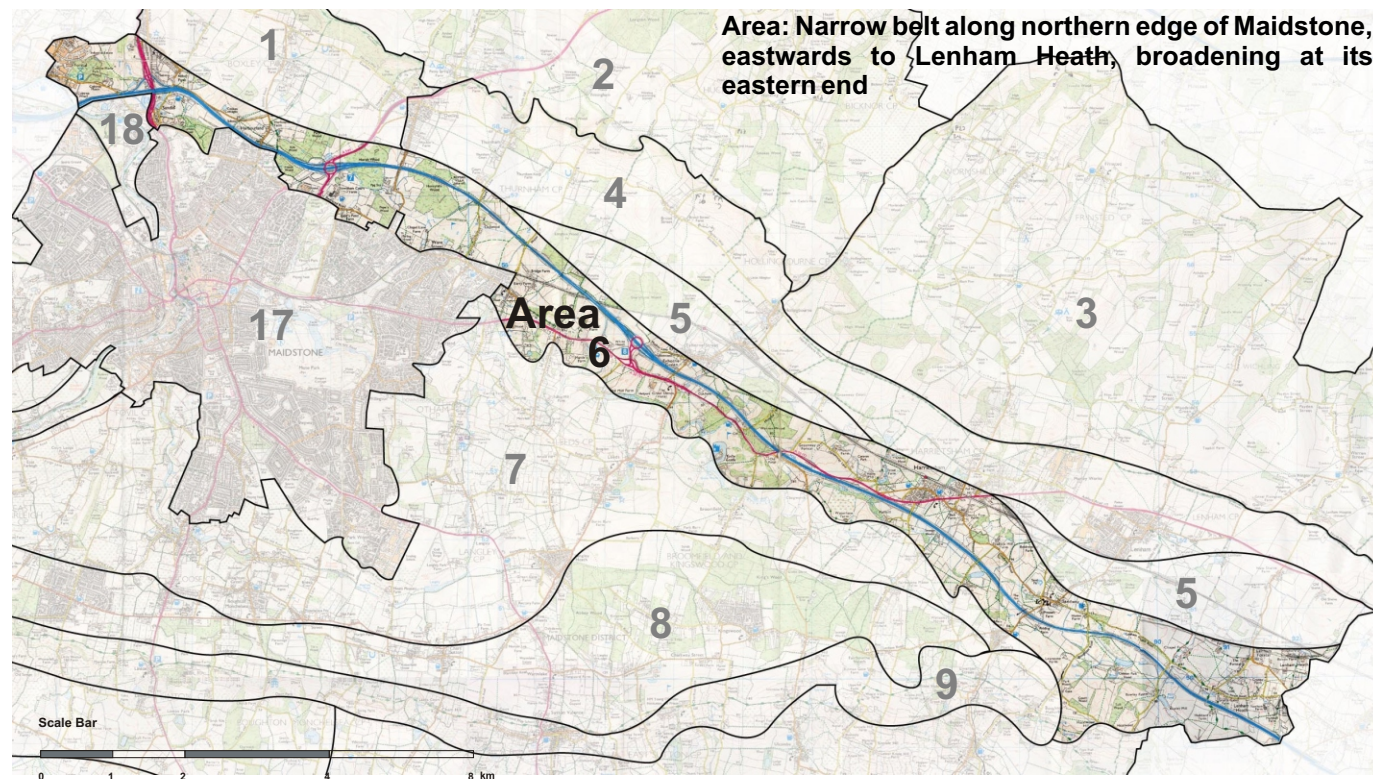


Area 6: Leeds Transport Corridor

Landscape Character Areas



Landscape Character

This area is the north-eastern edge of the Greensand, where it abuts the Gault Clay, and consists of the free-draining variable acid soils and loams of the Folkestone Beds, contrasting with the heavy soils of the Gault Vale immediately to the north. Although there are few orchards, other crops include cereals, potatoes and field vegetables, with medium-size arable fields, pasture and small copses.

