

Overcliffe

Conservation Area Character Appraisal



Overcliffe Conservation Area

Character Appraisal

This document was prepared on behalf of Gravesham Borough Council based on an extensive survey dated 2007 by:

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1. STATEMENT OF THE SPECIAL INTEREST OF THE CONSERVATION AREA

The Overcliffe Conservation Area encompasses part of the early 19th century Rosherville New Town development in Northfleet and the mid-19th century houses along Overcliffe which were developed as part of this prestigious suburb, directly to the west of Gravesend Town Centre. The fine, large houses which line the roads are a mixture of villas and terraced residences, some sited to take advantage of the views northwards towards the River Thames.

To the west, and leading down to the river, Burch Road and Pier Road were laid out as part of the embryonic Rosherville New Town in the 1830s. They feature tall three storey terraced houses set behind small front gardens or basements. The Burch Road houses have retained distinctive architectural features such as wrought iron first floor balconies and elaborate doorcases and porches. The houses in London Road are of plainer design but retain their original built form and coherence as important historic terrace. They date from the 1840s and incorporate a small parade of shops.

The Overcliffe villas, which were built from 1864 to 1870 along the south side of the road, look out over the steep chalk cliffs to the river Thames. Their views to the river are partially obscured by the trees that line the north side of the road, but these trees fortunately also help to hide the retail and industrial sites that now occupy the foreshore below. The built form on the south side of Overcliffe mainly consists of pairs of broad semi-detached villas built over two or three storeys on wide plots. The north side has very little built form due to 19th century excavation of the chalk cliffs.

The openness of the uncluttered streetscape is accentuated by the breadth of the highway and the lack of any buildings along the north side of the road.

To the south of Overcliffe, St James's Road is a relatively quiet corner of the Conservation Area and features late 19th century houses that adjoin later residential developments. The semi-detached two storey houses in this road were built to a more modest scale and design than the Overcliffe and Rosherville properties after Gravesend's resort town status diminished towards the end of the 19th century.

The Conservation Area retains much of its original architectural character from the prestigious 19th century residential suburb. The survival of the historic layout and the many historic buildings, together with the dramatic location on the top of chalk cliffs, all provide positive features which justify designation as a conservation area.

2. OVERCLIFFE CONSERVATION AREA

2.1 Background

Overcliffe Conservation Area was designated on 1st February 1990 by Gravesham Borough Council and was extended on 14th February 2001. The Conservation Area includes the 19th century development directly to the west of Gravesend along Overcliffe (which becomes London Road at the Northfleet parish boundary) and parts of the adjoining streets of St James's Street, St James's Road, Lennox Road, Pier Road and Burch Road. To the north of Overcliffe the land drops suddenly to the retail and industrial area of Thames Way where large businesses and superstores line the Gravesend foreshore.

2.2 Purpose of the appraisal

This conservation area appraisal has been written by The Conservation Studio on behalf of Gravesham Borough Council. It was prepared in December 2007 and was followed by a process of community engagement, which informed the content of this document. This appraisal defines the special architectural and historic interest for which Overcliffe Conservation Area merits designation. It identifies the positive features that should be protected and highlights the negative factors that detract from its character and appearance. It will be used by the Borough Council in considering proposals for demolition or alteration of buildings, as well as for new developments. It will also help property owners and developers to take account of the importance of buildings, features, spaces and landscape within and adjacent to the Conservation Area.

This conservation area character appraisal, and those for the two other conservation areas in Northfleet, will lead to a management plan, setting out policies and actions to conserve and enhance their special architectural and historic interest and to mitigate the effects of negative features. The appraisals and management plans are to be included as background papers in the emerging Local Development Framework (LDF) and, as such, will be a due consideration in the planning process. In due course the appraisals and management plans may also be adopted as a separate Development Plan Document within the LDF.

Preparation of the appraisal involved an extensive survey of the conservation area undertaken in October 2007. The omission of any particular feature does not imply that it is of no significance.

2.3 Planning policy context

Conservation Areas are defined as '*areas of architectural or historic interest the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance*' in the *Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990* (The Act). Local Planning Authorities are required by the Act to identify the parts of their area that should be designated as conservation areas and to formulate and publish proposals to preserve or enhance them. Local authorities must submit proposals for the protection and enhancement of conservation areas for consideration at a public meeting within the relevant area. They must also have regard to any views expressed by people attending the meeting.

Broadly, the effects of designation are:

- Conservation Area Consent must be obtained from the local planning authority or Secretary of State prior to the substantial or total demolition of any building or structure within a conservation area, with some exceptions;
- The local planning authority must consider the desirability of *preserving or enhancing* the character or appearance of the conservation area when assessing applications for change in conservation areas;
- Permitted development rights are slightly different in conservation areas;
- Permission is required from the planning authority to fell or lop a tree over a certain size.

Further, more detailed information is provided in the management plan.

As well as receiving statutory protection, conservation areas are protected by regional, county and local planning policies. Relevant policies include:

- **Regional Planning Guidance for the South East (RPG9)** (published March 2001), Key Development Principle No.9; Policy Q2; Policy Q5; Policy Q7; Policy E1.
- **Regional Planning Guidance 9a: The Thames Gateway Planning Framework** (1995), Paras. 5.4.7 & 5.4.8: Built Heritage, Annex 1: Planning Framework Principles No.13.
- **Draft South East Plan (Regional Spatial Strategy)** (submitted to Government on 31st March 2006), Section D8 Management of the Built and Historic Environment: Policy BE1; Policy BE2; Policy BE7; Section E4 (Kent Thames

Gateway).

- **The Kent and Medway Structure Plan** (adopted 6th July 2006), Policy QL1: Quality of Development and Design; Policy QL6: Conservation Areas; Policy QL7: Archaeological Sites; Policy QL8: Buildings of Architectural or Historic Importance; Policy QL9: Historic Landscape Features; Policy QL10: Heritage Assets – Enabling Development.
- **Gravesham Local Plan First Review** (adopted November 1994), Policy TC0, TC1, TC2, TC3, TC4, TC5, TC6, TC7, TC8, TC9, TC10, TC11, TC12, Policy R3, Proposal PM13, Policy AP3.

Thames Gateway

In addition to the various conservation areas in the towns, the Northfleet and Gravesend conurbation is recognised as being in a Growth Area within the Kent Thames Gateway Sub-region by the Draft South East Plan of the South East Regional Assembly. The various policy documents outlined above have, since RPG9 (1994), recognised Gravesham's important place in the Thames Gateway (incorporating the former East Thames Corridor). RPG9a emphasizes the importance of Gravesham in achieving the Thames Gateway's overall vision (para. 6.8.1).

The Thames Gateway is an overarching term for the regeneration of large parts of East London and parts of Essex and Kent, including Northfleet and Gravesend. The Thames Gateway London Partnership estimates that the expected investment in the whole region will provide 150,000 jobs and 200,000 homes over the next 10 years. The large scale of this scheme will see a great deal of change across the area, including the introduction of new transport infrastructure including a Channel Tunnel Rail link (with a

new connection at nearby Ebbsfleet, now completed) and several major road building schemes such as the widening of the A2 to the south of the town.

The policies included in the local and regional guidance, as outlined above, seek to guide this period of change and the specified policies all recognise the importance of retaining Gravesham's heritage. The management plan that accompanies this document will propose how Gravesham's, and more specifically, Gravesend's, special character can be preserved and enhanced while these large scale changes take place.

documents were drafted. Subsequently, a period of full public consultation was held after which further revisions were made to arrive at this final agreed document. A Public Consultation Report is attached as Appendix 3 to this document for information.

2.4 Community involvement

The survey of the Conservation Area has included a process of public consultation to identify the following:

- The special characteristics of Overcliffe Conservation Area;
- The key negative features and issues;
- A range of possible actions that would mitigate or offset these detractors.

The consultation began with the notification of key stakeholders in Northfleet and Gravesend at the beginning of the appraisal process. It was followed by the distribution to every property in the conservation areas of an invitation to a public meeting held on 29th November 2007. Leaflets were also displayed in public places. The meeting included a description of the principal and desired outcomes of appraisals and management plans and led into a general discussion. The meeting was attended by various representatives of the Borough Council and local interest groups. Following the meeting, the outcomes were discussed by Gravesham Borough Council and The Conservation Studio, and the

3. LOCATION AND LANDSCAPE SETTING

3.1 Location

Gravesend is the administrative capital of the Borough of Gravesham in north-west Kent. The Borough is generally rural in appearance with a number of attractive historic villages, Northfleet and Gravesend forming the only urban areas in the locality.

Gravesend is about 35 kilometres to the east of central London, with Canterbury approximately 65 kilometres to the south and east. The A2 and M2 trunk roads link these locations, and because of the proximity of the M25 and M20 motorways, and the rail link to the Channel Tunnel, Gravesend is very well connected to other parts of the country and beyond.

The Oxford Archaeological Unit's Kent Historic Landscape Characterisation (2001), commissioned by Kent County Council and English Heritage, notes that: "*The process of 19th and 20th century urbanisation is particularly marked in the northern areas of Kent*". Within this study, the Dartford and Gravesham Conurbation is characterised as "*a well defined urban conurbation with some limited marshland and horticulture along its edges*".

The Overcliffe Conservation Area lies on the western edge of the town of Gravesend. The western continuation of New Road, Overcliffe, subsequently becoming London Road to the west, forms the linear backbone of the Conservation Area and spans the boundary between the parishes of Gravesend and Northfleet. The road follows the edge of a chalk promontory, affording expansive views northwards across a heavily industrialised part

of the Thames riverside. Overcliffe is lined on the south side by 19th century residential development and the Conservation Area also includes further sections of residential streets, such as the southern parts of Burch Road and Pier Road.

3.2 Activities and uses

The buildings within the Overcliffe Conservation Area are predominantly in residential use. Many of the dwellings were erected during the 19th century as large single dwelling houses, but the majority have since been subdivided into flats. This pattern of use is particularly noticeable in the three-storey-over-basement terraces on Burch Road and Pier Road, where the signs of multiple-occupancy, such as groups of meter boxes and rubbish bins, are visible. Houses of a smaller scale, such as those on St James's Road, tend to have been retained in single residential use.

Overcliffe contains some of the largest properties within the Conservation Area, many of which have been converted to non-residential use. These include a nursery school, a political party office, a charity organisation, a hotel and a chartered accountancy. Some of the terraced buildings on London Road are occupied by commercial uses at ground floor level, including an Indian restaurant and a vacant shop. The Elephant's Head Public House is a local landmark standing at the junction with Pier Road.

The retail needs of the local community are addressed by the large supermarket which stands on the south side of London Road, just outside of the Conservation Area boundary. This store also serves the large number of people who pass along this busy arterial route between Gravesend and Northfleet in

vehicles.

3.3 Topography

The distinctive topography of this part of Gravesend and Northfleet reflects the extensive chalk quarrying that took place in the 19th century along this southern bank of the River Thames. Overcliffe was laid as a stagecoach route in 1801, with open land lying to the north. This land, the Fair Field, was subsequently the site of chalk excavations, resulting in a steep cliff between the high ground, Overcliffe, and the base of the quarries. This low level terrain at the base of the cliffs is now occupied by industrial units. The unusual scenery contributes to interesting views within and out from the Conservation Area, for example there are clear views to the rear of nos. 1-12 Pier Road from Overcliffe, across an excavated gulf in the land.

