

AGENDA

CABINET MEETING



Date: Wednesday 4 December 2013
Time: 6.30 pm
Venue: Town Hall, High Street,
Maidstone

Membership:

Councillors Garland (Chairman), Greer, Moss,
Paine, Mrs Ring and J.A. Wilson

Page No.

1. Apologies for Absence
2. Urgent Items
3. Notification of Visiting Members
4. Disclosures by Members and Officers
5. Disclosures of lobbying
6. To consider whether any items should be taken in private because of the possible disclosure of exempt information
7. Minutes of the Meeting held on 13 November 2013

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Continued Over/:

Issued on 26 November 2013

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**Alison Broom, Chief Executive, Maidstone Borough Council,
Maidstone House, King Street, Maidstone Kent ME15 6JQ**

KEY DECISION REPORTS

- | | | |
|----|--|----------|
| 8. | Report of the Head of Planning and Development - Maidstone Borough Local Plan Public Consultation Draft - Group 2 Policies | 3 - 98 |
| 9. | Report of the Head of Planning and Development - Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy | 99 - 201 |

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 13 NOVEMBER 2013

Present: Councillor Garland (Chairman), and
Councillors Greer, Moss, Paine, Mrs Ring and
J.A. Wilson

Also Present: Councillor Burton

86. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

There were no apologies for absence.

87. **URGENT ITEMS**

There were no urgent items.

88. **NOTIFICATION OF VISITING MEMBERS**

Councillor Barned was in attendance.

89. **DISCLOSURES BY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS**

There were no disclosures by Members or Officers.

90. **DISCLOSURES OF LOBBYING**

There were no disclosures of lobbying.

91. **EXEMPT ITEMS**

RESOLVED: That the Items on the Agenda be taken in public as proposed.

92. **MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 22 OCTOBER 2013**

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the Meeting held on 22 October 2013 be approved as a correct record and signed.

93. **MID-YEAR STRATEGIC PLAN PERFORMANCE REPORT 2013/14**

Cabinet considered the report of the Head of Policy and Communications regarding the progress made in the year to date against the Strategic Plan 2011-15 actions and progress made in the second quarter of 2013/14 for the Council's key performance indicators.

RESOLVED:

- a) That the progress made against the Strategic Actions be noted;
- b) That the out-turns of the KPIs (as attached at Appendix A to the report of the Head of Policy and Communications) be noted;
- c) That the Update on the Business Improvement Programme from the Business Improvement Manager, as attached at Appendix C to the report of the Head of Policy and Communications, be noted;
- d) That a further report on Customer Services including channels of communication being prepared for the Corporate Leadership Team in December to identify the issues with the customer service and channel shift indicators where the targets are unlikely to be met be noted;
- e) That the following additional indicators that are unlikely to achieve the annual target be noted:
 - HSG 004 – Average time taken to process and notify applicants on the housing register
 - HRO 001 – Working days lost due to sickness absence (rolling year); and
 - WCN 006 – Missed bins (per 100,000 collections).
- f) That a review of performance management to be undertaken by the Head of Policy & Communications following the Corporate Peer Review be noted.

94. **BUDGET MONITORING - SECOND QUARTER 2013/14**

The Cabinet considered the report of the Head of Finance and Resources concerning the capital and revenue budget and expenditure figures for the second quarter of 2013/14, together with other financial matters with a material effect on the medium term financial strategy or balance sheet.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

95. **DURATION OF MEETING**

6.30 p.m. to 6.43 p.m.

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET

WEDNESDAY 4 DECEMBER 2013

REPORT OF HEAD OF PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT

Report prepared by Michael Murphy and Sarah Anderton

1. MAIDSTONE BOROUGH LOCAL PLAN PUBLIC CONSULTATION DRAFT – GROUP 2 POLICIES

1.1 Issue for Decision

1.1.1 To approve the second group of draft local plan policies for Maidstone Borough (attached at Appendix A). These policies will be incorporated in a full draft of the local plan to be published for Regulation 18 (Preparation) public consultation. This group of policies comprises a number of spatial policies, which are the key overarching policies for the Borough, and also development management policies which add more detail to the spatial policies.

1.1.2 The majority of the spatial policies have been the subject of public consultation in 2011 and have undergone some amendments following representations made during the consultation. The development management policies have already been to Scrutiny committee on 20 August 2013 and have been amended following recommendations made by this committee.

1.1.3 In addition a proposed site allocation policy for the Maidstone East and Royal Mail Sorting Office site and a revised policy for the Newnham Park site are included in this group.

1.2 Recommendation of Head of Planning and Development

1.2.1 That Cabinet approves the proposed policies and associated plans of the Maidstone Borough Local Plan (attached at Appendix A, C, D and E), for public consultation.

1.2.2 That Cabinet approves the proposed site allocation policy for Maidstone East and the Royal Mail Sorting Office site attached at Appendix B for public consultation.

1.2.3 That Cabinet approves the proposed site allocation policy for Newnham Park attached at Appendix B for public consultation and adopts the policy for development management purposes

1.3 Reasons for Recommendation

1.3.1 The Cabinet report of 22 October 2013 explains that with further work required to finalise housing need and supply, it is not possible at this time to bring the local plan as a whole for consideration by Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet. The decision has therefore been made to take policies unaffected by the spatial strategy and housing target to the forthcoming Scrutiny and Cabinet meetings in three groups, with the first group having already been approved by Cabinet on 22 October.

1.3.2 This report focuses on the second group of local plan policies being put forward for approval by Cabinet. The list of Group 2 policies is included in the table below.

Group 2 Policies	
Spatial Policies	
SP1	Maidstone Town Centre (CS2)
SP2	Maidstone Urban Area (CS3)
SP3	Rural Service Centres (CS4)
SP4	Rural Settlements
SP5	Countryside (CS5)
Development Management Policies (borough wide)	
DM9	Historic and Natural Environment (CS13)
DM10	Open Space and Recreation
DM11	Community Facilities
DM15	Economic Development (CS8)
DM16	Retention of Employment Sites
DM20	Mooring Facilities and Boat Yards
DM21	Housing Mix (CS9)
DM22	Affordable Housing (CS10)
DM23	Local Needs Housing (CS11)
Development Management Policies for the Countryside	
DM28	Design Principles in the Countryside
DM29	New Agricultural Buildings and Structures
DM30	Conversion of Rural Buildings in the Countryside
DM31	Rebuilding and Extending Dwellings in the Countryside
DM32	Change of Use of Agricultural Land to Domestic Garden Land
DM33	Accommodation for Agriculture and Forestry Workers
DM34	Live-Work Units
DM35	Expansion of Existing Businesses in Rural Areas
DM36	Holiday Caravan and Camp Sites
DM37	Caravan Storage in the Countryside

DM38	Retail Units in the Countryside
DM39	Equestrian Development
Delivery Framework	
ID1	Infrastructure Delivery (<i>CS14</i>)
ID2	Electronic Communications
Retail and Mixed Use Land Allocation	
	Maidstone East/Royal Mail Sorting Office (will form part of Policy RMX1)
	Newnham Court (will form part of Policy RMX1)

- 1.3.3 Of the 30 Group 2 policies listed above, several of the policies include amended core policies from the previous iteration of the Core Strategy (included in italics in table). A number of these policies have not been seen by Members since public consultation on the Core Strategy in 2011, whereas others were approved by Cabinet in March 2013 to form part of the new local plan at the forthcoming public consultation in 2014. Where a significant amendment has been made to any of these policies, or a new policy has been proposed, it is summarised below.
- 1.3.4 SP1 - Maidstone Town Centre - previously CS2 (2011)
Policy SP1 is the overarching spatial policy for the town centre. Its last iteration (CS2) formed part of the Core Strategy public consultation draft in 2011. Policy SP1, included in Appendix A, has had a number of significant amendments since 2011 in response to the public consultation and in particular, the Town Centre Assessment (2013) and Retail Capacity Study (2013), both undertaken by the consultants DTZ.
- 1.3.5 The supporting text includes a town centre Vision which has been carried forward from the 2011 version of the core strategy. The Vision sets out what the town centre will be like by the end of the plan period. It acknowledges that to achieve a 'first class traditional town centre' the Local Plan needs to make provision for appropriate development in the town centre to accommodate future needs and to support this with both environmental and accessibility improvements. The policy also highlights that development must demonstrate a particular quality of design and, where appropriate, have specific regard to the setting of the riverside.
- 1.3.6 In view of the key role that retail will play in sustaining the health of the town centre, Policy SP1 proposes that the Maidstone East site, in conjunction with the adjacent Royal Mail Sorting Office site, be allocated in the Local Plan as a key site for new retail development in the town centre for the early part of the plan period. This site has an existing allocation in the adopted Maidstone borough-wide Local Plan (2000) for mixed use development including retail (bulky goods), offices and housing. It is proposed that the site now be prioritised for a

combination of comparison and convenience retail development. An element of residential development would also be appropriate. The proposed site allocation policy which provides the more detailed development criteria for this site is included in Appendix B. This policy will form part of Retail and Mixed Use site allocations policy (Policy RMX1) when the complete draft local plan is presented to Members. The details for this site are being brought to Members now because the local plan's approach to retail development in the town centre is relevant to the proposals for Newnham Park, which are also considered as part of this report.

- 1.3.7 Evidence in the Retail Capacity Study (2013) projects that there will be further growth in retailing over the later phases of the plan, additional to that which could be accommodated on the Maidstone East/Sorting Office site. The objective is that this need should be met in, or close to, the retailing core of the town centre as the best way to help sustain and expand its shopping function. The longer term redevelopment of the area centred on The Mall is considered to represent an opportunity to both upgrade this key shopping centre and to provide additional floorspace for which there will be a need. This is a substantial proposal which will take time to come to fruition.
- 1.3.8 Policy SP1 identifies the Mall area of the town centre as a broad location for future retail growth (see Appendix E for a plan showing the broad location). This brings clarity about the Council's view of where longer term retail growth in the town centre should be delivered. This will help to underpin the early discussions and negotiations needed for a scheme to progress. A detailed allocation for the site would be brought forward in a subsequent review of the Local Plan.
- 1.3.9 A number of respondents to the 2011 consultation queried how the over supply of poorer quality office stock was to be addressed. The town centre is and will continue to be a focus for office-based employment. There is however an acknowledged over-supply of poorer quality office stock in the centre¹ which has the overall effect of suppressing rental values and thereby inhibiting the supply of new, modern floorspace either through new development or refurbishment. It is proposed that the approach should be to seek to retain the best quality stock in the town centre where possible as part of the designated Economic Development Areas (Policy DM16) whilst allowing for the redevelopment of the poorer quality stock for alternative uses. The poorer quality stock is generally located in older premises, which are inflexible to adjust to meet evolving business needs and have limited or no dedicated car parking.

¹ Employment Land Forecast (March 2013)

- 1.3.10 The role of residential development is a further matter on which respondents to the 2011 consultation sought clarification. Policy SP1 (vii) specifies that there will be scope for additional residential development as part of the overall mix of uses in the town centre. This may be delivered either as an element within mixed use schemes or through smaller scale redevelopment where the commercial role of the town centre will not be undermined. Specific sites will be allocated in the Local Plan. Residential will be the key alternative use for the poorer quality office stock referred to above. The delivery of housing on these sites will be contingent on;
- The value of the office stock reducing to a level where redevelopment becomes viable
 - Leases on individual premises coming to an end
 - The return of the market for town centre apartments
- 1.3.11 The text of the town centre policy in the 2011 Core Strategy defined town centre quarters to provide a framework for the more detailed site allocations to follow in a subsequent plan document. As a comprehensive local plan is being prepared, which includes site allocations, the value of the quarters approach has lessened and these have not been carried forward into the current policy.
- 1.3.12 The Maidstone Borough-wide Local Plan (2000) does not define a specific boundary for the town centre. A proposed town centre boundary to be included in the new Local Plan is shown in Appendix C. This is the area to which Policy SP1 will apply and represents that area where 'town centre uses' (retail, offices, leisure/entertainment and arts/culture/tourism) are currently concentrated and where new provision should be focussed, based on assessment of character and function. In the 2011 Core Strategy the boundary was drawn quite expansively to include the Springfield area. The prospect was that a large scale office/education campus could be established there.
- 1.3.13 Subject to Members' views when the full suite of site allocation policies are considered at a subsequent meeting, it is considered that this area could have a greater role in delivering new residential development and at this point it is therefore recommended that it is excluded from the town centre boundary. The Haynes site is not currently in a 'town centre use' and is in a more peripheral location, removed from the core of the town centre. Again, subject to Members' final decisions, this site could have a role in delivering additional housing and is excluded from the town centre boundary at this time.
- 1.3.14 The plan in Appendix D shows the primary shopping area (PSA) within the town centre, drawing on analysis in the Town Centre Assessment (2013). The PSA is relevant for the application of the sequential test; retail sites within the PSA are defined as 'in centre' sites, sites within

300m walking distance of the PSA are 'edge of centre' sites and those beyond this 300m distance are 'out of centre'.

- 1.3.15 SP3 – Rural Service Centres - previously CS4 (2011)
The planned development and maintenance of sustainable communities underpins the council's approach to rural areas where the primary aim is to direct development towards rural settlements that can best act as service centres for their local population and surrounding rural communities. Rural service centres (RSC) form part of the settlement hierarchy for the borough and are seen as the most sustainable locations for growth outside of the town centre and urban area
- 1.3.16 Comments received at public consultation on what was then Policy CS4 in the Core Strategy (2011) called for the designation of Coxheath as a rural service centre and questioned the inclusion of Harrietsham in the policy because of its proximity to Lenham and a perceived lack of services and facilities. Based on a recent review of services and facilities in Maidstone's rural villages, Policy SP3 now designates an additional two villages as RSC, namely Coxheath and Yalding, while also continuing to retain Harrietsham's designation. The villages referred to above have a number of the key services and facilities expected of a RSC, serve a wider community and are considered sustainable locations for future growth.
- 1.3.17 SP4 – Larger Villages (New Policy)
A recent review of services and facilities in the rural villages has identified the larger villages of Boughton Monchelsea, Hollingbourne and Sutton Valence as settlements that have a more limited range of services than the RSCs but still offer some services that meet the day-to-day needs of their local communities.
- 1.3.18 Policy SP4 designates Boughton Monchelsea, Hollingbourne and Sutton Valence as Larger Villages because each village has a number of services and facilities that meet local needs and make the villages more sustainable settlements than most other rural settlements outside of the RSCs. These Larger Villages are considered suitable locations to accommodate additional housing development, subject to the availability of acceptable sites, but the overall scale of development that will be acceptable in these settlements will generally be less than in the RSCs as they are less sustainable locations for meeting the development needs of the borough as a whole.
- 1.3.19 SP5 – Countryside – previously CS5 (March 2013)
The supporting text of Policy SP5 has been amended to define what the term "countryside" means for development management purposes and the policy itself has been strengthened to ensure development in the countryside meets strict design standards.

- 1.3.20 RMX1 (part) Retail and Mixed Use Land Allocations: Newnham Park Previously Strategic Site Policy SS4 (March 2013)
The policy for the strategic employment site at Junction 7 (Newnham Park) was approved by Cabinet in March for public consultation. The policy allocates the site for a medical campus, a replacement retail centre and a nature reserve. Cabinet also approved the policy, along with the other strategic site allocations, for development management purposes.
- 1.3.21 Since this decision, the Town Centre Assessment (2013) has been completed as part of the evidence base for the Local Plan. This study underlines the particular importance of retail to the health of the town centre. The presence of significant numbers of the largest national retailers and the role of anchor stores is crucial in sustaining the attractiveness of the town centre to shoppers into the longer term. The Retail Capacity Study (2013) has also clarified the scale of new retail floorspace that will be needed to accommodate projected growth in retail expenditure. Under a sequential approach, this additional floorspace should be directed to the town centre as a first preference. The recent approval of the Next store at Eclipse Park is a further reason to take stock and re-clarify the approach that should be taken to additional retail development at Newnham Park. This is being brought to Members now because a planning application for a retail scheme at the Newnham Park site is likely to be submitted in the near future.
- 1.3.22 As set out earlier in this report, in addition to the allocation of the Maidstone East/Sorting Office site, it is proposed that The Mall be identified as a longer term location for retail development to provide upgraded and additional shopping floorspace suited to modern retailers' requirements in a town centre location.
- 1.3.23 In view of the priority to be afforded to retail growth in the town centre, it is considered that the Newnham Park policy text and policies map should be amended to:
- Confirm that development should primarily provide for the replacement of the existing garden centre and existing shops (some 14,300sqm of A1 floorspace)
 - Confirm that the additional retail floorspace above this quantum be limited to some 700sqm
 - State that the additional floorspace should not be used for the sale of clothing, footwear, accessories, jewellery and watches, in order to control the diversion of trade from the town centre.
 - Confirm that building heights should be controlled across the whole site. Large scale retail warehouse style buildings will not

be acceptable in this prime gateway location within the setting of the Kent Downs AONB.

- (On the policies map) show the retail redevelopment to be focused on the existing retail footprint and show the area to the east of the existing retail area to be for medical use, rather than for medical **or** retail use as is in March 2013 version of the policy.

1.3.24 The Newnham Park policy specifies that development proposals should have no significant adverse impact on the town centre. The judgement of what constitutes a significant adverse impact will be based on the facts at the time, including the health of the town centre and the nature of the impact that is forecast. This is considered to be a more robust approach than specifying the percentage impact threshold in the policy text.

1.3.25 The revised version of the Newnham Park policy is included in Appendix B. Where the text preceding the policy was purely descriptive, it has been abridged so that it will be consistent with the other site allocation policies when the complete draft Local Plan is published. This policy will form part of Retail and Mixed Use Policy RMX1 when the complete draft local plan is presented to Members.

Cabinet will be requested to approve the revised Newnham Park policy for development management purposes.

1.3.26 DM9 – Historic and Natural Environment – previously CS13 (March 2013)

This policy did not draw any significant comments during Regulation 18 public consultation on the (then) Core Strategy in 2011. However, since the policy was approved by Cabinet in March 2013, the supporting text of DM9 has now been amended to highlight that the borough can be broadly divided into 7 distinct landscape types as opposed to 4 types in the previous iteration of the policy. The policy has also been amended and now includes an extra criterion (iii) which ensures that new development does not have a negative impact on ground and surface water and ground source protection zones.

1.3.27 DM15 (Economic Development) – previously CS8 (March 2013)

Policy DM15 sets out the overall planning approach to economic development. The rural conversion policy (Policy DM30) prioritises business uses over residential uses and, for completeness, reference to this preference has been added in Policy DM15. In addition, Policy DM15 does not now set out the sequential sites test for town centre uses as this is now more fully covered in Policy DM17.

1.3.28 A number of the development management policies that comprise part of Group 2 have already been to Scrutiny Committee in August 2013.

Although some minor points were raised by Scrutiny with respect to the policies, the main thrust of comments focused on the need for further new policies to address live-work units and the expansion of existing businesses in the countryside. Both of these policies have now been developed and are included in the Group 2 policies attached at appendix A.

- 1.3.29 The supporting text of the first of these policies (DM34: Live-Work Units) defines the term live-work and ensures that such development will only be acceptable where it meets detailed criteria, which excludes development of new build live-work units in the countryside and stipulates that the workspace element of a live-work unit should comprise at least 30% of the total floorspace.
- 1.3.30 Policy DM35 (Expansion of Existing Businesses in Rural Areas) addresses the importance of balancing the advantages of job creation in the rural economy with the adverse impact this can sometimes have on the rural environment. The policy sets out a number of detailed criteria to ensure that for a planning permission to be granted, the new development is appropriate in scale for the location and can be satisfactorily integrated into the local landscape.
- 1.3.31 A further new policy, DM28, (Design Principles in the Countryside) has been developed through consultation with officers. This policy aims to ensure a consistent level of high quality design in rural areas for both new proposals and extensions or alterations to existing buildings. The new policy should be read in conjunction with Policy DM3 (Principles of Good Design).
- 1.3.32 Minor amendments to certain Group 2 policies have also been made following officer-level consultation. The following points summarise the amendments made:
- Policy DM10 (Publicly Accessible Open Space and Recreation) - includes an amendment to criterion 4 which strengthens the policy to ensure that for development on existing open spaces, proposals will have to consider the contribution that the existing site makes to the character, amenity and biodiversity of the area. The policy also provides a reference to the Green and Blue Infrastructure SPD.
 - Policy DM16 (Retention of Employment Sites) – Criterion 5 sets out the approach to non-employment generating redevelopment proposals on existing employment sites in Maidstone and the RSCs (outside the designated Economic Development Areas). The supporting text (para 12.99) has been amended to require a viability report to demonstrate that there is no realistic prospect of the site being retained in economic use.

- Policy DM20 (Mooring Facilities and Boat Yards) – includes an amendment to policy criterion 1 to make the policy less restrictive for the development of small scale and short term mooring facilities at existing locations within the context of other plan policies that address design and landscaping.
- Policy DM22 (Affordable Housing) – includes additional paragraphs to the supporting text to explain how the council will apply either the 15% or 30% affordable housing target on previously developed land depending on how the viability of the proposed development is likely to be affected.
- Policy DM31 (Rebuilding and Extending Dwellings) – includes an additional criterion to ensure that new or replacement outbuildings (e.g. garages) should be subservient in scale, location and design to the host dwelling.
- Policy DM39 (Equestrian Development) – has been amended for applications for small private stables. Previously, the policy stated that permission would only be granted if the owner of the horses lived adjacent to, or opposite, the proposed site. However this restriction has now been removed. For applications for commercial stables (10 or more), the restriction still applies.
- Policy ID2 (Electronic Communications) – includes an additional paragraph to the supporting text which encourages new development to include provision of utilities infrastructure to accommodate high speed broadband and where possible, to include facilities supporting mobile broadband and Wi-Fi. This is also supported in the policy text of ID2.

1.3.33 Policies in the new Maidstone Borough Local Plan have been designed to avoid repetition, so the local plan should be read as a whole when determining planning applications. A table of all local plan policies is included at Appendix F. Once the three groups of policies have been presented to Members over the coming months, the local plan will be presented to Cabinet, via Scrutiny Committee, as a whole in advance of Regulation 18 public consultation early in 2014. This will give Members the opportunity to see the local plan as a single document and to see how certain policies are connected.

1.4 Alternative Action and why not Recommended

1.4.1 The policies (attached at Appendix A as Group 2) could have been presented to Cabinet for consideration as part of the new Maidstone Borough Local Plan as a whole. However, deliberation of these policies, some of which have not been seen by Members since October 2011, at

this point offers the opportunity for early debate, and the chance to identify new local issues that have not been addressed through these and/or other policies that will be carried forward to the local plan.

1.5 Impact on Corporate Objectives

1.5.1 The new Maidstone Borough Local Plan will assist in delivering the spatial objectives of the Community Strategy and the Strategic Plan over the plan period. It will also have regard to objectives set out in other Council documents, such as the Economic Development Strategy and the Housing Strategy. The local plan will support the council’s priorities for Maidstone to have a growing economy and to be a decent place to live, and the consultation processes will strive to meet corporate and customer excellence.

1.6 Risk Management

1.6.1 The council still has a local planning policy framework that comprises adopted development plan documents and supplementary planning documents, endorsed guidance, and saved policies from the Maidstone Borough Wide Local Plan 2000. These policies are still relevant and carry weight in the decision making processes provided there is no conflict with the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).

1.6.2 However, the council has a duty to maintain an up-to-date policy framework, and current policies are increasingly becoming outdated or are in conflict with the NPPF. The policies that are the subject of this report, together with other policies of the Maidstone Borough Local Plan, will provide a robust framework for the development management process and will reduce the risk of inappropriate development.

1.7 Other Implications

1.7.1

1.	Financial	
2.	Staffing	
3.	Legal	X
4.	Equality Impact Needs Assessment	
5.	Environmental/Sustainable Development	X
6.	Community Safety	
7.	Human Rights Act	

8. Procurement

9. Asset Management

1.7.2 Legal: Legal services offer advice on document content and processes to ensure the Maidstone Borough Local Plan is found sound at examination. A number of meetings have been held with Counsel and regular meetings have been set up with the Head of Legal Services. These services can be managed within the existing budget for local plan production.

1.7.3 Environmental/Sustainable Development: A sustainability appraisal, incorporating a strategic environmental assessment is required for all local plan policies², including site allocations. Consultants have been appointed to undertake this technical exercise, and costs can be managed within the existing budget for local plan production. The sustainability appraisal is an iterative process, and the policies that are the subject of this report have undergone initial appraisal and have been amendment as a result.

1.8 Relevant Documents

None.

1.8.1 Appendices

Appendix A: Draft Maidstone Borough Local Plan Policies 2013 – Group 2.

Appendix B: Allocation Policies for Maidstone East and Newnham Court (including plans)

Appendix C: Proposed Town Centre Boundary

Appendix D: Proposed Primary Shopping Area

Appendix E: The Mall: Broad Location for Future Retail Growth

Appendix F: List of All Local Plan Policies

1.8.2 Background Documents

None.

² **SEA Directive:** European Directive 2001/42/EC 'on the assessment of the effects of certain plans and programmes on the environment'. Transposed into UK law via The Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004.

IS THIS A KEY DECISION REPORT?

THIS BOX MUST BE COMPLETED

Yes

No

This is a Key Decision because it affects all wards and parishes.

Wards/Parishes affected: All.

Policy SP1 - Maidstone town centre

6.1 Maidstone has a successful town centre. It has been, and continues to be, a centre for public administration, reflecting Maidstone's County town role. Both the County and Borough councils are located with the town centre along with other public sector employers such as the Passport Office and the HM Prison Service. Coupled with public administration, business, financial and professional services are particularly important economic sectors and between them they account for a third of employment in the local economy with the town centre acting as a particular hub for these activities. This is reflected in the volume of office floorspace in the town centre which is estimated to be some 192,000 sqm.

6.2 Maidstone town centre is also a significant shopping destination, offering a predominately outdoor, street-based shopping environment. There is some 141,000sqm of retail floorspace within the town centre boundary.

6.3 The town centre has a good balance of major, national retailers alongside a strong, independent offer. The former are particularly concentrated in Fremlin Walk, the southern end of Week Street and The Mall, the town's main indoor shopping centre. The town centre benefits from a high representation of major retailers and has a particular strength in clothing and footwear shops. The presence of a critical mass of national chain stores is an important factor in attracting shoppers into the town which in turn helps to attract and retain the major retailers themselves.

6.4 The local independent shops are principally found within the Royal Star Arcade and along Gabriel's Hill, Pudding Lane and Union Street. These shops add to the town centre's distinctiveness and complement and support the mainstream shopping offer. The larger retail units on the west side of the river also have a predominantly complementary role to the main shopping area. Whilst these units are close to the core of the town centre 'as the crow flies', the routes across the river for walkers and cyclists are indirect and, to a degree, unattractive to use which limits the potential for sustainable linked trips.

6.5 The town centre like others across the country faces challenges from the economic downturn as shoppers spend more cautiously and prioritise value for money. Retailing patterns are also changing as more people turn to the internet for their purchases. Many national retailers are responding to the changing environment by consolidating their national store networks into a portfolio of fewer, larger stores. For Maidstone there is the challenge of competition from other Kent town centres such as Ashford, Tunbridge Wells and Chatham. Planning permission has recently been granted for an extension to Bluewater (30,000sqm) which will further enhance its attractiveness as a major shopping destination and result in further competition for the town centre.

6.6 Maidstone town centre also supports a wide range of leisure, cultural and tourist attractions and enjoys an active night time economy. The majority of cultural and tourist facilities are based around the historic core of the town and including the Hazlitt Theatre on Earl Street, the recently extended museum on St Faiths Street and the Archbishops Palace and All Saints Church to the south. Lockmeadow is the town's major leisure and entertainment complex whilst Earl Street has become a particular focus for restaurants and cafes.

6.7 The combination of the centre’s historic fabric, riverside environment and accessible green spaces helps give the town it’s distinct and attractive character. The town centre benefits from the select number of green spaces interspersed through it, such as Brenchley Gardens and Trinity Gardens, whilst further afield the substantial facilities of both Whatman Park and Mote Park are within an extended walking distance of the town centre.

6.8 The quality and attractiveness of the High Street Conservation Area has been substantially upgraded by the recent High Street Improvement works. As well as expanding pedestrian-friendly areas and reducing the dominance of vehicles, the scheme has created a new public space in Jubilee Square which is used for community and promotional events.

6.9 The River Medway is the key natural landscape feature within the town centre. The river corridor acts as a contrast with the urban townscape, provides pedestrian and cycleway routes and serves as a wildlife corridor by linking urban habitats with the countryside beyond. The River Len, a tributary of the Medway, also runs through the town centre.

6.10 The town centre is also the focus of wider initiatives which will add to the vitality of the town centre and increase its draw. Town Centre Management is a long standing initiative which acts to maximise the appeal of the town centre including through the organisation of promotional events and crime reduction initiatives. The recently established Maidstone Town Team will be delivering projects associated with marketing, events, regeneration and culture.

The future role of Maidstone Town Centre

6.11 The future role of Maidstone as one of the principal town centres in Kent in continuing to act as the County Town will be guided by a vision of what the centre will be like by the end of the plan period.

Town Centre Vision

By 2031 a regenerated and sustainable Maidstone town centre will be a first class traditional town centre at the heart of the 21st Century County Town that has maintained its place as one of the premier town centres in Kent by creating a distinctive, safe and high quality place that has:

- Retained its best environmental features, including the riverside and the enhanced public realm;
- Provided a variety of well-integrated attractions for all ages including new shopping, service sector based businesses, leisure, tourism, and cultural facilities; and
- Improved access for all.

Key Components in Realising this Vision are:

- Enhancing the diversity of the retail offer, supporting a continued balance between independent and multiple retailers;
- Creating a highly sustainable location resilient to future climate change;
- Establishing the town centre as an attractive hub for business building on the town centre's assets and environment; and
- Creating a stronger mix and balance of uses within the centre to support long term viability including where appropriate residential development.