The impact of the transport corridor (M20 A20, CTRL and railway) falls heavily on this undulating rural landscape of mixed farmland. There are extensive views over Maidstone from the western part of this area; along the northern edge of the town a variety of urban fringe development has appeared between the motorway and the town edge, such as Newnham Court 'retail village' and the golf course.

The built environment consists in the main of scattered farmsteads. This area is also notable for parkland: Leeds Castle's woodland and park, and Chilston Park, formerly designated SSSI for its many ancient trees and lichens. The integrity of its parkland landscape, however, has been severely compromised by the construction of the M20 and now the CTRL. Mineral extraction at the eastern end of this area (Lenham Forstal) is indicative of the underlying soils, which give rise to remnant heathy characteristics, although there is no longer any heath in the Borough. This landscape of woodland, parkland and mixed farmland has been severely affected by the 20th century transport corridor. Remaining woodland helps to screen it, but requires reinforcement.



Leeds Castle, with the M20 to the left.

Area 6: Leeds Transport Corridor

Landscape Character Areas

Landscape Designations

Part of this area is designated SLA and all the land to the north of the M20 is designated AONB. The SLA designation in the western part of this area includes the Cobtree Estate and golfcourse, Sandling on the fringe of Maidstone, an area to the east of Bearsted and the environs of Leeds Castle. The relevance of these designations is discussed below.



Hedgerow of bracken, sallow and hazel

Physical Influence

Although there is no dramatic change in topography, this area is more undulating than the Gault Clay vale and consists of very different geology and soils. It is well drained and more fertile than the clay, although variable, and shows some remnant heathy characteristics in its roadside flora.

Historical and Cultural Influences

This area is notable for parkland. Leeds Castle lies five miles south east of Maidstone and is one of the outstanding heritage properties in Kent, now with an international reputation. It is a superbly sited moated castle within a medieval deer park landscaped in the 18th century, set in the fertile and well-watered valley of the river Len. The castle is of various dates - 13th, 15th, 16th and early 19th century - while the 400 acre parkland dates from the mid 18th century when mixed clumps, belts and specimen trees were planted between the formal avenues. The estate underwent major restoration in the 1920s and now contains a golf course, ornamental water gardens, extensive walled gardens, a maze, aviary and grotto. Russell Page was involved in the gardens from 1935 onwards and created both the Great Water and the Culpeper garden. Many important trees have been lost to storm damage and screen belts along the A20 have been largely destroyed, causing visual and noise intrusion. These have now been largely replaced but still require time in order to function as an adequate screen. Despite the proximity of the M20, the motorway is partly screened by parkland-edge vegetation, although there has been some severance and the motorway is visible from some areas within the parkland. The Channel Tunnel Rail Link (CTRL) now under construction (2001) will significantly increase the impact of the transport corridor, especially where the M20 and CTRL will run in parallel with no intervening vegetation.

Chilston Park lies two miles south of Lenham and consists of an 18th century red brick and stone house, now run as an hotel, within an estate of 112 ha/280 acres. The park has been severed by the M20 and CTRL but was once more extensive, including land on the North Downs ridge beyond Lenham. It was considered by John Evelyn, writing in the 17th century, to be one of the finest parks in England. Many parkland trees were badly affected by storm damage, although a notable lime avenue remains. The former contemporary extensive formal gardens around the house have been replaced by informal 20th century plantings, while the kitchen and walled gardens are no longer part of the estate.



Chilston Park - derelict pines adjacent to M20

Key Characteristics:

- undulating acid sands and loams;
- mixed farmland with a few orchards;
- few settlements, scattered farmsteads;
- historic parkland;
- dominated by transport corridor, partly screened by vegetation;
- extensive views up to North Downs chalk slopes;
- some degraded areas with lost hedgerows and large arable fields;
- distinctive skyline of the North Downs to the north.

