

Maidstone Borough Council
Strategic Planning, Sustainability and Transportation
Committee

Tuesday 8 September 2015

Urgent Update Report

Item 13: Landscapes of Local Value

Officer comment

At the 23rd July 2015 meeting of this Committee, the Greensand Ridge, Len Valley and Medway Valley areas were agreed as Landscapes of Local Value (LLV) for Regulation 18 consultation. These agreed areas are shown on the plan attached at Appendix Two to this urgent update.

In addition, this Committee agreed the proposed Loose Valley LLV area with the addition of two fields off Cripple Street/Postley Road. This agreed area is also shown on the attached plan at Appendix Two.

Committee also resolved that four additional areas be reviewed for inclusion in the LLVs but unfortunately these have not all been specifically addressed in the report included in the agenda papers for this meeting (8 September 2015). Officers apologise for this omission. The four areas were Lenham Vale, Court Lodge Road Harrietsham, Land North of Cuckoo Wood (Sandling) and Fields North of Barty House Thurnham.

Also, since the publication of the agenda for the 8th September meeting, Councillors and Officers have had the benefit of a site visit to some of the identified areas. In addition, further representations have been received from members of the public, Parish Council's and Councillors on the issue, primarily relating to the setting of the Kent Downs AONB and the Low Weald. (These representations are attached at Appendix One).

The additional consideration set out below rectifies the omissions from the report and also provides further commentary on the previously proposed; Setting of the Kent Downs AONB LLV and the Low Weald which have been the subject of further representations as outlined above.

Setting of the Kent Downs LLV, Court Lodge Road Harrietsham, Lenham Vale, Fields North of Barty House and Land North of Cuckoo Wood.

Since the meeting of this Committee on 23 July 2015, further review of this previously recommended Setting of the Kent Downs AONB Area of Local

Landscape Value and the proposed additions to it that Councillors requested be investigated has taken place.

All of the sites are located to the foreground of the Kent Downs AONB and form part of its setting.

Court Lodge Road Harrietsham has been the subject of further representations which are appended. The site has been assessed again and it is recommended that it should not be included because the area in question is not contiguous with the proposed area of the Setting of the Kent Downs AONB LLV and in addition its landscape character and landscape sensitivity is not classified as high/high in the Landscape Capacity Study.

Lenham Vale has been re-assessed and contrary to the recommendation in the published papers, due to the fact that the area is not contiguous with the Setting of the Kent Downs AONB LLV and the fact that the neighbouring authority, Ashford BC, is not proposing any local landscape designations is is not considered appropriate to include this area.

With respect to the fields North of Barty House, again this area is not contiguous with other proposed LLV and should not be included.

Land north of Cuckoo Wood is also not contiguous with the adjacent LLV and in addition does not meet the high test for inclusion in terms of landscape character and landscape sensitivity. It therefore should not be included within the Setting of the Kent Downs AONB LLV.

Existing national policy guidance in the NPPF and NPPG and also the statutory duty the Council has pursuant to s85 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 which requires a 'relevant authority' in '*exercising or performing any functions in relation to or so as to affect land in an area of outstanding natural beauty*', to '*have regard to the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the area of outstanding natural beauty.*' This duty includes land beyond the AONB boundary (generally referred to as the setting). This duty and the national guidance together with the proposed criteria in policy SP5 provide a robust set of measures to protect both the AONB and its setting.

Further reference to the setting of the Kent Downs AONB has been added to the supporting text of policy SP5 (Appendix Two)

It is considered therefore, that it is not necessary to designate the Setting of the Kent Downs AONB as an LLV. Members are therefore recommended not to designate the Setting of the Kent Downs AONB LLV, and that the plan and the revisions to policy SP5 and its supporting text attached at Appendix Two be approved.

Low Weald

Councillors' attention is drawn to the further representations attached at Appendix One.

The Committee also resolved that the area of the Low Weald be re-examined for designation as a LLV. This reconsideration is set out in paragraphs 2.9 to 2.13 of the report. This consideration proposes that a small area of the Low Weald (the 'Ulcombe Mixed Farmlands') could be included as an extension to the Greensand Ridge LLV which would be re-named the Greensand Ridge and Low Weald LLV.

On further reflection, confirmed by the on-site review, this area is not sufficiently distinct from the land further to the south. It also does not share the topographical characteristics of the Greensand Ridge, which represents a dominant visual feature in the landscape.

On this basis, the justification for its identification as a LLV is highly marginal.

Contrary to the published papers it is therefore recommended that the Greensand Ridge LLV **remain as agreed by this committee at its meeting on 23 July 2015** as shown on the plan attached at Appendix Two. It is accordingly recommend that the Low Weald **not** be included as a LLV

Councillors are also advised that the opportunity has also been taken to assess the supporting text and criteria for policy SP5 and a revised version is attached at Appendix Two. Specific reference has been made to the setting of the Kent Downs and High Weald AONBs and also the Low Weald as well as number of the criteria being further strengthened.

Councillors are recommended to agree the changes to policy SP5 and its supporting text set out at Appendix Two to this urgent update report.

Amendments to recommendation

Substitute existing recommendations for the following:

1. That the amendments to draft policy SP5 and its supporting text set out at Appendix Two to this urgent update report be approved for further public consultation (Regulation 19 consultation).
2. That the plan attached at Appendix Two to this urgent update report be approved for further public consultation (Regulation 19 consultation).

APPENDIX ONE

Steve Clarke

From: Steve Clarke
Sent: 08 September 2015 15:35
To: Steve Clarke
Subject: FW: G&T Sites at Maplehurst and The Low Weald / LLVs
Attachments: G&T sites around Maplehurst, Staplehurst - authorised, unauthorised and pending consideration; ENQ02023 - Stage 1 complaint (ack); MBC PAP 26.8.15.pdf; Draft amended grounds.pdf; 209091 - Consent Order.pdf; FW: Perfect Place Frittenden Road Staplehurst

From: Stephen Clews ([REDACTED])
Sent: 02 September 2015 17:18
To: Rob Jarman
Cc: johnperry ([REDACTED]); Louise Brice (Cllr); Alison Broom; helengrant ([REDACTED])
Subject: G&T Sites at Maplehurst and The Low Weald / LLVs

Dear Mr Jarman
.....