The main route of Overcliffe and London Road runs straight and level in an east-west direction parallel to the River Thames. Ancillary roads branch from this route to the north and to the south. The two roads to the north, Pier Road and Burch Road, follow the natural topography in a gentle slope down toward the river – this is how we would have to imagine Fair Field and the land to the north of Overcliffe before chalk quarrying created the steep cliffs the flat expanse along the Thames before they were filled with industry..

3.4 Geology and Biodiversity

Northfleet and Gravesend lie on a thick belt of chalk that is the most significant geological trademark of this part of Kent. Otherwise, the geology of Kent is varied and lies on a “crumpled dome” of sedimentary rock which is also found under Sussex and Surrey. The dome’s peak has eroded, exposing the

rocks below, while the chalk along the edge has been more resilient to erosion and has created the North Downs in Kent and South Downs in Sussex. The area between the two is the Weald, notable for its heavy clays and sandstone outcrops.

In 1797 Hasted described Northfleet: *“Its situation, from its neighbourhood to the marshes, is accounted unhealthy, and was it not for the burning of such quantities of lime so close to it, it would be much more so. The soil is in general good tillage land; the northern part, which is bounded by the river Thames, is chalk; the rest of it is still loam, though some of it has a strong mixture of gravel with it.”*

This abundant availability of chalk has had a considerable effect on the area as it has been excavated for many centuries and used for activities associated with the construction of buildings.

Brick and lime kilns were established on the Northfleet foreshore in the 18th and 19th centuries. The area provides good sources of sand and these, which together with the London Clay found on the nearby Hoo Peninsula to the east, provided the raw materials for brick making.

3.5 Relationship of the Conservation Area to its surroundings

The immediate surroundings of the Conservation Area are urban townscape, including a heavily industrialised foreshore.

The following features form the immediate setting of the Conservation Area:

- To the north of Overcliffe: A modern car showroom and beyond that large industrial works and warehouses by the river. This is

all set on the low level terrain, at the foot of the inland cliff, created by the chalk excavation;

- To the north of London Road: Mainly 1930/40s residential development and two large detached villas in Burch Road, which are reminders of the Rosherville New Town Development. Beyond that to the north the surviving riverside parts of the Rosherville New Town which form the Landsdowne Square Conservation Area, and beyond that the river Thames.
- To the east: 20th century flats, an office block and commercial/retail units leading into New Road and Gravesend town centre;
- To the south: Mainly 20th century rows of terraced housing with occasional churches and other community buildings;
- To the west: 20th century residential and commercial buildings lining the road towards the historic core of Northfleet with a few surviving detached 19th century villas in between;
- To the north-west: Industrial area on the former Rosherville Gardens leading to the Thames riverside.

4. HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

4.1 Archaeology

Evidence of prehistoric activity in and around Northfleet and Gravesend is rich. Many finds from the lower Palaeolithic period having been made in the Ebbsfleet valley including the richest Levallois (containing distinctive knapped flints) site in Britain. Roman finds have been made in Gravesend around the hospital and St George's Church. The most important and extensive local excavation in recent years, at nearby Springhead on the path of the new Channel Tunnel Rail Link, uncovered the Roman town of *Vagniacae*, a former Iron Age settlement that the Romans occupied in 43 AD.

However, the Overcliffe Conservation Area is not within Kent County Council's designated *Areas of Archaeological Potential*.

4.2 Historical development

The Overcliffe Conservation Area is split across the neighbouring parishes of Gravesend and Northfleet. The name "Gravesend" is derived from Gravesham, possibly meaning "*graaf-ham*", the home of the reeve or bailiff of the Lord of the Manor. The name "Northfleet" is derived from "north creek" due to its position to the north of the creek that rises from Springhead to form the River Fleet or Ebbsfleet.

The road comprising Overcliffe, together with the westwards continuation named as London Road, were constructed as a stagecoach route across open land in 1801. The route connected from Dover through Gravesend in the east to the village of Northfleet in the west and onwards to London. The distinction between the two settlements has been blurred

through increased levels of development along this arterial route through the 20th century.

This new Dover to London road provided a backbone for development which was laid out along ancillary roads to either side, such as Burch Road. Burch Road contains the oldest houses within the Conservation Area, laid out in the 1830s as part of the Rosherville New Town Development. Prior to this date, this part of the southern river bank comprised open fields, interspersed with surviving rocky outcrops from chalk excavations. A large country house, Crete Hall, was built circa 1800 by Benjamin Burch. The estate was subsequently owned by the Rosher family, whose plan was to make Rosherville a prestigious residential area that would mirror the Milton New Town development based around Harmer Street on the other side of Gravesend. However, the ambitious plans of both schemes were never fully realised.

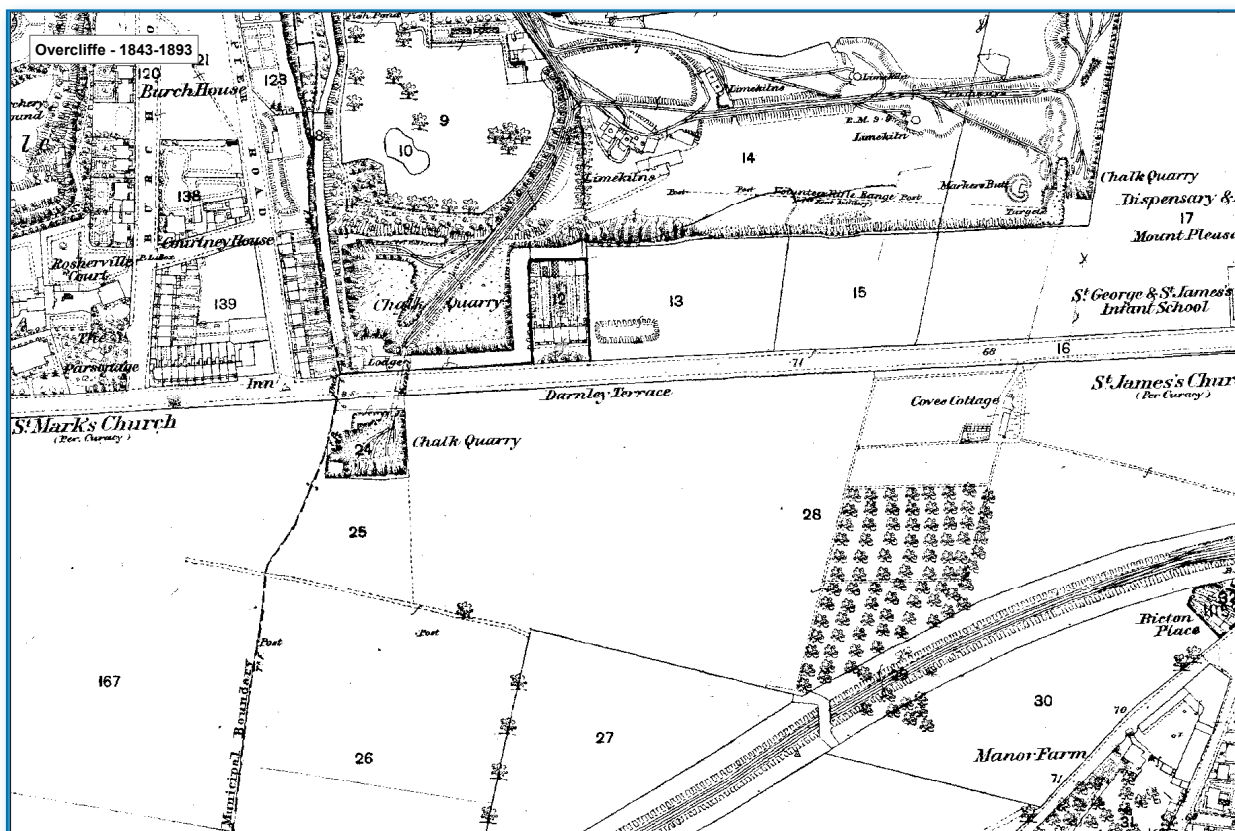
The Rosherville Gardens were developed from an area of chalk excavation in Northfleet, close to the eastern boundary of the parish of Gravesend, in the 1830s. At this time there were a number of ventures to develop Northfleet into an exclusive Gravesend suburb and isolated pockets of houses were built in newly laid roads and along the Overcliffe. Rosherville Gardens (Kent Zoological and Botanical Gardens Institution) was the brainchild of Jeremiah Rosher, a local industrialist who had built a new Crete Hall in 1818 and was keen to capitalise on the burgeoning fashion for taking day trips by steamboat from London to Gravesend. The gardens were lavish, featuring cliff top walks, a bear pit, a bijou theatre, a lake and illuminations. A new pier was built to receive the growing number of visitors and a grand hotel was built between the pier and

the entrance to the gardens. The opening of this new visitor attraction coincided with the reopening of the Clifton Baths and the construction of the Town Pier and Gordon Promenade in Gravesend.

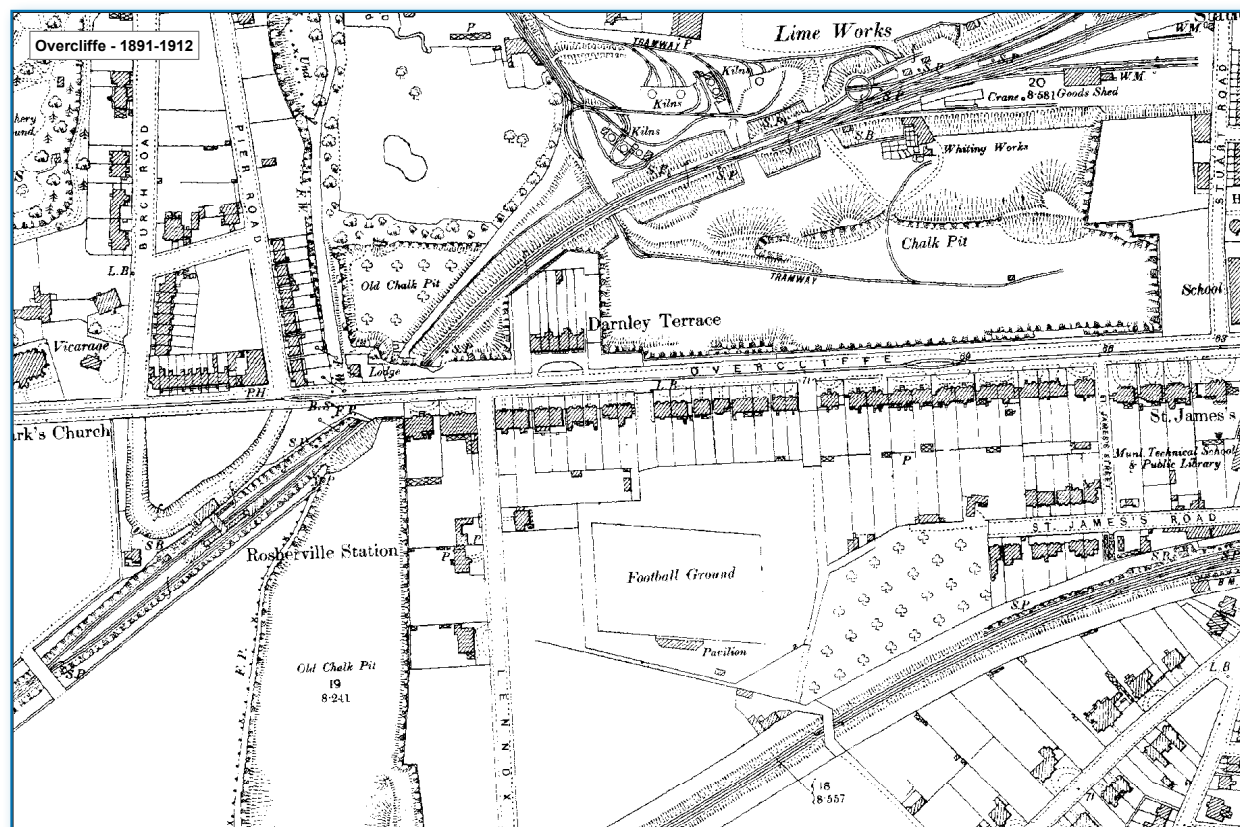
The south side of Overcliffe was developed from the 1860s and the long row of paired villas eventually connected the two parishes. These handsome villas were very desirable residences within walking distance of Rosherville Gardens in the west and Gravesend town centre in the east and were located by a smart promenade overlooking the River Thames. However, the residential expansion of the area was halted by the increasing industrialisation of this part of the Thames, which saw large parts of the landscape quarried away and factories built on it.