Shopping

6.12 The Town Centre Assessment (2013) reveals that the centre is performing well in retail terms, signified by stabilising vacancy rates and the presence of major retailers, especially in the Primary Shopping Area. Vacancy rates are higher, however, in the more secondary shopping areas which detracts from the overall vitality and viability of the town centre. A flexible approach to allowing service and leisure uses in these locations will help to improve unit occupation and diversify the mix of uses in the town centre. The town centre assessment has identified the importance of restaurants, cafes and coffee shops as well as personal retail (hairdressers etc) and leisure uses in encouraging people to extend the length of their visit to the town centre.

6.13 The Retail Capacity Study (2013) forecasts the need for new shopping floorspace in the town for both comparison and convenience shopping over the timeframe of the local plan. The study takes account of predicted changes in shopping patterns such as the increasing role of the internet, population growth and expenditure growth. There are limits to predicting retail trends over such an extended period and the study advises that the findings for the latter part of the plan period (2026 and 2031) in particular must be regarded as broad indications of retail capacity rather than absolute quantum. A further review of the capacity forecasts will be needed in the middle of the plan period, in or around 2020.

	2016	2021	2026	2031
Comparison (sqm)	5,500	12,400	18,800	23,700
Convenience (sqm)	3,700	4,400	5,250	6,100

Table 6.1 Retail Capacity (cumulative)

6.14 To accommodate needs in the early part of the plan period, the key opportunity and top priority for new retail development will be the Maidstone East/Royal Mail Sorting Office site. The site has capacity to accommodate 10,000sqm of convenience and comparison retailing. This is sequentially the first choice site with close, direct walking connections to the heart of the town centre and further scope to enhance the quality and attractiveness of this route through a scheme of enhanced public realm, as well as improved public transport connections in association with the site's development. This site can help to deliver a new modern shopping destination, creating a further 'anchor' shopping location in the town centre alongside Fremlins Walk and The Mall. The site is considered a suitable location for both convenience and comparison type shopping and could help to address the identified lack of larger, more modern units available in the town centre which are important in attracting new operators into the town.

6.15 The Mall is the town centre's main indoor shopping centre and is currently well occupied as one of the key anchor locations in the town centre. The building is, however, becoming dated with its layout and internal environment is less suited to modern retailers' requirements compared with both Fremlin Walk and competing centres further afield such as Tunbridge Wells, Canterbury and Ashford. Without positive and significant intervention there is a considerable risk that the commercial attractiveness of the centre will decline over the plan period to the detriment of the town centre as a whole.

6.16 In response, the Plan identifies this part of the town centre, centred on The Mall, as a broad location for a retail led redevelopment for the longer term. The location encompasses The Mall, the multi storey car park fronting Romney Place and Sainsburys as well as the now demolished King Street car park site and the former Bowlplex building, both on the north side of King Street. As well as reproviding the existing quantum of floorspace, a comprehensive scheme could deliver net additional shopping floorspace and help meet the retail growth predicted for later in the plan period. Development here will help to sustain and enhance the commercial health of the town centre.

6.17 A scheme in this location is unlikely to come forward until the latter end of the plan period (post 2021) and the Borough Council will work actively to help bring the site forward. Site assembly and the physical constraints of the site will be amongst the issues to be addressed. The identification of the location in this Local Plan brings clarity about where longer term growth in the town centre will occur. An allocation for the site will be forthcoming in a future review of the Local Plan.

Offices

6.18 Offices based businesses are an important component in the commercial success of the town centre. The town centre is a sustainable location for offices and it offers the dual benefits of having good transport connections and a full range of services and facilities close at hand.

6.19 The town centre office market has been challenged for a number of years. The last significant new office building completed in the town centre was the Countygate development early in the last decade. There is a significant supply of poorer quality office stock which is less suited to modern occupier requirements because this stock is generally older, is not suited to flexible sub-division, is less energy efficient and has limited or no dedicated car parking. This over supply has had the effect of suppressing values. Coupled with a confirmed supply of business park office development at locations such as Kings Hill and Eclipse Park, the net effect is that new 100% office development is unlikely to be viable in the current market and would not proceed without a substantial pre-let. This position is not unique to Maidstone; the market in many regional office locations is reported to be constrained at present.⁽¹⁾

6.20 A route to tackle this issue is to address the oversupply of poorer quality stock. Recent changes to the General Permitted Development Order enable the conversion of office space to residential use with the need for planning permission for a limited 3 year period (until 30 May 2016) and this could start to secure a step change. A number of factors are likely to need to be in place for the office to residential conversions and redevelopment schemes in the town centre to come forward;

- The value of office stock, in terms of rents, to fall further so that redevelopment for alternative uses becomes viable
- Existing tenant leases to come to an end
- An uplift in the market for town centre apartments

6.21 There are locations within the town centre, however, where it is considered important that higher quality office floorspace is retained for the longer term, recognising that in the short term its conversion to residential use could happen without consent. These are the locations with more modern office buildings with car parking. These sites are designated in the plan for office (B1) use.

6.22 In addition the site at Mote Road is an opportunity to redevelop an existing office area to provide better quality stock, recognising that viability is likely to be challenging in the short to medium term.

Housing

6.23 Whilst commercial uses are the priority for the town centre, residential development can have a supporting role, in particular as part of mixed use schemes. Additional residential development in the town centre will help to promote town centre vitality, especially during the evening. The principal

opportunity will be Maidstone East/Sorting Office site where an element of housing will be delivered alongside significant new retail with other select opportunities for town centre housing also allocated in the plan.

6.24 The Springfield/Whatmans sites off Royal Engineers Road and the Haynes site on Ashford Road are gateway locations just beyond the town centre boundary where significant new residential development is planned.

Accessibility

6.25 The town centre has a function as a transport hub. Improving accessibility into and around the town centre is also important for sustaining and improving the commercial health of the town centre. Key measures are identified in the draft Integrated Transport Strategy and include increasing the frequency of bus services serving the town centre, enhancing the Park & Ride service, a revised approach to car parking management and improvements to the bridge gyratory. The strategy also highlights the value of public realm improvements, including to the River Medway towpath, to improve both the pedestrian and cyclist experience.

Quality in the town centre environment

6.26 Capitalising on the centre’s existing environmental assets is a further way to support sustainable growth in the town centre and to further enhance its commercial appeal.

6.27 The town centre has an interesting historic core but, in the past, it has not consistently benefited from high quality design or exceptional public realm. Much of the core of the town centre is prioritised for pedestrians but in places the quality of the surfaces and street furniture have begun to deteriorate and the connections between different locations within the centre are not always clear and legible.

6.28 The High Street enhancement scheme represents a recent positive step change in this respect and the town centre will benefit from further such schemes being brought forward as highlighted in the draft Integrated Transport Strategy and the Infrastructure Delivery Plan.

6.29 Also better linkages to and enhancement of the existing green spaces and riverside environment within the town centre would help to ‘green’ the town centre and help to adapt to, and mitigate against, climate change. The Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy will help to identify the principles that should be followed and the subsequent action plan will include specific initiatives for implementation.

Town centre boundary

6.30 The town centre boundary identifies the area covered by the Policy SP1 and has resulted from a combined assessment of:

- the extent of the area which contains, and is suitable for, the main focus of town centre uses;
- the existing character and form of development;

- the visual, physical and functional relationship between areas; and
- the potential for appropriate development opportunities

6.31 The boundary has been refined since previous version of the Core Strategy (2011) to exclude the areas of Springfield and Haynes to reflect their more distant location from the core of the town centre uses and the potential that these locations have in providing for new housing over the plan period.

Policy SP 1

Maidstone town centre

1. The regeneration of Maidstone town centre, as defined on the policies map, is a priority. This will be achieved by:
 - i. Retaining and enhancing a variety of well integrated attractions for all ages including shopping, service sector-based businesses, leisure and cultural facilities;
 - ii. The retail-led redevelopment of Maidstone East/Royal Mail Sorting Office site;
 - iii. For the medium to longer term, promoting a comprehensive retail redevelopment centred on The Mall;
 - iv. The retention of the best quality office stock whilst allowing for the redevelopment of lower quality offices;
 - v. The protection and consolidation of retail uses in the primary shopping frontages;
 - vi. Outside the primary shopping frontages, allowing for wider range of supporting uses including those that contribute to the night time economy;
 - vii. Select opportunities for residential redevelopment;
 - viii. The retention of the best environmental features, including the riverside, and delivery of the public realm improvements as identified in the Infrastructure Delivery Plan; and
 - ix. Achieving improved accessibility to the town centre through the measures in the draft Integrated Transport Strategy.
2. Development in the town centre should:
 - i. Demonstrate a quality of design that responds positively to the townscape, including ensuring the conservation and enhancement of the town centre's historic fabric. Additionally for sites adjacent to the River Medway, development should:
 - a. Respond positively to the river's setting as seen in both short range views and in longer range views from the river valley sides; and
 - b. Ensure public access to the riverside is secured and maintained either through on-site measures or off-site contributions.
 - ii. Contribute to the priority public realm and accessibility improvement schemes for the town centre identified in the Infrastructure Delivery Plan and the draft Integrated Transport Strategy.

Policy SP2 - Maidstone urban area

6.32 Policy SP 2 is specifically concerned with the built up area of Maidstone that is outside the identified town centre boundary but within the urban boundary shown on the policies map. This area has a varied mix of housing, shopping and community facilities, a range of business locations, a number of attractive green spaces and good transport links that all act in combination to make Maidstone an attractive place to live and work.

6.33 As the town has grown over the centuries areas of distinct architectural character have emerged. Adopted Character Area Assessment SPDs detail the locally distinctive character of an area, and offer guidance on improving the quality of an area. During the local plan period, change within the urban area will tend to be incremental in nature due to in-filling and select redevelopment of appropriate urban sites.

6.34 Land allocations within the urban area specifically at locations close to the town centre will comprise a mix of uses, which will include retail and community facilities, where possible. Major planned development at the edge of the urban area to meet housing and employment needs is to be supported by necessary infrastructure. Development proposals at all locations within the urban area should look to include links to open spaces.

Regeneration

6.35 There are four neighbourhoods within the urban area that have been identified as being in need of regeneration: Park Wood, High Street, Shepway North and Shepway South. These areas currently fall within the 20% most deprived in the country and a cross-cutting theme of the Sustainable Community Strategy is to tackle health, education and employment inequalities in these areas of relative disadvantage. Development within or adjoining these locations will look to close the gap between these areas and other parts of Maidstone by focusing on improving accessibility to health services, equal access to education and training opportunities, and job creation.

Policy SP 2

Maidstone urban area

As the largest and most sustainable location, Maidstone town will be the focus for new development. Outside of the town centre boundary identified in Policy SP 1, Maidstone will continue to be a good place to live and work. This will be achieved by:

1. The development and redevelopment or infilling of appropriate urban sites in a way that contributes positively to the locality's distinctive character;
2. Retaining well located business areas;
3. Maintaining the network of district and local centres, supporting enhancements to these centres in accordance with the overall hierarchy of centres;
4. Ensuring that development positively contributes to the setting, accessibility, biodiversity and amenity value of the town's green spaces and the River Medway and the River Len;
5. Supporting development that improves the social, environmental and employment well-being of those living in identified named areas of deprivation; and
6. Allocating sites at the edge of the town for housing and business development.

The boundary of the urban area is defined on the policies map.

Policy SP3 - Rural service centres

Rural service centres (RSC)

6.36 The planned development and maintenance of sustainable communities underpins the council’s approach to rural areas where the primary aim is to direct development towards rural settlements that can best act as service centres for their local population and surrounding rural communities. Rural Service Centres play a key part in the economic and social fabric of the borough and contribute towards its character and built form. They act as a focal point for trade and services by providing a concentration of public transport networks, employment opportunities and community facilities that minimise car journeys.

6.37 An assessment of services and facilities available in each settlement in the borough forms part of the basis for determining the villages that can be designated as RSC. Other factors like the accessibility of the villages, their potential to accommodate additional growth, and the role each village plays as a service centre for its surrounding hinterland are also important. The following villages have been designated as rural service centres based on the above:

- Coxheath
- Harrietsham

- Headcorn
- Lenham
- Marden
- Staplehurst
- Yalding

6.38 The RSCs are difficult to compare because they do not all share the same level of key services and facilities. However, all of the RSCs have a good range of services and facilities and serve a wider community. The vision for the service centres is that they will continue to be focal points where improved infrastructure and the strategic location of new development will reduce the need to travel and will help to maintain and improve on the range of essential local services and facilities. It is important that the RSCs remain sustainable settlements with the services and facilities necessary to support a growing population. The following text provides a summary of the distinctive character of each RSC.

Coxheath

6.39 Coxheath has the advantage of a compact urban form and a good offering of key services and facilities to support a growing population. Healthcare services in the village are particularly strong and include two GP surgeries, a dentist, a NHS hospital, community trust clinic and chiropractic clinic. The village also has a pharmacy. Unlike the other RSCs Coxheath does not have a train station but it has a regular bus service which connects the village to Maidstone town centre. Coxheath also has the advantage of being in close proximity to the town centre in comparison to other RSCs, which affords good access to a number of secondary schools.

Harrietsham

6.40 Harrietsham has the population to support key services. Provision of, and access to, schools and community facilities in the village are adequate but will require improvement with any increase in population. The village has good public transport connections to Maidstone and other retail and employment centres. There is a local aspiration for replacement almshouses to support the local elderly population and for additional play facilities, which are limited.

Headcorn

6.41 Headcorn has a diverse range of services and community facilities which are easily accessible on foot or by cycle due to the compact form of the village. There are local employment opportunities and there is a local wish to ensure that existing employment sites are kept in active employment use. A regular bus service runs between Headcorn and Maidstone and the village has good rail linkages to other retail and employment centres. Flooding is an issue in Headcorn as the village is surrounded on three sides by the functional floodplain of the River Beult and its tributaries. The Strategic Flood Risk Assessment advises strict controls on the location of development within Flood Zones 2 and 3.

Lenham

6.42 Lenham has the key services and community facilities expected of a rural service centre. The village performs the best in terms of education facilities, with a primary school and nursery school located on the same site, and as the only village to have a secondary school within the village boundary. Transport links to Maidstone and other retail and employment centres by bus and rail are adequate. There is a local aspiration for a small level of housing development in the village to sustain the thriving village centre and local businesses in general. The need for housing is centred on young people to ensure long term sustainability.

Marden

6.43 Marden is a successful RSC, particularly in terms of employment opportunities, and also has strong key community facilities such as a medical centre, library and village hall. Marden has frequent rail connections to London and other retail and employment centres, which has created a demand for new development. This has to be balanced with the desire to ensure local people have access to affordable housing. Public transport connections to Maidstone are less frequent and require improvement. Flooding is an issue in Marden and the Strategic Flood Risk Assessment advises strict controls on the location of development within Flood Zones 2 and 3.

Staplehurst

6.44 Staplehurst is the largest of the rural service centres in terms of population and size, and has a number of the key community services and facilities one would expect, including good health care services consisting of a health centre, pharmacy, optician and chiropractic clinic. The village also has more employment providers than most of the other RSCs. Current transport infrastructure in Staplehurst is good but there is room for improvement to cope with high levels of demand at peak times. Local aspirations for Staplehurst express a need for improvement to highways infrastructure in line with any new large scale housing developments.

Yalding

6.45 Yalding has a number of the key services and facilities expected of a rural service centre. Retail and healthcare opportunities in the village are not as strong as in some RSCs but the village does have a local shop, post office and GP surgery. The village is served by a nearby train station and has connections by bus to Maidstone town centre, which is essential in terms of access to secondary education. There is a potential development site to the west of Yalding which affords an opportunity to improve the range of services and facilities in the village.

6.46 The Water Cycle Study indicates that a number of the rural service centre catchment areas have at least some known problems with sewer flooding. It is therefore important that surface water run-off from new development does not make this problem worse. Future developments in the rural service centres should include the implementation of sustainable urban drainage systems (SuDS) to reduce surface water run-off. To ensure consistency across each rural service

centre with respect to the Strategic Flood Risk Assessment, a detailed flood risk assessment is recommended prior to any development with the obvious intention of ensuring new development is located outside areas liable to flooding.

6.47 Whilst Maidstone town will be the focus for most new development, development in the RSCs with associated infrastructure improvements is considered far more sustainable than the ad hoc growth of smaller settlements. New sites are allocated at the edge of all RSCs for housing development. Local needs housing will also be appropriate in accordance with Policy DM23.

Policy SP 3

Rural service centres

At the designated Rural Service Centres of Coxheath, Harrietsham, Headcorn, Lenham, Marden, Staplehurst and Yalding defined on the policies map the Council will:

1. Focus new housing and employment development within and at the edge of the settlements, where new development will be permitted when it is:
 - i. An allocated site in the local plan;
 - ii. Minor development such as infilling; or
 - iii. The redevelopment of previously developed land that is of a scale appropriate to the size of the village.
2. Retain and improve existing employment sites and encourage new employment opportunities provided the site is in an appropriate location for, and suited to, the use; and
3. Resist the loss of local shops and community facilities, whilst supporting new retail development to meet local need.

Policy SP4 - Larger villages

6.48 Maidstone Borough contains a number of settlements that have a more limited range of services than the rural service centres but still offer some services that meet the day-to-day needs of their local communities. The overall amount of development that will be acceptable in these settlements will generally be less than in the rural service centres as they are less sustainable locations for meeting the development needs of the borough as a whole.

6.49 The assessment of village services and facilities identifies three villages that can be designated as Larger villages, namely:

- Boughton Monchelsea

- Hollingbourne (Eyhorne Street)
- Sutton Valence

6.50 In similarity to the rural service centres, all three villages have different characteristics and there is variation in the limited range of services and facilities they provide. The following text provides a summary of the distinctive character of each larger village.

Boughton Monchelsea

6.51 Boughton Monchelsea performs well in the audit in terms of education and childcare, with a primary school, playgroup, nursery and nearby secondary school. It performs poorly in terms of healthcare, with no GP surgery or other health care service. The village has a local shop, post office, village hall and recreation areas. Although the village is close to the urban area, public transport connections to Maidstone town centre are infrequent, and this is not helped by the fact that residential areas within the village are quite dispersed. Local employment opportunities in the village are also limited.

Hollingbourne (Eyhorne Street)

6.52 Hollingbourne (Eyhorne Street) is a linear settlement with two pockets of residential areas approximately 0.5km apart. The larger residential area (Eyhorne Street) is removed from the primary school and pre-school, and one of the local playing fields. The village has no GP surgery or healthcare facilities apart from an osteopath clinic, but does have some good key facilities, including a village hall, local shop, post office, pubs and a restaurant. Rail connections to Maidstone town centre and other retail and employment destinations are good, and the village also has a regular bus service to the town centre.

Sutton Valence

6.53 Sutton Valence performs well in the audit in terms of education facilities. There is a pre-school, primary school and the Sutton Valence boarding school, which caters for children from the age of 3 to 18. In terms of services and community facilities there are pubs, a church, a village hall, mobile library service and good playing pitches. The village has a medical practice but no dentist or pharmacy. Public transport connections to Maidstone town centre and Headcorn are good due to a regular bus service. The village does not have a train station.

6.54 Based on the analysis of village services and facilities, all three villages are considered sustainable locations for limited new housing development provided that it is of a scale in keeping with their role, character and scale. Local need housing will also be appropriate in accordance with Policy DM23. An appropriate increase in population would help to support village services and facilities. The continued sustainability of these villages as places to live and work is dependent on the retention of local services that meet community needs coupled with the retention of adequate transport services to enable access to larger centres for those services that are not available locally.

Policy SP 4

Larger villages

At the designated larger villages of Boughton Monchelsea, Hollingbourne (Eyhorne Street) and Sutton Valence defined on the policies map the council will:

1. Focus new development within the settlement boundaries, when it is:
 - i. An allocated site in the local plan;
 - ii. Minor development such as infilling; or
 - iii. The redevelopment of previously developed land that is of a size appropriate to the role, character and scale of the village; and
2. Resist the loss of local shops and community facilities, whilst supporting new retail and community services to meet local need.

Policy SP5 - Countryside

The countryside

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

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

Rural economy

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

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

6.59 Many rural businesses have begun to diversify away from traditional rural activities primarily through the re-use of farm and other buildings for commercial non-agricultural purposes. This has not only helped to retain economic activity within rural areas but has enabled a number of farms to remain operational. Tourism is of great importance to the local rural economy with the countryside providing ample leisure and open-air recreational opportunities. As well as sustaining many rural businesses these industries can be significant sources of employment and can help support the prosperity of rural settlements and sustain historic country houses, local heritage and culture. To a lesser degree, the winning of minerals such as sand and chalk has also taken place as a diversification activity, but these activities are largely confined to relatively small-scale sites on the North Downs and Greensand Ridge.

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

Small villages

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

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

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

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

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

Design

6.66 The countryside is a sensitive location within which to integrate new development and the borough council will expect high quality designs to respect the high quality and distinctive landscapes of the borough in accordance with policy DM28.

Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

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

6.68 The council will ensure proposals conserve and enhance the natural beauty and distinctive character of the AONB, taking into account the economic and social well-being of the area. Rural diversification and land-based businesses in the Kent Downs AONB will only be acceptable where they help improve the special

character of the AONB and are in accordance with the Kent Downs AONB Management Plan, supporting guidance and position statements. Economic development within the AONB should be located in existing traditional buildings of historic or vernacular merit in smaller settlements, farmsteads or within in groups of buildings in sustainable locations.

6.69 New development in the AONB needs to respect the vernacular architecture, settlement character and the natural beauty of the local landscape. This will require high quality designs as set out in Policy DM28. To help developers produce designs of a suitably high quality, the council will continue to encourage the use of the Kent Downs AONB Unit’s design guidance and publications.

Quality Landscapes

6.70 In addition to the Kent Downs AONB and sites of European and national importance, the borough includes vast tracts of quality landscape, including parts of the Greensand Ridge together with the Medway, Loose and Len river valleys. The council will protect its most versatile and sensitive landscapes.

Policy SP 5

Countryside

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

1. The following types of development will be permitted in the countryside:
 - i. Small-scale economic development, including development related to tourism and open-air recreation, through:
 - a. The re-use or extension of existing buildings except in isolated locations;
 - b. The expansion of existing businesses; or
 - c. Farm diversification schemes;
 - ii. Small-scale residential development necessary to:
 - a. Meet a proven essential need for a rural worker to live permanently at or near their place of work;
 - b. Meet a proven need for Gypsy and Traveller accommodation; or
 - c. Meet local housing needs;
 - iii. The winning of minerals; and
 - iv. Development demonstrated to be necessary for agriculture or forestry.
2. Development in the countryside will only be permitted where:
 - i. The type, design and scale of development and the level of activity maintains, or where possible, enhances local distinctiveness; and
 - ii. Impacts on the appearance and character of the landscape can be appropriately mitigated;
 - iii. It meets such other exceptions as indicated by policies elsewhere in this plan.
3. The loss of local shops and community facilities which serve small 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, and the extent and openness of the Metropolitan Green Belt will be rigorously protected and maintained. Landscapes of good condition and high sensitivity will be conserved; and
6. Development in the countryside will retain the setting of and separation of individual settlements

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

Policy DM9 - Historic and natural environment

12.28 Maidstone's historic and natural environment is a fundamental part of the borough's economic wealth and social well being, the benefits of which are far-reaching. It is essential to ensure these historic and natural asset bases remain robust and viable.

Historic environment

12.29 Maidstone has been shaped and influenced by a long past history, the legacy of which is a strong and rich cultural heritage. The Archbishop's Palace and Leeds Castle are two high profile heritage assets but the borough also abounds with many other historical buildings. These heritage assets contribute to the strong sense of place which exists across the borough. However, this rich historical resource is very vulnerable to damage and loss. The Local Plan allows some flexibility for the re-use and conversion of historic assets but care must be taken to ensure this does not lead to unacceptable adverse impacts. Small scale changes over time, especially the standardisation of building materials and practices can erode the special character and appearance of places, and the setting of historic features such as listed buildings and scheduled monuments, which can be crucial in maintaining historic integrity.

12.30 The Local Plan will ensure the qualities and local distinctiveness of the historic environment are recognised and protected. This will be achieved in part through the protection of Scheduled Ancient Monuments, Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas from inappropriate development. The Local Plan will seek to encourage a greater understanding of designated and non-designated heritage assets and their values through partnership working with communities, developers and asset managers. The council will encourage mutually beneficial and sustainable proposals to conserve and enhance heritage assets for future generations whilst acknowledging the social and economic challenges faced by land owners and managers.

12.31 All development proposals will be expected to be accompanied by an initial survey to establish what on-site assets there are. Sufficient information to assess the direct and indirect effects of development on past or present heritage assets together with any proposed prevention, mitigation or compensation measures will also be required. Without this there will be a presumption against granting permission.

Green and blue infrastructure

12.32 A green and blue infrastructure (GBI) is a network of natural components which lie within and between the borough's towns and villages and which provide multiple social, economic and environmental benefits. Maidstone borough contains a wide range of green open spaces together with a number of rivers and streams. Key assets include the Kent Downs AONB, the River Medway and its tributaries, Mote Park, and the distinctive green corridors which help shape Maidstone town. Amongst other things, these green spaces and blue corridors provide reservoirs for biodiversity and quiet recreation; act as corridors for the movement of animals, plants and people; and provide opportunities for the protection and enhancement of the local landscape and historic assets; water management, green education, and the mitigation of climate change impacts.

12.33 Green and blue infrastructure has the capacity to deliver a wide range of positive outcomes in line with the objectives of the Sustainable community strategy including:

- Helping to attract and retain higher paying employers;
- Helping in the creation of an efficient, sustainable, integrated transport system;
- Helping to tackle climate change; and
- Creating healthier communities.

12.34 The green and blue infrastructure is considered to be of such importance that a Green and blue infrastructure strategy (GBIS) will be produced. The strategy will look to encourage the creation of links and stepping stones to help in the movement of people and wildlife across the built up urban area. In the rural areas the focus will be more on land management, and creating and enhancing habitat networks. The strategy will also seek to identify those areas of the borough where deficiencies exist and look to provide guidance on how these can be overcome. The council will promote a partnership approach with developers, land owners and neighbouring local authorities, including Kent County Council, to help achieve the objectives of the GBIS.

12.35 The growth proposed in the borough provides a chance to increase the value of green spaces and blue corridors. New development will be expected to contribute towards the goal of a linked network which extends across the borough and beyond. Development schemes will be expected to contribute towards improved connectivity through the provision of footpaths and cycle routes that are part of a strategic network; space for nature that contributes to the larger landscape-scale pattern of connected habitat; and the provision of imaginative recreational facilities that give educational and physical health benefits to local people. The council will liaise with neighbouring local authorities, including Kent County Council, to ensure potential linkages at all scales and across administrative boundaries are recognised in the development of specific proposals. Developers will also be expected to provide details of how the green and blue infrastructure elements of their proposal, including publicly accessible open spaces, sites managed for their biodiversity, geodiversity or heritage interest, will be managed and maintained over the long-term. The council will provide further advice on this in the Landscape Character Guidelines supplementary planning document.

12.36 Publicly accessible open space, recreation and tourism are essential elements of sustainable communities, contributing towards health, quality of life, sense of place and overall well-being. Spaces and facilities form a part of the overall green and blue infrastructure network and within built up areas can provide local linkage between the town centre, urban neighbourhoods and the surrounding countryside. The needs and deficiencies in publicly accessible open spaces and facilities, and the open space standards, are identified in the Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy.

Climate change

12.37 Climate change is resulting in ever more variable weather patterns, the outcomes of which include flooding and drought. Natural systems are able to adapt to these consequences. However, adverse changes to the natural systems can result in increases in damage to property and compensation costs, and a decrease in water resource resilience. A green and blue infrastructure approach represents a means to positively tackle these issues. It can offer alternative flood mitigation strategies, such as Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SUDS) and the creation of water meadows. It is able to provide the means to capture and store rainwater, as well as help improve water quality. Development proposals will be expected to take full account of climate change and mitigate for any anticipated climate change impacts.

Water Framework Directive

12.38 The Water Framework Directive (WFD) looks 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 WFD is for all water bodies to reach good status by 2027. In Maidstone this would mean improving their physical state, preventing deterioration in water quality and ecology, and improving the ecological status of water bodies. The WFD introduced the concept of integrated river basin management and such plans should influence development plans. Maidstone lies within the Thames River Basin District and in December 2009 the Environment Agency published the Thames River Basin Management (RBMP).

12.39 The council will continue to work in partnership with the Environment Agency and other bodies to help achieve the goals of the WFD and actions of the Thames RBMP. The council will also actively encourage development proposals to include measures to 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.

Biodiversity

12.40 Maidstone is a biodiverse district endowed with a variety of habitats including heathlands and chalk downlands, orchards and ancient woodland, river valleys and ponds, wildflower meadows and parklands. All of these are underpinned by an equally diverse array of soils. Soils are a fundamental element of the ecosystems found within these habitats but one which is highly susceptible

to damage. The council will work in partnership with land owners, land managers and developers to encourage better soil handling practices to avoid the degradation of soil and ensure soil functions are maintained as appropriate.

12.41 The broad range of habitats forms an extensive network across rural and urban areas, including previously developed land. Many sites are important for their nature conservation and geological interest, and are designated for their protection. In Maidstone, these include a site of international importance, namely the North Downs Woodlands Special Area of Conservation (SAC), nationally important Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), locally important Local Wildlife Sites (LWS) and Local Nature Reserves (LNR). Current designated nature conservation sites will be noted on the policies map.

12.42 As a result of increasing development pressures in the past many of the borough's biodiversity assets have been lost, damaged or fragmented. In response to this decline the council has acted in partnership with other bodies to undertake surveys of the borough's habitats and ancient woodlands. It has also adopted the Maidstone Local Biodiversity Action Plan (LBAP), a key element of which is the establishment of a connecting network of sites and corridors on a landscape scale. By reconnecting fragments of habitats to form a mosaic, the natural environment is provided with the means to become self-sustaining as well as being better able to respond to and adapt to climate change.

12.43 Development proposals will be expected to be supported by an initial survey of on-site assets. Surveys must be undertaken at the appropriate time of year for the relevant habitats, species, flora and fauna. Where harm to protected species or habitats is unavoidable, developers must ensure suitable mitigation measures are implemented to enhance or recreate the features, either on or off-site, and bring sites into positive conservation management. Sufficient information to assess the direct and indirect effects of development on protected sites, species, biodiversity or geology, and any proposed prevention, mitigation or compensation measures must be provided. There will be a presumption against granting permission without this information. Proposals should particularly seek to avoid damaging and fragmenting existing habitats. Opportunities to contribute towards the UK priority habitats and species in Maidstone and any additional Maidstone LBAP habitats and species should be maximised.

