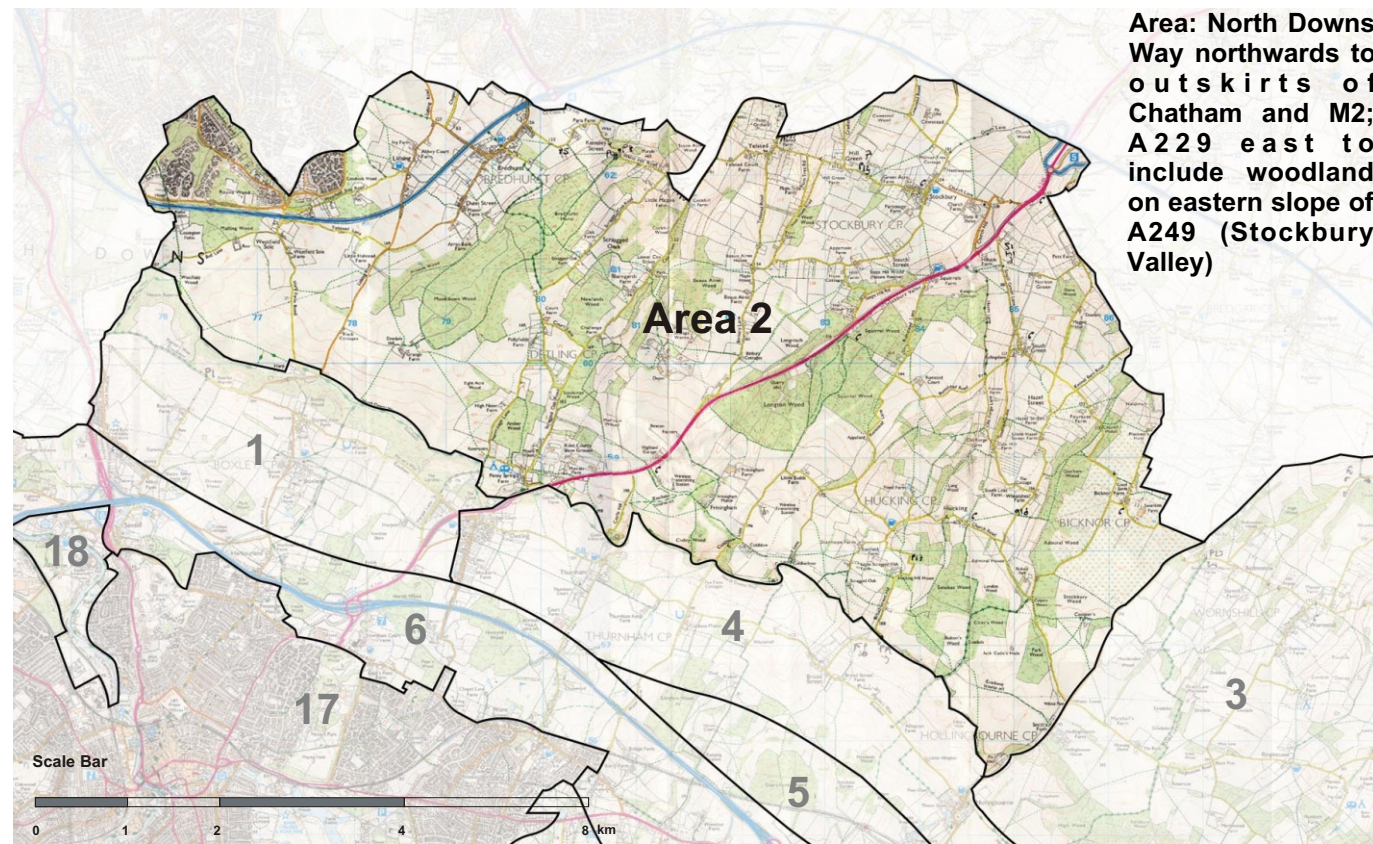


## Area 2: Bredhurst to Bicknor North Downs

## Landscape Character Areas



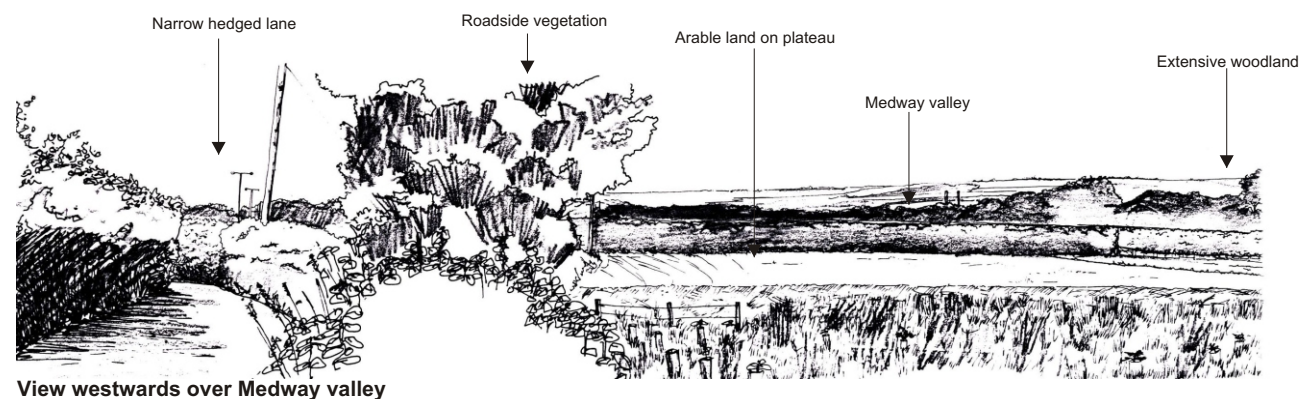
**Area: North Downs Way northwards to outskirts of Chatham and M2; A229 east to include woodland on eastern slope of A249 (Stockbury Valley)**

### Landscape Character

This area consists of the dip slope of the North Downs to the north of the Chalk scarp. It is a large-scale landscape, high, open and generally rolling, with big blocks of woodland and large arable fields. Much of the woodland clings to the steep sides of the valleys cut into the chalk and there is significant variation in vegetation, depending on the soil type. There are few settlements and a mixed field pattern, mainly regular but of varying size. It is mostly remote and undeveloped, with a mosaic of rural landuses, but to the north it is bounded by the M2 and is affected by the outskirts of Chatham. This proximity lends an urban-edge influence to the northern part of this area, characterised by fly-tipping, dumping and an emphasis on security issues, such as high-level fencing and obtrusive signage.

In the west above Boxley Vale the landscape is bleak, where woodland and hedges have been removed from the plateau, and arable cultivation, although intensive, is difficult on the very flinty soils. The twisting roads lack verges or hedges and there is little topographical variation.

