

CHURCH HILL WILMINGTON CONSERVATION AREA APPRAISAL



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Introduction

Under Section 69 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, local planning authorities have a duty to review and designate new conservation areas from time to time.

Following public consultation, the Church Hill Wilmington Conservation Area was designated on 7th September 1998.

Conservation area designation introduces a general control over the demolition of unlisted buildings and provides the basis for policies designed to preserve or enhance all the aspects of character or appearance that define an area's special interest. It will be for the Dartford Borough Local Plan Review to determine whether changes are necessary to the actual policies which apply to conservation areas.

This statement defines as fully as possible the character and appearance of the area including architectural and natural features of the Church Hill Wilmington Conservation Area.

Any omissions of particular buildings, features or space should not be taken to imply that they are of no interest or importance.

Origins and Development

The Conservation Area comprises the core of the village of Wilmington, which is situated



Figure 1- St. Michael and All Angels Church



Figure 2- Coombe Cottage

immediately to the south of Dartford. Wilmington lies on the escarpment forming an important ridge and backdrop to Dartford. Church Hill is identified on the earliest Ordnance Survey maps, and formed part of the local lanes serving the villages and hamlets to the south of the town. The importance of the Church of St. Michael is paramount to the

area. There has been a place of worship on the site from at least Saxon times (Figure 1). The Church has been extensively changed over time and includes



Figure 3- Wilmington House

mediaeval, Saxon, and even some Arts and Crafts alterations. Coombe Cottage is one of the few properties in the village set within it's own grounds (Figure 2). Prior to 1850 when Wilmington School was opened, a Dames school for elementary education was held at Coombe Cottage. It was the first voluntary school in the area, prior to the introduction of compulsory education.

Subsequently, Coombe Cottage became the residence of the curate of St. Michael and All Angels Church. The path between the cottage and the church is known locally as "Curate's Walk".

The building of Wilmington House (Figure 3) early in the C18th, together with the attendant land incorporated in the grounds, protected the local area from major development in the intervening years. However, in the mid 1930's the grounds to the front of the house, which included the lodge and stable buildings, were sold for development. A contemporary planning application (Figure 4) shows the formation of Church Walk. Examination of other planning applications for the houses along Church Hill show that the whole site developed rapidly.

The application shown in

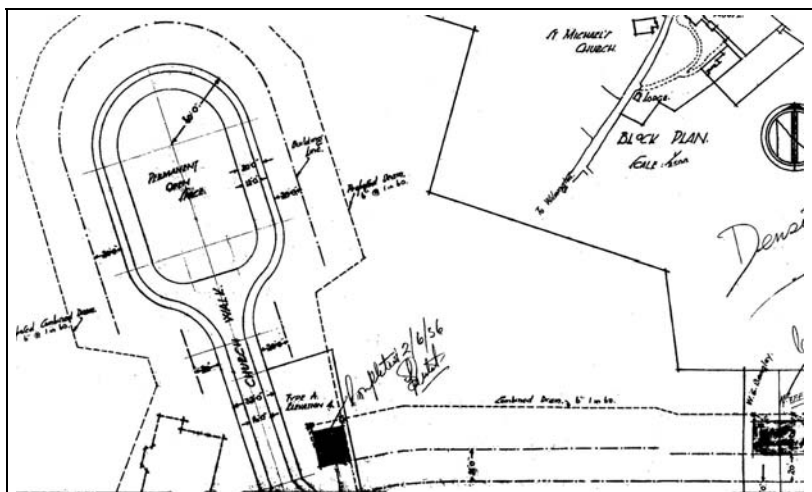


Figure 4 - Church Walk Planning Application Circa 1935

Figure 4 proposed a road improvement line passing through Wilmington House. Although this was never implemented, it may explain why the properties on Church Hill are set further back from the road. As a consequence, the large verge has mature trees, which greatly enhances the setting (Figure 5).