12.44 Development likely to have an adverse effect on the integrity and conservation objectives of internationally important nature conservation sites is unlikely to meet the requirements of the Habitats Directive. Such development will not be considered favourably. Damage must be minimised in those exceptional cases where the strategic benefits of a development clearly outweigh the importance of a local nature conservation site, species, habitat or geological feature. Any remaining impacts must be fully mitigated and a mitigation strategy accompany the planning application. Compensation will only be acceptable in exceptional circumstances.

Landscape

12.45 The Local Plan will adopt a character approach to landscape. The borough can be broadly divided into 7 distinct landscape types, namely the Dry Valleys and Downs, Chalk Scarp Landscapes, Gault Clay Vale, Greensand Orchards and

Mixed Farmlands, Greensand Ridge, Low Weald and Valleys, each of which has a strong visual identity and sense of place. The visual character of Maidstone's landscape is highly valued by those living, working and visiting here. A significant proportion of the borough benefits from high quality landscapes. A large area of the borough lies within the Kent Downs AONB, a nationally important landscape designation and a strong level of protection will be given to this designation and its setting, set out in Policy SP5. However, all of the landscapes play an important role in contributing to the borough's environmental, economic and social values. Therefore all landscapes, rather than just those that are designated, will be viewed as a natural asset. This is in line with the European Landscape Convention.

12.46 The National Planning Policy Framework encourages the protection of valued landscapes. Whilst the Maidstone Landscape Character Assessment 2012 identifies the various landscape types and characters. The proposed Landscape Character Guidelines supplementary planning document will provide further detail on how these landscapes are to be protected.

12.47 The landscape character approach represents the best way to conserve and enhance valued landscape characteristics, and improve or reinstate positive features where they have been eroded. At the same time, it can also address social, cultural and economic issues. It is not always possible to retain the landscape in exactly the same form that is currently valued. Climate change for instance will lead to small but continuous changes in biodiversity. Some landscape change is inevitable and Local Plan policies for a living landscape allow for certain forms of development to take place.

12.48 Development proposals will be expected to be informed by the emerging guidance provided in the Maidstone Landscape Character Assessment 2012 and the proposed Landscape Character Guidelines supplementary planning document. New development should be well designed and sympathetic to the character of the landscape types identified within the borough. Policy DM9 sets out the broad policy framework for the local landscape approach being taken by the council.

Policy DM 9

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. The character, distinctiveness, diversity and quality of Maidstone's landscape and townscape will be protected and enhanced 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; and
 - 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.
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 appropriate to the scale and nature of the impacts cannot be achieved.

Account should be taken of the Landscape Character Guidelines supplementary planning document and the Green and Blue Infrastructure SPD.

Policy DM10 - Open space and recreation

12.49 High quality, publicly accessible open space can bring about opportunities for promoting social interaction and inclusion in communities. Sports and recreation areas and facilities can contribute positively to the well being and quality of those communities. Open space can also have a positive impact upon the quality of the built environment and can be of ecological value. The National Planning Policy Framework encourages the provision and retention of high quality open spaces, a stance that the council supports.

12.50 The council will seek to secure publicly accessible open space provision for new housing and mixed use development sites, in accordance with standards [to be defined] in the Green and blue infrastructure SPD.

12.51 It is important to ensure that any new publicly accessible open space and sports provision preserves the quality of life for existing residents, as well as the visual amenity of the locality, especially in rural areas. Intense sports uses, such as multi use games areas, can generate significant amounts of noise; while sports and other recreation uses may include lighting, such as floodlighting. This can be harmful to the living environment of nearby occupiers and to the visual amenity of the countryside where levels of artificial lighting are generally very limited. The council will seek to ensure that new publicly accessible open space and recreation areas are appropriate to their setting in these regards.

12.52 The loss of existing open space, sport and recreation facilities will be resisted, unless there is a proven overriding need for the development and there would be no resulting deficiency, or net loss, of such space/facilities in the locality. In considering the impact of the loss of open space, the council will have regard to the visual amenity and biodiversity value of the land in question.

Policy DM 10

Publicly accessible 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 standards [to be defined] in the green and blue infrastructure SPD:
 - i. Natural and semi natural areas of open space;
 - ii. Amenity green space;
 - iii. Provision for children and young people's equipped play areas;
 - iv. Public [and private⁽³⁾] outdoor sports facilities; and
 - v. Allotments.
2. 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.
3. 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; or
 - ii. An alternative provision of an equivalent community benefit can be provided to replace the loss.
4. In dealing with applications to develop existing open areas within the urban area and village settlements, 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.

Further details on the provision of green and blue infrastructure, including publicly accessible open space, will be provided in a Green and blue infrastructure supplementary planning document.

Policy DM11 - Community facilities

12.53 In order to build well functioning, sustainable communities, it is essential that adequate community facilities are provided. The National Planning Policy Framework emphasises the importance of creating healthy, inclusive communities, with appropriate facilities, to create attractive residential environments. The Infrastructure Delivery Plan lists the key social infrastructure needed to support

3 definition required

the level of development planned for the borough. Community facilities encompass educational, cultural and recreational facilities, including schools, libraries, places of worship, meeting places, cultural buildings (such as museums and theatres) and sports venues.

12.54 The council seeks to resist the net loss of viable community facilities, as this runs contrary to the aim of achieving sustainable, inclusive communities.

12.55 School premises are generally only in operation during particular hours. These sites offer opportunities to provide additional community uses outside of school hours. Such dual uses can increase the range of community facilities and can help to maximise land usage in a suitable manner. The council will therefore encourage dual usage of educational premises in appropriate circumstances.

Policy DM 11

Community facilities

The adequate provision of community facilities, including social, education and other facilities, is an essential component of new residential development.

1. Residential development which would generate a need for new community facilities or for which spare capacity in such facilities does not exist, will not be permitted unless the provision of new, extended or improved facilities (or a contribution towards such provision) is secured by planning conditions or through legal agreements unless the specific facilities are identified for delivery through the Community Infrastructure Levy
2. Proposals which would lead to a loss of community facilities will not be permitted unless demand within the locality no longer exists or a replacement facility acceptable to the council is provided.
3. The council will seek to ensure, where appropriate, that providers of education facilities make provision for dual use of facilities in the design of new schools, and will encourage the dual use of education facilities (new and existing) for recreation and other purposes.

Policy DM15 - Economic development

12.85 The local economy is characterised by its strong base in administration and professional services, as well as public services, stemming in particular from Maidstone's county town role. The town centre is an established focus for shopping and leisure activities, drawing trade from both within the town and beyond, in particular the Malling area, Medway and Sittingbourne. The local workforce is generally quite highly skilled and although a proportion of residents travel outside the borough to work this is more than matched by those who commute in. Whilst the average earnings of those who commute out of the borough is higher than that of those who work in the borough, because of the prevalence of higher paid jobs in London as well as a preponderance of lower wage employment in the borough, the gap has been narrowing over recent years ⁽⁴⁾ In general unemployment in the borough is low when compared with the Kent and national picture ⁽⁵⁾.

12.86 For Maidstone Borough to grow in a sustainable manner the increase in house building needs to be aligned with growth in local employment. ~~It is estimated that the borough's resident labour supply will increase by some xxxx~~

4 Annual Monitoring Report 2011/12.

5 'Unemployment in Kent' Research & Evaluation Bulletin, Kent County Council (September 2013)

people between 2011 and 2031 based on a housing target of xxxx dwellings over the same period⁽⁶⁾. Economic growth will be achieved through a range of provision and for the purposes of the Local Plan, and in line with the NPPF, economic development includes the following uses:

- Uses within Class B of the Use Class Order including offices, research and development, warehouses and industry
- Public and social uses such as health and education
- Town centre uses such as retail, leisure, entertainment, arts, cultural and tourism development.

12.87 The net additional land requirements for B class uses and retail to 2031 are to be delivered through the allocation of sites and the granting of planning permissions. Other economic growth will be created through tourism, social infrastructure provision such as education and health care, construction and other small scale opportunities such as the conversion or extension of rural buildings that will not necessarily require the allocation of land. The council's Economic Development Strategy (2008) provides the economic vision for the borough and sets out how prosperity will be achieved across the range of business sectors. This strategy is currently being reviewed.

12.88 A significant proportion of Maidstone's growth in B class uses is expected to come from office-based employment. The first choice location for new office development will be the town centre. The council is aiming to create the right conditions for growth in the town centre through a comprehensive approach, improving accessibility, enhancing the public realm and encouraging a range of commercial uses, primarily retail, office and leisure related. This is directed through the specific policies of the Local Plan. A particular issue is the quantity of long-term vacant office stock in the town centre and the identification of appropriate alternative uses for such stock. An initial estimate is that some 5,100sqm of currently vacant office stock in the town centre and elsewhere may no longer be fit for purpose at present⁽⁷⁾.

12.89 In addition to town centre office sites, there is a complementary role for offices at beyond centre sites which are well connected to the highway network, such as Eclipse Park in recognition of the differing market demand that such sites meet.

12.90 The proposed strategic site allocation at Junction 7 is a particular opportunity to create a hub for medical related businesses, capitalising on the development of the Kent Institute of Medicine and Surgery, to attract high value, knowledge intensive employment and businesses as a boost to the local economy. This site will also deliver additional general office space in a high quality environment. Outline consent has recently been granted for the medical hub (subject to the completion of a section 106 agreement). The further specific sites allocated for additional employment development, including storage, warehousing and industrial development in line with identified needs, will help provide for a range of jobs of differing skill and wage levels as a way of helping to maintain a low unemployment rate going forward.

6 add reference document
 7 Revised Employment Land Forecast (2013)

12.91 With the exception of some of the secondary office stock within the town centre, existing business sites and industrial estates are an important and appropriate part of the business stock for the future which can also help to provide for the range of employment needs. Policy DM16 directs the retention, intensification and regeneration of the identified Economic Development Areas. In addition, there is a significant stock of commercial premises outside these designated areas which also provide for local employment. Within Maidstone urban area and the Rural Services Centres the first preference will be for such existing sites to remain in employment generating uses.

12.92 Retail development makes a big contribution towards the economic health of the borough and reinforces Maidstone's role as County Town. Maidstone Town Centre is the primary focus for retail development within the borough with the RSCs also providing appropriate local levels of retail facilities as set out in the Centre Hierarchy. Retail provision elsewhere in the borough currently comprises district centres and a degree of out of town development.

12.93 Within the countryside the priority for economic development will be on the conversion and extension of existing suitable buildings and established sites, farm diversification and tourism where this can be achieved in a manner consistent with local rural and landscape character in order that a balance is struck between supporting the rural economy and the protection of the countryside for its own sake. Policy DM35 sets out the considerations which will apply when established rural businesses want to expand their existing premises. There is also a trend towards to greater homeworking which allows for a reduced impact on transport infrastructure.

12.94 Opportunities for further tourist related development will be supported in particular within the town centre as well as small scale initiatives that support the rural economy. The council will also promote education, leisure and cultural facilities, again within the town centre in particular, to retain a higher proportion of young and well educated people within the borough and in turn enhance the prospects of creating a dynamic local economy.

Policy DM 15

Economic development

1. The council is committed to supporting and improving the economy of the borough and providing for the needs of businesses. This will be achieved through the allocation of specific sites and through:
 - i. The retention, intensification, regeneration of the existing industrial and business estates identified as Economic Development Areas as defined on the policies map;
 - ii. The retention, intensification, regeneration and expansion of the existing economic development premises in Maidstone urban area and the Rural Service Centres provided the site is in an appropriate location and suited to the economic development use in terms of scale, impacts and economic viability;
 - iii. Enhancing the vitality and viability of Maidstone town centre and maintaining the hierarchy of retail centres;
 - iv. Supporting proposals that encourage highly skilled residents to work in the borough to reduce out-commuting;
 - v. Improving skills in the workforce in particular by supporting further and higher education provision within Maidstone's urban area;
 - vi. Supporting improvements in information and communications technology to facilitate more flexible working practices;
 - vii. Prioritising the commercial re-use of existing rural buildings in the countryside over conversion to residential use; and
 - viii. Supporting proposals for the expansion of existing economic development premises in the countryside, including tourism related development, provided the scale and impact of the development is appropriate for its countryside location.

Policy DM16 - Retention of employment sites

12.95 In addition to new allocations of employment land, it is important that a stock of existing employment sites is maintained. A range of well located commercial premises and sites need to be secured so that they can continue to be available to meet the needs of existing and modernising businesses. Policy DM16 identifies Economic Development Areas across the borough designated specifically for B class uses, which include sites with planning permission as well as established, existing employment locations.

12.96 The demand for office, manufacturing and warehouse premises can be expected to fluctuate over the plan period in line with changes in the economic cycle. It is important that these designated, good quality and productive sites are not permanently lost to alternative uses as a result of only short term changes in demand, whilst recognising that the permanent protection of a site that has no prospect of coming forward for its designated use is counter-productive for the local economy. Recent changes to the General Permitted Development Order

enable the conversion of office space to residential use without the need for planning permission for a limited 3 year period (until 30 May 2016). Policy DM16 identifies locations with higher quality office floorspace for retention in the longer term, recognising that in the short term conversion to residential use could happen without consent. The recent General Permitted Development Order changes also allow up to 500m² of B1 floorspace to be used for B8 uses without the need for planning permission.

12.97 Planning applications which seek alternative non B class uses in identified Economic Development Areas will be supported only where there is clear evidence that substantiates why the site should not be retained for its designated use. This must include evidence of, and the outcomes from, the concerted marketing of the site for its designated uses for a continuous period of at least 12 months prior to the applicant's submission via relevant commercial property publications and websites. In addition, applications should include an analysis of the on-going suitability of the site for its designated uses and its commercial viability for those uses. Both the suitability and viability assessments should evidence current market conditions and also the future prospects for the sectors for which the site is designated. The analysis of future prospects should look ahead at least 5 years to ensure a medium term view of market trends and employment land requirements is taken.

12.98 Exceptionally, a mixed use scheme which incorporates an element of non B class uses may be a means to achieve an overall upgrade in the quality of B class business floorspace on a designated site or bring underused premises into more productive use. The overall employment capacity of the site should be maintained or increased by such a scheme as measured by either the employment-generating floorspace provided or the number, permanence and quality of the jobs created. Any proposals for retail or leisure would also need to comply with policy DM17.

12.99 There is also a significant stock of B class employment premises and sites outside the designated Economic Development Areas. In the Maidstone urban area and the rural service centres, the redevelopment or expansion of existing sites for employment-generating uses will be supported. Redevelopment of such sites for non-employment generating uses will be permitted where the existing use has an adverse impact on residential amenity, highway safety or causes over-riding visual harm or where it is proven through the submission of a viability report that there is no realistic prospect of its commercial reuse.

Policy DM 16

Retention of employment sites

1. The following locations, as defined on the policies map, are designated Economic Development Areas for use classes B1, B2 and B8:
 - i. Lordswood Industrial Estate;
 - ii. Forstal Road, Aylesford;
 - iii. 20/20 Allington;
 - iv. Parkwood Industrial Estate, Maidstone;
 - v. Tovil Green/Burial Ground Lane, Tovil;
 - vi. Station Road/Lodge Road, Staplehurst;
 - vii. Pattenden Lane, Marden;
 - viii. Detling Airfield;
 - ix. Lenham Storage, Lenham;
 - x. Marley Works, near Lenham;
 - xi. Barradale Farm, near Headcorn;
 - xii. Station Road, Harrietsham;
 - xiii. Dove Hill Works, Boxley;
 - xiv. Lenham Triangle, Lenham;
 - xv. Tenacre Park, Harrietsham; and
 - xvi. Hart Street Commercial Centre, Hart Street, Maidstone.

2. The following locations, as defined on the policies map, are designated Economic Development Areas for use class B1:
 - i. South Park Business Village, Maidstone;
 - ii. Turkey Mill Court, Maidstone;
 - iii. Eclipse Park, Maidstone;
 - iv. Albion Place and Sittingbourne Road, Maidstone;
 - v. East and West of Lower Stone Street, Maidstone;
 - vi. Fairmeadow and Bishops Way, Maidstone; and
 - vii. County Gate, Staceys Street and Invicta House, Sandling Road, Maidstone.

3. Within designated Economic Development Areas, change of use or redevelopment of a site or premises to non B class uses will not be permitted unless it can be demonstrated that there is no reasonable prospect of their take up or continued use for the designated uses in the medium term.

4. Within designated Economic Development Areas, mixed use proposals incorporating an element of non B class uses may exceptionally be permitted where such development would facilitate the regeneration of the site to more effectively meet the needs of modern business and where the overall employment capacity of the site is maintained.

5. Outside the designated Economic Development Areas, the redevelopment and expansion of existing B class employment premises in Maidstone urban area and the rural service centres for employment-generating uses will be supported. Redevelopment of existing or vacant employment premises in Maidstone urban area and the rural service centres for non-employment uses will be permitted provided it can be demonstrated that the existing use has an adverse impact on residential amenity, highway safety or causes over-riding visual harm and/or there is no reasonable prospect of continuing or re-establishing an employment use.

Policy DM20 - Mooring facilities and boat yards

12.111 Mooring facilities and boatyards can provide tourism and recreation facilities which can contribute positively towards the economy. The National Planning Policy Framework lends strong support to the building of a robust economy, including within rural areas. The River Medway, which runs through both the urban and rural parts of Maidstone Borough, is an important asset, which provides opportunities to enhance tourism and recreation facilities through additional and enhanced mooring facilities. The council wishes to safeguard existing boat yards, in order to protect water-based recreation facilities. The River Medway contributes positively towards a varied range of recreational facilities and this enhances the attractiveness and diversification of the borough for local communities and visitors.

12.112 However, in order to safeguard the rural character of the countryside and the quality of the built environment, it is important that such proposals are limited in scale and that their cumulative impact is not harmful to amenity. Much of the River Medway is seen in the context of highly sensitive townscape and landscapes, such as the Maidstone All Saints’ Church Conservation Area, the valley formation of high landscape quality through Teston, East and West Farleigh and the Green Belt at Nettlestead.

12.113 The council will also have regard to the advice of the Environment Agency in assessing flooding issues.

Policy DM 20

Mooring facilities and boat yards

1. Further small scale and short term mooring facilities will be permitted at the following locations subject to the views of the Environment Agency:
 - i. Allington
 - ii. Maidstone town centre - subject to an increase in the width of the navigable channel without loss of ecological value
 - iii. Wateringbury
 - iv. East Farleigh
 - v. Yalding
 - vi. Stoneham

And provided that all of the following criteria are met:

- vii. There is no loss of flood plain or land raising;
 - viii. The impact, including cumulative impact, shall preserve landscape quality, ecology and uses of the river and valley in the locality;
 - ix. Proposals create no operational problems for other river users, including fishermen;
 - x. Facilities are provided for disposal of boat toilet contents;
 - xi. The site is capable of being adequately screened and it being possible to provide appropriate landscaping with indigenous species; and
 - xii. The presence of any similar uses in the locality and the combined effect of any such concentration would be acceptable in terms of environmental impact and highway safety.
2. The council will not permit the redevelopment to other uses of boat yards that are in use, or have the potential to be used, in connection with water-based recreation.

Policy DM21 - Housing mix

12.114 The key requirements for of a mixed community are a variety of housing, particularly in terms of tenure and price, and a mix of different households such as families with children, single person households and older people. Maidstone Borough Council recognises that to truly promote sustainable communities there must be a mix of types of housing that are provided in any given development or location. The council will actively seek to balance communities where particular house sizes or tenures have become prevalent beyond an evidenced need.

12.115 Evidence detailed in the Maidstone Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) 2013 guides the profiles of development that are required in urban and rural locations. This evidence is valuable in determining the local housing picture and as a consequence which types and tenures of housing are required. The council will not, however, set specific targets within policy because these would result in inflexibility and a situation where imbalances could begin to occur over time.

12.116 Developers will need to access a range of sources, including the SHMA, to help shape their proposals. Local stakeholders, including parish councils, may often be able to provide targeted information that assists an applicant to submit a locally relevant scheme. Where affordable housing is proposed or required, the housing register may provide additional guidance.

Policy DM 21

Housing mix

Maidstone Borough Council will seek to ensure the delivery of sustainable mixed communities across new housing developments and within existing housing areas throughout the borough.

1. A sustainable mix of house sizes, types and tenures will be sought that reflects the needs of those living in Maidstone Borough now and in years to come.
2. Accommodation profiles detailed in the Strategic Housing Market Assessment 2013 will be used to help inform developers to determine which house sizes should be delivered in urban and rural areas to meet the objectively assessed needs of the area. In relation to affordable housing, the council will expect the submission of details of how this information has been used to justify the proposed mix.
3. Gypsy, Traveller and Travelling Showpeople accommodation requirements will form part of the borough need for housing.

An affordable and local needs housing supplementary planning document will be produced to expand on how the proposals in this policy will be implemented.

Policy DM22 - Affordable housing

12.117 Maidstone Borough has a clear affordable housing need. The Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) supports the approach of seeking a proportion of dwellings to be provided on site for affordable housing needs. The on site provision of dwellings is necessary to aide community integration.

12.118 Viability testing indicates that affordable housing is achievable with a one dwelling threshold. For practical purposes, the threshold will be set at 10 dwellings. Affordable housing will be provided on site. Alternative provision will not be accepted unless there are exceptional circumstances that justify it. Any proposals for off site or financial provision must be made at the time of the application.

Targets by area

12.119 Affordable housing targets will differentiate across the borough by geographical area and existing land use, this is due to relative issues such as land price and policy considerations. Previously developed land, within the urban area, will be required to provide the lowest level of affordable housing contribution, primarily because of existing use values, meaning that it costs more to regenerate sites and areas that may otherwise remain unused or under used. On greenfield and private residential garden sites in the urban area and around the urban periphery, the council recognises that land may be relatively more expensive because of the expectation of policy coming forward to develop these sites, giving a hope value. Sites at urban periphery locations can also reasonably expect to contribute to a wide range of infrastructure requirements as well as affordable housing. Evidence has indicated that in rural locations and on the edge of rural settlements, although land values are higher, so are the values of the developments. In these areas development remains viable when factoring in higher affordable housing targets, still returning acceptable profits for landowners and developers.

Previously developed land

12.120 In the urban area and on the urban periphery the definition of previously developed land that the council uses when applying this policy will determine which affordable housing target is applied to a given development. The resulting difference in requirement will be between 15% and 30% as per the proposed policy.

12.121 The NPPF definition clarifies what is considered previously developed land and [in most cases] what is commonly referred to as greenfield land. However, there are circumstances where land that demonstrably exhibits greenfield characteristics can technically be argued to be previously developed land.

12.122 The key consideration that the council will take into account in these circumstances is how the viability of the proposed development is likely to be affected. On sites where there is inherent viability, developers should make commensurate contributions. On sites where there is a question relating to how much of the site actually is previously developed land (likely attracting higher

costs to redevelop) and how much is more reflective of greenfield land (likely attracting lower costs to develop), at least half of the land area should have been developed i.e. buildings and ancillary features, if the 15% target rate is to apply.

Policy DM 22

Affordable housing

On housing sites or mixed use development sites of 10 residential units or more, the council will seek the delivery of affordable housing.

1. The target rates for affordable housing provision are:
 - i. Previously developed land - urban - 15%;
 - ii. Greenfield and private residential gardens - urban and urban periphery - 30%; and
 - iii. Countryside, rural service centres and larger villages - 40%.

This provision will consist of:

2. The integrated on site provision of dwellings or, where proven necessary in exceptional circumstances, off site provision in the following order of preference:
 - i. An identified off site scheme;
 - ii. The purchase of dwellings off site; or
 - iii. A financial contribution towards off site affordable housing.
3. Of the affordable dwellings provided, not less than 50% will be affordable rented housing, social rented housing or a mixture of the two. The balance of up to 50% of the affordable dwellings provided will be a mixture of shared ownership and intermediate rented housing, with a target split of 40%/10% respectively.
4. In cases where the required provision cannot be achieved on the grounds of viability, the council will negotiate a reduced contribution. This will be subject to viability evidence.

An affordable and local needs housing supplementary planning document will be produced to expand on how the proposals in this policy will be implemented.

Policy DM23 - Local needs housing

12.123 Market housing in the borough's rural settlements can be both expensive and in limited supply. Affordable housing, although addressing the issue of expense, can also be in limited supply.

12.124 This means that local people can often be forced to move away from the settlement that they call home, or that they must share a dwelling beyond a point that is reasonably comfortable for them to do so.

12.125 Outside of Maidstone, the seven rural service centres and selected rural settlements, the amount of market housing that is planned will be more limited. This means that many rural communities may not benefit from a general supply of affordable housing as provided for in policy DM22.

12.126 The council must therefore work in close partnership with parish councils and local stakeholders in order to maintain and promote sustainable, mixed and inclusive communities.

12.127 Local needs housing seeks to address the lack of general supply by allowing the development of exception sites under agreed local needs, sustainability and environmental criteria. The housing must remain affordable in perpetuity and priority will be given to occupants who have a specified connection to the settlement – often being residential, employment or family.

12.128 Rural service centres will benefit from some general affordable housing as a result of planned development, but there may also be cases where local needs housing is required.

Policy DM 23

Local needs housing

The council will work with parish councils and local stakeholders to bring forward sustainably located local needs housing in its rural communities, where this has been proven necessary by a local needs housing survey undertaken by or on behalf of the parish council(s) concerned.

1. People meeting the relevant occupation criteria will be given priority to occupy local needs housing (under the council's housing allocation scheme).
2. Local needs housing will remain available in perpetuity to meet the need for which it was permitted. This will be secured by planning conditions and/or legal agreements as appropriate.
3. Sustainability of the site and its settlement will be a prime consideration in decision making. The council will give preference to settlements and communities where a range of community facilities and services including shops, health and education are present. Settlements must be effectively served by public transport.
4. The scale of development must be sympathetic within the context of the settlement where it is located.
5. Where national landscape, ecological and heritage designations are affected by the proposed development, the necessity for development must be proven to outweigh the purpose for which the designation is made.

An affordable and local needs housing supplementary planning document will be produced to expand on how the proposals in this policy will be implemented.

Policy DM28 - Design principles in the countryside

14.1 Policy SP5 sets out the types of development which would be acceptably located within the borough's countryside. The Local Plan seeks high quality designs in all types of development but Policy DM28 sets out additional principles to ensure high quality designs are realised in the borough's countryside.

Policy DM 28

Design principles in the countryside

Outside of the settlement boundaries as defined on the policies map, proposals which would create high quality design and meet the following criteria will be permitted:

1. Conserve and enhance the landscape and scenic beauty of the Kent Downs AONB and its setting;
2. Outside the Kent Downs AONB, cause no significant harm to landscape of highest value and respect the landscape character of the locality;
3. Not result in unacceptable traffic levels on nearby roads; unsympathetic change to the character of a rural lane which is of landscape, amenity, nature conservation, or historic or archaeological importance or the erosion of roadside verges;
4. Where built development is proposed, there would be no existing building or structure suitable for conversion or re-use to provide the required facilities. Any new buildings should, where practicable, be located adjacent to existing buildings or be unobtrusively located and well screened by existing or proposed vegetation which reflect the landscape character of the area; and
5. Where an extension or alteration to an existing building is proposed, it would be of a scale which relates sympathetically to the existing building and the rural area; respect local building styles and materials; have no significant adverse impact on the form, appearance or setting of the building, and would respect the architectural and historic integrity of any adjoining building or group of buildings of which it forms part.

Account should be taken of the Kent Downs AONB Management Plan and the Maidstone Borough Landscape Character Guidelines SPD.

Policy DM29 - New agricultural buildings and structures

14.2 Certain agricultural and forestry developments do not require planning permission provided that the development falls within one of the categories set out in the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 1995 (as amended). However, most of these permitted developments need to

be submitted to the council for their prior approval of siting, design and external appearance. Developments that are not covered by this Order require planning permission in the usual way. The National Planning Policy Framework lends strong support to the rural economy and seeks to promote agricultural and land based rural businesses. The maintenance of land in agricultural use generally aids the preservation of the rural character of the countryside and the rural economy.

14.3 Whilst the council generally seeks a positive approach towards agricultural development, it is important to ensure that new development is justified and appropriately sited, in order to minimise the impact upon the openness, character and appearance of the countryside.

14.4 In recent years, changing consumer demands and production techniques have seen an increase in the use of polytunnels or other similar semi-permanent structures for cultivation purposes in the countryside. Such structures can have a significant visual impact on the landscape and due to their impermeable nature can result in increased surface water run-off. There is also a concern that such development has an impact on biodiversity. These potential negative impacts should however, be seen against the benefit that an increased growing season can have for the rural economy and the increased period where locally grown produce is available thus reducing reliance on imported produce.

Policy DM 29

New agricultural buildings and structures

Proposals for new agricultural buildings or structures on land in use for agricultural trade or business which meet the following criteria will be permitted:

1. The proposal is necessary for the purposes of agriculture;
2. The proposal would not have an adverse impact on the amenity of existing residents;
3. The building or structure would be located within or adjacent to an existing group of buildings, in order to mitigate against the visual impact of development, unless it can be demonstrated that a more isolated location is essential to meet the needs of the holding. Where an isolated location is essential the site should be chosen to minimise the impact of the building or structure on the character and appearance of the countryside; and
4. In the case of polytunnel development in addition to the above, the council will expect proposals to address the following issues:
 - i. How surface water run-off will be dealt with and controlled;
 - ii. The inclusion of a rotation programme for the covering/uncovering of the structures/frames; and
 - iii. The inclusion of a programme for the maintenance and enhancement of existing field margins in the interests of encouraging biodiversity.

Policy DM30 - Conversion of rural buildings

14.5 Kent has a long agricultural history, with many buildings and structures having been constructed over the centuries to support the agricultural industry. However, changes in agricultural practises have rendered many of these buildings redundant, leaving them vacant and prone to dereliction. Government advice in the National Planning Policy Framework supports the re-use of redundant buildings where an enhancement to their setting would result. It also places emphasis upon the building of a strong, rural economy, which the conversion of redundant rural buildings can support.

