

# **Howes Place Conservation Area Appraisal**



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# **1 Introduction**

This particular area of Huntingdon Road has been identified as an area for consideration of being designated as a Conservation Area following the 2008/09 Suburbs and Rapid Assessment Report. This appraisal provides information about its architectural merit and historical development and sets out why this area should be considered for designation as a Conservation Area.

## **1.1 Method**

Consultant's Scott Wilson working on behalf of the City Council's Historic Environment Team analysed the character of the National Institute of Agricultural Botany (NIAB) and Howes Place section of Huntingdon Road and set out the essential characteristics of the location and how it might be protected and improved.

## **1.2 Location**

NIAB and Howes Place are located approximately one and a half miles north west of the City Centre on the edge of the City on Huntingdon Road. The area is surrounded by institutional sports and other open grounds to the north and east. Suburban residential areas have encroached on these grounds particularly fronting Huntingdon Road.

Land in this area is under increasing pressure for redevelopment as Cambridge grows.

## **2 The Planning Policy Context**

### **2.1 Legislation**

Section 69 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 imposes a duty on Local Planning Authorities (LPAs) to designate as Conservation Areas any 'areas of special architectural or historic interest the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance'.

The special character of Conservation Areas means that the control of development is stricter than in other areas. Therefore: *New buildings and the spaces around them must preserve or improve the character of the area. The siting, scale height, form, details and building materials will all need to be carefully chosen.*

### **2.2 National Policy**

Planning Policy Statement 1 (PPS1): Delivering Sustainable Development (2005) outlines the Government's commitment to protecting and enhancing the quality of the historic environment (paragraph 17).

Planning Policy Statement 5: Planning for the Historic Environment (PPS5) advocates that Local Plans should consider the qualities and local distinctiveness of the historic environment and how these can contribute to the development of the spatial vision in the local development framework core strategy. Consideration should also be made of how best to conserve individual, groups or types of heritage assets that are most at risk of loss through neglect, decay or other threats (paragraph HE3.4).

### **2.3 Local Policy**

Cambridge Local Plan (July 2006) sets out the current policies and proposals for future development and land use to 2016. A summary of Local Plan policies and the major implications of Conservation Area designation are appended to the end of this report.

## **3 Summary of Special Interest**

### **3.1 Introduction**

The special character of the NIAB and Howes Place area is defined by its layout and mock 18<sup>th</sup> century architectural style united in the landscape designed by the architect Percy Morley Horder in 1921 and their association with Sir Lawrence Weaver and the welfare of ex-servicemen.

### **3.2 General Character**

This area is a 1921 architect designed development of 15 houses and a 3 storey institutional building. Later additions to Howes Place, Nos. 16-18 have been sympathetically integrated into this original plan using the original formal landscaping. In addition to the formal landscaping of rows of pleached limes and beech and other neatly trimmed hedges, the number of mature trees and hedges, which lie to the rear of the Howes Place properties, in NIAB's grounds and on the field and property boundaries in the area, are significant. They reinforce the ties between the function of NIAB and the landscape in general.

### **3.3 Landscape Setting**

Originally built in an isolated location, ideally located for the growing of plants for testing, NIAB and Howes Place have become surrounded by the suburbs of Girton and Cambridge on the Huntingdon Road front. The significant relationship with horticulture still remains with the formal landscape to the street of Howes Place and gardens of NIAB.

The most important views of the area are from Huntingdon Road where it's straightness allows some distant views of the area and its trees, whilst in closer view the buildings and the formal landscape come to the fore. The rows of pleached limes and interspersed hedges are unique in Cambridge. Tree framed views along Howes Place are also important.

### **3.4 Historical Development**

NIAB is at the junction of a number of historic manors, and lies within Chesterton, held by the Crown until c.1200. Land transfers were via the Earl of Winchester to Barnwell Priory and then to Thomas Brakyn in 1540, who was mayor three times and MP for Cambridge four times.

