

Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy



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Executive Summary

1. Introduction

- Outlines what green and blue infrastructure is.
- Why Maidstone Borough needs a green and blue infrastructure strategy.
- The purpose of the green and blue infrastructure strategy.
- How the Strategy was produced.

2. Policy Context

The legislative frameworks for elements of green and blue infrastructure are reviewed:

- European Context: EU green infrastructure strategy 2013, European Landscape Convention, Habitats Directive and Water Framework Directive.
- National Context: Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, Countryside and Rights of way Act (2000), Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act (2006), Flood and Water Act (2010), National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 2012, Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) (2016 update) and Sport England's planning objectives.

The contribution that green spaces and the water environment can make to other strategies is also examined including how Planning can support the green and blue infrastructure strategy. An important role is identified for the Local Plan (2016) to secure new green and blue infrastructure to serve new development. It sets out how planning policy and decisions should ensure that development is well located and designed to protect and enhance the natural features of a site and the local landscape character.

The strategy aims to be closely integrated with the following local strategies: Visions for Kent 2012-22, Growing the Garden of England: A strategy for environment and economy in Kent 2011, Kent Nature and Biodiversity Partnerships including the Maidstone Biodiversity Strategy, the Countryside and Coastal Access Improvement Plan 2013-2017, Maidstone Integrated Transport Strategy 2016 and the Sustainable Community Strategy for Maidstone.

It points out that the borough's landscape, habitats and public rights of way do not stop at the administrative boundary and it is vital that this strategy responds to and influence the approach to the green and blue infrastructure in the surrounding area.

3. Vision and Objectives

The Strategy sets out a vision for the borough's green and blue infrastructure for the next 20 years after reviewing the policy context and understanding the rich assets of the borough's green space and water environment and the challenges it faces.

The vision is for greener, healthier, attractive towns and villages sustainably connected to the rich tapestry of distinctive landscapes, wildlife habitats and waterways – valued, enjoyed and cared for by local people.

Detailed objectives are set out to achieve the vision and guide the strategy's proposals set out for each of the strategy's seven key themes:

- mitigating and adapting to climate change;
- integrating sustainable movement and access for all;
- promoting a distinctive townscape and landscape;
- maintaining and enhancing biodiversity, water and air quality;
- providing opportunities for sport, recreation, quiet enjoyment and health;
- retaining and enhancing a quality environment for investment and through development; and
- providing community involvement and opportunities for education.

4. Understanding Maidstone Borough's existing green and blue infrastructure resources

Maidstone is an exceptionally green borough with a number of open spaces, the largest of which is Mote Park. There are numerous smaller parks, greens and amenity spaces within the town and villages with playgrounds and sports facilities. Maidstone Borough however is largely rural and the countryside offers areas of high quality landscape and biodiversity and a wide range of informal recreation opportunities. There is also an extensive network of waterways with five main rivers that provide rich biodiverse corridors for wildlife and for recreation.

The following existing green and blue infrastructure resources are set out and described (including maps): landscape character, habitats, heritage assets, publically accessible green space, amenity green space, provision for children and young people, natural and semi-natural green space, allotments and community gardens, outdoor sports facilities, green and blue corridors and private green space.

An outline assessment of current deficiencies in accessible open space provision is provided utilising the Open Spaces Quality Audit, the Accessibility Maps and the Quantitative Assessment of Open Space Provision using the new (Local Plan 2016) standards to produce the following indicative open space deficiencies by place/ward:

- **Amenity Green Space**

Current deficiency within Maidstone - North, Fant, High Street, Bearsted, Allington and North Wards

- **Children's Play Space**

Considered as, at best, fair in most of the borough but deficient in the urban area of Maidstone and, possibly, Marden, Staplehurst, Headcorn and Sutton Valence.

- **Natural/Semi-natural Greenspace**

Whilst considered as good in general, deficient in the urban area of Maidstone and Staplehurst, Headcorn and Marden and, possibly, Lenham, Coxheath and Sutton Valence.

- **Allotments**

Deficient in most of the Maidstone urban area and Staplehurst.

- **Outdoor Sports Facilities**

Considered as very poor with indications of deficiencies in most of the borough but will be informed by the Playing Pitches Strategy (2016/17).

Key Issues identified to be addressed by the Strategy are: impacts of climate change, gaps in the connectivity of blue and green resources, inequalities in accessibility to public open space, landscape and townscape quality, water and air quality, health inequalities and the need to accommodate development to meet the projected needs of the community.

5. Key Principles and Opportunities

The main purpose of the green and blue infrastructure strategy is to maximise the functionality and therefore the benefits of the resource in Maidstone Borough and to help deliver the council's wider community and planning objectives. For each of the seven key themes identified, the following principles and opportunities for conserving, improving and creating green and blue infrastructure are considered:

- Key issues
- How can the green and blue infrastructure help
- Examples of Good Practice

- Key principles and opportunities for Maidstone's green and blue infrastructure including conserving and improving and creating new opportunities.

The key opportunities and principles for conserving, improving and creating green and blue infrastructure are brought together in a strategic framework plan (Map 14).

The framework plan identifies and prioritises four broad areas where green and blue infrastructure interventions will have the most impact on achieving the strategy objectives: the Capstone-Bredhurst area, the M20 corridor, River Beult corridor and Laddingford/Low Weald area. In addition it highlights designated Biodiversity Opportunity Areas, river catchment improvement areas and the eight poorest quality publicly accessible green space sites, which should be a priority for improvement.

Maidstone urban area is also a priority for improvements due to the high population levels, level of multiple deprivation and need to mitigate effects of air pollution through tree planting and encouraging active, sustainable travel. The framework plan indicates green and blue corridors in the urban area to conserve and improve to help achieve these objectives.

Developing more detailed green and blue infrastructure plans for the Maidstone urban area will be an important next step and is included in the strategy action plan.

The framework plan also identifies where spatially-specific proposals for Maidstone Borough's green and blue infrastructure will interact and link with green infrastructure proposals of adjoining districts, including Tunbridge Wells Council's High Weald/Low Weald links project, Tonbridge & Malling Council's 'Principal Green Corridors' and Swale Council's 'Strategic Green Grid Routes'.

6. Delivering the Strategy

The vision, objectives and proposals of this strategy will be translated into action through the Delivery Framework set out in Appendix 1.

The Strategy recognises that as the planning, design and management of the green and blue infrastructure resource is the responsibility of many different organisations, the strategy can only be delivered successfully in partnership. Key stakeholders are: MBC councillors, KCC (Maidstone Borough) councillors, parish councillors, resident associations, resident groups, MBC (cross-departmental), Kent Downs AoNB Unit, Environment Agency, Medway Valley Countryside Partnership, Mid Kent Downs partnership, Kent Wildlife Trust, Kent High Weald Partnership, River

Catchment Improvement Groups, Neighbouring Authorities and Friends of Parks and Allotment Association representatives.

Key stakeholders have agreed an accompanying action plan (Maidstone Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy: Action Plan April 2016). The action plan is grouped into a number of themes to help deliver the strategy's vision and objectives. Each action also identifies which green and blue strategy objectives it would help to meet and identifies a timescale and lead partner.

The Maidstone Local Plan (2016) and planning decisions can play an important role in securing the protection and enhancement of the Borough's green and blue infrastructure. For this reason the strategy identifies specific planning actions detailed in paragraph 2.27 of the Strategy.

The Strategy recommends that a green and blue infrastructure forum comprising key stakeholders be set up to implement and monitor the strategy. The forum would also help raise the profile of the borough's green and blue infrastructure within partnership organisations and help to attract resources.

It recommends that the Borough Council co-ordinates the forum and the forum be structured around the action plan themes. Each theme has a principal agency responsible for delivering the majority of actions within the theme and it is recommended that they are represented on the forum. In addition, the central role of planning means that a representative of the Local Planning Authority should attend the forum.

1. Introduction

What is green and blue infrastructure?

- 1.1. Green and blue infrastructure is the green space and water environment essential to the quality of our lives and ecosystem. It is referred to as 'infrastructure' as it is as important as other types of infrastructure such as roads, schools and hospitals. It is taken to mean all green space and water of public and natural value.

For the purposes of this strategy, green and blue infrastructure includes:

- natural and semi-natural greenspaces - including woodlands, scrub, grasslands (egs downland, acid grasslands, commons and meadows) wetlands, open and running water and rock areas (eg quarries);
- green corridors - including river corridors, river and canal banks, cycleways/bridleways and rights of way;
- outdoor sports space (with natural or artificial surfaces and either publicly or privately owned) - including pitches for football, cricket, rugby, tennis courts, bowling greens, golf courses, school and other institutional playing fields;
- parks and gardens - including urban parks, country parks and formal gardens;
- amenity greenspace (most commonly, but not exclusively in housing areas) – including informal recreation spaces, greenspaces in and around housing, domestic gardens and village greens;
- provision for children and teenagers - including play areas, skateboard parks, outdoor basketball hoops, and other more informal areas (eg 'hanging out' areas, teenage shelters);
- allotments and community gardens;
- cemeteries and churchyards; and
- the wider countryside.

Why does Maidstone Borough need a green and blue infrastructure strategy?

- 1.2. Research and best practice have established a number of benefits which green and blue infrastructure can bring:
- mitigating and adapting to climate change;
 - integrating sustainable movement and access for all;
 - promoting a distinctive townscape and landscape;
 - maintaining and enhancing biodiversity, water and air quality;
 - providing opportunities for sport, recreation, quiet enjoyment and health;

- retaining and enhancing a quality environment for investment through development (in Policy section); and
- providing community involvement and opportunities for education.

What is the purpose of the green and blue infrastructure strategy?

- 1.3. The role of the strategy is to promote, guide and co-ordinate investment in Maidstone Borough's green and blue infrastructure over the next 20 years.
- 1.4. The strategy aims to:
 - bring increased certainty about the importance of this key part of the borough's environment;
 - maximise the number of overlapping benefits of green and blue infrastructure by looking holistically at each area to ensure it is delivering as many benefits as possible;
 - co-ordinate a wide range of stakeholder interests and focus limited resources on a number of interlinked proposals to maximise the benefits for green and blue infrastructure;
 - act as a basis for attracting resources including grant funding, Section 106 development funding and, when approved, the Community Infrastructure Levy;
 - guide the Local Plan in relation to Green and Blue Infrastructure.
 - Input to the Integrated Transport Strategy; and
 - provide background to a Green and Blue Infrastructure Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) which would provide detailed guidance to developers, partners and decision makers on future provision of green and blue infrastructure.

How was the Strategy produced?

- 1.5. The Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy is based on up to date evidence (see Appendix 2).
- 1.6. In 2013 a consultation draft strategy was produced and key stakeholders as well as local communities, Parish Councils and the wider public were invited to comment. The draft Strategy was amended as a result of comments received.
- 1.7. In 2015 a series of workshops were held with key stakeholders and partners involved in delivering improvements to the borough's green spaces and water environments in order to generate a multi-agency Action Plan to accompany the Strategy.

2. Policy context

This section briefly reviews the legislative framework for elements of green and blue infrastructure. It also examines the contribution green spaces and the water environment can make to delivering a number of other strategies.

European context

- 2.1. **Enhancing Europe's Natural Capital: EU Green Infrastructure Strategy 2013**¹ is a European Commission strategy 'to promote the deployment of green infrastructure in the EU in urban and rural areas'. The strategy focus is on promoting green infrastructure in the main policy areas such as agriculture, forestry, nature, water, marine and fisheries, regional and cohesion policy, climate change mitigation and adaptation, transport, energy, disaster prevention and land use policies.
- 2.2. The **European Landscape Convention** (ELC) is the first international convention to focus specifically on landscape. It is dedicated exclusively to the protection, management and planning of all landscapes in Europe. The Convention was signed by the UK government on 24th February 2006, ratified on the 21st November 2006, and became binding in this country on 1st March 2007. Every landscape forms the setting for the lives of a local population, and the quality of those landscapes affects everyone's lives. The ELC seeks to reconcile environmental management with the socio-economic challenges of the 21st century and to help people and communities to re-connect with place. The Convention aims to promote landscape protection, management and planning across Europe, and to organise European-wide co-operation on landscape issues. The Convention covers land and water (inland and seas), and natural, rural and urban areas.
- 2.3. Adopted in **1992, the Conservation of Natural Habitats and of Wild Fauna and Flora, (commonly known as the Habitats Directive)**, requires each member state to make legislative and administration provision to enable them to maintain or restore natural habitats and wild species at favourable conservation status, through site and species protection objectives. Of particular interest in Maidstone Borough is the Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) designation under the Habitats Directive. SACs are designated for their importance as natural habitat types and as the habitats supporting international species of importance

¹ European Commission (2013) Environment, Green Infrastructure [Online] available from: <http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/ecosystems/>

listed within the Directive. Along with Special Protection Areas (SPAs), which are designated under the Birds Directive, these sites form a European network of designated sites called 'Natura 2000'. In Maidstone part of the North Downs is designated a SAC which is therefore of international conservation status.

- 2.4. The Habitats Directive is applied via the **Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010² (as amended)**, commonly shortened to the "Habitats Regulations".
- 2.5. **Water Framework Directive (WFD)**. The purpose of the Water Framework Directive is to establish a framework for the protection of inland surface waters, estuaries and groundwater. The framework for delivering the Directive is through River Basin Management Planning. The UK has been split into several River Basin Districts (RBDs). Each River Basin District has been characterised into smaller management units known as Water Bodies. The surface Water Bodies may be rivers or lakes. Ecological Status is classified in all Water Bodies, expressed in terms of five classes (high, good, moderate, poor or bad). The 'Catchment Based Approach' has recently been adopted by DEFRA as the key approach to implementing the water quality enhancement required under the WFD and a River Catchments theme is included in the Action Plan.

National context

- 2.6. **The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981**, as amended, is the statutory basis for species and habitat protection within the UK. The Act sets out the protection afforded to wild plants (Schedule 8) and animals (Schedule 5) in the UK, and reviews the species to which it applies every 5 years. The protection can be connected to the actual species, or its habitat (resting or breeding). Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) are also notified under the Act. These sites are nationally important and are intended to reflect the best examples of particular features of interest (biodiversity, geodiversity and/or physiographical) across the country. Maidstone Borough has 9 sites of Species Scientific Interest.
- 2.7. **The Countryside and Rights of Way Act (CRoW) 2000³** provides access on foot to certain land types (mountain, moorland, heath or down), changed the public rights of way (PRoW) legislation, increased the requirements for the management and protection of Sites of Special

² [The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010](#)

³ UK Legislation (2013) The Countryside Rights of Way Act 2000 Available at: <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2000/37/contents>

Scientific Interest (SSSIs), strengthened wildlife enforcement law and provided clarification on the management and designation of Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

- 2.8. Section 40 of **The Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act (NERC) 2006**⁴ places a duty on Local Authorities and other public bodies to preserve biodiversity. At a strategic level the Act ensures that biodiversity principles are:
- Adopted into approaches regarding the delivery of services and functions and involve all partner landholding;
 - Promoted in urban design and regeneration/development plans and projects;
 - Incorporated into land management practices in rural regeneration/development schemes; and
 - Encourage to help engender local pride and environmental stewardship.
- 2.9. Section 41 of NERC commits the Secretary of State, in consultation with Natural England, to publish a list of the habitats and species which are of principal importance in the preservation of biodiversity. The list is to be kept under review and revised where appropriate. It is therefore used by the local authority and public bodies to identify species that require consideration within planning for the purposes of the protection of biodiversity.
- 2.10. The **Flood and Water Management Act, 2010**, provides for comprehensive management of flood risk for people, homes and businesses, helps safeguard communities from rises in surface water drainage charges, and protects water supplies to the consumer. Climate projections suggest that extreme weather will happen more frequently in the future and this act aims to reduce the flood risk associated with extreme weather.
- 2.11. **The Water Framework Directive (WFD) (The Water Framework Directive (2000/60/EC) December 2000)** seeks to improve the local water environment for people and wildlife, and promote the sustainable use of water. The Directive applies to all surface water bodies, including lakes, streams and rivers as well as groundwater. The overall aim of the WDF is for all water bodies to reach good status by 2027, and in Maidstone this would mean improving their physical state and preventing deterioration in water quality and ecology. The WDF introduced the concept of integrated river basin management and such plans should influence development plans. Maidstone lies within the Thames River

⁴ [Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006](#)

Basin District and the South East RBD and in December 2009 the Environment Agency published the River Basin Management Plans (RBMPs) for both Thames and the South East. The Medway Catchment Plan which will form part of the Thames River Basin Management Plan 2 will fulfil the WFD requirements and become a legally binding document ratified by UK and EU parliaments. Through the formation of Catchment Improvement Groups (CIGs), the local community as well as private and public bodies inform and shape this work.

- 2.12. **National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 2012⁵**, paragraphs 73-77, 99-103 and 109-118, outline the national approach to the natural environment and open spaces. It encourages the creation and enhancement of a network of open spaces and natural habitats and the protection of existing areas of open space and landscapes.
- 2.13. The NPPF requires Local Authorities to protect and plan for biodiversity, by identifying areas for potential enhancement and corridors.
- 2.14. When new development is brought forward in areas which are vulnerable to flooding care should be taken to ensure that risks can be managed through suitable adaptation measures, including through the planning of green infrastructure.
- 2.15. Local Plans should take account of climate change over the longer term, including factors such as flood risk, coastal change, water supply and changes to biodiversity and landscape. New development should be planned to avoid increased vulnerability to the range of impacts arising from climate change.
- 2.16. It also states that policies should protect and enhance public rights of way and access.
- 2.17. **Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) - Natural Environment (2016 update)⁶**, explains key issues in implementing policy to protect biodiversity, including local requirements including guidance on landscape, biodiversity and ecosystems, green infrastructure and brownfield land, soils and agricultural land.
- 2.18. **Sport England⁷** has set out its planning objectives:
 - **Protect existing facilities:** Sport England seeks to help protect sports and recreational buildings and land including playing fields.

⁵ [National Planning Policy Framework](#)

⁶ [Planning Policy Guidance - Natural Environment](#)

⁷ [Sport England Delivering Sport and Recreation](#)

They expect these to be retained or enhanced as part of any redevelopment unless an assessment has demonstrated that there is an excess of provision and they are surplus to requirements, or clear evidence supports their relocation. Sport England is a statutory consultee on all planning applications affecting playing field land and will object to such an application unless one of five exceptions applies.

- **Enhance the quality, accessibility and management of existing facilities:** They wish to see the best use made of existing sports facilities through improving their quality, access and management. Sport England have developed a wide range of supporting advice on understanding and planning for facility provision, including efficient facility management such as community access to school sites.
- **Provide new facilities to meet demand:** They seek to ensure that communities have access to sufficient high quality sports facilities that are fit for purpose. Using evidence and advocacy, Sport England helps to guide investment into new facilities and the expansion of existing ones to meet new demands that cannot be met by existing provision.

How can Planning support the green and blue infrastructure strategy?

- 2.19. The emerging Local Plan⁸ can play an important role in protecting existing open space and ensuring new green and blue infrastructure is provided to serve new development. Similarly, planning decisions should ensure that development is well located and designed to protect and enhance the natural features of a site and the local landscape character.
- 2.20. Specifically, planning policy and decisions should:
- protect green space in the flood plain from development
 - require developers to create new habitats focusing on the 12 priority BAP habitats as part of green infrastructure planning and design in new developments;
 - ensure that existing habitats and protected species are accommodated and any loss appropriately mitigated in all new development and that development within Biodiversity Opportunity Areas do not significantly increase the fragmentation of wildlife habitats or neutralise significant opportunities for habitat restoration or recreation;
 - conserve and enhance the distinctive character of the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and its setting; the setting of

⁸ [Submission version Maidstone Borough Local Plan 2016](#)

the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and the Greensand Ridge, Medway Valley, Len Valley, Loose Valley and Low Weald as landscapes of local value;

- encourage developers of large sites in locations with a history of orchards to provide appropriately managed community orchards as part of their proposal;
- require developers to conserve and enhance existing publicly accessible green space within development sites;
- ensure developers of new housing sites provide for all types of publicly accessible open space to a specified standard where there is insufficient accessible open space already provided; and
- ensure developers provide details of how green and blue infrastructure will be managed and maintained to a high quality over the long term.

How can green and blue infrastructure support local strategies?

As well as seeking to support the objectives of national legislation, the strategy aims to be closely integrated with the following local strategies.

- 2.21. **Vision for Kent 2012-2022 (Kent County Council)** concludes that tackling climate change is everyone's responsibility. It also emphasises making the most of Kent's natural environment for people to enjoy and contribute to their wellbeing and improving overall health while tackling the health inequalities gap. Green infrastructure can help manage the impacts of climate change and contribute to healthy lifestyles.
- 2.22. One of the key themes of **Growing the Garden of England: A strategy for environment and economy in Kent – 2011** is rising to the climate change challenge – working towards a low carbon Kent prepared for and resilient to the impacts of climate change.
- *Climate Change Priority 5 is to reduce future carbon emissions.*
 - *Climate Change Priority 6 is to manage the impacts of climate change, in particular extreme weather events.*
 - *Valuing Environment Priority 9 is to conserve and enhance the quality of Kent's natural and heritage capital.*
 - *Valuing Environment Priority 10: Ensure that Kent residents have access to the benefits of Kent's coast, countryside, green space and cultural heritage.*
- 2.23. The strategy identifies a number of actions all of which Green and Blue Infrastructure can help deliver:

- *Action CC 5.2: Proactively support the development of high-quality, non-traffic, shared walking and cycling routes.*
- *Action VE 9.1: Establish functional habitat areas and wildlife networks in Biodiversity Opportunity Areas that support local landscape character.*
- *Action VE 9.2: Update the Landscape Character Condition Assessment identifying areas of declining condition and taking action to improve them.*
- *Action VE 10.1 Deliver the Countryside Access Improvement Plan, with an on-going commitment to customer led improvements to Kent's green infrastructure.*
- *Action VE 10.2 Deliver initiatives in the Kent area that enable people to more readily access green space and the historic environment such as Explore Kent, outdoor learning, and volunteering.*

2.24. **The Kent Biodiversity Partnership⁹** is a broad network of organisations, each with a common focus for biodiversity conservation in Kent. The Partnership aims to make Kent a place where plants, animals and habitats are protected and enhanced, both for their own sake and as an integral part of the quality of life in the county.

The Partnership's Steering Group has a role in:

- Overseeing the development, implementation, monitoring and review of the Kent Biodiversity Action Plan (Kent BAP);
- Leading the way in developing partnership projects and initiatives for the protection and conservation of biodiversity in Kent; and
- Ensuring biodiversity is at the heart of our aim for a more sustainable future for Kent.

2.25. **Kent Nature Partnership¹⁰** is a Local Nature Partnership (LNP) that are are partnerships of a broad range of influential organisations, businesses and people, and from a range of sectors, charged by government with the task of bring about improvements in their local natural environment in England. To achieve this they are expected to ensure that consideration for the environment is put right at the heart of local decision-making.

2.26. Local Nature Partnerships originated in a vision set out in the UK government's 2011 'Natural Environment White Paper', which identified the need to take greater account of the value of the environment when strategic decisions are made that affect people and the local economy. The overall purpose of an LNP is to:

⁹ [Kent Biodiversity Partnership](#)

¹⁰ [Kent Nature Partnership](#)

- Drive positive change in the local natural environment, taking a strategic view of the challenges and opportunities involved and identifying ways to manage it as a system for the benefit of nature, people and the economy.
- Contribute to achieving the Government's national environmental objectives locally, including the identification of local ecological networks, alongside addressing local priorities.
- Become local champions influencing decision-making relating to the natural environment and its value to social and economic outcomes, in particular, through working closely with local authorities, Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) and Health and Wellbeing Boards.

2.27. **The Kent Countryside and Coastal Access Improvement Plan 2013**
 - **2017** sets a number of objectives especially for sustainable transport:

Priority walking objectives include:

- *Make promoted routes as accessible as possible and promote them to a wide audience.*
- *Ensure new developments encourage and provide for walking and cycling, including links to the wider countryside.*
- *Widen the audience for walking, including under-represented groups.*
- *Officers will proactively seek opportunities to improve the accessibility of the network, following consultation with local landowners and parishes.*

Priority cycling objectives include:

- *Support increasing cycling for everyday journeys, including seeking improvements to routes serving transport hubs, large employers and schools, and connecting cycling networks.*
- *Deliver a continued increase of traffic-free routes and a better connected network to support the development of tourism, family and recreational cycling.*

Priority equestrian objectives include:

- *Continue to improve equestrian infrastructure and develop new routes in target areas identified by riders.*

2.33. Sustainable transport routes can form an important part of the Green and Blue Infrastructure network and provide corridors for people and wildlife.

2.34. **The Maidstone Integrated Transport Strategy 2016** sets out a number of objectives which Green and Blue Infrastructure can help fulfil by incorporating inclusive modes of transport that are affordable and easily available to everyone (such as walking, cycling and public transport) and providing existing or new routes including the River Medway Towpath.

2.35. The **Sustainable Community Strategy for Maidstone 2009–2020** overarching priorities are Troubled Families (Community Budgets);

Tackling worklessness and poverty and Local environmental improvements. Underpinning the three priorities, there are seven long-term outcomes that the Borough Council aspires to achieve through a partnership approach in Maidstone, including:

Improved health and wellbeing of people which enables them to live active and independent lives

By 2020 we will have facilitated the creation of active, healthy and independent communities where the gap in health inequalities within the borough have been reduced...

Mixed and sustainable communities with an increased supply of new homes, improved existing dwellings and a high quality physical environment

...the quality of our environment will be improved with cleaner streets and high quality green spaces. Further, the Borough Council and its partners will play an active role in neighbourhood action planning helping to address local issues and improve the quality of life for residents by developing a common understanding of issues within areas of high need, including environmental improvements, but other crossing cutting issues such as health inequalities, low levels of educational attainment, skills and qualifications, high unemployment and low economic activity.

2.36. In accordance with the UK BAP, the **Maidstone Biodiversity Strategy A Local Biodiversity Action Plan Phase 1 2009 – 2014**¹¹ primary aims for biodiversity conservation are:

- *Maintain and enhance the populations and natural ranges of species and the quality and extent of wildlife habitats and ecosystems.*
- *Conserve internationally, nationally and regionally important species, habitats and ecosystems and to enhance their conservation status where possible.*
- *Conserve species, habitats, and natural and managed ecosystems that are locally characteristic and to enhance their conservation status where possible.*
- *Maintain the genetic variation within species and hence habitats and ecosystems.*
- *Contribute to the conservation of biodiversity on a local, regional, national, European and global scale.*
- *Ensure that current policies and practices which affect the environment do not damage global biodiversity, but instead contribute towards conserving and enhancing it.*

¹¹ [Maidstone's Biodiversity Strategy](#)

- *Increase public awareness of, and involvement in, conserving biodiversity.*

2.37. Green and Blue Infrastructure is crucial to successfully delivering the BAP objectives.

Strategies which help support Green and Blue Infrastructure are set out in Appendix 2.

Supporting adjoining green and blue infrastructure strategies

2.38. Clearly the borough's landscape, habitats and public rights of way do not stop at the administrative boundary and it is vital that this strategy responds to, and influences, the approach to the green and blue infrastructure in the surrounding area.

2.39. Each has a strategy which sets out the existing assets and approach to green space and the water environment:

- Medway Wildlife, Countryside and Open Space Strategy 2008–2016.
- Swale Green Grid Strategy 2007.
- Tonbridge and Malling Green Infrastructure Report 2009.
- Tunbridge Wells Borough Green Infrastructure Plan Supplementary Planning Document Consultation Draft, 2014.
- Ashford Green & Blue Grid Strategy 2008 (though this focuses on the urban area and its immediate setting).

2.42. A number of strategies propose strategic green routes to better connect the green and blue assets across administrative boundaries (e.g. Faversham and Sittingbourne to the North Downs Way; the Medway Gap and Kings Hill to Maidstone town via the green wedges and improved links between the High Weald and Low Weald through Tunbridge Wells Borough).

2.43. Areas for habitat creation or enhancement are proposed along the boundaries with Swale Borough and Medway.

2.44. A High Weald Transition Zone is identified to the south of the Maidstone Borough to enhance and restore the landscape character of the part of the High Weald National Character Area that lies outside the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and this could have a beneficial impact on the Borough.

