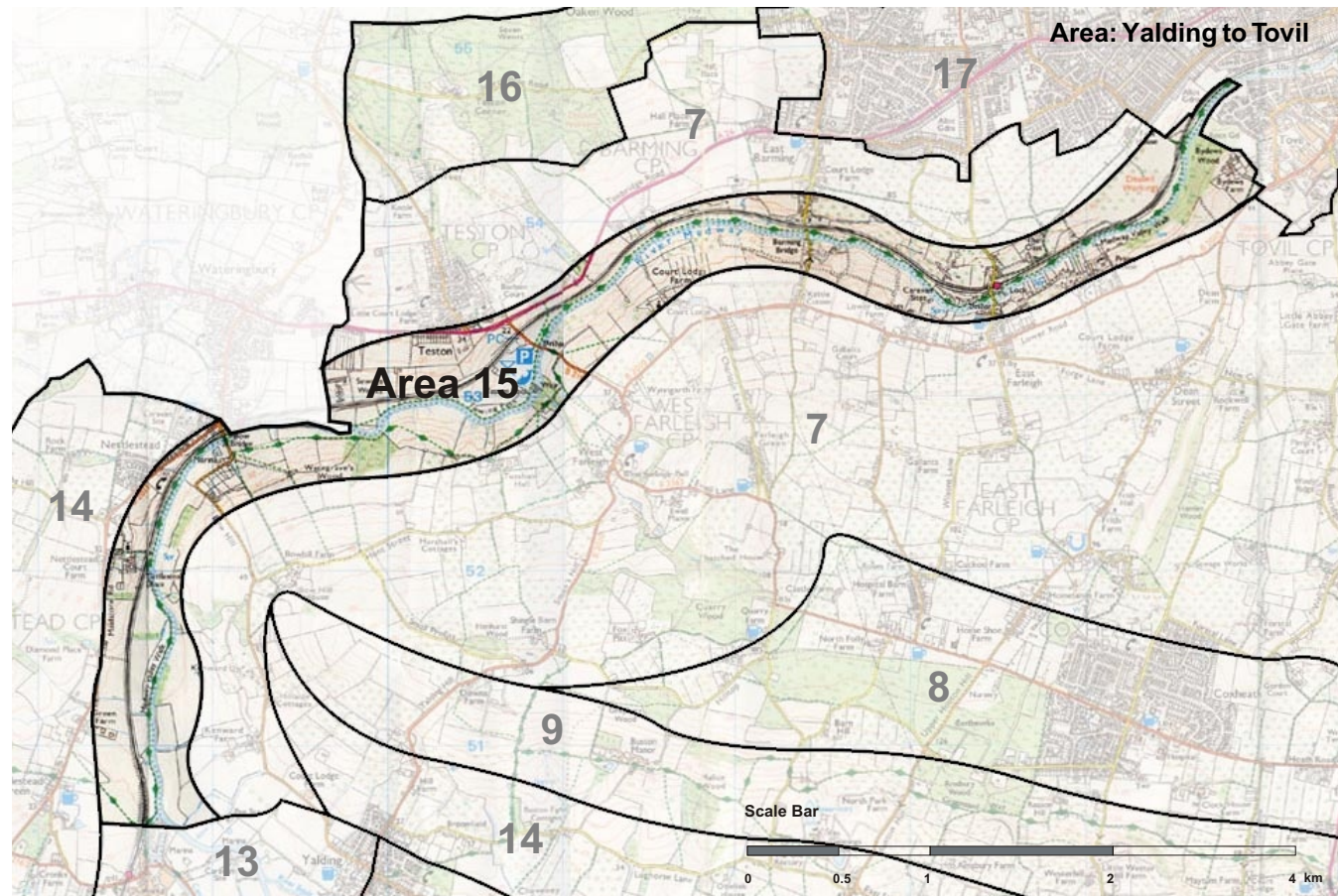


# Area 15: Middle Medway Valley

## Landscape Character Areas

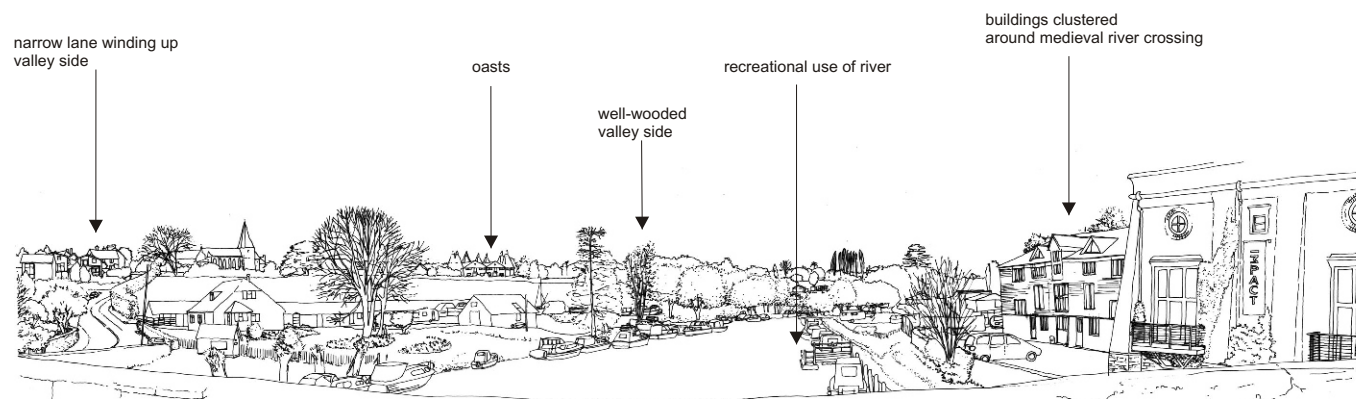


### Landscape Character

Although the upper reaches of the Medway meander across the clay vale with little topographical change and little impact upon the landscape, except for the vegetation in the immediate surroundings, the middle reaches are quite dramatic. The river has cut through the Greensand Ridge to create a sharply defined, narrow, steep-sided valley. The form of this valley dictates that the river only influences the landscape character within a limited area, and has no impact within Area 7. Views within the valley are tight and intimate, crowded with incident and often containing both historic features, such as bridges, and activity along the river. Out of the valley, (Area 7) views are extensive and the river valley is difficult to pick out. This area has high recreational value, based specifically on the river and associated activities. Care is needed to ensure that visitor pressure does not prejudice the nature conservation value of the river and its banks.



East Farleigh:medieval bridge



# Area 15: Middle Medway Valley

## Landscape Character Areas

The vegetation and land use on the valley slopes is characteristic of the surrounding area, being a mixture of pasture and orchard, with pasture in hedged fields adjacent to the river. Where woodland or traditional tall orchard cover has been lost on the upper slopes, views can be obtained of the sharp urban edge of Maidstone. This serves to alter