Further east within this area the land is more topographically varied, so that the ridge of the scarp is not a dominant feature, and less intensively farmed. Mixed hedges of hazel, hawthorn and occasionally holly, of medium height, enclose paddocks, small pastures, neglected scrub or remnant orchard. Occasionally Leyland cypress is used, striking a foreign note. Overgrown hedges along narrow lanes can give a false impression of enclosure in this mainly high, open landscape, within which the valleys create miniature undulating landscapes fringed with woodland.



View westwards over Medway valley

## Area 2: Bredhurst to Bicknor North Downs

## Landscape Character Areas

Traffic on the dual carriageway A249 in the Stockbury valley is very intrusive within this otherwise tranquil and remote landscape, with its network of narrow, winding, hedged lanes. The homogeneity of the landscape is marred by the dereliction of orchards and grassland, overgrown hedges and unmanaged woodland. As most of the woodland is on the valley slopes, development on the crests and ridges can be obtrusive.

### Landscape Designations

This area lies within the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and is designated at county level as a Special Landscape Area (SLA). The north-western part of this area is designated an Area of Local Landscape Importance (ALLI) in the Local Plan. There are three ALLIs to the north of the M2 which either provide attractive views from the motorway or provide a setting for local development. The relevance of these designations to potential development is discussed in the Landscape Guidance section of this document.