14.6 However, the quantity and quality of buildings in the countryside in Maidstone borough brings increasing pressure for their re-use. In line with the objective to protect the quality of rural landscapes for their intrinsic value and openness, it is necessary that buildings considered for re-use are of permanent and substantial construction, not requiring major or complete reconstruction and that their resulting form and appearance is in keeping with the simple, functional character inherent in rural areas.

14.7 The quality and condition of rural buildings in the borough varies considerably. This wide range of buildings also includes buildings such as oasthouses, which are indigenous only to the hop growing areas of the country and exemplify the historical development of agriculture in Kent. Many of these vernacular buildings have a degree of significance which merits consideration as a heritage asset. These functional buildings are often of simple form and character, so external alterations require careful consideration.

14.8 In order to support the objective of promoting a strong, rural economy, the council will seek to secure business or recreation uses for redundant rural buildings, unless it can be demonstrated that such a use is not suitable or viable. Such uses are of a more functional nature than residential uses, and typically require less physical changes, having a lesser impact upon the countryside and rural character. Residential conversions can be detrimental to the fabric and simple form and character of the building. They therefore require particular attention, in order to prevent a loss of rural character and local identity.

Policy DM 30

Conversion of rural buildings

Outside of the settlement boundaries as defined on the policies map, proposals for the re-use and adaptation of existing rural buildings which meet the following criteria will be permitted:

1. The building is of a form, bulk and general design which is in keeping with its rural surroundings;
2. The building is of permanent, substantial and sound construction and is capable of conversion without major or complete reconstruction;
3. Any alterations proposed as part of the conversion are in keeping with the rural character of the building in terms of detailed design, form and materials;
4. There is sufficient room in the curtilage of the building to park the vehicles of those who will live there without detriment to the visual amenity of the countryside; and
5. No fences, walls or other structures associated with the use of the building or the definition of its curtilage or any sub-division of it are erected which would harm the visual amenity of the countryside.

In addition to the criteria above, proposals for the re-use and adaptation of existing rural buildings for commercial, industrial, sport, recreation or tourism uses which meet the following criteria will be permitted:

6. The traffic generated by the new use would not result in the erosion of roadside verges, and is not detrimental to the character of the countryside;
7. In the case of a tourist use, the amenity of future users would not be harmed by the proximity of farm uses or buildings; and
8. In the case of self-catering accommodation a holiday occupancy condition will be attached, preventing their use as a sole or main residence.

Proposals for the re-use and adaptation of existing rural buildings for residential purposes will not be permitted unless the following additional criteria to the above are met:

9. Every reasonable attempt has been made to secure a suitable business re-use for the building;
10. Residential conversion is the only means of providing a suitable re-use for a listed building, an unlisted building of quality and traditional construction which is grouped with one or more listed buildings in such a way as to contribute towards the setting of the listed building(s), or other buildings which contribute towards the character of the countryside or which exemplify the historical development of the Kentish countryside; and
11. There is sufficient land around the building to provide a reasonable level of outdoor space for the occupants, and the outdoor space provided is in harmony with the character of its setting.

Policy DM31 - Rebuilding and extending dwellings in the countryside

14.9 The intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside is an important asset of the borough, which is recognised by the National Planning Policy Framework and which is highly sensitive to development. However, in order to support rural communities, a level of flexibility for certain forms of development in rural areas is required.

14.10 In appropriate circumstances, the council will support the rebuilding of a lawful residential dwelling or an extension to an existing dwelling. In considering such proposals, the council will have particular regard to the mass and visual prominence of the resulting building, including the cumulative impact of such changes. The volume of new development will be more critical than its footprint.

14.11 The term 'original dwelling' refers to the dwelling as it was on 1st July 1948 or, if built later, as it was when first erected and granted planning permission.

Policy DM 31

Rebuilding and extending dwellings in the countryside

Outside of the settlement boundaries as defined on the policies map, proposals for the replacement of a dwelling in the countryside which meet the following criteria will be permitted:

1. The present dwelling has a lawful residential use;
2. The present dwelling is not the result of a temporary planning permission;
3. The building is not listed;
4. The mass and volume of the replacement dwelling is no more visually harmful than the original dwelling;
5. The replacement dwelling would result in a development which individually or cumulatively is visually acceptable in the countryside; and
6. The replacement dwelling is sited to preclude retention of the dwelling it is intended to replace, or there is a condition or a planning obligation to ensure the demolition of the latter on completion of the new dwelling.

Proposals to extend dwellings in the countryside which meet the following criteria will be permitted:

7. The proposal is well designed and is sympathetically related to the existing dwelling without overwhelming or destroying the original form of the existing dwelling;
8. The proposal would result in a development which individually or cumulatively is visually acceptable in the countryside;
9. The proposal would not create a separate dwelling or one of a scale or type of accommodation that is capable of being used as a separate dwelling; and
10. Proposals for the construction of new or replacement outbuildings (e.g. garages) should be subservient in scale, location and design to the host dwelling and cumulatively with the existing dwelling remain visually acceptable in the countryside.

Policy DM32 - Change of use of agricultural land to domestic garden land

14.12 Changes in the agricultural industry sometimes result in vacant agricultural land being sold off as individual plots. In some cases this land is simply retained as open pasture land. However, planning permission is required where agricultural land is used to form an enlarged domestic garden, for example, where land is regularly mown and laid to lawn or used as an outdoor seating and play area.

14.13 Significant swathes of the borough, particularly in the Medway valley and Greensand fruit belt, are graded as high quality agricultural land under the DEFRA classification. The National Planning Policy Framework recognises the benefits of best and most versatile agricultural land. Where agricultural land is

highly graded (grade 1 or grade 2) and is functionally well located for agricultural purposes, such that future agricultural use is feasible, the council will seek to resist its irreversible loss to domestic use.

14.14 The change of use of agricultural land to domestic garden land is also, in principle, contrary to the objective of safeguarding the open, rural character of the countryside, which is advocated by the National Planning Policy Framework. The domestication of the countryside, through the replacement of open pasture with lawns, domestic plants and garden furniture is generally harmful to the integrity and character of rural landscapes. This policy of restraint will safeguard against inappropriate and excessive extensions to domestic gardens.

14.15 In some cases, applicants may seek development that results in the infill of an area between existing clear boundaries to existing built development. Where development constitutes such infilling and is in keeping with the layout of the existing built environment, the impact upon the countryside is likely to be minimised.

Policy DM 32

Change of use of agricultural land to domestic garden land

Planning permission will be granted for the change of use of agricultural land to domestic garden if there would be no harm to the character and appearance of the countryside and/or the loss of the best and most versatile agricultural land.

Policy DM33 - Accommodation for agricultural and forestry workers

14.16 The maintenance of land in agricultural use generally aids the preservation of the rural character of the countryside and the rural economy. The National Planning Policy Framework lends strong support to the rural economy and seeks to promote agricultural and land based rural businesses. It also recognises that residential development in the countryside may be justified when there is an essential need for a rural worker to live permanently at, or in the immediate vicinity of, their place of work.

14.17 In considering whether a dwelling is essential, the council will apply functional and, if appropriate, financial tests. It is the needs of the holding, not the preferences of the individuals concerned, which will determine whether a dwelling is essential or not. The council will condition any planning permission to ensure that proposed dwellings and, where appropriate, existing dwellings remain in agricultural occupancy.

14.18 If a new dwelling is essential to support a new farming activity, whether on a newly created agricultural unit or an established one, it should normally be provided by a caravan or other temporary accommodation for the first three years. This is to ensure that the enterprise is viable and to prevent the retention of unnecessary built development within the countryside.

Policy DM 33

Accommodation for agricultural and forestry workers

Proposals to site a caravan or other form of temporary housing accommodation for an agricultural or forestry worker outside of the settlement boundaries as defined on the policies map which meet the following criteria will be permitted:

1. The dwelling and its siting on an agricultural or forestry holding are essential for the efficient development and running of the enterprise there;
2. The need is for accommodation for a full time worker;
3. There is clear evidence that the enterprise has been planned on a sound financial basis and that there is a firm intention and ability to develop it;
4. No other housing accommodation is already available locally to meet the need;
5. The necessary accommodation cannot be provided by the conversion of a building on the holding; and
6. The necessary accommodation would be sited with any farmstead or other group of rural buildings on the holding.

Where a temporary planning permission is granted for a dwelling, the council will:

7. Limit the permission to a term of no more than 3 years;
8. Limit the occupation of the accommodation to a person solely or mainly working, or last working in the locality in agriculture or forestry, or a widow or widower of such a person and to any resident dependants;
9. Require the removal of the temporary accommodation within 3 months after the expiry of the permission; and
10. Require the restoration of the site within 12 months after the expiry of the permission in accordance with a scheme agreed with the local planning authority unless a permission is granted for a permanent dwelling there.

Proposals for a new permanent agricultural or forestry dwelling in the countryside outside defined settlement boundaries in support of existing agricultural or forestry activities on well-established units which meet the following criteria will be permitted:

11. There is a clearly established existing functional need for the dwelling;
12. The need relates to a full time worker or one who is primarily employed in agriculture and does not relate to a part time requirement;
13. The unit and the agricultural or forestry activity have been established for at least 3 years, have been profitable for at least one of them, are currently financially sound, and have a clear prospect of remaining so;

14. The functional need could not be fulfilled by another dwelling on the unit, or any other existing accommodation in the area which is suitable and available for occupation by the worker(s) concerned; and
15. The new dwelling is no larger in size than is justified by the needs of the enterprise or more expensive to construct than the income of the enterprise can sustain.

The council will limit the occupation of any dwelling to a person solely or mainly working, or last working, in the locality in agriculture or forestry, or a widow of such a person, and to any resident dependents.

Policy DM34 - Live-work units

14.19 A live-work unit is defined as “the genuine and permanent integration of living and working accommodation within a single self-contained unit, where the principal occupier both lives at and works from the property.”

14.20 In terms of the Use Classes Order live-work is “sui generis”, in other words unique or “of its own kind”. Live-work does not therefore fall neatly into any specific class within the Use Classes Order. In practical terms it is a composite use that brings together, within a single unit, residential (use class C3) and workspace. The workspace element would generally be expected to fall within the B1 use class, as, by definition being integral to a living space, the work use undertaken would have to be capable of being carried out in a residential area without detriment to residential amenity.

14.21 In practical terms this usually means use class B1(a) offices, but the work element of live/work could conceivably include small scale B1(c) light industrial use. In some instances it might include uses which do not fall strictly within the B use class such as a treatment room for an alternative health practitioner, or an artists’ studio.

14.22 The construction of new live/work buildings will be restricted to the defined urban area and the defined boundaries of the rural service centres and larger villages. New-build live/work units in the countryside will not be permitted. In the countryside permission will be restricted to appropriate proposals for the conversion and re-use of existing buildings.

14.23 If a large extension to the building would be necessary to provide appropriate workspace and living accommodation planning permission will not be granted. The council’s policy on rural building conversions to create live-work units relates to the re-use of existing buildings, not to the extension and re-use of rural buildings.

14.24 It is also important that a conversion creates a workspace which can accommodate a genuine business use. The workspace element of a conversion should be at least 30% of the total floorspace. While the policy refers to an ancillary residential use it is not considered that this means that the employment premises must be larger than the residential accommodation and a 30% designation will normally be acceptable provided that the resulting employment premises are sufficient to accommodate a genuine business use.

14.25 Nevertheless, the employment premises are of primary importance in terms of a live-work conversion; it is on this basis that permission would be granted for a conversion scheme and occupation of the ancillary residential accommodation is always tied to the use of these employment premises. The calculation of floorspace in the rural building will include ground and first floor accommodation.

14.26 For conversion and re-use applications, the council will require a full application, with detailed drawings of elevations showing the impact of the conversion on the building and its setting. Permitted development rights for subsequent alterations will normally be withdrawn.

14.27 The occupancy of the living space on new-build or conversion schemes will be restricted to a person directly involved with the business being operated. The council will impose a condition prohibiting occupation of the living accommodation until after the works necessary for the establishment of an employment generating use have been completed. The council will also impose a condition which retains the workspace.

Policy DM 34

Live-work units

1. The construction of new-build live-work units will be restricted to the defined urban area and settlement boundaries of the rural service centres and larger villages. New-build live-work units outside of the settlement boundaries as defined on the policies map will not be permitted.
2. Proposals for the conversion of rural buildings to employment generating uses with ancillary living accommodation which meet the following criteria will be permitted:
 - i. The building is of a form, bulk and general design which is in keeping with its rural surroundings;
 - ii. The building is of permanent, substantial and sound construction and is capable of conversion without major or complete reconstruction;
 - iii. Any alterations proposed as part of the conversion are in keeping with the rural character of the building in terms of detailed design, form and materials;
 - iv. There is sufficient room in the curtilage of the building to park the vehicles of those who will live there without detriment to the visual amenity of the countryside;
 - v. No fences, walls or other structures associated with the use of the building or the definition of its curtilage or any sub-division of it are erected which would harm the visual amenity of the countryside;
 - vi. The proposals are well related to the existing road network with direct access off a public road, and will not require construction of a new long track to serve the building;
 - vii. The proposals will not create conditions prejudicial to highway safety;
 - viii. The building is not situated in an isolated location, relative to local services such as shops, schools and public transport;
 - ix. The domestic curtilage is minimal, unobtrusive and capable of being screened;
 - x. The building is of sufficient size to accommodate a genuine business use and that any residential accommodation will be ancillary to that use; The workspace element of the conversion should comprise at least 30% of the total floorspace; and
 - xi. The development is not situated in the farmyard of a working farm where conversion would prejudice the future operation of a farming business.
3. The council will impose a condition prohibiting occupation of the living accommodation until after the works necessary for the establishment of an employment generating use have been completed. The council will also impose a condition which retains the workspace.

Policy DM35 - Expansion of existing businesses in rural areas

14.28 There are already many industrial and business enterprises located in rural areas. Some are long established, others normally small-scale, have been granted planning permission to operate in disused rural buildings. Many of these enterprises will over time need to expand and/or diversify. While such expansion is desirable for job creation, it can radically change the nature of the enterprise and its impact on the local environment. It is therefore important to weigh carefully the advantages to the rural economy of job creation or an improved industrial/business facility against the potential for an adverse impact on the rural environment.

14.29 In all cases where permission for expansion is granted, the council will require reasonable measures to be taken to ameliorate the impact, not only of the extension but also of the existing enterprise, on the local environment. Such measures, where required, will normally be considered essential for the grant of permission. Where necessary, planning agreements may be used to secure environmental improvements. Conditions will also be imposed to ensure there is adequate landscaping, parking and servicing provision.

Policy DM 35

Expansion of existing businesses in rural areas

The expansion of existing industrial or business enterprises which are currently located outside of the settlement boundaries as defined on the policies map will be permitted where;

1. There is no significant increase in the site area of the enterprise. Minor increases and rounding off the existing site will be acceptable;
2. There is no significant addition of new buildings. New buildings may be permitted, provided they are small in scale and provided the resultant development as a whole is appropriate in scale for the location and can be satisfactorily integrated into the local landscape;
3. The increase in floorspace would not result in unacceptable traffic levels on nearby roads or a significant increase in use of an existing substandard access;
4. The new development, together with the existing facilities, will not result in an unacceptable loss in the amenity of the area. In particular the impact on nearby properties and the appearance of the development from public roads will be of importance;
5. The open storage of materials can be adequately screened from public view throughout the year.

Policy DM36 - Holiday caravan and camp sites

14.30 Holiday caravan and camp sites provide alternative forms of accommodation which can add to the tourist attraction of the borough. The National Planning Policy Framework recognises the importance of sustainable

tourism for a prosperous rural economy. However, the provision of tourist facilities must be balanced against the need to protect the quality of the countryside for the sake of its intrinsic character and beauty. Holiday caravan and camp sites should be located outside the borough's most sensitive landscape areas, in particular outside the Kent Downs AONB, and should not be prominent in the landscape and should be well screened.

14.31 In order to prevent the creation of isolated residential uses in rural areas, which would conflict with the aims of sustainable development, a holiday occupancy condition will be attached to any planning permissions.

Policy DM 36

Holiday caravan and camp sites

1. Proposals for sites for the stationing of holiday caravans and/or holiday tents outside of the settlement boundaries as defined on the policies map will be permitted where;
 - i. The proposal would not result in an unacceptable loss in the amenity of the area. In particular the impact on nearby properties and the appearance of the development from public roads will be of importance;
 - ii. The site would be unobtrusively located and well screened by existing or proposed vegetation and would be landscaped with indigenous species.
2. A holiday occupancy condition will be attached to any permission, preventing use of any unit as a permanent encampment.

Policy DM37 - Caravan storage in the countryside

14.32 In many cases, it is impractical to store private caravans within the curtilage of dwellings. However, open storage of caravans can be an intrusive feature of rural landscapes. Within Maidstone Borough, the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty is a highly sensitive and open landscape of national importance. In this area, the council will resist proposals for open storage of caravans, in order to preserve the quality of this valued landscape. In other locations, such development should be appropriately screened and sited, where it would not be isolated or prominent in the landscape.

Policy DM 37

Caravan storage in the countryside

Proposals for the open storage of private caravans outside of the settlement boundaries as defined on the policies map which meet the following criteria will be permitted where:

1. The site lies outside the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and its setting;
2. The site would provide comprehensive all year screening before the use commences, which may including bunding, tree and shrub planting, and fencing in appropriate locations, and there is no unacceptable impact on the landscape or environment;
3. Security arrangements (including lighting) would not be intrusive;
4. The proposal would not result in a concentration of sites; and
5. The proposal is situated close to existing built development, including residential accommodation.

Policy DM38 - Retail units in the countryside

14.33 The creation and expansion of rural businesses can contribute towards a prosperous rural economy. However, whilst promoting a strong rural economy, the National Planning Policy Framework also recognises the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, which is a valuable asset. Retail development in the countryside, if not strictly controlled, can also run counter to the objectives of sustainable development, by creating additional journeys to rural locations. It is therefore necessary to restrict development to that which primarily actively supports the maintenance of land in agricultural and other appropriate land based uses, such as farm shops primarily retailing produce at, and produced upon, their holding.

14.34 In considering such development, the council will view positively proposals where a significant proportion of produce, in terms of turnover, would originate upon the farm holding where it would be sold and, in granting planning permission, will consider the imposition of conditions to restrict the type of goods and extent of produce which does not originate upon the holding, for sustainability reasons. The council will seek to resist retail proposals in rural locations where the business case is not considered to justify such a location.

Policy DM 38

Retail units in the countryside

1. Proposals involving retail sales outside defined settlement boundaries as defined on the policies map will only be allowed in the case of shops selling fresh produce at the point of production (or originating from the farm holding) provided that:
 - i. A significant proportion, based on annual turnover, of the range of goods offered for sale continues to be fresh produce grown and sold on the farm holding in question;
 - ii. The range of any additional sale goods would be restricted to agricultural produce and the offer for sale of other goods, including packaged or preserved food products, would not exceed a minimal level; and
 - iii. The proposal is not demonstrably damaging to the viability of rural local centres and village shops.
2. In granting planning permission for farm shops, the council may impose conditions to restrict the amount of produce which originates outside the farm holding in which the proposed development is located and also to restrict the proportion of non food and other items to be sold, unless the proposal provides for a more sustainable alternative for the local community.

Policy DM39 - Equestrian development

14.35 Horse riding remains a popular leisure activity in the borough. The National Planning Policy Framework advises that recreational facilities can make an important contribution to health and wellbeing of communities. Whether planning permission is needed for the use of land and buildings for horses and equestrian activities depends on whether the horses are used for agricultural, recreational or commercial purposes. The use of land for grazing (which is part of the definition of agriculture in Section 336 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990) is widely taken to include the grazing of horses and so does not require planning permission. The need for planning permission arises when horses are kept on the land. Horses are considered to be 'kept' when their food is supplemented over and above any grazing that takes place or shelter is provided for them. This can be in the form of stables or field shelters. If these circumstances exist the land is no longer used for agricultural purposes but is used for the keeping of horses. Planning permission is necessary for this change of use.

14.36 In order to protect the openness of the countryside, the use of existing buildings is preferred to the erection of new structures for equestrian purposes. Where this is not possible, the scale, siting and finish should be chosen to minimise visual impact and avoid prominent and isolated development. The

proposed development should not be of a degree of permanence that could be adapted for other use in the future. Consideration must also be given to the security and safety of the animals being kept upon the land. For commercial proposals (10 stables or more), the council will only grant consent where the manager or owner of the animals makes adequate provision for the security of the site.

Policy DM 39

Equestrian development

Proposals for domestic or commercial stables or associated equestrian development which meet the following criteria will be permitted:

1. The conversion of existing buildings would be used in preference to new built development
2. New stables and associated buildings would be grouped with existing buildings on the site wherever possible, and are not of a degree of permanence that could be adapted for other use in the future;
3. All new development is of a design which is sympathetic to its surroundings in terms of scale, materials, colour and details;
4. The proposal is accompanied by an integral landscaping scheme including boundary treatments which reflect the landscape character of the area;
5. The proposal contains an appropriately sited and designed area for the reception of soiled bedding materials and provision for foul and surface water drainage;
6. Adequate provision is made for the safety and comfort of horses in terms of size of accommodation and land for grazing and exercising;
7. The site would have easy access to bridleways and/or the countryside; and
8. For proposals of 10 stables or more, adequate provision is made for the security of the site in terms of the location of the proposed development in relation to the manager or owner of the animals.

Policy ID1 - Infrastructure delivery

Providing the infrastructure needed to support growth

15.1 Infrastructure can be separated into three main categories; physical infrastructure (such as highways and public realm improvements), community infrastructure (such as schools, adult social services and cultural facilities) and green infrastructure (such as play spaces and parks).

15.2 The local plan shapes where new development should be located and also manages the pressure relating to speculative proposals through policy. It will provide new homes, jobs, services and thereby support social, economic and environmental objectives. The impact of development on local communities and the fabric of the existing built and natural environment is an important consideration. Managing this impact involves protecting existing infrastructure and securing the timely investment of new infrastructure.

15.3 The council has actively engaged with the main providers of infrastructure including parish councils at the Rural Service Centres and Larger Villages and has a good understanding of existing infrastructure in the borough and its associated constraints to further development. The product of this engagement process is the Infrastructure Delivery Plan, which sets out the type, location and phasing of the infrastructure required to support the overall strategy for development in the local plan. It also details those who have responsibility for delivering the infrastructure, potential funding sources and estimated delivery timescales.

15.4 Where new development creates a need for new or improved site specific infrastructure, provision of such infrastructure or contributions will be sought from developers (through S.106 legal agreements) to make the development acceptable in planning terms. The key requirements of dedicated planning agreements are that they must be:

- d. Necessary to make the proposed development acceptable in planning terms;
- e. Directly related to the development; and
- f. Fairly and reasonably related in scale and kind to the proposed development.

15.5 Site specific infrastructure requirements arise when there is a direct link between development and supporting infrastructure that is required to make the development happen. It will usually be provided within the development site boundary or exceptionally may be provided in an off-site location or in the last resort by in-lieu contributions.

15.6 In Maidstone Borough, some forms of infrastructure provision have historically not kept pace with development. This has been a contributory factor to some issues such as a congested road network, a shortage of affordable housing, deficiencies in open space provision and poor access to key community facilities in certain areas. There is concern that future growth will intensify this problem unless a co-ordinated effort is made to ensure that essential infrastructure accompanies new development at all times.

15.7 Where there are competing demands for developer contributions towards the delivery of infrastructure for new development proposals, the council will prioritise these demands in the manner listed below, which ranks infrastructure types in order of importance:

Infrastructure priorities for residential development:

1. Affordable Housing
2. Transport
3. Open Space
4. Public realm
5. Health
6. Education
7. Social Services
8. Utilities
9. Libraries
10. Emergency Services

Infrastructure priorities for business and retail development

1. Transport
2. Public Realm
3. Open Space
4. Education
5. Utilities

15.8 The prioritisation of infrastructure provision has been designed to address essential requirements first. This should not be taken to imply that the infrastructure at the lower end of the list is of lesser importance rather than the precise timing of providing it is not critical to the phasing of development.

15.9 There is a trend towards greater home working which allows for a reduced impact on transport infrastructure. In order to facilitate this option, developers of new sites will be encouraged to install optic cables (or the latest technology infrastructure) to serve new occupants.

Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL)

15.10 It is important to ensure that there is a reasonable prospect that planned infrastructure is deliverable in a timely fashion. The Infrastructure Delivery Plan provides the evidence that the council has an understanding of the costs required in meeting anticipated growth set out in the local plan. Funding for the infrastructure schemes listed in the Infrastructure Delivery Plan is expected to comprise a number of components:

- Existing resources (i.e. current/outstanding Section 106 Contributions)
- New Homes Bonus
- Mainstream public funding
- Future site specific provision (Including Section 106 contributions)
- Community Infrastructure Levy

15.11 It would be extremely unlikely that the finance from the first 4 funding sources listed above would be sufficient to fund the total amount of infrastructure provision that is being sought. The Community Infrastructure Levy is intended to fill the funding gap that exists once existing resources (to the extent that they are known) have been taken into account. If a funding shortfall remains once the CIL charging levy is determined there will be a need to prioritise key infrastructure projects to ensure that the overall strategy within the local plan can be delivered. The list of key infrastructure projects considered necessary to support the local plan (identified through consultation with infrastructure providers) is included in the Infrastructure Delivery Plan, which accompanies this document.

15.12 The local plan focuses development at the Maidstone urban area and the Rural Service Centres. Infrastructure is needed at a strategic level to support this growth. Strategic elements of the infrastructure required will be provided for by the Community Infrastructure Levy. This could include but is not limited to:

- Environmental improvements to Maidstone Town Centre
- Improvements needed to Maidstone’s transport infrastructure
- Additional education and community facilities or expansion to existing facilities
- Strategic open space requirements

15.13 New development will add incrementally to the need for strategic infrastructure. The Community Infrastructure Levy allows local authorities to raise funds from developers undertaking new development within the council’s area. This is a fair, transparent and accountable levy which will be payable by the majority of new housing developments. The levy gives developers a clear understanding of what financial contribution will be expected towards the delivery of infrastructure. Some types of development are automatically exempt from the charge and the council can determine whether to charge the levy for other forms of development.

15.14 As the council moves towards developing its Community Infrastructure Levy it will need to make decisions about which types of development it wishes to place the charge on. Proceeds from the levy will be applied to identified projects within the Infrastructure Delivery Plan, with contributions being pooled and generally applied on an off-site basis.

15.15 The council will produce a Charging Schedule setting out the levy rate(s). This will comprise part of the Local Development Framework but it will not be part of the Statutory Development Plan. Viability testing will be undertaken to ensure a levy is set that strikes an appropriate balance between the desirability of funding infrastructure from the levy and the potential impacts of the levy on the viability of development across the borough. Once the levy is set, it will be applied to all development that meets the qualifying criteria.

15.16 Section 106 Agreements will continue to be used for site specific infrastructure on development sites, such as local provision of open space, connection to utility services (as required by legislation), habitat protection, flood mitigation and access roads.

15.17 Exceptionally, where developers face genuinely abnormal costs or for any other reason consider that paying the normal contribution towards infrastructure costs would seriously threaten the viability of a development, the council will be prepared to consider requests for a reduction subject to an "open book" approach being adopted.

15.18 Provision of affordable and local needs housing is dealt with in detail in policies DM22 and DM23 respectively.

Policy ID 1

Infrastructure Delivery

1. Where development creates a requirement for new or improved infrastructure beyond existing provision, developers will be expected to provide or contribute towards the additional requirement being provided to an agreed delivery programme.
2. Detailed specifications of the site specific contributions required will be included in the Strategic Site policies and other site allocation policies. Development proposals should make provision for all the land required to accommodate any additional infrastructure arising from that development. Dedicated Planning Agreements (S.106 of the Town and Country Planning Act,1990) will be used to provide the range of site specific facilities which will normally be provided on site but may in exceptional circumstances be provided in an off site location or as a last resort via an in-lieu financial contribution. In some cases, separate agreements with utility providers may be required.
3. Where developers consider that providing or contributing towards the infrastructure requirement would have serious implications for the viability of a development, the council will encourage an "open book" approach and, where necessary, will operate the policy flexibly.
4. Where there are competing demands for developer contributions towards the delivery of infrastructure for new development proposals, the council will prioritise these demands in the manner listed below, which ranks infrastructure types in order of importance:

Infrastructure priorities for residential development:

- i. Affordable housing
- ii. Transport
- iii. Open space
- iv. Public realm
- v. Health
- vi. Education
- vii. Social services
- viii. Utilities
- ix. Libraries
- x. Emergency Services

Infrastructure priorities for business and retail development:

- xi. Transport
- xii. Public realm
- xiii. Open space
- xiv. Education
- xv. Utilities

5. The Community Infrastructure Levy will be used to secure contributions to help fund the strategic infrastructure needed to support the sustainable growth proposed in Maidstone Borough set out in the Infrastructure Delivery Plan. Once the levy is set, it will be applied to all development that meets the qualifying criteria. Following viability testing, the Community Infrastructure Levy rate(s) will be set out in the Charging Schedule to accompany the Publication version of the local plan.

Policy ID2 - Electronic communications

15.19 Advanced, high quality communications infrastructure plays a key role in sustainable economic growth, and high speed communication networks, including broadband, are also an important element in the provision of local community facilities and services. The National Planning Policy Framework lends strong support to the expansion of electronic communication networks, including telecommunications and high speed broadband.

15.20 The council recognises the importance of such development and similarly adopts a positive approach to such development. New development (residential, employment and commercial) should provide ducting that is available for strategic fibre deployment. Other forms of infrastructure, such as facilities supporting mobile broadband and Wi-Fi, should be included where practicable.

15.21 Certain telecommunications developments do not require planning permission by virtue of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 1995 (as amended). However, local authorities are able to exercise some control over the siting and appearance of these developments. In these cases, and in the case of telecommunication developments subject to full planning control, the council will apply policy ID2.

15.22 In considering electronic communications development, the council will expect the operator to have regard to the Code of Best Practice on Mobile Network Development in England (published July 2013) or any subsequent best practice guide. Development should be sited, where possible, to minimise visual impact.

