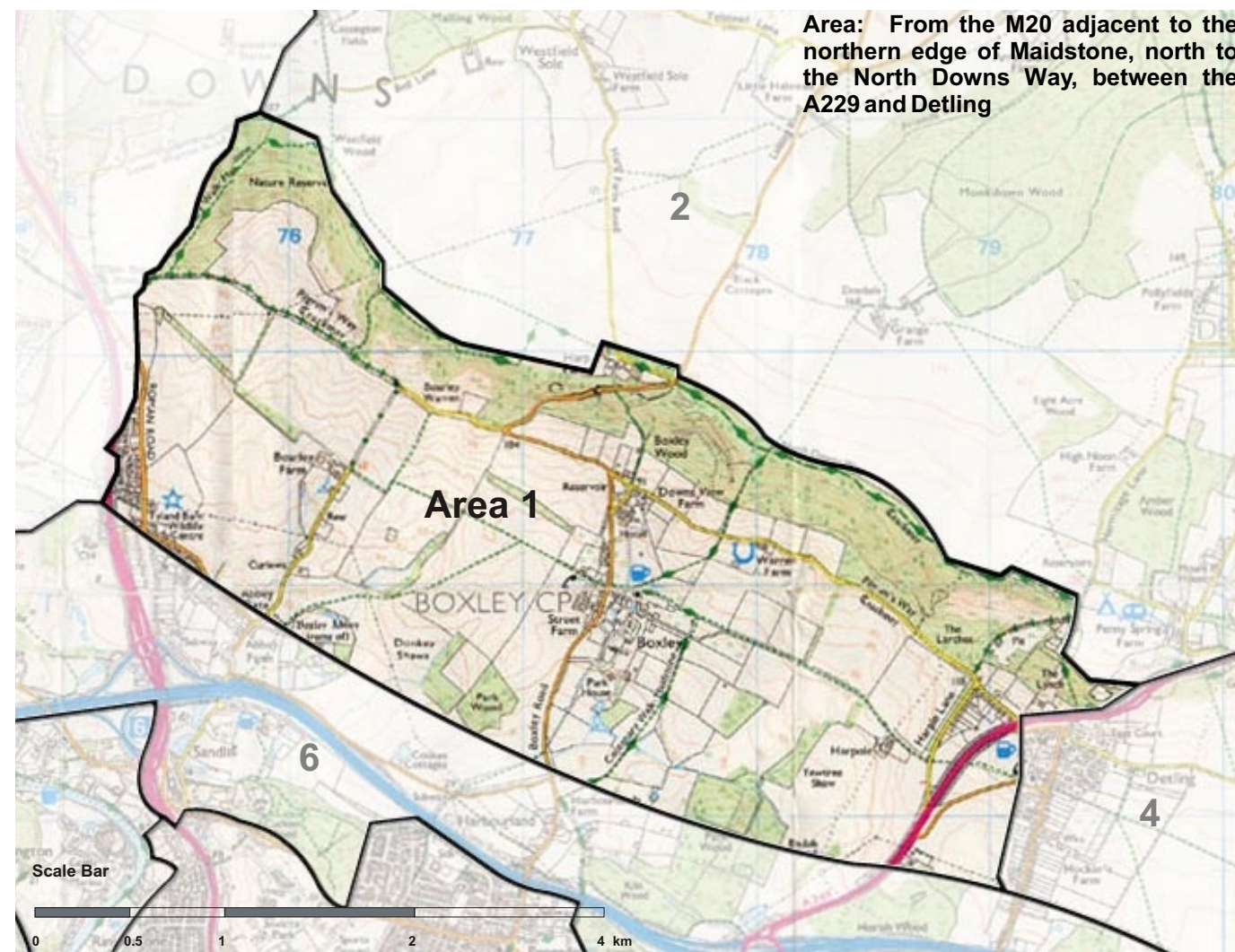


8.0 Individual Landscape Character Areas and Landscape Guidance

Landscape Character Areas

- 1 - Boxley Vale
- 2 - Bredhurst to Bicknor North Downs
- 3 - Wormshill to Otterden North Downs
- 4 - Hollingbourne Vale
- 5 - North Maidstone Gault Clay Vale
- 6 - Leeds Transport Corridor
- 7 - Greensand Fruit Belt
- 8 - Coxsheath Greensand Plateau
- 9 - Greensand Ridge
- 10- Southern Mixed Pasturelands
- 11- Beult Valley
- 12- Low Weald Fruit Belt
- 13- Teise and Upper Medway Valley
- 14- Valeside Parklands
- 15- Middle Medway Valley
- 16- Oaken Wood
- 17- Maidstone Urban Area
- 18- Lower Medway Valley



Landscape Character

This small area is distinctive by virtue of its dramatic landform and simple balance of landcover. It has long been settled, with straggly linear villages, but is now heavily influenced by the 20th century transport infrastructure to the south. Despite its proximity to the county town it is surprisingly remote away from the motorways, due to extensive woodland cover on the scarp and variable topography. Despite 20th century change, the woodland appears to contain the arable fields and equal them in scale. Some linking hedges and shaws have been lost, but the lower part of the scarp foot never had a strong hedgerow network. On the upper slopes there are thicker, often overgrown hedges. The advent of the transport corridor has brought a loss of tranquillity, noise, light and permanent local landscape change. There is local evidence of fly-tipping, small fires, etc, along the trackways and roadsides, in particular the Pilgrim's Way, which detracts from the remoteness and sense of historic continuity.

Landscape Designations

Boxley Vale lies within the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), designated after the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 for its natural beauty with the objectives of:

- conserving natural beauty;
- promoting sustainable forms of social and economic development that conserve and enhance the environment;
- meeting demand for recreation consistent with conservation of natural beauty.