Figure 5- Treed setting

Character

The Conservation Area is characterised by two contrasting elements- relatively large and consistently detailed houses set in a mature landscape; and three important, individual buildings – the church, Wilmington House and Coombe Cottage- the former two dominating the street scene.

It is not typical inter-war suburbia; the houses are of some architectural quality, albeit within a limited palette of style. These are offset against the Church and Wilmington House.

Each house in Church Hill is



Figure 6- Church Hill

relatively unique to its neighbour (Figure 6, 7 and 8). In Church Walk, the style is more homogenous, although again each house has unique features (Figure 7 and Figure 8). Much of the housing in the Conservation Area was developed in the mid to late 30's, by Cooper Estates Ltd,

based in Wilmington House.



Figure 7- Church Walk



Figure 8- Church Walk

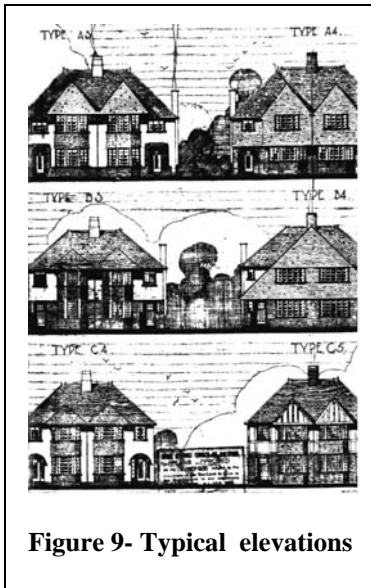


Figure 9- Typical elevations

The land associated with Wilmington House was developed within only 2 or 3 years. The consistency of detailing and materials used throughout much of the Conservation Area can still be

seen. The style of the



Figure 10- Wilmington House

domestic buildings is homogenous, although a variety of elevations were available for each house type (Figure 9). The style has altered little over the intervening period, reinforcing the architectural character of the area and providing a consistent backdrop to the street.

Wilmington House offers a strong visual stop to the vista travelling east from Wilmington (Figure 10). This may have been a deliberately contrived vista when the House was built since it is on the axis of the road. The historic building itself is of good quality and Grade II listed. Unfortunately the building has lost its setting over the years. Apart from the vista along the road, there is no real sense of the original layout of the estate. Wilmington House is currently used as offices. The extensions carried out in the 1950's, 60's and 1970's are of simple design



Figure 11- St Michael and All Angels Church

and not of particular



Figure 12- St. Michael and All Angels Church

architectural merit.

The office use creates excessive demand for car parking, and the rear of the property offers little landscape opportunity for such an important local building. Fortunately the car park is shielded from the road by a tree belt along the boundary.

St. Michael and All Angels Church is hidden from the street due to the trees within the churchyard. Nevertheless it is an important building within the Conservation Area. The

graveyard wall also forms an important linear feature in the street, offsetting the trees within the yard and opposite.

The graveyard has a tranquil air away from the bustling Church Hill, and from within the graveyard there are fine views of the church (Figures 11 and 12). The precincts around the church are defined as an area of archaeological potential due to the antiquity of the use of the site.

St. Michael and All Angels has all the requisite qualities of a fine local church. There are four important tombs and memorials within the yard, although some are in need of repair. These include the Hulse Memorial dated 1795, (Figure 13) and the Russell family vault dated 1852 (Figure 14). The fine yew tree over the Hulse Memorial is several hundred years old.

The treed bank to the west edge of the graveyard provides seclusion from the adjacent Oakfield Park, and the nearby public footpath offers a sedate walk off Church Hill and into the park.

St. Michael and All Angels Church provides a focal point when entering the Conservation Area from the North. The view of the church is framed by the trees forming the front boundaries to 3 Church Field,



Figure 13- Hulse Memorial



Figure 14- Hobbs and Russell vaults



Figure 15- A2 Boundary

Homestead, The White House and Mounthaven and hence these are included in the Conservation Area for their contribution to the street scene.