Policy ID 2

Electronic communications

The council supports the expansion of electronic communications networks, including the provision of high speed broadband. Proposals for new masts and antennae by telecommunications and code systems operators will be permitted provided:

1. It has been demonstrated that mast or site sharing is not feasible and that the apparatus cannot be sited on an existing building or other appropriate structure that would provide a preferable environmental solution;
2. It has been demonstrated that an alternative, less environmentally harmful means of providing the same service is not feasible;
3. Every effort has been made to minimise the visual impact of the proposal;
4. Proposals adhere to current Government advice on the health effects of exposure to radio waves; and
5. Consideration has been given to the future demands of network development, including that of other operators.

Newnham Park

1.1 Newnham Park is a 28.6 hectare site located to the north of the urban area adjacent to junction 7 of the M20 motorway. Newnham Court Shopping Village dominates the western part of the allocated site, and the Kent Institute of Medicine and Surgery (KIMS) hospital is under construction on the northern perimeter of the site together with a new access road. Expanded hospital facilities and associated development to form a medical campus will create a specialist knowledge cluster that will attract a skilled workforce to support the council's vision for economic prosperity.

1.2 Newnham Court Shopping Village has been developed (and continues to develop) in a piecemeal fashion over time and, consequently, the visual impact of this site is poor. The inclusion of the Shopping Village with the medical campus as part of the allocation will deliver a comprehensively planned development that will provide quality buildings in a parkland setting.

1.3 A rectangular field of approximately 3 hectares to the south east of the development site, is identified for new woodland planting, to be developed as a parkland nature reserve, and transferred into the ownership of a Trust to ensure its long term maintenance. This field offers the opportunity to provide for net gains in biodiversity and ecological connectivity between the large expanses of ancient woodland.

1.4 Newnham Park is located in the countryside and lies within the setting of the nationally designated Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), where particular attention needs to be paid to protecting and conserving the distinctive character of the landscape. Existing landscape features within the site boundaries should be retained where possible, and the site is subject to tree preservation orders. There are constraints to development particularly along boundaries adjacent to the Local Wildlife Site/ancient woodland where a landscape buffer of between 15m and 30m will be required, together with a minimum 15m landscape buffer to be planted each side of the stream running through the site. Most of the site is of limited ecological value, the areas of interest primarily focused at the edges of the site and along the stream.

1.5 The medical campus will deliver up to 150,000m² of specialist medical facilities and associated uses, of which 25,000m² will provide for related offices and research and development. Appropriate uses on the site will include hospital or healthcare facilities, specialist rehabilitation services, medical related research and development, central laboratory facilities, and medical training. Medical facilities to the west of the existing stream will be delivered in advance of those being provided on land to the east of the stream.

1.6 The regeneration and revitalisation of Maidstone's town centre is a priority and the town centre will continue to be the primary retail and office location in the borough. Development will predominantly comprise replacement premises for the existing garden centre and for the shops already established on site (equating to some 14,300sqm) and a limited amount of additional floorspace at Newnham Court Shopping Village (up to 700sqm) within the vicinity of the existing retail footprint, as shown on the policies map. Restrictions on the type of goods sold and the class A and D2 uses operating should ensure that the Village is

1 . Proposed allocations

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complementary rather than in conflict with the vitality and viability of the town centre and should ensure that the character and appearance of area is consistent with its sensitive location. The town centre functions successfully due to the mix of uses in close proximity to each other. Consequently, new additional non-retail floorspace (i.e. that which does not fall within use class A1) at Newnham Park, such as cafés, restaurants and public houses, together with banks and estate agents, are unlikely to be acceptable. Similarly, leisure uses such as cinemas and bowling alleys, and other uses that are likely to conflict with the town centre, will not be permitted. Conversely, subject to restrictions on the type of goods sold, retail premises that have a unique and recognised "out of town" format, such as 'homeware' offers, are likely to be acceptable on the allocated site because conflict with town centre uses would be unlikely. The height and bulk of the retail units will need to be controlled in this sensitive landscape location and for this reason conventional retail warehouse style buildings will not be acceptable. In order to assess the impact of proposals on the town centre, a retail impact assessment will be required.

1.7 Critical to the successful development of Newnham Park is the provision of appropriate transport infrastructure. Vehicular access to the site will be taken from the New Cut roundabout, with bus and emergency access from the A249 Sittingbourne Road. A bus interchange will be provided as part of the retail development, together with a car park management plan. A Travel Plan will be required to accompany a planning application. Permeability is an important aspect of the site's development, and enhanced pedestrian and cycle links to the residential areas of Grove Green, Vinters Park and Penenden Heath, and to Eclipse Business Park, will be provided.

Site name, address	Newnham Park, Bearsted Road, Maidstone		
Ward	Boxley	Parish	Boxley
Current use	Medical, retail and open countryside		
Newnham Park development criteria			
Newnham Park is allocated for a medical campus, a replacement retail centre and a nature reserve, as identified on the policies map. Planning permission will be granted if the following criteria are met:			
On site			
Design and layout			
1. Phased provision of a maximum of 150,000m ² of specialist medical facilities set within an enhanced landscape structure of which 25,000sqm will provide for associated offices and research and development;			

Site name, address	Newnham Park, Bearsted Road, Maidstone
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. Provision of a replacement garden centre and replacement retail premises of up to 14,300 sqm gross retail floorspace and additional provision of retail floorspace not exceeding 700 sqm gross retail floorspace which is not to be used for the sale of clothing, footwear, accessories, jewellery and watches. All replacement and additional retail floorspace shall be confined to the vicinity of the existing footprint of the current retail area as shown on the policies map. New additional non-A1 floorspace will not be appropriate. The retail development should include the provision of a bus interchange and a car park management plan; 3. Creation of a parkland nature reserve of approximately 3 hectares on land to the south east of the site, as shown on the policies map, and through a legal agreement transferred to a Trust; 4. Construction of buildings of high quality design in a sustainable form that reflect the site's prime location as a gateway to Maidstone; 5. Mitigation of the impact of development on the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and its setting through: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. The provision of new structural and internal landscaping to be phased in advance of development; ii. The retention and enhancement of existing planting; iii. The use of the topography in site layout plans to exclude development on the higher, more visually prominent parts of the site; iv. The control of building heights across the whole site in response to the site's topography with no building to exceed 4 storeys in height; v. The use of low level lighting; and vi. The use of green roofs where practical. 6. Medical facilities on land to the west of the existing stream will be delivered in advance of medical facilities on land to the east of the stream; 7. The additional retail floorspace must be of an out of town format that is complementary to town centre uses and, by means of a sequential sites assessment, demonstrably require an out of town location. Large scale retail warehousing style buildings will not be acceptable in this sensitive landscape location; 8. Submission of a retail impact assessment which clearly demonstrates that the retail development has no significant adverse impact on the town centre; 9. Provision of a landscape buffer of between 15m and 30m in width along the northern and eastern boundaries of the site in order to protect Ancient Woodland, with tracts of planting extending into the body of the development;

1 . Proposed allocations

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Site name, address	Newnham Park, Bearsted Road, Maidstone
	<p>10. Provision of a landscaped buffer of a minimum 15m in width on both sides of the existing stream running north-south through the site (minimum 30m width in total), in order to enhance the amenity and biodiversity of this water body; and</p> <p>11. Submission of a full landscape assessment to be approved by the council.</p> <p>Archaeology</p> <p>12. Provision of a watching archaeological brief in order to protect any heritage assets found on site.</p> <p>Access</p> <p>13. Vehicular access to the site from the New Cut roundabout, with bus and emergency access from the A249 Sittingbourne Road;</p> <p>14. Enhanced pedestrian and cycle links to the residential areas of Grove Green, Vinters Park and Penenden Heath, and to Eclipse Business Park; and</p> <p>15. Submission of a Travel Plan, to be approved by the Borough Council.</p> <p>Ecology</p> <p>16. Submission of an ecology survey and detailed mitigation measures.</p> <p>A development brief, to be approved by the council, will detail the way in which medical facilities, retail redevelopment and the nature reserve, together with integral landscaping and supporting infrastructure, are delivered in an integrated and coordinated manner.</p> <p>Off site</p> <p>Highways</p> <p>17. Submission of a full Transport Assessment to identify off-site highway improvements to serve the development, to be secured in a phased manner by the provision of infrastructure or through contributions by means of a signed legal agreement prior to the commencement of development;</p> <p>18. Capacity improvements to the Bearsted roundabout at the junction of Bearsted Road with the A249 Sittingbourne Road, together with the provision of pedestrian crossing facilities;</p> <p>19. Capacity improvements to the New Cut roundabout at the junction of Bearsted Road and New Cut Road, together with the provision of pedestrian crossing facilities;</p> <p>20. The upgrading of Bearsted Road to a dual carriageway between Bearsted roundabout and New Cut roundabout, land take being confined to the north of Bearsted Road;</p>

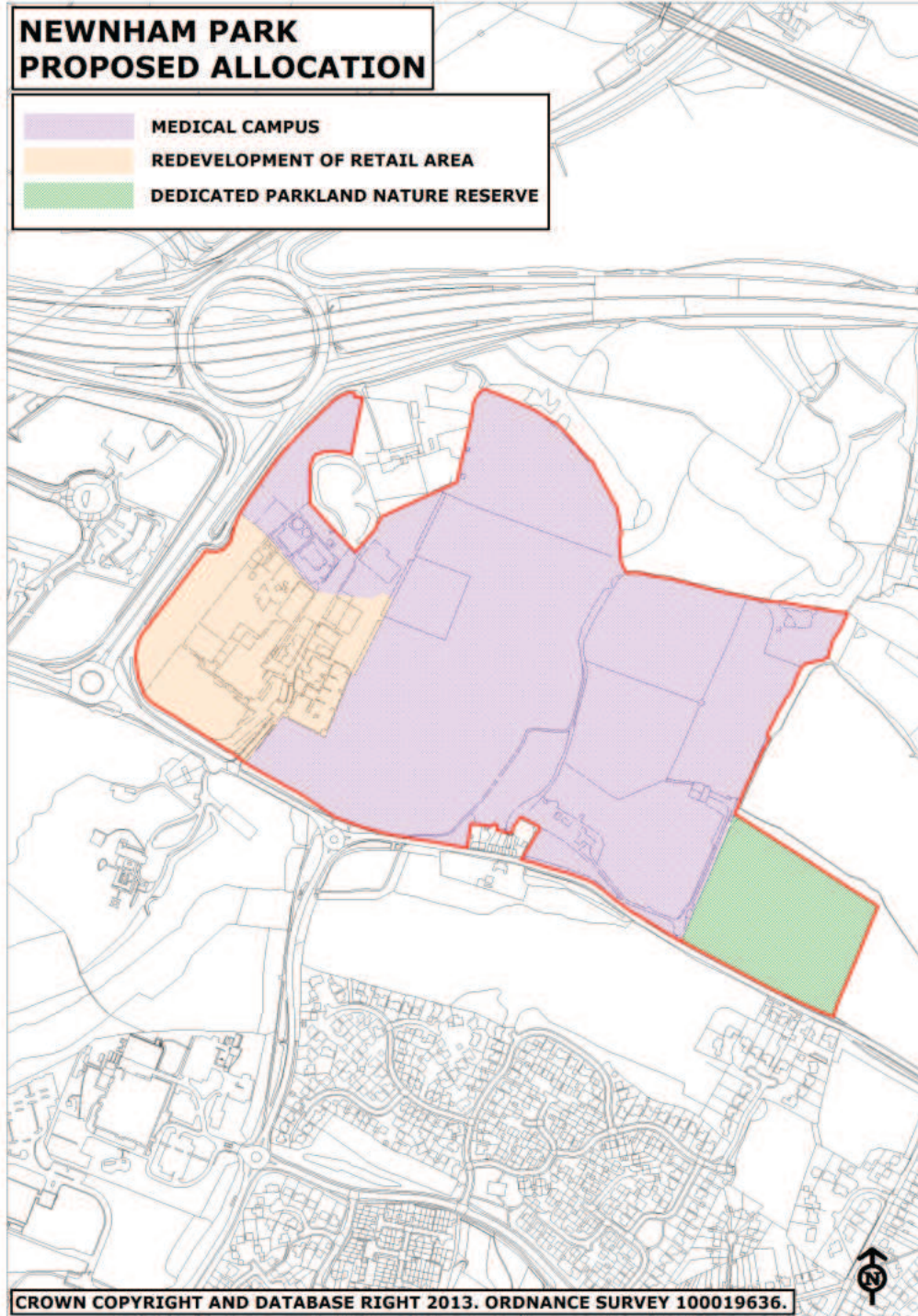
1 . Proposed allocations

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Site name, address	Newnham Park, Bearsted Road, Maidstone
	<ol style="list-style-type: none">21. Safety and capacity improvements to the M20 motorway junction 7 roundabout;22. Improved public transport to operate between the site and the town centre, via New Cut Road and Ashford Road;23. Bus priority measures on New Cut Road, where feasible, and traffic signal priority measures at the junction of New Cut Road and the A20 Ashford Road; and24. Improved bus links to the site from the residential areas of Grove Green and Penenden Heath.

1 . Proposed allocations

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Maidstone East and Maidstone Sorting Office

1.8 Maidstone East is a long standing development site located close to the heart of Maidstone town centre. Combined with the adjacent Royal Mail Sorting Office site, which has more recently become available, there is the opportunity to achieve a substantial retail-led redevelopment here which will help to regenerate this part of the town centre. The site is in a key gateway location, prominent in views from the station, from the Medway valley to the west and, to a lesser degree, from Fairmeadow. The prompt delivery of a successful retail-led mixed use scheme here will do much to upgrade the quality and attractiveness of this northern entrance to the town centre.

1.9 This edge of centre site is considered suitable for a combination of comparison and convenience retailing. The site already benefits from direct links via Week Street to the main shopping areas of the town centre and an important element in any scheme will be upgrading of the quality and attractiveness of this pedestrian route to help maximise the prospect of linked trips. Providing an element of comparison shopping in units fronting onto Sessions Square will particularly help to attract shoppers from the rest of the town centre to the development and vice versa.

1.10 Housing is seen as an important supporting use on this site. Residential development could be delivered in separate blocks either to the west of the site or possibly south of the railway line fronting Brenchley Gardens, or on upper floors above the retail development.

1.11 The overall station environment will also be uplifted, improving overall accessibility to and within the station, increasing the prominence of the station building itself and facilitating easier transfer between buses, trains and taxis. Network Rail has specific requirements for the site relating to the provision of commuter car parking and track maintenance.

1.12 Sessions House is a prominent listed building which faces and over-looks the site. Development heights will be controlled to limit the impact on views of the building from the west and would not normally exceed 5 storeys. There is also the opportunity through the development to achieve a better frontage to the western side of Sessions House Square.

1.13 A development proposal could also encompass Cantium House as part of a comprehensive scheme if this site becomes available.

Site name, address	Maidstone East and Maidstone sorting office, Sandling Road, Maidstone		
Ward	North	Parish	N/A
Current use	Railway station, parking, Royal Mail sorting office		
<p>Maidstone East and Maidstone sorting office development criteria</p> <p>Planning permission will be granted if the following criteria are met:</p>			

1 . Proposed allocations

On site

Design and layout

1. The provision of up to 10,000sqm of comparison and convenience shopping floorspace and some 210 dwellings.
2. The provision of a more prominent station entrance fronting onto Sessions House Square/Week Street
3. Development is designed to respond to the listed Sessions House and its setting. Development should provide an 'active' frontage comprising individual retail units facing the west side of Sessions House Square and provide direct pedestrian entrance into the development via this frontage
4. Development is designed to achieve a visual and physical connection between Sessions Square and Brenchley Gardens.
5. The overall height and bulk of development is controlled to limit the overall incursion in views of Sessions House from the west.
6. Assessment of the archaeological potential of the site is undertaken and the measures needed to address the assessment's findings secured.
7. The provision of commuter car parking to serve Maidstone East railway station.
8. Maintenance access for Network Rail to the western end of the railway tracks is secured.

Access

8. The scheme enables the improved, safe and convenient interchange between buses, trains and taxis, including through the provision of improved pick up/drop off facilities
9. Full disabled access to the station and platforms is secured.
10. Highway access is taken from Sandling Road. An additional, in-bound only access to the Sorting Office part of the site could be taken from Fairmeadow.

Flooding and water quality

11. The submission of a detailed surface water drainage strategy for the development based around sustainable drainage principles .

Noise

12. The submission of a transportation noise assessment and the delivery of resultant noise attenuation measures in particular for residential development sited close to the railway line and/or Fairmeadow.

Air Quality

13. The submission of an air quality assessment and emissions reduction plan.

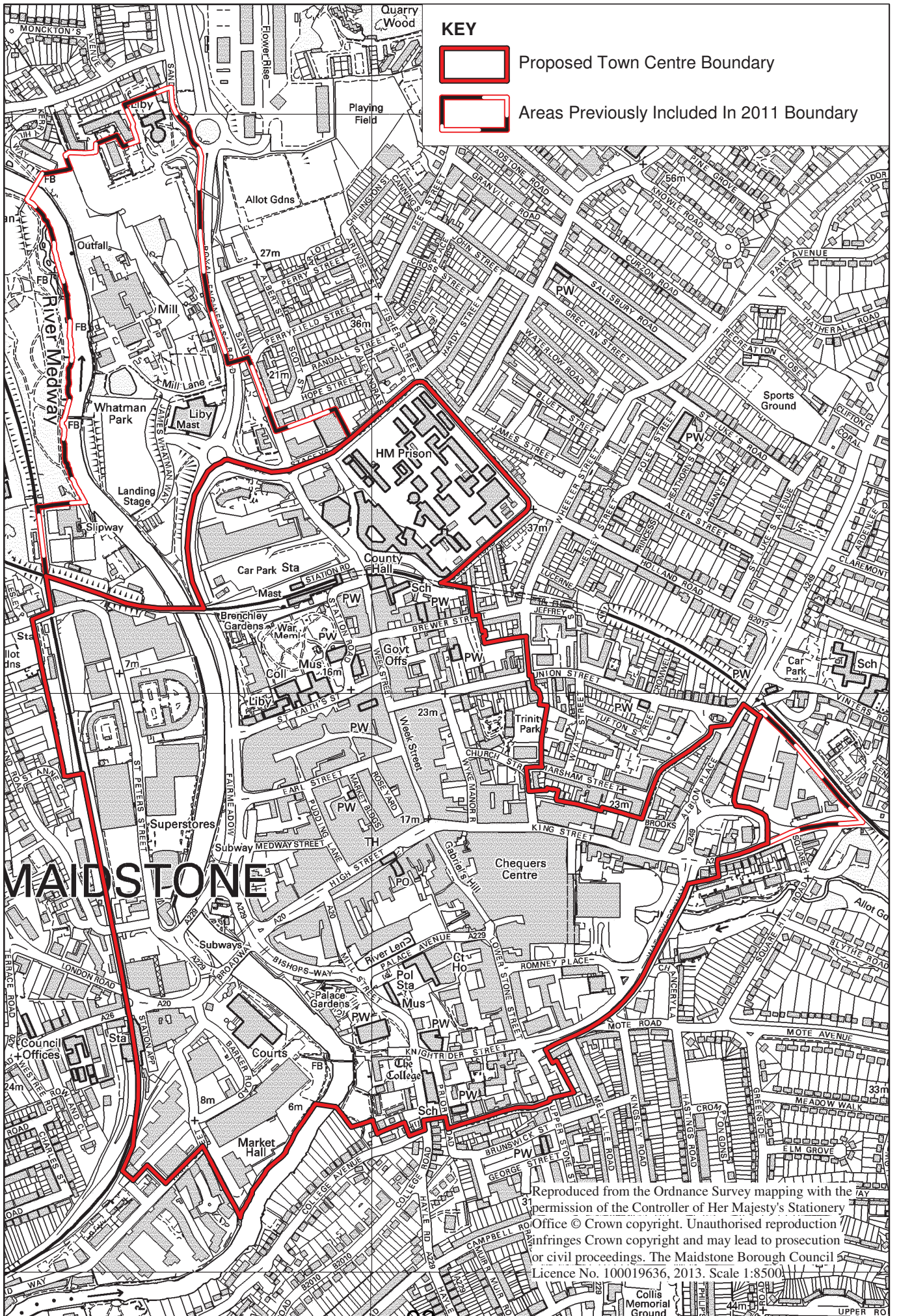
<p>Land contamination</p> <p>14. The submission of a land contamination assessment and the delivery of resultant mitigation measures.</p> <p>Off site</p> <p>Public realm</p> <p>15. Contributions to a comprehensive public realm enhancement scheme for the stretch of Week Street linking the site to the junction with Fremlin Walk, and from the site to Brenchley Gardens, to significantly upgrade the quality and attractiveness for pedestrians.</p> <p>16. Complementary, linked public realm improvements to Sessions House Square to provide an enhanced public open space.</p>
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Table 1.1

1 . Proposed allocations

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KEY



Proposed Town Centre Boundary

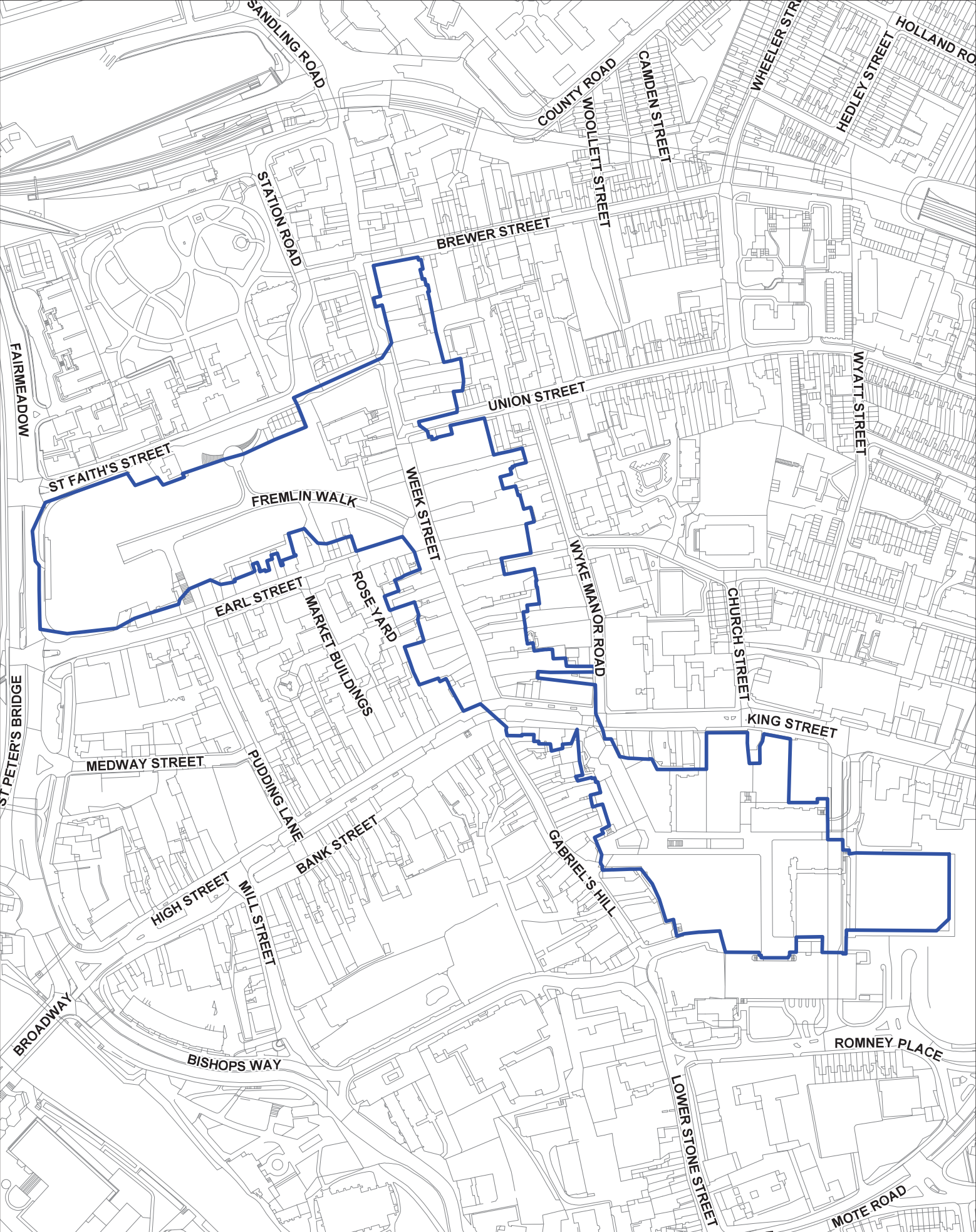


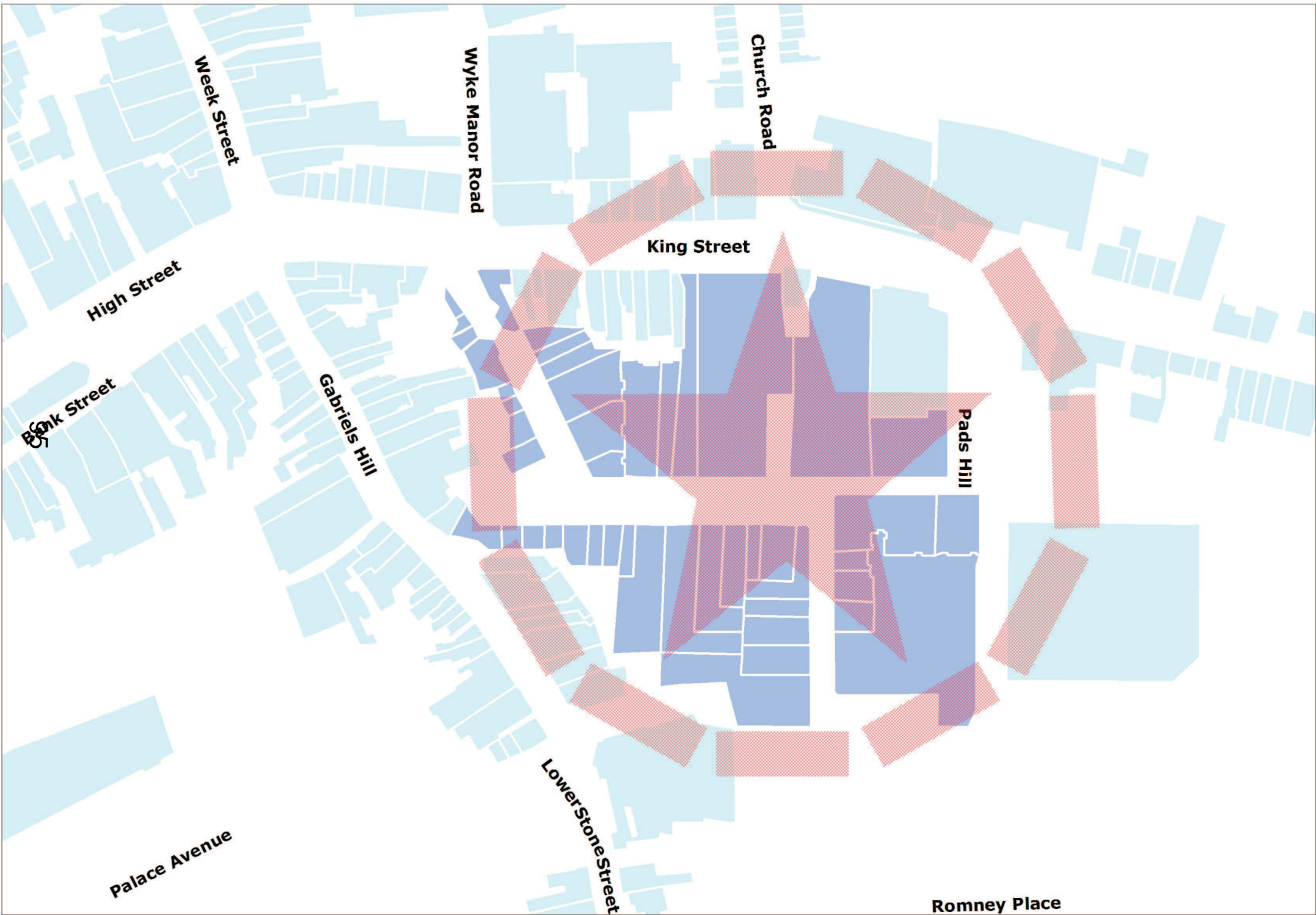
Areas Previously Included In 2011 Boundary

MAIDSTONE

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Maidstone Town Centre Proposed Primary Shopping Area





High Street

King Street

Church Road

Wyke Manor Road

Pads Hill

Lower Stone Street

Romney Place

Bank Street

Gabriels Hill

Week Street

Palace Avenue

Appendix B – Local Plan Policies List

NPPF Model Policy	
NPPF1	Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development
Spatial Vision/Objectives & Spatial Policies	
SS1	Maidstone Borough Spatial Strategy
SP1	Maidstone Town Centre
SP2	Maidstone Urban Area
SP3	Rural Service Centres
SP4	Rural Settlements
SP5	Countryside
Land Allocations	
H1	Housing Allocations
H2	Housing Densities
RMX1	Retail and Mixed Use Allocations
EMP1	Employment Allocations
GT1	Gypsy and Traveller Allocations
PKR1	Park and Ride Allocation
Development Management Policies for Maidstone Borough	
DM1	Sustainable design and development (CS6)
DM2	Renewable and low carbon energy schemes
DM3	Principles of good design
DM4	Residential garden land
DM5	External Lighting
DM6	Signage and shop fronts
DM7	Residential extensions, conversions and redevelopment
DM8	Non-conforming uses
DM9	Historic and Natural Environment
DM10	Open Space and Recreation

DM11	Community Facilities
DM12	Sustainable Transport
DM13	Public Transport
DM14	Park and Ride
DM15	Economic Development
DM16	Retention of Employment Sites
DM17	Town centre uses
DM18	District centres, local centres and local shops and facilities
DM19	Residential premises above shops and businesses
DM20	Mooring facilities and boat yards
DM21	Housing Mix
DM22	Affordable Housing
DM23	Local Needs Housing
DM24	Gypsy, Traveller and Travelling Showpeople Accommodation
Development Management Policies for the Town Centre	
DM25	Primary shopping frontages
DM26	Secondary shopping frontages
DM27	Leisure and community uses in the town centre
Development Management Policies for the Countryside	
DM28	Design Principles in the Countryside
DM29	New Agricultural Buildings and Structures
DM30	Conversion of Rural Buildings
DM31	Rebuilding and Extending Dwellings in the Countryside
DM32	Change of Use of Agricultural Land to Domestic Garden Land
DM33	Accommodation for Agricultural and Forestry Workers
DM34	Live/Work Units
DM35	Expansion of Existing Businesses in Rural Areas
DM36	Holiday Caravan and Camp Sites

DM37	Caravan Storage in the Countryside
DM38	Retail Units in the Countryside
DM39	Equestrian Development
Delivery Framework	
ID1	Infrastructure Delivery
ID2	Electronic Communications

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET

4 DECEMBER 2013

REPORT OF THE HEAD OF PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT

Report prepared by Darren Bridgett

1. GREEN AND BLUE INFRASTRUCTURE STRATEGY

1.1 Issue for decision

1.1.1 To consider the draft Green and blue infrastructure strategy, attached as Appendix 1, as the strategic basis for green and blue infrastructure delivery. It is proposed that the strategy is approved for targeted stakeholder engagement. This will inform the production of the Maidstone Borough Local Plan (MBLP) and a supplementary planning document (SPD), which will add further detail in due course.