Low Weald / LLV

The perception is that removing SLA status from the Low Weald by not giving any part of that area LLV status will simply make development in the open countryside easier to justify. At the August meeting of the Strategic Planning Sustainability & Transport Committee you stated that policy ENV28 adequately protects the nature and character of the open countryside but our experience around Maplehurst simply does not support that assertion.

The Low Weald SLA was introduced in the Maidstone Borough-wide Local Plan 2000 and, to quote from your 14 July 2015 report to the Strategic Planning, Sustainability and Transport Committee, "it is clear that the geology and topography of these areas has not changed" - so the only reason to reverse the decision taken in the 2000 Local Plan appears to be a concern that MBC would be giving special protection to too much open countryside within the Borough.

The application of the 7 criteria used by MBC in concluding that the Low Weald fails to warrant LLV status is subjective and too broad brush, ignoring as it does specific areas within the Low Weald that MBC's Landscape Character Assessment (2013 and 2013) and Landscape Capacity Study: Sensitivity Assessment (2015) concluded are in good condition, highly sensitive to significant change and which should be preserved. The criteria that the Low Weald is deemed not to satisfy are:

- 1 Part of a contiguous area of high quality landscape - to assert that none of this large area of open countryside meets this criteria because "it is punctuated by development in several locations" is simply perverse.
- 2 Significant in long distance public views and skylines – as a Low Weald, it is by nature flat but there are numerous public vantage points affording long distance views over its beautiful countryside
- 3 Locally distinctive in their field patterns, geological and other landscape features - the assertion that the Low Weald fails this criteria in its entirety is not only contrary to the findings of the Landscape Character Assessment (2013 and 2013) and Landscape Capacity Study: Sensitivity Assessment (2015) but also Natural England's National Character Area Profile
- 4 Providing a valued transition from town to countryside - given the Low Weald "is punctuated by development in several locations" (see above) and meets the criteria "preventing the coalescence of settlements which would undermine their character", I struggle to see why it does not provide a valued transition from town to countryside, at the very least in parts as recognised, for example, in the

emerging Staplehurst Neighbourhood Plan which identifies the open countryside east of Staplehurst as a valuable green corridor enhancing the adjoining Staplehurst Conservation Area .

The Setting of the Kent Downs AONB is rightly recommended for LLV status having met 5 of the criteria (the threshold for LLV status appears to be meeting 4 criteria) including the first three listed above. The southern Low Weald borders the High Weald AONB so why does MBC not consider any part of that setting of the High Weald AONB deserves LLV status? Can MBC simply ignore the setting of a nationally designated landscape area because it happens to be in another borough?

The minutes of the Strategic Planning, Sustainability and Transport Committee meeting on 18 August state “that a re-examination of the area of the Low Weald, excluding SSSIs, be carried out to establish if areas within the Low Weald should be included in the Landscapes of Local Value policy”. Please can you confirm when you expect the results of that re-examination to be published and where?

Many thanks

Stephen Clews
Broadlake, Mill Lane
Frittenden, Kent TN17 2DX

Steve Clarke

From: Steve Clarke
Sent: 08 September 2015 15:32
To: Steve Clarke
Subject: FW: Landscapes of Local Value
Attachments: MBC landscapes.xlsx

From: Stephen Clews [REDACTED]
Sent: 07 September 2015 17:05
To: David Burton (Cllr); Clive English (Cllr); Fay Gooch (Cllr); Susan Grigg (Cllr); Tony Harwood (Cllr); Stephen Paine (Cllr); Val Springett (Cllr); Nick de Wiggondene (Cllr); Val Springett Cllr; Nick.DeWiggondene; Fran Wilson (Cllr); John Perry (Cllr); Louise Brice (Cllr); eric.hotson; Staplehurst
Subject: Landscapes of Local Value

Dear Members of the MBC Strategic Planning, Sustainability and Transportation Committee

The draft Maidstone Borough Local Plan 2014 identified the Greensand Ridge, and the river valleys of the Medway, the Loose (as amended) and the Len as proposed LLV's. Subsequently the setting of the AOB has been added and it is proposed to add a small part of the Low Weald to the Greensand Ridge LLV.

I cannot find anything on the MBC web-site to explain whether the boundaries of these proposed LLV's accord with the boundaries of landscape character areas as detailed in the Jacobs landscape character assessment (March 2012 amended July 2013) and landscape capacity study: sensitivity assessment (Jan 2015) and, if they don't, why they don't. From cross referencing the Landscapes of Local Value map included with your papers for item 13 of tomorrow's meeting with MBC's landscape Capacity Study, it is clear to me that they do not align as part of some character areas are included in LLV's whilst the rest of that same character area is excluded. Please see attached analysis.

As non-criteria based designations are no longer supported by government policy, seven criteria have been applied to previously identified and newly proposed LLVs, supported by the landscape character and capacity assessments compiled for MBC by Jacobs.

I cannot find anything to explain who devised the seven criteria to assess potential LLV's (the report that went to your committee meeting on 14 July 2015 merely states that "*Relevant criteria for assessing landscapes of local value have been developed for Maidstone*"), what the rationale for those individual criteria were or who assessed the potential LLV's against those criteria (inevitably, a subjective assessment). The 14 July 2015 report simply states that "*together, the application of the criteria and the evidence provided by the landscape character and sensitivity assessments enable the identification of landscapes of local value, and provide the council with the justification to protect valued landscapes which are in good condition and highly sensitive to significant change*". However, the result of that assessment is that many landscape character areas independently deemed to have a High Overall Landscape Sensitivity will **not** be afforded any additional protection (whilst part of one, Harrietsham Vale, with a Low Overall Sensitivity ranking is included within a LLV).

