

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



October 2013

Contents

1. Introduction	1
What is green and blue infrastructure?	1
Why does Maidstone Borough need a green and blue infrastructure strategy?	1
What is the purpose of the green and blue infrastructure strategy?	2
What is the consultation draft strategy?	2
2. Policy context	4
European context	4
National context	5
South east region	6
How can green and blue infrastructure support local strategies?	8
Supporting adjoining green and blue infrastructure strategies	11
Map: Kent boundaries	12
3. Understanding the existing green and blue infrastructure resources	15
Landscape character	15
Map 1: Landscape character	16
Habitats	19
Map 2: Habitats	20
Designated sites	22
Map 3: GBI designations: landscape and biodiversity	24
Heritage assets	25
Map 4: GBI designations: heritage	27
Publicly accessible green space	28
Map 5: Publicly accessible green infrastructure	32
Blue infrastructure: rivers and water bodies	33
Map 6: Blue infrastructure	36
Sustainable movement links	37
Map 7: Sustainable movement links	38
Community involvement and education	39
Map 8: Issues and opportunities	40
Key issues: The impact of climate change	41
Key issues: Gaps in the connectivity of green and blue infrastructure resources and inequalities in accessibility to public open space	42
Map 9: Analysis of accessible natural green space, (ANGSt)	45
Key issues: Landscape and townscape quality	47
Key issues: Water and air quality	48
Key issues: Health inequalities	49
Key issues: The need to accommodate development to meet the	50

projected needs of the community

4. Vision and objectives	51
Vision	51
Objectives	51
5. Opportunities and draft proposals	53
Mitigating and adapting to climate change	53
Integrating sustainable movement and access for all	57
Promoting a distinctive townscape and landscape	60
Maintaining and enhancing biodiversity, water and air quality	64
Providing opportunities for sport, recreation, quiet enjoyment and health	69
Providing community involvement and opportunities for education	73
Creating a quality environment for investment and meeting development needs	77
Map 10: Draft proposals	80
6. Next steps	81
Appendix 1	A1-1
Strategies which help support green and blue infrastructure	A1-1

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.

Reproduced from the Ordnance Survey mapping with the permission of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationary Office © Crown Copyright. Unauthorised reproduction infringes Crown Copyright and may lead to prosecution or civil proceedings. The Maidstone Borough Council Licence No. 100019636, 2013.

Kent Boundaries



Dartford District

Gravesham District

Medway

Swale District

Thanet District

Sevenoaks District

Tonbridge and Malling District

Canterbury District

Maidstone District

Dover District

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.

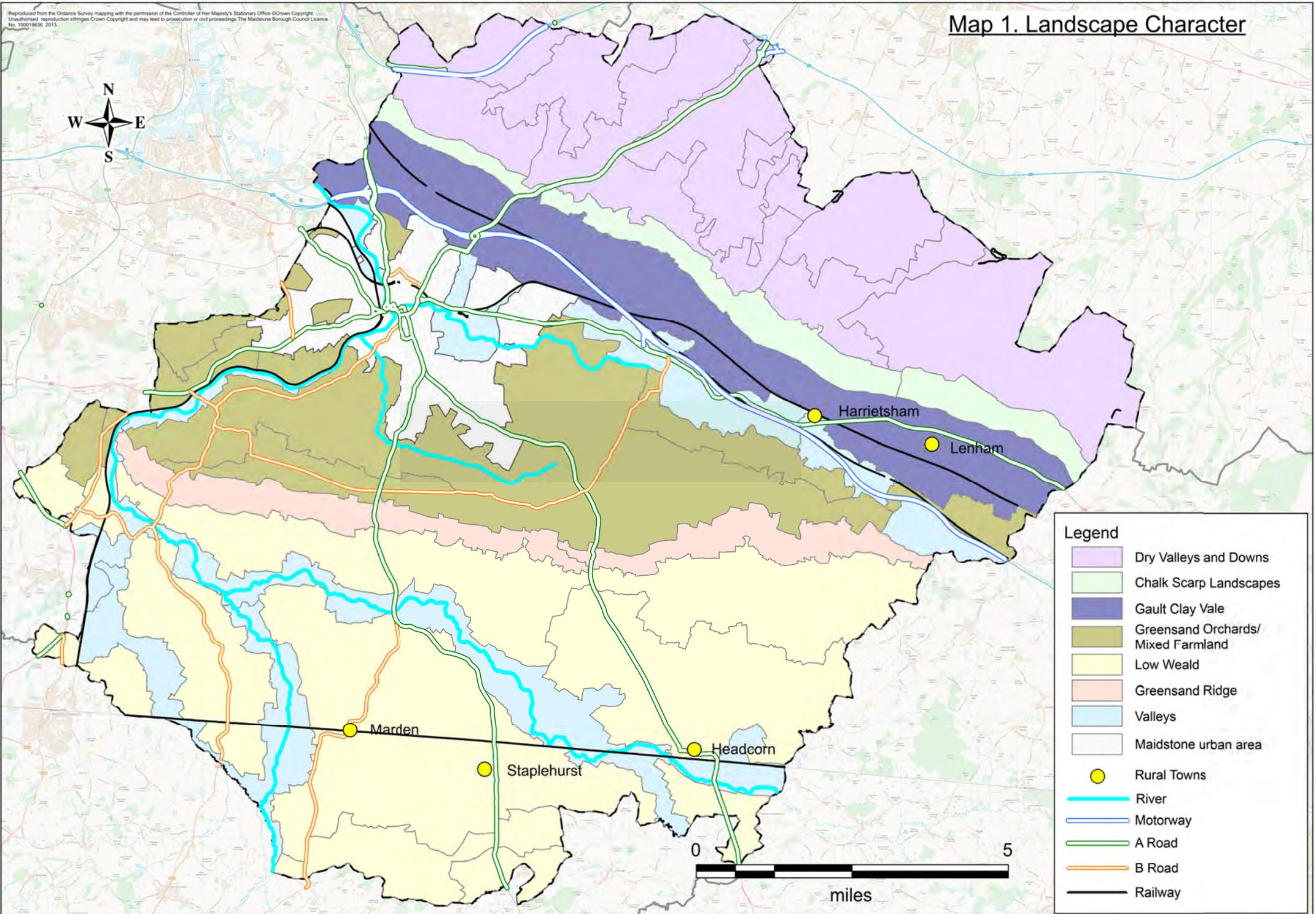
3.4. Landscape character



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



Legend

- Dry Valleys and Downs
- Chalk Scarp Landscapes
- Gault Clay Vale
- Greensand Orchards/Mixed Farmland
- Low Weald
- Greensand Ridge
- Valleys
- Maidstone urban area
- Rural Towns
- River
- Motorway
- A Road
- B Road
- Railway