perceptions of the rural nature of this area and to reduce its apparent tranquillity. Closer to Maidstone there are allotments and recreation areas on the east bank, and the urban edge becomes more apparent as built development encloses the river and the railway. Ancient woodland (Bydews Wood) clothes the valley slopes on the edge of the town and forms an attractive background for water-based recreation.



Recreational use of the Medway



View into Medway valley:  
the river is imperceptible

### Landscape Designations

The southern section of this area is designated SLA and the remainder ALLI. An explanation of the implications for developers is set out in Part 9.0: Landscape Guidance. The SLA designation protects scenic quality and distinctive character; the ALLI designation encourages the maintenance of open space and public access.

### Physical Influence

Sharply-defined river valley incised through Greensand Ridge. Very narrow and steep sided; not visible within the wider landscape.



This reach of the Medway also has nature conservation value

### Key Characteristics:

- tight valley with steep sides;
- very picturesque, especially around historic bridging points;
- recreational use of river for boating, canoeing, fishing and walking;
- boatyards and small marinas;
- gentrification of oast houses and farm buildings;
- historic bridges at Teston and East Farleigh.

## Area 15: Middle Medway Valley

## Landscape Character Areas

### Historic and Cultural Influences

Historic bridging points at Teston and East Farleigh, with ancient settlement gathered around.