The meeting of your committee on 18 August 2015 resolved "That a re-examination of the area of the Low Weald, excluding SSSIs, be carried out to establish if areas within the Low Weald should be included in the Landscapes of Local Value policy." In response, Rob Jarman's report dated 8 September 2015 merely states that "*it is necessary to take full account of the comprehensive assessment of the borough's landscapes undertaken for the council by Jacobs which rated all areas in terms of landscape character and visual sensitivities. Eleven of the Low Weald character areas and the two river valley areas do not demonstrate high ratings in both categories thus not providing sufficient evidence for this area to be included in the designation.*" Therefore, it would appear that unless a landscape character area scored "High" in both Landscape Character Sensitivity and Visual Sensitivity, it does not warrant inclusion in a LLV, even if the Overall Landscape Sensitivity was "High". If that's the "criteria" being applied for the Low Weald, why is the same criteria not applicable to Thurnham Vale, Broomfield Undulating Farmlands, Leeds Castle Parklands or Harrietsham Vale, all of which are included, at least in part, in proposed LLVs but which did not score High in both Landscape Character Sensitivity and Visual Sensitivity?

I question whether this LLV assessment process has been transparent, fair or consistent and would urge you to consider whether a more rigorous approach is required.

Many thanks

Stephen

Stephen Clews
Hill View House, The Hill
Cranbrook, Kent TN17 3AD

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

	Landscape Sensitivity Analysis			Proposed LLVs				
	Landscape Character Sensitivity	Visual Sensitivity	Overall Landscape Sensitivity					
Gault Clay Vale	1	Bredhurst & Stockbury Downs	L	H	M	Setting of the AONB		
	12	Sandling Vale	L	M	L			
	13	Boxley Vale	H	M	H			
	14	Thurnham Vale	H	M	H			
	15	Eyborne Vale	H	H	H			
	16	Harristham to Lenham Vale	M	H	H			
	17	East Lenham Vale	H	H	H			
	18	Barming Greensand Fruit Belt	L	M	L			
	19	Barming Hath Arable Land	L	M	L			
	20	Oaken Wood	H	M	H			
	21	Teston Valley Side	M	H	H			
	22	Nettlestead Wooded Farmlands	H	M	H			
	23	Nettlestead Valley Side	H	M	H			
	24	East Barming Orchards	H	H	H			
	27	Farleigh Greensand Fruit Belt	H	H	H			
	28	Coxheath Plateau	M	M	M			
	Greensand Orchards & Mixed Farmlands	29	Boughton Moncheusea to Chart Sutton Plateau	L	M		L	Medway Valley Loose Valley (part)
30		Langley Heath Undulating Farmland	H	H	H			
31		Kingswood Plateau	M	M	H			
32		Broomfield Undulating Farmlands	H	M	H			
33		Lenham Heath Farmlands	L	M	L			
Greensand Ridge		34	Linton Greensand Ridge	H	H	H	Greensand Ridge & Low Weald Greensand Ridge & Low Weald (part)	
		35	Sutton Valence Greensand Ridge	H	H	H		
		36	Nettlestead Woodlands	H	M	H		
		37	Nettlestead Green Farmlands	L	M	L		
		38	Yalding Farmlands	H	M	H		
	39	Laddingford Low Weald	M	M	M			
	40	Beltring Grasslands	H	M	H			
	41	Linton Park & Farmlands	H	M	H			
Low Weald	42	Ulcombe Mixed Farmlands	H	H	H	Greensand Ridge & Low Weald		
	43	Headcorn Pasturelands	H	M	H			
	44	Staplehurst Low Weald	H	M	H			
	45	Sherenden Wooded Hills	H	M	H			
	46	Knoxbridge Artable Lowlands	H	M	H			
	47	Waterman Quarter Low Weald	H	L	M			
	48	Medway Valley Allington	H	M	H			
Valleys	49	Leeds Castle Parklands	H	M	H	Setting of the AONB		
	50	Harristham Vale	L	M	L			
	51	Chilston Parklands	H	H	H			
	52	Medway Valley to Wateringbury	H	H	H			
	53	Medway Valley Yalding	H	M	H			
	57	Teise Valley	H	M	H			
	58	Beult Valley	H	M	H			

Oak House
Frittenden Road
Staplehurst
Kent TN12 0DJ

Mr Rob Jarman
Head of Planning and Development
Maidstone Borough Council

7 September 2015

Dear Mr Jarman

I am writing to you express my absolute astonishment that you are recommending removal of the Staplehurst Low Weald Special Landscape Area (SLA) designation from the area to the East of Staplehurst and further that it will not be included in the list of Landscapes of Local Value (LLV).

After reading the assessment of the Staplehurst Low Weald SLA that you and your consultants Jacobs have recently submitted I am stunned that firstly, they have assessed the area as running from the village of Staplehurst west towards Marden (instead of east of the village towards Headcorn/Frittenden as per the existing SLA) and secondly that as such they have not identified the area east of Staplehurst as a locally significant landscape, deserving of the extra protection that an LLV would afford.

As anybody who has ever actually visited this area could attest, in addition to the criteria that have already been assessed by you for the purposes of consideration for LLV status, this area also fulfils three additional criteria, notably, (criteria ii) significant long distance public views and skylines, (criteria iii) locally distinctive in its field patterns, geological and other landscape features and (criteria vii) provides a valued transition from town to countryside.

The landscape in this area is of strong hedgerow boundaries, well vegetated ponds, ancient woodlands, protected orchards and agriculture/pastureland - all providing natural habitats and good ecological connectivity. The enclosure and field patterns of the area form an integral part of the wider surrounding landscape and pastures, enclosed as they are by hedgerow boundaries with an abundance of mature oak trees and ponds, and they are highly representative of the wider Low Weald landscape.

The landscape typically contains weather boarded and tile hung oasthouses, barns and ancient manorial farmhouses, many of which are of historical importance.

The low hedgerow boundaries allow good visibility and long distance views of the undulating landscape towards the South (High Weald) which must surely be why there is such a high percentage of popular and well used public footpaths that criss-cross this area.

Sitting as it does to the South of the Maidstone urban sprawl, outside the village envelope of Staplehurst and before the High Weald, I would argue that the area, with its winding historic lanes,

edged with deep ditches and green verges, provides the 'valued transition from town to countryside' that is required to satisfy this criteria.

I would strongly urge you, and the MBC Committee members, to reconsider including the area to the East of Staplehurst as a landscape of local value.

