

Swale Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy

DRAFT

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**THE
ENVIRONMENT
PARTNERSHIP**

Researched & Prepared by TEP

Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy for Swale

Foreword

Signed

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 (AQMs), four of which are in Sittingbourne and one in Faversham. AQMs 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.

Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy for Swale

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
Blue Infrastructure Type	Approximate Percentage (%) of Swale Borough
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

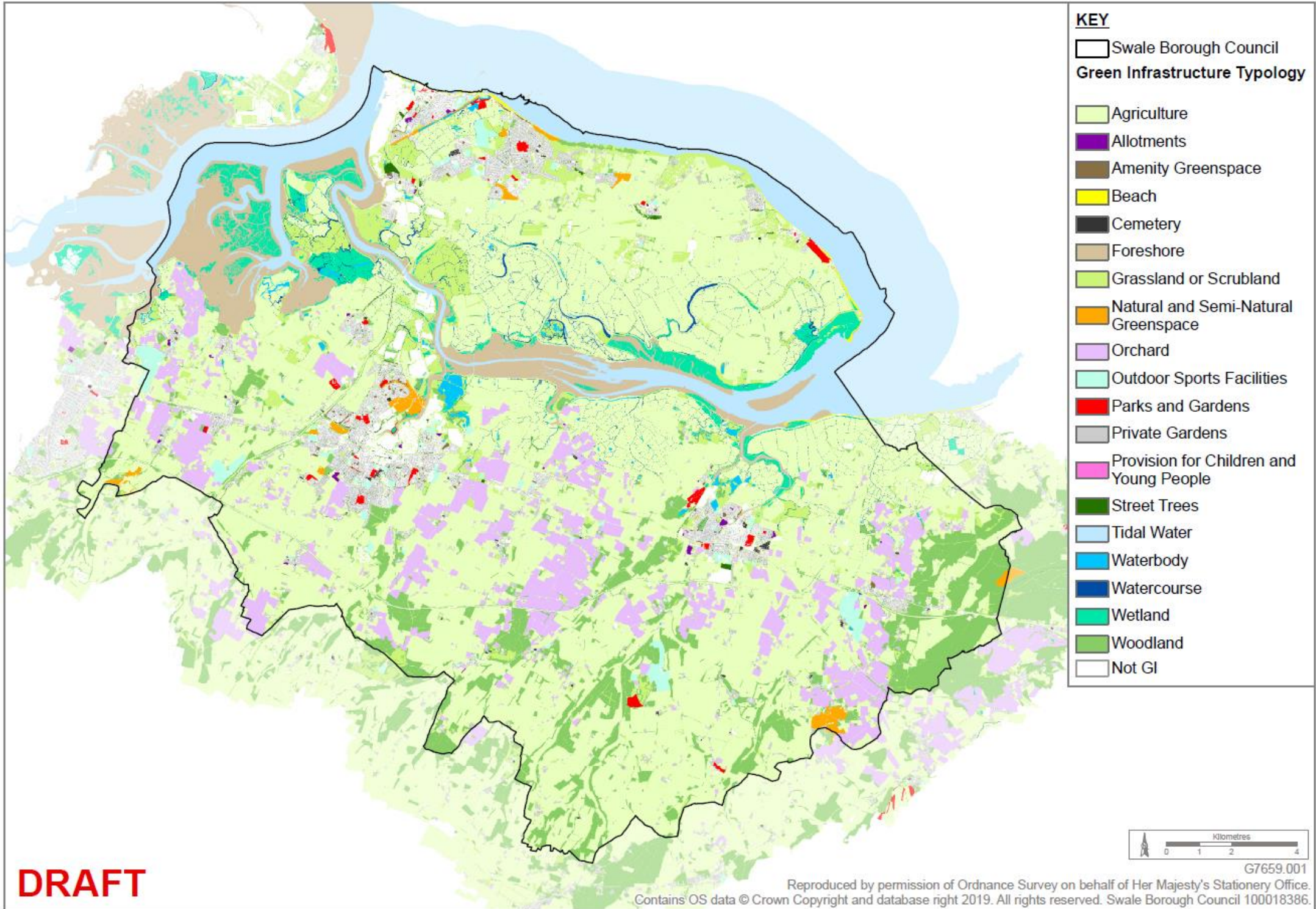
- 2.4 Swale currently has 16 allotments across the Borough; four in Faversham; six in Sittingbourne; five on the Isle of Sheppey and 1 one on Upchurch allotments.

Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy for Swale

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



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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 residents¹.' 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.

¹ 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.

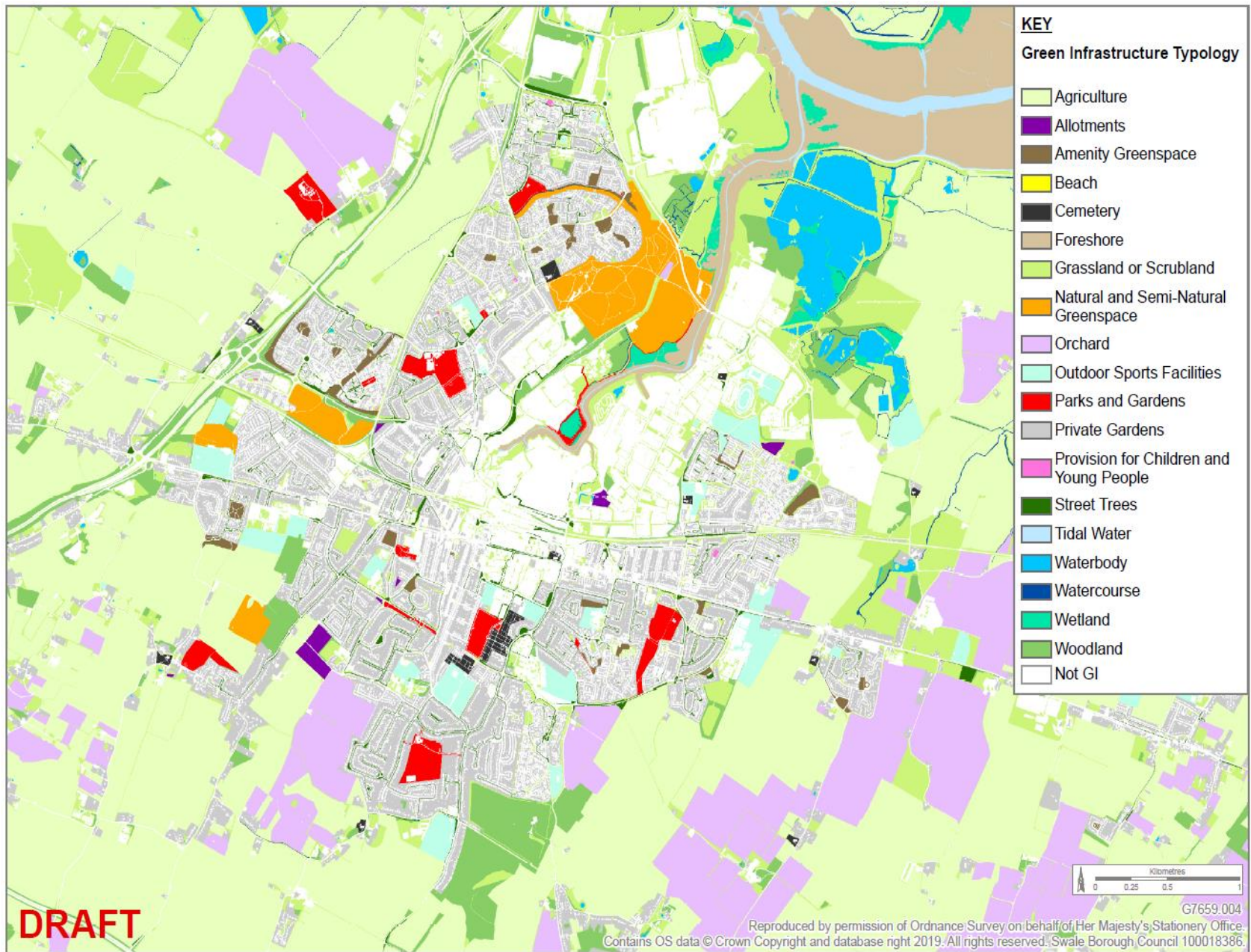
- 94% of Swale is GBI; the borough already has a lot of GBI and corresponding engagement projects, creating opportunity to enhance existing assets
- The majority of the borough is covered by agricultural land, presenting opportunities GBI enhancements alongside farmers and landowners
- 24% of the population 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.

Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy for Swale

Built Infrastructure

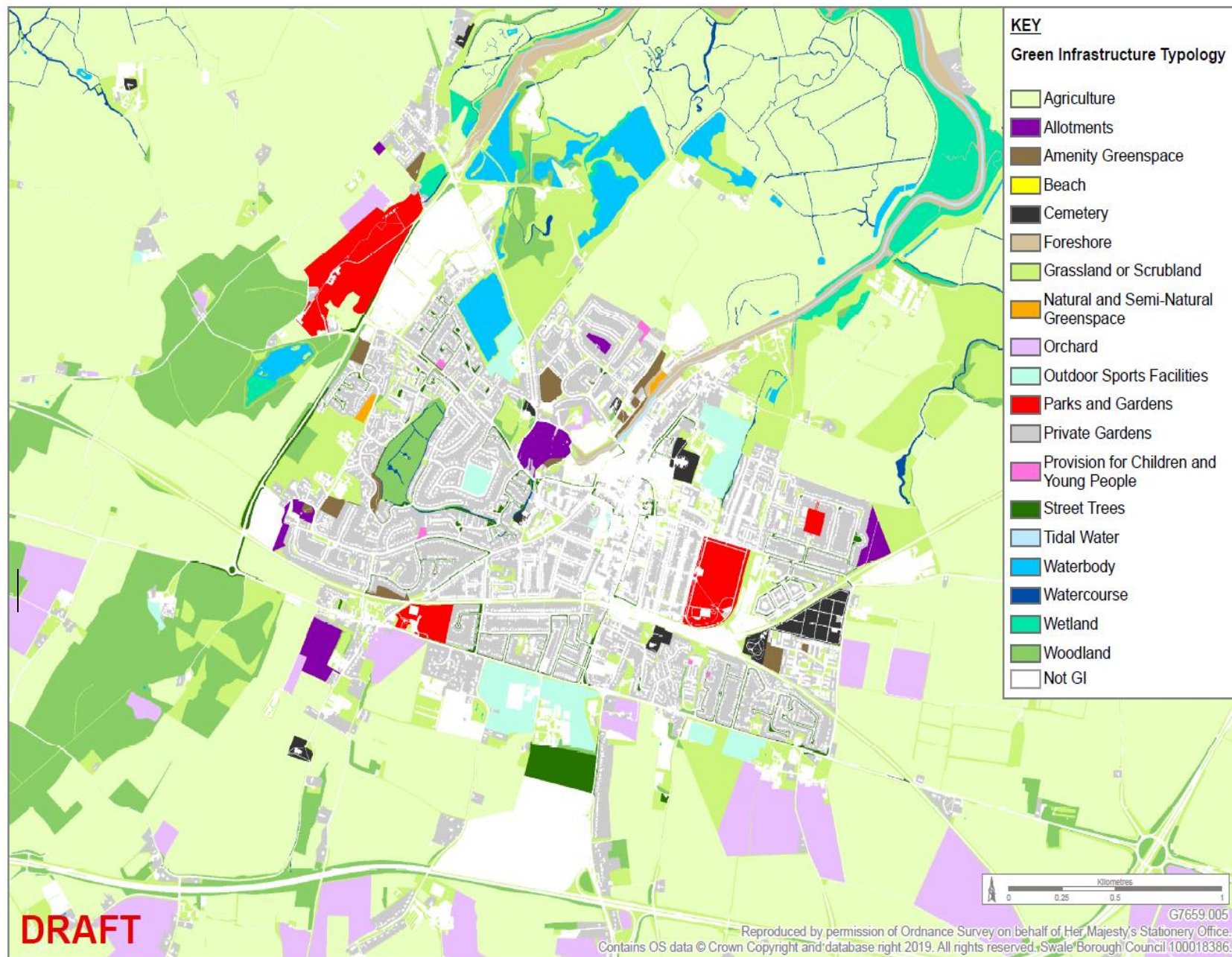
- 2.29 The population of 140,800 is largely concentrated in four main towns; Sittingbourne, Faversham, Sheerness and Minster. Sittingbourne is the main town, acting as the main employment and service centre for the Borough home to the largest industrial estate in the borough - Eurolink. As stated in 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

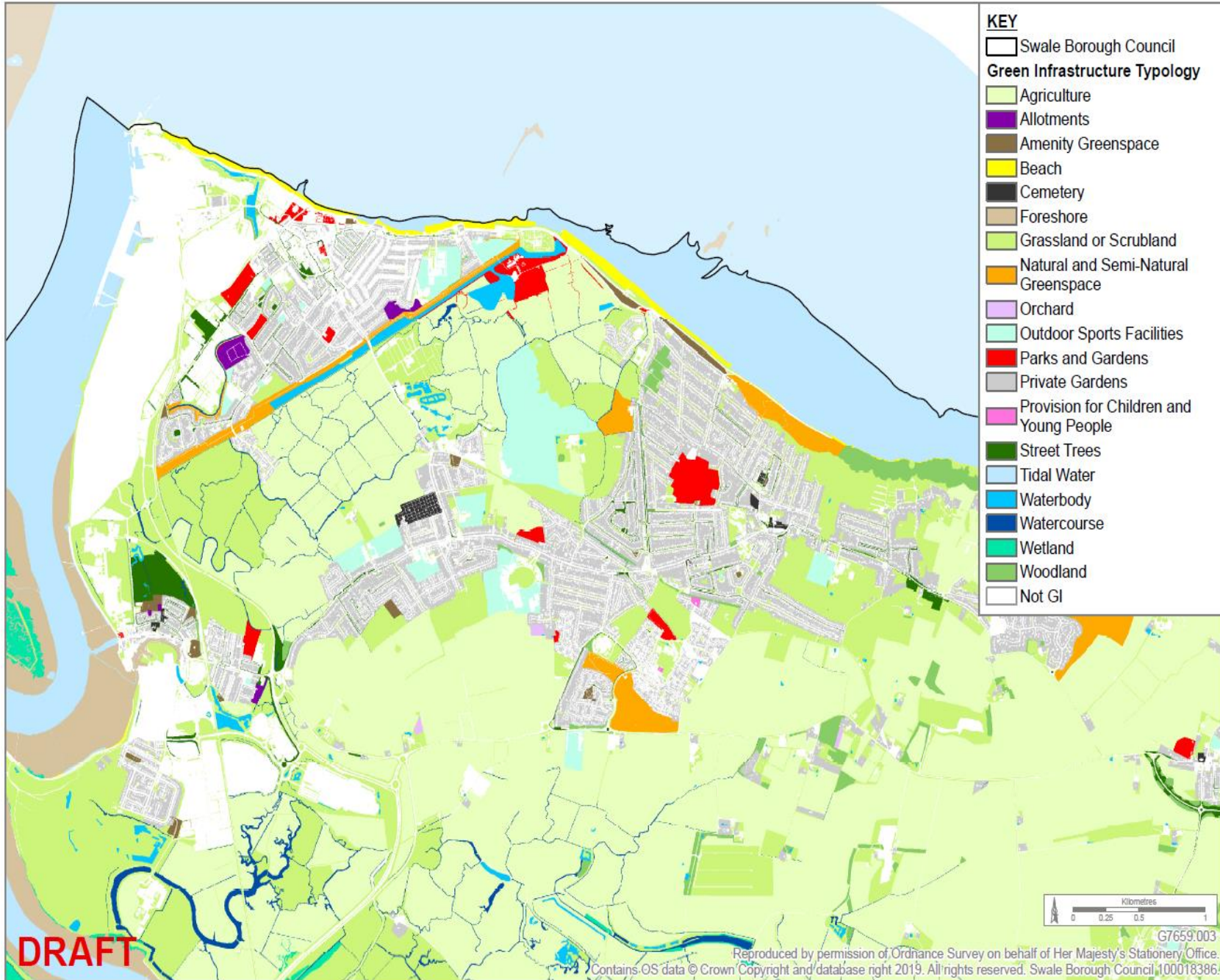
Figure 3: GBI Typology in Faversham



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.

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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)

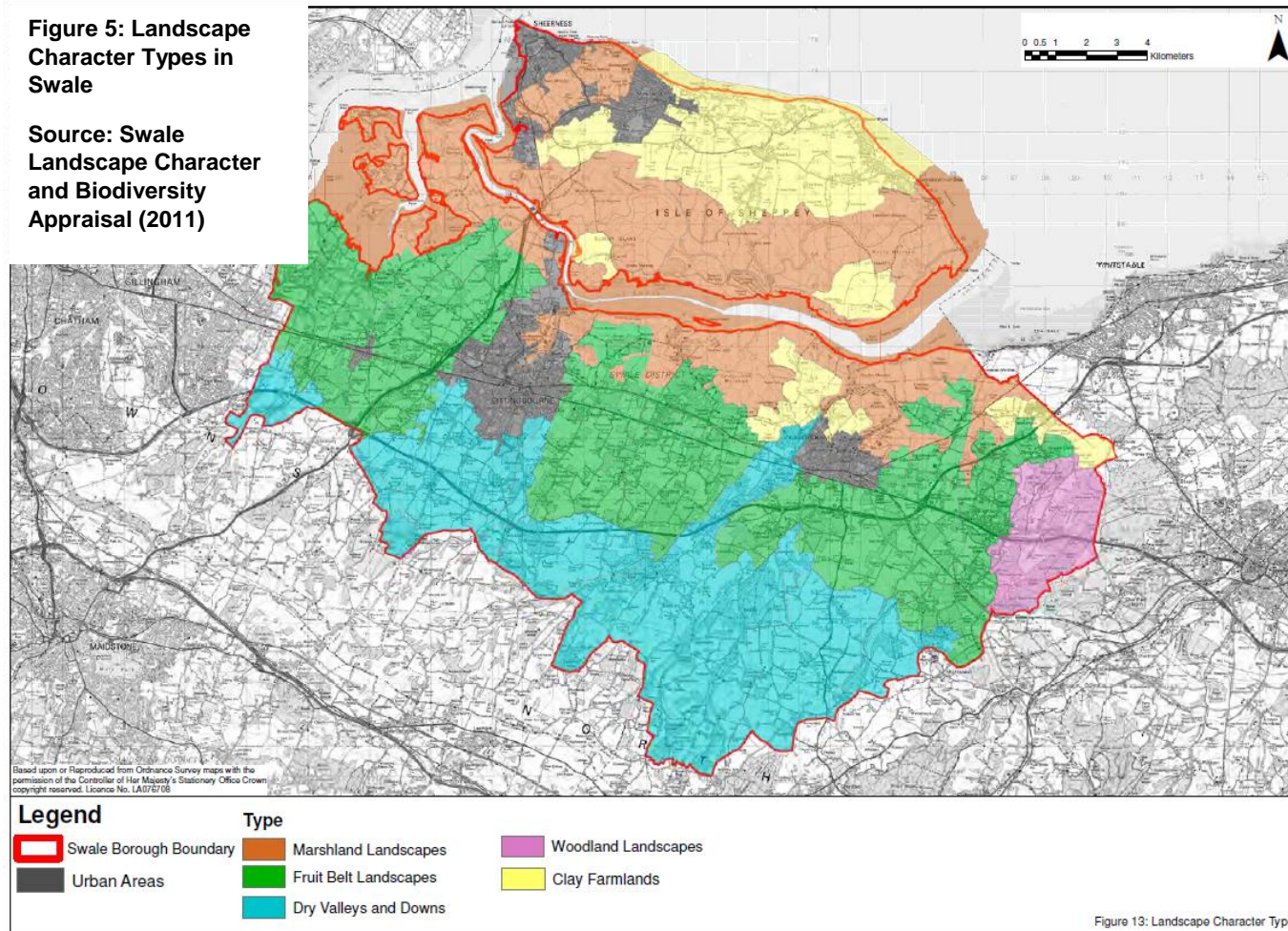


Figure 13: Landscape Character Types

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 18th 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.