The Kent Downs landscape is valued for its dramatic south-facing scarp, secluded dry valleys, the network of tiny lanes and for its isolated farms and churches, together with its rich tapestry of wildlife habitats of national nature conservation importance. In addition to the AONB designation, at County level this area has been identified as a Special Landscape Area (SLA), a designation which represents distinctive landscapes throughout Kent. The importance of landscape designations and their relevance to development proposals is discussed in the following landscape guidance section.

Physical Influences

Boxley Vale lies on the south-facing scarp of the North Downs and consists of Chalk, which is overlain with Gault Clay in the valley bottom.

The topographical variation in this character area is dramatic, ranging between 25m AOD and 185m AOD, with a south-facing steep slope of large rolling hills. The narrow lanes that twist within this landscape offer a great variety of views, except where they are overhung with trees. There are occasional extensive views up along the Downs or southwards; much of Maidstone is screened by blocks of woodland on its periphery.



View down chalk scarp from Boarley Warren

Historic and Cultural Influences

In prehistoric times much of the Downs is likely to have been covered in dense deciduous woodland, although the primary woodland on this part of the Chalk scarp is yew and whitebeam. There is a long history of human settlement in this area, where colonisation crept slowly upwards from the river valley of the Medway. Prehistoric sites, such as the Kits Coty megaliths, lie just outside the Borough boundary, but there are several Roman sites and possibly prehistoric trackways (Pilgrim's Way); the stone walls around the medieval abbey at Boxley are a striking local feature. The historic settlement pattern is of a parish boundary containing an area of downland, scarpfoot and chartland (common).

The open areas of the Downs were once widely grazed, and many of the old drove roads still exist, although the primary historic route in this area is the North Downs Way. Boxley may owe its name to the box that grows extensively in local woodlands, was probably established by c.825 AD and certainly existed at Domesday, when it had a population of 76 (to Maidstone's 108). Boxley Abbey was founded in 1146 by William of Ypres and was an important Cistercian house and place of pilgrimage. Edward II was resident there in 1321, while laying siege to Leeds Castle, but it subsequently fell into ruin after the Dissolution.

