



## AGENDA

### LOCAL PLAN PANEL MEETING

Date: Thursday, 3 September 2020

Time: 7.00pm

Venue: Virtual meeting via Skype\*

Membership:

Councillors Mike Baldock (Chairman), Monique Bonney (Vice-Chairman), Alastair Gould, James Hunt, Carole Jackson, Elliott Jayes, Peter Marchington, Benjamin Martin, Richard Palmer, Eddie Thomas and Ghlin Whelan.

Quorum = 4

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Pages

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1. Apologies for Absence and Confirmation of Substitutes

2. Minutes

To approve the [Minutes](#) of the Meeting held on 30 July 2020 (Minute Nos. 27 - 31) as a correct record.

3. Declarations of Interest

Councillors should not act or take decisions in order to gain financial or other material benefits for themselves or their spouse, civil partner or person with whom they are living with as a spouse or civil partner. They must declare and resolve any interests and relationships.

The Chairman will ask Members if they have any interests to declare in respect of items on this agenda, under the following headings:

(a) Disclosable Pecuniary Interests (DPI) under the Localism Act 2011. The nature as well as the existence of any such interest must be declared. After declaring a DPI, the Member must leave the meeting and not take part in the discussion or vote. This applies even if there is provision for public speaking.

(b) Disclosable Non Pecuniary (DNPI) under the Code of Conduct adopted by the Council in May 2012. The nature as well as the existence of any such interest must be declared. After declaring a DNPI interest, the Member may stay, speak and vote on the matter.

(c) Where it is possible that a fair-minded and informed observer, having considered the facts would conclude that there was a real possibility that the Member might be predetermined or biased the Member should declare their predetermination or bias and then leave the meeting while that item is considered.

**Advice to Members:** If any Councillor has any doubt about the existence or nature of any DPI or DNPI which he/she may have in any item on this agenda, he/she should seek advice from the Monitoring Officer, the Head of Legal or from other Solicitors in Legal Services as early as possible, and in advance of the Meeting.

## **Part A Reports for Recommendation to Cabinet**

4. Kent Downs AONB consultation draft management plan

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5. Settlement Hierarchy Study

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**Issued on Tuesday, 25 August 2020**

The reports included in Part I of this agenda can be made available in **alternative formats**. For further information about this service, or to arrange for special facilities to be provided at the meeting, **please contact DEMOCRATIC SERVICES on 01795 417330**. To find out more about the work of the Cabinet, please visit [www.swale.gov.uk](http://www.swale.gov.uk)

Chief Executive, Swale Borough Council,  
Swale House, East Street, Sittingbourne, Kent, ME10 3HT

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<b>Local Plan Panel Meeting</b>	
<b>Meeting Date</b>	3 September 2020
<b>Report Title</b>	Draft Kent Downs AONB Management Plan 2020 – 2025
<b>Cabinet Member</b>	Cllr Mike Baldock, Cabinet Member for Planning Cllr Tim Valentine, Cabinet Member for Environment
<b>SMT Lead</b>	James Freeman
<b>Head of Service</b>	James Freeman
<b>Lead Officer</b>	Karen Sinclair
<b>Key Decision</b>	No
<b>Classification</b>	<b>Open</b>
<b>Recommendations</b>	That the Panel agree, subject to any additional comments, the Council’s response to the consultation on the draft Kent Downs AONB Management Plan at Appendix 2 of the report.

## 1 Purpose of Report and Executive Summary

- 1.1 The Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty is one of 37 areas in England designated for the conservation and enhancement of the natural beauty of the landscape, biodiversity and cultural heritage.
- 1.2 Under the Countryside and Rights of Way (CRoW) Act 2000 there is a statutory requirement for local authorities to produce Management Plans for Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) within their boundaries and to review them every five years. Where the AONB covers more than one local authority area, then the CRoW Act requires them to act jointly in preparing a Management Plan. The Kent Downs AONB covers 12 local authority areas and, therefore, the AONB Joint Advisory Committee (JAC) has prepared the Management Plan for and on behalf of the constituent local authorities.
  - 1.1. As the current Management Plan for the Kent Downs AONB covered the five-year period to 2019, a review and update of the plan has recently been undertaken. Whilst much of the current Management Plan approach remains relevant, the review recognises that the context within which the Management Plan operates is likely to see considerable change over the next few years, providing both opportunities and threats: these include the departure from the European Union and its impact on agriculture, mitigating and adapting to climate change, biodiversity loss, growing development pressures and the outcomes from the Government’s 25 Year Environment Plan and 2019 Landscapes Review.
- 1.3 Consultation on the draft Management Plan is taking place over an eight-week period between the 14<sup>th</sup> July and 7<sup>th</sup> September 2020. The purpose of this report is to agree the Council’s formal response to the draft Kent Downs AONB Management Plan.

## 2 Background

- 1.1. The CRoW Act requires local authorities to review adopted and published AONB Management Plans at intervals of not more than five years, setting out the local authorities' policy approach to the management of the AONB. The CRoW Act also requires local authorities to act jointly in the preparation and review of AONB Management Plans and to 'have regard to' the purposes of AONB designation in exercising or performing any of their functions affecting land in the area: the national Planning Practice Guidance highlights that this is particularly important when considering development proposals. The Management Plan provides some of the evidence required to inform and guide the preparation of Local Plan policies (and other strategic policy) in relation to the AONB. It is also a material consideration in the determination of planning applications and at appeal.
- 1.2. The review of the Management Plan on behalf of the 12 local authorities has been co-ordinated by the AONB JAC, which includes member (Cllr Tim Valentine) and officer (Principal Landscape and Urban Design Officer) representatives from the Council. The Council, together with other JAC members, had the opportunity to comment on an earlier informal iteration of the draft Management Plan and a number of the comments made by the Council have been reflected in the published consultation draft Management Plan.
- 1.3. The AONB Management Plan sets out a vision, aims and principles to guide the management of the Kent Downs AONB and seeks to ensure that the natural beauty and special character of the landscape and vitality of the communities within the AONB are recognised, maintained and strengthened into the future. The successful implementation of the Plan's vision and aims is not just the responsibility of the AONB JAC but is also dependent on the partnership and cooperation of many organisations, individuals and communities. As such the Management Plan provides an agreed approach to conservation and enhancement, guiding the work of stakeholders and providing a framework to coordinate plans and strategies of a range of partners.
- 1.4. The current Kent Downs AONB Management Plan came into effect in April 2014 and will be replaced by this review. Natural England, the Government's statutory advisor on landscape, has previously advised that the Kent Downs AONB Management Plan represents exemplary or best practice. Reflecting this, much of the existing Management Plan remains in place.
- 1.5. The Management Plan is structured around a number of themes including: the management of the AONB, sustainable development, landform and landscape character, biodiversity, farmed landscape, woodland and trees, historic, cultural and scientific heritage, heritage coasts, geology and natural resources, quality of life and vibrant communities, access, enjoyment and understanding. For each of these themes the special characteristics and qualities of the AONB are articulated together with the main issues, opportunities and threats, aims and principles.
- 1.6. A copy of the draft Management Plan 2020 – 2025 is attached as Appendix 1 to the report, with the key changes to the Management Plan set out below. Whilst a

light touch review has been undertaken, changes have been made to ensure it responds to the changing context in which the plan operates including new legislation, guidance and changes to government and other agendas.

- the vision focuses on a shorter time period (10 years as opposed to 20 years). Whilst the overall direction of the vision remains largely unchanged the wording has been strengthened to reflect the level of growth and change expected in Kent and in recognition of the timetable adopted by local authorities to respond to the climate and ecological emergencies they have declared;
- 'Policies' have been replaced by 'principles'. This reflects the advice of the JAC that the Management Plan should as a whole be recognised as the policy for the AONB;
- Sustainable development is presented as an overarching theme and places the plan in the local context of contributing to the delivery of some of the Sustainable Development Goals, which were agreed globally in 2015;
- the concept of a natural capital and ecosystems approach is embedded across the management plan;
- The climate change section has been updated to reflect the most recent climate change predications and anticipated impacts. The draft Management Plan also sets an ambitious target for AONB landscape management to be carbon neutral by 2030;
- The draft Management Plan recognises the potential significant changes and challenges to farming arising from the UKs departure from the European Union. But the opportunities that this may bring are also recognised, in particular the indication that future public financial support for agriculture through the new Environmental Land Management system (ELMs) will be focused on 'the public good' and investment in new access opportunities, nature recovery and landscape management. The draft Management Plan provides a framework for the opportunities presented by ELMs;
- The link between landscape and community health and well-being has been strengthened;
- Aligning the Management Plan with the Kent Biodiversity Strategy, recognising the scale and impact of biodiversity loss that has been experienced; and
- The overview and narrative covering landscape character has been updated to reflect the findings of the Landscape Character Area review, which has been undertaken (and published) alongside the review of the Management Plan.

1.7. The Management Plan review has been undertaken at the same time as the Government's review of protected landscapes. The national Landscape Review report was published in September 2019 and made a number of recommendations with regard the funding, role and management of AONBs, including their role in the planning system. However, it will be the Government's response to the Review that will provide confirmation of any changes related to governance, funding and the statutory purposes of the AONBs: this is expected by the end of the year. Reflecting this, and to 'future proof' the Management Plan, the findings and recommended actions of the national Landscape Review are referenced throughout the Plan. Some minor changes to the draft Management Plan may be needed to reflect and ensure consistency with the Government response but it is not expected that this would delay the adoption process.

- 1.8. Following the end of the consultation period, the responses received will be considered by the AONB Unit and used to inform a final version of the Management Plan, which will be presented to the local authorities for adoption. At this stage, a further report will be brought to the Panel with an appropriate recommendation to Cabinet. The aim is for all 12 local authorities to go through the Management Plan adoption process by the end of March 2021.
- 1.9. The draft Management Plan is an authoritative and comprehensive Plan for the AONB and will ensure the management of the AONB continues successfully. In terms of the review of the Local Plan, it is considered that the existing AONB policy (Policy DM 24) remains consistent with the reviewed Management Plan and no substantive changes to the Local Plan in respect of the approach taken to the AONB are envisaged at this stage.
- 1.10. A suggested response to the consultation has been prepared using the consultation response form (Appendix 2 to this report). The proposed response acknowledges the engagement that has taken place with a broad range of stakeholders and the opportunity the Council has had to contribute to the review process. Subject to a number of comments and suggestions, it is considered the draft Management Plan should be supported by the Council.

### **3 Proposals**

- 3.1 The proposal is for a response to be agreed and submitted as the Council's formal response to the draft Kent Downs AONB Management Plan public consultation.

### **3 Alternative Options**

- 1.1. The Panel could decide not to submit a Council response to the draft Management Plan public consultation. However, not submitting a response at this stage would mean the Council would miss the opportunity to influence the Management Plan prior to considering the final management plan for adoption: at this stage there will not be the opportunity to seek amendments to the Plan.
- 1.2. The recommended action, therefore, is to submit the response proposed (Appendix 2) subject to any additional comments the Panel may agree.

### **5 Consultation Undertaken or Proposed**

- 1.3. Officers from the Environment and Leisure, Housing, Economic Development and Community, Development Management and Planning Policy (including the Conservation and Urban Design/Landscape officers) teams were asked for comments to feed into the Council's response.
- 1.4. The preparation of the Management Plan has involved a wide-ranging public engagement process undertaken by the AONB Unit, including through the 'Heads of the Hills' 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations for the Kent Downs AONB. The AONB Unit have directly informed a wide range of individuals and organisations about this



consultation and details of the consultation have been publicised on the Kent Downs AONB website and through other means including social media.

## 6 Implications

Issue	Implications
Corporate Plan	<p>The AONB Management Plan supports the Council's corporate priorities of:</p> <p>Investing in our environment and responding positively to global challenges (Priority 2)</p>
Financial, Resource and Property	<p>The Council is a funding partner of the Kent Downs AONB JAC and makes an annual revenue contribution, which is funded from the Council's revenue budget.</p> <p>There are no additional financial implications arising from this report.</p>
Legal, Statutory and Procurement	<p>There is a statutory requirement to carry out a review of the Kent Downs AONB management plan at five-year intervals and to act jointly with other local authorities within the AONB in its preparation. Failure to do so will place the Council in breach of Section 89 of the CRoW Act 2000.</p> <p>Local authorities are required to have regard to the Management Plan and to the purposes of AONB designation in carrying out their functions.</p>
Crime and Disorder	None identified at this stage.
Environment and Climate/Ecological Emergency	<p>The draft Management Plan has been subject to a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), which provides a comprehensive assessment of its potential environmental impacts, and Sustainability Appraisal (SA). The SEA and SA processes have been combined into an Environment Report published alongside the draft Management Plan.</p> <p>The Environment Report concluded that there is nothing in the Management Plan that will undermine the special qualities of the AONB and the implementation of the Plan, including measures to address environmental and climate change considerations, will have environmental and sustainability benefits for the Kent Downs AONB.</p>
Health and Wellbeing	The draft Management Plan recognises the health and wellbeing benefits that can be gained from enjoyment of the landscape and includes specific aims in this respect.
Risk Management and Health and Safety	None identified at this stage.

Equality and Diversity	The draft Management Plan has been subject to an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) and this has been published alongside the draft Plan. The assessment concluded that the Plan would not be expected to negatively affect any protected group. Rather it supported a range of improvements that would remove barriers and enable a wider range of people to benefit from access, understanding and enjoyment of the AONB.
Privacy and Data Protection	None identified at this stage.

## 7 Appendices

- 7.1 Appendix 1 – Draft Kent Downs AONB Management Plan 2020 - 2025  
Appendix 2 – Draft response

## 8 Background Papers

The review of the Kent Downs AONB Landscape Character Areas, Environment Report and EIA can be found online at:

[https://kccconsultations.inconsult.uk/consult.ti/kentdowns\\_aonb/consultationHome](https://kccconsultations.inconsult.uk/consult.ti/kentdowns_aonb/consultationHome)

The Kent Downs AONB Management Plan 2014 – 2019 can be found online at:

<https://www.kentdowns.org.uk/landscape-management/management-plan/>

# **Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Draft Management Plan 2020-2025**

**For Public Consultation July – September 2020**

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# 1. The Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

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## Summary of changes

The overview has been updated to strengthen perceptual, historic and cultural references and confirming the international and national significance of the Kent Downs.

The vision has been tightened and focuses on a shorter time period, it reflects the rapid growth planned for Kent and the recognition and declaration climate and biodiversity emergencies by many members of the AONB partnership.

The special characteristics descriptions have been updated in a minor way and made more consistent with the following sections of the plan. Issues concerning the special characteristics have been removed from the narrative because they are repeated in the issues sections of the plan and are not part of the character or qualities of the landscape. The section on components, characteristics and qualities has been updated to be consistent with national guidance and the revised Landscape Character Assessment for the Kent Downs.

The quality of life descriptions are no longer described as special characteristics and qualities, and the section on development pressure was removed as it repeats information in the Sustainable Development section and while is a feature of the AONB it is not one of its special characteristics.

The access section has been updated particularly to recognise the growth in visiting and the new concerns this is bringing with regards to site capacity and visitor experience.

The public perception section was updated to include the Head for the Hills project which used the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebrations to engage more people than previously.

Information from the Kent Environment Strategy public perception survey has been included.

## Overview

The Kent Downs is a significant landscape, recognised nationally and internationally for its quality and character. This is a landscape of drama and intimacy; there is diversity and contrast within the AONB; there are ancient places as well as the bright white of a new cliff fall, the quiet of a woodland walk, dramatic hills and tranquil valleys, birdsong, breath-taking views, dazzling wild flowers, stars at night and the crashing of waves. The landscapes of the Downs have been shaped by the combination of nature and human hands, creating a place that has inspired art and science; retains remarkable historic places and patterns, internationally valued nature and is much valued by people. This is a distinctive, national landscape of outstanding quality and value.

### 1.1 A vision for the Kent Downs AONB in 2030

The first AONB Management Plan agreed a 20 year vision; while this 2004 vision remains fundamentally unchanged the context has changed markedly, with unprecedented growth predicted in Kent adding around 25% to the population by 2031, just 11 years. The decline in biodiversity and impact of climate change which has been declared or recognised as an emergency by Parliament and most of the AONB Partnership. The policy context that the AONB partnership is operating in is rapidly moving and in the light of this – while the partnership remains far sighted and ambitious for the AONB in the future we have re-focused our vision to a 10 year period.

In 2030... the qualities and distinctive features of the Kent Downs AONB, the dramatic south-facing scarp, secluded dry valleys, network of tiny lanes, isolated farmsteads, churches and oasts, orchards, dramatic cliffs, the ancient woodlands and delicate chalk grassland along with the ancient, remote and tranquil qualities, are valued, secured and strengthened.

The Kent Downs has become a landscape where rapid change supports the AONB's distinctive features. Responses to development pressures and climate change have enhanced landscape character and what is valued by people about the landscape. The Kent Downs landscape is recognised and valued, enjoyed and cherished and its future conservation and enhancement is a certainty.

Strong, assertive leadership from the AONB partnership along with positive partnerships with key organisations, local people and land managers act together with wider publics to

conserve, enhance, enjoy and promote a nationally and internationally recognised and valued landscape.

## 1.2 The special components, characteristics and qualities of the Kent Downs AONB

The rich landscape of the Kent Downs AONB is made up of diverse component factors with special characteristics and qualities which together distinguish it as a landscape of national and international importance and underpin its significance and natural beauty. The components, characteristics and qualities are consistently recognised and valued by the public, individuals, institutions, organisations and experts alike. The landscape components of Kent Downs have been identified as:

### **Dramatic landform and views; a distinctive landscape character**

The Kent Downs dramatic and diverse topography is based on the underlying geology. Key features comprise impressive south-facing steep slopes (scarps) of chalk and greensand; scalloped and hidden dry valleys, especially valued where they have a downland character; expansive plateaux; broad, steep-sided river valleys, and the dramatic, wild and iconic white cliffs and foreshore.

Breath-taking, uninterrupted, long-distance panoramas are offered across open countryside, estuaries and the sea from the scarp, cliffs and plateaux. The dip slope dry valleys and river valleys provide more intimate and enclosed vistas.

The character of the Kent Downs is much valued; it arises from a distinctive, recognisable and pattern of elements in the landscape that make the Kent Downs particular and special as well as significant nationally and internationally.

### **Biodiversity-rich habitats**

The unique landscapes of the Kent Downs create and contain a rich and distinctive biodiversity of local and often national or international importance. This landscape provides a home to several species that are largely or wholly confined to the Kent Downs.

Habitats found in the Kent Downs include chalk grassland and chalk scrub; woodlands (ancient woodland, veteran trees and wood pasture), traditional orchards and cobnut platts, chalk cliffs and the foreshore, chalk streams and wet pasture, ponds and spring lines; heath and acid grassland. Hedgerows and trees outside woodlands are key features of the landscape and serve an important wildlife function along with networks of linear features of shaws, flower-rich field margins and road verges.

The wildlife of the farmed landscape is special in the Kent Downs. Many key habitats are farmed habitats and the Downs support some of the most important arable weed communities in Britain.

### **Farmed landscape**

A long-established tradition of mixed farming has helped create and maintain the natural beauty of the Kent Downs. The pastoral scenery is a particularly valued part of the landscape. Farming covers around 64% of the AONB. Disconnected 'ribbons' of permanent grassland (shaves) are found along the steep scarp, valley sides, and on less-productive land having been created by grazing. Locally concentrated areas of orchards,

cobnut plats (nut orchards), hop gardens and other horticultural production are also present, their regular striate form can enhance the rise and fall of the land, increasingly vineyards add to this ordered character.

### **Woodland and trees**

The Kent Downs is one of Britain's most wooded landscapes. Broadleaf and mixed woodland cover around 23% of the Kent Downs and frame the upper slopes of the scarp, dry valleys and plateaux tops. Almost 70% of the woodlands are ancient woodland meaning they have been continuously present at least since 1600; they support nationally important woodland plant and animal species. Large areas of sweet chestnut coppice are present throughout the Downs. Woodland is a much valued component of the landscape, the sights, changing colours, smells and sounds adding to the perceptual qualities of the landscape.

Individual, hedgerow, fine and ancient trees outside woodlands are a most important, characteristic and sometimes dramatic element of the landscape.

### **A rich legacy of historic and cultural heritage**

Millennia of human activity have created an outstanding cultural inheritance and strong 'time depth' to the Kent Downs. In the original designation the characteristic villages, churches and castles are particularly noted and the historic settlement pattern remains an important distinctive component of the AONB. There are the remains of Neolithic megalithic monuments, Bronze Age barrows, Iron Age hill-forts, Roman villas, roads and towns, medieval villages and hamlets focused on their churches, post-medieval stately homes with their parks and gardens and historic defence structures from Norman times to the twentieth century.

Fields of varying shapes and sizes and ancient wood-banks and hedges, set within networks of droveways and sunken lanes have produced a rich historic mosaic, which is the rural landscape of today. Architectural distinctiveness is ever present in the scattered villages and farmsteads and oast houses, barns and other characteristic agricultural buildings, farmsteads, churches and historic country houses. The diverse range of local materials used, which includes flint, chalk, ragstone, timber, brick and peg tile, contributes to the character, colour, tone and texture of the countryside.

The AONB landscape has long been an inspiration to artists, scientists and leaders, from Shakespeare to Samuel Palmer, Darwin to Churchill and Turner to Moore, now with contemporary and more diverse publics drawing their own inspiration. The inspiration that the landscape of the Kent Downs offers is not confined to the influential and famous, we know that a wide variety of people greatly value this place for many of the same reasons.

### **The Heritage Coasts**

The Heritage Coasts either side of Dover, include the shoreline, cliffs and adjacent downland. The White Cliffs form part of our national identity and display internationally important geological exposures, they form a soaring land and seascape of vast horizons of sea and sky extending westwards to the subtle crumbling Greensand and Clay cliffs of Folkestone.

The wildlife of the Heritage Coasts is internationally important, the clifftops consisting of nationally important chalk grassland and scrub, the cliff-faces supporting important breeding sea bird colonies including Fulmars, Rock Pipits, Lesser-black backed Gulls and

the only Kent population of Kittiwakes. Seabirds wheeling high in the sky connect the sea and sky.

### **Geology and natural resources**

The imposing landform and special characteristics of the Kent Downs is underpinned by its geology. This is also the basis for the considerable natural capital and natural resources which benefit society. These include the soils which support an important farming sector and can sequester carbon; soil represent and is important biodiversity resource in its own right. The water and the water resources which support rivers teeming with wildlife and offering enchanting landscapes. Hidden below the chalk is a significant aquifer providing 75% of Kent's drinking water and feeding the much valued chalk streams of the Downs. Fresh, clean air is experienced across the AONB and the vegetation patterns of the Downs are effective at removing air pollution.

### **Tranquillity and remoteness**

Much of the AONB provides surprisingly tranquil and remote countryside – offering dark night skies, space, beauty and peace. Simply seeing a natural landscape, hearing birdsong, seeing and hearing the sea, watching stars at night or 'bathing' in woodland are much valued perceptual qualities of the AONB.

## **2. Quality of life in the Kent Downs**

While not characteristics and qualities of the landscape, the important social and economic components of the Kent Downs are a key to its future conservation and enhancement.

### **Vibrant communities**

The Kent Downs is a living, working landscape shaped and managed by people. The most up to date population estimate as shows a total population of 96,000. While changing in nature, many of the Kent Downs communities are strong and vibrant, assertively seeking to conserve and enhance the place that they live in. Surrounding the AONB are large, rapidly growing and increasingly diverse urban communities, the Kent Downs offer a greatly valued landscape of peace, beauty and space to breath.

### **Access, enjoyment and understanding**

The Kent Downs is an easily accessible and charming landscape well provided with access opportunities; over 1 million people live within a kilometre of the AONB boundary. There is considerable demand for access and recreation in the Kent Downs and providing this in a way which supports the special characteristics and qualities of the AONB is an increasingly important but challenging task; many site managers are reporting 'over visiting' with sites being at and beyond their capacity on many occasions.

The AONB provides a public rights of way network four times as dense as the national average and there is a high relative density of bridleways and byways. Active user groups help to promote the sustainable management and use of the AONB for quiet countryside recreation.



Access to the Kent Downs AONB particularly through walking, cycling and riding provide demonstrable benefits to health and well-being at the same time visiting can support the local economy and services.

Improving the understanding and enjoyment of the AONB is an important task, without this the landscape may not be fully recognised, valued or enjoyed and its future conservation and enhancement may not be assured.

In the preparation of the 2004 Management Plan and its subsequent reviews, comments and engagement have been sought from many participants including local authorities, stakeholders, local residents and visitors to the AONB. A key issue was to confirm what is most valued about the Kent Downs and what are the most important related issues and priorities in the view of respondents. The main consultation method used for the 2004 plan was a written questionnaire in the Kent Downs newspaper, *The Orchid*. Respondents could also complete an online questionnaire.

For this 2019/20 review the AONB Unit used the 'Head for the Hills' 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations of the Kent Downs AONB to reach a wider audience. Nearly 1000 individuals and organisations participated and, as in previous consultations, the special characteristics and qualities that formed the basis of the original AONB designation are still those most valued by people today.

<b>Most important components of natural beauty in the Kent Downs AONB</b>	<b>2003</b>	<b>2008</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>2019</b>
Chalk Downland	59%	74%	71%	70%
Woodland	52%	43%	41%	48%
Landform & Geology	45%	41%	34%	34%
Ancient Lanes and Paths	33%	47%	40%	45%
Orchards/Cobnut Platts	21%	17%	14%	12%
River Valleys	20%	21%	19%	13%
Hedgerows	20%	19%	18%	15%
Historic Settlements	17%	25%	24%	23%
Mixed Farmland	14%	17%	12%	14%
Dry Valleys	7%	7%	8%	11%
Historic Parklands	6%	9%	7%	9%
<b>Most valued features of the Kent Downs AONB</b>	<b>2003</b>	<b>2008</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>2019</b>
Scenery and Views	86%	83%	79%	74%
Wildlife	49%	48%	39%	58%
Peace and Quiet	46%	49%	39%	45%
Outdoor Recreation	33%	10%	12%	16%
Villages and Village Life	32%	32%	29%	21%
Historic Buildings	24%	17%	14%	13%
Dark Skies	n/a	6%	7%	12%
Amenities	10%	8%	7%	4%
Available Local Produce	7%	8%	5%	6%

Visitor Attractions	n/a	n/a	7%	4%
PROW Network	n/a	41%	45%	47%
Locally Distinct Highways	n/a	1%	3%	2%
<b>Priorities for Action</b>				
Prevention of Illegal Activities	56%	77%	71%	62%
Conserving Wildlife	54%	63%	59%	69%
Conserving Views and Scenic Beauty	50%	55%	56%	53%
Conserving Tranquillity	38%	36%	43%	59%
Preventing Loss of Historic Buildings	8%	22%	20%	22%
Management of Equine Land Use	n/a	8%	5%	4%
Information about Access to Countryside	2%	10%	15%	8%
Information on Features of AONB Landscape	12%	8%	2%	7%
More organised events	9%	6%	8%	5%
Research and Response to Climate Change	n/a	12%	7%	12%
Access	n/a	n/a	4%	n/a
<b>Action Needed to Improve Enjoyment of AONB</b>				
Encourage farmers to use more environmentally friendly techniques	45%	39%	44%	52%
Improve Sustainable Transport	23%	39%	38%	32%
Ensure Peace and Quiet	29%	64%	50%	50%
Greater Emphasis on Development Control	27%	34%	43%	39%
Getting Out and About	23%	14%	13%	15%
Better Information on Wildlife in Area	22%	9%	10%	13%
More Information on Where to Go in AONB	20%	17%	21%	17%
Improve or Increase Visitor Facilities	16%	17%	15%	12%
More Information on Local Produce	11%	11%	12%	9%
Highways Management that respects sensitivity of AONB	n/a	23%	22%	27%
Control of Light Pollution to Protect Dark Night Skies	n/a	19%	18%	26%

Figure 1.1 'Have Your Say' Survey Results 2003-2019

In addition to the AONB Survey, the Kent Downs AONB partnership participates in the Kent Environment Strategy Public Perception Survey (2018) which demonstrates that 97% of respondents felt that the countryside was either important or very important to them with over 80% using the countryside at least once a fortnight; for many people walking, benefits to their children, loving nature were important motivators, the most important elements of the countryside were woodlands, rivers and lakes, undeveloped coast, low lying hills and wildflower grasslands, all important components of the Kent Downs.

## 2. The Management of the Kent Downs AONB

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### Summary of changes

***This short note records the main changes made to the current AONB Management Plan when preparing this draft.***

*The vision period has been shortened to 2030 in recognition of the rapid growth and change expected in Kent in that period, it has been tightened and seeks to be more inclusive.*

*The introductory section has been amended and now contains broadly standardised text which is consistent with the other English AONB Management Plans.*

*References to the IUCN category V definition are updated and strengthened.*

*There are more references to the legal background of the designation and legal definitions, for instance of natural beauty, this is in common with other English AONB Management Plans.*

*A natural capital and ecosystems services approach is more clearly embedded in this section and more widely across the Management Plan*

*The findings of the Government's Landscape Review have been referenced not least with regard to the need for more resources, improved purposes (common with the National Parks) and structures if AONB partnerships are to meet the intentions of the legislation. The findings of the Landscape Review are referred to in the issues opportunities and threats as they are an independently generated review of AONBs and National Parks.*

*The references to the importance of partnership working have been strengthened with the intention to widen the partnerships we have and seeking to make them more inclusive and diverse.*

*MMP 2 has been altered to align it to the revised approach of the plan, MMP 4 and 6 have been removed because they repeated national policy*

*The intention to work collaboratively with other National Landscapes has been strengthened*

*'Policies' have been replaced by 'Principles' in accordance with the advice of the Kent Downs AONB Joint Advisory Committee. The previous policies and policy approach have been clarified, simplified and updated to respond to the approach agreed by the JAC and the new issues opportunities and threats and changing context.*

## **Our vision**

In 2030... the Kent Downs AONB is widely recognised and greatly valued. It is a landscape cherished and held in the highest esteem by those who visit, live and work there and nearby and by those who influence its future. Residents and visitors know where the AONB is and they understand its character and qualities and support the purposes of its designation. The Kent Downs AONB partnership is acknowledged, supported, funded and equipped to be the main and an influential and effective advocate and champion for the AONB. A diverse range of individuals and organisations are delivering positive action on the ground and are collaboratively engaged in the partnership and management planning. The AONB partnership is engaging and open about the conservation and management of the AONB.

### **2.1 The Kent Downs in context**

#### **2.1.1 Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty**

The 46 Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) in England, Wales and Northern Ireland cover approximately 1/8th of the land surface. In England 33 AONBs amount to 15% of the total land area. They vary greatly in landscape character and size ranging from the smallest, the Isles of Scilly (16sq. km) to the largest, the Cotswolds (2,038 sq. km). In Kent, the High Weald and Kent Downs AONB cover around a third of the county's land area.

The distinctive character and natural beauty of AONBs make them some of the most special and cherished places in Britain. AONBs are living, working landscapes that contribute some £16bn every year to the national economy. Although home to less than half a million people (under 2% of England's population), over two thirds of England's population live within half an hour's drive of an AONB and around 170 million people visit English AONBs every year, spending in excess of £2bn.

Together with National Parks, AONBs represent our most outstanding landscapes; unique and irreplaceable national assets, each with such distinctive character and natural beauty that they are recognised internationally as part of the global Protected Areas Family to be managed in the interest of everyone – local residents, businesses, visitors, and the wider public - and protected for future generations.



Figure 2.1 National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty in England

### 2.1.2 International recognition

Areas of Outstanding National Beauty are recognised and classified by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). Along with National Parks and Heritage Coasts the AONBs in England and Wales fall into Category V – Protected Landscapes/ Seascapes. These are defined as a ‘protected area where the interaction of people and nature over time

has produced an area of distinct character with significant ecological, biological, cultural and scenic value: and where safeguarding the integrity of this interaction is vital to protecting and sustaining the area and its associated nature conservation and other values.’ The IUCN primary objective for Category V Protected Landscapes is ‘to protect and sustain important landscapes/seascapes and the associated nature conservation and other values created by interactions with humans through traditional management practices.’

Until recently, the AONB designation was regarded (together with that of UK National Parks) as an anomaly in the international protected area system which prioritised ‘naturalness’ as a criterion of value. In the last quarter-century, however they have come to be recognised, particularly within Europe, as leaders in the move towards area-based sustainable development. AONBs, in particular, as ‘working’ landscapes, lead the way in pioneering new approaches to integrated countryside management based on voluntary partnerships engaging and working with local communities to secure common goals.

### 2.1.3 National legislation

The National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 legislated for the designation of AONBs and National Parks. Their purpose was to be similar – to conserve and enhance natural beauty. The Countryside Commission further defined the purpose of AONB designation in a statement of 1991.

Purpose of AONB designation...

‘...is primarily to conserve and enhance natural beauty’.

‘In pursuing the primary purpose of designation, account should be taken of the needs of agriculture, forestry, and other rural industries and of the economic and social needs of local communities. Particular regard should be paid to promoting sustainable forms of social and economic development that in themselves conserve and enhance the environment”.

‘Recreation is not an objective of designation but the demand for recreation should be met so far as this is consistent with the conservation of natural beauty and the needs of agriculture, forestry and other uses.’

Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty: A policy statement (Countryside Commission, CCP 356, 1991, p. 5).

Various Acts progressively strengthened the legal framework for AONBs; the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, revised and partially replaced the AONB provisions of the 1949 Act, including a requirement that a management plan be prepared for each AONB and reaffirms the primary purpose (Section 82). In the case of the Kent Downs AONB (and others covered by more than one local authority), the management plan must be prepared by the local authorities acting jointly, it is the AONB Unit which takes forward this work for the Local Authorities.

Four common national aims unite AONBs partnerships and management plans:

- Conserve and enhance the natural and cultural heritage of the UK’s AONBs ensuring they meet the challenges of the future.
- Support the economic and social well-being of local communities in ways which contribute

to the conservation and enhancement of natural beauty.

- Promote public understanding and enjoyment of AONB landscapes and encourage people to conserve and enhance them.
- Value, sustain and promote the benefits that AONBs provide for society including clean air and water, food and carbon storage.

### 2.1.4 The Kent Downs AONB

The Kent Downs AONB is a nationally important landscape and one of the most enchanting parts of southern England. The AONB was designated in July 1968; it covers 878sq.km (326 sq. miles) stretching from the Surrey/Greater London border to the Strait of Dover. Aside from a small area within the London Borough of Bromley, the AONB lies wholly within the county of Kent and covers around 23% of the total land area of the county. It rises to an altitude of 250m above sea level at its highest point at Toy's Hill south of Sevenoaks, and is crossed in three places by the river valleys of the Darent, the Medway and the Stour, all flowing northwards.

The Kent Downs are the eastern half of the North Downs ridge of chalk stretching from Farnham in Surrey to the English Channel. The western half of the chalk ridge lies within the Surrey Hills AONB, which adjoins the Kent Downs. The same ridge of chalk reappears on the French side of the Channel, where it is designated le Parc Naturel Régional des Caps et Marais d'Opale. In Kent, the North Downs, along with part of the Greensand Ridge and Lympne Escarpment form the Kent Downs AONB.

The Kent Downs is the eighth largest AONB in England and Wales, and administratively one of the most complex falling within twelve Local Authorities and lying partly or wholly within 137 parish council boundaries.

When the Kent Downs were confirmed as an AONB, the overall remarks of the designation committee were summarised as:

“The scarp slope and dry valleys of the Kent Downs are the main target for designation, particularly where they retain a downland character, that woodlands are highly valued throughout the designated area and particularly on the scarp slope and dry valley sides, and that other qualities of note are views from the escarpment, pastoral scenery, parklands, villages, churches and castles.”

The boundary of the Kent Downs AONB was drawn over 50 years ago, over time a variety of requests to extend the boundary have been submitted but the view of the Joint Advisory Committee has been to hold off from formally promoting boundary reviews until the process for extension has been simplified. Simplifying boundary extensions is a recommendation of the Governments Landscape Review which might create the opportunity to extend the AONB in the future.



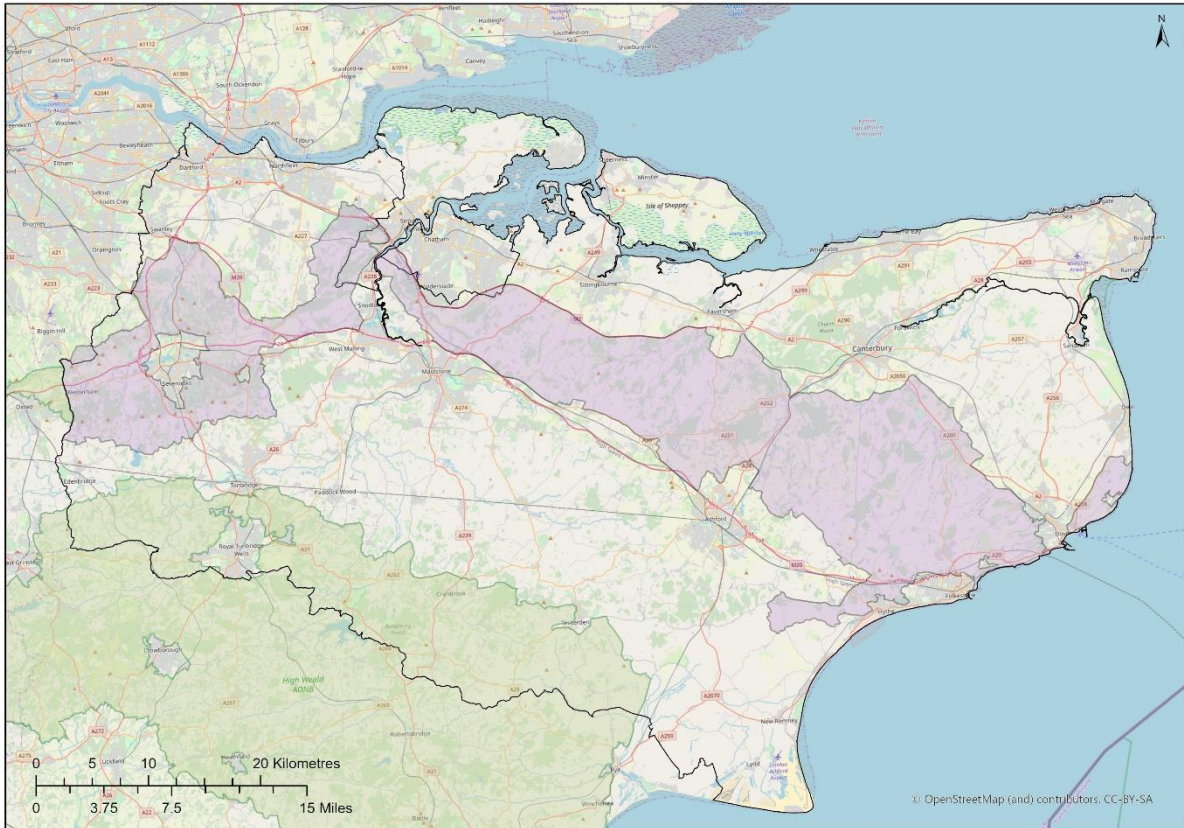


Figure 2.2 Kent Downs AONB Boundary

### 2.1.5 Definition of natural beauty and landscape

The term ‘natural beauty’ remains at the heart of the purpose of AONB designation. Part IV of the 2000 Act provides the following definition of natural beauty:

“Any reference in this Part to the conservation of the natural beauty of an area includes a reference to the conservation of its flora, fauna, geological and physiographical features”.  
Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, section 92.

The term ‘natural beauty’ was always intended to embrace more than just the visual or scenic elements of the landscape and the definition has been updated and broadened to include historic and cultural heritage. Government agency guidance specifically on AONBs provides a useful non-technical definition:

“Natural beauty is not just the look of the landscape, but includes landform and geology, plants and animals, landscape features and the rich history of human settlement over the centuries.”

(Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty: A guide for AONB partnership members –  
Countryside Agency, CA24, November 2001)

The Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 (NERC): Section 99 formally clarifies in law that the fact that an area consists of or includes land used for agriculture or woodlands, or as a park, or ‘any other area whose flora, fauna or physiographical features are partly the product of human intervention in the landscape’ does not prevent it from being

treated, for legal purposes ‘as being an area of natural beauty (or of outstanding natural beauty).’

At the core of the secondary purpose of AONB designation is the understanding that the landscape is not just scenery, but it is the result of the historic and on-going interaction between people and place. Social and economic activity that contributes to the landscape and natural beauty is fundamental to shaping the future of the AONB.

The important link between people and place is emphasised in the European Landscape Convention (Council of Europe) where landscape is defined as “an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors”. The convention, ratified by the UK in 2006, also recognises that “the landscape is an important part of the quality of life for people everywhere; in urban areas and in the countryside, in degraded areas as well as in areas of high quality, in areas recognised as being of outstanding beauty as well as everyday areas”.

## **2.2 Management planning for AONBs**

In recognition of the national and international importance of AONB landscapes the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 required relevant Local Authorities to jointly prepare, publish and subsequently review a Management Plan. It is required that the Plan (as a whole) formulates their policy for the management of the AONB and for carrying out their functions in relation to it. The Management Plan is essentially about conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the AONB, the statutory purpose of the designation, but it is widely scoped partly because of the complexities of what is included in ‘landscape’ and ‘natural beauty’ and also to respond to the wide variety of functions Local Authorities are responsible for.

### **2.2.1 The role of this management plan revision**

The first statutory Kent Downs AONB Management Plan was adopted in April 2004. This is the third revision. In their formal observations the Countryside Agency and subsequently Natural England recognised the Kent Downs AONB Management Plan and its early reviews as representing ‘exemplary’ and ‘best practice’.

This revised Management Plan is based on the original plan and its subsequent revisions. It justifies and details the aims and principles for the conservation and enhancement of the Kent Downs AONB. It has been prepared by the Kent Downs AONB Unit and Joint Advisory Committee (JAC) for, and on behalf of, the twelve local authorities that have land within the Kent Downs, thus fulfilling their statutory obligations.

### **2.2.2 The status and role of management plan principles**

The overarching aim of this Management Plan is to achieve the purpose of AONB designation.

The scope of the CRoW Act was wide for AONB Management Plans requiring policy both for the management of the AONB and for the Local Authorities to carry out their many functions. As part of this review process the Joint Advisory Committee has recommended that the approach of the plan is altered to recognise that the Management Plan as a whole

represents their Policy (to be consistent with the CROW Act 2000 and PPGs). With this in mind what were described as 'Policies' in previous Plans are now described as 'Principles'; some previous Policies have been removed so as not to repeat national policy.

The Management Plan does not and cannot formulate land use planning policies but provides evidence to assist in the policy and decision making process in planning. The status of the Management Plan combined with the thorough process of Management Plan making and review means that the AONB Management Plan is a material consideration in planning matters and should be afforded weight in decisions. The Planning Practice Guidance confirms this, stating that 'AONB Management Plans may contain information which is relevant when preparing plan policies, or which is a material consideration when assessing planning applications'.

### 2.2.3 A Duty of Regard

The strengthened status of AONBs through the CROW Act has brought commitments from a wide range of organisations – including those who are not directly involved in the AONB partnership. Section 85, Part IV of the CROW Act requires all public bodies, statutory undertakers and relevant authorities to demonstrate that they have taken account of the purposes of the AONB in their decision making.

The Kent Downs AONB partnership has prepared a series of guidance documents, which form part of the Management Plan and inform and provide practical ways for organisations and individuals to implement their Duty of Regard.

In support of the Duty several Public Bodies and Statutory undertakers have either signed Joint Accords or have developed practical projects to deliver the conservation and enhancement of Natural Beauty on the ground. Notable amongst these are the Forestry Commission, Natural England and UK Power Networks.

### 2.2.4 Who is the plan for?

First and foremost, the Management Plan belongs to the AONB Local Authorities – the plan provides the vision, aims and principles that formulates their policy for the management of the AONB and for carrying out their functions in relation to it.

Second, this Management Plan is for all the government agencies, statutory undertakers, utilities and public bodies which have a 'duty of regard' (under S85 of the CROW Act 2000) for the purposes of the AONB designation in their functions and operations. All public bodies and relevant authorities have to demonstrate that they have taken into account the purposes of the AONB designation in all their functions within the area. This Management Plan will inform, guide and influence that process.

Finally, and importantly, this is a plan for everyone who cares for, manages or whose work might affect the AONB as well as for those who live, work or play in the Kent Downs. The impact and difference that can be made by farmers, land managers, individuals, countryside management organisations, and community and voluntary organisations, when viewed as a whole is critical to the future of the Kent Downs. We intend that this Management Plan is practical and relevant to a wide and diverse range of individuals and organisations, and that

it will help advise and influence activities, decisions and the perception people have of the Kent Downs.

### 3. The role of the Kent Downs AONB partnership

Within an area as large and varied as the Kent Downs, there are many hundreds of individuals and organisations which have a role in managing the landscape, supporting local business and communities and enabling quiet recreation. The Joint Advisory Committee plays a pivotal role in realising the strategic vision for the Kent Downs AONB and overseeing the Management Plan.

**The Joint Advisory Committee (JAC)** for the Kent Downs AONB was established in July 1997 and is at the heart of the partnership. JAC membership includes the twelve local authorities who have joint responsibility to prepare and review the Management Plan, namely: Ashford, Bromley, Canterbury, Dover, Gravesham, Kent, Maidstone, Medway, Sevenoaks, Folkestone and Hythe, Swale and Tonbridge & Malling; as well as Natural England. Additional advisory members are the Environment Agency, Country Land and Business Association (CLA), the National Farmers Union (NFU), Visit Kent, The Kent Association of Local Councils (KALC) and Action with Communities in Rural Kent (ACRK).

**An Executive** of JAC representatives and some outside advisors has assisted in steering the work of the Kent Downs AONB Unit. At a much larger scale, an occasional Kent Downs Forum is held for a wider audience, to discuss current issues and gain input and advice.

**The AONB Unit** is employed through and hosted by Kent County Council and works on behalf of Government and the JAC to carry out the preparation and review of the Management Plan, to advocate its vision, aims and principles and work in collaborative partnerships to deliver a range of actions described in the Action Plan.

The objective of the JAC is to ensure that the AONB Unit is effective, efficient and authoritative, recognised and valued by partners and policy makers as a professional body securing the purposes of the designation, delivering significant added value and enabling action on the ground. To achieve this the AONB Unit:

- Builds knowledge and partnerships in order to inform and realise the ambitions of the Management Plan.
- Delivers great value to partners, providing authoritative advocacy, advice and support, catalysing activity amongst existing organisations and leading where appropriate.
- Carries out a timely, inclusive and authoritative review of the AONB Management Plan on behalf of Local Authorities.
- Leads on the delivery of the AONB Management Plan and generates partnerships and collaboration in support.
- Builds capacity, motivation and professionalism and retains expertise and high quality, highly motivated staff.
- Actively seeks finance, partnerships and other resources to support the delivery of the

Management Plan.

In doing this the Unit retains the highest standards of business management.

### **Together the JAC, its Executive and the Unit form the Kent Downs AONB partnership.**

The Government's **Landscape Review** made several recommendations about the future governance, funding and staffing arrangements for both AONBs and National Parks, these seek to ensure that AONBs in particular had sufficient resources to meet the objectives of the designation, improve efficiency and collaboration, strengthen participation and enhance delivery. It could be that in the plan period the governance, funding and staffing arrangements of the Kent Downs AONB are reviewed.

*'Today, we have a system [in England] which is fragmented, sometimes marginalised and often misunderstood. Indeed it is not really a system at all, but 10 National Parks, who do not always work together effectively, and an entirely separate network of 34 less powerful Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs). They have different purposes from National Parks, vastly less money, but sometimes greater pressures; and yet cover areas that are more visited, sometimes more biodiverse and are just as beautiful.'*

### **The AONB partnership's role in planning policy and decisions**

Planning and development issues have a fundamental impact on the statutory purposes of AONB designation; until the CRow Act 2000, the land use planning system was the main legal mechanism by which AONBs were protected, conserved and enhanced.

The Kent Downs AONB partnership has agreed to take on a limited land use planning role, in summary this is to:

- Provide design guidance in partnership with AONB Local Authorities.
- Comment on forward/strategic planning issues e.g. Local Plans.
- Involvement in development management only in exceptional circumstances, e.g. in terms of scale and precedence.
- Provide planning advice/comments on development management in other cases at the request of a Kent Downs AONB Joint Advisory member and /or Local Authority Planning Officers.

This Management Plan is required by the legislation to 'formulate the Local Authority policy for the management of the AONB and for carrying out their functions in relation to it'. The planning function of Local Authorities is a critical way to conserve and enhance the Kent Downs.

### **Delivering in partnership and developing wider collaboration**

Much that has been achieved since the publication of the first Kent Downs Management Plan has been through the many partners who work on the ground in the AONB. The Kent Downs AONB partnership is recognised nationally as one of the most effective at securing activity and resources in support of the Management Plan and its policies; this revision recognises that even greater benefit could be generated through larger scale and more broadly scoped

collaborative partnerships working across sectors, seeking greater inclusion and diversity and at a landscape scale.

## **4 The management of the Kent Downs AONB – issues opportunities and threats**

The Government's Landscape Review has provided an overarching evidence based assessment of the issues opportunities and threats affecting the management of our National Landscapes, they are recognised by the Kent Downs AONB Joint Advisory Committee and so this plan does not repeat them here. The local response to the Review will be framed by the vision, aims and principles of this plan.

## **5 The management of the Kent Downs AONB - aims**

A landscape in which:

1. In line with the findings of the Government's Landscape Review the partnership leading the conservation and enhancement of the landscapes of the Kent Downs is effective and influential, properly resourced, suitably representative and has powers which are fit for purpose.
2. The vision, aims and principles of the AONB Management Plan are supported, promoted and delivered through strong advocacy, diverse, collaborative partnerships, individual actions, strategy, policy, programmes and management decisions.
3. The AONB partnership provides leadership and direction for the future conservation and enhancement of the AONB within the context of the Kent Downs AONB Management Plan.

## **6 The management of the Kent Downs AONB - principles**

- MPP1 The Management Plan and its supporting documents, supported by a strong partnership approach, will be pursued as the primary means to develop, co-ordinate and promote the management, conservation and enhancement of the Kent Downs AONB.
- MM2 Individual Local Authorities will give a high priority to the AONB Management Plan vision, aims and principles in taking forward their relevant functions.
- MPP 3 The development of strong, diverse working partnerships and landscape scale collaborations to implement the vision, aims and principles of the AONB Management Plan will be pursued.
- MPP4 Collaborative working partnerships and initiatives with other National Landscapes will be pursued.
- MPP5 The involvement of diverse interest groups in decisions about and affecting the Kent

Downs AONB future will be supported.

MPP6 The preparation and review of the Management Plan, advocacy of its aims and principles and work in partnership to deliver the actions described will be pursued through a properly resourced AONB Unit supported technically and financially by the Local Authorities.

# 3. Sustainable Development

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## Summary of changes

**This short note records the main changes made to the current AONB Management Plan when preparing this draft.**

The vision has been altered to a shorter time period (20 to 10 years) in response to the scale and pace of change identified in Kent and the timetable adopted by Local Authorities to respond to the climate and ecological emergencies they have declared or recognised. (Kent



Growth and infrastructure Framework timeframe is 2031, many Local Authorities have 2030 climate and in some cases ecological targets)

Sustainable development is no longer described as a 'special character' – rather it is presented as an overarching theme of the plan.

The plan refers to the global 2030 agenda for Sustainable Development, the 17 Sustainable Development Goals and places the plan in the local context of the national commitment to deliver these goals.

The section on development pressure has been updated to reflect newly available research and the current situation (Kent Growth and Infrastructure Framework). Information and evidence from Government's Landscape Review (2019) has been added as important context.

A section has been added to reflect the work happening in the south east area amongst National Landscapes to prepare a vision in response to the opportunities and threats from the growth trajectories in the London and the London City Region.

A new section has been added focusing on Natural Capital and Ecosystems services (updated from previous plan and now included in Sustainable Development section rather than natural resources section of the plan) This reflects the approach of the 25 year Environment Plan and emerging Environment Bill.

A strengthened section is included on a landscape led approach which has been combined with the previous local character and qualities section.

The section on Climate Change has been updated to reflect the 2018 and 2019 climate predictions and anticipated impacts; the Draft Kent Climate Change Risk Assessment (2019) is referenced along with the Committee on Climate Change report on land use (2020). The Local Authority climate emergency declarations have been reflected. The vision has been updated with ambitious climate targets for the AONB Unit and the landscape as a whole.

References to the Kent Downs AONB Setting Position Statement have been made and a principle has been added in support of its use.

'Policies' have been replaced by 'Principles' in accordance with the advice of the Kent Downs AONB Joint Advisory Committee. The previous policies and policy approach have been clarified, simplified and updated to respond to the approach agreed by the JAC and the new issues opportunities and threats and changing context.

Preliminary comments and advice on first draft received from the Kent Downs AONB JAC and partner organisations have been incorporated.

### 3. Our vision

In 2030 ... the principles of sustainable development are at the heart of the management of the Kent Downs. Change reinforces and enhances the characteristics, qualities and distinctiveness of the Kent Downs and benefits its communities and economy. While the surrounding urban areas have expanded considerably, innovative management techniques and policy approaches successfully address the pressure and opportunities presented by

growth to the landscapes of the AONB.

The impacts of climate change are being felt but the mitigation and adaptive responses taken are landscape led, effective and carefully chosen to enhance the characteristics, qualities and distinctiveness of the landscape rather than detracting from them. The natural capital and ecosystems service provision of the Kent Downs has been enhanced. Important areas of tranquillity have been identified, protected and expanded and provide 'oases of calm'.

### **3.1 Overview**

Achieving sustainable development is an overarching principle for much national and international policy. The UN General Assembly defined sustainable development as meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

#### **3.1.1 The Sustainable Development Goals**

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is a historic global agreement to eradicate extreme poverty, fight inequality and injustice and leave no one behind. Agreed by world leaders at the UN in 2015, the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) succeed the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The SDGs are universal with all signatories expected to contribute to them internationally and deliver them domestically. This Management Plan is underpinned by, and contributes towards delivery of the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals; the Plan contributes locally to some of the ways that the UK Government is supporting the delivery of the Sustainable Development Goals domestically.

#### **3.1.2 Sustainable Development in the Kent Downs AONB**

Sustainable development has economic, social and environmental dimensions. In the context of the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, sustainability should be judged widely and in accordance with the sustainable development goals but with a focus on the purposes of the AONB designation.

Applying this to the local circumstances of the Kent Downs, particular attention should be given to the special characteristics and qualities of the area and supporting a landscape led approach. These in turn help to apply to a variety of plans, strategies and policy frameworks so that proposals in or affecting the AONB can be judged. The protection afforded to the AONB should be commensurate with the national and international status of the area and give appropriate weight to the AONB's importance.

To assist this process, this management plan identifies the special characteristics and qualities of the Kent Downs landscape and provides an updated description of the landscape character of the area. In this context, key issues, threats and opportunities are identified along with a vision, aims and principles which respond to them. Strategic issues are identified in this section of the plan these are: over-arching 'guiding themes' (3.2) arising from the purposes of designation the context of the natural capital approach and the need to respond to climate change and ecological loss, and 'recurrent themes' (3.3) which arise frequently across the topics in this plan. These themes will be considered first when considering projects, proposals, policies and local authority functions, before turning to specific sections later in the management plan. In the absence of local criteria-based policies, the intention is that this management plan's vision, aims and principles will provide a

helpful evidence to assist with decision making.

### 3.1.3 Unprecedented growth and development pressures

The position of the Kent Downs, close to London, mainland Europe, major urban centres and growth areas means that the Kent Downs AONB, perhaps more than any other of Britain's protected landscapes – AONBs, Heritage Coasts or National Parks, has experienced and is experiencing severe development pressure. Evidence from a Defra commissioned review of growth and development in AONBs carried forward by Prof. Bibby (University of Sheffield) shows the Kent Downs AONB as being an 'outlier' in the amount of growth it has accommodated *'The Kent Downs AONB stands out as an area which has experienced major, but expected, change, showing a rate of urban growth of almost 10%.pa, with the urban area spreading by 14 ha over the decade'* (2014) the population of the Kent Downs has increased by 3% in the previous plan period.

The Kent Growth and Infrastructure Framework (2018 update) prepared by a wide partnership of Local Authorities at the County level has identified an unprecedented level of planned growth in Kent in the period to 2031, this includes a 24% growth in the number of homes (additional 178,600) and a 23% growth in the number of people (additional 396,300); there is an increase of 21% of jobs (additional 170,300) planned.

It is the scale and pace of change which was the primary reason that the Kent Downs AONB Joint Advisory Committee decided to shorten the immediate vision period of the AONB Management Plan from 20 to 10 years; so that the plan responds effectively to the immediate issues of growth, biodiversity loss and climate change.

The issues of growth, urbanisation and development present an opportunity and a threat. New transportation infrastructure including strategic trans-European highways, High Speed Rail, the proposed Lower Thames Crossing, communications infrastructure and housing, as well as the pressures of intensive agriculture and forestry, increased recreational use and illegal activities such as fly tipping and off road driving can detract significantly from this important landscape.

An important role of the management plan is to manage and mitigate the detracting pressures on the landscape and, at the same time seek a positive exchange of goods and services between the Kent Downs and the surrounding urban areas. Despite the intense pressure experienced in the Kent Downs, it is still true that the AONB has largely retained its character and community based, focused projects have shown the real benefit of sustainable development approaches.

The development pressures experienced in the Kent Downs AONB are specifically referenced in the Government's Landscape Review describing the Kent Downs (and High Weald) as:

*'especially large AONBs which cross multiple local authority boundaries and under particular development pressure,'*

### 3.1.4 Cumulative Change

Against this backdrop of large-scale development, there is continual pressure for small-scale development and change creating a cumulative impact on the special character and qualities of the AONB. The landscape character assessment review of the Kent Downs continually picked up small scale poorly designed or inappropriately located, housing development,

detracting influences from recreational land management, such as golf courses, equine facilities and visitor attractions, poor boundary treatments, badly designed highways, water and telecoms infrastructure, each individually small impact taken cumulatively is progressively diminishing the qualities and character of the AONB at a strategic scale. At the same time the cumulative impact of careful enhancements made through individual agri-environment schemes, conservation projects and carefully judged development can cumulatively conserve and enhance the landscape.

### **3.1.5 The London City Region**

The Kent Downs AONB Unit led a group of 12 National Landscapes operating in the London City Region to develop a 25 year vision. The vision recognises the opportunities and threats generated by the area's predicted population growth from 12 – 20m in the period 2017 to 2042. The overall aim is to collaborate to establish London and the South East as the World's Greenest City Region, where the Protected Landscapes are treasured and the population mobilised to enjoy and care for these natural environments.

A 7 point plan of goals was created; this management plan seeks to deliver against those goals at the local level.

## **3.2 Guiding themes**

Some of the sustainability issues to be addressed in the Kent Downs AONB are of a high-level, over-arching nature which should inform actions and decisions in the area generally. These are Natural beauty (outlined in section 1.2.1), Natural Capital and the provision of ecosystems services, climate change, ecological loss, a landscape led approach, net gain and green infrastructure provision.

### **Natural Capital and the provision of ecosystem services**

This plan is strongly informed by a natural capital approach; natural capital includes the air, water, soil and ecosystems that support all forms of life, the various sections of the plan contribute, where appropriate, to supporting the natural capital goals of the Government's 25 Year Environment Plan: clean air, clean and plentiful water, thriving plants and wildlife, reducing environmental risk, using resources more sustainably, managing environmental pressures, mitigating and adapting to climate change, minimising waste, enhancing biosecurity and, most particularly, enhancing beauty, heritage and engagement with the natural environment.

The UK government has repeatedly emphasised the importance of 'Natural Capital'. Natural Capital offers a range of goods and services that society benefits from, called ecosystem services. These services range from crop pollination soil fertility maintenance, waste sinks to climate and water regulation. Ultimately all human life depends on ecosystem services for clean air, clean water and food production. Services have been grouped into four categories:

- Supporting services, such as nutrient cycling, oxygen production and soil formation. These underpin the provision of the other 'service' categories.
- Provisioning services, such as food, fibre, fuel and water.
- Regulating services, such as climate regulation, water purification and flood protection.

- Cultural services, such as education, recreation, and aesthetic value including beauty.

The ecosystems services of the Kent Downs are identified in Natural England's National Character Assessment for the North Downs and Wealden Greensand and are therefore not repeated here. The Kent Nature Partnership is in the process of generating a high level Natural Capital Account for Kent including the Kent Downs AONB. The Management Plan, taken as a whole, seeks to secure, conserve and enhance the natural capital value of the Downs and therefore the ecosystems services that the landscapes of the Kent Downs offer society.

### **Climate Change in the Kent Downs**

Climate change will affect the ability of future generations to meet their needs. The UK Climate Projection (UKCP) Programme 2018 provided a much finer grain (2.2km<sup>2</sup>) projection of climate change to 2100. Headline changes include hotter, drier summers; particularly hot summers and hot summer days are expected to become more common. While summers are expected to be drier there will be an increase in the intensity of heavy summer rainfall events. Warmer, wetter winters are also predicted with greater rainfall intensity. Sea level rise is predicted to continue (already 17cm since the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century), with predictions ranging from around 30cm to 90cm by 2100 depending on the emissions scenario, these are significantly higher than the 2009 projections.

The UK Climate Impact Programme (UKCIP 2019) provides tools to establish adaptation approaches to the projections. At a Kent level the information and evidence provided by the UKCP and UKCIP has provided an evidence base for the Kent Climate Change Risk Assessment (KCCRIa). As this draft Management Plan is written the KCCRIa is also in draft; several key characteristics and qualities of the Kent Downs are predicted to change, these are picked up elsewhere in the plan; the more urgent issues identified include introduction of new pests and diseases, sea level rise and coastal erosion, wild fire, both drought and flooding affecting water bodies, water scarcity, soil erosion, air quality issues, changes in species distribution and abundance and changes in land management practice.

In recognition of the very serious threats climate change places on society the UK Parliament has declared an environment and climate emergency. Many of the Local Authority partners to the Kent Downs AONB Joint Advisory Committee have either declared or recognised an emergency or have plans to significantly reduce carbon use by 2030. There are a number of nature-based responses to climate change, some of which are mentioned in the Committee on Climate Change report on landuse (2020) these include wilding, tree and hedgerow establishment, permanent grassland creation and management and soil carbon enhancement for instance through regenerative farming, in addition new energy crops are promoted along with a shift in consumption from (and therefore production of) the most carbon intensive foods these approaches are reflected and promoted elsewhere in the plan.

### **A landscape led approach, local character and qualities**

Section 4 of the Plan demonstrates that landscape is made up of many component factors; it is complex and all the more wonderful for that. The primary purpose of an AONB is to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the landscape, this must take into account all of the factors identified in this plan and in relevant guidance. The landscape of the Kent Downs AONB extends beyond administrative boundaries and is a strategic matter which should be

specifically considered in Local Authority's duty to cooperate in plan making.

A landscape led approach to resource management and development, means starting with an understanding of the landscape. In a Nationally protected landscape how it is defined has to be the driving force for change; its elements, its context, special character and qualities, its distinctiveness, sense of place, patterns and sensitivities; how it is perceived by people and for what reasons it is valued by people; applying best practice and an iterative approach. Conversely, a landscape led approach does not mean simply imposing an intervention within an existing landscape pattern. Projects, plans and policies in or affecting the Kent Downs AONB should start with delivering the purposes of the designation, taking a landscape led approach is the only way to achieve this.

Local characteristics and qualities are the triumph of the distinctive and the diverse over the uniform. Each section in this management plan explains what that means in the Kent Downs. Many aspects of local characteristics and qualities are specific to the designated area, such as the landform and landscape of the scarp and dip slope, the woodland and biodiversity which thrive on the steep scarp slopes, the sights and scents, the time depth, access routes, patterns of settlement and farming practices which respond to them all.

Many more local characteristics are distinctive to individual places or small localities, from building materials to traditional events, fruit trees to dew ponds and dene holes. These provide variety around different parts of the AONB, in addition to the sense of place which comes from being within the designated area. These qualities, features and experiences should not be seen in isolation but as vital components of a landscape led approach to AONB management which reveres and therefore conserves and enhances what is locally special.

As part of the statutory review of this Management Plan a revision of the Kent Downs AONB Landscape Character Assessment has been taken forward; Landscape Character Assessment is covered in more detail in section 4. Landscape Character Assessment is an important tool for taking a landscape led approach and the Kent Downs AONB Landscape Character Assessment forms an integral component of this plan.

### **Intended Net Gain**

The intention of achieving a net gain initially for biodiversity and eventually for the environment as a whole, through development is a key principle in the government's 25 Year Environment Plan. It is expected that biodiversity net gain will become mandatory as part during the plan period. Net gain is also required by national planning policy in the National Planning Policy Framework para 170 and 174. Biodiversity Net Gain is covered in more detail in section XXX

Net Gain provides the potential to generate substantial new investment streams to achieve the sustainable development and biodiversity objectives of the AONB Management Plan. While this is important and welcome for the AONB whether a net gain can be achieved is yet to be proven.

### **Green infrastructure provision**

The Kent Downs AONB is recognised as a strategically important component of the Green Infrastructure of Kent and the south east of England. Green Infrastructure provision is

embodied in the Governments Planning Policy Statements (PPS) 1 and 12 and is an essential component of good planning for urban and rural areas. Green infrastructure is a key tool to create a resilient environment in the face of climate change supporting biodiversity and access opportunities.

### 3.3 Recurrent themes

Some topics arise so frequently when seeking to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the Kent Downs that they should be understood for their strategic importance to the landscape management of the AONB. These cross-cutting topics are usually one of a number relevant to any action or decision affecting the AONB. They are assembled here to highlight their overall importance and should be viewed as matters to address first whenever this management plan is relevant, before turning to specific topics in each of the following sections. This does not mean that each one will necessarily be significant to every decision or action, but that their possible applicability should always be considered.

#### Tranquillity and remoteness

The perception of being away from the noise, sights and smells of modern life is a much valued feature of many parts of the AONB where people can refresh body and soul. In the south east of England tranquillity is an increasingly rare resource. Research by the Campaign for the Protection of Rural England (CPRE) has shown that since the 1960s England has lost over 20% of its tranquil areas to urban sprawl, traffic and light pollution. The average size of our tranquil areas has reduced by 73%. As Kent's population increases, this resource will become more important and increasingly under threat. National tranquillity mapping carried out by the CPRE and more recently by Winchester University has confirmed that the Kent Downs offers important areas of relative tranquillity.

A 2003 CPRE survey documents the loss of dark night skies over the last 20 years through badly designed and sited night lighting. An accepted and often valued part of living in or visiting the countryside has always been dark, star-filled skies. These qualities are increasingly difficult to enjoy outside the AONB, while there are several parts of the Kent Downs which benefit from truly dark skies.

The importance of tranquillity has been noted in the National Planning Policy Framework which requires (paragraph 180 (b)) that planning policies and decisions should aim to 'identify and protect areas of tranquillity which have remained relatively undisturbed by noise and are prized for their recreational and amenity value for this reason'. One way that tranquillity within the Kent Downs is currently impacted is as a result of several main flight paths passing over the AONB; the impact of overflying airplanes on landscape tranquillity can be significant, especially where background noise is otherwise low.

The erosion of tranquillity is an issue that has been emphasised in the public engagement stage of this AONB Management Plan, it is an important issue for the public and Local Authority partners and a part of the special characteristics and qualities of the Kent Downs.

#### Setting

The setting of the Kent Downs AONB is broadly speaking the land outside the designated area which is visible from the AONB and from which the AONB can be seen, but may be wider when affected by intrusive features beyond that. The setting of the Kent Downs is not

formally defined or indicated on a map. The setting of the AONB landscape should be distinguished from the setting of listed buildings and other heritage assets (on which there is legislation and also policy in the National Planning Policy Framework and elsewhere).

Proposals which would affect the setting of the AONB are not subject to the same level of constraint as those which would affect the AONB itself. The weight to be afforded to setting issues will depend on the significance of the impact. Matters such as the size of proposals, their distance, incompatibility with their surroundings, movement, reflectivity and colour are likely to affect impact. Where the qualities of the AONB which were instrumental in reasons for its designation are affected, then the impacts should be given considerable weight in decisions. This particularly applies to views to and from the scarp of the North Downs.

The Kent Downs AONB Joint Advisory Committee has prepared a 'Setting Position Statement' which forms an integral component of this Plan.

### **Design and materials**

The special characteristics and qualities of the Kent Downs include the quality of the built heritage and settlement patterns. To conserve and enhance the natural and scenic beauty of the Kent Downs, the scale, extent and design of new development, re-development and restoration is critical. The NPPF places considerable focus on the importance of good design, stating that 'Permission should be refused for development of poor design that fails to take the opportunities available for improving the character and quality of an area and the way it functions' while the Planning Practice Guidance advises that all development in AONBs 'will need to be located and designed in a way that reflects their status as landscapes of the highest quality'.

To support the statutory Duty of Regard towards the conservation and enhancement of natural beauty placed on public bodies and statutory undertakers the Kent Downs AONB Partnership has produced a series of design guidance documents:

- The Kent Downs AONB Landscape Design Handbook (which is being reviewed as part of the Management Plan Review).
- The Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Rural Streets and Lanes: A Design Handbook
- The Kent Downs AONB Farmsteads Design Guidance
- Managing Land for Horses – a guide to good practice in the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.
- The Kent Downs AONB Guidance on the Selection and Use of Colour in Development
- A Buildings and Settlement Design Guide is planned.

The Kent Downs has a rich tradition of half-timbered and weather-boarded buildings. There is also a legacy of locally distinctive architecture in locally derived building materials such as Ragstone, flint and chalk. Soft red bricks and peg-tiles lend colour and here and there long-straw thatching can be seen. The predominance of local materials helps to establish the distinctive character of the built environment. The conservation and enhancement of these diverse buildings requires local sources of building materials, as well as skilled craftsmen who understand and respect the building traditions of the past and the architectural vernacular. High quality modern design can draw from the past. New development should use available, sustainably sourced traditional as well as appropriate new materials and a design approach which fits neatly with and complements the valued traditions, forms and



patterns of the past, while securing environmental efficiency and affordability.

### **Mitigation**

This plan promotes the use of the mitigation hierarchy so that first adverse impacts on any of the sustainable development goals should be avoided and, wherever possible, alternative options which reduce or eliminate such impacts should be pursued. Where adverse impacts are unavoidable, measures to mitigate the impact should be applied. Where adequate mitigation measures are not possible, compensatory measures be adopted.

This approach is supported in para. 32 of the National Planning Policy Framework; this management plan follows the priorities set out in the NPPF by focusing on the avoidance of damage to the characteristics and qualities of the Kent Downs AONB. However, mitigation is also important. Reducing the impacts of unavoidable change from infrastructure and growth and a growing population close to the AONB, changing land management, the needs of the AONB population and access and enjoyment, for instance, is an on-going challenge. Likewise, infrastructure and growth in the setting of the AONB can challenge the qualities of the AONB itself. Mitigation will also be needed where schemes which have benefits for the AONB also themselves have adverse effects, for example where:

- affordable housing to sustain local AONB communities is needed but must be constructed in ways which minimise impacts on their surroundings;
- infrastructure to reintroduce woodland management (with benefits including biodiversity, wood products, renewable energy, and employment) may also need road access, harm local amenities or erode tranquillity; and
- improved recreational access to enjoy the qualities of the AONB could erode those very qualities.
- Farm management and diversification activities

In addition, the AONB must play its part in appropriately mitigating the impacts of climate change, which demands responses by all sectors of local life. This should be achieved in a way which supports rather than harms the character and qualities of the AONB.

Given the anticipated pace and scope of growth it is increasingly likely that impacts on the AONB may not be mitigated satisfactorily. In these circumstances the AONB Partnership will seek substantive compensatory payments to enable enhancement of the landscape elsewhere.

## **3.4 Sustainable development – main issues, opportunities and threats**

- a. The predicted scale and pace of growth in Kent and the London City Region is unprecedented; to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the AONB and to create benefit for new communities significant new efforts and investment in the enhancing the green infrastructure, landscape, its natural capital and ecosystems services will be required.
- b. There is a rapidly changing context in which the management, conservation and enhancement of the Kent Downs AONB Landscape is conducted.

- c. Cumulative loss of landscape features, tranquillity and character and suburbanisation has been experienced in the AONB due to incremental poorly located, designed and badly screened development, leisure uses, intensive agricultural and forestry practices, pressure from traffic and significant levels of urban growth and development.
- d. The expected impact of climate change is clear being felt and will be substantial, mitigation and adaptation responses should be implemented that are urgent, evidence based and enhance landscape character, qualities and resilience.
- e. There is a need to work at a community level to support project-based sustainable development initiatives and exemplars in the AONB and to increase the scale, integration and impact of activity.
- f. Despite a significant loss and continuing pressure, the Kent Downs still provides important relatively tranquil areas; the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) places a requirement on Local Planning Authorities to identify and protect tranquil areas.
- g. Dark night skies are a feature of the Kent Downs and are a valued part of the experience of tranquil rural areas.
- h. The quality of the setting of the AONB particularly in the experience of views is recognised as important in the original designation and in the enjoyment of the landscape today.
- i. The choice of design and materials in restoration, new development and landscape management are recognised as critical when seeking to conserve and enhance the landscape of the Kent Downs AONB.
- j. By applying the Sustainable Development Goals to the management principles of the Kent Downs AONB the Partnership can bring forward environmental, social and economic benefits for existing and new communities.
- k. Biodiversity net gain and eventually environmental net gain provide major opportunities to take forward the conservation and enhancement of the landscapes of the Kent Downs AONB

### 3.5 Sustainable development – aims

A landscape in which:

1. AONB conservation and enhancement, sustainable development goals and the vision aims and principles of the AONB Management Plan are the starting point of net gain and green infrastructure investments, plans, projects and policies affecting the Kent Downs.
2. The character and distinctiveness of villages, farmsteads and individual buildings are conserved and enhanced by combining the best traditions of the past with the best

technologies of the present to create environmentally sustainable and locally enhancing development.

3. A positive, proactive and urgent approach is taken to the implications of climate change and intelligent and effective mitigation and adaptation responses are chosen which support landscape character and ecosystem services.
4. All development achieves landscape enhancement; conservation and mitigation is delivered in every case.
5. A tranquil environment is protected, conserved and enhanced.
6. The setting and views in and out of the AONB are conserved and enhanced.
7. The impact of infrastructure on the qualities of the AONB is significantly reduced.
8. Cumulative small-scale developments and change contribute to the conservation and enhancement of the AONB rather than detracting from it.

### 3.6 Sustainable development – principles

- SD1 Ensure that projects, proposals, plans and net gain investments affecting the Kent Downs AONB take a landscape led approach, are framed by the Sustainable Development Goals appropriate to the Kent Downs, cross cutting and recurrent themes, the vision, aims and principles of the AONB Management Plan.
- SD2 The local character, qualities, distinctiveness and natural resources of the Kent Downs AONB will be conserved and enhanced in the design, scale, siting, landscaping and materials of new development, redevelopment and infrastructure and will be pursued through the application of appropriate design guidance and position statements which are adopted as components of the AONB Management Plan.
- SD3 Ensure that development and changes to land use and land management cumulatively conserve and enhance the character and qualities of the Kent Downs AONB rather than detracting from it.
- SD4 A strategic, evidence led approach to both the adaptation to and mitigation of the impacts of climate change on the natural beauty and historic character of the Kent Downs, and its human consequences, will be pursued with a target that AONB landscape management is carbon neutral by 2030 and the AONB Unit is carbon neutral by 2025. *(targets to be confirmed during consultation on draft plan)*
- SD5 Renewable and sustainable energy initiatives and energy efficiency measures will be pursued where they help to conserve and enhance the natural beauty and landscape character of the AONB and bring environmental, social and economic benefits to local people and ensure proposals conform with the Kent Downs AONB Renewable Energy Position Statement.

- SD6 Activities to increase understanding of the importance and the extent of tranquillity, remoteness and dark night skies within the Kent Downs will be pursued.
- SD7 New projects, proposals and programmes shall conserve and enhance tranquillity and dark night skies.
- SD8 Ensure proposals, projects and programmes do not negatively impact on the distinctive landform, landscape character, special characteristics and qualities, the setting and views to and from the AONB.
- SD9 The particular historic and locally distinctive character of rural settlements and buildings of the Kent Downs AONB will be maintained and strengthened. The use of sustainably sourced locally-derived materials for restoration and conversion work will be encouraged. New developments will be expected to apply appropriate design guidance and to be complementary to local character in form, siting, scale, contribution to settlement pattern and choice of materials.
- SD10 Positive measures to mitigate the negative impact of existing infrastructure and growth on the natural beauty and amenity of the AONB will be pursued.
- SD11 Major development should avoid the Kent Downs AONB in line with NPPF guidance. Where it is decided that other development will take place that will have a negative impact on the landscape character, characteristics and qualities of the Kent Downs AONB or its setting, mitigation and or compensatory measures appropriate to the national importance of the Kent Downs landscape will be identified, pursued, implemented and maintained. The removal or mitigation of identified landscape detractors will be pursued.
- SD 12 Transport and infrastructure schemes and growth areas are expected to avoid the Kent Downs AONB. Unavoidable developments will be expected to fit unobtrusively into the landscape, respect landscape character, be mitigated by sympathetic landscape, buffering and design measures and provide environmental compensation through benefits to natural beauty elsewhere in the AONB.
- SD13 A strategic, landscape led approach to green infrastructure and net gain investments is taken to ensure the conservation and enhancement of the special characteristics and qualities of the Kent Downs AONB.

## 4. Landform and landscape character

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### Summary record of changes

**This short note records the main changes made to the current AONB Management Plan when preparing this draft.**

The vision has been altered to a shorter time period and is in the wider context outlined in sections 2 and 3 of the plan.

The overview and narrative covering Landscape Character Assessment has been updated to reference the wholesale review and findings of the AONB Management Plan Landscape Character Area (LCA); the LCA has been included as forming an integral part of the Management Plan (as was advised by the Joint Advisory Committee), albeit in a separate document; principle LLC5 reflects this

The descriptions of key character types have been updated to reflect the more up-to-date approach of the revised LCA.

The issues, opportunities and threats have been updated to reflect and be consistent with the key findings of the LCA review.

The potentially large investments in landscape management signalled as part of New Environmental Land Management Systems following EU Exit, intended net gain, nature recovery and natural capital plans are referred to and the aims and principles have been updated to seek that these support, potentially augment and do not conflict with valued landscape character and strengthen resilience.

'Policies' have been replaced by 'Principles' in accordance with the advice of the Kent Downs AONB Joint Advisory Committee. The previous policies and policy approach have been clarified, simplified and updated to respond to the approach agreed by the JAC and the

new issues opportunities and threats and changing context.

A new, positive approach is taken to landscape change, seeking to conserve and enhance the AONB and improve its ability to mitigate climate change, enhance nature and provide other ecosystems services and health and well-being.

## 4.1 Our vision

In 2030... the rich diversity of landscape character and qualities distinctive to the Kent Downs are protected, enhanced and managed to the highest standards in a co-ordinated and continual programme. The special characteristics and qualities of the Kent Downs AONB are widely recognised, valued and strengthened and landscape character informs land and resource management, nature recovery plans, intended net gain and natural capital investments, responses to climate change and development decisions.

## 4.2 Overview

The fundamental and special characteristics that distinguish the natural beauty of the Kent Downs landscape were identified when the Kent Downs AONB was designated in 1968. These were reconfirmed in the 1995 Kent Downs AONB Landscape Assessment and its reviews and again in the views expressed in the public and stakeholder consultation for the original AONB Management Plan and its subsequent reviews.

## 4.3 Landscape Character Types and Areas within the Kent Downs AONB

### Landscape character

Landscape character is described as a distinct, recognisable and consistent pattern of elements in the landscape that makes one landscape different from another and can provide a helpful description and sense of place to our surroundings. A landscape led, Landscape Character supported approach, further supported by historic landscape character assessment, can assist in informing landscape management decisions and its use is supported by Planning Practice Guidance for the Natural Environment.

The founding Kent Downs AONB Landscape Assessment was prepared by the Countryside Commission (1995 CCP 479); it identified 13 Landscape Character Areas in the AONB. Many of these have been divided into local character areas which detail specific local characteristics and identify some of the pressures facing them. Drawing from these descriptions, the 2004 Landscape Assessment of Kent described Landscape Character Area condition and sensitivity assessments. At a local level landscape character assessments have been prepared as part of the Local Plan Process for several Kent Downs Local Authorities.

As part of this review of the Management Plan a full review of the **Landscape Character Areas** (LCAs) these are described in fully in Annex 1 of this plan. The review included defining Landscape Character Types and reviewing the established Landscape Character Area descriptions and some boundaries. The full, reviewed landscape character areas have been integrated into this plan and are being consulted upon at the same time.

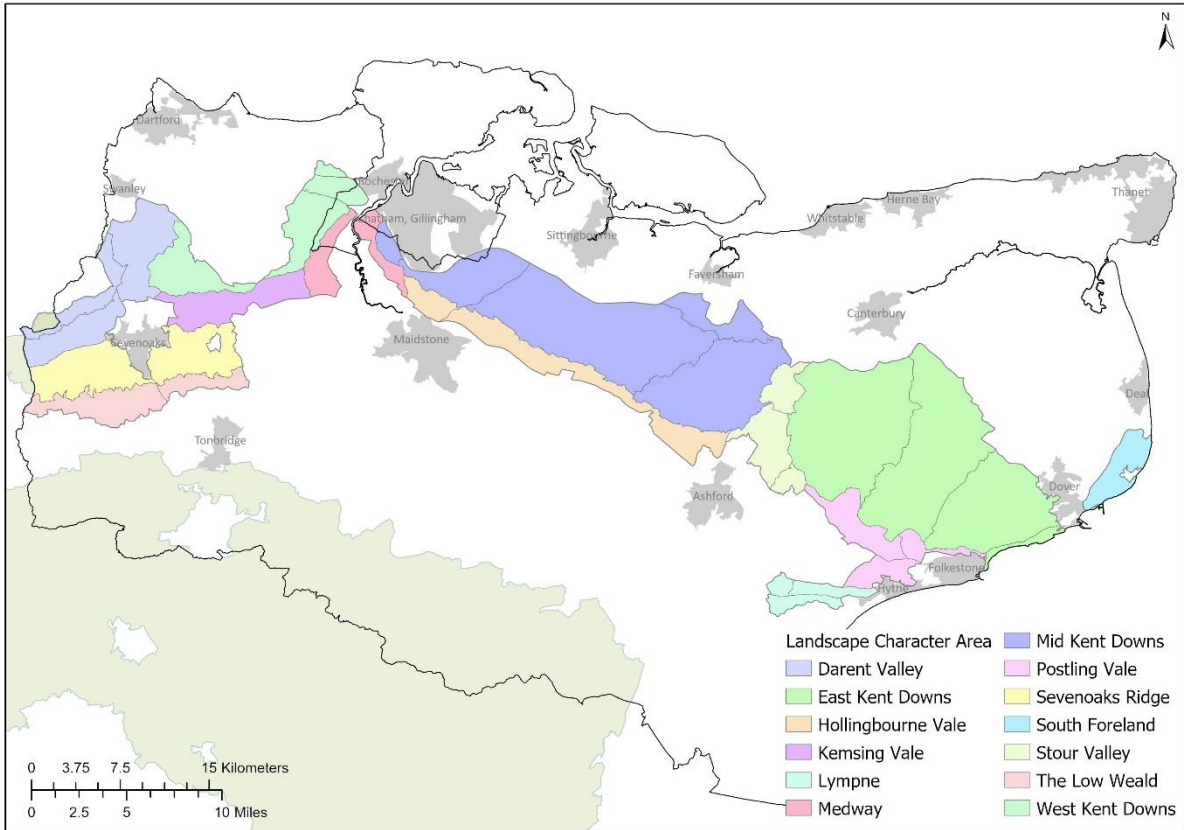


Figure 4.1 Kent Downs AONB landscape character areas

**Landscape Character Types (LCTs)** are defined as distinct types of landscape that are relatively homogenous in character. They are generic in nature in that they may occur in different areas but wherever they occur, they share broadly similar combinations of geology, topography, drainage patterns, vegetation, historical land use and settlement pattern.

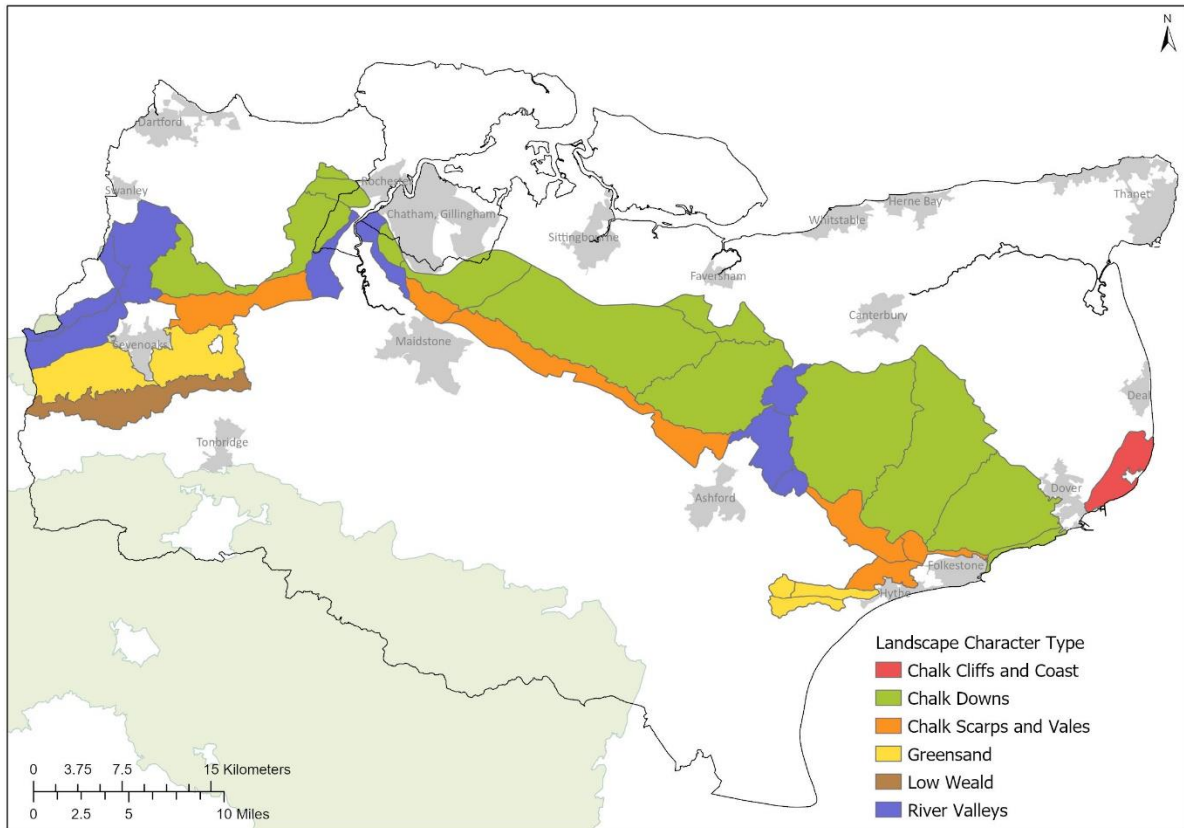


Figure 4.2 Kent Downs AONB landscape character types

There are six key LCTs within the Kent Downs AONB, reflecting the area’s underlying geology and its topography; these are Chalk Scarp and Vales, Chalk Cliffs and Coast, Chalk Downs, Greensand, Low Weald and River Valleys.

**The Chalk Scarp and Vales**

The long arc of the North Downs chalk ridge is the most dominant element of the AONB, consisting of the steep, south-facing scarp slope rising above the Gault clay vale below. Spectacular views are offered along the chalk escarpment across the Vale of Holmesdale; the scarp along with the dramatic views it affords was a key target for the original designation of the Kent Downs AONB.

**The Chalk Cliffs and Coast**

The Chalk scarp ends dramatically at the English Channel forming the White Cliffs, one of the most evocative and best known British landmarks. The scale of the Kent Downs landscape is at its greatest here. The high vertical cliffs and the white chalk contrast starkly with the foreshore and constantly changing sea below with the bustle of ferries and shipping; overall the coast provides an awe-inspiring panorama. The expansiveness and drama is increased further by enticing glimpses of the French coast on the horizon.

**The Greensand**

The undulating Greensand Ridge rises to one of the highest points in southeast England at 250 metres at Toy’s Hill. The views from along the length of the Greensand Ridge are some



of the best in southern England, and on a clear day, the High Weald and the South Downs beyond can be seen. In the east Kent Downs, the Lympne escarpment of calcareous Sandstone and Ragstone provides a spur of higher ground affording dramatic views across the near-level Romney Marsh and Hythe Bay.

### **The river valleys**

Further diversity is provided at the points where the three main rivers, the Darent, Medway and the Great Stour cut through the chalk. Each river flows in a northerly direction and they form broad, steep-sided valleys with open vistas along the river corridors. The River Medway does not lie in the AONB itself, although parts of its tidal flood plain are within the boundary.

### **Chalk Downs**

Behind the scarp, open plateau and dry valleys offer a beautiful, greatly valued and intimate feature of much of the Kent Downs landscape and they are often criss-crossed by a maze of tiny, sunken one track lanes. The downland valleys often have a narrow strip of rough grassland, scrub or woodland along their steepest slopes, locally known as shaves, which are important for wildlife. The larger dry valleys such as Elham and Alkham have the sporadic winterbournes such as the Nailbourne in Elham, flowing occasionally during the very wettest winters. The plateaux areas often dominated by stiff clay with flint soils overlying the solid chalk, the soils were historically difficult to cultivate and were used extensively for sheep grazing. Much of the ancient woodland remains framing the plateaux and enclosing the dry valleys.

### **National Character Areas**

Natural England has described National Character Areas (NCAs) which divide England into 159 distinct natural areas. Each is defined by a unique combination of landscape, biodiversity, geodiversity and cultural and economic activity. Their boundaries follow natural lines in the landscape rather than administrative boundaries, making them a good decision making framework for the natural environment. The National Character Areas Profiles which cover the Kent Downs AONB include the North Downs (119), Wealden Greensand (120) and Romney Marshes (123).

### **Landscape condition and change**

Landscape condition is strongly influenced by external factors which can contribute to or detract from landscape character. The assessment of condition evaluates the landscape pattern and the presence of incongruous features (detractors). It also evaluates how well the landscape functions as a habitat for wildlife and the condition of cultural or 'man-made' elements such as enclosures, built elements and roads. Urban fringe areas are often under pressure and are therefore often described as being in poor condition whilst other more remote areas may still have the same basic features but be described as in a better condition. It is therefore practical to assume that condition may vary throughout a character area and any conclusions should be regarded as a summary of the overall situation.

Landscapes are not static; they change and evolve over time. In a Protected landscape setting the purpose of management planning is to drive positive change that '*conserves and enhances*' the character and qualities that are valued and for which the landscape was designated. It is remarkable and re-assuring how consistently the public attitude of what is most valued in the Kent Downs reflects the original targets for designation.

More than for any previous revision of the Kent Downs AONB Management Plan the context is changing rapidly; there are new opportunities and threats from leaving the EU and a

shared urgency to respond to climate change. In this context this Management Plan seeks to be forward looking and to promote positive landscape change that supports the purposes of the designation, reflects what is valued by the public and takes a positive approach to the climate and ecological emergencies, this means that the plan will promote more tree planting than has been suggested in the past, be more active on low carbon land management and encourage new opportunities for access for health and well being.

#### **4.4 Landform and landscape character - main issues, opportunities and threats**

While the Landscape Character Area review found an overall positive picture driven by the interventions of the AONB partnership, partner organisations, farmers and land managers and many others there remains concern and further opportunity, these are picked up in detail in the revised Landscape Character Assessment of the Kent Downs AONB 2020.

- a. Loss of and damage to the quality and character of the AONB through the cumulative effect of inappropriate, poorly designed general development and land use change.
- b. Degradation of the setting and urban fringe impacts in certain Kent Downs landscape character areas through development, infrastructure, urbanisation and recreational pressure.
- c. The impact of Ash Dieback disease with the consequent loss of woodland, roadside and in-field ash trees is already impacting significantly on landscape character, and will continue to do so.
- d. The erosion of natural beauty and special character through illegal activities particularly fly tipping, abandoned cars and illegal off-road vehicles and other antisocial behaviours.
- e. The opportunity to promote landscape character conservation and enhancement through new funding mechanisms (ELMs, Net Gain etc.) and new partnerships specifically focusing on proposed positive management actions as well as addressing and seeking to remove or mitigate identified detractors.
- f. General lack of awareness of the importance and value of the Kent Downs landscape, its characteristic features and the social and economic benefits it brings.
- g. A landscape led, supported by a landscape character approach not used sufficiently or appropriately in land-use, land management and development management decisions, Landscape and Visual Impact Assessments and design; landscape character assessments are not always consistent or up to date.
- h. Major potential threats and opportunities lie in responses to climate change, the introduction of intended net gain policies and natural capital/ ecosystems services payments. These could drive outcomes which are either contrary or supportive of the valued landscape characteristics and qualities of the Kent Downs.

## 4.5 Landform and landscape character - aims

A landscape in which:

1. The diversity of landscape character across the Kent Downs is properly described and understood, maintained, conserved and enhanced, and the strong sense of place of individual localities is recognised, reinforced and celebrated.
2. A landscape led approach supported by landscape character is used to inform AONB management decisions and areas of opportunity and threat are identified and become the focus for action.
3. The highest standards of landscape conservation, restoration and enhancement are encouraged and integrated into all land uses in the Kent Downs and its setting.
4. There is better understanding of which landscape features local people and visitors value and all people are encouraged to play a part in retaining and enhancing these features.
5. New interventions in the landscape developed to provide, public good, intended net gain, natural capital enhancement, nature recovery and climate mitigation support the valued characteristics of the Kent Downs, seeking to manage, enhance, change positively so as to amplify and augment landscape character and qualities and make it more resilient and more valued for the future.