The land appears to be known as Arbury Meadow and was variously used for sheep and cattle grazing and later in part as a 'sheep walk' prior to the general enclosure of Chesterton in 1838. During the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century, land, which was not set aside for housing, was used for horticulture. Close Farm was developed during the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, with its farm buildings located to the east of the farmhouse. Close Farm is now known as The White House. Its

agricultural/horticultural association continues with the modern scientific testing of plants following the building of NIAB in 1921.

The name of Howes has an historic association with adjacent land to the west. Howe House, the Felix Hotel and Traveller's Rest public house lie on ancient fields (or closes) of the medieval hamlet of Howes, which straddles a number of parishes. The hamlet disappears by c.1600 but the name remains in the rebuilt house and 'Howes Place'.

### **3.5 Archaeology**

Cambridgeshire has been settled since at least the Bronze Age, with settlements known close to modern day Chesterton.

Huntingdon Road is a Roman road which extends from the vicinity of the Castle Mound in a north westerly direction. 19<sup>th</sup> century maps identify an ancient site of "Roman Coffins" on the southern side of the Road between NIAB and St Giles and St Peter's Church.

Large scale archaeological evaluation was undertaken in 2007/8 between Huntingdon and Histon Roads. Pits of medieval and undetermined date were found along with sherds of medieval pottery to the south of the NIAB building.

## 4 Social History

NIAB was founded in 1919 by charitable subscription, through an initiative of Sir Lawrence Weaver, the Commercial Secretary of the Board of Agriculture and Fisheries:

- to improve the existing seeds, plants and crops, aiding the introduction or distribution of new varieties;
- to improve methods of husbandry;
- to encourage the discovery, investigation of inventions and processes of benefit.

In 1921 the existing NIAB building was constructed along with number 1-15 Howes Place for the Housing Association for Officers Families (HAOF).

The HAOF charity was founded in 1917 by Evelyn Elizabeth Brinton, Ernest Ridley Debenham and Lawrence Weaver. Evelyn Elizabeth Brinton (née Forbes) (1868-1929), Daughter of Sir Charles John Forbes 4th Baronet; wife of William Dodge James, later wife of John Chaytor Brinton is commemorated in a plaque on No. 5 Howes Place (now overgrown) "Founder of the Housing Association for Officers Families. Chairman 1916-1929. She went about doing good."

A number of ex-servicemen were employed by NIAB.

Further information is contained in "Crop and Seed Improvement – A history of the National Institute of Agricultural Botany 1919 to 1996" by Dr P. S. Wellington and Valerie Silvey, 1996.

## 5 Spatial Analysis

Howes Place and NIAB are located directly off Huntingdon Road, which is a major arterial road for commuters to Cambridge from the north west. Despite this being a busy road, the set back of the buildings and landscaping of the area means that it retains a tranquil air.

Howes Place is a linear cul-de-sac with a small central green located to the southern side of the street. This green is the only public open space within the area of study. The area is laid to lawn and edged with a medium height evergreen topiary hedge on the eastern, southern and western sides and pleached limes on the northern side. It is visible from the street through the tree trunks of the limes. The green is separated from the houses by an access road and narrow gardens or car parking.

It is probable that an additional green area was planned for the opposite side of the street, where the plan form of Nos. 14-15 reflect that of Nos. 9-10, forming a strong visual corner to the green. However, Nos. 14-15 are now an integral part of the NIAB site, with high security fences interrupting the relationship between the two sides of the street.

The linear nature of Howes Place is enhanced by the linear form of the landscaping directing views along the street and allowing only glimpses of the houses.

NIAB was built as a pavilion building set within its own landscaped gardens, continuing the formal style of Howes Place with avenues of pleached limes and formal hedges. It is set back significantly from Huntingdon Road behind a gravel courtyard and was accessed by foot through the roadside hedge and picket gate. A large arch on the southern elevation allowed vehicular access to the courtyard from Howes Place increasing visual integration between the street and NIAB.

## **6 Architectural Overview**

### **6.1 Percy Morley Horder**

Morley Horder was a noted Edwardian architect who's passion was the Arts and Crafts Movement. He used the principles of historical vernacular architecture to create structures for modern purposes and married these with landscape gardens, occasionally working with Gertrude Jekyll. He built a number of institutional buildings including the Chapel Court at Jesus College and private homes, including Pinfold Manor, Walton-on-the-Hill, Surrey, in 1913 for David Lloyd George.