### Buildings and Settlement

Square oasts in East Farleigh. Traditional vernacular buildings in settlements associated with ancient river crossings, in a variety of styles and materials, from red brick and hang-tile to the use of ragstone. More recent buildings or conversions are more or less successful depending on the extent to which they have responded sympathetically to the local vernacular. The pitch of a new roof can jar if it is only a few degrees removed from the angle traditionally adopted, but conversions that use traditional materials can be very successful.

### Landcover and Biodiversity

Pasture in hedged fields is the typical land cover in this area, with hedged dwarf rootstock orchards and some woodland on the upper valley slopes. There is one SNCI within the area. Nettlestead Churchyard, on the valley slope above the Medway, contains unimproved grassland with a good variety of herbs, mature ash and yew trees and a rich colony of lichens. The church supports a colony of bats.



The upper valley slopes merge into Area 7

**Landscape Condition:**

**Condition**

Detracting features: few  
 Visual unity: strong  
 Cultural integrity: N/A  
 Ecological integrity: variable  
 Functional integrity: high

**Robustness**

Pattern of elements: narrow range  
 Consistency of pattern: variable  
 Distinctive features: river, bridges, oasts  
 Historic continuity: strong  
 Impact of landform: strong  
 Extent of tree cover: N/A  
 Extent of visibility within area: limited by valley landform

<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: conserve and restore**

**Principles**

- conserve and enhance the rural riverside character, managing or restoring hedges around pasture. Retain traditional orchards where they still exist or ensure that recent orchard plantings are edged with traditional shelterbelts. Woodland and shelterbelts on the upper slopes of the valley can help to screen the edge of Maidstone and restore the rural character of this area. However, planting should not extend down the slopes to the river, as this masks the landform and reduces its impact and character;
- increases in recreational or other development that are out of scale with this intimate valley will be resisted by the Borough Council. Developers should seek to maintain the existing balance of land uses;
- the archaeological potential of any site must be fully explored before finalising development proposals, as this is an area with a long history of settlement;
- recreational pressure should be managed to prevent loss of biodiversity along the riverbank;
- within boatyards and marinas, adequate pollution control measures must be in place to prevent damage to the aquatic environment;
- development within the river valley should respect the vernacular tradition and echo existing structures in style and massing;
- management agreements for high quality habitats should be pursued.

**Practical measures**

- areas subject to pressure from leisure use may need well thought-out soft surfacing designs, rather than hard surfaces which would exclude vegetation. An extremely 'tidy' appearance is not appropriate in this environment;
- riverbank erosion is part of the natural fluvial process. However, if it is necessary to control this, the use of bioengineering techniques will be preferable to the use of hard finishes;
- native planting schemes, using characteristic species, should be proposed in association with any development. On the valley sides, oak, ash, hazel, hawthorn, field maple, beech and willow would be appropriate, with willow, alder, poplar, willow and alder buckthorn near the riverbank.

**Landscape Sensitivity**

This narrow character area is confined within the river valley and is extremely sensitive to change. Its robustness of topography and vegetation cover is mediated by the impact that even minor changes to river or land use could bring about. Recreational use must be balanced against nature conservation interests, and the two integrated, wherever possible, without detriment to landscape character. Views within the valley are tight and intimate, so any change would be readily visible here, if not within the wider landscape. Historically, development has crowded around the river crossings, then spread up the valley sides. Any further development should respond to this pattern and reflect traditional styles and materials, while planting should be carefully designed to enhance landform and reflect locally native species. Planting on the upper valley slopes could help to screen views out, especially of the urban edge, but should not be placed within the valley except where it reflects the traditional hedgerow pattern.

**Typical Planting Mixes (Area 15: Acid sand / river valley alluvium)**

Pedunculate oak is a characteristic feature of semi-natural woods in this area. Ensure that all species used are of local provenance.