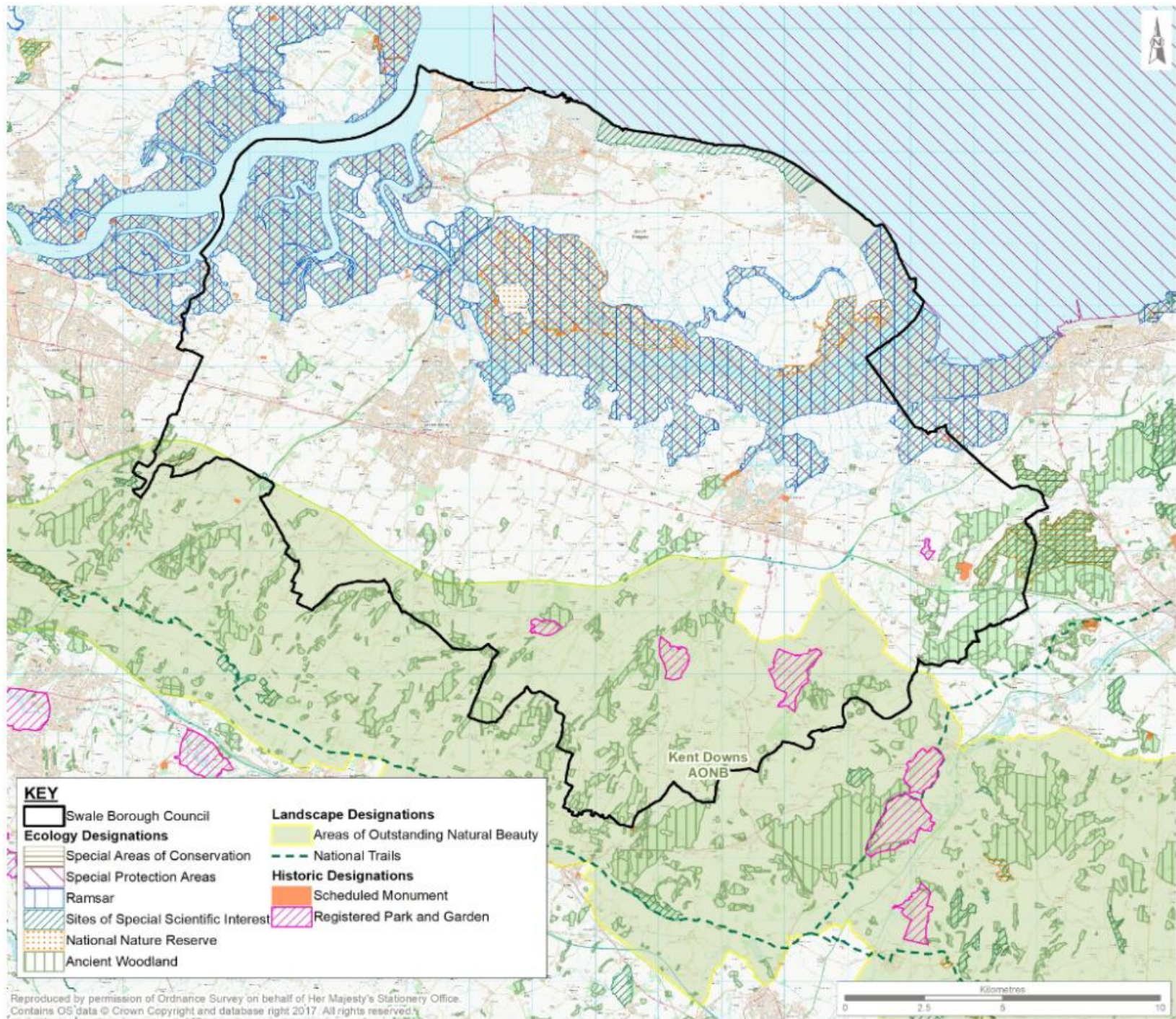


Figure 6: Landscape and Ecological Designations in Swale

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.

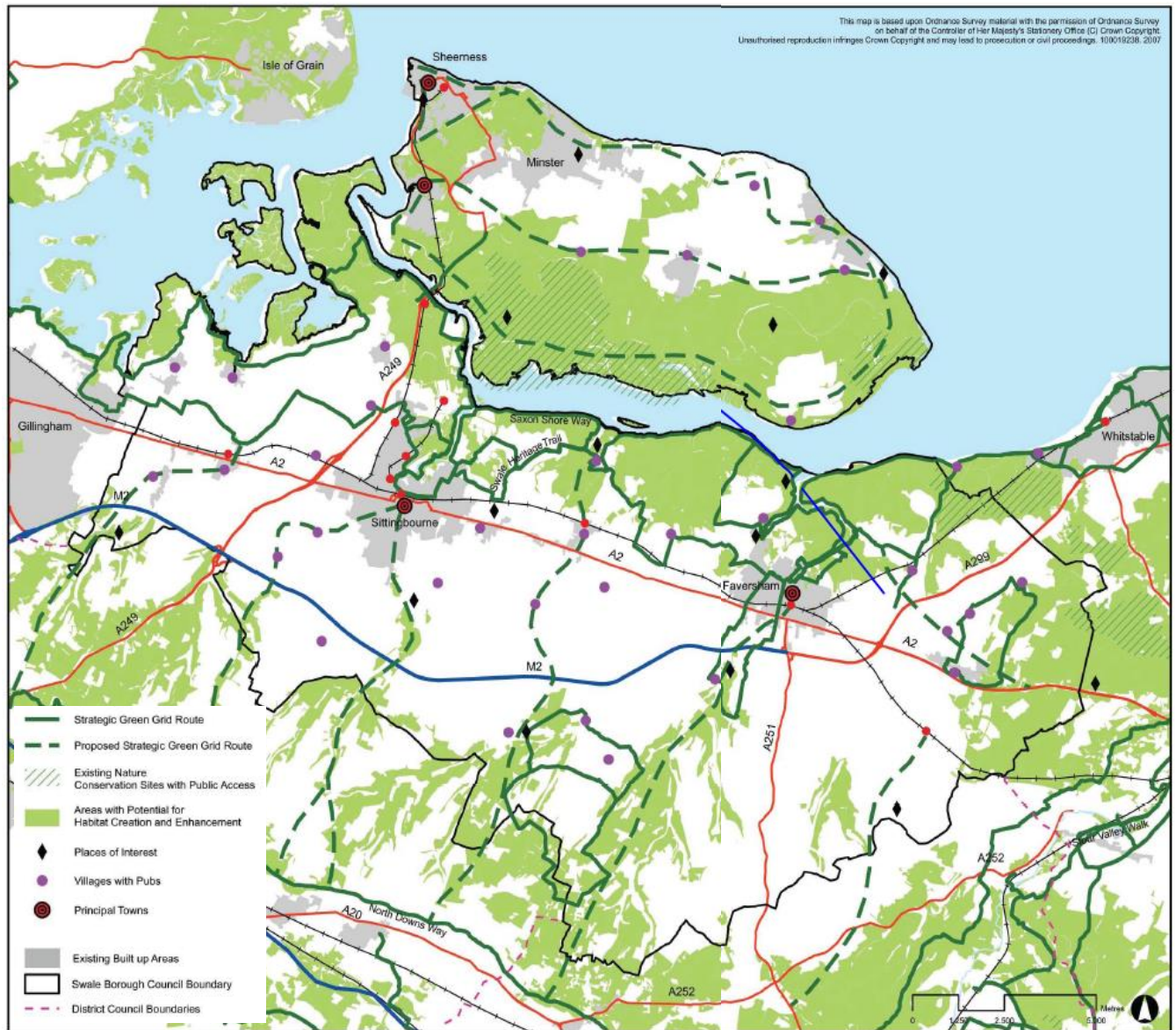


Figure 7: Swale Green Grid – Strategic Green Grid Framework (Source: Swale Green Grid Strategy, 2016)

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.



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.

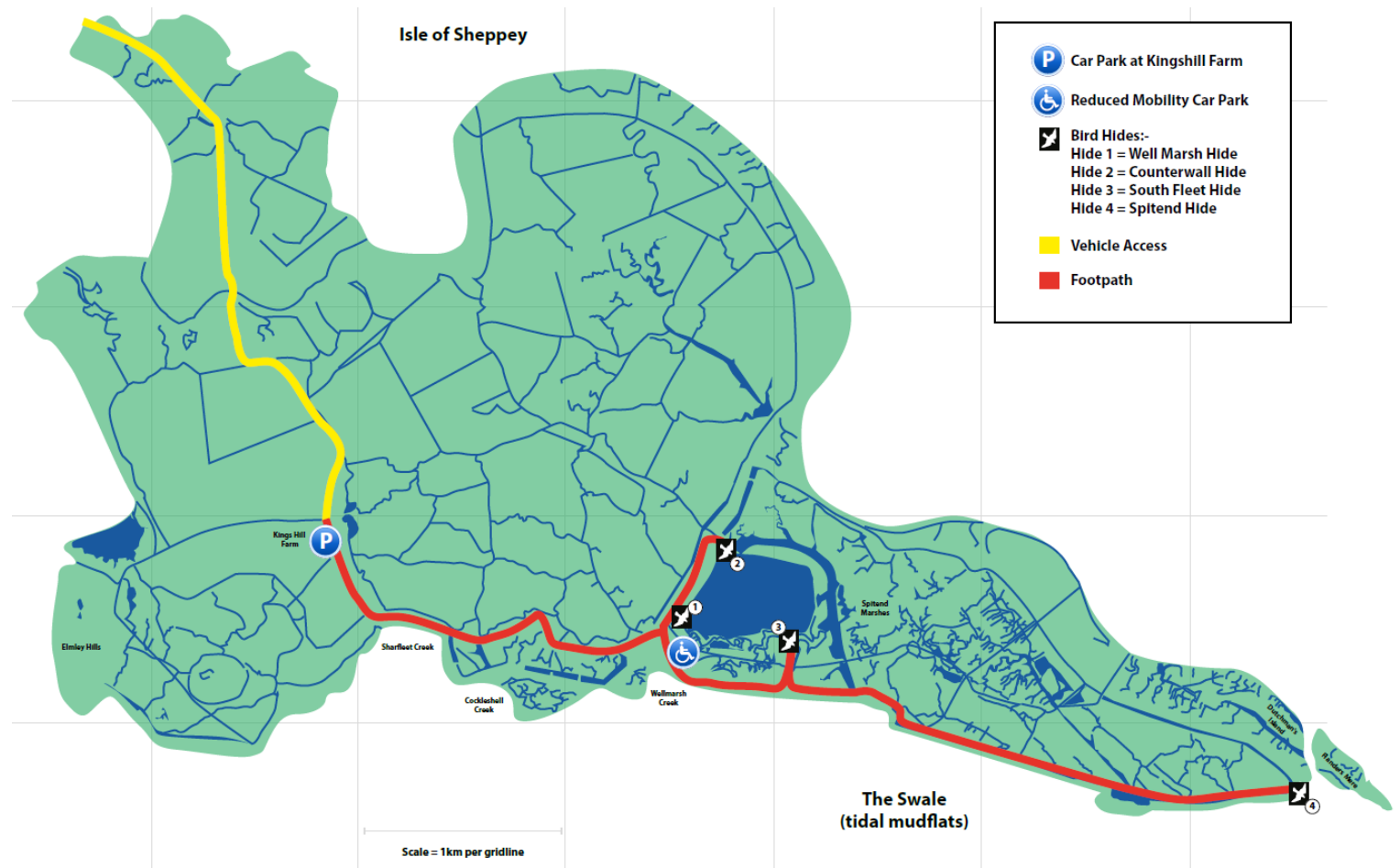


Figure 9: Map of Elmley NNR (Source: Elmley NNR)

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

Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy for Swale

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 objectives²:
- 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.