Although much of the medieval monastic landscape around Boxley Abbey has been lost to farming, south east of the village there are parkland remnants.

Key Characteristics:

- dramatic steep-sided valley between chalk scarp and northern edge of Maidstone;
- evergreen scarp woodland;
- Pilgrim's Way and North Downs Way trackways;
- impact of transport corridor - CTRL and M20;
- narrow winding lanes overhung with trees;
- extensive use of ragstone for walls and red brick for buildings, with pegtiles;
- small settlements, sparsely distributed;
- notable variation in scale between small settlements and large woodland blocks and arable fields.

The parish of Boxley has a significant industrial history, from chalk quarries for lime kilns, building (the columns of the nave of Boxley Church are built of chalk) and, since the 19th century, the manufacture of cement, and from the extraction of fullers earth. This is a rare clay-like substance that occurs in seams below the Sandgate Beds, i.e. at the base of the Chalk scarp, and could be quarried rather than mined. Its main use was to remove the natural oils from sheep's fleece - or 'fulling' - which was an important part of the cloth production industry. As this industry declined it was used in preparing the 'felts' needed for the papermaking industry. Copperas, a rare mineral used to dye wool, for tanning and dressing leather and for making ink, and silver sand for glassmaking were also found locally.

Buildings and Settlements

This area is still predominantly rural, with a string of small villages nestling between large blocks of woodland and medium scale arable fields. However, the influence of the transport corridor is increasing with the advent of the CTRL between the M20 and the M2 and the link road between the two motorways.

Many domestic buildings are constructed of red brick with pegtile roofs, while ragstone is extensively used for walls. Timber frame construction for domestic buildings is also widespread. There are localised instances of the use of flint (see photo) and some rare examples of the use of chalk blocks for masonry. The houses and farm buildings of Boxley village appear to have a unity of red brick and hung-tile facades but these are frequently Victorian improvements to older timber frame buildings. Use of the products of the local tile and brick kilns added to the unusual unity of materials.

Landcover and Biodiversity

This area is a mix of medium-scale regular arable fields (smaller to the east of Boxley) and areas of woodland, either in blocks or angled along the scarp below the North Downs Way. The evergreen scarp vegetation of box and yew is prominent, although there is also deciduous woodland (beech, ash, whitebeam, wild cherry and silver birch, with an understorey of hazel, hawthorn, Midland hawthorn, elder and privet). Despite the obvious presence of chalk close to the surface, reflected in the local vegetation, there are few remaining areas of chalk grassland. Boxley Warren is an example of a current chalk grassland initiative.



Flint, ragstone and red brick wall, Detling



Lady orchid (*Orchis purpurea*)

The woodland on the steepest part of the scarp in this Character Area forms part of the Wouldham to Detling Escarpment SSSI, a 10km stretch which also includes examples of scrub and unimproved grassland habitats on chalk supporting a number of rare and scarce species of plants and invertebrates (see Part 9.1 General Landscape Guidance for significance of SSSI designation). Formerly open grazing land, it is now scrub and young woodland, with a rich community of plants and animals. Scarce plants include *Rosa rubiginosa*, lady orchid (*Orchis purpurea*) and stinking hellebore (*Helleborus foetidus*), while box (*Buxus sempervirens*) is a rare small tree. On the chalk grassland there are other scarce and rare plants, including several orchids and meadow clary (*Salvia pratensis*).