As a complete contrast, the A2 trunk road marks the southern boundary of the Conservation Area. The A2 forms a very strong sound and visual barrier to the remaining part of the High Road. The boundaries of the properties adjacent to the A2 form a natural line to the

boundary of the Area (Figure 15).

Materials and Styles

The area is basically split into two discrete built elements; the inter-war housing in Church Walk, Church Hill, and the High Road, and the grouping of Wilmington House, and St. Michael and All Angels Church and Coombe Cottage.

As previously described, the inter-war housing was built with consistent style and detail. The palette of materials is limited to brick, render and plain tiled roofs. Some steel windows have been replaced with modern UPVC.

Wilmington House is built in fine red brick and has classical Georgian proportions, complete with a pedimented portico. The modern extensions are of simple 'brick box' design in a contrasting brick to Church Walk. The major extension to the side and rear of the House now practically subsumes the original building at the rear, and forms a major part of the public elevation in Church Walk.

St. Michael and All Angels Church has a wealth of varying materials including knapped flint with stone dressings, render

and even timber weatherboarding to the spire.

Conclusions

The Conservation Area is important due to the local history it represents. Most of the houses were built within a short period of each other, and with the associated maturing landscape they form a local architectural and historic group built under the auspices of one builder. As a counterpoint, the three major buildings- Wilmington House, St. Michael and All Angels Church and Coombe Cottage- form their own settings and have their own history. Each is important in their own right- together they form an important historic core to the Conservation Area.