At the end of the 19th century industry was firmly established in Northfleet with the large scale production of cement and paper and the appearance of the landscape had been transformed by chalk excavation. At this time the Northfleet Urban District Council was formed and the last elements of the rural settlement were removed as pavements and kerbs were laid and trams installed on the roads.

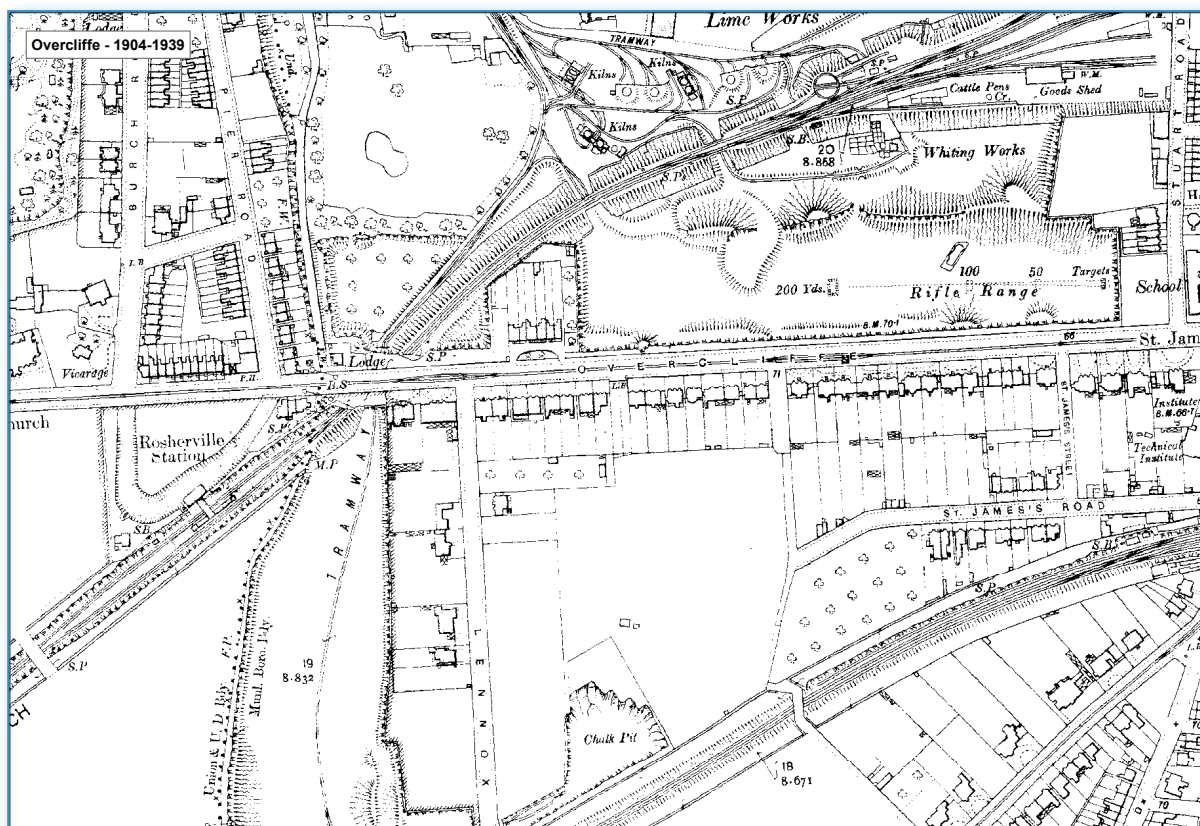
As the twentieth century progressed, Northfleet struggled to hold onto its tourist trade and the Rosherville Gardens and its dedicated branch train line were eventually forced to close. The industrialised parts of Northfleet then spread to fill the void and Northfleet has continued to exist as a heavily industrialised conurbation with factories and mills located close to the river and residential roads spreading inland.



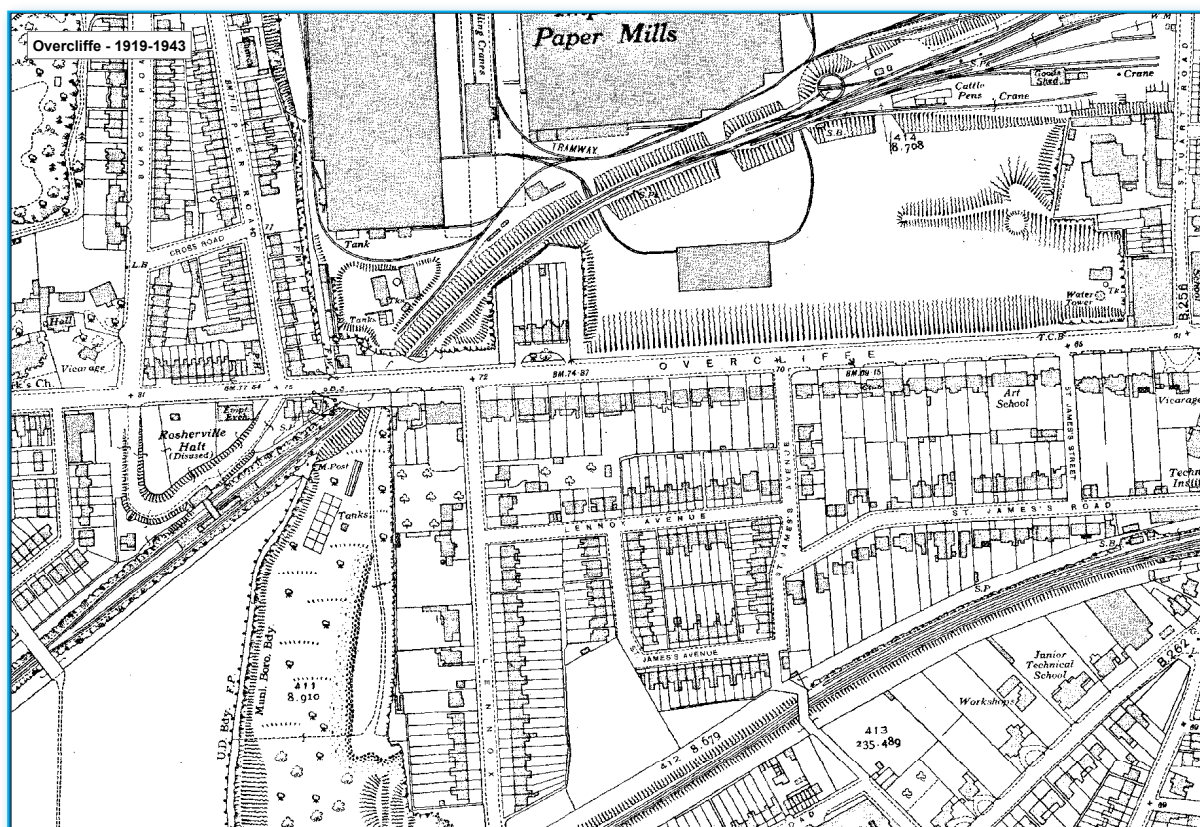
1843 - 1893



1891 - 1912



1904 - 1939



1919 - 1943

5. SPATIAL ANALYSIS

5.1 Layout and spaces

Overcliffe was laid out as a stagecoach route in 1801 to provide a direct path from Northfleet to Gravesend, avoiding the winding shore road to the north and the disused Watling Street to the south. It is a broad straight road which connects with New Road in the east and London Road in the west. The road was laid through the open land of the Fair Field; this land was subsequently the site of extensive chalk quarrying resulting in steep chalk cliff lying to the north of the greater extent of the length of Overcliffe. Therefore no roads, and few houses, could be built extending northwards from much of Overcliffe. A winding footpath drops down the steep cliff incline to the industrial and commercial areas on Thames Way on the Gravesend foreshore. As a result of this cliff, the north side of Overcliffe is bordered by a pavement and cast iron railings, beyond which a narrow grass verge is planted with shrubs and trees; with the fall away of the land far-reaching views are afforded across the foreshore and to the river, contributing a spacious character to the route.

The south side of Overcliffe is lined with large villas, typically arranged in paired form and set in spacious grounds. Houses are set back from the pavement behind large front gardens, which further contributes to the wide, open appearance of the road.

St James's Street, St James's Avenue and Lennox Road were all laid out in the late 19th century as ancillary roads running south from Overcliffe. These are all narrower streets with residential development on either side. Further residential side roads are found at the western end of the Conservation Area,

connecting to London Road; Burch Road and Pier Road are wide side-roads which lead north to Lansdowne Square, another surviving part of Rosherville New Town, and the Northfleet riverside.

The western end of Overcliffe passes over a tunnel in the chalk which was cut for the now defunct Gravesend branch of the London, Chatham and Dover Railway. The railway line has been replaced by Thames Way and an off ramp leading from this modern road climbs the chalk embankment steeply to join the point where Overcliffe becomes London Road at the boundary of the parish of Northfleet.

There are no significant public open spaces within the Conservation Area. The large amounts of open space that once existed in the vicinity have either been used for housing or removed through chalk excavations, such as Fair Field, and are now occupied by industrial premises.

5.2 Relationship of Buildings to Spaces

Within the Overcliffe Conservation Area almost all of the buildings are set back from the public thoroughfare behind front areas and gardens, thereby enhancing the wide, open character of the roads. Wide pavements enhance this sense of spaciousness. The largest buildings set in extensive grounds are those which line the south side of Overcliffe. These groups of semi-detached villas were originally built with gaps between each pair of houses, however many of these gaps have since been infilled with single-storey side-extensions, removing former views through to rear gardens. The stature of the houses on Overcliffe is enhanced through their location and setting, with the houses ranged almost exclusively along the southern side of the road, while on the north side there is only

a narrow strip of land before the land falls away as a steep chalk cliff. The houses stand proudly close to the cliff edge, overlooking the wide spacious road and the foreshore below.

The strong linear arrangement of buildings along Overcliffe is interrupted in two places, at the junction of two side roads, St James's Avenue and Lennox Road. The northern section of these two roads are characterised by the sides of the plots running back from the houses on Overcliffe. Gable ends of the buildings on Overcliffe and boundary walls to their rear gardens are set directly at back-of-pavement line, introducing a sense of enclosure and framing narrow views at these points. Moving southwards along these roads and extending beyond the boundary of the Conservation Area, the buildings are typically compact detached houses of late 19th and 20th century date, set behind front gardens.

At the eastern end of the Conservation Area St James's Road runs parallel to Overcliffe, connected to it via St James's Street. The road was laid out in the late 19th century with modest two-storey houses on either side. These are arranged in pairs or small groups of terraces and with the houses set on either side of the road which visually frame the wide road.