## 4.4 Landform and landscape character - principles

- LLC1 The protection, conservation and enhancement of special characteristics and qualities, natural beauty and landscape character of the Kent Downs AONB will be supported and pursued.
- LLC2 The promotion, management, restoration and appropriate creation of prominent views and viewpoints will be supported.
- LLC3 The provision of co-ordinated and high quality landscape conservation guidance will be pursued, focusing on the special characteristics and qualities, natural beauty and the landscape character of the AONB.
- LLC4 The detection, prevention, and prosecution of illegal and overtly damaging activities which detract from landscape character will be pursued.
- LLC5 The revised Kent Downs AONB Landscape Character Assessment forms an integral, interconnected, component part of the AONB Management Plan.
- LLC6 The improved awareness and appreciation of all the special qualities of the AONB landscape and its conservation to people who influence the future of, live, work in or visit the AONB will be pursued.
- LLC7 The development of strategic, long-term, landscape action and enhancement plans for Landscape Character Areas of the AONB which present the greatest threats or opportunities or where natural capital, intended net gain, nature recovery, ELM or

climate mitigation investments are proposed, will be pursued.

# 5. Biodiversity

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## Summary record of changes

**This short note records the main changes made to the current AONB Management Plan when preparing this draft.**

The vision has been altered to a shorter time period and is in the wider context outlined in sections 2 and 3. The vision is now wider including the concept of a nature recovery network, providing connections beyond the AONB. The vision reflects the National Association of AONBs Colchester declaration.

The overview has been changed to be more Kent downs specific and refers to the significant biodiversity decline experienced across Britain including reference to the 2019 State of Nature Report.

The overview also refers to the substantively changing context of policy and legislation and removes sections on the Environment White Paper and Biodiversity 2020

Reference to conserving nature in the context of being an IUCN Cat V Protected Landscape has been inserted.

The emerging 'Colchester Declaration' is referenced

Reference to the Lawton principles has been clarified and strengthened

The Kent Biodiversity Strategy (KBS) (DRAFT) is referenced and the expectations are that the Management Plan and KBS align.

'Wilding' is referenced

The risks identified to Local Wildlife Sites by the Kent Nature Partnership have been referenced

The Special Characteristics have been updated and small amounts of additional detail added for instance greater reference made to neutral grassland habitats

The issues opportunities and threats have been updated to reflect biodiversity losses, wilding, climate change issues, the uncertain environment for livestock and the uncertain regulatory and payment frameworks

'Policies' have been replaced by 'Principles' in accordance with the advice of the Kent Downs AONB Joint Advisory Committee. The previous policies and policy approach have been clarified, simplified and updated to respond to the approach agreed by the JAC and the new issues opportunities and threats and changing context.

BD1 has been split and shortened to avoid repetition with BD6

BD7 has been added to recognise the need to be involved in and respond to the rapidly changing national context for biodiversity conservation.

BD8 has been added to recognise the importance of connecting people with nature and of ensuring sensitive sites and species are not harmed by over visiting.

## Our vision

By 2030... the distinctive wildlife habitats of the Kent Downs are understood better, enjoyed and celebrated and are in favourable, resilient condition with individual characteristic species flourishing. There is a far-sighted nature recovery plan being implemented for the Kent Downs, which recognises and responds to the substantial changes that will be experienced and is linked to a wider nature recovery network. An approach to intended biodiversity net gain is understood and agreed and is achieving advances in biodiversity and habitats across the Kent Downs. There has been an increase in the extent and quality of key characteristic habitats and abundance of species of the Downs. People, policy and funding regimes recognise, value and support the importance of nature in the Kent Downs.

### 5.1 Overview

#### 5.1.1 Nature in the Landscapes of the Kent Downs

The unique landscapes and history of the Kent Downs created and contain a rich and distinctive biodiversity which contributes greatly to the natural beauty of this exceptional

place, adding much of the detail which makes the Kent Downs significant, characteristic and special.

The natural vegetation of the Kent Downs is believed to have been broadleaved woodland. This would have been varied in structure and composition, with open glades and patches of grassland and heath created by fallen trees and grazing animals, and chalk grassland refugia found on the exposed cliff tops. The 'wildwood' would have been a dynamic system with varied habitats but the woodland element has been cleared and managed over the last 6,000 years. Woodland clearance gave way to the expansion grasslands, scrub and arable, however heavy, flint laden soils have meant that clearance has been less than in many parts of Britain. The Kent Downs is a heavily wooded landscape and in many places a centuries-old landscape remains in place, nonetheless farming and cultivation has been a significant influence on the biodiversity of the AONB.

### **5.1.2 A rapidly changing context**

While the natural heritage of the Kent Downs is characteristic and valued, the strategic and policy context for biodiversity conservation and enhancement has changed substantively, partly due to multiple failures to prevent biodiversity loss at a local, national and international level. At the same time the potential impacts and risks of climate change are now better researched and understood and the approach of the plan needs to be far sighted in its response.

At the time of writing, environmental policy, and the wider political context in which it is being developed, is dynamic: Many of the Local Authority partners to the Kent Downs AONB have declared or recognise a Climate and in some cases Ecological Emergency; The Government's 25 Year Environment Plan has been published and gives us some idea of the ambition and direction of travel and stated clear intent for AONBs and National Parks; The Government's Review of Designated Landscapes has been clear that there is much more for National Landscapes to do on nature recovery and what we have now is 'not good enough'; the mechanisms by which the ambitions of the 25 year plan and the Glover review will be delivered are still in development. The 2019 State of Nature Report shows that, at a national level, the 'UK's wildlife loss continues unabated' with 41% of species in decline since 1970, abundance of wildlife in decline and 15% under threat from extinction.

As this draft plan is written there is considerable uncertainty as a result of the decision to leave the EU. Particular areas of policy change and development that will affect the delivery of the Biodiversity vision of this Management Plan include: The Environment Bill; The Agriculture Bill; the development of Environmental Land Management Systems; Biodiversity and Environment Net Gain discussions; The Nature Recovery Network and Local Natural Capital Plans.

It is possible that during the consultation period of this draft plan there will be more clarity about the context and so the Plan's ambitions and in particular the delivery mechanisms for nature, will need to be able to respond and adapt to each of these accordingly as more detail, policy and legislation is revealed, that being said the vision and nature's essential place in the conservation and enhancement of Natural Beauty is unchanged by the legislative and policy context.

### **5.1.3 IUCN Category V Protected Landscape Status and nature conservation.**

The Kent Downs AONB is recognised as an IUCN Category V Protected Landscape. The primary objective of Category V status is, 'To protect and sustain important

landscapes/seascapes and the associated nature conservation and other values created by interactions with humans through traditional management practices.’ The conservation of nature is a primary objective of this Plan and traditional management practices are vital to the conservation of both the species and habitats of the Kent Downs, be it in woodlands, farmed landscapes, heath or down, the integrity of the interaction between people and nature over time has produced the distinctive character and is an essential component of its future conservation and enhancement.

#### **5.1.4 The Colchester Declaration**

At its national conference in July 2019, the National Association for Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty jointly agreed ‘[The Colchester Declaration](#)’.

[https://landscapesforlife.org.uk/application/files/7815/6326/2583/The\\_Colchester\\_Declaration.pdf](https://landscapesforlife.org.uk/application/files/7815/6326/2583/The_Colchester_Declaration.pdf)

The Declaration recognises the global concern for the future of the natural world and has established a series of pledges that the AONBs will take forward if Government provides the powers and resources to do so. As this draft is written such resources have not yet been made available but this draft management plan includes key principles established in the Declaration.

#### **5.1.5 A Local Nature Partnership for Kent**

The Natural Environment White Paper created the opportunity to develop Local Nature Partnerships to further objectives for the natural environment. The Kent Nature Partnership has a vision for the Garden of England to have a healthy natural environment that is rich in wildlife, is enjoyed and valued by all and underpins our long-term economic, social and personal wellbeing. The Kent Downs AONB partnership is represented on the Board of the Kent Nature Partnership and this plan is an important part of delivering that wider vision.

#### **5.1.6 Kent Biodiversity Strategy**

At the time of writing the Kent Nature Partnership’s Biodiversity Strategy for Kent is in preparation however it is clear that most species and habitats important in the Kent Downs AONB have been recognised a significant part of the Kent Resource. Our intention is that this Management Plan and the Kent Biodiversity Strategy align, within the wider context of the Colchester Declaration and emerging national legislation. The final version of this plan will include, in its action plan, targets for nature recovery within the AONB landscape and in the context of the expected Environment Act, Agriculture Act, Landscapes Review, Colchester Declaration and Kent Biodiversity Strategy as adopted.

#### **5.1.7 The Lawton Principles**

The Lawton Report ‘Making Space for Nature’ draws from a wide range of evidence to review England’s wildlife and ecological network. The report reiterates that the natural world is fundamental to our wellbeing, health and economy and that priorities for action at a landscape scale should be:

- 1st Manage existing sites better
- 2nd Make existing sites larger
- 3rd Create new sites
- 4th Enhance connectivity
- 5th Create new corridors



While much emphasis is now being placed on new and larger areas for nature, landscape scale approaches to enhancing biodiversity, the Lawton principles promote the better management of existing sites first in most cases. In addition the contribution of many small-scale individual enhancements can help support this more overarching approach, indeed it is a critical component.

### **5.1.8 Wilding**

The 'wilding' approach calls for the establishment of large expanses of land set aside for nature, connected by corridors which allow the movement of species between the larger areas. The approach recommends wilding on sites of least risk first (i.e. where there is limited other value) This builds on the central idea that natural processes should be allowed to take their course, including natural succession on open habitat, fluctuations in population abundance and presence of species without deliberate intervention. This is in contrast to current conservation practice which often involves the close management of habitats to maintain them at a particular successional stage (such as grassland or heathland) in order to support a distinct array and abundance of species in 'favourable status'. Intervention under a rewilding approach is limited to restoring missing species and missing parts of the system which allow natural processes to occur. (Definition taken from Woodland Trust position statement). The charity Rewilding Britain emphasises the 'need to encourage a balance between people and the rest of nature where each can thrive'.

The most prominent example of wilding in southern lowland Britain is at the Knepp Estate in Sussex. The landscape generated by wilding evolves and differs from that which is described in the designation of the Kent Downs AONB and understanding of its biodiversity value is emerging and will change over time. Knepp represents wilding at a large scale, the concept of wilding can however be adopted at many different scales across urban and rural landscapes. It is expected that wilding will be an important part of a suite of tools deployed in nature recovery, including in lowland Britain and in Designated Landscapes such as the Kent Downs AONB.

## **5.2 Biodiversity - special characteristics and qualities**

### **5.2.1 The wildlife of the Kent Downs**

The wildlife of the Kent Downs is particularly rich and distinctive, it is also varied, reflecting changes in the local climate, geology, soils and topography and its close proximity to the continent. In Britain, there are several very rare and charismatic species largely or wholly confined to the Kent Downs. This is true of several beautiful rarities, such as the lady, monkey and late spider orchids, black veined and straw belle moths as well as rare arable field wild flowers. Other rare and threatened species occur in good numbers; for example the dormouse, the edible or Roman snail, the adder and rare arable field wild flowers along with several butterflies associated with downland. Many of these are recognised in Section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act as species of principle importance in England. Semi-natural habitats of particular importance in the Kent Downs are also recognised in the UK list of priority habitats and in the Kent Biodiversity Strategy and the Kent Downs is recognised as containing nationally 'Important Plant Areas' by Plantlife.

#### ***Grassland***

Unimproved chalk downland is for many the essence of natural beauty in the Kent Downs landscape with its flower-rich, scented springy turf and profusion of insect life. Orchids and butterflies of chalk downland are symbolic of this habitat and the AONB supports populations of some of the country's rarest chalk species. Chalk grassland is an internationally important

habitat, with over half the world's resource found in England. Although this habitat is one of the most valued features of the Kent, the remaining extent of unimproved chalk grassland is less than 2% of the AONB land area (about 1500 ha or 80% of the Kent and 6% of the UK resource). For many rare species in the Kent Downs it is the warm, sunny south-facing chalk slopes which are important.

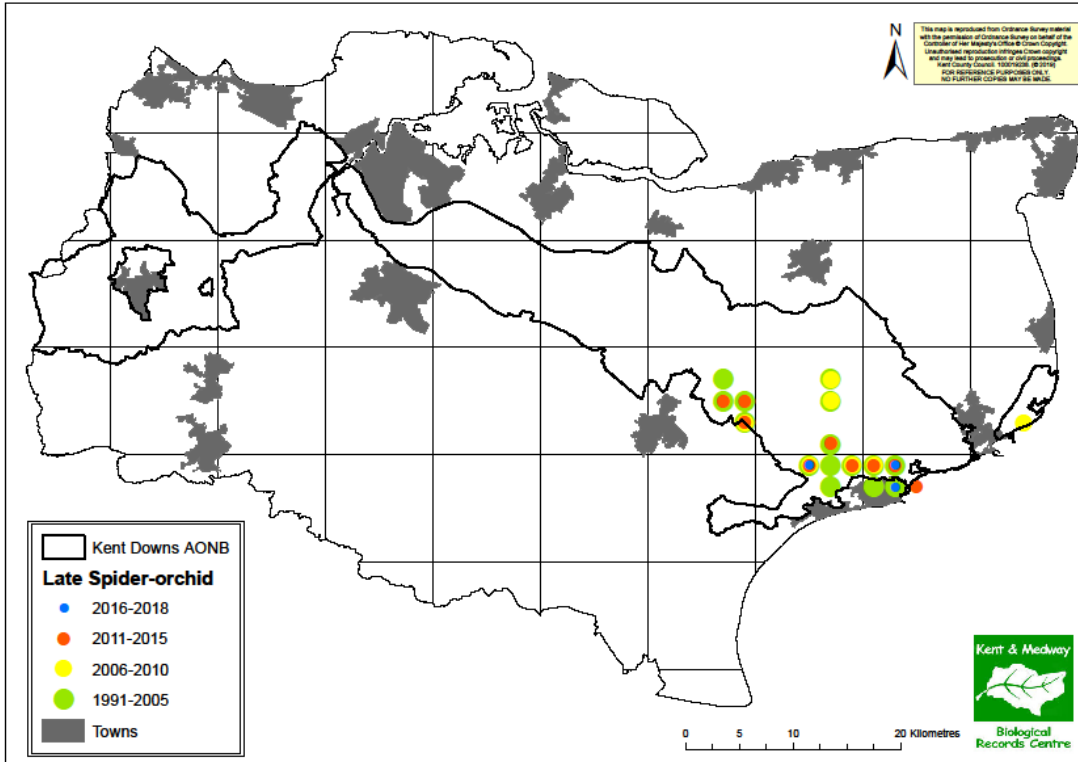


Figure 5.1 White Helleborine distribution in the Kent Downs AONB

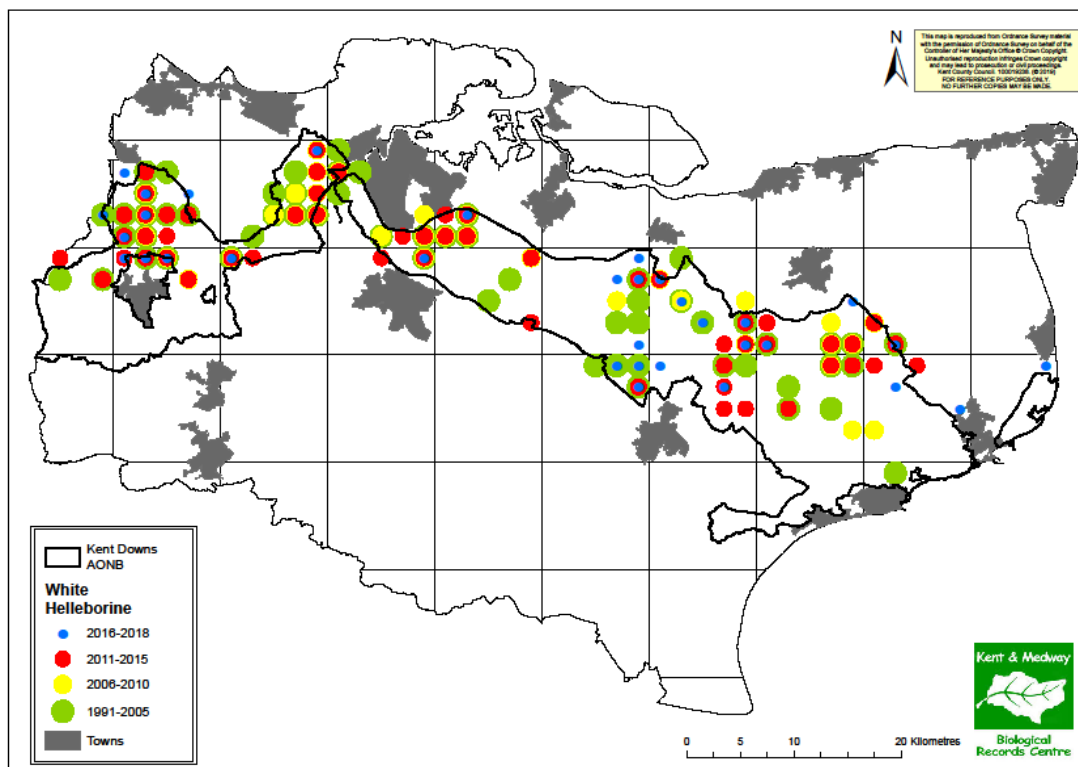


Figure 5.2 White Helleborine distribution in the Kent Downs AONB

The Kent Downs is home to other grassland habitats often overlooked and less designated; neutral grassland can be found in valley bottoms and often forms part of Local Wildlife Sites, road verges and church yards, providing flower rich areas supporting a variety of pollinators, reptiles, amphibians and insects.

#### ***Ancient woodland, chalk cliffs, foreshore and seabed platform***

These are important, special and characteristic habitats of the Kent Downs AONB which are covered in detail in separate sections of the plan.

#### ***Chalk streams and wetlands***

Chalk streams, river corridors, flood plains and spring lines, together with ponds, dew ponds and small wetland areas are the principle wetland types in the Kent Downs. Chalk streams and ponds are frequently seasonal in nature and often host characteristic species. Chalk streams are unique with only around 200 in the world, most of which are found in the southern half of England. In the Kent Downs the Darent, Nailbourne, Stour and Dour are defined as chalk streams.

#### ***Acid grassland and heaths***

Acid grassland and heaths on the greensand and clay plateau typically survive in parkland, common land and Chart Woods. Acid grassland can occur on clay caps near downland adding an interesting diversity to the landscape.

#### ***Species-rich hedgerows and road verges***

Species-rich hedgerows, headlands, ditches and road verges and the sunken lanes of the Downs are a special, diverse and distinctive feature. Often the road verges and hedges are rich in plant and animal diversity, providing important habitats and connectivity. Hedgerow

trees are particularly striking in the landscape and, in combination with the hedge, provide important ecological connectivity.

**Farmland habitats**

Farmland habitats and species adapted to traditional mixed farming practices; in particular the Kent Downs supports a nationally important site for arable weed communities – supporting some of the UK’s most threatened native plant species and farmland birds.

**Wood pasture and parkland**

There is a strong legacy of parkland and wood pasture in the AONB where there are often large, open-grown and veteran trees which are special features in their own right. Trees outside woodlands are particularly threatened and important part of the beauty and ecology of the landscape of the Downs.

**Traditional orchards**

The Kent Downs landscape is strongly associated with fruit growing, with orchards making a significant contribution to the local distinctiveness of parts of the Downs. The terms ‘traditional’ or ‘old’ orchard, usually refer to orchards of apples, pears, plums and, in the Downs, cherries with large, widely spaced fruit trees, traditionally with grazed grassland below; traditional Kentish Cobnut platts are important and distinctive, particularly in the western portion of the AONB.

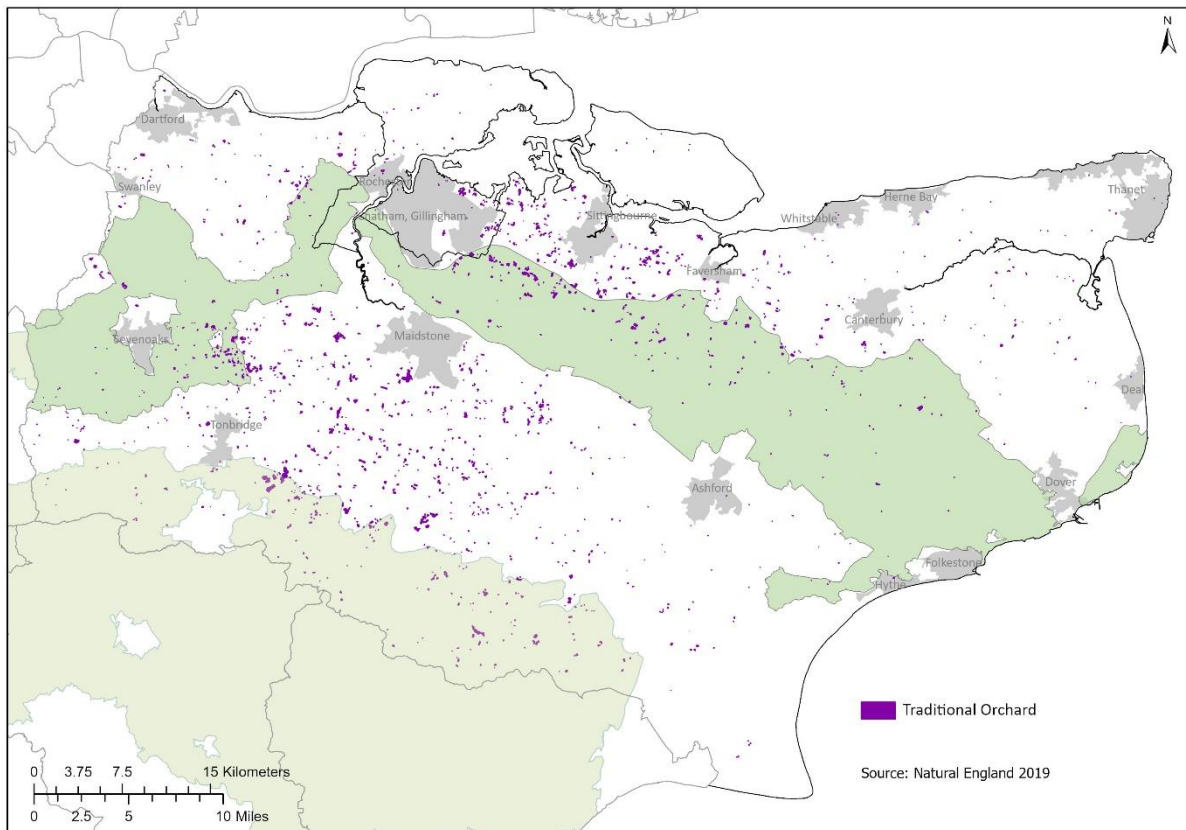


Figure 5.3 Traditional Orchards in Kent

### 5.2.2. Designated nature conservation sites

The most important nature conservation sites in the Kent Downs are legally protected and managed primarily for their biodiversity value. There are 38 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) in the Kent Downs AONB covering some 4420 Ha, of these the following sites are of international importance and are currently protected under the European Union's Habitats Directive as Special Areas of Conservation (SAC):

- Folkestone to Etchinghill Escarpment
- Wye and Crundale Downs, National Nature Reserve
- Queendown Warren, Local Nature Reserve
- Lydden and Temple Ewell, National Nature Reserve (on the AONB boundary)
- Park Gate Down
- Dover to Kingsdown Cliffs (the only SAC for the maritime chalk cliff features in the country)
- North Downs woodlands. The scarp slopes of the Medway Valley are designated for internationally important beech-yew woodland communities.

Management of these important sites rests largely with Government and public bodies, and specialist conservation organisations. However a number of key sites are in private ownership, such as parts of the Folkestone and Etchinghill escarpment owned by Eurotunnel, and the Medway Valley escarpment by Lafarge or Trenport Holdings.

Of recognised county level importance the Local Wildlife Site network is also critical in conservation of the landscape and wildlife and is felt to be at increasing risk; research by the Kent Nature Partnership showed limited reference to Local Wildlife Sites and Biodiversity Opportunity Areas in Local Plans despite the importance of these sites is recognised in the Natural Environment White Paper and Lawton review. In total Special Areas of Conservation (SACs), Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) and Local Wildlife Sites (LWSs) cover some 16% of the AONB.

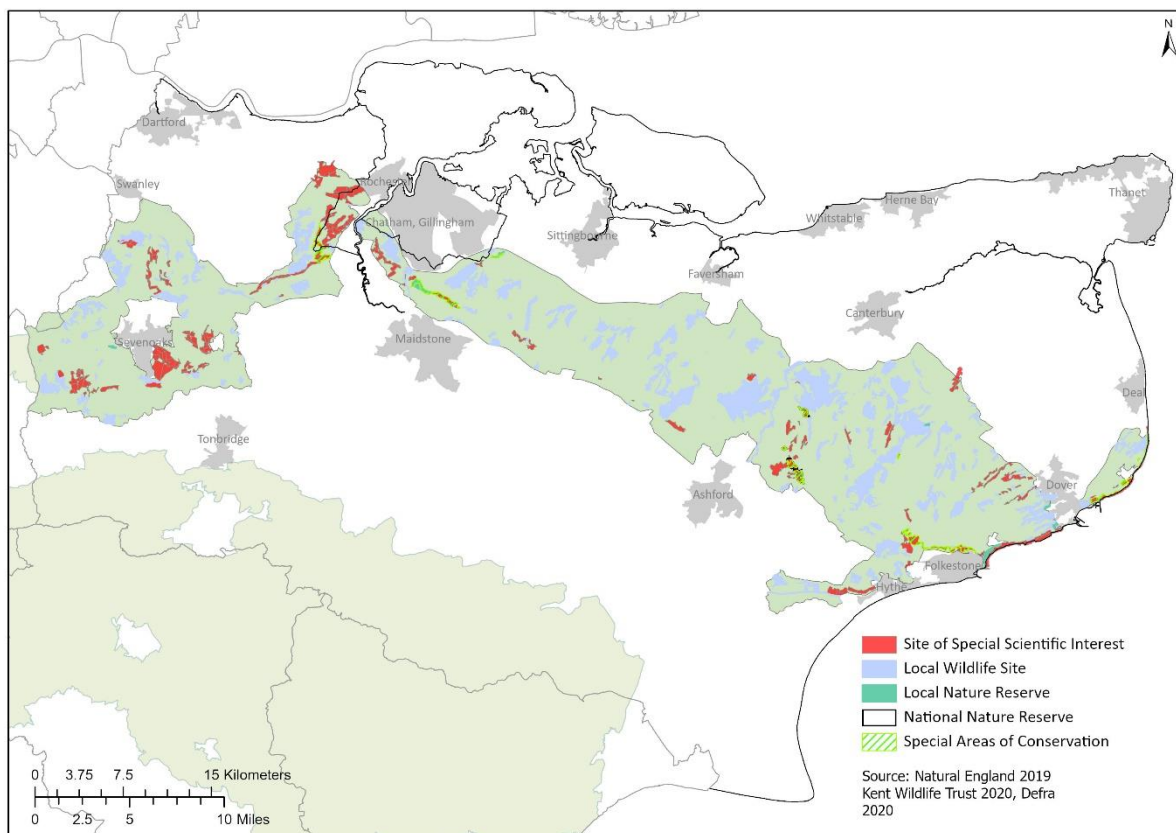


Figure 5.4 Nature Conservation Sites in the Kent Downs AONB

### 5.3 Biodiversity - main issues, opportunities and threats

Despite the extent of recognised and recorded nature conservation sites in the AONB some are losing species and condition, elsewhere habitat loss and change, alien species, pests and disease and the impact of climate change are detracting from the biodiversity of the Kent Downs. Many plant and animal species depend on suitable long-term management of appropriate habitats in the wider countryside.

In the context of continued biodiversity loss and while a wide range of national and local policy development is live there is an opportunity for the Kent Downs AONB Partnership to influence policy development so as to benefit the characteristics and qualities of the Kent Downs.

- a. Growth and an increasing population along with increased public access to sensitive sites have been identified by site managers as a key issue in maintaining the quality of special habitats. This is in part a 'problem' of the successful promotion of access to nature and creates the opportunity to create new, less sensitive places for people and nature.
- b. Habitat fragmentation, decline, damage and loss are recognised as issues across Kent Downs habitats. In response there is the opportunity to manage, extend and connect existing priority protected and designated sites and habitats as well as create new habitat and areas of wilding as a critical step to conserve and enhance biodiversity and generating

high quality Green Infrastructure for Kent in which the Kent Downs could play a focal role. Examples of new habitat creation, for instance from green hay from chalk grassland, show how positive changes can be achieved over time and with consistent intervention. The Kent Downs has been identified as a key area for enhancement for pollinators and is mapped as a 'B line' by Buglife.

c. Great uncertainty prevails over the livestock industry. A lack of grazing livestock or poor returns from managing remaining areas of semi-natural grassland, and other traditionally grazed habitats important in the Kent Downs (particularly small, inaccessible or unprotected sites) means that the most effective and landscape appropriate way of securing the established wildlife interest as well as landscape quality (by grazing) is increasingly uncertain.

d. There is a general lack of awareness and understanding of the biodiversity resource and its designations; trends in biodiversity; the value of the nature of the Kent Downs and how it contributes to landscape condition, the quality of life, health and wellbeing and the economy is combined with an associated lack of funding and support for management. The Colchester Declaration promotes the restoration of nature if sufficient resources are made available.

e. Need to provide accessible and well-managed sites with easy access from urban areas to provide contact with nature, health and wellbeing benefits, as well as to reduce pressure on existing particularly sensitive sites is seen as an important opportunity particularly for the new Environmental Land Management Systems.

f. Need to respond to the repeated failure to meet Biodiversity targets and the opportunity for the Kent Downs AONB to make a significant local contribution to meet future targets.

g. Kent Downs landscape is sensitive to changes in climate, pollution and to more abrupt changes caused by extreme weather events; both are predicted. The UK and Kent Climate Change Risk Assessments identify key risks to Kent Downs biodiversity. At the same time the ability of each habitat to sequester carbon has been identified and could be an opportunity to link habitat creation to climate change mitigation; the so called 'nature based' response.

h. The opportunity to develop significant collaborative partnerships to secure the biodiversity objectives of the plan.

i. In the light of new approaches to nature conservation such as wilding and intended net gain; there is an opportunity to create new and valued habitats, reflecting what exists and is valued but also resilient for the future increasing the abundance of nature in the Kent Downs. At the same time a significant risk exists for the loss of sites where previous environment schemes have achieved significant gains.

j. New crops (such as vines) and cropping patterns (such as zero tillage) create opportunities to enhance the biodiversity of the Kent Downs.

k. In the context of the recent departure of the UK from the EU there remains considerable uncertainty covering wildlife regulations and payments for the enhancement of nature.

## 5.4 Biodiversity - aims

A landscape in which:

1. The rich diversity of natural features, wild animals, plants and habitats are recognised, conserved, enhanced and positively managed so that the extent and condition of key habitats is enhanced in a way that allows both rare and characteristic species to flourish and to be resilient to future change.
2. A functionally connected nature recovery network of well-managed, wilder and connected sites of biodiversity importance covers the Kent Downs. These provide habitats for locally typical and rare species and communities, places for people to connect with nature and the essential building block to achieve functional, resilient ecological networks.
3. Species distinctive and characteristic of the Kent Downs but more common and widespread flourish due to careful and sensitive management.
4. Comprehensive and easily accessible data informs and influences land management and development decisions and monitors changes to biodiversity.
5. The natural heritage and wildlife is recognised for its inherent value for contributing to the landscape character, quality of life and the economic value of the Kent Downs.
6. Collaborative management at a landscape scale secures significant enhancement to the habitats and species, of the Kent Downs, improves resilience as a local response to the national and international challenges to biodiversity.
7. At least 75% of the 38 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) and Local Wildlife Sites in public or protective ownership in the Kent Downs are restored to favourable condition by 2030.

## 5.5 Biodiversity – principles

- BD1 Creation of new habitats and connecting habitat corridors will be pursued, informed by the Lawton principles, landscape character, the needs for new recreation, the needs for resilience and the threats to existing habitats and species. Delivery will be through collaboration to establish resilient, functional ecological nature recovery networks and high quality green infrastructure.
- BD2 Local, regional and national biodiversity targets and spatial priorities for habitats and species distinctive to the Kent Downs will be supported; a role for Kent Downs AONB partnership in delivering a Nature Recovery Network, the Kent Biodiversity Strategy and Colchester Declaration will be defined and delivered.
- BD3 Targeting of advice, grants and agreements to reduce fragmentation and enhance the biodiversity of the Kent Downs will be pursued.
- BD4 The collection, promotion and sharing of information on land cover, designated wildlife sites, habitats and species to assist in effective biodiversity and landscape



character management and monitoring will be encouraged.

- BD5 The protection, conservation, enhancement and extension of Kent Downs priority and distinctive habitats and species will be pursued; the Biodiversity Duty of Regard (NERC Act 2006) will be promoted.
- BD6 The generation of sustainable markets for the products of sensitively managed UK Priority Habitats characteristic to the Kent Downs AONB will be supported.
- BD7 The Kent Downs AONB Partnership will be active in seeking to secure the best outcome for the biodiversity of the Kent Downs from the changing national policy framework.
- BD8 Generating a greater connection between people and nature will be pursued at the same time as dispersal of visitor pressure from sensitive wildlife sites where the biodiversity interest is at threat.

## 6. Farmed landscape

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### Summary record of changes

**This short note records the main changes made to the current AONB Management Plan when preparing this draft.**

The layout and content of this section has changed such that the special characteristics and qualities are clearer and the rapidly changing context for agriculture is described.

The vision period has been shortened to 10 years and updated to reflect issues like the net carbon zero and the rapid contextual changes for agriculture.

The description of special characteristics and qualities has been focused and background information has been placed in the ‘overview’ section; the mixed farmed nature of the landscape has been emphasised, the various components of which are described.

The overview section is re-titled overview and context and has been updated in the light of a very rapidly changing context for agriculture. This section provides contextual information on the evolution of farm practice in recent times and the consequent impacts on landscape. Key changes in agricultural land uses are recorded and the recent very rapid increase in vineyards in the Kent Downs recorded.

The section on climate change has been updated to recognise the IPCC special report on Climate Change and Land (2019), the Committee on Climate Change report on land use

(2020) and new approaches to agriculture which provide climate mitigation and adaptation such as regenerative agriculture are referenced.

The east Kent Downs Natural England led project has been referenced as a best practice case example.

The phrase 'farming industry' has been replaced with 'farming enterprises' to recognise the variety and nature of farm businesses

The issues, opportunities and threats have been updated to reflect the substantial uncertainty in the current UK farm economy, trade, climate and public intervention regimes. The increasing wish for and impact of public access to the farmed landscape is noted and recognised as a diversification opportunity in the context of new Environmental Land Management systems (ELMs)

Successful interventions are recognised and the opportunity to spread the approach is identified along with new approaches to low carbon/ carbon positive farming.

Changes in the pattern of Kent Downs farming, such as the rapid introduction of vineyards are recognised

Policies' have been replaced by 'Principles' in accordance with the advice of the Kent Downs AONB Joint Advisory Committee. The previous policies and policy approach have been clarified, simplified and updated to respond to the approach agreed by the JAC and the new issues opportunities and threats and changing context. Policies that appeared determinative of planning matters have been removed and principles updated in response to the significantly changed context.

Water availability and water issues for farming is a key matter but is covered in the natural resources section.

## Our vision

In 2030... the Kent Downs AONB is a place where agriculture takes and is appreciated for a pivotal role in the conservation of natural beauty and landscape qualities and character as well as wider. Sustainable farming is the predominant land-use of the AONB and the heritage of mixed farming is retained in a contemporary context, supports and enhances landscape character, nature and is an increasingly important part of the Kent Downs contribution to achieving net zero carbon emissions. There is a greater public understanding of the roles of farming and more opportunities to gain carefully managed access to farmed landscape and to understand farming systems. Despite the volatile context a broad range of crops are sustainably produced and are suited to the increasing extremes of climate, local conditions and market forces as well as the landscape. Naturally diverse permanent grasslands are well managed by grazing and orchards, platts and hop gardens retain an important place in the landscape. The flourishing number of vineyards are managed in a way that conserves the characteristics and qualities of the AONB. The high quality products of the Kent Downs are commercially successful and high environmental quality is a market advantage.

### 6.1 Overview and context

The Kent Downs AONB is principally a farmed landscape, with around 64% of its land

classed as agricultural. Centuries of changing farming practices have shaped the landscape to create an important part of the natural beauty which is celebrated today. Historically the range of soil types of the Kent Downs has supported mixed farming practices where arable crop production has co-existed with livestock grazing and horticulture. The patchwork of land-use created by mixed farming is also vital for many valued plant and animal species associated with farmland. The farmed landscape is much valued for the access afforded along public rights of way, permissive paths and open access land.

Departure from the European Union is expected to be the most significant change to the context for farmers and land managers in the Kent Downs, since the UK joined the European Community in 1972. At the time of drafting there is considerable uncertainty about the future of payments to farmers, the impact to farming of post EU exit, trade arrangements and the scale and targeting of new Environmental Land Management systems (ELMs). The direction of travel has been signalled in the Government's 25 Year Environment Plan and early iterations of the Agriculture and Environment Bills but agriculture is operating in an increasingly uncertain and volatile environment.

### Farm tenure and farming type in the Kent Downs

Figure 6.1 indicates that the Kent Downs AONB continues to be a landscape of mixed agricultural use. There has been a reduction in overall farmland area as well as a rationalisation of farming practice. This data originates from Defra, Geographical breakdowns are only available in the years that correspond to the EU Farm Structure Survey, next updates expected later in 2020.

% of Farmed Land cover	1961	1972	1990	1999	2007	2008	2009	2010	2013	2016
Arable	53	64	58	55	50	54	55	54	52	54
Grassland	37	27	35	30	34	35	34	34	35	32
Grassland with scrub	0	0	1	9	Data not available					
Orchards and hops	7	6	4	4	2	3	2	2	2	2
Parkland	3	3	2	3	Data not available					
Area of Farmed Land (ha)	64,227	64,925	64,141	64,546	60,836	57,833	57,213	55,797	55,477	58,132

Figure 6.1 Farm Cover in the Kent Downs AONB

Figure 6.2 shows an increase in the changing nature of farm holdings in the Kent Downs. There is a move to larger 'contract' farming and cooperative farming ventures, especially on the most productive land in order to achieve economies of scale often leading to crop rotations on a whole farm rather than field scale. The move to larger scale farming shown in Figure 6.2, can also lead to monocultures over large areas which consequently leads to lack of mosaic and therefore reduced opportunity for natural biodiversity, and increasing

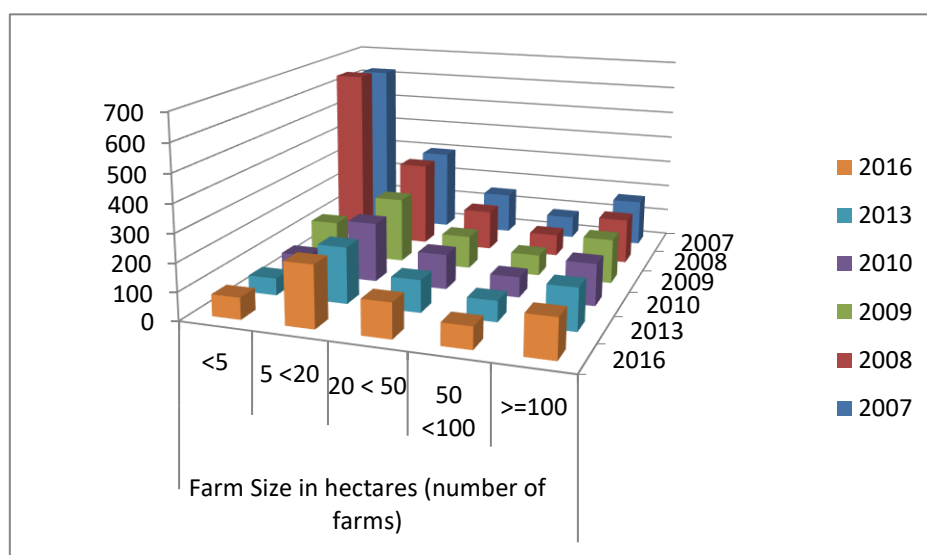


Figure 6.2 Farm Size in the Kent Downs AONB

fragmentation of natural biodiverse pathways.

When medium sized farms are absorbed into larger holdings, farmhouses and buildings can be sold off with small holdings or to 'amenity' farmers and landowners who are not reliant on agriculture as a main income. The general setting and relationship between buildings in farmsteads and immediate landscape around farm buildings is becoming more 'suburbanised'. The separation of farm holdings and farm cottages and the increasing price of housing effectively prices agricultural workers out of the rural housing market.

An increasing focus for farm business is to enhance the skill base or human resource so that farm enterprises can remain viable, resilient and effective; operating sustainably with a strong knowledge base that encompasses the wide context that farming now operates within.

### Changing financial signals to farmers.

Since WWII early government policy and incentives encouraged increased food production. Farm businesses responded by adopting new crops, technologies and practices, which have seen a marked increase in crop production and efficiency of scale. In some cases, the cost has been the loss of landscape quality, biodiversity and historic features that have been part of the mixed farming landscape for centuries; elsewhere farmers have chosen to conserve and enhance the landscape at the same time as increasing productivity.

Where there has been removal of hedgerows and field margins, deep ploughing of grassland and drainage of wetlands, as well as the intensive use of pesticides and inorganic fertilisers

the result is sometimes sterile farmscapes with little wildlife or reduced landscape interest, and damaged soils, albeit this form of agriculture is highly productive.

More recently the agricultural economy has been subject both to the removal of production-based subsidy and to increasing volatility driven by global markets and climatic fluctuations affecting both produce value and production costs. These pressures require farmers to make increasingly market led decisions and to use up to date methods to retain competitive advantage, reduce risk and add financial resilience. At the same time public opinion and Government policy has strengthened in favour of environmentally sensitive farming that produces high-quality food with less cost on the public purse.

The departure of the UK from the EU brings with it potentially significant changes and challenges and substantial amounts of uncertainty. The signals from Government and early versions of the Agriculture and Environment Bills indicate that future public financial support for agriculture will be focused on 'the public good'; this is expected to include new access opportunities; enhancement of water, soil and air, investments in nature recovery and in landscape beauty, so called ecosystems services. The details of the new Environmental Land Management systems will be determined during the plan period.

### **Livestock farming in the Kent Downs**

Sheep and beef cattle play an important part in the AONB land-based economy and form an important part of the mixed farming landscape. There has been a continued decline in livestock numbers (particularly sheep which have nearly halved in number since 1990), which is important to retain the special character of the AONB. This decline has been experienced in other AONBs; the High Weald AONB has researched opportunities to redress the change (Restocking the High Weald report) – many of the proposals are applicable to the Kent Downs.

There are multiple pressures faced by livestock enterprises. The loss of grazing livestock and skilled graziers due to the poor economics of grazing, has led to areas of grassland that were previously grazed, falling out of use only to be ploughed up for crops, planted with trees, converted to leisure use or scrubbed over through abandonment. At the same time the role of livestock in improving soil quality is increasingly understood and there is a potential that rotational agriculture may increase in response to soil degradation.

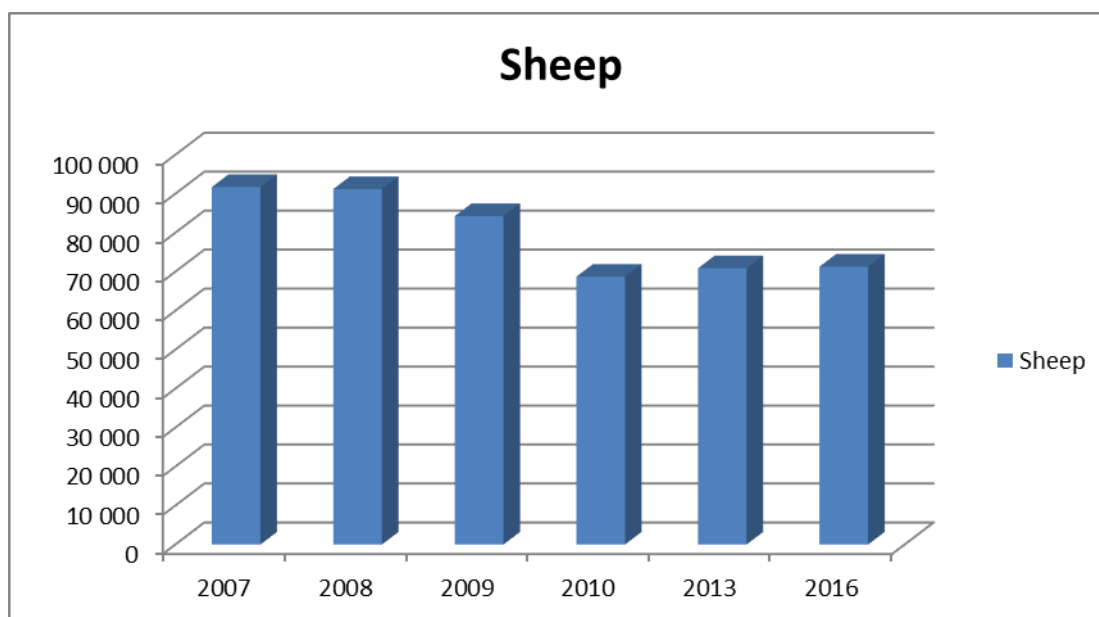


Figure 6.3 Sheep numbers in the Kent Downs AONB

Horses are an increasingly common grazing animal in the AONB; equine management is classed as leisure rather than agricultural use. Equine activities play an important role in the AONB land-based economy and can provide a market for local farm produce for feed and bedding for instance. If managed in a sustainable and sympathetic manner, horse grazing can make a positive contribution to the management of the pastoral quality of the AONB's natural beauty. However examples of good practice can be difficult to find and the impacts of growth in equine enterprises have tended to detract from the Kent Downs landscape character, creating subdivided paddocks, new structures, overgrazing, lighting and ménages. Good practice guidance has been published for the management of land for horses in the Kent Downs AONB.

### Arable agriculture

Part of the mixed farm picture of the Kent Downs landscape arable agriculture is an important economic component of the Kent Downs. Key crops include wheat, oil seed rape and barley. There is an unusually high amount of grade 2 and 3 agricultural soils in the AONB making arable agriculture viable with parts of the AONB being a focus for production based agriculture. Arable crops are undifferentiated commodities with generally little opportunity to add value in the farm enterprise and local economy. Like many types of agriculture, arable farming is increasingly driven by technological innovation which can lead to the simplification of crop rotations and field patterns but can also drive greater precision and efficiency. At the same time the role of minimal or no tillage farming in improving soil quality is increasingly understood and there is a potential that this form of cultivation may increase in response to soil degradation and climate change mitigation.

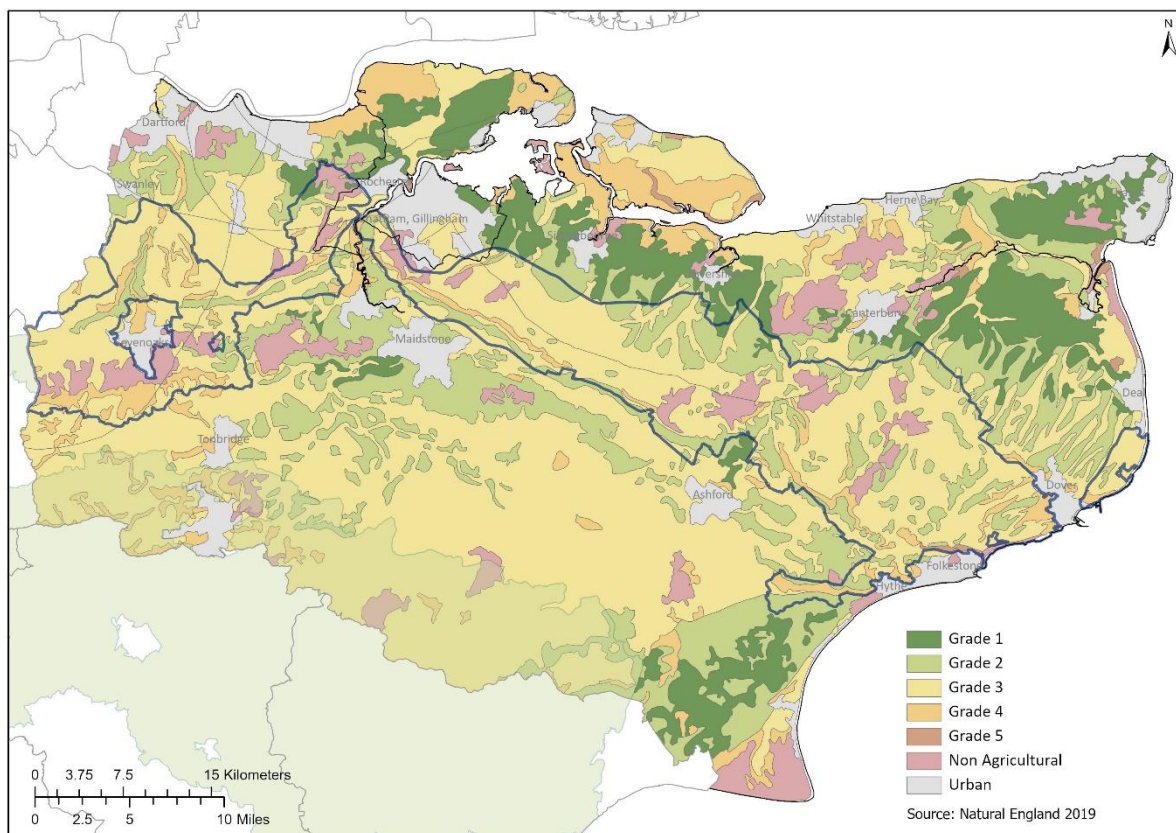


Figure 6.1 Agricultural land classification in Kent

### Orchards and Fruit

Traditional orchards of large trees with understorey grazing are difficult and uneconomic to manage and many have been grubbed or replaced by more productive and labour-efficient, safer, smaller fruit trees grown in closely spaced rows. Their greater uniformity and more intensive management have reduced the associated wildlife and landscape value of these orchards. They do, however, provide a modern and important link to a valued historic landscape. Research by Natural England found orchards can be important for biodiversity, carbon storage and the local economy.

Other horticultural activities add variety and interest to the AONB landscape. For example, lavender, as a crop for essential oils has replaced a number of hop gardens, and a rapidly increasing number of vineyards have been planted adding a new hue to the AONB scenery. A further locally distinct landscape feature is the production of cobnuts in the south east corner of the Greensand Ridge, centred around Platt and Plaxtol (a cobnut orchard being called a plat)

The area of orchards and hop gardens in the AONB has decreased by nearly 50% since 1961 (70% nationally). There has however been a recent upturn in orchard planting including walnuts and new fruits such as apricots which could increase significantly if the predicted climate changes take place. Additionally, the use of polytunnels has increased slightly.

Vineyards are a rapidly increasing component of fruit growing in the Kent Downs Vineyards are often located in prominent positions in the landscape and by their nature tend to be highly visible. Viticulture is a high value, high profile activity, generating relatively high levels



of employment when compared with other agricultural uses. Careful vineyard management can present opportunities to create new areas of flower-rich grasslands and species rich hedgerows.

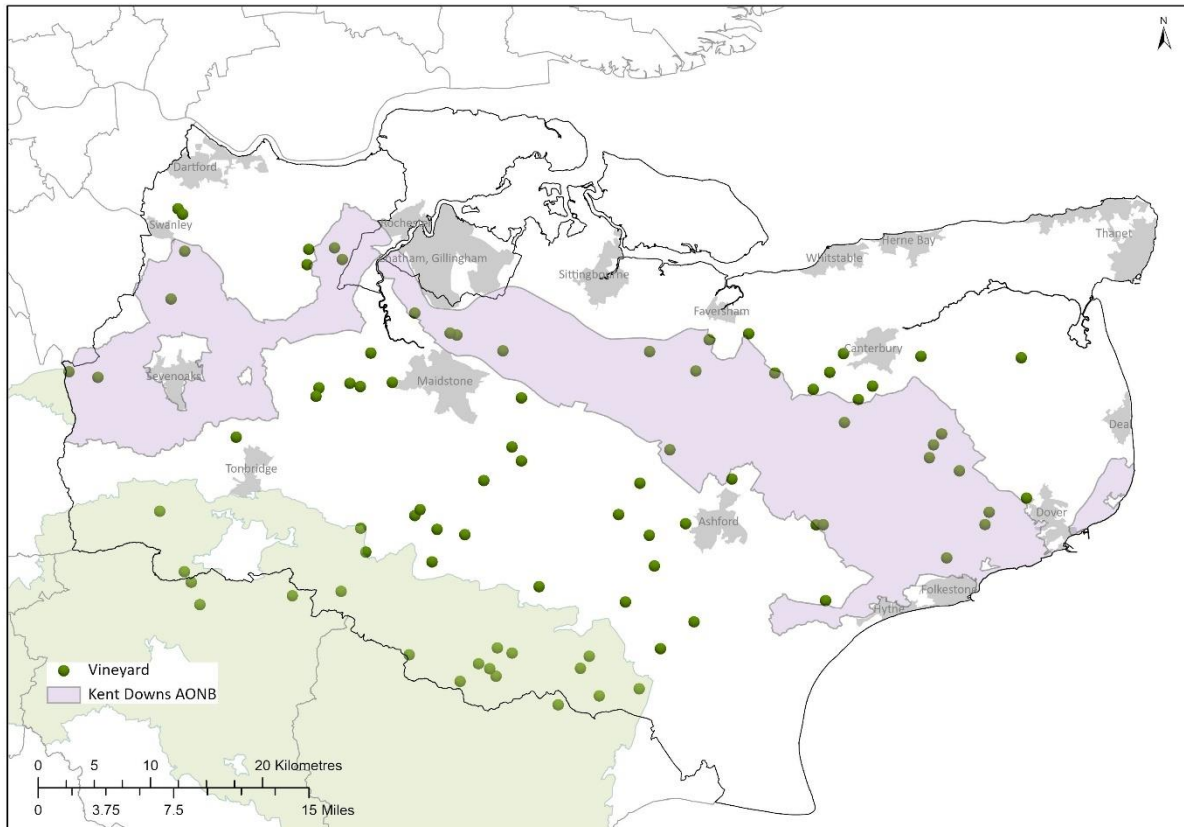


Figure 6.2 Vineyards in the Kent Downs AONB

While currently covering a small area of the AONB the use of polytunnels and glass houses is anticipated to continue increasing (together with the associated transport and storage infrastructure) in order to meet the needs of post EU exit fresh food supply, quality standards and a longer season as required by customers. Polytunnels can be significant detractors from landscape character and qualities in the Kent Downs and in its setting. Poly tunnels are temporary developments for which decommissioning strategies should be established and enforced. The horticultural sector is a small but often prominent feature in the AONB landscape and significant to the rural economy.

#### *Agriculture and Climate Change*

Climate change adds a further powerful influence with agriculture having an important role both in adapting to the changes already in train and mitigating further impacts. The IPCC Special report on Climate Change and Land (2019) brings a special focus on the place land management and agriculture has in responding to climate change. Agriculture has been a significant net contributor to carbon, methane and nitrous oxide emissions globally, at the same time agriculture is extremely sensitive to climate change impacts, in particular changing weather patterns and increasing extremes in weather events.

The IPCC report emphasises that most land-related responses that contribute to climate change adaptation and mitigation also combat land degradation and enhance food security,

as well as contributing to sustainable development and other societal goals, so called 'co-benefits'. The Committee on Climate Change report on landuse (2020) promotes low carbon farming techniques, a reduction in the most carbon intensive products, more tree planting and increasing agro forestry and further increases in bioenergy crops.

The National Farmer's Union (NFU) and Country Land and Business Association (CLA) have both recognised the important risks of climate change and role that farming has in response. The NFU have published a plan to meet net zero carbon from agriculture by 2040 which includes increasing efficiency, enhancing carbon storage in soils and woodlands and coupling bioenergy with carbon capture. Other approaches where agriculture can have an important mitigating effect as well as engendering adaptation include evolving agricultural systems including regenerative agriculture and agro-forestry.

There is an important role for agriculture in Kent Downs to adapt to and mitigate the urgent climate impacts.

#### *Farmsteads and Historic farm buildings*

Historic farm buildings are an important cultural part of the landscape and are the category of historic building most at risk; farmstead guidance prepared by the Kent Downs AONB Unit in partnership with English Heritage and Kent County Council seeks to secure this important special characteristic in the Kent Downs.

#### *Agri-environment schemes*

The public farm payment arrangements are critical to the management of the Kent Downs landscape with agri-environment and cross compliance schemes having made an important contribution to landscape conservation.

Since its inception in 1991, the Countryside Stewardship Scheme (CSS) which was followed by the Environmental Stewardship Scheme (ESS) and subsequently the current Countryside Stewardship Scheme (CS) have brought positive changes to the landscape, wildlife and historic features of the AONB and continue to do so.. Until 2013 such schemes have achieved significant enhancements to the landscapes of the Kent Downs.

39,699ha (45%) of the AONB (this equates to 74% of the utilisable agricultural area) is managed under agri-environment schemes, 262 agreements are in place. This includes 5,538ha of managed grassland with 487ha with public access payments. 734ha of unimproved chalk grassland and 250ha of semi improved chalk grassland.

The eastern part of the Kent Downs AONB has been the focus of a 20 year programme which has applied Countryside Stewardship payments to deliver landscape scale conservation in the farmed environment. A consistent 1:1 approach of advice and support in five focused areas of 50-80km<sup>2</sup> and to groups of 12 to 20 farmers has created large areas of restored and recreated grassland. The figures and outcomes are impressive with over 900Ha of arable and species poor grassland now converted to wild-flower rich meadows 300Ha of which have been sown with native, local wildflower mixes.

The exit of the UK from the EU brings with it an opportunity to look again at how public funding supports farming and land management. The Environmental Land Management systems are being tested and co-designed with farmers and land managers as this plan is written and pilots of a new scheme which will use public money for public good are expected in the mid term of the plan period. Much remains to be defined but the 'public goods' have

been clearly signalled by the 25 Year Environment Plan and the AONB Unit is running three tests and trials for Defra.

#### *Collaborative approaches to farming and the landscape*

Research and pilots in various Nature Improvement Areas, such as the Marlborough and South Downs add to the east Kent work led by Natural England and show the greater potential for landscape and biodiversity gain from wide collaborative management across farm holdings (clusters) rather than at a single farm holding level. This approach can address the issues of managing ecosystem services and seeking payment for them. Given future natural resource management issues and the importance of the farmed landscape to the natural beauty of the Kent Downs, a wide collaborative approach to farming and landscape could form an innovative future approach to landscape management in the Kent Downs. Farmer cooperation is an important theme in the developing Environmental Land Management systems.

#### *Nitrate Vulnerable Zones and catchment sensitive farming*

Currently about half of the AONB is covered by a Nitrate Vulnerable Zone (NVZ). The NVZ programme aims to reduce nitrate pollution in water through regulation of how and when nitrogen is applied to land, the management and storage of manure and the use of cover crops. Farmers in a Nitrate Vulnerable Zone are required to follow mandatory rules to tackle nitrate loss from agriculture Countryside Stewardship schemes target areas of the Kent Downs AONB to assist with the management of the water environment.

Catchment Sensitive farming advice (provided by Natural England and Commercial Water Companies) looks to address the diffuse water pollution from agriculture at source, pathway and receptor sites. It provides both 1-2-1 advice and farm cluster workshop and training events for farmers and looks to collaborate, negotiate and influence in a well-informed way to achieve pragmatic outcomes. Relevant to this is the ban on Metaldehyde for outdoor use in agriculture and the recent Farming Rules for Water legislation which protects water from runoff (soil, fertiliser and manures); this has 8 rules based around assessing risk and taking the appropriate steps to avoid or mitigate.

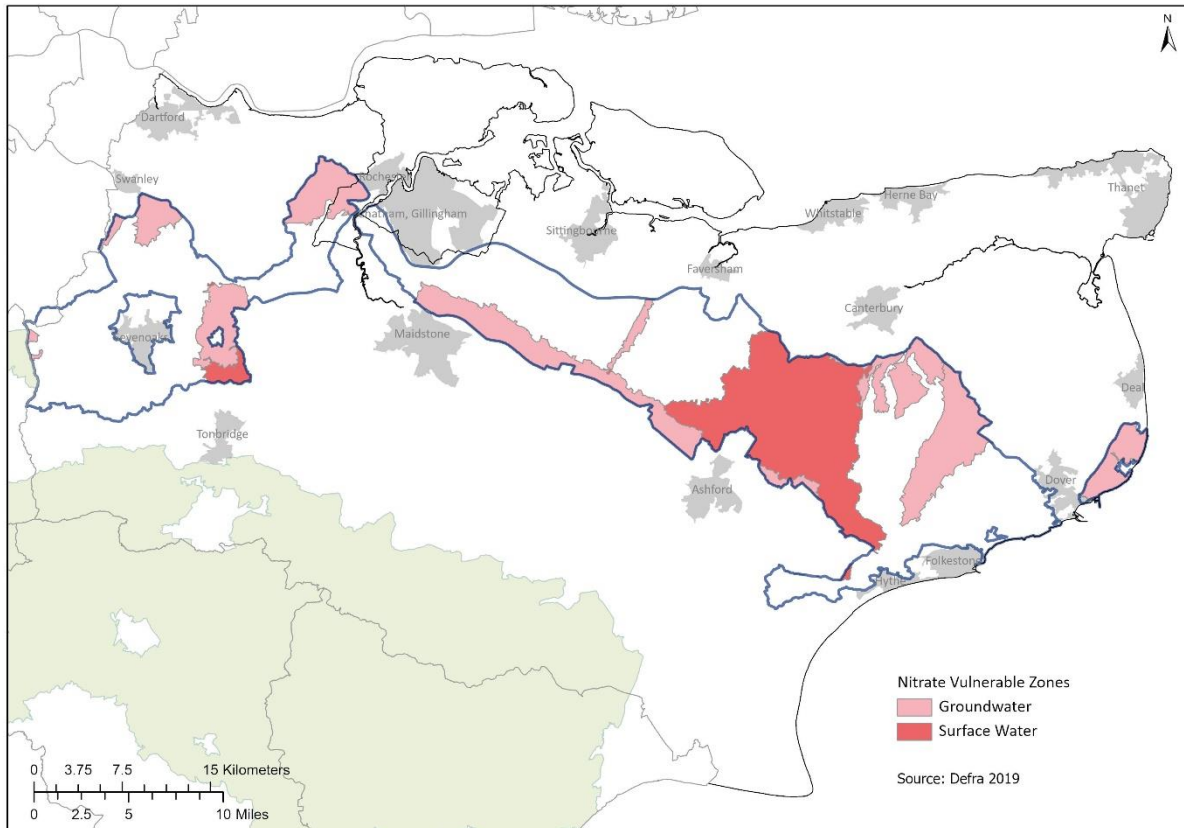


Figure 6.3 Nitrate Vulnerable Zones

### Farm Diversification Activity

Farms have been diversifying their businesses for many years; this provides a way to increase returns for the enterprise, stabilise incomes and utilise farm resources effectively. Farm diversification can be carried out in a way which supports the wide objectives of the Kent Downs AONB Management Plan. Equally diversification, for instance to some renewable energy technologies or intrusive leisure activities can run counter to the characteristics and qualities which are valued. The Kent Downs Farm Diversification Tool Kit provides an integrated approach to farm diversification, balancing business, planning and environmental issues when considering diversification proposals.

Access to the farmed landscape is much valued and important for health and well-being; at the same time the negative impact of access on farm enterprises is an increasing concern of farmers and farm managers. In the context of new arrangements for farm payments carefully managed access could form a diversification opportunity at the same time as providing public good and managing and mitigating impacts on the farm enterprise.

## 6.2 Farmed landscape - special characteristics and qualities

### A mixed farm landscape

The character of Kent Downs farmland is characterised by a tradition of mixed farming, with arable crops and grasslands, occasional orchards and platts set among a lattice of ancient woodland, hedgerows and copses.

A key part of this mixed farm landscape, **arable** agriculture has always been an important part of the character of this landscape. The area of arable land has fluctuated only slightly over the 50 years since designation. The seasonally changing colours and hues of arable agriculture and grassland typify the rich heritage of mixed farming. The Kent Downs are particularly notable for rare species associated with arable agriculture particularly the rare wildflowers found on reserves such as Ranscombe Farm and farmland birds.

Pastoral landscapes are a particularly valued component of the Kent Downs; **permanent, flower rich grassland**, including neutral grassland in some valley bottoms, grazed flood meadows but most notably chalk grassland found often on the dramatic chalk scarps and on 'shaves' in the dry valleys. In many cases the chalk grassland is of International importance for its wildlife. More productive grasslands, sometimes part of farm rotations.

**Orchards and horticulture** play an important part in the special character of the AONB landscape, the regular striate form enhancing the rise and fall of the land. Teynham (just north of the AONB) became the site of the first 'mother' nursery for commercial fruit orchards in England in the days of Henry VIII, and there is still a concentration of top and stone fruit (tree fruit) and hop growing along the northern fringes of the Mid Kent Downs. In the Kent Downs it is the traditional cherry orchards which are particularly distinctive.

The Kent Downs AONB has, along with the South Downs National Park and Surrey Hills AONB, has become the target for increasingly confident and capable English **wine growing** and production. There has been a rapid expansion of vineyard areas in the AONB have been planted with vineyards since the publication of the last AONB Management Plan; this is expected to continue to grow at a rapid rate and is creating a new character. A study into the impacts and opportunities arising from viticulture conducted in the Kent Downs, Surrey Hills AONBs and the South Downs National Park will report during the consultation period of this plan, its findings will be included in the second draft.

### 6.3 Farmed landscape - main issues, opportunities and threats

- a. Need to balance viable, resilient and competitive farming enterprises with the need for sensitive environmental management in a landscape of national importance.
- b. Decline in farmland area of the Kent Downs, grazing livestock enterprises and loss of skilled graziers.
- c. Substantial uncertainty about the farming and land management economy and its wider context driven by volatility in agricultural commodity prices (both scale and speed), the impact of trade negotiations and future public payment arrangements post EU exit.
- d. Uncertainty and limited funding for agri-environment (Environmental Land Management) schemes and the incentives they offer, particularly in the face of rising farm gate prices, along with the ending of long run Stewardship schemes. This issue is counter balanced by the considerable successes of the Natural England approach in east Kent Downs and the opportunities presented by ELMs.

- e. Ploughing of permanent grassland and previous stewardship land as a response to uncertainty about the future farm payment environment.
- f. Changes in landholdings and land management practice. Loss or amalgamation of medium-sized mixed farms and growth of large units with 'share' or 'contract' farming often with an associated loss of crop diversity and establishment of small farming units/residential or leisure owners, where farming is not the main source of income and experience and continuity of land management are not guaranteed.
- g. Rationalisation of the farming system and loss of the mixed farming landscape, diversity and distinctiveness and selling off of farmhouse and buildings/cottages from the farmland estate; separating land and accommodation changing the character and landscape setting of former farmhouses; estate cottages and farm buildings.
- h. Given the relatively high proportion of grade 2 and 3 land there is a need to encourage investment in landscape character management in areas of 'productive' agriculture.
- i. Farm diversification and development activities such as increased equine facilities, permitted rights afforded to farm building conversions, shooting and field sports, alternative crops (e.g. lavender, biomass energy crops, vineyards) and non-agricultural enterprises (e.g. self-catering cottages, glamping and new uses for traditional farm buildings) can have important detracting impacts as well as benefits to the characteristics, qualities, and rural economy of the Kent Downs.
- j. Increasing use of polytunnels to provide high quality, low 'food mile' soft and stone fruit and other high value produce but can be important detractors from the landscape.
- k. The need to manage adaptation and mitigation strategies for climate change in a way that supports landscape character and qualities; for instance promote low carbon farming, soil restoration, regenerative agriculture, natural flood management, sensitive water storage sensitive design in new agricultural buildings.
- l. The opportunity to develop a wide collaborative approach to farmland management in the Kent Downs and build on the long term strategic approach to habitat restoration developed by Natural England.
- m. Lack of public awareness of the links between farming and land-based activities, environmental issues, landscape conservation and management is combined with an increasing wish for access to land and the opportunity presented by the development of the ELMs to radically change this position and manage the impacts of access in a positive way.
- n. Historic farm buildings are the category of historic building identified as being most at risk and the historic character of farmsteads is being lost.

## 6.4 Farmed landscape – aims

The Kent Downs remains principally a farmed landscape where the character and qualities of the landscape are supported by strong, viable, resilient and sustainable farming enterprises

and where:

1. Public payments support the objectives of the AONB management plan which forms the strategic framework for ELMs. The conservation of landscape character and diversity, the restoration and enhancement of wildlife habitats, the conservation of historic and cultural features, responses to climate change and the welcoming of people to enjoy the landscape, are all integrated and complementary activities to contemporary, competitive, sustainable and resilient farming.
2. The mixed farming landscape is promoted in a modern collaborative context and at a landscape scale; the benefits of previous public investment in agri-environment and former set aside schemes are retained and good and innovative land management practice which supports and enhances the ecosystem services of the AONB is encouraged to all agricultural enterprises, farm owners and managers.
3. Farm diversification and development activities conserve and strengthen landscape character, qualities and local distinctiveness.
4. Locally produced, high-quality and sustainably produced food is available and environmental quality is a market advantage.
5. There is heightened awareness and understanding by residents and AONB visitors of the importance and fundamental role played by farming, and the connection between landscape conservation, environmentally responsible farming and high quality food are appreciated by all people.

## 6.5 Farmed landscape - principles

- FL1 The AONB will retain the mixed farming character for which it is valued.
- FL2 The targeting of public agricultural payments to make a positive, landscape scale contribution to conserving and enhancing the special characteristics, qualities and landscape character of the Kent Downs AONB and supporting ecosystems services and public wellbeing will be pursued using the AONB Management Plan as the strategic framework.
- FL3 Farming practices that improve AONB landscape character and qualities, or mitigate damaging impacts, will be supported and pursued through guidance.
- FL4 The use of integrated whole farm and farm cluster planning which includes a business planning, landscape, heritage, biodiversity and habitat assessments and supports ecosystems services will be pursued.
- FL5 Farm diversification activities will be supported if they help achieve the vision, aims and principles of the AONB Management Plan.
- FL6 The production, supply and marketing of AONB produce derived from environmentally sensitive management will be encouraged and supported.
- FL7 Conversion from agricultural to leisure use and the creation of non-agricultural structures will be resisted because of the cumulative negative impact on the

landscape character and qualities of the AONB.

- FL8 A collaborative, long term 'cluster farm' approach to achieving the farmed landscape objectives of the AONB will be pursued.
- FL9 The adoption of new and modified farming approaches to climate mitigation and adaptation and soil enhancement that produce co-benefits for landscape and biodiversity will be supported where they support the landscape character and qualities of the Kent Downs.
- FL10 Activities will be supported that increase wider public understanding of farming and the benefits that the farmed landscape can bring for high quality food production, recreation, well-being, nature conservation, the historic environment, landscape and a buoyant rural economy.



# 7. Woodland and trees

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## Summary record of changes

**This short note records the main changes made to the current AONB Management Plan when preparing this draft.**

The vision has been updated and altered to a shorter time period and is set in the wider context outlined in section 2, references to the health and wellbeing benefits of woodland are emphasised more.

The structure of this section has changed to provide a more clearly focused section on the character and qualities of woodlands and trees in the AONB.

The overview and strategic context sections have been updated to recognise changes in woodland and forestry policy, practice and the wider context, some contextual issues which were previously contained in the special characteristics and qualities section are now included in the overview section. This is an attempt to be clearer about what is context and what the special characteristics and qualities of the trees and woodlands of the AONB are.

The overview as well as the special characteristics sections have been altered to increase the emphasis on trees outside woodland and reference the canopy as a whole, rather than woodlands and trees outside woodlands separately.

References to the impact of pests and diseases has been updated and reflects the intensification and spread of ash dieback, the expansion of Oak Processionary Moth and the diseases of sweet chestnut.

The new, substantial demand point for timber grown in the Kent Downs (Sandwich combined heat and power) is referenced and the need to secure sustainable woodland management on the back of this demand is referenced in the issues section

The issues, opportunities and threats have been updated, for instance reference to the Renewable Heat Incentive has been removed, the importance of trees outside woodlands and tree canopy has been emphasised more and the significant government and local agenda for more tree planting (establishment) is referenced. The increasing pressure for woodland recreation and access is referenced as are the negative consequences that have been identified, and this is balanced with the increasing need for and evidence of the important place that woodlands and trees have in supporting access, enjoyment, health and well-being.

The important role of trees and woodlands in mitigating and adapting to climate change is referenced as is the drive to increase woodland creation and tree planting.

Sustainable management of woodlands and trees is used throughout the section, to be clearer to the reader what this means the aims and principles sections now reference sustainable management of woodlands and trees

'Policies' have been replaced by 'Principles' in accordance with the advice of the Kent Downs AONB Joint Advisory Committee. The previous policies and policy approach have been clarified, simplified and updated to respond to the updated issues opportunities and threats and changing context.

## Our vision

In 2030... the characteristic Kent Downs network of woodland and trees is greater in extent and is conserved and enhanced for its landscape, wildlife and historic value. Sustainably managed woodlands and trees are resilient to stressors such as pests, disease, visitor pressure and climate change, they provide inherent mitigation and adaption to that change. Buoyant markets for woodland products support the productive, sustainable management of trees and woodlands; high quality multi-functional management provides well-used places for leisure and recreation, health and wellbeing and are rich in characteristic wildlife.

## 7. Overview

The Kent Downs AONB is one of Britain's most wooded landscapes and it contains a nationally significant amount of ancient woodland. Woodland covers around 23% of the AONB and is the second largest land-use after farming, tree canopy cover which includes trees outside woodlands in the Kent Downs.

	2012	% of AONB Woodland resource	2018	% of AONB Woodland resource	% Change 2012 - 2018
Broadleaved Woodland	15479	81.6	14643	79.8	-1.8
Assumed Woodland	131	0.7	75	0.4	-0.3
Low Density	11	0.1	27	0.1	0.1
Coppice	432	2.3	847	4.6	2.3
Mixed	197	1.0	137	0.7	-0.3
Conifer	2134	11.2	1940	10.6	-0.7
Ground Prepared for Planting	72	0.4	43	0.2	-0.1
Coppice with Standards	11	0.1	30	0.2	0.1
Felled	51	0.3	407	2.2	1.9
Shrub	46	0.2	24	0.1	-0.1
Young Trees	405	2.1	179	1.0	-1.2
	18969	100.0	18352	100.0	

*Figure 7.1 Woodland resource in the Kent Downs AONB*

*Source: Forestry Commission National Forest Inventory 2012/2018*

The highest woodland concentrations in the AONB are found on the Greensand Ridge between Sevenoaks and Tonbridge; along the chalk escarpment in West Kent; in large blocks in the mid Kent Downs; above the Stour Valley and in areas of the East Kent Downs plateaux. Much of the AONB's woodland comprises, fragmented sites in disparate ownership, a situation exacerbated by the increase of wood lotting (breaking up woods into multiple small ownerships). Wood lotting research in Kent has found some negative impacts; often woodland management is absent and the ability to manage woodlands as a whole can be compromised. However, new owners are often motivated to improve and understand woodland wildlife and heritage.

The declarations of climate and environmental emergencies has placed a new focus on woodlands and trees and in particular woodland and tree establishment – the Kent Downs AONB landscape can support more woodlands and in particular trees outside woodlands.

## 7.1 Ancient woodland

Almost 70% of the Kent Downs woodland is ancient woodland, around 30% of this is plantation on ancient woodland sites (PAWS) (3,585ha); areas of ancient woodland where non-native species have been planted, generally in the 20th century. The careful, gradual restoration of PAWS sites to native species composition is a current priority for woodland management. The Forestry Commission strategy for ancient woodland is described in the 'Keepers of Time' policy statement (2019), embedded in the Managing ancient and native woodland practice guide.

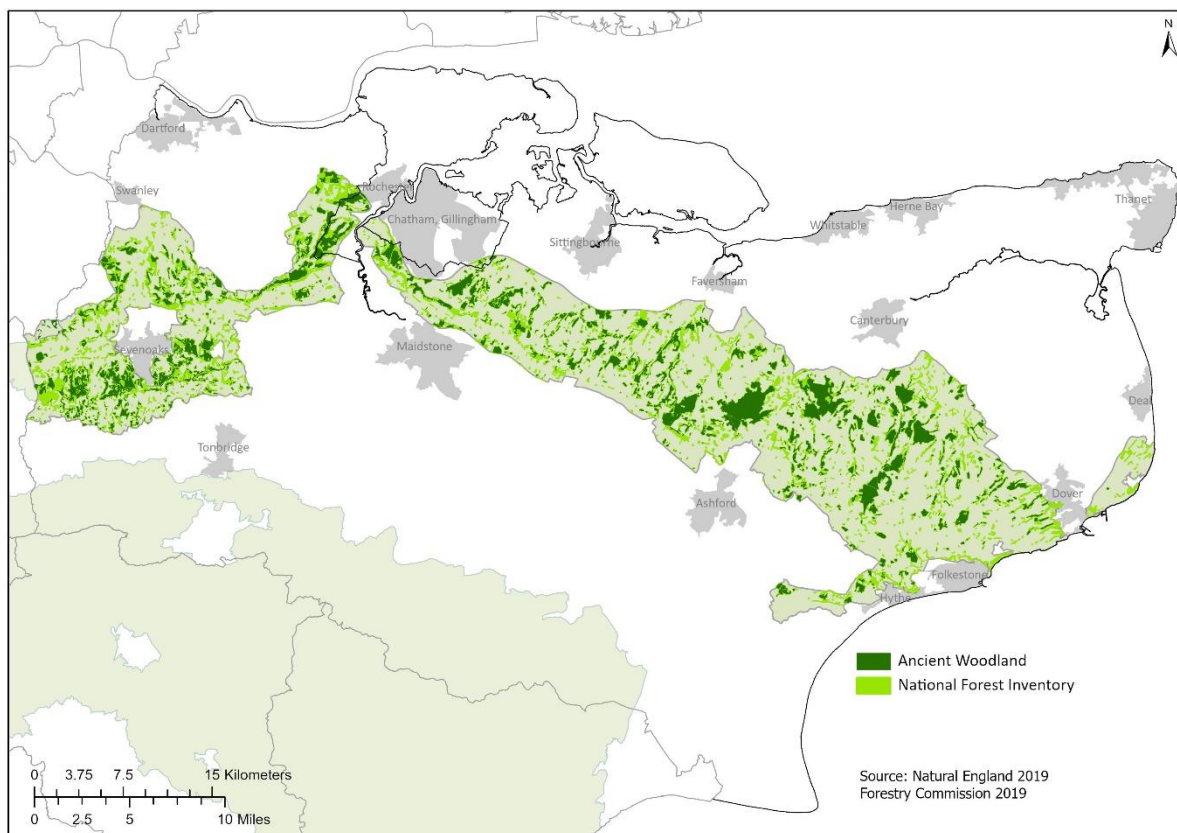


Figure 7.2 Woodland cover in the Kent Downs AONB

## 7.2 Tree pests and diseases

Ash is a particularly prominent tree in the Kent Downs AONB, both in the woodlands and hedgerows ash forms an important component of the landscape. The Kent Downs woodlands were one of the first areas in Britain to experience widespread infection from Ash Dieback (*Hymenoscyphus fraxineus*); the landscape implications are already serious with whole woodlands filled with dead and dying ash trees, trees outside woodlands dying and being felled and clear evidence that the impact is intensifying and spreading across the Downs. There is an increasingly serious risk to the ecosystems services provided woodlands and the health and safety of the public and woodland workers in particular. The Kent Downs has been identified as an Important Ash Area by the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC), reflecting the prominence of Ash in the landscape and the associated nature conservation interest.

Ash Dieback is only one of many tree diseases and pests which are affecting or expected to affect the Kent Downs landscape; in the period of the last plan sweet chestnut blight and Oriental gall wasp have been recorded in Kent, oak processionary moth has been extending from London into the Downs and in 2019 infected imported oak trees were intercepted in or near the Kent Downs. An important issue for the commercial woodlands is the eight-toothed spruce bark beetle (*Ips typographus*) which has been recorded in Kent; it is a serious pest of spruce with a potentially significant impact on the British forestry industry. Grey Squirrel have an important impact on the ability to produce high quality timber. The Government has published a Tree Health Resilience Strategy (2018) and Research Strategy for Ash Dieback (2019) along with an Ash Dieback tool kit which was developed by the Tree Council that

have informed the drafting of the revised plan and provide a helpful strategic context but do not create a landscape recovery plan.

Tree planting and woodland establishment is an increasingly important priority nationally; ensuring the biosecurity of nursery trees is vitally important to ensure that more tree diseases are not established which are likely to vastly outweigh any benefit that new planting might bring. Trees are very good at establishing themselves and new planting is by no means always the best or most effective way to establish new woods or even trees outside woodlands, tree planting should only be used where natural regeneration is not a viable option.

### 7.3 Coppice woodlands

Throughout the AONB coppiced sweet chestnut is common, often planted into ancient woodland over the last two centuries. Historically sweet chestnut coppice was used for pit props in the east Kent coalfields and for fencing and hop poles. Latterly, as these industries declined, chestnut coppice went for hardwood pulp at the nearby paper mills which have now closed. Chestnut is still coppiced for high value fencing and more recently for the supply of wood chip for heat and fuel for Sandwich combined heat and power. Like ash, sweet chestnut is facing several diseases which may seriously affect its productivity and viability in the Kent Downs and there is concern about the future resilience of single species woodlands.

The continuation of coppicing is important for landscape and biodiversity conservation. Much of the AONB's woodland landscape was once characterised by blocks (cants) of coppice stools cut on regular cycles. Many ancient woodland animal and plant species require coppice management which cyclically opens up the woodland floor to light. Coppice with standards creates edges and mosaics of high canopy with taller and shorter coppice stands, providing a diversity of ecosystems within the woodland habitat. Establishing and managing coppicing is difficult where deer populations are high because re-growth can be browsed off. It has been noted that deer populations in Kent woodlands are growing (The Deer Initiative); it is important to maintain deer numbers at a level that does not prejudice the re-establishment of coppicing or regeneration of trees and woodlands.

The relatively new practice of 'wilding' taken forward to enhance biodiversity may be a way to emulate some of the beneficial effects of coppice for woodland diversity and create open areas in woodland, but is likely to detract from the potential for woodland products to be harvested.

In Kent, Sussex and Surrey there remains a coppice industry which, although small and threatened, is showing signs of resurgence and could provide a basis from which to return the coppice woodland of the Kent Downs to rotational management and thus continue a management tradition with origins in the Neolithic period.

### 7.4 Shooting in woodlands

The Kent Downs landform and landscape character makes its woodlands suitable for shooting, particularly pheasant shooting which is thought to be one of the most important economic drivers for woodland management. Where game bird management is poor the quality of woodland biodiversity is damaged and grey squirrel encouraged, at the same time game management can align with conservation aims where not intensive and doesn't restrict woodland management.

## 7.5 Climate change, trees and woodlands

Climate change puts a special focus on the woodlands of the Kent Downs. The Forestry Commission has identified a series of key impacts which include declining tree health and limited mortality in some native species but increasing productivity for others, particularly where water and soil nutrients are available, changes to ground flora, loss of drought sensitive species particularly on shallow soils, damage from extreme events and the likelihood that forests and woodland are likely to be increasingly seen as a cool shady refuge for healthy exercise, whilst public access to forests may be interrupted by closures due to storm damage, and roads and paths being washed away. Trees and woodlands are acknowledged to be important carbon sinks through the biomass of trees and in the associated soils. The use of timber in building and for other permanent uses is an effective way of 'locking' carbon dioxide and removing it from the atmosphere; using timber from coppice for heat and heat and power is a low carbon emissions source of energy (compared with fossil fuels) but does not 'lock' carbon. The wood fuelled combined heat and power plant at Sandwich has provided a major new demand point for timber grown in Kent (160K tonnes each year).

The Woodland Trust report 'Adapt or Die' suggests that beech, a feature in parts of the Downs, will no longer be viable in the Kent Downs by as soon as 2050. Forestry Commission research indicates that the Kent Downs will be a refuge for lowland woodland types as climatic conditions change. Additionally sweet chestnut, being a species of Southern Europe, is likely to be well adapted to the predicted conditions; coppicing is thought to be a way to make the woodland ecosystem more resilient. The relatively single species nature of many chestnut woodlands makes them potentially less resilient to the predicted impacts of climate change as well as disease.

As part of the strategy to reach net carbon zero by 2050 the Committee on Climate change has promoted significant new tree planting across Britain; the Kent Downs AONB can accommodate new woodland, woodland expansion and in particular trees outside wood while, at the same time enhancing landscape character and providing other 'co-benefits' such as flood amelioration, wildlife enhancement and new access opportunities.

## 7.6 Forestry and woodland in public ownership

The Kent Downs AONB contains large areas of Forestry England owned land (1,560ha); much of this is conifer plantation on ancient woodland sites; the policy position for which is to return to broadleaved woodland over time. Forestry England owned woodlands are popular with visitors and public usage can be high near urban areas. Kings Wood is home to the Stour Valley Creative Partnership collection of artist's interventions; several notable pieces appear on a sculpture trail albeit there has been limited commissions in recent years. There are several examples of community owned and managed woodlands in the Kent Downs and this enthusiasm is an important opportunity for the future sustainable management of the woodlands and trees of the AONB.

## 7.7 Health and wellbeing from trees and woodlands

Trees and woodlands have been demonstrated as providing many health and well-being benefits, Forest Research, for instance has identified key beneficial characteristics in its publication 'Trees and woodlands: Nature's health service', new approaches to woodland recreation for health and well-being, such as 'forest bathing', are increasingly popular and also have demonstrable benefits for participants. New research (see section 10) identifies the critical function of the vegetation of the Kent Downs, in particular trees and woodlands, in

mitigating air pollution.

### 7.8 The canopy approach

The recognition of the importance of the whole tree canopy, not just woodland cover is growing. Woodlands and trees outside woodlands together provide an ecological and landscape network which is much valued for its scenic beauty but also for the functions, or ecosystems services it provides; supporting wildlife diversity, climate mitigation and adaptation, water management and clean air. There are significant challenges to the health and extent of the tree canopy of the Kent Downs in particular from tree disease and pests at the same time farming systems which integrate trees with other farm crops can be a way to extend and connect the canopy.

### 7.9 A Tree Champion and Tree Strategy

The Government has appointed Sir William Worsley as the Tree Champion with an agenda of setting a direction for the country's trees and woodlands over a 25 year period. More tree planting has been an important priority and it is expected that a draft England Tree Strategy will be published as this plan is being consulted upon, the priorities of the Tree Strategy will be reflected in the second draft plan where they are appropriate to the conservation and enhancement of the Kent Downs AONB.

## 8 Woodland and trees - special characteristics and qualities

Woodlands and trees are a vital part of the Kent Downs' natural beauty, providing a green, tranquil mantle to the upper slopes of the escarpments and valleys. The woodlands emphasise the undulating nature of the dip slopes and scarp, and frame the agricultural lower slopes and settlements. Individual, fine and ancient trees along with in field and hedgerow trees are an important, characteristic and sometimes dramatic element of the landscape. The woodlands and trees of the Kent Downs are much valued for the sights, sounds, wildlife, cultural meaning and narrative as well as for recreation, to improve health and well-being they provide.

Almost 70% (12,114 ha) of the Kent Downs woodland resource is ancient woodland (continuously present since at least 1600). The Kent Downs' ancient woodland is nationally significant representing (3.3%) of the total in England and Wales (Natural England, Ancient Woodland (England) Inventory).

Ancient woodland is irreplaceable and valued for its cultural, landscape and biodiversity importance and the products it supplies. Some ancient woodland may represent our only link with the original post glacial 'wildwood' and is more likely to contain vulnerable animal and plant species than any other habitat. Ancient woodlands can also include physical evidence of former landscape management practices. The rich but sensitive ground flora of ancient woodlands – bluebells, wood anemones, ramsons and yellow archangel – and the bird song of warblers, nightingale and nightjar and the rare and beautiful butterflies, even the dank scents of rotting leaves in the winter are part of the natural beauty of the AONB. Much of the valued woodland wildlife, invertebrates, lichens and fungi, are associated with old trees, deadwood or open ground and are restricted to ancient woods and wood pasture. The ancient woodlands of the Kent Downs also preserve the evidence of thousands of years of human activity in earthworks, monuments and place names.

The diversity of woodland types broadly follows the different soil types within the AONB, including clay (with ash, hornbeam and oak); chalk (with ash, beech and yew) and free draining sands (with oak, birch and beech). Lowland beech yew woodland is particularly distinctive in the Kent Downs and is of European importance.

Trees outside woodlands; in field trees, hedgerow trees and individual notable trees are a particularly important and vulnerable part of the landscape of the Kent Downs and are generally unlikely to regenerate under current land management systems; each tree is an ecology and has a story. Often prominent in land and streetscapes, trees outside woodlands are an important quality of the landscape.

## 7.2 Woodland and trees - main issues, opportunities and threats

- a. There has been an increase and intensification of the impact of pests and diseases on woodlands and trees and this is expected to continue; the approach to woodland and trees in the landscape should be responsive to this significant threat.
- b. There is a need to ensure that markets for woodland products secure sustainable woodland management which support landscape character, wildlife and the local economy.
- c. There is a need to build an appropriately trained work force with the capacity to both generate and take advantage of new markets.
- d. Restocking on woodland sites, woodland creation and tree planting needs to be resilient to future climates mixing natural regeneration and planting schemes use a diverse range of appropriate species which are certified as bio secure and ideally of local provenance. (NB the use of species found previously in the area, such as lime and elm, and appropriate non-native stock are being considered as a response to the impacts of climate change, pests and disease but this is not conclusive and there is a need to be open to new approaches).
- e. The implications of climate change put a special focus on Kent Downs woodlands for both adaptation and mitigation responses; the resilience of woodlands and trees and a considered approach to woodland and tree cover expansion are a key consideration.
- f. The diversity of type and motivation of wood owners and the rapidly changing woodland context means there is a need for consistent intervention and advice to support sustainable woodland management.
- g. The emphasis on multi-purpose woodland use is supported but can bring challenges for owners and managers and it can be the case that recreation, biodiversity and landscape management are do not bring commercial returns. Woodland recreation provides many benefits but increasing pressure is sometimes considered an increasing issue for woodland management, affecting commercial options, biodiversity and visitor experience.
- h. Intensive agriculture, infrastructure and building developments have led to the loss of



woodland and transitional habitats around woods.

- i. Pheasant and other game bird rearing can cause a loss of biodiversity and landscape value but where managed well can support sustainable woodland management.
- j. There is a need to take a strategic approach and propose long term management solutions to minimise biodiversity loss, to promote woodland regeneration and to limit the long term impact of disease and pest species in Kent Downs woodlands.
- k. There is a need to consider and monitor the potential re-emergence of commercial conifer plantations in the AONB following market improvements.
- l. There is a need to support the use of the UK Forestry Standard and Grown in Britain certification for woodland products.
- m. There is a need for the restoration and management of open space in woodlands, particularly woodland rides and glades and to carefully consider the opportunity for a wilding approach in certain circumstances.
- n. Insufficient understanding of the value, condition and location of 'veteran' trees, specimen trees outside woodlands and standing /lying deadwood in woodlands and parkland – for landscape, biodiversity, cultural and historic reasons.
- o. The need to harness the popular value of woodlands to improve understanding, engage new management arrangements and wider community and individual involvement, health and well-being.
- p. The historic features contained in woodlands can often be overlooked, there is a need to ensure that they are better understood conserved and protected during woodland management operations.
- q. The need to continue to promote and secure the restoration of PAWS sites through guidance and management support.

### **7.3 Woodland and trees – aims that support the sustainable management of woodlands and trees**

A landscape in which:

- 1. The irreplaceable fine tree and ancient woodland characteristics and qualities, cultural heritage and landscape character is restored, conserved and enhanced.
- 2. The sustainable management of woodlands and trees provides beautiful landscapes, recreation and education, carbon sequestration, timber, a source of renewable energy, a wildlife habitat and assists with adaptation to the impacts of climate change.
- 3. Existing and expanded areas of woodlands and trees form functional ecological networks alongside other key habitats of the AONB in order to encourage resilience to the impacts of climate change and enhance landscape character and quality; the

canopy cover of the Kent Downs is increased.

4. Woodland ecology and archaeology is well understood, conserved, enhanced and recognised for its value.
5. There are sustainable levels of access to woodlands for, health, well-being, recreation and leisure with wider, more inclusive opportunities for people to benefit. Careful management ensures the conservation and enhancement of the special characteristics and qualities of woodlands and trees.
6. The production of high quality timber and valuable underwood is stimulated through sustainable markets.
7. A collaborative management approach is taken to the management, enhancement and establishment of trees and woodlands of the Kent Downs is taken.

#### **7.4 Woodland and trees - principles that support the sustainable management of woodlands and trees**

- WT1 The extent of woodland, transitional habitats around woodland and trees outside woodland will be retained connected and extended.
- WT2 A strategic, collaborative approach will be pursued to secure sustainable multipurpose woodland and tree restoration, management and establishment that does not risk further pests and diseases, conserves and enhances the special qualities and character of the landscape, the resilience of woodlands and trees and benefits people's enjoyment, health and well-being.
- WT3 The managed, gradual conversion of plantations on ancient woodland to deciduous woodland will be supported where locally distinct woodland types, tree species and bio-secure principally local provenance tree stock or natural regeneration are used.\*
- WT4 Training, accreditation and wider understanding of woodland management to woodland owners and workers, local people and visitors will be encouraged and supported.
- WT5 The restoration and management of woodland open habitats and spaces, such as rides, glades, and wood pasture, for landscape, biodiversity and archaeology conservation purposes will be supported.
- WT6 The identification, protection, management, planned replacement and reintroduction of trees outside woodlands including fine specimen and 'veteran' trees will be pursued. This will include developing a Kent Downs based ash dieback recovery plan.
- WT7 Positive and strategic management interventions to overcome damage to woodlands, such as from disease, illegal and harmful recreation, an expanding deer population, poorly managed use for game rearing, livestock and development associated with wood lotting, will be pursued.

- WT8 In response to pressures on woodlands and the positive motivations of many new woodland owners, co-ordinated actions and the development and promotion of guidance and support which integrates sound landscape, heritage and biodiversity management will be supported.
- WT9 New markets for sustainably produced, appropriately certified woodland products and marketing initiatives will be supported.
- WT10 Research to understand the ownership patterns and motivations of woodland owners will be encouraged to support a master planning approach to the conservation and enhancement of the woodlands and trees of the Kent Downs.
- WT11 The identification and review the extent of ancient woodlands using up to date methodology will be supported.