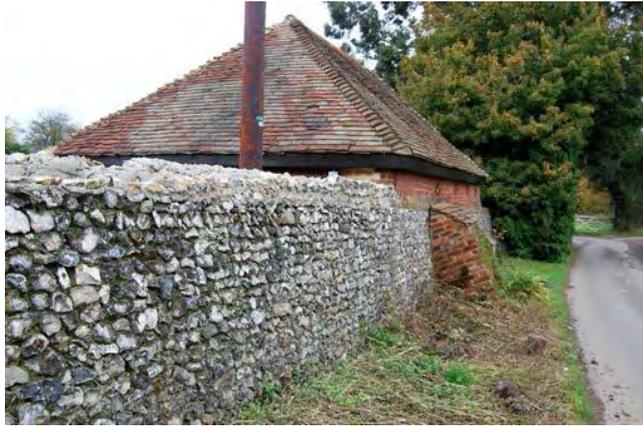
3.6. The North Downs to the north of Maidstone town is a distinctive chalk downland with a continuous and steep scarp along its southern edge giving extensive views across Maidstone Borough and the rest of Kent. Chalk soils support areas of high quality unimproved chalk grassland. Clay-with-flints soils 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.

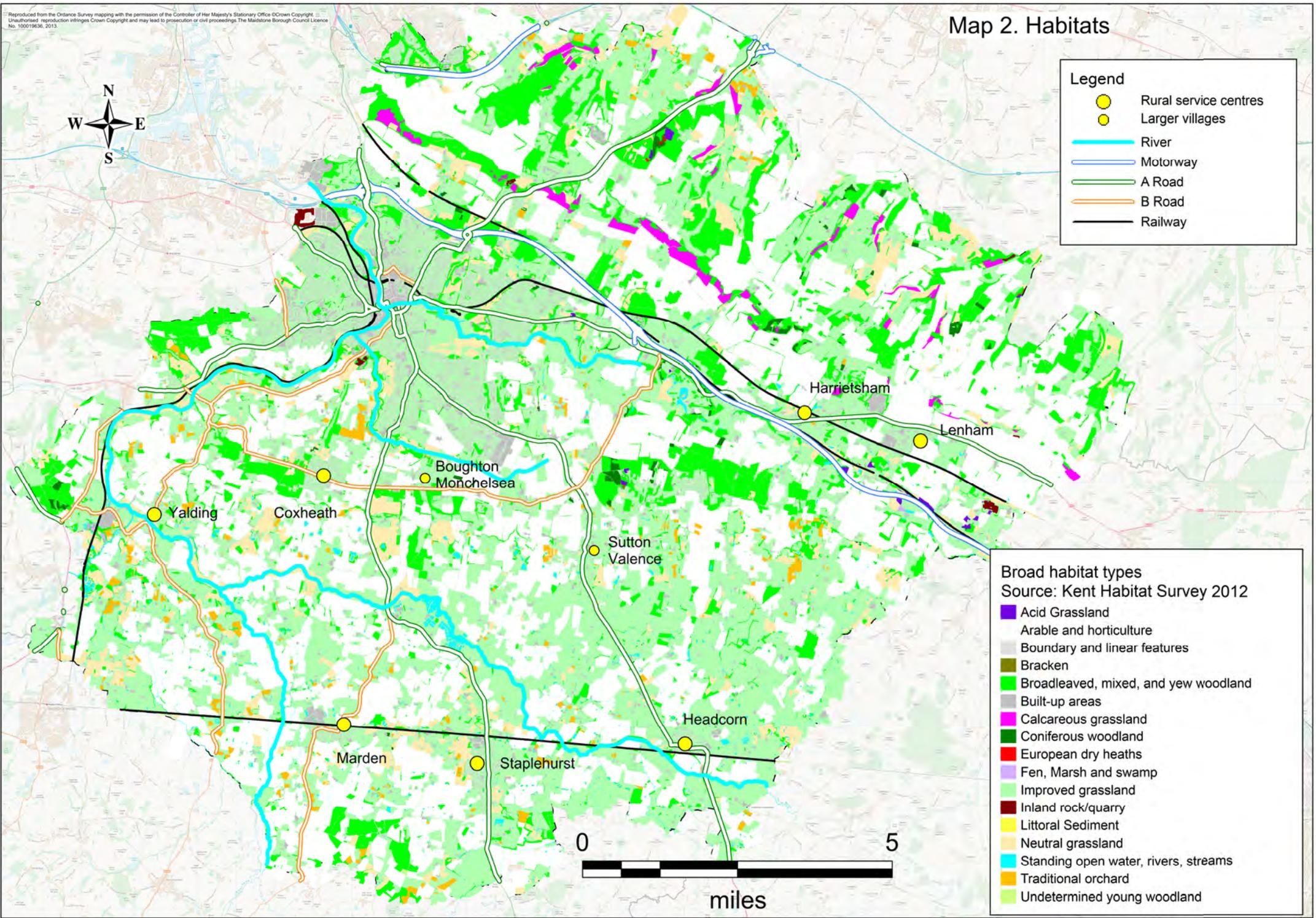
3.14. Map 2 below shows the locations of each broad habitat within the borough. Figure 1 shows the amount of each habitat.