Area 6: Leeds Transport Corridor

Landscape Character Areas

Buildings and Settlement

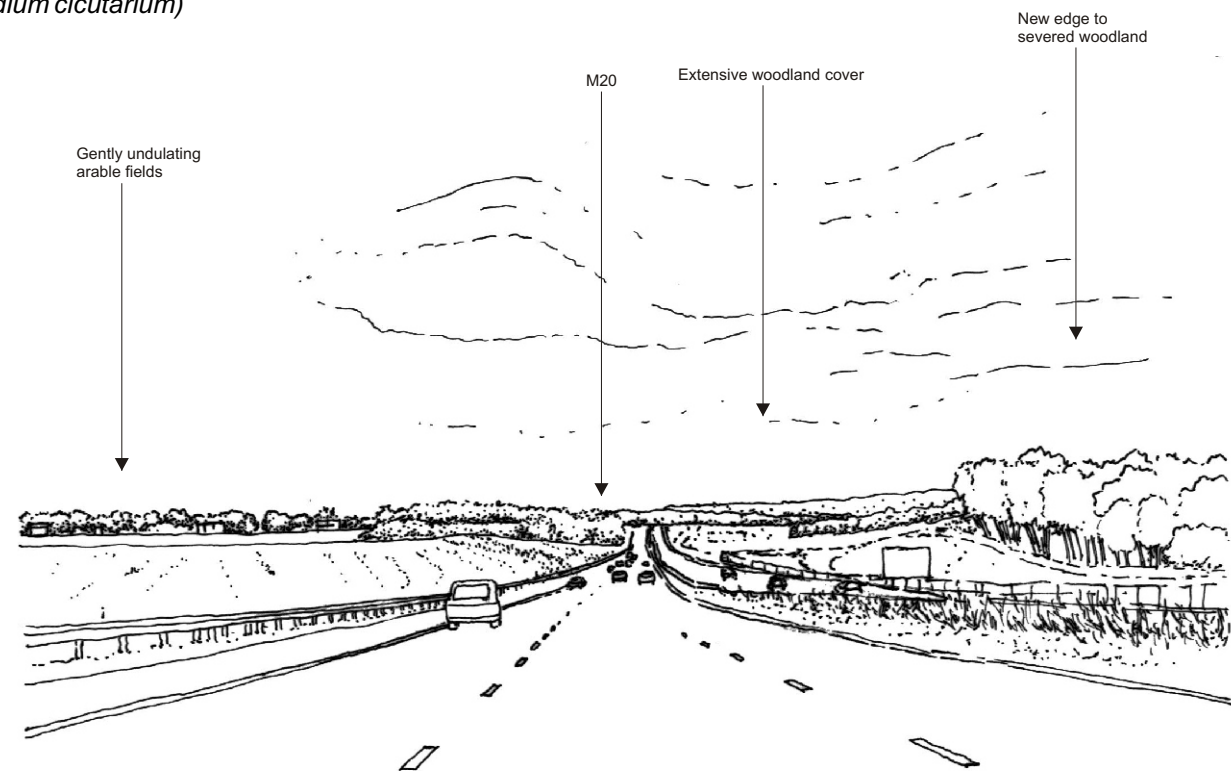
The main settlement within this area is Harrietsham, which is effectively divided by the A20, the larger part of the village lying to the north, the older development being around West Street, with more recent development in the Church Road area; and the East Street Conservation area situated to the south. The completion of the M20, and currently construction of the CTRL have further intensified the impact of the transport corridor on the village, and the effective screening of noise and visual intrusion from the concentration of transport-related infrastructure is a significant problem in considering any new development within the settlement. At its western end, the area skirts the northern edge of Maidstone.

Landcover and Biodiversity

The transport corridor has had a major impact on farmland, woodland and parkland, with a significant loss of open heathy and acid grassland habitats. This is still, however, a mainly rural landscape dominated by broadleaf woodland and plantations, with more arable towards the eastern end. Here the pattern of land use is smaller in scale and more varied, with a field pattern that contains both large and small fields.