\* Policy WT3 may be amended only on the basis of sound evidence to reflect the possibility that non-native tree stock of native species could be more resilient to climate change impacts, a position statement will be prepared as part of the delivery of the AONB Management Plan.

# 8. Historic, Cultural and Scientific Heritage

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## Summary of changes

**This short note records the main changes made to the current AONB Management Plan when preparing this draft.**

The vision and overview have been strengthened to include greater reference to arts and science in the cultural heritage of the Kent Downs

This section of the plan is now more closely aligned to the UN definition of cultural heritage and supports the IUCN Category V definition of the AONB being a Protected landscape with significant ecological, biological, cultural and scenic value.

References to the connection between the historic heritage of the Downs and the setting has been included, there is generally greater reference to more recent historic heritage.

The importance of as yet unknown (buried) historic heritage and undesignated sites has been emphasised.

Following consultation interventions, the section on artistic, scientific and cultural value has been expanded to afford similar weight to the historic heritage.

'Policies' have been replaced by 'Principles' in accordance with the advice of the Kent Downs AONB Joint Advisory Committee. The previous policies and policy approach have been clarified, simplified and updated to respond to the approach agreed by the JAC and the new issues opportunities and threats and changing context.

A new principle has been added to promote an arts and cultural strategy for the Kent Downs.

## Our vision

In 2034... the rich heritage of historic landscape, buildings, settlements and sites that characterise the Kent Downs' historic and cultural fabric are maintained in favourable condition and are enhanced to reflect their local character and significance. The environmental performance of historic buildings is enhanced in a way that is sensitive to their character. They are understood and cherished by local people and visitors alike for their intrinsic value and for their important contribution to quality of life and rural economy. Vibrant and exciting artistic and cultural interpretation and celebration of the Kent Downs is supported and strong partnerships for the arts and cultural development in the Downs is in place and delivering extraordinary, contemporary work enjoyed by and inspiring wide and diverse publics.

### 8.1 Overview

The Kent Downs is a significant cultural landscape; the UN definition of cultural heritage encompasses natural heritage which is the understandable focus of much of the plan for an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty however the concept of landscape encompasses much more than nature and landform and if we are to conserve and enhance this cultural landscape the plan must encompass wider components of landscape, including tangible and intangible cultural heritage. By affording adequate focus to the historic and cultural heritage of the landscape the fundamental objective of the AONB being recognised and valued is more likely to be achieved as is the conservation and enhancement of the landscape. This approach supports the IUCN objective to provide a framework to underpin active involvement by the community in the management of valued landscapes or seascapes and the natural and cultural heritage that they contain

Virtually every facet of the Kent Downs has been shaped by thousands of years of human activity – in the fields and woods, tracks and lanes and villages and hamlets, an indelible memory of past times, conflict and industry has been left to us. At the same time the extraordinary landscapes Kent Downs are particularly closely linked to the lives and inspirations of many of our greatest artists, scientists and leaders. While the landform and geology underlies its beauty, the Kent Downs AONB is very much a cultural landscape.

### 8.2 Historic and cultural heritage - special characteristics

There is a strong 'time depth' to the Kent Downs landscape and in its setting which adds to its distinctive, ancient feel. Glimpses of prehistory can be caught at various places across the AONB. Numerous Palaeolithic flints have been discovered in the AONB taking human activity back to the lower Palaeolithic period. Artefacts found on the higher land of the Kent Downs indicate the, probably occasional, presence of Mesolithic people. Notable traces of Neolithic culture are present in the lower Medway Valley in the form of megalithic burial monuments and structures which include Kit's Coty, Little Kit's Coty and the Coldrum Stones. There are also earthen long barrows, particularly in the Medway and Stour Valleys. Bronze Age round barrows are dotted across the landscape and the Iron Age saw the development of massive hill-forts like that at Oldbury Hill near Ightham as well as widespread farmsteads and rural settlements.

Kent was probably the scene of the Roman invasion of Britain in AD43 and almost 400 years of Roman occupation have left their mark. The Roman road network, stretching in straight lines across the landscape is still represented by, for example, Stone Street which connected Canterbury with the port at Lympne and sections of Watling Street linking Dover, Canterbury, Rochester and London. Indeed throughout history Kent has been in the front line of

exchange and conflict; this role has left an indelible prints on the landscape expressed in routeways and castles, trenches and docks.

The increasing sophistication and landscape impact of agriculture is recorded in the lynchets found throughout the Kent Downs. There is evidence that Roman and Iron Age field and settlement patterns have strongly influenced the landscape we see today.

Estate centres like Wye and Charing were established in the Anglo-Saxon period. From this time on the carving out of fields from woodland, known as assarting, and unenclosed wood pasture commons appeared in the Kent Downs landscape. Churches were also erected which formed the beginnings of the parochial structure that has continued to the present day. Drove ways, connecting estate centres with summer pastures in the Weald have left their mark in the particularly distinctive north-east to south-west orientation of the road network across much of the Downs which provides a 'grain' to the landscape.

The commons or 'minnises' of the high clay caps of the Kent Downs are believed to have been established by the Anglo-Saxon or early medieval period and form distinctive open areas of rough grass, bracken, heather and gorse. Many have now been enclosed but open minnises most notably Ewell Minnis near Dover and Stelling Minnis remain as important remnants of previously more widespread landscape features.

The Norman invasion saw the coming of the castle, varying in scale from that at Dover, the 'key' to England, to smaller structures of local lords, such as the ring-work and bailey at Thurnham. Villages grew into towns and churches were rebuilt in stone, ecclesiastical interest in the countryside is witnessed by monastic houses and the palaces of the Archbishop of Canterbury for example at Otford and Charing, both of which are located on the 'Pilgrims Way' or old road, itself an ancient route linking England to the continent. Local man John Kempe established the medieval college at Wye, in 1447 when he was Archbishop of York.

The character of the Kent Downs landscape was well established by the Tudor period. There were many nucleated villages or hamlets clustered around flint and brick churches and greens, as well as settlements along river valleys and routeways and spring line settlements at the base of the escarpment. Land was cultivated and grazed throughout the AONB and the many isolated farmsteads bear testimony to this agricultural history. It is believed that complex patterns of enclosure, particularly in the more fertile areas, have been created in part by the influence of the Kentish custom of 'Gavelkind' inheritance where property was divided equally rather than being allotted to the oldest heir, producing a multiplicity of holdings.

The selling off of church lands following the Reformation led to the growth of country estates with their parks and gardens which cover an important part of the AONB. Designed landscapes in the Kent Downs include Godmersham and Chilham in the Stour Valley, Doddington and Belmont Parks in the mid Kent Downs and Bourne Park and Higham Park on the River Nailbourne.

Along the White Cliffs Heritage Coast, facing as it did potential attack from mainland Europe, there is a rich heritage of defence structures, including Dover Castle and the Western Heights, 19th century Martello towers and the concrete and brick remains of anti-invasion structures and colossal gun emplacements of the two World Wars. Other, more contemporary heritage features include the remains of, brick fields, railway arches, lime kilns, chalk pits ranging from small village pits to large sites associated with the Medway cement

industry remind us of the various scales of industry found in but mostly around the landscape of the Kent Downs.

Aside from these grand and dominant historic sites and structures, the multitude of smaller cultural and historic features also help characterise the landscape of the AONB. These are the traces of ordinary people who have worked the land for centuries and have shaped its special character. Networks of ancient, often 'laid' hedgerows which still provide enclosure for livestock; wood and field banks which marked boundaries between different manors or estates, picked out with pollarded or 'stubbed' ancient trees; field patterns and lynchets revealing ploughing patterns from centuries ago; hollow ways and sunken lanes, now often byways, carved into the land by millennia of passing feet and hooves; and dene holes (deep excavations into the chalk) and borrow pits where rock and minerals were excavated by hand.

The Kent Downs has a rich tradition of half-timbered and weather-boarded buildings. There is also a legacy of locally distinctive architecture in locally derived building materials such as Ragstone, Flint and Chalk. Soft red bricks and peg-tiles lend colour and here and there long-straw thatching can be seen. The conservation and enhancement of these diverse buildings requires local sources of building materials, as well as skilled crafts workers who understand and respect the building traditions of the past and the architectural vernacular.

There is still much to discover, for example, the Kent Downs continually reveals archaeological surprises, often of national importance; the significance of the unknown historic heritage, as well as that which is undesignated is felt to be underplayed and more focus should be afforded to it.

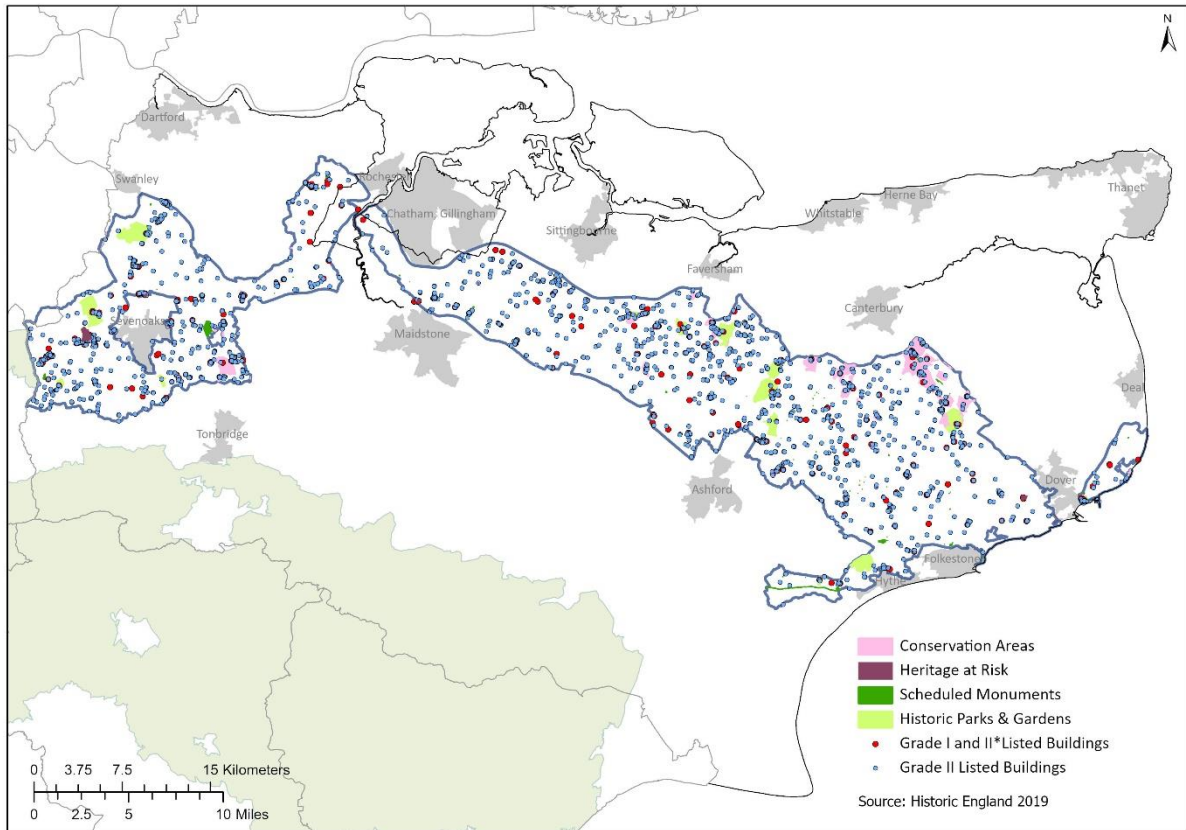


Figure 8.1 Heritage Features in the Kent Downs AONB

### 8.3 Historic Landscape Characterisation

‘Every place, like every person, has its distinctive character, in large measure determined by its inherited features such as streets, hedges, archaeological sites, buildings or place names. Understanding this character is one of the starting points for deciding a place’s future, the first step in working out how places can be made better in the future’ (English Heritage).

Historic Landscape Characterisation describes landscape character based on historical attributes surviving in the present landscape. Kent was one of the first counties to prepare a historic landscape character map on a county wide basis. The mapping is intended to provide broad scale and overall assessment of historic character.

The Kent Downs AONB is made up mainly of a ‘field pattern’ historic landscape type, covering approximately 63% of the area. Whilst this historic landscape type is further defined into subcategories, there is no predominant field type. Woodland landscape types also feature heavily with some large tracts being present in the east of the AONB. Also notable are the presence of a large number of areas of parkland, indicating the importance of the managed estates within the landscape.

As part of this review of the Kent Downs AONB Management Plan the Landscape Character Assessment has been revised and updated; closer attention to historic landscape character has been incorporated. The Landscape Character Assessment will be consulted on concurrently with this Draft.



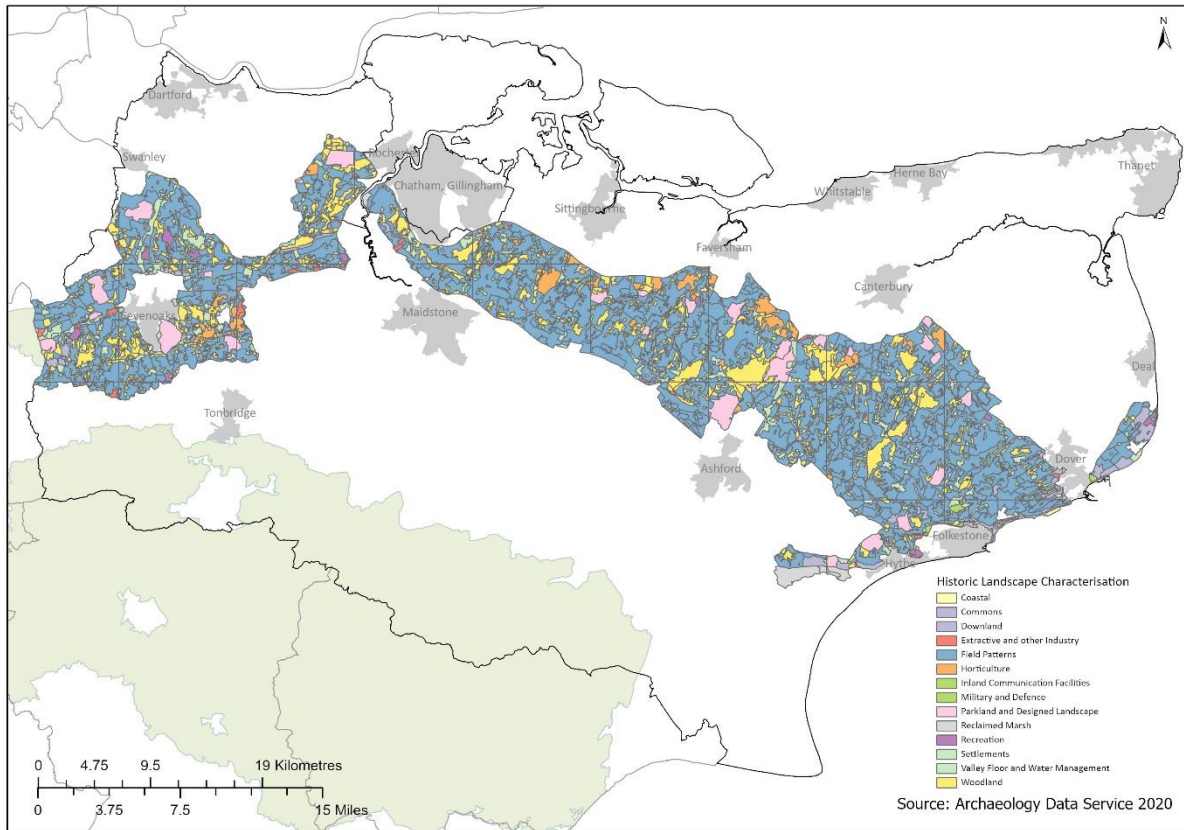


Figure 8.2 Historic Landscape Characterisation of the Kent Downs AONB

### 8.4 Artistic, cultural and scientific importance

The extraordinary landscapes Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty are particularly closely linked to the lives and inspirations of many of our greatest artists, scientists and leaders.

When the nation voted in a BBC poll for our ‘greatest Britons’ the top vote was, perhaps unsurprisingly, for Sir Winston Churchill and 4<sup>th</sup> was Charles Darwin, both lived in and were inspired by the landscapes of the Kent Downs.

Churchill’s early life is described as ‘itinerant’ but when he did decide to put down roots it was at Chartwell in the western part of the Kent Downs. It is said that the tranquillity of the place captivated him along with the views which stretch far across the Weald. Churchill apparently said that “I bought Chartwell for that view.” It was, however, also only 25 miles from the House of Commons, despite this convenience, his view was that “a day away from Chartwell was a day wasted”.

The characteristics of Chartwell which so inspired Churchill are also some of those which remain highly valued by people today; the views from the Downs were one of the most important ‘targets’ when the Kent Downs was designated an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and when we ask people what they most value about the Kent Downs today, it is the scenery and views which always come top. Along with this the tranquillity that the Downs afford in an increasingly busy county is much cherished.

Darwin lived and worked at Downe House just beyond the western edge of the Kent Downs, the chalk landscapes of the Downs were a crucial part of his studies. Dubbed 'Darwin's landscape laboratory' the downland landscape is of critical scientific importance and unique cultural significance as the place in which the theory of evolution by natural selection was developed. When Downe House and the surrounding landscape was placed on the tentative list for World Heritage Status it was the Chalk landscapes that 'provided unique insights into the scientific understanding of natural life and biodiversity. The ideas that were developed from daily observations and experiments at Downe have had a profound influence on the life sciences, medicine, agriculture, philosophy, the creative arts and general views of humankind's relation to other living creatures in the natural world.'

Fine houses with their parks and gardens can be found across the Kent Downs, of these Godmersham frequently hosted Jane Austen 'who would spend weeks at a time with her brother Edward, his wife Elizabeth and their children, for whom she was a much loved aunt. Godmersham is believed by many to be the inspiration for her novel Mansfield Park (1814).

Charles Dickens had many connections with the Downs, including the village of Cobham where the Leather Bottle pub is known to many as Charles Dickens' favourite Ale House. According to the pub, 'the great man not only used the inn and often stayed; he also featured it in The Pickwick Papers, for it was here that the lovelorn Mr Tracy Tupman fled after being jilted by his sweetheart Rachel Wardle, where he drowned his sorrows in Mr Pickwick's company.'

Bishopsbourne was sometime home to novelist Joseph Conrad, much more recently Riddley Walker by Russell Hoban, a post-apocalyptic science fiction novel set in Kent where the Devil's Kneading Trough features as 'Mr Clevver's Roaling Place'.

Perhaps it is visual artists that draw most from landscape; in the Kent Downs the Darent Valley is especially notable as being 'indelibly associated with one of the greatest of English Romantic artists, Samuel Palmer. For a brief period, the landscape inspired some of the most intense paintings in the history of British art, so original that Palmer's contemporaries laughed; but they are now recognised as uniquely personal expressions of a vision of England much closer to that of William Blake than the more traditional views of J.M.W. Turner and John Constable.

Few landscapes in England are so closely associated with a single artist. The only comparable example is the Stour Valley in East Anglia, where Constable, who was born at East Bergholt, captured the rivers and farmhouses, the gentle hills and varied vegetation, in a succession of naturalistic paintings from the beginning of his career to the late 1820s.... Palmer ..worked in a wholly individual manner, inspired by Blake's technique, by Old Master prints, and above all, by the possibility of experiencing in the Darent Valley the visions of ideal landscape, of paradise, that he had been seeking. For Palmer, like Blake, believed that the second Coming of Christ would take place in England, not in the 'dark Satanic mills' of the north, but in the land of 'mountains green, 'pleasant pastures, and 'clouded hills'. In a sense, Palmer found in the Darent Valley the epitome of 'England's green and pleasant land' as described by Blake.'

More recently Henry Moore lived and worked in the Kent Downs at Kingston near Canterbury where again the landscapes of the Kent Downs were seminal in his work; 'It was this landscape that had a profound influence on Moore's work. His time there allowed him the

space to carve in the open air and to indulge his life-long preference for a natural setting for his sculptures.’

Moore began filling this rural landscape with wood obtained from a Canterbury timber yard and blocks of Hopton Wood stone that came from Derbyshire. These were erected in the garden and surrounding countryside. He later wrote, “Living at Burcroft was what probably clinched my interest in trying to make sculpture and nature enhance each other.”

Ideas for his sculptures were taken directly from natural forms such as stone, pebbles and pieces of wood. Sketchbooks from the 1930s show the artist’s constant obsession with nature and the progression from natural forms to sculptural ideas; some of them providing source material for much later sculptures. “Space, distance, landscape, plants, pebbles, rocks, bones, all excite me and give me ideas” explained Moore.

There is strong contemporary interpretation and artistic celebration of the Kent Downs AONB landscapes. In Kings Wood near Ashford a collection of sculptures within the forest respond to the place and the Stour Valley Creative Partnership commissions new and young artists to respond to the beauty of the woods. Along the National Cycle Route 2, a series of commissions forms the Chalk and Channel Way; from sculpture to poetry, artists have been inspired by the dramatic coastline between Folkestone and Dover. Most recently a commission taken forward by the AONB Unit’s Ash Project titled ‘Ash to Ash’ by Ackroyd and Harvey creates a dramatic and fitting artistic response to the urgent issue of Ash dieback.

The Kent Downs landscape continues to be influential and inspirational to contemporary artists and cultural life, and this quality needs to be celebrated, engagement widened and made more diverse linked to culturally led regeneration activities and promoted more widely.

### **8.3 Historic and cultural heritage - main issues, opportunities and threats identified**

- a. The need to increase understanding, engagement, awareness of, and inspiration from, the historic, artistic, built and cultural heritage of the Kent Downs; and to encourage greater opportunities for the historic and cultural heritage to inform contemporary decisions, landscape management, regeneration and place making.
- b. The need to conserve and protect the historic environment, both above and below ground, scheduled and unscheduled. Issues include the effect of deep ploughing, the introduction of (deep rooting) energy crops and arable conversion on sites containing buried archaeological remains, heritage crime, and development affecting or in the setting of historic buildings.
- c. Recognition and reinforcement of special historic landscape character and the local distinctiveness of settlements, settlement patterns, farmsteads, ancient routeways, buildings and design in the Kent Downs landscape through the planning process as well as in, detailed historic characterisation, Neighbourhood Plans, Village Design Statements and Conservation Area Appraisals.
- d. Dearth and loss of skills and local sustainably sourced materials for historic building conservation, informing new developments and sustaining traditional management approaches important to landscape character and qualities.

- e. The recognition of the importance of 20<sup>th</sup> Century heritage in the landscape.
- f. The opportunity to work collaboratively with the Arts Council, Heritage Fund and cultural regeneration programmes to secure new artistic and cultural activity and an intelligent, innovative curatorial approach to celebrate, understand and interpret the complex landscape components of the Kent Downs, research the dynamics of human experience in the landscape and support rural and urban regeneration.

## 8.4 Historic and cultural heritage - aims

A landscape in which:

1. The principal special characteristics and qualities of the historic character of the Kent Downs landscape, the sites and features, field and settlement patterns, villages, hedgerows, routeways, woodlands and parklands are recognised, valued, conserved and enhanced.
2. The economic and 'quality of life' benefits of living, working in and visiting an historically-rich, artistically and culturally inspiring environment is recognised and actively supported.
3. New developments respect and reinforce the traditions of the past, whilst integrating sustainable technologies and sensitive design.
4. The landscape context and setting of historic buildings, features and settlements is protected, conserved and enhanced.
5. Restoration and conversion of the built heritage and new developments reflect local character and will meet high environmental standards, using sustainably sourced, locally derived materials and skilled workers.
6. Communities are engaged and involved in the historic and cultural environment of the Kent Downs through methods such as conservation area management planning, village design, neighbourhood planning, place making and interpretation.
7. Vibrant and contemporary artistic and cultural celebration of the Kent Downs supports the conservation, interpretation, enjoyment, understanding and enhancement of the landscape and engages diverse publics.

## 8.5 Historic and cultural heritage - principles

- HCH1 The conservation and enhancement of the historic character and features of the Kent Downs landscape will be pursued and heritage-led sustainable economic activity and tourism encouraged.
- HCH2 A wider understanding of the historic, cultural, scientific and artistic importance of the Kent Downs landscape and its historic character will be supported in part to inform the interpretation and management of the AONB.
- HCH3 In recognition of the emerging national relationship with the Arts Council and arts and cultural regeneration efforts in Kent an arts and cultural strategy for the Kent Downs

will be pursued.

- HCH4 The preparation and use of best practice guidance, promotion of skill acquisition and sourcing suitable sustainable materials for conserving, enhancing and adapting the historic and cultural environment to climate change will be supported.
- HCH5 Opportunities to develop contemporary and innovative artistic, historic, cultural and scientific interpretation and celebration of the landscape and people of the Kent Downs will be pursued.
- HCH6 The application of high standards of design sympathetic to cultural heritage within the AONB, identified in guidance including the AONB Landscape Design Handbook, Kent Downs Farmstead Guidance and any relevant Village Design Statements and Neighbourhood Plans, will be pursued.
- HCH7 The protection, conservation, and enhancement of heritage features under threat will be pursued through policies, projects and partnerships.

# 9. The Heritage Coasts

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## Summary of changes

**This short note records the main changes made to the current AONB Management Plan when preparing this draft.**

The vision period has been updated and is now until 2030; the vision has been revised to recognise the transformative work that is already undergoing in the management of the Heritage Coasts

To help emphasise the cultural importance of the White Cliffs a Shakespeare quote has been added

The Overview section has been updated, the England Coast Path, Marine Conservation Zones reference to the opportunity to development of management plans for MCZs. Reference is made to the Dover Strait Seascape Assessment and the Dover Strait Action Plan.

The description of the definition and purposes of Heritage Coasts have been updated to be consistent with current guidance.

The special characteristics and qualities have been updated and any contextual information placed in the overview section.

Issues identified by partners and through reviewing the evidence base have been referenced, for instance the impact of rapid traffic growth on the roads and sea, the impact of rapidly increasing visitor numbers, the potential re-introduction of the Chough

'Policies' have been replaced by 'Principles' in accordance with the advice of the Kent

Downs AONB Joint Advisory Committee. The previous policies and policy approach have been clarified, simplified and updated to respond to the approach agreed by the JAC and the new issues opportunities and threats and changing context.

New principles (HC8-10) have been added to promote the sustainable management of visitors, extend the defined area further into the marine environment and to promote and support further land purchases by 'protective owners' such as the National Trust as well as building partnerships with existing land owners to help take forward the conservation and enhancement of the area.

## Our vision

In 2030... the special place that the White Cliffs of Dover have in the hearts and minds of millions of people is justified by the reality experienced on the ground. Collaborative effort continues to transform the management of the coasts which meets the needs of the landscape, natural and historic environment and communities, while supporting the sustainable regeneration of the coastal economy including the coastal towns.

### 9.1 Overview

The magnificent chalk cliffs between Folkestone and Kingsdown form one of Britain's most evocative and best known landmarks. For many they are the first sight of Britain while views to France hold a special appeal, where chalk and clay cliffs also held in great national regard mirror the landscape drama. The Dover Strait is one of the world's most important, recognised and busiest seascapes.

The Kent Downs has a special place in some of our most renowned literature, the White Cliffs, forever in the hearts and minds of our nation, appear in many well-known songs, stories and poems sometimes as a metaphor for the whole country; they are never so well described as in King Lear as Gloucester entreats Edgar (Tom) to take him to the Dover Cliffs – he describes that;

*'There is a cliff, whose high and bending head,  
Looks fearfully in the confinèd deep.  
Bring me but to the very brim of it,  
And I'll repair the misery thou dost bear  
With something rich about me. From that place  
I shall no leading need.'*

*Edgar describes the cliff;*

*'Come on, sir; here's the place: stand still. How fearful  
And dizzy 'tis, to cast one's eyes so low!  
The crows and choughs that wing the midway air  
Show scarce so gross as beetles: half way down  
Hangs one that gathers samphire, dreadful trade!  
Methinks he seems no bigger than his head:  
The fishermen, that walk upon the beach,  
Appear like mice; and yond tall anchoring bark,  
Diminish'd to her cock; her cock, a buoy  
Almost too small for sight: the murmuring surge,  
That on the unnumber'd idle pebbles chafes,*

*Cannot be heard so high. I'll look no more;  
Lest my brain turn, and the deficient sight  
Topple down headlong.'*

Globally coastal Chalk is a scarce resource, the UK holds 57% of Europe's resource, Kent holds 35% of the UK resource.

The impacts of global climate change, including sea level rise and the greater frequency and intensity of storms, is projected to have a significant effect on the Heritage Coast, making adaptation strategies, particularly, an important priority for the future management of the coast.

This extraordinary natural and cultural resource can strongly assist the regeneration of Dover and Folkestone, and has been identified as the basis to secure World Heritage Site status for the Dover Strait. Equally this part of the AONB is particularly sensitive and is facing continual challenge, from the impacts of climate change and growth. Recreation pressure has increased significantly in the plan period with the National Trust reporting over 10% year on year increases in visitor numbers and visitor car parks are regularly closed on account of capacity constraints. Visitor pressure is unevenly spread with Langdon Cliffs recording over 500,000 visitors each year and areas of Lydden Spout (also in National Trust ownership) only 4000 visitor movements.

Defence and invasion is one of the themes of the Heritage Coast and forms an important reference in the landscape. Features in the Kent Downs include the magnificent Dover Castle described as 'the key to England', Napoleonic Martello towers, the 'listening ears' built between the wars and superseded by radar installations some of which are now listed. World War II frontline fortifications, defences, gun emplacements and anti-tank devices appear along the coast.

Communication and cultural exchange are important themes. In 1899 the first international wireless transmission was sent from Wimereux, France to South Foreland lighthouse. Cross channel trade and cultural exchange continues apace – the Strait of Dover being one of the world's busiest shipping lanes. The close proximity of Dover Harbour and views of the Strait's central shipping channel means ferries and large cargo vessels are frequent features.

Arising both from conflict and seagoing exchange and transport there is an extraordinary and outstanding collection of wrecks comprising both air and water craft, including the Dover Boat, the oldest sea-going boat in the world. Another example is the protected wreck of the Langdon Bay, located on the edge of Dover Harbour. It is thought to be the remains of a Middle Bronze Age vessel carrying a scrap metal cargo from France to Britain, indicating early cross-channel trade.

Navigation marks are often conspicuous in the landscape for example the National Trust-managed South Foreland lighthouse, which stands 21 metres high on the headland, and a white windmill (near to the lighthouse).

## **The Heritage Coasts**

England's 32 Heritage Coasts have been established in the best areas of undeveloped coast to:



- conserve, protect and enhance:
- the natural beauty of the coastline
- their terrestrial, coastal and marine flora and fauna
- their heritage features
- encourage and help the public to enjoy, understand and appreciate these areas
- maintain and improve the health of inshore waters affecting heritage coasts and their beaches through appropriate environmental management measures
- take account of the needs of agriculture, forestry and fishing and the economic and social needs of the small communities on these coasts

Natural England's Designation Strategy promotes AONB Management Plans incorporating policies for the management of Heritage Coasts at a strategic level. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) recognises the importance of the special character of Heritage Coasts and advises that development should be consistent with that special character.

The White Cliffs Countryside Partnership (WCCP) has a Heritage Coast management function as part of its purpose. In the previous management plan period, the Kent Downs AONB Unit worked in partnership to secure and then chaired the 'Up on the Downs' Landscape Partnership Scheme funded by the (then) Heritage Lottery Fund, the Scheme made significant and lasting investments in improving the condition of and partnership arrangements affecting the Heritage Coast and a wider inland area.

In the plan period of the last AONB Management Plan the National Trust has made important land purchases in the two Heritage Coasts and invested further in their conservation and enhancement, this new ownership arrangement, along with local partnership working has greatly increased the delivery of the Heritage Coast purposes. As a testament to the value placed by people on this area of coast, a National Trust appeal to purchase land reached its target of £1.2 m in just 19 days.

### **Seascape assessment of the Strait of Dover**

The description of seascape character, like landscape character describes what is distinctive, special and characteristic in an area of sea (and land in coastal areas). Seascape character assessment is a tool and spatial framework to help integrate management decisions. Completed in July 2015 a full seascape character assessment of the Strait of Dover represents an important management resource. The study provides an evidence base to support marine planning and management as well as that of the coastal zone. The seascape character assessment has been used in support of the preparation of this Plan.

The assessment helped confirm the special characteristics and qualities of the Heritage Coasts and the priorities for management. The Strait is described as a cohesive seascape unified by geology, socio-economic functions, biodiversity, history, culture and intervisibility. The Strait is an area of multiple interests and values and the Assessment confirms the need for sensitive and integrated management which is clear in the vision, aims and principles of the plan.

The seascape character assessment has fed into the joint UK/ France Dover Strait Action Plan which while focusing on energy and climate change issues promotes several actions and activities which are coherent with the objectives of this Plan.

## Marine Management Plans and Marine Conservation Zones.

**Marine plans** guide those who use and regulate the marine area to encourage sustainable development while considering the environment, economy and society. As a result marine plan policy topics across environmental sectors, economic sectors and social sectors are relevant to Kent Downs. Such policy topics can include Seascape, Biodiversity and Land-based infrastructure. AONBs are referenced in many numerous policies.

Heritage Coasts are included in Policy S-HER-1 (Heritage Assets) and Policy S-SCP-1 (Seascape) in the South Marine Plan. It is expected to be in similar policies in the South East Marine Plan.

The Heritage Coast east of Samphire Hoe will be covered by policies within the South East Inshore Marine Plan which is being prepared by the Marine Management Organisation (draft plan expected early 2020). The south east marine plan area includes tidal waters and extends to the mean high water springs mark. The Kent coast west of Samphire Hoe is covered by policies within the 2018 statutory South Marine Plan”

Described as ‘blue belt’ around the English Coast **Marine Conservation Zones** are areas designated by the Government to protect a range of nationally important, rare or threatened habitats and species. There are three designated MCZs close to the Kent Downs Heritage Coasts: Dover to Folkestone; Dover to Deal and the Folkestone Pomerania.

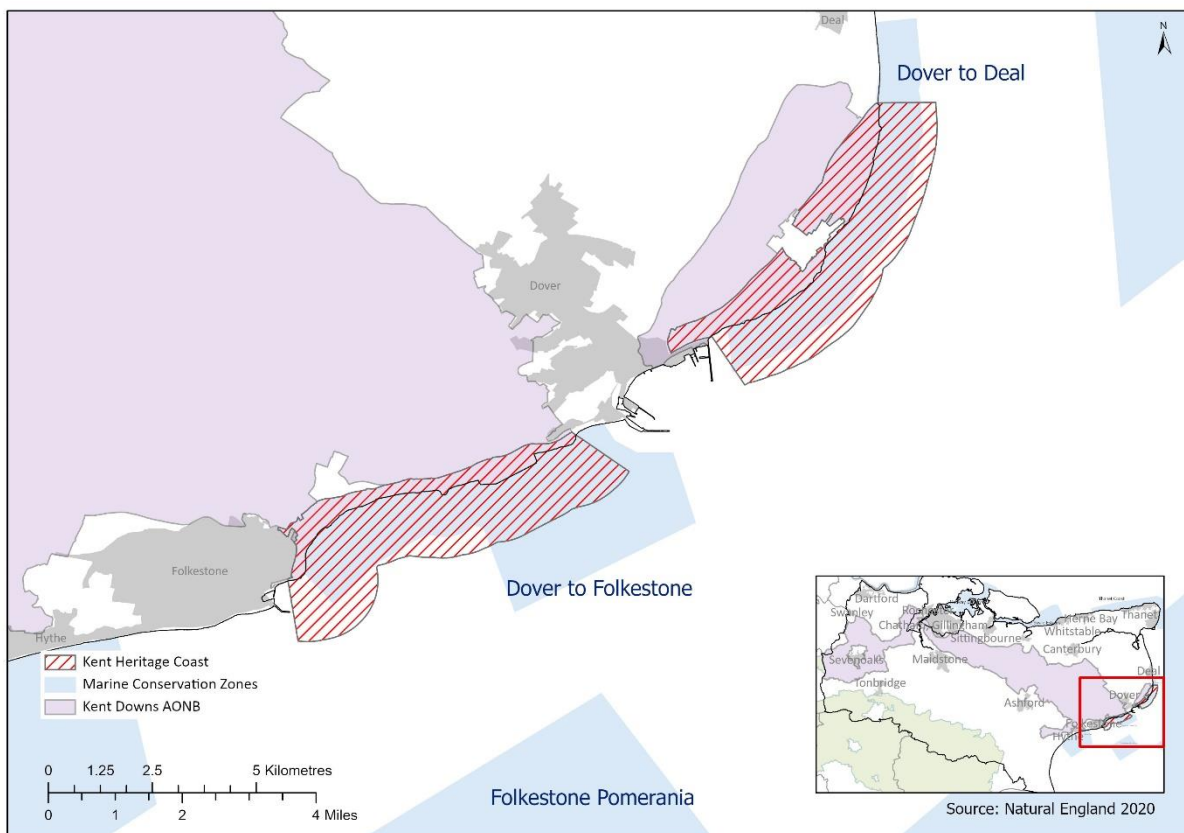


Figure 9.1 Kent Heritage Coast

## 9.2 The Heritage Coasts - special characteristics and qualities

The Heritage Coasts either side of Dover have been defined as some of the best undeveloped coast in England, they include the shoreline, cliffs and adjacent downland. The White Cliffs form part of our national identity; forming a soaring landscape with a seascape of vast horizons of sea and sky extending westwards to the subtle crumbling Greensand and Clay cliffs of Folkestone.

Behind the rearing cliffs is a landscape of windswept coastal chalk downs, with further undeveloped areas of salt-wind sculpted scrub, open downland, and farm-land punctuated by the remnants of thousands of years of exchange and conflict. The Heritage Coasts are one of the few places in south east England which offer a feeling of 'wilderness'. The ever changing chalk cliffs, foreshore and seabed platform are home to distinctive wildlife influenced by the sea, climate, geology and exposure.

The Heritage Coast's wildlife is internationally important, the clifftops consisting of nationally important chalk grassland and scrub, the cliff-faces supporting important breeding sea bird colonies including increasing numbers Fulmars, Rock Pipits, Lesser-black backed Gulls and Peregrines. Seabirds wheeling high in the sky connect the sea and sky.

The cliffs and grassland contain rare plants such as Hoary and Sea Stock, Rock Sea-Lavender, Sea Heath and Wild Cabbage. Most of the area is notified as SSSI, not just for the rich communities of birds, wildflowers but also seaweeds and particularly for the invertebrates. The Heritage Coasts are a vital landing point for migrating birds and insects and are home to many rare species. The proximity to mainland Europe places the Heritage Coasts in a key position as species migrate in response to climate change.

The geological exposures of the cliffs form an internationally important stratigraphic reference site for extensive and near-continuous exposures of Lower, Middle and Upper Chalk, historically important for their contribution to the sciences of geology and coastal geomorphology and are all designated as SSSI. The Chalk cliffs and to the west Gault Clay are rich in fossils. On the seashore at Copt Point the exposed Greensand forms a series of rock pools with important seaweed colonies. The Greensand was also the home of an active quern stone (corn grinding) industry dating to the first century BC.

Like the natural heritage, the historic and cultural heritage of the Heritage Coasts is of national and international significance, there are frequent cultural references in music, drama, literature, poetry and painting and the built heritage ranges from the magnificent Dover Castle to the underground scratches of graffiti in the chalk by a bored, or scared soldier from the Second World War.

The Heritage Coasts are a popular area for quiet countryside recreation; the cliff tops are crossed by the Saxon Shore Way Long Distance Path and the North Downs Way National Trail. The England Coast Path has been created along these sections of coast and there are several areas of open access land. Several areas offer extraordinary, panoramic views across to France. While access to the base of the cliffs can be difficult but provides a feeling of remote wildness and relative tranquillity with exposure to the elements being a key feature.

### 9.3 The Heritage Coasts - main issues, opportunities and threats

- a. Cultivation and coastal erosion have reduced the botanically-rich chalk grassland and associated historic heritage on the cliff tops to a narrow strip, making management difficult and placing the habitat at risk, this has been addressed in several areas and there remains the opportunity to continue this important effort.
- b. High and rapidly increasing visitor pressure, particularly at the Dover to Kingsdown Heritage Coast and parts of the Folkestone Warren is degrading important habitats and placing the historic heritage at risk and reducing the valued sense of tranquillity as well as the visitor experience – key sites such as the National Trust Visitor Centre exceed their capacity for visitor parking on regular occasions.
- c. Arable agriculture can sit uncomfortably with the natural beauty and wild scenery of the cliff tops and can damage the historic heritage, a significant opportunity remains further to expand the valued coastal grassland, it is also thought to be causing diffuse pollution affecting the quality of the marine environment.
- d. Discordant development, for instance caravan parks, visitor resources, and unsympathetic screening attempts occur in the Heritage Coasts.
- e. The enthusiasm for the area brings an opportunity build on the collaborative management activity and improve coordination and impact.
- f. Development pressure and traffic growth continues in and in the setting of the Heritage Coast.
- g. The need to increase understanding of the dynamic nature of the coast, accelerating coastal processes and the impacts of climate change.
- h. Despite improvements achieved through partnership management but there are remaining areas of inappropriate, antisocial and illegal activities, such as off-roading vehicles, extensive wild camping, fly-tipping and vandalism in parts of the Heritage Coasts.
- i. The safety, interpretation, conservation and potential sensitive re-purposing of remaining military and historic structures, many of which are un-designated is a new heritage priority.
- j. The very high quality, iconic natural and historic environment can be an important component of a programme to regenerate the coastal towns of Dover and Folkestone, but the Heritage Coasts are in themselves extremely sensitive to development and visitor pressure.
- k. Marine litter and air pollution are significant detractors from the character and qualities of the Heritage Coast.
- l. The opportunity identified and supported by Kent County Council and the Pas-de-Calais Department to secure World Heritage Site status for the Strait of Dover has yet to be realised.

- m. Marine Conservation Zones identify nationally important areas of the marine environment and afford the opportunity to generate agreed management plans for each Zone.
- n. The Heritage Coasts are much loved, genuinely iconic national landscapes with partnerships in place to support their management.
- o. A new partnership has developed to promote the reintroduction of the chough to the Heritage Coasts; this distinctive and charismatic bird could be a trigger for further collaboration amongst land managers and wider improvements in the habitat of the Heritage Coasts. At the same time the once substantial Kittiwake Colony has disappeared, there is a general lack of trend data of the important wildlife features of the Heritage Coast.

## 9.4 The Heritage Coasts - aims

A landscape in which:

- 1. A wide, collaborative approach achieves careful, appropriate management of as well as respect and international recognition for the Heritage Coasts which reflects the extremely high national esteem in which they are held.
- 2. The extreme importance and sensitivity of the Heritage Coasts are recognised publicly, through appropriate international status and in policy.
- 3. The importance and value placed on these iconic landscapes delivers resources and partnerships to ensure their future management and which supports the regeneration of the nearby coastal towns.

## 9.5 The Heritage Coasts - principles

- HC1 Coastal defence policies and approaches will respect the special character and qualities of the Heritage Coasts, allowing, where practicable, a naturally functioning coastline.
- HC2 The opportunity to support economic regeneration through the sustainable and integrated management of the Heritage Coasts in accordance with their defined purposes and those of the AONB will be pursued.
- HC3 Threats to the qualities and character of the Heritage Coast will be resisted and managed.
- HC4 A collaborative approach, such as that employed by the WCCP and the Up on the Downs Landscape Partnership, will continue to be pursued to secure the objectives for Heritage Coast strategy and management and address the specific threats and opportunities identified.
- HC5 Achieving World Heritage Site status or other appropriate international recognition for the Strait of Dover will be supported.

- HC6 The conservation and enhancement of the special characteristics of the Heritage Coasts and Strait of Dover will be pursued through the Marine Plan making process, the development of new Heritage Coast Management Plans and the preparation of Marine Conservation Zone Management Plans.
- HC7 The England Coast Path National Trail will be managed in a manner that is sensitive to the landscape character and qualities and in partnership to meet and retain National Trail standards. The conservation and enhancement of the landscape of the corridor of the National Coastal Trail in the Heritage Coasts will be pursued.
- HC8 A collaborative strategic approach to manage visitor pressure to benefit the visitor experience, reduce impact, conserve the character and qualities of the area and support sustainable regeneration will be supported.
- HC9 New opportunities to secure 'protective ownership' of areas of the Heritage Coasts and partnerships to enhance management with existing private and public owners will be supported.
- HC10 The extension of the definition of Heritage Coast/ AONB into the marine environment will be supported; inclusion of areas currently defined as Heritage Coast within the AONB will be supported subject to the Government's response to National Landscapes Review.

# 10. Geology and natural resources

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## Summary of changes

The Vision time frame has been shortened in line with the rest of the plan and strengthened to recognise the importance of natural resource enhancement (e.g. of soils)

The Ecosystems services section has been strengthened, includes references the Natural Capital approach, has been updated and is more clearly reflected in the principles.

The overview section has been expanded and now includes contextual information that was previously contained within the 'special characteristics' sections

The 'overview' descriptions of key the natural resources have been updated, reflect the natural capital and ecosystems services approaches; references to the priorities of the Government's 25 Year Environment Plan have been included. References to natural flood and drought management and the PROWATER project have been included; references to soil conservation, enhancement and restoration have been strengthened to reflect the increasing policy priority for soils

The section now includes reference to clean air, in recognition of the importance afforded to clean air in public policy and priorities and the important role that the AONB demonstrably has in providing clean air.

The special characteristics section has been clarified and contextual information is removed and now included in the overview section. They have been updated to include more perceptual qualities which are important in landscape and reference components of national and international importance.

Tranquillity issues have been moved to the sustainable development section.

'Policies' have been replaced by 'Principles' in accordance with the advice of the Kent Downs AONB Joint Advisory Committee. The previous policies and policy approach have been clarified, simplified and updated to respond to the approach agreed by the JAC and the new issues opportunities and threats and changing context. Policy GNR 3 has been removed because it repeats national policy, other principles have been updated to respond to the changed context but there are not substantial changes.

Reference to exploring the opportunity to secure Geopark status for the Kent Downs has been inserted into principle GNR1 to recognise the importance of the geological resource of the AONB.

New principles have been added to focus on the conservation of soil and the benefits the Kent Downs landscape offers for clean air.

## Our vision

In 2030... great care is taken to conserve and manage the natural resources of the Kent Downs particularly soil, air, ground and river water. New and innovative ways to both reduce resource use and enhance the existing natural capital have been adopted which support landscape character and qualities, the economy and communities. The need to conserve and enhance natural beauty means mineral resource winning occurs away from the AONB, except in exceptional circumstances, and worked out quarry sites have been restored to enhance local landscape character.

### 10.1 Overview

The natural and cultural features that create the Kent Downs' sense of place and special character have in large part been governed by the physical environment. Kent Downs natural resources provide vital ecosystem services to the population of Kent and beyond. With significant changes predicted in the natural environment along with substantial new demands placed on our natural resources, positive action and management is an important priority for the conservation and enhancement of the Kent Downs.

#### Natural Capital and the provision of ecosystem services

This plan is strongly informed by a 'natural capital' approach; natural capital includes the air, water, soil and ecosystems that support all forms of life, as this approach is overarching for the plan more details are included in section 3.



### *Geology*

The AONB encompasses several geological layers each following the broad east-west sweep of Kent. The folded and undulating Chalk, Greensand, Gault Clay and Ragstone have intricate overlying layers of Clay with Flint, sand, river gravels and alluvium together these determine the nature and pattern of the land and soil, and the plants and animals they support.

The geology of the Kent Downs means that mineral winning has been a long run activity, from historic deneholes used to source chalk used to dress acid soils to sand and gravel extraction particularly on the northern edge of the Greensand. Some previous workings have revealed exposures which have been left uncovered and reveal strata of important rocks, minerals and fossils. The Kent Downs AONB and its setting contain important remaining resources of sharp sand, gravels and building sands, many of the less constrained sites containing these resources have been exploited or allocated meaning that pressure to exploit the resources in or in the setting of the Kent Downs is expected to increase. The Kent Minerals and Waste Strategy Local Plan 2013-30 recognises the importance and sensitivity of the landscapes of the AONB and its setting in its narrative and policies.

### *Soil*

Soil is an irreplaceable and often overlooked natural resource, a vital component of our natural capital and an ecology in its own right. The pattern and quality of soil is a key determinant of the AONB's natural vegetation and is fundamental to land uses choices. In semi-natural habitats, an undisturbed soil structure is a vital ecosystem component.

On cultivated land, careful soil management is a primary principle of good farming and carbon management but overall soil quality has been declining at a UK level. Soil erosion can occur on ploughed steeper slopes of the AONB and where crops are harvested in wet conditions, for instance maize, the soil eventually being washed into adjacent watercourses – adding to the flooding risk. Innovations in farming practice including minimal and zero tillage provides opportunities to increase soil fertility and carbon storage and reduce emissions.

Pollution or contamination of soil can occur through pesticide and other chemical misuse, which can accumulate over time, and can leach into surface and groundwater supplies. Soil husbandry is increasingly understood to be important for carbon management. The UK Climate Risk Assessment has identified that drier summers leading to increased soil moisture deficits may result in the increased release of greenhouse gases such as carbon dioxide and methane. Heavy rainfall, especially following a dry period, may increase soil erosion. Improving and restoring soil health is a high priority in Governments 25 Year Environment Plan.

### *Water*

The quality and quantity of the ground water aquifer and the surface river water is determined in no small part by landscape management and other activities. The quantity of ground and surface water is becoming a more critical issue as Kent is set to accommodate very significant population growth (see sections 2 and 3). Abstraction already occurs throughout the AONB and has been linked to low summer river flows particularly of the Rivers Darent and Little Stour. This situation will be exacerbated by the effects of climate change. Not only will these factors have a profound effect on Kent's potable water supply, but also may impact on the AONB's physical and ecological character over time.

Water supply is at the forefront of issues being addressed by water companies through

Water Resource Management Planning. There is an emerging potential coherence of interests between the needs of sustainable landscape management and water resource management.

The prevalence of fruit farming in Kent and the Kent Downs AONB, along with increasingly uncertain climatic conditions creates a strong demand for irrigation; this creates an additional significant pressure in an already stressed water environment. The creation of water storage reservoirs can be at odds to the character of the landscape of the Kent Downs AONB. Abstraction licence reforms are expected to help manage and mitigate the pressures on stressed water environments in the Kent Downs.

The Government is promoting locally focussed decision making and action at the heart of the debate about the future direction of improvements to the water environment. The Catchment Based Approach (CaBA) aims to generate more effective stakeholder engagement in order to tackle environmental problems at a more local scale. It is thought that this will particularly help tackle pollution from diffuse sources, by their diffuse nature, local. The collaborative ways of working to consider the needs of the water environment fit comfortably with the AONB management approach.

The Kent Downs AONB partnership has led on developing new, landscape based approaches to the management of flood and drought in a way that supports landscape character and qualities. At the same time, the PROWATER project will report during the plan period; this will provide new information covering the sustainable management of landscapes to support aquifer recharge and water quality in the AONB and elsewhere in Kent.

Within the Chalk and Greensand domes, percolated water forms the groundwater aquifer, which provides 75% of Kent's drinking water, there is an increasing concern about the emergence of nitrates (applied historically) emerging in the aquifer based water supply. Water availability is one of the biggest issues facing the UK water sector with pressures on availability already evident, especially in southern and eastern England.

#### *The Water Framework Directive and Catchment Abstraction Management Strategies*

Currently the Management Plan operates within the context of the Water Framework Directive's (WFD), and it is expected that the provisions of the framework will remain in place for some time following the UK exit from the EU. The main objectives of the WFD are to protect and enhance the water environment and ensure sustainable water resource use for economic and social development.

The scope of the framework is wide, covering lakes, streams, rivers, groundwater, groundwater dependent ecosystems, estuaries and coastal waters out to one mile from the low-water mark. The Environment Agency is the lead authority for implementing the WFD. Whilst the Agency will focus on the appropriate application of regulations and using an evidence-based approach to ensure the most cost-effective actions are taken; improving the health of our natural water environment will require collaborative working across many sectors and making use of local knowledge.

Catchment Abstraction Management Strategies (CAMS) set out how catchment water resource management can contribute to WFD implementation. From the context of the AONB landscape it is essential that investments in achieving the WFD and (CAMS) and their successors are taken forward in ways that supports the conservation and enhancement of the special characteristics and qualities of the AONB landscape.

## *Air*

Clean air is one of the top priorities of the 25 Year Environment Plan and important to the health and well-being of us all as well as the ecosystems around us. It has become increasingly apparent that agriculture, transport and industry are important contributors to air pollution, agriculture being responsible for ammonia and nitrogen emissions as well as carbon dioxide. The Office for National Statistics working with the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology researched the extent of removal of harmful pollutants; the findings show that the vegetation of Mid Kent is the 4<sup>th</sup> highest area in Britain in removing pollution; this particularly significant given the proximity of nearby urban (beneficiary) populations.

## **10.2 Geology and natural resources - special characteristics**

### **Geology**

The Kent Downs are valued as a place of spectacular views, dramatic scenery and landscape character and quality. The underlying geology is quite literally the foundation of this natural beauty; the pattern and hues of the landscape. The Chalk in particular is an ever present component of much of the Kent Downs.

The AONB contains a number of special nationally and regionally important geological or physiographical features, eight of which have been designated as geological Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) – including the full extent of the Chalk cliffs of the Heritage Coasts, where the exposures are of international significance. Where they are not statutorily designated, some sites have been selected as Regionally Important Geological Sites (RIGS) which are sometimes referred to as Local Geological Sites.

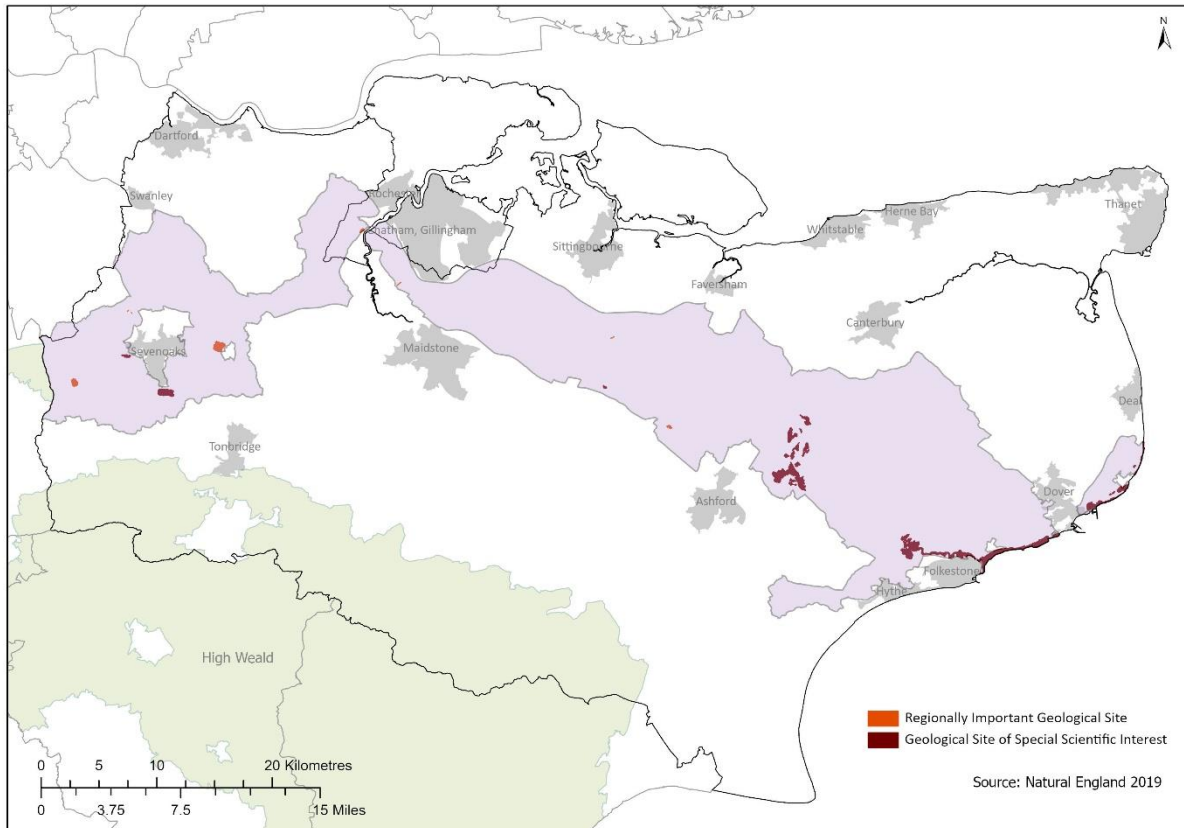


Figure 10.1 Important geological sites in the Kent Downs AONB

## Soil

The irreplaceable nature of soils, their colour, scents and texture as well as their connection with the pattern of natural vegetation, settlement and land use is a fundamental determinant of the character and qualities of the AONB. An undisturbed soil structure is a vital ecosystem component in woodlands and other semi-natural habitats and soil function is crucial in the Kent Downs AONB landscape contribution to biodiversity loss climate mitigation and adaptation.

## Water

Water helps define the landscape we see today, the pattern of settlement, land form, agriculture and wildlife are in part determined by the water environment. The Kent Downs AONB is a comparatively dry landscape; rain water permeates easily through the porous Chalk and Greensand bedrock with generally few areas of standing water, except where Clay-lined dew ponds are present. Where the permeable Chalk and Greensand layers meet impermeable Gault Clay, water seeps out in spring lines. The lower scarp slopes are characterised by historic settlements that have developed around these water sources (e.g. Postling, Hollingbourne and Underriver). These springs flow into the main river catchments, flowing out of and sometimes through the AONB. Our chalk streams and rivers are of international importance because of their nature, beauty and rarity.

## Air

The Kent Downs offers the opportunity to experience the 'open air' clean, fresh air is an important natural and perceptual quality of the Downs; it adds to the health and wellbeing

that the AONB provides to residents and visitors. The landscape and vegetation pattern of the Kent Downs is particularly important in the air pollution reduction it achieves close to beneficiary populations.

### 10.3 Geology and natural resources - main issues, opportunities and threats

#### Geology

- a. Lack of awareness about the importance of AONB geology and landform.
- b. There are important mineral resources in the Kent Downs and its setting which are expected to come under further pressure for development as less constrained sites are worked out and as a result of the UK leaving the EU. Mineral workings can have a serious impact on landscape quality. Restoration plans may be affected by the deficit of inert materials which were once more easily obtainable.
- c. The importance of geological sites and features tends to be overlooked due to lack of information, interpretation, poor management, development, landfill and dumping.

#### Soils

- d. Soil erosion, especially on the steeper slopes and under 'open' arable crops, such as maize and potentially some biomass crops; climate change enhances this risk.
- e. Maintaining and improving soil quality, for instance through minimal and zero tillage methods, and promoting the relationship between good soil management and climate change mitigation.

#### Water

- f. Pollution of rivers and springs from point sources, including public and private sewerage systems, agriculture and fish farms.
- g. Diffuse pollution from agricultural sources leading to nutrient enrichment, reduced water and elevated levels of silt and pesticides.
- h. The expected increase in water demand for public use and irrigation in already over abstracted catchments presents major challenges for water resource management and potentially the installation of significant new water infrastructure in or affecting the landscape.
- i. Predicted increase and volume of flooding and drought events. River flooding in the Kent Downs affects localised areas.
- j. Need to understand the relationship between landscape management, aquifer recharge and water quality.
- k. The water companies' Water Resources Management Plans process provides an opportunity for collaborative working to secure a more resilient water supply at the same time as landscape management which supports landscape character.

- l. The opportunity to collaborate with the Catchment Based Approach to secure the conservation and enhancement of landscape character as well as delivery of Water Framework Directive (or its successors) objectives – and also ensuring that AONB principles and projects support the WFD.

### **Air**

- m. The important benefits of clean air are increasingly understood whereas the role of the Kent Downs landscape in providing these services is not well understood and at risk, for instance from tree disease.
- n. There is a need to reduce air pollution from transport and agriculture in the Kent Downs.

### **Ecosystems services and green infrastructure**

- o. The significant benefits of Kent Downs ecosystem services are insufficiently recognised and valued and the opportunities to secure payment for them is not yet developed.
- p. The need to establish and secure the Kent Downs as a vital component of Kent's green infrastructure provision.

## **10.4 Geology and natural resources - aims**

A landscape in which:

1. A safe, clean environment is protected, conserved and enhanced, where residents, visitors and nearby populations benefit from essential ecosystem services and increased well-being and quality of life.
2. Important geological sites and exposures of the Kent Downs are recognised, conserved and enhanced.
3. The natural capital resources of soil, water and air will be conserved, enhanced and managed in a way which enhances landscape character and qualities.
4. Local sources of pollution indigenous to the AONB are minimised, reduced or controlled.
5. The Kent Downs AONB landscape provides vital services and green infrastructure for Kent and the south east.

## **10.5 Geology and natural resources - principles**

GNR1 Activities designed to protect, conserve and enhance the important geological exposures of the Kent Downs will be encouraged. To recognise the importance of the geology of the Kent Downs the opportunity to secure Geopark status for the Kent Downs will be explored.

GNR2 Careful management and sensitive restoration of existing minerals and waste sites in or affecting the Kent Downs will be pursued.

GNR3 A careful approach will be taken to reduce the likely pressure for new minerals sites

in or affecting the Kent Downs AONB including ensuring the provision of wharfs to enable alternative sources to be provided.

GNR4 Advice to farmers and land managers which seeks integrated environmental land and natural resource management in the Kent Downs will be encouraged.

GNR5 A strategic collaborative Catchment Based Approach will be taken to the management of the water environment in the Kent Downs AONB to secure a more resilient water supply, achieve good ecological status in the water bodies and the conservation and enhancement of the landscape.

GNR6 Additional water abstraction particularly in the Darent and Great Stour river catchments will be resisted unless it can be demonstrated that there will not be any harmful impacts upon the special character and qualities of the Kent Downs. Support for Water Resource Management Planning which seeks to secure the conservation and enhancement of the Kent Downs AONB will be pursued.

GNR7 A collaborative approach will be pursued to secure the provision of appropriate ecosystems services and green infrastructure, which supports the special character and qualities of the Kent Downs, for the benefit of the community and economy.

GNR 8 Ensure that projects, proposals and plans as well as future public agricultural payments recognise and seek to protect, conserve enhance the extent, quality and functions of the soil.

GNR 9 Ensure that landscape management practice, plans and policies seek to enhance the clean air benefits that the Kent Downs AONB offers recipient populations.

# 11. Quality of Life and Vibrant Communities

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## Summary record of changes

**This short note records the main changes made to the current AONB Management Plan when preparing this draft.**

The vision period has shortened and the vision is framed to be more inclusive, this is in response to engagement work taken forward in the preparation of the Plan and the evidence provided by the Government's Landscapes Review. The proposed new purpose to foster economic and community vitality is referenced.



The link between the landscape and community health and well-being has been strengthened and a new aim and principle has been added to reflect this important priority.

There is more background information including that provided by the Landscape Review which provided helpful information at a national level about community engagement in National Landscapes.

The information and evidence base has been updated, more detail is provided on Neighbourhood Planning now that this is active in the Kent Downs.

Reference is made to the House of Lords Select Committee on Rural Economy and the evidence is used to inform this section of the plan; the issues identified by the Select Committee and the evidence gathering for the Management Plan are closely aligned.

New information on the visitor perception of Kent is added and the increasing issue of 'over visiting' is covered in this and section 12.

The potential of impacts from EU exit (for instance on Rural Development funding) are covered in the narrative, issues and principles.

Reference is made to the Landscapes Review intention to expand volunteering in National Landscapes; if this is supported by Government an approach which would not undermine existing volunteer groups is promoted, a new principle is established to support volunteering in the Kent Downs. Reference is made to the health benefits of volunteering from information provided by Prof. Pretty at University of Essex.

The baseline social and economic evidence has not been substantially updated because it remains the most up-to-date information available. The limited evidence base is recorded as an issue and a new principle supports further evidence gathering.

'Policies' have been replaced by 'Principles' in accordance with the advice of the Kent Downs AONB Joint Advisory Committee (JAC). The previous policies and policy approach have been clarified, simplified and updated to respond to the approach agreed by the JAC and the new issues opportunities and threats and changing context.

## Quality of life

### Secondary purposes of AONB designation

The landscape comes first. The primary purpose of AONB designation is to 'conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the landscape'; this is the focus of the Management Plan.

The secondary purposes of AONB designation are to take account of the needs of land-based and rural industries and of the economic and social needs of local communities. The demand for recreation should be met in a way that is consistent with the conservation of natural beauty and the needs of agriculture, forestry and other uses.

The following sections set out how the secondary purposes of AONB designation will be addressed by the Management Plan, it recognises that, without the support of a wide range

of people the conservation and enhancement of the natural beauty of the landscape will not be achievable. A principal consideration is how secondary purposes relate back to the primary purpose of designation. The challenge for this Management Plan is to find ways in which social and economic well-being, public understanding and enjoyment, can be complementary to, and can further support, the primary purpose of conserving and enhancing natural beauty.

## 11. Vibrant communities

*'Any attempt to create a division between what visitors need and what locals want will always be arbitrary: lots of people who live in national landscapes love their natural beauty, and lots of people who visit want to be in places which are real communities. It is a shared interest.'*  
Government's Landscape Review 2019

### Our vision

In 2030... a diversity of people and communities are central to the conservation, enhancement and enjoyment of the Kent Downs; they value this special place and feel welcome to enjoy, experience and benefit from the AONB. People and communities have a strong, positive influence over change through being engaged and active participants. Communities' work and voluntary activity marries social and economic well-being with landscape conservation and enhancement. Individuals and organisations choose to buy goods and services that in themselves benefit the Kent Downs landscape and economy. The health and well-being benefits of contact with nature and beauty have become central to the purposes and management of the landscape and the Kent Downs partnership.

#### 11.1 Overview

The Kent Downs AONB is a 'living part of modern England, not isolated from the forces which shape the rest of society' the beautiful Downs are located close to millions of people. One aim of this Management Plan must be to find ways of achieving thriving, vibrant communities and a sustainable and prosperous local economy that conserves and enhances this nationally important area. This is why the IUCN Category V definition (see section 2) is so important and why combining both people and nature is a particular challenge for this plan.

While an AONB Management Plan is not the primary means for tackling social and economic needs, without the right social and economic conditions, it is difficult to conserve and enhance the valued landscape. In recognition of the importance of vibrant communities to supporting the purposes of the AONBs the Landscape Review has recommended a new purpose for AONBs and National Parks which would be to 'Foster the economic and community vitality of their area in support of the first two purposes'.

#### 11.2 Vibrant communities

"Rural communities and the economies in them have been ignored and underrated for too long. We must act now to reverse this trend, but we can no longer allow the clear inequalities between the urban and rural to continue unchecked. A rural strategy would address challenges and realise potential in struggling and under-performing areas, and allow vibrant

and thriving areas to develop further. Doing nothing is not an option." Lord Foster of Bath – Chair of the House of Lords Select Committee for the Rural Economy.

The findings of the House of Lords Select Committee (April 2019) for the rural economy and the context, issues and opportunities identified in this plan are largely coherent; at the time of writing the Government response to the Committee report is awaited.

The population of the Kent Downs AONB in 2011 (most recent census information) is estimated to be approx. 96,000 or around 5.5% of Kent's population.

Social and economic information is difficult to establish at an AONB level but the most recent information available shows an AONB population which is generally older, with fewer ethnic minority groups than the rest of the county. This is supported by information provided to the independent Landscape Review. The population of the Kent Downs has more white-collar and professional workers than the county as a whole, with higher owner-occupancy and car ownership per household. A higher percentage of people are self-employed, probably resulting in more home-working and indicative of an increasing knowledge-based economy within the AONB.

The ease of access to main urban areas, including Greater London, and the attractiveness of the villages and countryside places great demand on most parts of the AONB as a place to live and work and from which to commute. House prices are high and the percentage increase has been higher than the regional average.

There is a lack of affordable and/or rented housing within or adjacent to the AONB particularly for young people and families, and people on lower incomes (including public sector workers and those employed in the land-based industries). This creates 'hidden households' where young adults continue to live with parents rather than establishing themselves independently.

Incomes are higher than the regional average and are around the average for people living in a protected landscape.

Not surprisingly, the percentage of people employed in land-based economic activities is double that for the county as a whole, although this figure is a small part of the overall AONB workforce (3.8%). However AONB residents from other industry sectors are in similar proportion to the county as a whole; hotels and restaurants are important employers in the Kent Downs AONB.

The Kent Rural Delivery Framework evidence base described Kent's rural communities as active and entrepreneurial; they are a considerable asset which can be harnessed to secure the future of the AONB. Rural poverty and exclusion is regarded as a hidden but real issue in a number of communities particularly for isolated elderly people, people with disabilities, migrant workers and some young families. While lower than the regional average the Index of Multiple Deprivation is higher than for other South East National Landscapes. Added to this, there are five wards on or immediately adjacent to the AONB boundary with high social and economic needs.

The importance of traditional land-based economic activities to the AONB's rural income is small and declining. However, a number of other employment sectors and industries (such as transportation, distribution, tourism and retail) depend on land-based activities and landscape to some extent. The diversification of the employment base in a way which

supports the landscape character and special characteristics of the AONB needs to be encouraged and developed. The community heritage knowledge which resides with older generations of residents is a valuable resource for the celebration of the landscape and community vibrancy.

Some of the challenges for communities of the Kent Downs are to maintain balance and diversity given limited housing availability and high house prices, an aging population and sometimes difficult access to services. The provision of affordable local needs housing which is of sensitive design and location is a high priority identified by Action with Communities in Rural Kent (ACRK) through their community engagement, and this has been supported by the Landscapes Review evidence.

Evidence from the Kent Downs partnership and other Protected Landscapes shows that to be 'thriving and vibrant' communities need good access to services, social and community links, places to meet and interact, places for recreation and work, links beyond the immediate community, access to jobs, good digital connectivity and community activities and engagement. Rural deprivation issues also require close attention and support. In the context of a protected landscape these community needs should be met in ways which support the character, qualities and characteristics of the landscape. Indeed landscape and environmental conservation and design can be a good focus for community development.

The Kent Downs AONB has benefitted from substantial investment supporting sustainable rural development through various EU programmes including Interreg and LEADER. The expected exit from the EU places these at risk and there is considerable concern that the Shared Prosperity Fund may not provide a comparable or improved replacement.

*'One thing stood out, talking to people in the course of this review and examining the responses to our call for evidence. They worry that longstanding communities feel under great pressure, and point in particular to house prices and jobs.'* Government's Landscape Review 2019

### **Community, parish planning and neighbourhood plans**

There has been long running support for community and parish planning in the Kent Downs AONB. Community engagement in understanding the built and cultural heritage can be important to community identity and activity. There are a variety of community planning approaches including Village Design Statements, Parish Plans; neighbourhood planning and Conservation Plans.

The Localism Act introduced the neighbourhood planning system, Neighbourhood planning gives communities the opportunity to develop a shared vision for their neighbourhood and help shape the development and growth of their local area. Neighbourhood plans can influence where communities propose new homes, shops and offices are built, have their say on what those new buildings should look like and what infrastructure should be provided.

### **Community services and enterprises**

There has been long run concern about the decline in community and village services such as village shops, post offices, churches and pubs. Consequently the loss of such assets can trigger the creation of community run enterprises which in themselves are a community development catalyst and can be a vehicle to support a sustainable local economy which supports landscape character there are several examples across the AONB of successful community run facilities working alongside more 'traditional' businesses.

## Volunteering

There is already a strong voluntary ethic in and around the Kent Downs; Parish Councils, conservation volunteers, charities, tree and river wardens, footpath volunteers, walks leaders, religious groups, village and community enterprises and the Countryside Partnerships all rely on voluntary efforts and often this supports landscape conservation and the enhancement of communities. Participating in volunteering can provide healthy exercise and social interaction and is known to benefit health and well-being; even life expectancy is greater for those who participate in volunteering. Given the wide and established volunteer groups the AONB Partnership has deliberately sought not to 'compete' with existing volunteer organisations but to support them.

The Government's Landscape Review strongly promotes expanding volunteering in our national landscapes through the support of a National Landscape Service, as this emerges the Kent Downs AONB response should be positive but should not undermine but strengthen existing volunteer groups.

Much of the volunteer 'force' benefiting the Kent Downs AONB is made up of actively retired individuals; there is a concern that as work and life patterns change this resource may reduce substantively.

## Our neighbours

The Kent Downs AONB is in a unique position of being so close to major urban and growth areas and London. There are now well over 1 million people living within one kilometre of the Kent Downs AONB boundary, many are areas of high social and economic need and the growth trajectory for Kent is unprecedented (see sections 2) and. The AONB offers a place for recreation, health and well-being to these communities, but the relationship needs to be carefully developed so that all benefit and landscape qualities and community life are not compromised. We know from the Landscape Review that there are considerable barriers to many people and communities to accessing and enjoying the Kent Downs landscape, these are covered in more detail in section 12.

## Sustainable rural leisure and tourism

Sustainable rural leisure and tourism has been identified as a key way to supporting the socio-economic well-being of rural areas. Providing jobs and supporting community services, sustainable rural tourism of itself can be a catalyst for community development.

Sustainable tourism has been defined as "Tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, and the environment and host communities." Making Tourism More Sustainable – A Guide for Policy Makers, UNEP World Tourism Organization.

Perception research taken forward by Visit Kent in 2017 show that the main perceptions of Kent are to do with the coast, scenic countryside, the culture, gardens and historic buildings, food and festivals. The countryside is referred to frequently. In particular there are mentions of a variety of scenery, 'quiet countryside', the garden of England, orchards, hops, oast houses. Kent sustains a leadership position when it comes to tourist perceptions. Even amongst those who have never visited Kent, the region is seen more positively than its neighbours on the most motivating imagery dimensions including, Coastal, Rural, Historic, Nature, Food & Drink and Seaside.' Visit Kent 2018 Many of these features are provided 'in spades' by the landscapes of the Kent Downs

As part of the evidence gathering for this review it became clear that ‘over visiting’ has rapidly become an issue across the AONB particularly on countryside with heritage sites. Visitor site car parks are often full by mid-morning on a sunny weekend and the visitor experience at risk of declining, along with erosion to paths, damage to the historic, natural and cultural heritage as well as loss of tranquillity. Making tourism and recreation more sustainable is not just about controlling and managing the negative impacts, tourism and recreation are in a special position to benefit local communities economically and socially, and to raise awareness and support for environmental conservation.

In recognising the importance of sustainable rural tourism, the Kent Downs AONB Unit has taken the lead, the EXPERIENCE project a £3m E.U. funded project which seeks to improve facilities to promote off season visiting, encourage sustainable tourism and promote new sites and visitor resources so reducing pressure on ‘honey pots’.

*‘There are lots of benefits to communities from designation – pubs and village shops are kept busy, and more visitors means more people who might support bus services. Studies, which are largely based on surveys of businesses in national landscapes, provide strong evidence that environmental quality in general, and in national landscapes in particular, help to support a significant proportion of local economic activity.’* Government Landscape Review

### **Community health and well-being**

The evidence is clear that there are multiple physical and mental health benefits from access and contact with beautiful places; these range from just feeling enlivened after a walk in the open air to significant therapeutic interventions with those with dementia, have experienced trauma or, for instance, suffer from cardio-vascular disease. The NHS recruitment of link workers to boost social prescribing demonstrates that the evidence has effected change in practice. The AONB landscape and partnership has a significant opportunity to collaborate with Public Health and the NHS to support social prescribing and to develop partnership projects and programmes that can change lives including for seriously affected families and individuals.

The Government’s Landscape Review promotes a new statutory duty for AONBs and National Parks; one of the 27 proposals specifically supports the landscapes catering for and improving the nation’s health and wellbeing and promotes a new statutory purpose, to: ‘actively connect all parts of society with these special places to support understanding, enjoyment and the nation’s health and wellbeing’. The Kent Downs AONB partnership strongly supports this ambition.

## **11.3 Vibrant communities - main issues, opportunities and threats identified**

### **Social exclusion, deprivation and access to services**

- a. A number of areas and wards around and within the AONB have high levels of social deprivation and communities experience barriers to experiencing and benefiting from the AONB. Within the AONB community diversity is low, rural poverty and social exclusion can be ‘hidden’ and is an issue for some elderly people, ethnic minority groups, migrant workers, people with disabilities and those on low incomes.
- b. Retaining and improving access to, and provision of, local services and facilities including super-fast broadband, post offices, village shops, public houses and

community infrastructure.

- c. Community facilities, such as schools, libraries, social care and doctors' surgeries, are unevenly available and accessible.
- d. There is limited up-to-date specific data on the social and economic profile of the Kent Downs.

### **The availability of affordable housing**

- e. Housing prices have continued to rise, in some parts, well above and faster than the national average.
- f. Considerable demand for affordable and local needs housing in many parishes in the AONB

### **Maintaining and diversifying the employment base**

- g. Decline in farming and forestry employment, although both industries are still important economically in terms of maintaining Kent Downs character.
- h. Skills gap for some local employers, such as locally based skilled forestry and farm workers as well as heritage skills.

### **Sense of community and belonging**

- I The need to attach people to place and landscape heritage where an increasing proportion of the population are not directly involved in landscape management.
- J The need to overcome barriers to accessing and enjoying the landscape for a more diverse range of people
- k. The need to improve community recognition and value of the special characteristics of the AONB to secure its future conservation and enhancement.
- l. The need for support to achieve greater and a more diverse community capacity and involvement in decisions affecting the AONB.

### **Sustainable leisure and tourism**

- m. There is an opportunity and demonstrable need to sustainably manage the numbers, impact and income from visitors to benefit local people, local services and support the conservation and enhancement of the AONB landscape.
- n. Some areas within the AONB suffer either from over capacity or overuse, leading to a detrimental impact on both the landscape character and qualities, visitor experience and host communities.
- o. The departure of the UK from the EU raises concerns about how sustainable rural development will be supported.

## 11.4 Vibrant communities - aims

A landscape in which:

1. Thriving, diverse, vibrant communities understand, recognise and value the special qualities of the AONB and play an active role in its conservation and enhancement while reducing their environmental impact.
2. A strong and sustainable rural economy supports the special characteristics and qualities of the AONB and is supported by residents and visitors, who value and use sustainable local produce and services.
3. There is well designed, sustainable and affordable housing, particularly for workers employed in the land-based economy and conservation of the AONB's landscape, social and economic vitality.
4. Accessible, affordable local services and facilities are available to all and are well-used throughout the AONB.
5. The high quality environment and landscape of the AONB is seen as an asset to local businesses, which in turn contribute to the conservation of the landscape through the use of local sustainable goods and labour and through active conservation and enhancement.
6. The area is recognised by both local communities and visitors as a premier sustainable tourism destination.
7. The environmental impact of AONB communities is stabilised and reduced.
8. The health and wellbeing benefits offered to communities and individuals are actively pursued.

## 11.5 Vibrant communities - principles

- VC1 Community and business initiatives that improve the recognition, engagement in and conservation of the AONB and encourage community life will be pursued.
- VC2 Positive and sustainable links between the AONB (landscape, communities and partnership) and nearby communities, particularly from excluded groups and from neighbouring deprived areas will be pursued.
- VC3 Initiatives which are in line with existing policies of the Local Planning Authority that increase and improve the supply of affordable housing for (i) those with proven local needs, and (ii) workers whose activities directly contribute to the purposes of the AONB designation, will be supported where it is demonstrated that the proposals are suitably located, of high quality design, limited quantity and scale and are built to the best current environmental standards.
- VC4 The retention and development of local services, facilities and employment



opportunities in order to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the Kent Downs AONB and reduce the need to travel by car and maintain viable rural communities will be supported.

- VC5 Skills training and business development assistance will be encouraged where they contribute to the viability of communities and meet the purposes of the AONB.
- VC6 The development of sustainable visitor and tourism facilities will be pursued where they enhance people's enjoyment and understanding of the AONB without detracting from its special characteristics and qualities.
- VC7 Tourism and leisure businesses in the AONB will be encouraged to adopt the principles of sustainable tourism and to demonstrate their commitment to sustainability.
- VC8 Local communities will be encouraged to prepare and promote Village Design Statements, Parish Plans and Neighbourhood Plans as appropriate to assist in the conservation and enhancement of local distinctiveness as settlements evolve. These documents should address development requiring planning permission, automatically permitted development, and change outside the scope of the planning system.
- VC9 Opportunities to better understand the social and economic profile of the Kent Downs AONB will be pursued.
- VC10 Support will be given to groups that encourage volunteering in the Kent Downs, in the event of the recommendations of the Landscapes Review being supported an approach with continues to support local groups will be established.
- VC 11 Opportunities to enhance the health and wellbeing of communities and individuals will be actively pursued focusing on opportunities to generate the greatest health and wellbeing outcomes or where there are gaps in provision.

# 12. Access, enjoyment and understanding

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## Summary of changes

This note records the main changes made to the current AONB Management Plan when preparing this draft.

Findings from Landscape Review concerning access and participation have been included throughout this section as part of the context and evidence base.

This section of the plan has used the extensive evidence base (market research, literature review etc.) provided for the Kent Rights of Way Improvement Plan (2018) which provides helpful contextual information. Particular emphasis is placed on understanding the barriers to access as well as the issues and risks of 'over visiting'

Greater emphasis is placed on both widening access opportunities and recognising that there are already areas of the AONB that are experiencing unsustainable access pressure.

Where available the evidence base has been updated, in some cases no new evidence is available so we have relied on that provided in the previous plan.

The implementation of the England Coast Path on the Heritage Coasts is referenced

There is greater emphasis on the health and well-being opportunities offered by access to the Kent Downs and links made to social prescribing

'Policies' have been replaced by 'Principles' in accordance with the advice of the Kent Downs AONB Joint Advisory Committee. The previous policies and policy approach have been clarified, simplified and updated to respond to the approach agreed by the JAC and the new issues opportunities and threats and changing context.

## Our vision

In 2030... the Kent Downs AONB is a place of natural beauty with opportunity and access for all people; they feel welcome to participate in quiet recreation for health, relaxation, enjoyment and for cultural and artistic expression.

Improved management ensures that the Public Rights of Way and much of the highway network is safe, quiet and convenient for walkers, cyclists and horse riders and public transport is an attractive option to reach and enjoy the landscape. Maintenance of the Public Rights of Way and highway network is sympathetic to biodiversity and landscape character.

The Kent Downs AONB is recognised, valued and celebrated by residents, visitors and by those who simply delight in the fact that it is there.

### 12.1 Overview and context

The Kent Downs AONB offers some of England's most captivating and accessible countryside. The AONB has a resident population of over 93,000 people, however a further in excess of one million live within one kilometre and over 2 million within 10km of the boundary.

The AONB has 1876km/1166miles of Public Rights of Way network which is four times the density of the national average. The Kent Downs accommodates 40% of Kent's bridleways and 50% of Kent's byways on 23% of the county land area. For this important resource to be used there is clear evidence from the Public Rights of Way improvement plan evidence base that its maintenance, connection and promotion are key.

The AONB is crossed by or adjacent to four motorways, many trunk and 'A' roads, and hundreds of smaller roads. It is served by five railway lines with 27 railway stations and numerous bus routes and services. The Port of Dover, the UK's busiest ferry terminal, as well as the Channel Tunnel terminal are both immediately adjacent to the AONB. Ashford and Ebbsfleet International stations are in easy reach.

While there is often concern about the impact of recreation, carefully managed access to attractive countryside, particularly walking, cycling and horse riding can bring physical and mental health benefits, enable people to enjoy a great landscape, reconnect with nature and provide support to the local economy. The review of payments for land management which will follow the UK's exit from the EU provides a major opportunity to invest in new, well managed access to the landscape as part of a package Environmental Land Management payments which will use 'public money for public good'.

### **Managing access in the Kent Downs**

Under the Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act (2000), a Countryside Access Forum for Kent has been established. The role of the Forum is to advise on the improvement of public access to land within Kent for the purpose of open-air recreation and enjoyment. The Kent Countryside Access Forum (KCAF) also responds to Government consultations, contributes to the Kent Countryside Access Improvement Plan and steers and monitors access and recreation policy in Kent.

### **The Kent and Medway Rights of Way Improvement Plans**

Under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act (2000), Highway Authorities have a duty to develop a Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP). Kent's ROWIP was adopted as county policy in 2018 its vision is "*To provide a high quality, well-maintained Public Rights of Way network, that is well used and enjoyed. The use of the network will support the Kent economy, encourage active lifestyles and sustainable travel choices that support health and wellbeing, and contribute to making Kent a great place to live, work and visit*". Medway's ROWIP is being reviewed at the same time as this plan the draft review has informed this section of the plan.

The Kent ROWIP identified 6 key priorities for action; to encourage active lifestyles and utilisation of the Rights of Way for all of the many benefits these bring people, to evolve the network to meet future demand, to have good knowledge of use of the network and barriers to the use, to ensure a well maintained network of public Rights of Way, ensure that statutory responsibilities are taken forward and stator compliance is delivered and to work efficiently and enhanced our understanding of when and why people use the Rights of Way network and what the barriers are to use. In Medway the RoWIP is being prepared at the same time as this Management Plan; Medway Council's current priorities for the PROW service is to increase the use of volunteers, Community Pay Back Team and The Prison Service, the creation of an asset register, update the definitive maps and statements, a digitised definitive map, creation of disabled friendly walking routes, instillation of disabled friendly furniture on popular routes, completion of the England Coast Path followed by extending the Thames Path from Woolwich to Grain giving Medway three national trails.

### **Open access land**

Under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act around 0.6% of Kent and Medway has been dedicated for open access; the majority of this is chalk downland, along with registered common land and parkland within the AONB. 46% of open access land in Kent is within the

Kent Downs AONB (23% of the County). Open access land is managed by Kent County Council as the Access Authority. Additionally the Forestry Commission and the Woodland Trust has dedicated its land for open access. In many cases access land was already available through time limited agreements. However where large tracts of land have been mapped, for instance around Dover, there are significant access opportunities.

### Coastal access

The Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009 placed a duty on Natural England to improve access to the English coast through the creation of a continuous long-distance walking route, the 'England Coast Path National Trail'. The England Coast Path has been defined along the two Heritage Coasts of the Kent Downs AONB. The path provides a Coastal Access Margin on the seaward side of the new path, similar to open access land, providing significantly more access than the path itself. The North Downs Way National Trail and the new England Coast Path National Trail are increasingly building partnership working arrangements to share experience and enhance the potential benefits of the Coast Path.

### Visitors to the Kent Downs

Limited visitor information is available for the AONB as a whole; Visit Kent's research shows that the total visitor number for Kent in 2017 was 65 million people, spending £3.8bn in the county, a record figure and a 7% year on year increase. It is also clear from Visit Kent research that visits to the countryside and heritage sites are important motivators for many visits to Kent. The current estimates for Kent Downs AONB visitor numbers is approximately 20 million day visits a year, which is similar to the Cotswolds.

Evidence from the Landscapes Review shows that there are around 100m visits to national parks each year; and around 170m visits to AONBs but the benefit is not shared amongst all sections of society.

The Landscape Review states that 'statistics show certain groups especially disconnected. Most visits are made by the same (better off, less diverse) people repeatedly, and those who miss out are the older, the young – especially adolescents – and those from lower socio-economic groups and black, Asian and minority ethnic communities:

- 13% of children (under 16) and 5% of young people (aged 16-24) typically never visit the natural environment or even spend any of their leisure time outdoors.
- Children are spending less time unsupervised outside and children from black, Asian and minority ethnic, and low income, communities are even less likely to do so.
- 18% of children living in the most deprived areas never visit the natural environment at all.
- 20% fewer Visibly Minority Ethnic (VME) children go out into green spaces weekly compared to white, middleclass children.
- Children from deprived backgrounds visit 10% more than VME children.
- The numbers of children going on school visits to the countryside is shockingly low at just 6-7%.
- The groups which visit the countryside least are those aged 65 and over, members of the black, Asian and minority ethnic population and residents living in the most deprived areas of England.'

While it is clear that there are many people who are not benefiting from access to the beautiful landscapes of the Kent Downs, evidence from the engagement stage of this Management Plan review shows clearly that many visitor sites are now experiencing 'over visiting' such that parking facilities are often overwhelmed at weekends and the visitor

experience can be harmed as well as the landscape character and qualities of the areas that people are seeking to visit.

While visitor numbers are already growing rapidly the population of Kent is destined to grow at an unprecedented pace; in the period to 2031 the population of Kent is expected to increase by about  $\frac{1}{4}$  placing increasing pressure on already pressurised sites.

## Walking

There is strong policy support at a national and local level to promote walking and cycling, this ranges from the National Planning Policy Framework to the Kent Active Travel Plan. The density of Public Rights of Way in the Kent Downs is four times higher than the national average. This is an invaluable asset and enables access to and enjoyment of virtually all parts of the AONB and can provide good links between the Downs and local towns and villages. The use of footpaths in the AONB is unevenly distributed with greater usage in the west and around 'honey pot' attractions.

The evidence base for the Kent Rights of Way improvement Plan identifies key priorities for the improvement and enhancement of the network which would support better use, a common theme is the enhancement of the quality of paths and bridleways including better surfaces, fewer barriers, clear signing and more accessible information. The need for clear signing is supported by research by Cycling UK.

Of national importance is the North Downs Way National Trail which starts at Farnham in Surrey and follows the North Downs through Surrey and Kent to Dover with a loop via Canterbury. Of the 153 mile trail, 70 miles lie within the AONB. Based on data from people counters on the Trail management estimates 550,000 users on the trail in 2016 based on a 5% year on year rise in use over the last 10 years which included a 14% increase in 2015.

National Trails are promoted as long distance routes, although user surveys show that the majority of use on the North Downs Way tends to be for shorter walks. The opportunity to upgrade appropriate sections of the North Downs Way to include cyclists and horse riders is being considered and is supported. Two regional routes, the Saxon Shore Way and Greensand Way also pass through the Kent Downs, and there are a number of county recreational routes.

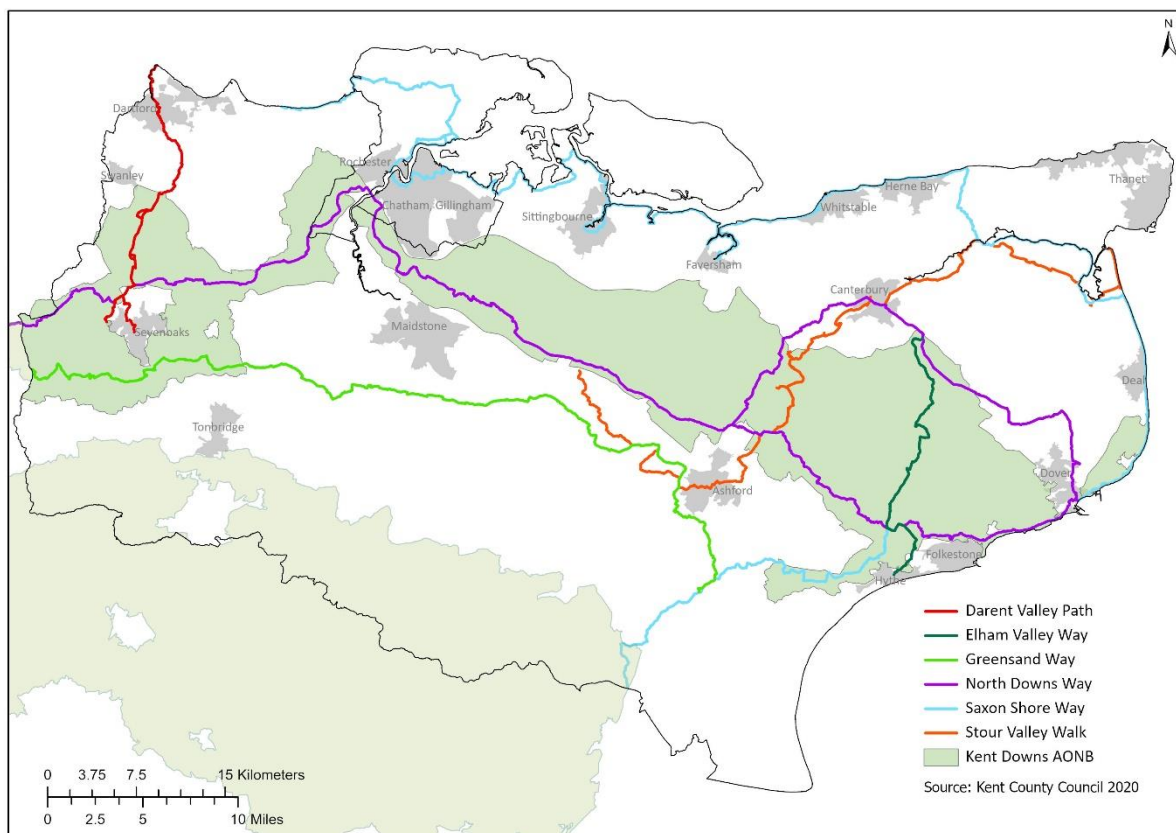


Figure 12.1 Promoted walking routes in Kent

## Cycling

Cycling is increasingly popular and can be a sustainable means of transport and recreation and is generally a quiet activity with low impact on the countryside. The increased prevalence of cycles makes the sometimes very steep hills of the Kent Downs now much more accessible to a greater number of people on cycles. Opportunities for off-road cycling in the AONB have been developed by Sustrans and Cycle UK. Sections of two National Cycle Routes and two regional routes pass through the AONB and the Pilgrims Cycle Trail, from Rochester to Canterbury, provides an arterial route through the Kent Downs. There are also a number of locally promoted on and off road cycle routes. Dedicated cycling routes are proposed as an effective and low impact link between the Kent Downs and nearby urban and growth areas.

Following a significant increase in requests for cycling information along the North Downs Way, a partnership with Cycling UK and Sustrans has been established to create a linear multi user route to allow cyclists, horse riders and mobility vehicles to explore the Trail and AONB. A combination of proximity to large urban populations, the advance of cycle technology (mountain bikes/ e-bikes) and the rapid rise of cycling is driving the need to provide infrastructure and information for these purposes.