Conclusion

- 2.45. It is clear from an analysis of local strategies that green and blue infrastructure can play a major role in delivering a wide range of benefits within the borough, particularly:
- Mitigating and adapting to climate change.
 - Integrating sustainable movement and access for all
 - Promoting a distinctive townscape and landscape
 - Maintaining and enhancing biodiversity, water and air quality
 - Providing opportunities for sport, recreation, quiet enjoyment and health
 - Retaining and enhancing a quality environment for investment and through development, and
 - Providing community involvement and opportunities for education
- 2.46. In many instances there is reference to tackling inequalities such as health or access to green space and affordable modes of transport. Green spaces and the water environment can provide an inclusive resource for healthy exercise and for neighbourhood enhancement. This strategy will also seek to implement opportunities that tie in with affordable and sustainable transport.

3. Vision and objectives

- 3.1. Reviewing the policy context and understanding the rich assets of the borough's green space and water environment, and the challenges it faces, the strategy has set out a vision for the borough's green and blue infrastructure for the next 20 years.

Vision

Greener, healthier, attractive towns and villages sustainably connected to the rich tapestry of distinctive landscapes, wildlife habitats and waterways – valued, enjoyed and cared for by local people.

- 3.2. A number of more detailed objectives are needed to help achieve this vision and to guide the strategy's proposals. These are set out for each of the strategy's key themes.

Objectives

Theme 1: Mitigating and adapting to climate change

In the towns and villages:

To avoid increasing flood risk, provide increased shade and enhance the sustainable connections to key destinations and the countryside.

In the countryside:

To create a robust and resilient landscape with improved links between wildlife habitats.

Theme 2: Integrating sustainable movement and access for all

In the towns and villages:

To enhance the sustainable connections to key destinations and the countryside.

In the countryside:

To improve sustainable access by footpaths, riverside walks, cycleways and bridleways.

Theme 3: Promoting a distinctive townscape and landscape

In the towns and villages:

To maintain and improve valued open spaces, heritage and tree cover and create new high quality, well linked green spaces to serve new development.

In the countryside:

To conserve and enhance the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and its setting, maintain landscapes of local value and restore and improve sensitive landscape in the poorest condition.

To take into account the economic and other benefits of the best and most versatile agricultural land.

Theme 4: Maintaining and enhancing biodiversity, water and air quality

In the towns and villages:

To retain existing, and encourage new, wildlife habitats and landscape features and improve river and air quality.

In the countryside:

To maintain, enhance and extend the rich tapestry of distinctive wildlife habitats and improve water quality.

Theme 5: Providing opportunities for sport, recreation, quiet enjoyment and health

In the towns and villages:

To improve accessibility to green spaces including the countryside, make green spaces more attractive and welcoming and achieve new standards to improve green space provision and address existing deficiencies.

In the countryside:

To improve sustainable access within the countryside and waterways and retain tranquil areas for quiet enjoyment.

Theme 6: Providing community involvement and opportunities for education

To achieve greater community involvement in the planning and management of green spaces and encourage the use of green and blue infrastructure as an educational resource.

Theme 7: Retaining and enhancing a quality environment for investment and through development

To provide a high quality environment and development standards which form the benchmark for new, high quality, well planned developments with sufficient well integrated, high quality green spaces.

4. Understanding Maidstone Borough's existing green and blue infrastructure resources

Existing green and blue infrastructure resources

Overview

Maidstone is an exceptionally green borough with a number of open spaces, the largest of which is Mote Park, which is Grade II on the Historic England Register of Historic Parks. There are numerous smaller parks, greens and amenity spaces within the town and villages with playgrounds and sports facilities. Maidstone Borough however is largely rural and the countryside offers areas of high quality landscape and biodiversity and a wide range of informal recreation opportunities. There is also an extensive network of waterways with five main rivers that provide rich biodiverse corridors for wildlife and for recreation.

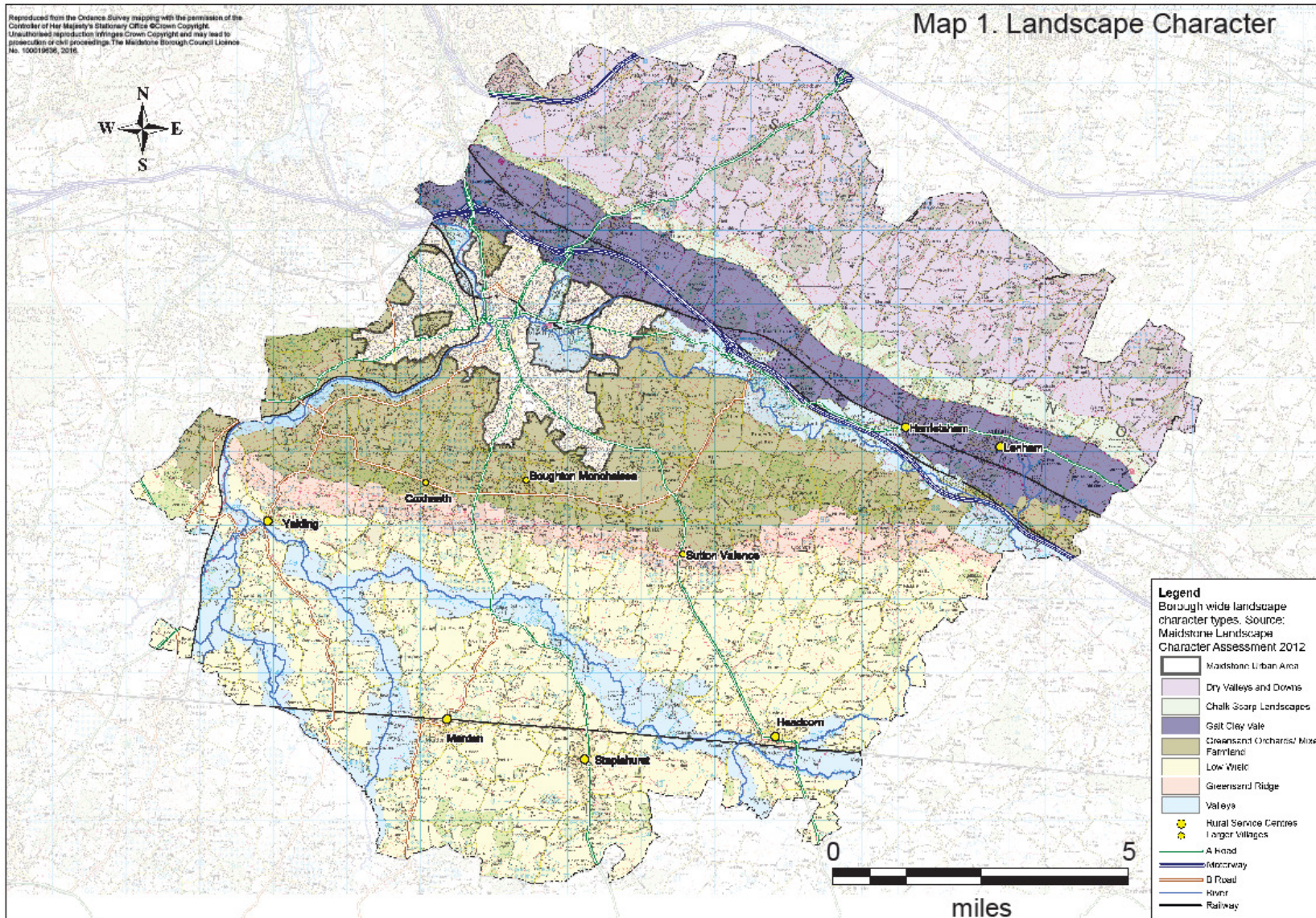
Landscape character



- 4.1. Landscape character is strongly defined by geodiversity with four distinct rock types that define the landform and character of the borough – Chalk, Gault Clay, Lower Greensand and Wealden Clay which run in bands of varying widths in a north westerly to south easterly direction across the borough. Due to this distinctive geomorphology, a clear landform division occurs between the North Downs and the Low Weald. In general, the harder Greensand and Chalk stand out in the landscape as ridges, and the Gault Clay forms low ground in between with the Low Weald forming much of the southern part of the borough.
- 4.2. Maidstone's diverse rural landscape is dominated by three national landscape character types: the North Downs, Wealden Greensand and Low Weald, which can be further broken down into seven landscape character areas which themselves have broadly similar patterns of key

physical elements such as geology, landform, soils, vegetation, land use, settlement and field pattern¹², as shown on Map 1.

¹² Maidstone Landscape Character Assessment, 2009



- 4.3. The North Downs to the north of Maidstone town is a distinctive chalk downland with a continuous and steep scarp along its southern edge giving extensive views across Maidstone Borough and the rest of Kent. Chalk soils support areas of high quality unimproved chalk grassland. Clay-with-flints soils on the upper parts of the dip-slope supports oak/ash woodland and scrub with beech/ash/maple is common on the valley sides. Land is largely dominated by arable fields with a few pockets of traditional downland grazing. A series of springs emerge at the foot of the North Downs scarp where the porous chalk meets the Gault Clay and this spring line is marked by early settlements and farmsteads, notably at Boxley, Thurnham and Hollingbourne, Harrietsham and Lenham. These small watercourses eventually feed into the River Len via a series of small streams and ditches.
- 4.4. Along the foot of the scarp and wrapping itself around the southern, eastern and western parts of Maidstone town the Wealden Greensand area is characterised by old orchards and woodland. The undulating Greensand Ridge provides a distinctive landscape characterised by sunken lanes and hidden valleys with panoramic views southwards to the Low Weald. The landscape is generally a varied and pleasant mix of winding lanes and mixed farmlands with a high percentage of fruit, scattered small woodlands and grasslands interspersed with larger arable fields. Orchards and hops used to be more frequent but now the landholdings are fragmented and much of the land use converted to arable. Two rivers, the Loose and Len, dissect this fruit belt. The Loose valley runs into Maidstone town to the south and the Len valley runs to and through Mote Park from the east.
- 4.5. The Low Weald is bisected by the Beult (below), Teise and Medway rivers and includes an abundance of ponds and small stream valleys often with wet woodlands of alder and willow and scattered orchards. The field patterns, many of medieval character, hedgerows, stands and buildings of character add to the distinctive character of the area. Traditionally, orchards and hops were widespread. But during the 20th century many were converted to horticultural and arable crops.



- 4.6. Within these landscapes are many attractive villages with historic vernacular style buildings, and there is a particularly strong use of ragstone throughout the landscape, which reflects the underlying geology.



- 4.7. Maidstone town forms the primary urban area and a striking characteristic in the town's overall urban form is its stellate development pattern. In the past ribbons of development extended out along radial routes leaving fairly substantial undeveloped areas in between. Over the years some of these undeveloped areas became infilled, and the overall urban form became more nebulous in shape, but only parts of its green corridors have been developed, leaving the remainder as a significant defining feature of the town. There are nine broad green corridors located across the urban area linking urban Maidstone with the surrounding countryside. Parts of the corridors are continuous, such as those closely connected with the river valleys of the Medway and Len whilst others have become separated or isolated islands of green space.



The green corridors often penetrate within or close to the town centre. The amenity value of the green corridors to urban dwellers is particularly important, and they also provide opportunities for many green and blue infrastructure functions including non-motorised transport routes; recreation and sport; and biodiversity. The River Medway is also a defining feature of the town with the river entering the town from Watlingbury to the south west through a green corridor, through the centre of the town as a wide river, and out to the north west towards Allington.

Habitats



- 4.8. A UK BAP habitat is described in broad terms and can often include a number of UK BAP priority habitats. In Maidstone there are 17 UK BAP broad habitat types. Arable and horticulture and improved grassland are the largest broad habitat types, occupying almost three-quarters of the Borough area. Important woodland habitats are also found here, with over 11% of the Borough being broadleaved, mixed and yew woodland.
- 4.9. Map 2 shows the locations of each broad habitat within the borough. It is based on the Kent Habitat Survey 2012¹³ which provides a county-wide survey of all habitats in Kent and is available to view online at <http://www.archnature.eu>. Figure 1 shows the amount of each habitat.

¹³ Kent Habitat Survey 2012 <http://www.archnature.eu>.

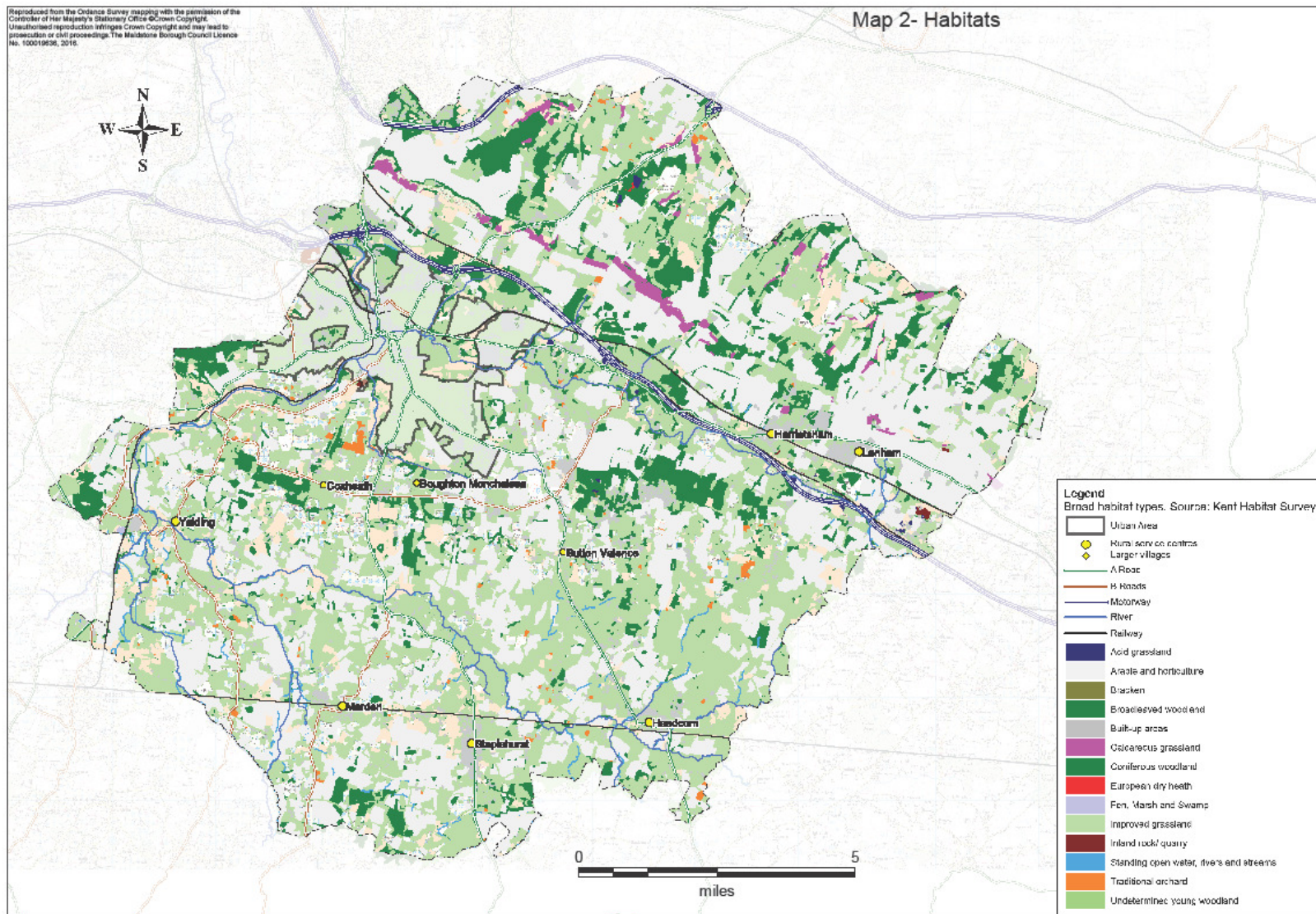


Figure 1: UK broad habitat types in Maidstone Borough

| Broad habitat type | Area (ha) |
|--|----------------------|
| Arable and horticulture | 14923.1 |
| Improved grassland | 13476.8 |
| Broadleaved, mixed and yew woodland | 4344.6 |
| Neutral grassland | 2208.7 |
| Built up areas | 1434.2 |
| Boundary and linear features | 1246.7 |
| Orchard | 386.9 |
| Calcareous grassland | 273.9 |
| Standing open water and canals | 258.3 |
| Coniferous woodland | 120.7 |
| Rivers and streams | 115.5 |
| Acid grassland | 29.4 |
| Inland rock | 18.4 |
| Fen, marsh and swamp | 12.7 |
| Bracken | 2.5 |
| Dwarf shrub heath | 2.3 |
| Undetermined young woodland | 1.2 |

(Source: Kent Habitat Survey 2012)

- 4.10. Within the broad habitat classes are a number of UK BAP priority habitats, which have been recognised as of importance for nature conservation because they support rich or scarce communities, they are particularly fragile or they are very rare within the UK. This includes more than one fifth of the county's UK BAP priority habitat traditional orchard and a significant proportion of calcareous grassland, lowland beech and yew woodland, wet woodland and lowland mixed deciduous woodland¹⁴.

¹⁴ Kent Habitat Survey 2012

Figure 2: UK priority habitats in Maidstone Borough

| UK priority habitat | Area (ha) |
|-----------------------------------|----------------------|
| Lowland mixed deciduous woodland | 2259 |
| Lowland wood pasture and parkland | 1250 |
| Calcareous grassland | 143 |
| Traditional orchards | 107 |
| Lowland yew and beech | 84 |
| Lowland meadow | 45 |
| Wet woodland | 39 |
| Lowland dry acid grassland | 9 |
| Lowland heathland | 4 |

(Source: Kent Habitat Survey 2003)

4.11. Designated sites

Many sites have been recognised for their landscape or biodiversity value and have formal designations offering varying degrees of protection (see Map 3).



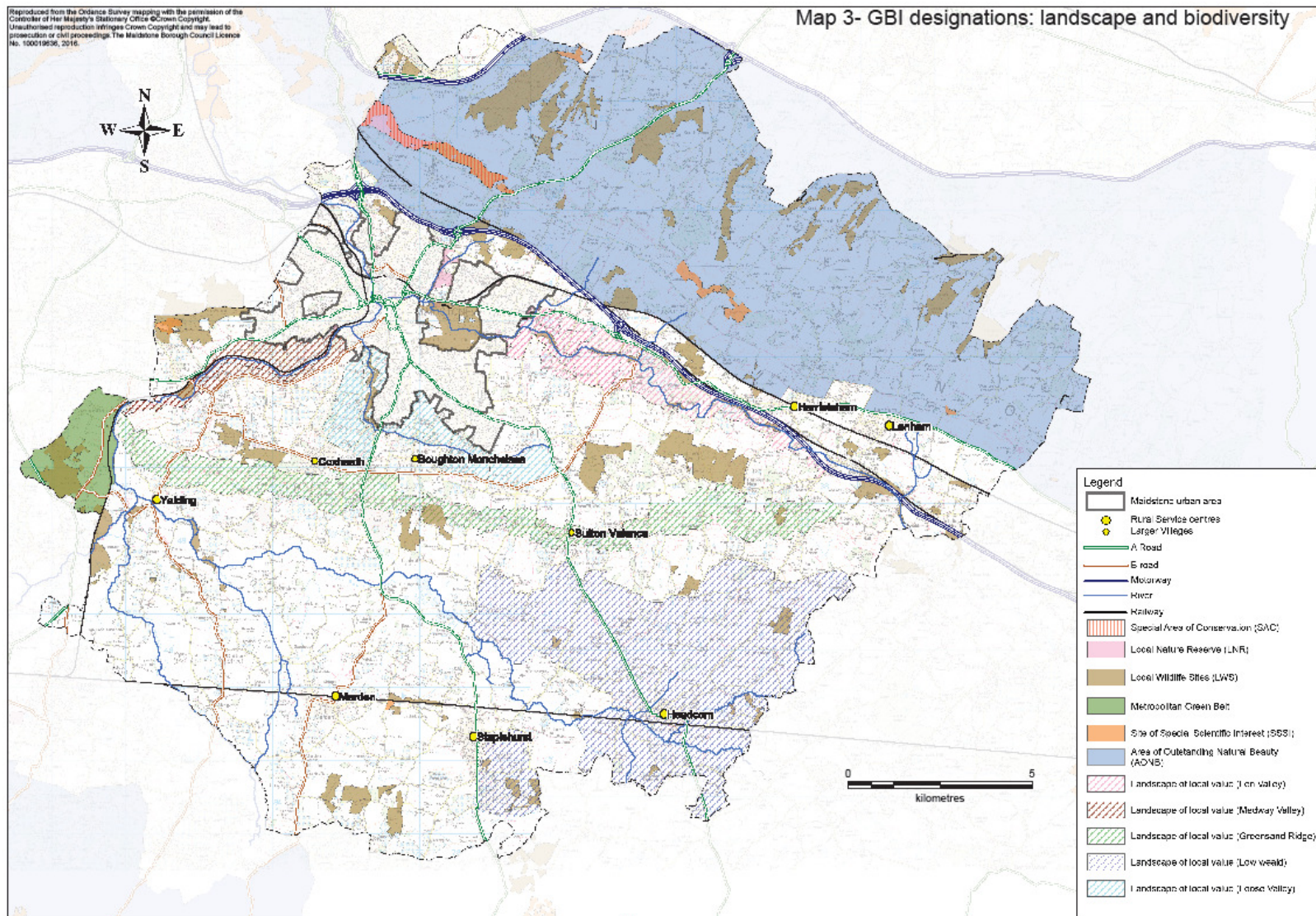
- 4.12. Just over a quarter of the borough is within the **Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)**. The AONB is a visually prominent landscape that contributes significantly to the borough's high quality of life. It is an important amenity and recreation resource for both Maidstone residents 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 enhance.

- 4.13. The council has also designated five **Landscapes of Local Value**; the Greensand Ridge, Medway Valley, Len Valley, Loose Valley and Low Weald. These have been identified according to criteria relating to character and sensitivity.
- 4.14. A small area to the west of the borough lies within the **Metropolitan Green Belt**, incorporating the villages of Nettlestead and Nettlestead Green. The key purposes of the Metropolitan Green Belt include preventing urban sprawl and to assisting in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment.
- 4.15. Within the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, the North Downs Woodlands is designated as **Special Area of Conservation** due to its existing and regenerating chalk grassland and mature beech and yew woodland - features that are threatened or rare in a European context.
- 4.16. **Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs)** represent Britain's finest sites for fauna, flora, geology and physiographical features and are protected by legislation. There are nine SSSI sites within the borough including chalk grassland and woodland sites on the Kent Downs, the clay River Beult environment and geological SSSI's at quarries such as at Allington and Lenham.
- 4.17. Maidstone borough also has four **Local Nature Reserves (LNR)**, four Wildlife Trust Reserves (WTR) and two community nature areas (CNA) which are publicly accessible reserves of local/regional wildlife value where enjoyment by the public is actively promoted. Non-statutory nature conservation sites, known in Maidstone as **Local Wildlife Sites (LWS)**, are regionally and locally important nature conservation sites. Maidstone borough has approximately 59 sites that occur within its boundary, which cover approximately 2629 hectares. The majority of habitat found in LWS within the borough is lowland mixed deciduous woodland.
- 4.18. The Borough includes four **Biodiversity Opportunity Areas (BOA's)** identified by the Kent Nature Partnership, comprising Greensand Heath and Commons, Mid Kent Greensand and Gault, Mid Kent Downs, Woods and Scarp and Medway and Low Weald Wetlands and Grasslands. The 2015 BOA maps indicate where the delivery of Kent Biodiversity Strategy targets should be focused in order to secure the maximum biodiversity benefits. The BOA maps also show where the greatest gains can be made from habitat enhancement, restoration and recreation, as these areas offer the best opportunities for establishing large habitat areas and networks of wildlife habitats. Many areas outside the designated areas

and identified BOAs also have substantial biodiversity interest, and include a number of ancient woodlands and other areas of habitats. It will still be necessary to maintain, enhance, buffer and extend areas of wildlife habitat outside the mapped areas in order to maintain the wildlife interest and richness of the wider countryside.



- 4.19. Parts of the borough fall within the **Wealden Great Crested Newt Important Area for Ponds (IAP)** identified by the Environment Agency (Important Areas for Ponds in the Environment Agency Southern Region, 2009). Great Crested Newt populations thrive where there is high pond density and a well-connected landscape. This helps ensure the survival of populations even if sub-populations are affected by, for example, pond desiccation or fish introductions. The IAP covers the whole of the Weald but within this large area there are 'hotspots' with clusters of Great Crested Newt populations including in Marden and Staplehurst which have a high density of pond.



Heritage Assets

4.20. Maidstone Borough has been shaped and influenced by a long history, the legacy of which is a strong and rich cultural heritage. From the characteristic ragstone villages and hop and fruit-growing infrastructure of oast houses and orchards to grand historic parks and gardens such as at Leeds Castle estate and Mote Park, these heritage assets contribute to the strong sense of place, which exists across the borough. Many are designated for their national historic significance but Maidstone also contains numerous heritage assets of local significance in the form of historic buildings, local parks and gardens, archaeological sites and monuments most of which are included in the Kent Historic Environment Record. . The most significant heritage assets have been mapped to inform the development of the Green and blue infrastructure strategy (see Map 4).

4.21. There are several **Scheduled Monuments** within the Borough defined under the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979 such as remains of historic buildings, moated sites, earthworks and historic bridges. These are designated for their historic significance of national importance and it is an offence to carry out, without consent, any works resulting in the

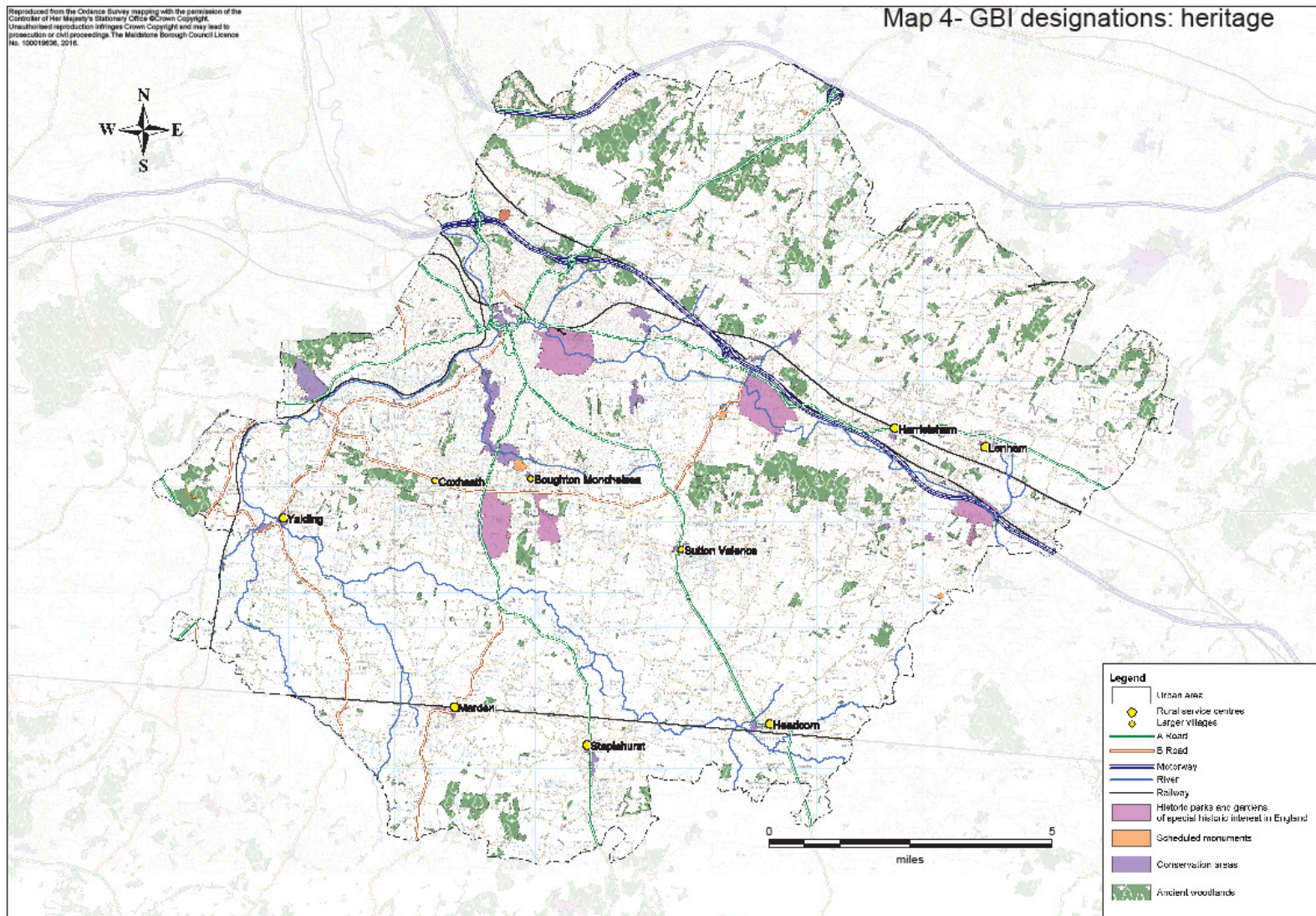
demolition,
destruction, damage,
alterations or repair
to any Scheduled
Monument. A

Conservation Area

is a local
designation, which
aims to protect
special architectural
or historic interest,
made by Local
Planning Authorities

under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990. There are 41 Conservation Areas throughout Maidstone Borough, mainly focused around traditional settlement centres. As trees make a significant contribution to the character of an area, all trees with a trunk diameter exceeding 75mm at 1.5m above ground level are legally protected within Conservation Areas – adding protection to this important part of the green infrastructure.