Yours sincerely

Nicola Jessel

cc: Borough Cllrs Burton, English, Gooch, Grigg, Harwood, Paine, Springett, de Wiggondene, Wilson

Steve Clarke

From: Rob Jarman
Sent: 04 September 2015 13:20
To: Cheryl Parks; Steve Clarke
Subject: Fwd: The Low Weald

Fyi

Sent from Samsung Mobile on O2

----- Original message -----

From: Mrs Elieen Riden <[redacted]@btinternet.com>
Date: 04/09/2015 12:33 (GMT+00:00)
To: "David Burton (Cllr)" <DavidBurton@maidstone.gov.uk>, "Clive English (Cllr)" <cliveenglish@maidstone.gov.uk>, "Fay Gooch (Cllr)" <FayGooch@maidstone.gov.uk>, "Susan Grigg (Cllr)" <SusanGrigg@maidstone.gov.uk>, "Tony Harwood (Cllr)" <tonyharwood@maidstone.gov.uk>, sephenpaine@maidstone.gov.uk, "Val Springett (Cllr)" <ValSpringett@maidstone.gov.uk>, "Nick de Wiggondene (Cllr)" <NickDeWiggondene@maidstone.gov.uk>, "Fran Wilson (Cllr)" <franwilson@maidstone.gov.uk>
Cc: chrisberry@maidstone.gov.uk, Rob Jarman <robjarman@maidstone.gov.uk>, AlisonBroome@maidstone.gov.uk, "Martin Round (Cllr)" <MartinRound@maidstone.gov.uk>, "Richard Thick (Cllr)" <RichardThick@maidstone.gov.uk>, [redacted]@unabillandee.com, PAULINA SOCKELL <paulina.stockell@kent.gov.uk>, ERIC HOTSON <erichotson@kent.gov.uk>, helen.whately.mp@parliament.uk, "John Perry (Cllr)" <JohnPerry@Maidstone.gov.uk>, CHRIS POOLE <[redacted]@cobens.co.uk>, CHRIS SMITH <[redacted]@linxsb360.co.uk>, Sutton Valence <clerk@suttonvalence.org.uk>, JOHN DAVIS <[redacted]@outlook.com>, LORRAINE COOK <[redacted]@hotmail.com>, Maurice Stancombe <[redacted]@gmail.com>, SHARON JUDGE <[redacted]@yahoo.com>
Subject: FW: The Low Weald

Dear Members

I am writing on behalf of local residents of Sutton Valence and surrounding areas;

At your meeting on Tuesday 8th September, will you please vote to include the **WHOLE OF THE LOW WEALD** as a **LANDSCAPE OF LOCAL VALUE** in the Draft Local Plan.

The countryside has Changed since the 2000 local plan. More of our green areas now need all the protection they can get. This part of Kent once

known all over the World as the "Garden of England" is being slowly consumed by development.

Visitors come to Kent from far and wide to enjoy the landscape and the history and beauty of our Towns and Villages.

Members, please make the time to stand on the GreensandRidge and look down on the Low Weald, you will understand why local people value it and want it protected. Your decision will be of immense importance for the future of this part of Kent. Maidstone must not be influenced by other authorities and their plans, this is our countryside, and it is precious to us.

Yours sincerely,

Eileen Riden,

Chair, SuttonValence Parish council

Steve Clarke

From: Rob Jarman
Sent: 03 September 2015 14:30
To: Steve Clarke; Cheryl Parks
Subject: Fwd: The Low Weald

Sent from Samsung Mobile on O2

----- Original message -----

From: East Sutton Parish Council <east Suttonparishcouncil@gmail.com>
Date: 03/09/2015 13:43 (GMT+00:00)
To: "David Burton (Cllr)" <DavidBurton@maidstone.gov.uk>, "Clive English (Cllr)" <cliveenglish@maidstone.gov.uk>, "Fay Gooch (Cllr)" <FayGooch@maidstone.gov.uk>, "Susan Grigg (Cllr)" <SusanGrigg@maidstone.gov.uk>, "Tony Harwood (Cllr)" <tonyharwood@maidstone.gov.uk>, "Stephen Paine (Cllr)" <StephenPaine@maidstone.gov.uk>, "Val Springett (Cllr)" <ValSpringett@maidstone.gov.uk>, "Nick de Wiggondene (Cllr)" <NickDeWiggondene@maidstone.gov.uk>, "Fran Wilson (Cllr)" <franwilson@maidstone.gov.uk>
Cc: chrisberry@maidstone.gov.uk, Rob Jarman <robjarman@maidstone.gov.uk>, Alison Broom <AlisonBroom@maidstone.gov.uk>, "Martin Round (Cllr)" <MartinRound@maidstone.gov.uk>, "Richard Thick (Cllr)" <RichardThick@maidstone.gov.uk>, Elizabeth May <jonandelizabeth@hotmail.com>, Graham Edmed <graham@edmed.co.uk>, Jonathan Worsfold <jsworsfold@yahoo.co.uk>, Malcolm Ireland <ireland.malcolm@gmail.com>, Turnill & Co Ltd <enquiries@turnillandco.com>
Subject: The Low Weald

Dear Cllrs

At last night's Parish Council meeting I was instructed to write to you to express the dismay that the Parish Council feels at the proposed area of the Low weald to be designated as a Landscape of Local Value. The Parish Council believes that the whole of the Low Weald in the Borough should be designated as a LLV.

This Borough Council should be proud of its special landscapes and do everything in its power to protect them for future generations and not make a decision partly based on how other Boroughs are proceeding. The fact that the whole of this area has not had special protection previously is not a justifiable reason not to protect now.

Before you make a recommendation on this please take the time to go and look down on this area from the Greensand Ridge.

Kind Regards

Janet Burnett
Clerk to East Sutton Parish Council

01622 844135

www.eastsuttonpc.kentparishes.gov.uk

This email and any attachments to it may be confidential and are intended solely for the use of the individual to whom it is addressed. If you are not the intended recipient of this email, you must neither take any action based upon its contents, nor copy or show it to anyone. Please contact the sender if you believe you have received this email in error.