He designed and in 1921 built the NIAB building and the buildings of 1-15 Howes Place. He also laid out the landscaped gardens.

### **6.2 Howes Place**

Nos. 1-15 Howes Place were constructed to wrap around a central green, set back from the street, with Nos. 3-4 and 9-10 forming an 'H' plan to negotiate the corners. Nos. 14-15 form a further 'H'-shape, but are now contained within the NIAB complex. It may have been originally planned to repeat the same pattern of development on the opposite side of the street.

The Royal visit on 18<sup>th</sup> October 1921 was taken on a tour of Howes Place, which included a central laundry house and was originally supplied with heating and hot water from a central boiler. It appears that No. 6 was the Laundry House as it is in a central location and is to a different design and plan form. Three houses were occupied at the time of the visit by officers' widows and one house was of a special plan for seriously disabled officers.

The houses are built as two storey semi-detached properties joined by linking 2 metre high gated brick walls. Constructed in the pseudo 18<sup>th</sup> century polite architectural style with vertical sliding sashes, symmetrically similar to NIAB. However, these buildings have tiled hipped roofs with sprocket eaves.

Nos. 16-18 Howes Place were constructed between 1939 and 1948 and reflect the design of the Morley Horder buildings in respect of set back, materials, roof pitches and vertical emphasis of the windows. The level of architectural detail is much simpler, but they sit comfortably with NIAB and the remainder of Howes Place.

### **6.3 NIAB**

The 'E'-shaped plan of the building is enclosed on the south western side with walls and gate piers forming a gravelled courtyard. The building is of pseudo 18<sup>th</sup> century polite architectural style with vertical sliding sashes in a symmetrical form. Constructed of white brick under a hipped mansard plain tiled roof of two and a half storey, with a three storey entrance, Pevsner had in 1970 already

recognised the architectural importance of NIAB: “1921 by Morley Horder. An extension by JBF Cowper & Poole (1955) is of no architectural interest, though the red-brick stores and boiler house of 1963 are. Aluminium curtain-walling on a brick ground floor.”

The extensions and additions to the rear of the building are only visible where they are close to the property boundary on Howes Place or Whitehouse Lane. The 1955 extension is not of architectural interest, in addition to harming the character and visual link between Nos. 14 and 15 Howes Place on the western side of the street. The harm to Nos.1-12 is to a lesser extent. The stores are not visible from the street.

## **7 Trees, Landscape and Open Spaces**

### **7.1 Introduction**

Set on the gravel ridge to the north west of the City Centre the area is relatively flat. However, the expected long views are interrupted by the many trees which give character to the area, intermingled with open fields and suburban housing estates.

The landscape within and around the area is the structure within which individual buildings are set. Much of this landscape is protected by Tree Preservation Orders.

NIAB is set within a formal landscaped garden to the Huntingdon Road consisting of formal avenues of pleached lime trees and evergreen/semi evergreen hedges. The limes and hedges also form the property boundary to Huntingdon Road.

A Mulberry tree planted by King George V provides a natural element to the manicured landscape. It is important for its historic association and is mirrored by a Mountain Ash on the opposite side of the garden to return some symmetry.

Street trees along both sides of Huntingdon Road enhance and soften the nature of the busy street.

### **7.2 Howes Place**

Howes Place is based around a central village green laid to lawn and enclosed with neatly trimmed evergreen hedges. The narrow quiet street is formally planted with two parallel rows of pleached lime trees in the road verge, to either side of an informal tarmac path. Part of the original double avenue is missing to the western side of Howes Place, where the NIAB building has been extended northwards. This linear form is further enhanced with the beech and other hedges which are grown as a medium height boundary treatment to many properties.

A Mulberry tree planted by Queen Mary provides an alien asymmetrical natural element to the manicured landscape, important for its historic association.

## **8 Key Characteristics of the Area**

### **8.1 Uses**

The area is characterised by two current uses: the horticultural institutional use of the NIAB complex and the residential use of the remaining properties.

### **8.2 Buildings**

The buildings are of two to three storeys in height.

