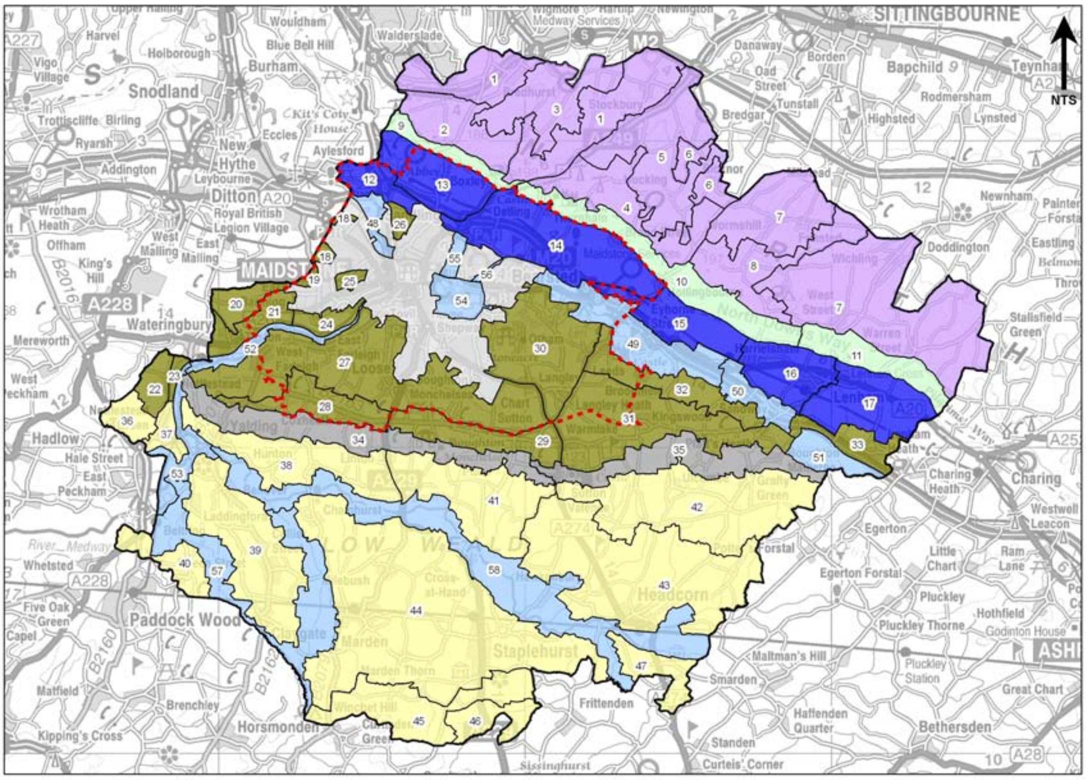
MAIDSTONE LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT



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JACOBS

MAIDSTONE
Borough Council

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Preamble

This revision has been published in response to post consultation comments and suggestions based on local knowledge from the Members of Maidstone Borough Council.

What is the Maidstone Landscape Character Assessment 2013 document?

- The Maidstone Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) identifies all of the landscape types and landscape character areas that occur in the rural part of the borough (i.e. outside of the main urban area of Maidstone). For each landscape character area, the LCA contains:
  - a description of the landscape and its features;
  - an assessment of its condition (ie the pattern of the landscape; the presence of detracting features; the state of the habitats and man-made elements within the landscape);
  - an assessment of its sensitivity (ie the ability of a landscape to accept change without causing irreparable damage to the distinctiveness of the landscape; a measure of the 'sense of place'); and
  - landscape management guidelines.

Why do we need the Maidstone Landscape Character Assessment?

- We need the LCA to help planning in the borough meet the requirements of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) in protecting and enhancing valued landscapes.

How will the Maidstone Landscape Character Assessment be used?

- In conjunction with the relevant planning policies in the Maidstone Borough Local Plan and the forthcoming Landscape Character Guidelines Supplementary Planning Document.
- To help ensure changes to the landscape take place in a way that maintains the local landscape character, retaining and strengthening positive landscape features.
- To help ensure any new development is sustainable in location and sensitive to the local landscape character.
- To inform the preparation of:
  - landscape management strategies; and
  - landscape schemes and development briefs.

What are the guidelines for landscape character areas?