Landscape Condition

Condition

Detracting features: M20 and CTRL
 Visual unity: modified
 Cultural integrity: modified
 Ecological integrity: modified
 Functional integrity: coherent if modified

Robustness

Pattern of elements: simple, unified
 Consistency of pattern: modified
 Distinctive features: woodland, arable, topography
 Historic continuity: modified
 Impact of landform: high
 Extent of tree cover: extensive, in large blocks
 Extent of visibility: medium/variable

CONDITION	Good	Strengthen and reinforce	Conserve and strengthen	Safeguard and manage
	Moderate	Improve and reinforce	Improve and conserve	Conserve and restore
	Poor	Reconstruct	Improve and restore	Restore condition to maintain character
		Weak	Moderate	Strong
		ROBUSTNESS		

Landscape Guidance: conserve character and strengthen condition

Principles

- the AONB designation protects the natural beauty of the landscape and any development which would adversely affect this will be strongly resisted by the local authority. Large-scale development proposals must be accompanied by an environmental impact assessment;
- all SSSIs are firmly protected from development that would have an adverse effect on their special interest. This interest may extend beyond the site boundary. Any developer must ensure that development proposals within or adjacent to an SSSI would not have any adverse effect;
- development harmful to the interest of SNCI sites will not be permitted;
- Ancient Woodland will be protected from development and encouragement will be given to the maintenance and sympathetic management of ancient woodland sites;
- continue to manage and maintain existing woodland;
- consider opportunities for conversion of arable areas back to pasture or chalk downland;
- unimproved or semi-improved grassland is a valuable repository of rare or scarce floral species and important habitat for a wide range of invertebrates. Its retention and conservation should be a priority;
- extend the principle of securing management agreements for high quality habitats.

Practical Measures

- although extensive planting is proposed around the CTRL currently under construction, any development proposed in this area should take account of the proximity of the transport infrastructure and may need to include appropriate screen planting on its perimeter, which should reflect the local field boundary pattern;
- use only species that are chalk tolerant, such as yew, silver birch, wild cherry, whitebeam, ash and beech on the chalk of the scarp face, with hazel, hawthorn, privet and box in the understorey;



Red brick used to divide different materials

- there are few hedges in this area. The landscape scale is large, so belts of tree planting would be more appropriate than single or double row hedges. Alternatively, double or triple lines of hawthorn could be allowed to develop into tall (3m) hedges. Other appropriate hedge species would be a mix of hazel and hawthorn with a little privet and/or box;
- use local materials and building styles - red brick or hung-tile for walls, pegtiles for roofs, ragstone and flint for garden walls; timber frame buildings and flint are traditional in this part of the Borough. All roofs should be pitched.

Landscape Sensitivity

The lower slopes of the vale are more sensitive than the upper slopes due to the relative lack of hedgerows and woodland. Development in this area would be exposed to views and would require careful integration through appropriate landscape treatment. On the upper slopes, the use of thick hedges and woodland belts would assist the integration of small-scale developments, although it should be remembered that the upper slopes may be visible over a wide area. Large-scale development would therefore be difficult to integrate, and would be strongly resisted within the AONB.

Typical Planting Mixes (Area 1: Chalk)

The species listed below are those typically found within the SNCI woodlands within this area, which all thrive in the dry chalk soils. Yew woodland is a threatened habitat type, listed in the EC Habitats Directive. Existing yew woodland should therefore be conserved but supports only limited wildlife. It would therefore be more appropriate to use yew as an important component of a mixed broadleaf woodland (see below).

Hawthorn hedges are a distinctive feature of this area. Where nature conservation issues are more important than landscape character, a mixed species hedge could be planted.

Woodland:

(on chalk slopes)		(in valleys)	
Beech	30	Ash	30
Hazel	10	Beech	10
Pedunculate Oak	15	Field Maple	25
Whitebeam	10	Hazel	20
Wild Cherry	25	Pedunculate Oak	15
Yew	10		
	100%		100%