At the western end of Overcliffe, where the natural topography survives uninterrupted by the scars of former chalk excavation, residential development extends northwards right up to the riverside. A small lodge, no. 38 Overcliffe, stands surrounded by modest gardens, which are largely concealed from the public thoroughfare by a high brick boundary wall. Nos. 106-120 London Road is a continuous terrace of houses, some of which are set back from the pavement behind front garden areas. The terrace provides

a coherent building line. A few of the front areas have been lost through the removal of boundary walls, such as nos. 106-109 London Road, which while this has created wider pavements, has undermined the formal historic setting of these buildings. Opposite, the late 19th century corner buildings nos. 103-105 London Road have a more direct relationship with the public thoroughfare; being set close toward the front of the plot and as the result of this projection into the streetscene, they are important landmark buildings. The buildings are positioned on the edge of the embankment which drops down to the Thames Way. They stand with large gaps in the streetscene to either side of them and therefore provide a small island of built form in an otherwise more open location.

A similar built form to the terrace of houses on London Road is evident in Burch Road and Pier Road, which formed part of the early 19th century Rosherville New Town development. Nos. 2-8 Burch Road are a continuous terrace of three-storey buildings raised above a basement; the buildings are set back from the pavement by the front basement wells which are contained by cast iron railings. The tight-knit development and the height of the buildings in relation to the surrounding 20th century development, which has not followed the historic pattern of development, gives these buildings a strong presence on the street. Pier Road is lined with a two-storey terrace on the west side and three-storey paired villas on the east side, all of which are set behind small front gardens. These gardens add to the sense of spaciousness of this wide thoroughfare.

5.3 Landmarks, focal points and views

The principal landmarks in the Overcliffe Conservation Area are:

- Nos. 103 to 105 London Road;
- No.108 London Road (The Elephant's Head Public House)

These landmark buildings provide focal points within the Conservation Area through their position as individual or corner buildings. The linear spine of the Conservation Area is the straight length of wide road of Overcliffe and London Road. There are clear views along this route, which is framed on the southern side by the fine 19th century paired villas, and at the northern side by a tree and shrub belt along the cliff edge. These villas are attractively detailed with a variety of architectural flourishes, and their special interest is furthered by the group value created by the number of these villas which survive to form a strong coherent building line of paired villas.

The principal positive views are:

- Along Overcliffe in both directions;
- Along the rows of 19th century terraced houses in Pier Road and Burch Road;
- Northwards along Pier Road to Lansdowne Square and the River Thames;
- Across the Thames Way industrial area to the River Thames from Overcliffe;
- The Gravesend chalk cliffs and the rear of the villas nos. 1-12 Pier Road from Overcliffe.

5.4 Trees, boundaries and planting

Trees and groups of shrubs play a very important role in creating a sense of enclosure

along the northern edge of Overcliffe and they also line the footpath down to the Thames Way. Important tree groups are marked on the Townscape Appraisal map.

Street trees are uncommon in the Conservation Area, despite the breadth of the pavements and the ease with which new planting could be accommodated. However, some trees grow in the front gardens of the Overcliffe properties and these are also marked on the Townscape Appraisal map.

Most of the buildings in the Conservation Area stand behind front gardens which are enclosed by a variety of boundary treatments. Historically, the front boundaries would have been of cast iron railings set into low stone dwarf walls, of which a good surviving example is provided by nos. 2-8 Burch Road. The cast iron railings have an arrow-head detail. This is a typical boundary treatment of early 19th century houses. The plots of later 19th century buildings would have been bounded by mid-height brick walls, sometimes surmounted by cast iron railings. In some cases the brick was rendered to correspond with the render coat on the villa; an example of historic rendered boundary walls is provided by nos. 32-33 Overcliffe. In many instances throughout the Conservation Area the historic boundaries have been demolished or substantially altered.

In Overcliffe there is a mixture of brick walls, railings and trees or hedging. Most of the houses have front gardens bounded by low brick walls. Entranceways are traditionally framed by tall brick gate piers with capstones which form an important part of the setting of the historic buildings and distinguish the driveway approaches. Many of the piers have been removed when front gardens were converted to vehicular hardstandings and

entrances widened. 19th century walls have been lowered, painted or replaced altogether. On the northern side of the Overcliffe the pavement is bordered by cast iron railings, behind which grow shrubs and tall trees. This tree-belt forms an important green corridor in what is otherwise a prevalently hard urban landscape. The only significant planting in the Conservation Area can be seen in the private gardens along Overcliffe, some of which are well stocked.

The loss of historic boundary walls is common issue throughout the Conservation Area. Many of the original brick boundary walls in St James's Road have also been removed to allow access for cars onto hardstandings, although some 19th century flint walling remains in place outside no. 9 and alongside no. 23. The terrace comprising nos. 106-120 London Road has lost almost all of the historic boundary treatments to the front areas, which were of cast iron railings set into stone dwarf walls. Instead, the predominant boundary treatments are the low red-brick walls of 20th century date, which, while they follow the historic boundary line, do not preserve or enhance the setting of this important terrace. In some instances, a boundary has been completely forfeited, such as in front of nos. 118-119 London Road, and the area laid to hardstanding.

The buildings on Pier Road which lie within the Conservation Area are of two distinct periods of development: 19th century paired villas lie on the east side of the road, and an early 20th century terrace lies on the west side of the road. These buildings would traditionally have had quite different boundary treatments to the front gardens, cast iron railings and brick walls respectively, but these have nearly all now been replaced with modern brick walls. The loss of the traditional

boundary treatments has undermined the setting of these historic buildings and the replacement boundaries have blurred the distinction between the two distinct phases of development.

6. STREETSCAPE

6.1 Public realm

Pavements

The pavements in the Overcliffe Conservation Area generally feature modern materials (concrete slabs, tarmac or poured concrete with concrete kerbs) although some traditional materials remain, such as the 19th century granite kerbs. The pavements are fairly narrow along these connecting roads, but become broader in London Road and are even wider along Overcliffe. In all locations, the traditional relationship of raised pavement to road surface has been maintained, with the edges of the pavements being often defined by kerb stones.

Generally, the pavements at the western part of the Conservation Area are poorly maintained with many broken or cracked slabs, probably due to vehicular overrun and illegal car parking. Some original 19th century granite kerbing remains, namely 300 mm kerbstones in Pier Road and Burch Road.

To the east, the pavements along the north side of Overcliffe are covered in a continuous tarmac surface, and along the south side there is a mixture of yellow poured concrete and concrete slabs which incorporates many vehicular crossovers. Again, some original granite kerbing remains, but this time only 200 mm deep. The pavements in Lennox Road, St James's Street and St James's Road are predominantly surfaced in tarmac or concrete with concrete kerbs. Some 200 mm granite kerbs remain in St James's Road.

Street furniture, signage and other features

The Conservation Area has a small amount of modern street furniture most of it being situated in Overcliffe. This includes car parking meters fixed to the pavement in Overcliffe, electricity cabinets, post boxes, black plastic litter bins and a metal bench with timber seating. A number of illuminated traffic island columns are also fixed to the various crossing points on Overcliffe. Such a collection of 20th century streetscape clutter has undermined the appearance of this historic residential area. Of note is the historic street sign which survives on Lennox Road, attached to the gable wall of no. 34 Overcliffe.

Highway signs are fixed to freestanding poles around the Conservation Area, most notably on pavements on the north side of Overcliffe and around the entrances to Pier Road and Burch Road. The large brown heritage board and the banners advertising the car showroom clutters the views along Overcliffe.

Street lighting

Street lighting in the Conservation Area is all modern. Hockey-stick style modern street lights predominate and fully light the busy highway of Overcliffe and London Road. There are instances where individual properties have introduced lighting, such as at the Overcliffe Hotel which has introduced two Victorian-style lamp posts in the front parking area.

Pedestrian movement and footpaths

Pedestrian access through the Conservation Area is generally good although there are no controlled crossings across Overcliffe or London Road, only traffic islands at infrequent intervals. The north side of Overcliffe is

especially pedestrian-friendly as there are no side roads which intersect with it. Footpaths lead down to Thames Way at the cliff bottom from either side of Overcliffe.

Traffic and parking

The traffic through the Conservation Area is intermittently heavy due to its location on a major route into and out of Gravesend. The movement of traffic is controlled by the traffic lights on London Road. Some of the industrial traffic which affects other parts of Northfleet bypasses Overcliffe via Thames Way in order to avoid the busy one way system in Gravesend Town Centre and this alleviates some of the traffic congestion. The straightness and breadth of Overcliffe, and the clear sight-lines along it, mean that fast traffic is often a problem despite the 40 mph speed limit. This has a detrimental effect on the overall character of the Conservation Area. On street parking is not permitted in Overcliffe and London Road which has led to a large number of the front gardens being paved over and the loss of many boundary treatments.

Traffic is much less frequent on Pier Road and Burch Road due to their residential status away from the major trunk road. Parking is generally limited to the parking bays that line the east side of both the streets. There is traditional kerbside parking along Cross Road, between Burch Road and Pier Road.

7. THE BUILDINGS OF THE CONSERVATION AREA

7.1 Building types

Most of the buildings in the Conservation Area date from the 19th century and were built as substantial dwelling houses. The buildings were constructed as either short continuous terraces or broken terraces of paired villas. Many of these have now been sub-divided into flats, most notably the early 19th century houses in Burch Road and Pier Road, or converted for other uses. For instance, nos. 6-8 Overcliffe used to be Gravesend Art School and is now occupied by a firm of accountants, and nos. 15-16 operate as a hotel. The buildings have largely retained their original built form and architectural details which provide a reminder of their original residential use. There is one modern block of flats, Pioneer Court, on the corner of Overcliffe and St James's Street. A number of modern garages and extensions can be seen, particularly along Overcliffe. To the rear of no. 108 London Road is a single storey prefabricated office building.

There are a few instances where a change of use in a building has resulted in the substantial alteration to a structure, such as the introduction of commercial premises into the ground floor of former houses on London Road. Living accommodation has been retained on the upper levels. In some cases, these alterations occurred shortly after the buildings were constructed, such as The Elephant's Head Public House, and the traditionally detailed 'shop front' now forms an important part of the historic fabric.

7.2 Building form

The buildings in the Overcliffe Conservation

Area have a domestic scale and are arranged in short rows of terraced, paired or detached buildings that are mainly two or three storeys tall. The most tightly packed three storey terraced buildings line Pier Road, Burch Road and the north side of London Road. These early 19th century houses tend to be two windows wide, faced with brick or render, with pitched tile or slate roofs. The buildings on Burch Road are raised above a basement.

The buildings ranged along the south side of Overcliffe prevalently take the form of paired villas. These stand in spacious plots, with the buildings set well back from the pavement line behind front gardens. Some of the villas have been extended on the side returns which has weakened the distinction between individual pairs of villas and obscured the important views through between villas to the rear gardens beyond. The villas are typically of two-storeys raised above a half-basement with a central front doors being approached up a flight of steps. The raised form of these villas increases their visual presence on the street. Nos. 32-33 and 34 Overcliffe are an imposing three-storey group, set on either side of the entrance to Lennox Road. Some of the original features of the villas, most notably their chimneystacks, have been removed. This has had a detrimental effect on them as individual buildings but also most importantly when seen as part of a group. A four storey modern block of flats (Pioneer Court) in Overcliffe marks the eastern edge of the Conservation Area.