Map 2. Habitats



Legend

- Rural service centres
- Larger villages
- River
- Motorway
- A Road
- B Road
- Railway



Broad habitat types
Source: Kent Habitat Survey 2012

- Acid Grassland
- Arable and horticulture
- Boundary and linear features
- Bracken
- Broadleaved, mixed, and yew woodland
- Built-up areas
- Calcareous grassland
- Coniferous woodland
- European dry heaths
- Fen, Marsh and swamp
- Improved grassland
- Inland rock/quarry
- Littoral Sediment
- Neutral grassland
- Standing open water, rivers, streams
- Traditional orchard
- Undetermined young woodland

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.



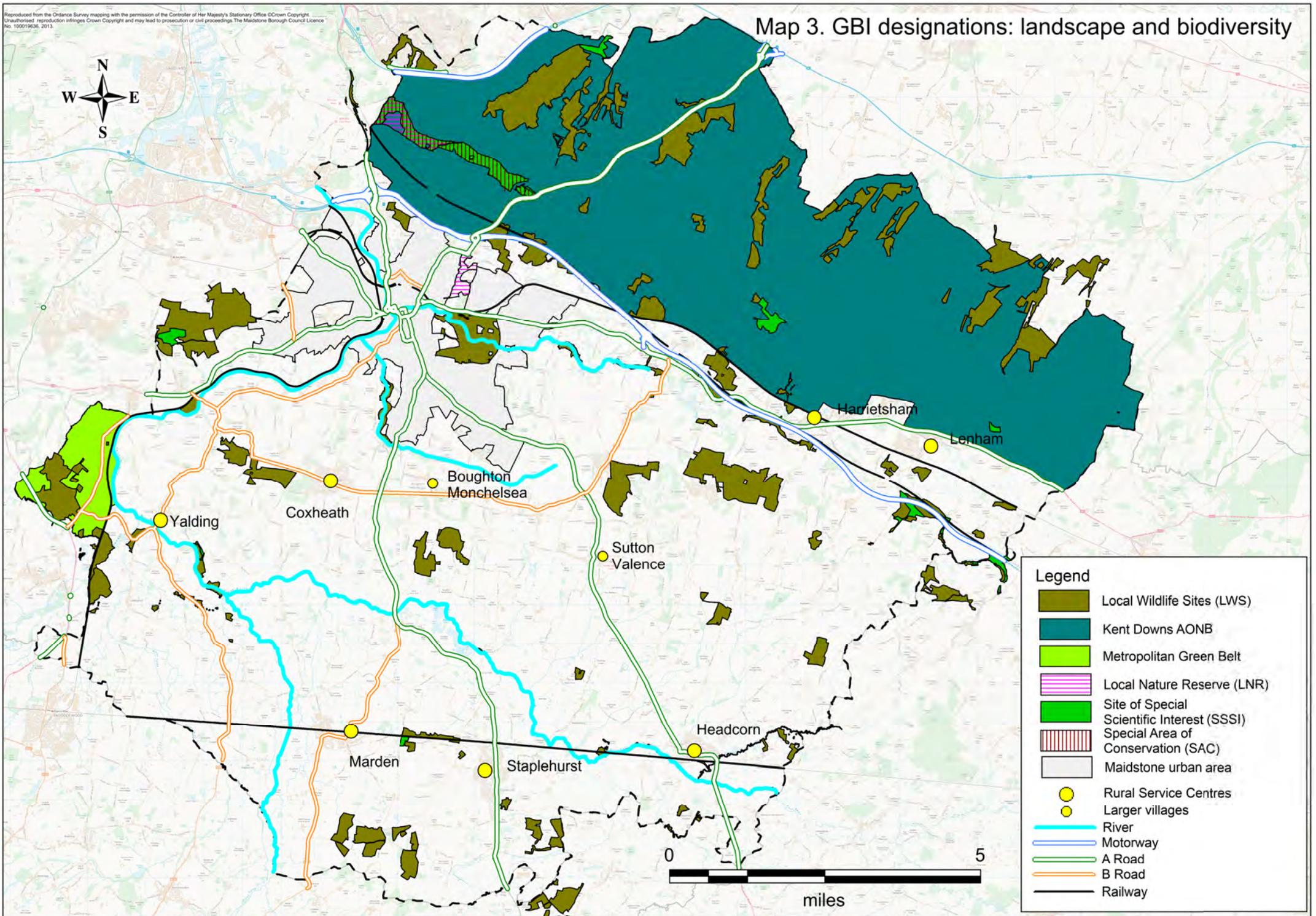
- 3.18. **Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs)** represent Britain's finest sites for fauna, flora, geology and physiographical features and are protected by legislation. There are nine SSSI sites within the borough including chalk grassland and woodland sites on the Kent Downs, the clay River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