- 4.22. A **Register of Landscapes, Parks and Gardens** of Special Historic Interest has been maintained by Historic England since the 1980s and the designation of such sites forms a material consideration within the planning process. Within Maidstone Borough there are several registered sites, comprising Mote Park (below), Leeds Castle Estate, Linton Park, Chilston Park and Boughton Monchelsea Place.



- 4.23. **Ancient woodland** in England is defined as an area that has been wooded continuously since at least 1600 AD. Fragments and swathes of ancient woodland are strewn across Maidstone Borough, with particularly large ancient woodland blocks at Oaken Wood to the west and at Kings Wood to the east.

Publicly accessible green space

4.24. An updated audit of the quantity of publicly accessible green space across the Borough was carried out in 2014. Publicly accessible green space was defined as all open access land which is owned by Maidstone Borough Council, Kent County Council, Forestry Commission, Woodland Trust, parish councils, housing associations or 'open access' land (land which has been voluntarily dedicated under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000), or land which has been voluntarily deemed as publicly accessible by the landowner through other legal means. In calculating the quantity of publicly accessible green space, land crossed by a Public Rights of Way (footpaths, bridleways, etc) such as farmland was not deemed to be publicly accessible as a whole. Green spaces were categorised and quantified as the following types:

- Amenity green space – informal recreation spaces, recreation grounds, village greens, urban parks, formal gardens, and playing fields.
- Equipped play areas – playgrounds, ball courts, outdoor basketball hoop areas, skateboard parks, teenage shelters and 'hangouts'.
- Outdoor sports facilities – outdoor sports pitches, tennis, bowls, athletics and other sports.
- Allotments – land used for growing of own produce including urban farms, (not private gardens).
- Natural/semi-natural – including woodlands, urban forestry, scrub, grasslands, wetlands, open and running water, banks to rivers, lakes and ponds, wastelands, closed cemeteries and graveyards.

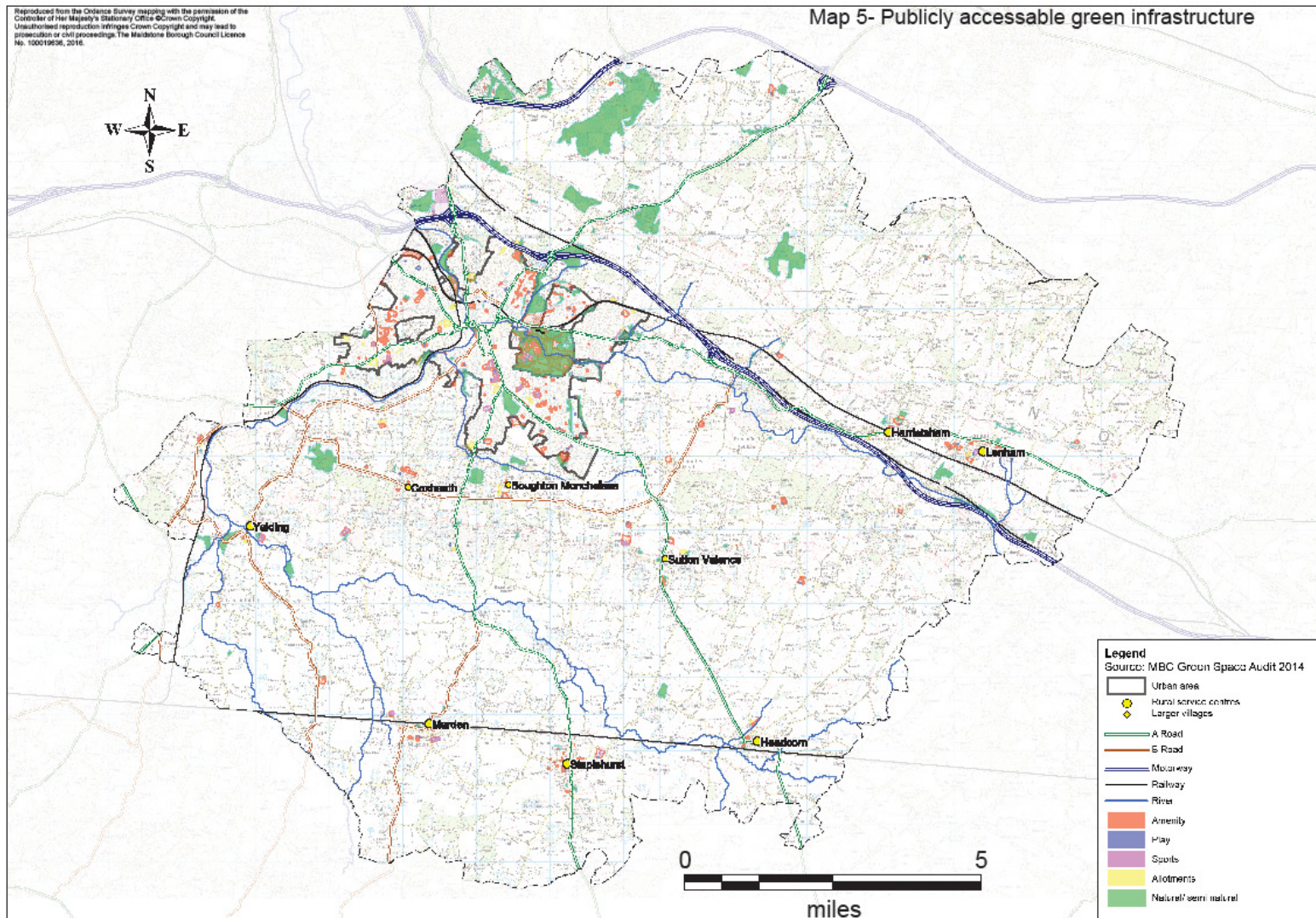
Multi-functional green spaces such as parks were quantified by their component parts (such as natural and semi natural open space, sports pitches and children's play areas) to provide an accurate assessment of the quantity of different functional areas

The quantities and locations of green spaces are shown in Figure 3 and Map 5

Figure 3: Quantity (m²) of publicly accessible green space¹⁵

| URBAN WARDS | Allotments | Amenity | Natural | Play | Sports | Ward Totals |
|--------------------------------|----------------|------------------|-------------------|----------------|------------------|-------------------|
| ALLINGTON | 0 | 47,812 | 72,634 | 12,916 | 78,470 | 211,832 |
| BARMING | 18,507 | 18,170 | 57,373 | 1,276 | 0 | 95,326 |
| BEARSTED | 8,474 | 25,730 | 109,029 | 809 | 23,790 | 167,832 |
| BOXLEY | 8,196 | 93,343 | 4,567,731 | 6,799 | 599,791 | 5,275,860 |
| BRIDGE | 32,596 | 50,479 | 40,536 | 3,497 | 0 | 127,108 |
| DOWNSWOOD AND OTHAM | 8,217 | 37,665 | 70,450 | 3,981 | 8,001 | 128,314 |
| EAST | 1,154 | 94,067 | 38,808 | 7,774 | 9,882 | 151,685 |
| FANT | 45,165 | 26,012 | 39,269 | 6,130 | 17,094 | 133,670 |
| HEATH | 2,035 | 54,365 | 24,382 | 26,183 | 6,679 | 113,644 |
| HIGH STREET | 6,660 | 33,521 | 20,669 | 2,469 | 10,652 | 73,971 |
| LOOSE | 22,547 | 23,769 | 2,077 | 813 | 0 | 49,206 |
| NORTH | 43,840 | 14,169 | 99,536 | 5,071 | 0 | 162,616 |
| PARK WOOD | 0 | 52,486 | 33,361 | 4,322 | 16,072 | 106,241 |
| SHEPWAY NORTH | 3,299 | 67,473 | 1,727,765 | 5,920 | 144,987 | 1,949,444 |
| SHEPWAY SOUTH | 0 | 49,063 | 77,220 | 4,615 | 0 | 130,898 |
| SOUTH | 24,338 | 96,428 | 78,883 | 5,804 | 36,515 | 241,968 |
| Urban Ward Totals: | 225,028 | 784,552 | 7,059,723 | 98,379 | 951,933 | 9,119,615 |
| RURAL WARDS | | | | | | |
| BOUGHTON MONCHELSEA | | | | | | |
| CHART SUTTON | 15,297 | 77,556 | 223,629 | 1,077 | 15,230 | 332,789 |
| COXHEATH AND HUNTON | 18,912 | 75,828 | 423,867 | 5,327 | 17,197 | 541,131 |
| DETLING AND THURNHAM | 6,500 | 14,446 | 731,201 | 1,354 | 0 | 753,501 |
| HARRIETSHAM AND LENHAM | 9,405 | 125,954 | 356,673 | 4,377 | 18,168 | 514,577 |
| HEADCORN | 7,758 | 56,788 | 22,682 | 2,898 | 10,928 | 101,054 |
| LEEDS | 0 | 14,893 | 14,353 | 1,213 | 20,703 | 51,162 |
| MARDEN AND YALDING | 12,034 | 112,541 | 226,466 | 4,269 | 52,661 | 407,971 |
| NORTH DOWNS | 0 | 36,890 | 782,057 | 3,175 | 5,814 | 827,936 |
| STAPLEHURST | 0 | 33,812 | 15,825 | 3,041 | 40,537 | 93,215 |
| SUTTON VALENCE AND LANGLEY | 21,965 | 62,629 | 99,720 | 2,243 | 1,560 | 188,117 |
| Rural Ward Totals: | 91,871 | 611,337 | 2,896,473 | 28,974 | 182,798 | 3,811,453 |
| Green Space Type Totals | 541,927 | 2,180,441 | 17,015,919 | 225,732 | 2,086,664 | 12,931,068 |

¹⁵ Green Space Audit data from Green and Blue Spaces Provision in Maidstone Borough Quantitative Assessment (May 2014)



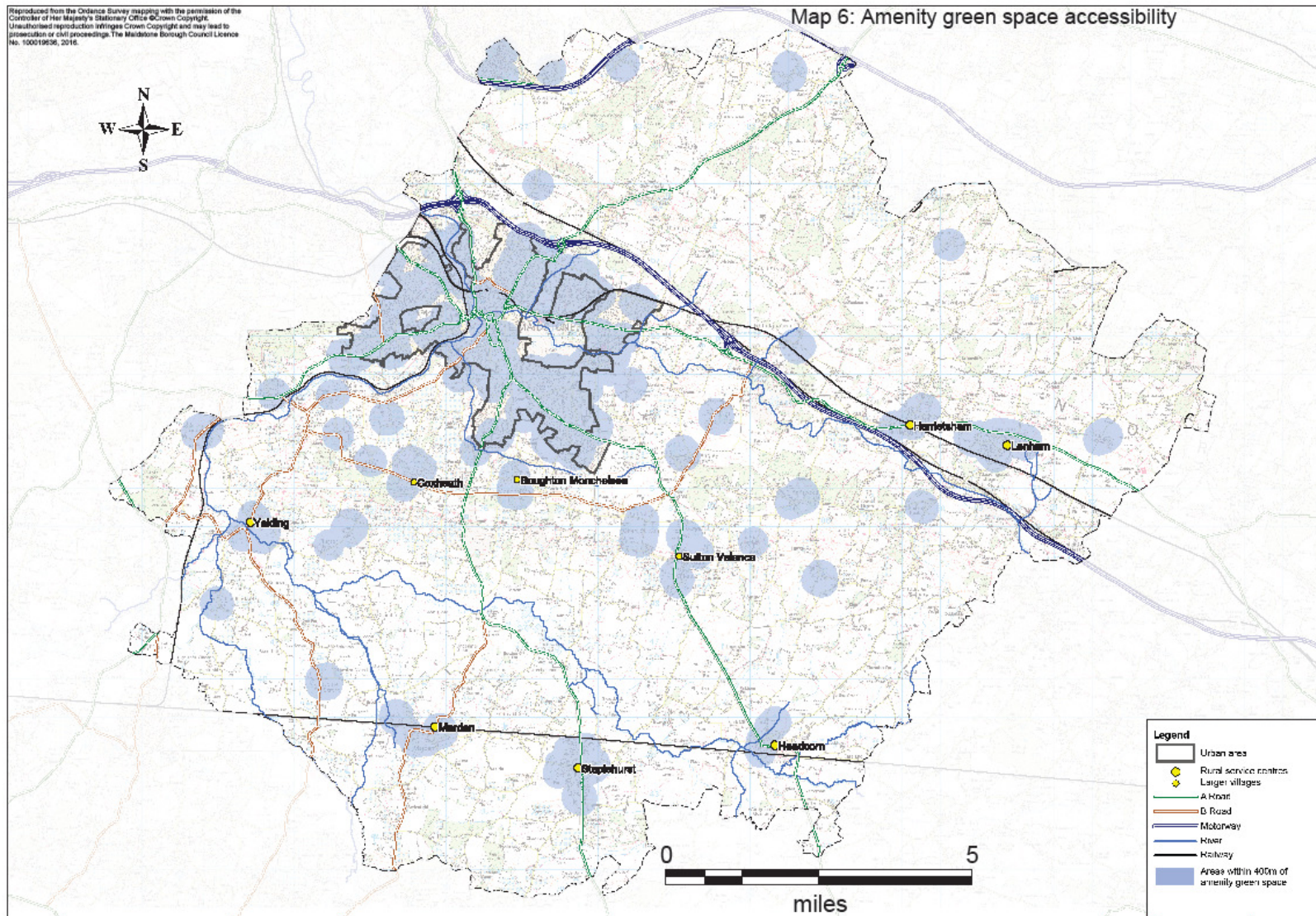
- 4.25. The quality of publicly accessible green spaces is key to their effective functioning and use. An assessment of quality was carried out in 2014/15 on 140 sites across the Borough including amenity green spaces, natural and semi-natural green spaces and allotments. The assessment was based on the quality and accessibility aspects of the Green Flag Award programme resulting in an assessment of either 'Very Poor', 'Poor', 'Fair', 'Good' or 'Very Good'. Of the 140 sites assessed 8 were scored to be in Poor condition, 62 as Fair, 57 as Good and 1 as Very Good, (Teston Picnic Site).
- 4.26.** Play areas were assessed using the Play Area Scoring Matrix (PASM), which assesses the quality, accessibility and use of each area grading them as either Excellent ($\geq 70\%$), Satisfactory (56%-69%) or Requires Improvement ($\leq 55\%$). The PASM assessment is carried out by Maidstone Council bi-annually providing an overall picture of quality of play areas across the Borough and recent assessments show a reduction in quality across all sites since 2009 as the level of available capital funding has reduced and more sites are graded as requiring improvement.

Amenity green space

- 4.27. The formal parks and gardens in the borough, found mostly in and around Maidstone town, and managed by Maidstone Borough Council comprise; Mote Park, Whatman Park, Clare Park, Millennium River Park, Brenchley Gardens, South Park, Cobtree Manor Park and Penenden Heath. There are two country parks which are owned and managed by Kent County Council – Teston Bridge Country Park on the River Medway and White Horse Wood Country Park on Detling Hill.
- 4.28. Four of the parks gained a national Green Flag Award in 2015 in recognition of their exceptionally high standards, excellent facilities and strong community involvement, namely Mote Park, Cobtree Manor Park, Whatman Park, and Clare Park. Millennium River Park is a linear route which runs along 10km of the River Medway that opens up to riverside spaces along the way from Teston Bridge Country Park to Allington. The river park was opened in 2001 as one of the 'lasting legacy' projects funded in part by the National Lottery to celebrate the new millennium. The path passes through Whatman Park, a key open space in Maidstone town which combines a natural riverside landscape with activity areas including a skate park, adventure play area, toddlers play area and the Riverstage Arena (a roofed amphitheatre used for a variety of events).



- 4.29. In addition to formal parks and gardens, smaller scale amenity green spaces are most commonly but not exclusively found in housing areas and include informal recreation spaces, green spaces in and around housing and village greens. These provide space for informal activities close to home or work, and they can enhance the appearance of residential or other areas. Many of the smaller settlements in the borough rely on these informal spaces for their recreational needs.
- 4.30. Current provision of amenity green space equates to 0.7 hectares per 1000 population in the urban area and 1.47 hectares per 1000 population in the rural areas. A 2015 telephone survey of residents found that most people believe the quantity of amenity space to be 'good' or 'very good'. However, there are specific areas deficient in amenity space, for example, parts of Allington and North Wards within Maidstone urban area fall below 0.7 hectares per 1000 population and have areas which are not within 400m of amenity open space as shown on Map 6.

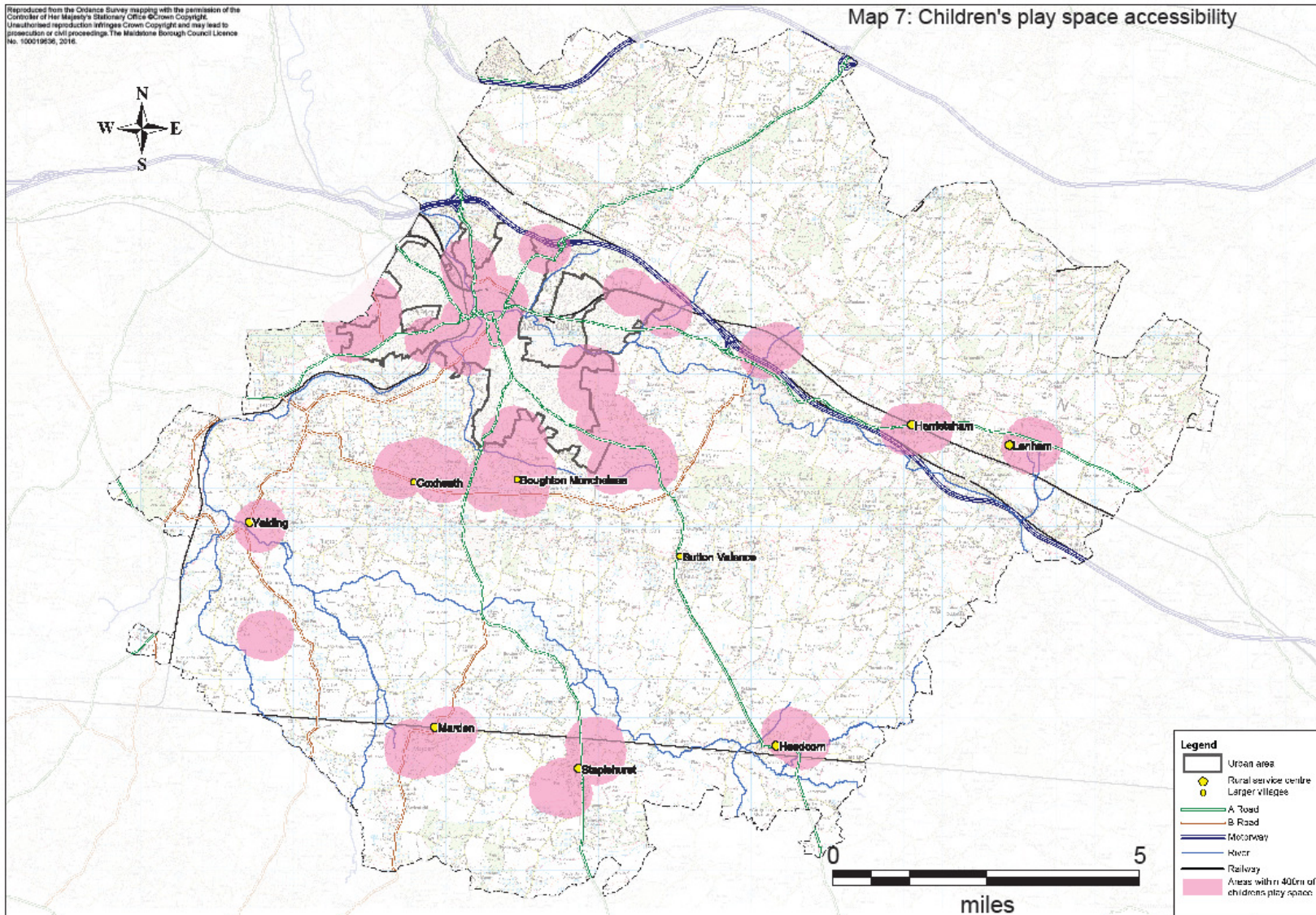


Provision for children and young people

- 4.31. The 2014 publicly accessible green space audit identifies 119 separate play areas within the borough, including equipped playgrounds, ball courts, skateboard areas, teenage shelters and 'hangouts'. Mostly owned and managed by Maidstone Borough Council or the parishes, many are located within parks and green spaces and are hard surfaced elements within the green infrastructure, and are of variable quality.
- 4.32. The Draft Maidstone Play Strategy 2014 – 2024 categorises play areas into three types; 'Destination Play Areas' with a wide range of facilities visited by park users from outside the borough as well as the local community, such as at Mote Park and Cobtree Manor Park; 'District Play Areas' also with a wide range of facilities but mainly used by local communities and some passing visitors to the borough such as at South Park, Penenden Heath and Whatman Park and 'Local Neighbourhood Play Areas' which have a more limited range of play equipment but provide important informal leisure areas for families in the immediate local community. These areas are further subdivided into Larger and Smaller Local Neighbourhood Play Areas. Larger examples include Shepway Green, Barming Heath and Nettlestead Village Hall. Smaller examples include Albert Reed Gardens, Camden Street and Lime Trees at Staplehurst.
- 4.33. Current provision of equipped play areas equates to 0.09 hectares per 1000 population in the urban areas and 0.07 per 1000 population in the rural areas. There is concern about the lack of play facilities from many local residents with 40% believing the provision to be 'very poor', 'poor' or 'fair' in a 2015 telephone survey. The 2014 audit of publicly accessible green spaces identifies Bearsted (north and south of the A20), south Loose (east and west of the A229) and Maidstone town centre as areas deficient in play space as shown on Map 7. The Draft Maidstone Play Strategy 2014 – 2024 also identifies a lack of youth facilities in Headcorn, Detling, Lordswood, Harrietsham, Teston and Yalding and a lack of children's play facilities in Detling

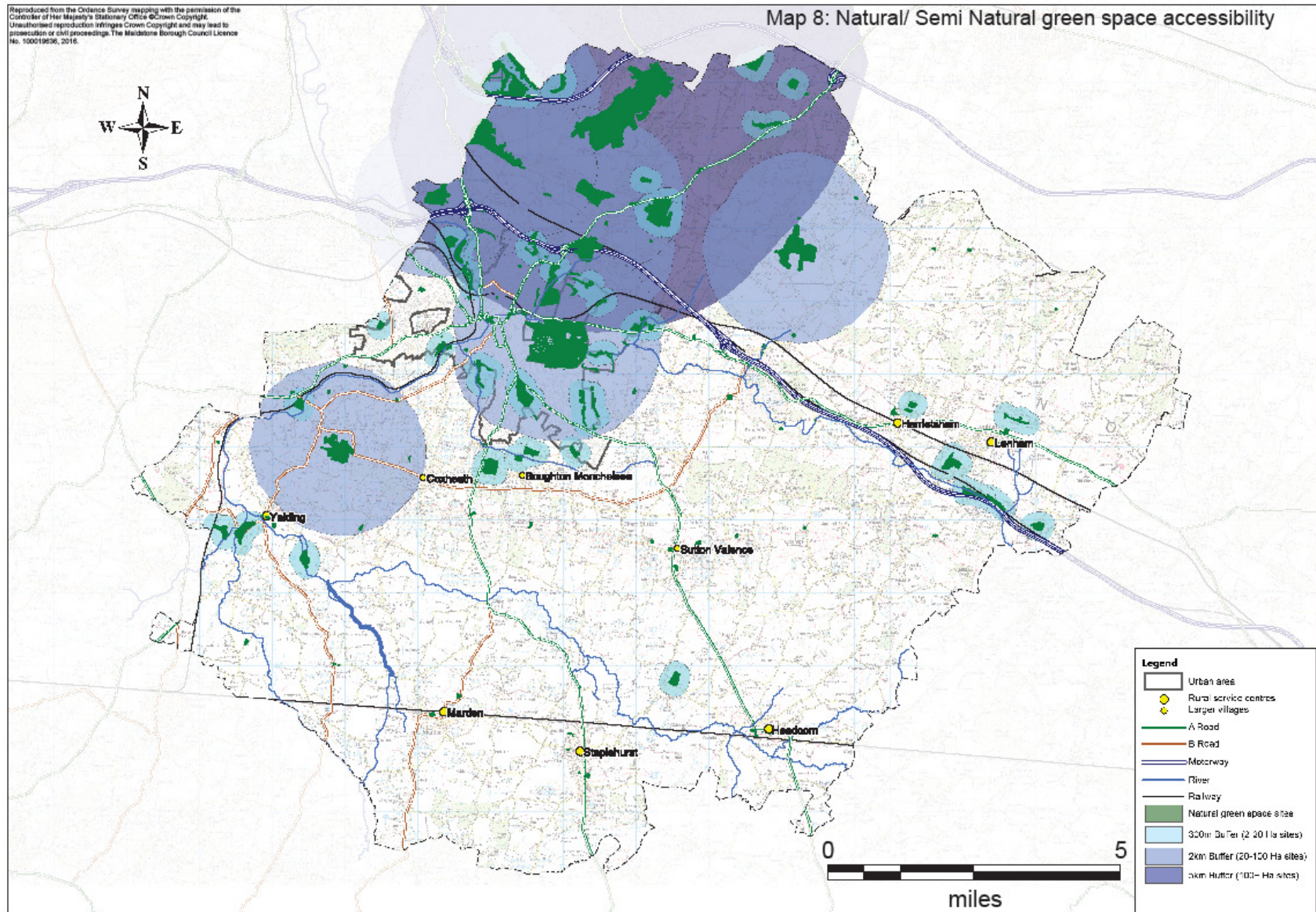
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Map 7: Children's play space accessibility



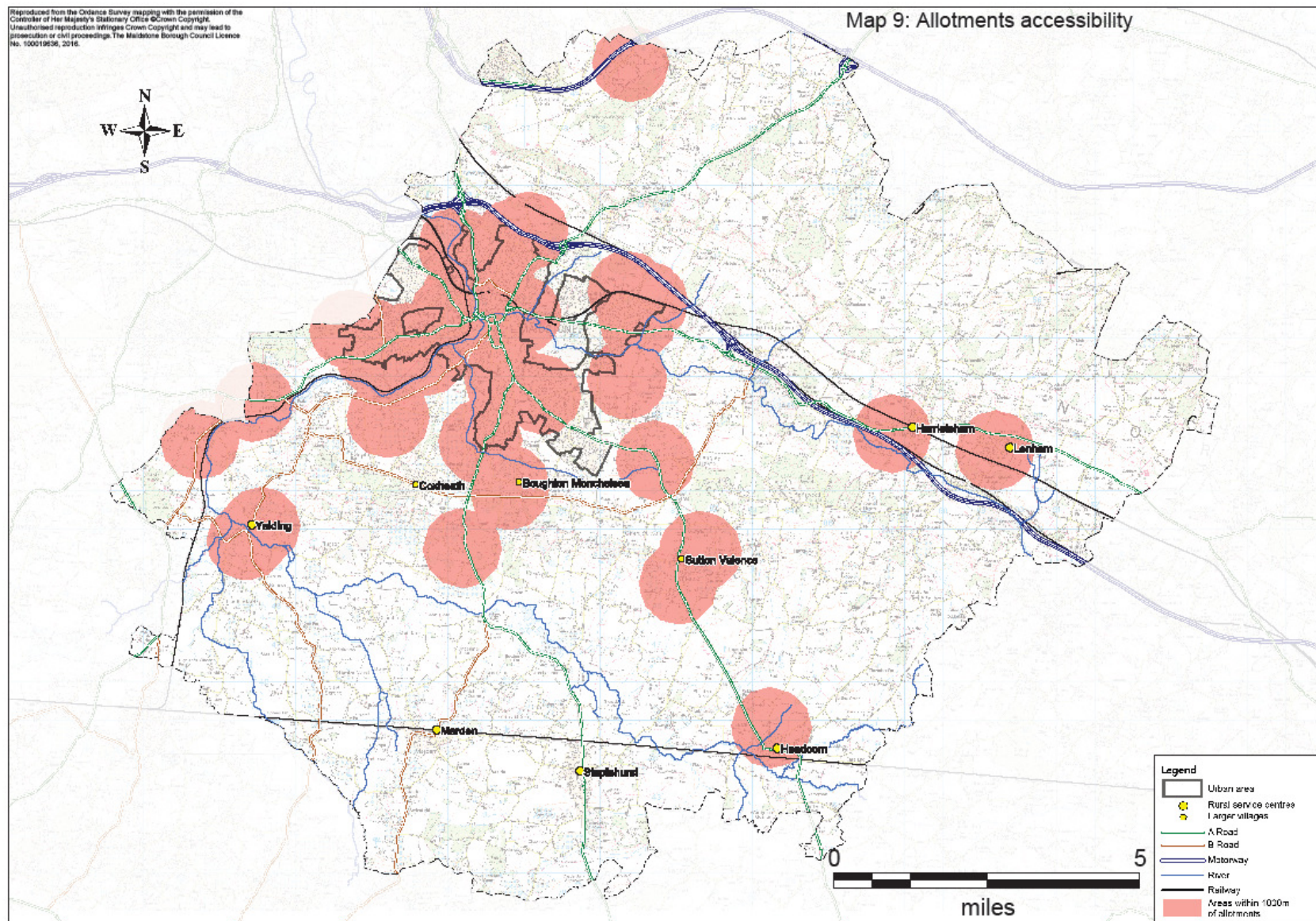
Natural and semi-natural green space

- 4.34. Natural and semi-natural publicly accessible spaces including woodlands, scrub, grasslands, wetlands, open and running water and wastelands are scattered across the borough and fall within many different ownerships, both public and private. The Kent Wildlife Trust manage a number of nature reserves, comprising the Larches, Marden Meadows, Quarry Wood, and Kiln Wood as well as the grounds of their headquarters, Tyland Barn Visitors Centre which includes a demonstration nature park. The extensive Hucking Estate Woodland on the North Downs Way is owned and managed by the Woodland Trust. Vinters Valley Nature Reserve is managed by an independent Trust.
- 4.35. Cemeteries and churchyards and other burial grounds are included within the category of natural and semi-natural green space. They are important for quiet contemplation, burial of the dead as well as wildlife conservation and promotion of biodiversity. There are two cemeteries in the borough, Maidstone Cemetery and Vinters Park Crematorium and numerous churchyards within the smaller settlements.
- 4.36. Current provision of natural and semi-natural green space is higher than for other green space types and equates to 6.31 hectares per 1000 population in the urban areas and 6.95 hectares per 1000 population in the rural areas. 72% of residents rated the amount of natural and semi natural space as very good / good in a 2015 telephone survey. However there are areas deficient in accessible natural and semi-natural green space, particularly in some of the rural areas of the Borough as shown on Map 8 which is highlighted in draft Neighbourhood Plans in Lenham, Headcorn and Coxheath.