1.2 Recommendation of the Head of Planning and Development

1.2.1 That Cabinet approves the draft Green and blue infrastructure strategy, attached as Appendix 1, for targeted stakeholder engagement.

1.3 Reasons for recommendation

1.3.1 Terminology

For the purposes of the report, open spaces, green spaces and green and blue infrastructure (GBI) are interchangeable terms.

1.3.2 The draft Green and blue infrastructure strategy

The draft GBI strategy is a strategic level document. The core content of the document deals with principles, but does not examine GBI with site specific detail. The document comprises:

- **Policy context** – understanding how the existing international, national, regional and local policy structure

already addresses GBI issues and how this affects what the council is aiming for with the GBI strategy.

- **Existing green and blue infrastructure resource** – an overview of the resources already present in the borough and the key issues facing them.
- **Vision and objectives** – a proposed vision and set of objectives for how the borough will address GBI issues in the next 20 years.
- **Opportunities and draft proposals** – strategic proposals for GBI, taking on board best practice examples from relevant local schemes not necessarily located in the borough.
- **Next steps** – further work that is necessary to give the strategy detail and make it measurable. This report discusses necessary next steps.

1.3.3 The purpose of the GBI strategy is 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 and the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) – where qualifying infrastructure projects are identified.
- Form the basis for GBI delivery, through policies in the emerging Maidstone Borough Local Plan and an SPD, which will set quantitative and qualitative standards for different types of green [and blue] space and provide detailed guidance to developers, partners and decision makers on its future provision.

1.3.4 The draft strategy therefore works not only within the remit of planning – planning will be an equal partner, certainly with other sections in the council, e.g. Parks and open spaces, or Community and leisure.

1.3.5 Green and blue infrastructure in planning

Development is considered sustainable if it is in line with the guidance found within the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). The three broad topic areas which the framework seeks to guide are the economy, society and the environment.

1.3.6 GBI relates specifically to the environmental aspect of these three topics. The infrastructure itself is the identified green space, water and ecological environment essential to maintaining the quality of people's lives. This is covered in more detail at 1.3.8.

1.3.7 Types of green and blue infrastructure

GBI is commonly considered to be:

- **Natural and semi-natural green spaces** – including woodlands, scrub, grasslands (e.g. downlands, acid grasslands, commons and meadows), wetlands, open and running water and rock areas (e.g. quarries).
- **Green and blue 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 green space** – (most commonly, but not exclusively in housing areas) including informal recreation spaces, greenspaces in and around housing, domestic gardens and villages greens.
- **Provision for children and teenagers** – including play areas, skateboard parks, outdoor basketball hoops and other more informal areas (e.g. 'hanging out' areas, teenage shelters).
- **Allotments and community gardens.**
- **Cemeteries and churchyards.**
- **Accessible countryside and nature reserves.**

1.3.8 The benefits of green and blue infrastructure

The benefits that green and blue infrastructure can bring are:

- Maintaining and enhancing biodiversity, water and air quality.
- Promoting a distinctive townscape and landscape.
- Achieving a quality environment for investment and development.
- Providing opportunities for sport, recreation, quiet enjoyment and health.
- Integrating sustainable movement and access for all.
- Providing community involvement and opportunities for education.
- Mitigating and adapting to climate change.

1.3.9 How the council currently delivers green and blue infrastructure

The Green spaces for Maidstone strategy (GSS), adopted in 2005, sets the strategic green infrastructure direction for the council. For planning purposes, the GSS is interpreted by policy OS1 – Open space, adopted as the single policy of the Open space development plan document (DPD) in 2006. This policy requires the contribution of open space, based on standards defined in the GSS. The draft GBI strategy would replace the GSS and update many of its objectives.

1.3.10 Interpretation of the Green and blue infrastructure strategy in the Maidstone Borough Local Plan

For planning purposes, the draft strategy supports policies within the emerging MBLP – DM9 – Historic and natural environment and DM10 – Open space and recreation.

1.3.11 Supplementary planning document

A Green and blue infrastructure SPD will be produced that expands on the proposed MBLP planning policies – the SPD will:

- Take forward the aspirations for green spaces and the water environment set out in the local plan and GBI Strategy and provide detailed guidance to developers, partners and decision makers on future provision
- Promote the provision of quality green space and water environments which are readily accessible to all
- Set quantitative and qualitative standards for different types of green space provision

- Explain whether the green space/ water environment should be provided on site – critical thresholds of the scale of development for on-site provision and the relationship with CIL when developer contributions may be appropriate instead of on-site provision, and the appropriate financial contributions sought, including for longer term maintenance, and
- Establish at what stage of a development green space and water environments should be provided (trigger points on large scale developments).

To inform the SPD, the GBI strategy will develop an action plan, with a timeframe for action. Necessary further work, detailed below, will provide the basis for the action plan and the SPD.

1.3.12 The continuity of strategy and planning policy

For comparison, the equivalent strategies and planning policies are:

	Current	Proposed replacement
Strategic level	Green spaces strategy, 2005.	Green and blue infrastructure strategy, 2013/14. (Proposed adoption 2014).
Planning policy level	OS1 – Open space, 2006.	DM9 – Historic and natural environment. DM10 – Open space and recreation. (To be adopted as part of the Maidstone Borough Local Plan).
Supplementary guidance level	None.	Green and blue infrastructure SPD. (To be adopted following in due course following adoption of the Maidstone Borough Local Plan).

1.3.13 Next steps – further evidence work

The council is commissioning an audit of existing open spaces, this is due to be completed in April 2014. The purpose of the audit is to update the baseline knowledge of open space resource in the borough and to refine it with knowledge gained since 2005 and 2007.

1.3.14 Next steps – refining open space types

Officers are proposing that for the audit of open spaces, the eight categories of open space outlined in the GSS, for which provision is currently sought by policy OS1, should be examined to understand their ongoing relevance in terms of provision requirement. There is an issue to address between the relevance of open space types in their everyday usage/function and what is realistic to seek provision for through development. Specifically, three categories are proposed to be reviewed:

Open space type	Reason for review
Green (and blue) corridors	These serve an important function, linking in particular the centre of Maidstone with the surrounding countryside and providing routes for sustainable travel. However, it is difficult to measure the corridors in terms of provision standards, they are a more conceptual feature of GBI than physical, and as such it is questionable if development can provide new corridors. Corridors should continue to be recognised as such but their value is qualitative rather than quantitative.
Parks and gardens	There is a question of whether the true value of parks and gardens is being recorded. In Mote Park a significant portion of the park could be recorded as natural and semi-natural green space, which provides a significant resource to the local community, yet if the parks and gardens categorisation remains, this and other resources might not be adequately recorded. Outside of the urban area, parks and gardens are already assessed in terms of provision by their component green space types.
Cemeteries and	Cemeteries and churchyards provide an

churchyards	important resource, not least for bereaved relatives. The issue, however, is how these are planned for and whether their provision is truly a matter for an open space policy. It is proposed that cemeteries and churchyards be recorded as amenity green space.
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1.3.15 Next steps – defining standards

The results of the open space audit will inform an iterative process where officers will be able to determine new provision standards. When these standards have been developed and agreed with members, they will be subject to a topic specific public consultation, which would need to take place before being included in policy DM10 – Open space and recreation, in the emerging MBLP. This inclusion will be at the regulation 19 stage consultation of the local plan.

1.3.16 Next steps – stakeholder engagement

While the audit of open spaces is being undertaken, the GBI strategy will need to be refined through targeted stakeholder engagement. The proposed list of stakeholders is detailed below, this has been determined through topic expertise/local knowledge.

<p>Key stakeholders</p> <p>Maidstone Borough Council (cross-departmental)</p> <p>Kent County Council</p> <p>Kent Downs AONB unit</p> <p>Environment Agency</p> <p>Medway Valley Countryside Partnership</p> <p>Mid Kent Downs Partnership</p> <p>Kent Wildlife Trust</p> <p>Maidstone Borough parish council representatives</p> <p>Neighbouring authorities</p> <p>Friends of parks and Allotment Association representatives</p>
--

1.3.17 It is proposed that the stakeholder engagement would take place over a six week period prior to regulation 18 MBLP consultation. This would be tailored to fit within the time allowed, and may take the form of a stakeholder event, or requests for comment on the strategy document.

- 1.3.18 The general public and local businesses will be invited to comment on the strategy for the duration of this period.
- 1.3.19 The results of the stakeholder engagement and public consultation will provide the basis for proposed amendments. These results will be reported back to members in February 2014. When the results of the open space audit are available, they will be integrated into the strategy.
- 1.3.20 Next steps – action plan and adoption of GBI strategy
The completion of the next steps elements (1.3.13 to 1.3.19) will provide the foundation for an action plan, which will be prepared and agreed with members and key partners. The important element of any action plan is for the actions within it to be measurable and realistic, with timescales, resources and key partners identified. When the action plan has been agreed, the next stage would be for the council to adopt the document as strategy.
- 1.3.21 Next steps – supplementary planning document
Preparation of an SPD is reliant on an adopted policy (those outlined at 1.3.12) to add detail to. These policies will be adopted with the Maidstone Borough Local Plan. However, early engagement with stakeholders to set the foundations for the SPD will take place later in 2014.
- 1.4 Alternative action and why not recommended
- 1.4.1 The alternative action is that the council continues to rely on the Green spaces strategy to set its strategic direction. This action is not recommended because the document is now almost nine years old. In the time since the GSS was adopted, there have been changes to the planning system, including the abolition of structure plans and regional plans, the reversion to local plans, and the publication of the NPPF, which presumes in favour of sustainable development.
- 1.4.2 There is a need therefore to understand what has changed in the national and local policy environment. The last audit of green spaces in the borough was in 2005 (updated in 2007) and since then, there has also been a significant amount of development. The council could choose to rely on the data which it has, allied

with the local knowledge of members and officers to determine where changes have occurred. However, it is recommended that a comprehensive review is undertaken which builds on this information, rather than relying solely on it.

1.4.3 The GBI strategy [and SPD] will provide greater certainty to developers about which infrastructure is expected as part of their proposals.

1.5 Impact on corporate objectives

1.5.1 For Maidstone to have a growing economy. Green and blue infrastructure plays an indirect but key role in the growth of the Maidstone economy. The infrastructure supports the character of the borough and the wellbeing of its residents, making it a more attractive place in which to work and live.

1.5.2 For Maidstone to be a decent place to live. Green and blue infrastructure plays a key role in the health and wellbeing of residents. The infrastructure gives residents the chance to take part in sport and leisure, to travel sustainably, it makes their home a distinctive place and in years to come will help mitigate the effects of climate change.

1.6 Risk management

1.6.1 There is a risk that the audit of open space may take longer than expected. Until the audit is under way, there is the chance that there will be unforeseen circumstances that delay the survey. However, the results of the survey are not required for regulation 18 stage of the MBLP consultation, which will take place in March 2014. The results of the audit will be required in time to derive provision standards and hold a topic specific consultation prior to the regulation 19 stage of the MBLP consultation. These standards will then be included as part of the regulation 19 stage consultation. This risk will be mitigated by careful planning of the audit programme of work. Stakeholders key to the progression of the audit, such as parish councils, will be given advance notice.

1.6.2 The further risk is that standards are not determined in time to be included in policy. Open space contributions could still be delivered through the CIL. The developer would pay a flat CIL rate, of which

the council would deliver open space. This is an alternative option to the delivery of open space through section 106 obligations. CIL could still be used for the delivery of larger GBI projects e.g. borough-wide, regardless of how the on site delivery of open space is achieved.

- 1.6.3 There is a risk that the stakeholder engagement may take longer than expected. This is a risk, however, the programme of engagement will be tailored to address a targeted range of issues. A six week engagement period will be set aside for stakeholder engagement and will be started in time to allow for necessary amendments coming from the engagement to be reported to members before the MBLP regulation 18 consultation begins.

1.7 Other implications

1.7.1

1.	Financial	X
2.	Staffing	
3.	Legal	
4.	Equality impact needs assessment	
5.	Environmental/sustainable development	X
6.	Community safety	
7.	Human Rights Act	
8.	Procurement	X
9.	Asset management	X

- 1.7.2 Financial. There are potential financial implications resulting from the way that open space and future GBI requirements are delivered i.e. through section 106 obligations or through CIL, or a combination of both. There are also costs associated with public/stakeholder engagement [for the GBI strategy and for the

proposed open space provision standards], for which the resource will need to be identified before this proceeds.

- 1.7.3 Environmental/sustainable development. Green and blue infrastructure is integral to providing the environmental balance necessary for development to be sustainable.
- 1.7.4 Procurement. This may lead in future years to procurement implications if the council is to invest CIL receipts into GBI.
- 1.7.5 Asset management. As with procurement, in future years there is the potential that the council may acquire GBI assets, so would need to consider how it manages these assets.

1.8 Relevant documents

1.8.1 Green spaces for Maidstone strategy, 2005.

1.8.2 Open space DPD, 2006.

1.8.3 Appendices

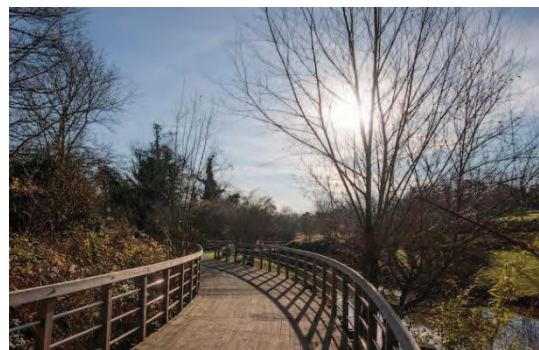
1.8.4 Appendix 1 – Draft Green and blue infrastructure strategy.

1.8.5 Background documents

1.8.6 None.

<u>IS THIS A KEY DECISION REPORT?</u>		<u>THIS BOX MUST BE COMPLETED</u>	
Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>
If yes, this is a key decision because: It potentially affects all wards and parishes.			
Wards/parishes affected: Potentially all.			

**Consultation draft
Maidstone
Borough Council
Green and blue
infrastructure
strategy**



October 2013

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1. Introduction

1.1. What is green and blue infrastructure?

1.2. 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 urban greenspaces - including woodlands, scrub, grasslands (eg downlands, 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
- accessible countryside and nature reserves.

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

1.4. 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
- Achieving a quality environment for investment and development
- Providing community involvement and opportunities for education

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

1.6. The role of the consultation draft strategy is to promote, guide and co-ordinate investment in Maidstone Borough's green and blue infrastructure over the next 20 years.

1.7. The emerging 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 and the Community Infrastructure Levy.
- Form the basis for a Green and Blue Infrastructure Supplementary Planning Document to set quantitative and qualitative standards for different types of green space and provide detailed guidance to developers, partners and decision makers on future provision of green and blue infrastructure.

1.8. What is the consultation draft strategy?

1.9. The consultation draft strategy is a starting point in the journey towards an adopted strategy.

1.10. There are a number of important steps to take before the strategy can be completed.

1.11. Further work has been commissioned to update the information that the council holds in relation to the quantity, quality and accessibility of existing publicly accessible open space. This information, when available, will form part of the basis for open space requirements through the Maidstone Borough Local Plan.

1.12. As part of the consultation process, the council will seek close engagement with key stakeholders and partners involved in delivering improvements to the borough's green spaces and water environments.

- 1.13. The council will also seek views from local communities and parish councils.
- 1.14. At this stage, the consultation draft strategy assesses:
- The legislative and policy framework which influence the future of the Borough's green space and water environment;
 - The current assets; and
 - The emerging issues which will have an impact on the green space and water environment.
- 1.15. The consultation draft strategy outlines a draft vision and objectives, and draft proposals.
- 1.16. When further data is available and there has been a meaningful dialogue with key stakeholders as part of the consultation process, the council will re-assess and prioritise the draft proposals and produce an action plan to accompany the strategy. The action plan will identify a series of prioritised actions each with a timescale, target and lead partner.

2. Policy context

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

2.2. European context

- 2.3. **Enhancing Europe's Natural Capital: EU Green Infrastructure Strategy 2013** 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. By the end of 2013, the Commission will develop guidance to show how green infrastructure can be integrated into the implementation of these policies from 2014 to 2020. In addition, the Commission will set up an EU financing facility by 2014 together with the European Investment Bank to support green infrastructure projects by the end of 2015. The Commission will also carry out a study to assess the opportunities for developing an EU-wide network of green.¹
- 2.4. 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.
- 2.5. 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

¹ European Commission (2013) Environment, Green Infrastructure [Online] available from: <http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/ecosystems/> accessed on 26 July 2013

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 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.

2.6. The Habitats Directive is applied in the UK via the **Conservation (Natural Habitats & c.) Regulations (England) 1994 (as amended), commonly shortened to the Habitats Regulations.**

2.7. National context

2.8. **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.

2.9. **The Countryside and Rights of Way Act (CRoW) 2000**² provides access on foot to certain land types such as mountain or moor land, brought a change to the laws of public rights of way (PRoW), increases the requirements for the management and protection of Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs), strengthens wildlife enforcement law and provides clarification on the management and designation of Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).³

2.10. **The Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act (NERC) 2006** places a duty on Local Authorities and other public bodies to preserve biodiversity. At a strategic level the Act ensures that biodiversity principles are:

² UK Legislation (2013) The Countryside Rights of Way Act 2000 [Online] Available at: <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2000/37/contents> accessed on 23.07.2013

³ accessed on 23.07.2013

- 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.
 - Encourage to help engender local pride and environmental stewardship.
- 2.11. Section 41 of act 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 biodiversity⁴.
- 2.12. **National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)**, paragraphs 73-77 and 109-118, outlines 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. 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.
- 2.15. It also states that policies should protect and enhance public rights of way and access⁵.

2.16. South east region

2.17. The South East England Biodiversity Forum (SEEBF) is an independent advisory group consisting of statutory bodies, local authorities and non-government organisations. They identify, advise upon and respond to biodiversity challenges in the South East, engaging

⁴ UK Legislation (2013) Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 [Online] Available at: <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2006/16/contents> accessed on 25.07.2013

⁵ CLG (2012) The National Planning Policy Framework [Online] Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/6077/2116950.pdf accessed on 03.08.2013

with key regional stakeholders in an attempt to achieve sustainable development⁶.

- 2.18. With the aim of protecting and enhancing priority habitats and species, SEEBF have produced the South East Biodiversity Strategy (SEBS) which provides a framework of actions, and acts as a guide for organisations and individuals. The strategy's vision for the South East is that:

Its landscapes and water bodies, coasts and seas, towns and cities - where living things and their habitats are part of healthy, functioning ecosystems; where we value our natural environment, where biodiversity is embedded in policies and decisions, and where more people enjoy, understand and act to improve the natural world about them⁷.

- 2.19. The aims of SEBS is to:-

- Be a clear, coherent and inspiring vision for the South East.
- Provide a framework for the delivery of biodiversity targets that guide and support all those who have an impact on biodiversity in the region.
- Embed a landscape scale approach to restoring whole ecosystems in the working practices and policies of all partners.
- Create the space needed for wildlife to respond to climate change.
- Enable all organisations in the SE to support and improve biodiversity across the region.
- Be a core element within the strategies and delivery plans of organisations across the South East region.

- 2.20. There are a number of elements to the strategy which include targets for BAP habitats and species and a framework for coordinated delivery, organisations responsibilities, accountability for leading partnership working towards BAP targets, stakeholder guidance and support, best practice examples, and the identification of Biodiversity Opportunity Areas (BOAs) for the region.⁸

⁶ SEEBF (2013) The South East Biodiversity Forum [Online] Available at: <http://strategy.sebiodiversity.org.uk/>. Accessed on 26.07.2013

⁷ SEBS (2013) Our Vision [Online] Available at: <http://strategy.sebiodiversity.org.uk/> accessed on 29.07.2013

⁸ The South East England Biodiversity Forum (2009) The South East Biodiversity [Online] Available at: http://strategy.sebiodiversity.org.uk/data/files/SEBS/seebf_regional_stratweb.pdf Accessed on 29.07.2013

2.21. How can green and blue infrastructure support local strategies?

2.22. 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.

2.23. 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.*

2.24. 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.*

2.25. The Draft Kent Countryside Access Improvement Plan 2009–14 sets a number of objectives especially for sustainable transport:

2.26. 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.*

2.27. 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.*

2.28. Priority equestrian objectives include:

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

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

2.30. **The Maidstone Draft Integrated Transport Strategy 2012** 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:

- *Objective 4: Encourage sustainable travel choices by prioritising walking, cycling and public transport use.*
- *Objective 7: Ensure the transport network provides inclusive access for all users.*

2.31. The **Sustainable Community Strategy for Maidstone 2009–2020** contains a number of objectives which the local Green and Blue Infrastructure can help deliver, including:

- *Create healthier communities and support older people to lead more active and independent lives.*
- 2.32. This includes reducing health inequalities which exist within the Borough and implementing the 'Choosing Health Plan' for Maidstone focusing on health inequalities
- *Make Maidstone Borough a place where people of all ages - children, young people and families - can achieve their aspirations.*
- 2.33. This involves increasing children's participation in regular sporting activities and addressing obesity.
- *Build a thriving sporting, creative and cultural life for all.*
- 2.34. It is intended to utilise the opportunity provided by the 2012 Olympic games to increase active participation in sport for all ages, by increasing the provision of high quality, affordable and improved sporting facilities. This also involves enhancing the quality, use and appearance of the river in terms of leisure, cultural and sporting facilities and activities.
- *Retain and enhance Maidstone Borough's distinctive history, landscape and character.*
- 2.35. This aims to enhance biodiversity and links between semi natural habitats.
- 2.36. This also involves continuing to improve parks and open spaces – particularly Mote Park as the largest park in the Borough - and implementing capital investment in new facilities and maintaining parks and open spaces. Finally the aim is to protect the Borough's high quality landscape and the countryside.
- 2.37.** In accordance with the UK BAP, the **Maidstone Biodiversity Strategy A Local Biodiversity Action Plan Phase 1 2009 – 2014** 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.*
- *Increase public awareness of, and involvement in, conserving biodiversity.*

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

2.39. Strategies which help support Green and Blue Infrastructure are set out in Appendix 1.

2.40. Supporting adjoining green and blue infrastructure strategies

2.41. 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. The districts which adjoin Maidstone Borough are illustrated below.

Kent Boundaries



Dartford District

Medway

Gravesham District

Swale District

Thanet District

Sevenoaks District

Tonbridge and Malling District

Canterbury District

Maidstone District

Dover District

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Ashford District

Tunbridge Wells District

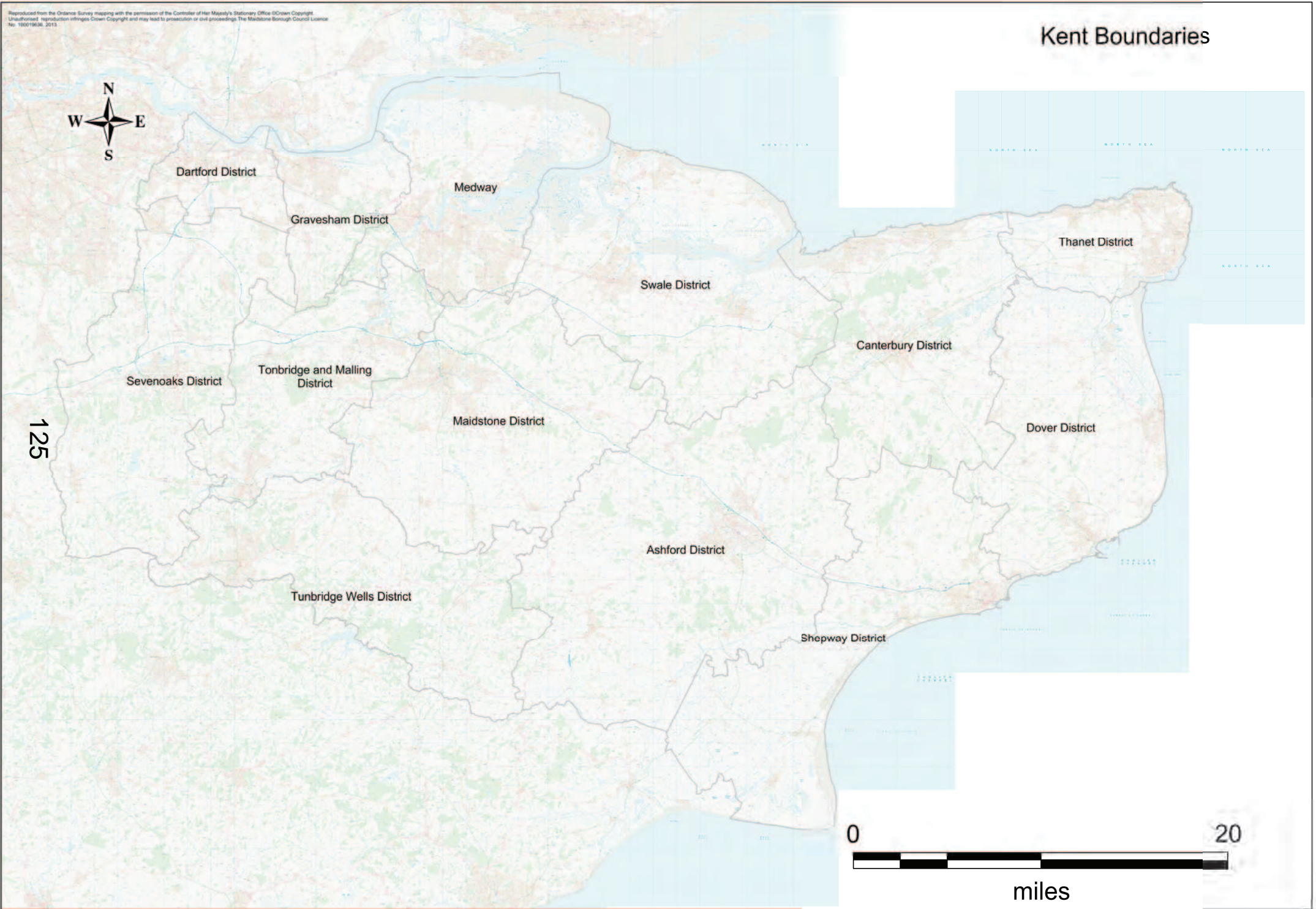
Shepway District

0

20



miles



- 2.42. 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, May 2013.
 - Ashford Green & Blue Grid Strategy 2008 (though this focuses on the urban area and its immediate setting).
- 2.43. 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).
- 2.44. Areas for habitat creation or enhancement are proposed along the boundaries with Swale Borough and Medway.
- 2.45. 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.

2.46. Conclusion

- 2.47. 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
 - Creating a quality environment for investment and development and
 - Providing community involvement and opportunities for education
- 2.48. 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. Understanding the existing green and blue infrastructure resources

3.1. Existing green and blue infrastructure resources

3.2. Overview

3.3. 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 English Heritage 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 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.

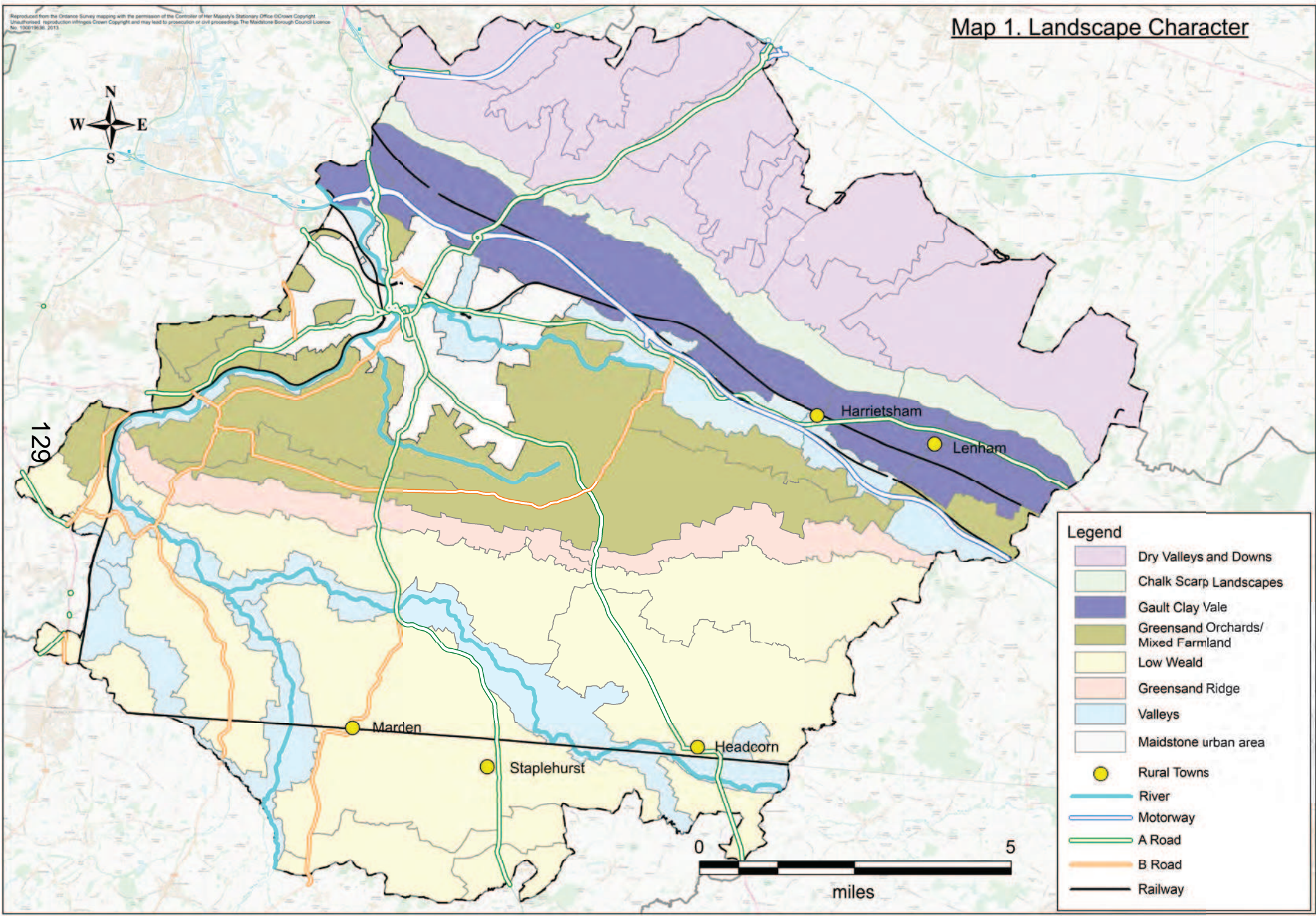
3.4. Landscape character



3.5. 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 pattern¹, as shown on Map 1 (below).