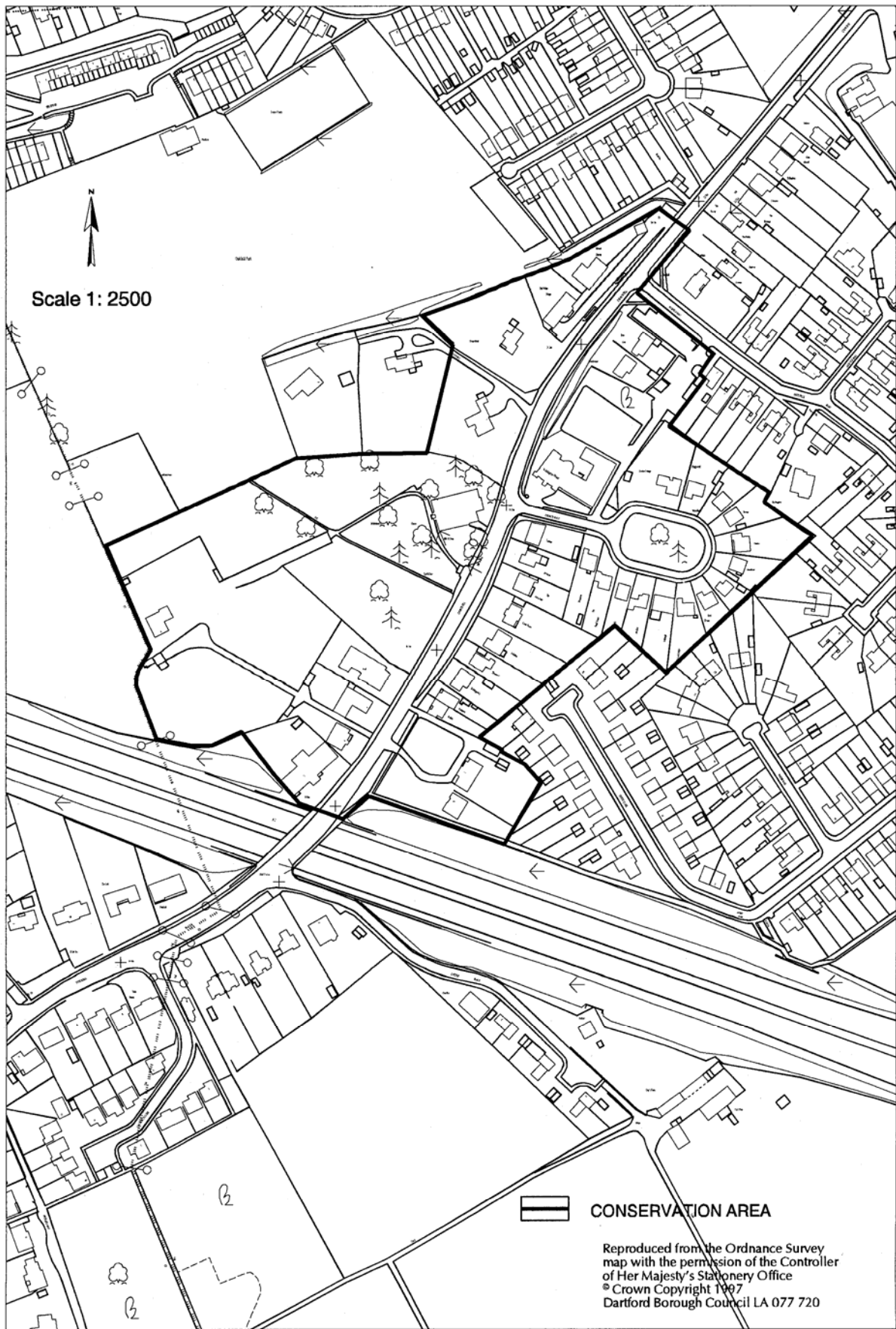
Development Control Considerations

1. Any losses of trees should be replaced on a like for like basis, as they are a dominant feature. The major trees in the Conservation Area (behind Wilmington House and Doone Cottage) are already protected by Tree Preservation Orders. However the sense of enclosure offered by the trees within the open space centred in Church Walk should not be overlooked. These trees offer visual interest in what could be a particularly bland space, being flat and otherwise just grassed.
2. The trees both within and opposite the churchyard are also a key element in the landscape, helping to form a green wedge between the church and the surrounding development, and acting as a backdrop to Oakfield Park beyond. Some also contribute to the street scene directly, as do the very important trees in the easterly verge of Church Hill, opposite the churchyard.
3. The important vista to the north-east towards Wilmington House, along Church Hill needs to be protected to prevent the architectural impact of Wilmington House being disrupted. Any new signage or alteration to alignment of this road needs to be carefully considered.
4. The trees to the front boundaries of 3 Church Field, Homestead, The White House and Mounthaven form an important part of the vista of St. Michael and All Angels Church on the approach from the north. These properties are specifically included to ensure any works to these trees are subject to control.
5. The materials used are traditional and are subdued, with no strident colours except for white painted render on the domestic buildings. Architectural forms are traditional, with pitched, plain tiled roofs, natural brickwork with relatively small openings for doors and windows. Any alterations or renovations to the unlisted and domestic buildings require care consideration in terms of location, mass, colour and texture. Any extension needs to carefully address the style and materials of the existing buildings to minimise their impact. Attention to the detailing of replacement windows is vital- particularly proportions of lights and vents, thickness of glazing bars and frames etc, and frame colour. The slim section of the original windows is impossible to match in UPVC; the resultant frame thicknesses build into clumsy replicas of the original. Replacement of front doors would require the same careful consideration.

6. Wilmington House forms an extremely important termination to the vista along Church Hill from the south west. Therefore any change to this building should be carefully considered not just for their immediate impact on the building, but in terms of massing in the context of this vista.

7. St. Michael and All Angels Church has an important aspect to the street, and another to the west. Any alterations to this building need to address these aspects as changes to the massing and configuration of the Church will be very important.