## Horse riding and driving

Although the network is limited, 40% of Kent's bridleways are in the AONB, making the Kent Downs a significant area for horse riding. The latest information (provided for the previous

AONB Management Plan) estimates 100,000 riders in Kent, 50,000 regular riders, and horse numbers between 30 and 40,000 (Land Use Consultants/KCC). Evidence from the British Horse Society (BHS) and the Public Rights of Way teams (from maintenance spend) indicates that the increasing use of bridleways is damaging the route fabric. The BHS in Kent estimates a population of 90 horses per kilometre of bridleway, creating significant pressure on the network. Horse riding, driving and equine events provide important opportunities for access, exercise, health and wellbeing and can provide access opportunities for those with disabilities and mental health therapeutic needs.

Horse riding, like cycling and walking is increasingly difficult and dangerous on rural roads because of the volume and speed of traffic and the bridleway network in Kent is limited.

Other opportunities for informal countryside recreation are generally provided on the many open access sites, picnic sites and facilities across the AONB. These include 12 Country Parks and picnic sites, 44 Village Greens (44.9ha) and 48 areas of Registered Common Land (442.7ha). Access for informal recreation is also available at a number of National Trust properties concentrated on the Greensand Ridge south of Sevenoaks, parts of the White Cliffs Heritage Coast, Forestry Commission-owned woodland and sites owned and managed by Kent Wildlife Trust and the Woodland Trust.

### **Organised events**

The continued strong growth in organised events for a range of outdoor activities including cycling sportives on-road and trail (cross-country), running, duathlons, triathlons, sponsored walks, orienteering and geocaching has increased. Events are led by a range of organisations including charitable bodies, sports clubs, and increasingly local events companies specialising in running and cycling events, such as Nice Work based in East Sussex which operate several events in and around Kent. Local running clubs are also active in this area, such as Istead and Ifield Harriers (North Downs Run) and Centurion Running (North Downs 50 and 100). In 2017 Pilgrims Hospice ran a walking challenge from Wye to Dover. In its second year of running in 2019 the event attracted 500 walkers with plans to develop this further. The North Downs Way alone sees over 10,000 people/ year take part in these events with new events appearing at around 4 events/ year. Inevitably this leads to an increase in users training for these events and training for other similar events in other locations. Transport connections to large populations make the landscape and trail attractive assets for event organisers.

### **Access for Artistic and Cultural expression**

The Kent Downs has long provided an important location for the creation and research of many creative projects. In recent years this activity has increased with artists and cultural practitioners focussed on outcomes that are more sustainable and connect to environmental concerns. There are several areas of the AONB where people can access and enjoy great art; there is an opportunity for the partnership to provide infrastructure and partnerships that can support this work

### **Field sports**

The Kent Downs landscape lends itself to pheasant shooting and hunting with extensive areas of woodland and tree cover and arable and mixed farm use. It is estimated that game bird shooting generates at least £10 million per annum for the local economy and is one of the most economically important uses for Kent Downs woodlands. However, conflicts arise because of overstocking with pheasants; woodland management for game birds; the impact of the stocked bird populations on wild plant and animal communities and the landscape



impact of game bird cover crops. A collaborative project with the Game Conservancy Trust has produced best practice guidance for game bird management in the Kent Downs.

Fishing is also popular although the Kent Downs offers limited scope for coarse and freshwater fishing, such as along the river and gravel pits of the Great Stour valley. Sea fishing is also popular off parts of the Heritage Coast, such as St Margaret's Bay and Samphire Hoe where national competitions are held.

### **Country motor sports**

Country motor sports are growing in popularity and are of special relevance in the AONB as the Kent Downs (23% of Kent's land area) accommodates 53% of the byways. Activities include events on public roads such as car tours, treasure hunts and road rallies along with green-laneing and trail riding on byways. While responsible users promote good practice and respect for others, the use of byways and unmetalled roads by 4x4 vehicles and motorbikes, although legal, can lead to significant conflicts with other users because of disturbance, safety issues and damage to the Rights of Way surface. There remains illegal use of footpaths and bridleways by motorised vehicles, and the use of byways to access the wider landscape. These and other recreational activities can negatively affect the tranquillity of the AONB which is a much-valued component of natural beauty.

The declaration of climate and environmental emergencies means that promoting motor vehicle use for recreation in its own right is unlikely to remain supportable and supporting a move to providing for electric vehicles will be an increasing priority.

### **Road users**

The rural road network of the Kent Downs is often of ancient origin and its pattern is an important part of the special character and qualities of the landscape. The Kent Growth and Infrastructure Framework identifies traffic growth and congestion as an important issue in Kent and the Kent Downs is not immune; the roads of the Kent Downs provide well used north south links through the county and are also used as an important way to access the landscape and the main UK Europe transport routes pass partly through or very close by the AONB. Greater reliance on the car is partly thought to be because people perceive roads to be dangerous to walk or cycle. The KCC road safety rural campaign states that rural roads account for 3/5 of road fatalities, which are focused on roads to and from urban areas.

The historic and ancient routeways and paths are susceptible to damage by modern vehicular use, detracting from the enjoyment of the area by walkers and cyclists and damaging the fabric of the lane.

### **Access for people with restricted mobility and socially excluded groups**

Greater recognition of the needs of socially excluded groups, and legislation including the Disability Discrimination Acts 1995 and 2005, are leading to enhanced efforts to meet the needs of all, including people with disabilities, on low incomes or without access to private transport.

Research from the Kent Countryside Access Improvement Plan has shown that 18% of people with a disability never visit the natural environment, compared with 8% of the non-disabled population. Research found that disabled people visited the countryside to enjoy views, the landscape and to relax and they perceived the countryside as inherently rewarding and beneficial to the same degree as the wider population, especially for the psychological benefits. In addition, accessing the natural environment gave people with

disabilities a sense of continuity between their disabled and non-disabled selves, and a sense of achievement.

For people with mobility restrictions there are a growing number of promoted routes and sites and user groups are taking active and welcome steps to support wider access for all.

### **Health and well-being**

There is compelling evidence for the health and well-being benefits of contact with nature and access to the countryside. With a rapidly increasing urban population in Kent and London there is a special focus on the role of the Kent Downs landscape in providing these significant multiple benefits. The evidence base for the Rights of Way Improvement plan added to this saying *'Our research showed that the clear majority of PROW users experienced only positive feelings relating to vitality and happiness when using the network, showing how valuable the network is in improving people's quality of life through health and wellbeing benefits.'* This evidence base is being recognised in the NHS and in the early years of the plan the NHS will be recruiting 'link workers' to connect prescribers with local agencies which can provide support for a wide range of people for instance with long-term conditions, need support with their mental health, are lonely or isolated or have complex social needs which affect their wellbeing.

### **Education and children**

Over the next 20 years, today's children will become tomorrow's decision makers. If we are to secure a future for this precious landscape, we should actively encourage understanding and education for young people. The close proximity of substantial urban areas to the Kent Downs AONB offers a special opportunity to promote exciting and engaging activities for schools and families. The disconnection between children and the natural environment has been described as 'Nature Deficit Disorder' and its consequences and the opportunities to address it have been documented in a National Trust report. One of the 'stand out' recommendations of the Government's Landscape Review was to offer all children a night under the stars.

There are many opportunities to reconnect children with nature (and dark night skies), link education activities to the national curriculum and to strengthen the understanding, enjoyment and celebration of the AONB landscape.

### **Information and interpretation**

At the heart of enjoyable countryside recreation is high quality information that helps visitors plan their use of the Kent Downs, and increases the understanding and satisfaction of their experience. Information is currently available in a variety of forms but tends not to be coordinated. The Landscape Review as well as the Rights of Way Improvement Plan have identified the need for better information and clearer signing as a priority for the future management of National Landscapes to benefit visitors and local people alike.

No specific AONB visitor centres exist, although many of the existing centres do provide information about the Kent Downs.

## **12.2 Access, enjoyment and understanding - main issues, opportunities and threats**

- a. Estimated day visitor numbers are high and increasing. Pressure on the special

characteristics and qualities of the AONB as well as particular countryside routes, sites and areas can be very high but unevenly distributed, concern about 'over visiting' has been reported by farmers and land managers, managers of wildlife sites and managers of visitor attractions.

- b. The very rapid growth trajectory for Kent will generate new opportunities for and pressures from access for enjoyment, health and well-being.
- c. There is a need to identify how the CRow Act open access sites can bring wider benefits and links to education and information provision.
- d. Differences in requirements and uses between rightful PRow users (horse riders, cyclists, motorbikes, 4x4s and walkers, those with dogs) can result in conflicts.
- e. Conflicts between rightful PRow users and illegal users, fly-tipping, dumping and path obstruction.
- f. The increasing popularity of horse riding and off road cycling which is focused particularly on the AONB, putting pressure on the rights of way network farm land and wildlife sites. The need to enhance, extend, connect and improve fragmented Public Rights of Way network and secure higher rights on PRow without harming the characteristics and qualities of the AONB.
- g. There are a variety of groups and individuals who experience barriers to enjoying the landscape whose needs require understanding, attention and active support or interventions.
- h. Need to ensure that the PRow network is well signposted, way-marked, connected and maintained using materials and equipment appropriate in design and sustainably sourced.
- i. Improving the rural road network for its landscape quality and to promote quiet countryside recreation by managing traffic pressures to provide quiet and safe access.
- j. Need to increase and enhance people's understanding of and access opportunities to the AONB, its landscape and countryside practices and to provide coordinated information in a number of formats appropriate to their setting.
- k. Need to maximise coastal access opportunities through the newly defined England Coast Path National Trail and support the enhanced management of the coastal corridor.
- l. Need to promote exciting and engaging education and interpretation schemes for children and young people both in and out of the school context.
- m. The opportunity to promote the availability and use of safe non-car based countryside transport and recreation opportunities and seek integrated public transport initiatives.
- n. The opportunity to secure health and well-being benefits through social and green prescribing in the Kent Downs.

## 12.3 Access, enjoyment and understanding - aims

A landscape that provides:

1. Sustainable opportunities and facilities to enable everyone to safely enjoy and understand the AONB countryside without detracting from it, where perceptual and physical barriers to access are removed and minimised.
2. A legally defined, well maintained, connected and promoted Rights of Way and permissive path network that provides safe, well designed connected and satisfying routes for walkers, cyclists and horse riders where conflicts between rightful uses are minimised.
3. New routes and connections between public rights of way and a highway network which is increasingly available and safe for walkers, cyclists and horse riders.
4. Access where illegal or damaging recreational activities are actively controlled.
5. Special places, events, media and appropriate support available throughout the year for people of all ages and backgrounds to learn about their environment, enjoy and benefit from the AONB landscape, know they are there and celebrate its diversity and richness.
6. Innovative and stimulating opportunities for all people to be involved artistically and culturally and to exercise and improve their health and well-being, in tranquil and inspiring surroundings.

## 12.5 Access, enjoyment and understanding - principles

- AEU1 Co-ordinated information and interpretation for recreation, access, education, and health and well-being across the AONB which is accurate, well presented and appropriate to its setting, readily available in a variety of formats and fosters a greater understanding and respect for the AONB as well as a wider diversity of people benefiting will be pursued.
- AEU2 Diversions and stopping up of PRowWs will be resisted unless it can be demonstrated that they will not have a detrimental impact on opportunities for access and quiet enjoyment of the AONB landscape and historic character.
- AEU3 Investment to secure sustainable, high quality, low impact and easy access, multi-user routes and high quality public transport options from towns and growth areas to the AONB will be pursued.
- AEU4 The sustainable and enhanced management and promotion of Public Rights of Way, permissive paths and open access sites will be pursued.
- AEU5 Mechanisms will be supported to resolve conflicts between rightful users of Public Rights of Way. Where there are irreconcilable conflicts from legal but damaging activities, quiet recreation will be supported above other activities.
- AEU6 Robust mechanisms to resist and overcome illegal use and poor maintenance which

harm the opportunity to explore and enjoy the AONB will be pursued where design is in accordance with the Landscape Design Handbook.

- AEU7 Improvements to the Rights of Way Network to overcome barriers provide and improve countryside access, health and well-being opportunities, including, connecting with NHS social prescribing, enhanced way-marking, signposting and maintenance, new routes and establishment of higher rights which conforms with AONB policies and design guidance, will be pursued. Support for investment in access from the new Environmental Land Management Systems will be pursued.
- AEU8 High standards of landscape and recreational management, accessible visitor facilities, access opportunities and increased opportunities for learning and health enhancement, artistic and cultural expression through a coordinated strategy and programme of training, events, guided walks and gateway routes and sites will be pursued.
- AEU9 Initiatives for children, schools and youth groups which encourage interest in and learning about the AONB and reconnection with nature will be pursued.
- AEU10 Support will be given to the North Downs Way and England Coast Path National Trails as the main promoted routes in the Kent Downs, the establishment of a North Downs Way multiuser route will be supported.
- AEU11 A reduction in the need to travel by car will be supported through new and improved measures to provide integrated, attractive and affordable public transport in the Kent Downs. New business, community and other initiatives in support of the vision, aims and policies of the Management Plan will seek to relate to existing public transport links.
- AEU12 Sustainable solutions to problems of rural traffic will be supported, particularly in rural settlements or where there is a conflict with landscape quality or walkers, cyclists and horse riders.
- AEU13 A strategic approach to the use of road signage, furniture, design and maintenance that conserves and enhances the local character and distinctiveness and encourages non-motorised access will be pursued through the adoption and implementation of the AONB Rural Streets and Lanes Design Handbook.
- AEU 14 Proposals which detract from the amenity and enjoyment of users of the Public Rights of Way network will be resisted.

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## Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Draft Management Plan

### Consultation Questionnaire

The Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Unit are seeking your views on the Kent Downs AONB Draft Management Plan 2020 – 2025. Kent County Council (KCC) is hosting this consultation on their behalf.

#### **What information do you need before completing the questionnaire?**

We recommend that you read the **Draft Management Plan** (or sections relevant to your interests) and accompanying **Draft Landscape Character Assessment** (or sections relevant to your interests) before filling in this questionnaire. The Environment Report and Sustainability Assessment and Equality Impact Assessment are also available. All consultation material is available on KCC's website [kent.gov.uk/kentdownsaonb](http://kent.gov.uk/kentdownsaonb) or in hard copy on request.

We recognise that the AONB Management Plan and accompanying Landscape Character Assessment are broad in the subjects and geography they cover so please do not feel obliged to answer all of the questions. We welcome your response to any or all of the matters they cover.

The Draft Plan was prepared before the Covid-19 pandemic and it will be vital we consider how the Management Plan responds to the crisis. This questionnaire provides an opportunity for you to tell us any key considerations you feel we should take into account.

This questionnaire can be completed on our website. Alternatively, you can fill in this Word version and return it via email to [mail@kentdowns.org.uk](mailto:mail@kentdowns.org.uk) or by post to Kent Downs AONB Unit, West Barn, Penstock Hall Farm, Canterbury Road, East Brabourne, Ashford, Kent TN25 5LL.

**Please ensure your response reaches us by midnight 7<sup>th</sup> September 2020.**

**Alternative Formats:** If you need this questionnaire or any of the consultation documents in an alternative format, please email [alternativeformats@kent.gov.uk](mailto:alternativeformats@kent.gov.uk) or call 03000 421553 (text relay service number: 18001 03000 421553). This number goes to an answering machine which is monitored during office hours.

**Privacy:** Kent County Council collects and processes personal information in order to provide a range of public services. Kent County Council respects the privacy of individuals and endeavours to ensure personal information is collected fairly, lawfully, and in compliance with the General Data Protection Regulation and the Data Protection Act 2018.

## Section 1 – About You

### Q1. Are you responding on behalf of ...?

Please select the option from the list below that most closely represents how you will be responding to this consultation.

Select **one** option only.

- |                                     |   |
|-------------------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/>            | Yourself as an individual   |
| <input type="checkbox"/>            | Yourself in your professional capacity  |
| <input type="checkbox"/>            | A representative of a local community group or residents' association             |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | On behalf of a Parish / Town / Borough / District Council in an official capacity |
| <input type="checkbox"/>            | A Parish / District / County Councillor   |
| <input type="checkbox"/>            | An educational establishment, such as a school or college                         |
| <input type="checkbox"/>            | On behalf of a business   |
| <input type="checkbox"/>            | On behalf of a charity, voluntary or community sector organisation (VCS)          |
| <input type="checkbox"/>            | Other   |

If 'Other', please specify:

#### Q1a. If you are responding in your professional capacity, please tell us what it is:

#### Q1b. If you are responding on behalf of an organisation (community group, resident association, council, educational establishment, business or any other organisation), please tell us the name of the organisation here:

Swale Borough Council

### Q2. Please tell us the first five characters of your postcode:

*Please do not reveal your whole postcode. We use this to help us to analyse our data. It will not be used to identify who you are.*

ME10 3



## Section 2 – Kent Downs AONB Draft Management Plan

The Draft Management Plan is formed of 12 sections. You can provide feedback on all or as many of the sections as you like. If you would rather not provide feedback on any section, just move on to the next set of questions.

1. The Kent Downs AONB [Page 4](#)
2. The Management of the Kent Downs AONB [Page 7](#)
3. Sustainable Development [Page 9](#)
4. Landform and Landscape Character [Page 13](#)
5. Biodiversity [Page 16](#)
6. Farmed Landscape [Page 19](#)
7. Woodlands and Trees [Page 22](#)
8. Historic and Cultural Heritage [Page 25](#)
9. Heritage Coast [Page 28](#)
10. Geology and Natural Resources [Page 31](#)
11. Quality of Life and Vibrant Communities [Page 34](#)
12. Access, Enjoyment and Understanding [Page 37](#)

## **1. The Kent Downs AONB**

A vision is a description of what an organisation would like to achieve or accomplish and is intended to serve as a guide for what action will be taken in the future.

**The overarching ten-year vision for the Kent Downs AONB included in the Draft Management Plan 2020-25 is as follows:**

“In 2030... the qualities and distinctive features of the Kent Downs AONB, the dramatic south-facing scarp, secluded dry valleys, network of tiny lanes, isolated farmsteads, churches and oasts, orchards, dramatic cliffs, the ancient woodlands and delicate chalk grassland along with the ancient, remote and tranquil qualities, are valued, secured and strengthened.

“The Kent Downs has become a landscape where rapid change supports the AONB’s distinctive features. Responses to development pressures and climate change have enhanced landscape character and what is valued by people about the landscape. The Kent Downs landscape is recognised and valued, enjoyed and cherished and its future conservation and enhancement is a certainty.

“Strong, assertive leadership from the AONB partnership along with positive partnerships with key organisations, local people and land managers act together with wider publics to conserve, enhance, enjoy and promote a nationally and internationally recognised and valued landscape.”

**Q3. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the vision for the Kent Downs AONB in 2030**

See page 3. Select **one** option only.

Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Unsure
✓					

**Q3a. Please provide any comments on the vision here:**

General comments – The Council welcomes the opportunity to comment on the consultation draft of the Kent Downs AONB Management Plan and acknowledges the wide-ranging engagement that has been undertaken in the preparation of the draft Management Plan.

Overall, the Council considers that the approach taken and changes made to be acceptable and will ensure that the Management Plan continues to ensure that the special qualities of the area are protected.

**The Draft Management Plan identifies special components, characteristics and qualities of the Kent Downs AONB.**

- Dramatic landform and views; a distinctive landscape character
- Biodiversity-rich habitats
- Farmed landscape
- Woodland and trees
- A rich legacy of historic and cultural heritage
- The Heritage Coasts
- Geology and natural resources
- Tranquillity and remoteness

**Q4. To what extent do you agree or disagree that we have identified what makes the area distinctive and special to you?**

*Select **one** option only.*

Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Unsure
✓					

**Q4a. If you have answered ‘tend to disagree’ or ‘strongly disagree’, please tell us why here:**

**The Draft Management Plan also identifies the social and economic components which are key to the future conservation and enhancement of the Kent Down AONB. See page 6.**

- Vibrant communities
- Access, enjoyment and understanding

**Q5. To what extent do you agree or disagree that we have identified the key social and economic components?**

Select **one** option only.

Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Unsure
✓					

**Q5a. If you have answered 'tend to disagree' or 'strongly disagree', please tell us why here:**

## **2. The Management of the Kent Downs AONB**

Our vision for the management of the Kent Downs AONB is as follows:

“In 2030... the Kent Downs AONB is widely recognised and greatly valued. It is a landscape cherished and held in the highest esteem by those who visit, live and work there and nearby and by those who influence its future. Residents and visitors know where the AONB is and they understand its character and qualities and support the purposes of its designation. The Kent Downs AONB partnership is acknowledged, supported, funded and equipped to be the main and an influential and effective advocate and champion for the AONB. A diverse range of individuals and organisations are delivering positive action on the ground and are collaboratively engaged in the partnership and management planning. The AONB partnership is engaging and open about the conservation and management of the AONB.”

**Q6. To what extent do you agree or disagree with our vision for the management of the Kent Downs AONB?**

See pages 9 – 18. *Select **one** option only.*

Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Unsure
✓					

**Q6a. Please provide any comments on our vision for the management of the Kent Downs AONB here:**

The vision is supported.

**Q7. To what extent do you agree or disagree that we have identified the right aims for the management of the Kent Downs AONB?**

See page 20. Select **one** option only.

Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Unsure
✓					

**Q7a. If you have answered ‘tend to disagree’ or ‘strongly disagree’, please tell us why here:**

**Q8. To what extent do you agree or disagree that we have identified the right principles for management of the Kent Downs AONB?**

See page 20. Select **one** option only.

Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Unsure
✓					

**Q8a. If you have answered ‘tend to disagree’ or ‘strongly disagree’, please tell us why here:**

### **3. Sustainable Development**

Our vision for sustainable development is as follows:

“In 2030 ... the principles of sustainable development are at the heart of the management of the Kent Downs. Change reinforces and enhances the characteristics, qualities and distinctiveness of the Kent Downs and benefits its communities and economy. While the surrounding urban areas have expanded considerably, innovative management techniques and policy approaches successfully address the pressure and opportunities presented by growth to the landscapes of the AONB.

“The impacts of climate change are being felt but the mitigation and adaptive responses taken are landscape led, effective and carefully chosen to enhance the characteristics, qualities and distinctiveness of the landscape rather than detracting from them. The natural capital and ecosystems service provision of the Kent Downs has been enhanced. Important areas of tranquillity have been identified, protected and expanded and provide ‘oases of calm’.”

**Q9. To what extent do you agree or disagree with our vision for sustainable development?**

See pages 23 – 26. *Select one option only.*

Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Unsure
✓					

**Q9a. Please provide any comments on our vision for sustainable development here:**

Under section 3.1.3 reference is made (in the second paragraph) to the 2018 Kent Growth and Infrastructure Framework (GIF). However, the figures in the GIF for the planned delivery of housing and jobs were based on forecasts in Local Plans as of September 2017. Since then housing/employment requirements have changed as Local Plans have progressed and, for the avoidance of doubt, it should be recognised that the GIF only represents a snapshot in time.

**Q10. To what extent do you agree or disagree that we have identified the right guiding themes for sustainable development?**

See pages 26 – 28. *Select one option only.*

Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Unsure
✓					

**Q10a. If you have answered ‘tend to disagree’ or ‘strongly disagree’, please tell us why here:**

In the section on ‘Green Infrastructure Provision’ at the top of page 29, reference is made to Planning Policy Statements 1 and 12. These were replaced by the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) in 2012. The latest version of the NPPF (2019) makes several references to Green Infrastructure and the Management Plan should be amended to reflect this.

**Q11. To what extent do you agree or disagree that we have identified the right recurrent themes for sustainable development?**

See pages 29 - 31. *Select one option only.*

Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Unsure
✓					

**Q11a. If you have answered ‘tend to disagree’ or ‘strongly disagree’, please tell us why here:**



In Section 3.3 (Tranquillity and Remoteness) there is reference to the 2003 CPRE Dark Skies report. CPRE published an updated Dark Skies report from in 2016 and consideration should be given to referencing that as the more recent report.

In Section 3.3 (Mitigation) the final paragraph states:  
*'Given the anticipated pace and scope of growth it is increasingly likely that impacts on the AONB may not be mitigated satisfactorily. In these circumstances the AONB Partnership will seek substantive compensatory payments to enable enhancement of the landscape elsewhere'*

It is unclear on what basis or how the AONB Partnership would seek 'substantive compensatory payments' and this should be clarified.

Notwithstanding the above, it is noted that Principle SD11 refers to 'compensatory measures' rather than 'compensatory payments': it would be helpful for there to be consistency in the terminology used.

It is also noted that in Principle SD12, which refers to transport and infrastructure schemes and growth areas, reference is made to *'provide environmental compensation through benefits to natural beauty elsewhere in the AONB'*. It is unclear why there is a difference in approach/wording between SD11 and SD12 and there may be a case for the use of similar wording. Alternatively, as there is some cross over in the intention of SD11 and SD12, consideration could be given to combining the two.

**Q12. To what extent do you agree or disagree that we have identified the right main issues, opportunities and threats for sustainable development?**

See page 31. Select **one** option only.

Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Unsure
✓					

**Q12a. If you have answered 'tend to disagree' or 'strongly disagree', please tell us why here:**

**Q13. To what extent do you agree or disagree that we have identified the right aims for sustainable development?**

See page 32. Select **one** option only.

Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Unsure
✓					

**Q13a. If you have answered ‘tend to disagree’ or ‘strongly disagree’, please tell us why here:**

**Q14. To what extent do you agree or disagree that we have identified the right principles for sustainable development?**

See pages 33. Select **one** option only.

Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Unsure
✓					

**Q14a. If you have answered ‘tend to disagree’ or ‘strongly disagree’, please tell us why here:**

#### **4. Landform and Landscape Character**

*The section is informed by the accompanying **Draft Landscape Character Assessment** which details the identifying characteristics of the landscape of the Kent Downs AONB and makes landscape management recommendations on actions, investments and priorities to conserve and enhance the landscape. **See Section 3 of this questionnaire on page 40** to answer the questions on the Landscape Character Assessment.*

Our vision for landform and landscape character is as follows:

“In 2030... the rich diversity of landscape character and qualities distinctive to the Kent Downs are protected, enhanced and managed to the highest standards in a co-ordinated and continual programme. The special characteristics and qualities of the Kent Downs AONB are widely recognised, valued and strengthened and landscape character informs land and resource management, nature recovery plans, intended net gain and natural capital investments, responses to climate change and development decisions.”

**Q15. To what extent do you agree or disagree with our vision for landform and landscape character**

See page 36. *Select **one** option only.*

Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Unsure
✓					

**Q15a. Please provide any comments on our vision for landform and landscape character here:**

**Q16. To what extent do you agree or disagree that we have identified the right landscape character types and areas within the Kent Downs AONB?**

See pages 36 - 39. Select **one** option only.

Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Unsure
✓					

**Q16a. If you have answered ‘tend to disagree’ or ‘strongly disagree’, please tell us why here:**

**Q17. To what extent do you agree or disagree that we have identified the right main issues, opportunities and threats for landform and landscape character?**

See page 40. Select **one** option only.

Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Unsure
✓					

**Q17a. If you have answered ‘tend to disagree’ or ‘strongly disagree’, please tell us why here:**

**Q18. To what extent do you agree or disagree that we have identified the right aims for landform and landscape character?**

See page 41. Select **one** option only.

Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Unsure
✓					

**Q18a. If you have answered ‘tend to disagree’ or ‘strongly disagree’, please tell us why here:**

**Q19. To what extent do you agree or disagree that we have identified the right principles for landform and landscape character?**

See pages 41. Select **one** option only.

Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Unsure
✓					

**Q19a. If you have answered ‘tend to disagree’ or ‘strongly disagree’, please tell us why here:**

## **5. Biodiversity**

Our vision for biodiversity is as follows:

“By 2030... the distinctive wildlife habitats of the Kent Downs are understood better, enjoyed and celebrated and are in favourable, resilient condition with individual characteristic species flourishing. There is a far-sighted nature recovery plan being implemented for the Kent Downs, which recognises and responds to the substantial changes that will be experienced and is linked to a wider nature recovery network. An approach to intended biodiversity net gain is understood and agreed and is achieving advances in biodiversity and habitats across the Kent Downs. There has been an increase in the extent and quality of key characteristic habitats and abundance of species of the Downs. People, policy and funding regimes recognise, value and support the importance of nature in the Kent Downs.”

**Q20. To what extent do you agree or disagree with our vision for biodiversity?**

See pages 44 – 47. *Select **one** option only.*

Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Unsure
✓					

**Q20a. Please provide any comments on our vision for biodiversity here:**

**Q21. To what extent do you agree or disagree that we have identified the right special characteristics and qualities for biodiversity?**

See pages 47 - 51. Select **one** option only.

Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Unsure
✓					

**Q21a. If you have answered ‘tend to disagree’ or ‘strongly disagree’, please tell us why here:**

**Q22. To what extent do you agree or disagree that we have identified the right main issues, opportunities and threats for biodiversity?**

See page 52. Select **one** option only.

Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Unsure
✓					

**Q22a. If you have answered ‘tend to disagree’ or ‘strongly disagree’, please tell us why here:**

**Q23. To what extent do you agree or disagree that we have identified the right aims for biodiversity?**

See page 54. Select **one** option only.

Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Unsure
✓					

**Q23a. If you have answered ‘tend to disagree’ or ‘strongly disagree’, please tell us why here:**

**Q24. To what extent do you agree or disagree that we have identified the right principles for biodiversity?**

See page 54. Select **one** option only.

Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Unsure
✓					

**Q24a. If you have answered ‘tend to disagree’ or ‘strongly disagree’, please tell us why here:**



## **6. Farmed Landscape**

Our vision for farmed landscape is as follows:

“In 2030... the Kent Downs AONB is a place where agriculture takes and is appreciated for a pivotal role in the conservation of natural beauty and landscape qualities and character as well as wider. Sustainable farming is the predominant land-use of the AONB and the heritage of mixed farming is retained in a contemporary context, supports and enhances landscape character, nature and is an increasingly important part of the Kent Downs contribution to achieving net zero carbon emissions. There is a greater public understanding of the roles of farming and more opportunities to gain carefully managed access to farmed landscape and to understand farming systems. Despite the volatile context, a broad range of crops are sustainably produced and are suited to the increasing extremes of climate, local conditions and market forces as well as the landscape. Naturally diverse permanent grasslands are well managed by grazing and orchards, plats and hop gardens retain an important place in the landscape. The flourishing number of vineyards are managed in a way that conserves the characteristics and qualities of the AONB. The high-quality products of the Kent Downs are commercially successful and high environmental quality is a market advantage.”

**Q25. To what extent do you agree or disagree with our vision for farmed landscape?**

See pages 57 – 61. *Select **one** option only.*

Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Unsure
✓					

**Q25a. Please provide any comments regarding our vision for farmed landscape here:**

**Q26. To what extent do you agree or disagree that we have identified the right special characteristics and qualities for farmed landscape?**

See page 66. Select **one** option only.

Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Unsure
✓					

**Q26a. If you have answered ‘tend to disagree’ or ‘strongly disagree’, please tell us why here:**

**Q27. To what extent do you agree or disagree that we have identified the right main issues, opportunities and threats for farmed landscape?**

See page 67. Select **one** option only.

Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Unsure
✓					

**Q27a. If you have answered ‘tend to disagree’ or ‘strongly disagree’, please tell us why here:**

**Q28. To what extent do you agree or disagree that we have identified the right aims for farmed landscape?**

See page 68. Select **one** option only.

Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Unsure
✓					

**Q28a. If you have answered ‘tend to disagree’ or ‘strongly disagree’, please tell us why here:**

**Q29. To what extent do you agree or disagree that we have identified the right principles for farmed landscape?**

See page 69. Select **one** option only.

Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Unsure
✓					

**Q29a. If you have answered ‘tend to disagree’ or ‘strongly disagree’, please tell us why here:**

Principle FL7 – whilst recognising the negative impact changes in agriculture have had on the visual amenities of the AONB and to biodiversity, such as polytunnels and the widescale destruction of hedgerows, there may be some leisure uses that are more beneficial to the AONB and this needs greater consideration. For example, communities buying agricultural fields and turning them into wildlife areas, wildlife watching huts and other non-intrusive structures should be supported.

There also appears to be some conflict between the wording of FL7 and VC7, which supports sustainable leisure uses in the AONB. Whilst recognising the issues highlighted, it is suggested that the wording of FL7 in the current Management Plan should be retained.

## 7. Woodlands and Trees

Our vision for woodlands and trees is as follows:

“In 2030... the characteristic Kent Downs network of woodland and trees is greater in extent and is conserved and enhanced for its landscape, wildlife and historic value. Sustainably managed woodlands and trees are resilient to stressors such as pests, disease, visitor pressure and climate change, they provide inherent mitigation and adaptation to that change. Buoyant markets for woodland products support the productive, sustainable management of trees and woodlands; high quality multi-functional management provides well-used places for leisure and recreation, health and wellbeing and are rich in characteristic wildlife.”

**Q30. To what extent do you agree or disagree with our vision for woodland and trees?**

See pages 72 – 77. Select **one** option only.

Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Unsure
✓					

**Q30a. Please provide any comments on the vision for woodland and trees here:**

**Q31. To what extent do you agree or disagree that we have identified the right special characteristics and qualities for woodlands and trees?**

See page 77. Select **one** option only.

Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Unsure
✓					

**Q31a. If you have answered ‘tend to disagree’ or ‘strongly disagree’, please tell us why here:**

**Q32. To what extent do you agree or disagree that we have identified the right main issues, opportunities and threats for woodlands and trees?**

See page 78. Select **one** option only.

Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Unsure
✓					

**Q32a. If you have answered ‘tend to disagree’ or ‘strongly disagree’, please tell us why here:**

**Q33. To what extent do you agree or disagree that we have identified the right aims that support the sustainable management of woodlands and trees?**

See page 79. Select **one** option only.

Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Unsure
✓					

**Q33a. If you have answered ‘tend to disagree’ or ‘strongly disagree’, please tell us why here:**

**Q34. To what extent do you agree or disagree that we have identified the right principles that support the sustainable management of woodlands and trees?**

See page 80. Select **one** option only.

Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Unsure
✓					

**Q34a. If you have answered ‘tend to disagree’ or ‘strongly disagree’, please tell us why here:**

## **8. Historic and Cultural Heritage**

Our vision for historic and cultural heritage is as follows:

“In 2034... the rich heritage of historic landscape, buildings, settlements and sites that characterise the Kent Downs’ historic and cultural fabric are maintained in favourable condition and are enhanced to reflect their local character and significance. The environmental performance of historic buildings is enhanced in a way that is sensitive to their character. They are understood and cherished by local people and visitors alike for their intrinsic value and for their important contribution to quality of life and rural economy. Vibrant and exciting artistic and cultural interpretation and celebration of the Kent Downs is supported and strong partnerships for the arts and cultural development in the Downs is in place and delivering extraordinary, contemporary work enjoyed by and inspiring wide and diverse publics.”

**Q35. To what extent do you agree or disagree with our vision for historic and cultural heritage?**

See page 83. *Select **one** option only.*

Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Unsure
✓					

**Q35a. Please provide any comments on the vision for historic and cultural heritage here:**

For consistency, the end date for the vision should be changed to 2030.

**Q36. To what extent do you agree or disagree that we have identified the right special characteristics and qualities for historic and cultural heritage?**

See pages 83 - 89. Select **one** option only.

Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Unsure
✓					

**Q36a. If you have answered ‘tend to disagree’ or ‘strongly disagree’, please tell us why here:**

**Q37. To what extent do you agree or disagree that we have identified the right main issues, opportunities and threats for historic and cultural heritage?**

See page 89. Select **one** option only.

Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Unsure
✓					

**Q37a. If you have answered ‘tend to disagree’ or ‘strongly disagree’, please tell us why here:**



**Q38. To what extent do you agree or disagree that we have identified the right aims for historic and cultural heritage?**

See page 90. Select **one** option only.

Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Unsure
✓					

**Q38a. If you have answered ‘tend to disagree’ or ‘strongly disagree’, please tell us why here:**

**Q39. To what extent do you agree or disagree that we have identified the right principles for historical and cultural heritage?**

See page 90. Select **one** option only.

Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Unsure
✓					

**Q39a. If you have answered ‘tend to disagree’ or ‘strongly disagree’, please tell us why here:**

## **9. Heritage Coast**

Our vision for the Heritage Coast is as follows:

“In 2030... the special place that the White Cliffs of Dover have in the hearts and minds of millions of people is justified by the reality experienced on the ground. Collaborative effort continues to transform the management of the coasts which meets the needs of the landscape, natural and historic environment and communities, while supporting the sustainable regeneration of the coastal economy including the coastal towns.”

**Q40. To what extent do you agree or disagree with our vision for the heritage coast?**

See pages 93 – 97. *Select **one** option only.*

Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Unsure
✓					

**Q40a. Please provide any comments on the vision for the heritage coast here:**

**Q41. To what extent do you agree or disagree that we have identified the right special characteristics and qualities for the heritage coast?**

See page 97. Select **one** option only.

Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Unsure
✓					

**Q41a. If you have answered ‘tend to disagree’ or ‘strongly disagree’, please tell us why here:**

**Q42. To what extent do you agree or disagree that we have identified the right main issues, opportunities and threats for the heritage coast?**

See page 98. Select **one** option only.

Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Unsure
✓					

**Q42a. If you have answered ‘tend to disagree’ or ‘strongly disagree’, please tell us why here:**

**Q43. To what extent do you agree or disagree that we have identified the right aims for the heritage coast?**

See page 99. Select **one** option only.

Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Unsure
✓					

**Q43a. If you have answered ‘tend to disagree’ or ‘strongly disagree’, please tell us why here:**

**Q44. To what extent do you agree or disagree that we have identified the right principles for the heritage coast?**

See page 99. Select **one** option only.

Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Unsure
✓					

**Q44a. If you have answered ‘tend to disagree’ or ‘strongly disagree’, please tell us why here:**

## **10. Geology and Natural Resources**

Our vision for geology and natural resources is as follows:

“In 2030... great care is taken to conserve and manage the natural resources of the Kent Downs particularly soil, air, ground and river water. New and innovative ways to both reduce resource use and enhance the existing natural capital have been adopted which support landscape character and qualities, the economy and communities. The need to conserve and enhance natural beauty means mineral resource mining occurs away from the AONB, except in exceptional circumstances, and worked out quarry sites have been restored to enhance local landscape character.”

**Q45. To what extent do you agree or disagree with our vision for geology and natural resources?**

See pages 102 – 105. *Select **one** option only.*

Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Unsure
✓					

**Q45a. Please provide any comments on the vision for geology and natural resources here:**

**Q46. To what extent do you agree or disagree that we have identified the right special characteristics and qualities for geology and natural resources?**

See page 105 - 106. *Select **one** option only.*

Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Unsure
✓					

**Q46a. If you have answered ‘tend to disagree’ or ‘strongly disagree’, please tell us why here:**

**Q47. To what extent do you agree or disagree that we have identified the right main issues, opportunities and threats for geology and natural resources?**

See pages 107 - 108. *Select **one** option only.*

Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Unsure
✓					

**Q47a. If you have answered ‘tend to disagree’ or ‘strongly disagree’, please tell us why here:**

**Q48. To what extent do you agree or disagree that we have identified the right aims for geology and natural resources?**

See page 108. Select **one** option only.

Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Unsure
✓					

**Q48a. If you have answered ‘tend to disagree’ or ‘strongly disagree’, please tell us why here:**

**Q49. To what extent do you agree or disagree that we have identified the right principles for geology and natural resources?**

See page 108. Select **one** option only.

Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Unsure
✓					

**Q49a. If you have answered ‘tend to disagree’ or ‘strongly disagree’, please tell us why here:**

## 11. Quality of Life and Vibrant Communities

Our vision for quality of life and vibrant communities is as follows:

“In 2030... a diversity of people and communities are central to the conservation, enhancement and enjoyment of the Kent Downs; they value this special place and feel welcome to enjoy, experience and benefit from the AONB. People and communities have a strong, positive influence over change through being engaged and active participants. Communities’ work and voluntary activity marries social and economic well-being with landscape conservation and enhancement. Individuals and organisations choose to buy goods and services that in themselves benefit the Kent Downs landscape and economy.

“The health and well-being benefits of contact with nature and beauty have become central to the purposes and management of the landscape and the Kent Downs partnership.”

**Q50. To what extent do you agree or disagree with our vision for quality of life and vibrant communities?**

See pages 111 – 116. *Select **one** option only.*

Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Unsure
✓					

**Q50a. Please provide any comments on the vision for quality of life and vibrant communities here:**



**Q51. To what extent do you agree or disagree that we have identified the right main issues, opportunities and threats for quality of life and vibrant communities?**

See page 116 - 118. *Select **one** option only.*

Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Unsure
✓					

**Q51a. If you have answered ‘tend to disagree’ or ‘strongly disagree’, please tell us why here:**

In Section 11.2 (Vibrant Communities) on page 114 reference is made to the ‘expected exit from the EU’ (4<sup>th</sup> paragraph). This should be updated to reflect the current position.

**Q52. To what extent do you agree or disagree that we have identified the right aims for quality of life and vibrant communities?**

See page 118. *Select **one** option only.*

Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Unsure
✓					

**Q52a. If you have answered ‘tend to disagree’ or ‘strongly disagree’, please tell us why here:**

**Q53. To what extent do you agree or disagree that we have identified the right principles for quality of life and vibrant communities?**

See page 118. Select **one** option only.

Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Unsure
✓					

**Q53a. If you have answered ‘tend to disagree’ or ‘strongly disagree’, please tell us why here:**

Principle VC3 – it is noted that the Action Plan for the current Management Plan includes an action to work with Local Planning Authorities to provide an explanation for this principle. The Management Plan and/or Action Plan should continue to support local authorities in having more positive policies towards the provision of affordable housing in the AONB beyond reliance on the Rural Exceptions Policies.

Principle VC4 – whilst the intent of this principle is supported, there is a severe lack of any policy approach that would halt, let alone reverse, the current decline in such rural service provision. A pro-active approach is needed to try and secure rural shopping provision. Perhaps a partnership with a body like the National Trust to open local shops is urgently needed.

## **12. Access, Enjoyment and Understanding**

Our vision for access, enjoyment and understanding is as follows:

“In 2030... the Kent Downs AONB is a place of natural beauty with opportunity and access for all people; they feel welcome to participate in quiet recreation for health, relaxation, enjoyment and for cultural and artistic expression.

“Improved management ensures that the Public Rights of Way and much of the highway network is safe, quiet and convenient for walkers, cyclists and horse riders and public transport is an attractive option to reach and enjoy the landscape. Maintenance of the Public Rights of Way and highway network is sympathetic to biodiversity and landscape character.

“The Kent Downs AONB is recognised, valued and celebrated by residents, visitors and by those who simply delight in the fact that it is there.”

**Q54. To what extent do you agree or disagree with our vision for access, enjoyment and understanding?**

See pages 121 – 128. *Select **one** option only.*

Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Unsure
✓					

**Q54a. Please provide any comments on the vision for access, enjoyment and understanding here:**

**Q55. To what extent do you agree or disagree that we have identified the right main issues, opportunities and threats for access, enjoyment and understanding?**

See page 128. Select **one** option only.

Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Unsure
✓					

**Q55a. If you have answered ‘tend to disagree’ or ‘strongly disagree’, please tell us why here:**

**Q56. To what extent do you agree or disagree that we have identified the right aims for access, enjoyment and understanding?**

See page 130. Select **one** option only.

Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Unsure
✓					

**Q56a. If you have answered ‘tend to disagree’ or ‘strongly disagree’, please tell us why here:**

**Q57. To what extent do you agree or disagree that we have identified the right principles for access, enjoyment and understanding?**

See page 130. Select **one** option only.

Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Unsure
✓					

**Q57a. If you have answered ‘tend to disagree’ or ‘strongly disagree’, please tell us why here:**

Principle AEU11 – there is nothing in the Management Plan that recognises or seeks to tackle the decline in rural bus provision, let alone consider measures that could improve it. The Management Plan and/or Action Plan should be clearer on the ‘new and improved’ measures required to be taken to deliver on this statement.

## Section 3 – Draft Landscape Character Assessment

The Draft Landscape Character Assessment (which is made up of 13 individual documents) outlines the identifying characteristics of the landscape of the Kent Downs AONB and makes landscape management recommendations on actions, investments and priorities to conserve and enhance the landscape. These recommendations inform the Draft Management Plan.

**Q58. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the landscape management recommendations in the draft Landscape Character Assessment?**

Select **one** option in each row.

Chalk Downs	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Unsure
LCA 1A West Kent Downs						
LCA 1B Mid Kent Downs						
LCA 1C East Kent Downs						

Chalk Scarps and Vales	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Unsure
LCA 2A Kemsing Scarp and Vale						
LCA 2B Hollingbourne Scarp and Vale						
LCA 2C Postling Scarp and Vale						

Chalk Cliffs and Coast	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Unsure
LCA 3A White Cliffs Coast						

Select **one** option in each row.

River Valleys	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Unsure
LCA 4A Darent Valley						
LCA 4B Medway Valley						
LCA 4C Stour Valley						

Greensand	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Unsure
LCA 5A Sevenoaks Greensand Ridge						
LCA 5B Lympne Greensand Escarpment						

Low Weald	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Unsure
LCA 6C Low Weald Eden Valley						

**Q58a. Please provide any comments on the landscape management recommendations here:** *Please be as specific as is possible in your answers and provide evidence if appropriate.*

No comments.

## Section 4 – Supporting Assessments

**Q59. We have completed an Environment Report and Sustainability Assessment on the Draft Management Plan.**

**If you have any comments on this assessment, please provide them here:**

The Environment Report and Sustainability Assessment is available at [kent.gov.uk/kentdownsaonb](http://kent.gov.uk/kentdownsaonb) or in hard copy on request.

The Council is satisfied that the Environment Report has appropriately considered the social, economic and environment issues relevant to the Kent Downs AONB.

To help ensure that we are meeting our obligations under the Equality Act 2010 we have undertaken an Equality Impact Assessment (EqIAs) for the draft Management Plan.

An EqIA is a tool to assess the impact any proposals would have on the protected characteristics: age, disability, sex, gender reassignment, sexual orientation, race, religion, and carer's responsibilities. The EqIA is available at [kent.gov.uk/kentdownsaonb](http://kent.gov.uk/kentdownsaonb) or in hard copy on request.

**Q60. We welcome your views on our equality analysis and if you think there is anything else we should consider relating to equality and diversity. Please provide any comments here:**

No comments.



## Section 5 – Additional Information

**Q61. The Draft Management Plan was prepared before the Covid-19 pandemic. It will be important to consider how the Management Plan should respond to the crisis. Please provide any key considerations you think we should take into account here:**

*If your comments directly relate to a specific section of the Draft Management Plan, please include the name of the section with your comment.*

No comments.

**Q62. If you have any examples of landscape enhancement, biodiversity, or access improvement projects in your local area, please provide details here:**

If you wish to discuss, please contact [mail@kentdowns.org.uk](mailto:mail@kentdowns.org.uk)

**Q63. How did you find out about this consultation?**

Select *all that apply*

<input type="checkbox"/>	Received an email from Kent County Council
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Received an email from Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Unit
<input type="checkbox"/>	Received an email from another organisation or contact
<input type="checkbox"/>	From a friend or relative
<input type="checkbox"/>	Newspaper
<input type="checkbox"/>	Social Media (Facebook or Twitter)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Kent.gov.uk website
<input type="checkbox"/>	Other

If other, please specify:

**Q64. Finally, do you any other comments to make about our Draft Management Plan?**

Given that the audience for the Plan is potentially very wide and needs to be understood by a variety of audiences it may be helpful to include a glossary of main terms.

**Kent Downs AONB Citizen's Panel and Newsletter**

The Kent Downs AONB is considering establishing a Citizen's Panel. Members would be asked for their feedback on a range of issues to help the AONB better understand residents' views and provide the right information to help people enjoy the landscape.

If you are interested in learning more, please visit <https://bit.ly/3cpYPnq>

Visit our website [KentDowns.org.uk](http://KentDowns.org.uk) and join our email list via <https://bit.ly/2Lq7Bsb> to stay up to date with news and events in the Kent Downs Areas Outstanding Natural Beauty.

## Section 6 - More About You

We want to make sure that everyone is treated fairly and equally, and that no one gets left out. That's why we are asking you these questions. We won't share the information you give us with anyone else. We'll use it only to help us make decisions and improve our services.

***If you would rather not answer any of these questions, you don't have to.***

***It is not necessary to answer these questions if you are responding on behalf of an organisation.***

**Q65. Are you.....? Select *one* option only.**

<input type="checkbox"/>	Male
<input type="checkbox"/>	Female
<input type="checkbox"/>	I prefer not to say

**Q66. Is your Gender the same as your birth? Select *one* option only**

<input type="checkbox"/>	Yes
<input type="checkbox"/>	No
<input type="checkbox"/>	I prefer not to say

**Q67. Which of these age groups applies to you? Select *one* option only.**

<input type="checkbox"/>	0-15	<input type="checkbox"/>	25-34	<input type="checkbox"/>	50-59	<input type="checkbox"/>	65-74	<input type="checkbox"/>	85 + over
<input type="checkbox"/>	16-24	<input type="checkbox"/>	35-49	<input type="checkbox"/>	60-64	<input type="checkbox"/>	75-84	<input type="checkbox"/>	I prefer not to say

**Q68. To which of these ethnic groups do you feel you belong?**

Select **one** option only.

White English	<input type="checkbox"/>	Mixed White & Black Caribbean	<input type="checkbox"/>
White Scottish	<input type="checkbox"/>	Mixed White & Black African	<input type="checkbox"/>
White Welsh	<input type="checkbox"/>	Mixed White & Asian	<input type="checkbox"/>
White Northern Irish	<input type="checkbox"/>	Mixed Other*	<input type="checkbox"/>
White Irish	<input type="checkbox"/>	Black or Black British Caribbean	<input type="checkbox"/>
White Gypsy/Roma	<input type="checkbox"/>	Black or Black British African	<input type="checkbox"/>
White Irish Traveller	<input type="checkbox"/>	Black or Black British Other*	<input type="checkbox"/>
White Other*	<input type="checkbox"/>	Arab	<input type="checkbox"/>
Asian or Asian British Indian	<input type="checkbox"/>	Chinese	<input type="checkbox"/>
Asian or Asian British Pakistani	<input type="checkbox"/>	I prefer not to say	<input type="checkbox"/>
Asian or Asian British Bangladeshi	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Asian or Asian British Other*	<input type="checkbox"/>		

(Source: 2011 Census)

**\*Other Ethnic Group - If your ethnic group is not specified on the list, please describe it here**

A Carer is anyone who cares, unpaid, for a friend or family member who due to illness, disability, a mental health problem or an addiction cannot cope without their support. Both children and adults can be carers.

**Q69. Are you a Carer?** Select **one** option only.

<input type="checkbox"/>	Yes
<input type="checkbox"/>	No
<input type="checkbox"/>	I prefer not to say

The Equality Act 2010 describes a person as disabled if they have a longstanding physical or mental condition that has lasted, or is likely to last, at least 12 months; and this condition has a substantial adverse effect on their ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities. People with some conditions (cancer, multiple sclerosis and HIV/AIDS, for example), are considered to be disabled from the point that they are diagnosed.

**Q70. Do you consider yourself to be disabled as set out in the Equality Act 2010?**

Select **one** option only.

Yes

No

I prefer not to say

**Question 70a. If you answered 'Yes' above, please tell us the type of impairment that applies:**

*You may have more than one type of impairment, so please tick **all** that apply. If none of these applies to you, please select 'Other', and give brief details of the impairment you have.*

<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>

Physical impairment

Sensory impairment (hearing, sight or both)

Longstanding illness or health condition, or epilepsy

Mental health condition

Learning disability

I prefer not to say

Other

If you selected Other, please specify:

**Q71. Do you regard yourself as belonging to a particular religion or belief?**

Select **one** option only.

Yes

No

I prefer not to say

**Q71a. If you answered 'Yes' above, which of the following applies to you?**

Select **one** option only.

Christian

Buddhist

Hindu

Jewish

Muslim

Sikh

Other

I prefer not to say

If you selected Other, please specify:

**Q72. Are you...? Select **one** option only.**

Heterosexual/Straight

Bi/Bisexual

Gay woman/Lesbian

Gay man

Other

I prefer not to say

If you selected Other, please specify:

## Consultation Privacy Notice

Last Updated: 10 June 2020

### Who are we?

Kent County Council collects, uses and is responsible for certain personal information about you. When we do so we are regulated under the General Data Protection Regulation which applies across the European Union (including in the United Kingdom) and we are responsible as 'controller' of that personal information for the purposes of those laws. Our Data Protection Officer is Benjamin Watts.

### The personal information we collect and use

#### Information collected by us

In the course of responding to Consultations published by Kent County Council we collect the following personal information when you provide it to us:

- Postcode
- Email address if you want updates on a consultation
- Feedback on the consultation
- Equalities Data - Ethnicity, Religion, Sexuality, Gender Reassignment, Disability or if you are a Carer
- Cookies – we use three types of cookies when you use our website. For more information about the cookies and how they are used please visit <https://kahootz.deskpro.com/kb/articles/kahootz-cookie-information-ci>

We use cookies to remember who you are and a few of your preferences whilst you use the website.

We do not use cookies to collect personally identifiable information about you, track your behaviour or share information with 3rd parties.

Our cookies do not contain any of your personal information and only take up about one-thousandth of the space of a single image from a typical digital camera.

All of the cookies we set are strictly necessary in order for us to provide the online service to you.

You do not need to submit any equalities information if you do not want to. KCC is committed to the principle that all our customers have the right to equality and fairness in the way they are treated and in the services that they receive. Any information you do give will be used to see if there are any differences in views for different groups of people, and to check if services are being delivered in a fair and

reasonable way. No personal information which can identify you, such as your name or address, will be used in producing equality reports. We will follow our Data Protection policies to keep your information secure and confidential. Your equality data will be anonymised before sent to other teams.

### How we use your personal information

We use your personal information to inform you of the outcome of the consultation, if you have requested updates.

We may use your postcode to carry out a type of profiling to estimate which one of a number of lifestyle groups you are most likely to fall into. We do this using geodemographic segmentation tools. We do not make any decisions about individual service users based solely on automated processing, including profiling.

### How long your personal data will be kept

We will hold your personal information for up to 6 years following the closure of a consultation.

### Reasons we can collect and use your personal information

We rely on *'processing is necessary for the performance of a task carried out in the public interest'*

And *'processing is necessary for compliance with a legal obligation to which the controller is subject.'*

The provision of contact details, including name, address or email address is required from you to enable us to respond to your feedback on consultations.

We rely on *processing is necessary for reasons of substantial public interest* as the lawful basis on which we collect and use your special category data for the purpose of equalities monitoring.

Further, the processing is necessary for the purposes of identifying or keeping under review the existence or absence of equality of opportunity or treatment between groups of people with the view to enabling such equality to be promoted or maintained.

You can read KCC's Equality Policy on our website <http://www.kent.gov.uk/about-the-council/strategies-and-policies/corporate-policies/equality-and-diversity>

### Who we share your personal information with

Kent County Council are hosting this consultation on behalf of the Kent Downs AONB Unit services. We may share your personal data and feedback with the Kent Down AONB Unit who may need to respond to your feedback. In some cases that may include your name and contact details if provided.

We will share personal information with law enforcement or other authorities if required by applicable law.



We use a system to log your feedback, which is provided by a third-party supplier.

## Your Rights

Under the GDPR you have a number of rights which you can access free of charge which allow you to:

- Know what we are doing with your information and why we are doing it
- Ask to see what information we hold about you
- Ask us to correct any mistakes in the information we hold about you
- Object to direct marketing
- Make a complaint to the Information Commissioners Office

Depending on our reason for using your information you may also be entitled to:

- Ask us to delete information we hold about you
- Have your information transferred electronically to yourself or to another organisation
- Object to decisions being made that significantly affect you
- Object to how we are using your information
- Stop us using your information in certain ways

We will always seek to comply with your request however we may be required to hold or use your information to comply with legal duties. Please note: your request may delay or prevent us delivering a service to you.

For further information about your rights, including the circumstances in which they apply, see the guidance from the UK Information Commissioners Office (ICO) on individuals' rights under the General Data Protection Regulation.

If you would like to exercise a right, please contact the Information Resilience and Transparency Team at [data.protection@kent.gov.uk](mailto:data.protection@kent.gov.uk).

## Keeping your personal information secure

We have appropriate security measures in place to prevent personal information from being accidentally lost or used or accessed in an unauthorised way. We limit access to your personal information to those who have a genuine business need to know it. Those processing your information will do so only in an authorised manner and are subject to a duty of confidentiality.

We also have procedures in place to deal with any suspected data security breach. We will notify you and any applicable regulator of a suspected data security breach where we are legally required to do so.

## Who to Contact

Please contact the Information Resilience and Transparency Team at [data.protection@kent.gov.uk](mailto:data.protection@kent.gov.uk) to exercise any of your rights, or if you have a

complaint about why your information has been collected, how it has been used or how long we have kept it for.

You can contact our Data Protection Officer, Benjamin Watts, at [dpo@kent.gov.uk](mailto:dpo@kent.gov.uk). Or write to Data Protection Officer, Kent County Council, Sessions House, Maidstone, Kent, ME14 1XQ.

The General Data Protection Regulation also gives you right to lodge a complaint with a supervisory authority. The supervisory authority in the UK is the Information Commissioner who may be contacted at <https://ico.org.uk/concerns> or telephone 03031 231113.

For further information visit <https://www.kent.gov.uk/about-the-council/about-the-website/privacy-statement>

<b>Local Plan Panel Meeting</b>	
<b>Meeting Date</b>	03 September 2020
<b>Report Title</b>	Settlement Hierarchy Study
<b>Cabinet Member</b>	Cllr Mike Baldock, Cabinet Member for Planning
<b>SMT Lead</b>	James Freeman
<b>Head of Service</b>	James Freeman
<b>Lead Officer</b>	Aaron Wilkinson
<b>Key Decision</b>	No
<b>Classification</b>	Open
<b>Recommendations</b>	It is recommended that Members note the content of this report and the Settlement Hierarchy Study at Appendix I.

## **1 Purpose of Report and Executive Summary**

- 1.1 As part of the Local Plan Review (LPR), and as per paragraphs 15 and 20 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), the Council will need to provide a positive vision for the future of Swale and set out a strategy for the pattern, scale and quality of the development. This must be done with the objective of contributing to the achievement of sustainable development.
- 1.2 Defining and implementing a settlement strategy is, in part, assisted by the identification of settlement tiers, forming a settlement hierarchy, which help guide development to sustainable locations with good access to services, facilities and employment opportunities. A settlement hierarchy study has subsequently been prepared which reviews the tiers/hierarchy set out within the adopted Local Plan and considers whether any changes are required. This is available at Appendix I to this report.

## **2 Background**

- 2.1 The Swale Rural Sustainability Study 2011 carried out a similar review which contributed to the settlement hierarchy set out on page 45 of the adopted Local Plan (also available in Appendix I). It splits the Borough's settlements into 6 tiers based on their access to services, facilities and employment opportunities.
- 2.2 This settlement hierarchy study re-assesses the sustainability of the settlements within the Borough to understand how our towns, villages and smaller settlements function currently. A full methodology has been set out in section 3 of the study. To summarise, it carries out an audit of the services and facilities which are present in each settlement, splitting these out by key services and higher-order services (those which would likely only be found in the largest and most sustainable settlements).

- 2.3 It then assesses the accessibility of the settlements by considering the distance and ease of access to the nearest main town and the level of public transport provision. This is because, for many smaller settlements, higher-order facilities and opportunities are unlikely to be present but it is the ease and ability to access such facilities elsewhere which becomes important in determining settlement sustainability.
- 2.4 Taking these outputs into account, the study then suggests a settlement hierarchy and summarises the key findings for each tier. The settlement hierarchy proposed does not recommend a change to that in the adopted Local Plan. It does however acknowledge that development in certain tiers would need to be accompanied by a rise in general sustainability through improvements to, or additional, services, facilities and employment opportunities.
- 2.5 The settlement hierarchy will form part of the evidence base used to determine a settlement strategy for the LPR.

### **3 Proposals**

- 3.1 The proposal, therefore, is that Members note the content of the Settlement Hierarchy Study.

### **4 Alternative Options**

- 4.1 Although a settlement hierarchy is not explicitly required by the NPPF, the identification of settlement tiers is a well-established principle of plan-making which contributes to defining and implementing a settlement strategy and follows the sustainable development theory.
- 4.2 There would be no benefit to Members disregarding the content of the Settlement Hierarchy Study given that it contributes to evidence base relating to the development of a settlement strategy for the LPR. Therefore, there are no realistic alternatives.

### **5 Consultation Undertaken or Proposed**

- 5.1 No consultation has been undertaken or is proposed. However, this report will be used with other evidence to draft the content of the LPR. When the LPR is consulted on at the Regulation 19 stage, consultees will be able to make comments on this document if they wish to.

### **6 Implications**

Issue	Implications
Corporate Plan	The proposal would align with: Priority 1: Building the right homes in the right places and supporting quality jobs for all.

	Priority 2: Investing in our environment and responding positively to global challenges. Priority 3: Tackling deprivation and creating equal opportunities for everyone.
Financial, Resource and Property	None identified at this stage – the work has been carried out within the Planning Policy budget.
Legal, Statutory and Procurement	None identified at this stage.
Crime and Disorder	None identified at this stage.
Environment and Sustainability	The new Local Plan will be subject to a Sustainability Appraisal.
Health and Wellbeing	None identified at this stage.
Risk Management and Health and Safety	None identified at this stage.
Equality and Diversity	The new Local Plan will require a full community impact assessment.
Privacy and Data Protection	None identified at this stage.

## 7 Appendices

7.1 The following documents are to be published with this report and form part of the report:

- Appendix I: Settlement Hierarchy Study

## 8 Background Papers

8.1 The Swale Rural Sustainability Study 2011

<http://www.swale.gov.uk/assets/Planning-General/Planning-Policy/Evidence-Base/Swale-Rural-Sustainability-Study-with-covers.pdf>

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# Swale Borough Council Settlement Hierarchy Study

Draft Report  
August 2020



## **1. Background and national policy context**

- 1.1 The Council is currently undertaking a Local Plan Review (LPR) and, as per paragraphs 15 and 20 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), will need to provide a positive vision for the future of Swale and set out a strategy for the pattern, scale and quality of development. This must be done with the objective of contributing to the achievement of sustainable development.
- 1.2 With regards to urban areas, planning policies should seek to ensure the vitality of main centres. For rural areas, they should identify opportunities for villages to grow and thrive, especially where this would support local services. Where there are smaller groups of smaller settlements, development in one village may support services in a village nearby.
- 1.3 Significant development should be focused in locations which are, or can be made, sustainable through limiting the need to travel and offering a genuine choice of transport modes.

## **2. Local policy context and purpose of study**

- 2.1 Several pieces of evidence have already been prepared, or are being prepared, in consideration of the above. However, there is a need to assess the sustainability of the settlements within the Borough to understand how our towns, villages and smaller settlements function at the moment. This will contribute to the wider decision to be made regarding the LPR's settlement strategy.
- 2.2 Bearing Fruits 2031, The Swale Borough Local Plan (the adopted Local Plan) identifies 34 towns and villages within the Borough which are defined by built-up area boundaries and within which, the principle of development is broadly accepted. There are a number of other, smaller, settlements without boundaries which are considered to be in the open countryside.
- 2.3 The adopted Local Plan splits these settlements into a tiered hierarchy identifying those which offer the best opportunities for sustainable development based on their access to services, facilities and employment opportunities. This can be viewed in Table 1 below or on page 45 of the adopted Local Plan.
- 2.4 This study reviews the existing settlement hierarchy by auditing the current provision of services and facilities in the Borough's settlements and recommending whether it should be taken forwards as is or re-structured. It also allows for the identification of settlements which may at risk of stagnating or declining sustainability.
- 2.5 It is not the role of this study to identify the capacity of each settlement to grow or to advise on the likely quantum of growth which each settlement could accommodate. Service provision is not necessarily a fixed given and can evolve over time according to market forces or changing travel and service patterns, shopping trends and advances in technology. This study presents a snapshot in time of what is available



now and uses this information to inform a settlement hierarchy for consideration in the LPR.

Settlement tier	Role	Name of Settlement
1. Main Borough Urban Centre	All services and job opportunities. Good quality transport options. Primary focus for housing, retail, employment and other developments and for the concentration of principal public services and facilities. Likely to attract population from widest area.	Sittingbourne.
2. Other Borough Centres	Most services and job opportunities. Fair to good quality transport options. Smaller towns with a secondary focus for housing, retail, employment and other developments and concentration of principal or satellite public services and facilities. Likely to be acting as centres for their home and surrounding populations and close to other nearby smaller urban centres.	Faversham and Sheerness.
3. Other Urban Local Centres	Limited/variable range of local services at each, but in-combination providing a reasonable range. Variable quality transport options. Clusters of larger urban areas close to other Borough Centres. Likely to be the focus of developments seeking to meet the needs of their own and wider needs.	Minster and Halfway and Queenborough and Rushenden.
4. Rural Local Service Centres	Provides most or all of the following: primary health care, education, organised sport and recreational facilities, food and other shopping, pub, post office and place of worship. Mostly, accessible by frequent (hourly) bus and/or train services. Usually on main transport corridors which contributes to the range of services. Likely to be serving passing, home, visiting and surrounding rural populations for day to day services, with some sharing of services with nearby smaller settlements. Populations will travel to other centres for more major shopping, leisure and employment needs.	Boughton, Eastchurch, Iwade, Leysdown, Newington, Teynham.
5. Other villages with built-up area boundaries	A variety of settlements. The more sustainable provide: primary education, recreation area, a shop, and accessible by bus or train (of reasonable frequency). Currently less sustainable villages will be without one or more of these services, with little or no public transport or relatively remote from their nearest urban centre or main transport corridor. Single or occasional clusters of villages may contain limited day to day services for their home communities, whilst others lack these services or are only able to improve them with new investment. Populations will travel to other centres for more major shopping, leisure and employment needs, whilst less sustainable locations will need to travel to meet even day to day needs.	Bapchild, Bayview, Borden, Bredgar, Conyer, Doddington, Dunkirk, Eastling, Hartlip, Lewson Street, Lower Halstow, Lynsted, Neames Forstal, Newnham, Oare, Painter's Forstal, Rodmersham Green, Selling, Sheldwich Lees, Upchurch and Warden Bay.
6. The open countryside outside the built-up area boundaries	A variety of settlements, hamlets, ribbon development, clusters of buildings and isolated houses. Dependent on location, services limited or non-existent. Usually well away from transport corridors or of small and sporadic form. Some locations able to meet a very limited range of day to day services for their home communities, but many with no immediate access to these or a wider range of services.	All other remaining settlements and habitation without built-up area boundaries and other areas.

Table 1 – The settlement hierarchy in the adopted Local Plan.

### 3. Methodology

3.1 Although a common piece of evidence, there is no national guidance on how to undertake settlement hierarchy studies. The methodology used has been developed

considering the Swale Rural Sustainability Study 2011 and some more recent settlement studies carried out by other local authorities which have been successfully tested through local plan examinations. The methodology is set out in 4 stages below.

### Stage 1 – Identify the settlements to be reviewed

3.2 The first step in the process is to define the settlements being studied. This begins with those that have defined built-up area boundaries as set out within the adopted Local Plan. These can be seen in Table 2 below.

Settlements with built-up area boundaries			
Bapchild	Bayview	Borden	Boughton
Bredgar	Conyer	Doddington	Dunkirk
Eastchurch	Eastling	Faversham	Halfway
Hartlip	Iwade	Kingsborough Manor	Lewson Street
Leysdown	Lower Halstow	Lynsted	Minster
Neames Forstal	Newington	Newnham	Oare
Painters Forstal	Queenborough	Rodmersham Green	Rushenden
Selling	Sheerness	Sheldwich Lees	Sittingbourne
Teynham	Upchurch	Warden	

Table 2 – Settlements with built-up area boundaries in the adopted Local Plan.

3.3 Next, smaller settlements without a built-up area boundary but with a clearly identifiable nucleus of development are included. These can be seen in Table 3 below.

Settlements without built-up area boundaries			
Baddlesmere	Bobbing	Bobbing Hill	Chestnut Street
Danaway	Dargate	Goodnestone	Graveney
Hernhill	Milstead	Staplestreet	Throwley Forstal
Tunstall			

Table 3 – Settlements without built-up area boundaries in the adopted Local Plan.

3.4 Using this approach, most settlements within the Borough are included. However, there are a small number which are considered to small and/or sporadic in their form to be studied. These can be seen in Table 4 below.

Settlements not included			
Howt Green	Oad Street	Otterham Quay	Windmill Hill
Horsham Lane	Deerton Street	Hogbens Hill	Stalisfield Green
Kingsdown	Erriotwood	Leaveland	Throwley
Luddenham	Shellness	Brambledown	Warden Point
Eastchurch Cliffs			

Table 4 – Settlements not included in the study.

3.5 It should be noted that Ospringe is not studied separately due its boundary being contiguous with Faversham, with the services and facilities clearly being shared. Furthermore, an additional settlement is added which was not included in the 2011

study. Kingsborough Manor was in the very early stages of its development at the time but is now largely complete with its own defined built-up area boundary.

### Stage 2 – Audit the services and facilities

3.6 The next stage is to carry out an audit of the services and facilities which are present in each settlement. The services and facilities logged as part of this audit are those considered to be of importance to the sustainable functioning of settlements. Traditionally, these include the following key services and facilities:

- Convenience stores
- Places of worship
- Recreation grounds
- Primary schools
- Village/community halls
- Public houses
- Pre-schools/nurseries
- Dentists
- Pharmacies
- GP surgeries/health centres

Additionally, the larger and most sustainable settlements would provide a fuller range of higher-order services and facilities including the following:

- Banks/post offices
- Libraries
- Supermarkets
- Leisure centres
- Colleges
- Secondary schools
- Hospitals/minor injury units

Finally, in the increasingly digital society that we live in, it is considered that access to fibre broadband enhance an area's sustainability credentials. This is likely to become increasingly the case as shopping patterns continue to change and the percentage of the population that works from home continues to rise.

### Stage 3 – Audit of accessibility

3.7 Whilst a simple audit of services and facilities is an important part of reviewing the settlement hierarchy, a further analysis of accessibility is also considered to be necessary. This is because, for many smaller settlements, higher-order facilities and opportunities are unlikely to be present but it is the ease and ability to access such facilities elsewhere which becomes important in determining settlement sustainability. The following factors are therefore considered:

- Travel distance between the settlement and the nearest town providing most or all of the services and facilities.
- Availability of public transport (train and bus).

3.8 With regards to public transport, settlements are assessed to determine whether they have a good, fair, limited or no level of public transport accessibility. This takes into account frequency, hours of operation, destinations and walking distance to bus stops

and train stations. Clearly, more frequent services, for longer durations, are the most desirable. With regards to walking distances to stops and stations, there is limited national guidance on the matter. Planning for Walking (2000, 2015) and The Manual for Streets (2007) all suggest that the distances resulting in the most walking/cycling are 400m for bus stops and 800m for train stations. These have been widely adopted within planning policy.

3.9 Taking this into account, the level of public transport provision is defined by the following standards (to qualify for each tier of service quality, all of the requirements listed need to be met):

- Good:
  - 400m walking distance to a bus stop and 800m to a train station (subject to presence of an accessible, lit footpath)
  - At least 7am-7pm all day service (Monday to Saturday) with reduced service on evenings and Sundays
  - Minimum 30-minute daytime frequency
  - Presence of both bus and rail with multiple destinations
- Fair:
  - 800m walking distance to railway station or bus stop (subject to presence of accessible, lit footpath)
  - At least 8am-6pm service (Monday to Saturday) with reduced service on evenings and Sundays
  - 30-60 minute daytime frequency
- Limited:
  - 800m walking distance to railway station or bus stop (subject to presence of an accessible, lit footpath)
  - Less than 8am-6pm service Monday to Friday with limited or no service at the weekend
- None:
  - No regular bus or train service

3.10 The sources of the information collected through Stages 2 and 3 can be seen in the Table 5 below.

Data	Source
Hospitals, minor injury units, public houses, village/community halls, recreation grounds, supermarkets, convenience stores, banks	Swale Borough Council (SBC) mapping
Bus stops and timetables	Bus times website - <a href="https://bustimes.org/">https://bustimes.org/</a>
GP surgeries, health centres, pharmacies, dentists	NHS website - <a href="http://www.nhs.uk/service-search">www.nhs.uk/service-search</a>
Leisure centres	SBC website - <a href="https://www.swale.gov.uk/leisure-centres/">https://www.swale.gov.uk/leisure-centres/</a>

Data	Source
Secondary schools, colleges, primary schools, nurseries, pre-schools, libraries	Kent County Council website - <a href="https://www.kent.gov.uk/">https://www.kent.gov.uk/</a>
Post offices	Post office website - <a href="https://www.postoffice.co.uk/branch-finder?">https://www.postoffice.co.uk/branch-finder?</a>
Fibre broadband	U switch website - <a href="https://www.uswitch.com/broadband/postcode_checker/">https://www.uswitch.com/broadband/postcode_checker/</a>
Bus stops and timetables	Bus times website - <a href="https://bustimes.org/">https://bustimes.org/</a>
Train stations and timetables	National rail website - <a href="https://ojp.nationalrail.co.uk/service/planjourney/search">https://ojp.nationalrail.co.uk/service/planjourney/search</a>

Table 5 – Data sources

#### Stage 4 – Construction of hierarchy

3.11 The final stage of the study is to construct a settlement hierarchy taking into account the evidence collected at Stages 2 and 3. This includes a qualitative assessment with a summary of the features of each tier. The commentary includes general notes on employment. This allows consideration of any specific circumstances within each settlement not captured by the assessment thus far which may affect its suggested position within the hierarchy. It ensures that the hierarchy is not based purely on a scoring system which could have given rise to a crude and over-simplistic assessment.

#### **4. The resulting hierarchy**

4.1 Following the application of the methodology above, a settlement audit matrix has been compiled, a summary of which can be seen at Table 6 in Section 5. The full matrix can be seen in Table 7 at the end of the study. Using this, the settlements have been grouped into the hierarchy set out below. Recognising the settlement structure and pattern within the Borough, it is considered appropriate to keep a 6-tiered structure. Overall, the suggested settlement hierarchy has not changed from that in the adopted Local Plan.

4.2 Section 6 provide a summary of the features of each tier and the full settlement audit matrix at Table 7 provides further information about service provision in each settlement.

#### Swale Borough Settlement Hierarchy

**Tier 1 – Principal town:** Sittingbourne.

**Tier 2 – Secondary towns:** Faversham and Sheerness.

**Tier 3 – Urban service centres:** Minster & Halfway and Queenborough & Rushenden.

**Tier 4 – Village service centres:** Boughton, Eastchurch, Iwade, Leysdown, Newington and Teynham.

**Tier 5 – Small villages:** Bapchild, Bayview, Borden, Bredgar, Conyer, Doddington, Dunkirk, Eastling, Hartlip, Kingsborough Manor, Lewson Street, Lower Halstow, Lynsted, Neames Forstal, Newnham, Oare, Painters Forstal, Rodmersham Green, Selling, Sheldwich Lees, Upchurch and Warden Bay.

**Tier 6 – The open countryside –** Baddlesmere, Bobbing, Bobbing Hill, Chestnut Street, Danaway, Dargate, Goodnestone, Graveney, Hernhill, Milstead, Staplestreet, Throwley Forstal and Tunstall.

## 5. Settlement audit matrix

5.1 A summary of the settlement audit matrix used to build the settlement hierarchy can be seen in Table 6 below. The full matrix can be seen in Table 6 at the end of this study.

Tier	Settlement	Key services	Higher-order services	Public transport provision	Distance to nearest town (km)
1	Sittingbourne	11	7	Good	0
2	Faversham	11	7	Good	0
	Sheerness	11	6	Fair	0
3	Minster & Halfway	11	3	Fair	3.3
	Queenborough & Rushenden	10	2	Fair	5.3
4	Boughton	8	2	Fair	6.1
	Eastchurch	10	0	Limited	8.8
	Iwade	10	1	Fair	4.8
	Leysdown	7	1	Limited	15
	Newington	10	1	Fair	5.1
	Teynham	10	2	Fair	5.3
5	Bapchild	8	0	Fair	2.8
	Bayview	3	0	Limited	13
	Borden	6	0	Limited	2.7
	Bredgar	7	1	Limited	5.4
	Conyer	2	0	Limited	7.8
	Doddington	4	1	Limited	11
	Dunkirk	3	0	Fair	8.2
	Eastling	5	0	Limited	8.1
	Hartlip	7	0	Limited	7.9
	Kingsborough Manor	1	0	Limited	7.7
	Lewson Street	3	0	None	6.8
	Lower Halstow	7	0	Limited	8.9
	Lynsted	5	0	Limited	7.3
	Neames Forstal	2	0	Fair	6.8
	Newnham	3	0	Limited	9.1
	Oare	5	1	Limited	3
Painters Forstal	2	0	Limited	4.2	
Rodmersham Green	4	0	Limited	3	

Tier	Settlement	Key services	Higher-order services	Public transport provision	Distance to nearest town (km)
	Selling	6	1	None	7.1
	Sheldwich Lees	4	0	Limited	5.8
	Upchurch	9	1	Limited	9.6
	Warden	5	0	Limited	15
6	Baddlesmere	4	0	Limited	7.9
	Bobbing	6	0	Limited	3.8
	Bobbing Hill	1	0	Fair	3.1
	Chestnut Street	2	0	Limited	3.6
	Danaway	1	0	Limited	4.9
	Dargate	3	0	Limited	3.6
	Goodnestone	3	0	Limited	3.8
	Graveney	4	0	Limited	5.1
	Hernhill	7	0	Limited	7.1
	Milstead	4	0	None	6
	Staplestreet	2	0	Limited	6.1
	Throwley Forstal	3	0	None	9.5
Tunstall	4	0	Limited	3.1	

Table 6: Summary of the settlement audit matrix.

## 6. Summary

### Key Findings

#### 6.1 Tier 1 – Principal town

Sittingbourne remains at the top of the hierarchy, justified by it being the largest town in the Borough with the greatest range of services and facilities. These include all key and higher-order services and facilities including secondary schools, a college, a minor injuries unit and the Borough's main library. It holds the largest share of the Borough's population and economy with over 2000 employment units. There is a retail centre in the high street, Sittingbourne retail park and Princes Street retail park. It is also the location of the Eurolink industrial estate and Trinity trading estate. Kent Science Park is an important employer although it is situated away from the main town. The ongoing town centre regeneration has and is expanding the leisure and retail offer further with a cinema, hotel and restaurants. Sittingbourne is served by a train station and bus hub with the greatest and most frequent variety of destinations. It is the most sustainable settlement within the Borough.

#### 6.2 Tier 2 – Secondary towns

Faversham and Sheerness, smaller than Sittingbourne, are unique in their identity and offer all of the key services and facilities and most of the higher-order ones too. Sheerness falls short of having its own hospital but benefits from that nearby at Minster. These towns also offer a wide range of employment, retail and leisure

facilities. Faversham, the Borough's smaller, market town, acts as a focal point for trade and services for the wider rural area here and has around 780 employment units. For the Isle of Sheppey, Sheerness is its main centre with an employment base in its high street and industry linked to the Port of Sheerness. There are around 430 employment units here. Public transport provision is good at Faversham, and fair at Sheerness but with connections to Sittingbourne. Away from Sittingbourne, these are the Borough's most sustainable locations.

### 6.3 Tier 3 – Urban service centres

Individually, the settlements within this tier are more limited in their range of services and facilities, although still having many of the key ones but at a lower frequency. However, due to their proximity to each other, Minster and Halfway and Queenborough and Rushenden combined create larger urban service centres which are able to support and be supported by their proximity to Sheerness and each other. There is an employment focus to the West of Minster, at Neatscourt retail park and around Queenborough Creek. Minster and Halfway have around 410 employment units and Queenborough and Rushenden have some 225. Public transport is more limited, although still fair with connections in and amongst each other and Sheerness.

### 6.4 Tier 4 – Rural service centres

The villages in this tier provide the majority of the following key services and facilities: GP surgeries, primary schools, recreational grounds, convenience stores, public houses, post offices and places of worship. Newington and Teynham have the highest level of services and facilities serving their communities as well as having train stations, but overall, public transport provision is fair or limited. They are more isolated from the strategic road network but generally closest to the main link roads in between (the A249 and the A2). Those on the eastern end of the island have less services and facilities but given the distance to the nearest town at Sheerness, act as local centres for their communities. Leysdown and the surround have a unique tourism offer but otherwise would benefit from more diverse employment opportunities, public transport improvements and support for local services. As a whole, the eastern end of the island has around 295 employment units. All of these villages are likely to serve their and the surrounding rural populations' day to day needs with some sharing of services with nearby smaller settlements. They will need to travel to other centres for a wider range of retail, leisure and employment needs.

### 6.5 Tier 5 – Small villages

These smaller villages vary in size and offer. The more sustainable provide primary schools, recreation grounds, convenience stores and have fair public transport provision. These include the likes of Upchurch, Bredgar and Bapchild. The less sustainable are without a few or most of the key services and facilities with limited or no public transport offer. A common theme for these villages, however, is their isolation from the nearest urban service centres and towns, as well as the main transport corridors to access these locations (the A249 and the A2). Even by foot,



there are not always suitable, lit footpaths for use. Single or occasional clusters of villages may contain enough services to meet the day to day needs for their own communities, whilst others would require investment to provide or improve them. Travel to the urban service centres and towns is necessary for many or most needs.

#### 6.6 Tier 6 – The open countryside

The remainder of the Borough's settlements are without defined boundaries and form very small villages, hamlets, ribbon development, clusters of houses and isolated houses. Services and facilities here are extremely limited with public transport provision generally limited or non-existent. They are usually well away from the Borough's main transport corridors with poor foot links in and amongst them. Occasionally, a small range of day to day needs can be met but on the whole, there is no immediate access to a wider range of services, facilities and employment opportunities.

### 7. **Conclusion**

- 7.1 It has not been the role of this study to identify the capacity of each settlement to accommodate growth, or to advise on the quantum of growth which each settlement should accommodate. However, the Local Plan Review will define and implement a settlement strategy that is, in part, assisted by a settlement hierarchy that helps to guide the location of development, services and facilities and employment to the most sustainable locations, or to those which can be made sustainable with the appropriate investment.

Settlement	Healthcare			Education			Leisure/recreation and cultural						Utilities				Key services	Higher-order services	Total count	Public transport provision	Distance to nearest town (km)		
	Hospital/minor injuries unit	GP surgery/health centre	Pharmacy	Dentist	Secondary school	College	Primary school	Pre-school/Nursery	Public house	Village/community hall	Library	Leisure centre	Recreation ground	Place of worship	Supermarket	Convenience store						Bank/post office	Fibre broadband
Sittingbourne	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	11	7	18	Good	0
Faversham	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	11	7	18	Good	0
Sheerness	x	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	11	6	17	Fair	0
Minster	✓	✓	✓	✓	x	x	✓	✓	✓	✓	x	✓	✓	x	✓	✓	✓	✓	11	3	14	Fair	4.3
Queenborough	x	✓	✓	x	x	x	✓	✓	✓	✓	x	✓	✓	x	✓	✓	✓	✓	10	2	12	Fair	4.2
Teynham	x	✓	✓	x	x	x	✓	✓	✓	✓	x	✓	✓	x	✓	✓	✓	✓	10	2	12	Fair	5.3
Halfway	x	✓	✓	x	✓	x	✓	✓	x	✓	x	x	✓	✓	x	✓	✓	✓	9	2	11	Fair	2.4
Newington	x	✓	✓	x	x	x	✓	✓	✓	✓	x	x	✓	✓	x	✓	✓	✓	10	1	11	Fair	5.1
Iwade	x	✓	✓	x	x	x	✓	✓	✓	✓	x	x	✓	✓	x	✓	✓	✓	10	1	11	Fair	4.8
Boughton	x	✓	x	x	x	x	x	✓	✓	✓	x	x	✓	✓	x	✓	✓	✓	8	2	10	Fair	6.1
Eastchurch	x	✓	x	✓	x	x	✓	✓	✓	✓	x	x	✓	✓	x	✓	x	✓	10	0	10	Limited	8.8
Bapchild	x	x	x	x	x	x	✓	✓	✓	✓	x	x	✓	✓	x	✓	x	✓	8	0	8	Fair	2.8
Upchurch	x	✓	x	x	x	x	✓	✓	✓	✓	x	x	✓	✓	x	✓	✓	✓	9	1	10	Limited	9.6
Bredgar	x	x	x	x	x	x	✓	x	✓	✓	x	x	✓	✓	x	✓	✓	✓	7	1	8	Limited	5.4
Leysdown	x	✓	✓	x	x	x	✓	x	✓	x	x	x	✓	x	x	✓	✓	✓	7	1	8	Limited	15
Selling	x	x	x	x	x	x	✓	x	✓	✓	x	x	✓	✓	x	x	✓	✓	6	1	7	None	7.9

Settlement	Healthcare				Education				Leisure/recreation and cultural						Utilities				Higher-order services	Total count	Public transport provision	Distance to nearest town (km)	
	Hospital/minor injuries unit	GP surgery/health centre	Pharmacy	Dentist	Secondary school	College	Primary school	Pre-school/Nursery	Public house	Village/community hall	Library	Leisure centre	Recreation ground	Place of worship	Supermarket	Convenience store	Bank/post office	Fibre broadband					Key services
Bobbing	x	x	x	x	x	x	✓	x	✓	✓	x	x	x	✓	x	✓	x	✓	6	0	6	Limited	3.8
Hartlip	x	x	x	x	x	x	✓	✓	✓	✓	x	x	✓	✓	x	x	x	✓	7	0	7	Limited	7.9
Hernhill	x	x	x	x	x	x	✓	✓	✓	✓	x	x	✓	✓	x	x	x	✓	7	0	7	Limited	7.1
Lower Halstow	x	x	x	x	x	x	✓	x	✓	✓	x	x	✓	✓	x	✓	x	✓	7	0	7	Limited	8.9
Doddington	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	✓	x	x	x	✓	✓	x	x	✓	✓	4	1	5	Limited	11
Oare	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	✓	✓	x	x	✓	✓	x	x	✓	✓	5	1	6	Limited	3
Borden	x	x	x	x	x	x	✓	✓	✓	✓	x	x	x	✓	x	x	x	✓	6	0	6	Limited	2.7
Lynsted	x	x	x	x	x	x	✓	✓	✓	x	x	x	x	✓	x	x	x	✓	5	0	5	Limited	7.3
Warden	x	✓	x	x	x	x	x	✓	x	x	x	x	✓	x	x	✓	x	✓	5	0	5	Limited	15
Eastling	x	x	x	x	x	x	✓	x	✓	✓	x	x	x	✓	x	x	x	✓	5	0	5	Limited	8.1
Baddlesmere	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	✓	✓	x	x	x	✓	x	x	x	✓	4	0	4	Limited	7.9
Graveney	x	x	x	x	x	x	✓	x	x	✓	x	x	x	✓	x	x	x	✓	4	0	4	Limited	5.1
Milstead	x	x	x	x	x	x	✓	x	✓	x	x	x	x	✓	x	x	x	✓	4	0	4	None	6
Rushenden	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	✓	x	x	x	x	✓	x	x	✓	x	✓	4	0	4	Limited	6.3
Sheldwich Lees	x	x	x	x	x	x	✓	✓	x	x	x	x	x	✓	x	x	x	✓	4	0	4	Limited	5.8
Tunstall	x	x	x	x	x	x	✓	x	x	✓	x	x	x	✓	x	x	x	✓	4	0	4	Limited	3.1

Settlement	Healthcare				Education				Leisure/recreation and cultural						Utilities				Total count	Public transport provision	Distance to nearest town (km)		
	Hospital/minor injuries unit	GP surgery/health centre	Pharmacy	Dentist	Secondary school	College	Primary school	Pre-school/Nursery	Public house	Village/community hall	Library	Leisure centre	Recreation ground	Place of worship	Supermarket	Convenience store	Bank/post office	Fibre broadband				Key services	Higher-order services
Rodmersham Green	x	x	x	x	x	x	✓	x	✓	✓	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	✓	4	0	4	Limited	3
Dargate	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	✓	✓	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	✓	3	0	3	Limited	9.6
Dunkirk	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	✓	✓	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	✓	3	0	3	Fair	8.2
Lewson Street	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	✓	x	x	x	x	✓	x	x	x	✓	3	0	3	None	6.8
Newnham	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	✓	x	x	x	x	✓	x	x	x	✓	3	0	3	Limited	9.1
Bayview	x	x	x	x	x	x	✓	x	✓	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	✓	3	0	3	Limited	13
Goodnestone	x	x	x	x	x	x	✓	x	x	x	x	x	x	✓	x	x	x	✓	3	0	3	Limited	3.8
Neames Forstal	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	✓	x	x	x	x	✓	2	0	2	Fair	6.8
Throwley Forstal	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	✓	✓	x	x	x	✓	3	0	3	None	9.5
Chestnut Street	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	✓	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	✓	2	0	2	Limited	3.6
Conyer	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	✓	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	✓	2	0	2	Limited	7.8
Painters Forstal	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	✓	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	✓	2	0	2	Limited	4.2
Staplestreet	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	✓	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	✓	2	0	2	Limited	6.1
Bobbing Hill	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	✓	1	0	1	Fair	3.1
Danaway	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	✓	1	0	1	Limited	4.9

Settlement	Healthcare				Education			Leisure/recreation and cultural					Utilities				Distance to nearest town (km)						
	Hospital/minor injuries unit	GP surgery/health centre	Pharmacy	Dentist	Secondary school	College	Primary school	Pre-school/Nursery	Public house	Village/community hall	Library	Leisure centre	Recreation ground	Place of worship	Supermarket	Convenience store		Bank/post office	Fibre broadband	Key services	Higher-order services	Total count	Public transport provision
Kingsborough Manor	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	✓	1	0	1	Limited	7.7

Table 7 – Full settlement audit matrix

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<b>Local Plan Panel Meeting</b>	
<b>Meeting Date</b>	3 <sup>rd</sup> September 2020
<b>Report Title</b>	Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy for Swale
<b>Cabinet Member</b>	Cllr Mike Baldock, Cabinet Member for Planning
<b>SMT Lead</b>	James Freeman
<b>Head of Service</b>	James Freeman
<b>Lead Officer</b>	Natalie Earl
<b>Key Decision</b>	No
<b>Classification</b>	Open
<b>Recommendations</b>	1. It is recommended that Members note the content of this report and the Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy for Swale in appendices I, II and III.

## 1 Purpose of Report and Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report sets out the Green and Blue Infrastructure (GBI) Strategy for Swale. The purpose of the GBI Strategy is to identify and guide opportunities for a greener, healthier, more biodiverse and prosperous Swale.
- 1.2 The Strategy looks at Swale’s current GBI resource, Swale’s priorities for GBI, the multi-functionality of GBI and the opportunities that we have in Swale both with our existing GBI and for new GBI provision. It then goes on to look at urban GI (Appendix II to this report) in Swale and then finally how to deliver these opportunities.
- 1.3 This Strategy will be part of the evidence base of the Local Plan Review and will help to inform the development of policies for the Local Plan; both strategic, site specific and for development management purposes.
- 1.4 The purpose of this report is to present the GBI Strategy and to seek Member endorsement of this as part of the evidence base for the Local Plan Review.

## 2 Background

- 2.1 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) defines green infrastructure as “*a network of multi-functional green space, urban and rural, which is capable of delivering a wide range of environmental and quality of life benefits for local communities.*” It is now best practice that ‘blue’ infrastructure is included in these strategies and these include rivers, creeks, streams, ponds, ditches, etc.
- 2.2 Green and Blue Infrastructure is recognised as critical infrastructure for the health of Swale’s residents, wildlife and habitats. GBI is the network of multi-functional green

and blue spaces which make up the essential ecosystems for both people and nature.

- 2.3 A large proportion (around 60%) of Swale’s environment is already recognised internationally, nationally and locally for the diversity of its wildlife and habitats, recognising the quality of Swale’s environment. The aim of the GBI Strategy is to improve the quality, accessibility and multi-functionality of these assets and the linkages between them.
- 2.4 Swale faces a number of challenges including high levels of inactivity amongst residents, concentrated pockets of poor air quality, a north-south wildlife corridor severance, pockets of traffic congestion and the challenge of sustainably managing a growing visitor economy. These can all be improved by enhancing and growing the GBI network in Swale.
- 2.5 While most types of GBI may have a primary purpose or function, by its nature GBI is multi-functional, providing a range of benefits. GIS analysis has been used to map the multi-functionality of Swale’s existing GBI, giving a useful indication as to where investment in GBI would deliver maximum benefits for both people, wildlife and habitats. The need for creation and enhancement of protection of GBI has been assessed through a range of forums including an evidence base review, stakeholder consultation, qualitative analysis and mapping. Typology mapping has identified where certain types of GBI are lacking or are abundant in Swale.
- 2.6 To respond to Swale’s context, to help to realise environmental goals and to highlight areas where investment in GBI could help to bring multiple benefits, the GBI plan identifies four opportunity areas:
1. A Green and Biodiverse Borough
  2. A Healthy Blue Environment
  3. A Healthy, Connected and Active Swale
  4. A Beacon for the Visitor Economy
- 2.7 Under each of these opportunity areas, the GBI Strategy provides practical advice for the optimisation of Swale’s GBI resources. Though not an opportunity area in itself, the climate and ecological emergency, declared by Swale in 2019, spans all opportunity areas, and therefore forms a central role within the Strategy.
- 2.8 The vision of the Strategy is:
- ‘To develop a resilient, biodiverse and multi-functional GBI network to contribute to ensuring Swale is a great place to live, work, invest and visit, and respond to the climate emergency.’*



## Multi-functionality

- 2.9 One of the principal drivers of GBI planning is to manage land and water in a more sustainable way. While most types of GBI have a primary purpose or function, it is usually desirable for functions to co-exist, leading to multifunctional GI and the ability to use land more effectively and efficiently for the benefit of people and nature. By promoting multi-functionality, GBI allows the same area of land or water to perform several functions, offering a range of benefits for people and ecosystems.
- 2.10 The range of functions delivered by GBI include improving health and wellbeing, providing recreation spaces, the provision of food, improving air quality, supporting and enhancing wildlife and habitats, mitigating and adapting to climate change, managing water resources, reducing flood risk and supporting heritage and cultural assets. Across Swale, GBI can deliver up to 22 functions and this multi-functionality has been assessed and mapped.
- 2.11 GBI functions operate at multiple scales, all working together to form part of an interconnected green and blue network.