¹ Maidstone Landscape Character Assessment, 2009

Map 1. Landscape Character



- 3.6. 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.
- 3.7. 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 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.

- 3.8. The Low Weald is bisected by the Beult (left), 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. Traditionally, orchards and hops were widespread. But during the 20th century many were converted to horticultural and arable crops.



3.9. 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.



3.10. Just over a quarter of the borough is within the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

3.11. 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 Wateringbury 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.

3.12. Habitats



3.13. A UK BAP broad 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.

3.14. Map 2 below shows the locations of each broad habitat within the borough. Figure 1 shows the amount of each habitat.

Map 2. Habitats

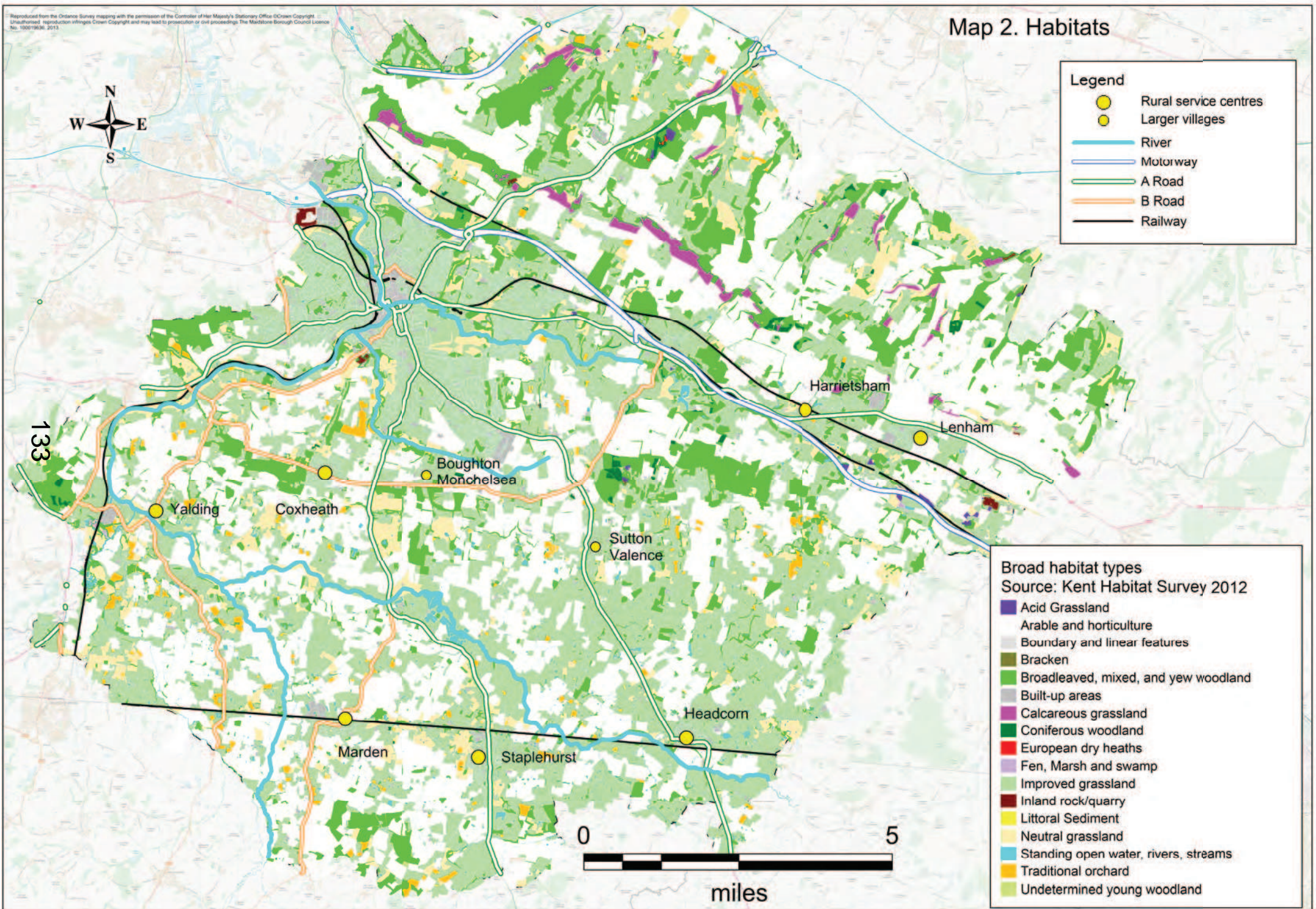


Figure 1: UK broad habitat types in Maidstone Borough

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)

- 3.15. 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 woodland².

² 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)

3.16. Designated sites

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



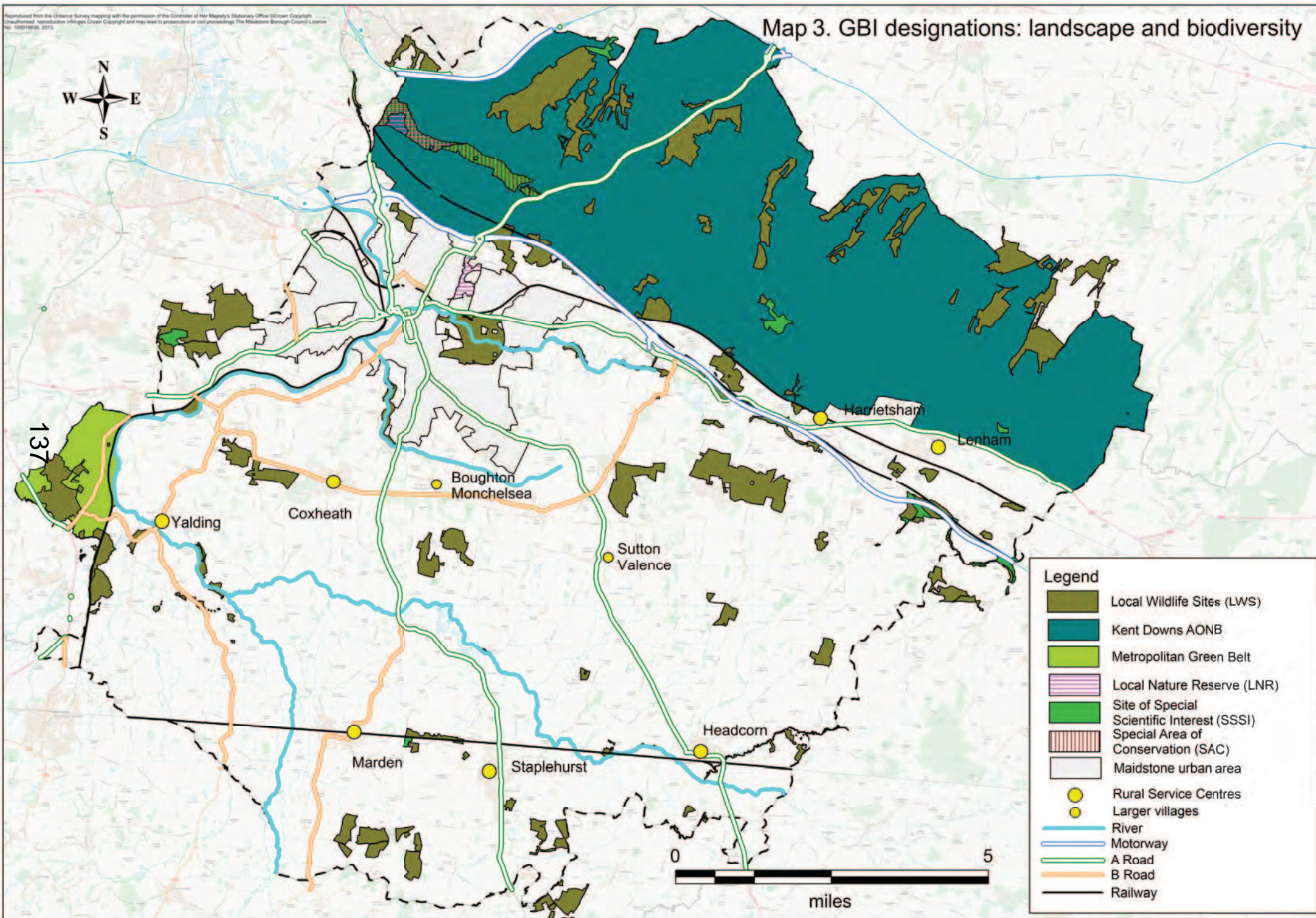
- 3.18. **Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs)** represent Britain's finest sites for fauna, flora, geology and physiographical features and are protected by legislation. There are nine SSSI sites within the borough including chalk grassland and woodland sites on the Kent Downs, the clay River Beult environment (right) and geological SSSI's at quarries such as at Allington and Lenham.

- 3.19. Maidstone 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.



Map 3. GBI designations: landscape and biodiversity



3.20. Heritage assets

3.21. 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 historic significance. Heritage assets have been mapped to inform the development of the Green and blue infrastructure strategy (see Map 4 -below).

3.22. 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

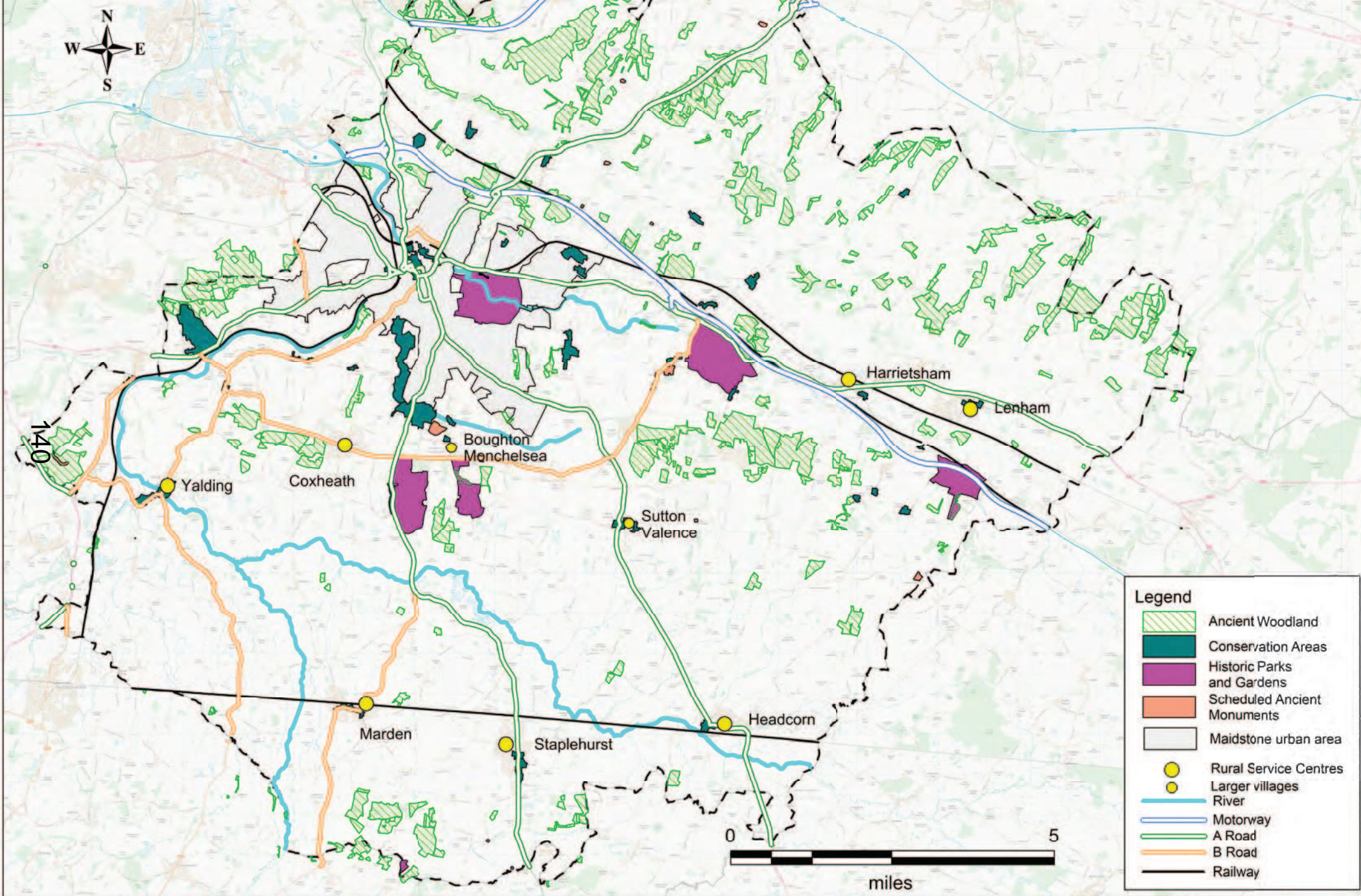


special architectural or historic interest, made by Local Planning Authorities under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990. There are 41 Conservation Areas throughout Maidstone Borough, mainly focused around traditional settlement centres. As trees make a significant contribution 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. A **Register of Landscapes, Parks and Gardens** of Special Historic Interest has been maintained by English Heritage since the 1980s. Although not yet statutory, such sites form 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. **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.



Map 4. GBI designations: heritage



3.23. Publicly accessible green space

3.24. The Borough's green space strategy adopted by the council in 2005 identifies a number of different types of public open space. These were mapped in 2005 and updated in 2007 – see Figure 3 below and Map 5 (below).

Figure 3: Overall quantity of publicly accessible green space

Type of green space	Total area (ha)
Parks and gardens	220
Natural and semi-natural	3719
Amenity	189
Provision for children and young people	13
Outdoor sports facilities	556
Allotments	35
Total:	4732

(Source: Green space audit data, 2005 updated in 2007)

3.25. produced for the highest profile green spaces. An overview of the resource by typology is outlined below.

3.26. Green and blue corridors

3.27. These include paths along riverbanks, cycleways, and footpaths. Maidstone'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 footpath, 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. Further detail on movement links is included in the 'Sustainable green links' section.

3.28. Parks and gardens

3.29. 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.

3.30. Three of the parks gained a national Green Flag Award in 2013. Mote Park won the award for the first time and Whatman Park (right) and Clare Park have retained the awards for four and six years respectively. 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).

3.31. Amenity green space

3.32. 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 (right). 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.

3.33. Provision for children and young people

3.34. There are over 100 play areas within the borough, including equipped playgrounds, ball courts, skateboard areas, teenage shelters and 'hangouts' according to a 2012 survey. 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.

3.35. Natural and semi-natural green space

3.36. 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.

3.37. Allotments and community gardens

3.38. 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.

3.39. Cemeteries and churchyards

3.40. Cemeteries and churchyards and other burial grounds are important for quiet contemplation, burial of the dead, 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.

3.41. Outdoor sports facilities

3.42. 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 playing fields are scattered throughout the borough in the smaller settlements.

3.43. Private green spaces

3.44. 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.

3.45. Updating the Audit

3.46. Further work has been commissioned to update the information that the council holds in relation to the quantity, quality and accessibility of existing publicly accessible open space. Through this process, the Borough Council intends to classify open space into five different types:

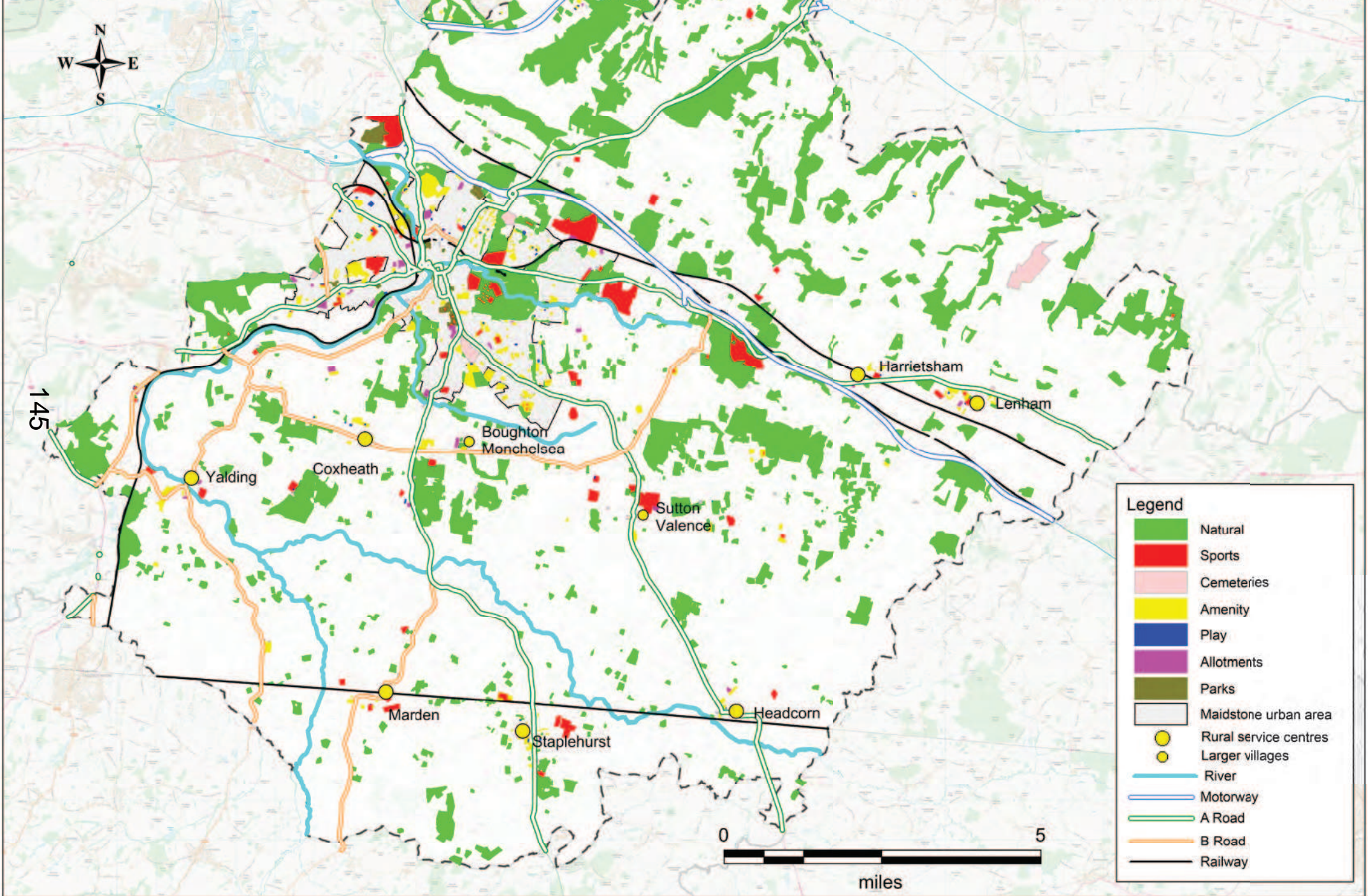
- Natural and semi-natural.
- Amenity.
- Provision for children and young people.
- Outdoor sports facilities.
- Allotments.
- Green and blue corridors, whilst playing an important role as connecting corridors, will be classified as one of the types above, such as natural or semi-natural open space.

3.47. Similarly, parks and gardens will be classified by their component parts (such as natural and semi natural open space, sports pitches and children's play area) rather than as a park and garden itself.

3.48. Cemeteries will be similarly classified as amenity or other type of open space.

3.49. This information, when available, will form part of the basis for open space requirements through the Maidstone Borough Local Plan.

Map 5. Publicly accessible green infrastructure



3.50. Blue infrastructure: rivers and waterbodies

3.51. 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.

3.52. 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 borough³. 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.

³ Maidstone Borough Strategic Flood Risk Assessment, 2008

- 3.53. Flooding has historically been a problem for settlements within the Medway floodplains. Today, Medway flows are controlled by sluice gates and flood storage areas. In addition, inland flood defences such as banks, structural walls and impounding reservoirs help to protect land within the floodplains. Map 6 (below) shows the extent of the functional floodplain including the predicted climate change influence.



- 3.54. 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).
- 3.55. The River Len flows into the Medway from the east where it forms an open pond. 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 (above), 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.

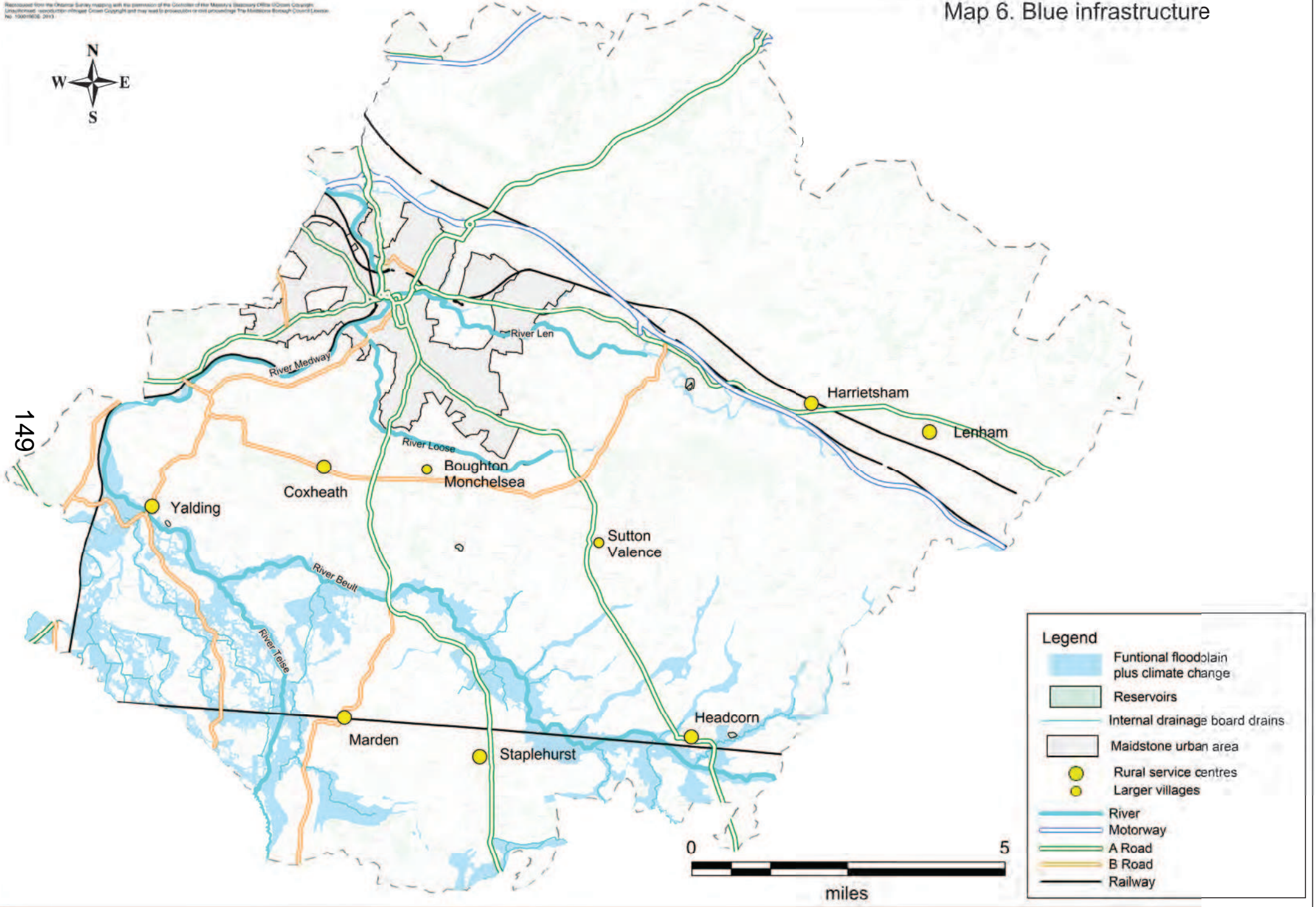
- 3.56. The Loose Stream is a small tributary of the Medway, which rises near Langley and flows through the Parishes of Boughton Monchelsea, Loose and Tovil before joining the River Medway. The Loose Valley Conservation Area extending some two miles in length was designated due to the heritage value 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.
- 3.57. 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.



- 3.58. 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.
- 3.59. 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.



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Legend

- Functional floodplain plus climate change
- Reservoirs
- Internal drainage board drains
- Maidstone urban area
- Rural service centres
- Larger villages
- River
- Motorway
- A Road
- B Road
- Railway

3.60. Sustainable movement links

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

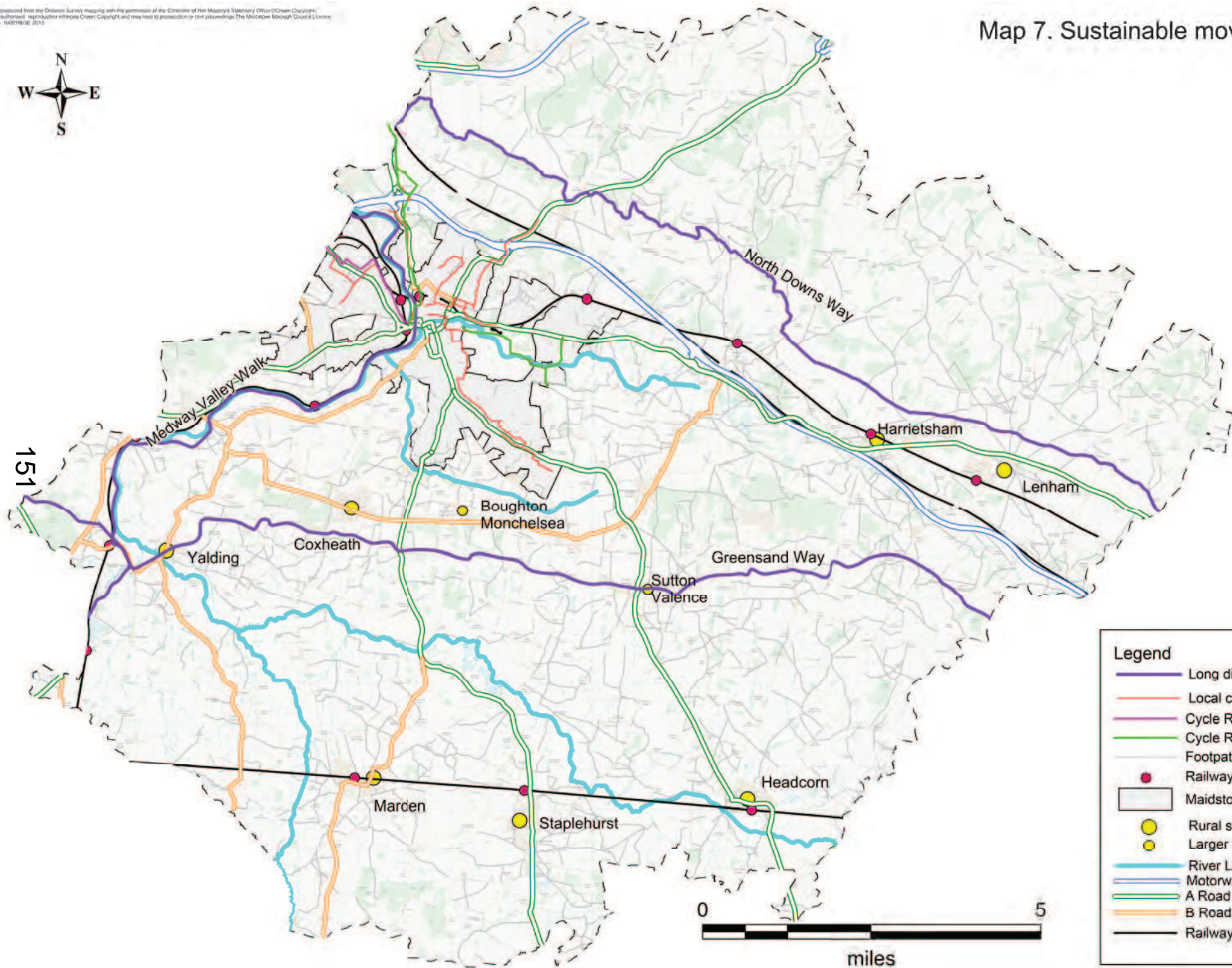


3.62. National Route 17 of the National Cycle Network connects Rochester, via Maidstone and Ashford, to join with National Route 2 on the South coast between Folkestone and Lydd following the line of the North Downs Way National Trail. Maidstone also has a Regional Route (RR20) for cyclists which originates 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.