### Physical Influences

The Chalk forms the backbone of the Downs but is overlain on the north-facing dip slope by clay-with-flint soils that support different vegetation types. Most of the woodland in this area is within the valleys on the dip slope. There are a few linear woodlands marking the top of the scarp, as in Boxley Vale, and this area has a sweeping, open character.

### Historical and Cultural Influences

This has been an historically impoverished area, as the clay-with-flint soils are difficult to cultivate. The area has therefore remained remote and undeveloped, but contains three motte and bailey medieval castles: Stockbury, Binbury and Thurnham, all situated in high ground, probably as a symbol of the Norman dominance of a major route across the Downs. (Bredhurst is a 'wood' reference, while Stockbury describes 'the swine pastures of the Stoke people', 8 miles to the north, and dates from the 11th century.) In 1829 the area to the north of Boxley was described by the historian W.H. Ireland as 'a barren, dreary country covered in flints'. In the 20th century the construction of the M2 motorway and the encroachment of the residential estates of Walderslade and Lordwood tied the northern reaches of the area to the Medway Towns rather than to Maidstone. Defensive elements dating from World War II, such as pill boxes and anti-tank traps, are still visible in this area.

### Buildings and Settlement

There are no settlements of significant size in this area. Bredhurst and Stockbury have 20th-century envelopes around older cores - Stockbury is recorded in the Domesday book, while Yelstead has a lightly suburban character, as recent building styles and materials differ from vernacular tradition. Isolated farmhouses of varying ages are scattered in the landscape. Flint is used for churches and walls, sometimes mixed with brick and/or ragstone. The northern part of this area is more settled than the higher chalk downland.

The Kent County Showground and Detling airfield lie on the dipslope above Detling. Although out of keeping with the AONB designation of the area, these large sites are surprisingly low in visual impact upon the wider landscape to the south which lies over the crest of the chalk scarp. From the north, the site is partly screened by woodland.



Traditional timber framed house near Bredhurst

### Key Characteristics:

- generally undulating chalk ridge and dip slope;
- soil variation: clay-with-flints on the dip slope, chalk on the ridge;
- large-scale and open;
- extensive woodland;
- few settlements;
- remote and undeveloped;
- urban-edge influence along northern boundary;
- mosaic of deciduous woodland, large arable, small pastures, neglected grassland, scrub and derelict orchards on the slopes, overgrown hedges and scrubby shaws;
- tranquil, even towards northern edge and motorway;
- rather bleak on the plateaux.

### Landcover and Biodiversity

This area supports a wide range of landcover but is dominated by the mix of medium to large-scale arable and extensive woodland. Within this, particularly in the northern part of the area, small regular fields contain pasture, neglected grassland and derelict orchards.

Purple Hill SSSI is designated for its chalk grassland which supports the nationally rare Kentish milkwort (*Polygala austriaca*) and at least three orchids, and its woodland, which is mainly hornbeam coppice with a ground flora of bluebell (*Hyacinthoides non-scripta*), dog's mercury (*Mercurialis perennis*), wood sorrel (*Oxalis acetellosa*) and yellow archangel (*Lamiastrum galeobdolon*). The hazel coppice with large beech trees has a varied ground flora, including scarcities such as stinking iris (*Iris foetidissima*), fly orchid (*Ophrys insectifera*) and lady orchid (*Orchis purpurea*).

Bredhurst Woods (SNCI and Ancient Woodland) is a large complex of diverse habitats, including very rich original coppice, with hornbeam/hazel merging into ash/hazel/field maple. Yew groves with whitebeam are also present on the chalk. The ground flora is very rich, with many orchids. In the valleys the ash/field maple coppice has a ground flora of herb paris (*Paris quadrifolia*) with butcher's broom (*Ruscus aculeatus*), spindle and hawthorn in the scrub layer. Over 50 Ancient Woodland indicator plants are present. The woodland is surrounded by unimproved chalk grassland, which supports typical species and a colony of rare Watling Street thistle (*Eryngium campestre*). This site is considered to be one of the 10 best dip slope woods in Kent and is likely to be of SSSI standard.