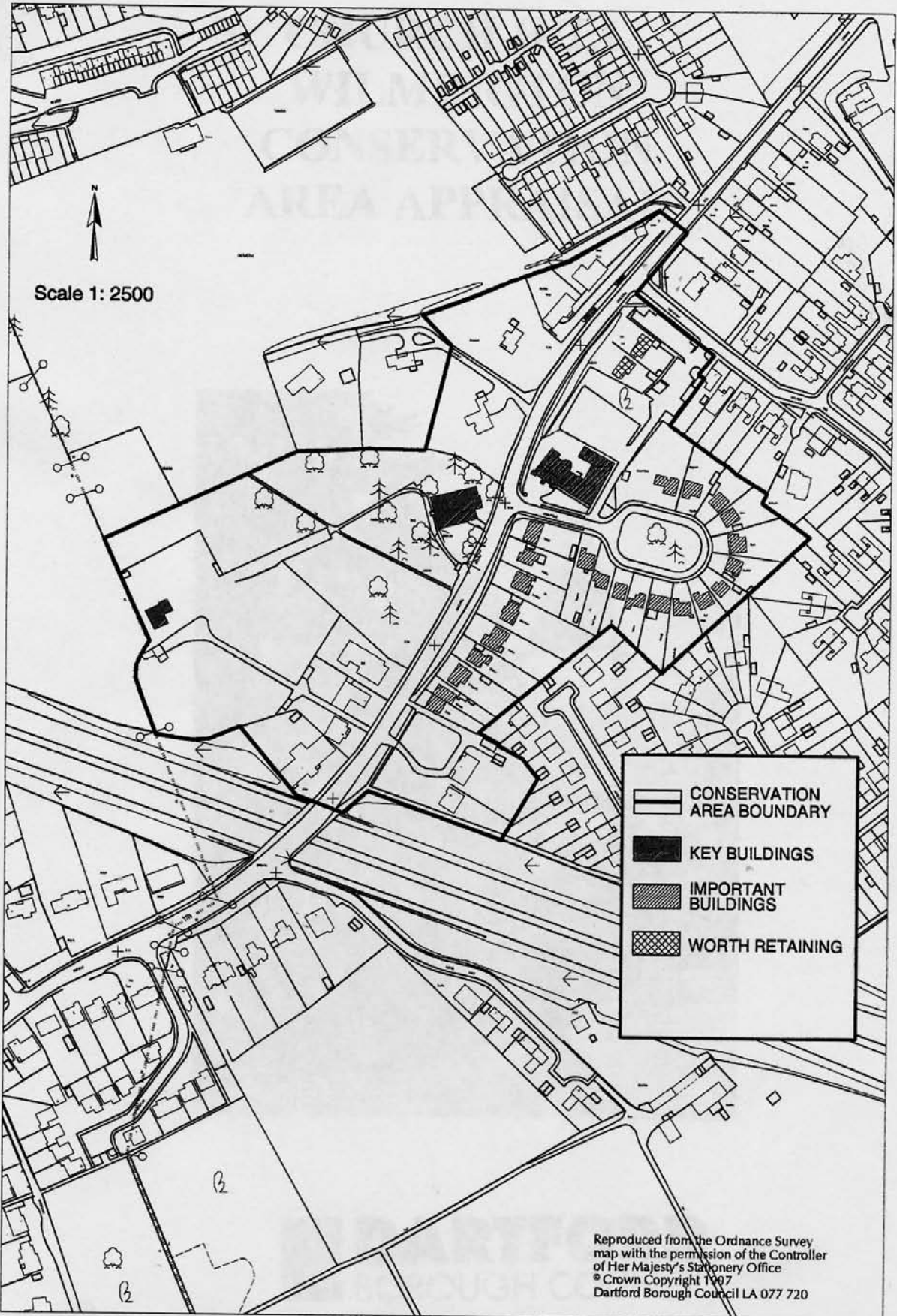
8. Coombe Cottage is an important residence set within it's own grounds. Any development must respect the setting of the cottage with the church.



CHURCH HILL WILMINGTON - CONSERVATION AREA

MAP 1





Scale 1: 2500

- CONSERVATION AREA BOUNDARY
- KEY BUILDINGS
- ▨ IMPORTANT BUILDINGS
- ▩ WORTH RETAINING

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CONTRIBUTION OF BUILDINGS

MAP 3