The paired villas which line the eastern side of Pier Road are of an earlier date than those paired villas on Overcliffe, having been constructed as part of the Rosherville New Town Development in the early 19th century. Each villa comprises a three-storey single bay block set above a basement, with a

slightly lower three-storey recessed wing offset on either the left or right side return to accommodate the entrance and staircase. This arrangement creates an attractive rhythm along the group of paired villas, with visual interest provided by these recessed entrance bays. The grand row of terraced houses along the eastern side of Burch Road (nos. 2 – 8) is of the same building period and features elaborate porches articulated with classical details such as Corinthian columns.

To the south of Overcliffe, the houses on Lennox Road and St James's Road are fairly modest two bay, two-storey semi detached houses, also set behind front gardens. A similarly modest group of buildings are found at nos. 84-93 Pier Road, a terrace of late 19th century two-storey houses.

Another residential building in the Conservation Area, no.38 Overcliffe, is a unique survival being the much altered former lodge to Bycliffes, a house that once stood close to the river. The single storey structure stands behind a tall rendered wall over which stretches a slate roof with oversailing eaves.

7.3 Listed buildings

There are no listed buildings on the Conservation Area. However, nos. 2 to 8 Burch Road may meet the criteria for statutory listing.

7.4 Locally listed buildings

Government advice is that the preparation of a List of Locally Significant Buildings is a useful planning tool. "Locally Listed" buildings are valued for their contribution to the local scene, or for their local historic associations, but are not considered to be of national importance, so they are usually not eligible

for statutory listing. Policies to control them can be included in the Local Development Framework.

Gravesham Council does not currently maintain a formal list of locally significant buildings (usually called the 'Local List') either in Northfleet or elsewhere, although all buildings that were identified in the 1974 Listed Buildings Survey for their architectural or historic interest, but were not awarded a listing status, have been treated as 'Buildings of Local Interest' ever since when considering planning applications. Following the importance the Government places in its Heritage White Paper on the compilation of Lists of Buildings of Local Interest, Gravesham Borough Council's list is due to be reviewed soon.

The Management Proposals for the Gravesend and Northfleet Conservation Areas contain a list of buildings which might be considered for inclusion in a Local List, once the Council have approved the criteria to be used for selection. All of them are considered to be key unlisted buildings.

7.5 Key unlisted buildings

A number of unlisted buildings have been identified as being buildings of townscape merit. Buildings identified as having 'townscape merit' will vary, but commonly they will be good examples of relatively unaltered historic buildings where their style, detailing and building materials provides the streetscape with interest and variety. Most importantly, they make a *positive* contribution to the special interest of the Conservation Area. Where a building has been heavily altered, and restoration would be impractical, they are excluded.

Key unlisted buildings include:

- Overcliffe: nos. 8 to 36 (consec.);
- St James's Road: nos. 2 to 20 and nos. 9 to 25;
- London Road: nos. 103 to 119;
- Burch Grove: nos. 1 to 8 Pier Road: nos. 1 to 12.

Government guidance in PPG15 '*Planning and the historic environment*' advises that a general presumption exists in favour of retaining those buildings which make a positive contribution to the character or appearance of a conservation area (paragraph 4.27). The guidance note states that proposals to demolish such buildings should be assessed against the same broad criteria as proposals to demolish listed buildings.

7.6 Building Materials

Most of the buildings in the Conservation Area are built using local materials, particularly yellow stock brick, although the slate which is commonly used to cover roofs was imported from elsewhere in the country, usually Wales. Another local material that is used in the Conservation Area is flint and at least two remaining 19th century flint boundary walls remain in St James's Road.

Many of the buildings, including those in London Road, Pier Road and Burch Road, are faced in render which would have been produced in the local factories. Northfleet was at the centre of some innovation in construction techniques in the 19th century, including the invention of Roman and Portland cements. Many cement works and chalk pits were established in the area, so it is not surprising that the Conservation Area retains buildings which use these materials. Although

a great number of the houses in Overcliffe and St James's Road are also rendered, the majority of them have distinctive front elevations of brown Kentish brick.

7.7 Local details

The buildings in the Conservation Area display a number of varied details typical of the 19th century and predominantly in variations of the Classical style. These include:

- The use of yellow and brown stock brick;
- The use of a render coat either across whole facades or for details such as quoins and window dressings;
- Slate roofs;
- Canted bays (Overcliffe and St James's Road and some later additions to Burch Road) sometimes with dentil cornice;
- Round headed or pointed first floor window arches (Overcliffe)
- Steps up to front door;
- Elaborate rendered doorcases and porches, many of which are articulated by Corinthian columns (Burch Road and Overcliffe);
- Deep overhanging eaves with Italianate dentil detailing (Overcliffe);
- Brick chimney stacks;
- Small dormer windows;
- Vertically sliding timber sash windows;
- Parapets (Burch Road, London Road and Pier Road);
- Flint boundary walls (St James's Road);
- Cast iron railings (London Road, Pier Road and Burch Road);
- Basement accommodation (London Road, Pier Road and Burch Road).

8. CHARACTER AREAS

8.1 Summary of Character Areas

Within the present boundaries the Overcliffe Conservation Area can be divided into three Character Areas according to landscape, topography, historical development, layout, building type, and uses.. Positive features that contribute to the character of each area, or negative features that detract from it, are summarised at end of each section. The three Character Areas are:

Character Area 1: Overcliffe

Character Area 2: St James's Road

Character Area 3: Rosherville New Town

8.2 Character Area 1: Overcliffe

This character area is notable for the consolidated appearance of the varied terraced or semi-detached villas, built between 1864 and 1870 along the main road between Gravesend and Northfleet. Many of the buildings retain an impressive number of their original architectural features and the houses form an important coherent group of historic structures. However, in terms of the wider setting, the overall character has changed considerably since the area was first developed. This once prestigious location overlooking the Thames riverside has become a major traffic route, and views from the houses across towards the river are now compromised by the industrial development below the chalk cliffs.

The various groups of houses along Overcliffe have a similar residential built form although the size and height of the buildings diminishes slightly to the west of St James's Avenue before gaining stature again around the entrance to Lennox Road, where nos. 32-33

and 34 Overcliffe are of an imposing three storeys in height. The buildings are detailed in variations of the Classical style, with notable Italianate references, such as deep eaves supported on a large wall-cornice. Quoins, doorcases and window dressings are all presented in the Classical manner, such as the distinctive doorcases and porches set on Corinthian columns or pilasters. Overall, the group of villas comprise a coherent group, and variations in the architectural details introduce visual texture and interest. For example nos. 9 to 16 have distinctive pointed window arches to the first floor and dentil cornicing on the ground floor canted bays. No.17 next door has similar canted bays and quoins but the bays are plain and the first floor windows are arranged differently. The building has also received a heavy coat of paint and is an example of how unsympathetic alterations to just one building can have a dramatic detrimental effect on the character and appearance of a whole group of buildings and streetscene within a Conservation Area.

Other houses along Overcliffe have suffered from a variety of changes that have eroded their 19th century splendour. Nos. 6 to 8, for example, have noticeably poor modern replacement windows. In addition to that the buildings have lost their front gardens in order to create car parking for the business which operate from these premises. The similar creation of unsympathetic hardstandings in former front gardens is a common negative feature throughout the character area. Car parking provision has also inevitably led to the loss of boundary treatments and the formation of vehicle crossovers over the pavement.

Further west, beyond no. 36 Overcliffe, the streetscape gives way to trees and railings and views to the south and north across the chalk excavations. Nos. 103-105 London

Road is a small group of late 19th century buildings standing on the cliff edge above the Thames Way and the former railway line. The group is somewhat isolated by the wide main roads which surround it, but they retain fine historic features such as impressive brick chimneystacks, applied timber framing and steeply pitched, tiled roofs.

Lennox Road features some detached modern infill houses, as well as a fine 19th century building, no. 5 Lennox Road, which is parallel in style and age to the houses in Overcliffe and which therefore is included within the Conservation Area.

Pioneer Court at the eastern end of Overcliffe is one of the only modern buildings in the Conservation Area. At four storeys high, it is larger than the historic buildings along Overcliffe with a considerable amount of additional massing stretching back into St James's Street. Although the appearance of the building is modern, the designers of the building have arranged the windows at a similar level to the neighbouring historic buildings on Overcliffe and there are similarly proportioned canted bays on the ground floor, softening the impact of this very prominent building.

Overall, Overcliffe is characterised by the steady rhythmic sequence of paired villas and the spaces between them. Some of these gaps have been infilled in a variety of ways, but generally the paired villa form continues to be legible. One of the most striking features of this character area is the relationship of the strong built form on the south side which contrasts dramatically with the trees and the cliff edge on the northern side. Some of the positive impact which this historic group of buildings makes on the Conservation Area has been diminished by gradual changes such

as the removal of chimney stacks and other alterations to the roofscape, and the loss of boundary treatments to the front gardens.

The principal positive features of Character Area 1: Overcliffe are:

- Predominantly 19th century sub-urban character;
- The long, straight, wide urban highway;
- Coherent form, style, materials and age of buildings along Overcliffe;
- Arrangement of pairs of buildings and detached houses on the south side of the road facing the River Thames;
- Buildings arranged with a common building line and set behind front gardens;
- A domestic scale of building on wide plots;
- Pitched or hipped roofs covered in slate or tile;
- Distinctive groups of chimney stacks shared by pairs of semi detached houses;
- Use of yellow stock and brown brick, which is sometimes rendered and painted;
- Sash windows, retaining their original glazing pattern and division, giving a predominantly vertical emphasis;
- The mixture of tall trees that line the north side of Overcliffe.

The principal negative features of Character Area 1: Overcliffe are:

- The speed and volume of the traffic;
- Some modern infill between buildings (between nos. 10 and 11, nos. 12 and 13, nos. 14 and 15 Overcliffe) with a more horizontal emphasis and filling the gaps between buildings;
- The poor quality construction of some of the modern buildings/extensions with the use of cheap and unsuitable materials;
- The negative appearance of modern buildings just outside the Conservation

Area, particularly the car showroom and its associated signage including the large, garish banners;

- The loss of architectural features, notably chimney stacks and timber double hung sash windows;
- Unsympathetic uPVC replacement windows and doors and concrete roof coverings which has diminished the character and appearance of the buildings concerned;
- Prominent highway signage;
- The conversion of front gardens to hard standings leading to groups of parked cars, the loss of greenery and boundary treatments and some unsightly bin storage;
- The lack of maintenance of the iron railings along Overcliffe;
- Some graffiti, notable on boundary walls such as outside no.24 Overcliffe.

8.3 Character Area 2: St James's Road

The area to the south of Overcliffe, St James's Road, has a relatively peaceful character as a result of it being away from the main road. The buildings are modestly proportioned houses that are still occupied by families and have not been sub-divided. Many of the front gardens of St James's Road have been retained and attractively landscaped although a few have been altered to accommodate hardstandings. There are some surviving brick boundary walls with stone capping and occasional instances of 19th century flint garden walls along the sides of plots.

The architecture of some of the houses is similar to that found in Overcliffe, featuring canted bays and round headed windows with keystones to the first floor. This includes nos. 2, 4, 6, 15, 17, 19, and 21 St James's Road. Other buildings are more readily

identified with later 19th century or early 20th century architectural details and feature red brick elevations with square bays featuring rendered columns dividing the sash windows. The houses built further west, and nos. 11 and 13 which were built later, share this detailing. Many of the houses have been rendered or painted although nos. 19 and 21 remain with unpainted facades and retain elegant original doorcases and decorative eaves brackets below the roof.