Allotments and community gardens

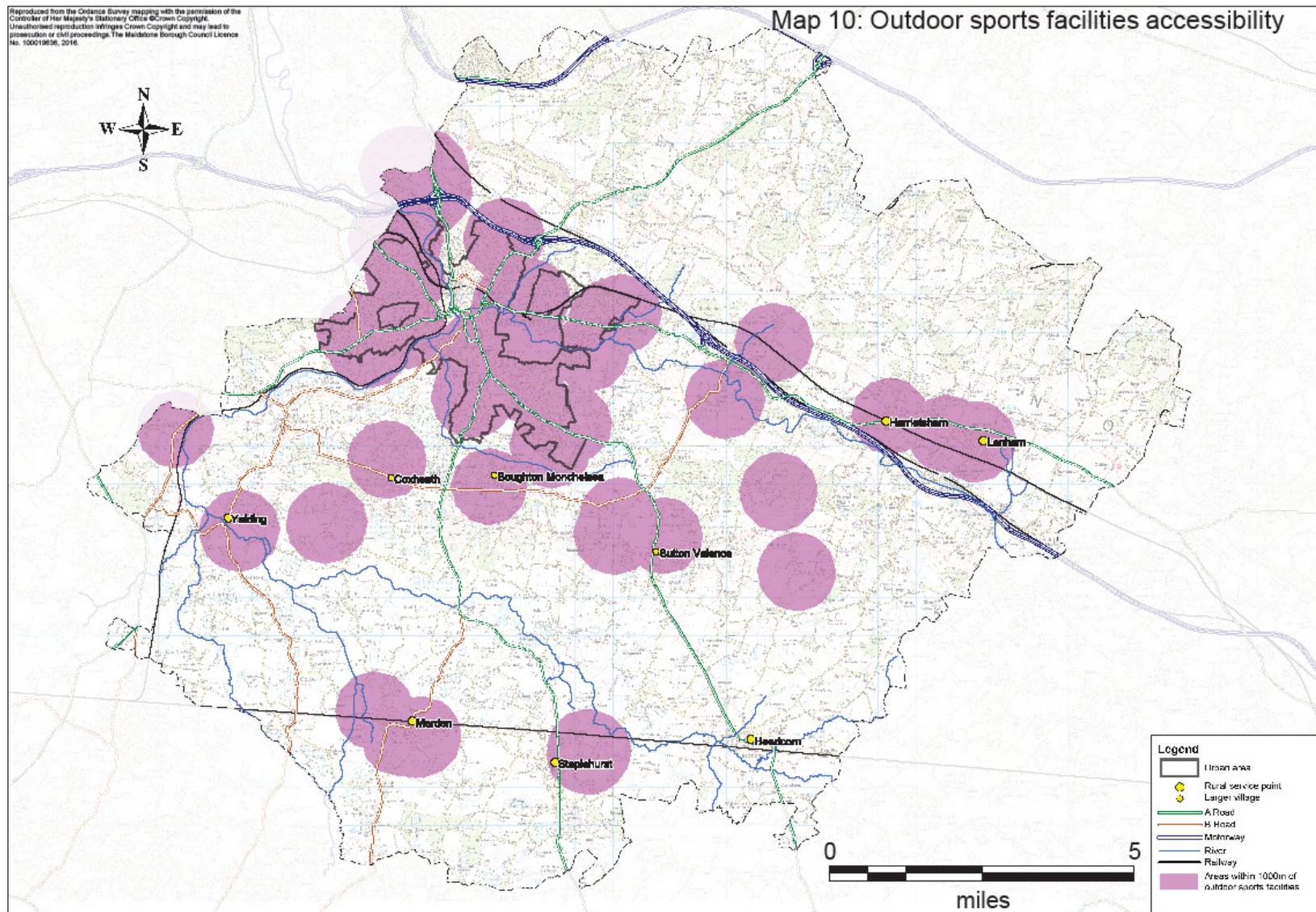
- 4.38. Allotments and community gardens provide opportunities for people to grow their own produce contributing to sustainability, health and social inclusion. There are 12 allotment sites in Maidstone town which are run by the Maidstone Allotments Management Committee, a group of volunteers who look after them on behalf of the council. 17 parish councils also run their own local allotments. Demand for allotments is currently higher than supply as there is a waiting list for allotments. Currently, allotments are not advertised or promoted but if they were, in order to encourage healthy lifestyles for example, the demand may well rise significantly.
- 4.39. Current provision of allotments equates to 0.2 hectares in the urban areas and 0.22 hectares in the rural areas. There was a high degree of uncertainty about the provision of allotments in the 2015 telephone survey of residents with 47% stating they don't know or have no experience of allotments. Only 22% felt the provision of allotments was good or very good. The 2014 audit of publicly accessible green spaces identified deficiencies in allotments in Park Wood, Bearstead and Allington wards within Maidstone and Staplehurst and Marden as shown on Map 9. Harrietsham and Coxheath's draft Neighbourhood Plans also identify a shortage of allotment space.



4.40.

Outdoor sports facilities

- 4.41. Football pitches are available for hire at ten sites in and around Maidstone town and there is a rugby pitch and cricket club at Mote Park. There are also pay and play tennis courts at four sites. Informal and formal playing fields and other sports facilities are dispersed throughout the borough in the smaller settlements. The 2014 audit did not include outdoor sport facilities that are privately owned or those which have limited public access such as school sports pitches being used at weekends by community clubs. These are likely to grow in importance with greater emphasis on schools and colleges generating community use from fields and Sport England's strategy to develop multi-use community assets.
- 4.42. Current provision of publicly accessible outdoor sports facilities equates to 0.85 per 1000 population in urban areas and 0.44 hectares per 1000 population in rural areas. The 2015 telephone survey of residents shows concerns with regard to the amount of outdoor sports facilities with 43% rating them as fair, poor and very poor. The County Football and Hockey Associations also identify that provision for these sports in the borough is inadequate. The 2014 audit of publicly accessible green spaces identified deficiencies in outdoor sports facilities in Langley, Headcorn and Staplehurst as shown on Map 10 however, a comprehensive Playing Pitch Needs Assessment in line with Sport England's methodology is required to fully ascertain the borough's sports facility requirements



Green and blue corridors

- 4.43. Many of the publicly accessible green spaces outlined above form important green corridors. These include paths along riverbanks, cycleways, and footpaths. Maidstone borough's five main rivers provide important movement corridors for people and wildlife although some are more accessible to people than others. The Medway for example has a continuous path, which alternates from bank to bank, along its length through the borough, whilst its tributaries are only accessible in a few places. A combination of parks and green corridors in Maidstone town create a distinctive pattern of green corridors and wedges, some continuous and some broken, radiating out from the town centre. Railways and road corridors also provide important green corridors, often undisturbed by foot traffic. Some of these are managed actively for nature conservation. Many of the green and blue corridors are historic routes and contain nationally and locally important heritage assets. For example, during the Second World War the River Medway was the GHQ Stop-Line and still contains dozens of pillboxes and defence sites. Further detail on movement links is included in the 'Sustainable green links' section.

Private green spaces

- 4.44. Private gardens, school grounds and the grounds of other institutions such as hospitals also provide valuable green infrastructure, some of great value to wildlife. However, there is little information held about the borough's private green spaces and they have not been included in any mapping exercise to date. School grounds in particular are often under-utilised but can provide experiential outdoor learning facilities which reconnect children with nature. In areas of green space deficiency, school grounds can be managed for community use outside school hours.

Open Spaces Quality Audit

- 4.45. The Borough's open spaces sites assessment of accessibility and quality was conducted between October 2014 and April 2015. The assessment included visits to 140 open space sites across the Borough including parks and open spaces, natural and semi-natural greenspaces and allotments. The open spaces were not all in the Borough Council's ownership, but they were all freely accessible and open to the public.
- 4.46. Playing Pitches (and Indoor Sports Facilities) were not included in the Quality Audit. MBC have commissioned the production of a Playing Pitch

Strategy and an Indoor Sports Facilities Study that will report in early 2017.

- 4.47. The results of the assessments provide the Borough with a comprehensive overview of the condition and quality of the open space provision and provided a new level of management information.
- 4.48. The most popular reasons for Maidstone residents visiting open spaces are to walk, to take exercise, for fresh air, to use children's play equipment and to walk the dog. Amenity green space and natural and semi natural open space are most popular in terms of claimed usage.
- 4.49. Amenity green space is typically accessed by foot and by car whereas there is a slight preference for access on foot for both natural and semi natural space and play areas provision. The majority travel to outdoor sports facilities by car.
- 4.50. Amenity green space, play area provision and allotments appear to be in close proximity with residents, whereas natural and semi natural greenspace and outdoor sports facilities take longer for residents to reach.
- 4.51. Users often reference a place, eg Mote Park, rather than type when asked about open space provision. Residents and users often do not distinguish between amenity green space and natural and semi natural spaces which they see as the same types of space.
- 4.52. Most residents believe that the amount of open space available in the borough is either very good or good in relation to amenity green space and natural and semi natural space. But there are some concerns about the amount of play area provision for children and young people and outdoor sports facilities where they are rated as fair/poor and very poor respectively.

Assessment of current deficiencies in accessible open space provision

- 4.53. An outline assessment of current deficiencies in accessible open space provision within the borough can be undertaken using:

- The Open Spaces Quality Audit (2015) that set out new standards for public open space provision in new development.¹⁶
- Accessibility Maps: 6: Amenity green space, 7: Children's play space, 8: natural & semi natural green space, 9: Allotments, and 10: Outdoor sports facilities.
- The table below "Analysis of publically accessible green space against open space standards by ward" takes the information in Figure 3: Quantity of publicly accessible green space to provide a quantitative assessment of the current provision of publicly accessible green space against the open space standards based on the 2014 population figures.

This quantitative data combined with the qualitative information in the Open Spaces Quality Audit and the Accessibility Maps can be analysed together to produce an outline assessment of current deficiencies in accessible open space provision by Wards

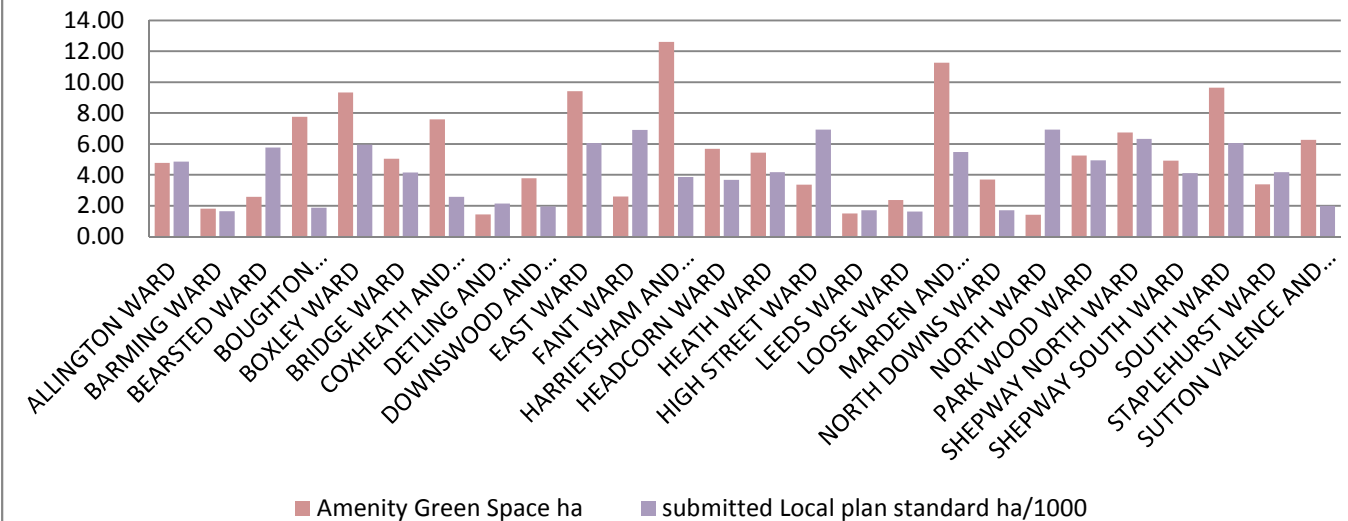
| Current Deficiencies in Open Space provision @ 2014 population figures | | | | | |
|--|---------------|------------|------------|---------|-----------|
| Ward | Allotments ha | Amenity ha | Natural ha | Play ha | Sports ha |
| ALLINGTON WARD | -1.39 | -0.07 | -37.78 | -0.44 | -3.24 |
| BARMING WARD | 1.38 | 0.17 | -9.60 | -0.46 | -3.78 |
| BEARSTED WARD | -0.80 | -3.20 | -42.72 | -1.98 | -10.82 |
| BOUGHTON MONCHELSE | 0.99 | 5.88 | 4.94 | -0.56 | -2.77 |
| BOXLEY WARD | -0.88 | 3.38 | 401.52 | -1.45 | 46.38 |
| BRIDGE WARD | 2.08 | 0.90 | -34.43 | -1.13 | -9.47 |
| COXHEATH AND HUNTON | 1.16 | 5.01 | 18.47 | -0.39 | -4.17 |
| DETLING AND THURNHAY | 0.04 | -0.70 | 53.23 | -0.63 | -4.90 |
| DOWNSWOOD AND OTH | 0.26 | 1.81 | -11.16 | -0.30 | -3.68 |
| EAST WARD | -1.61 | 3.35 | -52.34 | -1.39 | -12.85 |
| FANT WARD | 2.54 | -4.30 | -60.16 | -1.85 | -14.07 |
| HARRIETSHAM AND LENH | -0.16 | 8.73 | -0.21 | -0.94 | -7.02 |
| HEADCORN WARD | -0.28 | 2.00 | -31.92 | -1.03 | -7.32 |
| HEATH WARD | -0.99 | 1.26 | -36.37 | 1.13 | -8.88 |
| HIGH STREET WARD | -1.31 | -3.56 | -62.15 | -2.22 | -14.74 |
| LEEDS WARD | -0.49 | -0.21 | -14.36 | -0.49 | -1.82 |
| LOOSE WARD | 1.79 | 0.75 | -14.87 | -0.50 | -3.71 |
| MARDEN AND YALDING V | -0.36 | 5.79 | -28.12 | -1.53 | -7.23 |
| NORTH DOWNS WARD | -0.49 | 1.98 | 62.35 | -0.29 | -3.32 |
| NORTH WARD | 2.40 | -5.51 | -54.40 | -1.97 | -15.84 |
| PARK WOOD WARD | -1.41 | 0.32 | -42.42 | -1.33 | -9.66 |
| SHEPWAY NORTH WARD | -1.48 | 0.43 | 114.08 | -1.67 | 0.05 |
| SHEPWAY SOUTH WARD | -1.17 | 0.80 | -30.37 | -1.00 | -9.38 |
| SOUTH WARD | 0.70 | 3.59 | -48.34 | -1.58 | -10.19 |
| STAPLEHURST WARD | -1.19 | -0.79 | -37.16 | -1.19 | -5.48 |
| SUTTON VALENCE AND LA | 1.62 | 4.26 | -8.62 | -0.49 | -4.42 |

¹⁶ [Local Plan Evidence, Natural & Historic Environment ENV007 \(I\) Our proposed standard for open spaces](#)

Analysis of publically accessible green space against open space standards by ward

| Ward | Population @ 2014 | Allotment s m2 | Allotments ha | Provision (m2)/ 1000 population | Apply draft standard ha/1000 | Deficiency / ha | Amenity m2 | Amenity ha | Provision (m2)/ 1000 population | Apply draft standard ha/1000 | Deficiency cy / ha | Natural m2 | Natural ha | Provision (m2)/ 1000 population | Apply draft standard ha/1000 | Deficiency cy / ha | Play m2 | Play ha | Provision (m2)/ 1000 population | Apply draft standard ha/1000 | Deficiency cy / ha | Sports m2 | Sports ha | Provision (m2)/ 1000 population | Apply draft standard ha/1000 | Deficiency cy / ha |
|---------------------------|-------------------|----------------|---------------|---------------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------|------------|------------|---------------------------------|------------------------------|--------------------|------------|------------|---------------------------------|------------------------------|--------------------|---------|---------|---------------------------------|------------------------------|--------------------|-----------|-----------|---------------------------------|------------------------------|--------------------|
| ALLINGTON WARD | 6930 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1.39 | -1.39 | 47,812 | 4.78 | 6,899 | 4.85 | -0.07 | 72,634 | 7.26 | 10,481 | 45.05 | -37.78 | 12,916 | 1.29 | 1,864 | 1.73 | -0.44 | 78,470 | 7.85 | 11323 | 11.09 | -3.24 |
| BARMING WARD | 2360 | 18,507 | 1.85 | 7,842 | 0.47 | 1.38 | 18,170 | 1.82 | 7,699 | 1.65 | 0.17 | 57,373 | 5.74 | 24,311 | 15.34 | -9.60 | 1,276 | 0.13 | 541 | 0.59 | -0.46 | 0 | 0.00 | 0 | 3.78 | -3.78 |
| BEARSTED WARD | 8250 | 8,474 | 0.85 | 1,027 | 1.65 | -0.80 | 25,730 | 2.57 | 3,119 | 5.78 | -3.20 | 109,029 | 10.90 | 13,216 | 53.63 | -42.72 | 809 | 0.08 | 98 | 2.06 | -1.98 | 23,790 | 2.38 | 2884 | 13.20 | -10.82 |
| BOUGHTON MONCHELSE | 2680 | 15,297 | 1.53 | 5,708 | 0.54 | 0.99 | 77,556 | 7.76 | 28,939 | 1.88 | 5.88 | 223,629 | 22.36 | 83,444 | 17.42 | 4.94 | 1,077 | 0.11 | 402 | 0.67 | -0.56 | 15,230 | 1.52 | 5683 | 4.29 | -2.77 |
| BOXLEY WARD | 8500 | 8,196 | 0.82 | 964 | 1.70 | -0.88 | 93,343 | 9.33 | 10,982 | 5.95 | 3.38 | 4,567,731 | 456.77 | 537,380 | 55.25 | 401.52 | 6,799 | 0.68 | 800 | 2.13 | -1.45 | 599,791 | 59.98 | 70564 | 13.60 | 46.38 |
| BRIDGE WARD | 5920 | 32,596 | 3.26 | 5,506 | 1.18 | 2.08 | 50,479 | 5.05 | 8,527 | 4.14 | 0.90 | 40,536 | 4.05 | 6,847 | 38.48 | -34.43 | 3,497 | 0.35 | 591 | 1.48 | -1.13 | 0 | 0.00 | 0 | 9.47 | -9.47 |
| COXHEATH AND HUNTON | 3680 | 18,912 | 1.89 | 5,139 | 0.74 | 1.16 | 75,828 | 7.58 | 20,605 | 2.58 | 5.01 | 423,867 | 42.39 | 115,181 | 23.92 | 18.47 | 5,327 | 0.53 | 1,448 | 0.92 | -0.39 | 17,197 | 1.72 | 4673 | 5.89 | -4.17 |
| DETLING AND THURNHALL | 3060 | 6,500 | 0.65 | 2,124 | 0.61 | 0.04 | 14,446 | 1.44 | 4,721 | 2.14 | -0.70 | 731,201 | 73.12 | 238,955 | 19.89 | 53.23 | 1,354 | 0.14 | 442 | 0.77 | -0.63 | 0 | 0.00 | 0 | 4.90 | -4.90 |
| DOWNSWOOD AND OTHER | 2800 | 8,217 | 0.82 | 2,935 | 0.56 | 0.26 | 37,665 | 3.77 | 13,452 | 1.96 | 1.81 | 70,450 | 7.05 | 25,161 | 18.20 | -11.16 | 3,981 | 0.40 | 1,422 | 0.70 | -0.30 | 8,001 | 0.80 | 2858 | 4.48 | -3.68 |
| EAST WARD | 8650 | 1,154 | 0.12 | 133 | 1.73 | -1.61 | 94,067 | 9.41 | 10,875 | 6.06 | 3.35 | 38,808 | 3.88 | 4,486 | 56.23 | -52.34 | 7,774 | 0.78 | 899 | 2.16 | -1.39 | 9,882 | 0.99 | 1142 | 13.84 | -12.85 |
| FANT WARD | 9860 | 45,165 | 4.52 | 4,581 | 1.97 | 2.54 | 26,012 | 2.60 | 2,638 | 6.90 | -4.30 | 39,269 | 3.93 | 3,983 | 64.09 | -60.16 | 6,130 | 0.61 | 622 | 2.47 | -1.85 | 17,094 | 1.71 | 1734 | 15.78 | -14.07 |
| HARRIETSHAM AND LENHAM | 5520 | 9,405 | 0.94 | 1,704 | 1.10 | -0.16 | 125,954 | 12.60 | 22,818 | 3.86 | 8.73 | 356,673 | 35.67 | 64,615 | 35.88 | -0.21 | 4,377 | 0.44 | 793 | 1.38 | -0.94 | 18,168 | 1.82 | 3291 | 8.83 | -7.02 |
| HEADCORN WARD | 5260 | 7,758 | 0.78 | 1,475 | 1.05 | -0.28 | 56,788 | 5.68 | 10,796 | 3.68 | 2.00 | 22,682 | 2.27 | 4,312 | 34.19 | -31.92 | 2,898 | 0.29 | 551 | 1.32 | -1.03 | 10,928 | 1.09 | 2078 | 8.42 | -7.32 |
| HEATH WARD | 5970 | 2,035 | 0.20 | 341 | 1.19 | -0.99 | 54,365 | 5.44 | 9,106 | 4.18 | 1.26 | 24,382 | 2.44 | 4,084 | 38.81 | -36.37 | 26,183 | 2.62 | 4,386 | 1.49 | 1.13 | 6,679 | 0.67 | 1119 | 9.55 | -8.88 |
| HIGH STREET WARD | 9880 | 6,660 | 0.67 | 674 | 1.98 | -1.31 | 33,521 | 3.35 | 3,393 | 6.92 | -3.56 | 20,669 | 2.07 | 2,092 | 64.22 | -62.15 | 2,469 | 0.25 | 250 | 2.47 | -2.22 | 10,652 | 1.07 | 1078 | 15.81 | -14.74 |
| LEEDS WARD | 2430 | 0 | 0.00 | 0 | 0.49 | -0.49 | 14,893 | 1.49 | 6,129 | 1.70 | -0.21 | 14,353 | 1.44 | 5,907 | 15.80 | -14.36 | 1,213 | 0.12 | 499 | 0.61 | -0.49 | 20,703 | 2.07 | 8520 | 3.89 | -1.82 |
| LOOSE WARD | 2320 | 22,547 | 2.25 | 9,719 | 0.46 | 1.79 | 23,769 | 2.38 | 10,245 | 1.62 | 0.75 | 2,077 | 0.21 | 895 | 15.08 | -14.87 | 813 | 0.08 | 350 | 0.58 | -0.50 | 0 | 0.00 | 0 | 3.71 | -3.71 |
| MARDEN AND YALDING WARD | 7810 | 12,034 | 1.20 | 1,541 | 1.56 | -0.36 | 112,541 | 11.25 | 14,410 | 5.47 | 5.79 | 226,466 | 22.65 | 28,997 | 50.77 | -28.12 | 4,269 | 0.43 | 547 | 1.95 | -1.53 | 52,661 | 5.27 | 6743 | 12.50 | -7.23 |
| NORTH DOWNS WARD | 2440 | 0 | 0.00 | 0 | 0.49 | -0.49 | 36,890 | 3.69 | 15,119 | 1.71 | 1.98 | 782,057 | 78.21 | 320,515 | 15.86 | 62.35 | 3,175 | 0.32 | 1,301 | 0.61 | -0.29 | 5,814 | 0.58 | 2383 | 3.90 | -3.32 |
| NORTH WARD | 9900 | 43,840 | 4.38 | 4,428 | 1.98 | 2.40 | 14,169 | 1.42 | 1,431 | 6.93 | -5.51 | 99,536 | 9.95 | 10,054 | 64.35 | -54.40 | 5,071 | 0.51 | 512 | 2.48 | -1.97 | 0 | 0.00 | 0 | 15.84 | -15.84 |
| PARK WOOD WARD | 7040 | 0 | 0.00 | 0 | 1.41 | -1.41 | 52,486 | 5.25 | 7,455 | 4.93 | 0.32 | 33,361 | 3.34 | 4,739 | 45.76 | -42.42 | 4,322 | 0.43 | 614 | 1.76 | -1.33 | 16,072 | 1.61 | 2283 | 11.26 | -9.66 |
| SHEPWAY NORTH WARD | 9030 | 3,299 | 0.33 | 365 | 1.81 | -1.48 | 67,473 | 6.75 | 7,472 | 6.32 | 0.43 | 1,727,765 | 172.78 | 191,336 | 58.70 | 114.08 | 5,920 | 0.59 | 656 | 2.26 | -1.67 | 144,987 | 14.50 | 16056 | 14.45 | 0.05 |
| SHEPWAY SOUTH WARD | 5860 | 0 | 0.00 | 0 | 1.17 | -1.17 | 49,063 | 4.91 | 8,373 | 4.10 | 0.80 | 77,220 | 7.72 | 13,177 | 38.09 | -30.37 | 4,615 | 0.46 | 788 | 1.47 | -1.00 | 0 | 0.00 | 0 | 9.38 | -9.38 |
| SOUTH WARD | 8650 | 24,338 | 2.43 | 2,814 | 1.73 | 0.70 | 96,428 | 9.64 | 11,148 | 6.06 | 3.59 | 78,883 | 7.89 | 9,119 | 56.23 | -48.34 | 5,804 | 0.58 | 671 | 2.16 | -1.58 | 36,515 | 3.65 | 4221 | 13.84 | -10.19 |
| STAPLEHURST WARD | 5960 | 0 | 0.00 | 0 | 1.19 | -1.19 | 33,812 | 3.38 | 5,673 | 4.17 | -0.79 | 15,825 | 1.58 | 2,655 | 38.74 | -37.16 | 3,041 | 0.30 | 510 | 1.49 | -1.19 | 40,537 | 4.05 | 6802 | 9.54 | -5.48 |
| SUTTON VALENCE AND LAMBLE | 2860 | 21,965 | 2.20 | 7,680 | 0.57 | 1.62 | 62,629 | 6.26 | 21,898 | 2.00 | 4.26 | 99,720 | 9.97 | 34,867 | 18.59 | -8.62 | 2,243 | 0.22 | 784 | 0.72 | -0.49 | 1,560 | 0.16 | 545 | 4.58 | -4.42 |
| | 153620 | 316,899 | | | | | 1,395,889 | | | | | 9,956,196 | | | | 127,353 | | | 1,134,731 | | | | | 12,931,068 | | |
| | | | | | | | | | | | | 1293,1068 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