This area contains eight SNCIs: the River Len Alder Carr at Harrietsham, the River Len Mill Pond and Carr at Leeds, Fairbourne Mill Meadows and part of the Leeds Castle estate, together with Lenham Heath disused pit at the eastern end of this area. Fairbourne Mill meadows SNCI is unimproved grassland on the northern side of the river Len with a wide variety of herbs and grasses and an area of damp alder carr. The river Len alder carr SNCI lies alongside the railway and contains a variety of wet habitats, including alder carr, peat floor vegetation and an area of hazel/alder/chestnut coppice with oak standards. Ground flora ranges from meadowsweet (*Filipendula ulmaria*), through ramsons (*Allium ursinum*), cuckooflower (*Cardamine pratensis*) and narrow buckler-fern (*Dryopteris carthusiana*) to marsh-marigold (*Caltha palustris*), cowslip (*Primula veris*), bluebell (*Hyacinthoides non-scripta*) and wood anemone (*Anemone nemorosa*). This site supports a wide range of birds, including three species of woodpecker.

The river Len millpond and carr SNCI runs from below Leeds Castle to a large millpond and supports similar wet species to the above, including the locally found large bittercress (*Cardamine amara*), and is also important for birds, including kingfisher. The Leeds Castle estate SNCI lies partly within this area, where the original sessile oak woodland has been mainly converted to conifer plantation or pure chestnut coppice, which supports a good colony of the native wild daffodil (*Narcissus psuedo-narcissus*), rescued and relocated when the M20 was under construction. The woodland is dominated by bluebell, wood anemone, wood sorrel (*Oxalis acetosella*) and many other woodland species. Thirteen butterfly species have been recorded. The parkland is of value for lichens, fungi and invertebrates in veteran trees and unimproved acid grassland beneath them. Lenham Heath SNCI is a disused acid sandpit with a variety of habitats, developed since extraction ceased. Shallow pools, scrub and marsh support sallow scrub, heath spotted orchids (*Dactylorhiza maculata*), fenugreek (*Trifolium ornithopodioides*), bird's-foot (*Ornithopus perpusillus*) and stork's-bill (*Erodium cicutarium*)



Area 6: Leeds Transport Corridor

Landscape Character Areas

Towards the western end of this area Cuckoo Wood, just inside the M20 on the northern edge of Maidstone, is an SNCI in which 30 Ancient Woodland indicator plant species have been recorded. It consists mainly of chestnut or hornbeam coppice. Honeyhills Wood SNCI is squeezed between the railway and Roseacre on the northern edge of Maidstone. It includes bluebell-rich ancient mixed broadleaved woodland (hornbeam coppice, ash/field maple/hazel coppice and sessile oak coppice and a good variety of shrub species, including aspen, hawthorn, guelder rose and holly), unimproved neutral grassland and damp scrubby woodland with many orchids. The nearby Horish Wood is similar but bisected by the M20.

Area 6: Leeds Transport Corridor

Landscape Guidance

Landscape Condition

Condition

Detracting features: M20, CTRL, some degraded areas, lost field boundaries
 Visual unity: poor
 Cultural integrity: modified
 Ecological integrity: modified
 Functional integrity: modified

Robustness

Pattern of elements: disparate
 Consistency of pattern: poor
 Distinctive features: parkland
 Historic continuity: ancient modified
 Impact of landform: medium
 Extent of tree cover: fairly extensive
 Extent of visibility within area: extensive