*Woodland:*

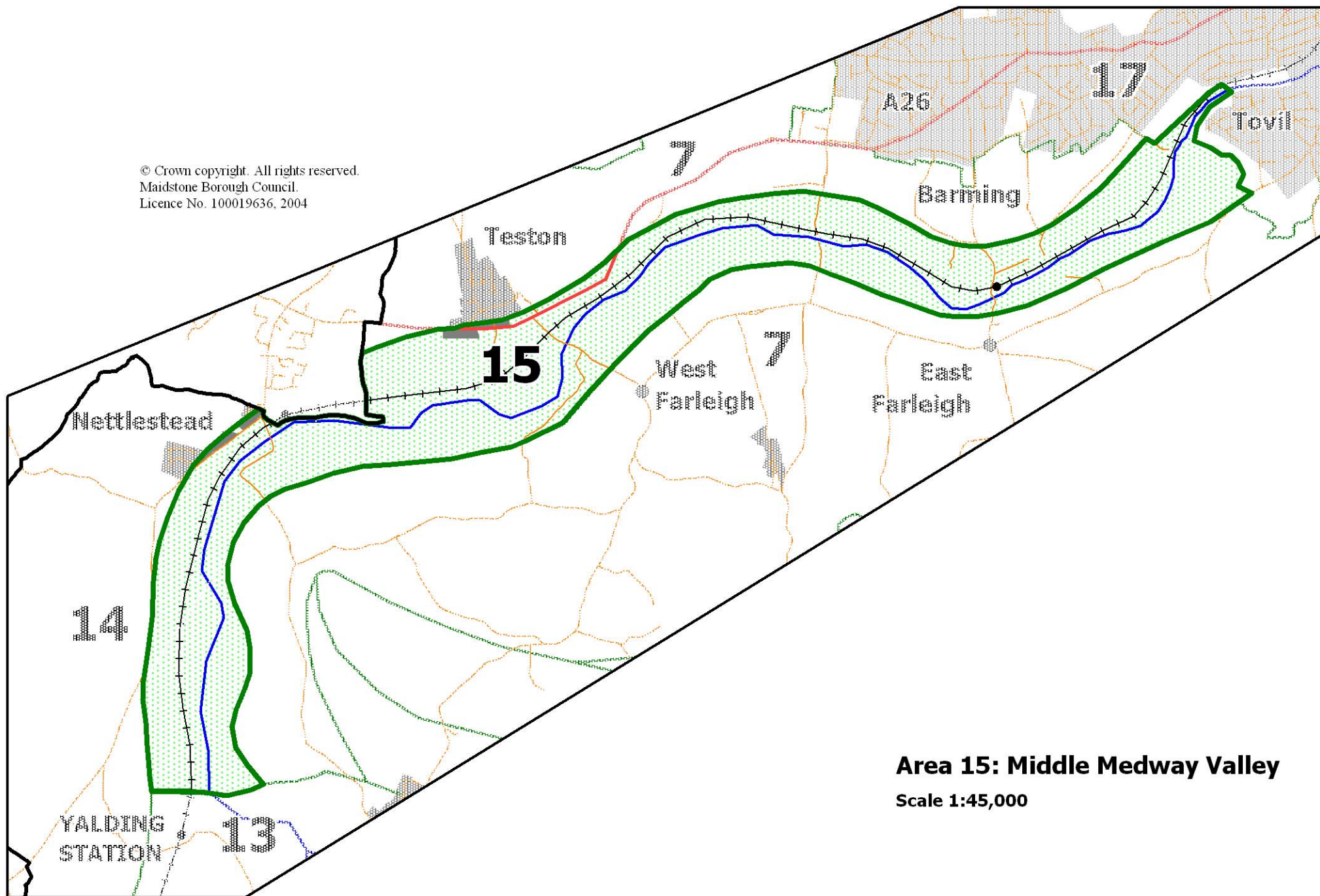
(on valley sides)		(in valley floor)	
Ash	10	Alder	25
Beech	25	Alder Buckthorn	10
Field Maple	10	Aspen	10
Hawthorn	10	Pedunculate Oak	15
Hazel	10	Silver Birch	10
Pedunculate Oak	10	Willow, Crack	15
Sallow	10	Willow, White	15
Sessile Oak	15		
	100%		100%

*Hedges:*

Field Maple	10
Hawthorn	70
Hazel	15
Holly	5
	100%

Plant hedges in a double staggered row, at 45cm centres, 30cm between rows.

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### Area 15: Middle Medway Valley

Scale 1:45,000