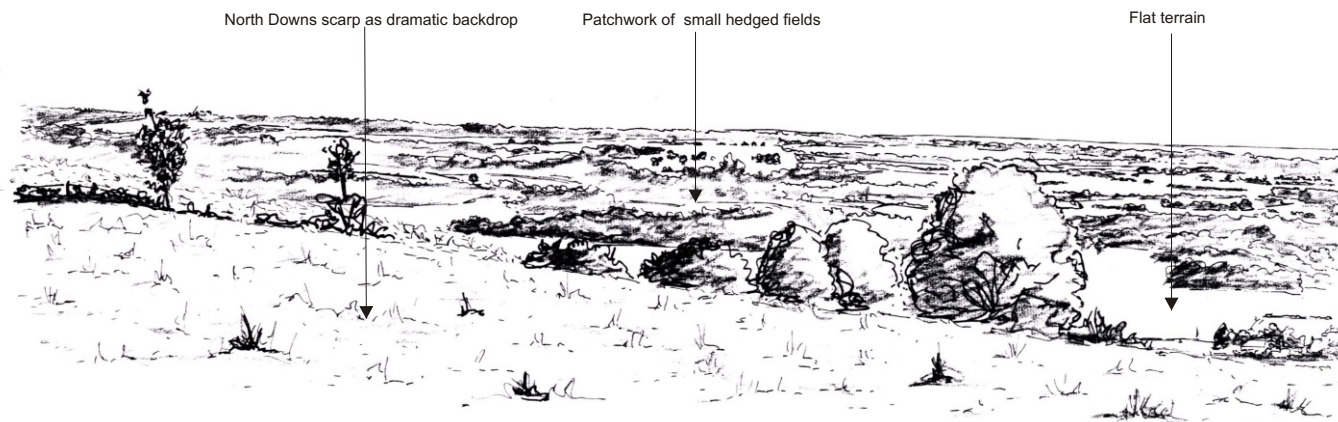
Stockbury Wood SNCI is mixed broadleaved Ancient Woodland on the plateau, previously managed as coppice-with-standards of pedunculate oak and occasional beech or cherry. The ground is dominated by bluebell, with wood anemone (*Anemone nemorosa*) also present. Two species of orchid and the rare green hellebore (*Helleborus viridis*) occur on chalky soils. Scrubby chalk grassland on the edge of the A249 has also been included and supports a rich invertebrate fauna, as well as badgers and dormice. Most of Squirrel Wood SNCI has been converted to conifer plantation and managed pure chestnut coppice but the flora still betrays its Ancient Woodland origins, with several orchids and woodruff (*Galium odoratum*).



Stark landscape of large-scale intensive arable cultivation on the clay-with-flints dip slope



Grubbed-up orchard overlooking the Swale



**Landscape Condition**

**Condition**

Detracting features: several  
 Visual unity: variable  
 Cultural integrity: modified  
 Ecological integrity: fragmented  
 Functional integrity: strong although mixed

**Robustness**

Pattern of elements: simple  
 Consistency of pattern: modified  
 Distinctive features: woodland  
 Historic continuity: ancient, but with 20th century buildings  
 Impact of landform: strong  
 Extent of tree cover: widespread  
 Extent of visibility: very open

<b>CONDITION</b>	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
		<b>ROBUSTNESS</b>		

**Landscape Guidance: improve areas and conserve character where condition is poor**

**Principles**

- within the AONB the landscape quality will be given the greatest possible protection and priority over all other planning considerations. Any development that would adversely affect the natural beauty of the landscape will be strongly resisted. Large-scale proposals will require the preparation of an environmental impact assessment;
- particular attention will be given to the protection and conservation of the scenic quality and distinctive character of the landscape within the SLA, and priority will be given to the landscape when applications are being considered;
- all SSSIs are firmly protected from development that would have an adverse effect on their special interest;
- 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.
- the Borough Council will pay particular attention to the maintenance of open space and the character of the landscape within ALLI areas. Encouragement will be given to improvements in public access;
- manage and maintain woodland, seeking further outlets for wood products;
- increase chalk grassland where possible and restore orchards and grassland where practicable;
- seek reduction of scale and openness on the plateau by planting hedges and shaws (narrow linear tree belts);
- manage hedgerows;
- unless planting extensive areas of woodland, re-create existing pattern of hedges and shaws;
- restore or create woodland to enclose development, reduce bleakness, screen views of the developed northern edge and M2 motorway and provide unity;
- if proposing development on the ridge or uplands, give due consideration to the impact of development within the wider landscape. Ensure that buildings are not positioned on ridgelines and that sufficient planting is proposed to provide an appropriate wooded setting;
- extend the principle of securing management agreements for high quality habitats