In general there is a less consistent appearance in this character area than in Overcliffe. St James's Street, which lies on the edge of the Conservation Area and links Overcliffe and St James's Road, is largely filled with modern buildings. It is dominated by the rear section of Pioneer Court.

There is no public space in this character area. Private gardens are therefore important and can be viewed in places, although it is regrettable that a large modern warehouse building has been built in the back garden to nos. 4 and 6 Overcliffe, visible from St James's Street.

The principal positive features of Character Area 2: St James's Road are:

- 19th century sub-urban character;
- The curving suburban road connecting with Gravesend town centre in the east;
- Detached and semi detached late 19th century two-storey residential houses facing each other;
- Buildings arranged with a common building line and set behind front gardens;
- A domestic scale of building on wide plots;
- Pitched or hipped roofs covered in slate or tile;
- Distinctive groups of chimneystacks on the gable end of pitched roofs;

- Use of yellow stock, red and brown brick, which is sometimes rendered and painted;
- Sash windows, retaining their original glazing pattern and division, giving a predominantly vertical emphasis;
- Encaustic tile front paths;
- Brick and flint boundary walls.

The principal negative features of Character Area 2: St James's Road are:

- Loss of some original features such as timber sash windows;
- Unsympathetic uPVC replacement windows and doors and concrete roof coverings;
- Graffiti on some boundary walls;
- Loss of some of the boundary walls and the paving over of front gardens;
- Modern unsympathetic pavement treatments;
- Some modern single storey infill garages filling the gaps between buildings;
- Overlarge modern residential developments on the edge of the character area (Pioneer Court).

8.4 Character Area 3: Rosherville New Town

This character area covers the western part of the Conservation Area including the early 19th century houses in London Road, Burch Road and Pier Road that were part of the unfinished Rosherville New Town development, plus some later houses. Most of the built form of London Road lines the north side of the road looking over former chalk quarries to the south, and it is this southern aspect that brings a sense of openness to this character area.

The development along London Road consists of a terrace of 14 properties built to four distinct groups which are unified by

the general proportions, the window pattern, the smooth render finish, and the recessed rounded corners. They were originally all houses but a number of them had their ground floors converted in the later 19th century to shop units. The appearance of this terrace on London Road has suffered more than others houses in the Conservation Area from the sub-division into flats and unsympathetic alterations. They have all now lost their original boundary railings and most timber sash windows have been replaced in uPVC. There is a large number of satellite dishes that have been fixed on the front elevations. Two surviving intricate first and second floor iron balconies give an indication of the attractive appearance of these houses when they were first built. The ground floor shopfronts and the public house frontage to the east of the character area retain some traditional proportions and materials and enliven the row. By contrast, the newsagent's shopfront to the west is modern with garish signage and unattractive roller shutters.

Burch Road contains a grand row of terraced houses (nos. 2 – 8) along its eastern side. Opposite, and lying outside of the Conservation Area boundary is the former site of St Mark's Church, which is now occupied by the 1970s Apex House building. The surviving 19th century boundary wall to the former church and the surrounding mature trees contribute to the character of the adjoining Conservation Area. The Burch Road houses are among the finest unlisted buildings in the Northfleet and Gravesend area, and are currently on the Borough Council's Local List. Unlike the houses in London Road they have retained most of their balconies, although two were lost in the late 19th century when canted bays were added to the ground floors of nos. 2 and 3. The detailing on the buildings is elegant and hints at the original vision

of Rosherville New Town as a prestigious suburb to Gravesend. The fine porches and steps up to the front doors are intact, as are many of the timber sash windows.

Cross Road acts as a connecting road between Burch Road and Pier Road and mainly contains the rear gardens of properties lining those streets. There are views of the rear elevations of the buildings on these two streets, and a number of unsympathetic alterations and extensions detract from the quality of the townscape in this area. The Nest is the much altered remains of an early 20th century outbuilding that has been redeveloped to create a single storey infill building.

The houses on the eastern side of Pier Road have suffered from more alteration than those in Burch Road. Few of the porches or boundary treatments have survived and the only ironwork remaining is on the small ground floor window cills to nos. 1 and 2. A row of later 19th century houses lie along the western side of Pier Road, behind small front gardens. They have attractive canted bays and bands of decorative terracotta tiles which contribute to the special interest of these buildings. However, some alterations and the addition of a number of satellite dishes on the front elevations have undermined their historic character. Next to this row, in the space behind The Elephant's Head public house on the corner of London Road, a small car dealership adds to the impression of cluttered street dominated by car parking. On the eastern side of Pier Road, there are some gaps between the buildings providing views through to the industrial part of Gravesend and to the chalk cliffs.

Further north along the road a lone pair of original Rosherville houses, nos. 82 and

83 Pier Road, stand on the corner of Cross Road with two balconies intact but most other features lost and replaced with modern materials such as pebbledash and uPVC windows. This pair of houses retains the imposing three-storey built form close to the edge of the pavement that is characteristic of the other 1830s Pier Road properties.

The principal positive features of Character Area 3: Rosherville New Town are:

- Urban character;
- Terraces of three storey early 19th century houses;
- Buildings arranged with a common building line behind front gardens;
- A domestic scale of building on narrow plots;
- Recessed rounded corner buildings (London Road);
- Gaps between buildings with views to Gravesend (Pier Road);
- Rendered and painted exteriors;
- Canted bays;
- Rendered parapets;
- Steps up to the front doors;
- Elaborate porches on Corinthian columns,
- Brick boundary walls and cast iron railings;
- Arrow-headed iron railings set on low stone dwarf walls;
- Low pitched roofs covered in slate;
- Large brick front-to-back chimneystacks;
- Sash windows, retaining their original glazing pattern and divided into small panes, giving a predominantly vertical emphasis;
- Cast iron balconies and other iron features;

The principal negative features of Character Area 3: Rosherville New Town are:

Loss of original features, especially porches and iron balconies;

- Poor maintenance, replacement or complete loss of boundary treatments;
- Unsympathetic modern replacement windows and doors, many of them in uPVC;
- The dominance of parked cars in the streetscene particularly around the car dealership on Pier Road;
- Satellite dishes;
- The inappropriate use of bold colours on some facades, notable nos. 1 and 2 Pier Road;
- Modern shopfront at no.118 London Road including roller shutters and modern signage;
- The addition of extra fixtures to the frontages of buildings as a result of multiple occupancy, notably gas meter cupboards;
- The negative appearance of modern buildings just outside the Conservation Area (the supermarket on the south side of London Road and Apex House, London Road);
- Speed and volume of traffic along London Road.

9. ISSUES

9.1 Definition of Issues

The following 'Issues' have been identified by the appraisal process (via extensive survey work) and have been modified to include the views of the local community as part of the public consultation exercise. They provide the basis for the Site Specific Actions in the Management Proposals. These issues will be subject to regular review by the Council and new ones may be added in the future.

9.2 Conservation area boundary review

It is suggested that there is little scope for alterations to the boundary of the Overcliffe Conservation Area as the designated area already includes the best preserved and architecturally most cohesive remaining parts of the Rosherville planned development of the early 19th century, and the later residential suburbs associated with the mid to late 19th century growth of Northfleet and Gravesend.

9.3 Education and information

Active measures for promoting better understanding of Gravesend and Northfleet and their places in history underpin the regeneration of the towns by drawing in external interest and resources. Gravesham Borough Council has recently published a number of guides in order to encourage an improvement in design standards in the borough's conservation areas. These include guidance on shopfronts.

9.4 Uses/ vitality

The London Road section of the Conservation Area in Northfleet retains a limited number of shops and some units appear to have fallen

into disuse. Their vacancy has led to a loss of vitality, which detracts from the character of the area. Measures to support existing business and promote the vitality of Northfleet and the wider area of Gravesend have been in operation and are ongoing.

Along Overcliffe, businesses and activities appear to inject more vitality into the area, although an unwelcome result of this is the increased amounts of parked cars in front of buildings. Pier Road and Burch Road also suffer from parking issues but these are generally related to the amount of vehicles used by occupants in the large subdivided buildings on those streets. Much of the traffic that uses Overcliffe is passing through and, therefore, does not contribute to the vitality of the area.

9.5 Enhancement potential

There is considerable scope for enhancement of both the buildings and open spaces in the Overcliffe Conservation Area. While property owners should be encouraged to make suitable improvements, wide ranging enhancement can probably only be achieved if other factors, such as parking and traffic issues, are addressed as part of a comprehensive scheme to improve the whole area. Also, there is a strong case for Council led grant schemes that help owners with the upkeep and repair of historic buildings or enable environmental improvements, including the re-installation of historic architectural features in the area.

The following buildings would benefit from large scale improvement or replacement:

- The modern shopfront at no.118 London Road;
- Infill buildings between nos.8 and 17 Overcliffe.

The following buildings would benefit for minor improvements or repairs:

- Nos. 110 to 119 London Road (general maintenance);
- Nos. 2 and 9 Burch Road (weeds and boundary treatment);
- The Nest, Cross Road (large plate glass window);
- Nos. 1 to 12 Pier Road (general maintenance issues);
- Nos 9 to 10 Overcliffe ;
- No. 17 Overcliffe (needs painting a more neutral colour and softening of the hard standing area to the front, side and rear of the building).

The following open spaces would benefit from improvement or enhancement:

- The gap between nos. 103 to 105 London Road and no. 36 Overcliffe;
- The north side of Overcliffe (railing and tree maintenance).

Other elements in the Conservation Area would benefit from improvement:

- The appearance of the Vauxhall Garage forecourt on Overcliffe;
- Highway signs;
- Unsympathetic modern windows and door replacements, many of which in uPVC, which should be replaced with windows and doors of an appropriate design and material;
- Unsympathetic roof coverings (concrete tiles) which should be replaced with traditional materials such as slates or clay tiles were appropriate;
- Illegal siting of satellite dishes;
- The appearance of hardstandings and boundary walls to front gardens in Overcliffe and St James's Road;

- The general modern appearance of pavements in St James's Street and Overcliffe and the maintenance of pavements in other streets;
- The condition of highway street furniture such as pedestrian railings and benches on Overcliffe and London Road.

9.6 Highways and traffic management

Traffic management is an important issue in the Overcliffe Conservation Area. The constant and busy activity detracts from the character and amenity of the area, and Overcliffe itself in particular. The wide road network around the junction of the four roads and the lack of adequate crossing facilities are detrimental to the amenity of the area. Heavy traffic is also detrimental to the special character of the Conservation Area.

9.7 Locally Listed buildings

There is no adopted comprehensive Local List for Northfleet (nor indeed, for Gravesham Borough generally) and the identification of buildings or structures for a Local List is considered to be a priority, once the criteria have been agreed. Any Local List should be drawn up with the full consultation of the local community.

9.8 Trees and Landscaping

Trees make an important contribution to the character of Character Area 1, but are less significant elsewhere at present. Mature specimens along the north side of Overcliffe and between Overcliffe and London Road on the south side, are of various types and create a sense of enclosure around the cliff edges on the Conservation Area boundary. The appearance of both Overcliffe and St. James's Street could be further enhanced by planting

of street trees. A tree strategy that considered issues of amenity, practicality and, importantly, succession planning would reduce the need to take ad hoc decisions on a case-by-case basis.

Appendices

Appendix 1	History of Gravesend
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Appendix 1

History of Gravesend

The earliest written recording of a settlement here is a reference to Gravesham in The Domesday Book of 1086. The name most likely means “graaf-ham”, the home of the reeve or bailiff of the Lord of the Manor.