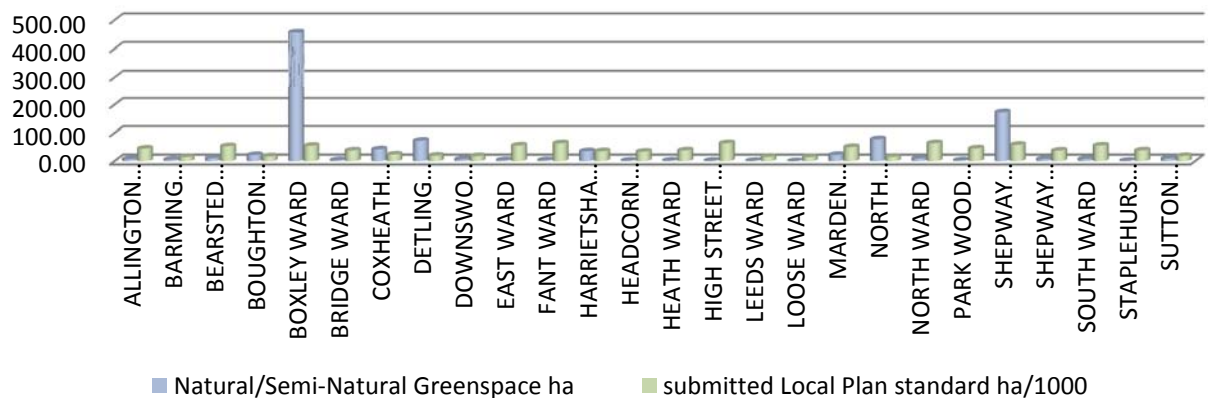
Amenity Greenspace



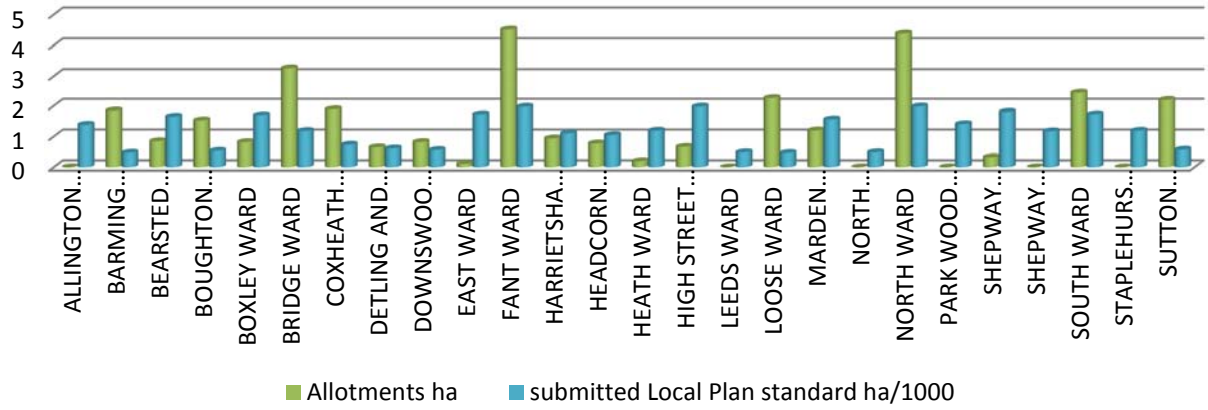
Children's Play Space



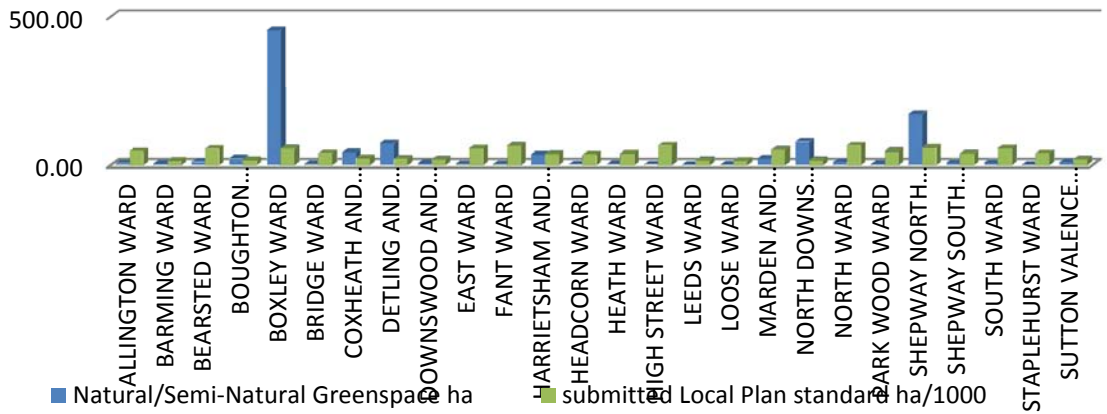
Natural/Semi-natural Greenspace



Allotments



Outdoor sports facilities




Comparative table of Open Space identifying deficiencies by place

| | Amenity Green Space Provision | Children's Play Space Provision | Natural/ Semi Natural Greenspace Provision | Allotments Provision | Outdoor sports facilities Provision |
|---|---|--|--|--|---|
| Open Spaces Quality Audit Survey Results | Very Good | Fair/Poor | Good | NA | Very poor |
| | Amenity Green Spaces Deficiencies | Children's Play Space Deficiencies | Natural/ Semi Natural Greenspace Deficiencies | Allotments Deficiencies | Outdoor sports facilities Deficiencies |
| Assessment against New (2016 Local Plan) Standards | North, Fant, High Street and Bearsted wards in Maidstone urban area | Maidstone urban area & Marden, Staplehurst & Headcorn | Maidstone urban area & Staplehurst, Headcorn & Marden | East, Shepway north, Park Wood, Allington, High Street & Shepway wards in Maidstone urban area & Staplehurst | All apart from Shepway north & Boxley |
| Accessibility Mapping | Parts of Allington & North Wards in Maidstone Urban Area | Bearsted (N & S of A20) South Loose (E & W of A229) Maidstone Town Centre & Sutton Valance | Lenham, Headcorn, Coxheath, Headcorn, Staplehurst, Marden & Sutton Valence | Parkwood Bearstead Allington Staplehurst Marden Harrietsham Coxheath Staplehurst | Langley Headcorn Staplehurst |

- 4.54. Using the qualitative information from the Open Spaces Quality Audit, analysing the Accessibility Maps and the quantitative analysis utilising the new (Local Plan 2016) standards shows the following current open space deficiencies by place/ward:
- 4.55. **Amenity Green Space**
Current deficiency within Maidstone - North, Fant, High Street, Bearsted, Allington and North Wards
- 4.56. **Children's Play Space**
Considered as, at best ,fair in most of the borough but deficient in the urban area of Maidstone and, possibly, Marden, Staplehurst, Headcorn and Sutton Valance.
- 4.57. **Natural/Semi natural Greenspace**
Whilst considered as good in general, deficient in the urban area of Maidstone and Staplehurst, Headcorn and Marden and, possibly, Lenham, Coxheath and Sutton Valence.
- 4.58. **Allotments**
Deficient in most of the Maidstone urban area and Staplehurst.
- 4.59. **Outdoor Sports Facilities**
Considered as very poor with indications of deficiencies in most of the borough but will be better informed by the Playing Pitches Strategy (2016/17).

Blue infrastructure: rivers and waterbodies

- 4.60. With five main rivers amounting to approximately 70km in length Maidstone Borough has an extensive network of blue infrastructure providing a distinctive landscape and benefits for people and wildlife, but it also has the risk of flooding. The main watercourse through the borough is the River Medway with major tributaries, the River Beult and the River Teise joining the Medway at Yalding, upstream of Maidstone town. The River Lesser Teise, River Len and River Loose are also tributaries of the River Medway. In addition, the Great Stour is a watercourse within the Maidstone Borough boundary under riparian ownership and is part of the Kentish Stour catchment area. The source of the Great Stour is located near Lenham. The watercourse flows from the east of Lenham before continuing to flow south east out of the Borough towards Charing. Only a short reach of the river, approximately 5 km, is within Maidstone Borough.
- 4.61. The Medway Valley is the largest river catchment in the borough (and indeed the whole of Kent) and the River Medway as the principal river is navigable over all of its length through the borough¹⁷. It is an example of a classic lowland river and cuts through the Greensand Ridge beyond Yalding and reaches its tidal limit at Allington Lock, before cutting through the chalk and flowing northwards to the Rochester estuary. The River Medway is a visitor attraction, which provides an attractive landscape over most of its length and public access is generally well served by the towpath. Extensive riverside walks (right) and moorings have been created including within Maidstone town centre. Around Allington there are a number of attractions - the fine, rolling and wooded countryside, the Listed Allington Castle, the locks, a marina, a large public house, riverside walks and the Museum of Kent Life. Upstream from Maidstone town there are picturesque medieval bridges at East Farleigh, Teston and Yalding. A picnic area is provided at Teston with walks in adjoining meadows, and a focal point at a river lock. A continuous towpath runs along the riverbank, and in addition to the picnic area at Teston there is a substantial area of meadowland available for informal public recreation at Yalding, called The Lees.
- 
- 4.62. As with all rivers, the River Medway and its tributaries give rise to flooding following heavy rainfall. Normal levels can be controlled by a number of locks and sluices as far upstream as Tonbridge but these do not provide any form of flood management. The Leigh Flood Storage Reservoir upstream from Tonbridge is operated to reduce flood flows through Tonbridge Town Centre. However, this benefit reduces with distance downstream owing to contributory inflows from the tributaries. Therefore, much of the Medway floodplain through the borough of Maidstone is undefended against flooding.

¹⁷ Maidstone Borough Strategic Flood Risk Assessment, 2008

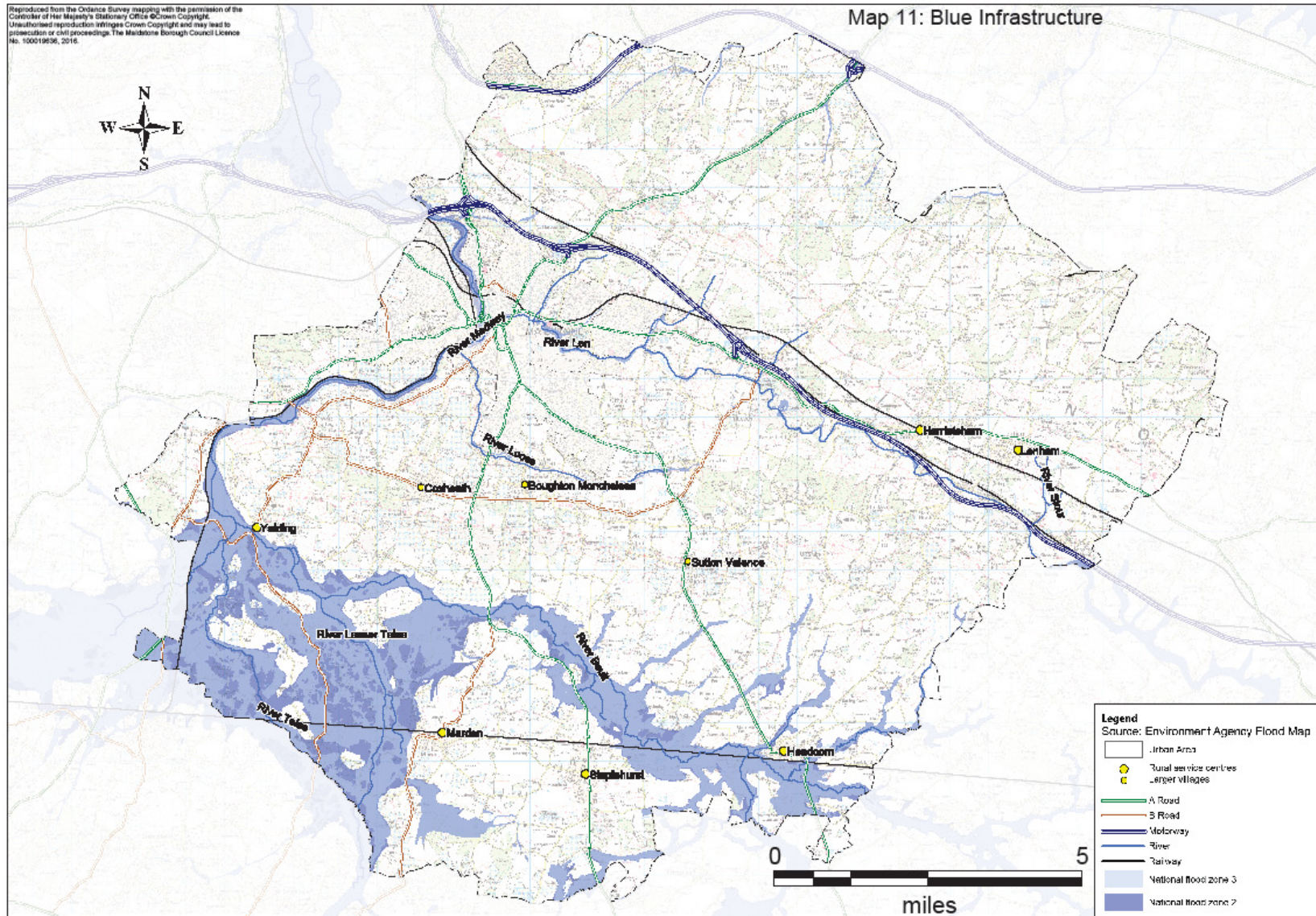
- 4.63. Map11 shows the extent of the functional floodplain including the predicted climate change influence.



- 4.64. A mixture of urban, parkland, agricultural and recreational sites make up the habitats across the Middle Medway Catchment. Along the length of the river and streams in the catchment there are several issues, which prevent them from filling their full potential for wildlife, including barriers to fish migration (such as locks and weirs) and pollution. The Environment Agency have recently installed a fish pass at Teston lock and have plans for another one at East Farleigh (subject to funding)

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Map 11: Blue Infrastructure



- 4.65. The River Len flows from headwaters between Lenham and Harrietsham into the Medway where it forms an open pond, originally a mill pond potentially dating from the Medieval Period when it would have formed part of the Archbishops Palace complex. The River Len is well known for the numerous mills which used the healthy flow of the river during the Medieval and Post Medieval periods and perhaps earlier. In these places, the narrow waters of the Len form attractive mill ponds with a wide array of water fowl including the unusual black swans at Leeds Castle. Along the length of the River Len to the east of the town there is a central band of mature broadleaved woodland and an area of ancient woodland to the east; both designated as Local Wildlife Sites. This strip of habitat connects well with more open sections to the east and, in conjunction with Mote Park, provides a potential corridor for wildlife movement between the town centre and the rural areas to the east. The River Len meanders through Mote Park beneath ragstone footbridges and a section of the River to the west of Mote Park has been designated as the River Len Local Nature Reserve due to its varied and abundant flora and fauna including water vole, Desmoulin's whorl snail and white legged damselfly. Public access to the River is limited beyond the town and Mote Park.
- 4.66. The Loose Stream is a small tributary of the Medway, which rises near Langley and flows through the Parishes of Boughton Monchelsea, Loose and Tovil before joining the River Medway. The Loose Valley Conservation Area extending some two miles in length was designated due to the heritage value of the numerous mills and associated structures (ponds, mill races etc) that harnessed the Loose stream for power over several hundred years. Riparian vegetation lines the waterways and provides a corridor of wildlife interest. With 8.5ha of the Loose Valley owned and managed by a voluntary organisation, the Loose Amenities Association, it is also a much valued landscape and a recreational amenity for local people.
- 4.67. The Rivers Beult and Teise rise from the east and south of the borough respectively merging and joining the Upper Medway near Yalding (below) prior to continuing as the River Medway through Maidstone and on to the Medway Towns before issuing into the Thames Estuary.



- 4.68. The River Teise and the Lesser Teise are narrow and their routes are defined by native vegetation. The rivers are not widely visible although tree belts and ditches provide a coherent habitat network. Large swathes of intensively farmed arable land have led to many ditches being filled with algae from fertiliser runoff. The Bewl Water reservoir management system at times adversely impacts on the functioning of the river. The River Beult flows for most of its length over Wealden Clay which has greatly influenced its ecology (right). Being one of the few lowland clay rivers to retain much

of the flora and fauna of its habitat type the river was designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) in 1994. The rivers' designation was given partly for its diverse range of submerged and floating channel vegetation and due to the presence of two nationally scarce invertebrates as well as a general abundance of other rarer invertebrates such as dragonflies. The river is publicly accessible along significant stretches although there is not a continuous riverside footpath. Fishing is popular on the river with a variety of species caught and observed on a regular basis.

Sustainable movement links

- 4.69. The borough has an extensive network of publicly accessible paths and tracks, including many popular public footpaths close to Maidstone town and the villages, as well as popular long distance walks such as the North Downs Way, the Medway Valley Walk, the Stour Valley Walk and the Greensand Way along the Greensand Ridge. The urban area also has a comprehensive, well-used network of paths that link neighbourhoods with work and leisure.

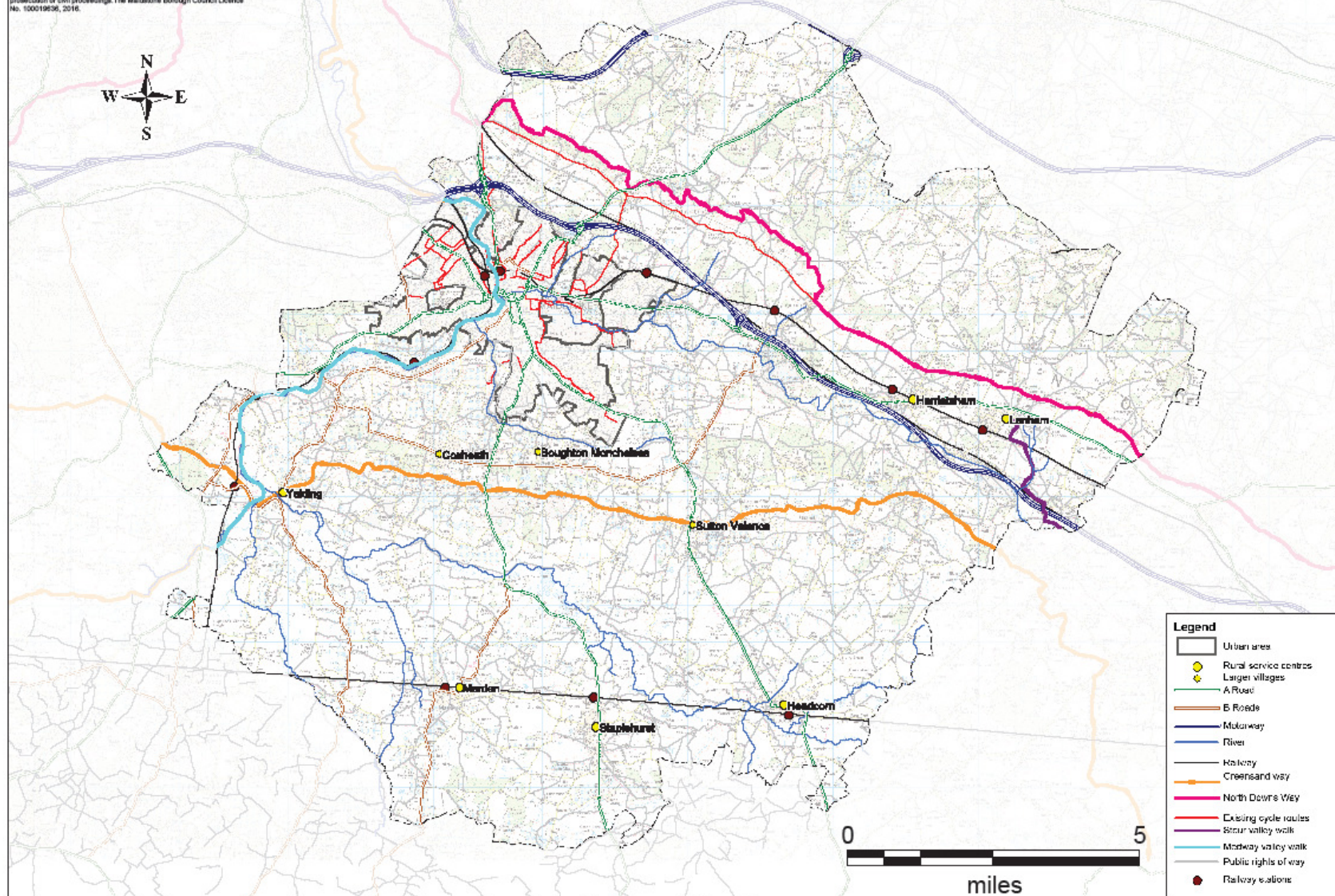


- 4.70. National Route 17 of the National Cycle Network connects Rochester, via Maidstone and Ashford, to join with National Route 2 on the South coast between Folkestone and Lydd following the line of the North Downs Way National Trail. Maidstone also has a Regional Route (RR20) for cyclists which originates in the town centre and extends along the A20 London Road into Tonbridge and Malling. A section of the route within Maidstone Borough is traffic free and provides good linkages to local schools in the residential area of Allington. There is also a recently established route leading from the town centre to Detling village, where it connects to the Pilgrims Way Cycle Route in the North Downs. This provides an excellent cross-district cycling amenity for residents of Maidstone and beyond.
- 4.71.** Many of these routes are legally protected Public Rights of Way and Kent County Council manages a larger rights of way network than any other local authority¹⁸. Map 12 shows the main route.

¹⁸ Countryside and Coastal Access Improvement Plan, Draft April 2013

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Map 12- Sustainable movement links



Community involvement and education

- 4.72. Local people are best placed to help decide what is needed in their local environment. Greater community involvement in green space management has led to numerous improvements to green infrastructure across the borough, in many cases generating more active positive use of the space. It also reduces a source of conflict between people and the council or other maintenance providers, in relation to the ongoing maintenance of green infrastructure. Mote Park, Clare Park and South Park all have active Friends groups who get involved in park management and events.
- 4.73.** Natural environments that are connected to local communities can provide a range of educational opportunities and assist in reconnecting society with the natural environment. The Maidstone countryside, and the green and blue spaces within its towns, are a fantastic educational resource not just about the natural world, but all aspects of the school curriculum from history to maths. Communities tend to be particularly keen to understand, protect and utilise their own local heritage assets. Local community archaeology projects can appeal to schools, families, young, old and those who like working at home or being out in the countryside. This broad community appeal can really help enhance the awareness, understanding and appreciation of the borough, its heritage and distinctive character. Organisations such as Medway Valley Partnership and the Kent Wildlife Trust offer a wide range of opportunities to schools and the wider public to get involved in educational events, talks and hands on practical tasks. Volunteering on environmental projects helps people gain valuable skills, giving increased confidence and potentially helping them in gaining employment.