² 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.

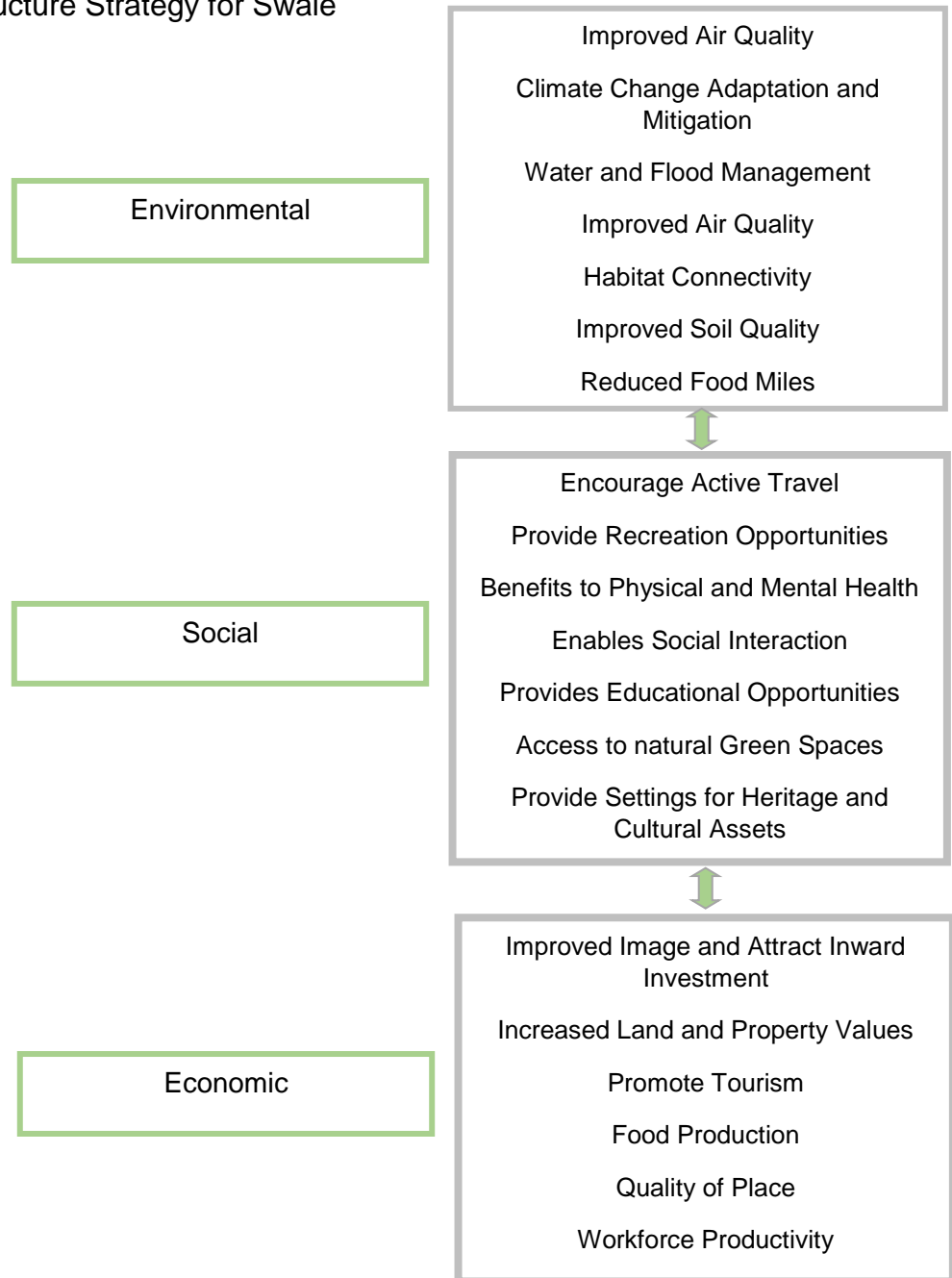


Figure 10 - Potential Functions and Benefits of GBI

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

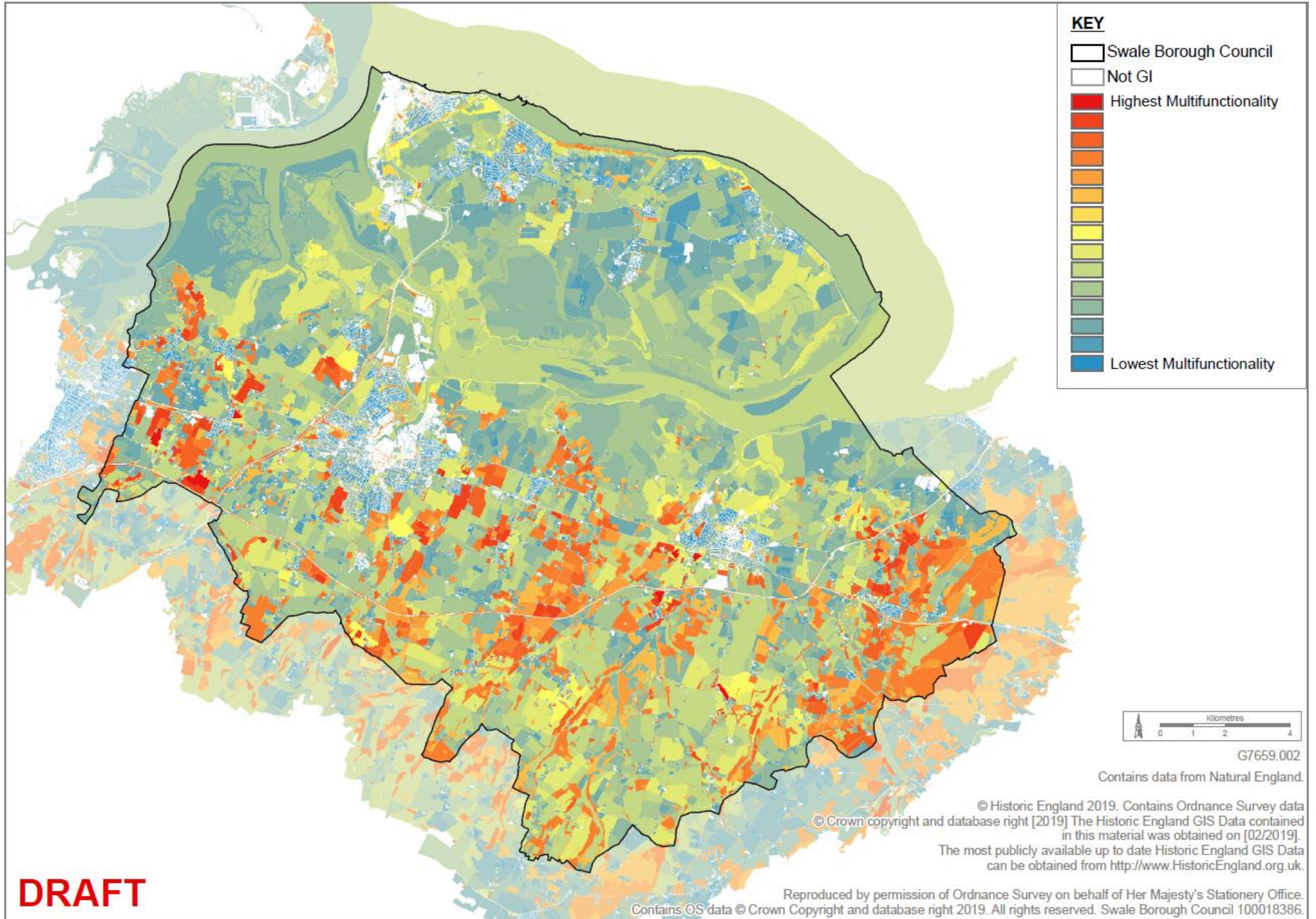
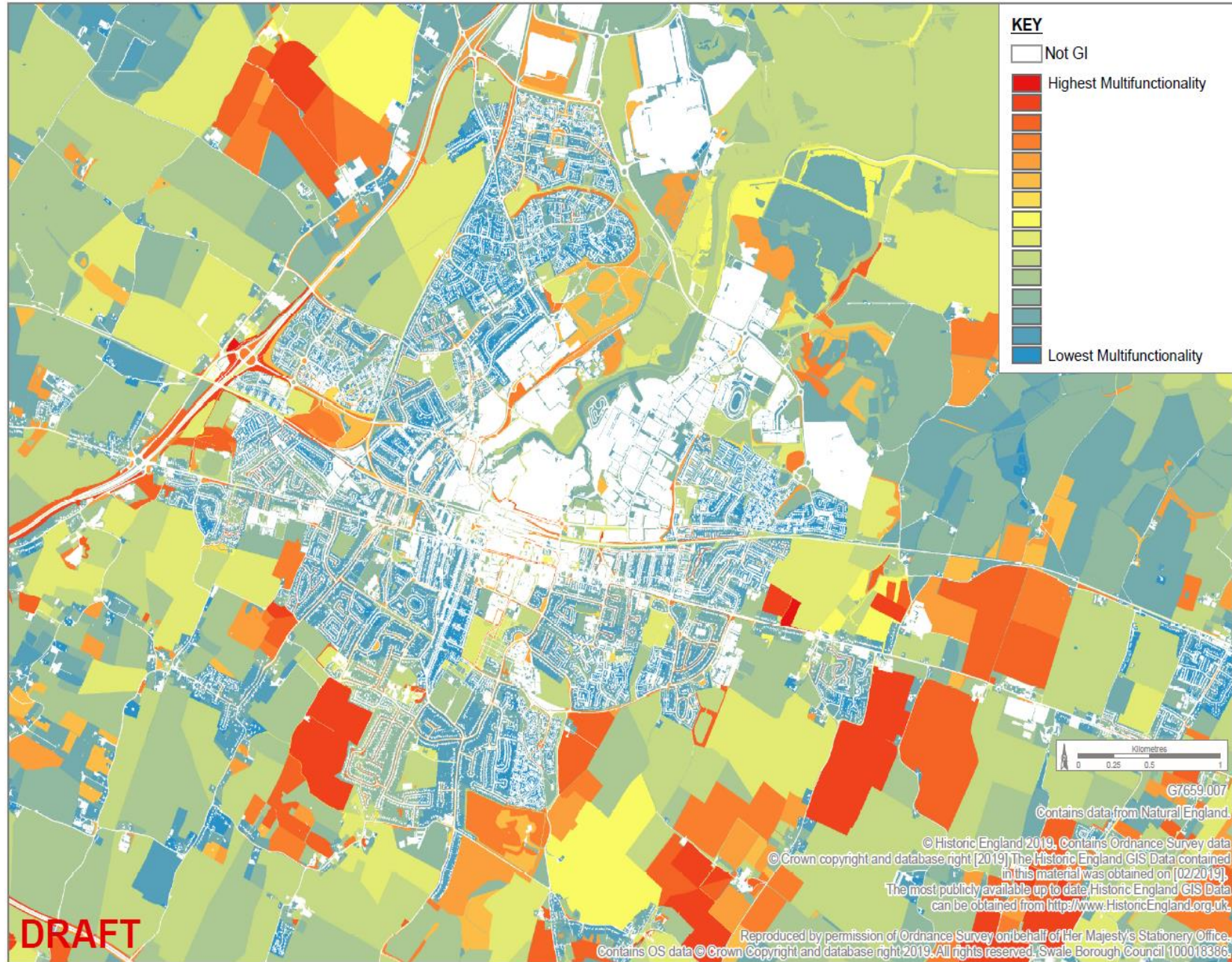