- The guidelines matrix and summary of actions help to provide guidance as to how best to maintain distinctive landscape character. They encourage actions which ensure positive key characteristics are protected from adverse change. They also put forward actions which can be used to help overcome the effects of more negative landscape characteristics. All of the recommended actions are locally appropriate to the character area and take into account the broader needs of the landscape type.
- The summary analysis is provided for each landscape character area. It gives a broad indication of an area's ability to accommodate change without the loss of its overall landscape integrity. This change may be how the land is managed or how the land is used.
- The matrix gives a broad indication of an area's ability of an area to accommodate change without losing its overall integrity, or uniqueness. This can help in decisions about the appropriateness of a development in a particular location, as well as its siting, type and scale. The table below sets out the sorts of landscape management actions which would be appropriate for each of the sensitivity/condition classes.
- The landscape guidelines are a summary of actions that are appropriate to the character area of a location. They provide direction as to how to conserve, restore, improve or strengthen the distinctive and positive features in a landscape.

Preamble

Guideline	Conserve	Conserve & Reinforce	Reinforce	Conserve & Restore	Conserve & Improve	Improve & Reinforce	Restore	Restore & Improve	Improve
Action	Encourage the conservation of distinctive features and features in good condition.	Conserve distinctive features and features in good condition and strengthen and reinforce those features that may be vulnerable.	Strengthen or reinforce distinctive features and patterns in the landscape.	Encourage the conservation of distinctive features and features in good condition, whilst restoring elements or areas in poorer condition and removing or mitigating detracting features.	Conserve distinctive features and features in good condition, whilst creating new features or areas where they have been lost or are in poor condition.	Strengthen or reinforce distinctive features and patterns in the landscape, whilst creating new features or areas where they have been lost or are in poor condition.	Encourage the restoration of distinctive landscape features and the removal or mitigation of detracting features.	Restore distinctive features and the removal or mitigation of detracting features, whilst creating new features or areas where they have been lost or are in poor condition.	Strengthen new features or areas where existing elements are lost or in poor condition.

Section 1 Introduction

Report Structure
This document is structured as follows:

Section 1 Introduction: Sets out the background and context; the importance of landscape character; aims, objectives and outcomes.

Section 2 Methodology: Outlines the approach and process behind the assessment methodology and provides guidance on how to use the document.

Section 3 Factors shaping the landscape: Outlines and describes the existing influences on the landscape outlined, including soils and geology, landform and drainage, historic background, land use and agriculture, ecological and landscape and heritage designations. Maps in this section are for indicative purposes only. Detailed information about any of the individual data sets should be obtained from the data set owners or other appropriate sources.

Section 4 Landscape characterisation and evaluation: Gives an overview of landscape character across the borough within the national and county context. It then goes on to provide detailed profiles of the landscape character types and areas identified by the assessment, with key characteristics, an analysis of landscape condition and sensitivity, and landscape guidelines.

Section 5 Summary and recommendations: Sets out the main findings of the assessment.

Background
The countryside has evolved over many hundreds of years. It has been created by the interaction of the natural environment and human activities, in particular the combination of physical, biological and cultural influences. Physical influences such as geology and landform, together with the overlying pattern of settlement and land uses are key determinants of landscape character.

Maidstone Borough covers an area of 363 km^2, of which over 90% is rural in nature. Landcover is predominantly arable or pasture with smaller areas of woodland and unimproved grassland. Topographically the borough ranges from low-lying land and river valleys to higher ridges, scarps and downland.

There is a need to retain pattern and diversity in the landscape to ensure that character and local distinctiveness are maintained. This is not necessarily about keeping the landscape as it is but is more about preventing everywhere becoming the same. In addition we need to ensure that landscapes are visually satisfying and give enjoyment to those who visit them, and those who live and work in them.

Government policy requires that planning authorities should ensure that the quality and character of the wider countryside is protected and, where possible, enhanced. The use of landscape character assessments based on a formal and robust assessment of the qualities of the landscape concerned is advocated.

Section 1 Introduction

Context

Maidstone Landscape Character Assessment and Landscape Guidelines was produced in 2000. Since then there have been changes within Maidstone's landscapes; landscape character assessment techniques have evolved; and there is an increased awareness of the impacts resulting from climate change.