## Priority Themes

- 2.12 Seven priority themes have been identified for the delivery of tangible and impactful action to deliver a resilient GBI network across Swale. All the priority themes are interconnected, with the ability to deliver multiple benefits. These themes are translated into Opportunity Areas within the Strategy. The themes are:
1. Wildlife and Biodiversity
  2. Recreation and Active Travel
  3. Water Resources
  4. Trees and Woodlands
  5. Landscape Character
  6. Health and Wellbeing
  7. Growing the Visitor Economy
- 2.13 As the Strategy highlights, there are already a wealth of existing projects within Swale run by communities, organisations and Swale Borough Council (SBC) which protect and enhance GBI through community engagement and improving the environment for local residents. These projects need to continue; alongside new ones.
- 2.14 The Strategy highlights the need for effective and collaborative partnership approaches for the delivery of the Strategy. GBI transcends administrative boundaries and our work with groups such as the North Kent Environmental Planning Group, will continue to be vital in the delivery of this Strategy, as will collaborative working with partners and stakeholders in the planning for GBI in Swale. Suggestions of potential funding streams are provided, including through the

Local Plan (via S106 contributions) or as part of Masterplanning for larger development sites and additionally as funding streams become available from other sources. This Strategy is a long-term project and success will only be achieved with the continued support and involvement of a wide range of partners.

### 3 Proposals

- 3.1 The proposal is that the Strategy forms part of the evidence base for the Local Plan process. The recommendation is therefore:
- I. That Members note the content of the Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy for Swale.

### 4 Alternative Options

- 4.1 The NPPF requires local plans to have an up to date evidence base and this includes on green and blue infrastructure. It is a cross cutting issue which affects air quality, climate change, healthy communities, tourism, biodiversity and leisure and should be considered at the plan making stage. The information contained within the document has been prepared with stakeholders and in line with best practice and government policy.
- 4.2 There would be no benefit for Members to disregard the content of the attached Strategy given that it provides an evidence base from which the relevant Local Plan policies can be prepared that will help to deliver many of the Council’s objectives. Therefore, there are no realistic alternatives.

### 5 Consultation Undertaken or Proposed

- 5.1 The consultant has had a number of detailed conversations with officers from within the council in the planning, leisure, tourism, economic development, urban design/landscape and Sheerness Town centre teams, as well as with specific Members and also with outside bodies such as the Kent Wildlife Trust, as the document has evolved. This was to gain local knowledge and expertise and to have their input into the final document.
- 5.2 The Local Plan Review process is subject to public consultation. This report will be used with other technical work to draft the content of the local plan document that will be brought to members of this panel for endorsement in due course.

### 6 Implications

Issue	Implications
Corporate Plan	Priority 2: Investing in our environment and responding positively to global challenges

	Priority 3: Tackling deprivation and creating equal opportunities for everyone
Financial, Resource and Property	The cost and resources for this piece of work were from within the Local Plan budget.
Legal, Statutory and Procurement	The Local Plan review is being prepared in accordance with Government regulations and the Council's constitution.
Crime and Disorder	None identified at this stage.
Environment and Sustainability	The whole Local Plan will be subject to a Sustainability Appraisal in the coming months. And the Strategy has taken into account the Swale Climate Change Action plan.
Health and Wellbeing	Health and wellbeing is a golden thread running through the production of the Local Plan.
Risk Management and Health and Safety	None identified at this stage.
Equality and Diversity	The whole Local Plan will require a full community impact assessment.
Privacy and Data Protection	None identified at this stage.

## 7 Appendices

7.1 The following document is to be published with this report and forms part of the report (It has been split into three documents due to its size):

- Appendix I: Draft Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy for Swale (Main document) (August 2020)
- Appendix II: Urban GBI Strategies (August 2020)
- Appendix III: Swale GBI Strategy Appendices (August 2020)

## 8 Background Papers

8.1 None.

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# Swale Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy

**DRAFT**

August 2020

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Appendix B - Potential Funders

Appendix C - Planning Policy Recommendation



THE  
ENVIRONMENT  
PARTNERSHIP

Researched & Prepared by TEP

Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy for Swale

**Foreword**

*Signed*

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# Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy for Swale

## Executive Summary

Green and Blue Infrastructure (GBI) is recognised as critical infrastructure for the health of Swale's residents and wildlife. GBI is the network of multi-functional green and blue spaces which make up the essential ecosystems for people and nature. This GBI Strategy, commissioned by Swale Borough Council (SBC) is to guide opportunities for a greener, healthier, more biodiverse and prosperous borough for the period 2020-2039. A large proportion of Swale's environment is already recognised internationally for the diversity of its wildlife and habitats. The coastline has been recognised for its environmental quality, as Minster Lees and Sheerness Beaches both fly the prestigious Blue Flag. The borough is home to significant woodland assets such as the Blean Woodlands which provide community recreation opportunities and are rich in wildlife. There are a wealth of existing projects, run by communities, organisations and SBC which have GBI at their centre and already go a long way in increasing community engagement and improving the environment for all.

Despite efforts to date, Swale continues to face unique challenges including high levels of inactivity amongst residents, concentrated pockets of poor air quality, north-south wildlife corridor severance, and the challenge of sustainably managing a growing visitor economy.

While most types of GBI may have a primary purpose or function, by its nature GBI is multi-functional, providing a range of benefits. GIS analysis has been used to map the multi-functionality of Swale's existing GBI, giving a useful indication as to where investment in GBI would be beneficial to result in maximum benefits for people and wildlife. The need for creation, enhancement or protection of GBI has been assessed through a range of forums including an evidence base review, stakeholder consultation, qualitative analysis and mapping. Typology mapping identifies where certain types of GBI are

lacking or abundant, and forms a basis for the rest of the Strategy. Local knowledge has formed a central role in the development of GBI opportunities, in terms of sense checking spatial and qualitative analysis, and guiding the delivery of practical advice.

To respond to the borough context, help to realise environmental goals, and highlight areas where investment in GBI can bring multiple benefits, the GI plan identifies four opportunity areas:

- **A Green and Biodiverse Borough**
- **A Healthy Blue Environment**
- **A Healthy, Connected and Active Swale**
- **A Beacon for the Visitor Economy**

Under each of these opportunity areas, the GBI Strategy provides practical advice for the optimisation of Swale's GBI resources. Though not an opportunity area in itself, the climate and ecological emergency, declared by Swale's councillors on 26 June 2019, spans all opportunity areas, and therefore forms a central, interwoven role within the Strategy.

Section 6.0 looks specifically at enhancing urban GBI in each of Swale's main urban areas including Sittingbourne, Faversham and Sheerness and Minster. Practical suggestions for greening town centres and addressing the challenges faced by Swale's urban areas are provided, such as enabling greener and safer routes to schools, and re-connecting the town centre and the coastline for benefits to both people and wildlife.

The Strategy highlights the need for effective and collaborative partnership approaches for the delivery of the Strategy. Suggestions of potential funding streams are provided. This Strategy is a long-term project and success can only be achieved with the continued support and involvement of a wide range of partners.



## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 The coastal borough of Swale is home to an abundance of Green and Blue Infrastructure (GBI) assets which form a key part of the fabric of our towns, settlements and landscapes. GBI is vital to the quality of life of our residents, as well as planning for climate change. Investment into GBI can deliver a range of benefits including environmental enhancements, public health benefits and contribute to the borough of Swale.

### Vision

1.2 Swale Borough Council ignited the vision for a Green and Blue Infrastructure (GBI) Strategy for the borough within the Swale Borough Local Plan 'Bearing the Fruits 2031', adopted in July 2017. The Local Plan set out the following vision in relation to GI across Swale:

1.3 *'To guide our approach and to create more robust ecological and landscape structures, we will set out a natural assets and green infrastructure strategy. It will identify gaps in our network and where strategic scale enhancements for biodiversity or landscape could take place, alongside where communities and biodiversity could adapt to the effects of climate change. Our strategy will manifest itself with the creation of a major new green infrastructure initiative within the A249 corridor, connecting both Sittingbourne and Iwade, together with other green links through to Kemsley and Milton Creek. At Faversham, new space at Oare will be established, whilst habitat creation to compensate for development and/or climate change will take place on Sheppey.'*

1.4 The GBI Strategy will guide the protection, enhancement, creation and maintenance of GBI across the borough until 2038. This Strategy will form part of the evidence base for Swales Emerging Local Plan, which will cover the period 2022-2038 and is in the early stages of preparation.

1.5 In June 2019, Swale's councillors voted to declare a climate and ecological emergency, committing the council to taking action to reduce carbon emissions and 'make space for nature'. It is important that the GBI Strategy reflects the objectives Climate and Ecological Emergency Motion, which are woven into the vision below.

1.6 Moving forward, the vision of this Strategy is:

***'To develop a resilient, biodiverse and multi-functional GBI network to contribute to ensuring Swale is a great place to live, work, invest and visit, and respond to the climate emergency.'***

### What is Green and Blue Infrastructure?

1.7 Green and Blue Infrastructure is the green spaces and water environment which make up the network of spaces which are essential to ecosystems and quality of life. The table below provides examples of the green and blue spaces which fall within a GBI network, comprising both public and private spaces.

## Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy for Swale

*Table 1: Examples of Green and Blue Infrastructure by type*

Type of GBI	Examples of Green Infrastructure Assets	Examples of Blue Infrastructure Assets
Parks and Gardens	Urban Parks Pocket Parks Country Parks Formal Gardens	
Natural and semi natural habitats	Woodland Nature Reserves Grassland	Wetlands Ponds Coastal Habitat Marine Habitats
Green Corridors	Footpaths Cycle ways Roadside verges Hedgerows Disused railways	Canals Rivers
Amenity Greenspaces	Children's play areas Urban green spaces Green spaces for informal activities	
Outdoor Sports Facilities	Sports pitches Playing Fields	
Other	Allotments Churchyards Moorlands Agricultural Land Street Trees	Sustainable Drainage Systems

- 1.8 The National Planning Policy Framework (2019) defines green infrastructure as ‘a network of multi-functional green space, urban and rural, which is capable of delivering a wide range of environmental and quality of life benefits for local communities.’
- 1.9 In a similar way to planning strategically for grey infrastructure delivery, such as roads, utilities and schools, it is just as important to plan for GBI at a strategic level in order to deliver a well-connected and healthy natural environment.

- 1.10 A Green and Blue Infrastructure network consists of interconnected spaces transcending the urban environments, linking to the wider countryside and coastal areas in order to provide a range of social, economic and environmental benefits.
- 1.11 GBI transcends administrative boundaries. As and therefore working together with partners and stakeholders is a vital part of planning for GBI in Swale.

### Multi-functionality

- 1.12 One of the principal drivers of GBI planning is to manage land and water in a more sustainable way. While most types of GBI have a primary purpose or function, it is usually desirable for functions to co-exist, leading to multifunctional GI and the ability to use land more effectively and efficiently for the benefit of people and nature. By promoting multi-functionality, GBI allows the same area of land or water to perform several functions, offering a range of benefits for people and ecosystems.
- 1.13 The range of functions delivered by GBI include improving health and wellbeing, providing recreation spaces, the provision of food, improving air quality, supporting and enhancing wildlife and habitats, mitigating and adapting to climate change, managing water resources, reducing flood risk and supporting heritage and cultural assets. Across Swale, GBI can deliver up to 22 functions and this multi-functionality has been assessed and mapped.

## Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy for Swale

- 1.14 GBI functions operate at multiple scales, all working together to form part of an interconnected green and blue network.

### Priority Themes

- 1.15 Seven priority themes have been identified for the delivery of tangible and impactful action to deliver a resilient GBI network across Swale. All of the priority themes are interconnected, with the ability to deliver multiple benefits. These themes are translated into Opportunity Areas in Section 5.0.

### Wildlife and Biodiversity

- 1.16 A large proportion of Swale is recognised nationally and at the European level for the quality of its wildlife and habitats. Restoring, protecting and improving existing habitats can improve the resilience of biodiversity across the borough where planned in an integrative way.
- 1.17 Effective networks of green infrastructure also provide opportunities for species to move and colonise new habitats, which is considered a key ecological response to climate change.
- 1.18 Climate change and biodiversity decline are real and present dangers needing urgent action in terms of woodland and wetland creation, soil conservation and establishment of wildlife-friendly landscapes. Amongst the pressures on biodiversity in Swale, the loss and fragmentation of habitat has been a large issue.

### Recreation and Active Travel

- 1.19 Green and blue spaces open to the public can increase enjoyment of outdoor pursuits and recreational activities, benefiting human health and longevity. Green infrastructure can also be used to encourage active travel, with integrated walking and cycling networks, promoting improved health. Increasing investment now in maintaining and creating these assets will make us healthier both physically and mentally and can have wider social benefits in addressing inequalities.

### Water Resources

- 1.20 GBI will be planned for in a way that reduces the frequency and severity of flooding, drawing on catchment wide approaches for landscape scale management. Sustainable drainage systems (SuDS) and natural flood management (woodland planting, land management) can be drawn on to slow the flow whilst providing a range of other benefits for wildlife water quality for example.
- 1.21 Swale's water resources such as creeks and lakes, as well as beaches on the Isle of Sheppey are also valued for their recreational value for activities such as sailing, kayaking, sea swimming, snorkelling and sea rowing. Enabling people to safely access Swale's blue infrastructure and encouraging more young people to get involved in watersports is key for physical and mental wellbeing.

## Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy for Swale

### Trees and Woodlands

- 1.22 Trees and woodlands not only provide an immense habitat network for a broad range of species but they also absorb significant quantities of pollutants, improving air quality and contributing to climate change mitigation.
- 1.23 Urban woodland can offer a sense of naturalness and freedom within the built up environment, encouraging people to leave the office and providing opportunities for contact with nature. Street trees can help combat the Urban Heat Island (UHI) effect, cooling our streets and adding shade. Additional benefits can include food provision and reducing surface water runoff.

### Landscape Character

- 1.24 The landscape of Swale gets its unique identity from its diverse natural environment including the extensive marshes, mudflats and saltmarshes of the Swale Estuary, chalk downland and ancient woodland within the AONB, the historic docklands at Sheerness, the diverse industrial base at Sittingbourne and the Creekside market town of Faversham. Planning for GBI at a landscape scale can ensure that conservation and enhancement works effectively across Swale and beyond.
- 1.25 Urban GBI can help bring a sense of the regional rural hinterland into the urban areas by pointing to the surrounding landscape character.

### Health and Wellbeing

- 1.26 Research undertaken as part of Swale's Active Lives Framework (2017) found that 24% of Swale's population are 'Inactive' doing less than 30 minutes of activity per week. Providing all Swale's residents with good access to GBI can raise levels of physical activity such as walking and cycling, having secondary health benefits such as reducing obesity and improving overall levels of health. GBI methods are a cost-effective method of improving public health outcomes.
- 1.27 The benefits of interaction with the natural, outdoor settings provided by GBI assets are well documented, and have been shown to support good mental health, combat social isolation and aid recovery from illness.
- 1.28 Air pollution is associated with a number of adverse health impacts, though GBI projects have been shown to reduce levels of pollutants in the air. Swale currently has five Air Quality Management Areas (AQMAs), four of which are in Sittingbourne and one in Faversham. AQMAs are areas where pollutants are above recommended levels, posing a health risk to the population. Targetting GBI in these areas can have a range of benefits.

## Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy for Swale

### Growing the Visitor Economy

- 1.29 Swale's geographic location makes the borough well placed to offer tourists a range of experiences, whether that be a coastal break or experiencing the beauty of the Kent Downs AONB. GBI can support the continued growth of Swale's Visitor Economy which currently supports 4,561 jobs across the borough.
- 1.30 GBI can add direct economic value through tourism or products whilst also adding value through improving 'Quality of Place,' and promoting distinctive places.

### **Purpose of the GBI Strategy**

- 1.31 The GBI Strategy will guide the delivery of the vision and support the implementation of programmes and projects to enable the creation a strategic network of green infrastructure across Swale, addressing needs and opportunities.

## 2.0 SWALE'S GBI RESOURCE

- 2.1 The borough of Swale lies on the North Kent Coast between the Medway Towns and Canterbury. The diverse, coastal borough is named after the narrow channel of tidal water between mainland Kent and the Isle of Sheppey. Four broad areas comprise the borough including Faversham, the Isle of Sheppey, Sittingbourne and the rural hinterland.
- 2.2 94% of Swale is green and blue infrastructure. 60% of the Borough is designated for international, national and local biodiversity and landscape value, recognising the quality of Swale's environment. Table 2 confirms the approximate quantity of green or blue infrastructure across the borough, which has been generated through the baseline mapping undertaken as part of the baseline to this Strategy. The typology plans (Figures 1-4) confirm the disposition of the various types of green and blue infrastructure throughout the borough.

Table 2: Approximate Quantity of GBI Typology across Swale

Green Infrastructure Type	Approximate Percentage (%) of Swale Borough
Agricultural land	49.1
Allotments	0.07
Amenity greenspace	0.1
Cemetery and burial grounds	0.08
Provision for Children and Young People	0.005
Grassland or scrubland	7.5
Green Corridor	0.1
Natural and semi-natural greenspace	0.5
Orchard	7.2
Outdoor sports facilities	1.1

Parks and gardens	0.3
Private gardens	4.1
Woodland	8.0
Street Tree	0.2
Beach	0.1
Foreshore	5.2
<b>Blue Infrastructure Type</b>	<b>Approximate Percentage (%) of Swale Borough</b>
Tidal Water	6.2
Waterbody	0.6
Watercourse	0.8
Wetland	2.3

### Agricultural Land

- 2.3 The borough is predominantly agricultural land, comprising 49% of Swale covering vast areas around the main settlements. Below the estuarine marshland is a highly fertile cultivated area which borders the chalk uplands of the North Downs AONB. Agriculture, including fruit and hop growing, is a key industry within the Borough, with the second largest agricultural workforce in Kent.

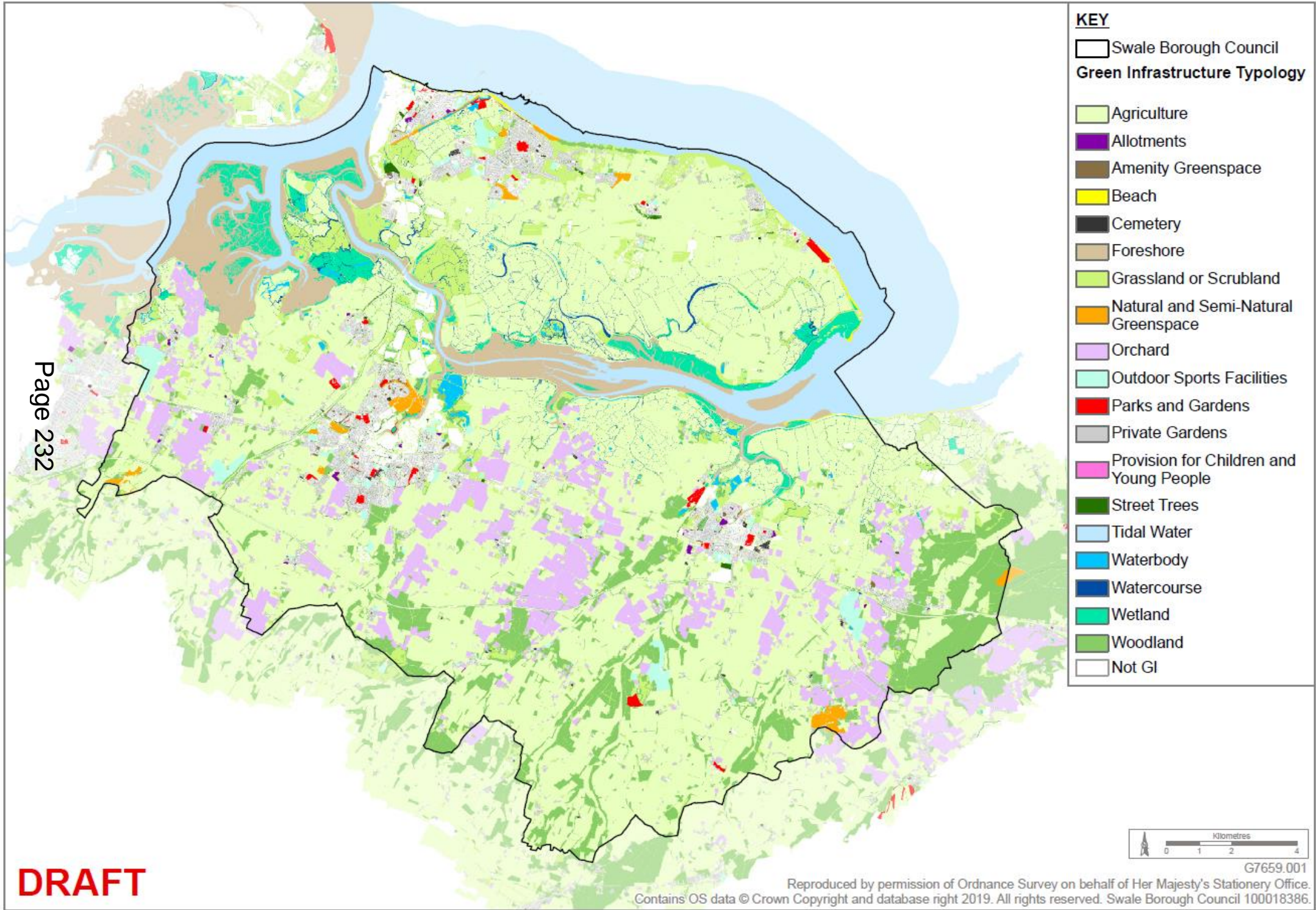
### Allotments

- 2.4 Swale currently has 16 allotments across the Borough; four in Faversham; six in Sittingbourne; five on the Isle of Sheppey and 1 one on Upchurch allotments.

### Amenity Greenspace

- 2.5 Amenity greenspace is often required as part of new housing developments to provide opportunities for informal activities such as dog walking, jogging and play. Amenity greenspaces are also found in urban areas, providing opportunities for workers to eat lunch or socialise or a space for recreation. It is important that new developments across Swale consider the connectivity of amenity greenspaces to the wider GBI network rather than in isolation.

Figure 1: GBI Typology in Swale





## Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy for Swale

### Cemeteries and Burial Grounds

2.6 Historic churchyards and cemeteries can provide quiet, open spaces within the busy urban area whilst supporting biodiversity. Swale Borough Council manage five cemeteries across the borough; three in Sittingbourne, Low Lane Cemetery in Faversham and Halfway Cemetery on the Isle of Sheppey. Accessibility to these spaces is particularly important to enable residents to visit.

### Provision for Children and Young People

2.7 Currently, the borough has a limited supply of spaces for children and young people, representing just 0.005% of land cover. There is scope for improvement, focussing efforts into larger scale community play schemes to provide 'activity hubs' for Swale's younger population.

2.8 As part of the Parks for People Improvement Project, Faversham Recreation Ground is undergoing a heritage led regeneration scheme to improve the park's facilities and encourage community engagement. This Heritage Lottery and Big Lottery Funded Project has already provided improvements to the play area and further works are planned to the skate park. Employing a park activities co-ordinator among many other planned improvements will provide an example of what can be achieved elsewhere in the borough to provide outdoor opportunities for children and young people.

### Green Corridors

2.9 Green corridors, such as green cycling and walking routes can provide opportunities for active travel. Swale is home to a section of the Saxon Shore Way, a long distance route along the coast which is predominantly off-road. Through Swale, the Saxon Shore Way follows The Swale, passing by creeks, mudflats, saltmarshes and the Oare Marshes Nature Reserve, internationally important for its bird life.

2.10 National Cycle Network (NCN) route 1 runs west to east through the northern half of the borough, providing connections to Canterbury and Dover in the east and Dartford and London in the west. NCR 174 spurs north from NCR 1 at Sittingbourne and provides a northerly connection to Sheerness and Minster on the Isle of Sheppey.

2.11 On the Isle of Sheppey, the Isle of Harty Way is a 12.8km flat, circular cycle route which is mostly off-road and connects Leysdown on the east of the island to the Isle of Harty, once an island separated by a mile of water.

## Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy for Swale

### Natural and Semi-Natural greenspace

2.12 Natural and semi-natural greenspaces can be defined as 'land, water and geological features which have been naturally colonised by plants and animals and which are accessible on foot to large numbers of residents<sup>1</sup>.' Access to these spaces can make an important contribution to quality of life in urban environments, whilst providing habitats for wildlife and educational opportunities.

2.13 Natural England's 'Accessible Natural Greenspace Standard' recommends that everyone should have access to at least one accessible two hectare site no more than a five minute walk from home and at least one twenty hectare site within 2km from home. The Strategy outlines how this analysis has been taken later on.

### Orchards

2.14 The central belt of the borough is occupied by a patchwork of orchards interspersed with wooded areas and the urban areas of Faversham and Sittingbourne. Many of the borough's orchards lie within the Kent Downs AONB.

### Outdoor Sports Facilities

2.15 Swale's urban areas comprise a range of outdoor sports facilities, playing pitches and recreation grounds. The provision of outdoor sports facilities should be needs led. The Faversham Recreation Ground Improvements showcase an opportunity to improve the quality of existing assets, including the refurbishment of the changing pavilion and toilet block to encourage its use, and make best use of existing sport and recreation assets.

### Parks and Gardens

2.16 Although parks and gardens form a small percentage of GI across the borough (0.43%), they cover significant localised areas, especially in urban centres. For example, on the Isle of Sheppey the Barton's Point Coastal Park lies at the northern tip of the island, north of the town of Sheerness. Within Sheerness, many other parks and gardens are integrated within the urban form. Leysdown Country Park also abuts the eastern edge of the Isle of Sheppey.

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<sup>1</sup> Harrison, C, Burgess, J, Millward, A, and Dawe, G (1995) Accessible Natural Greenspace in Towns and Cities English Nature Research Report 153, English Nature

## Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy for Swale

- 2.17 Oare Gunpowder Works County Park lies on the north western edge of Faversham home to open water, marshland, woodland set around old gunpowder buildings. Other parks in Faversham are integrated within the urban form, including Faversham recreation ground, though they are limited and poorly connected.

### Private Gardens

- 2.18 Though private gardens represent 4.1% of land cover across Swale, they often deliver a low number of functions. There is often a desire for low maintenance gardens resulting in impermeable surfaces and a lack of biodiversity. However, private gardens have a unique role to play within the urban environment due to their ability to provide interconnected habitats, air quality improvements and localised cooling through shading. Their close proximity to homes and therefore their ease of accessibility should therefore not be overlooked as part of a well-connected GBI network for a range of benefits.

### Woodland

- 2.19 After agricultural land, woodland occupies a significant area of the borough (8%). The largest area of woodland in Swale is the Blean Wood which lies close to and crosses the eastern borough border with Canterbury, extending to Herne Bay. There are also significant corridors of woodland south of Faversham, south of the M2 and within the Kent Downs AONB. Tree coverage within urban areas is currently limited.

### Street Trees

- 2.20 Trees in urban areas are known to provide a range of benefits such as reducing pollution, intercepting rainfall and providing shading. On the Isle of Sheppey, there are rows of street trees through the urban area of Minster, though street tree coverage is sparser across the rest of the Island.
- 2.21 In Sittingbourne, to the south of the A2, street trees line many primary roads in residential streets such as Swanstree Avenue and Bell Road, and their multiple connecting streets
- 2.22 Within the historic core of Faversham, street trees are sparse, though are more prevalent through the residential areas such as in the south east, west of Love Lane, and in Oare in the north east. The Western Link Road is home to one of the most significant street tree networks in Faversham.

### Beaches and Foreshore

- 2.23 Swale's coastal location means that beaches and foreshores amount to 5.3% of the borough's land cover. Foreshore refers to the area of shore that lies between the high tide mark and the low tide mark.
- 2.24 Swale's beaches are concentrated on the northern shore of the Isle of Sheppey. Two of Sheppey's bathing beaches have been awarded a Blue Flag Award, recognising Minster Leads and Sheerness Beaches as among the best in the country. Leysdown Beach also received a Seaside Awards for cleanliness and facilities.

## Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy for Swale

### Blue Infrastructure

- 2.25 Swale's coastal location has a major influence on the Borough. The Swale Estuary runs between the mainland and the Isle of Sheppey. Land on either side of The Swale is marshland, which extends the length of the district. Oare Country Park is home to a vast area of wetlands, supporting a range of aquatic and terrestrial species.
- 2.26 The north coast of the Isle of Sheppey abuts the Thames Estuary, looking out to wind turbines and the coast of Essex on the horizon. Other watercourses in the borough are to the north of the A2, as a result of the chalk landscape in the southern half of Swale.
- 2.27 Between the Swale and River Medway, a continuous belt of marsh runs uninterrupted. Mudflats, saltmarsh, inlets and creeks are all synonymous with this coastal area, which is prone to tidal flooding. There is a network of creeks within the Borough including Faversham and Milton Creeks which provide important ecological habitats.

### **Key Messages**

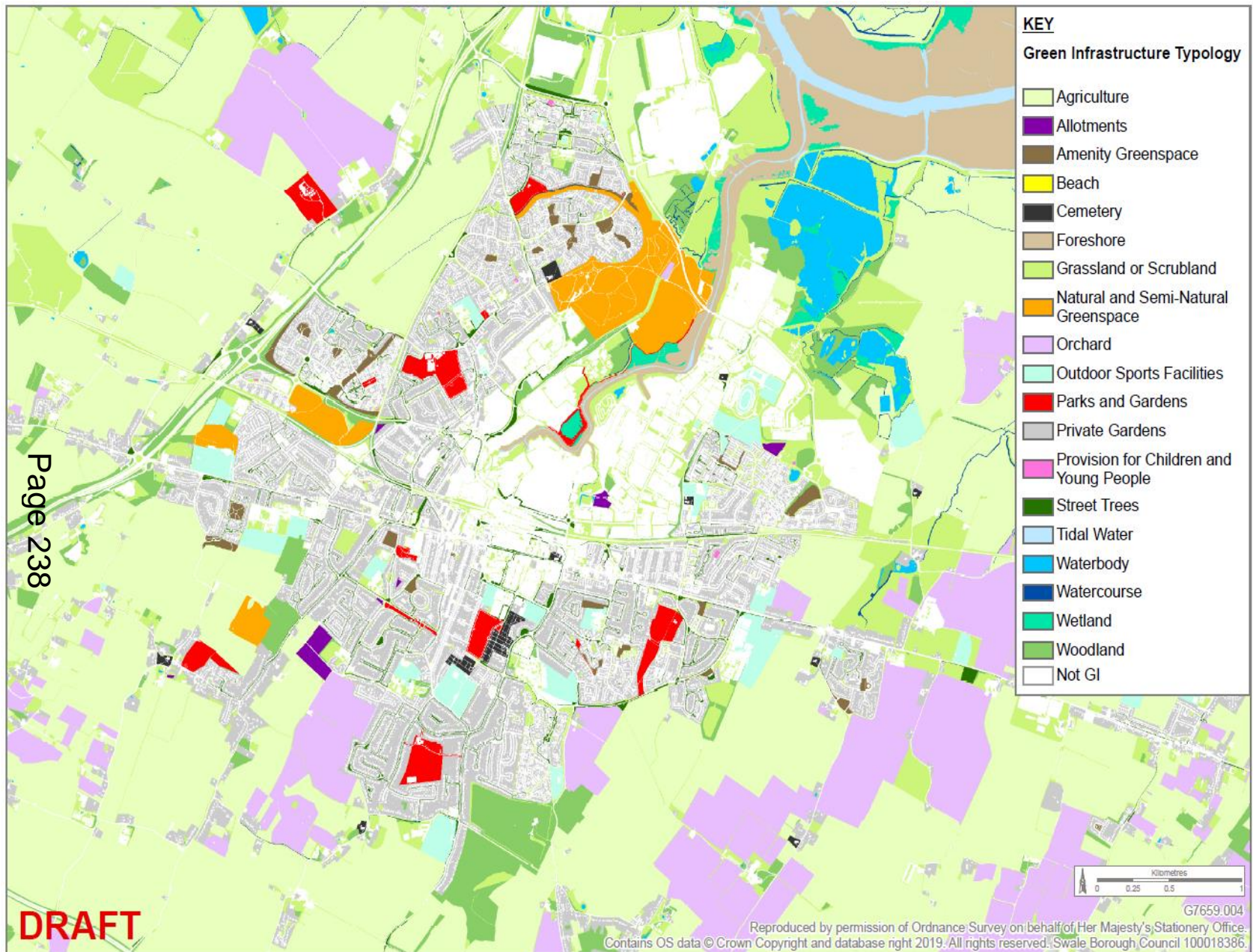
- 2.28 Drawing the above together, we can pull out the following key messages which are taken forward into the remainder of the Strategy.

- 94% of Swale is GBI; the borough already has a lot of GBI and corresponding engagement projects, creating opportunity to enhance existing assets
- The majority of the borough is covered by agricultural land, presenting opportunities GBI enhancements alongside farmers and landowners
- 24% of the population are currently inactive
- There is a general absence of GBI in parts of the urban areas
- Swale is home to significant woodland assets including the Blean Woodlands and a network of orchards across the centre of the borough
- GBI has the potential to enhance Swale's visitor economy
- Sittingbourne suffers from poor air quality, with four of the borough's five AQMAs located here
- SBC has declared a climate and ecological emergency and has published an Action Plan in response. All proposals within this strategy to increase and enhance the presence of GBI across the borough will contribute to combatting climate change.

### Built Infrastructure

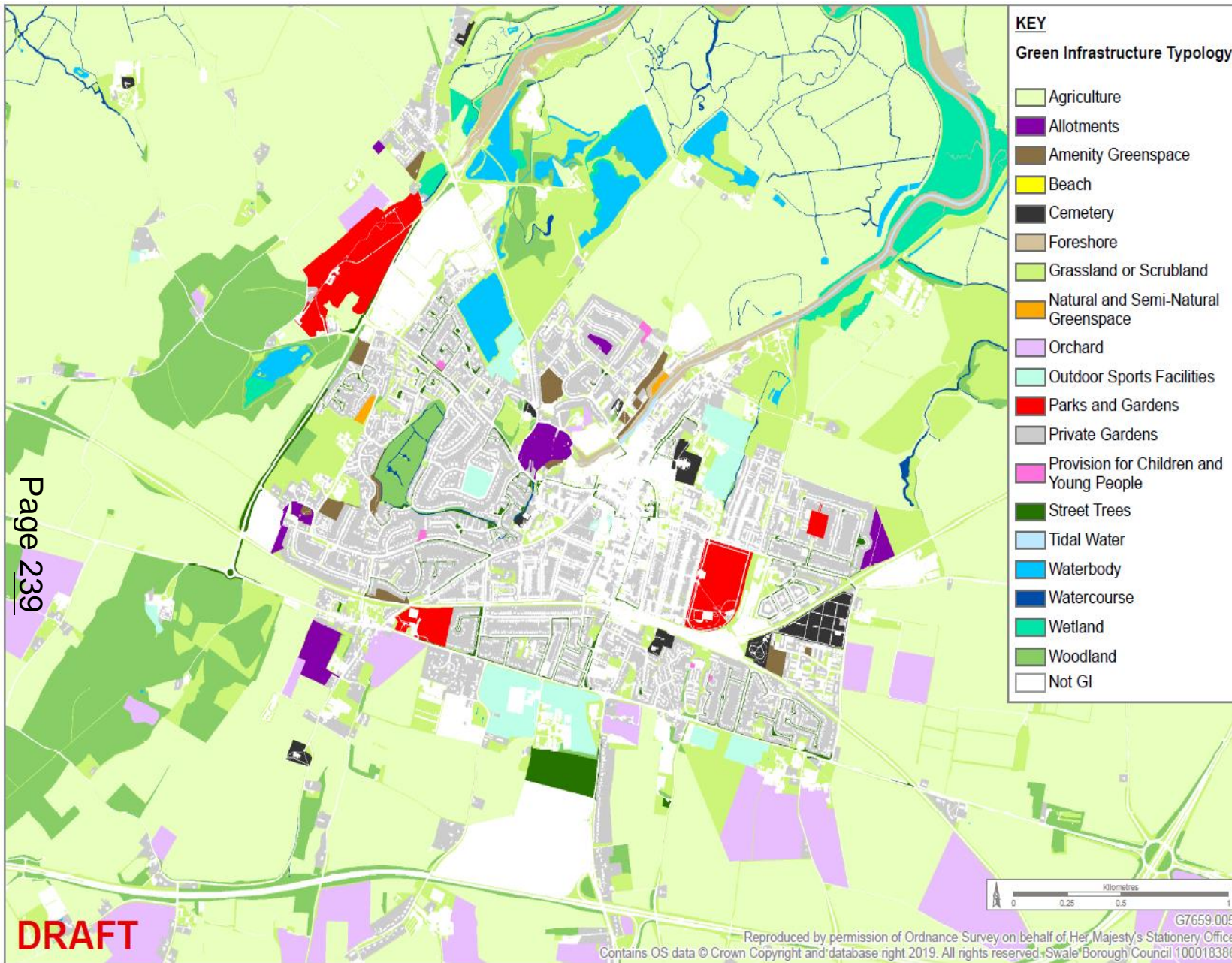
- 2.29 The population of 140,800 is largely concentrated in four main towns; Sittingbourne, Faversham, Sheerness and Minster. Sittingbourne is the main town, acting as the main employment and service centre for the Borough home to the largest industrial estate in the borough - Eurolink. As stated in Swale's Local Plan, Sittingbourne has a poor quality green urban environment in the centre and north of the town, with a recognised deficiency in parks and gardens, street trees and other green spaces.
- 2.30 Faversham, a historic market town is surrounded by attractive countryside and agricultural land. The town has a rich history and is home to a multiple waterways, sitting at the head of Faversham Creek. The Creek is currently underused by the public, with silting issues. There is little natural green space, though a significant block of woodland to the south west of the town comprises Judd's and Coxtett Woods. These woodlands present an opportunity to connect Faversham's residents via green links to this area.
- 2.31 The main town on the Isle of Sheppey is Sheerness, a distinctive seaside town and the main service centre for residents on the Island. It is connected to the mainland via the Sheppey Bridge. On the Isle of Sheppey more generally, there are deficiencies in formal outdoor sports facilities and allotments, though eco-tourism, drawing on the island's natural assets, is a potential growth area. For access to GBI, residents of Sheerness must generally travel to the outskirts of the town.

Figure 2: GBI Typology in Sittingbourne



- KEY FINDINGS**
- There are some parks and gardens, comprising recreation grounds dispersed through residential areas;
  - The Eurolink Industrial Park to the north of the A2 is particularly sparse of GBI. Its proximity to Milton Creek Country Park creates an opportunity for connectivity;
  - There are large orchards on the outskirts of the urban area;
  - In general, woodlands lie on the outskirts of the town;
  - A deficiency of street trees within the urban form

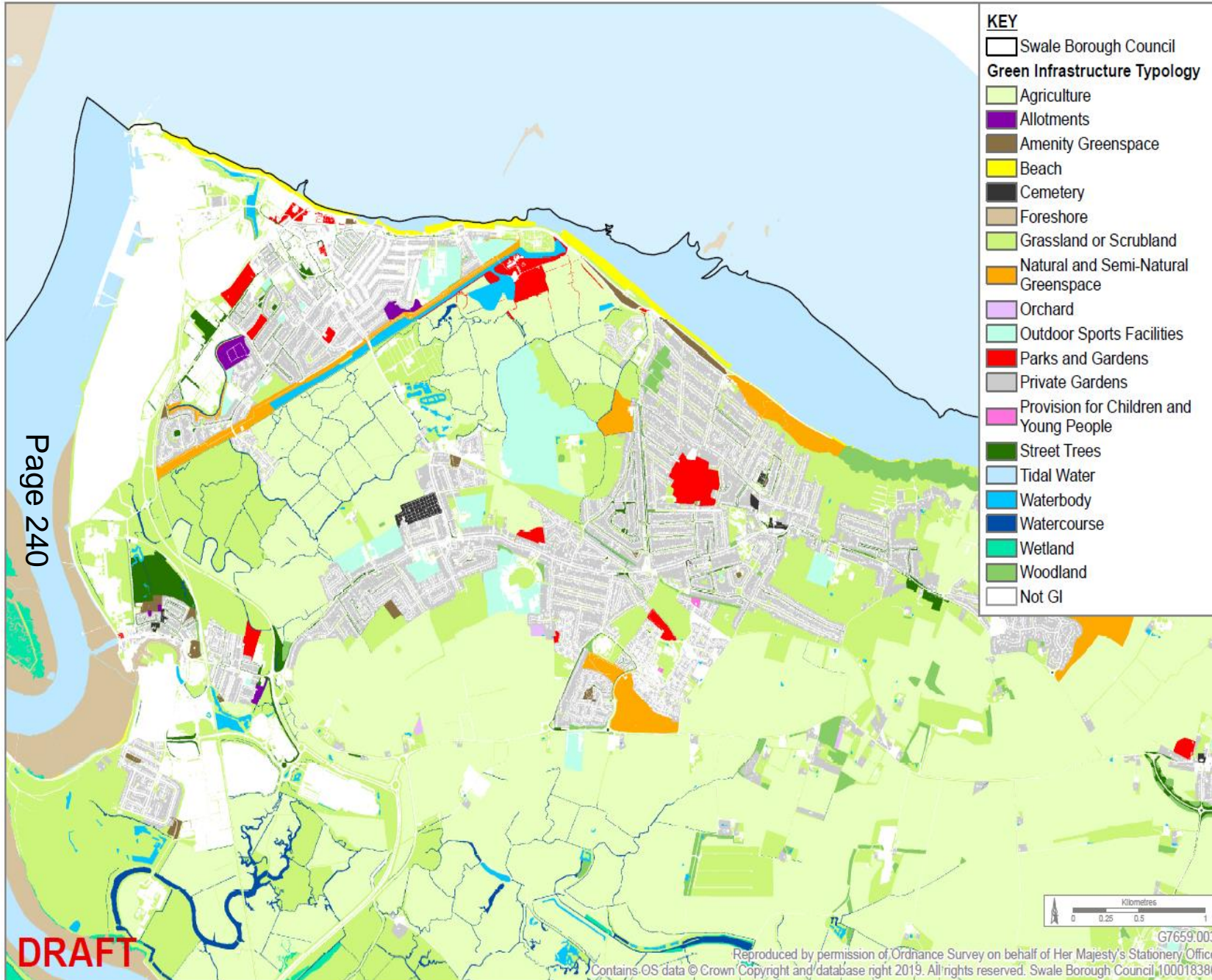
Figure 3: GBI Typology in Faversham



**KEY FINDINGS**

- There is limited GBI within the town;
- The town is surrounded by distinctive countryside and agricultural land; waterways including Faversham Creek pass through the town;
- There is little natural or semi-natural greenspace within the town;
- Oare Gunpowder Works Country Park to the west of the urban area provides access to woodland;
- There is a significant area of woodland near to the south western edge of the town, comprising Judd's Wood, Coxett Wood and Putt Wood.

Figure 4: GBI Typology in Sheerness and Minster



**KEY FINDINGS**

- There are deficiencies in formal outdoor sports facilities and allotments; For access to GBI, residents of Sheerness must generally travel to the outskirts of the town or the coastal areas;
- The Queenborough Lines, to the south of Sheerness is a large linear watercourse directly adjacent to the urban area;
- The industrial area on the western edge of the Isle of Sheppey is particularly devoid of GBI.



## Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy for Swale

### Landscape Character

2.32 The Swale Landscape Character and Biodiversity Appraisal (2011) identifies three broad landscape character types (LCTs) which cover the borough – the chalk of the Downs (Dry Valleys and Downs LCT), the central agricultural plain (Fruit Belt Landscapes LCT) and the clay marshes of the Thames Estuary (Marshland Landscapes LCT).

2.33 The appraisal sets out 42 local landscape character areas for the borough, highlighting the specific patterns of landform, land cover, land use and settlement which make one place different to another.

**Figure 5: Landscape Character Types in Swale**

**Source: Swale Landscape Character and Biodiversity Appraisal (2011)**

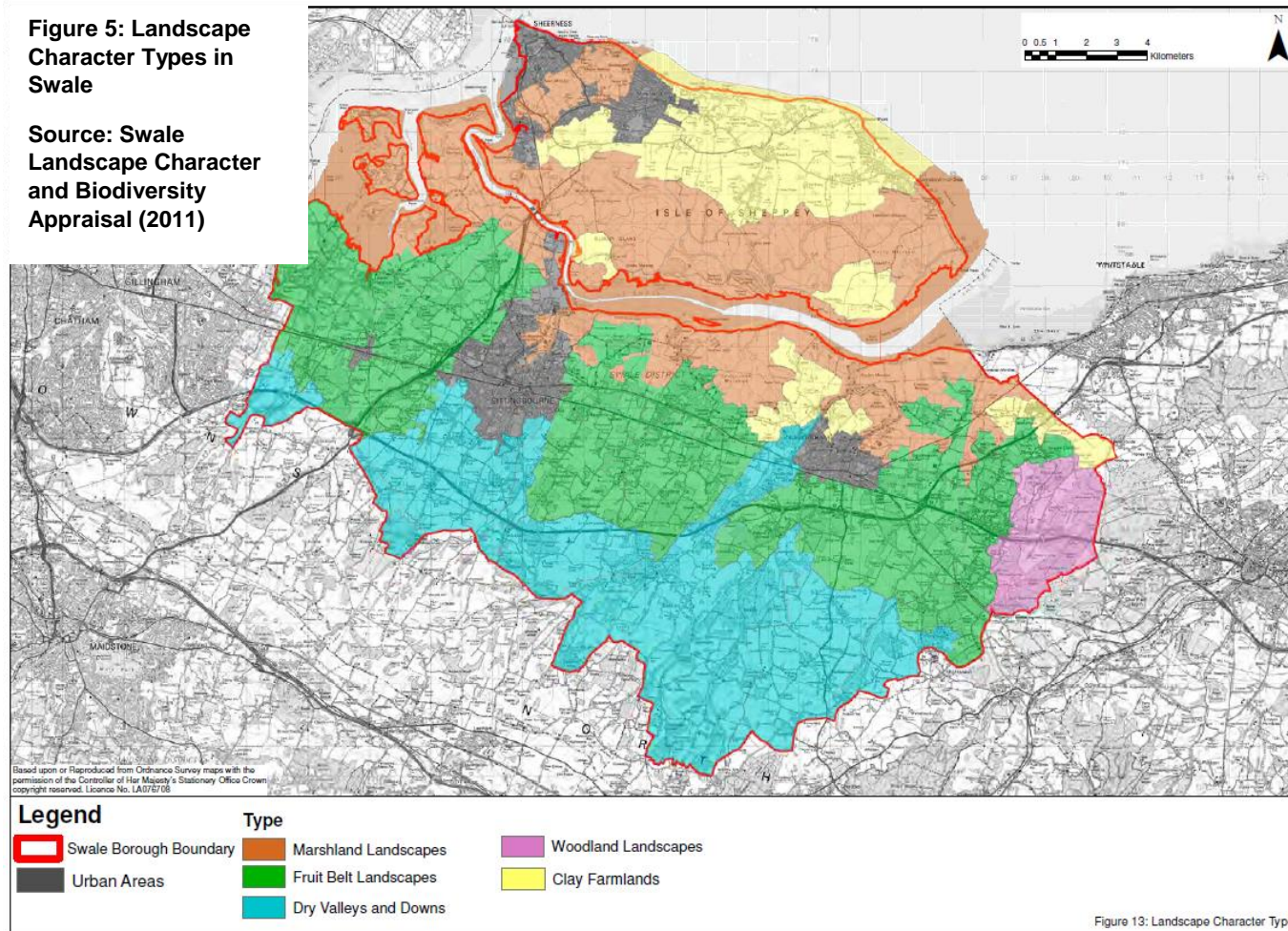


Figure 13: Landscape Character Types

## Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy for Swale

2.34 60% of the Borough is designated for international, national and local biodiversity and landscape value reflecting an increasing recognition of the quality of Swale's environment as an asset, as stated in Swale's Local Plan.

2.35 At a national level, the Swale is designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and at an international level, as a Special Protection Area (SPA), recognised for its wintering and breeding birds.

2.36 Part of the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty extends across the southern section of the Borough; approximately 23% of Swale Borough falls within this national designation. The area is known for its typical Kentish villages such as Milstead and Newnham, connected by narrow lanes.

2.37 The AONB is an important landscape and recreational resource for the communities of Swale. The Kent Downs AONB Unit works to deliver a number of projects within the AONB. In 2014, they published a Management Plan and accompanying Action Plan covering a range of themes including Sustainable Development, Biodiversity, Access, Enjoyment and Understanding and Landscape.

2.38 The Kent Downs AONB Management Plan sets out the following vision for the area:

*'In 2034... the qualities and distinctive features of the Kent Downs AONB, the dramatic south-facing scarp, secluded dry valleys, network of tiny lanes, isolated farmsteads, churches and oasts, orchards, dramatic cliffs, the ancient woodlands*

*and delicate chalk grassland along with the ancient, remote and tranquil qualities, are valued, secured and strengthened.'*

2.39 There are four Registered Park and Gardens (RPG) within the borough, clustered around the south of Faversham. Belmont RPG, approximately 4km south of Faversham town centre comprises an 18<sup>th</sup> century house sited within more than 3,000 acres open to the public. Lees Court occupies a rural location on the east side of the A251, approximately 5km south of Faversham.

2.40 Doddington Place RPG lies close to the southern edge of the M2 within the Kent Downs AONB. The landscaped gardens are surrounded by wooded countryside, in the centre of which sits a Victorian mansion.

2.41 Mount Ephraim RPG, approximately 5km east of Faversham, comprises a country house surrounded by terraced gardens, a large rockery and a mid-nineteenth century park.

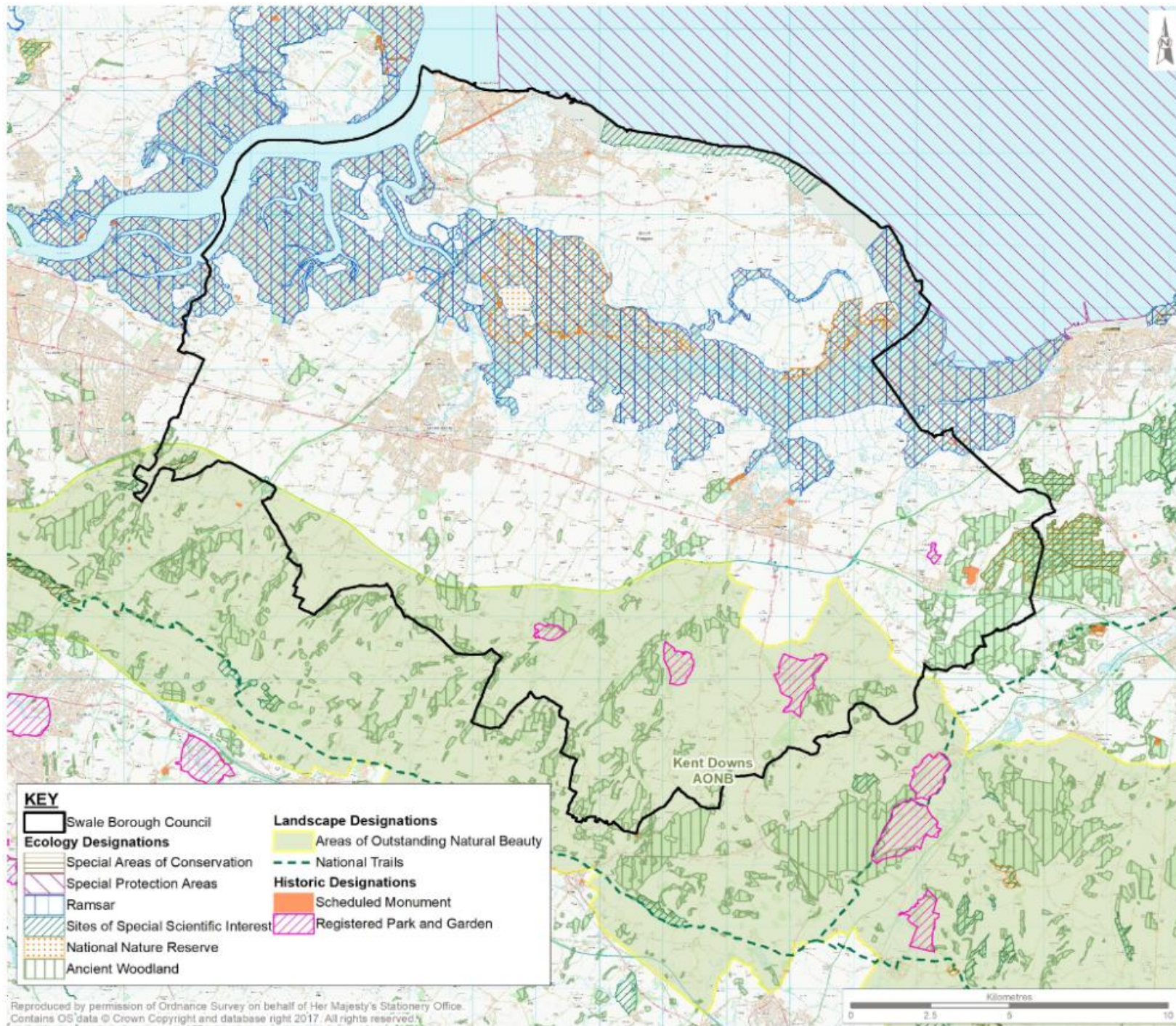


Figure 6: Landscape and Ecological Designations in Swale

# Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy for Swale

## Existing Green Infrastructure Initiatives

### Green Grid

2.42 Swale's Green Grid Strategy was published in June 2016, and describes the Green Grid as a 'strategic, joined up approach to land management' to create multi-functional green spaces. The Green Grid involves a wide range of stakeholder interests across Swale, focussing on connecting green spaces and communities for a range of benefits. Six green infrastructure components comprise the opportunities which form the spatial structure of the Green Grid:

- Greenspaces
- Corridors
- Hubs
- Gateways
- Major development sites
- Wider area initiatives

2.43 Swale's Green Grid forms part of more strategic Green Grid approach operating at Kent (county) level. The aim is for a greenspace network of footpaths, cycleways and wildlife corridors to connect North Kent's countryside and estuary landscapes.

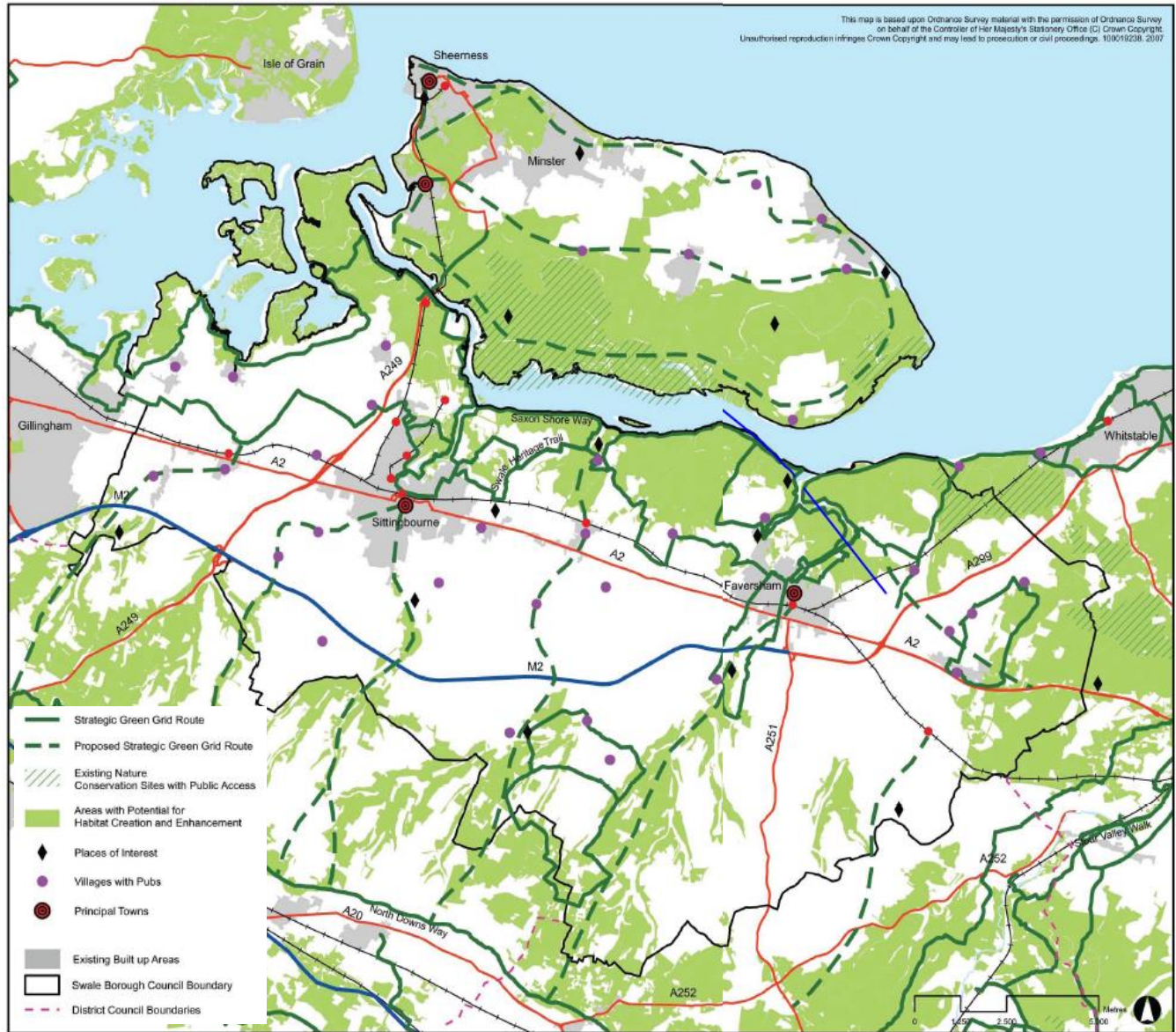


Figure 7: Swale Green Grid – Strategic Green Grid Framework (Source: Swale Green Grid Strategy, 2016)

## Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy for Swale

- 2.44 Swale's Green Grid partnership presents an opportunity to contribute to the wider strategic network of GBI across Kent, whilst also providing a number of potential delivery bodies for the implementation of GBI initiatives and objectives identified in this strategy.

### Bird Wise

- 2.45 Bird Wise, otherwise known as the Strategic Access Management and Monitoring Scheme (SAMMS) is a partnership between local authorities, developers and environmental organisations to raise awareness of how to enjoy the coast responsibly to protect the internationally important wildlife of the Swale Special Protection Area (SPA) and Ramsar Sites.
- 2.46 Bird Wise's project area, extending from Gravesend to Whitstable, surpasses Swale's borders. SAMMS involves the collection of tariffs from developments, which is then invested in rangers at Swale SPA, the delivery of educational programmes and encouraging responsible use of the SPA through signposting. The tariff scheme is based on the premise that an increased population will likely increase recreational pressure on the SPA, and therefore impact the 250,000 waders and waterfowl which spend the winter months on the marshes of the north Kent Coast. Bird Wise enables people to interact with green and blue infrastructure in a sustainable way, protecting the wildlife for years to come.

### BEGIN

- 2.47 Blue Green Infrastructure through Social Innovation (BEGIN) is set to run until 2020 and is a European Funded Project at the Kent County Council level. The project aims to deliver GBI, predominantly in urban areas to deliver climate change adaptation and increase climate resilience of the County as a whole. Innovation is a key aspect of BEGIN, promoting new and improved climate adaptation solutions, as well as facilitating the training of local people to maintain green and blue infrastructure beyond the project lifespan.
- 2.48 In practice, the BEGIN project in Kent involves locally focused project to respond to need for example the long standing surface water drainage issues along Bell Road in Sittingbourne. The Bell Road project in Sittingbourne has involved the implementation of sustainable drainage systems (SuDS) to slow the flow and intercept water including a wildflower garden and management of mature trees. The project has involved the local community, and it is hoped that the community will remain involved through the continued management of the project.
- 2.49 At the time of writing this Strategy, a new SuDS project is in its early stages at Snipeshill in Sittingbourne, using lessons learned from Bell Road. It is hoped that beyond the lifespan of the BEGIN project, we can learn from the schemes implemented and continue to adopt community level sustainable drainage projects to make us a more climate resilient borough.

## Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy for Swale

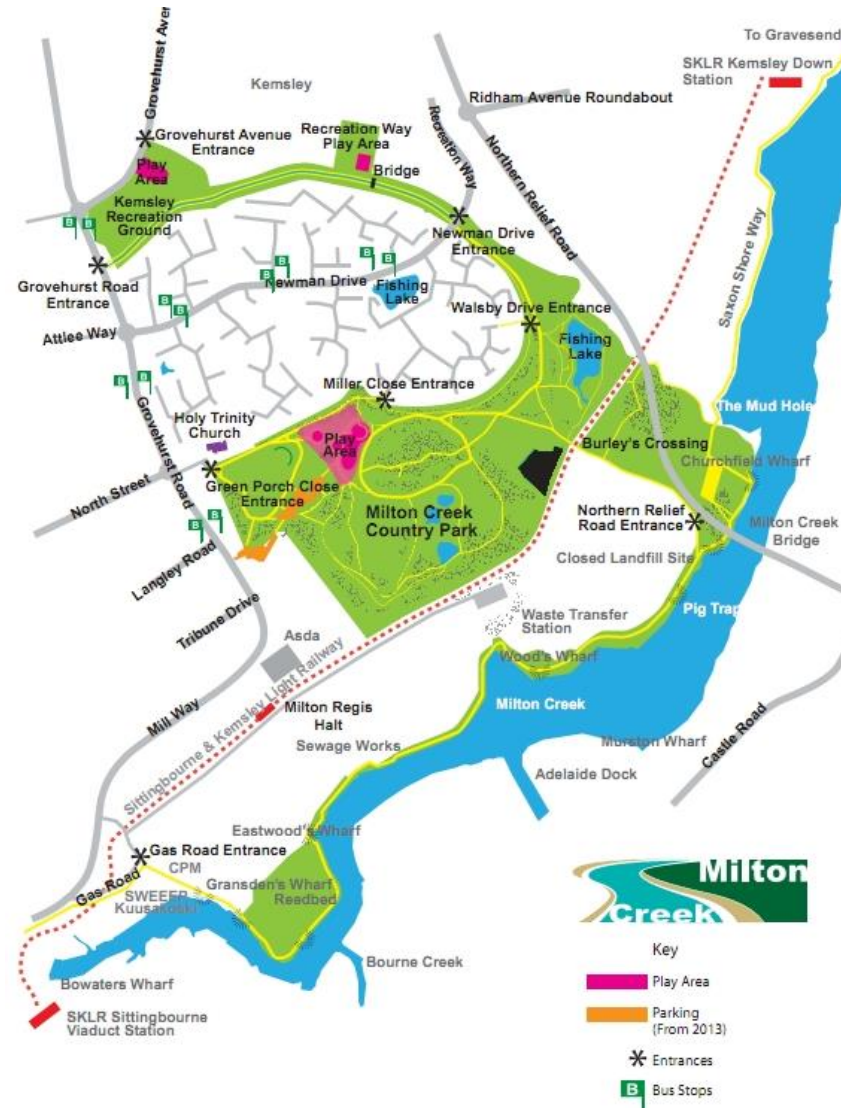
### Milton Creek Country Park

- 2.50 Milton Creek Country Park, a restored landfill site, lies in the north of Sittingbourne. Milton Creek, a shallow tidal inlet adjoins the east of the park, and there is an extensive pathway network linking areas of meadow and scrub. Restoration works began in 2003.
- 2.51 Milton Creek Country Park is a major community events space, home to many year-round events including ‘Arts in the Park,’ an annual summer event, weekly Park Runs, Keep Fit Boot Camp, Outdoor yoga and ‘Bat Walks,’ all encouraging interaction with the natural environment.
- 2.52 Milton Creek Trust, a charitable organisation, fund many of these events. Friends of Milton Creek is a residents group set up to promote and enhance the Country Park environment.

### South and South East In Bloom

- 2.53 The South and South East ‘In Bloom’ project forms part of the wider Britain in Bloom Initiative. The aim is to bring communities together to plant a range of species around towns and villages for greener communities. Though the initiative was only launched in Swale in 2019, the project has seen many social and environmental benefits including positive interaction between community members and thriving, interconnected habitat creation.

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**Figure 8: Map of Milton Creek Country Park**  
 Source: Milton Creek Trust and Friends of Milton Creek

## Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy for Swale

2.54 The 3,300 acre Elmley National Nature Reserve (NNR) is the only privately owned nature reserve in the UK, located on the south west of the Isle of Sheppey. The reserve is an internationally important fresh water marsh wetland, significant for its varied biodiversity including water voles, rare invertebrates and flora as well as wintering and breeding birds.

2.55 In line with the objectives of the Adopted Swale Local Plan, Elmley NNR has undergone investment to progress Eco-tourism objectives. By providing limited accommodation on site, the NNR are managing and limiting damage to the NNR, whilst still attracting people to experience wildlife.

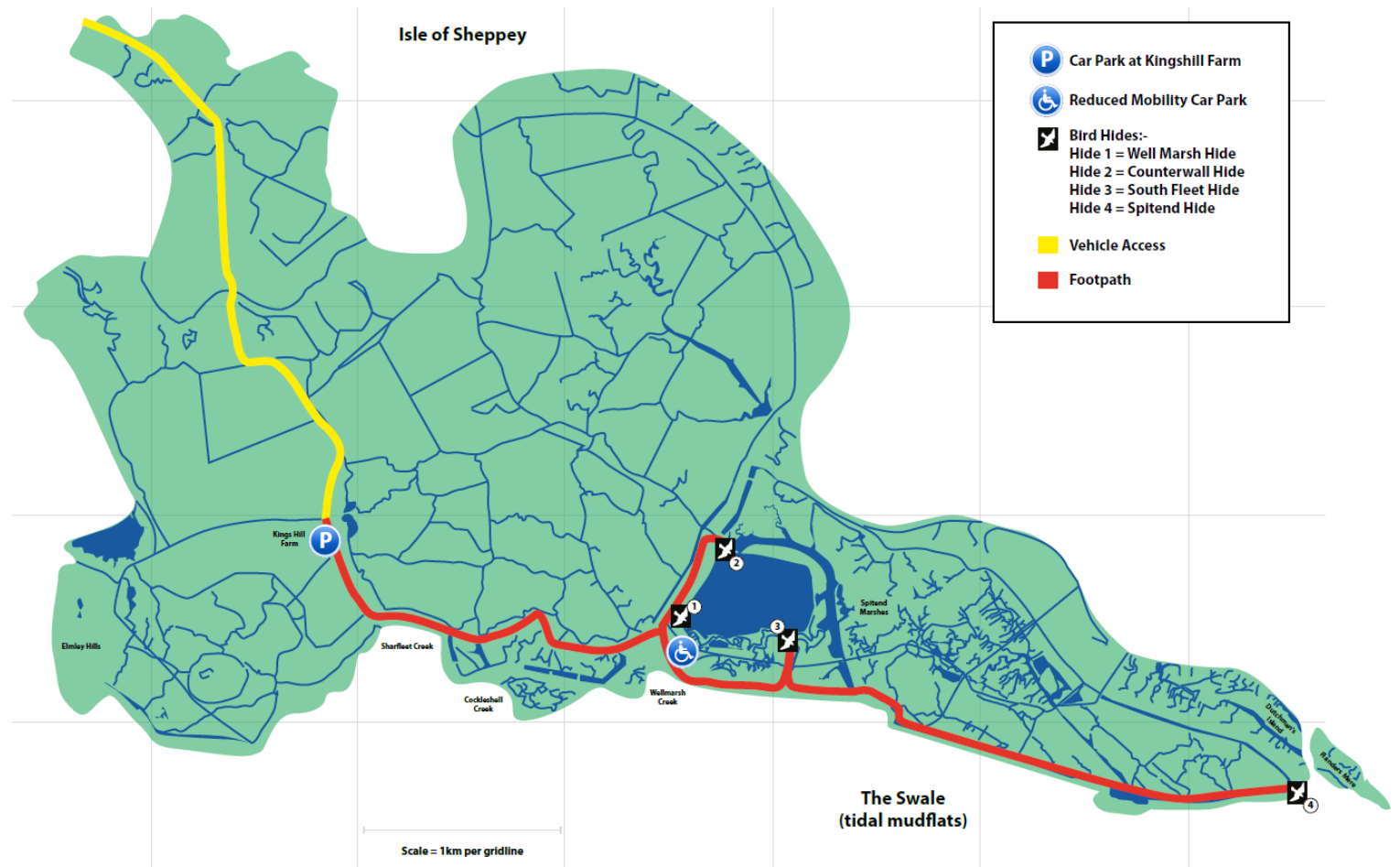


Figure 9: Map of Elmley NNR (Source: Elmley NNR)

## Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy for Swale

### Blean Woodland

2.56 Blean Woodlands in the east of Swale extends across the border into Canterbury district, and covers a total of eleven square miles. Almost all the woodland comprising the Blean woodland area is designated as ancient woodland. The Blean Woodland NNR covers one of the woods. Its value for wildlife is recognised at a national and European level; half of the Blean area is designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest and approximately one third as a Special Area of Conservation.

2.57 The areas of woodland comprising the Blean which fall within Swale's borough boundary include:

- South Blean Woods
- South Bishops Den Woods
- Blean Woods NNR
- Blean Wood
- Ellenden Wood
- Victory Wood

2.58 The cross-border nature of the Blean woodlands represents an opportunity for continued cross-border management of the Blean with Canterbury. The Big Blean Walk, a 25 mile circular walk through all of the Blean woodlands invites people to explore the history and nature of the area through interactive panels.

### Public Health Projects

#### *Forest Schools*

2.59 Forest Schools run at a range of locations throughout the borough including Milton Creek Country Park. The programme allows young people to explore the natural environment in an educational setting, whilst encouraging active and healthy lifestyles.

#### *Calorie Mapping*

2.60 Swale Borough Council's website provides six walks within urban areas, to get local populations moving.

### Making a Buzz for the Coastline

2.61 Kent is home to of the seven rarest bumblebee species in the UK, making their protection and important focus across the county. The Bumblebee Consultation Trust, in partnership with Kent Wildlife Trust, is leading a project along 135 miles of Kent's coastline to create better quality and longer lasting foraging habitat for bees. The project is set to run until the beginning of 2020, and includes various aspects of habitat creation and management.



## Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy for Swale

2.62 Kent Wildlife Trust's 'Bee Roads' work forms part of the wider Making a Buzz for the Coast Project. This involves the establishment of new Roadside Nature Reserves to add to the existing network managed by the trust. The aim is to provide corridors of roadside bee habitat, to connect populations of priority bumblebees.



*Bee Roads on the Isle of Sheppey*

### Breeding Waders in North Kent

2.63 The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and Natural England are leading a long term project to deliver advice to land managers in order to halt the decline of breeding waders within the Swale SPA area. To date, more than 10 farms are involved in the project, designed to enhance the grazing marsh pasture habitat type, for biodiversity benefits.

### Nature's Sure Connected

2.64 The 'Nature's Sure Connected' biodiversity monitoring project began in October 2018 and is led by Kent Wildlife Trust. The project aims for landscape-scale conservation, providing a platform and research based evidence for a network of stakeholders to work together to protect and restore the natural environment. The project, though set to end in 2020, will guide future landscape scale management across Kent through implementing practices and principles.



*Source: Kent Wildlife Trust*

### England Coast Path

2.65 Natural England is progressing plans to improve access to the coast in Swale. The project comprises the creation of a national trail, the England Coast Path. The routes proposed by Natural England usually follow existing walked lines on the ground, including a mixture of sections with an existing public right of way interspersed with sections without. The England Coast Path proposals will create new public rights of way along the parts of the trail that are not currently. The coast of the Isle of Sheppey for example is currently largely devoid of public rights of way. The proposals for the new 51km stretch of footpath to improve access to the coastline around the Isle of Sheppey are due to be finalised in winter 2020.

2.66 In June 2017, Natural England produced a report setting out proposals for improved coastal access along the 58km coastal stretch between Whitstable and Iwade, comprising new stretches of footpath and improved access to existing footpaths.

## 3.0 SWALE'S PRIORITIES

### Bearing Fruits 2031. The Swale Borough Local Plan (2017)

- 3.1 The Swale Borough Local Plan sets the vision and overall strategy for the area for the period between 2014 and 2031. The Local Plan recognises the value and benefits of green infrastructure for health and wellbeing and biodiversity and for creating attractive environments for inward investment.
- 3.2 The Local Plan identifies a natural assets and green infrastructure network and strategy for Swale highlighting the existing GBI network and a potential ways in which to protect and enhance the network for expansion over the lifetime of the Local Plan.
- 3.3 The Local Plan establishes the vision behind this GBI Strategy for Swale, which is to 'act as the means by which action can take place,' building upon the existing work to date.

### Swale Climate Change and Ecological Emergency Motion

- 3.4 On 26 June 2019, Swale's councillors voted to declare a climate and ecological emergency. The Motion sets out objectives for Swale including to make Swale Borough Council's own operations carbon neutral by 2025. Central to the Motion, is to 'make space for nature', meaning putting nature first within development, strategies and plans.

- 3.5 Planning for better integrated, well-connected and highly functioning nature networks and biodiversity is central to Swale's GBI Strategy, hence forming a key theme. The Strategy, by aiming to provide the tools to implement a well-connected GBI network, will contribute to other objectives within the Motion such as encouraging active transport through green corridors, pursuing the Swale Strategic Air Quality Action Plan, and safeguarding Swale's wild places, ancient woodlands and hedgerows.

### *Climate and Ecological Emergency Action Plan*

- 3.6 The declaration declared in June 2019 resulted in SBC drawing up a Climate and Ecological Emergency Action Plan in April 2020. The Plan sets out a list of actions to contribute to an 80% reduction in Swale's emissions by 2030 in order to make its fair contribution to the Paris Agreement.
- 3.7 One target within the action plan is to plant 148,100 trees on council owned land (or 60 acres of woodland) by 2025, to offset 20% of council emissions. This ambition is reflected in Section 5.0.

### Swale Active Lives Framework 2017-2022

- 3.8 The Council published the Active Lives Framework to explore how Sport and Physical Activity (SPA) can contribute to the wider health and wellbeing of our residents.
- 3.9 Our Active Lives Framework sets out the overall vision that '*the residents of Swale are encouraged, motivated, informed and have the opportunity to be more active and healthier.*'

## Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy for Swale

- 3.10 Objective three of the Active Lives Framework hopes to enable accessible, affordable and good quality facilities and places to participate in sport and physical activity. We know that providing high quality, well-connected green spaces and green routes can encourage people to engage with the outdoors and provide a platform for outdoor sports and recreation.
- 3.11 The Active Lives Framework highlights that the most notable population increase in Swale by 2025 will be in the 65+ age category. The GBI Strategy can contribute to the creation of more accessible, low impact sport and recreation provision.
- 3.12 Swale has a range of existing activities across the borough to engage people in outdoor activities such as Park Run and Forest Schools. The Active Lives Framework provides guidance for increasing participation, and providing new activities and spaces to exercise for people of all ages.
- 3.13 The links between GBI and health and active lives will be explored further in Section 4 on Opportunities.

### Swale Cycling and Walking Guidance Statement and Action Plan (2018-2022)

- 3.14 The Action Plan outlines the potential for increasing cycling and walking uptake throughout the borough, through a range of means such as better route maintenance, improvements to signposting and way marking and the promotion of walking and cycling opportunities by the NHS and other public sector staff.

- 3.15 Green active travel routes provide attractive places for people to travel close to home and can be newly planned or retrofitted using existing active travel routes.
- 3.16 Swale is already home to many recreational routes which provide access to the coast and countryside, including the Saxon Shore Way which passes through Swale along the North Kent coast. Other routes including those in Perry Wood, Elmley Nature Reserve and Barton's Point Coastal Park.
- 3.17 Swale's guidance on active travel has been created in the context of Kent County Council's Active Travel Strategy, the aim of which is to '*make active travel an attractive and realistic choice for short journeys in Kent.*' We know that providing a well-integrated network of green travel routes close to people's homes and places of work can increase walking and cycling uptake, whilst also providing health and wellbeing benefits.

### Swale Visitor Economy Framework (2018-2023)

- 3.18 The Swale Visitor Economy Framework (VEF) recognises the value of the visitor economy to Swale, being a core sector in terms of jobs, skills and economic performance. Enhancing the quality of Swale's coast, marshland and landscapes is recognised as being an important aspect of growing Swale's visitor markets.

## Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy for Swale

- 3.19 The VEF recognises a weakness in Swale's infrastructure. GBI has the potential to enhance the visitor experience through promoting high quality green transport routes for cycling and walking, creating opportunities for new and existing businesses to create facilities such as bike hire and cafes. We recognise that high quality green and blue spaces can attract visitors, highlighting the importance of enhancing our beaches, coastal and country paths and open spaces, whilst encouraging the use of sustainable travel routes. Faversham, the oldest market town in Kent, has many tourist attractions centred on its rich history, and there are also accessible links onto the Saxon Shore Way.
- 3.20 On the Isle of Sheppey, tourism is focused in the east of the Island around Leysdown-on-Sea and Warden. Eco tourism is a new attraction at Elmley National Nature Reserve. Sittingbourne is currently undergoing a period of investment with a new hotel and cinema due to open in 2020 with other attractions including Milton Creek Country Park, Sittingbourne and Kemsley Light Railway and access to more regional attractions.

### Kent Environment Strategy (2016)

- 3.21 Kent County Council's Environment Strategy recognises the intrinsic value of Kent's high quality, diverse landscape, being one of the most wildlife-rich counties in the UK. The Strategy links the counties' 350 mile coastline, landscape history, seascapes and resources as factors highly valued by residents, visitors and businesses, supporting the visitor economy.

- 3.22 In the face of unprecedented levels of growth across Kent, the Strategy aims to guide a balanced approach to supporting healthy communities whilst protecting and enhancing the natural environment. The Strategy also aims to guide people away from 'honey pot' sites, which attract large number of tourists who due to their numbers place pressures of the environment and local services.

### 25 Year Environment Plan (2018 onwards)

- 3.23 The Government's 25 Year Environment Plan sets out government action to help the natural world regain and retain good health. It aims to deliver cleaner air and water in the UK's cities and rural landscapes, protect threatened species and provide richer wildlife habitats. It calls for an approach to agriculture, forestry, land use and fishing that puts the environment first.

### Kent County Council Public Rights of Way Improvement Plan (PROWIP)

- 3.24 Promoting active lifestyles is a key objective with Kent's PROWIP, recognising the value of access to greenspace through use of the PROW network in combatting challenges surrounding inactivity and mental health. Through Kent's other objectives, key themes emerge such as improving accessibility and knowledge of routes, as well as meeting demand where there is deficit in provision.

## 4.0 GBI MULTI-FUNCTIONALITY

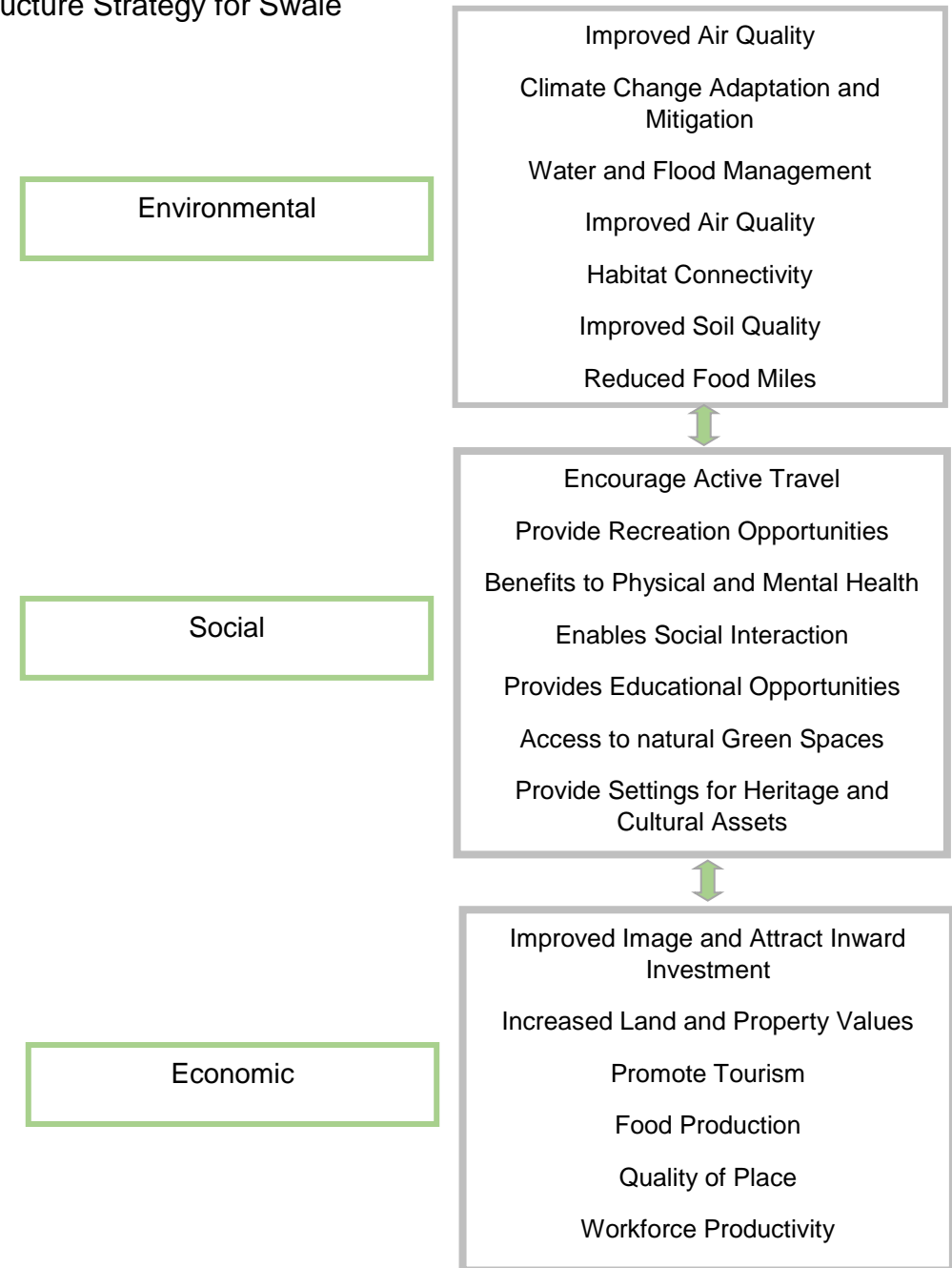
- 4.1 Using GIS mapping software, multi-functionality of GI is mapped across Swale. The approach is factual, objective, and quantitative and uses nationally recognised criteria applicable to the borough of Swale. There is potential for a GBI asset to deliver up to 22 functions, such as recreation, shading from the sun, removal of pollutants, habitat creation, storm water interception and carbon storage.
- 4.2 The multi-functionality plans (Figures 11-13) comprise 'heat' maps, providing a useful indication as to where the most multifunctional GBI is located. However, it is important to note that modest GBI functionality does not necessarily mean that land is of low value or quality. Some GBI assets may inherently be capable of delivering only a limited number of functions, and yet may be very important to their users, or to wildlife. Such assets would not require management for additional functions, yet in some instances would require appropriate management to retain their modest number of functions yet high quality, valued functions. The key factor is that GBI meets local needs, hence the production of this Strategy has been evidence based and involved extensive stakeholder engagement.
- 4.3 GBI in the south of the borough generally delivers more functions than in the north. Reasons for this are varied, though the area south of the M2 comprises the more diverse landscape of the Kent Downs AONB, as well as a proportion of woodland, agricultural land and orchards, responsible for high quantities of food production and evaporative cooling.
- 4.4 Locally concentrated areas of orchards are also located both sides of the M2 corridor, and are shown to be areas of high GBI functionality, providing functions such including tourism, habitat for wildlife, food production and pollutant removal.
- 4.5 Planning for multifunctional GBI will only be effective if undertaken in a sustainable way. Achieving sustainable development means that we must work towards the three pillars of sustainability, which comprise three overarching objectives<sup>2</sup>:
- The economic objective – helping to build a strong, responsive and competitive economy
  - The social objective – supporting strong, healthy communities in a well-designed and safe environment, with accessible open spaces for the whole population
  - The environmental objective – contributing to protecting and enhancing our natural, built and historic environment; making effective use of land, improving biodiversity, effectively using natural resources, minimising waste and pollution, mitigating and adapting to climate change and moving to a low carbon economy.

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<sup>2</sup> With reference to paragraph 8 of the National Planning Policy Framework

## Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy for Swale

- 4.6 Figure 10 shows how the many functions and benefits of GBI outlined above fall within each pillar. Mutually pursuing each pillar of sustainability can result in the creation of a wide range of interconnected benefits for whole communities.
- 4.7 In general terms, analysis shows that woodland delivers the most functions, whilst beaches, watercourses and areas of tidal water, private gardens and spaces for children and young people deliver relatively few. For example, the Blean Woodland at the east of Swale, is a highly functioning area of green infrastructure. Effective management can ensure that the Blean's many functions, including recreational provision, carbon storage and provision of wildlife habitats, are maintained and managed.
- 4.8 Through appropriate land management there are usually opportunities to increase the functionality of most types of GBI e.g. by improving public access, by planting trees, or by diversifying habitats.
- 4.9 As a general principle, increasing functionality of GBI is desirable because a multifunctional asset is likely to have more users, be more resilient to climate change and be regarded as a community or economic asset. However, as mentioned, more moderate functioning GBI can also be of great value to the population and wildlife. Multi-functionality mapping for example has shown the Swale to be an area of moderate GBI functionality, despite being nationally recognised for its species rich habitats. The key principle is that functionality aligns with need.



**Figure 10 - Potential Functions and Benefits of GBI**

## Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy for Swale

- 4.10 Need is assessed through a range of forums including evidence base review, stakeholder consultation, qualitative analysis and mapping. The typology mapping introduced earlier for example, at a very basic level identifies where certain types of GBI are lacking or abundant. Local need varies considerably from one place to another, according to different demographics and characteristics of communities, which is why need must be taken into account during analysis.
- 4.11 The lower functionality of beaches, waterbodies and tidal waters reflects the lower GBI multi-functionality in the north of the borough. Swale's northern boundary occupies a coastal location, with The Swale dissecting the mainland from the Isle of Sheppey. There is a lower density of trees and woodlands and more private gardens in the urban areas concentrated to the north of the M2.
- 4.12 Multi-functionality mapping for Faversham shows the highest levels of GBI functions on the outskirts of the town, where the urban area intersects with the rural hinterland. The mapping reveals the highly functioning woodland to the south west and west of Faversham town centre, including Bysing Wood, Judd's Wood, Coxtett Wood and Putt Wood.
- 4.13 In Faversham town centre and residential area, there is an absence of GBI in general, whilst domestic gardens deliver a limited number of functions. To the south of Faversham and the M2, there is a network of orchards connected by rural lanes, which are shown to be high functioning GBI assets. Davington woodland in the east of Faversham, provides a central woodland block within a predominantly residential area and performs multiple GBI functions. However, access is limited to public footpaths on the outskirts limiting the delivery of recreational functions.
- 4.14 Similarly to Faversham, Sittingbourne's most functional GBI assets encircle the town centre, with limited functional GBI pathways or corridors linking these assets to the residential population. Agricultural land and orchards on the outskirts of the town centre deliver highly in terms of GBI functions.
- 4.15 The functionality mapping shows high functioning corridors of street trees along some of the major roads in the town centre, though in general there is an absence of GBI, particularly larger open spaces and parks within the urban area. The lowest functioning GBI is shown to be private gardens as well as the waterbodies associated with Little Murston Nature Reserve to the north east of Sittingbourne town centre. Mapping shows that the functionality of Milton Creek Country Park in the north west of the town centre varies depending on habitats present, likely due to tree cover reducing closer to Milton Creek.



## Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy for Swale

4.16 No areas within Sheerness town centre stand out as delivering a particularly high number of GBI functions. The coastal area along the northern shore of the Island comprises Paddy's Point, Bugsby's Hole and Beal's Fall is shown to provide one of the highest functioning areas of GBI in this area. This stretch of coastline is rich in biodiversity and Warden Point in particular is a very accessible point for public recreation.