Set back from the street behind formal landscape, views of the buildings are limited.

The consistent use of white bricks under pitched tile roofs with vertically emphasised windows and symmetrical or near symmetrical treatment of facades provides homogeneity to the group of buildings.

A strong rhythm is created by the trunks of the pleached limes with their canopy creating a strong high level horizontal emphasis to the street.

### **8.3 Streets and Spaces**

Howes Place is based around a central village green laid to lawn and enclosed with neatly trimmed evergreen hedges. The linear nature of the quiet street is enhanced with the formally planted parallel rows of mature pleached lime trees and enhanced with beech hedges.

Parking is close to the residential buildings, accessed via gaps between the trunks of the lime trees.

The gardens of NIAB are private, but provide an attractive formal setting to the building and strong edge to Huntingdon Road.

The key individual trees are:

- Black Mulberry planted 18<sup>th</sup> October 1921 by King George V in the south western corner of the front lawn to NIAB. A tree has been planted in symmetry on the north west;
- Black Mulberry planted 18<sup>th</sup> October 1921 by Queen Mary in the lawn of Howes Place.

The key groups of trees are:

- Hedges and pleached lime trees which line Howes Place on the either side of the road and the end of the road;
- Hedges and pleached lime trees which form a landscaped garden around the original NIAB building;

- Street trees planted in the verge of Huntingdon Road in front of NIAB and Howes Place

Abutting the Proposed Conservation Area:

- Trees and hedges growing parallel to Huntingdon Road
- Trees and hedges forming field boundaries
- Trees to the southern side of Christ's College and Sidney Sussex College sports grounds in the rear of properties fronting Huntingdon Road.

## **9 Issues**

### **9.1 Introduction**

The special interest of the area is the inter-relationship of the formal and informal landscape with the buildings. Where the pleached lime avenues have been interrupted, the character of the area has been reduced.

Over the years, since the building of NIAB and Nos. 1-15 Howes Place the original horticultural landscape setting has been significantly reduced with the building of suburban housing. Whilst much of this is well landscaped behind trees and hedges, the built form is still visible in numerous places, and where garages and ancillary buildings have been built close to the front property boundaries, the impact is higher.

### **9.2 Works to existing Buildings**

Works to alter the residential buildings within the area has been minimal, however, works to extend NIAB and to build within the grounds has been extensive.

The extensions to NIAB have a harmful effect on the character of the 1921 building removing in part its relationship with its formal landscape.

In between the trunks of the limes on Howes Place, driveways have been formed to provide access to parking on what was the front garden of many properties. Where the driveways have been laid to tarmac the informality of the hard landscaping has been lost and trees could potentially be damaged.

### **9.3 Conservation Area Boundary**

The area is not currently designated as a Conservation Area, however, the importance of the area for its homogeneous architecture designed by an eminent architect and its strong formal landscape scheme coupled with mature informal landscape is at risk of losing its essential character through the cumulative impact of minor changes.

The buildings and landscape designed by Morley Horder in 1921 and the original farm and nursery trial beds where there is a strong association between the land and the function of the buildings are potentially at risk of unsympathetic change, despite the pleached limes being protected by Tree Preservation Orders.

The architectural details, which the residential buildings currently retain, need to be protected as it is detailing such as the original windows and doors and chimneys that maintain the character of the area.

## 10 Guidance

The formal and informal landscape is the key to this area. Further Tree Preservation Orders should be investigated to the rear of properties in Howes Place.

Currently the buildings retain a significant number of original architectural details. It is recommended that an 'Article 4(2) Direction', which restricts certain permitted development work, is introduced to ensure that architectural details, such as the unsuitable replacement of doors and windows, which the residential buildings currently retain, are not lost to unsympathetic alterations.

The monitoring of change is equally as important as the control. A photographic survey of the Conservation Area should be undertaken once every three years, to enable evaluation and action where necessary of unauthorised changes. This photographic survey should coincide with the review and updating of the Conservation Area Appraisal.

New buildings and additions within the proposed Conservation Area should be designed to a high quality and set within structured landscaping, maintaining the existing mature trees and hedges. A design guide will be developed to illustrate key points.