Steve Clarke

From: Rob Jarman
Sent: 03 September 2015 14:29
To: Steve Clarke; Chris Berry; Cheryl Parks
Subject: Fwd: Strategic Planning, Sustainability and Transport Committee 8th September

Sent from Samsung Mobile on O2

----- Original message -----

From: ann hanish <ann@staplehurst.com>
Date: 03/09/2015 14:14 (GMT+00:00)
To: Rob Jarman <robjarman@maidstone.gov.uk>
Subject: Strategic Planning, Sustainability and Transport Committee 8th September

Dear Mr Jarman,

Could I point out that in the document on LLV's to go before The Strategic Planning, Sustainability and Transport Committee on 8th September, point 2.10 fails to refer to the land to the EAST of Staplehurst that had SLA designation.

Regards

Ann Hanish

Steve Clarke

From: Rob Jarman
Sent: 02 September 2015 15:58
To: Chris Berry; Cheryl Parks; Steve Clarke; Sue Whiteside
Subject: FW: Low Weald-Landscapes of Local Value

Rob Jarman

Head of Planning and Development
Maidstone Borough Council
Maidstone House
King Street
Maidstone
ME15 6JQ

☎ 01622 602214 www.digitalmaidstone.co.uk

For appointments please contact: [e louisebarker@maidstone.gov.uk](mailto:louisebarker@maidstone.gov.uk) ☎ 01622 602288

From: eric.hotson@kent.gov.uk <mailto:eric.hotson@kent.gov.uk>
Sent: 02 September 2015 15:51
To: Rob Jarman
Subject: Re: Low Weald-Landscapes of Local Value

Dear Rob,

The classification should be re-instated. No sound reasons have been given for removal.

Eric Hotson
County Councillor

Steve Clarke

From: Steve Clarke
Sent: 08 September 2015 15:41
To: Steve Clarke
Subject: FW: Low Weald-Landscapes of Local Value

----- Original message -----

From: John Perry
Date: 02/09/2015 17:06 (GMT+00:00)
To: Rob Jarman <robjarman@maidstone.gov.uk>
Cc: ann hanish, "Annabelle Blackmore (Cllr)" "David Burton (Cllr) , LouiseBrice , "eric hotson" P Stockell
Subject: Re: Low Weald-Landscapes of Local Value

Hi Rob

My concern is what will go into the new Local plan. It is my understanding that the Officers did not consider the Low Weald would qualify as being a Landscape of Local Value and it is this that gives myself and my residents cause for concern since we believe this is fundamentally wrong. I understand your concern that the Low Weald per se covers a large area; but I believe that members and officers are reviewing this and we cannot see why areas such as the land to the east of Staplehurst should not be included given that it is my understanding that it was included in the previous designation. As I am sure you must recognise this is a serious issue for many of our residents; but hopefully it can be resolved.

Kind regards
john

From: Rob Jarman
Date: Wednesday, 2 September 2015 15:23
To: John Perry , ann hanish
Subject: RE: Low Weald-Landscapes of Local Value

Dear Both,
Are you making representations on, in effect, the re-instatement of the SLA in the adopted Local Pan (2000) and / or a larger area ? This would provide clarity for an urgent update report.

Thanks

Rob Jarman
Head of Planning and Development
Maidstone Borough Council
Maidstone House
King Street
Maidstone
ME15 6JQ

From: John Perry
Sent: 02 September 2015 13:45
To: ann hanish; Rob Jarman
Cc: Louise Brice (Cllr; David Burton (Cllr) (Home); Annabelle Blackmore (Cllr); Pstockell; Val Springett Cllr; Nick de Wiggondene MICA; Eric Hotson Staplehurst; Rory Silkin; 'Four Oaks Bed and Breakfast'; 'Martin Round'; Fort, Gill - Chaucer; John A. Wilson (Cllr Con)
Subject: Re: Low Weald-Landscapes of Local Value

Dear Rob

I writing to endorse everything that Ann Hamish has stated in her email to you. As a Ward Member for Staplehurst I believe passionately in the Low Weald and I was really surprised that it was not considered to be a Landscape of Local Value. As I stated at the July meeting of the Strategic Planning Committee, the Destination Management Plan opens with the statement that the Weald of Kent was something that defined Kentishness; the Low Weald is an integral part of this landscape with its own distinctive topology. Great play is made of the Greensand Ridge and rightly so, but the views you see from the Greensand Ridge are of the Low Weald!

I understand the argument that some care needs to be taken otherwise one can overdo the situation. But, as I understand the position the Low Weald was given special status in the 2000 Local Plan as a Special Landscape Area and I fail to see what has changed. I understand that Officers and some Members are now undertaking a tour of the Low Weald to review specific areas which I support and hope that something really positive comes out of these visits; one only has to stand on the Medieval Hertsfield Bridge to see just how special the Low Weald is. I think the words of Siegfried Sassoon, which I used in my previous presentation say it all: " the agricultural serenity of the Weald widespread in the delicate lazy sunshine".

I can't emphasise enough how important this issue is to the residents of the Ward I represent.

Kind regards
John

From: ann hanish
Date: Wednesday, 2 September 2015 12:43
To: <Robjarman@maidstone.gov.uk>
Cc: <LouiseBrice; [John Perry](#)>

Subject: Low Weald-Landscapes of Local Value

Dear Mr Jarman,

I write as a resident of the Low Weald rural area that lies to the East of Staplehurst. This area was previously a Special Landscape Area and it is of great concern that you are considering removing this area from Landscapes of Local Value status. I was pleased that the Strategic Planning, Sustainability and Transportation Committee on the 18th August 2015 agreed to reconsider areas of the Low Weald that were previously protected.

There are 3 points I will address on your tick list that it is claimed the area does not meet;

Significant in long distance public views and skyline.

By its very nature and designation the Low Weald is low lying. It is a low lying clay vale with woodland and irregular field patterns bounded by tall hedges, it is not a landscape of long views. However from vantage points such as Linton Hill or Sutton Valance it is possible to see for miles over the beautiful countryside of the low weald.

Locally distinctive in their field patterns, geological and other landscape features

Natural England's National Character Area Profile describes the Low Weald as having field boundaries of hedgerows enclosing small irregular fields and linking into small and scattered linear settlements. There are rural lanes and tracks with wide grass verges and ditches. Water is a dominant feature owing to the topography and impervious clay, particularly ponds and flood plains of the river Beult. There are numerous ponds mainly related to the history of brick making, quarrying and hammer and furnace ponds, legacies of the Wealden iron industry.