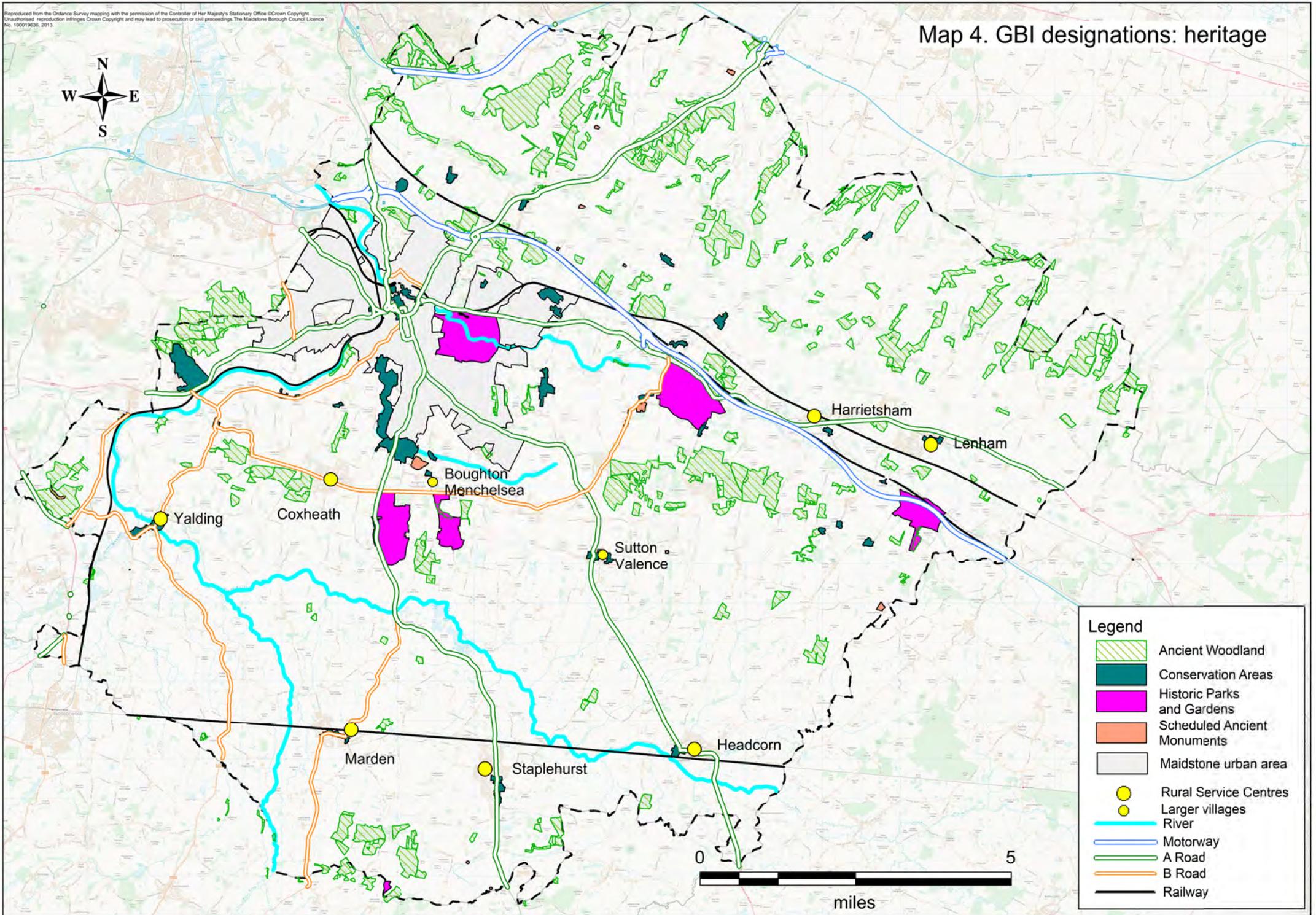


special architectural or historic interest, made by Local Planning Authorities under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990. There are 41 Conservation Areas throughout Maidstone Borough, mainly focused around traditional settlement centres. As trees make a significant contribution 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



- Legend**
- Ancient Woodland
 - Conservation Areas
 - Historic Parks and Gardens
 - Scheduled Ancient Monuments
 - Maidstone urban area
 - Rural Service Centres
 - Larger villages
 - River
 - Motorway
 - A Road
 - B Road
 - Railway

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:

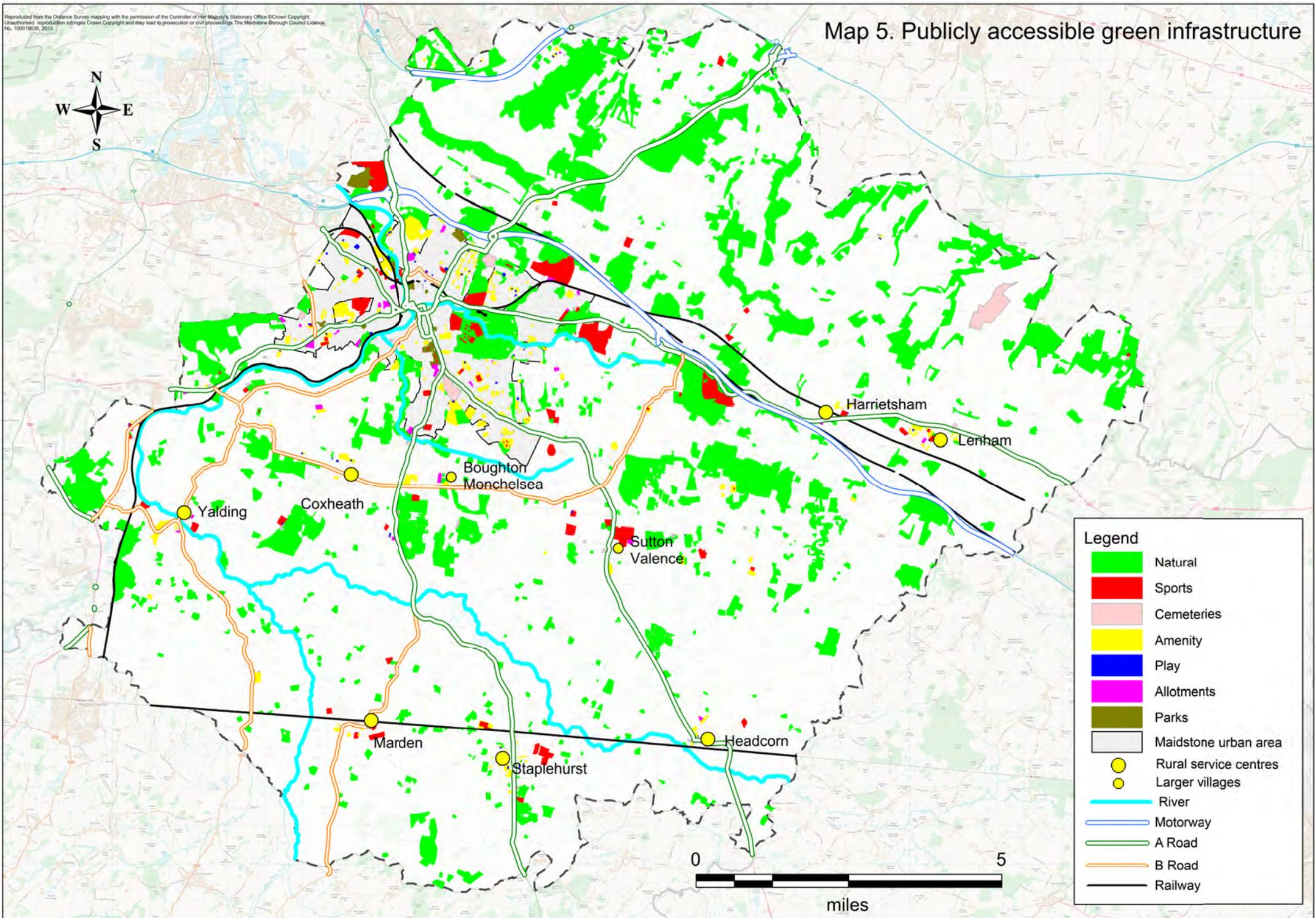
- Natural and semi-natural.
- Amenity.
- Provision for children and young people.
- Outdoor sports facilities.
- Allotments.
- Green and blue corridors, whilst playing an important role as connecting corridors, will be classified as one of the types above, such as natural or semi-natural open space.