**Practical Measures**

- use chalk-tolerant species, such as yew with whitebeam, hazel and holly, on the south facing chalk slopes ;
- on the clay-with-flint plateau, plant hornbeam coppice with pedunculate oak as a standard, or pedunculate oak/beechness/cherry in woodland or shaws; hornbeam/hazel coppice, graduating to ash/hazel/field maple, with butcher's broom, spindle and hawthorn would also be appropriate. Hedgerows could be hazel, hawthorn and field maple, either single species or mixed, or hazel/hawthorn/holly, with a little spindle, although poplar is used in this area as a tall windbreak;
- replace conifer windbreaks with traditional species, such as hazel and hawthorn;
- where possible use traditional local building materials and styles rather than 20th century variants i.e. ragstone or flint for garden walls and some buildings, with stained black weatherboard for outbuildings. Clay tiles should be used for roofs, which should always be pitched, and red or yellow stock bricks may be appropriate also.
- hedges should be hazel, hawthorn, privet, dogwood and wayfaring tree;

**Landscape Sensitivity**

This landscape is of quite robust character but of varying condition. The western end, on the dip slope above Boxley Vale, is very sensitive to change. The lack of topographical variation and landcover would make the integration of any development difficult. Large-scale development would require extensive screening. This, if it were to follow the lost local field pattern, could help restore the landscape at an appropriate scale and add variety. Development land use would, however, diminish the agricultural character of the area.

Within the more topographically varied and well-wooded areas to the east, the landscape is more robust but could not accommodate large-scale development. Where small-scale development is proposed, consideration should be given to the visibility of the North Downs over a large area, including parts of Maidstone, and the AONB designation of the area. Along the northern edge the urban influence of the Chatham and Gillingham outskirts is strong and diminishes its inherent rural character. Any proposed development should reinforce rural character by including hedges, shaws and woodland, following the existing landscape pattern. In this area, planting on the upper slopes and summits of the hills would also give a sense of enclosure and provide screening, but this should only be used where such screening is necessary, since it would compromise the open character of the area nearer the scarp.

**Building Materials**

Where possible use traditional local materials and styles rather than 20th century variants i.e. ragstone or flint for garden walls and some buildings. Development in the area should generally be within existing settlements.

**Typical Planting Mixes (Area 2: Chalk and clay-with-flints)**

Although yew/whitebeam woodland is characteristic of chalk slopes in this area, this is a very specialized type of woodland and supports limited wildlife. It would therefore be more appropriate to combine yew and whitebeam with broadleaf species that will also thrive on chalk (see A and B below). Lists C and D set out woodland species appropriate for the clay-with-flints plateau. Although some simple species hedgerows are found in this area, with poplar used as a windbreak, mixed hedges are found and provide a better habitat for wildlife.

**Typical Planting Mixes (Area 2: Chalk)**

*Woodland:*

<b>A:</b>		<b>B:</b>	
Ash	10	Ash	10
Beech	25	Beech	45
Pedunculate Oak	10	Hawthorn	10
Whitebeam	10	Hazel	10
Wild Cherry	10	Silver Birch	10
Yew	35	Whitebeam	10
		Wild Cherry	5
	100%		100%

*Hedges:*

Hawthorn in double or triple row at 30cm centres, 30 cm between rows

Hazel	75
Hawthorn	15
Privet	10
	100%

**Typical Planting Mixes (Area 2: Clay-with-flints)**

*Woodland:*

<i>C:</i>		<i>D:</i>	
Ash	10	Ash	5
Butcher's Broom	5	Beech	20
Field Maple	50	Cherry	5
Hawthorn	15	Hazel	10
Hazel	10	Hornbeam	50
Spindle	10	Pedunculate Oak	10
	100%		100%