The area contains ancient protected woodland and protected orchards. It is rich in biodiversity and supports rare species. The land is mainly supporting pastoral farming owing to the heavy clay soil with some arable farming on fields less prone to water logging. Architecturally it has weather boarded and tile hung houses, oast houses and barns and ancient listed manorial farms.

Providing a valued transition from town to countryside

In the Neighbourhood Plan currently being formulated by the residents of Staplehurst, the rural area to the east of the village is identified as an area outside the village development envelope to be retained as countryside for the enjoyment of the village. This area is a green corridor into the countryside from the built up area and is used for leisure pursuits such as horse riding, cycling, walking and jogging.

I hope that you will reconsider this area, I understand that it is not possible to include the whole of the Low Weald but I cannot understand what has changed to make an area previously afforded protection no longer eligible.

Ann Hanish, Exhurst Manor, Frittenden Road, Staplehurst, Kent TN12 0DL

APPENDIX TWO

Policy SP5 - Countryside

The countryside

5.56 Maidstone borough is predominantly rural with a large proportion of the population living in villages as well as on the fringes of the urban area. Much of the rural landscapes are of high quality with valuable agricultural and ecological resources within the borough. The countryside areas are highly accessible to those living and working in the urban areas, complemented by a wide and well-used public rights of way network. They also act as a major asset to attract new investment into the borough. However this proximity to the urban area brings with it pressures arising from an increased level of demand for houses, recreation and jobs in the countryside.

5.57 The countryside is defined as all those parts of the plan area outside the settlement boundaries of the Maidstone urban area, rural service centres and larger villages with defined settlement boundaries and is depicted on the policies map. The countryside has an intrinsic value that should be conserved and protected for its own sake. However there is also a need to ensure a level of flexibility for certain forms of development in the countryside in order to support farming and other aspects of the countryside economy and to maintain mixed communities. This needs to be mitigated in a way that maintains and enhances the distinctive character of the more rural parts of the borough.

Rural economy

5.58 Maidstone's rural economic character is diverse and complex in nature. The number of rural and agricultural businesses found within villages and rural service centres and the wider countryside account for a significant proportion of all firms in the borough. Small businesses are a particular feature of rural areas, as is homeworking, home-based businesses and live-work units.

5.59 Agriculture remains an important influence, fulfilling a number of important and varied roles in the countryside, contributing to the local economy, and managing and maintaining much of the valued landscapes. It benefits from the fact that much of the soil within the borough comprises the most high grade and versatile agricultural land. However, in line with other businesses agriculture needs to be able to react to new and changing markets and developments in technology. A more recent trend in agriculture is the response to demand for produce to be available on a year round basis. This leads to land being put under intense pressure for almost industrial scale development that can have an adverse impact on the wider landscape and natural assets, such as wildlife, soil and water resources that require protection within the landscape. Another trend is the increasing interest in smaller-scale renewable energy installations. Further advice and guidance on the landscape implications of these activities will be given in the Landscape Character Guidelines supplementary planning document.

5.60 Many rural businesses have begun to diversify away from traditional rural activities primarily through the re-use of farm and other buildings for commercial non-agricultural purposes. This has not only helped to retain economic activity within rural areas but has enabled a number of farms to remain operational. Tourism is of great importance to the local rural economy with the countryside providing ample leisure and open-air recreational opportunities. As well as sustaining many rural businesses these industries can be significant sources of

employment and can help support the prosperity of rural settlements and sustain historic country houses, local heritage and culture. To a lesser degree, the winning of minerals such as sand and chalk has also taken place as a diversification activity, but these activities are largely confined to relatively small-scale sites on the North Downs and Greensand Ridge.

5.61 The local plan will continue to recognise the importance of supporting small-scale rural business development. Its priority is to locate these businesses within the defined rural service centres. However, there are employment sites already located outside of these settlements and it is important to offer these businesses a degree of flexibility.

Small villages

5.62 The attractiveness of the countryside is partly due to its scattered settlement pattern and buildings. The overall settlement pattern across the borough is characterised by a large number of small villages scattered across the countryside surrounding a handful of larger, more substantial settlements. It is important these settlements retain their individual identities as there can be a delicate balance between settlement proximity and separation.

5.63 A small area to the west of the borough lies within the Metropolitan Green Belt (MGB), incorporating the villages of Nettlestead and Nettlestead Green. The fundamental aims of the MGB are to prevent urban sprawl and to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment. The local plan will support sustainable development within the MGB provided it is not harmful to the open character of the designation in accordance with the National Planning Policy Framework.

5.64 The rural settlements rely heavily on community-focused services. Community facilities such as clinics, health centres, day centres, playgrounds, playing fields and sports facilities, children's nurseries and schools, village halls and places of worship, together with local village services, particularly with respect to village shops, post offices, healthcare facilities and public houses are essential if small rural settlements are to remain vital and viable.

5.65 For sustainability reasons, the local plan priority is to locate new or improved community facilities in defined rural service centres and larger villages. However, in small villages new facilities may be permitted to serve the local community provided a clear need is demonstrated. The local plan will resist the loss of any community facility that meets an essential community need and which is not available or reasonably accessible elsewhere. In all cases, another beneficial community use should be sought before permission is granted for the removal of these facilities.

5.66 There has been a continued decline in local village services and the local plan will continue to resist any further losses. Any proposal for the re-use or re-development of an existing local village service will be required to be supported by clear evidence of non-viability, such as marketing the building or facility for a period of time to test whether another community interest, operator or owner could be found.