The Book refers to Gravesham being in the ownership of Odo, Bishop of Bayeux (the brother of William I) although it notes that the Manor had been split into three under the ownership of three Saxon thanes (or lords) before 1066. The Saxon settlement had grown around the Old Dover Road where the Saxon Parish Church of St Mary was built. There was also a small community to the north centred on a landing place (“hithe”) close to the location of the Town Pier, at the head of what was to become High Street.

In the 11th century Gravesham was an agricultural estate but by the 14th century it had grown into a small market town. By the end of the 13th century it had adopted the name Gravesend and the Bishop of London was Richard de Gravesende at this time.

The oldest building in Gravesend, Milton Chantry, dates from the 14th century and stands in the Gravesend Riverside Conservation Area next to the fort. It was a religious institution that owned considerable land in the area, on the outskirts of the fledgling town.

The course of High Street had been established by the middle of the 14th century. It stood at the centre of a network of streets and created a direct route from the river landing stage southwards out of the town towards the old Parish Church. It seems that at the time of the town’s first market charter, in 1356, the town re-established itself in a

new position closer to the river and it is likely that the market itself was sited on the corner of High Street and West Street next to the landing stage. This development led to the redundancy of the church and a chapel was built behind High Street on the present day site of the Parish Church of St George.

The town grew under various lordships including the crown, nobility and the Cistercian Abbey of the St Mary Graces in London. Although the location of the manor house has never been discovered, it would have been close to the church and possibly within or adjacent to the boundary of the Conservation Area.

In the medieval period most of the buildings were constructed of timber and therefore susceptible to fire damage. Although the houses and shops that lined the rising gradient of High Street would not have been as densely packed or as tall as they are today, the threat from the spread of fire was still great. Towards the end of the 14th century the town was almost completely destroyed by a combined French and Spanish force that sailed as far as Gravesend before retreating from an attack aimed at London. The resultant destruction led to the first rebuilding of the town.

In recompense for the attack, Richard II granted the people of Gravesend sole rights to ferry passengers to London and this gave rise to Gravesend’s growth as a maritime centre and trading port. The suitability of Gravesend in this regard was supported by its location as the first settlement after the estuary, the deep anchorage in the area and the relatively short crossing to the north bank at this location. Open barges transported passengers to and from the Pool of London and larger, ocean-going vessels continued out along the estuary

to the international destinations beyond.

By the end of the medieval period Gravesend was a sizeable town centred on High Street, with a variety of wharves and quays established around the landing stage. River related occupations, including, ferrying, victualling, rope and sail making and boat building and repairing, occupied the majority of the town's inhabitants. Many inns, stables and shops were established in the town, although none of these remain due to the regular outbreak of fires, which continued into the 18th and 19th centuries. Gravesend was surrounded by agricultural land, the produce of which continued to sustain those within the town, as it had done for many centuries before.

The important strategic position of Gravesend at the entry point to the river from the estuary led to Henry VIII constructing defences in the area. Five blockhouses were built between 1539 and 1540: two on the north bank near Tilbury and three on the south bank at Gravesend, Milton and Higham. The remains of the Gravesend Blockhouse stand on the eastern perimeter of the Conservation Area.

In 1562 a Charter of Incorporation united the two parishes of Milton and Gravesend, although the parish boundary runs down the centre of High Street, dividing it in terms of religious jurisdiction. Early maps therefore tend to show one side of High Street or the other, depending on which parish they relate to. The inhabitants of the newly unified areas were required to meet to transact municipal business and the first Town Hall was built in 1573. The Charter also required a Common Market to be held once a week and this was established behind the Town Hall next to Queen Street (at one time known as Milton Backside) and this arrangement still exists

in the 21st century. The market and fairs were confirmed in various Royal Charters by subsequent reigning monarchs and the commercial life of the town grew.

National and international trade also grew and Gravesend became a busy port. The Long Ferry was established by the 17th century, which took passengers who had disembarked from ocean voyages from Gravesend to Billingsgate. It also brought outward bound passengers including colonial settlers, twice a day. Pocahontas, the famous daughter of a Native American chief, died at Gravesend, and was buried in the crypt of the Church of St Mary.

The Great Fire of 1727 destroyed most of the High Street, surrounding streets and the 15th century parish church. The town was rebuilt and a new church (St George's) was erected by the Corporation. Gravesend was prosperous enough to recover from this and many other subsequent fires. Later in the century the town's standing was further boosted when the Duke of York, later King James II, built a Lord High Admiral's residence here. The house was on the site of the current Clarendon Royal Hotel, next to Gravesend Blockhouse, in the eastern corner of the Conservation Area.

Although the river remained the easiest route to trade and ferry passengers to and from London, the roads in England improved in the 18th century with the advent of the turnpikes. At the southern end of High Street, New Road and King Street were part of the stagecoach route from London to Rochester. The staging point at the New Inn would have encouraged further trade and activity at this southern end of High Street.

The 18th century saw the town grow into a bustling centre that mixed commercial and

residential uses, and the adjoining streets catered for the varying needs of residents. A Congregational chapel opened in Princes Street in 1717.

In response to increased international tension at the end of the 18th century, the defences at Gravesend were strengthened with the construction of the New Town Fort to the east of Gravesend Blockhouse, and new taller stone walls were built, connecting the two fortifications. The fort remained in use and was substantially rebuilt in the 19th century by Gravesend resident General Charles Gordon, whose famous deeds in China and Africa epitomise the image of the heroic Victorian military commander. His connection with Gravesend reinforces the town's link with the maritime military, and the riverside area even retains the Mission House in which Gordon once taught.

The 19th century also saw the development of the town in other ways. Gravesend became a destination for day trippers from London and visitors would arrive by steam boat and would then walk up Windmill Hill to take in the views and enjoy the entertainment. In the 1840s Rosherville Gardens were also opened. These pleasure grounds were created to the east of the town, ran up to the river's edge and wound up the cliffside to give impressive views across the river to Tilbury. In its heyday 20,000 visitors came to Gravesend every year, many of whom would have to pass from the newly built Town Pier through the Town Quay (now Town Pier Square). Engravings from the time show visitors on the promenade along the riverfront, and many would have continued to walk up High Street to Windmill Hill.

By the end of the 19th century, fashions had changed and the improved railway network

took day trippers to further afield resorts such as Margate and Ramsgate. Gravesend became more industrial as chalk pits and brickworks were opened in the surrounding areas, particularly Northfleet. Eventually Rosherville Gardens was closed and transformed into a cement works (utilising the local chalk). The marine industries, such as fishing and shrimping, which had supported the community in earlier centuries, came back to the fore, although modern advancements in shipbuilding meant that many ancillary trades were no longer required.

The opening of the Tilbury docks in 1886 provided some alternative means of employment. Travel to work was made possible by the ferry service between the two ports, which was converted to steam power in 1855. The industrialisation of the north shore of the Thames continued into the 20th century and in the 1950s a large power station was constructed at Tilbury. This giant structure and its smoking towers has dominated the view out of Gravesend ever since.

In the 20th century Gravesend continued to grow as a small market town with areas of light industry. Much of the industry was occupied with producing building materials which were often used to build houses in nearby London. As transport links to the city improved, Gravesend became a commuter settlement and with the addition of large retail parks close by, commercial trade has waned in the town. However, there has also been much development in the town, mostly residential. The majority of construction has been beyond the boundary of the Queen Street Conservation Area, although some historic buildings have been lost and replaced within the Conservation Area in the late 20th century. The Town Pier closed in 1969 when the car ferry was discontinued and

the passenger service was moved to West Street Pier. Many of the wharves and houses, especially those between the river and St Andrew's Chapel were cleared when the inner ring road was created. Other residential roads were also removed to make way for the St George's Shopping Centre.

In the 21st century the town is the focus of large residential building projects to meet the needs of the people in the area, although the historic commercial centre of High Street has been retained and seeks to attract shoppers that have more specialist, individual requirements.