In order to take account of these changes, Maidstone Borough Council commissioned Jacobs to undertake a landscape character assessment of the borough. The borough-wide study area encompasses the whole of the rural area up to and including the urban edge and green wedges of Maidstone, but does not include the main built-up area of Maidstone. This assessment was carried out at a scale of 1:25,000. A more detailed assessment of the rural setting of Maidstone's urban area, carried out at a 1:10,000 scale, is also incorporated (Figure 1). The study area broadly defined at project inception used the Key Diagram contained in the Core Strategy Preferred Options Development Plan Document 2007, and was further refined to follow the edges of landscape character areas. The assessment used the Maidstone Borough Council Landscape Character Assessment and Landscape Guidelines 2000 document, prepared by The Landscape Partnership Ltd, to help inform the new assessment. However provision of a toolkit of further landscape guidelines, including detailed planting schedules as per the Landscape Character and Guidelines 2000, falls outside the scope of this brief.

The importance of landscape character

Signed by the UK Government in February 2006, the European Landscape Convention (ELC) defines landscape as:

"an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors."

The ELC is an international agreement devoted to the protection, planning and management of all landscapes, whether they are of outstanding beauty, degraded or ordinary landscapes. It applies to rural, urban, coastal and marine areas. The convention calls for the integration of landscape in all relevant policies (cultural, economic and social) and the active engagement of the general public in shaping future landscapes.

The overall aim of landscape, planning, design and management should be to achieve sustainable landscapes that are as visually, ecologically and culturally as rich as possible to meet society's social, economic and environmental needs. Landscape character assessments provide essential information about landscape diversity, character and distinctiveness, evolution, and sensitivity to change as well as landscape management needs. This information is essential in helping to work towards the goal of developing a better understanding of landscapes.

Aims, objectives and outcomes

The main aims of the study are to provide an up-to-date assessment of landscape character in accordance with current guidance and best practice, and serve as an updated baseline of environmental information. It will also aim to provide logical, robust and defensible justifications for managing pressures for change in Maidstone Borough, without diminishing the value of the landscape.

Section 1 Introduction

The key objectives of the study are to:

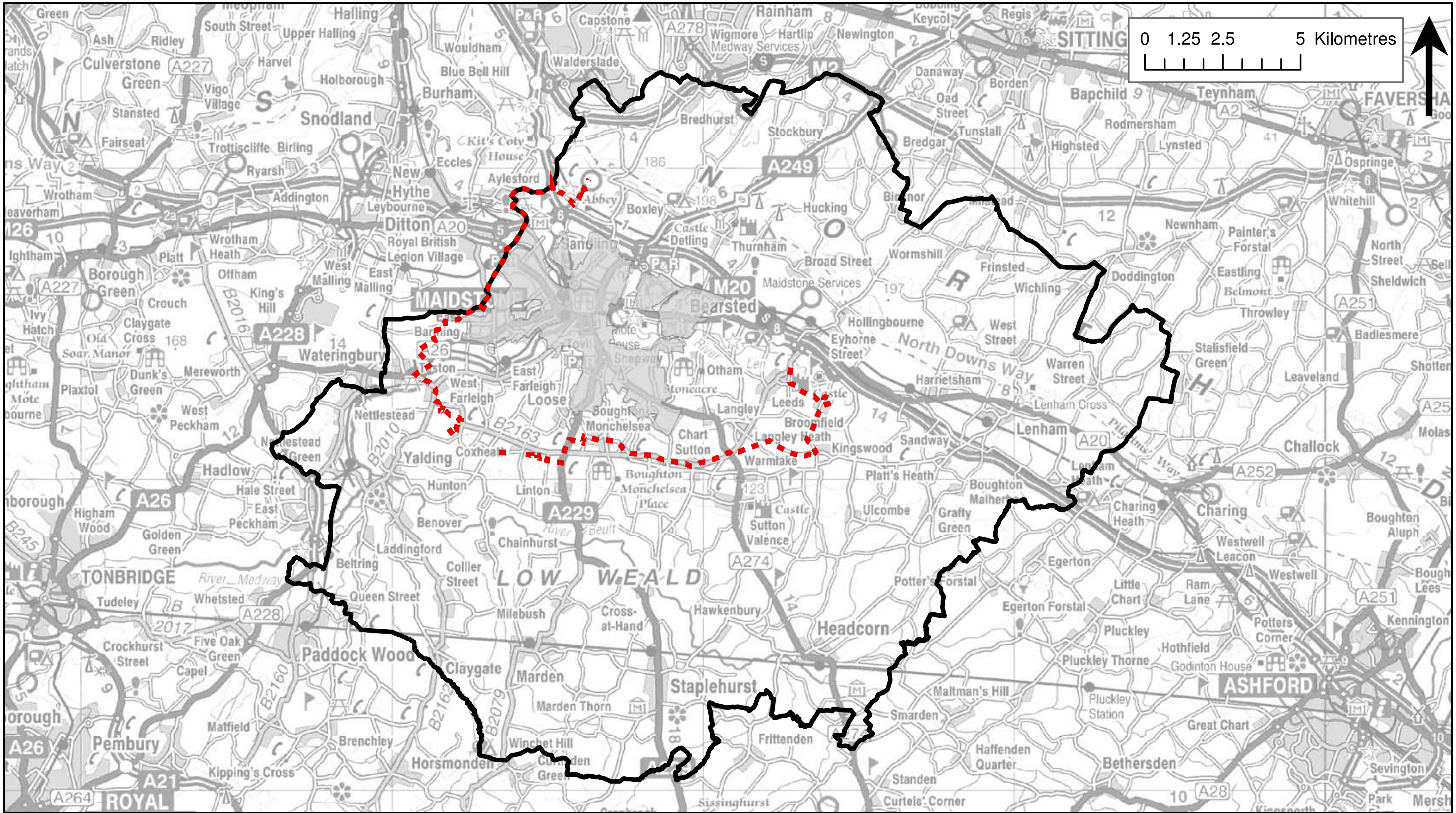
- Undertake a systematic assessment of the borough
- Provide a comprehensive description and evaluation of landscape character areas identified in the borough, integrating field data with historical, ecological and geodiversity information
- Engage with key technical stakeholders during the process to obtain their views and data for landscape character issues
- Assist in forming the basis of policies in Maidstone's Local Development Framework, in particular the Core Strategy, and set the foundation for a landscape character supplementary planning document
- Set the foundation for the development of integrated guidance for use as part of the development management process
- Identify those areas requiring landscape conservation, restoration, reinforcement or improvement