Key issues

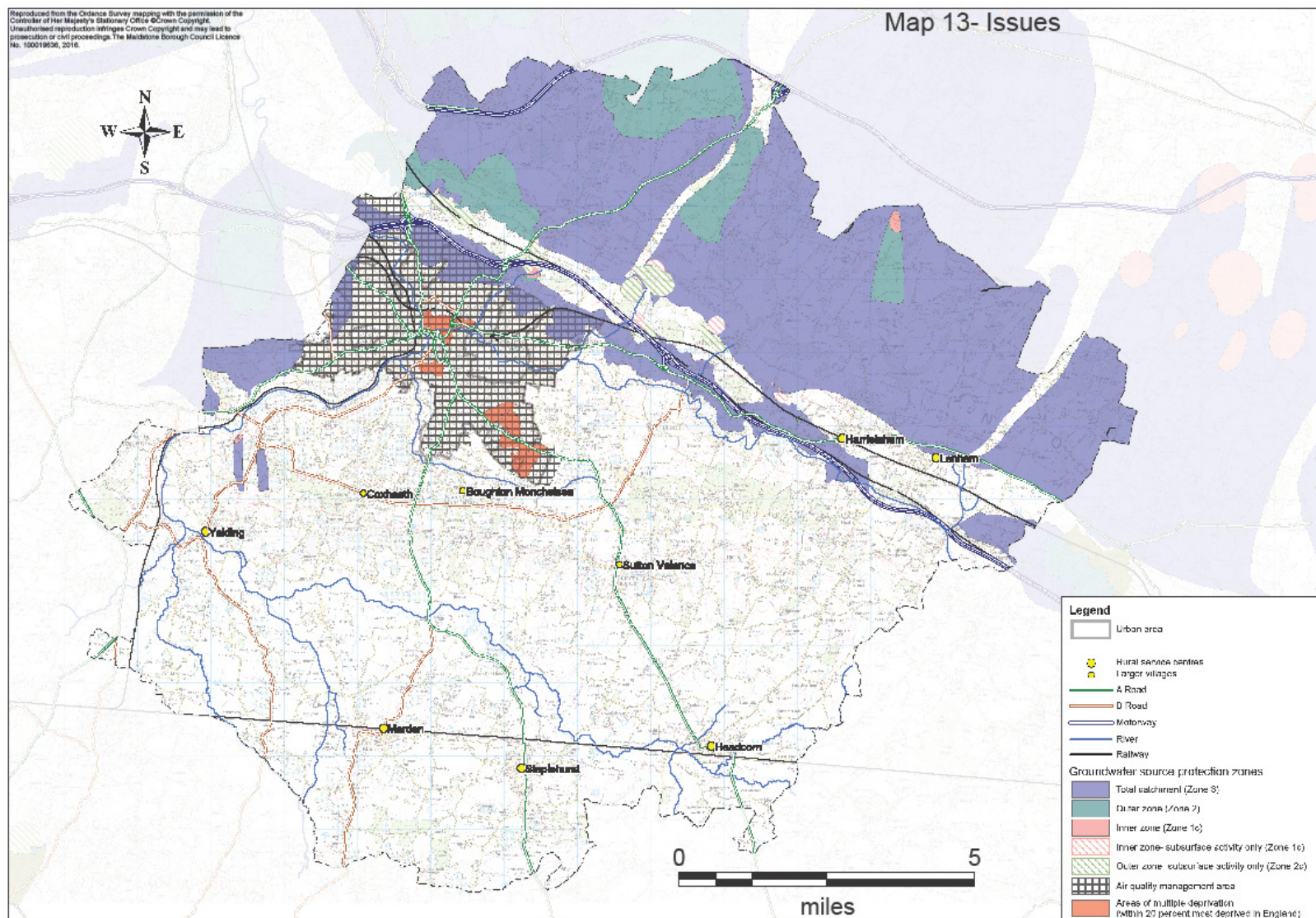
The impact of climate change

- 4.74. Climate change is increasingly likely to affect everyone with hotter, drier summers, wetter, milder winters and the number and extent of storms, floods and heat waves increasing. In Maidstone borough climate change is a particular challenge, especially the threat from extreme weather events. The borough suffered extensive flooding in 2000, and more recently in 2013/14, a heat wave in 2003, quickly followed by a two year drought. By 2020 Kent could be facing a 1.4°C temperature increase, 7% less rainfall in summer and more rainfall in winter. By 2050 the temperature could have risen by 2.8°C, and there could be 24% less rainfall in summer. To help reduce the impact of climate change, the borough must help achieve the national target to cut carbon dioxide emissions by 80% by 2050 and the Kent target of reducing greenhouse gas emissions (measured as CO₂ equivalent) to 60% below 1990 levels by 2030¹⁹.
- 4.75. The largest proportion of Maidstone Borough's carbon emissions comes from industrial and commercial activity with lesser but still significant emissions from transport and domestic energy use.
- 4.76. As one of the driest parts of England, coupled with high population density and household water use, there are significant pressures on water resources in Maidstone borough and the wider Kent area which affect both the water environment and water supplies. Over the next few decades, there will be increasing pressures from the rising population and associated development. Climate change could have a major impact on the water that will be available for consumption²⁰. All rivers and streams in the area are under increasing threat from the pressures of abstraction, river channel modifications and management, decreases in water quality, development, agriculture and climate change. Aquifer protection zones have been designated in the north and east of the area

¹⁹ Growing the Garden of England: A strategy for environment and economy in Kent, Kent Forum, July 2011

²⁰ The state of water in Kent, Kent Water Summit, Environment Agency, June 2012

Map 13- Issues



- 4.77. The majority of flood risk from watercourses within the borough is from fluvial flooding. In the vicinity of Allington there is also a risk of tidal flooding . Map 11 shows the extent of the functional floodplain taking into account climate change projections. Some areas of Maidstone town are within the functional floodplain of the River Medway, River Len, River Loose and their tributaries and are therefore at risk from frequent flooding. Historically the centre of Maidstone has flooded both in the November 1960 and September 1968 floods and 70 people were also affected by the floods in Maidstone in October 2000.
- 4.78. While fluvial flood risk does form a significant component of flood risk within the borough, there are also a high number of incidents of surface water flooding. Increased housing provision will also put a strain on water resources and further urbanisation if carried out without due care could lead to increased run off and hence flooding. New developments will have to be more robust, and designed to manage water effectively and provide shade. The Strategic Flood Risk Assessment highlights the importance of the installation and maintenance of adequate drainage or sustainable urban drainage (SUDs), particularly when considering the planning of new development (right). Well designed and constructed sustainable drainage infrastructure can play a major part in improving green and blue infrastructure with benefits in terms of water resources, water quality, enhanced biodiversity and public amenity and reduced flood risk. Conversely, poorly designed drainage networks can increase flood risk and reduce water quality, incurring long term financial damages.



- 4.79. Changing climatic conditions will also affect the ability of wildlife to survive locally and is also likely to result in species shifting their geographical distribution from parts of Europe, like the Mediterranean into the Southeast. Both of these scenarios mean that planning co-ordinated conservation effort across the Southeast and connected regions will play an important factor in the success to conserve biodiversity from a both a local and global perspective. BRANCH a project to examine the effects of climate change on biodiversity in Kent reported that there is an urgent need to ensure greater connectivity of habitats across Kent to ensure that species shifting geographical distributions due to climate change affects are possible.

Gaps in the connectivity of green and blue infrastructure resources and inequalities in accessibility to public open space

- 4.80. Gaps in provision of green and blue infrastructure relate to gaps in green corridors as well as missing links between existing spaces. There is a relative lack of green and blue infrastructure within the more densely built up area of Maidstone's town centre. Although Maidstone benefits from relatively good connectivity in terms of road and rail, the borough suffers from high levels of traffic which causes congestion problems, particularly in the town centre. This impacts on the economy and also has a negative impact upon air quality which can be damaging to the health of local people. Public consultation revealed that a large proportion of Maidstone's population view the transport system and particularly the accessibility of public transport, as inadequate. Maidstone also has the highest number of casualties (people killed or seriously injured) of any district in Kent²¹. More sustainable forms of travel on footpaths and cycleways (below) provide the opportunity for green corridors and provide an alternative to the car. However, although there is an extensive public rights of way network, it is fragmented and limited in some areas, such as along the Medway tributary rivers and along the 'green wedges' from the town centre.



²¹ Maidstone 2020. The Sustainable Community Strategy for Maidstone Borough 2009-2020



- 4.81. Access to nature on an everyday basis helps to secure quality of life for all. This is widely recognised by both the public and voluntary sectors with programmes to encourage participation such as walk4life, organised by Walk England and visit woods, an online database coordinated by the Woodland Trust for finding woods to visit throughout England. The Maidstone group of the 'Ramblers' is a local organisation which promotes walking and helps Kent County Council with the upkeep of the footpath network. Provision of places to access nature is important for giving everyone the opportunity to take advantage of the benefits that nature provides. There is substantial evidence that demonstrates the value of green spaces and contact with nature for improving mental well-being and physical health. Natural England's recommended Accessible Natural Greenspace Standard (ANGSt) which has been adopted by the Borough Council, recommends that people live within 300m of a 2ha natural greenspace, 2km of a 20ha natural greenspace and 5km of a 100ha natural green space. Map 8 shows there are significant areas across the rural parts of the Borough in particular around the settlements of Headcorn, Marden and Staplehurst where people do not have convenient access to publicly accessible natural greenspace. Although the natural environment of the countryside provides a resource for able-bodied people in these rural areas, local, accessible natural green space should be available close to where people live for those less able.
- 4.82. A well connected ecological network also helps wildlife move, feed, disperse, migrate and reproduce while delivering many ecosystem services such as improved health and wellbeing, mitigating climate change, crop pollination for food production and local environmental quality. Through environmental stewardship schemes run by Natural England and the Forestry Commission a significant area of the borough is currently managed to promote biodiversity.
- 4.83. Changes in agricultural practices have a major influence on both habitats and species. There has been a trend towards predominantly arable agriculture, loss of hedgerows, habitat fragmentation, land drainage, improvement of grassland and widespread use of pesticides, herbicides and fertilisers – all of which decrease biodiversity on

farmland. The decline of markets for woodland products has led to the abandonment of traditional woodland management such as coppicing and pollarding allowing dense undergrowth to shade out herbaceous species including spring flowers. Replanting with non-native tree species, particularly conifers, also has a detrimental effect on the ground flora by preventing sunlight reaching the woodland floor.



- 4.84. There is a continuing pressure for expansion of the urban areas to meet economic and social needs to build on open areas, such as gardens, school fields, allotments, open spaces and on urban fringes, which, if not managed carefully through the planning process, can lead to a loss of urban wildlife habitats and fragmentation. Road improvements and new roads have direct effects on habitats by causing disturbance to, or loss of, roadside verges, hedgerows, trees, ditches and farmland. Large numbers of street trees have been lost across Maidstone Borough to road widening, cable damage, wind-blow and disease. Infilling within and between rural settlements is also a threat to habitats such as unimproved pastures, wetlands and scrub.
- 4.85. Careful consideration is required through the planning process to ensure that increased light pollution from urban expansion does not impact on the biodiversity of local green and blue infrastructure. Adverse effects can potentially include causing migratory birds to collide with lit buildings, false dawns which disrupt bird behaviour, moth deaths, and the disruption of tree and plant biological mechanisms that are controlled by day length.
- 4.86. Noise pollution is also increased through urban expansion and can cause stress to animals, interfere with delicate predator-prey interactions, and cause detrimental effects on mating behaviour of animals. Such considerations need to be addressed through ecological appraisals as part of the planning application process.

Landscape and townscape quality

- 4.87. The borough is over 90% rural in nature, the rich and varied landscape provides a distinctive and in many cases attractive setting to the towns and other settlements.



However, landscape character is not static. For example, many farming landscapes are under pressure due to intensification of arable cultivation. The use of polytunnels for example can impact on landscape character, as well as biodiversity and flooding. Solar panels can have significant impact on landscapes. Traditional orchards of large trees with understorey grazing are difficult and uneconomic to manage and are being grubbed or replaced by smaller fruit trees grown in closely spaced, parallel rows (above). Their greater uniformity and more intensive management have reduced the associated wildlife and landscape value of these orchards although they continue to provide a modern and important link to a historic landscape component. Nevertheless, there are still numerous areas of landscape with a well-developed traditional patchwork of fruit fields, shelterbelts and woodlands that are worthy of conservation.

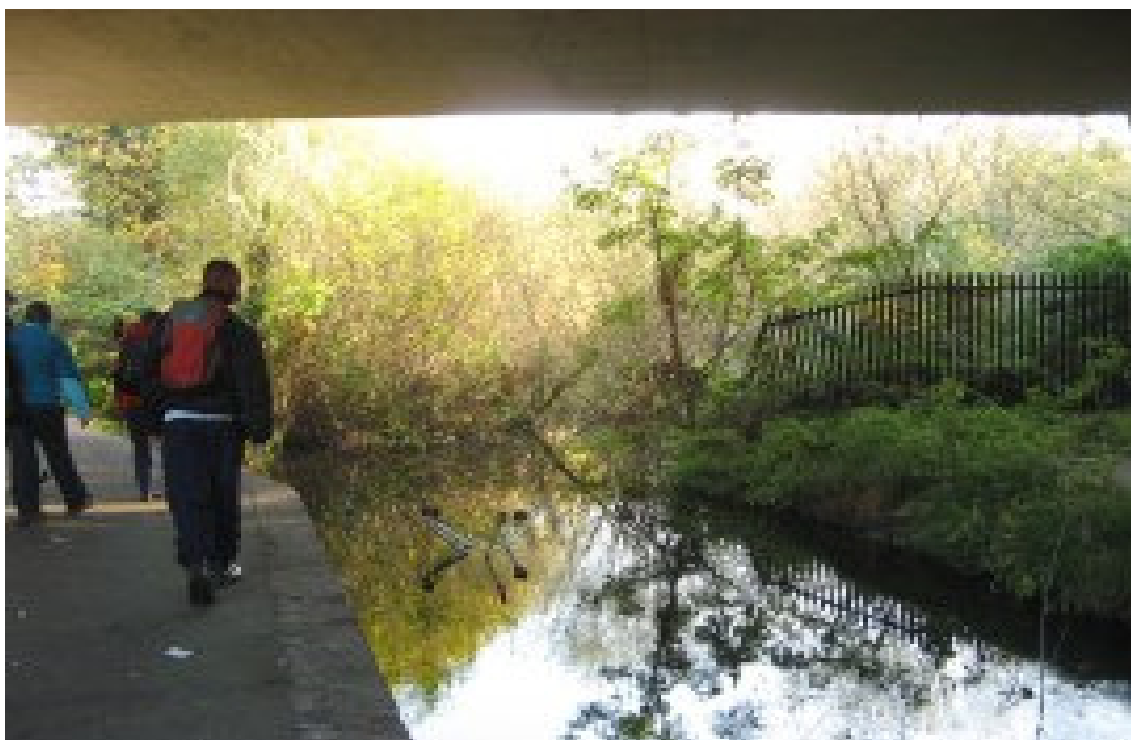
- 4.88. Whilst it is important to retain pattern and diversity in the landscape to ensure that character and local distinctiveness are maintained, this is not necessarily about keeping the landscape as it is but more about preventing everywhere becoming the same. We need to ensure that landscapes are visually satisfying and give enjoyment to those who visit them, and those who live and work in them. We also need to ensure that the cultural heritage embodied in the landscape is not lost.
- 4.89. Maidstone's historic environment is a fundamental part of the borough's economic wealth and social well-being, and a strong driver of tourism in the area, the benefits of which are far-reaching. This rich historical resource is very vulnerable to damage and loss from pressure for development and agricultural intensification and it is essential to ensure historic assets are protected and remain robust and viable.
- 4.90. The 2012 Maidstone Landscape Character Assessment identified 58 landscape character areas at the borough scale and a further 51 landscape character areas nested within the borough wide areas at the detailed level. Smaller areas were also assessed around the urban fringe of Maidstone. The condition and sensitivity of each of these areas was analysed. The assessment of condition evaluated the pattern of the landscape and the presence of incongruous features on the unity of the landscape. It also evaluated how well the landscape functions as a habitat for flora and fauna and the condition of cultural or 'man-made' elements such as enclosure, built elements and roads. Sensitivity is a measure of the ability of a landscape to accept change without

causing irreparable damage to the essential fabric and distinctiveness of that landscape. The analysis resulted in a matrix based on condition and sensitivity which aims to assist in the direction of any policy that might be applied to the land.

- 4.91. The pressure for expansion of the urban areas to meet economic and social needs if not managed carefully through the planning process could lead to a loss of the borough's most valued and sensitive landscape.

Water and air quality

- 4.92. Good air and water quality are critically important to providing the basic life support system that we all depend upon. The availability and quality of water is becoming a major issue. Increased abstraction from aquifers causes reduced water levels in many wetlands. Increased urban development, requiring additional water supplies, puts mounting pressure on the water resource. Agriculture, industry and residential areas all produce pollutants which can affect the quality of wetlands, open water bodies and flowing waters. Nutrient enrichment, or eutrophication, stimulates the growth of aquatic algae to the detriment of other wetland and aquatic plants. Bacterial growth also reduces the amount of oxygen available to fish and other aquatic animals. The ecological status of the River Medway is listed in the Thames River Basin District Management Plan as (Moderate), the River Beult (Poor), the River Teise and Lesser Teise (Moderate) and the River Len (below) (Bad)²².



- 4.93. On the River Beult, although designated as a SSSI for its diverse range of submerged and floating channel vegetation and the presence of two nationally scarce invertebrates as well as a general abundance of other rarer invertebrates such as dragonflies, canalisation has reduced riparian diversity and the many structures which bridge the river are barriers to fish migration in the upper system. These structures have also impounded the river often creating a very slow flowing system which has increased siltation. Pollution such as phosphates and nitrates are also an issue and in areas where pollution flows over riparian areas the vegetation can be dominated by more competitive species such as nettle and thistle. Non-native invasive flora are also issues on the Lower Beult and the catchment generally. The River Beult catchment is identified by Natural England as a catchment sensitive farming priority area. The Catchment Sensitive Farming initiative encourages farming communities to manage

²² River Basin Management Plan Thames River Basin District , Defra and Environment Agency, 2009

risks of runoff and leaching in order to reduce sediment, pesticide, nutrient and faecal matter, losses to water from yards and fields.

- 4.94. Some of the domestic water supply in the Borough is abstracted from underground and Source Protection Zones are in place to protect vulnerable groundwater areas (see Map 13). These zones show the risk of contamination from any activities that might cause pollution in the area. The 'Inner Zone' is defined by the 50 day travel time from any point below the water table to the source, the 'Outer Zone' is defined by the 400 day travel time from any point below the water table to the source and the 'Total Catchment' is defined as the area around a source within which all groundwater recharge is presumed to be discharged at the source.
- 4.95. Commuting by car from rural settlements to work in towns and cities is increasing, and the amount of freight carried by road has never been higher. This leads to increasing pressure to build new roads and improve existing ones. Vehicles directly contribute to air, noise, and water pollution. Air quality particularly that related to road transport and congestion is a significant issue²³. Maidstone's town centre, key road junctions and the M20 are all subject to poor air quality. Three new hotspots for the road vehicle pollutant Nitrogen Dioxide (NO₂) have been identified in Maidstone's urban area, in addition to the existing Air Quality Management Areas (AQMAs) in the Maidstone urban area and on the M20 between junctions 7 and 8 (see Map 13). NO₂ causes respiratory illnesses and possibly increases the risk of lung infections. Young children and people with asthma are the most sensitive to this pollutant.

Health inequalities

- 4.96. Life expectancy for men and women living in the borough is comparable with the regional average. However, life expectancy for men in the most deprived wards is five years below the borough average and for women is 2.4 years lower. Maidstone also has a higher estimated percentage of obese adults than the England average – at 26.5 per cent (24.2% nationally). Whilst the rate of adult participation in sport and recreation rate in Maidstone is above the average for England, it still only amounts to 22% of the adult population. Reception year children classified as obese is similar to the England average, but school aged children spending at least 3 hours a week on physical activity at school is 11.3% below the national average. This data suggests that there should be a focus on encouraging children to take more exercise²⁴.
- 4.97. Green spaces in the community can also provide significant social benefit. This enhanced 'social capital' includes social bridging features such as community networks, civic engagement, sense of belonging and equality, co-operation with others and trust in the community. GBI can also facilitate social bonding features, providing activities and environs in which families and friends can engage.
- 4.98. Quality affects how people perceive their local green space and therefore how often they visit. Evidence suggests that levels of social interaction can be directly influenced

²³ Maidstone 2020. The Sustainable Community Strategy for Maidstone Borough 2009-2020

²⁴ Maidstone 2020. The Sustainable Community Strategy for Maidstone Borough 2009-2020

by the availability of green space, particularly in urban areas. There is great opportunity to increase social interaction through schemes that encourage people to take part in improving their natural environment.

The need to accommodate development to meet the projected needs of the community

- 4.99. The quality of the environment impacts on people's quality of life, health and the attractiveness of an area to inward investment. With a significant number of new homes and businesses planned within the borough over the next 20 years, it will be crucial to consider the integration of high quality green and blue infrastructure from the outset. In addition, the pressure to use agricultural land for solar farms is increasing with potentially large impacts on landscape character and visual amenity.
- 4.100. Maidstone's towns and villages are shaped and made distinctive by the local landscape. The overall settlement pattern across the borough's countryside is characterised by a large number of small villages 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 separation²⁵. Elements of green and blue infrastructure can in practice serve more than one community (from adjoining settlements or beyond the Borough boundary regardless of where these may be located. If future settlements are to be places people want to live, planners and developers must continue to work with the

²⁵ Interim Approval of Maidstone Borough Local Plan Policies, 13 March 2013.

landscape – in deciding where to build and in how new developments are laid out. New developments can have a major impact on the landscape creating concern amongst existing residents but in finding solutions to the current housing shortage, it will not be possible to protect every greenfield site. What is needed is an understanding of habitats and the landscape condition, sensitivity and context and a strong landscape framework in place which maximises the multi-functional benefits that green and blue infrastructure can bring to new development.

5. Key Principles and Opportunities

- 5.1. The main purpose of the green and blue infrastructure strategy is to maximise the functionality and therefore the benefits of the resource in Maidstone Borough and to help deliver the council's wider community and planning objectives. Key principles and opportunities for conserving, improving and creating green and blue infrastructure have therefore been considered for each of the seven themes identified and these are shown below and summarised on Map 14

Mitigating and adapting to climate change



- 5.2. Climate change will increasingly affect water and land resources, and have an impact on biodiversity. The increasingly extreme weather it will bring affects everyone with more likelihood of flooding and periods of drought. Maidstone borough should contribute to national targets for reducing carbon dioxide emissions to mitigate climate change impacts in line with Growing the Garden of England: A strategy for environment and economy in Kent – 2011.

5.3. Key issues

- Pressures on the quantity and quality of water resources.

- Increased run off from development and potential impact on flooding.
- Additional heat and the need for shade.
- Connectivity of habitats may be insufficient to ensure species migration.
- Need to reduce carbon emissions.

5.4. How can the green and blue infrastructure help?

- Effective planning of the green and blue infrastructure network will help reduce the flood risk to people and property. Green spaces next to rivers and streams can create natural flood storage areas.
- Trees and other plants process rainwater (through interception, evaporation and transpiration) and sustainable drainage systems (SuDS) which include elements of green infrastructure like swales can help reduce the risk from surface water flooding particularly in high risk areas; a 10% increase in green infrastructure on a site can see a 5% reduction in surface water run off²⁶.
- Trees and woodlands help circulate air, provide shade and keep the built environment cool. Without them the urban area could be at least 5°C hotter²⁷ than the rural area making life more difficult particularly for younger and older people, who are more vulnerable to heat.
- Trees store carbon helping to reduce the impact of climate change.
- A well-connected green and blue network within and beyond the borough helps prevent species loss, allowing species to migrate or inhabit new areas and establish healthy ecosystems in a more suitable climate to survive.
- Creating networks of green spaces within new development including green roofs and living walls as well as using trees with bird and bat boxes can provide important stepping stones so wildlife can be more resilient to climate change, as well as creating a healthy environment for people. Measures to help nature can be built into housing, e.g. swift bricks where appropriate.
- Green corridors and strategic green spaces provide space for people to walk and cycle instead of using the car, helping reduce the amount of carbon dioxide going into the atmosphere.
- Green space for growing fruit and vegetables locally including allotments reduces carbon emissions by limiting the distance food travels to the local market.
- Green space can provide space for renewable energy technologies and local fuel crops helping to increase the amount of clean energy produced and used.

²⁶ Adapting Cities for Climate Change: The Role of The Green Infrastructure, Gill, S., Handley, J., Ennos, A., and Pauleit, S., 2007

²⁷ Biodiversity 2020: A strategy for England's wildlife and ecosystem services, DEFRA, 2011

5.5. Good Practice

River Medway, Len, Beult and Teise Catchment Improvement Groups

Through funding and support from the Environment Agency and local authorities, Medway Valley Partnership have set up catchment improvement groups for rivers in the Middle Medway catchment and the Kent High Weald Partnership are leading on the River Teise catchment. Representatives from river user groups, local authorities, land managers and owners and third sector organisations review river issues, opportunities, challenges and threats. The aim is to prioritise needs and develop catchment improvement plans to improve the river quality in the short and long-term through all partners. The catchment improvement groups look at the chemical water quality, physical structures, river flow, biodiversity, accessibility, recreation, abstraction, diffuse and point source pollution. Outline catchment improvement plans are being drawn up with the groups to deliver river improvements.

Kent Downs Woodfuel Pathfinder (KDWfP)

Around 50% of the woodland in the Kent Downs is unmanaged and in poor condition. Encouraging better woodland management is therefore a key priority as it can have important impacts on landscape, biodiversity and the local economy. It is also important for land owners, estate managers and farmers, not least because tax and agricultural policy require the active management of woodland assets. The Kent Downs Woodfuel Pathfinder, established in 2011 by Kent County Council in partnership with the Forestry Commission and managed by the AONB Unit, explores and delivers a range of interventions to help the woodheat sector evolve to a fully self-supporting industry whilst also delivering market driven management of Kent's woods and enhanced biodiversity via the re-establishment of traditional woodland practices such as coppicing.

Environmental stewardship

Agri-environment schemes such as Environmental stewardship are voluntary agreements that pay farmers and other land managers to manage their land in an environmentally sensitive way including new hedge or tree planting, pond restoration and protection of archaeological sites. They enable productivity while supporting the natural environment and the natural services that it provides. Environmental stewardship in Kent has improved more than 4000 hectares of habitat for wildlife and more than 450 ha of habitat has been created by farmers and landowners across the county.

Free tree scheme

A free tree scheme has given approximately 1500 free trees to residents in Maidstone each year since its launch in 2005.

Key principles and opportunities for Maidstone Borough's green and blue infrastructure



5.6. Conserve and improve

- Conserve and enhance existing green spaces and water environment assets, maximising their benefits.
- Conserve and restore green spaces and water environment as flood storage next to rivers and restrict development on floodplain.
- Deliver the river catchment improvement plan actions in partnership led by Medway Valley Countryside Partnership and Kent High Weald Partnership.
- Continue Stewardship Schemes with farmers and landowners to create new or improved wildlife corridors in the rural area.

5.7. Create new opportunities

- Reinforce the 'connectivity' and 'accessibility' of green and blue infrastructure resources to form a robust network for wildlife, integrated with networks in adjacent authorities.
- Carry out targeted planting of hedgerows to link habitats and counter habitat fragmentation.
- Require creative use of sustainable drainage systems sensitive to ecological needs in new development to help reduce flood risk.
- Plant more trees within the existing built up areas including the centre of Maidstone town, areas of multiple deprivation, and along the M20 corridor - particularly larger forest species trees, to help store carbon, filter pollutants and keep the urban area cool.
- Promote and create sustainable wildlife friendly green spaces and landscape areas as well as green roofs living walls, bird and bat boxes within new development and in urban areas providing more stepping stones for wildlife and making them more resilient to climate change.
- Develop the potential for biomass in Maidstone Borough through the Kent Pathfinder Project in partnership with the Forestry Commission.

- Encourage local food growing schemes and ensure sufficient supply of allotments and community gardens.

Integrating sustainable movement and access for all

5.8. Maidstone suffers from a high level of traffic bringing problems of congestion, air



pollution and a high level of road casualties. The borough has a good network of footpaths and the town has a several cycleways, but the network is fragmented in places and people do not always feel safe using the routes. Access to nature for local people is variable with some urban areas poorly connected to local green spaces. Fragmented sustainable links also means fragmented habitats.

5.9. Key issues

- Public Rights of Way network is fragmented and poorly connected in some areas, requiring the use of often very busy roads.
- Perceptions of safety particularly with an ageing population can be a barrier to use of footpaths.
- Significant area in the south of the borough where people do not have convenient access to larger areas of natural greenspace.
- Loss of green spaces within the built up area to development leading to a loss of urban wildlife habitats and fragmentation.
- Lack of trees within the more densely built up area of Maidstone's town centre results in a lack of stepping stones for species migration.

5.10. How can the green and blue infrastructure help?

- Green corridors, river corridors or larger parks and green spaces provide an attractive, quality environment for cyclists and pedestrians to travel sustainably between home, work, school, shops and services instead of by car.
- The public rights of way network provides sustainable access to the countryside by walking, cycling, and horse riding and is particularly valuable close to Maidstone, the smaller settlements and for tourists.
- Promoted trails and circular walks actively encourage use of paths in the wider countryside. This can increase use of nearby village services and rural attractions.

- Safe, easy to use access to open green spaces provides opportunities for people to benefit from an attractive and diverse natural environment as part of their everyday lives and by so doing, encourages them to look after it.

5.11. Good practice

Connecting communities

The project provides low cost, high value interventions to change perceptions of walking and cycling and unlock attractive links between local communities and key destinations.

Cycle/footpath links improving access to Maidstone Hospital and between Holborough Lakes and Snodland Station are nearing completion²⁸.

5.12. Key principles and opportunities for Maidstone Borough's green and blue infrastructure



5.13. Conserve and improve

- Maintain public rights of distance walks and promoted walks and rides borough to a high standard prioritisation of route influenced by local
- Improve the quality and existing paths, signage and furniture to and through spaces, especially lower isolated green spaces and corridors to encourage greater use, particularly by older people, those with children and those with disabilities.
- Conserve the few surviving 'green lanes' (roads which have never been paved) and byways (similar routes managed as public rights of way) and promote their way, long cycleways and through the with maintenance communities. surfaces of street existing green quality or along green



²⁸ Growing the Garden of England: A strategy for environment and economy in Kent, Kent Forum, July 2011
Kent Environment Strategy Monitoring 2013

use by pedestrians, cyclists and equestrians and prevent damage by motorised vehicles.

5.14. Create new opportunities

- Work with partners to secure new routes in areas of high demand and where possible in direct response to customer requests.
- Create improve connections along and between green corridors and Public Rights of Way particularly along the River Medway in the town centre and along other river corridors to encourage sustainable travel modes.
- Create an improved green corridor between Mote Park and Whatman Park through Maidstone town centre.
- Work towards the creation of improved green links from Maidstone town centre into the countryside utilising the green wedges.
- Incorporate multifunctional, sustainable routes (including wide inviting footpath routes through green corridors) in the design of new development and protect existing rights of way to ensure that walking and cycling can become the preferred choice for new residents.
- Increase opportunities for horse riders and cyclists with access to new paths supporting their recreational needs, particularly in the south of the borough where there is a lower provision.
- Designate a network of 'quiet lanes' across the borough to help fill gaps in the fragmented public rights of way network.