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



Legend

- Natural
- Sports
- Cemeteries
- Amenity
- Play
- Allotments
- Parks
- Maidstone urban area
- Rural service centres
- Larger villages
- River
- Motorway
- A Road
- B Road
- Railway

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.



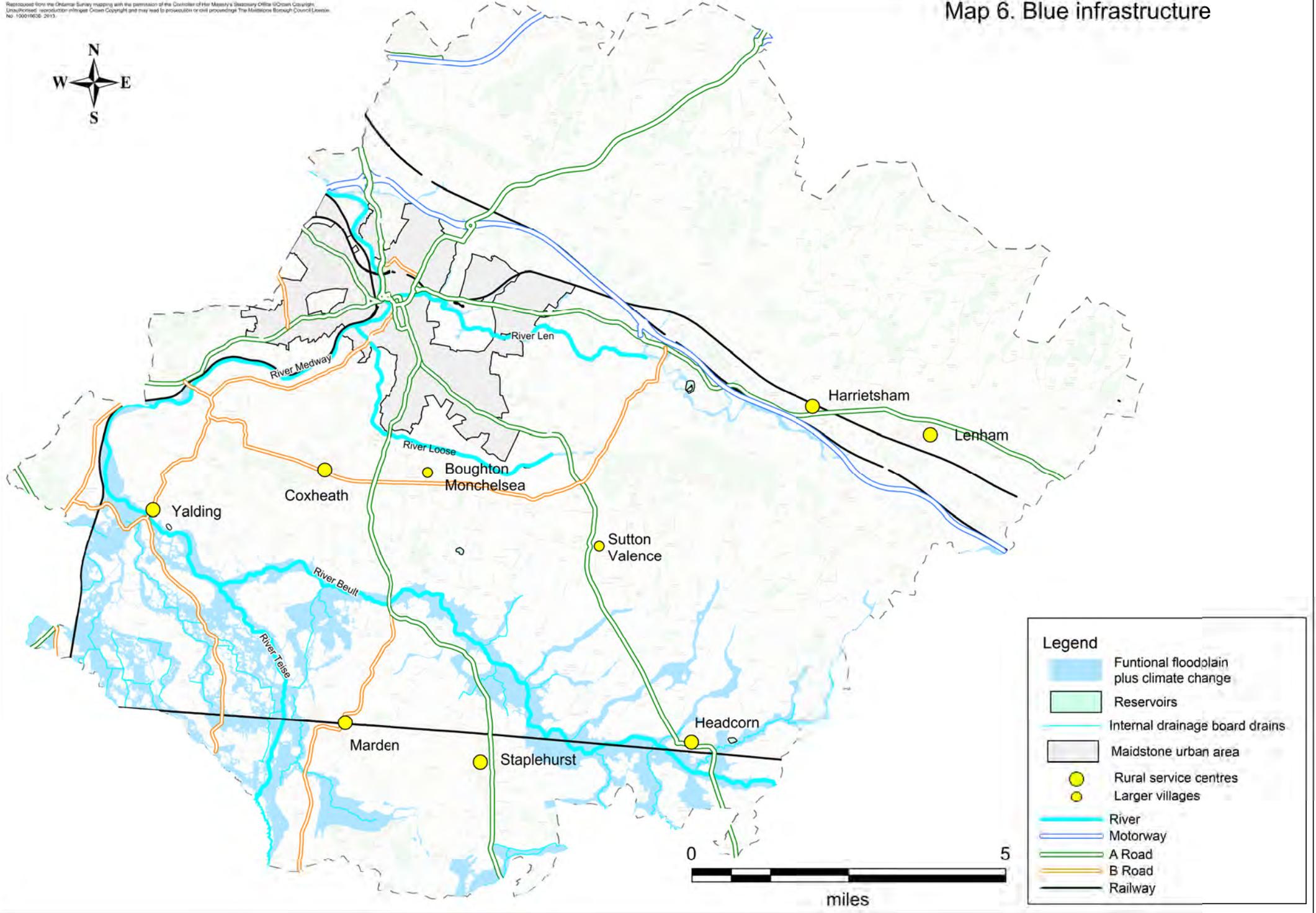
- 3.54. A mixture of urban, parkland, agricultural and recreational sites make up the habitats across the Middle Medway Catchment. Along the length of the river and streams in the catchment there are several issues, which prevent them from filling their full potential for wildlife, including barriers 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.

Map 6. Blue infrastructure



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.