Outcomes of the study are anticipated to be:

- Ensuring the diversity of landscape character in the borough is recognised and managed in a more sensitive manner
- Ensuring decisions on the landscape are underpinned by a robust and widely accepted assessment of the landscape character
- Promoting a better understanding of the borough's landscapes
- Guiding the process of accommodating change throughout the borough whilst maintaining the character and local distinctiveness of the landscape

Many of the judgments regarding landscapes are subjective, which means that they are open to equally valid but different individual interpretations. The process of landscape character assessment has to resolve this matter and has evolved so that current practice is now based on a logical and well thought out procedure. This procedure breaks down the analysis into the component parts, which collectively make up the landscape as we know it. It is a logical process, which enables decisions to be revisited over time as well as enabling different assessors to understand and contribute to the decisions reached.

This document will form the basis for future work associated with developing landscape guidelines. The challenge will be to find ways of identifying the important characteristics of the landscape that assist the process of accommodating change, where this is both desirable and practicable, whilst maintaining the links with the past and the natural environment.



Legend

Maidstone Borough Boundary/ Borough Wide Study Area

Detailed Study Area

Urban Area (excluded from detailed study area)

Figure 1 Study Area

Section 2 Methodology

Approach

The methodology used to undertake the landscape assessment is based on the latest guidance: 'Landscape Character Assessment Guidance for England and Scotland' (The Countryside Agency and Scottish Natural Heritage 2002). Appendix B sets out the technical methodology in full. There are essentially two elements to the assessment. Firstly the characterisation of the landscape where the landscape character areas are defined, and secondly the analysis of these character areas where judgements are made.

Landscape characterisation

Draft landscape character types and landscape character areas were established through desk based research and mapping, and then verified through field survey. The desk based research aims to be consistent in terms of the level of detail each background factor is analysed in. This is so that the draft landscape character types and areas are based on areas of common character which balance natural and cultural factors. In summary, the desk based research included analysis of the following:

- Geology and soils
- Landform and drainage
- Historic background
- Settlement and land use
- Agricultural land classification
- Biodiversity and ecological designations
- Landscape and heritage designations
- Aerial photographs of the study area
- Mapping of existing landscape character assessments covering the study area and adjacent boroughs/districts at national, regional and local level

Field survey

Field surveys were carried out during summer 2010. The aims of the field survey were to confirm or amend character area boundaries and to gain an understanding of the physical and visual aesthetics of each landscape character area, and how different elements combine to create distinctive landscape patterns. The Field Assessment Sheets are designed to analyse the component factors of the landscape, to reach a series of decisions on the:

- Aesthetics
- Key characteristics
- Pattern of elements
- Visual detractors
- Ecological integrity
- Cultural integrity
- Sense of place
- Visibility

Landscape analysis

Judgements regarding the landscape condition and landscape sensitivity of each landscape character area were made during the field surveys.