Figure 11: GBI Multi-functionality across Swale; 22 functions of GBI were assessed to generate this map

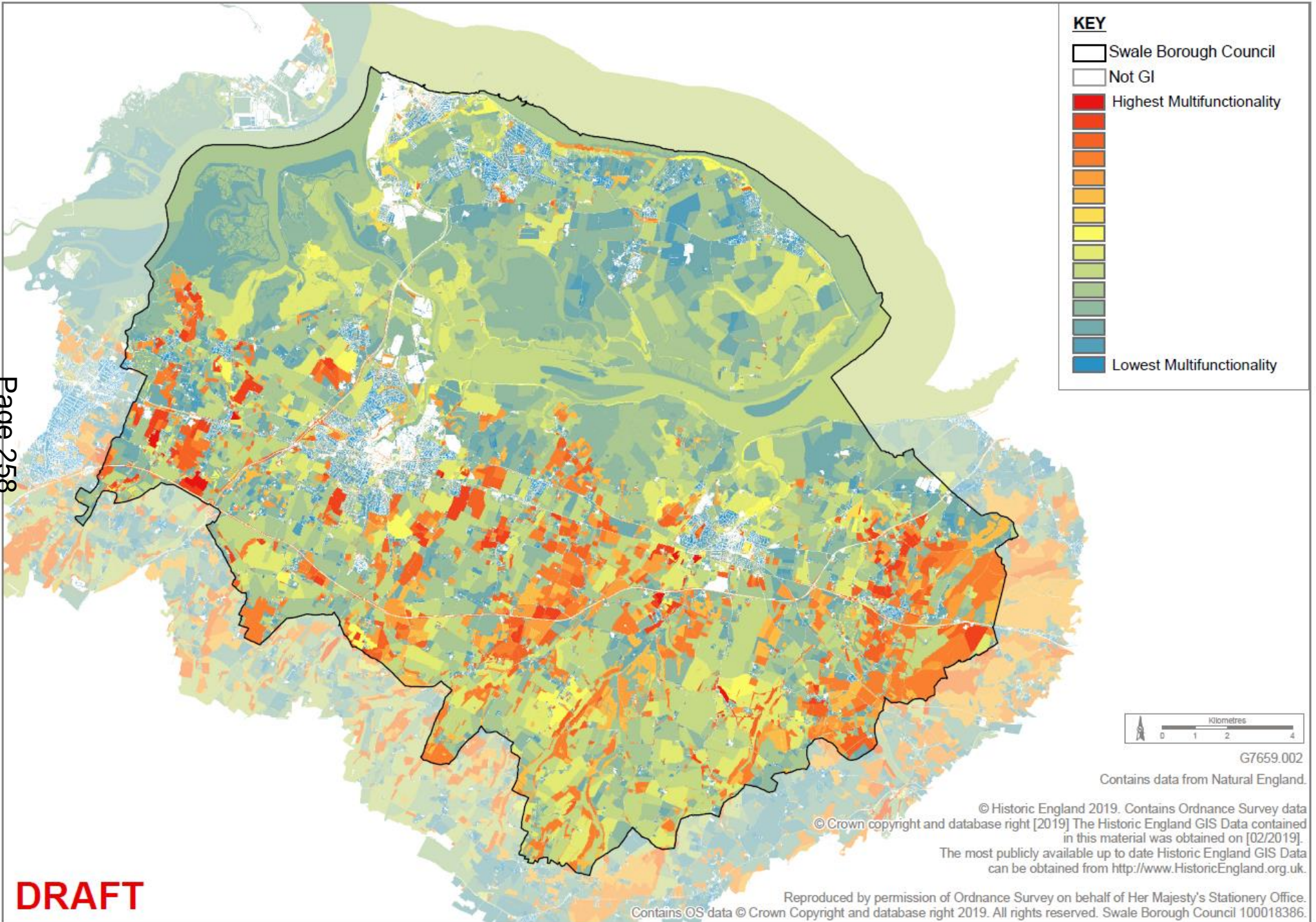
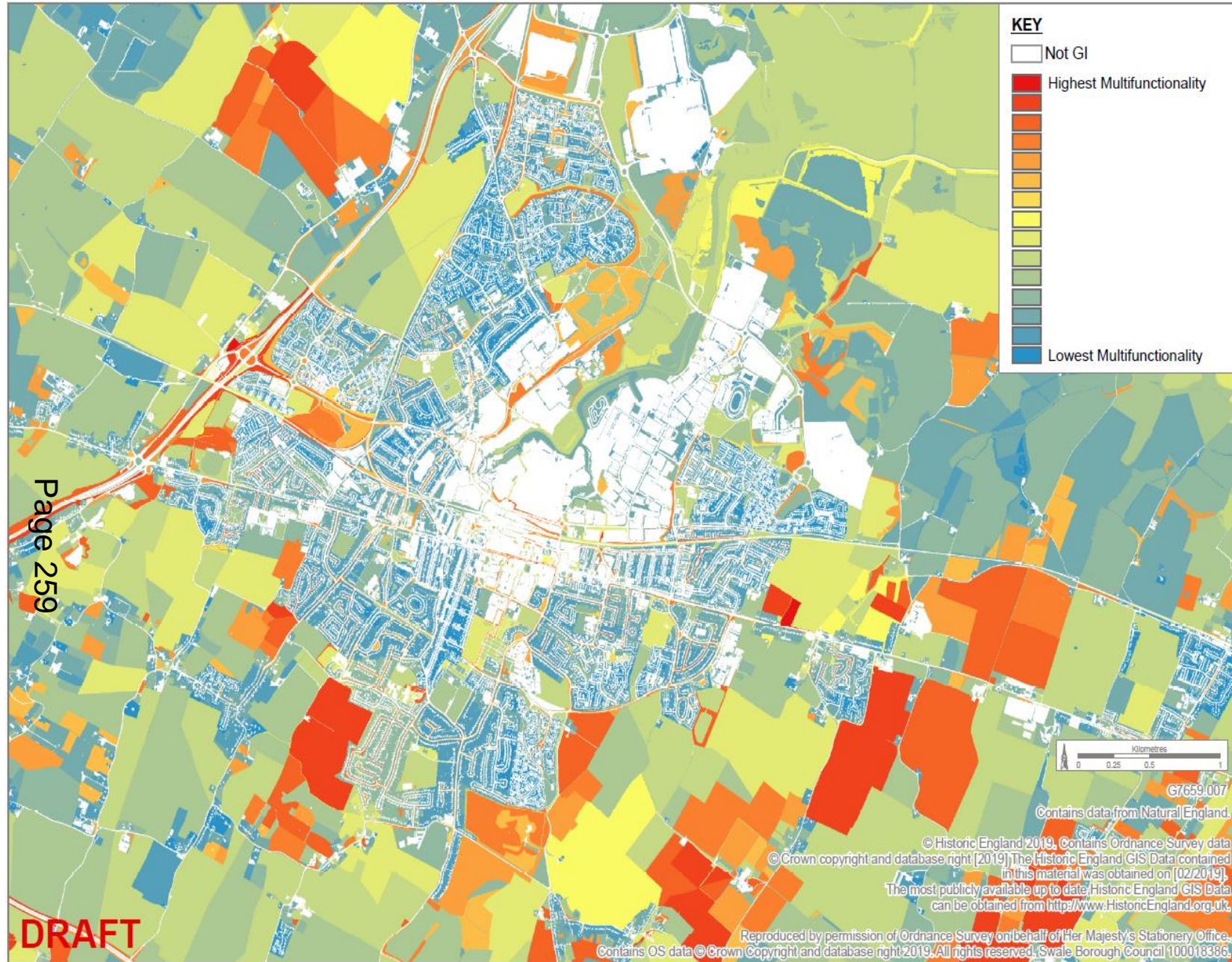


Figure 12: GBI Multi-functionality in Sittingbourne



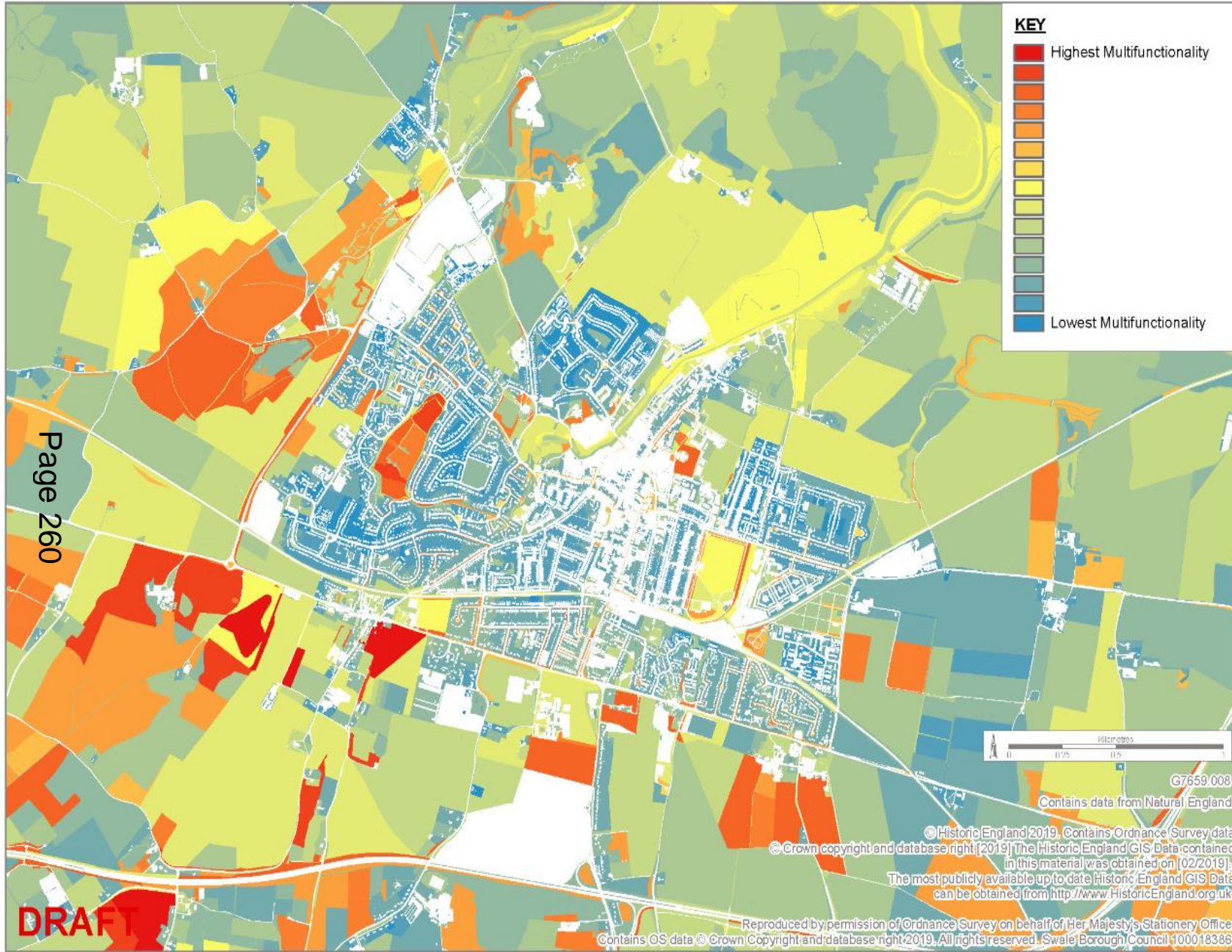
**KEY FINDINGS**

- In general, more multi-functional GBI is on the outskirts of the town;
- In general, the parks and recreation grounds within the urban area are performing a low number of functions;
- Milton Creek Country Park performs a moderate number of functions;
- The highest levels of multi-functionality are performed by the orchards on the outskirts of the town, known to provide shading, food provision and carbon storage among other functions provided. However, these areas are not accessible to the public

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Figure 13: GBI Multi-functionality in Faversham

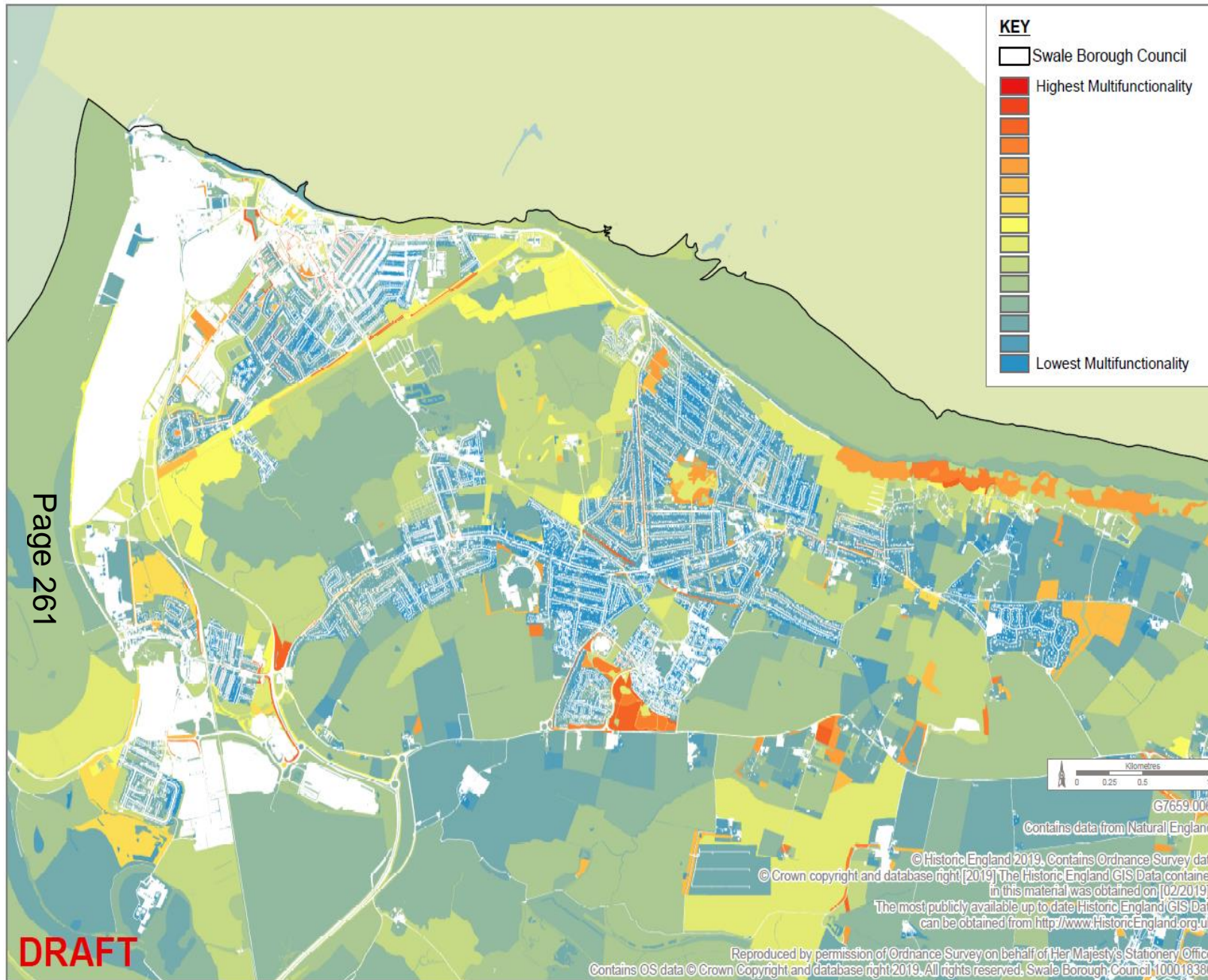


- ### KEY FINDINGS
- Oare Gunpowder Works Country Park performs many functions, and links to the western edge of the urban area;
  - The woodlands to the south west of Faversham perform many functions, though there are limited multi-functional connections providing a gateway to this area from the town;
  - Multi-functionality is generally poor along Faversham Creek;
  - The lowest levels of GBI multi-functionality are seen within the core of the town

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Figure 14: GBI Multi-functionality in Sheerness and Minster



### KEY FINDINGS

- No areas of GBI perform particularly high numbers of functions;
- The areas performing the lowest number of functions are in the urban areas of Minster and Sheerness;
- The highest number of functions are performed by woodland areas including Thistle Hill Community Woodland south of Minster;
- The Glen, which lies in the centre of Minster is classified as a Park and Garden on the typology mapping, and performs multiple functions, owing to significant woodland cover;
- Barton's Point Coastal Park performs low to moderate functions, representing potential to increase the benefits provided

## Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy for Swale

### Quality of Green and Blue Infrastructure

- 4.17 The multi-functionality maps show that high functionality is often associated with high environmental quality<sup>3</sup>, for example the high functionality of areas including the Blean Woodland and the Kent Downs AONB.
- 4.18 As stated earlier, low GI functionality does not directly correspond with land is of low value or quality. A highly-functioning environment is more likely to be widely valued and hence well-managed, but site-based quality assessment would still be required to assess whether particular sites are managed as well as it could be, bearing in mind local needs.
- 4.19 Quality, and its relationship with delivering GI benefits, needs to be addressed at all stages, including design, planning conditions, delivery and long-term management. Even well designed green infrastructure will not deliver the full range of benefits unless its long-term management is fully addressed from the outset.
- 4.20 In respect of GI provision and usage, a quality assessment can include benchmarking against England-wide data, particularly if this is available for local authorities with similar character. Provision and usage measures might include the proportion of the population which falls short of Accessible Natural Greenspace Standards, the proportion of people who regularly engage in exercise, the proportion of volunteers.

- 4.21 In respect of the recreation and health-related functions of GI, site based assessment could follow the Green Flag criteria to establish how welcoming a space is for people in terms of visual appearance, standards of maintenance and ease of access. The Green Flag Award is a national standard which recognises well managed parks and green spaces in the UK<sup>4</sup>.
- 4.22 In respect of biodiversity functions, site based quality assessment could follow the Defra criteria used for biodiversity impact assessment and for farm environment planning i.e. habitat condition, habitat distinctiveness, connectivity and whether designated sites are under active management.
- 4.23 Stakeholder engagement indicated that though GBI is abundant across the borough, many of Swale's GBI assets suffer from poor quality management and access. This theme begins to be revealed through the multi-functionality mapping, though as stated, does not provide the whole picture.

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<sup>3</sup> A measure of the condition of an environment relative to the requirements of one or more species, any human need or purpose. It includes measures such as pollution, aesthetic and habitat potential (Johnson et al (1997). "Meanings of environmental terms." *Journal of Environmental Quality*. 26: 581–89.)

<sup>4</sup> Find out more about the scheme at the following web address:  
<http://www.greenflagaward.org.uk/about-us/>

## Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy for Swale

4.24 It is beyond the scope of this plan to carry out a borough-wide quality assessment for GBI and identify specific quality targets or current shortfalls. Nevertheless stakeholder consultation has identified projects which tackle known GI quality deficiencies. Natural England is developing national GI standards which will include quality measures. Once published, these could be adopted for use in development planning, alongside other quality-oriented measures. These standards, along with schemes such as the 'Building with Nature Benchmark', make it easier for those charged with designing, delivering and maintaining green infrastructure to deliver the quality and benefits sought for the long term.

## 5.0 GBI OPPORTUNITIES

- 5.1 The vision of the Swale GBI Strategy is to *develop a resilient, biodiverse and multi-functional GBI network to contribute to ensuring Swale a great place to live, work and invest, and respond to the climate and ecological emergency.*
- 5.2 Moving forward from the understanding of the existing GBI network in Swale, this section of the Strategy highlights opportunities for investing in GBI which will have a range of benefits and meet areas of need across the borough. Areas of need have been established through stakeholder consultation and multi-functionality mapping.
- 5.3 Within this section, key opportunities for protecting, enhancing and creating GBI across Swale are outlined under the following key opportunity areas:
- **A Green and Biodiverse Borough**
  - **A Healthy Blue Environment**
  - **A Connected, Active and Healthy Swale**
  - **A Beacon for the Visitor Economy**
- 5.4 Throughout this section, there is practical advice provided for the optimisation of Swale's GBI resources. Though the practical advice is focused around specific areas and projects, it is hoped that the principles and broad opportunities can be transferred to other projects across Swale throughout the lifetime of this strategy.

- 5.5 The climate change and ecological emergency has not been named as a separate opportunity area as it spans and encompasses all opportunity areas, and therefore forms a central role within this section. For example, proposals to contribute to a green and biodiverse borough, though tree planting initiatives, connecting wildlife and habitats and better management of soils will contribute to carbon storage, decrease sealed surface cover and contribute to shading where appropriate, among their many other benefits for people and wildlife. Similarly, by encouraging people to leave their cars at home by providing safe, accessible and green active travel routes, Swale will see a reduction in air pollution and fossil fuel usage, whilst seeing decreases in health conditions across the population. In essence, climate change is interwoven through this section, and spans all opportunity areas.



## A Green and Biodiverse Borough

- 5.6 Swale's high quality, natural environment already plays a valuable role in providing habitat for wildlife.
- 5.7 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.

### Opportunities for Biodiversity

- 5.8 The following opportunity areas have been identified within Swale:
- Create a balance between public access for enjoyment and recreation and biodiversity protection
  - Protection and enhancement of existing habitats
  - Creating bigger and more joined up biodiversity networks
  - Plant more trees within urban areas

### *Kent Biodiversity Strategy*

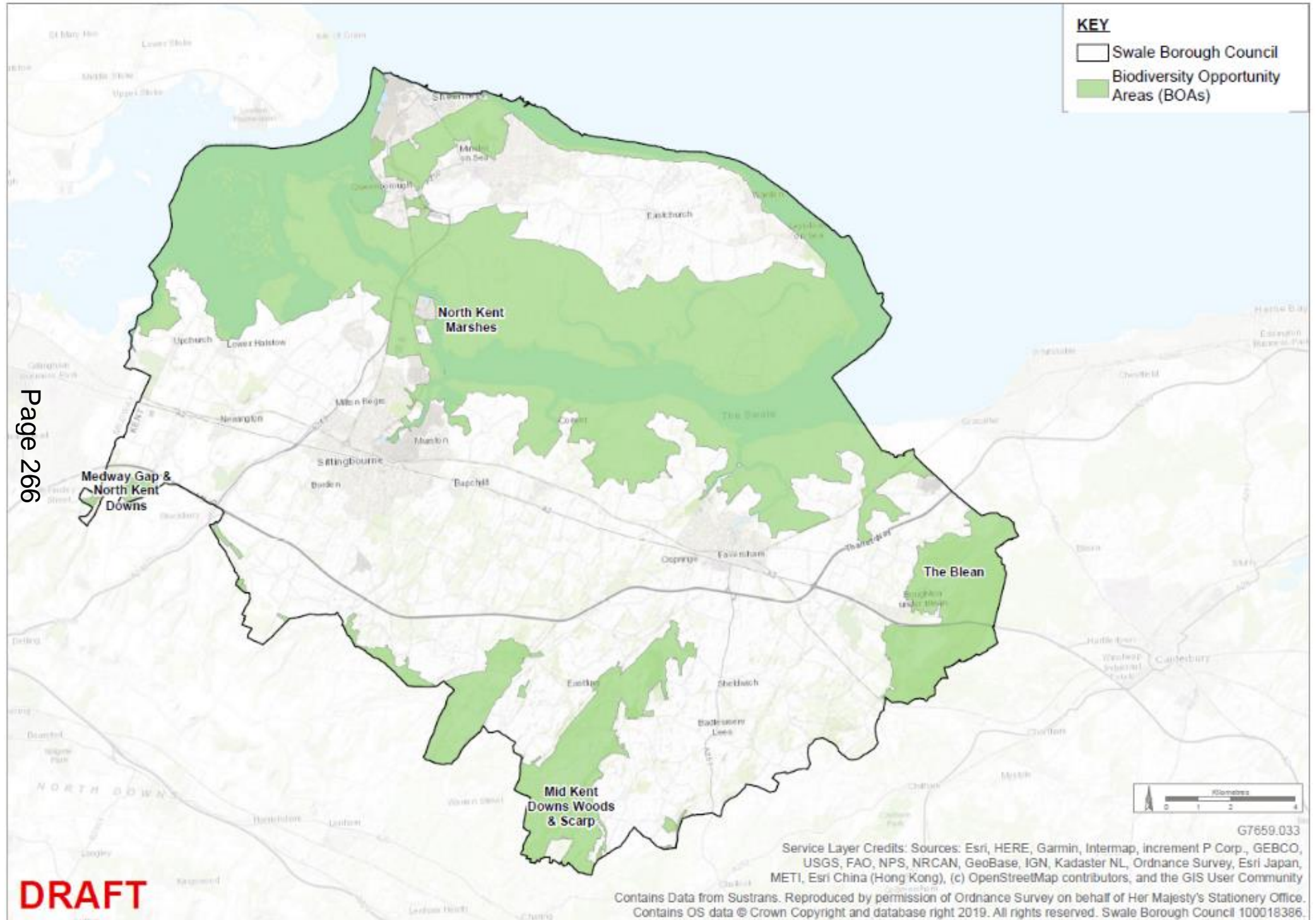
- 5.9 The opportunities and proposals within this section are aligned with the targets of the Kent Biodiversity Strategy. The adopted Kent Biodiversity Strategy runs from 2020-2025, though consultation has recently ended on an updated Kent Biodiversity Strategy 2019-2044 which was published in August 2019.

- 5.10 The Strategy divides the terrestrial biodiversity network into sections, known as Biodiversity Opportunity Areas (BOAs) which are a spatial reflection of the Kent Biodiversity Strategy. Targets have been set for maintaining, enhancing, restoring and creating habitats occurring in each BOA and for species conservation. Figure 15 shows the BOAs relevant to Swale, and demonstrates 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 of wildlife habitats. The following presents a brief summary of the BOAs relevant to Swale.

### North Kent Marshes

- 5.11 The North Kent Marshes is an open and remote landscape characterised by grazing marsh associated with wetlands, and the marshes are almost in their entirety designated for their national and international importance for their breeding and wintering bird populations. Targets include:
- Protect and enhance existing important marine and terrestrial habitats
  - Deliver more, bigger, better and connected habitats
  - Restore grazing marsh on improved grassland
  - Create new intertidal mudflat and saltmarsh
  - Maintain total extent of coastal vegetated shingle habitat
  - Maintain and enhance important ecological features within new development and create ecological networks within the built environment
  - Implement a sustainable access strategy, including the creation of alternative natural greenspace

Figure 15: Biodiversity Opportunity Areas in Swale



## Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy for Swale

### Mid Kent Downs Wood and Scarp

5.12 The area is within the Kent Downs AONB and contains a high number of Local Wildlife Sites. The area is characterised by important dense woodlands, steep-sided valleys and productive agricultural land. Targets include:

- Protect, manage and enhance existing habitats
- Restore and recreate chalk grassland to create large, continuous blocks on the scarp and on suitable soils in dip slope valleys
- Enhance species-rich neutral grassland
- Enhance or reinstate woodland management, and restore plantations on ancient woodland sites to native woodland and extend and reconnect fragmented, dip-slope woodlands
- Complement dip-slope woodlands by buffering with semi-natural habitats.

### Blean Woodland

5.13 The Blean is in the east of Swale and is one of the biggest complexes of ancient semi-natural woodland in England, with much of it designated as NNR, SSSI and LWS. It is of particular importance for birds and several threatened butterfly species. Targets include:

- No loss of ancient semi-natural woodland and its mosaic of associated habitats
- Enhance and reconnect woodland to create a very extensive block of habitat
- Restore conifer plantations on ancient woodland sites to suitable, wooded habitat

- At least 50ha of heath and acid grassland (including grazed wooded heath) should be restored or enhanced as part of the woodland matrix
- Creation of acid grassland and heathland
- Enhance species-rich neutral grassland to bring it to UK BAP priority habitat Lowland Meadow quality.

### Medway Gap and North Kent Downs

5.14 As shown on Figure 15, a very small section of the Medway Gap and North Kent Downs BOA falls within Swale. This small section comprises patches of woodland, a characteristic feature of the BOA as a whole.

## Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy for Swale

### **Nature Recovery Network**

5.15 The Nature Recovery Network is one of the primary commitments in the UK Government's 25-Year Environment Plan, intended to improve and better connect habitats.

5.16 The Wildlife Trust define a Nature Recovery Network as:

*'A joined-up system of places important for wild plants and animals, on land and at sea. It allows plants, animals, seeds, nutrients and water to move from place to place and enables the natural world to adapt to change. It provides plants and animals with places to live, feed and breed. It can only do this effectively if, like our road network, it is treated as a joined-up whole.'*

5.17 DEFRA is due to publish their Nature Strategy in early 2021, at which time local level Nature Recovery Network mapping is expected to be a requirement of local authorities. Though the full approach to developing a Nature Recovery Network will be outlined by DEFRA in their 2021 Nature Strategy, this section of Swale's GBI Strategy identifies a potential borough level network which aligns with DEFRA's objectives.

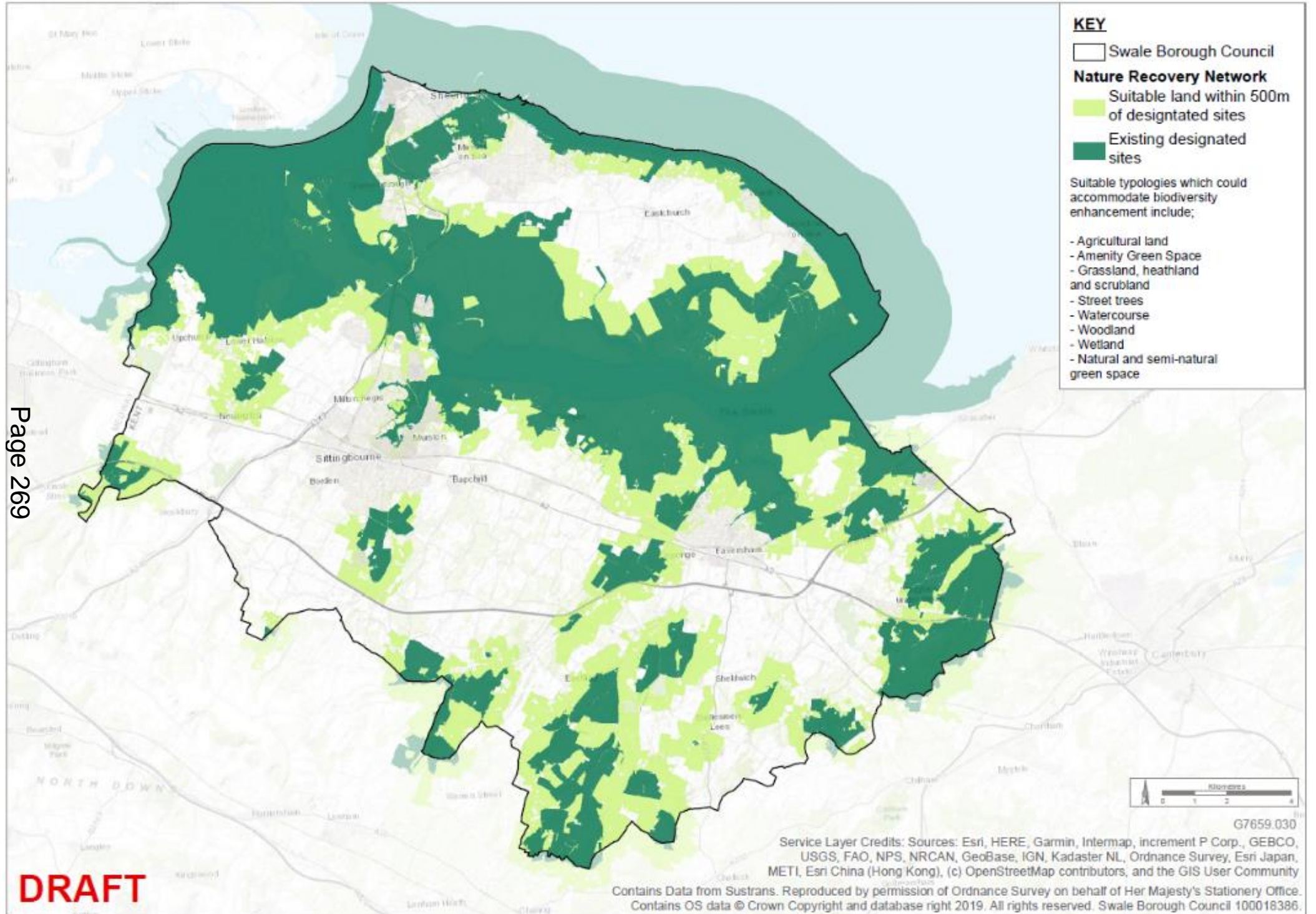
5.18 The potential Nature Recovery Network Map shown in Figure 16 is a 'works in progress' and will be subject to change once official guidance is released. Figure 16 has been developed using DEFRA's concept which puts existing protected sites at the core of a future network, as they constitute our best areas for wildlife whilst providing many other economic and social benefits.

5.19 We have then looked beyond protected sites to extend and link existing sites, to provide habitat connectivity and increase resilience in the face of climate change.

5.20 The Potential Wildlife Opportunity Corridor Map in Figure 17 shows a finer grain approach that would support any Nature Recovery Network.

5.21 A Nature Recovery Network would need to be aligned with neighbouring authority Nature Recovery Networks to contribute to a resilient, joined-up national network of biodiversity.

Figure 16: Potential Nature Recovery Network



**Box 5.1: Great Bells Farm****Case Study: Great Bells Farm, Isle of Sheppey**

The work of the RSPB and the Environment Agency, at Great Bells Farm, is a great example of a successful habitat creation scheme in the borough. The project, along the northern boundary of the Elmley Marshes Nature Reserve on the Isle of Sheppey, involved converting 160 hectares of poor quality farmland into a freshwater nature reserve. The project also involved the managed realignment of flood defences by removing embankments adjacent to the river channel, to reduce flood risk over the next century, set to have large economic benefit. The project involved the design and build of new wetland habitat and grazing marsh by the RSPB with the aim of mitigating for coastal habitat losses. Since completion in 2013, many rare species have been attracted to the wetland area, including lapwings and water voles.

The project has not just had benefits for wildlife, but by transforming the poor quality grazed area into a new biodiverse, wetland reserve, the visual and recreational enjoyment of local residents has also been improved.



*Recording the habitat creation at Great Bells Farm on the Isle of Sheppey, Kent (© Pryor Engineering)*

*GBI in New Development*

5.22 The National Planning Policy Framework highlights that the planning system has a crucial role to play in the implementation of green infrastructure for mitigating and adapting to climate change, healthy and safe communities. Policy CP7 of the Local Plan promote green infrastructure in new development. Section 7.0 of this report provides a 'toolkit' for developers in planning for an overall gain of GBI in new developments.

*Farmer Cluster*

5.23 Farmers and land managers already play a key role in safeguarding and enhancing the environment in Swale. The aim of Farmer Clusters is to provide an opportunity for farmers and landowners to work together cohesively, coordinated by a Conservation Advisor or Facilitator. Farmer Clusters provide the opportunity for have the potential to achieve large scale benefits for soils, water, biodiversity and landowners themselves at a landscape scale. Projects under the scope of a Farmer Cluster can include woodland management for biodiversity, establishing networks of pollinator habitats through farmland, soil management and nutrient retention and better land management to slow the flow. A key aspect of a Farmer Cluster is to ensure that the right activity is targeted in the right place.

## Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy for Swale

5.24 In Swale, opportunities have been identified by the Kent Wildlife Trust, to create a network of farmers within their existing project boundaries, covering large expanses of farmland. For example, Kent Wildlife Trust's project area focusing on water vole habitat along the coastal marshes between Sittingbourne to Whitstable presents an opportunity to continued landscape scale management.

### *Climate Change*

5.25 The natural environment has significant potential to help mitigate or offset the impacts of climate change. Climate change presents challenges for many species, particularly amphibians and invertebrates which are important for agriculture and biodiversity. Swale's towns are vulnerable to climate change due to high proportion of sealed surface cover and low tree canopy cover, meaning the heating effects of climate change will be exacerbated.

5.26 Investing in town centre greening projects, described later in Section 6.0, can not only attract inward investment, but increasing the presence of GBI such as street trees can support cleaner air, shading from the sun and provide vital corridors for wildlife.

5.27 At a broader scale, beyond Swale's towns, climate change will present impacts at the borough level on biodiversity, water resources, growing seasons, among others.

5.28 A general vulnerability to climate change pressures across Swale comes from low tree canopy cover, pressures on the ecological network and hydrological change resulting from changing weather patterns. All proposals within this document can contribute to climate change mitigation and increase climate resilience. The proposals under a 'Healthy Blue Environment' can also contribute to climate resilience through SuDS for example, which can reduce the risk of rapid surface runoff in resulting from increased rainfall.

5.29 As described in Section 3.0, SBC has outlined a commitment to tree planting across council owned land, amounting to a total of 60 acres of woodland by 2025. Woodland has significant to sequester carbon, and at this scale is predicted to offset 1,418 tonnes of carbon emissions. Progress to date includes planting 2,500 trees in country parks in 2019 and 2020. The inclusion of school and community groups within tree planting initiatives can educate about the benefits of tree planting, whilst improving health and wellbeing.

### *Soils and Agriculture*

5.30 Soil is a great carbon store and therefore has a vital role in tackling climate change. In Swale, farming is a key sector. Agriculture, including fruit and hop growing, is synonymous with the Borough. Swale has a wide area of some of the highest quality of agricultural land in the UK (called best and most versatile) which is found within a broad belt running east-west around the A2. High quality agricultural land, used for intensive farming, is not necessarily managed to maximise its carbon storage potential.

## Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy for Swale

5.31 Through farming practices we can actively increase the role of soils as a carbon store. Where farming is more intensive across the borough's central belt, and in the orchards in the AONB, positive engagement with farmers and land managers will be important in delivering landscape benefits.

5.32 Enabling land management which conserves and restores soil productivity and improves carbon sequestration is vital. Farmers play a key role in better land management practices. In September 2019, the National Farmers Union unveiled its vision for British Farming to achieve net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2019<sup>5</sup>, with three pillars of activity:

- Improving farming's productive efficiency
- Improving land management and changing land use to capture more carbon
- Boosting renewable energy and the wider bio-economy.

5.33 It is possible to work towards these aims across Swale, by encouraging farmers to engage in agri-environment schemes. Some beneficial practices relate to farm management such as improved crop rotations, reduced tillage and improved fertiliser application. Other relate to farmland vegetation, which may include:

- Curtailing livestock's access to watercourses through buffer strips
- Tree planting and existing habitat and hedgerow restoration
- 'Re-wilding' areas of relatively marginal farmland for water quality and biodiversity benefits as well as soil conservation.

5.34 The Kent Downs AONB Unit already provide a wealth of advice and support to farmers and landowners via a variety of toolkits. Across the AONB as a whole, over 70% of the land is farmed so supporting farmers is key. Farmers should be signposted to this existing available guidance including the Farm Diversification Toolkit, the Landscape Design Handbook and the Land Managers Pack<sup>6</sup>.

### *Parks and Open Spaces*

5.35 At a national level, parks and open spaces have come under increasing pressure due to decreased funding for maintenance, development pressures and under-use due to poor quality. As mentioned earlier, Swale has a reasonable number of parks nestled within urban and residential areas. This Strategy recognises the value in improving our existing parks, to be multi-functional spaces which are relevant to local needs. Parks have a contribution to make at a settlement and regional scale where they form part of habitat networks, river catchments and access networks, whilst also providing a valuable and sustainable resource for community use.

5.36 In terms of local need for green space, there is no better judge of gaps in the green space network than local people themselves. Creating forums, whether that be through technology, drop in sessions or workshops, gives local people to put forward spaces near to their homes which they think could be turned into green spaces.

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<sup>5</sup> National Farmers Union (2019) Achieving Net Zero: Farming's 2040 Goal

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.kentdowns.org.uk/landscape-management/farming/>



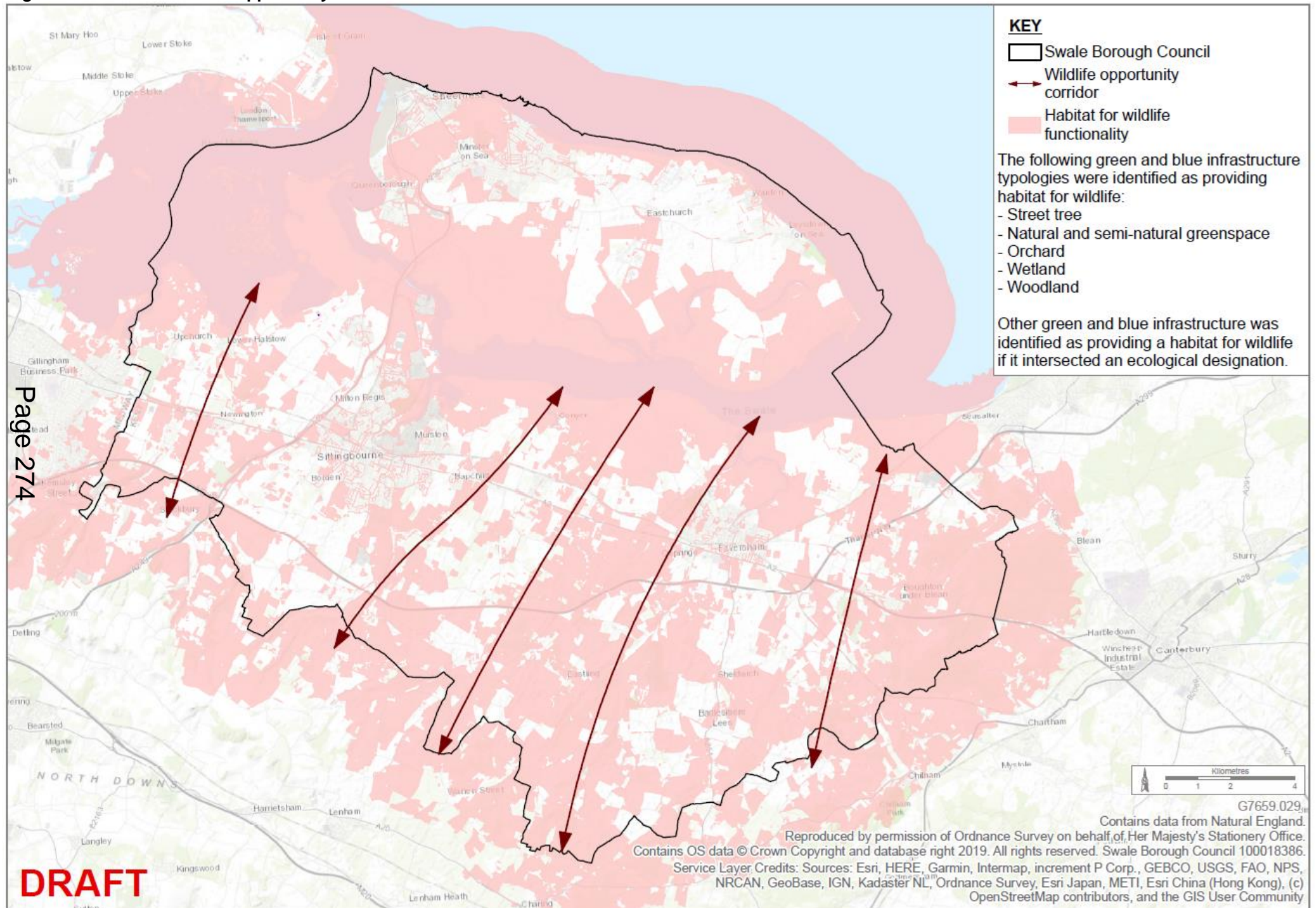
## Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy for Swale

### *Wildlife Corridors*

- 5.37 Wildlife corridors provide linkages across landscapes and are linear features which aim to connect significant habitat areas so that species are not forced to live in isolation. Habitat fragmentation occurs at multiple scales, and in response wildlife corridors can vary between small corridors created by local communities or large corridors that connect across different landscapes. For example, in Swale, the A2 which crosses the borough east to west severs many habitats in the north and southern sections of Swale. At a more local scale, hard engineering works along the banks of some of Swale's rivers and creeks over the years disconnects watercourses from their floodplains, inhibiting the movement of species. In contrast, wildlife corridors facilitate species migration, opening up new areas for finding food and shelter away from human activity.
- 5.38 At a more local scale, the role of private gardens in contributing to wildlife corridors must not be overlooked. For many of us, our gardens are a personal place to relax, though gardens are increasingly important for wildlife. By improving private gardens as a vital role for wildlife, we can also inspire residents to learn more about nature, from which stem many social benefits. The dissemination of information is a vital first step to encouraging wildlife friendly gardening, and in many counties this is led by the Wildlife Trust. Suffolk Wildlife Trust provide step by step guides to creating 'hedgehog highways', wildlife friendly vegetable patches, and attracting a range of species dependent on your garden type.

- 5.39 The borough is already home to significant wildlife corridors. The Swale for example, is internationally recognised for its habitats and bird species, and represents an important wildlife corridor traversing the north of the borough from east to west. Milton Creek, a waterway which runs north from Sittingbourne to its outfall in The Swale, is a wildlife corridor that has been reinforced through habitat improvement works along its bank at Milton Creek Country Park. Swale Council along with Kent Wildlife Trust and the Bumblebee Conservation Trust has already installed some successful wildlife corridors as part of their Making a Buzz for the Coast campaign, called 'Bee Roads'. The Bumblebee Conservation Trust has already held multiple workshops with young people on the Isle of Sheppey to teach them about the importance of bees and other insects.
- 5.40 The existing wildlife corridors primarily run east-west, meaning there is scope for improving north-south habitat connectivity across Swale. Figure 17 uses data on existing habitats across Swale, and provides some indicative opportunities for wildlife connectivity from north to south. Where possible, the opportunity corridors follow the line of various landscape features such as watercourses and creeks such as the White Drain in the east. As well as connecting the habitats shown on Figure 17 through habitat creation, habitats may also need enhancement for securing well connected and thriving corridors for the movement of species.

Figure 17: Potential Wildlife Opportunity Corridors



### Box 5.2: Rectory Playing Field, Sittingbourne

#### **Practical Advice for Optimising Swale's Green Spaces and Parks** **Rectory Playing Field, Sittingbourne**

Size: 3.8ha

Rectory Playing Fields is a linear, medium sized local green space serving the community of Snipeshill in Sittingbourne, largely comprising amenity grass. The park is surrounded on all sides by residential development, with Swanstree Avenue to the south and Rectory Road to the east. Facilities located in the centre of the park include a children's play area and outdoor exercise equipment, as well a basketball court. The south of the park is the narrowest point, and comprises amenity grassland in an elevated position, surrounded on three sides by property boundaries.

The main footpath runs north to south through the centre of the park with very limited tree planting, comprising only of a few mature trees though it well used by walkers. There is limited tree planting along the perimeters of the park, with property boundaries forming the majority of edges. The overall appearance of the park is rather stark, lacking ecological interest.

Similarly to the other parks in Sttingbourne, Figure 12 shows that Rectory Playing Fields currently performs a low to moderate number of functions, with the northern section of the park which contains the outdoor playground and basketball courts performing slightly higher in terms of GBI multi-functionality. The areas around the playing field are sparse of GBI, with few street trees and dense residential development. Creating a space which is appealing to the surrounding residents, which also benefits wildlife could create an engaging community hub, to encourage physical activity and social interaction, strengthening community ties.



Existing Basketball Court in Rectory Playing Fields

#### **Proposals**

The following concept proposals have been developed to illustrate specific actions which could be undertaken at Rectory Playing Fields to increase the multi-functionality of the park, providing a range of benefits for both people and nature.

#### Wildflower meadows and planting

The majority of land cover at Rectory Playing Fields, in a similar way to the majority of parks in Swale, is made up of closely mown grassland. These areas of amenity grassland are less suited to wetter conditions, are more liable to be scorched during higher temperatures, and provide little habitat for wildlife. Establishing meadow areas in parks increases an emphasis on biodiversity, and

**Box 5.2: Rectory Playing Field, Sittingbourne**

by reducing the number of grass cuts, there is a smaller pressure on budgets. By providing some close mown areas through differential mowing, pathways can be created to allow exploration of spaces.

Wildflower planting around the perimeter of the Rectory Playing Fields will create a more naturalistic and informal landscape, whilst attracting pollinators to the park. These proposals could be accompanied by tree planting and more informal paths to add diversity and interest to what is currently a large expanse of amenity grassland. This will have benefits for park users in the form of shading from trees, as well as creating an aesthetic appeal to draw people of all ages to engage with the outdoors.



The northern section of the playing fields which would benefit from meadow areas, and more informal pathways to encourage use

Other proposals include 'avenue' tree planting along the footpath and around the play area to provide shade during hotter weather, providing wind breaks in the large open space in the centre of the park whilst creating a sense of tranquillity. Appropriate planting around the existing outdoor exercise equipment in the southern section of the park would be beneficial to increase shelter and shade, to encourage year round use of the equipment whilst maintaining natural surveillance. Additional benefits of tree planting include carbon storage, pollution absorption and contributing to wildlife corridors.



Existing Public Footpath through the southern section which would benefit from tree planting for shade

Elsewhere, changes in mowing regimes will create a variety of grassland areas, whilst improving biodiversity in the park. The open grassland should be maintained in the northern section of the park to

**Box 5.2: Rectory Playing Field, Sittingbourne**

allow for informal play and recreation. Reduced cutting requirements over a long period will reduce maintenance requirements, amounting to cost savings and reduced carbon emissions from mowing.

Natural Play and planting

Well-designed play areas can have benefits beyond simply providing a space for outdoor play. Rectory Playing Field has existing steel play equipment on a bonded rubber surface. Incorporating natural materials where possible such as large shrubs and tree planting, whilst maintaining natural surveillance, would provide shelter whilst also storing carbon and providing habitat. Tree trunks, boulders and mounds provide opportunities for exploration and imagination. Upgrading surfacing when funds become available to surfaces such as sand, bark and reinforced grass play surfaces would provide greater permeability of rainwater and reduce heat absorption from the existing black ground surface.

Encouraging Walking, Cycling and Use of Public Transport

There are many public rights of way which connect the park to the wider area. For example, South Avenue Primary School is directly accessible via a public footpath which runs west from Rectory Playing Fields through residential development, and there are also footpaths to Highstead and Borden Grammar Schools. Maintenance of these public footpaths is essential, as well as ensuring they are well lit to ensure safety and provide ease of access.

Cycle parking where the park adjoins Rectory Road would further promote sustainable travel.

Green Flag

The Green Flag Award is the benchmark national standard for parks and green spaces in the UK, and it based on criteria of quality and management. The Rectory Playing Field is not currently accredited to the Green Flag standard. Working towards the Green Flag standard will ensure that the Rectory Playing Field is adhering to maintaining a welcome place, is healthy, safe and secure and is well maintained. Other key principles of the Green Flag Award include community involvement, environmental management such as waste minimisation and chemical use. Flying the Green Flag shows that the green space is satisfying these requirements and has been known to increase popularity and use of the spaces.

Street Furniture

The Rectory Playing Fields are currently sparse of street furniture, offering few places to sit other than benches around the existing play area. Providing comfortable places to enjoy the playing fields is important for inclusivity, for engaging the local population of all age groups. Street furniture including benches should be sited in areas to enjoy the proposed informal planting and wildflower meadows. Timber benches will provide all year comfort in comparison to metal benches.

### Box 5.2: Rectory Playing Field, Sittingbourne



Existing Outdoor Exercise Equipment in Rectory Playing Fields

encouraging consumption of locally sourced food. Engaging school children is a good way to engage all age groups. Parks can be good places for 'demonstration' plots to provide advice and support for growing produce in domestic gardens.

Only one of Swale's parks and green spaces has been awarded Green Flag status. The Oare Gunpowder Works Country Park, is also a Green Heritage Site. Working towards more of Swale's parks and green spaces achieving this standard can have many benefits for the borough as a whole including sharing of best practice, recognising well-managed parks, and raising awareness of the high quality parks on offer to Swale's residents.

### Principles for Swale's other Green Spaces and Parks

The methods described above relate to the Rectory Playing Fields, though the principles can be translated to other parks across Swale. Some measures which relate to the optimisation of all parks across Swale for a range of benefits include:

- Diversification of parks to provide activities such as outdoor gyms and exercise classes
- Promoting active and sustainable travel to and from parks
- Rationalising the storage of materials and equipment so that vehicle use and resources are minimised
- Improving biodiversity

Other parks across Swale may be more suited to implementing sites for community food growing or orchards. Implementing raised beds or planting fruit trees for management by local community groups present opportunities for increasing social engagement whilst

## A Healthy Blue Environment

5.41 The geology of Swale has influenced the natural course of the borough's rivers due to the way in which different rock types respond to rainfall. The south of the borough lies over chalk bedrock, covered over by clay-with-flint deposits so that the chalk tends to be exposed only in the valleys. Chalk is usually highly permeable meaning that it is capable of absorbing rainfall, also acting as an aquifer, storing water below ground. The high absorption rate means there are no main watercourses in the south of the borough, as shown on Figure 18 (generally south of the A2). The northern part of the borough is low-lying land with 'islands' of clay among alluvium deposits. Clay is relatively impermeable, allowing for little infiltration. The north of the borough is also home to marshes, characterised by saturated soils. The flat topography and saturated soils leads to water forming wetlands or running overland in numerous small creeks rather than in larger watercourses.

5.42 The principal watercourse in the borough is The Swale, which is a tidal channel running between the mouth of the River Medway and the North Sea, separating the Isle of Sheppey from the rest of the borough. The final section of the River Medway which forms a tidal estuary runs along the north west border of Swale, and is another large watercourse. The borough includes extensive areas of marshland around the Isle of Sheppey and along the borders of The Swale ('island' and 'mainland'), covered by a network of small creeks and drainage ditches.

5.43 Pressures on watercourses in Swale include:

- Low lying land in places, susceptible to flooding

- Changing nature of climate impacts resulting in river drought
- Pressures on watercourses and other water bodies from development and population growth
- Pollution from a range of sources including road runoff and agricultural pollution
- Reduced resource of public authorities to spend on maintenance and enhancement

### Opportunities

5.44 The following outlines where benefits through better management of our water environment across Swale can result in multi-functional benefits.

### *Reducing Flood Risk*

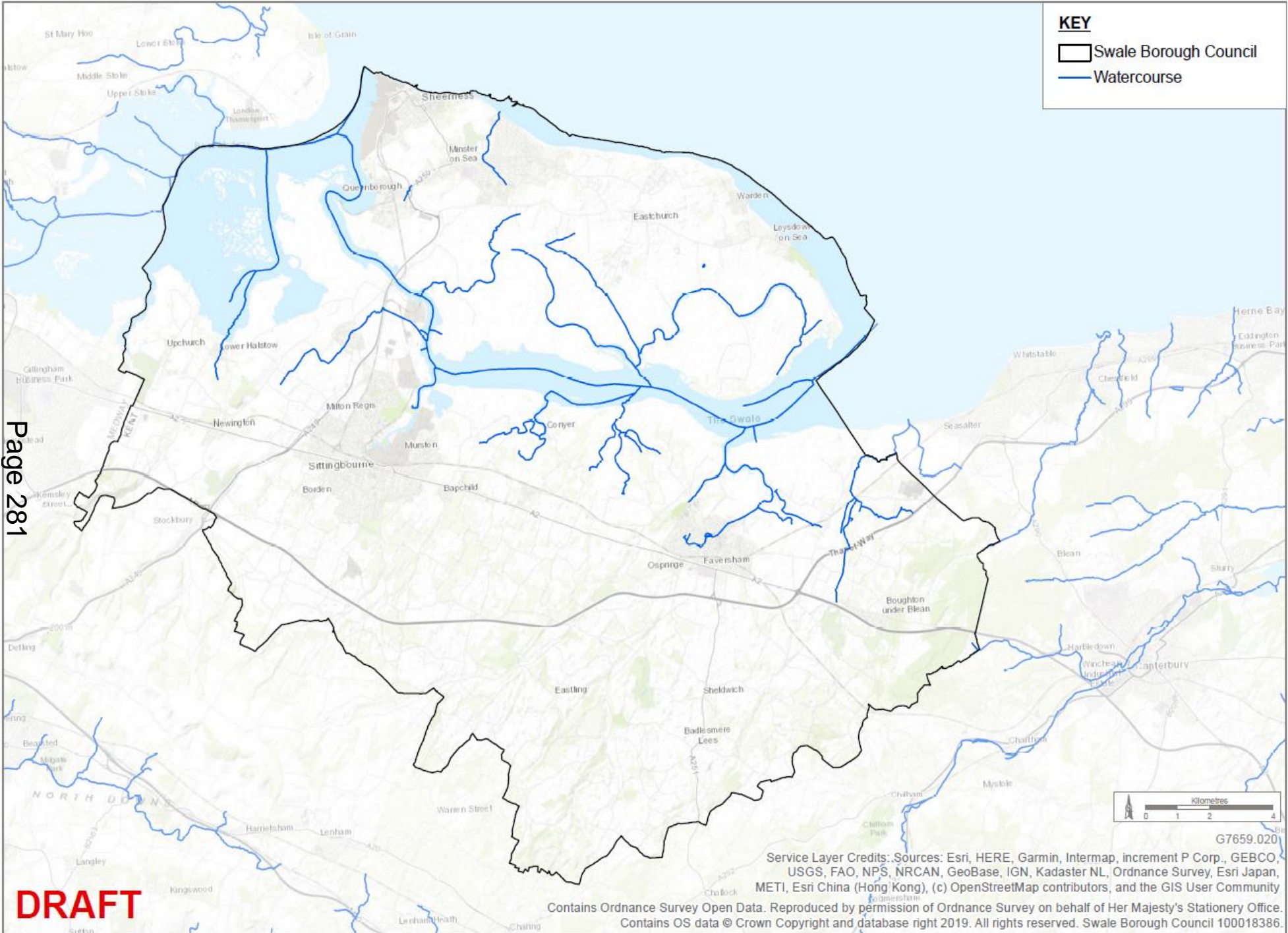
5.45 Flooding is a growing reality for communities that lie along Swale's rivers and creeks due to climate change and pressures from development. Sustainable solutions that help store water and 'slow the flow' are critical for mitigating and adapting to climate change. Natural flood management projects uses the ability of the natural landscape to reduce flood volumes and slow down the flow of water downstream. Projects may include creating storage ponds, planting trees, creating wetlands, restoring meanders rather than channelized watercourses and creating leaky dams.

## Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy for Swale

5.46 It is important to note that many of Swale's ordinary watercourses suffer as much from a lack of water as too much water, largely due to over abstraction. For example, this is an issue along the Westbrook Stream in Faversham, where there is over-abstraction from the dam upstream, causing much of the river to dry out. This results in pressure on wildlife and habitats further downstream such as for areas of wet woodland.



Figure 18: Watercourses in Swale



## Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy for Swale

### *Sustainable Drainage*

- 5.47 Well designed and constructed sustainable drainage infrastructure can have major benefits in terms of water resources, water quality, enhanced biodiversity and public amenity and reduced flood risk.
- 5.48 Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) mimic nature, typically managing rainfall close to where it makes groundfall to slow surface water runoff and reduce surface water flooding. SuDS are highly multi-functional in nature, and are often cheaper than 'grey' solutions whilst providing benefits for wildlife, air and water quality, visual amenity, recreation and carbon storage.
- 5.49 Within Swale, the Thames River Basin Management Plan explains that water quality is a particular issue, so well designed SuDS can filter pollutants before runoff reaches Swale's watercourses.
- 5.50 It is not only important that they are implemented in new development, but SuDS can also be effectively retrofitted into existing urban environments. Proposals for SuDS are discussed further within Section 6.0 Urban GBI.

### **Box 5.3: Alma Road, London**

#### **Case Study: Alma Road, London**

Alma Road lies in an area of Enfield, London which is generally low lying, as it forms part of the Lee Valley. The natural flow path of the Brimsdown Ditch is obstructed by a railway line, meaning there have been many incidences of surface water flooding.

5 rain gardens have been delivered on Alma Road through the BEGIN project, of which the focus was to disconnect most of the highway runoff from the surface sewer system for up to 5 years. This has reduced the pressure on the existing drainage system, allowing water to soak into the ground naturally. As well as reducing flooding, the rain gardens have an added traffic calming feature and have improved the public realm.

As the rain gardens are within the public highway, the adoption and maintenance is carried out by the Highway Services team in Enfield Council. A cost analysis has shown that the additional cost of maintaining the SuDS is not significant when the cost savings achieved by reducing the maintenance required for the gullies are accounted for.



**Before**



**After**



Source: SusDrain  
([https://www.susdrain.org/case-studies/case\\_studies/alma\\_road\\_rain\\_gardens\\_london.html](https://www.susdrain.org/case-studies/case_studies/alma_road_rain_gardens_london.html))

## Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy for Swale

### *Watercourses as Wildlife Corridors*

- 5.51 Better management of Swale's watercourses can create healthy, diverse and accessible (for wildlife) water corridors.
- 5.52 Globally, chalk stream habitats are rare and of the 200 chalk streams known globally, 85% are in the south and eastern England, including in Swale. These streams emerge from the chalk aquifer creating a pure water rich in minerals to support a diversity of wildlife.
- 5.53 Chalk streams are particularly vulnerable to drier weather, which is exacerbated by abstraction in Swale, which impacts habitat and wildlife. Restoring chalk stream habitats to protect and restore this internationally rare habitat will not only provide benefits for wildlife but will contribute to climate resilience.
- 5.54 The European eel (*Anguilla anguilla*) is a critically endangered species, but are also present in Swale including in Faversham Creek. However, many of Swale's streams have barriers to eel passage such as sluices. However, with the help of the Environment Agency, eel passes have recently been installed along Faversham Creek. The rollout of eel passages more widely would contribute to a thriving wildlife corridor for this species which travel from the western Atlantic.

### *Improving Access to Watercourses*

- 5.55 Watercourses can be used to provide new pedestrian or cycle walks, places to sit by, to enjoy, for play, for fishing, for education and so on. Ensuring sustainable access to Swale's watercourses where appropriate has benefits for recreation and health and wellbeing, for the tranquil enjoyment of waterways.
- 5.56 The Saxon Shore Way, a coastal path, provides access to distinctive landscapes and scenery along some of Swale's creeks, as well as cultural and historical interest and should be celebrated as a local asset. Increasing use of this asset could be encouraged by better way-marking and integrating the route as part of existing 'health walks' which currently take place throughout the borough.
- 5.57 Watercourses pass through the urban form of the towns of Sittingbourne and Faversham. Improving access to these watercourses is discussed further in Section 6.0 Urban GBI.

### *Habitat Restoration*

- 5.58 Enhancing river habitats is important for establishing healthy and connected ecosystems, where species can thrive. Rewilding sections of rivers can help to create more natural flow pathways. In some places in Swale, removing man-made features will be the best approach to river and habitat restoration.

## Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy for Swale

- 5.59 For example, the Iwade Stream is over-engineered along its upper section, presenting an opportunity to re-naturalise the river in this area. This is particularly pertinent due to the ‘flashy’ nature of the Iwade Stream, which means that it has high peak flows during storm events. By creating many small-scale flooding interventions, we can slow the flow of floodwater and store it higher up in river catchments during heavy rainfall periods.
- 5.60 Some places along Swale’s watercourses, such as along stretches of the Iwade Stream, are overly engineered through human intervention, which has involved amendments to the natural state of the watercourse through culverting, installing hard engineered banks or straightening river channels. These modifications have resulted in a loss of biodiversity along river channels and increased flows in places. Re-naturalising watercourses, which refers to restoring the natural processes of the river, can begin to vary flow through the channel, slow the flow and also provide a variety of connected habitats to welcome a range of species.
- 5.62 Mechanisms for delivery could include a Farmer Cluster as introduced earlier. Partnerships can include local authorities, water companies, businesses, landowners and local groups to draw on knowledge, expertise and man-power.

### *Catchment Wide Management*

- 5.61 Stakeholder consultation has identified considerable appetite for co-investment and partnership working at a river catchment-scale for improvements to the water environment, to have the most benefits to the people and nature. The aim would be to deliver river restoration schemes such as along the White Drain or the Iwade Drain, improvement in land management practices and water quality through habitat enhancement and creation, by targeting issues identified within the Water Framework Directive.

### Practical Advice for Optimising a Riparian Corridor The White Drain, Boughton-under-Blean

Due to regulatory changes in relation to the length of watercourses, the White Drain is now the only Water Framework Directive (WFD) waterbody in the North Kent Management Catchment other than The Swale. The WFD was created by European Parliament in 2000 to provide an overall framework to ensure the protection of rivers, lakes, estuaries, coastal and ground water across Europe. The aim is for all water systems to achieve 'good ecological status'<sup>7</sup> which means they reach a particular level of ecological and chemical quality. The White Drain currently suffers from **poor** ecological status.

The White Drain flows north from its source to the south of Boughton Street, before flowing through Boughton-under-Blean where it passes under the A2. The White Drain is fed by multiple streams including Hickman's Green, South Street and Boughton Church Farm streams. Upstream of the A2 dual carriageway, the White Drain is smaller in size and flows along the back of residential properties. This upstream stretch of the White Drain has natural banks, meanders and varied habitat.

It then flows to the east of Graveney across arable farming land, through the Graveney Marshes, with its outfall in The Swale estuary at the Seasalter Levels (Figure 19).

Boughton sewage pumping station lies on the banks of the river where it is small in scale. Past ecological surveys<sup>8</sup> have found high quantities of pollution linked with the pumping station, having impacts on biodiversity in the watercourse.

Much of the adjacent marshland is owned by the RSPB who undertake works in these areas such as ditch management, grassland works and planting.

Issues which affect the White Drain are predominantly associated with water quality and include:

- Road derived surface water runoff from the A2 Boughton Bypass, concentrated with heavy metals from tyre and break wear
- Pollution from Boughton sewage pumping station
- Agricultural pollution

#### Improving Water Quality of the White Drain

In the case of the White Drain, work has already been undertaken to identify where pollution is coming from (the A2), but for many watercourses, this is the first step in improving water quality to ensure that the best solutions for filtering and purifying water are put in place.

Where there is sufficient space within a watercourse, wetlands can remove contaminants during storm events as well as having multiple other benefits such as a habitat for wildlife and community amenity. Approximately 100m downstream from where road runoff from the A2 joins the White Drain, there is approximately 220m of available land where the White Drain runs through an incised channel. The South East Rivers Trust suggest that a suitable treatment to improve water quality would involve running the stream through a sediment trap, and then the construction of a linear wetland feature, planted with native plants, locally sourced where possible. This would substantially decrease the velocity of the water in this stretch and combined with the increased roughness from plants, this would help remove fine contaminated material. A project of this scale has been

<sup>7</sup> Water bodies are assigned one of five ecological status classes: 'high', 'good', 'moderate', 'poor' and 'bad'. 'High' ecological status represents an ecology relatively undisturbed by man.

<sup>8</sup> South East Rivers Trust have conducted numerous surveys along the White Drain, including in February 2015.

**Box 5.4: The White Drain**

costed at £10,000 for a 10m long sediment trap and 40m of linear wetland.

According to the Kent Wildlife Trust, an increase in livestock fencing along the river's edge will promote a recovery of riparian habitat, stimulating the recovery of the water vole population. The land is mostly agricultural land on either side of the river, and many fields are unfenced with cattle present. 5m buffer strips on the banks would mitigate field runoff to including pollutants and reducing disturbance of the river banks by cattle.

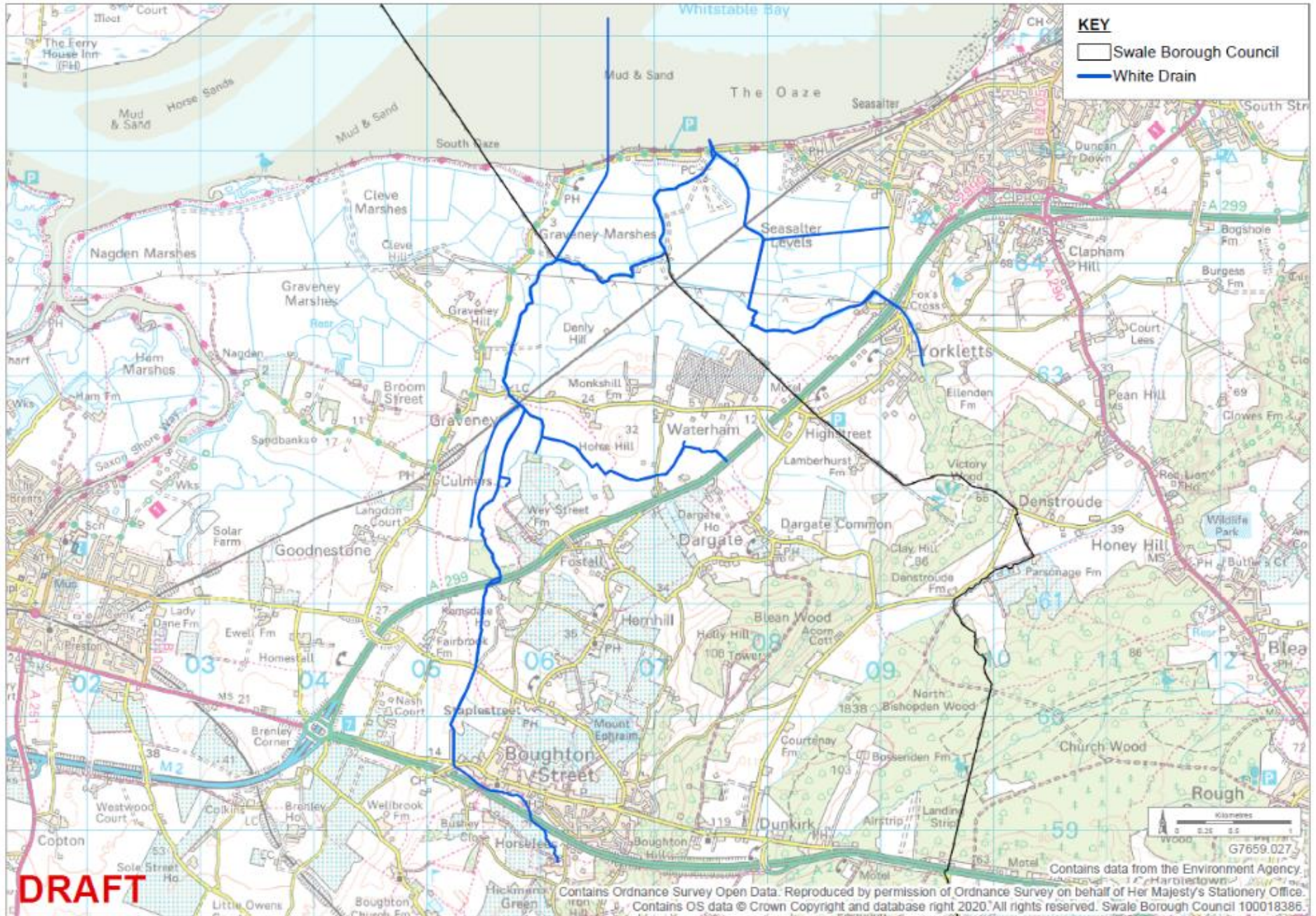
Improving Access

Improving access to riverbanks for the public can help to reconnect people to the natural environment. Recreational routes along river corridors can help to improve mental wellbeing, helping people to relax and unwind. Access in the form of PRow along the length of the White Drain is generally sparse, with only two PRow passing in close vicinity and over the watercourse just east of Culmers. As the White Drain flows through predominantly agricultural land, options for improving access are limited.

For other watercourses in Swale, where there is a shortage of public access, access should be considered for local residents, ramblers and nature watchers. Access to watercourses must be considered in full to reduce disturbance and pressure of wildlife whilst still providing enjoyment for people.

# Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy for Swale

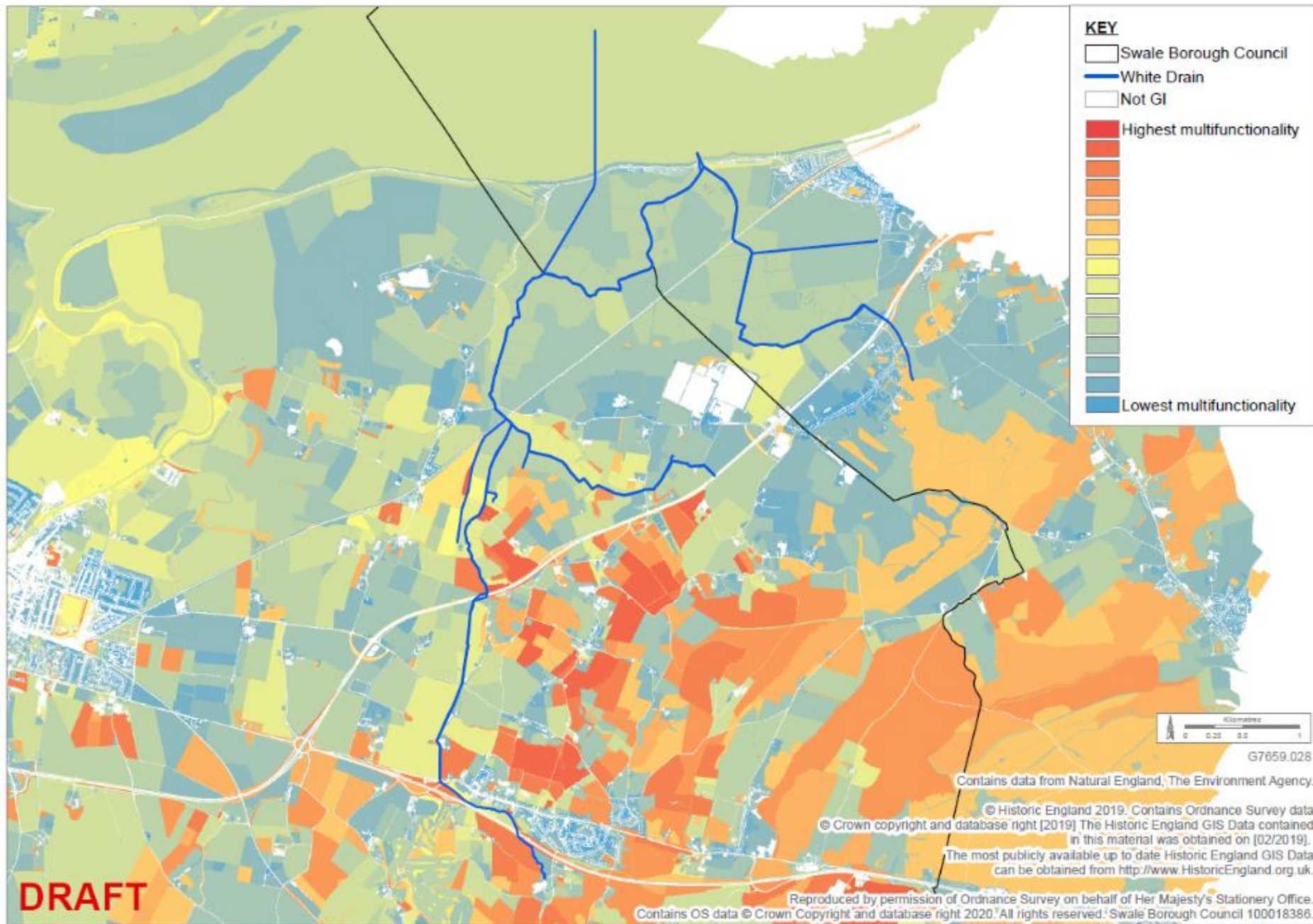
## Figure 19: Flow Path of the White Drain



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# Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy for Swale

## Figure 20: GBI Multi-functionality along the White Drain





## A Connected, Active and Healthy Swale

5.63 Of the thirty two indicators shown on Swale's Public Health England Profile<sup>9</sup>, 11 indicators are worse than the England average and only 5 are better (the remaining indicators are similar to the England average). Those worse than the England average include female life expectancy, mortality rate for the under 75 population and deprivation. Figure 21 shows the general picture of health in Swale, highlighting large health inequalities across the borough. Some areas concentrated around the Isle of Sheppey fall within the 20% most deprived areas in England in terms of health. This compares with areas around the Blean Woodland and the north west and south of Sittingbourne around Milton Regis and Kent Science Park fall within the least deprived 20% in terms of health deprivation in England. Providing opportunities for social interaction through GBI across Swale can help to overcome inequalities, by providing easy access to green and blue space for people of all incomes to promote better health.

5.64 The positive links between GBI and health is well evidenced. High quality GBI including greenways, cycle routes and well connected parks and recreation spaces can encourage leisure and exercise including walking and cycling, addressing a range of health issues such as obesity, heart disease and stress levels.

5.65 Swale's coastal location also offers opportunities for outdoor sport recreation including sailing, canoeing, and outdoor swimming, sometimes termed 'blue gyms'. However there is potential to increase and improve launch sites for kayaks and sailing boats, though potential wildlife disturbance must be a key factor due to the wealth of internationally designated wildlife along Swale's coastline.

### *A Connected Active Travel Network*

5.66 Connected green and blue spaces is a key factor in achieving a healthy and active borough to enable people to get out into the outdoors without the use of cars where possible. Transport is a generally a necessity of everyday life so increasing 'active travel' is a feasible approach to increasing physical activity. Figure 22 shows the existing public right of way (PRoW) and cycle way networks in Swale.

5.67 The borough has a good existing network of footpaths with links to the Saxon Shore Way and a range of long distance paths. However, in some places, the routes are fragmented and safety can be an issue due to poor route management creating overgrown footpaths.

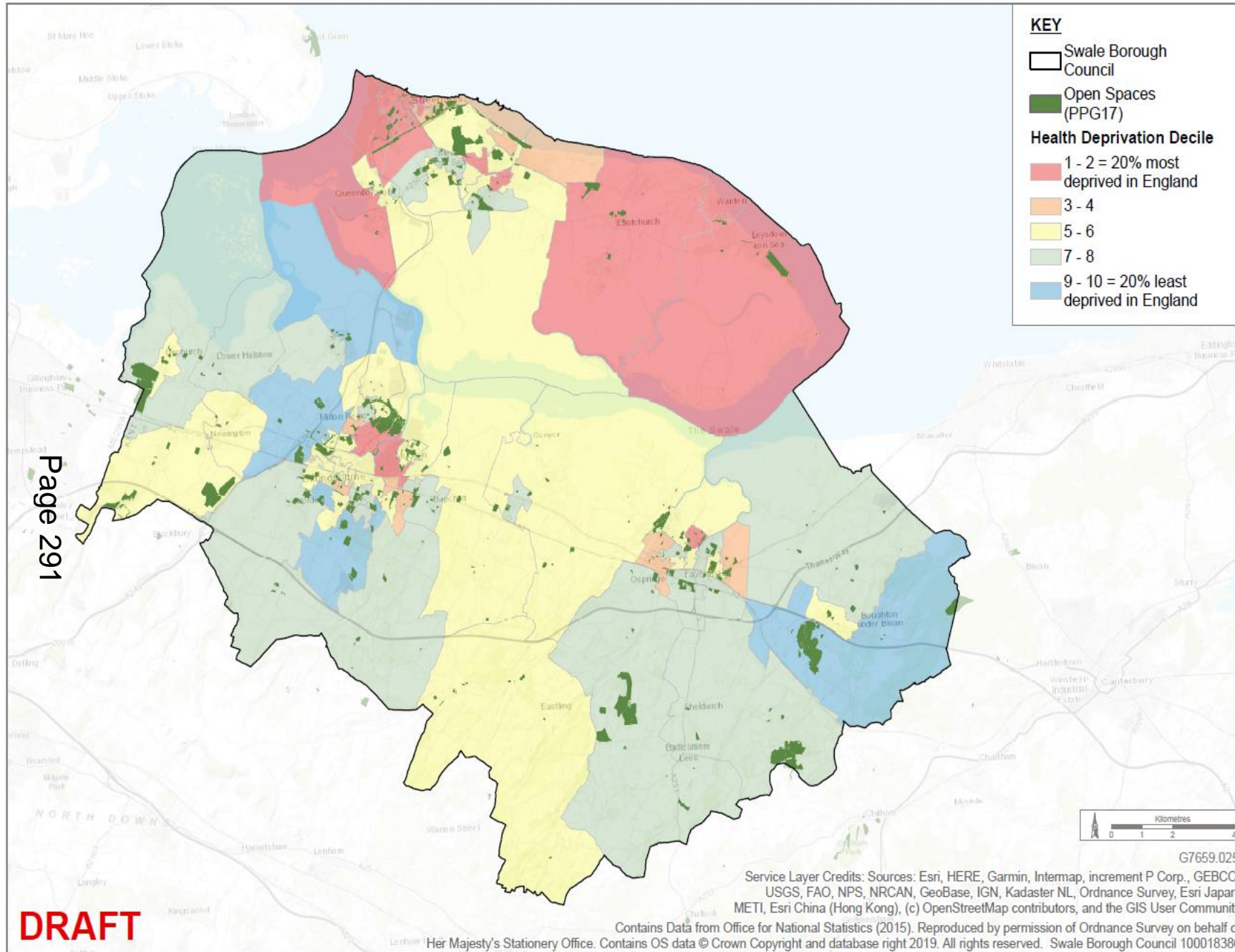
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<sup>9</sup> <https://fingertips.phe.org.uk/profile/health-profiles/data#page/0/gid/1938132701/pat/6/par/E12000008/ati/101/are/E07000113>

## Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy for Swale

- 5.68 Fragmented sustainable links including footpaths and cycle ways can also mean fragmented habitats. The way in which places are connected by networks of footpaths and cycleways influences how people travel around, impacting on how much physical exercise people undertake on a daily basis. Swale has an ageing population so GBI which is accessible for all ages is becoming increasingly important.
- 5.69 As mentioned earlier, 24% of Swale's population are currently inactive meaning they do less than 30 minutes of physical activity per week which is above the national average of 22%. When asking for views on how to get more people active across the borough, low cost, family-friendly activities are the most popularly cited in Swale, according to previous research as part of the Active Lives Framework (2017). Active travel initiatives are both low cost and family-friendly.

Figure 21: Overview of Health Deprivation in Swale



- KEY FINDINGS**
- Large areas of the Isle of Sheppey, particularly the east of the Island comprising Eastchurch, Leysdown-on-Sea are within the 20% most deprived areas in England in terms of health
  - The least deprived areas in terms of health are in the south and north west of Sittingbourne and around the Blean Woodland
  - The least deprived area in the north west of the borough comprises mainly marshland and is a largely unsettled landscape.

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## Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy for Swale

- 5.70 The PRoW network on the Isle of Sheppey, around the main employment area of Sheerness and Minster are generally less well-connected and sparser. A cycle route (NCN route 1) runs north from Sittingbourne to Sheerness, making active routes to work possible by bike. Active travel to and from work and school is proven to support higher productivity.
- 5.71 The existing PRoW network is fairly well connected around the outskirts of Sittingbourne and Faversham, providing links to the coast and to the surrounding countryside. However, within the urban cores of Faversham and Sittingbourne, there is a general absence of green routes, including street trees and cycle ways, discouraging active travel to work and school. As discussed in Section 6.0 Urban GBI, many barriers to active travel in Swale's towns are traffic volume and cycle safety.
- 5.72 Research undertaken as part of Swale's Climate and Ecological Emergency Action Plan shows that 22% of commuter journeys in Swale could be by bike (assuming good cycling infrastructure, such as segregated cycleways and the uptake of e-bikes), highlighting that demand and potential to increase uptake of active travel exists. Green travel routes provide a range of benefits.
- 5.73 From an environmental perspective, they can provide wildlife corridors and a range of habitats. Tree lined routes store carbon, whilst removing pollutants from the air, especially pertinent if routes pass close to main roads.
- 5.74 From a people perspective, green routes can provide cool, shaded environments for walking and cycling, and offer attractive, appealing environments to increase engagement in physical activity, resulting in benefits for both mental and physical health. In March 2019, Swale Borough Council commissioned Sustrans to complete a Cycling and Walking Audit in Faversham and on the Isle of Sheppey, which was one of the actions within Swale's Cycling and Walking Network Action Plan (2018-2022). Due to the many infrastructure works currently underway in Sittingbourne, an audit of the cycling and walking provision in this urban area is likely to come forward in the future.
- 5.75 The Audit is looking at the current provision of walking and cycling routes, existing obstacles and fragmentation of routes, and potential areas for improvement. Where new routes have been implemented as part of new developments, such as the Aldi Distribution Centre on the Isle of Sheppey, the Audit aims to assess how effectively they are performing. Though the timescales of the Audit and the Swale GBI Strategy differ, the importance of considering the outcomes of the Sustrans Audit is recognised. Where areas for improvement are identified, these should be prioritised when funding becomes available.

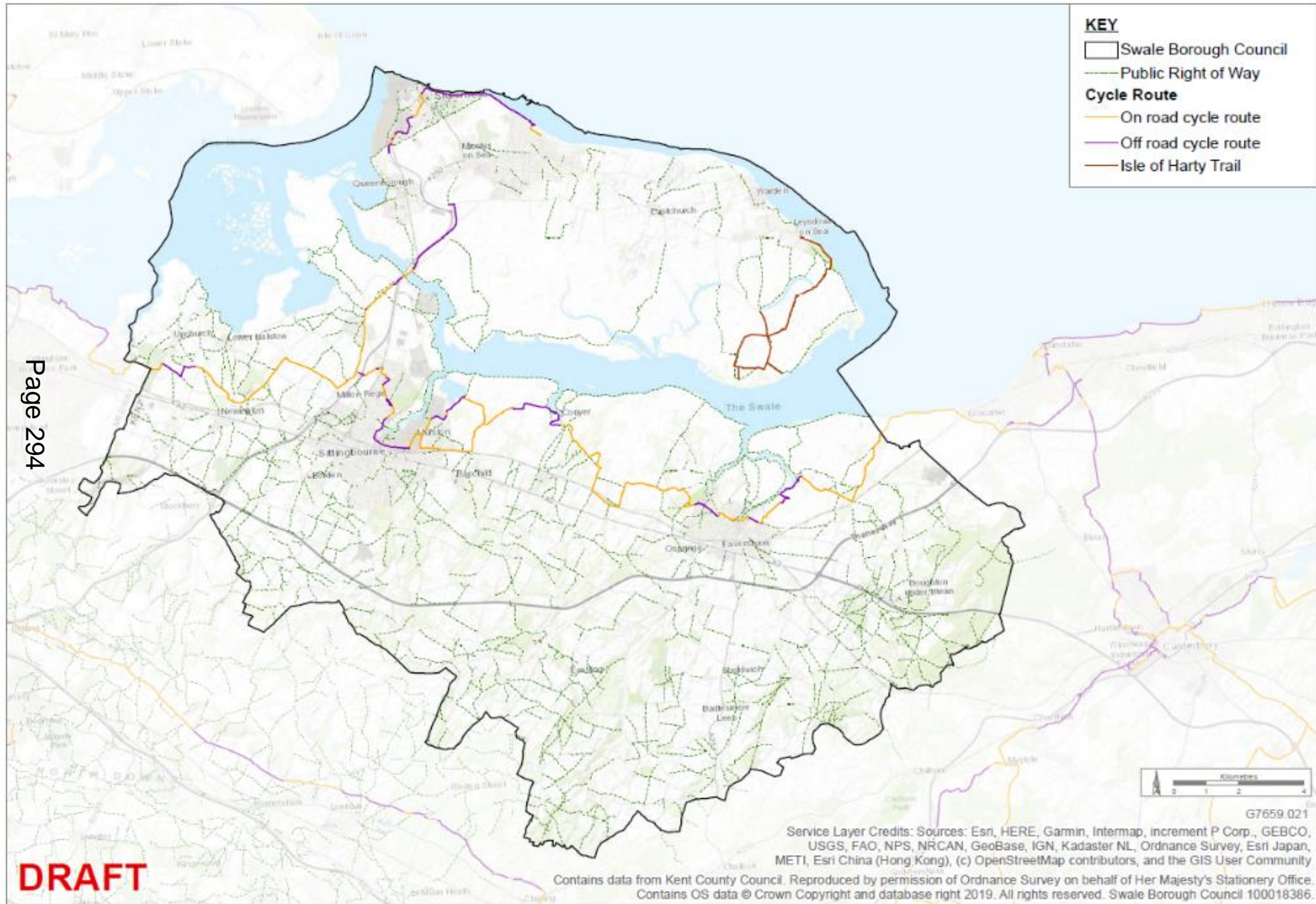
## Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy for Swale

- 5.76 Cycle connectivity between Faversham and Canterbury, in the neighbouring borough, is currently limited. NCN route 1 runs north east from Faversham, towards the Seasalter levels and entering Whitstable, before heading south towards Canterbury. A more direct route from Faversham could head south west from the market town, passing through the Blean Woodland where appropriate. Previous consultation with the public on cycle routes in Swale identified this more direct route as a project under high demand
- 5.77 Technology, such as wi-fi hotspots and activity tracking can make it easier and more attractive for people to plan visits using active travel<sup>10</sup>.

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<sup>10</sup> NHS England (2018). Healthy New Towns Programme

Figure 22: Existing public right of way and cycle network in Swale



## Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy for Swale

### *Better Management of Green Spaces*

- 5.78 At a local level, poorly managed spaces can become the focus for anti-social behaviour and cause feelings of social isolation and engagement in physical activity. It is important to not only improve the management of these spaces, but also promote local ownership over local green space to promote a better understanding and appreciation.
- 5.79 GBI does not only provide physical benefits for health, but also there is substantial evidence that GBI can have positive mental health benefits. 17.5% of Swale's population suffers from mental illness, so providing GBI alongside social prescribing which encourages interaction with nature and space for passive relaxation are essential in creating sustainable communities in our borough.

### *Encouraging Healthy Lifestyles*

- 5.80 Encouraging healthy physical activity is key to tackling some of the borough's health inequalities. We know that greener, more active lifestyles can have positive benefits for mental and physical health, reducing pressure on the NHS.

- 5.81 However, within Swale significant health inequalities exist, with an 11.7 year difference in life expectancy between the two ends of the deprivation scale (Figure 21) and the 2014 obesity rate was 20.9% in comparison to 24% for Canterbury and Coastal Kent. On the Isle of Sheppey, obesity levels in year six children were the highest for Swale in 2017/18<sup>11</sup>.
- 5.82 Being active every day increases overall quality of life, as well as having benefits such as reducing levels of social isolation, crime and antisocial behaviour. It is the quality not quantity of public parks and spaces that encourages people to be active, as well as ease of access. Those with access to a green space live longer than those without it<sup>12</sup> and the benefits increase for the least well off. Improving and creating green corridors and encouraging people to take greener routes to work and schools can help build physical activity into daily routines, supporting active living in the long term.
- 5.83 The public health sector in Swale currently provide health walks and forest schools which are popular among residents. Until recently, Swale had a health 'activator' in place on a three year funded programme which ended in 2019. The role of the activator was to take GP referrals, to get people into the outdoors, to tackle a range of health issues. Revisiting and reintroducing this idea would involve investigating how best to connect patients via their GP to link worker, to manage health conditions via activities which interest the person.

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<sup>11</sup> Kent Public Health Observatory Area Profiles

<sup>12</sup> Coombes E, Jones AP, Hillsdon M (2010) The relationship of physical activity and overweight to objectively measured green space accessibility and use. *Social Science & Medicine* 70: 816-822.

## Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy for Swale

5.84 Future funding avenues to restart this important work could include funding available for social prescribing under each emerging Primary care network, which will bring together local GP practices to cover populations of 30000+. At the county level, there are health trainers from “One You Kent” run by KCC who could assist in introducing people to green space activity from a health perspective.

5.85 Activities may involve gardening groups, exercise groups, ‘green’ and ‘blue’ gyms and conservation groups, all of which have been proven to improve individual wellbeing, physical and mental wellbeing and social relationships. See Section 6.0 Urban GBI for examples of where social prescribing initiatives are already underway in Swale’s key towns.

### *Outdoor Education and Community Involvement.*

5.86 Green and blue spaces can offer spaces to play and interact with nature, with proven mental and physical health benefits as well as child developmental benefits. Outdoor education within the setting of GBI, through Forest Schools, outdoor play and Citizen Science initiatives all provide rich opportunities for place-based education and ability to learn more about the local environment. Section 2.0 outlined where existing outdoor education opportunities are available in Swale, including Forest Schools in Milton Creek Country Park. Some schools already offer Forest Schools as part of the curriculum.

5.87 Proposals for expanding the offer of outdoor education is outlined further in Section 6.0 Urban GBI.

5.88 Green Gym can be free and enjoyable outdoor conservation activity sessions with an emphasis on health and fitness. Participants are guided in practical conservation activities.

5.89 In Kent, there are two registered Green Gyms at Ashford and Goudhurst, though there are currently no Green Gyms registered in Swale. The Faversham Urban GBI Strategy in Section 6.0 identifies some great non-registered outdoor gym groups already underway in the town, which have the potential to be expanded to involve conservation objectives. Establishing such a group centred in the larger settlements such as Sheerness, Faversham or Sittingbourne would provide an opportunity for communities to learn new skills whilst participating in exercise.

### *Improve Air Quality*

5.90 Clean air is one of the building blocks of the natural life support system. As mentioned earlier, Swale currently has five Air Quality Management Areas (AQMAs), four of which are in Sittingbourne and one in Faversham, suggesting that implementing GBI for maximum air quality benefits should be targeted within these spaces. Section 6.0 addresses proposed interventions in Swale’s towns which can contribute to improved air quality.

#### **Box 5.5: Green Gym**

##### **Case Study: Green Gym**

Green Gym is a scheme run by The Conservation Volunteers (TCV) with the purpose of getting people involved in outdoor exercise whilst improving the environment at the same time.

Volunteers are guided by experienced leaders to undertake a range of group-based conservation projects, learning practical skills, reducing social isolation and improving general fitness. All sessions are free, presenting no barriers to engagement. Projects may include planting trees, sowing seeds, establishing wildlife ponds and clearing play areas, all essential for a multi-functional GBI network.



## A Beacon for the Visitor Economy

- 5.91 When we think of some of the UK's destinations which attract visitors in their thousands, we do not only think of the built form such as the monuments, restaurants, theatres and museums but also the green spaces nearby. The most inviting tourist destinations are just as much determined by their green spaces as their built form, including great parks and gardens, tree-lined avenues and squares, waterside embankments and green, navigable cycle routes for seeing the sights. These examples highlight the importance of GBI for visitors and residents alike.
- 5.92 Tourism and the visitor economy is the fourth largest sector in terms of jobs and skills within Swale, and is a major source of income, jobs and wealth generation for the borough. The importance of tourism is recognised within the Local Plan and Corporate Plan. Swale's Visitor Economy Framework for Sittingbourne, Faversham and Isle of Sheppey 2018-2023 aims to increase the value of the visitor economy by 11.5% by 2023. The visitor market is becoming increasingly competitive, and there is an opportunity to grow the market share from visitors from further afield by creating a unique visitor experience.
- 5.93 Only in the last two years have funds been allocated to manage the Visitor Economy in Swale, which is now a corporate priority. Well-planned and integrated GBI is recognised as one factor in meeting this corporate priority, in terms of contributing to a sense of place, enhancing visitor experience and creating attractive, relaxing environments to enhance the unique selling points of Swale. Well-designed GBI can reduce seasonality of visitor demand and contribute to generating year-round, sustainable tourism.

- 5.94 Though this section focuses on the Visitor Economy, the previous three opportunity areas, particularly a 'Green and Biodiverse Borough' and a 'Connected, Healthy and Active Swale' outline opportunities for enhancing the environment for a thriving economy in general. The recommendations in this chapter align with, and provide more detail with reference to GBI, to the recommendations set out in Swale's Visitor Economy Framework (VEF) 2018-2023. The VEF largely focuses on infrastructure and public realm improvements, though this GBI Strategy addresses the value in going beyond these measures for the enhancement and resilience of Swale's visitor economy.

### Visitor Gateways

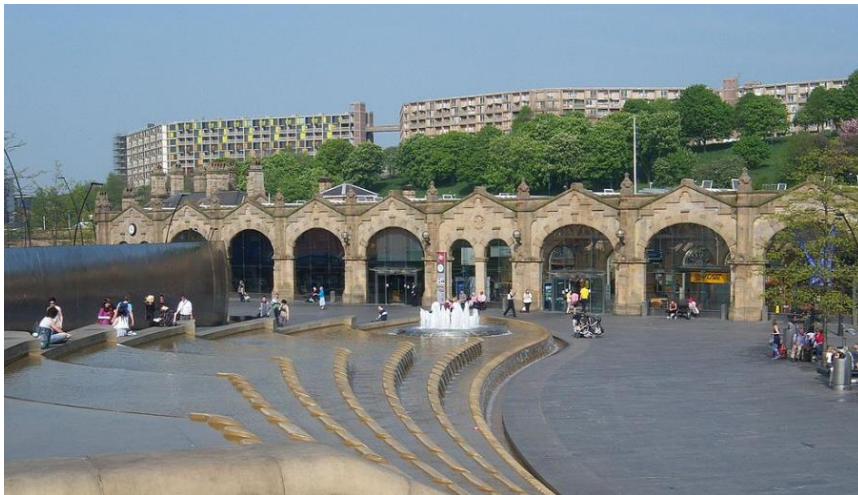
- 5.95 Gateways are a key economic priority as they welcome visitors to Swale and contribute to first impressions. Gateways to the towns of Sittingbourne, Faversham and Sheerness have been identified within the Urban GBI Strategies.
- 5.96 At a borough level, strategic gateways key tourist entry points would enhance approaches into the borough and key towns for visitors, whilst developing clear entrances and gateways to provide a strong sense of arrival. The precedent images below show the integration of GBI at key arrival points in other UK towns. The use of 'blue infrastructure' at Sheffield train station has multiple other benefits such as noise buffering from the adjacent A-road.
- 5.97 Key borough gateways have been identified to include:
- Sittingbourne Railway Station (see Section 6.0 Urban GBI Strategies)

## Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy for Swale

- A2 travelling west into the borough at the Blean Woodlands
- A2 travelling east into the borough, to the east of Rainham



*Precedent Town Centre Gateway Enhancements, Greenock*



*Precedent Town Centre Gateway Enhancements, Sheffield Train Station*

### *Promote Awareness of Swale's greenspaces and other outdoor attractions*

5.98 It is widely recognised that high-quality greenspace can support the success of the visitor economy by encouraging visits through the creation of attractive destination imagery. Accessible green spaces also provide opportunity for art and culture, play and relaxation, sport, wildlife-watching, events and celebrations, all attractive to visitors.

5.99 One aspect of promoting active travel to Swale's visitors is through investing in the right marketing tools. Working with train operators and other key partners can encourage visitors to travel to Swale by train. Visit Kent, and the Culture and Places Officer at SBC have already been working to encourage Greater London residents and other nearby towns to visit the borough, drawing on the coast and countryside as key selling points. See the case study for the 'Summer in Kent' Initiative. Drawing on the success of the Summer in Kent campaign, which is due to run each year, there is potential to rollout additional campaigns attracting a wide range of people to Swale from the surrounding boroughs. For example, Swale has much on offer for families, such as the Blue Flag beaches, Coastal Parks and Heritage Trails. Marketing the natural beauty of Swale as an exciting day trip or short break for families looking for an active trip is an option to enhance the visitor economy.

## Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy for Swale

### Enable and Promote Active Travel For Visitors

5.100 Encouraging visitors to come and explore the natural beauty and cultural heritage of Swale is one thing, but enabling them to access the attractions that Swale has to offer in a sustainable way is another.

5.101 On arrival by train, visitors must be confident that they can travel easily within the borough, highlighting the importance of integrated sustainable transport. The importance of presenting Sittingbourne Railway Station as a gateway is also reinforced, using GBI to enhance a sense of arrival. Gateway features may include a 'manned' pop-up information booth and a coffee barrister, presenting opportunities for work experience and interns. Cycle hire and information about key tourism routes should be provided at all arrival railway stations. Further detail is addressed within the Urban GBI Strategies for enhancing the arrival experience of visitors to Swale's towns.

5.102 There are many walking and cycling routes already on offer, so their promotion is key to make visitors feel they can easily visit what Swale has to offer without the need for a car. Explore Kent has developed a cycling and walking map, which highlights a number of routes on the Isle of Sheppey waiting to be explored, and can be found on Visit Swale's website<sup>13</sup>. These routes include the Isle of Harty Trail and the Sheerness Way.

5.103 Just like green corridors can connect homes, workplaces and schools, greenspace corridors and networks also have a role to play in encouraging visitors to travel within and between tourism areas. Swale's main tourism assets are mapped on Figure 23, with potential sustainable transport connections shown indicatively.

5.104 Though not the most sustainable of travel options, car parks also contribute to the arrival experience of visitors. In Swale's car parks, where appropriate, there may be scope for inserting additional greening without affecting overall capacity. This would improve visual quality, civic pride and sense of arrival, whilst also having benefits for biodiversity and drainage.