Placing dense landscape screens in front of set back buildings and additions, along with landscaping the long side and rear property boundaries plus areas such as car parking, is also important.

Development proposed adjacent to the proposed Conservation Area should also be designed to a high standard and be set within structured landscaping. In order not to detract from the special character of the Conservation Area the landscaping should not copy the use of pleached limes as these are indicative of Morley Horder's work. However, the use of themed strong lines combined with some informality would integrate any new area with the existing.

A strategy for the retention, protection and replacement of trees, which includes regular inspection and maintenance of all trees within the Conservation Area will maintain the character of the area.

The open space on Howes Place is essential to the layout of the street. The space should continue to be maintained as grassed open area.

The open area in front of the NIAB building should be maintained as an open area.

The materials and construction of the existing streets currently retains an informal nature, with un-kerbed grass verges. It is important to maintain this informality and where possible to remove the hard edged driveways, concrete

access roads and replace them with gravel, bound gravel or tarmac surfaces with high levels of aggregates in the wearing course.

## 11 Summary

This Appraisal has sought to identify what is special and unique about the NIAB and Howes Place area and to assess whether this special character is sufficient to warrant the designation of a new Conservation Area.

The area comprises the NIAB building and Howes Place. The buildings were designed and set out within a defined landscape in 1921 by noted architect Percy Morley Horder.

The buildings and landscape retain their essential characteristics and are little altered externally, with the exception of a large extension to the rear of NIAB. The relationship of the NIAB with Howes Place is still maintained despite the private sale of properties in Howes Place.

The area should be designated as a Conservation Area to protect and enhance its special character. An Article 4(2) Direction is also recommended to prevent small changes that would accumulatively undermine the area's special quality.

## 12 Appendices

### 12.1 Appendix I Listed Buildings and Buildings of Local Interest

#### (i) Listed Buildings

There are no Listed Buildings within the proposed Howes Place Conservation Area.

#### (ii) Buildings of Local Interest

National Institute of Agricultural Botany: designed by architect Percy Morley Horder in 1921 in a vernacular style of white bricks and pitched tiles roof is set within its original landscaped garden of gravelled courtyard and avenues of hedges and pleached lime trees.

Nos. 1-15 Howes Place: designed by architect Percy Morley Horder in 1921 in a vernacular style of white bricks and pitched tile roof is set within its original landscaped street with avenues of hedges and pleached lime trees.