Promoting a distinctive townscape and landscape



5.15. Maidstone's rich natural and cultural heritage provides a distinctive landscape that is essential to the borough's economic success. The often fragile resources which make up this landscape are vulnerable to loss or damage, particularly in areas with pressure for development, and need to be preserved or improved.

5.16. Key issues

- Local landscapes being lost to new development
- Areas of landscape and townscape which are less attractive and lacking in features typical of the area.
- Heritage landscapes such as Ancient Woodland and traditional orchards vulnerable to damage and loss.
- Changes in agricultural practices with loss of hedgerows, habitat fragmentation, land drainage, improvement of grassland and widespread use of pesticides, herbicides and fertilisers and polytunnels.
- Abandonment of traditional woodland management such as coppicing and pollarding and planting of non-native trees.

5.17. How can the green and blue infrastructure help

- Underlying geology and soils influence the type of trees, plants, wildlife and ecosystems that live in the local landscape.
- Geology and soil affects agricultural land quality influencing where different types of farming are more likely to take place, which in turn influences the landscape character.
- Traditional field patterns, hedgerows and wetlands reinforce the distinctive landscape in different parts of the borough.
- Green corridors and wider green wedges provide clear separation between urban neighbourhoods and between settlements. Keeping them is essential to protecting the distinctive identity of each settlement and preventing coalescence.
- Green space and landscape features including trees can contribute significantly to the character of the borough's give built up areas.

5.18. Good practice

Valley of Visions

Valley of Visions is an impressive landscape-scale project working in partnership with communities, landowners and local organisations to conserve the landscape, wildlife and rich heritage of the Medway Gap, and encourage residents and visitors to learn about and enjoy this part of the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. In 2007 the Valley of Visions Landscape Partnership Scheme was created with a £2.5 million grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund, awarded to conserve and celebrate this unique landscape. Chalk grassland restoration, new community trails and the conservation of important heritage sites are some of the successful projects undertaken.

The Kent and Medway Road Verge Project

Managed by a partnership between Kent Highways Services and Kent Wildlife Trust this project identifies, protects and manages road verges which contain threatened habitats or wildlife. Roadside nature reserves, marked by special signs, can link existing wildlife areas, helping to reconnect and restore landscape. This benefits both people and wildlife and makes nature more resilient to future change. They provide vital wildlife corridors for many species, particularly reptiles such as slow-worms and viviparous lizards, and mammals such as badgers. The project has a road verge project officer, based with the Trust, who works with a dedicated team of voluntary road verge wardens to maintain the condition of the verges and monitor their wildlife interest.

Key principles and opportunities for Maidstone Borough's green and blue infrastructure



5.19. Conserve and improve

- Conserve and enhance the scenic beauty of the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and its setting and the setting of the High Weald Area of Outstanding Beauty, which have the highest status of protection in relation to landscape and scenic beauty.
- Conserve and enhance designated 'Landscapes of Local Value'
- Ensure the diversity of landscape character in the borough is recognised and managed in a sensitive manner.
- Preserve the general extent of Maidstone town's green and blue corridors, and look for opportunities to enhance to reinforce the stellate pattern of green infrastructure and prevent coalescence of neighbourhoods.
- Retain valued and historic green spaces and trees within the built up areas of the borough and ensure new developments are designed sensitively to fit appropriately into the existing townscape/landscape.
- Ensure the qualities and local distinctiveness of the historic environment are recognised and protected from inappropriate development, particularly through the rural cycling routes ion of Scheduled Ancient Monuments, Conservation Areas and Listed Parks and Gardens.

5.20. Create new opportunities

- Improve and restore landscape in poor condition especially in the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
- Extend the High Weald Transition Zone project in Tunbridge Wells Borough to the Laddingford Low Weald area where landscape enhancements would help match the landscape quality of the surrounding area.

- Create a framework and action plan for each of Maidstone town's green and blue corridors.
- Improve degraded and poor quality urban green spaces with the involvement of the local community to enhance townscape character and quality.
- Promote and encourage traditional agricultural practices such as traditional orchards that conserve or enhance local landscape character and create new traditional orchards and platts.
- Encourage developers of large sites in locations with a history of orchards to provide appropriately managed community orchards as part of their proposal.
- Encourage developers of large sites in locations with heritage assets and landscapes to provide heritage enhancement measures
- Raise awareness of and improve access to historic parks and gardens through the creation of up to date information on accessible historic parks and gardens

Maintaining and enhancing biodiversity, water and air quality

- 5.21. Maidstone Borough's diverse mosaic of ecological habitats is dependent on clean water and clean air, which are also critical for human health. Five Biodiversity Opportunity Areas (BOA) are located in the borough (Greensand Heaths and Commons, Medway Low Weald Grassland and Wetland, Medway Gap North Kent Downs, Mid Kent Downs Woods and Scarp and Mid Kent Greensand and Gault), which show where the greatest gains can be made from habitat enhancement, restoration and recreation as these areas offer the best opportunities for establishing large habitat areas and/or networks or wildlife habitats. Much of the green infrastructure of the Borough is a working, productive environment and the production of food, fuel and timber relies on biodiversity and ecological processes to maintain water quality and supply, soil quality and pollination of crops. Increased urbanisation and vehicle traffic is affecting water and air quality in the borough, as well as posing a threat to wildlife. The ecological status of Maidstone's rivers is poor and Maidstone's town centre, key road junctions and the M20 are all subject to poor air quality. Non native invasive plants are a problem in many areas where they can out- compete native plants, damage riverbanks and landscapes, increase flood risk and reduce habitat availability for native wildlife.



5.22. Key issues

- Fragmented habitats.
- Availability and quality of water.
- Pressure on the water resource.
- Poor ecological status of the borough's rivers.
- Maidstone's town centre, key road junctions and the M20 are all subject to poor air quality.
- Pollution caused by agriculture and industry.

5.23. How can the green and blue infrastructure help?

- Urban trees improve air quality by reducing air temperature and directly removing pollutants from the air²⁹. As different species can capture different sizes of particulate (Freer-Smith et al 300 2005) a broad range of species should be

²⁹ Tiwary, A., et al. (2009) 'An integrated tool to assess the role of new planting in PM10 capture and the human health benefits: A case study in London', Environmental Pollution, 157(10), pp. 2645-2653

considered for planting in any air quality strategy. Generally, the larger the leaf area the greater the rate of pollution removal.

- Provision of habitats rich in wildflowers and reducing use of pesticides will support the insects required for pollination of crops.
- Green and blue infrastructure can support new opportunities for farmers and landowners such as creating locally distinctive food and drink or providing space for energy crops, like biomass and biofuels to supply a local market for renewable energy.
- Protected SSSIs, Local Nature Reserves and Local Wildlife Sites provide space where priority habitats and species can become established and thrive.
- Green and blue corridors including railway lines, rivers, and roadsides as well as individual trees and avenues between green spaces create healthy ecological networks that help wildlife move, feed, disperse, migrate or reproduce.
- Green spaces can provide dark areas where wildlife can retreat from areas with light pollution.
- Trees and plants including reed beds can naturally filter or diffuse urban pollution so that it does not reach soils and rivers, helping to improve soil and water quality and support healthy ecosystems.
- Creating space in new development for habitats provides important stepping stones for wildlife and helps them adapt to climate change.
- Access to stimulating, biodiverse space helps people learn, understand and enjoy nature which encourages them to support its protection.

5.24. Good practice

Save our magnificent meadows

Wildflower meadows and grassland are Kent's most threatened habitat and are fundamental to the patchwork landscape of the county. They have suffered huge declines in recent decades as a result of the pressure associated with agriculture and development and the impact of inappropriate management. The loss of these habitats is also linked to the decline of many invertebrate species, including a number of Biodiversity Action Plan priority species. The Save our magnificent meadows project aims to halt this decline and improve the biodiversity of meadows through a three year project which aims to increase recognition of the value of meadows within local communities and the wider population with supportive networks of meadow champions. To maximise impact the project will focus on the Low Weald which is important for its meadow habitats, particularly wet and riverside meadows, and one of the most significant lowland meadow sites in Kent, Marden Meadows SSSI. The project will be delivered primarily through a 'community landscape approach'. This multi-faceted approach will link community engagement with landscape-scale habitat improvement, offering the maximum benefits in both areas and seeking to create lasting change. Three community landscape areas have been identified: Yalding Riverside Meadows, Low Weald Villages and Sevenoaks and Tonbridge Weald.

Heaths Countryside Corridor

A local community project born out of a desire to provide places for local people to go and for wildlife to thrive now owns and manages three sites in the Lenham Heath and Charing Heath area. The objectives of the Heaths Countryside Corridor are 'to conserve and enhance, for the benefit of the public, the natural beauty and habitats of the Greensand belt area around Charing and Lenham and to educate the public in all matters relating to the natural and physical environment and its conservation and protection'. With support from Kent Wildlife Trust, Rail Link Countryside Initiative, Kentish Stour Countryside Project and Mid Kent Downs Countryside Partnership, the project has improved footpaths, provided leaflets and education packs and on site interpretation as well as planting and habitat management.

5.25. Key principles and opportunities for Maidstone Borough's green and blue infrastructure



5.26. Conserve and improve

- Conserve the characteristic flora, fauna and physical habitat features of rivers including their winterbourne stretches.
- Restore River Beult SSSI so that it changes from 'unfavourable' to 'unfavourable improving' and ultimately to 'favourable' condition
- Continue to implement the Invasive Non-Native Species control programme led by Medway Valley Countryside Partnership
- Implement the River Len Local Nature Reserve – Habitat Management Plan.
- Conserve and improve water habitats such as that being carried out at the River Len at Mote Park with the Friends of Mote Park Group, Medway anglers and Maidstone Borough Council.
- Identify and protect ponds of high biodiversity value and enhance the ecological quality and diversity focusing on the designated Wealden Great Crested Newt Important Area for Ponds.
- Conserve and restore ancient woodlands to their native composition through the removal of the non-native components, and by actively encouraging natural regeneration.

5.27. Create new opportunities

- Link together key habitats to form wider landscape-scale networks across the borough and beyond reflecting the approach of the Kent Living Landscape/biodiversity opportunity area project (supporting the Kent Wildlife Trust in managing the lowland calcareous sites and seek opportunities to create new chalk grassland in the Capstone Bredhurst improvement area and enhanced woodland and additional chalk grassland restoration in the Mid Kent Downs Woods and Scarp BOA).
- Restore, create and expand the 12 priority habitats through positive management of land and working with developers and others to create new habitat as part of green infrastructure planning and design in new developments.
- Combine landscape improvements and enhanced biodiversity in areas where biodiversity opportunity areas and areas for landscape improvement and restoration coincide: Bredhurst Dry Valleys area in the North Downs and the Laddingford Low Weald area in the south west of the borough.



- Develop a tree planting programme focused on air quality management areas, in particular the town centre and near the M20 between junction 8 and 9, with an emphasis on planting more large tree species.
- Incrementally green Maidstone town centre through the introduction of street trees and naturalisation of green spaces such as amenity grassland flanking the River Medway.
- Work with the Environment Agency and other partners to improve the Water Framework Directive classifications of Maidstone Borough's rivers and support the Medway Valley Countryside Partnership, the Kent High Weald Partnership and the Stour Valley Countryside Partnership in delivery of the river catchment improvement plan actions.
- Where appropriate and feasible, actively work to replace culverts, canalisation, weirs and other modifications of the borough's rivers with ecologically friendly alternatives.
- Develop woodland management plans which draw on traditional techniques.
- Designate more sites as local nature reserves to protect more land for biodiversity to help meet the Natural England standard of 1ha local nature reserve per 1,000 population and to provide more space for outdoor classrooms.
- Provide new accessible wildlife friendly green space and treescapes, improving the biodiversity value of existing spaces and bankside habitats, particularly along and close to green corridors.
- Ensure new developments create new priority habitats for species that are most at risk in the Maidstone BAP and improve specific biodiversity poor spaces.
- Ensure that existing protected habitats and species are accommodated and appropriately mitigated in all new development.

- Target agri-environmental stewardship schemes to habitats where there is limited progress towards achieving favourable condition as listed in the LBAP, (lowland dry acid grassland, lowland meadow, wet woodland, lowland heathland, lowland wood pasture and parkland).
- Raise public awareness of the importance of wild space for biodiversity and management techniques applied to enhance biodiversity.

Providing opportunities for sport, recreation, quiet enjoyment and health



5.28. Encouraging healthy physical activity is key to tackling the borough's health inequalities, particularly in areas of multiple deprivation and amongst children where the problems are most acute. There are many opportunities to make more use of the benefits that green and blue infrastructure provides as an effective and low-cost health resource.

5.29. Key issues

- Life expectancy for men in the most deprived wards is five years below the borough average and for women is 2.4 years lower.
- Obesity in adults and lack of exercise for school children.
- Poor quality or inaccessible public spaces limit the benefits they could be providing to local people.
- Poor quality outdoor sports pitches and lack of access to open space in some areas limit the opportunities for physical activity.

5.30. How can the green and blue infrastructure help?

- Access to green and blue infrastructure provides opportunities for formal sport or informal exercise and an effective and low-cost health resource.
- Access to nature can encourage participation in physical activity. Evidence suggests that being outdoors in nature is an important factor that helps to maintain people's motivation to keep fit. Many participants in health walks cite the changing seasons and variety of wildlife as a major encouragement to continue attending. This type of 'green exercise' – physical activity undertaken in the outdoors – connects people to nature in their local area³⁰.

³⁰ Securing the value of nature in Kent, 2011.

- Access to affordable, quality outdoor sports facilities will encourage more people to take part in sport.
- Contact with nature can help to prevent, alleviate and assist recovery from mental health problems. In particular, natural environments help to lower levels of stress, enhance mood, increase concentration and boost self-esteem.
- A network of child friendly, playable green spaces particularly close to where people live and on the routes to schools will encourage more children to play outdoors.
- Green routes encourage people to walk or cycle instead of taking the car, reducing unhealthy air pollution as well as promoting physical fitness.



5.31. Good practice

Naturally Active

Funded by the BIG Lottery Fund, Naturally Active is a project managed by the North West Kent Countryside Partnership covering the areas of Dartford, Gravesham, Sevenoaks and Bexley. It supports groups to access the countryside through a variety of outdoor activities such as improving a green space, wildlife photography and outdoor sports. Naturally Active aims to help improve mental wellbeing as well as the obvious physical benefits gained through being active. The success of the project will be measured on the long term sustainability of groups and their activities and as such the project aims to support groups in forming links to other organisations and providing training in green-skills, personal development and project leadership.

Green Gym

Green Gym is a scheme run by the The Conservation Volunteers, (TCV) which inspires people to improve their health and the environment at the same time. Experienced leaders guide volunteers through a range of conservation projects in the outdoors that benefit local green spaces. People learn practical skills, boosting their confidence and improving strength and stamina. The first Green Gym was launched in 1998 and there are now more than 80 nationwide. Evaluation of the Green Gym scheme in 2008 concluded that the overall physical health status of participants improved considerably, most significantly for people with the poorest physical and mental health.

In Kent, there are 2 green gyms, one at the Singleton Environment Centre in Ashford and another at Bedgebury National Pinetum in Goudhurst. Volunteers get involved in a wide variety of tasks such as pond management, scrub clearance, and coppicing woodland³¹.

³¹ Securing the value of nature in Kent, 2011.

5.32. Key principles and opportunities for Maidstone Borough's green and blue infrastructure

5.33. Conserve and improve

- Protect existing publicly accessible green space.
- Protect outdoor sports pitches from loss through development or require their replacement and improvement.

5.34. Create new opportunities

- Improve connectivity between green spaces, particularly along river corridors and between and within new and existing housing areas to help encourage their active use.
- Enhance quality and multi functionality of green spaces and redesign some existing green spaces to help address small gaps in provision and encourage more positive recreational activity.



- Ensure new green and blue infrastructure is provided to serve new development and areas of deprivation together with appropriate management and secure funding to maintain public open spaces to a high standard.
- Improve the quality of existing public pitches so they can accommodate more matches at peak times particularly for junior football.
- Secure more community access to affordable sports facilities particularly at schools to widen the availability of quality sports facilities close to home.
- Provide outdoor activities to encourage use of green spaces and explore the potential to set up a green gym in the borough.
- Incorporate exercise equipment in existing and new spaces to encourage healthy lifestyles particularly for those who do not wish to participate in organised activities or team sports in conjunction with local communities.
- Encourage the use of the rivers and their banks for sport and recreation where this is compatible with nature conservation and environmental policies.
- Encourage landowners to permit the use of woodlands for recreation where this is compatible with land management requirements and nature conservation policies.

Providing community involvement and opportunities for education



5.35. When people are involved in their local environment, they are more likely to respect and take care of it. Engaging local people is essential to creating places that work. It is also the most cost effective way to deliver improvements and maintain sites to a high quality. The green and blue infrastructure network also provides a fantastic educational resource.

5.36. Key issues

- Public parks and green space funding is under pressure and community involvement in management and volunteering can help secure additional resources.
- Anti-social behaviour in public green spaces can detract from use and therefore benefits.
- Lack of knowledge about the value of the natural environment in the local community means they are not always as protective of it.
- Schools are missing an opportunity if the natural environment is not used as part of learning.

5.37. How can the green and blue infrastructure help?

- Attractive spaces that are well managed and maintained generate positive use and encourage a variety of activities by all age groups and abilities. Involving local people in their design, management and maintenance helps address local needs. Children and young people in particular can provide valuable insights into what makes a good play space to help reduce pockets of anti social behaviour that may exist.
- Green spaces can generate civic pride and community ownership; Friends groups regularly use their spaces and are best placed to help put together a management plan to make sure their space is well looked after and provides facilities and

activities that local people want. They are better informed about their needs to apply for external funding from organisations like the National Lottery to see improvements take place more quickly on the ground.



- Green spaces provide a venue for outdoor learning across all aspects of the school curriculum.
- Providing volunteer opportunities on environmental projects can harness community energy and skills and add social value to green and blue infrastructure. Experience gained through working with specialist organisations like the Medway Valley Partnership can also prove attractive to employers.
- Providing activities for children and young people can inspire them to love and take care of the natural world throughout their lives.

5.38. Good practice

Thursday Action Group

The Medway Valley Countryside Partnership volunteer Thursday Action Group team carry out practical countryside projects on a weekly basis, including tree and hedge planting, pond clearing, bank protection and footpath work. They gained the Queens Award for Voluntary Services in 2010 for their work to maintain, protect and improve the biodiversity of the local countryside.

Friends of Mote Park

The friends of Mote Park are a group of residents who help to look after the park. A number of parks in the borough have active friends groups who add value to the council's management of the parks with events, fundraising and activities.

Vinters Valley Nature Reserve

Comprising over 40 hectares and once part of a large 18th century country estate, Vinters Valley Nature Reserve has been transformed with the help of the local community, into a much loved natural space. Leased from Kent County Council and Maidstone Borough Council, the reserve is managed by a Trust set up by local people. A 'Friends of the Reserve' scheme allows people to contribute financially towards the upkeep of the reserve in return for a quarterly newsletter and the opportunity to participate in wildlife events on the reserve. Monthly volunteer workdays during the autumn and winter also offer local people the chance to gain hands-on experience on the practical side of conservation.

5.39. Key principles and opportunities for Maidstone Borough's green and blue infrastructure

5.40. Conserve and improve

- Ensure continued support for voluntary and not for profit organisations such as the Medway Valley Countryside Partnership and the Kent Downs AONB Unit, who engage and involve local communities with a high degree of added value.
- Ensure local communities are kept informed of significant projects to improve green spaces by direct contact, meetings with representatives and use of the media and carry out consultation before site management plans are written.
- Support and encourage the development of 'Friends of parks' and similar groups and greater involvement in the delivery of improvements to green spaces and water bodies through projects.
- Improve publicity about sites such as parks and gardens, with better leaflets, events, website coverage and other promotional material and regularly inform the media of important issues relating to green spaces.

5.41. Create new opportunities

- Develop an umbrella group for environmental voluntary organisations to share information and resources.
- Foster the development of conservation volunteers.
- Consider further delegating management of sporting facilities, allotments and other activities to user groups.
- Encourage more franchises for catering and other green space facilities in appropriate locations to increase use of green spaces.
- Involve people, particularly the young, in environmental initiatives such as tree planting and develop a programme of educational walks and talks.
- Encourage the Kent Downs AONB Unit to hold educational events with local schools each year.

Retaining and enhancing a quality environment for investment and through development



5.42. The need for new housing and other development in Maidstone borough puts pressure on the green and blue infrastructure network but can also bring opportunities. Careful siting and design of new developments can enhance landscape quality and create new green and blue spaces. The development of poor quality brownfield sites offers the opportunity for urban greening and environmental improvements. Residents in new development will put pressure on existing accessible open space and it is important that a range of new or improved open spaces is brought forward to meet this new demand. Updated local open space standards for new developments have been devised based on evidence about the quantity, quality and accessibility of existing open spaces (See Policy DM22 – Open space and recreation in Appendix 1).

5.43. Good development considers the planning and design of the environment throughout the building process - from land acquisition and planning through to occupation with an understanding that the provision of high quality, attractive green spaces and access to green infrastructure delivers higher value for everyone. This approach can help unlock development sites as it can improve the chances of achieving consensus amongst stakeholders at the planning stages of a project. New development will also be more acceptable if it complements local landscape character and works with the grain of historic settlement.

5.44. Key issues

- Pressure on the landscape and vulnerable habitats.
- Potential loss of local landscape and historic character and coalescence of settlements.
- Lack of recreational space for new populations.
- Conflict between need for new development and space for flood storage and sustainable drainage systems.
- Pressure on drinking water supplies

5.45. How can the green and blue infrastructure help?

- A high quality green setting can help realise increased saleability and rentability of both housing and commercial property.

- Skilful planning and design of green and blue infrastructure will optimise the full development potential of a given location and is essential in creating sustainable development.
- Green routes for walking and cycling can help connect new and existing communities, ensuring new development is well integrated into existing settlements and retains an open, green character particularly in rural areas..
- A high quality, well-designed network of green and blue spaces within developments will create places that users will want to spend more time in leading to benefits for local businesses such as increased footfall and time spent.
- Intelligent use of existing green and blue infrastructure and the imaginative disposal/incorporation of on site resources such as clean subsoil and recyclable materials delivers reduced development costs.
- New developments designed with an understanding of landscape and historic character and function can be more acceptable to an existing community, and ensure a speedier path through the planning process.
- Green infrastructure can help mitigate any negative impacts of light pollution from new developments on wildlife and habitats.

5.46. Good practice

Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Landscape Design Handbook, 2005

This easy to use, well-illustrated handbook provides design guidance for anyone involved in new developments in the area. It aims to conserve and enhance the special characteristics of the AONB as a whole and the distinctiveness of the individual character areas.

The **Maidstone Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) Supplement, 2013** assimilates typical planting lists to reflect the landscape character types identified by the Maidstone Landscape Character Assessment 2012. In addition, the supplement contains general landscape guidance and design guidance for successfully integrating specific types of development within certain contexts such as the conversion of agricultural buildings; equestrian development; golf courses; residential areas; transport corridors and car parks. This guidance can help assimilate development more sensitively into local landscapes and will be retained until a Landscape Character Guidelines Supplementary Planning Document is published.

5.47. Key principles and opportunities for Maidstone Borough's green and blue infrastructure

5.48. Create new opportunities

- Adopt updated local open space standards for new developments based on a strong evidence base about the quantity, quality and accessibility of existing open spaces.
- Resist new development in flood plains and encourage water sensitive urban design which provides sustainable drainage systems, biodiverse flood storage areas and wetlands as part of new development.

- Ensure new strategic housing allocations to the south east of Maidstone town increase accessibility of open space for the adjacent areas of multiple deprivation.
- Produce good practice guidance for integrating green and blue infrastructure into new developments, drawing on the findings of this strategy and the landscape character assessment and Local Biodiversity Action Plan.
- Support Parishes in producing neighbourhood plans to provide detailed local guidance for developers on green and blue infrastructure.
- Encourage developers to work with local communities at the pre-application stage of the planning process to ensure local knowledge and views are taken into account from the outset.
- Ensure developers provide details of how the green and blue infrastructure elements of their proposals, including public open spaces, sites managed for their biodiversity, geodiversity or heritage interest, will be managed and maintained over the long-term.

Integrating Proposals for Maidstone Borough's green and blue infrastructure

- 5.49. The key opportunities and principles for conserving, improving and creating green and blue infrastructure are brought together in a strategic framework plan (Map 14).
- 5.50. The framework plan identifies and prioritises four broad areas where green and blue infrastructure interventions will have the most impact on achieving the strategy objectives: the Capstone-Bredhurst area, the M20 corridor, River Beult corridor and Laddingford/Low Weald area. In addition it highlights designated Biodiversity Opportunity Areas, river catchment improvement areas and the eight poorest quality publicly accessible green space sites, which should be a priority for improvement.
- 5.51. Maidstone urban area is also a priority for improvements due to the high population levels, level of multiple deprivation and need to mitigate effects of air pollution through tree planting and encouraging active, sustainable travel. The framework plan indicates green and blue corridors in the urban area to conserve and improve to help achieve these objectives. Developing more detailed green and blue infrastructure plans for the Maidstone urban area will be an important next step and is included in the strategy action plan.
- 5.52. Map 14 the Green and Blue Infrastructure Framework Plan identifies where spatially-specific proposals for Maidstone Borough's green and blue infrastructure will interact and link with green infrastructure proposals of adjoining districts, including Tunbridge Wells Council's High Weald/Low Weald links project, Tonbridge & Malling Council's 'Principal Green Corridors' and Swale Council's 'Strategic Green Grid Routes'.
- 5.53. Detailed projects and proposals are identified in the strategy action plan.