*Hedges:*

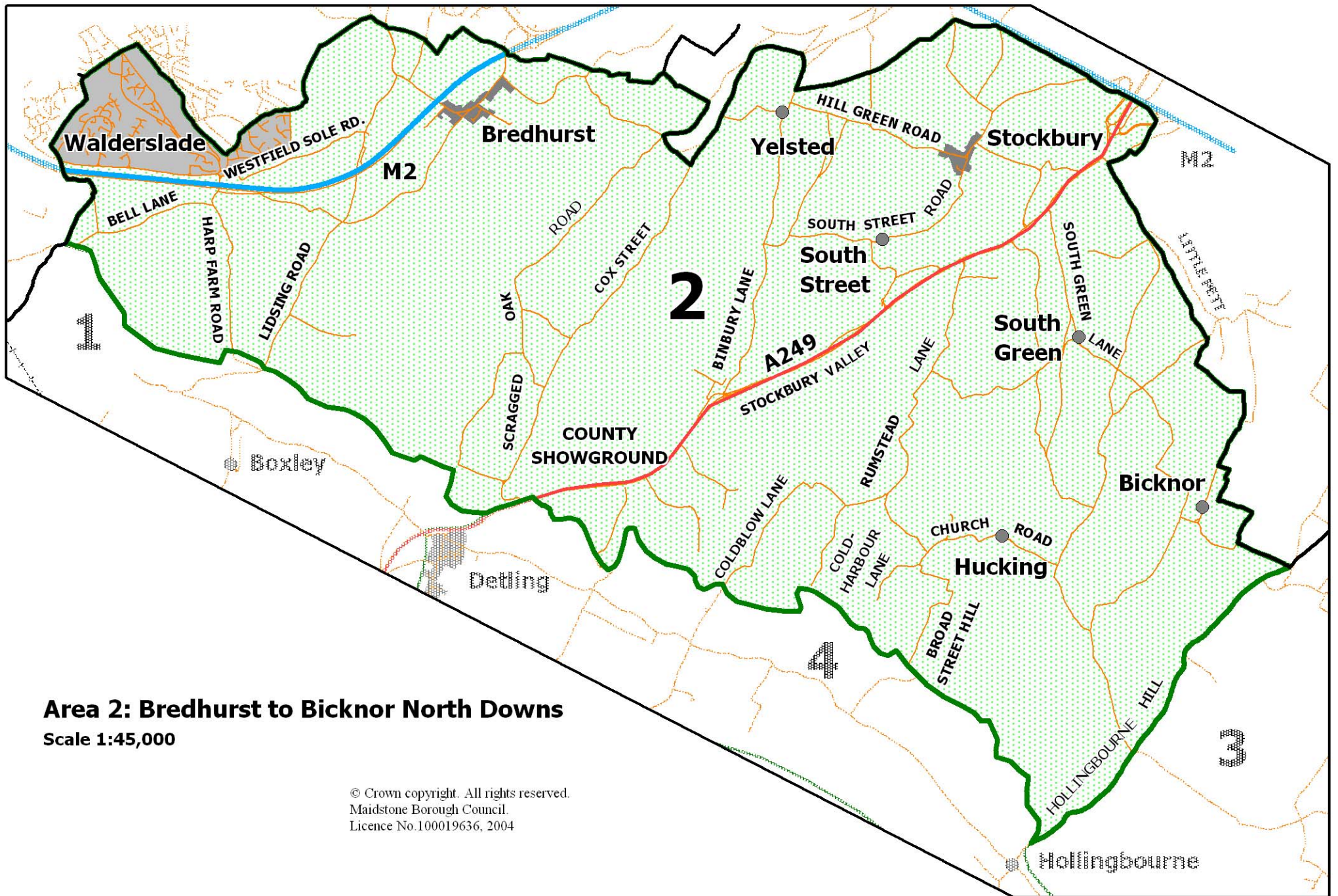
Field Maple	10
Hazel	15
Hawthorn	70
Holly	2.5
Spindle	2.5
	100%

Double staggered row at 30cm centres, 30cm between rows

Ensure that all species used are of local provenance



Late spider orchid



**Area 2: Bredhurst to Bicknor North Downs**

Scale 1:45,000

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