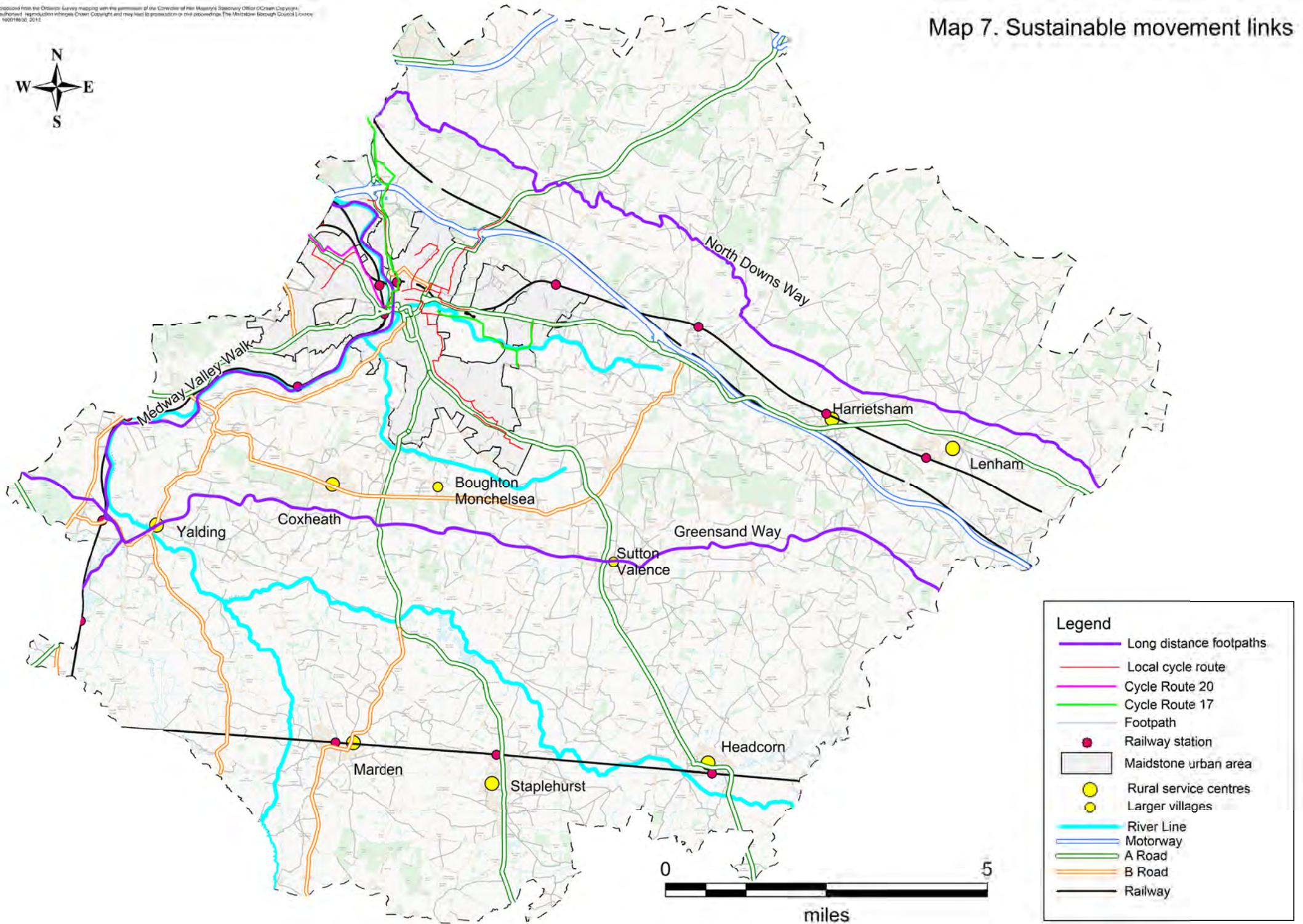


3.62. National Route 17 of the National Cycle Network connects Rochester, via Maidstone and Ashford, to join with National Route 2 on the South coast between Folkestone and Lydd following the line of the North Downs Way National Trail. Maidstone also has a Regional Route (RR20) for cyclists which originates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

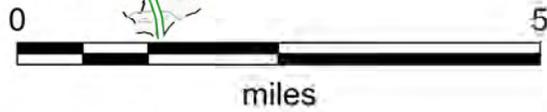
⁴ Countryside and Coastal Access Improvement Plan, Draft April 2013