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<sup>13</sup> <https://www.visit-swale.co.uk/visit-swale-blog/dust-off-your-bike-to-explore-sheppey-this-sparkling-winter/>

**Box 5.6: Summer in Kent**

**Case Study: Summer in Kent**

‘Summer in Kent’ was a short 4 month campaign, run between June and September 2019, to attract visitors to Kent, including Swale. The campaign was overseen by Visit Kent, and aimed at attracting residents from London to Swale, to ‘experience the great outdoors’, highlighting the natural beauty of the coast and countryside on offer in Swale.

A key part of the campaign was a partnership with train providers, to encourage visitors to Kent by train.

The target market was fairly narrow, with premier tourist destination hotspots picked out to attract a specific market.

**Calling all the taste makers...**

With a beautiful blend of blue flag beaches, marvellous market towns made for Instagram, gourmet delights at every corner, and a nature reserve offering the chance to spend the night under soul-stirring skies; escape the rat race, unwind and indulge in a unique summer escape to Faversham, Sittingbourne and the Isle of Sheppey...

*Faversham, Sittingbourne and The Isle of Sheppey*

*Marketing Text for Swale, found on Visit Kent's 'Summer in Kent' webpage (Source: Visit Kent, 2019)*

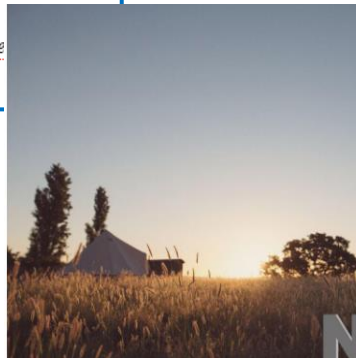
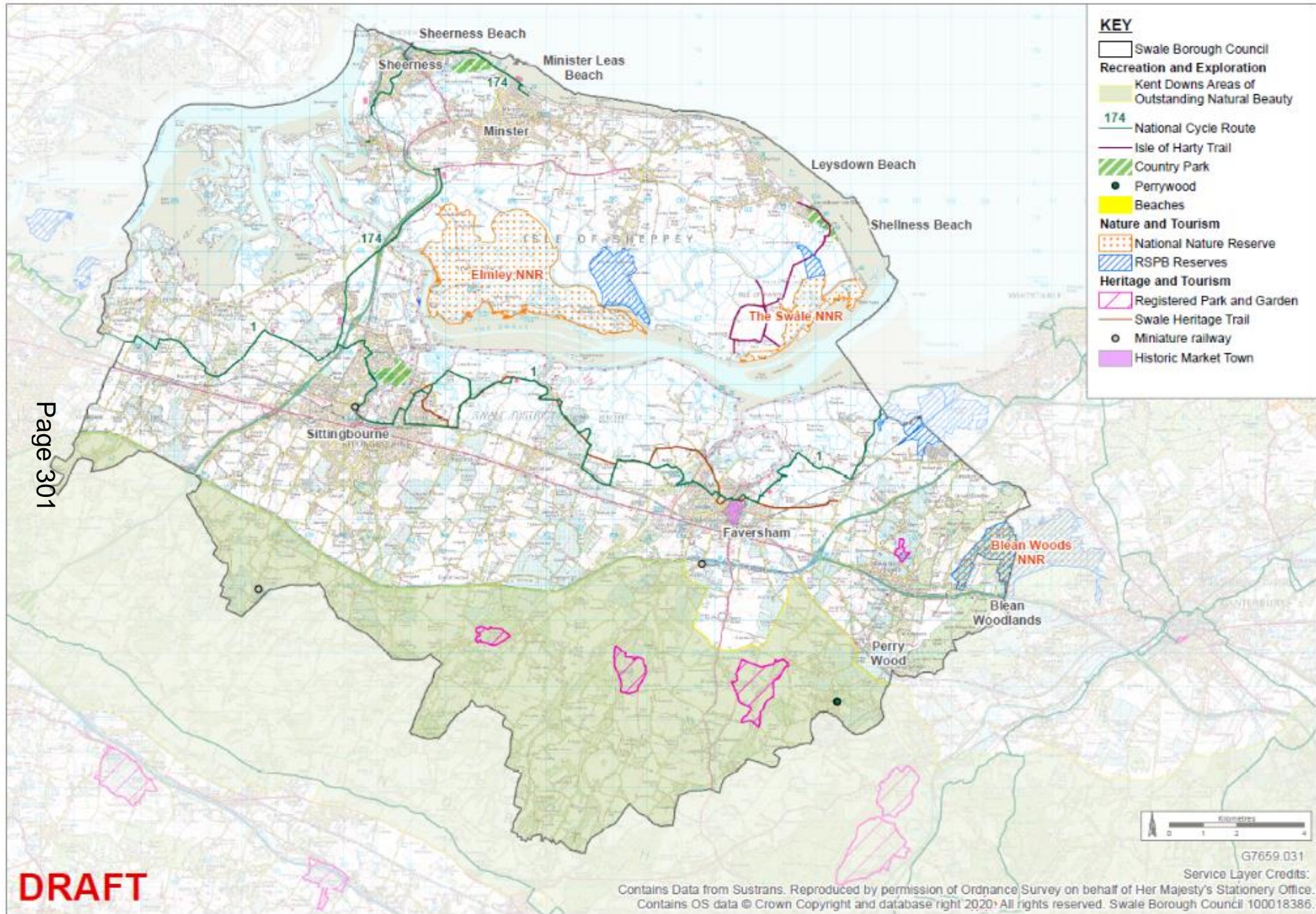


Figure 23: GBI Visitor Economy Assets



## Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy for Swale

### A Setting for Cultural Heritage Assets

5.105 Swale's historic environment is exceptional in its diversity and quality. The borough is home to over 1430 listed building, 50 conservation areas, 4 Historic Parks & Gardens and 22 Scheduled Monuments. Ensuring that everyone can make the most of the historic environment, whether that be through making it accessible or enhancing assets, is a priority within Swale set out in adopted local policy.

5.106 Just by their nature, many historic assets are associated with GBI including parks and woodlands. GBI should be integrated into building form in a way which celebrates and enhances the many heritage assets that Swale has on offer. Planning for GBI with heritage in mind can create attractive, accessible settings for the enjoyment of heritage assets for recreation and education, whilst raising awareness of Swale's rich history.

5.107 Many of Swale's historic assets were once inextricably linked to their settings. Where this is no longer the case due to urbanisation, the restoration of severed links using GBI linkages and corridors can create accessible, educational corridors. An existing network linking heritage features is the Swale Heritage Trail running between Murston and Goodnestone, running parallel with The Swale, incorporating a section of the Saxon Shore Way. The trail passes through the Little Murston Nature Reserve at the start of the route, through the market town of Faversham and along the creeks at Conyer, Oare and Faversham, passing my many features of historic interest.

5.108 There is potential to improve gateways to the Swale Heritage Trail. At the beginnings of the trail at Church Road, Sittingbourne, the trail soon heads past the remains of Murston Old Church on the banks of Milton Creek, which was once hoped to act as a 'gateway' to the trail. The work of Murston All Saints Trust (MAST) in raising funds to bring back the medieval church grounds into a green oasis should be celebrated and supported. Within the proposals, the role creating a 'community hub' within the church grounds should not be overlooked for its role in providing an inviting and lively gateway to the trail.



*Murston Old Church and surrounding churchyard*

### Enhance Connections to the AONB

5.109 The section of the Kent Downs AONB which lies in Swale is already home to many visitor attractions. Within the AONB as a whole, there are twelve local authorities so cross border partnerships is key for ensuring sustainable access and use of the AONB by visitors.

## Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy for Swale

- 5.110 In general, the AONB should be celebrated and promoted as an asset to the borough, accessible using a network of country lanes and PRow, with plentiful recreational opportunities. Ensuring visitors and residents recognise the proximity of Swale's key towns to the AONB should be a priority, whilst ensuring that visitors to the AONB do not have to travel by car, and there are alternative options. The southern extents of Faversham for example lie in the setting of the AONB, and ease of access on foot and by bicycle is key. Currently, there are no clear, marked routes to access the AONB.
- 5.111 Being just 1km north from the AONB, Faversham can act as a 'gateway town' into the AONB, to channel visitors or local populations to use the AONB as an area for recreation. Future projects could encourage appropriate facilities and information to enable people to sustainably access the nearby AONB.
- 5.112 The AONB within Swale is already home to many assets, visited regularly by visitors and residents alike. Three of Swale's four Grade II Listed Registered Parks and Gardens (RPGs) are in the AONB including Doddington Place, surrounded by 36 hectares of gardens, Belmont Park and Leeds Court. Each is within 3km of one another, though sustainable travel between each tourism asset is not currently maximised. A joint ticket for all three parks could be explored, with a mapped cycle route between each RPG, with appropriate cycle parking, to encourage exploration of the wider area.
- 5.113 The section of the Kent Downs AONB which is in Swale is home to a vast network of orchards, separated by expansive arable fields. The Kent Downs AONB Unit are keen to see the AONB continue as productive farmland, but it must be managed sustainably, allowing for biodiversity to flourish.
- 5.114 Stakeholder consultation revealed how more of Swale's farmers are looking to diversify into vineyards. The promotion of vineyards as tourist assets would support this diversification by Swale's farmers. It is expected that the Kent Downs AONB Unit will conduct research into how best vineyards can be managed as part of the AONB landscape to ensure they are immersed into the surroundings. This research will also aim to investigate how larger vineyards can be connected via cycle paths, to create a visitor economy attraction, enabling visitors to stop off multiple times on route to sample local wine. Forthcoming research will inform the approach to this potential link between the visitor economy and the natural landscapes of the AONB.
- 5.115 More widely, the development of sustainable visitor facilities should be supported where appropriate, to create 'hubs' for visitors where needed. As neighbouring boroughs such as Maidstone are covered by larger proportions of the Kent Downs AONB, it is appropriate to work collaboratively across borders to establish hubs in the most appropriate locations.

## Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy for Swale

5.116 Many of the rural roads through the AONB are narrow, with tall vegetation creating blind bends, raising safety issue for cyclists and pedestrians and therefore a barrier to accessing the AONB in a way other than the car. Informal passing places have been created in many places, caused by repeated wear and tear of rural lane boundaries, which cause erosion of natural landscape features and habitat loss. The designation of a 'quiet lanes' network, similar to those proposed in the neighbouring borough of Maidstone would assist in connecting up the fragmented network of PRow, and increase safety for pedestrians and cyclists by reducing traffic flow on narrow, rural lanes. A quiet lanes network would include traffic restrictions and one way systems to slow the flow of vehicles.

5.117 There is a need for baseline survey information, to understand how residents and visitors alike are currently accessing the AONB. From here, proposals for more integrated, well-signposted routes from Swale's urban areas to the AONB.

### Promote Eco-Tourism

5.118 Eco-tourism is now defined as 'responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment, sustains the well-being of the local people, and involves interpretation and education' (TIES, 2015<sup>14</sup>). In Swale, eco-tourism has been recognised as one way of limiting recreational pressure on the borough's valued internationally designated wildlife sites, whilst still allowing visitors to explore these areas in a sustainable way.

5.119 In Swale, the diversification of Elmley Nature Reserve (introduced in Section 2.0) to an eco-tourist resort is one example of where this has been done well. The continued diversification into the eco-tourism market should be promoted across the borough as a whole.

### **Urban GBI**

5.120 The following sections of the GBI Strategy develops three urban GBI strategies for Sittingbourne, Faversham and Sheerness and Minster. Each urban GBI Strategy is tailored towards the specific needs of the locality in terms of where investment in GI will support the growth of each town and deliver the widest public benefits, environmental improvements and enhancement of each town's economy.

5.121 Swale is experiencing an expanding urban population, with large increases in young people and families. 58% of Swale's population are urban based (Local Plan, 2017), primarily located around the A2 corridor, which exerts an urban influence on the character of this part of the Borough. With an increasing urban population, comes pressures on existing green spaces due to growth and infill development. It is necessary to ensure that the distance between people and the natural environment is not perceived to increase.

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<sup>14</sup> <https://ecotourism.org/what-is-ecotourism/>



## Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy for Swale

5.122 Though the benefits of GBI are the same in urban areas as elsewhere, the multiple benefits can often be felt more strongly due to higher population and traffic densities, and opportunities for connectivity and active travel. Business centres are concentrated in the towns of Sheerness, Faversham and Sittingbourne, so the potential benefits of GBI to Swale's economy in these locations should not be overlooked due to factors such as the need for reduced stress levels and increased health and wellbeing.

5.123 Planning GBI close to people's living environments, tailored to local interest and specific demands can also help to foster local stewardship and long term management.

5.124 The aim of the Urban GI Strategies is to advise on a range of GBI interventions in Swale's main towns to respond to the need under the four themes of the Strategy, which were introduced in Section 5:

- A Green and Biodiverse Borough
- A Healthy Blue Environment
- A Connected, Active and Healthy Swale
- A Beacon for the Visitor Economy

5.125 Guided by a review of best practice, policy and mapping of the existing GBI resource in Swale's urban environments (See Sections 2 and 4), a number of objectives to guide the planning and implementation of GBI initiatives across all of Swale's urban environments have been developed. These objectives align with the aims of the four themes, and include:

### **A Green and Biodiverse Borough**

1. Identify opportunities for town centre greening (using native species where feasible)
2. Increase urban tree planting for corridor greening

3. Optimise existing parks and green spaces to create multi-functional, useable spaces
4. Promote provision of multifunctional GBI in new development including both residential and employment uses

### **A Healthy Blue Environment**

1. Consider opportunities for Sustainable Drainage Systems – recognise work of the BEGIN project in creating flagship projects, note link to community engagement and stewardship
2. Develop opportunities to improve water quality
3. Protect, enhance and enable sustainable access to the wide range of waterways and water based habitats

### **A Healthy, Connected and Active Swale**

1. Recommend active travel routes linking residential areas to schools, work and public transport hubs for both physical and mental health benefits and social interaction
2. Encourage community participation and engagement through GBI initiatives
3. Promote healthy play and leisure
4. Enable access to affordable healthy food and food growing

### **A Beacon for the Visitor Economy**

1. Promote high quality gateway spaces at arrival points in town centres
2. Recommend active travel routes from public transport hubs to visitor attractions
3. Optimise areas of high townscape value through GBI to enhance heritage features

## Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy for Swale

5.126 The proposals and actions described in Section 6.0 have been informed by the evidence base and stakeholder consultation for the Swale GBI Strategy. They are indicative and would be subject to further detailed design, consultation and approval which is outside the scope of this study.

### Urban Fringe GBI Enhancement Zones

5.127 Where land is allocated for housing in Sittingbourne, it is predominantly on the town's urban fringes, resulting in potential changes to spatial patterns of population and demographic patterns, and pressure on existing GBI resources. Each Urban GBI Strategy outlined in this document presents areas within Swale's urban fringes, some of which are allocated for development, which have the potential to deliver a range of benefits by improving access and quality of GBI for a range of benefits. These opportunities could be achieved through the planning and development process.

## 6.0 GBI IN SITTINGBOURNE

See Separate Document 7659.018

# 7.0 GBI IN FAVERSHAM

See Separate Document 7659.018

8.0 GBI IN SHEERNESS AND  
MINSTER

| See Separate Document 7659.018

## 9.0 GBI IN DEVELOPMENT

- 9.1 As highlighted in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) the planning system has a crucial role to play in the implementation of GI, aiming to maximise design quality, environmental sustainability and ecological networks while enabling developers to achieve their objectives.
- 9.2 To avoid incremental loss of GI, development should proceed on a 'net-gain' principle; this should be in terms of the quantity of GI and its functionality. The GBI checklist, on the next page, sets out the requirements for planners and developers to help ensure that GBI is considered in all decisions affecting Swale's environment.
- 9.3 GBI should be seen as critical infrastructure in the same way as utilities or local transport networks. If it can be incorporated at the start of a project it is possible to achieve substantial cost savings through combining uses and creating multi-functionality. It can also improve the design, layout and appearance of a scheme.
- 9.4 Developers should be engaged in early discussions with the local authority regarding on site GBI provision so the costs of the expected high standards of quality and quantity of GBI can be accounted for by the developer in their land purchase negotiations.
- 9.5 The checklist provides a summary of the Green Infrastructure (GI) requirements for development in Swale. It consists of strategic and site specific considerations.

### Planning Conditions and Obligations

- 9.6 GI can be delivered as a co-product of investment in new or refurbished infrastructure. Development creates opportunities in the form of new or improved assets as well as threats related to the loss, damage or other alteration of environmental features. This justifies seeking contributions from developers to assist in both the continuing management of existing GI assets and in the creation of new assets – particularly where deficiencies have been identified.
- 9.7 Planning conditions allow the Council to direct, control and manage sustainable development patterns in accordance with its planning policy.
- 9.8 Planning obligations traditionally take the form of Section 106 (s106) agreements. These are private agreements negotiated between local planning authorities and persons with an interest in a piece of land (usually in the context of planning applications), and are intended to make acceptable development which would otherwise be unacceptable in planning terms.
- 9.9 Section 106 agreements can provide land and long-term funding for the implementation of new greenspace assets and improvements

**GBI Checklist**

Step 1: Consider the GBI opportunities and benefits that the proposed development could bring to Swale	Understand the site's importance for all aspects of GI. Identifying existing aspects of GI both on and off site through survey which may be affected by development It is important to consider the users of the development and the of GBI benefits that could be provided. Different types of development provide different opportunities for GBI (including SuDS). Residential development provides the opportunity for open space creation for recreation, connectivity to wildlife and flood resilience. Other types of development may present opportunities to link to strategic cycle routes and footpaths to encourage visitors and workers use sustainable modes of transport.
Step 2: Identify the GBI assets within and near the proposed development	Evaluate the site in terms of all GI constraints and opportunities. Utilise survey information to evaluate the constraints on the development caused by present GI and opportunities for enhancement of GI. Identify GBI assets within 1km of the proposed development, including aquatic and terrestrial habitats, ecological designated sites, heritage sites, Public Rights of Ways (PRoW), cycle routes. Maps of all GBI assets can be found in the GBI Strategy
Step 3: Review the Local Plan and it's evidence base e.g. Swale GBI Strategy	Review the Swale Borough Council's Local Plan and evidence base to understand development requirements as well as opportunities to contribute to projects within local plans and strategies. Planning policies and strategies can be found here: x The evidence base is saved here: x
Step 4: Designing for GBI	To involve the safeguarding of GI assets already present on site. The mitigation of any GI loss to ensure net gains for GI functions such as accessible green space and habitats for wildlife. Securing long term management and governance arrangements for GI on and where relevant off site.
Step 5: Identify opportunities for meeting Swale's GBI opportunities	Consider the information gathered from Steps 1 - 4 to understand how the proposed development can deliver the following GBI opportunities for Swale: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A Green and Biodiverse Borough</li> <li>• A Healthy Blue Environment</li> <li>• A Connected, Active and Healthy Swale</li> <li>• A Beacon for the Visitor Economy</li> </ul> Reinforce Strategic GI functions. Look to address deficiencies in local and borough wide GI networks where feasible. Seek to ensure active access linkages from the development to GI Networks
Step 6: Carry out pre-application discussions with Swale Borough Council	Swale Borough Council recommends applicants engage with the Council prior to submitting a planning application so that they can provide feedback and advice regarding the type of development, design and layout. Pre-application discussions provide the setting to discuss opportunities to improve the quality of GBI where low quality GBI assets are reduced in size due to proposed development. Post implementation maintenance arrangements for GBI schemes should be discussed.
Step 7: Submit planning application	GBI proposals should be clearly outlined within the planning application. Information about what to submit with your application form is here: x

## 10.0 DELIVERING THE STRATEGY

10.1 The vision of the Strategy and proposals outlined throughout this document need to be translated into action. The planning, design, management and maintenance of GBI is the responsibility of many different organisations, and to achieve most success, the strategy must be delivered in partnership.

### **The Partnership Approach**

10.2 While the Council may maintain a commitment to leadership, it cannot deliver this agenda on its own. Therefore, existing or new partnership arrangements should be considered to take this Strategy forward, benefitting from the advantage in leading a coordinated approach.

10.3 The Green Grid Partnership is an example of a project grouping that already exists, which could take an important role going forward in leading a wider partnership. The existing organisational relationships within the Green Grid can lay a strong foundation for projects going forward, whilst drawing in wider stakeholders and community groups.

10.4 A central co-ordinating role must be supported by partners taking the role of delivery leads and partners based on the nature of the project in relation to expertise and available resources. The partners that will be integral to the delivery of the Plan include, but are not limited to:

- Swale Borough Council
- Kent County Council
- Natural England
- Historic England

- Statutory Agencies – Environment Agency, Forestry Commission
- Kent Wildlife Trust
- RSPB
- Sustrans
- Kent Downs AONB Unit
- Kent and Medway Clinical Commissioning Group
- Landowners
- Volunteer Groups
- Other non-for-profit organisations
- Neighbouring Local Authorities
- Local Communities
- Education Providers

### **Delivery Mechanisms**

#### *GBI Manager or Co-ordinator*

10.5 Given the multi-functional nature of GBI, decisions and actions span many departments within SBC including green space management, culture and places and environment and landscapes. KCC has a role in implementing GBI projects in relation to highways and SuDS.

10.6 To assist in centralising and co-ordinating the approach to implementing the GBI Strategy, there is opportunity to create the role of GBI Co-ordinator to support the delivery of the strategy and allocate responsibilities. The GBI Co-ordinator would be aware of all that GBI has to offer, and co-ordinate between different local authority departments. They may act as a first point of contact for other delivery partners, engaging with stakeholders, planners and seek funding for future GBI projects.



## Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy for Swale

### *Land Management Incentives*

- 10.7 The majority of land that will form part of the GBI network falls outside the ownership of SBC and partners, which makes successful engagement with landowners vital for delivery.
- 10.8 Farming is a key sector for Swale and 49% of the borough's land is in agricultural use. Many landowners already manage lands productively through growing crops, grazing livestock, orchards and producing timber. The management of these landscapes can provide a vital part of maintaining many key ecosystem services such as food production, reduction in flood risk and wildlife corridors.
- 10.9 The participation of landowners in schemes to deliver GBI opportunities and priorities may require an initial investment, though there are likely to be long term cost savings. It is therefore important that incentives are available to cover initial costs, without affecting the viability of business. There are many grants available such as the Natural England agri-environment scheme and the Forestry Commission English Woodland Grant Scheme.

### *Development Management*

- 10.10 Section 7.0 covers GBI in Development in more detail. However, in summary, there are two main mechanisms by which financial contribution to GI can be secured from new proposed development through the planning process:
- Section 106 (of the Town and Country Planning Act) – for where GBI mitigation is required to counter a direct effect on a community or GBI feature

- Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) – payable towards to cost of local and sub-regional GBI

- 10.11 SBC can draw on both these mechanisms to secure future investment in GBI. Development should be required to deliver GBI enhancements on site wherever possible, and off site where not appropriate.
- 10.12 Decision makers at SBC, including Council Members, have a significant influence in the outcomes of planning applications. Being well informed about the roles and benefits of GBI is therefore essential to make a well-evidenced decision. It is recommended that SBC prepare a training package, whether that be through training sessions or online tools, which outlines the importance of GBI in terms of sustainable development, and its social, environmental and economic benefits. Key points may also include costs and maintenance issues.
- 10.13 Bird Wise otherwise known as the Strategic Access Management and Monitoring Scheme (SAMMS) is an existing partnership between local authorities in North Kent, developers and environmental organisations. It consists of a tariff mechanism for to generate payments for new residential development, which is then invested in rangers at Swale SPA, the delivery of educational programmes and encouraging responsible use of the SPA through signposting. The tariff scheme is based on the premise that an increased population will likely increase recreational pressure on the SPA. The annual monitoring reports for the Bird Wise scheme should inform the allocation of developer funds.

## Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy for Swale

### Policy

10.14 SBC is currently at an early stage in the preparation of the Emerging Local Plan which will cover the period 2022-2038. This GBI Strategy forms part of the evidence base for the new Local Plan.

10.15 Local Plan policy will be a major means of implementing the GBI Strategy, which is a material consideration in planning decisions.

### Community Initiatives

10.16 Continued growth of local forums, such as Friends of Milton Creek, could assist community involvement in and ownership of GI. The rollout of social prescribing initiatives through organisations like Red Zebra and the continued growth of Abbey Physic Community Garden can help enable community involvement by providing opportunities. The Council will actively seek the involvement of schools and communities in looking after the environment.

10.17 Volunteers have a significant supporting role in the delivery of GBI projects and ongoing stewardship, but realistic expectations need to be made of their capacity. Further investment or training may be required to provide guidance and increase skillsets. As outlined in Section 6.0 for example, significant works to counter the silting of Stonebridge Pond will be needed in future, beyond the capacity and resources of the Friends of Milton Creek and Stonebridge Pond Community Group. This would require funding and assistance from partner organisations such as the Environment Agency.

### Investment and Finance

10.18 Investing in GBI is often seen as a public sector activity, with SBC having been creating and managing parks and green spaces for many years. More recently, SBC has received grant funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) for the regeneration and improvements to Milton Creek Country Park and Faversham Recreation Ground. Public funding has also been supplemented in more recent years through developers by planning obligations such as Section 106 Agreements (S106). Whilst SBC and the planning system will continue to support investment in GBI, the tightening of public funds means that additional funding sources are required.

10.19 Table 7 lists the broad classes of investor and the types of GBI most likely to be of interest to each. Achieving a step-change in funding activity for GBI will require the blending of approaches, often termed 'blended finance' (Figure 7). The aim is to ensure that sufficient investment is available without an over-reliance on one funding source.

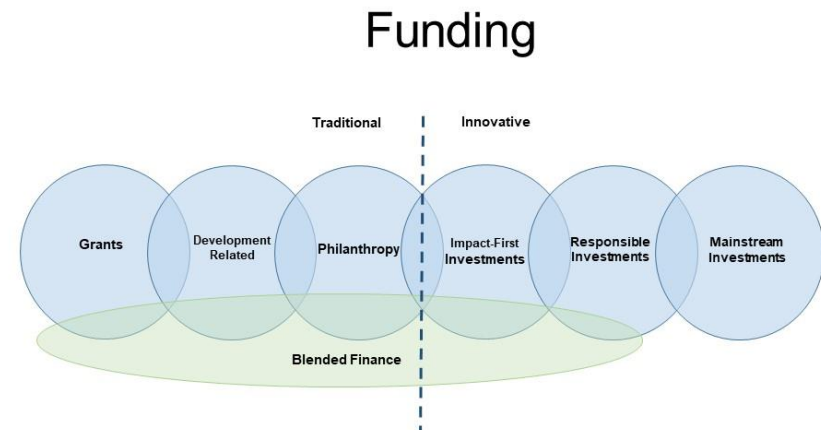


Figure 7 - Blended Finance Diagram<sup>1</sup>

## Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy for Swale

Table X: Types of Potential Investors in GBI

<b>Table X – Investors</b>						
<b>Investor type</b>	<b>Investor</b>	<b>Form</b>	<b>Typical size</b>	<b>Expectation</b>	<b>Term</b>	<b>Readiness to invest</b>
Public	Central and Local Government	Project funding Capacity building De-risking other investors Dedication of land and assets	Variable	Nil financial return Cost savings Public goods Delivery of statutory objectives	Variable	Yes, but budgets limited. Often have limited agency over land and assets
Philanthropist	Trusts Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) Funds linked to lottery/levies Individuals	Project funding Capacity building De-risking other investors Dedication of land and assets Voluntary offsetting	£5k - £500K	No expectation of financial return Potentially patient equity Publicity	Variable	High levels of interest in exploring repayable finance models and impact investment. General decline in charitable giving but uplift in offsetting
Obligated	Developers offsetting impacts	Project funding from obligated mitigation payments (S106) and CIL	£5k - £100K	Nil financial return Publicity	3 to 5 years	Yes, required through planning policy
Impact Investor	Social Investors	Debt investment or some equity	£150k - £1m	Repayment of principal plus 2-10% return	3-5 years	Most investment in social impact projects, little track record in environmental projects
Corporate	Water companies Insurance companies Infrastructure developers Commercial companies	CSR Initiatives Voluntary mitigation payments Debt or equity investment	£100k - £5m	Repayment of principal plus 2-10% return Cost savings in delivery of statutory or corporate objectives Increased resilience of built infrastructure	3 to 10 years	Yes, but projects must meet investor-specific criteria which may be influenced by regulatory agreements as to scope of project and limit to funding

10.20 The range of potential external funding sources is still extensive, including various Lottery funding streams, government grants such as Natural England’s Environmental Stewardship scheme, Landfill Tax, developer contributions through Section 106 Agreements, and the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL). Some further potential funding mechanisms are outlined below.

### *Green Infrastructure Fund*

10.21 The Council could stimulate some of this activity by establishing a Green Infrastructure Fund (GIF) investing in key initiatives to unlock potential or in leveraging additional funding or engagement. A GIF could provide a mechanism to draw in private sector or philanthropic funds alongside public sector investment.

### Tourism

10.22 One of the Opportunity Areas identified within the GBI Strategy is the Visitor Economy. The visitor pay-back model is based on the concept of visitors 'valuing' the destination. Swale has many valued landscapes with opportunities to enhance the visitor experience through GBI. According to Visit England, Visitor Payback is a simple way of inviting voluntary donations from visitors, inspiring them to put something back into looking after the places they love to visit<sup>15</sup>.

### **Publicising the GBI Strategy**

10.23 To secure investment, and ensure that GBI proposals meet local need, the publicising the GBI Strategy is a vital stage of delivery. This may involve the use of the council's web site and other electronic means. Not only should the Strategy itself be promoted, but engagement should also seek to engage the public and organisations to give opinions and ideas for local GI.

### **Monitoring and Evaluation**

10.24 Monitoring and evaluation is key to demonstrate the success of investments in GBI, to communicate and advocate for investment.

10.25 An annual monitor and review of the strategy and actions is recommended. This will include analysis of where proposals and targets have been met, as well as provide the recommendations necessary to ensure that the GBI Strategy continues to be effective and successful. Some indicators of evaluating success may include:

- Increasing the number of parks which have Green Flag Status;
- Increase in tree and woodland cover;
- Reduction in pollution levels around towns;
- Soil productivity;
- Health and wellbeing indicators such as reduction in obesity or respiratory and cardiovascular conditions

10.26 The Council should align monitoring with the targets of the borough's Climate and Ecological Emergency Action Plan (2020), Defra's Sustainable Development Indicators and/or the Government's 25 Year Environment Plan.

### **Management of GBI**

10.27 It should be agreed between project partners early on as to who is responsible for the legacy and upkeep of an element of GBI once the initial installation or enhancement works are complete. Costs must be clearly identified at the design stage and built into the project plan.

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[https://www.visitengland.com/sites/default/files/downloads/visitor\\_giving\\_helpsheets.pdf](https://www.visitengland.com/sites/default/files/downloads/visitor_giving_helpsheets.pdf)

10.28 The role of management may come down to a number of partners:

- Local Authority
- A Trust
- Charity
- Volunteer Organisation
- Community Group
- Management Company

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1.0 Introduction

2.0



3.0

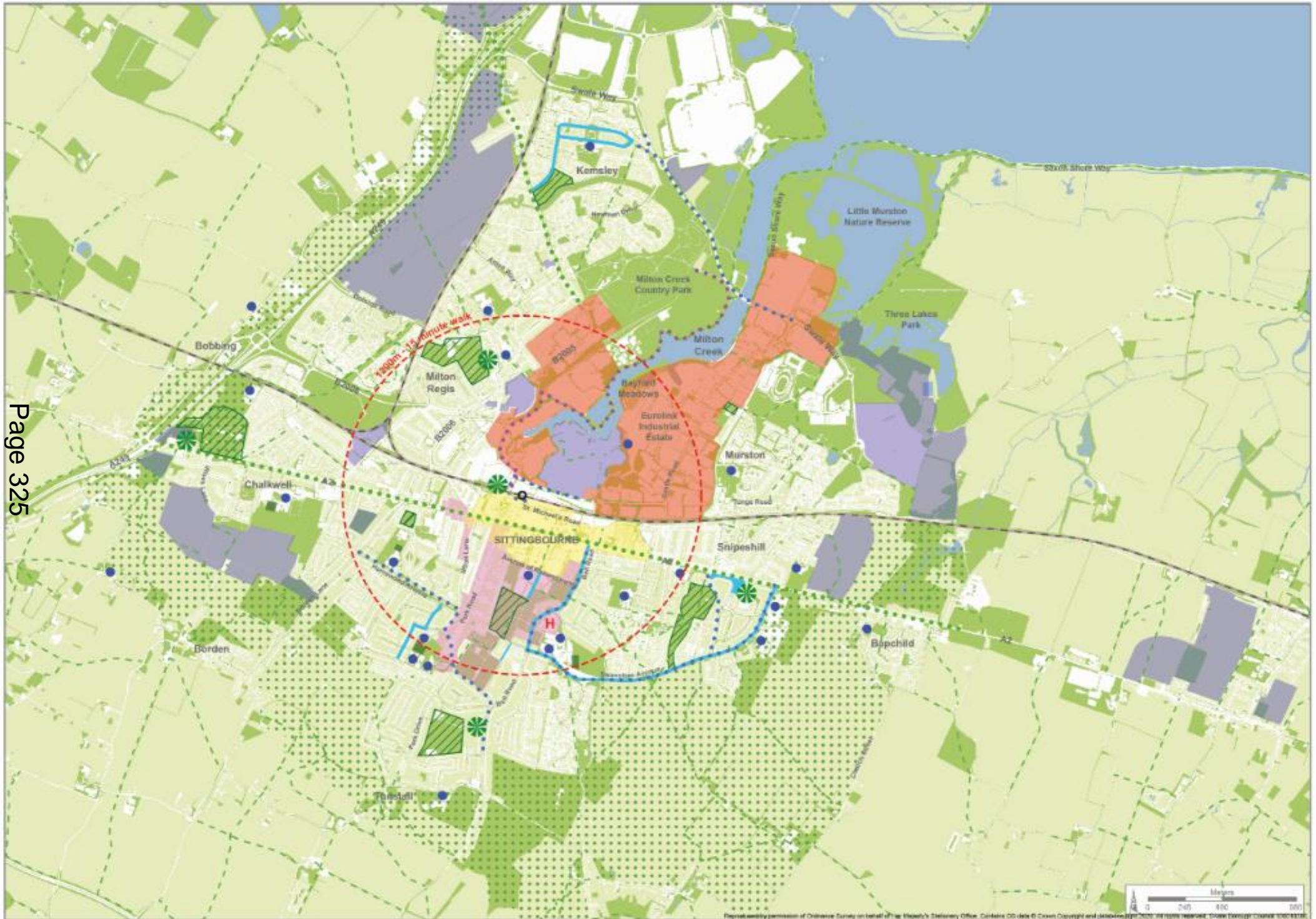
4.0

5.0

## 6.0 GBI in Sittingbourne








- 6.1 As mentioned earlier, Sittingbourne is Swale's main town, and primary employment and service centre. Accordingly, it is the most populated of Swale's three main towns, with a population of approximately 42,000 people. The town centre is orientated on an east-west axis with the historic High Street comprising a central point and providing retail services. Sittingbourne Retail Park lies to the north of the town off the B2006 Eurolink Way.
- 6.2 Once an industrial town, Sittingbourne now has a large commuter base for people working in London as the town has a high speed rail link to London St Pancras, providing opportunities to enhance the multiple benefits of Sittingbourne's accessible location. Despite its good rail links, some areas of Sittingbourne suffer from poor air quality. Four of Swale's five AQMAs are located in and near to Sittingbourne, located along the High Street through Newington, East Street, St Paul's Street and London Road in Teynham. The planting of street trees and other urban greening interventions such as green roofs absorb pollutants to combat poor air quality, if active travel routes are simultaneously provided to reduce traffic and reduce emissions.
- 6.3 Sittingbourne's poor quality green urban environment, primarily in the centre and north east of the town, is referenced in Swale's Adopted Local Plan (2017) and is stated to include a deficiency in parks and gardens, street trees and other open spaces. The GBI Typology Map for Sittingbourne (Figure 2) outlined a large area to the north of the A2, concentrated around the Eurolink Business Park, which suffers from lack of GBI. Figure 2 also shows that in the core of the town centre itself, to the south of the A2, there is an absence of GBI.
- 6.4 The more multi-functional of Sittingbourne's existing GBI assets lie on the outskirts of the town, including large areas occupied by orchards. Although these areas provide shading, food provision and carbon storage amongst other functions and should be valued for their functions, they are not publicly accessible, providing limited direct benefits to Sittingbourne's human population. Milton Creek performs moderately in terms of functions, however it's central, waterside location and array of events on offer makes this area a key GI asset for the town. The town centre itself lacks areas of multi-functional GBI though there are nine parks and open spaces nestled within the built form and in surrounding residential areas that respond to local need. There are opportunities to increase access to these existing parks by walking and cycling, and further optimise those green spaces, to create more multi-functional, inviting and readily accessible spaces.

Figure 24: Key Diagram – Urban GBI Strategy for Sittingbourne




**KEY**

**Existing GBI, Services and Infrastructure**




-  Publically accessible GBI
-  Other GBI
-  No GBI
-  School (Opportunity for safer routes to school)
-  Sittingbourne Memorial Hospital
-  Sittingbourne Train Station
-  Railway

**Proposed Interventions**



**A Green and Biodiverse Borough**

-  Promote provision of multi-functional GBI in development sites
-  Town centre greening
-  Commercial area greening
-  Optimise green spaces and parks
-  Corridor greening (street trees, roadside verges)
-  Urban Fringe GBI enhancement zones




**A Healthy, Connected and Active Swale**

-  Recreational and active travel route
-  Enhance existing routes for walkers and cyclists
-  Allotments in schools

**A Healthy Blue Environment**

-  Opportunity for SuDS
-  Promote access to waterways (see text)

**A Beacon for the Visitor Economy**

-  Gateway GBI
-  Optimising area of high townscape value through GBI
-  Active travel routes linking public transport hub and tourist attractions

GBI Opportunities in Sittingbourne

- 6.5 The earlier chapters have established that Sittingbourne has a number of existing GBI assets, but there are still areas of need, presenting significant opportunity for a more comprehensive and connected network of GBI to deliver a range of socio-economic benefits.
- 6.6 The aim of the Urban GI Strategy for Sittingbourne is to create a greener setting to the town to benefit the town’s health, biodiversity and economic performance.
- 6.7 There are a number of opportunities to retrofit GBI in Sittingbourne’s urban environment. Opportunities are set out below under each objective, and are displayed on the Key Diagram for Sittingbourne in Figure 24. It is important to note that not all GBI interventions can be displayed on the Key Diagram. Where social interventions are proposed, they are described in the text below.

**Proposals**

- 6.8 The remainder of this section, including the Key Diagram (Figure 24) and accompanying schedule (Table 3), outline the proposed projects interventions, actions to be implemented in Sittingbourne within the Plan Period to 2037-2038, subject to the availability of funding and consented development. The projects are organised under the key themes of this GBI Strategy, and align with the objectives for Urban GBI introduced earlier. The Key Diagram is overlaid over the existing GBI resource to show clearly where proposals are intended to address areas of non GBI, or complement or improve existing GBI assets.

## **A Green and Biodiverse Borough**

### ***Town Centre Greening***

- 6.9 Greening of Sittingbourne's town centre was initially promoted through the Sittingbourne Town Centre and Milton Creek Supplementary Planning Document (SPD)<sup>1</sup> which was adopted in September 2010 and is now outdated. To respond to the current context, a revised Sittingbourne Town Centre Development Framework is underway, which presents a key opportunity to enhance GBI provision in the town centre. An area suitable for town centre greening has been identified on the Key Diagram.
- 6.10 Many of Sittingbourne's key streets and residential streets have no street tree cover so there is opportunity to prepare a programme of implementation. Within this area, the following is recommended, where appropriate:
- Corridor greening along the A2 and High Street comprising street trees, rain gardens and tree pits
  - Pocket parks (less than 0.4 hectares)
  - Green roofs and walls on new and existing buildings
  - Improvements to the public realm
  - Enhance road verges along key gateways, including the A2 London Road, the B2005 Mill Way and Borden Lane, by introducing stretches of wildflower meadow
  - Greening of alleyways which run perpendicular to the High Street

- 6.11 The greening of alleyways between the High Street, St Michaels Road to the north and the network of roads to the south, must include measures which are suited to narrow pathways, ensuring access remains safe. This may include hanging baskets or narrow planters. Gateways to alleyways may include green walls and signposts.



Existing alleyway running south from the High Street

<sup>1</sup> Milton Creek Supplementary Planning Document (2010)  
<https://www.swale.gov.uk/sittingbourne-milton-creek-regen/>

- 6.12 Green walls can roofs provide a range of benefits including increased evapotranspiration, reduced storm water flow, improved air quality and noise reduction, as well as providing amenity value. Future town centre redevelopment presents opportunities for the integration of green walls into the built environment, and may represent a flagship project for the borough. The below image shows a vertical green wall near Tower Bridge, in London, which is irrigated by rainwater. The green wall was retrofitted onto an existing building, enhancing the local environment, providing a habitat for wildlife, and reducing runoff.



Vertical rain garden near Tower Bridge, London (Source: Landscape Institute. 2015)

- 6.13 The future regeneration of Sittingbourne town centre also presents an opportunity to consult with and work alongside local business owners to encourage and support the retrofitting of green walls and roofs onto existing buildings.
- 6.14 Generally, town centre greening can result in the provision of shade and passive cooling. Scientific research into air temperatures in urban areas shows that green sites are generally cooler than non-green sites<sup>2</sup>.

### ***Increase Urban Tree Planting for Corridor Greening***

- 6.15 Tree planting along Sittingbourne's major corridors has many benefits. The Landscape Institute states that '*street trees can add aesthetic quality to an urban area, but will also reduce airborne pollution, provide shade, reduce urban heat island effects, mitigate wind chill and turbulence and increase biodiversity*<sup>3</sup>.'
- 6.16 Along the A2 corridor through Sittingbourne, built form fronts onto the pavement edge in many places, so it is unlikely street trees would be feasible along the whole stretch of the route. Where properties front the road, community engagement and education schemes can raise awareness of 'greening' gardens for the benefit of biodiversity. Greener gardens along the A2 corridor for example would also contribute to place-making, and contribute to cleaner air. Corridor greening can be implemented alongside SuDS schemes to manage surface water runoff.

<sup>2</sup>

[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/236332932\\_Urban\\_greening\\_to\\_cool\\_towns\\_and\\_cities\\_A\\_systematic\\_review\\_of\\_the\\_empirical\\_evidence](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/236332932_Urban_greening_to_cool_towns_and_cities_A_systematic_review_of_the_empirical_evidence)

<sup>3</sup> Landscape Institute Position Statement - Green Infrastructure: An integrated approach to land use (2013)



- 6.17 The B2005 connecting Sittingbourne town centre with Kemsley is bound by properties which are set back from the road. A marked cycleway runs along stretches of the road. The corridor is a busy commuter route, and has the potential to encourage more car users to swap their commutes for biking or walking by creating a more attractive, safer setting. The numerous existing roadside verges could be diversified for wildflowers and SuDS schemes, and safety and perception of surrounding GBI could be increased by providing some areas of separation between the cycleway from the road through small areas of street tree or hedgerow planting, or rain gardens.
- 6.18 The cycleway along Swale Way, connecting Sittingbourne town centre and Milton Creek Country Park would benefit from similar interventions. The Country Park as a 'destination' along the cycle route provides an incentive for recreational users, commuters and tourists alike to use the cycle route. The aim would be to make the cycleway a calmer, greener route by providing separation between the busy traffic flow along the Swale Way corridor.

### ***Commercial Area Greening***

- 6.19 Figures 2 and 12 highlighted that Sittingbourne's main commercial area, the Eurolink Industrial Estate, is largely devoid of GBI despite the high working population. The Key Diagram for Sittingbourne shows an indicative area where GBI interventions should be focussed for commercial greening. Interventions such as street trees to create a green corridor along Castle Road, providing pocket parks and improving green active travel routes to the existing Milton Creek Country Park and the town centre, will all contribute to creating a greener working environment.
- 6.20 Existing green spaces on the outskirts of the Eurolink Industrial Estate create potential opportunities for employee recreation if access is improved. Three Lakes Park and Little Murston Nature Reserve are to the north east of the industrial park, on the northern side of the Swale Way. Three Lakes Park, designated as an SSSI, is currently occupied by Sittingbourne Angling Club. Introducing some levels of public access could maximise the proximity of this GBI asset to this key employment area. The existing pond and planting at Bayford Meadows Kart Circuit at the western end of Symmonds Drive is another example of a local green space which is currently publically inaccessible.
- 6.21 Greening should also be promoted at other new employment sites and for existing business areas as planning applications are submitted for re-development. The sites should be designed to deliver a high quality green setting for building form and providing space for recreation. For existing commercial sites, where businesses own land surrounding their property, businesses should be encouraged to develop multi-functional outdoor spaces for recreational use of staff and for biodiversity enhancements. This may include the provision of seating areas with tree planting for shade, wildflower planting and provision of pathways and gardens for staff use. Guidance can be made available through SBC and other channels such as The Wildlife Trust. Businesses should be aware incentives such as local grants. For example, the Green Space Business Award® is a project developed by DS Smith, a packaging company, and Keep Britain Tidy, to encourage business owners to improve environmental standards in nearby recreational areas. Contributing to the introduction of greener and safer cycleways for staff to reach work is one example.

### ***Optimise Existing Green Spaces and Parks***

- 6.22 Milton Creek Country Park was first introduced in Section 2.0, where its focus on community participation and engagement was highlighted. The Milton Creek area to the north of the town centre, which is now often referred to as the 'green heart' of Sittingbourne was once primarily industrial in nature. The green space, which provides a range of natural habitats, now enables a direct link via the Saxon Shore Way, through the town centre to the surrounding countryside and coast and is a key recreational and biodiversity asset providing benefits for both Sittingbourne's population and the environment. Figure 12 shows that Milton Creek Country Park performs moderate to high in terms of multi-functionality. Some areas of the park perform particularly well for wildlife such as the three ponds which have been especially created for Great Crested Newts and wildflower meadows which attract pollinators. These areas can also provide an educational benefit, encouraging local residents to learn more about nature.
- 6.23 Though there are seven pedestrian access points into the country park, including through Kemsley Recreation Ground, Newman Drive and Walsby Drive, visibility of access points into the country park is generally poor. 'A' Frame gates are currently in place, though 'gateway' entrances using signposting at highly visible entrances, such as the entrance to the west of Swale Way, to increase awareness and visibility of the park. The cycleway link between the town centre and the park is unattractive, running along Swale Way and through an industrial area, following routes of heavy traffic congestion. The greening of this route, along with the introduction of more obvious way-marking, could provide a more pleasant and legible route. As the cycleway follows road sides, there is opportunity to integrate SuDS into grass verge alongside the route, to divert road run-off into tree pits and roadside swales and gullies.
- 6.24 There are other areas for improvement in terms of access, such as providing public toilets and car park and other key services to benefit all park users. Though the priority is to encourage people to walk or cycle to the park, stakeholders have advised that Milton Creek requires a suitable car parking facility.
- 6.25 Swale's Open Space Strategy (2010) was the first step in the optimisation of Sittingbourne's parks and green spaces. It included an audit of all existing spaces, to see where parks are performing well and where there is room for improvement. Public Access also remains at the heart of the emerging Open Spaces and Play Strategy (2017-2022) for the borough.
- 6.26 Sittingbourne's other parks and green spaces have seen little investment in comparison to Milton Creek Country Park and would benefit from a wider range of activities on offer, in places designed in an inviting way to make it easy for people to participate. A potential strategy for optimising Sittingbourne's Rectory Playing Field is provided in Section 5.0 and the principles can be translated to Sittingbourne's other open spaces. Many of Sittingbourne's existing green spaces are nestled in urban areas, making safe access a potential issue.
- 6.27 The King George V Playing Field for example is accessible from an access gate set between properties, from Woodstock Road. By providing a 'gateway' entrance, improving the approach to the Playing Field, and increasing signage, there is an opportunity to enhance the usage of the park. Another 'gateway' is proposed to Kemsley Recreation Ground off Forge Road. There is no existing frontage to the park so improving the presence of the park with street trees or a public art feature could increase the attractiveness of the park. Ensuring parks form key sections of active travel routes can also encourage people to divert from their usual route to or from work and school to enjoy the local green space.

6.28 There are many informal amenity green spaces nestled within residential developments throughout the urban area of Sittingbourne. Amenity green spaces comprise informal recreation spaces and green spaces, providing opportunity for activities close to home or work. Though they often provide a central point to residential communities, enhancing the appearance of residential development, Sittingbourne's amenity green spaces are predominantly amenity grass with little biodiversity value and are under-used as community spaces. Proximity of amenity green spaces to homes and schools makes them a good opportunity for optimising for multiple uses. In some newer developments such as Reams Way in Kemsley and Bluebell Drive, there are children's play areas which increase usage of these spaces. Otherwise, improvements may include wildflower and tree planting, introducing seating spaces, and providing informal sport opportunities. These interventions can contribute to making amenity spaces a well-used focal point for a community, and a local haven for wildlife, whilst retrofitting SuDS.



Example of Existing Amenity Green Space off Ridham Drive, Kemsley

6.29 Going forward, ensuring parks and green spaces provide maximum benefits for people and biodiversity may involve workshops with local residents, and can even be a community-led process, guided by SBC. This approach allows local communities and groups to take ownership over what their local spaces to see improvements tailored to need.

***Promote provision of multifunctional GBI in new development***

6.30 As shown in the Key Diagram (Figure 24), there are many housing and employment allocations on Sittingbourne's settlement edge. 43% of all residential development is planned to be located in Sittingbourne (Local Plan, 2017). This new development should be integrated with existing and proposed GBI, but also presents an opportunity to require high quality, well-integrated GBI into proposals.

6.31 The edge of settlement location of many of Sittingbourne's allocations means that requirements should be set for ensuring that the wider countryside is linked to the city centre through strategic allocations, and that existing linkages are retained and improved, such as access to the Saxon Shore Way. For example, the location of housing allocation A 20 at Orbital, Staplehurst Road would introduce new development in a predominantly residential area largely influenced by the adjacent railway.

6.32 The allocation lies directly adjacent to The Meads Community Woodland, providing an opportunity for the allocation has potential to provide an attractive through-route for pedestrians in Chalkwell and Milton Regis to access the woodlands.

6.33 Opportunities also exist to maximise the benefits of GBI in terms of the image of the area, improving setting of the adjacent community woodland. Each new development would require GBI tailored to the site context, which should be drawn from the Guidance for GBI in new development, presented in Section 9.0 of this Strategy.

## **A Healthy Blue Environment**

### ***Sustainable Drainage Schemes (SuDS)***

6.34 Over the past few years, there have been an increasing number of SuDS schemes incorporated into Sittingbourne's urban form, which have been delivered predominantly through the BEGIN project (see Section 2.0). As part of the BEGIN project, the Bell Road SuDS project for example incorporates a wildflower meadow to reduce flood risk through roadside SuDS whilst promoting community stewardship and responsibility. Bell Road has been identified on the Key Diagram as an opportunity area for SuDS, to highlight the need for ongoing management. Future schemes should identify where localised flooding may be mitigated through SuDS, and use lessons learned from the Bell Road scheme.

6.35 SuDS schemes through Sittingbourne's urban environment can also contribute to the town centre greening objective. Street side rain gardens can contribute to reducing surface water runoff, whilst greening routes to work and school, promoting education of GBI initiatives and can be part of a nature recovery network for wildlife through the urban environment (see case studies on following page).

6.36 According to the Environment Agency, the southern section of the Eurolink Industrial Estate is at high risk from surface water flooding, as well as a large area of Grove Park in Chalkwell and linear areas following the flowpaths of watercourses north-south through Sittingbourne.

6.37 SuDS initiatives such as road side rain gardens and tree pits along main streets such as Avenue of Remembrance and Swanstree Avenue could double as active travel routes whilst mimicking the natural environment. Networks of SuDS along secondary residential streets such as Chaucer Road, West Ridge and Windsor Drive which are at high risk of surface water flooding, could alleviate flood risk, reduce pressure on the sewer network and create a more attractive street scene.

6.38 Implementing SuDS schemes presents an opportunity for education and community engagement. For example, the image below shows a street tree scheme in Manchester. Through a simple diagram painted onto the ground showing the flow path of surface water which is retained by the tree pits, it not only creates interest for commuters of all ages passing by, but also is an educational tool, to express the value of the bringing the natural world into our urban environments.



Interactive SuDS Scheme.

## Box 6.1: Bridget Joyce Square

### CASE STUDY

#### Bridget Joyce Square, London

The Bridget Joyce Square SuDS project was created to improve water quality and reduce surface water flood risk alongside transforming a dangerous road into a safe community space for socialising and commuting.

This section of Australia Road in the London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham lies between a school and two playgrounds. The road was at high risk of surface water flooding due to its location within the Counter Creek Sewer catchment, which is described as one of London's 'lost rivers'. The project included the conversion of the road into a pedestrian and cyclist space with 1,320m<sup>2</sup> of permeable paving. Rainfall is directed to bio-retention basins and rain gardens which also take rainwater from the roof of the school.

The project covers an area of 0.3ha, is designed to hold 55m<sup>3</sup> of water and incorporates 120m<sup>2</sup> of rain gardens. Community engagement was a key part of the project which they are now able to benefit from as the scheme provides a new events space for the local community by the entrance of the school. In addition to this, 49 trees were planted as part of the project.



References:  
Text/Image 1 and 2:  
<https://www.london.gov.uk/what-we-do/environment/climate-change/surface-water/bridget-joyce-square-suds>  
Text/Image 3:  
<https://openhouselondon.open-city.org.uk/listings/6693>

## Box 6.2: Greener Grange Town

### CASE STUDY

#### Greener Grange Town, Cardiff

Greener Grangetown is a sustainable drainage system (SuDS) project that has also been designed to transform the quality of the public realm across a Cardiff neighbourhood (with similar characteristics to some Sittingbourne neighbourhoods in terms of building form and street layout).

108 rain gardens deliver visual amenity improvements and a more sustainable approach to rainwater treatment. The result is a more resilient urban sewer network and a street environment that is more attractive - and more useful - for residents and commuters.

This green infrastructure project in Cardiff, removes more than 40,000m<sup>3</sup> of rainwater each year from entering the combined sewer network, whilst creating attractive and safer routes to work and school.



References:  
<https://www.arup.com/projects/greener-grangetown>

- 6.39 Milton Creek is a shallow tidal inlet running north-east from Sittingbourne to join the Swale at Elmley Reach. Milton Creek Country Park is open to the creek in its eastern section, so is enjoyed by residents for amenity purposes.
- 6.40 The Saxon Shore Way provides access along the western edge of the creek from Sittingbourne town centre, providing a great community asset for recreational purposes.
- 6.41 To the east of Sittingbourne is the Mill Pond, which once fed a watermill at Tonge for over 900 years. The Mill Pond attracts many visitors, now set within a public access park which is a focal point for tourism, easily accessible from Bapchild and north east Sittingbourne through the existing footpath network. A stream leaves the pond, rising to the north east of the A2, running alongside Tonge Barn, through Tonge, with an outfall at Conyer Creek. Improving public access along this stream would provide a tranquil route linking Sittingbourne with Conyer, whilst extending the recreational offer at the Mill Pond.

### **A Connected, Active and Healthy Swale**

#### ***Active Travel Routes and Easier Access to GBI from Homes, Work and Schools***

- 6.42 At present, Sittingbourne town centre, is quite car dominated, resulting in higher pollution levels and the wider town is home to largest concentration of AQMAs of any of Swale's towns. The A2 runs through the centre of the town which dissects the urban form into two rough halves.
- 6.43 The Key Diagram (Figure 24) demonstrates a 15 minute walking radius from the town centre. Within this area, active travel should be promoted and leaving the car at home should be advocated as the 'norm.' The retrofitting of GBI into the urban form to create attractive, safe routes to school and work can play a role in encouraging sustainable travel.
- 6.44 There is currently pedestrian severance between the new housing development to the north of the Eurolink way and Sittingbourne Railway Station. Though the development is in the immediate vicinity of the railway station, the road network and configuration of sites in the locality prevent direct access to the station and onwards to the town centre. An active travel route created by a network of street trees and signposting is proposed along Eurolink Way and Milton Road towards the station.
- 6.45 In the residential area to the south of the A2, the cluster of schools in close proximity creates an opportunity to make walking to and from school the preferred option for pupils and their parents or carers.
- 6.46 The following roads have been identified for their potential to incorporate active travel routes:
- Swale Way
  - Homewood Avenue to Ufton Lane
  - Bell Road to Swanstree Avenue

- 6.47 The proposed routes pass adjacent to some of Sittingbourne's parks, to encourage recreational use on the journey from work or school. The proposals for active travel routes also link with the SuDS proposals under the Healthy Blue Environment theme. By integrating rain gardens and street trees into the street scene, the locality becomes an attractive environment encouraging people to work and play.
- 6.48 The Key Diagram shows the existing routes for walkers and cyclists in Sittingbourne as opportunities for enhancement. These opportunities should include better way-finding, signposting and maintenance. For example, the Saxon Shore Way represents a key connectivity asset for Sittingbourne, and is accessible from the town centre, at a spur from Milton Creek Country Park. By providing signage to indicate travel times and destinations along the route of the Saxon Shore Way, and including better signage from Sittingbourne town centre to the route, there could be many more people benefitting from the access to blue infrastructure and recreational exercise. At this stage, these existing footpaths for improvement are indicative and will be informed further by the emerging Sustrans Feasibility Study.

#### Enhance Existing Routes for Walkers and Cyclists

- 6.49 As well as retrofitting GBI into roads and routes to promote active travel, Sittingbourne must also improve existing footpaths and routes to increase their use. There is a good network of footpaths linking surrounding smaller villages such as Borden, Tunstall, Highstead and Bapchild with the main settlement edge. Though the network exists, it is not comprehensive in all places, with inadequate way marking and poor maintenance.
- 6.50 To encourage people of surrounding settlements to walk and cycle to the town centre, there is a need for better signage and upkeep. As well as encouraging people to travel into Sittingbourne, this path network provides access for town centre residents to access surrounding areas of green space and the Kent Downs AONB. Therefore, their importance should not be overlooked due to their settlement edge location.
- 6.51 Many of Sittingbourne's existing routes pass through areas of historic, cultural and wildlife interest such as the Saxon Shore Way, and PRow alongside the Little Murton Nature Reserve. Where appropriate, viewpoints should be created using seating and informative signage to increase a sense of awareness of surroundings and create interest.

#### **Routes to Schools**

- 6.52 Access to Sittingbourne's primary schools and nurseries is currently facing pressures from heavy traffic flow and a lack of formal crossings, especially at busy junctions. Busy roads make school drop-off and pick-up difficult and creates obstacles in safe road crossings.
- 6.53 To encourage parents and children to leave cars at home, and walk or cycle to school, there are options for making routes more interactive, where possible. For example, the earlier case study of Bridget Joyce Square in London shows where sustainable drainage features have been integrated into the public realm.
- 6.54 Three objectives to improve routes to schools, to create safer, more accessible and attractive environments include:
- Deter car use by banning cars in a wide radius
  - Encourage active travel to school by improving physical environments through GBI interventions
  - Increase education and awareness of the benefits of active travel for both children and families

6.55 Encouraging active travel to school will involve the creation of safer, more appealing routes for children and parents, making leaving the car at home the easier option. Implementing GBI along existing routes to school can be a great way to encourage people of all ages to leave the car at home. Examples of possibilities to enhance active travel routes around Westlands Primary School are outlined.

Potential Safer Routes to School: Westlands Primary School

6.56 Westlands Primary School lies on the northern side of Homewood Avenue, in the south eastern part of Sittingbourne. There are three pedestrian entrances to the school along Homewood Avenue, one being the main entrance which also provides vehicular access. There is a fourth access at the junction between Johnson Road and Barrow Grove, to the north east of the school, providing both pedestrian and vehicular access. Homewood Avenue is a very busy route, with parked cars on pavements and two-way traffic making crossing difficult and unsafe at drop-off and pick-up times.

6.57 Safe routes to Westlands should follow those currently used by pupils as far as possible, which are those outlined on Figure 25. Example interventions to make safer routes to Westlands Primary may include the following, which would be subject to further detailed design:

- Implement traffic calming measures along Homewood Avenue, which already benefits from pavements and grass verges on either side of the road. Planting street trees can not only act as a traffic calming measure but also soften the street scene and provide habitats; and
- Create interest for children along roadsides. This may include pathways mown through roadside wildflower verges or interactive SuDS schemes like the one shown in Figure 25

**Figure 25: Potential Future Safer Routes to Schools Scheme at the Westlands Primary School**





### Education and Awareness around Active Travel to Schools

6.58 Alongside interventions to the physical environment outlined above, using Westlands Primary School as an example, there are opportunities to increase education and awareness around the benefits of walking or cycling to school, through a range of interventions for both pupils and parents. Education initiatives, though not directly GBI proposals in themselves, should be implemented alongside the promotion of walking and cycling and greener environments.

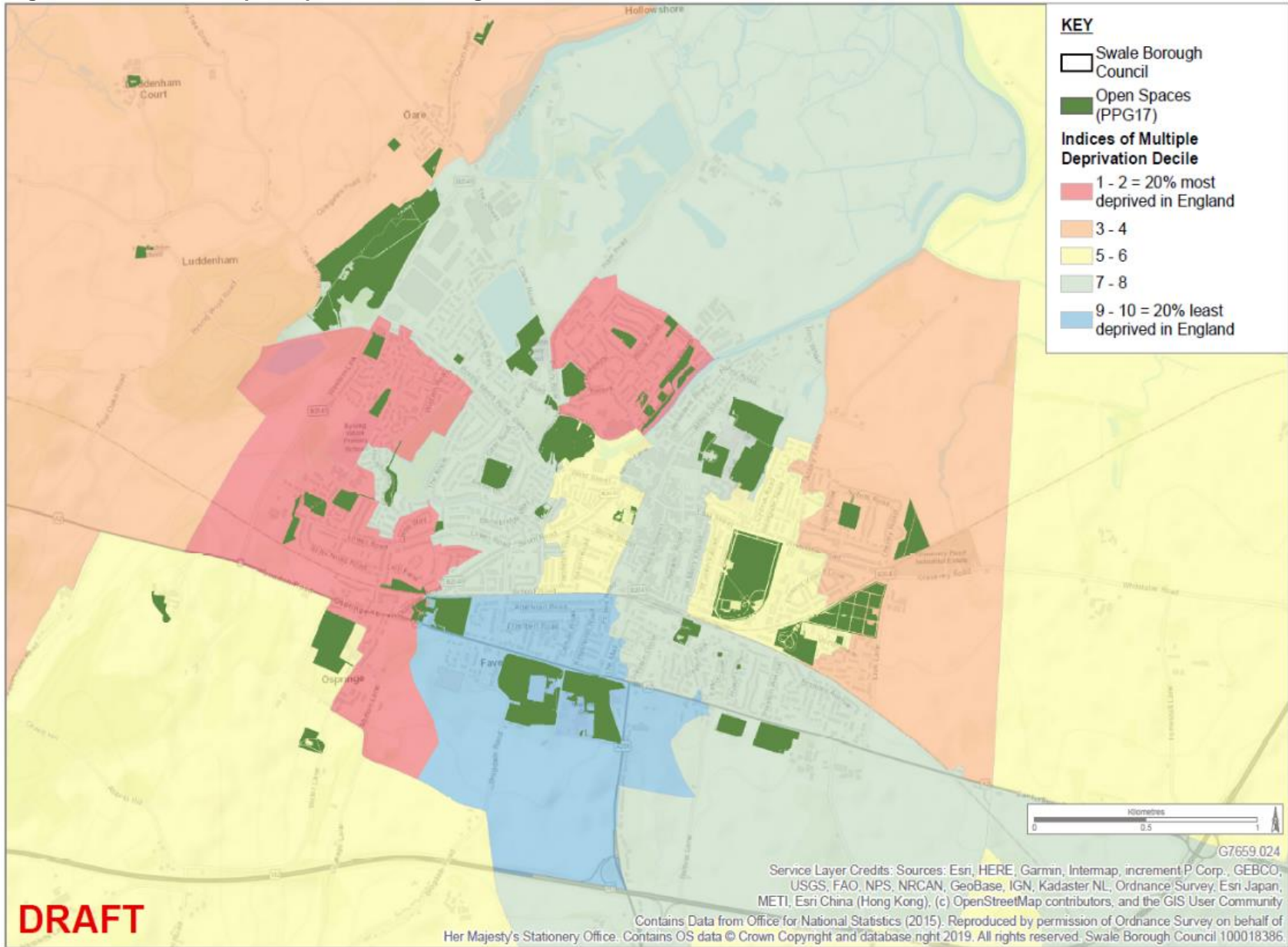
### ***Encourage community participation and engagement through GBI initiatives***

6.59 As shown in Figure 26, levels of deprivation vary throughout Sittingbourne, with the areas of Milton Regis and Chalkwell are in the 20% most deprived in England. Social prescribing, targeting the most deprived areas would have benefits for general wellbeing, mental health and reducing isolation. Social prescribing services refers to enabling GPs, nurses and other primary healthcare professionals to refer people to a range of non-clinical services, which may include health walks, Forest Schools, Green Gyms and volunteer groups. The social prescribing service would benefit from the town's close proximity to the surrounding countryside accessible by the PRoW network, to increase the programme on offer. Referring people to these activities can increase outdoor activity, engagement with nature and decrease the prevalence of social isolation.

6.60 Sittingbourne can take lead from Faversham, where a social prescribing service is up and running through the use of Red Zebra Community Solutions. See the Urban GBI Strategy for Faversham for further information.

6.61 As demonstrated throughout this Strategy, there is plentiful existing projects and activities for residents to engage with across Sittingbourne. Milton Creek Country Park for example is a hub of activity, running community events and activities weekly. Raising awareness and improving access for all should be a priority, to make the most of existing opportunities for improving health and wellbeing and decreasing social isolation.

Figure 26: Index of Multiple Deprivation in Sittingbourne



### ***Promote Healthy Play and Leisure***

- 6.62 Many of the examples drawn on throughout this Urban GBI Strategy for Sittingbourne make reference to promoting healthy play. For example, the use of interactive features along active travel routes are examples of encouraging engagement and fun through GBI.
- 6.63 Many schools in Sittingbourne already have Forest School activities underway as part of the curriculum. Children are invited to spend lessons in the outdoor environment, learning key skills whilst also receiving the benefits of GBI such as improved mental and physical wellbeing. Encouraging Forest Schools and part of the curriculum in all schools across Sittingbourne will enable the benefits to be felt more widely.
- 6.64 Within Sittingbourne's existing outdoor spaces, including parks and amenity spaces, opportunities for natural and healthy play are in their plenty. Figure X shows an existing outdoor play space in a residential development off Reams Way in Kemsley, Sittingbourne. This space, which was once just open grassland, has been transformed into a play space with interest through mounding, and the use of natural materials.



Existing play space in Kemsley, off Reams Way

### ***Enable Access to Affordable, Healthy Food and Food Growing***

- 6.65 The Key Diagram indicates a number of Sittingbourne's school grounds where by working together with the Wildlife Trust, there is potential to create school allotments. By encouraging students to participate in growing local food, the stewardship approach can be adopted, with a sense of ownership. With appropriate planting allotments will also contribute to the nature recovery network within the town, and can be a hub for wider community engagement including for education purposes and to reduce the sense of marginalisation in the community. Allotments can be integrated into wider GBI networks for wider reaching impacts. For example, the potential school allotment at Minterne Community Junior School is nestled between proposals for SuDS, an active travel route and a proposed area in which to optimise high townscape value through GI.

## **A Beacon for the Visitor Economy**

### ***High Quality Gateway GBI***

6.66 As identified under the Optimising Parks and Gardens subheading, some of Sittingbourne's parks have been identified as requiring improvements to their approaches and entrances. In terms of the visitor economy, gateway GI refers to creating attractive arrival points and approaches to the town centre. These are identified at the railway station and at key approaches to the town via the A2 at Chalkwell and Snipeshill.

### ***Active Travel Routes Linking Public Transport Hubs and Tourist Attractions***

6.67 The Saxon Shore Way providing onward links to Kent's coastline, as well as Milton Creek Country Park, are both key assets for Sittingbourne. An active travel route is proposed linking the railway station to these GBI assets. It is important that this feature is accompanied by way-marking and publicity, to encourage visitors to leave the train at Sittingbourne and experience the coastline.

6.68 The town centre greening proposals explained earlier in this chapter will make Sittingbourne's town core more attractive. Making the town centre an attractive place to live and work can stimulate inward investment and contribute to wider public realm improvements, retain small businesses and encourage the town centre to flourish and increase visitor 'dwell time'. Increasing the offer in Sittingbourne, can stimulate tourist spending and make the town an attractive place for overnight stays with onward visits to other parts of the Borough including the Kent Downs AONB, Elmley Nature Reserve, and the many beaches and coastal parks on the Isle of Sheppey

### ***Optimising Areas of High Townscape Value through GBI***

6.69 The area to the south of the town centre is home to a concentration of buildings and spaces of historic and architectural interest. GBI enhancements and interventions in this area can enhance the quality of place and the setting of the existing heritage assets. This is covered in more detail in the Sittingbourne Town Centre Development Framework.

### **Schedule of Actions**

6.70 To bring together the Urban GBI Strategy for Sittingbourne, Table 3 below outlines a proposed 'Schedule of Actions'. Proposed actions are grouped under the four opportunity areas, with a delivery partners and potential funding streams outlined. Further information regarding each funding stream, including examples of organisations which fall into each category, can be found in Appendix B Funding.

**Table 3: Schedule of Actions – Sittingbourne Urban GBI Strategy**

<b>Activities</b>	<b>Actions</b>	<b>Lead Partner</b>	<b>Delivery Partners</b>	<b>Potential Funding Streams</b>
<b>A Green and Biodiverse Borough</b>				
Town centre greening	Enhance road verges along key gateways, including the A2 London Road, the B2005 Mill Way and Borden Lane, by introducing stretches of wildflower meadow.	Wildlife Trust (Bee Roads) in partnership with Bumblebee Conservation Trust	SBC; Kent County Council Highways and Transportation	Grant funding secured for the Bee Roads project
	Work with developers and investors to ensure that GBI is delivered within the upcoming Sittingbourne Town Centre Development Framework.	SBC	Businesses, Investors	Fiscal initiatives e.g. BID; Commercial Finance
	Carry out alleyway greening projects, linking the High Street to neighbouring streets.	SBC	Wildlife Trust, Businesses	Multi-agency public sector funding; Commercial Finance
	Work with local business owners to encourage and support the retrofitting of GI to their buildings using green walls and green roofs.	SBC	Town Council	Fiscal initiatives e.g. BID; Mainstream public sector funding; Commercial Finance
	Encourage interventions that provide shade and passive cooling such as street tree planting schemes.	SBC	Kent County Council Highways and Transportation	Mainstream public sector funding; or Multi-agency public sector funding
Urban Tree Planting and Corridor Greening	Increase tree cover/planting along the main transport corridors including the A2 and B2005	Kent County Council Highways and Transportation	Wildlife Trust; Town Council	Mainstream public sector funding
	Provide some native species to contribute to the nature recovery network	Wildlife Trust	SBC	Mainstream public sector funding; or Multi-agency public sector funding; potential CIL contributions
	Green the cycleway between Milton Creek Country Park and Sittingbourne town centre	SBC	Sustrans; Kent County Council Highways and Transportation	Mainstream public sector funding; Potential CIL contributions
Commercial area greening	Work with owners of commercial and industrial premises to improve the local environment around commercial sites	SBC	Businesses; Kent Wildlife Trust	Mainstream public sector funding; Fiscal initiatives e.g. BID; Commercial Finance

	Implement pocket parks within existing commercial areas, such as the Eurolink Industrial Estate	SBC	Businesses; Wildlife Trust	Mainstream public sector funding; or Multi-agency public sector funding; Fiscal initiatives; Voluntary Maintenance
Optimise green spaces and parks	Provide gateways to existing parks and gardens	Wildlife Trust	SBC; Community Groups	Mainstream public sector funding; Multi-agency public sector funding; Potential CIL contributions
	Milton Creek Country Park Improvements <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Improve visibility of access points into Milton Creek Country Park through signposting and way-marking</li> <li>○ Create gateway entrance points at the most visible entrance locations</li> <li>○ Increase accessibility for all demographics by providing formalised car parking provision, toilets and amenities</li> </ul>	Friends of Milton Creek and Milton Creek Trust	SBC; Wildlife Trust	Mainstream public sector funding (Local Grants from SBC and/or KCC); Income Generating Opportunities; Potential CIL contributions; Voluntary Maintenance
	Invest in existing amenity green spaces within residential areas to create multi-functional and accessible green spaces	SBC	Community Groups	Potential CIL contributions; Multi-agency public sector funding; Voluntary Maintenance
Promote provision of multi-functional GBI in development	Ensure that all development sites adhere to open space requirements, provide multi-functional GI and contribute to the wider GI network	SBC	Developers; Wildlife Trust	Developer funds
	Ensure that the wider countryside is linked to the town centre through strategic allocations and that corridor linkages into the town are retained in the future.	SBC	Developers; Wildlife Trust	CIL contributions; S106
	Encourage new development to connect to and improve existing sustainable transport routes and create new cycleways and greenways where relevant	SBC	Developers; Wildlife Trust	CIL contributions; S106
	Ensure that existing allocations consider GBI, connectivity and active travel routes and SuDS	SBC	Developers; Wildlife Trust	CIL contributions; S106

<b>A Healthy Blue Environment</b>				
Opportunities for SuDS	Work together with the Kent County Council Highways and Transportation to assess the potential and rainfall storage alongside roads	Kent County Council SuDS Team	Environment Agency; SBC; Kent County Council Highways and Transportation ;	Mainstream public sector funding
	Implement suitable SuDS type tree pits alongside urban street tree planting	Kent County Council SuDS Team	Environment Agency; SBC; Kent County Council Highways and Transportation ;	Mainstream public sector funding; or multi-agency public sector funding
	Incorporate SuDS into new development to manage surface water	Kent County Council SuDS Team	Environment Agency; SBC; Kent County Council Highways and Transportation ;	Mainstream public sector funding; or multi-agency public sector funding
Promote access to waterways	Improve access to the Milton Creek Way through green corridor links	SBC	Friends of Milton Creek and Milton Creek Trust; Sustrans	Mainstream public sector funding; or multi-agency public sector funding
<b>A Healthy, Connected and Active Swale</b>				
Active travel routes to work and school	Improve the pedestrian route from Sittingbourne Railway Station to the town centre	SBC	Sustrans; Kent County Council Highways and Transportation ; Wildlife Trust	Mainstream public sector funding; or multi-agency public sector funding; Potential CIL contributions
	Along high footfall commuter routes such as Bell Road, Ufton Lane, and North Street, implement corridor greening initiatives to maximise the potential for increased walking and cycling.	SBC	Sustrans; Kent County Council Highways and Transportation ; Wildlife Trust	Mainstream public sector funding; or multi-agency public sector funding; Potential CIL contributions
	Increase pedestrian and cyclist permeability between Sittingbourne Railway Station and the Crown Quay housing development to the north of the Eurolink Way.	SBC	Sustrans; Kent County Council Highways and Transportation ; Wildlife Trust	Mainstream public sector funding; or multi-agency public sector funding; Potential CIL contributions

	Invest in Safer Routes to Schools Programmes, by greening the road networks surrounding schools, creating car free zones and introducing traffic calming measures.	SBC	Sustrans, Kent County Council Highways and Transportation , Primary and Secondary School Leadership	Mainstream public sector funding; or multi-agency public sector funding; Potential CIL contributions
Encourage community participation and engagement through GBI initiatives	Increase involvement in and awareness of outdoor activities run from Milton Creek Country Park	Friends of Milton Creek and Milton Creek Trust	SBC, Red Zebra Community Solutions	Mainstream public sector funding; or multi-agency public sector funding; Commercial Finance
	Set up a social prescribing services system, learning lessons from the system in Faversham.	Kent and Medway CCG	Red Zebra Community Solutions, SBC	Mainstream public sector funding; or multi-agency public sector funding
Promote healthy play and leisure	Encourage Forest Schools to form part of the curriculum in all schools across Sittingbourne	SBC	Primary and Secondary School Leadership; School Boards; Wildlife Trust; Forest Schools	Mainstream public sector funding; or multi-agency public sector funding
	Retrofit existing amenity spaces for outdoor activity, including natural play space	SBC	Community Groups	CIL Contributions; Mainstream Public Sector Funding
Enhance existing and create new routes for walkers and cyclists	Where footpaths pass through areas of historic/cultural/wildlife interest, create viewpoints using seating and informative signage	SBC	Sustrans; Natural England; Historic England; Medway Swale Estuary Partnership	Mainstream public sector funding; or multi-agency public sector funding such as HLF
	Provide adequate way-marking including signage indicating travel times and destinations along the Saxon Shore Way, including better signage from Sittingbourne town centre to the route.	SBC	Sustrans; Medway Swale Estuary Partnership	Mainstream public sector funding; or multi-agency public sector funding; Potential CIL contributions
	Provide gateways to the wider countryside, including the AONB to the south, by increasing signage, way-marking and improving quality of existing footpaths	SBC	Kent County Council Highways and Transportation ; SBC; Developers; Kent Downs AONB	Mainstream public sector funding; or multi-agency public sector funding; Potential CIL contributions



			Unit; NFU	
Enable access to affordable healthy food and food growing	Work together with schools and the Wildlife Trust to improve wildlife habitats and create school allotments on school grounds	School Boards	SBC; Parent Teacher Associations; Wildlife Trust	Mainstream public sector funding; or multi-agency public sector funding
<b>A Beacon for the Visitor Economy</b>				
Active travel routes linking public transport hubs and tourist attractions	Improve the arrival experience to the town centre, including enhanced pedestrian access to and from Sittingbourne Train Station	SBC	Visit Kent; Sustrans	EU funding; Mainstream public sector funding; or multi-agency public sector funding
High quality gateway spaces at arrival points in town centres	Conduct a baseline inspection of the gateways illustrated on the key diagram for Sittingbourne & undertake more detailed proposals	SBC	Visit Kent	EU funding; Mainstream public sector funding; or multi-agency public sector funding
	Improve the sense of arrival at Sittingbourne railway station	SBC	Wildlife Trust	EU funding; Mainstream public sector funding; or multi-agency public sector funding; Potential CIL contributions
	Create gateway signage of a consistent design	Visit Kent	SBC	EU funding; Mainstream public sector funding; or multi-agency public sector funding
Optimise areas of high townscape value through GI	Enhance the setting of existing architectural and heritage assets through GBI enhancements, Refer to Sittingbourne Town Centre Development Framework.	SBC	Historic England; Wildlife Trust	EU funding; Mainstream public sector funding; or multi-agency public sector funding

## 7.0 GBI in Faversham

- 7.1 Faversham, a historic market town, with a population of approximately 19,600, has excellent railway links to London. Its character is influenced by both its maritime and industrial heritage as well as present day links with food and brewing. Forty percent of Faversham's town centre is designated as a conservation area and the town is home to 500 listed buildings, reflecting the town's historic significance and presenting opportunities to respond to and enhance this heritage through sensitive and appropriate GBI provision. The town is bordered by distinctive countryside and agricultural land, and is close to the Kent Downs AONB. Faversham lies in the eastern section of the borough, to the north of the A2.
- 7.2 The form of the town is varied, though largely compact. In the town centre, there is a fine-grained block structure, resulting in very few street trees and limited amenity space. South of the town centre, but north of the railway line, there is a grid of residential streets with front gardens, where trees and vegetation contribute to the presence of GBI within street scenes. The Brents Residential Community in the north of the town has more amenity spaces interspersed throughout built form, with intermittent street trees. Industrial estates lie on the outer edges of Faversham, bordering the surrounding countryside.
- 7.3 As demonstrated in Figure 13, GBI multi-functionality varies throughout Faversham. In general, the lowest levels of multi-functionality are seen within the town centre, where tightly woven built form dominates. Faversham Creek is also has a lower number of functions.
- 7.4 There are some pockets of high multi-functionality, including Oare and Gunpowder Works Country Park, to the north west of the town, as well as woodlands on the town's outskirts. Within the urban form itself, Faversham Recreation Ground delivers a moderate number of functions, with some of the wooded areas around the perimeter standing out as being highly multi-functional.
- 7.5 The Faversham Creek Neighbourhood Plan was made on 24th June 2017, following a successful referendum outcome. The boundary of the Neighbourhood Plan is limited to the Faversham Creek area, though its objectives remain relevant to this urban GBI Strategy for their role in promoting sustainable development and responding to local need.

The following objectives of the Neighbourhood Plan are relevant to this Urban GBI Strategy:

*2. Manage the threat of flood by safeguarding functional floodplain and ensuring that such measures necessary to protect the area are undertaken*

*4. Reinforce the Creek's public destination potential*

*5. Encourage greater use of the Creek, especially by communities at Davington/ North Preston, by creating multi-function green space on the Front Brents and in the Stonebridge allotments for wildlife, water management, cultural, recreational and tourism activities*

*7. Avoid significant harm to areas designated for their ecological importance, whilst ensuring that a network of habitats is provided*

*8. Improve capacity and safety for cyclists at pinch points to and from the area and pedestrian and cycle links between Davington and North Preston to the town centre via the Creek*

*13. Create living and working environments that respond to the Creek's rich and outstanding maritime heritage*









*14. Maintain and enhance the surrounding townscape setting of the Creek, its roofscape and higher ground, allotments, waterways, landmark buildings and urban marshland edges*

*15. Open up pedestrian/cycle/visual connections to adjacent marshland landscapes by creating a creek-edge route*

*16. Improve community safety around the basin by creating activity and natural surveillance*

## KEY

### Existing GBI, Services and Infrastructure





-  Publically accessible GBI
-  Other GBI
-  No GBI
-  School (Opportunity for safer routes to school)
-  Faversham Cottage Hospital
-  Faversham Train Station
-  Railway
-  Abbey Physics Community Garden

### Proposed Interventions



#### A Green and Biodiverse Borough

-  Promote provision of multi-functional GBI in development sites
-  Town centre greening
-  Commercial area greening
-  Optimise green spaces and parks
-  Corridor greening (street trees, roadside verges)

#### A Healthy, Connected and Active Swale

-  Recreational and active travel route
-  Enhance existing routes for walkers and cyclists
-  Allotments in schools
-  Enhance connections to Faversham Creek

#### A Healthy Blue Environment

-  Opportunity for SuDS
-  Promote access to waterways (see text)

#### A Beacon for the Visitor Economy



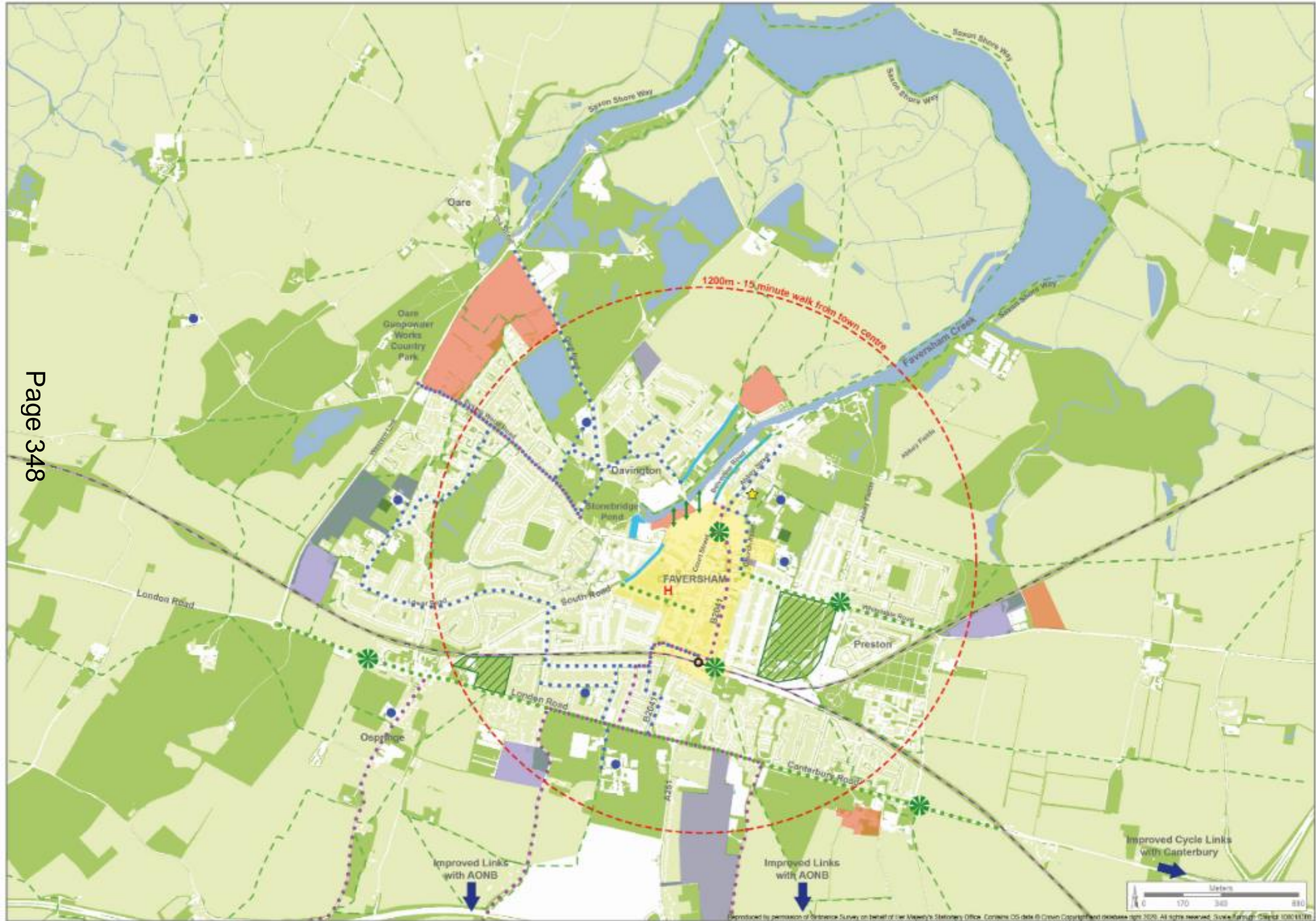
-  Gateway GBI
-  Active travel routes linking public transport hub and tourist attractions

Figure 27: Key Diagram – Urban GBI Strategy for Faversham



## A Green and Biodiverse Borough

### **Town Centre Greening**

7.6 Faversham's town centre comprises a medieval market town formation, arranged around tight grid layout. Built form is prominent, as narrow pavements and buildings fronting the road have created little room for GBI over the years. As shown in Figure 3, this has resulted in a town core largely absent of GBI. As demonstrated in Section 5.0 of this Strategy, there are many benefits of living in close proximity to GBI, and a high quality historic environment can help to create places where people want to live and work, whilst enhancing Faversham's rich cultural heritage.

7.7 Faversham's town centre public realm centres on the Front Brents and Crab Island Town Greens, the market place, the surrounding shopping streets, the railway station and car parks. Much of Faversham's town centre has no street tree cover so there is opportunity to prepare a programme of implementation. In some areas, where pavements are wider, there is potential to implement street trees and rain gardens. Along Court Street for example, there are wider pavements, large areas of hardstanding and cobbles which would benefit from sensitively integrated public realm improvements through GBI.



Potential areas for public realm improvements through street trees and rain gardens along Court Street



Potential areas for public realm improvements through street trees and rain gardens along Court Street

7.8 The use of rain gardens and planted tree pits for SuDS, integrated as part of traffic calming measures can make improvements town centre improvements multi-functional, to provide habitats for wildlife, amenity value, reduce flood risk and provide shade.

7.9 Though abundant with historical interest, the square at Market Place is particularly absent of GBI. This area is often busy, being home to Faversham Market and a range of shopping facilities. Well-designed GBI integrated into the public realm can improve experience and deliver a range of benefits to residents, visitors and nature. Due to the central location of the square, and personal meaning to Faversham residents, the design and implementation of GBI within this area would benefit from public consultation. The involvement of businesses around the square can present opportunities for greening outside shopfronts, whether that be through planters, hanging baskets or green walls, where permitted by statutory historic designations.

- 7.10 Vehicular access is severely restricted, so in many cases pedestrians take priority over pedestrians. The full pedestrianisation of Market Place presents further opportunity for greening this area of the town centre, as the absence of cars creates additional area for green space. Further benefits of pedestrianisation include improved air quality and a reduction in noise pollution.



Market Place Square, with a view to the Guild Hall in the right

- 7.11 Back Lane, passing beneath no.12 Market Place, is the principal pedestrian access into Market Place from the main town centre car park. However this historic lane passes between rather unappealing rear extensions. Previously accessible, more attractive routes such as Hugh Place and Beddington Square are now gated to the public. The closure of these pedestrian routes has markedly reduced the permeability of the town centre environment in the approach from the south. Re-instating permeability through greening alternative routes is important for pedestrian permeability.

- 7.12 Due to the tightly knit nature of Faversham's urban form, private gardens and other forms of private property have an important role to play in greening of the town centre. Individual gardens within the town centre may be small but they create important green links between the built form and the wider countryside, forming vital wildlife corridors. They also have the ability to provide health and wellbeing benefits, air quality improvements and localised cooling through shading. Their close proximity to homes and therefore their ease of accessibility should therefore not be overlooked as part of a well-connected GBI network for a range of benefits.
- 7.13 Stone Street, shown on Figure 27 as a potential corridor for urban greening is one example of where private gardens can play an important role in connecting up GBI networks for wildlife. Narrow pavements and on-street parking present barriers to other forms of greening such as street trees and rain gardens. However, the greening of adjacent gardens fronting the road can contribute to an improved public realm, whilst linking up habitats.



Typical house type on Stone Street, presenting opportunity for the greening of private gardens

- 7.14 There are many resources already available through the Wildlife Trust, providing valuable information on how to garden for maximum ecological benefit. Local hubs for advice and guidance, such as the Abbey Physic Community Garden, would present opportunities for shared learning.

### ***Urban Tree Planting and Corridor Greening***

- 7.15 Along the A2 corridor to the south of Faversham, built form stands close to the road edge in a similar way to Sittingbourne, though the route is already green along most of the section, with mature hedges lining the road, and mature garden vegetation fronting the road side.
- 7.16 The B2040 Whitstable Road, which runs to the north of Faversham Recreation Ground is a well-used route into the town centre from the east. Properties front both side of the road with small front gardens, and public footpaths run along both sides of the road. Opportunities for greening are limited, though there are small spaces for rain gardens within the road layout, such as the junction with Millford Road, and opportunities for garden greening.
- 7.17 There is scope for wildflower planting on existing grass verges throughout the town centre, increasing multi-functionality and contributing to a comprehensive and connected wildlife network.

### ***Commercial Area Greening***

- 7.18 Industry in Faversham is concentrated to the eastern edge of Western Link, as well as the retail area within the town centre. To the east of Western Link, large warehouses occupy large areas and are typically surrounded by hardstanding and access roads. Although there is a strong tree belt along the eastern edge of Western Link, providing screening from the road, the area surrounding the warehouses and units would benefit from tree planting. Benefits include reduced energy demand for heating and cooling. In the car park of the superstore in this area, tree planting has the added benefit of shading for parked vehicles reducing the urban 'heat island' effect and improving shopper experience. Rain gardens and bioswales can reduce the risk of flooding by slowing surface water runoff and again improve user experience.
- 7.19 Future commercial development in Faversham should consider the following proposals:
- Green roofs/walls
  - Tree Planting
  - Rain gardens and bioswales
  - Pocket parks for workers
  - Enhanced connections to existing PRow
- 7.20 The benefits of these was discussed at paragraphs 6.9 to 6.14 and these could be secured through the planning process.

## Optimising Existing Parks and Green Spaces

7.21 In general, Faversham town centre has deficiencies in parks and gardens, formal outdoor sports facilities and amenity green space. This could be partly due to the nature of the built form; as a historic market town, terraced properties are dense and built form is fine-grained with little green space other than in gardens. The green spaces which do exist in Faversham, including Faversham Recreation Ground, King George V Recreation Ground and the Abbey Physic Garden, well managed, well used and valued community spaces, with a variety of activities. The Oare Gunpowder Works Country Park also lies on the outskirts of the town and is considered in more detail on in paragraphs 7.23 – 7.25.



*Faversham Recreation Ground*



- A1: Improved footpath surfaces and edges along historic boundary routes
- A2: Historic walks redesigned as informal woodland style paths with wildflower, bulbs and natural play elements
- B1: Lodge building refurbished with cafe kiosk to frontage and public WC
- B2: Performance space with formal garden, steps and power point
- C1: Upgrading of sports changing pavilion including internal public toilet provision and community room
- C2: Toilets converted for storage facility
- C3: Improve compliant access
- D1: Improve toddler play provision. Play area extended
- D2: Improve junior play provision. Play area extended
- D3: Outdoor fitness area
- D4: Natural and imaginative play along linear walk
- E1: Reinstate vertical bar railings to Whistable Road and Park Road
- E2: Drinking fountain plinth restored
- E3: Original wrought iron gates refurbished
- F1: Improved lighting at the Lodge
- F2: Interpretation wayfinding signs at the Lodge building, fountain plinth and entrances
- F3: Car park improvements
- F4: Restricted vehicle access using bollards
- F5: Pedestrian access route to car park on Jubilee Way
- F6: Location reinforced for car parking to serve users of the bowling and tennis clubs

Figure 28: Improvements to Faversham Recreation Ground under the Heritage Lottery Fund grant

7.22 As mentioned earlier in Section 2.0, Faversham Recreation Ground is currently undergoing a heritage led regeneration scheme to improve the park's facilities and encourage community engagement. Works include play area improvements, restoration of heritage features, improved pedestrian access refurbishment of changing pavilion and toilet block and implementing and programme of events including a performance space (Figure 28). Part of the refurbishment includes the employment of a part time Activity Coordinator and Ranger post to encourage and undertake events, activities and volunteering on site. The Activity Coordinator role provides a friendly face within the community, important for increasing engagement in outdoor activity amongst all demographics. The benefits of increased engagement including informal learning opportunities, skills development and increased community resilience. Previous activities at the Recreation Ground include litter picking and craft workshops, which were well received by the local community.