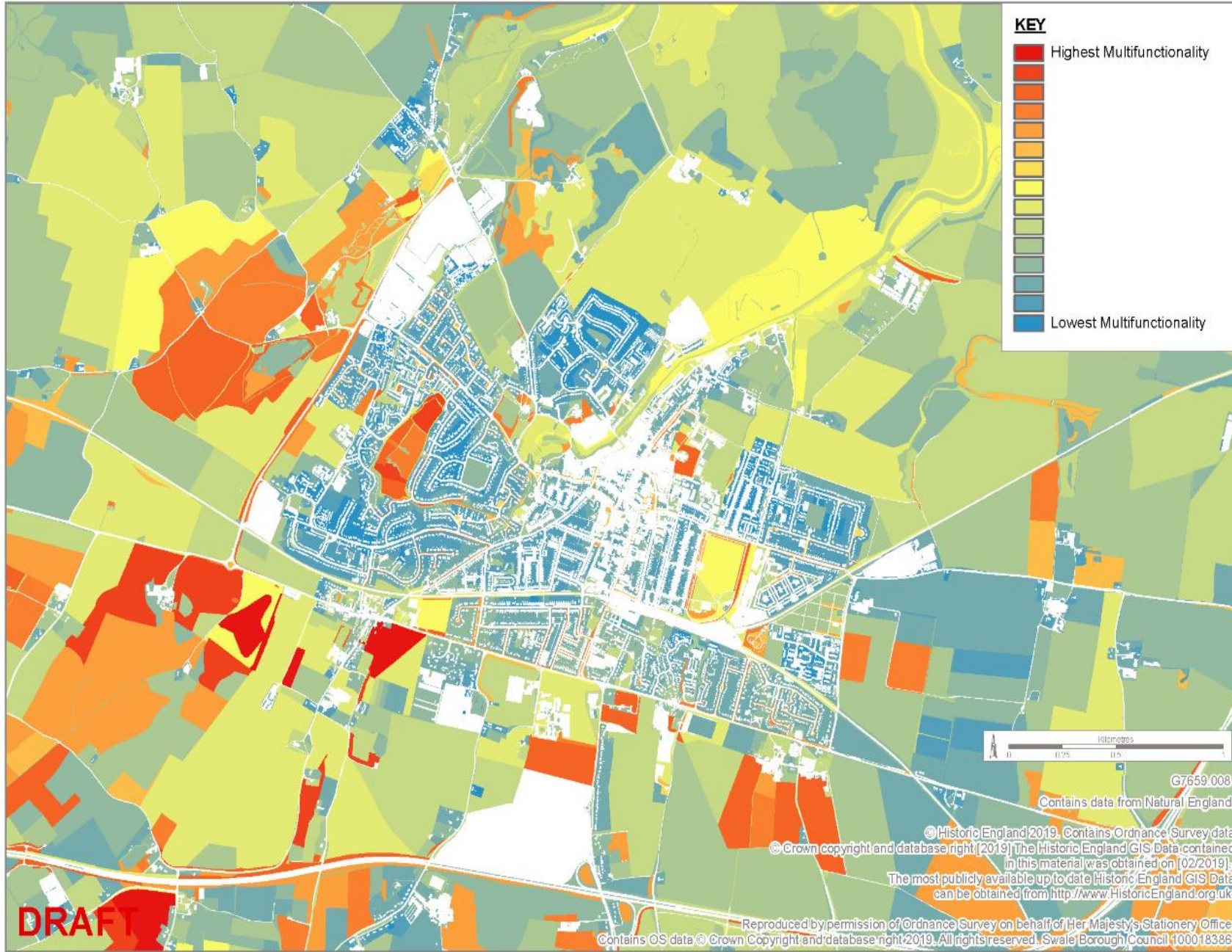
Figure 12: GBI Multi-functionality in Sittingbourne



KEY FINDINGS

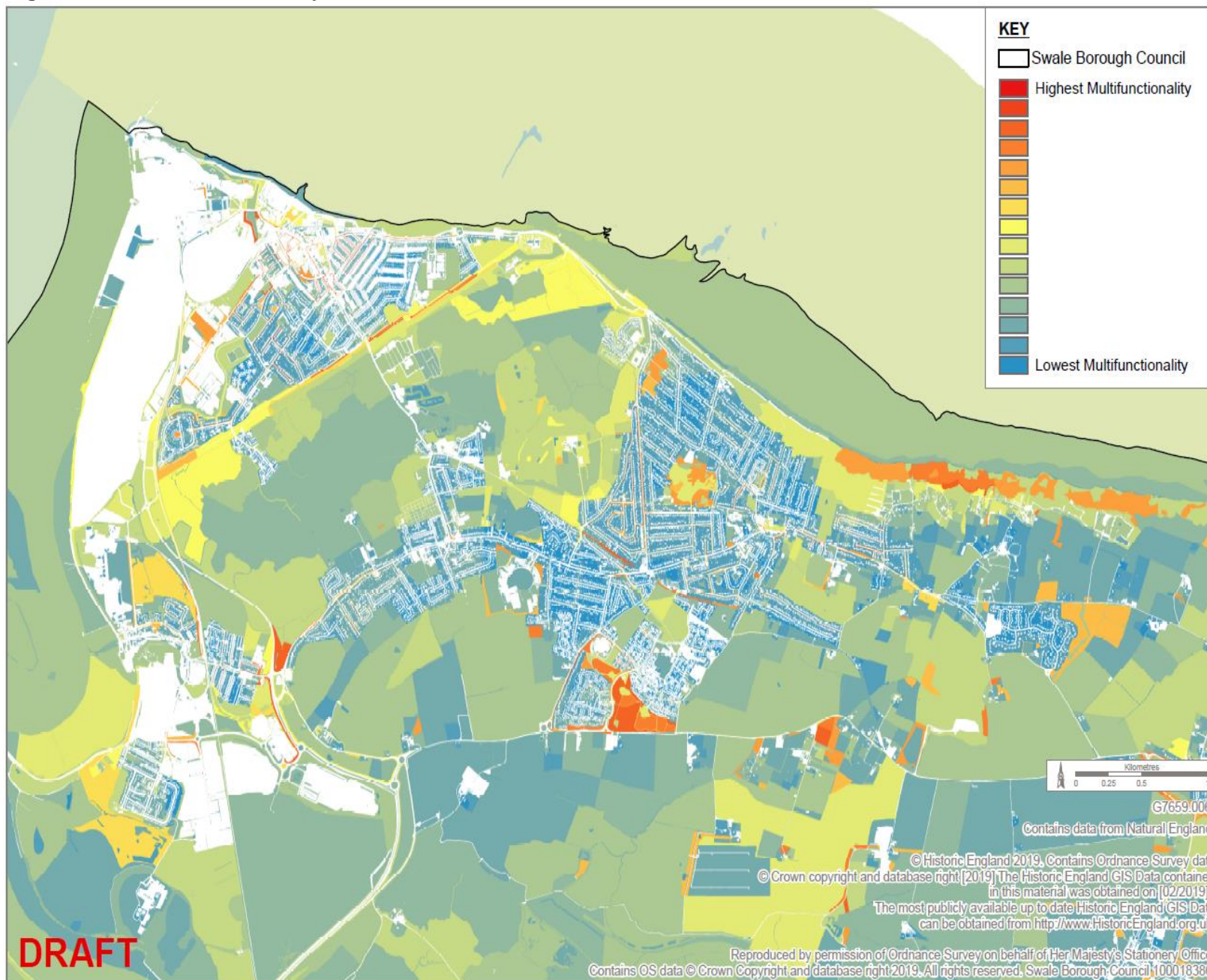
- In general, more multi-functional GI is on the outskirts of the town;
- In general, the parks and recreation grounds within the urban area are performing a low number of functions;
- Milton Creek Country Park performs a moderate number of functions;
- The highest levels of multi-functionality are performed 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

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

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

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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 quality³, 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.

³ 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.)

- 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 UK⁴.
- 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.

⁴ 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.

Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy for Swale

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

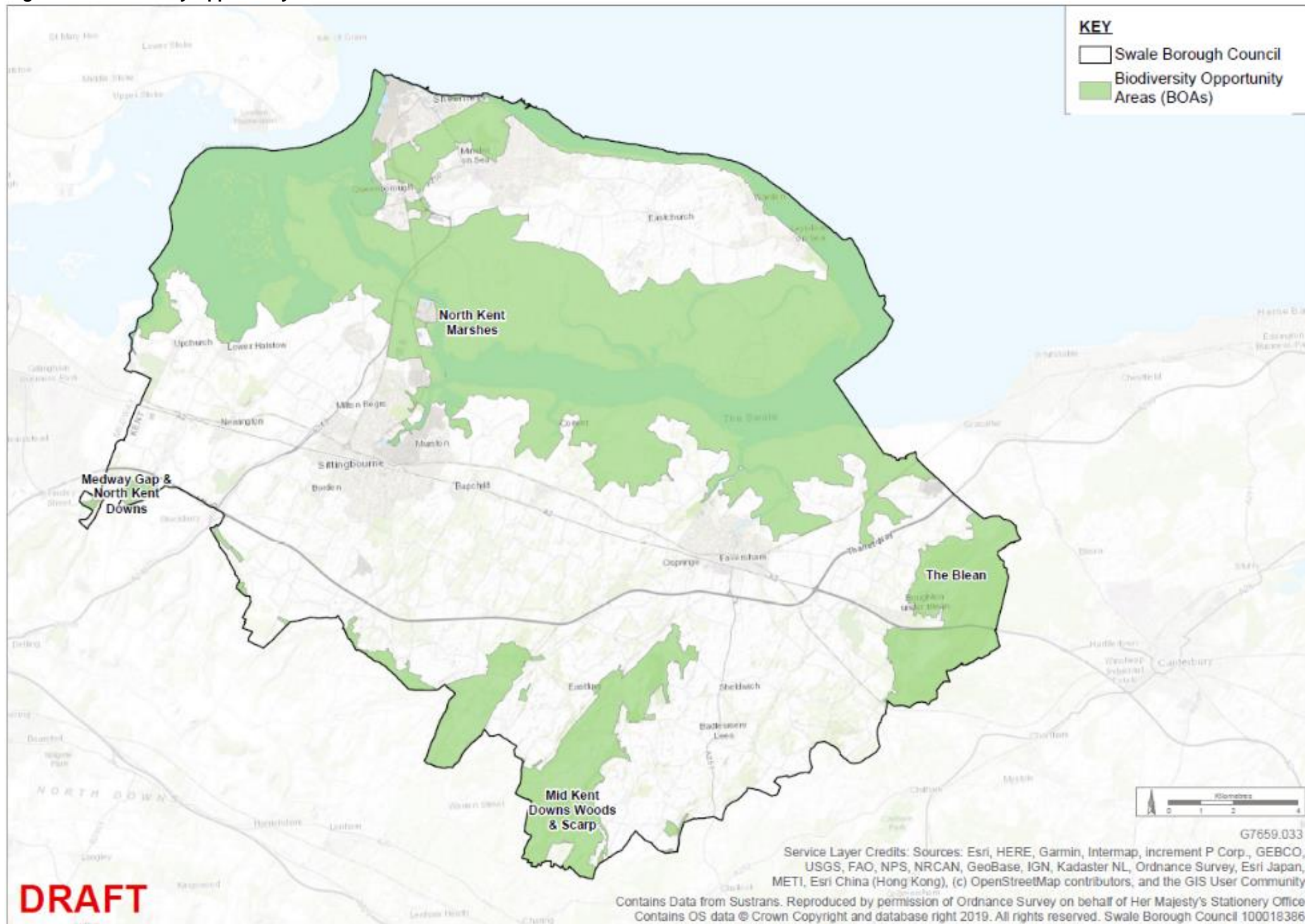
- 5.9 The opportunities and proposals within this section are aligned with the targets of the Kent Biodiversity Strategy. The adopted Kent Biodiversity Strategy runs from 2020-2025, though consultation has recently ended on an updated Kent Biodiversity Strategy 2019-2044 which was published in August 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.

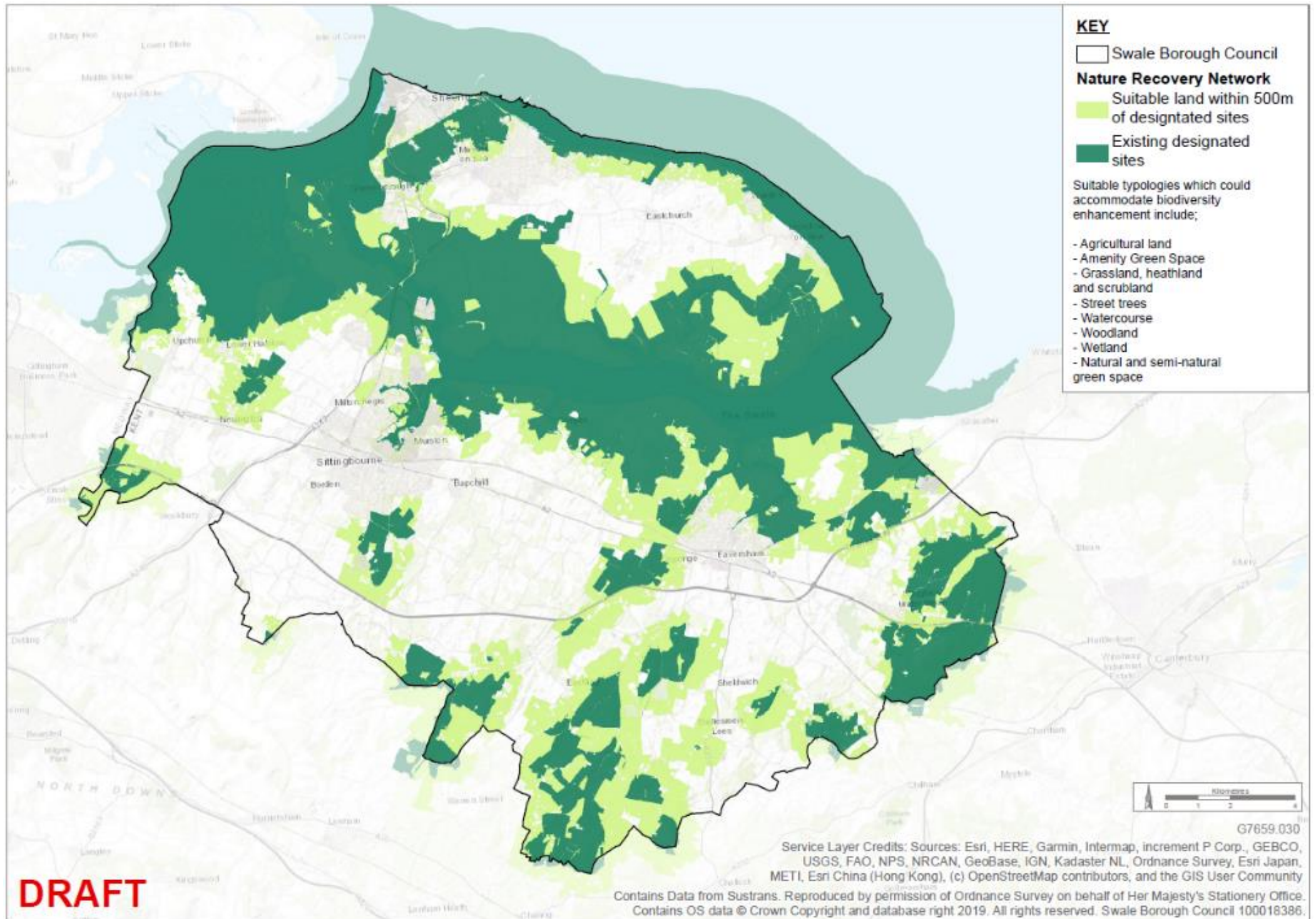
5.18 The potential Nature Recovery Network Map shown in Figure 16 is a 'works in progress' and will be subject to change once official guidance is released. Figure 16 has been developed using DEFRA's concept which puts existing protected sites at the core of a future network, as they constitute our best 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 2019⁵, 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 Pack⁶.

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.

⁵ National Farmers Union (2019) Achieving Net Zero: Farming's 2040 Goal

⁶ <https://www.kentdowns.org.uk/landscape-management/farming/>

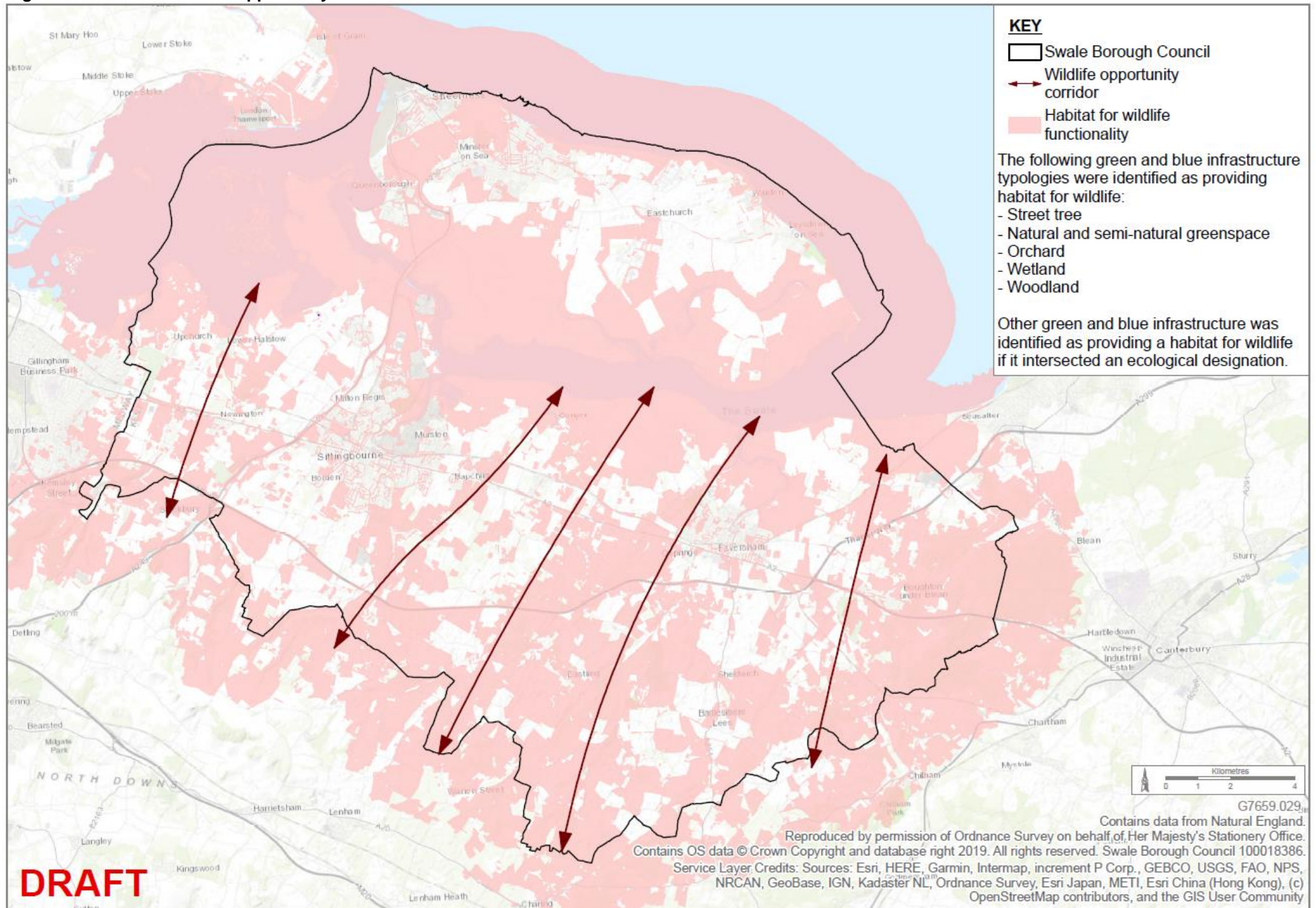
Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy for Swale