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: reconstruct

Principles

- the AONB designation is applied to areas of high landscape quality and scenic beauty. Any development that would adversely affect the natural beauty of the landscape will be resisted and large-scale development will be strongly resisted. Where development is permitted, the highest standards of design and siting must be employed and the traditional character of buildings and local materials should be used;
- Special Landscape Areas (SLAs) will be protected by the Borough Council, and priority will be given to landscape over other planning considerations when considering development proposals. Developers are advised to ensure that their proposals will not be detrimental to the landscape character or quality of the area, will reflect local distinctiveness and will use local building materials and styles;
- development harmful to the interest of SNCIs will not be permitted; in most cases developers will be advised to look for alternative sites;
- Ancient Woodland will be protected from development and the Borough Council will encourage the maintenance and sympathetic management of Ancient Woodland sites;
- extend the principle of securing management agreements for high quality habitats;
- woodland should be reinforced and extended to prevent fragmentation, creating green corridors where woodland blocks are inappropriate;
- where replanting within or adjacent to historic parkland, due care and respect must be paid to avoid damaging the integrity of these sites. Ornamental species may be more appropriate but specialist advice should be sought. More detailed information is set out in the Landscape Guidelines (Part 9.2: Special Issues);
- use local materials for hard detailing in new developments;
- where possible recreate open heathy and acid grassland habitats outside the floodplain of rivers and streams.

Practical Measures

- this is one of few areas within the Borough where pines are found, planted in parkland and often in poor condition as a result of either age or the 1987 gale. It is to be expected that many pines planted during the Victorian enthusiasm for newly discovered species would now be over-mature. This area is mainly notable for woodland, for the water-related species along the river Len, and for parkland trees. Although most new planting should consist exclusively of native species, particularly when woodland belts are more appropriate than hedges, the opportunity may arise to plant individual ornamental specimens.

Area 6: Leeds Transport Corridor

Landscape Guidance

- development within the transport corridor can be mitigated by appropriate planting, using the existing field boundary pattern wherever possible. Planting along the edge of the new infrastructure may serve to emphasise its presence; planting along existing field boundaries or woodlands that have been divided by road or railway will reduce its dominance, especially within the immediate area.
- where the existing field pattern has been damaged by the transport infrastructure, left-over corners can either be taken into adjoining fields, planted up as copses or spinneys, or allowed to regenerate naturally. Stands of pure sessile oak would be appropriate in this area on drier soils, with willow and alder in damp corners.
- appropriate species for woodland planting would be sessile oak with chestnut, ash, field maple, hazel, spindle and guelder rose. In damper areas willow, osier and alder are more appropriate;
- hedge species should be hazel or hawthorn with spindle, guelder rose and field maple, and willow in damper areas.

Landscape Sensitivity

All land to the north of the M20 is designated AONB and the area between the motorway and the northern edge of Maidstone has become a buffer zone, losing its rural wooded character to intermingled transport-related development. Any development here would be highly visible from the North Downs AONB and large-scale development would be resisted. The buffer zone is sensitive to change in that the topography does not assist integration, but the woodland blocks can help with screening.

The landscape character of this area is compromised by its current land use, and transport-related development often requires bright colours, high level lighting and extensive signage, as well as infrastructure. All of these would detract from the quality of the AONB. Smaller-scale development would require integration within the existing woodland structure. For example, around Eythorpe Street small linear woodland or shaws are characteristic, with larger areas of woodland to the west.

Typical Planting Mixes (Area 6: Acid sands and clay)

There is a notable distinction in this area between the general woodland planting and the species found along watercourses, in particular the river Len; in the species found in different parts of the area (see references to the location of SNCIs above) and between native species in the wider landscape and the ornamental species in the parkland. Particular care should therefore be taken to ensure that the planting mix selected is appropriate for the precise location. Ensure that all species used are of local provenance.

Woodland:

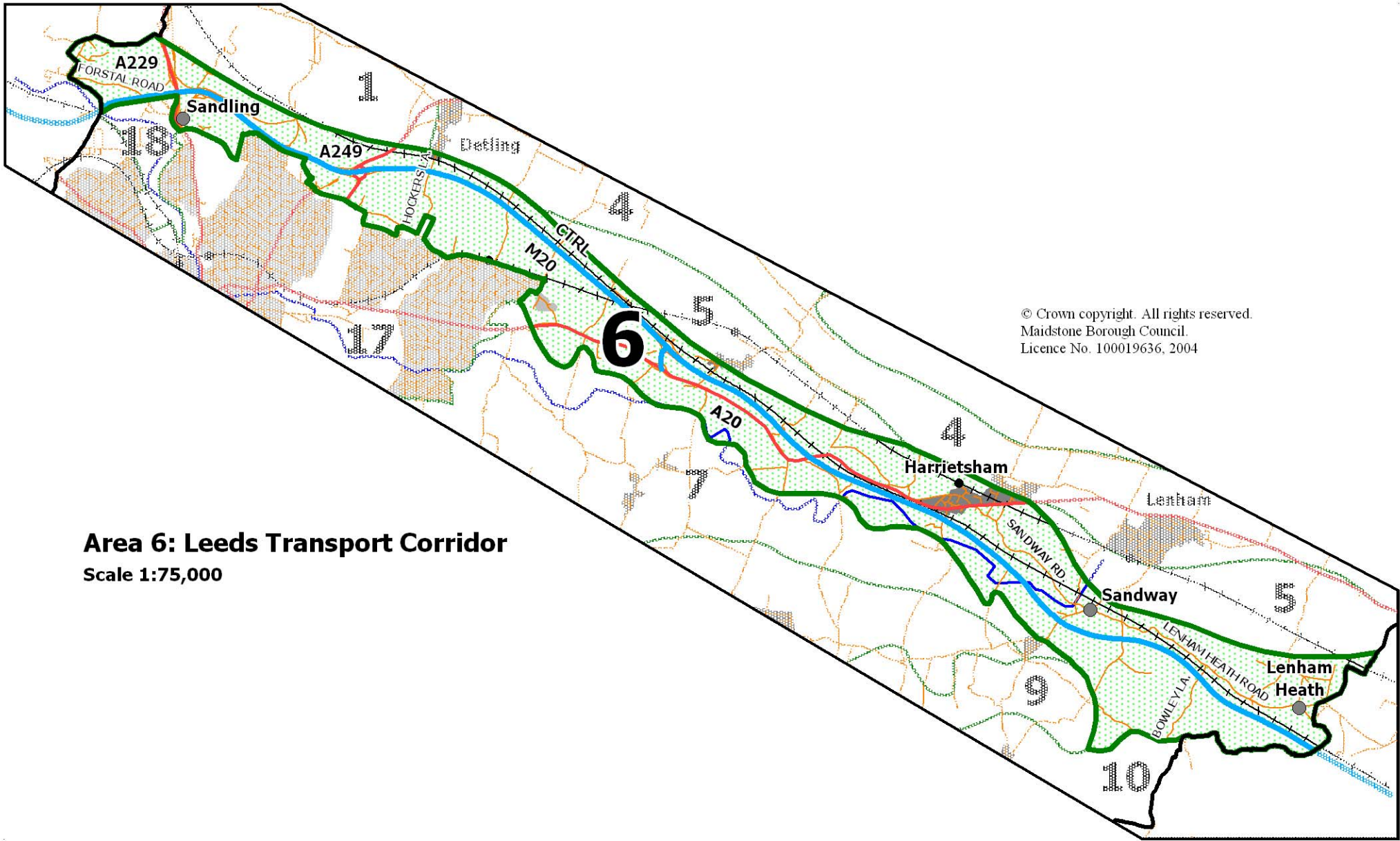
(dry central areas)	(damp areas and water courses)	(western end)
Broom 5	Alder 35	Ash 5
Field Maple 10	Guelder Rose 10	Aspen 5
Gorse 10	Hawthorn 20	Field Maple 10
Guelder Rose 5	Hazel 10	Hazel 10
Hazel 20	Sweet Gale 10	Hornbeam 30
Holly 10	Willow 15	Hawthorn 15
Sessile Oak 35		Holly 5
Spindle 5		Sessile Oak 10
		Sweet Gale 10
	100%	100%
		100%

Hedges:

Field Maple 10
Guelder Rose 5
Hawthorn 65
Hazel 5
Sallow 5
Spindle 5
Sweet Gale 5
100%

NB increase percentage of willow, osier and sweet gale in damp areas.

Plant in double row at 45cm centres, 45cm between rows



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Area 6: Leeds Transport Corridor
Scale 1:75,000