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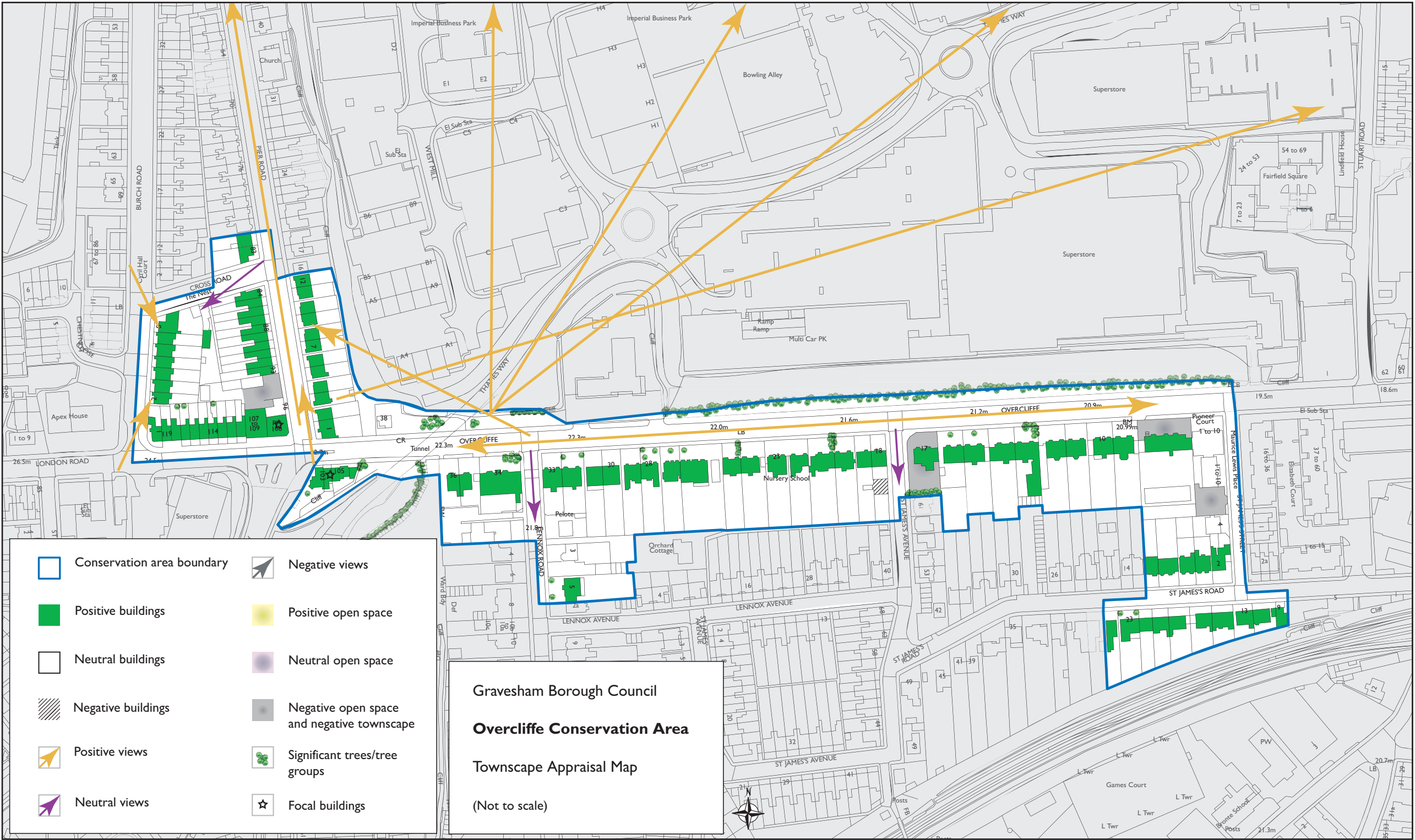
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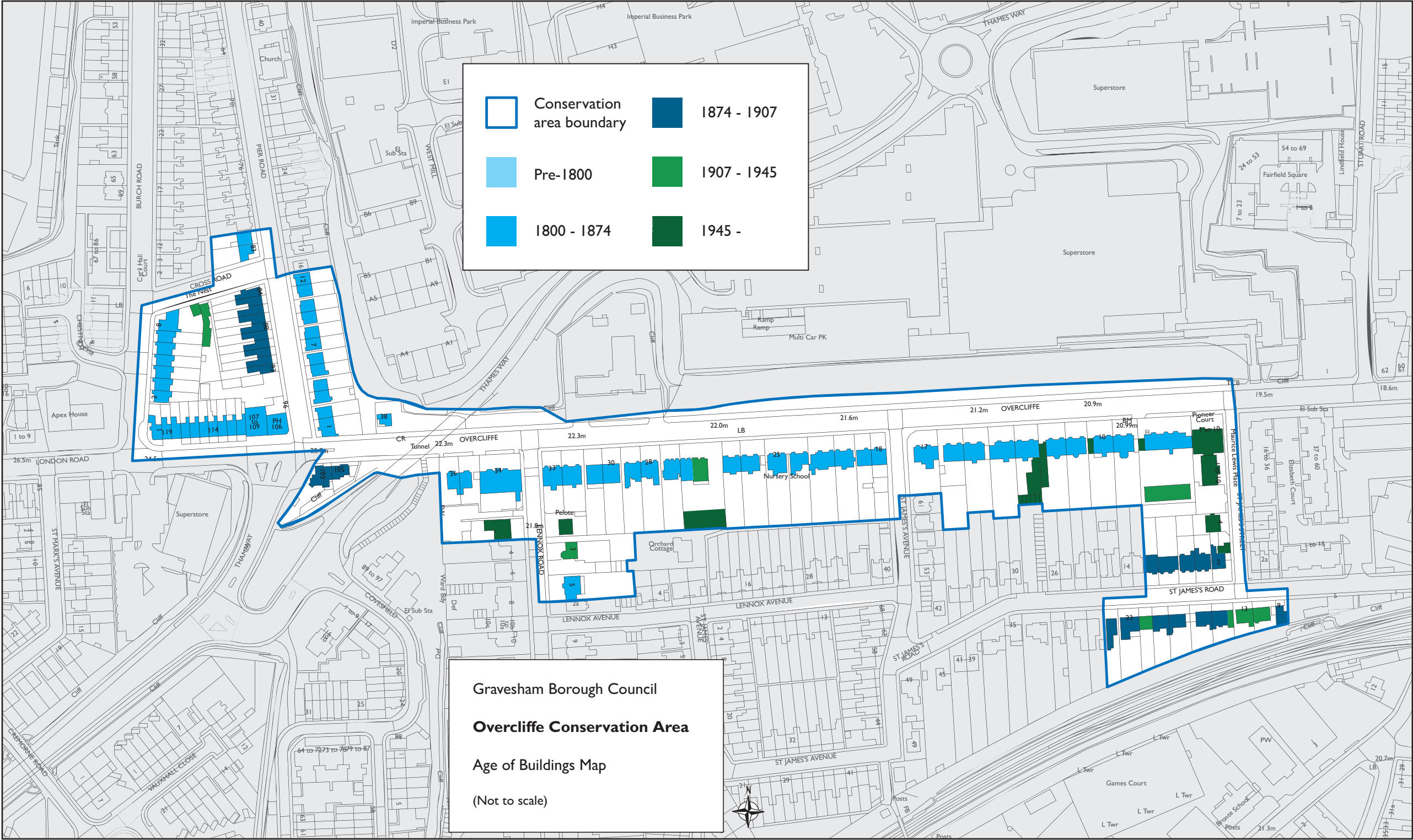
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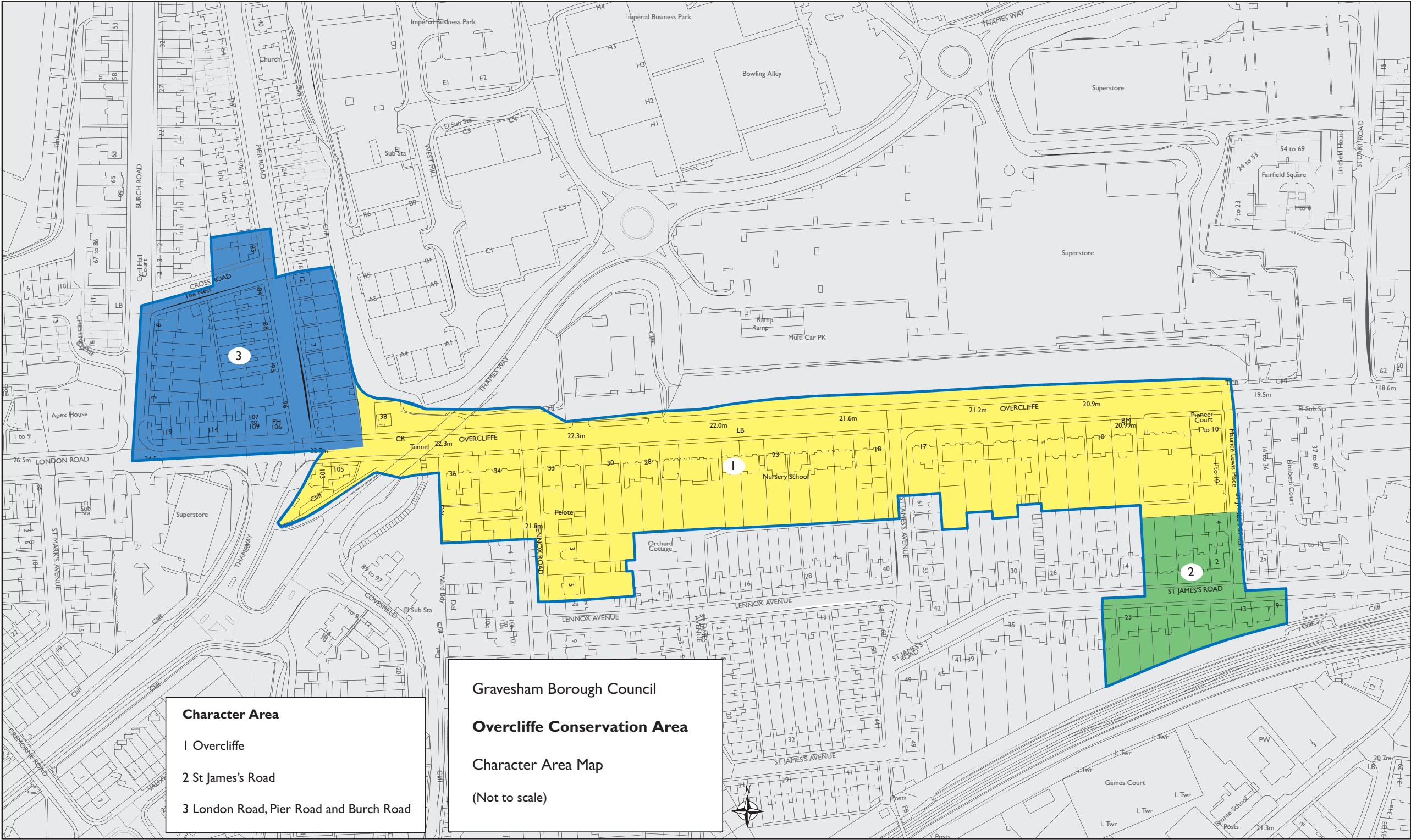
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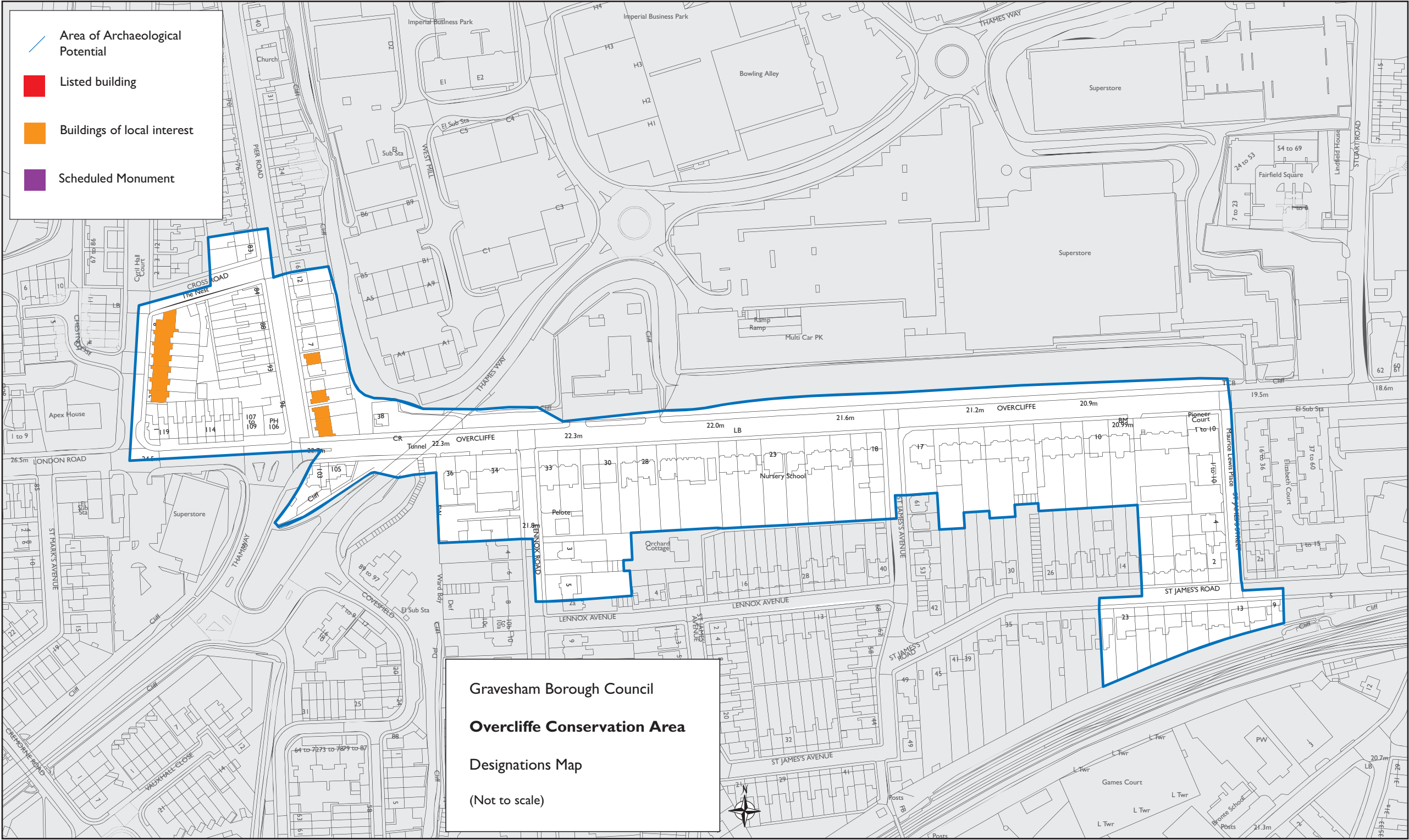
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