### *Oare Gunpowder Works Country Park*

- 7.23 Oare Gunpowder Works County Park lies on the north western edge of Faversham which is an important biodiversity asset and was linked to the former Gunpowder Industry in Faversham.
- 7.24 The Country Park is a hub for volunteer activity and community engagement. Friends of Oare Gunpowder Works, a volunteer group, led by the Green Spaces officer at Swale Borough Council, meet every Thursday and once a month on the second Sunday. The group tasks carry out a range of tasks including tree planting, tree felling, fence fixing and litter picking.
- 7.25 There is need for better, more comprehensive pedestrian connections to the country park, which is outlined under the '*A Connected, Active and Healthy Swale*' theme in this section.

### *Amenity Green Space*

- 7.26 There are many amenity green spaces within residential developments throughout the urban form of Faversham. Through community input, these spaces should receive investment to ensure they provide maximum benefit to people and wildlife. Currently, many of Faverham's amenity green space comprises closely mown grass which limits the multi-functionality of these areas. Diversification of planting, and the addition of seating areas can provide communal space and habitats for wildlife within the urban fabric.
- 7.27 Swale's Open Space Strategy (2010) and the subsequent emerging Open Spaces and Play Strategy 2017-2022, provide an initial steer in the optimisation of Sittingbourne's parks and green spaces. It included an audit of all existing spaces, to see where parks are performing well and where there is room for improvement.

- 7.28 Paragraph 6.28 outlines a range of interventions which are appropriate to the informal nature of amenity green spaces, to improve their multi-functionality for both people and wildlife. These are also applicable to Faversham's amenity green spaces. Going forward, ensuring parks and green spaces provide maximum benefits for people and biodiversity may involve workshops with local residents, and can even be a community-led process, guided by SBC. This approach allows local communities and groups to take ownership over what their local spaces to see improvements tailored to need.

### ***Promote Provision of Multifunctional GBI in New Development***

- 7.29 As shown in the Key Diagram (Figure 27), there are several housing and employment allocations on Faversham, the largest between to the south of the A2 Canterbury Road, and to the east of Western Link. The Western Link site is already being progressed by a developer, although future phases must align with this Strategy.
- 7.30 For the outline planning application for up to 250 dwellings at Preston Fields, south of the A2, which is awaiting a decision, future reserved matters applications must be integrated with existing and proposed GBI. The proximity of the allocation to the Kent Downs AONB offers a potential to provide a 'gateway development' to the AONB. A signposted PRoW through the site, linking surrounding residential development, including that to the north of the A2 Canterbury Road, to the AONB would increase access on foot to the AONB to maximise the recreational potential of this greenspace.

## **A Healthy Blue Environment**

### ***Sustainable Drainage Systems***

7.31 As referred to below, Faversham town centre is liable to tidal flooding from Faversham Creek, which has a floodplain typically 100m to 200m wide. Three tributaries of the creek also run through the town from the outskirts. . During more extreme events, Flooding of the creek can also indirectly cause flooding from the sewer system as water back-flows through the system. Therefore the vital role of SuDS within the urban fabric of the town must not be overlooked, for their potential in reducing surface water runoff whilst contributing to benefits for people and wildlife.

7.32 Using evidence from recent flood events, including the tidal surge of December 2013 which resulted in numerous flooded properties bordering Faversham Creek, the Key Diagram (Figure 27) identifies areas suitable for the sensitive integration of SuDS. Along Faversham Creek, Belvedere Road, Church Road and parts of Upper Brents lie in Flood Zone 3. SuDS is often associated with large green spaces, however, there are a range of SuDS features which can be easily designed into constrained urban settings which would suit the nature of the built form along the streets in the flood plain, such as Belvedere Road. According to Kent County Council's design guidance on Masterplanning for SuDS<sup>4</sup>, space efficient SuDS include green roofs, bioretention gardens, permeable paving, rills, rainwater harvesting, hardscape storage, micro-wetlands, and bioretention tree pits. These SuDS are also suitable for the town centre, to be implemented alongside town centre greening measures for multi-functional proposals.



The junction between Belvedere Road and Sager Road which presents opportunity for rain gardens and tree pits.

### **Westbrook Stream**

7.33 The Westbrook is a spring-fed chalk stream, which runs to the west of Faversham, and flows roughly north into Faversham Creek and The Swale beyond. The historic course of the stream runs from a spring at Lorenden in the south west of Faversham, along Water Lane, through Ospringe and past the area of Chart Mills – a Scheduled Monument and one of the oldest of Faversham's three gunpowder factories. This latter section to Chart Mills is culverted. The woodland at The Knole comprises various springs which feed into the Westbrook near Chart Mills. The construction of the M2 motorway has altered the course of the spring at Lorenden. This alteration, as well as heavy water abstraction, means that the upstream reaches of the Faversham often run dry.

<sup>4</sup> [https://www.kent.gov.uk/data/assets/pdf\\_file/0020/23582/Masterplanning-for-SuDS-Part-4.pdf](https://www.kent.gov.uk/data/assets/pdf_file/0020/23582/Masterplanning-for-SuDS-Part-4.pdf)

- 7.34 Once the stream runs at surface again, it runs north through Stonebridge Way Estate and is culverted under West Street, before entering Stonebridge Pond. The stream then flows through Stonebridge Allotments, over a weir and sluices, with an outfall in Faversham Creek, at which point the stream becomes brackish.
- 7.35 The Westbrook Stream and Stonebridge Pond is an important community green space in Faversham. The multi-functionality mapping for Faversham (Figure 13) begins to demonstrate the multiple functions performed by the stream. The stream and its network of paths offers a recreational asset, linking different areas of the town, and is also a wildlife corridor offering ecological refuge for a range of species. The stream as a whole is one of many wildlife corridors and recreational assets which connects Faversham Creek to Bysing Wood and the North Downs.
- 7.36 Locally important heritage features, owing to Faversham's Gunpowder history, are evident along the bank structure and at Chart Mills. Buildings associated with the gunpowder industry stretched from Ospringe to Faversham Creek, powering multiple Mills, during which time the course of the creek was modified for materials transportation. Preservation of archaeology associated with this time is an important objective for the Westbrook.
- 7.37 Within policy (Local Plan, 2017), the Westbrook Stream and Stonebridge Pond is designated as a Local Green Space.
- 7.38 The Westbrook Stream is classed as an Ordinary Watercourse, though is not designated under the Water Framework Directive (WFD), so there are no WFD classifications or further WFD information to determine the quality of the watercourse.
- 7.39 The water quality is not routinely tested though is thought to be of reasonably good quality, due to the presence of indicator species. However the stream is vulnerable to pollution caused by run off from nearby roads. The Friends of the Westbrook and Stonebridge Pond (FWSP) Community Group, along with the Medway and Swale Estuary Partnership have undertaken work to establish the baseline conditions of the stream, improve water quality and flow and increase community stewardship. FWSP produced a Management Plan in 2016, and since then there have been a couple of modest funding grants to assist in carrying out various projects.
- 7.40 The Westbrook can be categorised into three general sections, for which interventions are addressed in turn:
- Upstream (Lorenden to Chart Mill)
  - Middle stretch (Chart Mill to Stonebridge Pond)
  - Downstream –(Stonebridge Pond to Faversham Creek)
- Upstream – Lorenden to Chart Mill*
- 7.41 The upstream section of the Westbrook, from Lorenden to Ospringe runs dry even during very wet periods, although signs suggest that the upper reaches of the Westbrook once carried significant flow. The section from Ospringe to Chart Mill is in culvert.
- Middle Stretch – Chart Mill to Stonebridge Pond*
- 7.42 Active springs provide water downstream of the old water mill/culvert at Stonebridge Way. The middle stretch of the Westbrook is characterised by low flow and a shallow gradient, and therefore high levels of siltation. Because of the low water levels, the middle stretch of the river suffers from the poorest water quality due to surface water runoff containing pollutants from roads.

*Downstream - Stonebridge Pond to Faversham Creek*

7.43 Stonebridge Pond is bound by allotments to the north and east, and West Street to the south and south west, beyond which is residential development along Stonebridge Way. There is good public access at this section. From Stonebridge Pond, the Westbrook flows in a north easterly direction to its outfall at Faversham Creek.

**Figure 29: Flow path of the Westbrook Stream**



- 7.44 Siltation is also an issue at Stonebridge Pond, just like the middle reaches of the stream. However, the pond is significantly deep in places, and addressing the issue of siltation would require a large project, beyond the expertise and resourcing of volunteer groups. Extensive machinery, and Environment Agency consent, would be required to dispose of the silt deposits. Though not an immediate threat to the pond, Stonebridge Pond will eventually dry out due to continued silt deposits if not addressed, and important habitat will be lost. This issue must be kept on the horizon, though an immediate fix is not possible without significant investment.



Stonebridge Pond

#### *Public Access*

- 7.45 The levels of public access along the Westbrook and at Stonebridge Pond vary. Generally one side of the stream is privately owned comprising residential gardens with the opposite side being publically owned and managed by KCC/Swale Borough Council as public open green space. The woodland at The Knole is owned privately by many owners and is not accessible to the public. The Stonebridge Pond Allotments are owned by Faversham Town Council and are only accessible to allotment holders.
- 7.46 Despite generally good public access, there are some areas where recreational amenity may be improved. Low-cost maintenance projects such as improved fencing along the middle stretches of the Westbrook will improve recreational amenity. There are opportunities to make a feature of the heritage assets along the river banks, through sensitively designed signage, to reinforce the historic significance of the area and draw on a sense of place. It is often the case that when users are aware of the historical and ecological significance of a place, they are more likely to keep to designated pathways and decrease wider disturbance. Some signage around Stonebridge Pond has already been installed, providing education about the wildlife at the pond.
- 7.47 There is currently no public access in the upper reaches of the Westbrook. Extending the access corridor north would provide access to Bysing Wood, increasing the length of the recreational corridor for public enjoyment.



Allotments at Stonebridge Pond

### *Wildlife and Biodiversity*

7.48 As a chalk stream, the Westbrook should be able to support a wide range of species. However, the Westbrook has a number of barriers including culverts and weird, preventing fish and eel passage.

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<sup>5</sup> 'The practice of public participation and collaboration in scientific research to increase scientific knowledge. Through citizen science, people share

7.49 Adjacent to and upstream of The Knole, works have been underway since 2018 for the installation of a gently curving, 'low flow channel'. The FWSP, supported by the North West Kent Countryside Partnership, have carried out a process of installing a series of stakes and bundles of thin chestnut branches – 'faggot bundles' - into the section of the Westbrook north of West Street. In times of high flow, water will fill the stream channel and the areas behind the bundles will silt up. The aim is to naturally narrow the stream to create more diversity in stream flow and habitat. It is important for these works to continue to reach their full benefit.

7.50 Behind The Knole, is an area of wet woodland. Due to the dryness of the river upstream of this point, the wet woodland is largely in decline. This section is in private ownership, though management interventions are required to conserve this important habitat.

7.51 Ongoing wildlife recording is important for the management of resources and to monitor whether the work being undertaken along the stream could be more effective. The frequent running of Citizen Science<sup>5</sup> projects is one way of 'upskilling' volunteers for the conservation and enhancement of habitats. Citizen Science schemes can also seek to involve the wider community beyond the FWSP volunteer groups, and can involve local school groups or holiday clubs. Anyone can take part and no special skills are required. There are online resources available to provide guidance to FWSP or another organisation for the rollout of such projects.

and contribute to data monitoring and collection programs' (Source: National Geographic Encyclopedia)

***Protect, Enhance and Enable Sustainable Access to Waterways***

7.52 The tidal Faversham Creek runs to the north east of the town, and links Faversham town centre to The Swale. The area around the Creek remained largely industrial until recently. The character of the area has now changed significantly, with the decline of industry and its replacement with areas of residential development on both sides of the Creek. It has also become a focus for small-scale retail and the emerging creative and cultural sector. The creek itself has long been in decline, with the Creek basin now partially silted, with a strong presence of car parks along the water's edge.

7.53 The waterfront at the creek basin is currently an under-used asset, with poor quality public access and large areas of hardstanding, which presents an excellent opportunity for improvement right in the heart of Faversham. Faversham Creek and its tributary, Oare Creek, have expansive views out to the flat, coastal landscapes, presenting a great opportunity to connect people to GBI through this 'gateway' area along the Creekside.



Faversham Creek

7.54 However currently, Faversham Creek is visually isolated from the rest of town centre and has unfulfilled potential in being a core part of the historic public realm, entrenched in its port history. Improving links between the town centre and the creek is a priority. A new waterfront public realm, with GBI at its heart, including clear, signposted routes from the town centre would create a lively and accessible waterfront destination.

7.55 There were once original walkways around the entire basin which have slowly been replaced by areas of car parking and industrial buildings. The restoration of this access would contribute to restoring the creek as a key part of the town centre, and contribute to the visitor economy. It would also provide better onward connections to the Saxon Shore Way, which runs alongside the creek.

- 7.56 Where development is proposed along the banks of the creek, such as that proposed within Faversham Creek Neighbourhood Plan, careful and imaginative design of new development should be central in order to celebrate the river rather than turn its back on it.
- 7.57 Upstream from the Creek Basin, Faversham Creek becomes a meandering tree-lined stream served by footpaths running alongside the water's edge, providing attractive routes to the town centre. These routes should be conserved and maintained, whilst providing way-marking enhancements were necessary.

### **A Connected, Active and Healthy Swale**

#### ***Active Travel Routes and Easier Access to GBI from Homes, Work and Schools***

- 7.58 The Key Diagram (Figure 27) demonstrates a 15 minute walking radius from the town centre. Within this area, active travel should be promoted and leaving the car at home should be advocated as the 'norm.' The retrofitting of GBI into the urban form to create attractive, safe routes to school and work can play a role in encouraging sustainable travel.

#### *Routes to Schools*

- 7.59 As mentioned throughout this strategy, the school journey is an important opportunity to establish regular physical activity for children by encouraging, and making it possible, for children to walk, cycle or scooter to school.

- 7.60 Traffic danger is a common reason within Faversham for parents for not allowing their children to walk or cycle to school. Traffic volume and cycle safety are important issues to be tackled, exacerbated by narrow streets within the town centre. Greening routes to schools, and increasing safety can increase the uptake of travelling to school on foot or by cycle. In turn, the number of cars on the roads, especially around school drop off points would reduce.
- 7.61 One other pipeline project to overcome traffic congestion is the '20's plenty' campaign which advocates for a town-wide 20mph limit. The project should be supported by SBC, schools, parents and the wider public for its role in increasing road safety, and should be coupled with greening initiatives.
- 7.62 The Key Diagram (Figure X) shows proposals for active travel routes around schools. In a similar way to the above, the aim would be to normalise walking or cycling to school by greening routes to schools, and where this isn't ideal, parents could park a distance away and travel the last part of the journey on foot. Proposals may include street trees, rain gardens, green crossings and increasing awareness of the benefits.
- 7.63 Stakeholder consultation highlighted that one potential, beneficial green active travel route would connect the Knole to Stonebridge way, which was not identified in the Sustrans Audit. Further discussion would be required about enabling dual pedestrian and cycling use.

#### *Routes to Work*

- 7.64 A large proportion of Faversham's residents work outside of the borough, with 70% of journeys into Canterbury generated from Faversham alone (Local Plan, 2018). The predominant modes of travel are car and train.



7.65 The direct route for people travelling to Canterbury by bike is along the A2. Between Dunkirk and Canterbury there is an existing dual use pavement for pedestrians and cyclists. However, from Faversham to Brenley Corner, the stretch of the A2 is dangerous for cyclists with fast flowing traffic and no cycle path. Between Brenley Corner and Dunkirk, cyclists often divert from the A2 to pass through Bloughton-under-Blean before re-joining the dual use cycleway onwards to Canterbury. Considering the large proportion of Faversham's residents that work in Canterbury, the safety of this route is important for encouraging active travel.

#### *Access to Oare Gunpowder Works Country Park*

7.66 The Oare Gunpowder Works Country Park is a significant green asset for the population of Faversham, which lies on the north west of the town. The park is open to the public seven days a week, though current access is predominantly by car with parking in front of the visitor centre.

7.67 Faversham's proximity to Oare and Gunpowder Works Country Park should be maximised by reducing the severance caused by Western Link. Greenways or safe crossing points should be provided from Davington and from the commercial area in the north western section of Faversham. For the wider population to benefit, the Key Diagram (Figure X) proposes active travel routes between the city centre and the Country Park, utilising the linear nature of Bysing Wood Road.

### Box 7.1 Sustrans School Streets

#### CASE STUDY

#### Sustrans School Streets

Sustrans School Streets is a programme to support schools and local authorities to trial and implement school streets across the UK. The aim is to tackle congestion, poor air quality and road safety concerns that many schools experience, by restricting motor traffic at the school gates, generally at drop-off and pick-up times.

A growing number of towns and cities are working with Sustrans to trial the School Streets approach. In 2019, jointly with the non-for profit organisation Playing Out, Sustrans helped 40 schools across the UK to close their road traffic. The image below shows chalk drawing on the road surface at a school in Newport to create a new crossing point and a fun, exciting environment.

In Tower Hamlets, School Streets are set to be coupled with tree planting to offer shelter and extra greenery, green walls on school buildings to filter air, and increased bike and scooter storage.



#### References:

Paragraphs 1-2 and Image: <https://www.sustrans.org.uk/our-blog/opinion/2019/november/stepping-up-for-safer-school-streets/>

#### Paragraph 3:

[https://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/ignl/transport\\_and\\_streets/roads\\_highways\\_and\\_pavements/School\\_Street\\_s.aspx](https://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/ignl/transport_and_streets/roads_highways_and_pavements/School_Street_s.aspx)

### **Encourage Community Participation and Engagement through GBI Initiatives**

#### *Abbey Physic Garden*

- 7.68 The Abbey Physic Community Garden is one green space to which medical practitioners currently refer residents through social prescribing. However, it is also well-used space by the general public, in the north-east of the town, tucked away behind the churchyard of St. Mary of Charity church.
- 7.69 Not only is the garden a haven for wildlife, but central to the running of the walled-garden is community involvement. Volunteers, who are all members of the Abbey Physic Community Garden organisation, are referred by mental health services, charities concerned with homelessness and drug abuse, and increasingly by GPs and self-referral. This process of referral is often referred to as social prescribing. The running of the garden with community involvement as a central process, presents lessons and opportunities for other green spaces across Faversham and Swale more widely.

#### *Red Zebra Social Prescribing*

- 7.70 Red Zebra Community Solutions has created a 'Connect Well online directory' to help improve the links between health professionals including GPs and nurses, and the voluntary and community sector. In Swale, the directory currently only operates in Faversham, with other services in Canterbury and Whitstable for example, holding a total of over 350 activities for those prescribed to get involved in. A large proportion of the 350 activities available have some link to GBI and outdoor activity.

- 7.71 In terms of conservation, gardening and general health and wellbeing, people of all ages across Faversham are already being prescribed by their health practitioners to the following activities through Red Zebra:

- Abbey Physic Gardening Group, woodworking group and Men's Shed Group
- Friends of Oare Gunpowder Works Volunteer Group
- Better Balance and Lower Limb classes at Faversham Outdoor Gym
- Lawn Bowls at Faversham Recreation Bowling Club

- 7.72 Where possible, the opportunities on offer for outdoor engagement and activity should be expanded in Faversham, though achievements to date should be celebrated. Monitoring and engagement with people taking part in activities would present opportunities for enhancement and identify further need. The principles and lessons learned through the Red Zebra schemes should inform the rollout of social prescribing across Swale's other towns to help with personal and community resilience.

### **Promote Healthy Play and Leisure**

- 7.73 Encouraging families to be more active is an achievable aim but in order to be feasible, accessible and attractive to families, options for outdoor activity as a family must be enjoyable. Off road cycling helps with both of these as the range of accessibility increases greatly with cycling, meaning attractions around Faversham would become within reach. Tag-along bikes and adaptors to tow children's bikes mean that even small children can be brought along, but these are preferable in an off road setting as they can affect stability and manoeuvrability.

- 7.74 Safe off road cycle routes directly out of town in Faversham are limited. Cycle route 1 leaves the town via Abbeyfields Road which is in poor condition and heavily potholed, leading past a sewage works. The cycle route quickly leaves the creekside, which potentially could be an attractive route if diverted, before passing along narrow roads which present hazards for cyclists.
- 7.75 The Great Stour Way, in the neighbouring authority of Canterbury, is a good model of an off road cycle track, with access from the city centre. The key is that these routes need direct access from towns to ensure that families without access to bike carriers and a vehicle can reach cycle routes from their doorsteps for recreation and exercise.

#### ***Enable Access to Affordable Healthy Food and Food Growing***

- 7.76 Faversham is already home to many flourishing allotments, such as the large allotment which lies adjacent to Stonebridge Pond on fertile ground. Other allotments include North Preston, Millfield and St Nicholas Road. All allotments are popular and often almost fully occupied, highlighting a willingness among local residents to grow and eat local produce. The Abbey Physic Garden also provides education to its volunteers on food growing.
- 7.77 To broaden the demographics involved in food growing, the Key Diagram indicates a number of Faversham's school grounds where by working together with the Wildlife Trust, there is potential to create allotments. At Queen Elizabeth Grammar School there is potential to share allotments with St.Mary of Charity Primary School, to act as a hub for wider community engagement.

### **A Beacon for the Visitor Economy**

#### ***Promote High Quality Gateway Spaces at Arrival Points***

- 7.78 As first impressions are key, the Key Diagram proposes the use of GBI to enhance the arrival point at Faversham train station. The existing arrival experience onto Station Road is dominated by built form and hardstanding. The brick wall along the southern edge of Station Road could be an opportunity for greening, through implementing green walls or climbing planters. This could be complemented by wall art to celebrate the heritage of Faversham, involving local residents and school children.
- 7.79 Lower cost interventions include planters and signposting to welcome visitors to the town. Ensuring clear, way-marked onward journeys is essential to providing an inviting experience.



Existing boundary wall along the southern side of Station Road.

7.80 Other gateways have been identified on the Key Diagram at key approaches to the town via the A2 and along Whitstable Road. At Whitstable Road, the integration of gateway GBI with Faversham Recreation Ground presents an opportunity to create an attractive arrival point to the town centre as well as a gateway to the green space itself. The gateway may include increasing the planting to provide visual interest around the existing access gate in the north western corner of the Recreation Ground where it runs adjacent to Whitstable Road.

#### ***Active Travel Routes from Public Transport Hubs to Visitor Attractions***

7.81 On arrival at Faversham Train Station, the proximity to the AONB should be promoted. Cycle hire close to the entrance point would enable visitors to access the AONB without the need for a car. Many nearby attractions are accessible by bike as outlined in Section 5.0 of the Strategy. = The Key Diagram shows a potential active travel route between the train station and the AONB.

7.82 Similarly, convenient and safe routes to the town centre should be signposted, with routes greened where possible.

#### **Optimise Areas of High Townscape Value**

7.83 Although Faversham has no areas of High Townscape Value designated through adopted policy, is not to say the GBI should not play a vital role in enhancing the setting of Faversham's many heritage assets.

7.84 Court Street for example is special for its outstanding assembly of buildings dating from between C15-C18, many timber-framed. The foreground of these historic buildings is currently dominated by parking bays along stretches of the road. GBI can contribute to improving the settings of existing properties. Improving the public realm along Court Street, and interspersing parking with street trees and planting can have benefits not only for the setting of heritage assets, but also for biodiversity, air pollution and shading from the sun.

#### **Schedule of Actions**

7.85 To bring together the Urban GBI Strategy for Faversham, table 4 below outlines a proposed 'Schedule of Actions'. Proposed actions are grouped under the four opportunity areas, with a delivery partners and potential funding streams outlined. Further information regarding each funding stream, including examples of organisations which fall into each category, can be found in Appendix B Funding.

Table 4: Schedule of Actions – Faversham Urban GBI Strategy

Activities	Actions	Lead	Partners	Funding
<b>A Green and Biodiverse Borough</b>				
Town Centre Greening	Increase street tree cover across the town centre.	Kent County Council Highways and Transportation	SBC, Town Council	Mainstream public sector funding; Fiscal initiatives e.g. BID; Commercial Finance
	In areas where wider streets and pavements permit such as Court Street, implement rain gardens and street trees to enhance the public realm and reduce surface water runoff.	Kent County Council SuDS Team	Town Council, SBC	Mainstream public sector funding; or Multi-agency public sector funding; Potential CIL contributions; Commercial Finance
	Work with local business owners and residents to green the square at Market Place	SBC	Businesses, Wildlife Trust	Mainstream public sector funding; Fiscal initiatives e.g. BID; Commercial Finance
	Re-instate pedestrian permeability between the town centre and the area to the south by greening alternative routes.	SBC	Sustrans, Kent County Council Highways and Transportation, Wildlife Trust	Mainstream public sector funding; or Multi-agency public sector funding; Potential CIL contributions
	Raise public awareness of the importance of wildlife-rich front gardens, including planting and trees, to enhance biodiversity, improve public realm and reduce flood risk	Wildlife Trust	Town Council; SBC, Schools	Mainstream public sector funding; or Multi-agency public sector funding
Urban Tree Planting and Corridor Greening	Increase tree cover/planting along the main transport corridors including the A2	Kent County Council Highways and Transportation	Wildlife Trust; Town Council	Mainstream public sector funding; or Multi-agency public sector funding; Potential CIL contributions
Commercial area greening	Work with owners of commercial and industrial premises to improve the local environment around commercial sites	SBC	Businesses; Kent Wildlife Trust	Mainstream public sector funding; Fiscal initiatives e.g. BID; Commercial Finance
Optimise green	Provide gateways to existing parks and gardens	SBC	Wildlife Trust; Community Groups	Mainstream public sector funding; Multi-agency public sector

spaces and parks				funding; Potential CIL contributions
	Invest in existing amenity green spaces within residential areas to create multi-functional and accessible green spaces	SBC	Community Groups	Mainstream public sector funding
Promote provision of multi-functional GBI in development	Ensure that all development sites adhere to requirements and recommendations of the Swale GBI Strategy including connected and multifunctional GBI	SBC	Developers; Wildlife Trust	Developer funds
	Ensure that the wider countryside is linked to the town centre through the allocated site and that corridor linkages into the town are retained in the future.	SBC	Developers; Sustrans Wildlife Trust	CIL contributions; S106
	Encourage new development to connect to and improve existing sustainable transport routes and create new cycleways and greenways where feasible	SBC	Developers; Sustrans	CIL contributions; S106
<b>A Healthy Blue Environment</b>				
Opportunities for SuDS	Implement SuDS in residential areas alongside Faversham Creek	Kent County Council SuDS Team	Environment Agency; SBC; Kent County Council Highways and Transportation ;	Mainstream public sector funding; or multi-agency public sector funding
	Implement suitable SuDS tree pits as part of street tree planting	Kent County Council SuDS Team	Environment Agency; SBC; Kent County Council Highways and Transportation ;	Mainstream public sector funding; or multi-agency public sector funding
	Incorporate SuDS into new development to manage surface water	Kent County Council SuDS Team	Environment Agency; SBC; Kent County Council Highways and Transportation ;	CIL contributions; S106
Westbrook Stream	Improve recreational amenity along the Westbrook through appropriate interventions such as footpath and fencing improvements and signposting	Friends of the Westbrook and Stonebridge Pond	SBC	Mainstream public sector funding; or multi-agency public sector funding
	Use GBI and signposting to enhance the setting of heritage features along the Westbrook	Friends of the Westbrook and Stonebridge Pond	SBC, Historic England	Mainstream public sector funding; or multi-agency public sector funding e.g. HLF
	Investigate the potential to extend public access northwards to Bysing Wood	SBC	Friends of the Westbrook and Stonebridge Pond; Sustrans	Mainstream public sector funding; or multi-agency public sector funding

	Support the continuation of the 'low flow channel' work	Friends of the Westbrook and Stonebridge Pond	SBC, Environment Agency	Mainstream public sector funding; or multi-agency public sector funding; Fiscal initiatives e.g. LCF
	Run Citizen Science projects where appropriate to assist in monitoring the effectiveness of interventions	Friends of the Westbrook and Stonebridge Pond	SBC	Mainstream public sector funding; or multi-agency public sector funding
	Longer term project to address siltation at Stonebridge Pond	Friends of the Westbrook and Stonebridge Pond	Environment Agency	Environment Agency
Promote access to waterways	Enhance pedestrian connections between Faversham Creek and the town centre	SBC	Sustrans	Mainstream public sector funding; or multi-agency public sector funding; Fiscal initiatives e.g. BID
	Increase public access along the banks of Faversham Creek, restoring historic footways and removing large areas of hardstanding	SBC	Business owners along the Creek, Sustrans, Environment Agency	Mainstream public sector funding; or multi-agency public sector funding
	Public realm improvements through GBI along Faversham Creek to create an attractive waterside environment	SBC	Business owners along the Creek, Environment Agency	Mainstream public sector funding; or multi-agency public sector funding
<b>A Healthy, Connected and Active Swale</b>				
Active travel routes	Improve the pedestrian route from Faversham Railway Station to the town centre	SBC	Sustrans; Kent County Council Highways and Transportation ; Wildlife Trust	Mainstream public sector funding; or multi-agency public sector funding; Fiscal initiatives e.g. BID
	Support and rollout the '20 is Plenty' Campaign across the town centre, prioritising streets around schools with supporting GBI measures	Town Council	SBC; Kent County Council Highways and Transportation	Mainstream public sector funding; or multi-agency public sector funding
	Investigate the potential for Sustrans School Streets Initiative	Town Council	SBC, Sustrans; Kent County Council Highways and	Mainstream public sector funding; or multi-agency public sector

			Transportation	funding
	Green the road networks surrounding schools, creating car free zones and introducing traffic calming measures.	SBC	Sustrans, Kent County Council Highways and Transportation , Primary and Secondary School Leadership	Mainstream public sector funding
	Increase safety for cyclists along the A2 between Faversham and Brenley Corner to provide onward connections to Canterbury	SBC	Sustrans, Kent County Council Highways and Transportation	Mainstream public sector funding
Encourage community participation and engagement through GBI initiatives	Increase awareness of initiatives such as the outdoor gym at the Recreation Ground.	Town Council	Red Zebra Community Solutions, SBC, Kent and Medway CCG, GPs	Mainstream public sector funding; or multi-agency public sector funding
	Build upon the existing social prescribing services system, learning lessons about need by conducting surveys and consultation with users of the service, and people who would benefit from participation	Red Zebra Community Solutions	SBC, Kent and Medway CCG, GPs	Mainstream public sector funding; or multi-agency public sector funding
	Celebrate and expand participation in initiatives at Abbey Physic Community Garden	Abbey Physic Community Garden Volunteers	SBC, Kent and Medway CCG, GPs	Mainstream public sector funding; or multi-agency public sector funding
Promote healthy play and leisure	Encourage Forest Schools to form part of the curriculum in all schools across Faversham	SBC	Forest Schools, Primary and Secondary School Leadership; School Boards; Wildlife Trust	Mainstream public sector funding; or multi-agency public sector funding
	Improve cycle routes directly out of Faversham town centre including Cycle Route 1. Investigate potential for diversion along the Creekside	Sustrans	Kent County Council Highways and Transportation , SBC	Mainstream public sector funding; or multi-agency public sector funding; Potential CIL contributions
Enhance existing and create new	Improve pedestrian and cycle connections between the town centre, residential neighbourhoods and the Oare Gunpowder Works Country Park	Sustrans; Friends of Oare and Gunpowder Works Country Park	Kent County Council Highways and Transportation , SBC	Mainstream public sector funding; or multi-agency public sector



routes for walkers and cyclists				funding; Potential CIL contributions; Income generating opportunities
	Where footpaths pass through areas of historic/cultural/wildlife interest such as along Faversham Creek, create viewpoints using seating and informative signage	SBC	Sustrans; Natural England; Historic England; Medway Swale Estuary Partnership	Mainstream public sector funding; or multi-agency public sector funding; Potential CIL contributions
	Provide signage indicating travel times and destinations along the Saxon Shore Way, including better signage from Faversham town centre to the route	SBC	Sustrans; Medway Swale Estuary Partnership	Mainstream public sector funding; or multi-agency public sector funding; Potential CIL contributions
	Provide gateways to the wider countryside, including the AONB to the south, by increasing signage, way-marking and improving quality of existing footpaths	SBC	Kent County Council Highways and Transportation ; SBC; Developers; Kent Downs AONB Unit; NFU	Mainstream public sector funding; or multi-agency public sector funding; Potential CIL contributions
Enable access to affordable healthy food and food growing	Work together with schools and the Wildlife Trust to improve wildlife habitats and create school allotments on school grounds	School Boards	SBC; Parent Teacher Associations; Wildlife Trust	Mainstream public sector funding; or multi-agency public sector funding; Potential CIL contributions
<b>A Beacon for the Visitor Economy</b>				
Active travel routes linking public transport hubs and tourist attractions	Improve the arrival experience to the town centre from Faversham train station and key road corridors through GBI enhancements	SBC	Visit Kent; Sustrans	EU funding; Mainstream public sector funding; or multi-agency public sector funding
	Establish high quality, car free access to the Kent Downs AONB using existing routes which run south from the town such as Faversham Road, Brogdale Road and Selling Road	Sustrans	Visit Kent, SBC	EU funding; Mainstream public sector funding; or multi-

				agency public sector funding
High quality gateway spaces at arrival points in town centres	Conduct a baseline inspection of the gateways illustrated on the key diagram for Faversham	SBC	Visit Kent	EU funding; Mainstream public sector funding; or multi-agency public sector funding
	Upgrade the green space around Faversham train station to improve the sense of arrival	SBC	Wildlife Trust, Visit Kent	EU funding; Mainstream public sector funding; or multi-agency public sector funding
	Create gateway signage of a consistent design	Visit Kent	SBC	EU funding; Mainstream public sector funding; or multi-agency public sector funding
Optimise areas of high townscape value through GI	Enhance the setting of existing architectural and heritage assets through GBI enhancements	SBC	Historic England; Wildlife Trust	EU funding; Mainstream public sector funding; or multi-agency public sector funding e.g. HLF

## 8.0 Sheerness and Minster

### *Sheerness*

- 8.1 Sheerness is the main town of the Isle of Sheppey with a population of 12,500. It is distinctive for its role as a traditional seaside town, its historic naval dockyard and the current Port of Sheerness which gives access via its deep water berths to larger ships. The town centre functions as the main shopping and service centre for the Island's residents and visitors.
- 8.2 Some of England's 20% most deprived neighbourhoods are in Sheerness and this is manifested in the poorer levels of educational attainment, ability to access jobs and health. The Local Plan (2017) also refers to Sheerness' town centre which is struggling to retain its role as the main commercial and service centre on the island. The Local Plan has a number of ambitions for the town centre including improving its vitality, providing a 'beacon' for coastal rejuvenation and preparing a longer term heritage strategy.
- 8.3 In terms of green and blue infrastructure (GBI), Sheerness has a number of significant assets, including the promenade and seafront and this extends east towards Minster. Sheerness is characterised by relatively high density development, although there are some GBI assets around the town centre including Beach Fields Park, Trinity Gardens, the 'Moat', a water body separating the town centre from the Port and the beach and seafront.

- 8.4 There is also the Queenborough Lines which extends along most of the southern edge of the settlement forming a 'spine' of GBI. The Queenborough Lines is as a former military canal and Scheduled Monument and has a multi-user route and accessible green space along its edge. Barton's Point Coastal Park, which includes a lake for watersports and other recreational activities, is at the eastern end of Queenborough Lines. Sports pitches at the eastern edge of Sheerness also front onto Queenborough Lines. In the residential areas to the west there are some park spaces including Festival Field and the Fleet. Opposite the Fleet there is a large allotment site and a linear waterbody also called the Fleet.

### *Minster*








- 8.5 The seafront extends east from Sheerness towards Minster where land rises up towards sea cliffs and higher land to the south which is occupied by the historic core of the town, including Minster Abbey. Minster is a predominantly residential area and has a population of 14,789. In terms of health and multiple deprivation, most areas are considered to correspond to the England average, although there are two areas, Kent Avenue and New Road respectively that are in the 20% deprived in England. Several key elements of social infrastructure are in Minster including the main campus of the Oasis Academy and the Isle of Sheppey Community Hospital. The Local Plan includes several existing and potential allocation sites for housing.
- 8.6 In terms of GBI, Minster also has a promenade and beach and the semi-natural green space that rises up from the seafront towards Royal Oak Point. The two main area green spaces and park are at the Glen and space accessed from Mills Close. There is also the semi-natural green space at Thistle Hill Way which was opened in 1999 and has established successfully as a wooded area with a series footpaths, glades and spaces for people to exercise.

Figure 30: Key Diagram – Urban GBI Strategy for Sheerness and Minster








**KEY**

**Existing GBI, Services and Infrastructure**



-  Publically accessible GBI
-  Other GBI
-  No GBI
-  School (Opportunity for safer routes to school)
-  Sheppey Community Hospital
-  Train Station
-  Railway

**Proposed Interventions**



**A Green and Biodiverse Borough**

-  Promote provision of multi-functional GBI in development
-  Town centre greening
-  Commercial area greening
-  Optimise green spaces and parks
-  Corridor greening (street trees, roadside verges)

**A Healthy, Connected and Active Swale**

-  Recreational and active travel route
-  Enhance existing routes for walkers and cyclists

**A Healthy Blue Environment**

-  Opportunity for SUDS (see text)
-  Promote access to waterways (see text)

**A Beacon for the Visitor Economy**

-  Gateway GBI

**A Green and Biodiverse Borough**

***Town Centre Greening***

**Sheerness**

- 8.8 Parts of Sheerness town centre pre-date the 20th Century and it is characterised by a fine grained pattern of streets, with buildings fronting onto the street and limited space for street trees or other GBI features. There is however opportunity to adapt to these constraints by proposing:
- Hanging baskets secured to lamp posts or buildings
  - ‘Parklets’ accommodating seating, decks and small trees and shrubs
  - Green roofs and walls on new and existing buildings
  - Adaptation of existing green space
  - Adaptation of vacant sites into ‘meanwhile’ GBI space
- 8.9 Hanging baskets are a common feature on high streets and residential streets in England and a coordinated approach could bring much visual amenity to the streetscene of High Street and Broadway. Flowering plants in hanging baskets also attract pollinators.
- 8.10 A parklet is a semi-permanent public pavement extension combining seating, trees, shrubs, flowers and bike parking. Parklets do not require a permanent concrete base and provide a space for people to sit with small trees and shrubs introducing greenery to streets where it would not be feasible to plant below ground level. The pedestrian space around the Clock Tower at the intersection of High Street and Broadway would have potential to accommodate a parklet.



Parklet (Example) Courtesy of Metristem Design

- 8.11 There are a number of alleyways (including Rides Mill Passage) that connect onto High Street that would benefit from retrofitting green walls. This would enhance the pedestrian environment providing visual amenity to users of the passageway and the High Street and could have a positive impact on footfall and people presence. A second alleyway extends east from High Street and this would benefit from a similar 'greening' treatment and would provide an enhanced route to Trinity Gardens (see below).
- 8.12 Other small spaces at the eastern end of Wood Street and Rose Street and near their intersection with High Street would benefit from some retrofitted parklets introducing planters, greening of walls and seating to provide cooling and visual amenity to the streetscene.



Minster Abbey

- 8.13 Providing an accessible green space in the town centre would allow residents, visitors and workers to enjoy the environment and would contribute to the visual amenity of the streetscene. This could include the adaptation of the established Trinity Gardens (grounds of Holy Trinity Church) through the management of the mature trees that could introduce more daylight and views, the provision of more seating and smaller scale planting to enhance the space.
- 8.14 There is a redundant older building south of Trinity Gardens with some unkempt ground to the perimeter. This could be converted into an attractive temporary 'meanwhile' space, with self-seeded vegetation and materials cleared. Planters with small trees and shrubs could be planted to the perimeter to improve visual amenity and streetscene.

- 8.15 The active Sheerness Town Council and other local community groups (Sheppey Matters) could take lead for the implementation and upkeep of some of these features.

#### Minster

- 8.16 The network of streets and area near to Minster Abbey include a number of mature trees conveying a wooded character, however there is off road parking and several vacant sites that undermine the quality and distinctiveness of the centre of the settlement. The central area would benefit from a similar treatment to that proposed for Sheerness town centre including hanging baskets, 'parklets' associated with food and beverage premises and, subject to the necessary approvals, the adaptation of vacant sites for accessible 'pocket parks'. The vacant sites are near to High Street to the south of the Abbey and could be transformed into small pocket parks for residents and visitors with seating, planting, interpretation. The pocket parks would enhance the centre of Minster and take advantage of the views south across the Swale and towards the Kent Downs.

#### ***Increase Urban Tree Planting for Corridor Greening***

- 8.17 Marine Parade is the main corridor linking Sheerness with Minster and it is highly prominent. There is potential for some sections of street tree planting in spaces between the road and the sea defence wall up to the settlement boundary. This would bring a number of benefits including visual amenity, provide shade and cooling and contribute to biodiversity.

- 8.18 A section of the wall west of the intersection of Marine Parade and Seager Road has a sloping profile and is retained by interlocking concrete units with small gaps filled with soil. The small gaps have been colonised with weeds but there would be opportunity to replace the material with a subsoil that could support wildflowers planting. This would greatly improve the visual appearance of the corridor, while also attracting pollinators and improving biodiversity.
- 8.19 Climbing plants have been successfully introduced to a section of the sea defence wall opposite the main access to the Oasis Academy (school site). The section of the planted wall coincides with a pedestrian access to the promenade. Other sections of the sea wall could be planted in a similar manner, particularly around pedestrian access points to improve legibility and enhance the pedestrian experience.
- 8.20 There is a sloping retaining wall, with interlocking blockwork, on the southern side of Marine Parade and the boundary with Barton's Point Coastal Park. Opportunities for wildflower planting could also be considered between the interlocking blockwork. Similar benefits would be achieved as referred to earlier.
- 8.21 Brielle Way (A249) provides the main approach from the 'mainland' into Sheerness. There are grass verges along much of the corridor and the opportunity for street tree planting to improve the visual amenity of the approach into the town and enhance biodiversity. Any tree species selected should be native with the proximity to the Kent Biodiversity Strategy Biodiversity Opportunity Area (BOA) extending across the mouth of the River Medway and along the Swale.

### ***Optimise Existing Green Spaces and Parks***

#### Sheerness

- 8.22 Festival Field and the Fleet both provide accessible amenity green space in the western part of the town for play, informal sport and recreation. However there would be opportunity to optimise those spaces for further benefit for people and nature. Festival Field (approx. 3ha) is characterised by a large area of close mown grass, some informal sports pitches, a play area, some intermittent tree planting and boundaries defined by railings. There are a number of potential features that could be retrofitted to help meet some of the needs of people and nature and to boost the GBI functionality of the space. Measures could include the planting of native hedgerows along railing boundaries to improve visual amenity, air quality and biodiversity. The hedgerow could be extended at the eastern boundary of the space to partly screen the neighbouring warehouses. Additional 'avenue' tree planting could be planted near to the boundary with New Road, bringing an enhanced sense of enclosure and visual amenity. There would be opportunity to strengthen the planting along the northern boundary of Festival Field. Beyond this boundary is the railway and the Port of Sheerness, so strengthening the edge with native woodland edge planting would eventually screen some views towards building form in the Port, help to reduce noise, improve air quality and enhance biodiversity. The approach to maintaining grass could be altered to the margins of the main field and play area by introducing wildflower meadows reducing costs for the Council, while improving biodiversity. The play area could be diversified with the inclusion of 'natural' materials such as tree trunks and boulders to provide opportunities for more creative play.
- 8.23 There are two primary schools within close proximity of Festival Field and there would be opportunity to provide several features to assist with learning including a community orchard and pond area with marginal planting. These features could be located in the north eastern corner of the space opposite the St Edwards RC School to enable some natural surveillance and a sense of ownership.
- 8.24 The Fleet (approx.1ha) is characterised by an area of close mown grass with some established tree planting to the edge of the space and two smaller areas retained as wildflower meadow. There are several features that could be retrofitted to help meet some of the needs of local people and nature and to boost the GBI functionality of the space. This could include planting sections of native hedgerow to improve the sense of enclosure to the space. This would be particularly appropriate near to the edge with Medway Road and the wildflower meadow planting could be extended alongside any hedgerow planting to enhance biodiversity. There would also be potential to include some seating along an informal footpath to the perimeter of the space and this is likely to encourage use of the space.
- 8.25 Subject to road levels and drainage system there would also be potential to create a swale alongside one side of the Fleet at the interface of the open space and the road. The swale would accommodate surface water runoff from the road and there would be opportunity to plant wet grassland species and aquatic plants. The swale would provide an interesting visual feature in the park, manage surface water runoff sustainably and enhance biodiversity. The case study in Chapter 5.0 at Alma Road in London demonstrates a successful precedent for incorporating a swale into a streetscape.



### Minster

- 8.26 The Glen (approx. 8ha) is a distinctive green space with a varied topography, diverse planting, interesting arrangement of space and a range of views. In terms of the management of the spaces, there is a mix of closely mown grass and meadow, however no footpath network to assist the user.
- 8.27 The Glen is in the north western part of Minster and is largely concealed by neighbouring residential development, although there is access gained from a number of cul-de-sacs. The nearest main road is The Broadway to the west, with access to the site gained from The Glen, a short residential road to the north west but with no signposting.
- 8.28 To address the deficiencies, the site would benefit from a number of enhancements including signposting from the main road network and the design of a series of gateway spaces at each access point. These could include some tree planting, seating, interpretation and an informal footpath linking each gateway to maximise the use of the space. On the lowest ground, infiltration basins could be constructed and established to enhance surface drainage, provide a habitat for wildlife and an interesting visual feature. The mowing regime could be modified to include more species rich grassland and wildflower meadows.



The Glen, Minster

### ***Promote provision of multifunctional GBI in new development***

- 8.29 The Key Diagram (Figure 30) shows there are several potential development sites for housing and employment. The housing sites tend to be the southern fringes of Minster and the employment sites along the A249 corridor.
- 8.30 In terms of the progression of these sites there is an excellent opportunity to integrate GBI from the outset of the design process where it is considered as critical infrastructure on an equal basis with utilities and roads.

- 8.31 For the housing sites there is an opportunity to propose a comprehensive and connected network of GBI that deliver many functions including recreation, active travel, SuDS, habitats for nature and climate change adaptation including the provision of shade and cooling. Such an approach would enhance the design, layout and appearance of the development and is likely to raise the commercial value of the housing for the developer.
- 8.32 Employment sites should consider a similar approach, with a particular focus on the development frontage, boundaries and provision of outdoor space for employees. Any proposals for GBI in development should also recognise any assets in or near to the site. All the development sites are in or near to Biodiversity Opportunity Areas (BOA) identified in the draft Kent Biodiversity Strategy (2019-2044) and GBI proposals will need to recognise and contribute to the relevant species and habitats.
- 8.33 The 700 home development of to the west of Barton Hill Drive, Minster, received outline planning approval in March 2020. The Council should ensure that a comprehensive and connected network of GBI is proposed for any reserved matters application. More specifically any proposals should include a suitable GBI frontage onto the A2500 and the interface with the BOA to the south. Strong links should also be established with the existing semi-natural green space at Thistle Hill Way.

### **A Healthy Blue Environment**

- 8.34 Queenborough Lines and the Fleet are the two main water bodies in Sheerness and they provide a number of benefits including visual amenity and a setting for recreation and active travel. Neither of the water bodies would be designated under the Water Framework Directive (WFD) but with the proximity of people and nature an early action would be to test water quality. This would establish if any fertilisers, herbicides or pesticides are being released into the water bodies from neighbouring land and consider actions to address any issues arising.
- 8.35 As these water bodies have limited connection to a wider water network it is likely that they are subject to a lack of oxygenation with algae and blanket weed growth. To address this potential issue, there would be opportunity to consider oxygenating plants to control algal blooms and improve the water quality.
- 8.36 As a Scheduled Monument any GBI proposals to the edge or setting of Queenborough Lines would need to be agreed with Historic England. A more detailed study could be undertaken to consider GBI improvements that could improve the edges and setting of the water body for the benefit of people and nature.



Queenborough Lines, Sheerness

- 8.37 The Fleet has the visual appearance of a meandering watercourse and a more detailed study could consider opportunities for diversifying planting to the margins to improve water quality, biodiversity and enhance the experience of pedestrians and cyclists.
- 8.38 The rationale for sustainable drainage schemes (SuDS) was highlighted under the Urban GI Strategies for Sittingbourne and Faversham. The potential for a SuDS scheme was described for the optimisation of green space at the Fleet in Sheerness and this approach could be applied to other locations.

### **A Connected, Active and Healthy Swale**

#### ***Active Travel Routes and Easier Access to GBI from Homes, Work and Schools***

- 8.39 Sustrans are currently working with Swale Borough Council and Kent County Council on active travel proposals in the Sheerness area and these will provide opportunity to access work and education without using the car. In addition, the Sheerness Way provides a 'loop' around Sheerness, with a spur to Minster on the sea front. The disposition of the route makes it convenient for residents accessing facilities Sheerness and attractive for visitors as it passes along the seafront and Queenborough Lines. There are a number of opportunities to retrofit GBI features along these routes particularly along the corridor of the Queenborough Lines and intersections with primary road network to improve the experience of the cyclist and pedestrian. The Sheerness Way passes next to Festival Field and the Fleet and the GBI proposals described earlier would benefit users of the route.
- 8.40 As a complementary initiative to GBI, there would be the opportunity to create a cycle version of the very successful Saturday morning 5km Park Run initiative across the UK. The 'Sheerness Way' Loop provides an ideal 8km circuit of the town and a marshalled cycle 'sportif' could promote participation on the island and raise the profile of the sport with its physical and social benefits.

#### ***Safer Routes to School, Health Facilities and Green Space***

- 8.41 The Urban GBI Strategy for Sittingbourne and Faversham outlined several schemes to encourage children and their carers to walk, cycle or scooter to school. Working with Sustrans, there is potential for active travel routes around all the other schools in Sheerness and Minster and the school locations are indicated on the Key Diagram. Box 7.1 is a case study 'Sustrans Schools Streets' outlining the approach create a safer and greener environment for active travel.

8.42 At Thistle Hill in Minster there is an implemented scheme for the primary school at Thistle Hill which has a number of segregated cycling and walking routes from neighbouring areas. The active travel infrastructure also serves the Sheppey Community Hospital and green space at Thistle Hill Way.

***Promote Healthy Play and Leisure***

8.43 The Isle of Sheppey provides residents with the opportunity to spend their leisure time in its varied landscapes and coastline. The modest size of the island and interesting features including beaches, sea front promenade, Queenborough Lines and Minster Abbey make it accessible for residents to enjoy active play and leisure.

8.44 The earlier sections highlighted that existing cycling and walking routes are focussed around the 'Sheerness Way', with wider links between Sheerness and Minster and around Thistle Hill. The Sustrans Study promotes the longer term existing routes would need to be 'joined up' to create a connected network of routes, particularly from the edges of Sheerness and Minster so residents can access assets around the island.



Queenborough Lines – linear green space

***Enable Access to Affordable, Healthy Food and Food Growing***

8.45 Sheerness has two large allotments; at the Fleet and at Richmond Street next to the Queenborough Lines. Both are easily accessible from the 'Sheerness Way' loop. The allotment at the Fleet has a concealed position set behind housing and garages on Medway Road. Working with the potential improvements proposed for the open space at the Fleet, referred to earlier, there would be the opportunity to acquire several of the garage units and replace these and the adjacent hardstanding with a garden or a facility for selling allotment produce. This would also form a gateway feature for the allotment with the potential to raise the profile and interest in food growing.

8.46 The earlier section on optimising green spaces promoted opportunities to alter the management of some areas of close mown grass with wildflower meadows. The Queenborough Lines includes an extensive linear strip of close mown grass. Replacing some of this with wildflower meadow would attract pollinators and in turn would enhance the fertilization process of the fruit and vegetable crop on the Richmond Street allotment. This enhancement would also contribute to the Biodiversity Opportunity Area (BOA) on the southern side of the Queenborough Lines.

8.47 There are currently no allotment sites in Minster. A more detailed study forming part of an update to the Swale Open Space Strategy (2009-2014) would establish the need for allotments in Minster in terms of quantity, accessibility and potential location of sites.

### **A Beacon for the Visitor Economy**

#### **Promote High Quality Gateway Spaces and Arrival Points**

##### **Sheerness**

- 8.48 Tourism is a vital part of the Isle of Sheppey economy and many visitors arrive at the railway station where their first impressions of Sheerness are formed. There would be opportunity to rationalise the arrangements outside the railway station so that it becomes more pedestrian centred gateway space, with public realm improvements, suitable street trees, hedgerows and planters. This could greatly improve the pedestrian experience which could extend to the pedestrian link to Beach Fields Park, Beach Street, promenade and beach.
- 8.49 Beach Fields Park is an established asset with a play facility and an associated green space next to the Sheppey Leisure Complex. Some of the boundaries to these spaces would benefit from some hedge and 'avenue' tree planting for better definition and visual screening from some neighbouring uses. Appropriate ornamental planting along sections of Beach Street would enhance the visitor experience. These improvements would also greatly enhance the Sheerness Burgundy Trail which forms a circular route revealing the history of local people, places and events. The Trail starts at the railway station and then heads towards the Moat and then along the seafront promenade, returning back along Broadway and High Street.

- 8.50 There is second walking trail 'Blue Town' which navigates part of the historic naval dockyard to the west of the town centre. There would be some opportunities for GBI along this route with some complementary public realm improvements to the streetscene. GBI improvements could include street trees, hedgerow planting and planters. The Moat and the Naval Terrace are two heritage features at the eastern edge of Blue Town and within a five minute walk from the station. Subject to the necessary approvals installation of a circular walk to the Moat would provide visitors with an interesting walking circuit linking the station, Naval Terrace and beach. There would also be opportunity to enhance the green space fronting the Naval Terrace and Dockyard Church. These GBI measure could also provide a link between the Blue Town Trail and the Sheerness Burgundy Trail.
- 8.51 The Queenborough Lines is an interesting feature for visitors and in addition to the corridor improvements to Marine Parade (referred to earlier) there would be opportunity for a gateway space near to the southern edge of High Street and the Scheduled Monument. The space could be configured around some appropriate public realm improvements, seating, tree planting and interpretation.

##### **Minster**

- 8.52 Minster Abbey was founded in 664AD and is a significant heritage asset in the town. It occupies the highest point of the island and there are some panoramic views from some of the neighbouring streets over the Swale and towards the Kent Downs AONB. There would be some opportunities for GBI that could be complemented by townscape and public realm improvements, interpretation and a heritage walking trail. These opportunities would combine with the proposals for town centre greening referred to earlier.

Table 5: Schedule of Actions – Sheerness and Minster Urban GBI Strategy

Activities	Actions	Lead	Partners	Funding
<b>A Green and Biodiverse Borough</b>				
Town Centre Greening	<b>Sheerness</b>			
	Hanging baskets secured to lamp posts or buildings	Town Council	SBC, Sheppy Matters, Wildlife Trust	Mainstream public sector funding; Fiscal initiatives e.g. BID; Commercial Finance
	Implement parklets where appropriate, such as the pedestrian space around the Clock Tower at the intersection of High Street and Broadway.	Town Council	SBC, Businesses, Kent County Council Highways and Transportation	Mainstream public sector funding; or Multi-agency public sector funding; Planning and Development Opportunities; Commercial Finance
	Retrofit green walls into existing alleyways such as Rides Mill Passage and the alleyway extending east from the High Street to Trinity Gardens.	Town Council	SBC, Sheppey Matters, Businesses, Wildlife Trust	Mainstream public sector funding; Fiscal initiatives e.g. BID; Commercial Finance
	Adapt Trinity Gardens to become an accessible green space, through the management of mature trees, seating provision and smaller scale planting.	Town Council	SBC, Sheppey Matters, Sustrans, Wildlife Trust	Mainstream public sector funding; or Multi-agency public sector funding; Planning and Development Opportunities
	<b>Minster</b>			
	Adapt vacant sites near to the High Street and south of the Abbey for pocket parks, with seating, planting and interpretation.	Town Council	SBC, Businesses, Kent County Council Highways and Transportation	Mainstream public sector funding; or Multi-agency public sector funding; Fiscal initiatives e.g. BID; Commercial Finance
Urban Tree Planting and Corridor Greening	Increase tree planting along Marine Parade between Sheerness and Minster	Kent County Council Highways and Transportation	SBC, Wildlife Trust; Town Council	Mainstream public sector funding; or Multi-agency public sector funding; Planning and Development

				Opportunities
	Tree planting along Brielle Way (A249) where there are existing grass verges	Kent County Council Highways and Transportation	SBC, Wildlife Trust; Town Council	Mainstream public sector funding; or Multi-agency public sector funding; Planning and Development Opportunities
	Wildflower planting at the intersection of Marine Parade and Seager Road	Wildlife Trust	SBC, Town Council	Mainstream public sector funding; or Multi-agency public sector funding; Planning and Development Opportunities eg BNG Funding
	Wildflower planting along the sloping retaining wall on the southern side of Marine Parade	Wildlife Trust	SBC, Environment Agency	Mainstream public sector funding; or Multi-agency public sector funding; Planning and Development Opportunities eg BNG Funding
	Introduce climbing plants along the sea wall, taking inspiration from the existing section at the Oasis Academy.	Wildlife Trust	SBC, Environment Agency	Mainstream public sector funding; or Multi-agency public sector funding; Planning and Development Opportunities eg BNG Funding
Optimise green spaces and parks	<b>Sheerness</b>			
	Retrofit features such as native hedgerows, avenue tree planting, strengthened boundary planting, natural play features and wildflower planting into Festival Field.	SBC	Town Council, Wildlife Trust, Community Groups, Sheppey Matters	Mainstream public sector funding; Multi-agency public sector funding; Planning and Development Opportunities
	Provide learning opportunities in the north eastern section of Festival Field such as a community orchard and pond area.	SBC	Town Council, Wildlife Trust, Community Groups,	Mainstream public sector funding; Multi-agency public sector

			Sheppey Matters	funding; Planning and Development Opportunities
	Retrofit features such as native hedgerow, extending the wildflower meadow and include some seating along an informal path at The Fleet.	SBC	Town Council, Wildlife Trust, Community Groups, Sheppey Matters	Mainstream public sector funding; Multi-agency public sector funding; Planning and Development Opportunities
	Create a swale alongside one side of the Fleet at the interface of the open space and the road. This is subject to road levels and drainage system.	Kent County Council SuDS Team	Environment Agency; SBC; Kent County Council Highways and Transportation ;	Mainstream public sector funding
<b>Minster</b>				
	Enhancements at The Glen open space: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Signposting from the main road network</li> <li>• Gateway spaces at each access point including tree planting, seating, interpretation</li> <li>• An informal footpath linking each gateway</li> <li>• On the lowest ground, infiltration basins could be constructed and established to enhance surface drainage</li> <li>• Modified mowing regime to include more species rich grassland and wildflower meadows</li> </ul>	SBC	Town Council, Wildlife Trust, Community Groups, Sheppey Matters	Mainstream public sector funding; Multi-agency public sector funding; Planning and Development Opportunities
Promote provision of multi-functional GBI in development	Ensure that all development sites deliver a comprehensive and connected network of GBI that deliver many functions including recreation, active travel, SuDS, habitats for nature and climate change adaptation including the provision of shade and cooling.	SBC	Developers; Wildlife Trust	Developer Funds
	Employment sites should consider a similar approach to above, with a particular focus on the development frontage, boundaries and provision of outdoor space for employees.	SBC	Developers; Businesses; Wildlife Trust	Developer Funds
	The Council should ensure that a comprehensive and connected network of GBI is proposed for any reserved matters applications associated with the 700 home Barton Hill Drive development.	SBC	Developers; Wildlife Trust	Developer Funds



<b>A Healthy Blue Environment</b>				
Water Quality	Test the water quality of the Queenborough Lines and the Fleet to establish is any fertilisers, herbicides or pesticides are being released into the water bodies.	Environment Agency	SBC; Historic England	Mainstream public sector funding; or multi-agency public sector funding
	Potential detailed study into opportunities for diversifying planting along the Fleet and improving water quality.	SBC	Environment Agency; Town Council	Mainstream public sector funding; or multi-agency public sector funding
<b>A Healthy, Connected and Active Swale</b>				
Active travel routes	Retrofit GBI features along the Sheerness Way, and along the corridor of the Queenborough Lines and intersections with primary road network to improve the experience of the cyclist and pedestrian.	Town Council	SBC; Sustrans; Kent County Council Highways and Transportation	Mainstream public sector funding; or multi-agency public sector funding; Planning and Development Opportunities
	Create a cycle version of the successful Saturday morning 5km Park Run initiative across the UK using the 'Sheerness Way' Loop which provides an ideal 8km circuit of the town	Town Council	SBC; Sustrans; Kent County Council Highways and Transportation	Mainstream public sector funding; or multi-agency public sector funding; Planning and Development Opportunities
	Implement active travel routes around all schools in Sheerness and Minster	Town Council	SBC; Sustrans; Kent County Council Highways and Transportation	Mainstream public sector funding; or multi-agency public sector funding
Enable access to affordable healthy food and food growing	Develop a gateway feature to the allotment at the Fleet, which may include a garden or a facility for selling allotment produce.	SBC	SBC; School Boards; Wildlife Trust	Mainstream public sector funding; or multi-agency public sector funding; Planning and Development Opportunities
	Replacing some of the linear strip of close mown grass along the Queenborough Lines with wildflower meadow would attract pollinators and in turn would enhance the fertilization process of the fruit and vegetable crop on the Richmond Street allotment.	Wildlife Trust	SBC, Town Council	Mainstream public sector funding; or multi-agency public sector funding; Planning and Development Opportunities

	As there are currently no allotment sites in Minster, undertake a detailed study forming part of an update to the Swale Open Space Strategy (2009-2014) to establish the need for allotments in Minster in terms of quantity, accessibility and potential location of sites.	SBC	Town Council; Academic Institutions	Mainstream public sector funding
<b>A Beacon for the Visitor Economy</b>				
High quality gateway spaces at arrival points in town centres	<b>Sheerness</b> Create a more pedestrian centred gateway space at Sheerness train station, with public realm improvements, suitable street trees, hedgerows and planters.	SBC	Visit Kent, Sustrans, Businesses	EU funding; Mainstream public sector funding; or multi-agency public sector funding
	Enhancements to Beach Fields Park: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Hedge and avenue tree planting along boundaries</li> <li>Appropriate ornamental planting along Beach Street</li> </ul>	SBC	Wildlife Trust, Town Council, Visit Kent, Sheppey Matters	EU funding; Mainstream public sector funding; or multi-agency public sector funding
	Retrofit GBI, such as street trees, hedgerow planting and planters, along the 'Blue Town' trail, with complementary public realm improvements to the street scene.	SBC	Wildlife Trust, Town Council, Visit Kent, Sheppey Matters	EU funding; Mainstream public sector funding; or multi-agency public sector funding
	Install of a circular walk linking the Moat, the station, Naval Terrace and beach.	Town Council	Sustrans, SBC, Visit Kent	EU funding; Mainstream public sector funding; or multi-agency public sector funding; Planning and Development Opportunities
	Enhance the green space fronting the Naval Terrace and Dockyard Church.	SBC	Wildlife Trust, Town Council, Visit Kent, Sheppey Matters	Mainstream public sector funding; or multi-agency public sector funding; Planning and Development Opportunities

	<b>Minster</b>			
	GBI improvements at Minster Abbey: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Townscape and public realm improvements</li> <li>• Interpretation</li> <li>• Heritage Walking Trail</li> </ul>	Wildlife Trust	SBC, Minster Abbey, Town Council, Historic England	Mainstream public sector funding; or multi-agency public sector funding; Planning and Development Opportunities

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## **Appendix A: Glossary - Green and Blue Infrastructure**

### Asset

A GBI Asset is identified where there is a need for GBI being met by a Type/Typology of GBI.

### Typologies

This is the primary use or description of GBI. The typologies used within this technical report are outlined below:

#### *Agricultural Land and Horticulture*

Agricultural land used for crop production and grazing.

#### *Allotment, Community Garden or Urban Farm*

These are open spaces primarily utilised by members of the public for the cultivation of fruit, vegetables and flowers. They usually consist of cultivation beds and boundary vegetation, and access can sometimes be restricted.

#### *Amenity Green Spaces and Village Greens*

This typology includes sites which are primarily for public recreation, and consist of grassed surface and associated vegetation. They are usually publically owned and managed.

#### *Cemeteries and Churchyards*

These are areas which are associated with churchyards or burial grounds. They primarily consist of grass with occasional shrubs or trees.

#### *Derelict and Vacant Land, Sewage Treatment Works*

Derelict and vacant land is land which has no formal use. It can include 'urban commons' which are used for informal recreation and brownfield land which has not yet been redeveloped. Sewage treatment works are large areas of private land which contain sludge drying areas, filter beds and other features associated with sewage treatment.

#### *Grassland, Heathland and Scrubland*

This typology includes sites which consist primarily of grassland and scrubland which are not agriculturally improved, but are also not part of a formal recreation space such as a village green.

#### *Green Corridors along Railways, Highways and Other Routes*

These are linear open spaces associated with transport routes such as cycle paths, roads and railways. They can consist of a mixture of grass, shrubs and trees.

### *Green Roof*

The roofs of buildings which have been covered in vegetation with the intention to reduce water surface runoff. A variety of vegetation can be present, including mosses, sedges and other low level vegetation.

### *Landscaped areas Around Housing and Industrial Estates/Premises*

These are areas which are associated with housing and industrial estates or premises. The areas usually consist of amenity grass, shrubs and trees.

### *Parks and Formal Gardens*

This typology includes parks and formal gardens designed for public use and contain a variety of landscape and horticulture elements. Extraneous facilities such as a toilet block or visitor centre may also be present on site.

### *Play Area (All Types)*

This typology includes open spaces designated for use by young people for recreation. It typically consists of grassed areas, trees and shrubs, with additional play equipment.

### *Playing Fields, Golf Courses, Equestrian Centre and Other Recreational Grounds*

This typology includes sites designated for sports recreation. They typically include vegetated sports surface and associated vegetation. The sites can be publically or privately owned.

### *Private Domestic Garden*

These areas are privately owned open space within the curtilage of individual dwellings, and are generally inaccessible to members of the public. They can include a variety of hard and soft landscape features.

### *Reservoir*

This typology consists of sites which are primarily large expanse of open water which do not form part of another open space site (such as a park). As stated in the data limitations, it was not possible to identify smaller waterbodies such as ponds from the source datasets.

### *School and Hospital Grounds*

These are open spaces associated with the grounds of educational and health facilities, and typically includes grassland with scattered trees, hedgerows and shrubs.

### *Street Trees*

Street trees are composed of a row or collection of individual trees along the side of a road in tree pits or on grass verges.

### *Watercourse*

This includes large areas of running water, such as rivers and canals. As stated in the data limitations, it was not possible to identify smaller watercourses such as streams or brooks from the source datasets.

### *Woodland*

This typology includes sites which are identified as woodland by the GiGL open spaces dataset. The woodland can include both deciduous and coniferous trees, and can be privately owned or publically accessible. Woodland within other open space typologies, such as parks and formal gardens, may not be included within this typology.

### Benefits

Whereas GBI functions refer to the specific use of land, benefits refer to the wider, potentially less tangible contributions to people and nature arising out of GBI. The graphic opposite demonstrates the link between specific GBI functions and the wider benefits. For example, the green travel route function can deliver a number of wider benefits, such as health and wellbeing for people who choose to walk or cycle, recreation benefits and a reduction in motorised traffic leading to less emissions into the atmosphere and reduced climate change risk.

### Ecosystem Services

Humankind benefits from a multitude of natural resources and processes that are sustained by ecosystems. These 'ecosystems services' include the provision of food, clean water, resources for energy and industry, flood alleviation, crop pollination and recreation opportunities. Ecosystem services are grouped into four broad categories: provisioning, such as the production of food and water; regulating, such as managing the climate; supporting, such as nutrient cycles and crop pollination; cultural, such as recreational benefits.

### Functions

One of the principal drivers of GBI planning is to manage land in a more sustainable way. While most GBI assets will have a primary purpose or function it is also possible for functions to co-exist, leading to multifunctional GBI and the ability to use land more effectively and efficiently. For example street trees add aesthetic quality to an urban area but can also support wildlife and improve environmental health by reducing airborne pollution and provide shade for people and wildlife. The functions used in this framework are defined below:

### *Aesthetic*

GBI can improve the image of an area and this can make the surrounding area a more attractive place to live, work and visit, and also result in higher property values.

### *Carbon Storage*

Carbon storage (or sequestration) is the removal of carbon from the atmosphere and the storage in plants, trees and soils. Trees and peat soils are particularly important for the storage of carbon. Different types of GBI will sequester carbon at different rates depending on the growth speed of vegetation.



### *Coastal Flood Protection*

GBI can protect infrastructure and agriculture close to the shore. It can protect against winds and sea spray through the reduction of the speed of the waves and the impact of tidal surges.

### *Connectivity for Wildlife*

Areas that wildlife can disperse through between habitat spaces. This function will become more important in the future, as species' ranges increase northwards with the climate changes. Different types of GBI provide connectivity for a variety of species. However the range of species is also dependent on other factors such as climate or disturbance.

### *Culture*

Space used for cultural purposes, the hosting of public art, events and festivals provide the function of culture.

### *Evaporative Cooling*

Evaporative cooling is the process by which plants transpire water which is evaporated from their surfaces cooling their immediate locality. All types of vegetation can provide this function, including open water. Plants with a larger leaf area are likely to be better than those with a smaller leaf area.

During periods of drought, irrigation is likely to be necessary to maximise this function in plants, whilst open water will continue to be valuable in its own right.

### *Food Production*

Land used for growing crops or the grazing of animals.

### *Green Travel Route*

Green travel routes are off-road routes for pedestrians and cyclists (for recreational purposes as well as moving between places) through greenery and includes the area surrounding the green travel route. These include PRowS.

### *Habitat for Wildlife*

The provision of a place for wildlife to live, including a source of food. The variety of types of GBI will provide habitats for a range of species. However the range of species is also dependent on other factors such as climate or disturbance.

### *Heritage*

Historic links in the landscape (including ancient woodlands, canals, designated sites and monuments). Heritage is defined as that which is inherited.

### *Learning*

GBI can provide a backdrop for outdoor classrooms and learning outside of the indoor school environment. It can also be used as a setting for learning new skills which may help adults develop skills for the workplace.

### *Noise Absorption*

Screening of noise, especially from major transport routes can improve quality of environment. However this requires GBI elements that are tall enough to intercept and absorb sound waves. This function is usually associated with urban areas, especially close to travel routes.

### *Private Recreation*

Land which is used for recreation but only by the landowners or those invited by the landowners to use. This primarily consists of private domestic gardens.

### *Public Recreation*

Areas that can be freely used for recreational purposes (formal/informal and active/passive), without any restrictions to access (such as payment or membership). This can include areas closed at night, on specific days or seasonally but this was assessed on an individual basis.

### *Restricted Public Recreation*

Areas that can be used by the public for recreational purposes (formal/informal and active/passive), but is restricted (usually via payment or membership). This usually includes outdoor sports facilities and formal parks and gardens.

### *Shading from the Sun*

Shading of people and surfaces from solar radiation can reduce temperatures and increase comfort levels and is usually provided by trees and taller plants. Shading from the sun is also important to protect agricultural land and other species from solar radiation. This function will become more critical when adapting to climate change.

### *Trapping Air Pollutants*

Removal of pollutants, including ozone, nitrogen dioxide and particles from the air, through uptake via leaf stoma and deposition on leaf surfaces. Once inside the leaf, gases diffuse into intercellular spaces and may be absorbed by water films to form acids or react with inner leaf surfaces. This function is usually associated with urban areas, especially close to travel routes.

### *Water Infiltration*

Vegetation and roots can aid the movement of water into the ground. Includes both surface infiltration and deep infiltration, which can reduce the risk of flooding.

### *Water Interception*

The interception of rainwater before it reaches the ground, by the leaves of trees and plants will slow the flow of water to the ground. This can reduce the risk of flooding. All vegetated types of GBI will intercept water in some way, although this varies with leaf area.

### *Water Storage*

Water storage in ponds, lakes, rivers and some wetlands. This water is accessible for human use and for irrigation if it is required.

### *Wind Shelter*

GBI can provide shelter from winds by slowing or diverting currents.

### Geographic Information System (GIS)

GIS is a system designed to capture, analyse, manage and present all types of geographical data. In the context of the Blackpool GBI Framework, GIS is used to map all GBI assets and identify the existing functions of those assets. GIS also provides the analysis for the needs assessment.

### Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD)

This is a measure of relative deprivation for Lower Super Output Areas. It is made up of 37 indicators reflecting different aspects of deprivation experience by those living in an area.

### Lower Super Output Area

The Lower Super Output Area is a geographic area used by the Office for National Statistics for many of its statistical outputs.

### Natural Capital Accounting

Natural capital is 'the stock of our physical natural assets (such as soil, forests, water and biodiversity) which provide flows of services that benefit people (such as pollinating crops, natural hazard protection, climate regulation or the mental health benefits of a walk in the park). Natural capital is valuable to our economy. Some marketable products such as timber have a financial value that has been known for centuries. In other cases (e.g. the role of bees in pollinating crops), we are only just beginning to understand their financial value.'  
Natural capital accounting is the process of calculating the stocks and flows described above and attributing them a financial value.

### Needs

The essence of sustainable development is providing for people's and nature's needs, now and in the future. So it is important to take people and nature as the starting point for GBI planning in the context of the built and natural environment. People and wildlife have many needs: for example people have needs to use greenspace for recreation and leisure and health and wellbeing; wildlife species have needs to move across land to find sources of food and places to shelter.

## **Appendix B: Potential Funding Streams**

The examples of funding opportunities provided in this appendix are not an exhaustive list and new funding opportunities are emerging frequently.

<b>Funding</b>	<b>Information</b>
<b>EU funding*<sup>1</sup></b>	
EU funding through the Structural and Cohesion Policy and its European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) or LIFE+ programme	Both enable green infrastructure projects by providing funding to support ecological coherence or connectivity. Most projects are rural, but some urban projects have been funded.
EU INTERREG	Funded by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF). Its aim is to jointly tackle common challenges and find shared solutions in fields such as health, environment, research, education, transport, sustainable energy and more. Kent have secured funding through the INTERREG Experience Project with a focus on sustainable tourism. Both Visit Kent and Kent Downs AONB are partners in this project with Swale Borough Council match funding the Kent Downs AONB element of the project.
<b>Mainstream public sector funding</b>	
Swale Borough Council	Capital and Revenue Funding
	Environment Grants
	Local Engagement Forum (LEF) Funding
	Sport and Physical Activity Grants
	Culture Grants
	Heritage Grants
Kent County Council	Capital and Revenue Funding
	Capital Grants for Sport
	Mental Health Grant Scheme (Revenue Grant)
<b>Multi-agency public sector funding*<sup>2</sup></b>	
<b>A Green and Biodiverse Borough</b>	
Basic Payment Scheme (BPS)	The biggest of the rural grants and payments that provide help to the farming industry. Farmers apply once a year - between March and May - and payments begin in December. Greening relates to agricultural practices which benefit the climate and the environment. Greening payments are made in addition to BPS payment for compliant farmers. Greening practices include: crop diversification; maintenance of permanent grassland; and ecological focus areas.
Heritage Lottery funding	Funding for heritage projects, which could include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Nature – Works to improve habitats or conserve species, as well as helping to connect people to nature in their daily lives</li> </ul>

\*<sup>1</sup> This includes existing and short term EU funding only. UK organisations, such as charities, businesses and universities, will continue to receive funding over a project's lifetime if they successfully bid into EU-funded programmes before the end of 2020. For example, Interreg Experience funding has been secured in relation to sustainable tourism with a substantial budget for infrastructure investments over the project lifetime.

\*<sup>2</sup> This funding stream is split by the four Opportunity Areas identified within Section 5.0 of the GBI Strategy. Not all funding streams fit neatly within one Opportunity Area with large areas of overlap, with opportunities for funders to meet multiple objectives within the GBI Strategy.

Funding	Information
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Designed landscapes - improving and conserving historic landscapes such as public parks, historic gardens and botanical gardens</li> <li>• Landscapes and the countryside - large-scale rural projects that help improve landscapes for people and nature, by for example, restoring habitats and celebrating the cultural traditions of the land</li> </ul> <p><a href="https://www.heritagefund.org.uk/funding/check-what-we-fund">https://www.heritagefund.org.uk/funding/check-what-we-fund</a></p>
Environment Agency	The Environment Agency develop 5 year work programmes which deliver projects to improve water quality and for flood management. Through these 5 year programmes there are opportunities to tap into funds for projects such as SuDS enabled tree pits, GBI related to flood alleviation as well as actions identified within the North Kent Catchment Action Plan.
Countryside Stewardship	<p>Countryside Stewardship (CS) provides financial incentives for farmers, woodland owners, foresters and land managers to look after and improve the environment. The current scheme runs out in early July 2020. The aim of the scheme is look after and improve the environment by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• conserving and restoring wildlife habitats</li> <li>• flood risk management</li> <li>• woodland creation and management</li> <li>• reducing widespread water pollution from agriculture</li> <li>• keeping the character of the countryside</li> <li>• preserving historical features in the landscape</li> <li>• encouraging educational access</li> </ul>
Rural Development Programme for England: LEADER funding	<p>LEADER funding (UK Government scheme) is available to local businesses, communities, farmers, foresters and land managers. All projects must support one or more of the 6 LEADER priorities. These are to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• support micro and small businesses and farm diversification</li> <li>• boost rural tourism</li> <li>• increase farm productivity</li> <li>• increase forestry productivity</li> <li>• provide rural services</li> <li>• provide cultural and heritage activities</li> </ul>
<b>Carbon Reduction</b>	
Woodland Trust	<p>Two delivery periods per year for free trees for schools. 30, 105 and 420 sapling packs available. Both schools and community groups can apply.</p> <p><a href="https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/plant-trees/schools-and-communities/">https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/plant-trees/schools-and-communities/</a></p>

Funding	Information
Environmental Land Management Schemes	Funding sources including Defra, Natural England and the Forestry Commission. Projects may include woodland planting and management, or habitat creation and management. Current priorities include carbon sequestration and water quality. Match funding is needed.
Woodland Carbon Guarantee (WCaG)	A £50 million scheme that aims to help accelerate woodland planting rates and develop the domestic market for woodland carbon for the permanent removal of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere. The Woodland Carbon Guarantee provides you with the option to sell your captured carbon dioxide in the form of verified carbon credits, called Woodland Carbon Units (WCUs), to the government for a guaranteed price every 5 or 10 years up to 2055/56, or to the open market. This scheme is not currently accessible to the public sector, though there may be potential for tenants of public sector land to apply. However, private and charitable landowners can apply.
CORSA (Carbon Offsetting Scheme for International Aviation)	Addresses the increase in total CO2 emissions from international aviation above 2020 levels through offsetting and mitigation projects.
Public Sector Local Carbon Offsetting Scheme	The public sector may be able to establish a carbon offsetting scheme, either on a verified or non-verified basis. Such a scheme could be used to tap into funds from local businesses seeking to offset their carbon emissions on an informal basis.
Countryside Productivity Scheme	<p>Provides funding for projects in England which improve productivity in the farming and forestry sectors and help create jobs and growth in the rural economy. It is administered by the Rural Payments Agency (RPA). Under the RDPE Countryside Productivity Scheme, there are grants for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• small grants</li> <li>• water resource management and reservoirs</li> <li>• improving forestry productivity</li> <li>• adding value to Agri-food</li> <li>• improving farm productivity</li> </ul> <p>The grants are funded by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD).</p>
<b>A Healthy Blue Environment</b>	
Water Environment Grant (WEG)	UK Government funding for organisations and land managers to improve the water environment in rural England. Administered by Environment Agency.
Insurance Industry	Detailed modelling carried out in the Wyre River catchment has shown that there is a strong case for NFM investment due to the potential savings available for the insurance industry from a reduction in household flooding claims.
Water Utilities Companies	There are regulatory pressures on water utilities to use catchment management approaches to reduce pollution entering water courses. Water companies have recognised that it is often more cost-effective to support farmers in adopting better land management practices to improve water quality at the source of pollution, rather than investing in water treatment infrastructure.
<b>A Healthy, Connected and Active Swale</b>	

Funding	Information
Department for Transport Funding	Funds large parts of Sustrans Work. Following Sustrans' Paths for Everyone report, they secured £21 million to develop the National Cycle Network in England. There may be funds for cycling as a result of the recent Coronavirus package announced by Department for Transport in April 2020.
England Coastal Path Establishment Fund (ECPEF)	Landowners can apply for a grant from the UK Government to help with 'establishment work'. This is work necessary to make the stretch fit for use as part of the England Coast Path.
Sport England Grant Funding	There are multiple funding streams but the Community Asset Fund for examples provides funding for enhancing the spaces which give communities the opportunity to be active, such as parks and green spaces.
Social Prescribing Funds	There is funding to employ Social prescribers as part of each Primary care network, which are forming under the new GP contract, bringing together local GP practices to cover populations of 30000+. There may also be opportunities to develop similar income streams for GI managers to provide social care and education activities on a paid-for basis. This is all still embryonic and relies on local initiative and willingness of the local health/education commissioners to invest in parks and health rangers. SBC have previously had a 'health activator' in place, which would be a good starting point to develop a similar model.
<b>A Beacon for the Visitor Economy</b>	
National Lottery Community Fund (previously the Big Lottery Fund)	A distributor of National Lottery funding, established as a non-departmental public body by an Act of Parliament. Grants provided for community-led activity, empowering young people, reaching communities, sports, arts and heritage. This funding has been granted to Milton Creek Country Park for the 'Arts in the Park' project.
<b>Planning and Development Opportunities</b>	
Section 106 Agreements	Negotiated with developers by local authorities. These generally last for five years before costs fall back to the local authority, and relate only to on-site measures.
The Community Infrastructure Levy (Planning Act 2008)	A local development tax toward the upkeep of all types of community infrastructure
Biodiversity Net Gain Funds	Under NPPF and local policy, biodiversity net gain is required for most forms of development. The Environment Bill (Royal Assent in early 2021, but not coming into full legal force till 2023) will require 10% biodiversity net gain. This is likely to generate funds via s106 agreement from future development, and there is merit in Swale Borough Council seeking to allocate land for biodiversity net gain where there is greatest opportunity for enhancement. This will encourage developers to direct their funding to such sites and enable the Council's planning team to influence the disbursement of such funds. Kent County Council and Natural England have a district licencing scheme in place for great crested newts which funds pond creation and restoration. In the future there may be district licencing for other species.
<b>Fiscal Initiatives</b>	
Business Improvement Districts (BIDs)	Business Improvement District (BID) Regulation allow local businesses to vote for a levy on their rates bill to fund investment in the local trading environment. Successful application of the BID model will require greenspaces to be located in close proximity to those local businesses to be taxed under the scheme. It will also be necessary to convince local businesses of the potential benefits which will accrue in terms of visitor perceptions and numbers.



Funding	Information
Landfill Communities Fund (LCF)	<p>A tax credit scheme enabling operators of landfill sites in England and Northern Ireland to contribute money to deliver projects. Projects must be within 10 miles of an Environment Agency registered landfill site, and must fall within the following categories:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Object A - the reclamation, remediation or restoration of land which cannot currently be used;</li> <li>• Object B - the prevention of potential for pollution or the remediation of the effects of the pollution;</li> <li>• Object D - the provision, maintenance or improvement of a public park or another public amenity;</li> <li>• Object DA - the conservation or promotion of biodiversity; and</li> <li>• Object E- the restoration of a place of religious worship or of historic or architectural interest.</li> </ul>
<b>Commercial Finance</b>	
Income generating opportunities	Revenue may be generated from the private sector or the general public in return for benefits they receive from greenspace. Income sources from businesses include rent or franchise fees for operating commercial activities within the greenspace (as in some Country Parks, for example), sponsorship or charitable donations, contributions to large scale, structural planting to offset carbon emissions, or the sale of renewable energy from generating facilities built in the greenspace
Service Charges	SBC building or tourism occupiers would pay a service charge. This would contribute to revenue funding for maintenance of GBI. An established mechanism for collecting charges and commissioning work would need to be developed.
Biodiversity and Carbon Offsetting	Statutory and voluntary contributions arising from developments and industries required to offset biodiversity effects and greenhouse gas emissions. Projects may include woodland planting, habitat creation and enhancement, or soil enhancement for carbon sequestration. This funding stream requires a 30 year management commitment. It could be linked to Council's own declaration of climate and ecological emergency – wishing to offset its own unavoidable emissions.
<b>Other</b>	
Voluntary maintenance by local communities	To maintain green spaces on a volunteer basis. Some councils, such as Islington Council in London, transfer a proportion of maintenance funds to the community for this service. Funding requirements can be reduced by fund-raising activities and by contributions of labour and expertise from not-for-profit organisations and voluntary and community groups.
Natural Environment Research Council	NERC funds excellent, world-leading research across the environmental sciences. Have previously invested around £1.2million in innovative projects to make use of green infrastructure. <a href="https://nerc.ukri.org/innovation/activities/infrastructure/">https://nerc.ukri.org/innovation/activities/infrastructure/</a> <a href="https://nerc.ukri.org/press/releases/2016/09-infrastructure/">https://nerc.ukri.org/press/releases/2016/09-infrastructure/</a>
Urban Tree Challenge	Round 2 closes on 31 May 2020 but similar schemes are expected in the future.

Funding	Information
	<p>The Urban Tree Challenge Fund (UTCf) has been developed in response to HM Treasury releasing £10 million in the 2018 Autumn Budget announcement for planting at least 20,000 large trees and 110,000 small trees in urban areas in England.</p> <p>The fund provides 50% of published standard costs for planting and establishment. The remaining costs of planting and establishing trees supported under the UTCf must be met through match funding, either in the form of money or labour.</p> <p><a href="https://www.gov.uk/guidance/urban-tree-challenge-fund">https://www.gov.uk/guidance/urban-tree-challenge-fund</a></p>

## **Appendix C: Planning Policy Recommendations**

## GREEN AND BLUE INFRASTRUCTURE STRATEGY FOR SWALE – PLANNING POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

### 1.0 Introduction

A Green and Blue Infrastructure (GBI) Strategy for Swale has been prepared by TEP. The GBI Strategy will guide the delivery of the GBI vision and support the implementation of programmes and projects to enable the creation a strategic network of green and blue infrastructure across Swale, addressing needs and opportunities.

This note outlines the key points from the GBI Strategy to be incorporated into local planning policy for Swale. As the local plan is emerging, this is an optimum time for this work to be undertaken to ensure it fully reflects the evidence within the GBI Strategy.

### 2.0 Planning Context

#### Local Context

The borough of Swale lies on the north Kent coast, covering a total area of 37,387 hectares. The borough is centred on the Swale estuary and encompasses land on both sides of the channel. The Isle of Sheppey lies to the north, separated from the mainland by the Swale estuary, and Faversham, Sittingbourne and hinterlands to the south. As a result of its coastal position, Swale is home to 71km of coastline.

Apart from the northern coast of the Isle of Sheppey and the town of Sittingbourne, it is a predominantly a rural borough, with a high concentration of orchards known as the North Kent Fruit Belt. Most of the southern half of the borough lies within the Kent Downs AONB, whilst Sittingbourne and the Isle of Sheppey forms the south eastern parts of the Thames Estuary Growth Area (2018).

Sittingbourne, Faversham and many of the Borough's larger villages lie either side of the A2 Watling Street, the main Roman road between Dover, Canterbury and London. Sheerness is now the main town on the Isle of Sheppey, though is of relatively recent construction having grown in association with the naval dockyards in the early 19th century.

On the Isle of Sheppey, Warden Village and Leysdown-on-Sea are both tourist areas, separated by agricultural land and areas of nature conservation interest.

#### National Policy

The National Planning Policy Framework ('the Framework') sets out the Government's definition of sustainable development and identifies how planning policies for England are expected to be applied. The Framework also provides guidance on Local Plan making and site allocation requirements that local planning authorities need to meet.

The Framework is purposefully positive, opportunity focused and pro-growth in seeking to facilitate development which will contribute to meeting the wider Government objectives.

Paragraph 20 outlines that Strategic Policies as set by local authorities that set out an overall strategy for the pattern, scale and quality of development, making specific provision for the '*conservation and enhancement of the natural, built and historic environment, including landscapes and green infrastructure, and planning measures to address climate change mitigation and adaptation.*'

Within Section 8 (Promoting Healthy and Safe Communities), the Framework states that planning policies and decisions should aim to achieve healthy, inclusive and safe places which:

- Promote social interaction, including opportunities for meetings between people who might not otherwise come into contact with each other
- Enable and support healthy lifestyles, especially where this would address identified local health and well-being needs – for example through the provision of safe and accessible green infrastructure, sports facilities, local shops, access to healthier food, allotments and layouts that encourage walking and cycling (Paragraph 91)

In section 14, the Framework emphasises that responding to climate change is central to the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development. Plans should take a proactive approach to mitigating and adapting to climate change, taking into account the long-term implications for flood risk, coastal change, water supply, biodiversity and landscapes, and the risk of overheating from rising temperatures. Policies should support appropriate measures to ensure the future resilience of communities and infrastructure to climate change impacts, such as providing space for physical protection measures (Paragraph 149). Paragraph 150 advises that new development should be planned in ways that 'avoid increased vulnerability to the range of impacts arising from climate change. When new development is brought forward in areas which are vulnerable, care should be taken to ensure that risks can be managed through suitable adaptation measures, including through the planning of green infrastructure.'

Section 15 is focused on Conserving and Enhancing the Natural Environment. This section states that planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by:

- Maintaining the character of the undeveloped coast, while improving public access to it where appropriate
- Minimising impacts on and providing net gains for biodiversity, including by establishing coherent ecological networks that are more resilient to current and future pressures
- Wherever possible, make improvements to the local environmental conditions such as air and water quality, taking into account relevant information such as river basin management plans (Paragraph 170)

Paragraph 171 states that plans should allocate land with the least environmental or amenity value, where consistent with other policies in the Framework; take a strategic approach to maintaining and enhancing networks of habitats and green infrastructure, and plan for the enhancement of natural capital at a catchment or landscape scale across local authority boundaries.

Opportunities to improve air quality or mitigate impacts should be identified, such as through green infrastructure provision and enhancement (Paragraph 181).

Paragraph 174 outlines the ways in which biodiversity should be protected and enhanced:

- Identify, map and safeguard components of local wildlife-rich habitats and wider ecological networks, including internationally, nationally and locally designated sites, wildlife corridors and stepping stones that connect them, and areas identified by national and local partnerships for habitat management, enhancement, recreation or creation
- Promote the conservation, restoration and enhancement of priority habitats, ecological networks and priority species, and identify and pursue opportunities for securing measurable net gains for biodiversity

There is further information in Planning Practice Guidance, a review of which is provided in the Appendices of the GBI strategy.

#### Local Policy

##### *Adopted Policy*

The Swale Borough Local Plan sets the vision and overall strategy for the area for the period between 2014 and 2031. The Local Plan recognises the value and benefits of green infrastructure for health and wellbeing and biodiversity and for creating attractive environments for inward investment.

The Local Plan identifies a natural assets and green infrastructure network and strategy for Swale highlighting the existing GBI network and potential ways in which to protect and enhance the network for expansion over the lifetime of the Local Plan.

The Local Plan establishes the vision behind this GBI Strategy for Swale, which is to 'act as the means by which action can take place,' building upon the existing work to date.

##### *Emerging Policy*

As a new Local Plan is progressed, it is important to ensure green and blue infrastructure forms a key focus within the Local Plan. Therefore the inclusion of a policy or a number of policies relating to green and blue infrastructure will ensure this is at the forefront on the Local Plan and can be both protected, enhanced and created.

At present, SBC are working on preparing the evidence base for the emerging Local Plan and have completed the local landscape designation review, employment land review, gypsy and traveller and travelling show person accommodation assessment and the Swale landscape sensitivity assessment.

### **3.0 Policy Recommendations**

The following section sets out policy recommendations from the GBI strategy. This is an indication of the key points and themes to be included within the policy, or at a more strategic level within the emerging Local Plan.

The strategic level points should be considered from the outset and the development of the key strategy and objectives for the Local Plan. The policy specific points should be considered with the GBI policies themselves, or within other relevant policies of the Local Plan. The recommendations below have been split in line with the themes of the GBI strategy.

#### Strategic Level Points:

- Develop a resilient, biodiverse and multi-functional GBI network to contribute to ensuring Swale a great place to live, work, visit and invest, and respond to the climate and ecological emergency.
- View GBI as critical infrastructure alongside transport and utilities to ensure maximum benefit

#### Policy Specific Points:

##### *A Green and Biodiverse Borough*

- Encourage tree planting, particularly in urban areas
- Enable connections between GI assets
- Protect and enhance existing habitats
- Promote GI in new developments
- Encourage town centre greening projects and retrofit where feasible
- Encourage use of sustainable modes of transport

##### *A Healthy Blue Environment*

- Reduce flood risk
- Encourage the use of SuDS in new developments, and retrofit where appropriate into existing development

- Improve access to watercourses and riverbanks for recreation

*A Connected, Active and Healthy Swale*

- Provide connections between green and blue spaces to encourage sustainable modes of transport and enable recreation and leisure uses
- Encourage healthy lifestyles
- Improve air quality across Swale

*A Beacon for the Visitor Economy*

- Encourage tourism in Swale and improve arrival spaces and gateways through retrofitted GI
- Promote active travel for visitors in Swale
- Protect and enhance heritage assets, integrating GBI into the setting of those assets
- Provide and enhance connections to the Kent Downs AONB
- Promote eco-tourism in Swale as a key opportunity



#### **4.0 Conclusions and Next Steps**

The note has set out the key points from the GBI Strategy which should be considered for inclusion with the emerging Local Plan. This includes key points to include in any GBI specific policy which is prepared to ensure key messages from the GBI Strategy are reflected in the emerging Local Plan.

Consideration should also be given to the multi-functionality mapping in the GBI Strategy which highlights key areas where enhancements could be made aligned to local needs. This may be particularly relevant for any site allocations that are included within the Local Plan. The areas identified could be incorporated into the allocations and clear requirements to improve / enhance these can then be specified into the policy. It may also be appropriate to avoid certain areas for development, as depicted through the mapping in the GBI Strategy.

There needs to be consideration given to how the proposals and recommendations provided within the GBI Strategy are considered as part of the planning application process. Further detail on GBI in development is presented in Chapter 7.0 of the GBI Strategy. Ensuring that some of the points raised in 3.0 Policy Recommendations are incorporated into the emerging policy will establish a clear baseline for GBI as developments come forward.

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