Design

5.67 The countryside is a sensitive location within which to integrate new development and the borough council will expect proposals to respect the high quality and distinctive landscapes of the borough in accordance with policy DM30. **In order to assist in the successful integration of new development into the countryside the Council will ensure Landscape and Visual Impact Assessments are carried out as appropriate to assess suitability and to aid and facilitate the design process.**

Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and its setting

5.68 A large part of the northern part of the borough lies within the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). This is a visually prominent landscape that contributes significantly to the borough's high quality of life. It is an important amenity and recreation resource for both Maidstone residents and visitors and forms an attractive backdrop to settlements along the base of the Kent Downs scarp. It also contains a wide range of natural habitats and biodiversity. Designation as an AONB confers the highest level of landscape protection and one which the Council has a statutory duty to conserve and enhance¹. Within the AONB, the Management Plan provides a framework for objectives to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the area. The Council has adopted the Management Plan and will support its implementation. Open countryside to the immediate south of the AONB forms the setting for this designation. In Maidstone this is a sensitive landscape that is coming under threat from inappropriate development and is viewed as a resource that requires conservation and enhancement where this supports the purposes of the AONB.

5.69 The Council will ensure proposals conserve and enhance the natural beauty, distinctive character, biodiversity and setting of the AONB, taking into account the economic and social well-being of the area. Rural diversification and land-based businesses in the Kent Downs AONB will only be acceptable where they help improve the special character of the AONB and are in accordance with the Kent Downs AONB Management Plan, supporting guidance and position statements. Economic development within the AONB should be located in existing traditional buildings of historic or vernacular merit in smaller settlements, farmsteads or within in groups of buildings in sustainable locations.

5.70 New development in the AONB needs to respect the vernacular architecture, settlement character and the natural beauty of the local landscape. This will require high quality designs as set out in policy DM30. To help developers produce designs of a suitably high quality, the council will continue to encourage the use of the Kent Downs AONB Unit's design guidance and publications.

5.71 The above considerations apply equally to the setting of the Kent Downs AONB. The Kent Downs AONB Management Plan 2014-2019 states that the setting of the Kent Downs AONB is '*broadly speaking the land outside the designated area which is visible from the AONB and from which the AONB can be seen, but may be wider when affected by*

¹ s85 Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000

intrusive features beyond that. It makes it clear that it is not formally defined or indicated on a map.

5.72 Generally the area is taken to include the land which sits in the foreground to and beyond the foot of the scarp slope of the North Downs. It is countryside sensitive to change, with a range of diverse habitats and landscape features, but through which major transport corridors pass. Preservation and enhancement of this area is also part of the Council's statutory duty and is covered under the guidance set out in national policy (National Planning Policy Framework and National Planning Practice Guidance). However, proposals which would affect the setting of the AONB are not subject to the same level of constraint as those which would affect the AONB itself. The weight to be afforded to potential impact on the setting will depend on the significance of the impact. Matters such as the size of proposals, their distance, incompatibility with their surroundings, movement, reflectivity and colour are likely to affect impact. The Kent Downs AONB Management Plan advises that *'where the qualities of the AONB which were instrumental in reasons for its designation are affected, then the impacts should be given considerable weight in decisions. This particularly applies to views to and from the scarp of the North Downs.'* It is considered therefore that it is not necessary to formally define the setting of the Kent Downs AONB and that the impact of development can be appropriately assessed through the criteria of the policy.

High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and its setting

5.73 The High Weald AONB lies beyond the southern boundary of the Borough adjacent to the parishes of Marden and Staplehurst, within the administrative area of Tunbridge Wells Borough Council. Its closest point to the Borough is at Winchet Hill in the southern part of Marden parish. The Council has exactly the same statutory duty to conserve and enhance the setting of this AONB as it does with the Kent Downs AONB and will apply the same policy considerations for any proposals that may affect its setting.

Landscapes of local value

5.74 The Council will **seek to protect or enhance** its most valued landscapes, which are in good condition. In addition to **The Kent Downs and High Weald AONB and their setting** and other sites of European and national importance are considered to be covered by appropriate existing policy protection in the National Planning Policy Framework, National Planning Practice Guidance and other legislation. As well as this national policy guidance and statutory duty, the settings of the Kent Downs and High Weald AONBs are also afforded protection through the criteria of policy SP5 and no additional designation is therefore necessary. In addition to these areas, the Borough does include s-significant tracts of landscape which are in good condition and are highly sensitive to significant change. **Landscapes of local value have been identified and judged according to criteria relating to the character and sensitivity:**

- i. Part of a contiguous area of high quality landscape;
- ii. Significant in long distance public views and skylines;

- iii. Locally distinctive in their field patterns, geological and other landscape features;
- iv. Ecologically diverse and significant;
- v. Preventing the coalescence of settlements which would undermine their character;
- vi. Identified through community engagement;
- vii. Providing a valued transition from town to countryside.

5.75 Development proposals within landscapes of local value should, through their siting, scale, mass, materials and design, seek to contribute positively to the conservation and enhancement of the protected landscape. Designated areas include including parts of the Greensand Ridge, together with **and** the Medway, Loose and Len river valleys. These landscapes were highlighted as areas of local value by the public through previous consultation.

5.76 The Greensand Ridge lies to the south of Maidstone and is defined by the scarp face of the Ridge with extensive views across the Low Weald to the south. It is characterised by frequent small blocks of coppice and deciduous woodland, extensive orchards and frequent **oast houses**, ~~oasts~~, with ragstone being a predominant material in walls and buildings.

5.77 The Medway Valley is characterised by the wide River Medway and steep valley sides where the valley incises the Greensand and is crossed by distinctive ragstone bridges. The area lends itself to much recreational land use including the Medway Valley Walk, although some sections are more wooded and remote in character. The Loose Valley lies to the south of Maidstone and is characterised by the Loose stream, mill ponds and springs with steep wooded valley sides, mature native woodland and traditional mill buildings and cottages. The Len Valley lies to the east of Maidstone and is bordered by Bearsted to the west. It is characterised by the River Len, historic mills and a network of pools with remnant orchards.

5.78 The Low Weald covers a significant proportion of the countryside, including the rural service centres of Headcorn, Staplehurst and Marden, in the more rural southern half of the Borough. The Low Weald is recognised as having some distinctive landscape features such as the field patterns and hedges, stands of trees, ponds and streams and buildings of character that should be protected, maintained or enhanced. The necessary protection for those areas of the Low Weald outside the boundaries of the rural service centres as defined on the policies map is provided under the criteria of policy SP5.

Policy SP 5

Countryside

The countryside is defined as all those parts of the plan area outside the settlement boundaries of the Maidstone urban area, rural service centres and larger villages defined on the policies map.