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

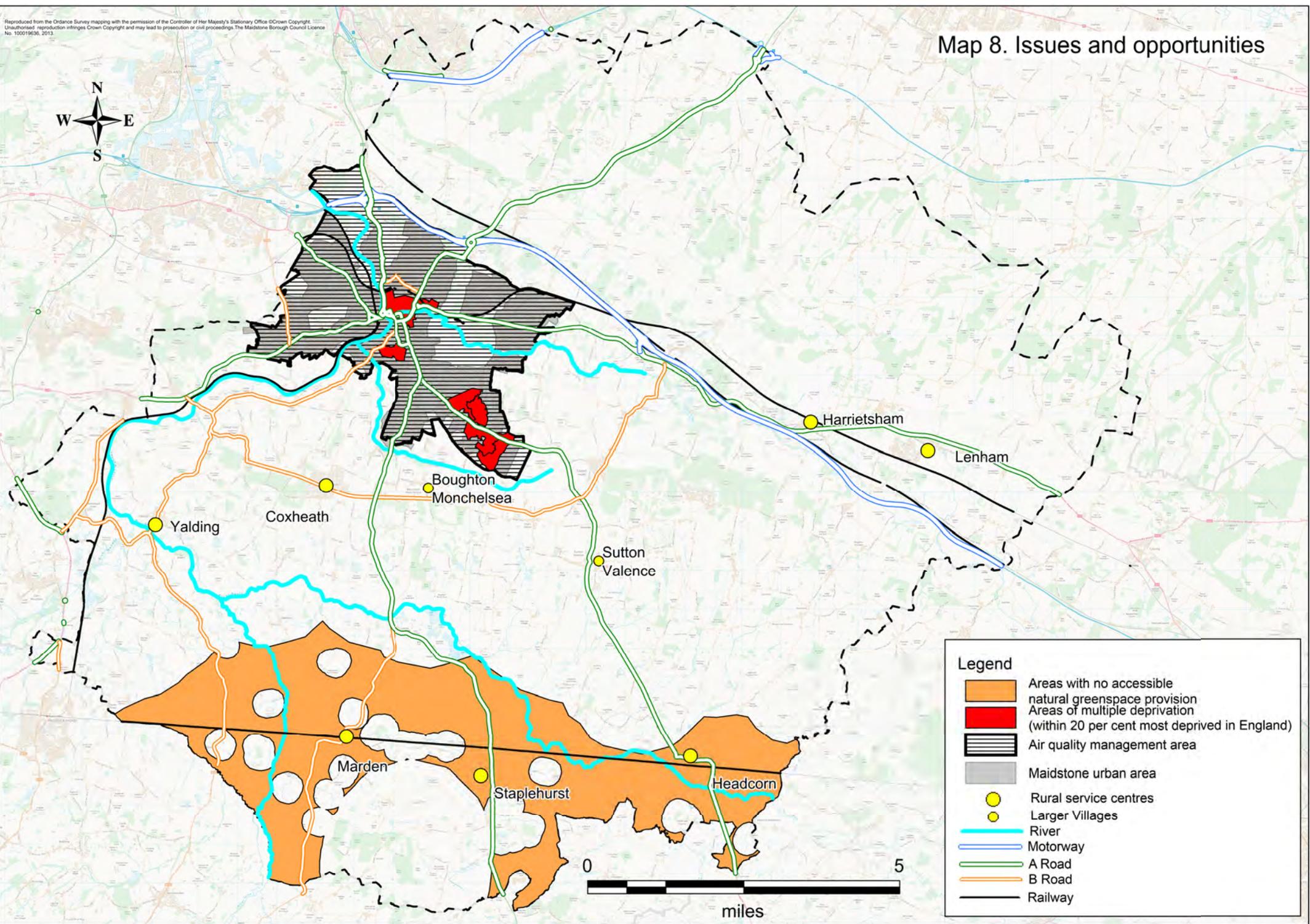


3.64. **Community involvement and education**

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



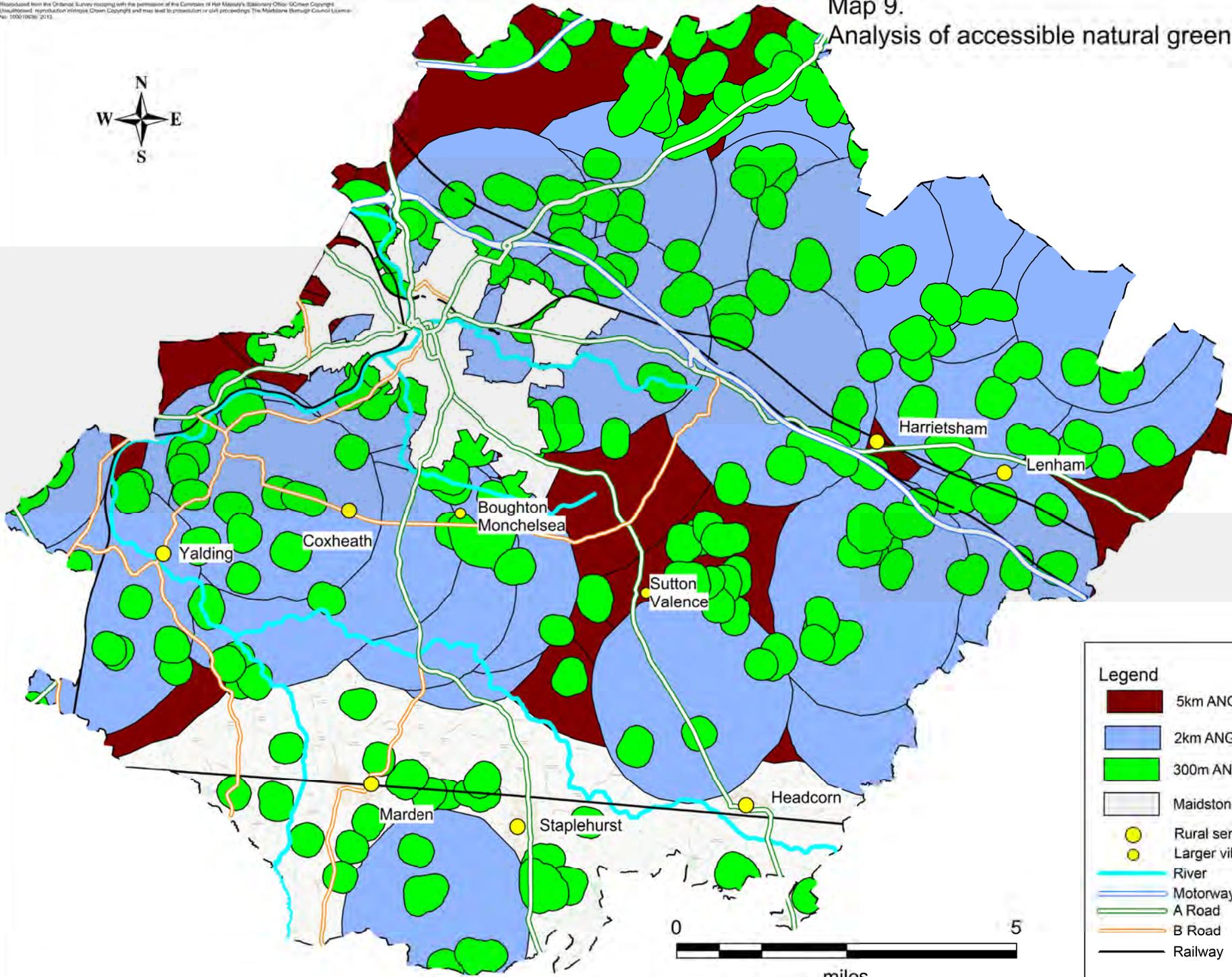
and blue infrastructure within the more densely built up area of **Maidstone's town centre**. Although Maidstone benefits from relatively good connectivity in terms of road and rail, the borough suffers from high levels of traffic which causes congestion problems, particularly in the town centre. This 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)