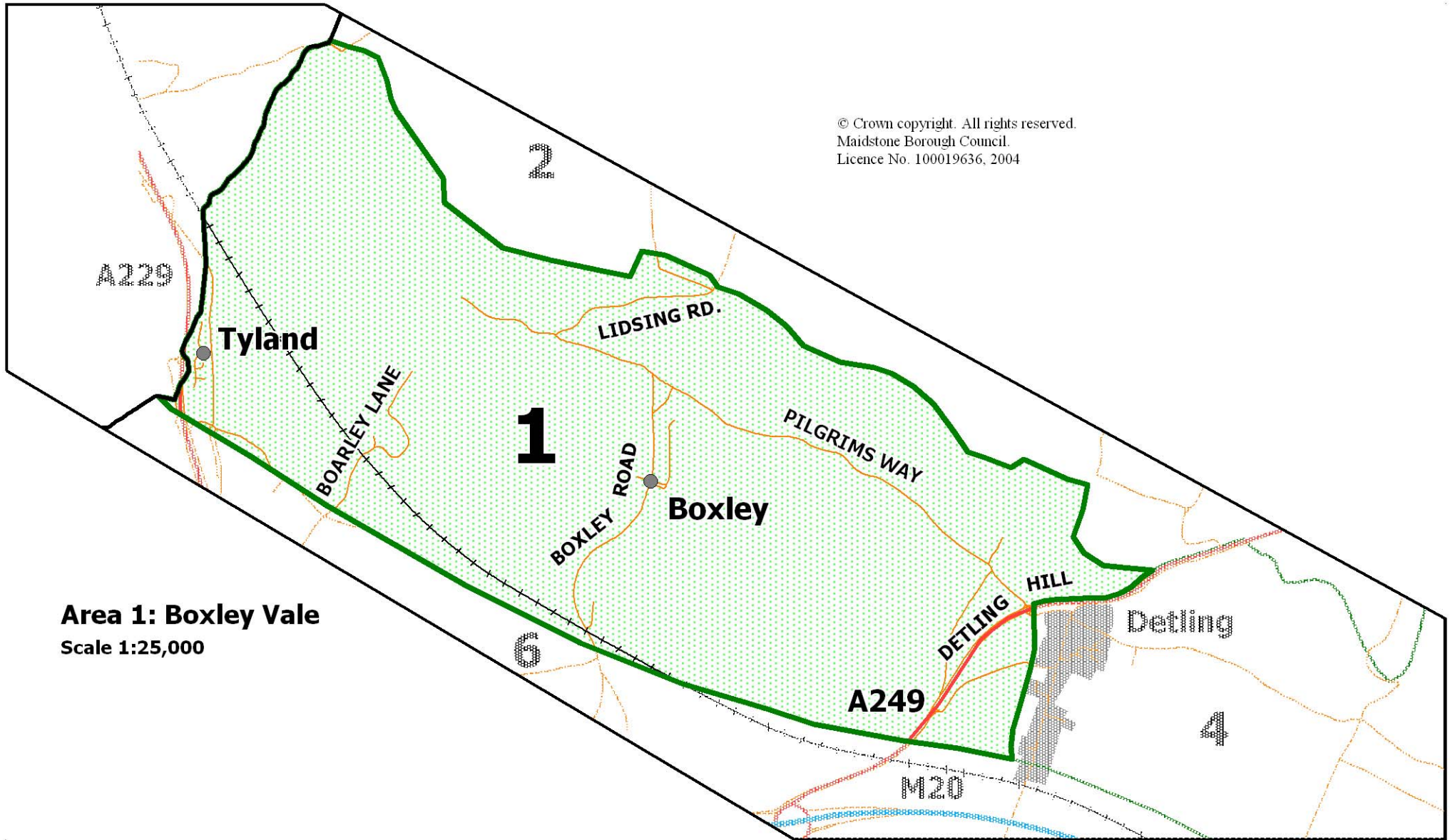
Hedges:

100% Hawthorn	Dogwood	5
	Field Maple	10
	Hawthorn	70
	Hazel	10
	Holly	2.5
	Wayfaring Tree	2.5
		100%

Ensure that all species selected are of local provenance

Plant hedges in a double staggered row at 45cm spacings, with 30cm between the rows.

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Area 1: Boxley Vale
Scale 1:25,000