1. Provided proposals do not harm the character and appearance of an area,

the following types of development will be permitted in the countryside:

i. Small-scale economic development, including development related to tourism and open-air recreation, through:

- a. The re-use or extension of existing buildings except in isolated locations;
- b. The expansion of existing businesses; or
- c. Farm diversification schemes;

ii. Small-scale residential development necessary to:

- a. Meet a proven essential need for a rural worker to live permanently at or near their place of work;
- b. Meet a proven need for Gypsy and Traveller accommodation; or
- c. Meet local housing needs;

iii. The winning of minerals; and

iv. Development demonstrated to be necessary for agriculture or forestry.

2. Where proposals meet criterion 1, development in the countryside will be permitted if:

i. The type, **siting, materials and** design, **mass** and scale of development and the level of activity maintains, or where possible, enhances local distinctiveness **including landscape features**; and

ii. Impacts on the appearance and character of the landscape can be appropriately mitigated. **Suitability and required mitigation will be assessed through the submission of Landscape and Visual Impact Assessments to support development proposals in appropriate circumstances.**

3. The loss of local shops and community facilities which serve villages will be resisted. In all cases, another beneficial community use should be sought before permission is granted for the removal of these facilities;

4. Proposals will be supported which facilitate the efficient use of the borough's significant agricultural land and soil resource provided any adverse impacts on the appearance and character of the landscape can be appropriately mitigated;

5. The distinctive character of the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and its setting, **the setting of the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty** and the extent and openness of the Metropolitan Green Belt will be rigorously protected and maintained;

6. The Greensand Ridge, Medway Valley, Len Valley and Loose Valley, as defined on the policies map, will be protected and maintained as landscapes of local value;

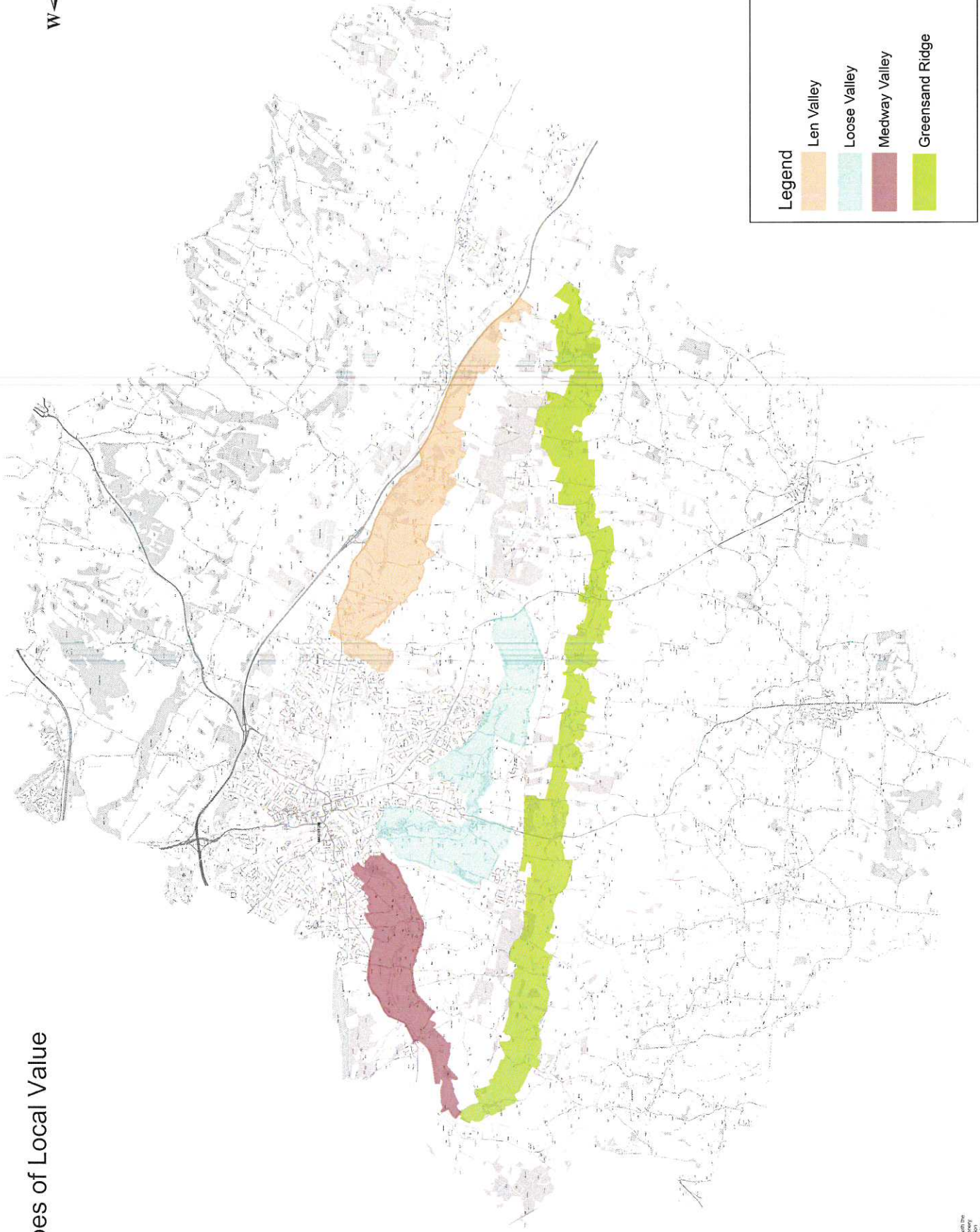
7. Development in the countryside will retain the setting of and separation of individual settlements; and

8. Natural assets, including characteristic landscape features, wildlife and water resources, will be protected from damage with any unavoidable impacts mitigated.

Account should be taken of the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plan and the Maidstone Borough Landscape Character Guidelines supplementary planning document.



Landscapes of Local Value



Legend

- Len Valley
- Loose Valley
- Medway Valley
- Greensand Ridge

Reproduced from the Ordnance Survey mapping with the permission of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office. All rights reserved. Ordnance Survey copyright and may still be in use. Ordnance Survey, 100019200.