3.63. 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 authority⁴. Map 7 (below) shows the main routes.

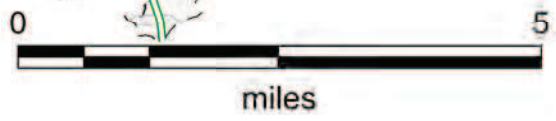
⁴ Countryside and Coastal Access Improvement Plan, Draft April 2013

Map 7. Sustainable movement links



Legend

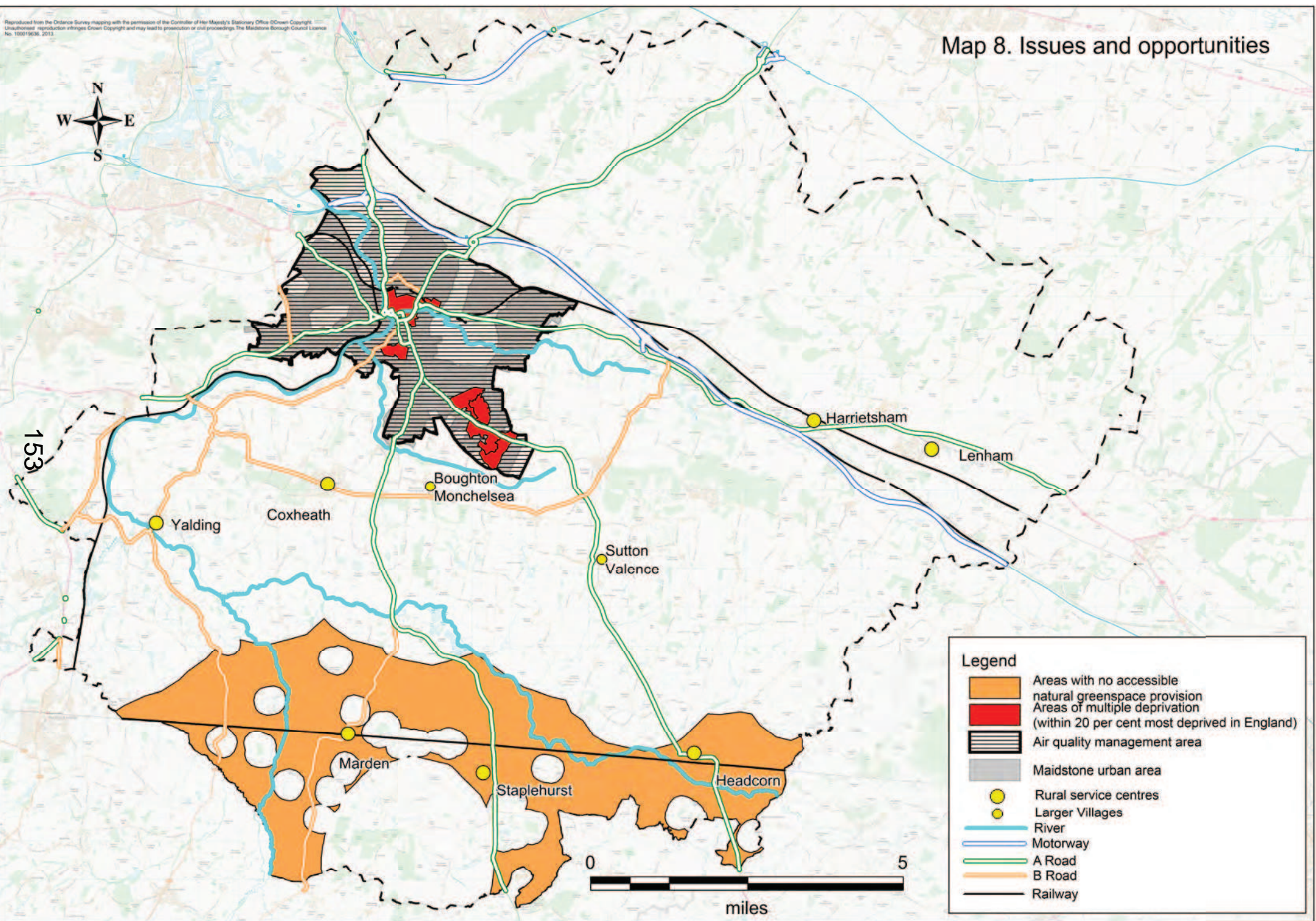
- Long distance footpaths
- Local cycle route
- Cycle Route 20
- Cycle Route 17
- Footpath
- Railway station
- Maidstone urban area
- Rural service centres
- Larger villages
- River Line
- Motorway
- A Road
- B Road
- Railway



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- 3.64. **Community involvement and education**
- 3.65. 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.
- 3.66. 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. 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.

Map 8. Issues and opportunities



Legend

- Areas with no accessible natural greenspace provision
- Areas of multiple deprivation (within 20 per cent most deprived in England)
- Air quality management area
- Maidstone urban area
- Rural service centres
- Larger Villages
- River
- Motorway
- A Road
- B Road
- Railway

3.67. Key issues

3.68. The impact of climate change

- 3.69. 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, particularly the threat from extreme weather events. The borough suffered extensive flooding in 2000, 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 2030⁵.
- 3.70. 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.
- 3.71. There are significant pressures on water resources in the Maidstone and wider Kent area which affect both the water environment and water supplies as it is one of the driest parts of England, coupled with high population density and household water use. 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 consumption⁶. 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 area⁷.
- 3.72. 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 (above). Map 3 shows the extent of the functional

⁵ Growing the Garden of England: A strategy for environment and economy in Kent, Kent Forum, July 2011

⁶ The state of water in Kent, Kent Water Summit, Environment Agency, June 2012

⁷ Maidstone Landscape Character Assessment, 2013

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.

- 3.73. Increased housing provision will 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).



- 3.74. 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.

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

- 3.76. 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



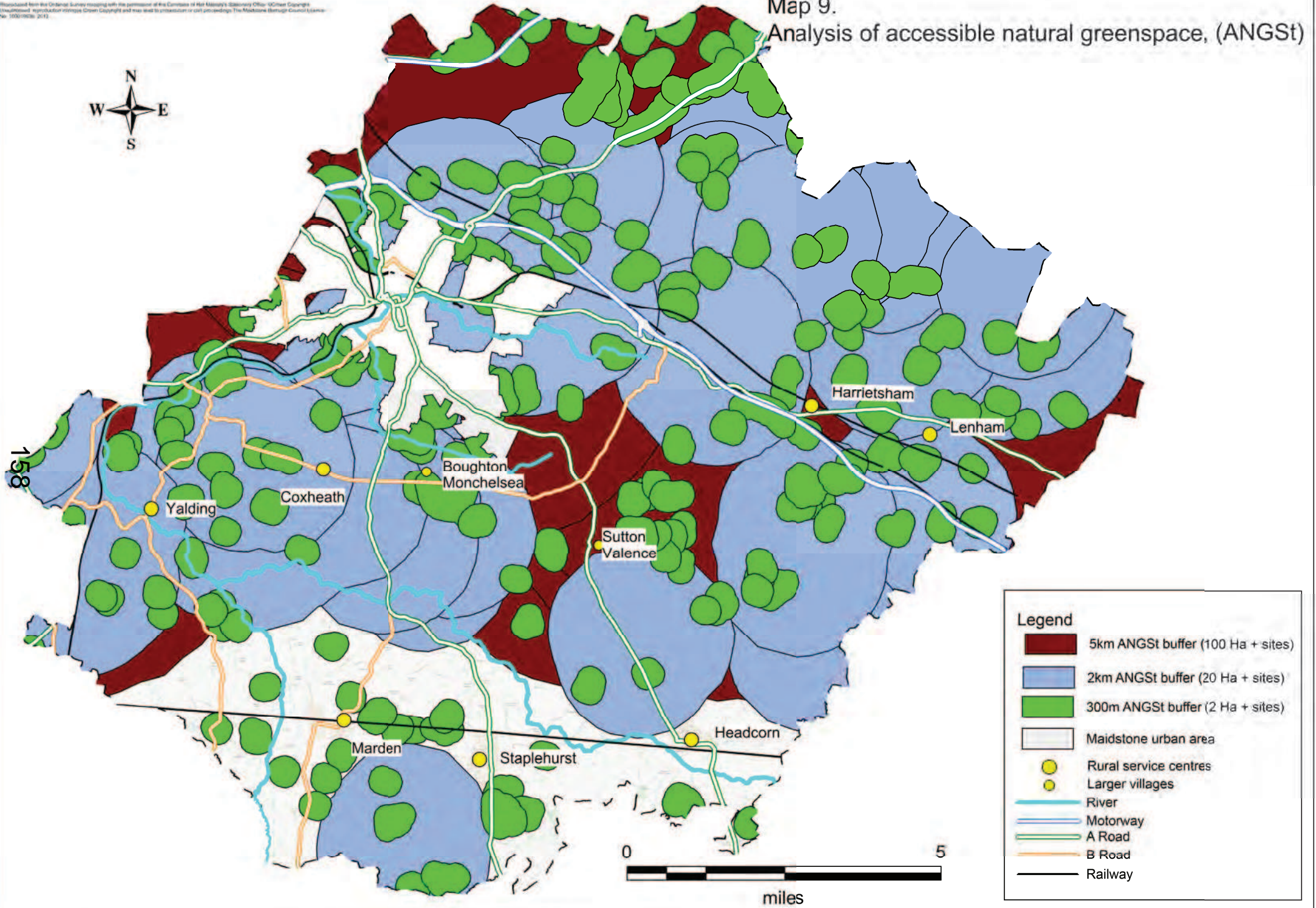
and blue infrastructure within the more densely built up area of Maidstone's town centre. Although Maidstone benefits from relatively good connectivity in terms of road and rail, the borough suffers from high levels of traffic which causes congestion problems, particularly in the town centre. This impacts 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 Kent⁸. More sustainable forms of travel on footpaths and cycleways (right) 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.

- 3.77. 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. 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 is a significant area in the south of the Borough around Headcorn, Marden and Staplehurst where people do not have convenient access to larger scale natural greenspace. Map 9 (below) shows the areas that meet these standards in Maidstone Borough.

⁸ Maidstone 2020. The Sustainable Community Strategy for Maidstone Borough 2009-2020



Map 9.
Analysis of accessible natural greenspace, (ANGSt)



- 3.78. 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.



- 3.79. 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.
- 3.80. 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.
- 3.81. Careful consideration is required through the planning process to ensure that increased light pollution from urban expansion does not impact on biodiversity. 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.

- 3.82. 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.

3.83. Landscape and townscape quality

- 3.84. 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. 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.

- 3.85. 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. Above all 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.
- 3.86. 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.

3.87. Water and air quality

3.88. 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) and the River Len (right) (Bad)⁹.



3.89. 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.

⁹ River Basin Management Plan Thames River Basin District , Defra and Environment Agency, 2009

- 3.90. 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 issue¹⁰. 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 8). 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.
- 3.91. **Health inequalities**
- 3.92. 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 exercise¹¹.
- 3.93. 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.
- 3.94. Quality affects how people perceive their local green space and therefore how often they visit. Evidence suggests that levels of

¹⁰ Maidstone 2020. The Sustainable Community Strategy for Maidstone Borough 2009-2020

¹¹ Maidstone 2020. The Sustainable Community Strategy for Maidstone Borough 2009-2020

social interaction can be directly influenced 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.

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

3.96. 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 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.

3.97. 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 separation¹². 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 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 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.

¹² Interim Approval of Maidstone Borough Local Plan Policies, 13 March 2013.

4. Vision and objectives

- 4.1. Reviewing the policy context and understanding the rich assets of the borough's green space and water environment, and the challenges it faces, the consultation draft strategy has set out a vision for the borough's green and blue infrastructure for the next 20 years. As with all other aspects of the draft strategy, the vision is set out to prompt further discussion with key partners and the wider community.

4.2. 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.

- 4.3. 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.

4.4. Objectives

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.

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.

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, maintain sensitive landscapes in good condition and restore and improve sensitive landscape in the poorest condition.

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.

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 set new standards to improve green space provision.

In the countryside:

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

Achieving a quality environment for investment and 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.

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.

5. Opportunities and draft proposals

5.1. The main purpose of the consultation draft 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. Opportunities and draft proposals have therefore been considered for each of the 7 key functions identified and these are shown on Map 10 (below)

5.2. Mitigating and adapting to climate change



5.3. 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 should contribute to national targets for reducing carbon dioxide emissions to mitigate climate change impacts in line with the Kent Environment Strategy.

5.4. 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.

5.5. 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 create natural flood plains where water flows and can be stored when it floods.
- 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 off¹.
- 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 hotter² 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.

¹ Adapting Cities for Climate Change: The Role of The Green Infrastructure, Gill, S., Handley, J., Ennos, A., and Pauleit, S., 2007

² Biodiversity 2020: A strategy for England's wildlife and ecosystem services, DEFRA, 2011

5.6. Good Practice

Medway Valley Partnership and the Medway, Len and Beult 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 Medway 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 and pond restoration). 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.

5.7. Draft proposals for Maidstone Borough's green and blue infrastructure



5.8. Protect and improve

- Protect and enhance existing green spaces and water environment assets, maximising their benefits.
- Protect 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.
- Continue Stewardship Schemes with farmers and landowners to create new or improved wildlife corridors in the rural area.

5.9. 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.
- Require creative use of sustainable drainage systems sensitive to ecological needs in new development to help reduce flood risk.
- Extend river catchment management plans to other key rivers within the borough including the Teise, Buelton and Loose.
- Plant more trees within the existing built up areas including the centre of Maidstone town to enhance areas of multiple deprivation, 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.

5.10. Integrating sustainable movement and access for all



5.11. 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 cycleways, but it is fragmented in places. 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.

5.12. Key issues

- Public Rights of Way network is fragmented and poorly connected in some areas.
- 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.

5.13. 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 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.

5.14. 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 completion³.

5.15. Draft proposals for Maidstone Borough's green and blue infrastructure



³ Growing the Garden of England: A strategy for environment and economy in Kent, Kent Forum, July 2011
Kent Environment Strategy Monitoring 2013

5.16. Protect and improve

- Maintain public rights of way long distance walks and cycleways and promoted walks and rides through the borough to a high standard with prioritisation of route maintenance influenced by local communities.
- Improve the quality and surfaces of existing paths, signage and street furniture to and through existing green spaces, especially lower quality or isolated green spaces and along green corridors to encourage greater use, particularly by older people, those with children and those with disabilities.



5.17. 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 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.

5.18. Promoting a distinctive townscape and landscape



5.19. 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.

5.20. Key issues

- 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.
- Abandonment of traditional woodland management such as coppicing and pollarding and planting of non-native trees.

5.21. 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.

5.22. 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.

5.23. Draft proposals for Maidstone Borough's green and blue infrastructure



5.24. Protect and improve

- Protect and enhance the scenic beauty of the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty which has the highest status of protection in relation to landscape and scenic beauty.
- 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 protection of Scheduled Ancient Monuments, Conservation Areas and Listed Parks and Gardens.

5.25. 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.

5.26. Maintaining and enhancing biodiversity, water and air quality

5.27. 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.

5.28. 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.

5.29. How can the green and blue infrastructure help?

- Urban trees improve air quality by reducing air temperature and directly removing pollutants from the air⁴. As different species can capture different sizes of particulate (Freer-Smith et al 300 2005) a broad range of species should be 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 support its protection.

5.30. 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

⁴ 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

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.

5.31. Draft proposals for Maidstone Borough's green and blue infrastructure



5.32. Protect and improve

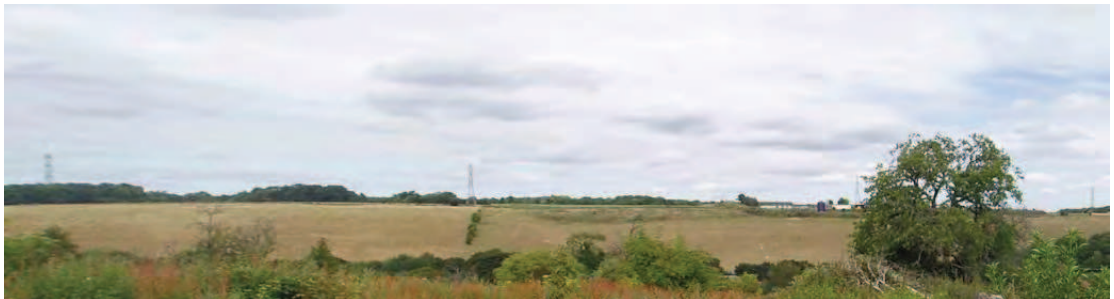
- Conserve the characteristic flora, fauna and physical habitat features of rivers including their winterbourne stretches.
- Implement the River Len Local Nature Reserve – Habitat Management Plan.
- Protect and improve water habitats such as that being carried out at the River Len at Mote Park with the Friends of Mote Park Group, Medway anglers and Maidstone Borough Council.
- Protect and restore ancient woodlands to their native composition through the removal of the non-native components, and by actively encouraging natural regeneration.

5.33. 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, 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 in delivery of the river catchment improvement plan actions.
- Produce in partnership with EA a policy tool kit for each river for landowners and developers (see River Len pilot tool kit).
- 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.

5.34. Providing opportunities for sport, recreation, quiet enjoyment and health



5.35. 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.

5.36. 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.

5.37. 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 area⁵.
- 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.

5.38. 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.

⁵ Securing the value of nature in Kent, 2011.

Green Gym

Green Gym is a scheme run by the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers, (BTCV) 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 woodland⁶.

5.39. Draft proposals for Maidstone Borough's green and blue infrastructure



5.40. Protect and improve

- Protect existing publicly accessible green space.

5.41. 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.

⁶ Securing the value of nature in Kent, 2011.

- 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.

5.42. Providing community involvement and opportunities for education



5.43. 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.

5.44. 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.

5.45. 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.

5.46. 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.

5.47. Draft proposals for Maidstone Borough's green and blue infrastructure



5.48. Protect 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.

5.49. Create new opportunities

- 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.

5.50. Creating a quality environment for investment and meeting development needs



5.51. The need for new housing and other development in Maidstone 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. 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.

5.52. Key issues

- Pressure on the landscape and vulnerable habitats.
- Potential loss of local landscape 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.

5.53. 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.

- 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 character and function can be more acceptable to an existing community, and ensure a speedier path through the planning process.

5.54. 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.

5.55. Draft proposals for Maidstone Borough's green and blue infrastructure

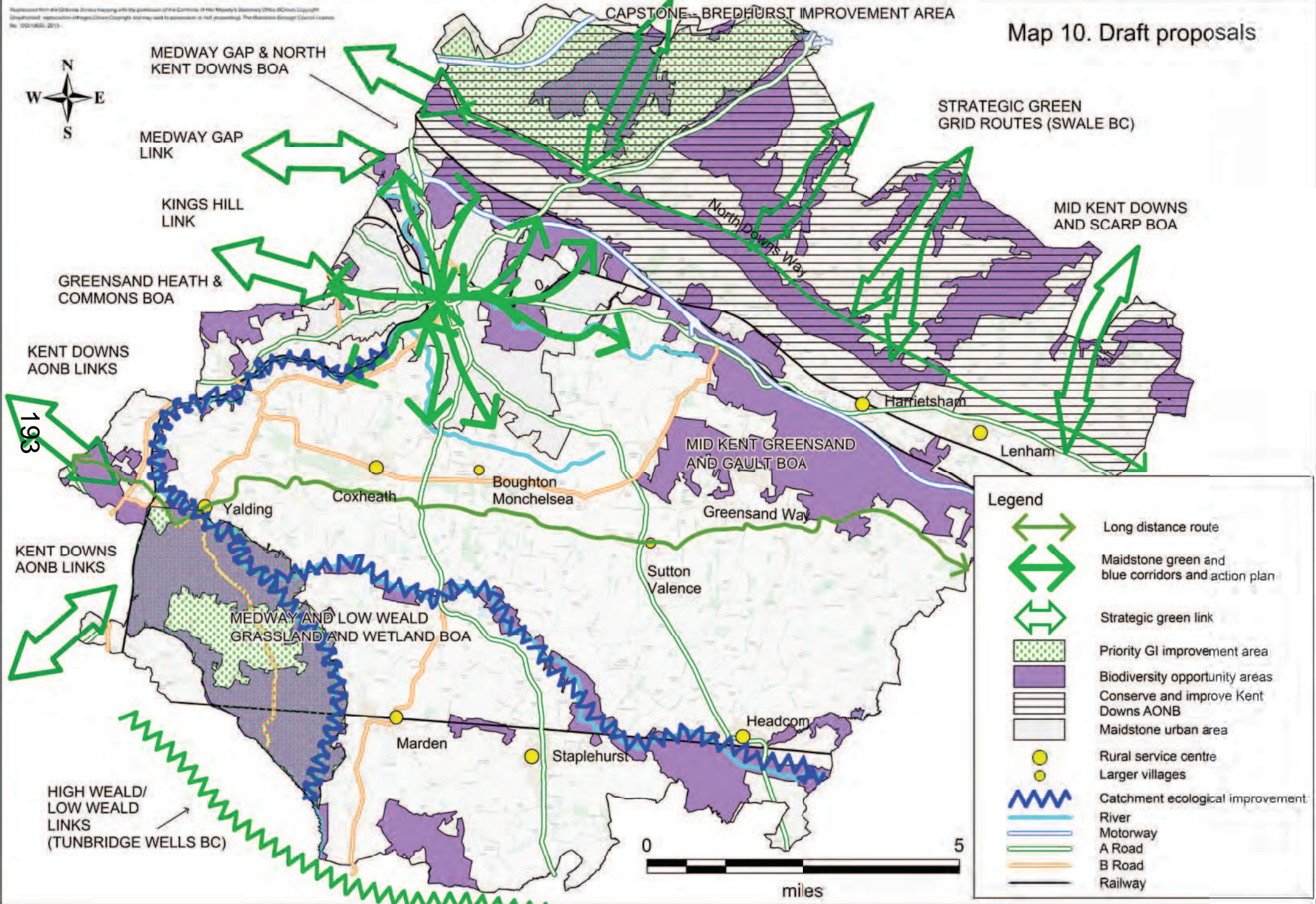
5.56. Create new opportunities

- Develop and 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.
- 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.

- 5.57. Map 10 below identifies the location of the spatially-specific draft proposals for Maidstone Borough's green and blue infrastructure and how they will interact with proposals of adjoining districts.

Map 10. Draft proposals



Legend

- Long distance route
- Maidstone green and blue corridors and action plan
- Strategic green link
- Priority GI improvement area
- Biodiversity opportunity areas
- Conserve and improve Kent Downs AONB
- Maidstone urban area
- Rural service centre
- Larger villages
- Catchment ecological improvement
- River
- Motorway
- A Road
- B Road
- Railway

6. Next steps

6.1. This consultation draft green and blue infrastructure strategy provides an overview of the green and blue infrastructure resource in the borough, and the key issues and opportunities it presents.

6.2. There are a number of key steps which need to be taken in moving this consultation draft strategy into a robust comprehensive strategy which has the ownership of important partners.

6.3. Open space audit

6.4. An updated audit of publicly accessible open space in the borough and local needs assessment is due to be completed in the next six months. This will inform the setting of up to date standards for the quantity, quality and accessibility of green space. This in turn will assist with the future provision and management of green spaces.

6.5. Stakeholder engagement

6.6. 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. A workshop and ongoing dialogue with key stakeholders is proposed as part of the consultation period in order to share the consultation draft strategy, discuss its proposals and agree its priorities. The consultation draft strategy would then be updated as part of the consultation process with a clear set of priorities with close involvement of all key stakeholders.

6.7. Partnership working

6.8. In order to implement and monitor the strategy, it is recommended that a green and blue infrastructure network forum comprising key stakeholders be set up to take the strategy forward. The forum would also help raise the profile of the borough's green and blue infrastructure within partnership organisations and help to attract resources.

6.10. A suggested list of key stakeholders is included below:

Key stakeholders

Maidstone Borough Council
Kent County Council
Kent Downs AONB Unit
Environment Agency
Medway Valley Countryside Partnership
Mid Kent Downs Partnership
Kent Wildlife Trust
Maidstone Borough parish council representatives
Neighbouring authorities
Friends of parks and Allotment Association representatives

6.11. Neighbouring authorities

6.12. 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 draft strategy along with those led by Kent County Council. Relevant cross border proposals and projects are included within the draft proposals (see Map 8). 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 network forum.

6.13. Public consultation

6.14. Wider public consultation on the strategy is also needed, to ensure all views are considered and to help gain wide support for the consultation draft strategy objectives and proposals. Targeted engagement with existing Friends Groups, Allotment Associations, other community groups active in the ongoing management, maintenance and development of Maidstone's green and blue infrastructure is a priority as well as providing opportunities for local residents and businesses to have a say.

6.15. Delivery of the strategy

6.16. The vision, objectives and proposals of this consultation draft strategy need to be translated into action. Once the strategy has been agreed by the key stakeholders, an accompanying action plan will be prepared and agreed with partners. The actions will have a timescale, target and lead partner.

6.17. 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. Each project in the action plan will have milestones and targets for delivery which will be used to update the plan. The Maidstone green and blue infrastructure forum/delivery group should monitor and review the strategy and 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.

6.18. Review

6.19. 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/delivery group considers that the green and blue infrastructure strategy is insufficiently effective in delivering its vision and objectives.

Appendix 1

1. Strategies which help support green and blue infrastructure

2. **Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plan 2009-2014** 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:

3. *Landform and landscape character – policies*

- **LLC1** The protection, conservation and enhancement of the components of natural beauty, landscape character and historic landscape character of the Kent Downs AONB will be supported and pursued.
- **LLC7** The development of strategic landscape action plans for landscape character areas or local character areas of the AONB which are most at threat or where greatest opportunity lie will be supported and pursued.

4. *Biodiversity – policies*

- **BD1** – The maintenance and enhancement of existing designated sites, and their extension through the reduction in fragmentation and the restoration and creation of landscape and habitat clusters and corridors will be supported and pursued to establish functional ecological networks, help achieve the government’s target for SSSIs in favourable condition, and to meet the local area agreement for the management of Local Wildlife Sites.
- **BD2** – Local, regional and national biodiversity action plan targets and spatial priorities for key habitats and species distinctive to the Kent Downs will be supported notably:

b) Increasing the managed area of ancient, semi-natural and coppiced woodland including restoration of plantation on ancient woodlands sites (PAWS).

c) The conservation of riparian and in-stream habitats and species associated with chalk streams, rivers, springs and ponds.

e) The management of existing old orchards and creation of new traditional orchards and platts.

- **BD3** – The conservation and enhancement of other characteristic and important habitats and species including neutral and acid grassland; heathland and wooded heath; parkland; wood pasture and veteran trees; ancient or species rich hedgerows; cereal margins; headlands and road verges will be supported.
- **BD4** – Targeting of advice, grants and planning agreements to reduce fragmentation and enhance the distinctive biodiversity of the Kent Downs will be supported.
- **BD6** – The conservation and extension of Kent Downs priority habitats will be encouraged and supported through the local development framework process and the promotion of the biodiversity duty of regard.
- **BD8** – Proposals to increase recreational use will be supported where they protect and where possible enhance the biodiversity and landscape qualities of the AONB and do not conflict with local authority policies.

5. *Woodland and trees – policies*

- **WT1** – The existing extent of woodland, transitional habitats around woodland and particularly ancient woodland will be protected and threats to the extent of woodland cover opposed.
- **WT7** – The planting of new woodlands and fine specimen trees will be encouraged where it is in keeping with landscape character, resilient to climate change, locally distinct woodland types and tree species are used and where local provenance tree stock or natural regeneration.

6. *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 landscape and historic character of the AONB.
- **AEU3** – Investment to secure sustainable, high quality, low impact and easy access routes from the towns and growth areas to the AONB will be pursued.
- **AEU7** – Improvements to the Rights of Way Network to provide and improve countryside access, including waymarking, signposting and maintenance, which conforms with AONB policies and design guidance, will be supported through the Countryside Access Improvement Plan.
- **AEU9** – The establishment and management of new public rights of way, particularly for walkers, horse riders and cyclists, together with

a safer and better connecting network will be supported, where they conform to policies to conserve and enhance the AONB.

- **AEU12** – Support will be given to the management and implementation of the North Downs Way National Trail initiatives where they conform to policies to conserve and enhance the AONB.
7. 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.
8. To enable Maidstone to retain a high quality of living and to be able to respond to the effects of climate change **Interim Approval of Maidstone Borough Local Plan Policies March 2013**, Policy CS13 – Historic and Natural Environment states 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:*
 - iii. 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; and internationally, nationally and locally designated sites of importance for biodiversity; and local biodiversity action plan priority habitats.*
 - 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, 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. The character, distinctiveness, diversity and quality of Maidstone's landscape and townscape will be protected and enhanced 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 proposals and any additional land put forward for mitigation purposes to take full account of the biodiversity present; and*
 - 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.*
 - 4. Development proposals will provide new public open space in line with policy OS1 of the Open Spaces Development Planning Document until such time as it is superseded. Public 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 appropriate to the scale and nature of the impacts cannot be achieved. A landscape character guidelines supplementary planning document will be produced to expand on how the proposals in this policy will be implemented.*
9. Policy DM10 of the **emerging Maidstone Borough Local Plan 2013** states:
- 1. For new housing or mixed use development sites, the council will seek delivery of the following categories of publicly accessible open space provision in accordance with the standards [to be defined] in the Green and blue infrastructure strategy:*

- i. Natural and semi natural areas of open space.*
 - ii. Amenity green space.*
 - iii. Provision for children and young people's equipped play areas.*
 - iv. Public and private outdoor sports facilities.*
 - v. Allotments.*
- 2. 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.*
- 3. 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, development will only be permitted if:*
 - i. There is no resulting deficiency in open space or recreation facilities in the locality.*

Or

 - ii. If alternative provision of an equivalent community benefit can be provided to replace the loss.*
- 4. In dealing with applications to develop existing open areas within the urban area and village settlements, the borough council will have regard to the contribution that the existing site makes to the character, amenity and biodiversity of the area and how the proposed development would affect that. The need to maintain and improve the appearance of the locality and conserve wildlife habitats will also be a key consideration.*