Legend

- 5km ANGSt buffer (100 Ha + sites)
- 2km ANGSt buffer (20 Ha + sites)
- 300m ANGSt buffer (2 Ha + sites)
- Maidstone urban area
- Rural service centres
- Larger villages
- River
- Motorway
- A Road
- B Road
- Railway



- 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

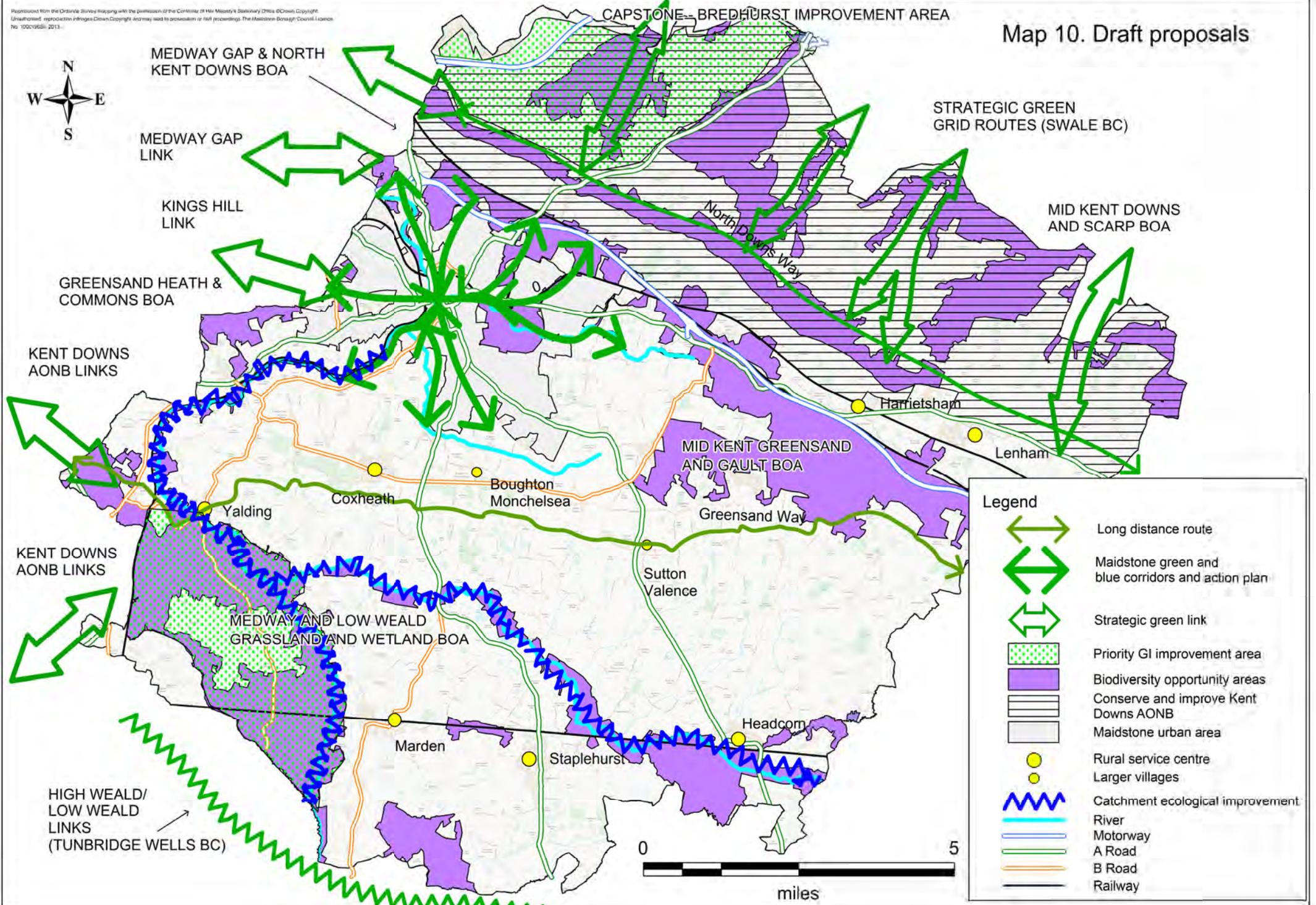
5.56. Create new opportunities

- 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



MEDWAY GAP & NORTH KENT DOWNS BOA

MEDWAY GAP LINK

KINGS HILL LINK

GREENSAND HEATH & COMMONS BOA

KENT DOWNS AONB LINKS

KENT DOWNS AONB LINKS

MEDWAY AND LOW WEALD GRASSLAND AND WETLAND BOA

HIGH WEALD/ LOW WEALD LINKS (TUNBRIDGE WELLS BC)

CAPSTONE-- BREDHURST IMPROVEMENT AREA

STRATEGIC GREEN GRID ROUTES (SWALE BC)

MID KENT DOWNS AND SCARP BOA

MID KENT GREENSAND AND GAULT BOA

Yalding

Coxheath

Boughton Monchelsea

Sutton Valence

Marden

Staplehurst

Headcorn

Harrietsham

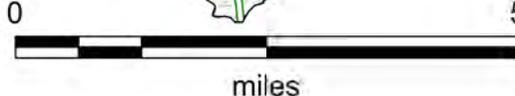
Lenham

Greensand Way

North Downs Way

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 a 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.*