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

Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy for Swale

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.

Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy for Swale

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.

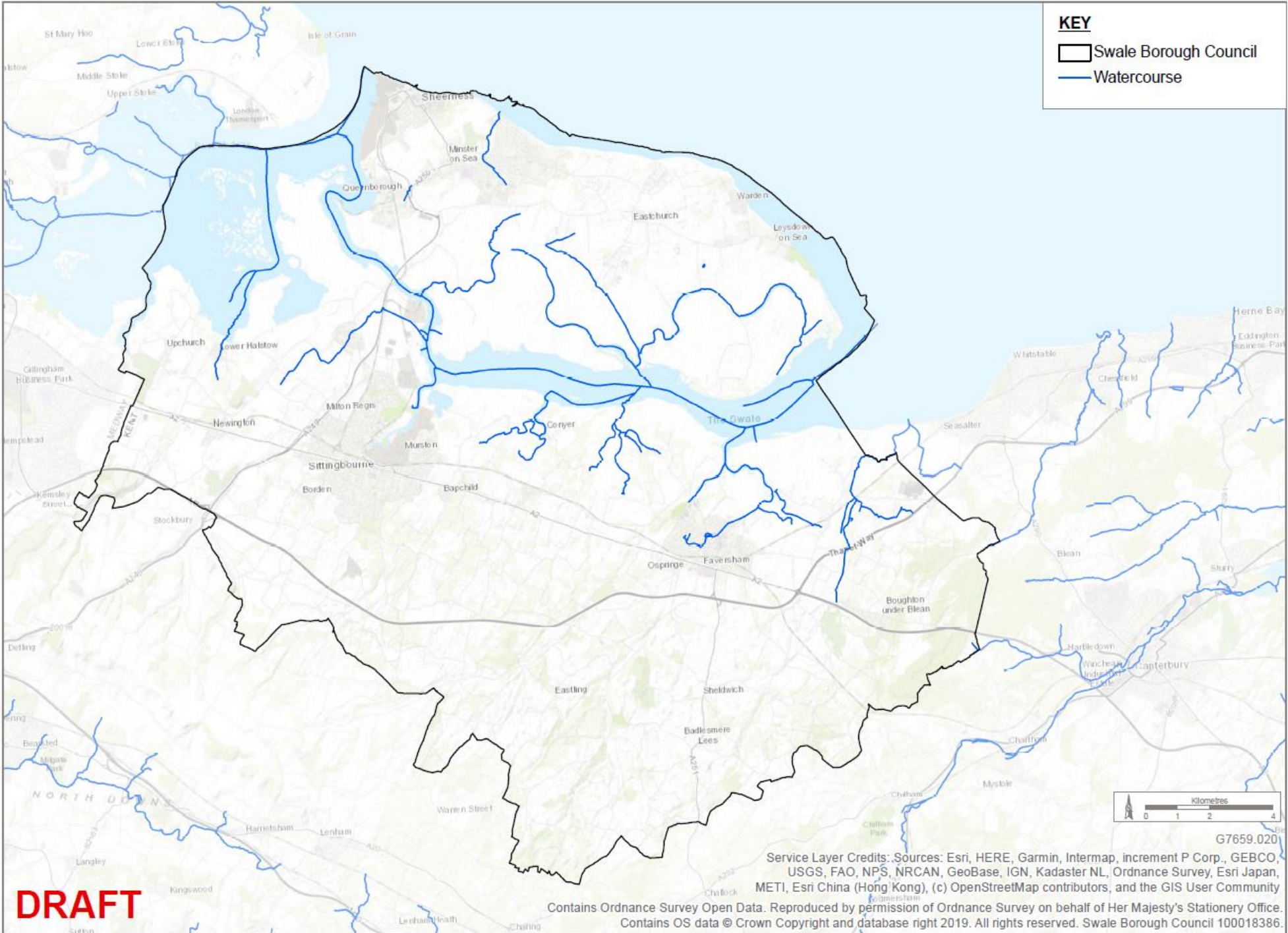
Reducing Flood Risk

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)

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'⁷ 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 surveys⁸ 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

⁷ 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.

⁸ 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.

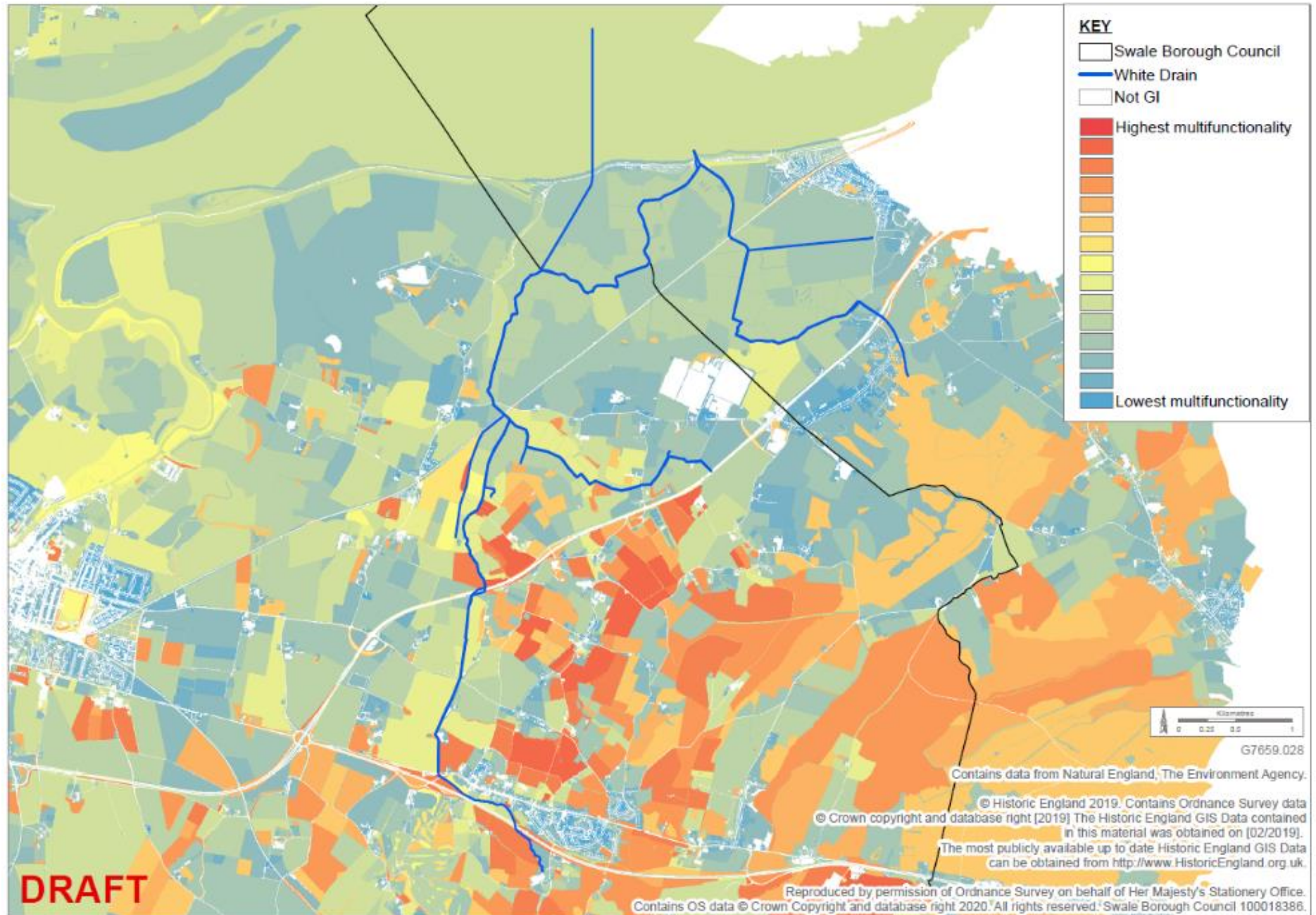
Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy for Swale

Figure 19: Flow Path of the White Drain



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 Profile⁹, 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.