6. Delivering the strategy

Delivery Framework

- 6.1. The vision, objectives and proposals of this strategy need to be translated into action through the Delivery Framework³²
- 6.2. As the planning, design and management of the green and blue infrastructure resource is the responsibility of many different organisations, the strategy can only be delivered successfully in partnership.
- 6.3. A list of key stakeholders is included below:

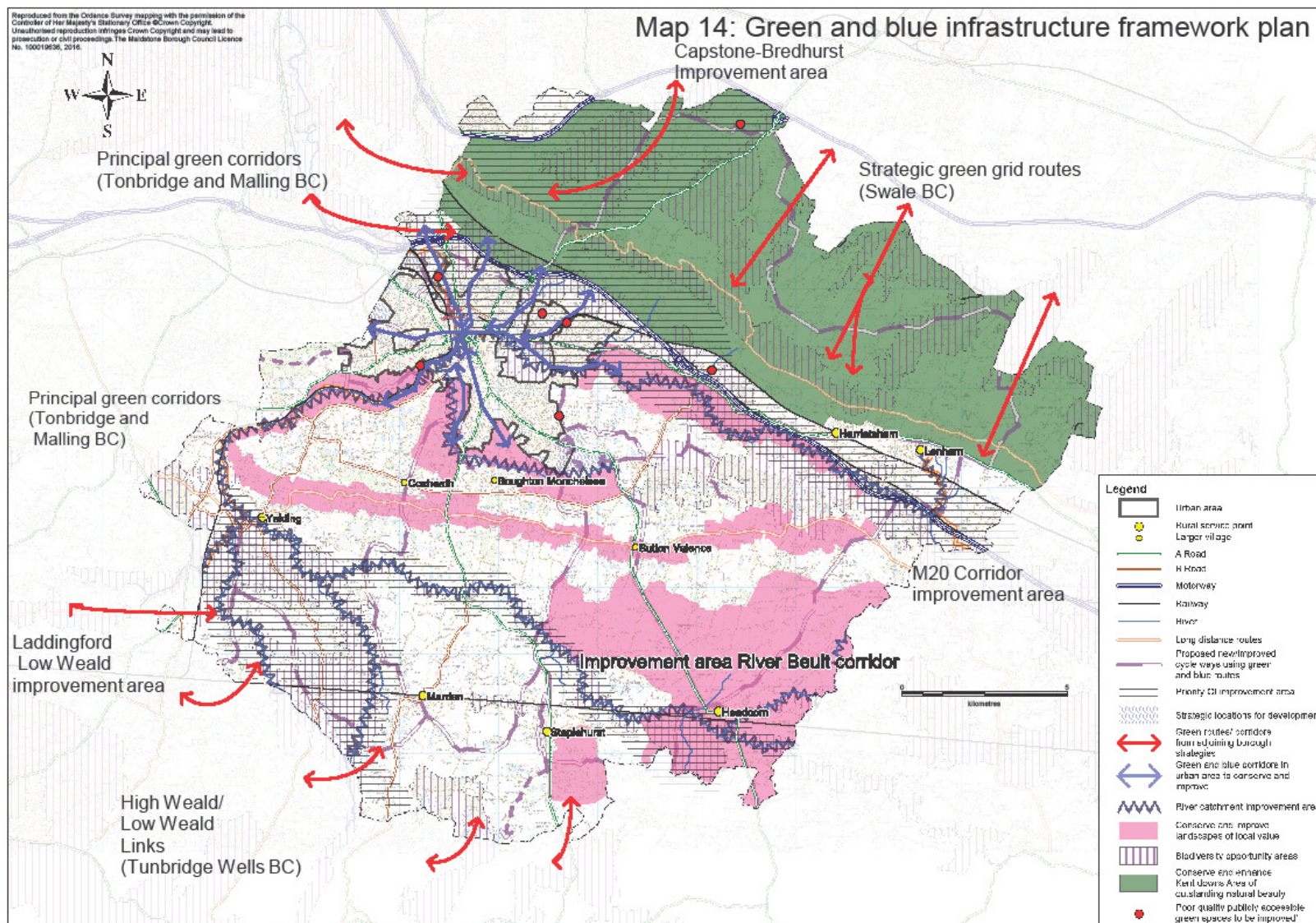
Key stakeholders

Maidstone Borough Council councillors
Kent County Council (Maidstone Borough) councillors
Maidstone Borough parish council councillors
Maidstone Borough resident associations
Maidstone Borough resident groups
Maidstone Borough Council (cross-departmental)
Kent County Council (cross-departmental)
Kent Downs AONB Unit
Environment Agency
Medway Valley Countryside Partnership
Mid Kent Downs Partnership
Kent Wildlife Trust
Kent High Weald Partnership
River Catchment Improvement Groups
Neighbouring authorities
Friends of parks and Allotment Association representatives

- 6.4. As part of the development of this strategy, key stakeholders have agreed an accompanying action plan³³. The action plan is grouped into a number of themes to help deliver the strategy's vision and objectives. Each action also identifies which green and blue strategy objectives it would help to meet and identifies a timescale and lead partner.
- 6.5. The Maidstone Local Plan (2016) and planning decisions can play an important role in securing the protection and enhancement of the Borough's green and blue infrastructure. For this reason the strategy identifies specific planning actions (see paragraph 2.27: How can Planning support the green and blue infrastructure strategy?).

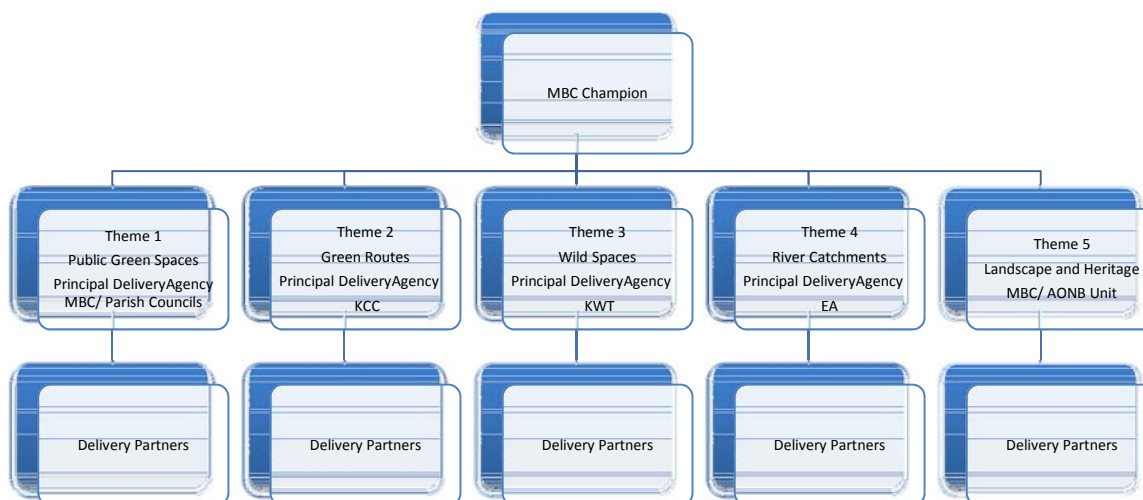
³² Appendix 1: Green and Blue Infrastructure Delivery Framework

³³ Maidstone Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy: Action Plan April 2016



Maidstone Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy:

Proposed delivery structure



- 6.6. The Maidstone green and blue infrastructure forum should monitor the delivery of the action plan, with the results published annually. Annual monitoring will help show progress, identify areas where delivery of the strategy is not taking place and provide vital information to feedback to partners and stakeholders
- 6.7. The action plan should be a live document which is reviewed and updated annually to reflect changing priorities and resources, or as new opportunities present themselves

Neighbouring authorities

- 6.8. Maidstone's green and blue infrastructure does not stop at the borough boundary and the green and blue infrastructure plans and policies of the five neighbouring boroughs (Tunbridge Wells, Tonbridge and Malling, Medway, Swale and Ashford), have been taken into consideration in preparing this strategy along with those led by Kent County Council. Relevant cross border proposals and projects are included within the proposals (see Map 14). Cross-border liaison and engagement will be important to achieve shared aims and objectives including effective transfer of information. It is recommended that representatives of neighbouring authorities join the green and blue infrastructure forum.

Review

- 6.9. A review of the strategy will be considered where:
- There is significant change in European and national legislation, or national or local policy; or
 - The Maidstone green and blue infrastructure forum considers that the green and blue infrastructure strategy is insufficiently effective in delivering its vision and objectives.

Appendix 1: Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy Delivery Framework

Executive Summary:

- Evidence for the Local Plan
- Sets strategic direction and vision for Green & Blue Infrastructure for the borough and identifies delivery opportunities through partnership working and the seeking of external funding and investment. Sets a framework that will underpin the 10 year Open Spaces Plan that will be drawn up by MBC Parks & Open Spaces Team.
- Will provide a framework for partner agencies to agree and deliver actions to benefit Green & Blue Infrastructure in the borough that are outside the direct control of MBC.

Delivery Framework:

| Key Themes | Key Issues Identified by GBIS | Strategic Objectives |
|---|---|---|
| Mitigating and adapting to climate change | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Pressures on the quantity and quality of water resources.• Increased run off from development and potential impact on flooding.• Additional heat and the need for shade.• Connectivity of habitats may be insufficient to ensure species migration.• Need to reduce carbon emissions. | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• To avoid increased flood risk, increase shade and enhance the sustainable connections to key destinations and the countryside, creating a robust and resilient landscape with improved links between wildlife habitats.• To minimise the effects of pollution and soil erosion on river catchments, and improve quality and accessibility. |
| Integrating sustainable movement and access for all | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Public Rights of Way network is fragmented and poorly connected in some areas, requiring the use of often very busy roads. | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Proactively seek opportunities to enhance sustainable and safe connections to key destinations and the countryside by working with partners to improve |

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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perceptions of safety particularly with an ageing population can be a barrier to use of footpaths. • Significant area in the south of the borough where people do not have convenient access to larger areas of natural greenspace. • Loss of green spaces within the built up area to development leading to a loss of urban wildlife habitats and fragmentation. • Lack of trees within the more densely built up area of Maidstone's town centre results in a lack of stepping stones for species migration. | <p>sustainable access by footpaths, riverside walks, cycleways and bridleways.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To provide new open space of all typologies to address specific deficiencies identified in specific areas. • Investigate the potential for 'Urban Greening' through provision of street trees and green infrastructure enhancements to the public realm. |
| Promoting a distinctive townscape and landscape | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local landscapes being lost to new development • Areas of landscape and townscape which are less attractive and lacking in features typical of the area. • Heritage landscapes such as Ancient Woodland and traditional orchards vulnerable to damage and loss. • Changes in agricultural practices with loss of hedgerows, habitat fragmentation, land drainage, improvement of | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conserve and enhance valued open spaces, heritage and tree cover and create new high quality, well linked green spaces to serve new development. • Conserve and enhance the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and its setting, maintain landscapes of local value and restore and improve sensitive landscape in the poorest condition. |

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| | <p>grassland and widespread use of pesticides, herbicides and fertilisers and polytunnels.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Abandonment of traditional woodland management such as coppicing and pollarding and planting of non-native trees. | |
| Maintaining and enhancing biodiversity, water and air quality | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fragmented habitats. Availability and quality of water. Pressure on the water resource. Poor ecological status of the borough's rivers. Maidstone's town centre, key road junctions and the M20 are all subject to poor air quality. Pollution caused by agriculture and industry. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improve the quality of publicly accessible parks and green spaces with the aim of achieving 'good' standard in accordance with the quality audit 2014 and redesign where needed to address gaps in provision. Review and update the Maidstone Local Biodiversity Action Plan (LBAP) to ensure detailed consideration given to the provision of linked habitat corridors in green space management plans to enhance the biodiversity of all public open spaces. Work with partner agencies to retain existing, and encourage new, wildlife habitats and landscape features and improve river and air quality. |
| Providing opportunities for sport, recreation, quiet enjoyment and health | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Life expectancy for men in the most deprived wards is five years below the borough | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improve the quality of publicly accessible parks and green spaces with the aim of achieving |

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| | <p>average and for women is 2.4 years lower.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Obesity in adults and lack of exercise for school children. • Poor quality or inaccessible public spaces limit the benefits they could be providing to local people. • Poor quality outdoor sports pitches and lack of access to open space in some areas limit the opportunities for physical activity. | <p>'good' standard in accordance with the quality audit 2014 and redesign where needed to address gaps in provision.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a playing pitch strategy to understand quantity, quality and accessibility of sports pitches and identify surpluses and deficits. • Investigate provision of new open space of all typologies to address specific deficiencies identified in specific areas. |
| | | |
| Retaining and enhancing a quality environment for investment and through development | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pressure on the landscape and vulnerable habitats. • Potential loss of local landscape and historic character and coalescence of settlements. • Lack of recreational space for new populations. • Conflict between need for new development and space for flood storage and sustainable drainage systems. • Pressure on drinking water supplies | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide a high quality environment and development standards which form the benchmark for new, high quality, well planned developments with sufficient well integrated, high quality green spaces. |
| | | |
| Providing community involvement and opportunities for education | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public parks and green space funding is under pressure and community involvement in management and | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage and educate local communities, schools and partner agencies to improve green spaces of all typologies through direct |

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| | <p>volunteering can help secure additional resources.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anti-social behaviour in public green spaces can detract from use and therefore benefits. • Lack of knowledge about the value of the natural environment in the local community means they are not always as protective of it. • Schools are missing an opportunity if the natural environment is not used as part of learning. | <p>contact, meetings with representatives and use of the media.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To achieve greater community involvement in the planning and management of green spaces and encourage the use of green and blue infrastructure as an educational resource. |
|--|---|--|

Areas not covered by the strategy / within the remit of external partner agencies:

- The GBIS does not cover the future needs of people, but is focussed on the environment, biodiversity and the countryside. More detail on the specific needs of different areas of the population will be identified and dealt with in the more detailed delivery of actions that will sit under the GIS and the Delivery Framework, for example through the 10 Year Open Spaces Strategy.
- A number of detailed actions are proposed by stakeholders as a result of the workshops during May 2016 that cannot be taken forward by MBC. The council will work with partners to influence where it can, the delivery of these actions by the appropriate agencies. The broad scope of these actions is set out below.

| Proposed delivery structure themes: | Summary of proposed actions: |
|-------------------------------------|---|
| Public Green Spaces | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provision of education packs for schools to encourage greater use of open spaces. |

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| Green Routes | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improvements to accessibility of PROW's, footpaths, cycleways and bridleways including specific schemes identified in the Integrated Transport Strategy and the Walking and Cycling Strategy. • Creation of quiet lanes, and retention of green lanes and byways. • Enhanced accessibility to play areas and areas of amenity open space. |
| Wild Spaces | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deliver outstanding actions in Maidstone LBAP habitat action plans. • Targeted planting of hedgerows to link habitats and counter habitat fragmentation especially Medway and Len River Valleys, dip slope of Kent Downs AONB and Greensand Ridge. • Continue to resource and extend the Kent and Medway Road Verge Project and manage roadside nature reserves to promote biodiversity and management of wildflower meadows and grassland through the Save Our Magnificent Meadows project and prioritise the Low Weald and urban areas. • Engage with businesses, local authorities and the forestry/ woodland sector to ensure the sustainable management of woodland in the Kent Downs and Greensand Ridge – beyond minimum standards and develop the potential for sustainable woodland management through fencing and building material and biomass through the Kent Pathfinder Project. • Increase reed beds for nitrate removal and provide phosphate removal in the River Len (designated as 'Bad' quality under the Water Framework Directive) as a whole river project to prevent nutrient enrichment across the catchment and enhance alder carr and other vegetation along the corridor of the river. |
| River Catchments | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve quality and accessibility of Medway riverside. • Implement location specific actions with Maidstone Stage 1 Surface water Management Plan. • Draft and implement River Catchment Improvement |

| | |
|------------------------|---|
| | <p>Plans to improve the quality of the water environment through partnership working.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prevent condition of water bodies getting worse and if this does occur, develop a plan of action to reverse the decline. • Improve understanding of Water Framework Directive role in delivering planning and land management to ensure any future developments take account of Water Framework Directive. |
| Landscape and Heritage | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify, manage or restore and where appropriate create viewpoints to and from the AONB. • Specific enhancements within the AONB as identified in the AONB Action Plan. • Encourage creation of new apple and cherry orchards and nut plots along transport routes within specific geographical areas such as the Low Weald and Greensand Ridge to help restore local landscape character. |

Appendix 2: Strategies which help support green and blue infrastructure

Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plan 2014 - 2019

The Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plan 2014 - 2019 sets out a number of policies within the Kent Downs AONB which stretches beyond the borough but which will help maintain and enhance key components of the green and blue infrastructure within this part of the borough, including:

Landform and landscape character – policies

- **LLC1** The protection, conservation and enhancement of special characteristics and qualities, natural beauty and landscape character of the Kent Downs AONB will be supported and pursued.
- **LLC7** The development of strategic landscape action plans for Landscape Character Areas of the AONB which are most at threat or where greatest opportunity lie will be supported and pursued.

Biodiversity – policies

- **BD1** - The maintenance and enhancement of existing designated sites and priority habitats, their extension and connection, will be pursued through sensitive management, fragmentation reduction and restoration. Creation of new habitats and habitat corridors will be pursued, informed by landscape character, through collaboration to establish functional ecological networks and high quality green infrastructure.
- **BD2** - Local, regional and national biodiversity targets and spatial priorities for habitats and species distinctive to the Kent Downs will be supported; a Kent Downs AONB response to Biodiversity 2020 targets will be pursued.
- **BD4** – Targeting of advice, grants and planning agreements to reduce fragmentation and enhance the distinctive biodiversity of the Kent Downs will be pursued.
- **BD6** - The protection, conservation and extension of Kent Downs priority and distinctive habitats and species will be supported through the Local Plan process, development management decisions and the promotion of the Biodiversity Duty of Regard (NERC Act 2006).

Woodland and trees – policies

- **WT1** – Threats to the existing extent of woodland and transitional habitats around woodland will be resisted. Extension of both habitat types will be supported where appropriate to landscape character. The loss of ancient woodland will be opposed.
- **WT6** - The identification, protection, management and planned replacement and reintroduction of fine specimen and 'veteran' trees will be pursued.

Access, enjoyment and understanding – policies

- **AEU2** – Diversions and stopping up of PRowS will be resisted unless it can be demonstrated that they will not have a detrimental impact on the opportunities for access and quiet enjoyment of the AONB landscape and historic character.
- **AEU3** – Investment to secure sustainable, high quality, low impact and easy access multiuser routes from towns and growth areas to the AONB will be pursued.
- **AEU7** – Improvements to the Rights of Way Network to provide and improve countryside access, health and well-being opportunities, including way-marking, signposting and maintenance, new routes and establishment of higher right which conforms with AONB policies and design guidance, will be supported.
- **AEU12** – Support will be given to the North Downs Way and England Coast Path National Trails as the main promoted route in the Kent Downs.

Maidstone Borough-Wide Local Plan 2000

The saved policies from the Maidstone Borough-Wide Local Plan 2000 help protect existing green and blue infrastructure or allocates sites for new open space.

ENV1 Pollution (Air, Land and Water)

ENV4 Noise

ENV5 Protection of Trees

ENV6 Landscaping, Surfacing and Boundary Treatment

ENV7 Riverside Zone of Special Townscape Importance

ENV16 Archaeological Remains of National Importance

ENV17 Important Archaeological Sites

ENV18 Land with Archaeological Potential

ENV19 Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest

ENV20 Important Historic Parks and Gardens

ENV22 Urban Open Space

ENV23 Loss of Open Space and Recreation Facilities

ENV24 Site Specific Public Open Space Allocations

ENV25 Allotments

ENV26 Development Affecting Public Footpaths and Public Rights of Way

ENV27 New Footpath, Cycleway and Bridleway Proposals

ENV28 Development in the Countryside

ENV29 Best and Most Versatile Agricultural Land

ENV30 Metropolitan Green Belt

Maidstone has two adopted local plan documents (formerly known as development plan documents – DPD) which are part of the local plan. These documents contain planning policies and should be read with the saved policies of the Maidstone Borough Wide Local Plan 2000:

Affordable Housing DPD (2006)

Open Space DPD (2006)

Maidstone Borough Local Plan 2016

The Publication version of the **Maidstone Borough Local Plan 2016** contains a number of policies which support the Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy:

Policy SP17 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...*
- 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 conserved, maintained and enhanced where appropriate;*
- 6. The Greensand Ridge, Medway Valley, Len Valley, Loose Valley, and Low Weald as defined on the policies map, will be conserved, maintained and enhanced where appropriate as landscapes of local value;*
- 7. Development in the countryside will retain the setting of and separation of individual settlements; and*
- 8. Natural and historic 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.*

Policy OS1 - Open space allocations

Sites are identified for provision of publicly accessible open space to complement the growth identified in the local plan.

Policy DM3 - Historic and natural environment

- 1. To enable Maidstone borough to retain a high quality of living and to be able to respond to the effects of climate change, developers will ensure that new development protects and enhances the historic and natural environment, where appropriate, by incorporating measures to:*
 - i. Protect positive historic and landscape character, heritage assets and their settings, areas of Ancient Woodland, veteran trees, trees with significant amenity value, important hedgerows, features of biological or geological interest, and the existing public rights of way*

network from inappropriate development and ensure that these assets do not suffer any adverse impacts as a result of development;

ii. Avoid damage to and inappropriate development within or adjacent to:

a. Cultural heritage assets protected by international, national or local designation and other non-designated heritage assets recognised for their archaeological, architectural or historic significance, or their settings;

b. Internationally, nationally and locally designated sites of importance for biodiversity; and

c. Local Biodiversity Action Plan priority habitats.

iii. Control pollution to protect ground and surface waters where necessary and mitigate against the deterioration of water bodies and adverse impacts on Groundwater Source Protection Zones, and/or incorporate measures to improve the ecological status of water bodies as appropriate;

iv. Enhance, extend and connect designated sites of importance for biodiversity, priority habitats and fragmented Ancient Woodland; support opportunities for the creation of new Biodiversity Action Plan priority habitats; create, enhance, restore and connect other habitats, including links to habitats outside Maidstone Borough, where opportunities arise;

v. Provide for the long term maintenance and management of all heritage and natural assets, including landscape character, associated with the development;

vi. Mitigate for and adapt to the effects of climate change; and

vii. Positively contribute to the improvement of accessibility of natural green space within walking distance of housing, employment, health and education facilities and to the creation of a wider network of new links between green and blue spaces including links to the Public Rights of Way network.

2. Protect and enhance the character, distinctiveness, diversity and quality of Maidstone's landscape and townscape by the careful, sensitive management and design of development.

3. Where appropriate, development proposals will be expected to appraise the value of the borough's historic and natural environment through the provision of the following:

i. An ecological evaluation of development sites and any additional land put forward for mitigation purposes to take full account of the biodiversity present, including the potential for the retention and provision of native plant species;

ii. Heritage and arboricultural assessments to take full account of any past or present heritage and natural assets connected with the development and associated sites; and

iii. A landscape and visual impact assessment to take full account of the significance of, and potential effects of change on, the landscape as an environmental resource together with views and visual amenity.

4. Publicly accessible open space should be designed as part of the overall green and blue infrastructure and layout of a site, taking advantage of the potential for multiple benefits including enhanced play, wildlife, sustainable urban drainage, tree planting and landscape provision. The form and function of green infrastructure will reflect a site's characteristics, nature, location and existing or future deficits.

5. Development proposals will not be permitted where they lead to adverse impacts on natural and heritage assets for which mitigation measures or, as a last resort, compensation appropriate to the scale and nature of the impacts cannot be achieved.

Account should be taken of the Landscape Character Guidelines SPD, the Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy and the Kent Downs AONB Management Plan.

Policy DM22 – Open space and recreation

1. For new housing or mixed use development sites, the council will seek to deliver the following categories of publicly accessible open space provision in accordance with the specified standards:

- i. **Quantity standards**

| Open space type | Draft standard (ha/1000 population) | Minimum size of facility (ha) |
|---|-------------------------------------|--|
| Amenity green space (e.g. informal recreation spaces, recreation grounds, village greens, urban parks, formal gardens and playing fields) | 0.7 | 0.1 |
| Provision for children and young people (e.g. equipped play areas, ball courts, outdoor basketball hoop areas, skateboard parks, teenage shelters and "hangouts") | 0.25 | 0.25 excluding a buffer zone but in cases where accessibility to children's and young people's provision is poor, for example outside a reasonable walking distance or where the crossing of major roads is necessary, smaller areas of open space may be justified on-site. |
| Publicly accessible outdoor sports (e.g. outdoor sports pitches, tennis, bowls, athletics and other sports) | 1.6 | To meet the technical standards produced by Sport England or the relevant governing bodies of sport. |
| Allotments and community gardens (e.g. land used for the growing of own produce, including urban farms. Does not include private gardens) | 0.2 | 0.66 |
| Natural/semi-natural areas of open space (e.g. woodlands, urban forestry, scrub, grasslands, wetlands, open and running water, banks to rivers, land and ponds, wastelands, closed cemeteries and graveyards) | 6.5 | 0.2 |

- ii. **Quality Standards**

All new open spaces should meet the following general standards:

- a. Be designed as part of the green infrastructure network in a locality, contributing to local landscape character, connecting with local routes and green corridors for people and wildlife as well as providing multi-functional benefits such as addressing surface water management priorities;
 - b. Provide a location and shape for the space which allows for meaningful and safe recreation and be sufficiently overlooked by active building frontages;

- c. Be easily found and accessible by road, cycleway, footpaths and public transport including by those with disabilities, with pedestrian crossings on roads where appropriate;
- d. Make the entrances accessible for all users, of appropriate size and inviting with a welcoming sign where appropriate;
- e. Provide clearly defined boundaries with fences or hedges where needed to ensure safety of users;
- f. Where appropriate provide interest and activities for a wide range of users in particular meeting the needs of elderly and less able users as well as children, young people and families;
- g. Where appropriate provide seats, litter bins and appropriate lighting to ensure safety of users without adversely affecting wildlife;
- h. Provide a range of planting, with appropriate mix of predominantly indigenous species, maintained to a good standard;
- i. Promote biodiversity on-site through design, choice of species and management practices;
- j. Submit an Open Space Layout and Design statement, to incorporate ecological management measures for approval by the council; and
- k. Provide a Management Plan with adequate resources identified for on-going management and maintenance.

In improving existing open space provision, the council will have regard to these standards.

iii. **Accessibility Standards**

If open space cannot be provided in full on development sites, due to site constraints, housing delivery expectations on allocated sites, or location, then provision should be provided off-site where it is within the distance from the development site identified in the accessibility standard.

| Open space type | Accessibility standard (radius from open space) |
|---|---|
| Amenity green space (e.g. informal recreation spaces, recreation grounds, village greens, urban parks, formal gardens and playing fields) | 400m |
| Provision for children and young people (e.g. equipped play areas, ball courts, outdoor basketball hoop areas, skateboard parks, teenage shelters and "hangouts") | 600m |
| Publicly accessible outdoor sports (e.g. outdoor sports pitches, tennis, bowls, athletics and other sports) | 1000m |
| Allotments and community gardens (e.g. land used for the growing of own produce, including urban farms. Does not include private gardens) | 1000m |
| Natural/semi-natural areas of open space (e.g. woodlands, urban forestry, scrub, grasslands, wetlands, open and running water, banks to rivers, land and ponds, wastelands, closed cemeteries and graveyards) | 300m (2ha site) 2km (20ha site) 5km (100ha site) 10km (500ha site) |

2. A financial contribution in lieu of open space provision will be acceptable, provided:
 - i. The proposed development site would be of insufficient size in itself to make the appropriate new provision; or
 - ii. The open space cannot be accommodated on-site due to site constraints, housing delivery expectations on allocated sites or location, and alternative appropriate off-site provision cannot be identified.
3. Where it can be demonstrated that existing open space provision can either wholly or partially mitigate the impacts of development in accordance with the above standards, the council may seek a reduced level of provision or financial contribution. Developers should take full account of open space requirements at an early stage of the development management process and are encouraged to engage with the council to determine the most appropriate quantum, type and location of open space provision.
4. The council will operate the policy flexibly to secure the provision of the typologies of open space which are most needed in the relevant area, taking account of the above standards and the suitability of the site to accommodate the identified needs.
5. Proposals for, and including, new publicly accessible open space and recreation provision will, where feasible, seek to reinforce existing landscape character, as defined in the Maidstone Landscape Character Assessment.
6. Proposals for, and including, new publicly accessible open space and recreation provision shall respect the amenities of neighbouring occupiers, by ensuring that development does not result in excessive levels of noise or light pollution. New lighting relating to such development will also preserve the character and visual amenity of the countryside.
7. Proposals for new development which would result in the net loss of open space or sport and recreation facilities will not be permitted unless there is a proven overriding need for the development. In addition, the development will only be permitted if:
 - i. There is no resulting deficiency in open space or recreation facilities in the locality when assessed against the quality standards of this policy; or
 - ii. An alternative provision, determined to be of an equivalent community benefit by the Borough Council and community representatives can be provided to replace the loss.
8. In dealing with applications to develop existing open areas within the urban area, rural service centres, larger villages and other locations, the Borough Council will have regard to the impact of the loss of the contribution that the existing site makes to the character, amenity and biodiversity of the area.

The Open Space supplementary planning document will contain further detail on how the policy will be implemented.

Appendix 3: List of legislation, strategies, documents, projects and organisations referenced in the strategy

1. European Commission (2013) Environment, Green Infrastructure
<http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/ecosystems/>
2. [The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010](#)
3. UK Legislation (2013) The Countryside Rights of Way Act 2000
<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2000/37/contents>
4. [Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006](#)
5. [National Planning Policy Framework](#)
6. [Planning Policy Guidance - Natural Environment](#)
7. [Sport England Delivering Sport and Recreation](#)
8. [Submission version Maidstone Borough Local Plan 2016](#)
9. [Kent Biodiversity Partnership](#)
10. [Kent Nature Partnership](#)
11. [Maidstone's Biodiversity Strategy](#)
12. [Maidstone Landscape Character Assessment 2013](#)
13. Kent Habitat Survey 2012 <http://www.archnature.eu>
14. Kent Habitat Survey 2012 <http://www.archnature.eu>
15. Maidstone Strategic Flood Risk Assessment 2008
http://www.maidstone.gov.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0011/23060/Strategic-Flood-Risk-Assessment-REDUCED.pdf
16. [Kent Countryside and Coastal Access Improvement Plan 2013-2017](#)
17. [Growing the Garden of England: A strategy for environment and economy in Kent, 2011](#)
18. [The State of water in Kent, Kent water Summit, Environment Agency, June 2012](#)
19. [Maidstone Landscape Character Assessment 2013](#)
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<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/19501436>
29. [Securing the Value of Nature in Kent \(2011\)](#)
30. [Securing the Value of Nature in Kent \(2011\)](#)