### 12.2 Appendix II Trees of Note

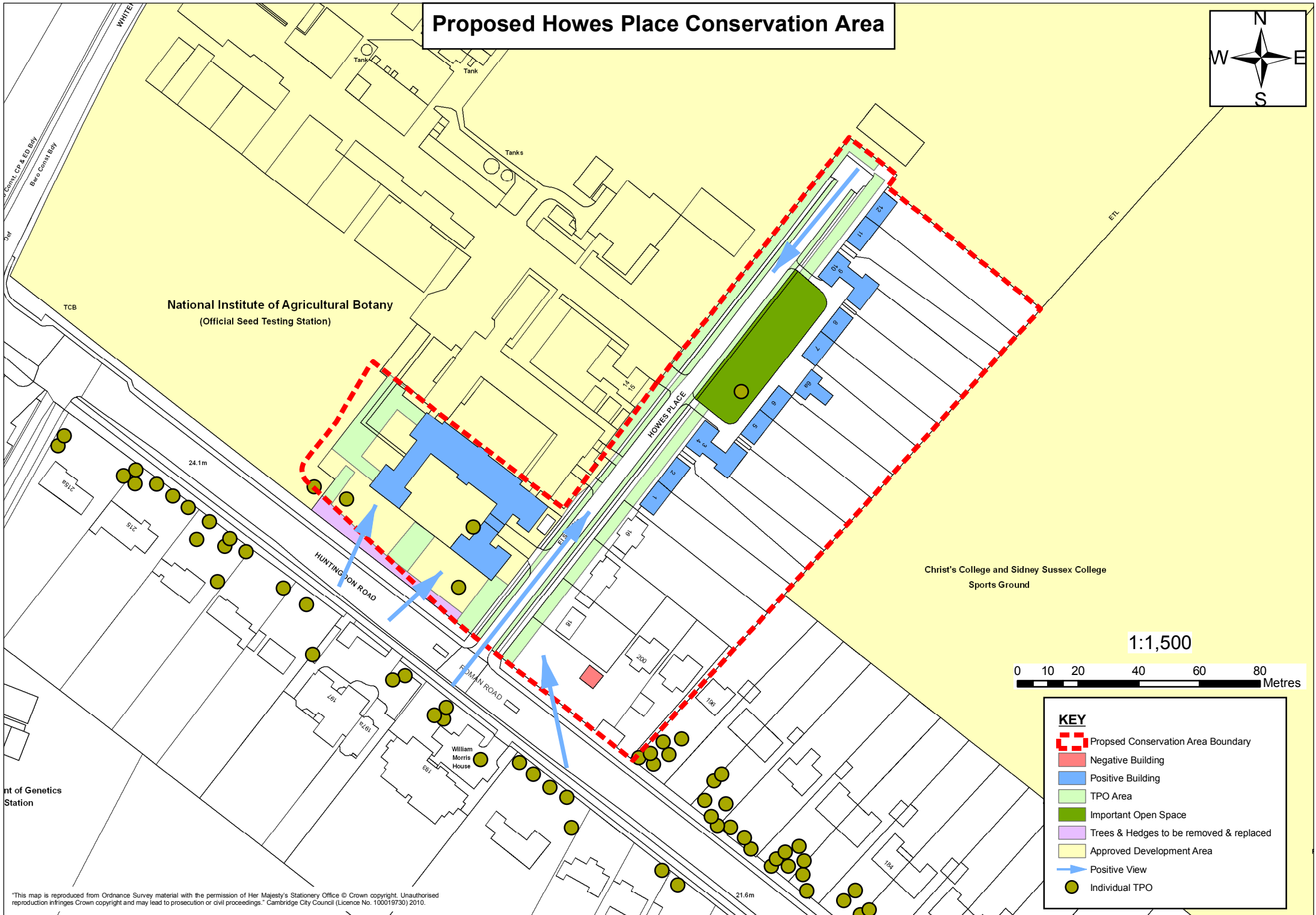
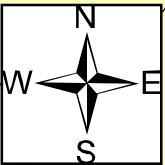
Address	Trees of Note
Howes Place	<p>Established <i>Morus nigra</i> (Black Mulberry), central green in front of Nos. 5 and 6 Howes Place.</p> <p>31 pleached limes, northern and western side of Howes Place.</p> <p>41 pleached limes, western side of Howes Place.</p> <p>48 pleached limes, eastern side of Howes Place.</p> <p>49 pleached limes, eastern side of Howes Place.</p> <p>Beech and other hedges</p>
NIAB Landscape Gardens	<p><i>Sorbus acuparia</i> (Mountain Ash), south western corner of NIAB, fronting Huntingdon Road.</p> <p><i>Magnolia grandiflora</i>, on eastern side of NIAB courtyard.</p> <p><i>Morus nigra</i> (Black Mulberry), south eastern corner of NIAB, fronting Huntingdon Road.</p> <p>40 pleached limes, western side of NIAB.</p>

	40 pleached limes, on southern side of NIAB, fronting Huntingdon Road.
Huntingdon Road	The street trees on Huntingdon Road form an avenue, reducing the impact of the busy road.

### **12.3 Appendix III Maps – Protected trees and Buildings and Landscape Features**

See next page.

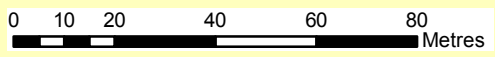
# Proposed Howes Place Conservation Area



National Institute of Agricultural Botany  
(Official Seed Testing Station)

Christ's College and Sidney Sussex College  
Sports Ground

1:1,500



KEY	
	Proposed Conservation Area Boundary
	Negative Building
	Positive Building
	TPO Area
	Important Open Space
	Trees & Hedges to be removed & replaced
	Approved Development Area
	Positive View
	Individual TPO

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