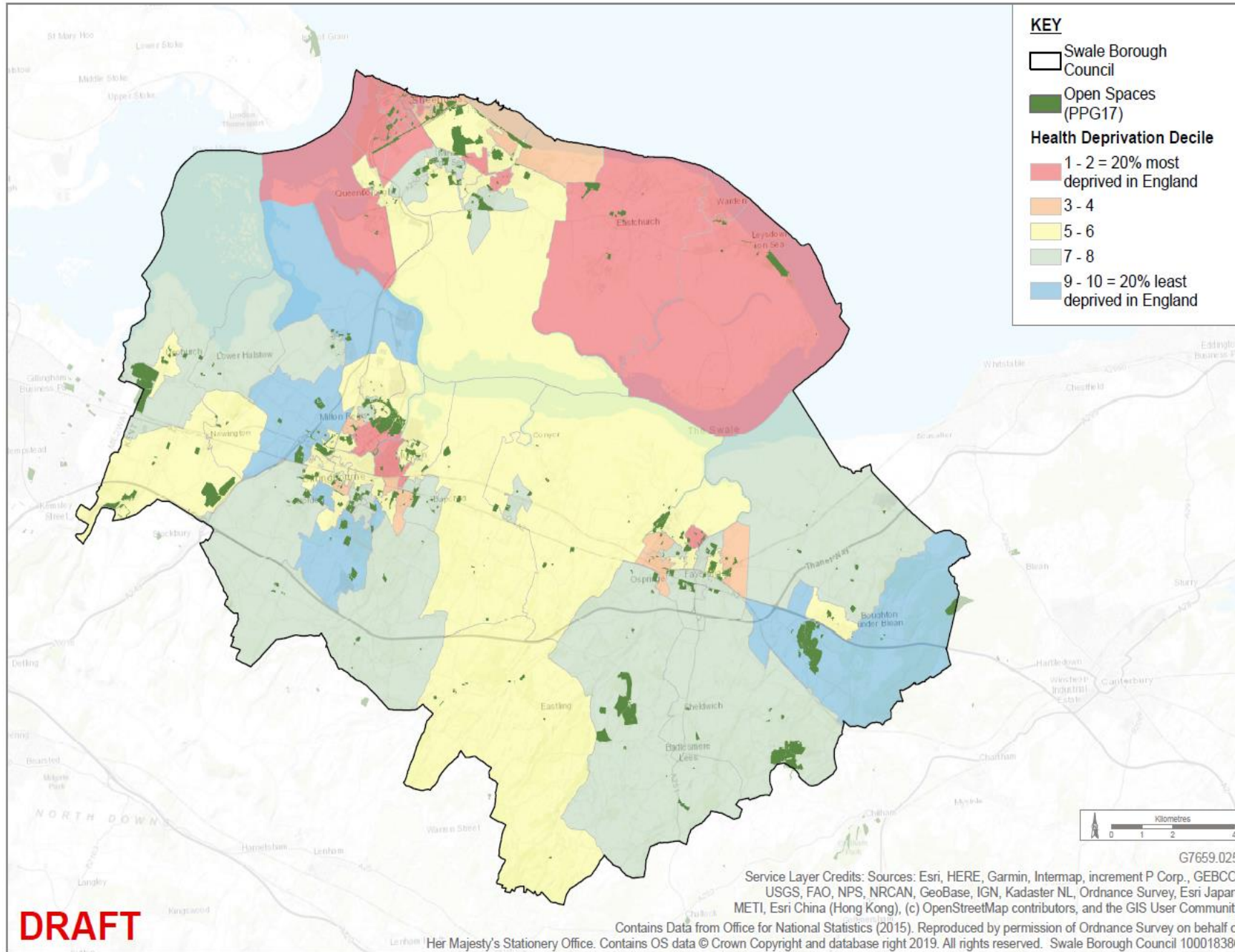
5.67 The borough has a good existing network of footpaths with links to the Saxon Shore Way and a range of long distance paths. However, in some places, the routes are fragmented and safety can be an issue due to poor route management creating overgrown footpaths.

⁹ <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 travel¹⁰.

¹⁰ NHS England (2018). Healthy New Towns Programme

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 2017/18¹¹.
- 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 it¹² 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.

¹¹ Kent Public Health Observatory Area Profiles

¹² 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.

Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy for Swale

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 website¹³. 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.

¹³ <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

Sheppey

Marketing Text for Swale, found on Visit Kent's 'Summer in Kent' webpage (Source: Visit Kent, 2019)

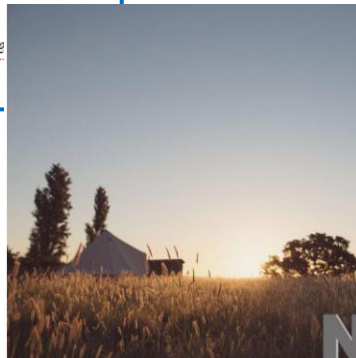
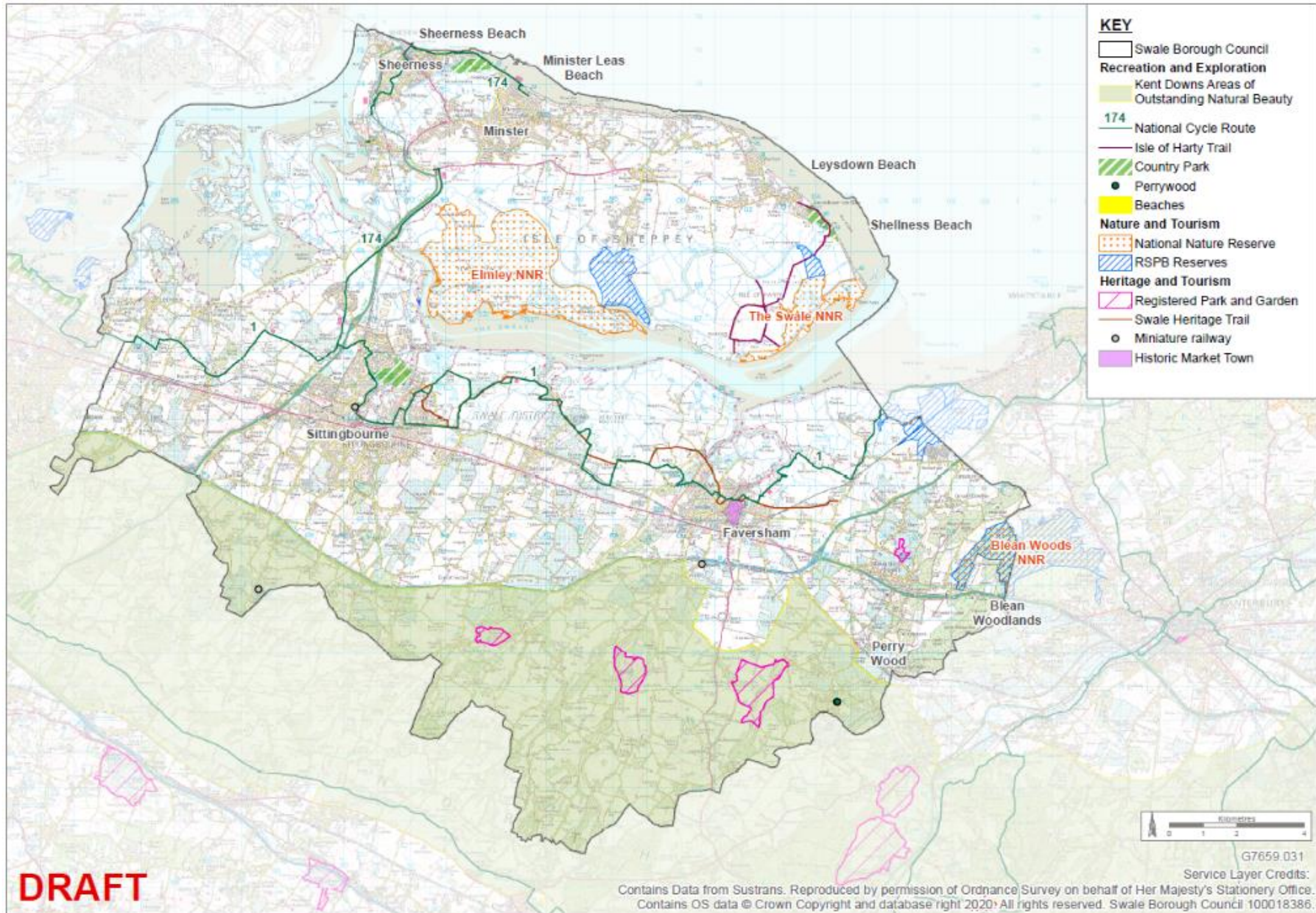


Figure 23: GBI Visitor Economy Assets



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, 2015¹⁴). 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.

¹⁴ <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

<p>Step 1: Consider the GBI opportunities and benefits that the proposed development could bring to Swale</p>	<p>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.</p>
<p>Step 2: Identify the GBI assets within and near the proposed development</p>	<p>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</p>
<p>Step 3: Review the Local Plan and it's evidence base e.g. Swale GBI Strategy</p>	<p>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</p>
<p>Step 4: Designing for GBI</p>	<p>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.</p>
<p>Step 5: Identify opportunities for meeting Swale's GBI opportunities</p>	<p>Consider the information gathered from Steps 1 - 4 to understand how the proposed development can deliver the following GBI opportunities for Swale:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Green and Biodiverse Borough • A Healthy Blue Environment • A Connected, Active and Healthy Swale • A Beacon for the Visitor Economy <p>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</p>
<p>Step 6: Carry out pre-application discussions with Swale Borough Council</p>	<p>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.</p>
<p>Step 7: Submit planning application</p>	<p>GBI proposals should be clearly outlined within the planning application. Information about what to submit with your application form is here: x</p>

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.

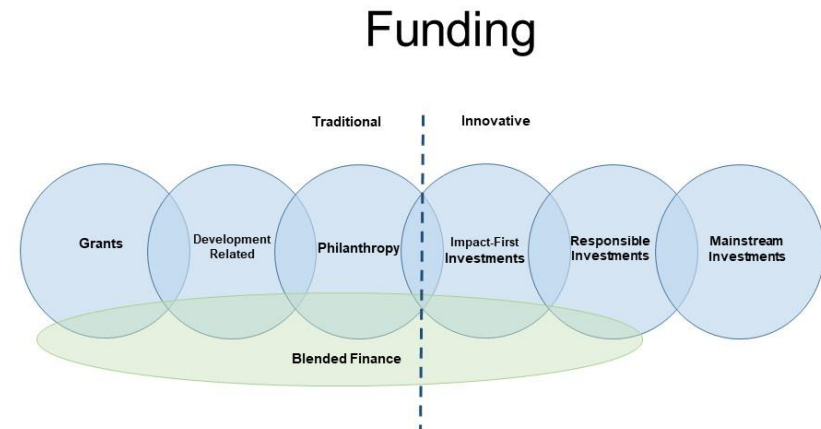


Figure 7 - Blended Finance Diagram¹

Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy for Swale

Table X: Types of Potential Investors in GBI

Table X – Investors						
Investor type	Investor	Form	Typical size	Expectation	Term	Readiness to invest
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.

Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy for Swale

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 visit¹⁵.

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

Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy for Swale

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