Landscape condition is strongly influenced by the impact of external factors, such as land use. Landscape condition is a measure of 'visual unity' (concluded through an analysis of the pattern of elements and detracting features) and 'functional integrity' (concluded through an analysis of the condition of cultural and ecological features).

Section 2 Methodology

Landscape sensitivity refers to the ability of a landscape to accept change without causing irreparable damage to the fabric and distinctiveness of that landscape. Landscape sensitivity is a measure of 'sense of place' (concluded through an analysis of landscape distinctiveness and continuity) and 'visibility' (concluded through an analysis of landform and tree cover).

Evaluation

The conclusions reached regarding the evaluation of each of the character areas have been expressed using a matrix that encompasses both the landscape condition and sensitivity. This analysis gives a broad indication of each area's ability to accommodate change in management or use without loss of overall landscape character. Landscape guidelines for each landscape character area have been developed from this analysis. It should be noted that where the guideline is to 'Conserve' a landscape character area, ongoing good practice and management will be required to sustain the good landscape condition/high landscape sensitivity. Many of the guidelines are not within the remit of the Local Planning Authority to implement directly as they are not responsible for managing the land in most cases. However, the guidelines, together with the matrices can be used to inform the:

- Application of criteria-based landscape protection and enhancement policies within the Local Development Framework
- Identification of spatial development options within the Local Development Framework
- Identification of landscape issues that may need to be considered in greater detail in relation to development management decisions

Limitations

It has to be recognised that whilst the process adopts a complex but logical critique of the landscape, many of the individual decisions are still based on the trained but subjective judgements of the assessors. Although conclusions have been reached for each of the character areas, it is not the purpose of this study to rank one character area against another. Likewise this study is not intended to identify in detail areas suitable for development. It may however offer guidance to both the Local Planning Authority and developers, when guiding policy and deciding the type and scale of development that may be appropriate, whilst respecting the character of the landscape.

Section 2 Methodology

How to use this document

The primary aim of this document is to guide the process of accommodating change throughout Maidstone Borough, whilst maintaining the character and local distinctiveness of the landscape.

1. Locate the Landscape Type and Landscape Character Area you are interested in (Front Cover/Figs 11 and 12).
2. Identify the corresponding number of the character area (Figure 12).
3. Check the contents page to locate the borough wide landscape description and to identify where the detailed information can be found if applicable (Fig 13).
4. Each character area falls within a broader landscape character type which is identified by the colour of the title bar. An introduction and generic guidelines for each character type are located at the start of the corresponding section with that coloured bar.
5. Character areas on the edge of Maidstone have been analysed in more detail. Detailed landscape character areas are described as subsections of borough wide character areas in this location.

Worked example

The area of interest is Coxheath.

- Figure 11 shows Coxheath to lie within the Greensand Orchards and Mixed Farmlands landscape character type, coloured a dark green on the map. Details of the main characteristics are found in the introduction to this landscape character type on page 160, identified by a dark green title bar at the top of the page. This information should be reviewed to gain a broad understanding of the landscape character and generic guidelines.
- Figure 12 shows Coxheath to lie within landscape character area 28, entitled Coxheath Plateau. A description of this character area is provided on pages 257-260.
- Lying as it does on the edge of Maidstone, Coxheath Plateau is divided into three detailed subsections - Coxheath is found in 28-3, entitled Coxheath Orchard. Information at a more detailed scale is given on pages 267-269.

Section 3 Factors shaping the landscape

Geology and soils

Figure 2 illustrates the geology and Figure 3 illustrates the soil types across Maidstone Borough. The underlying geology of Maidstone Borough consists of four distinct rock types that define the landform and character of the borough – chalk, Gault Clay, Lower Greensand and Wealden Clay which run in bands of varying widths in a north westerly to south easterly direction across the borough.

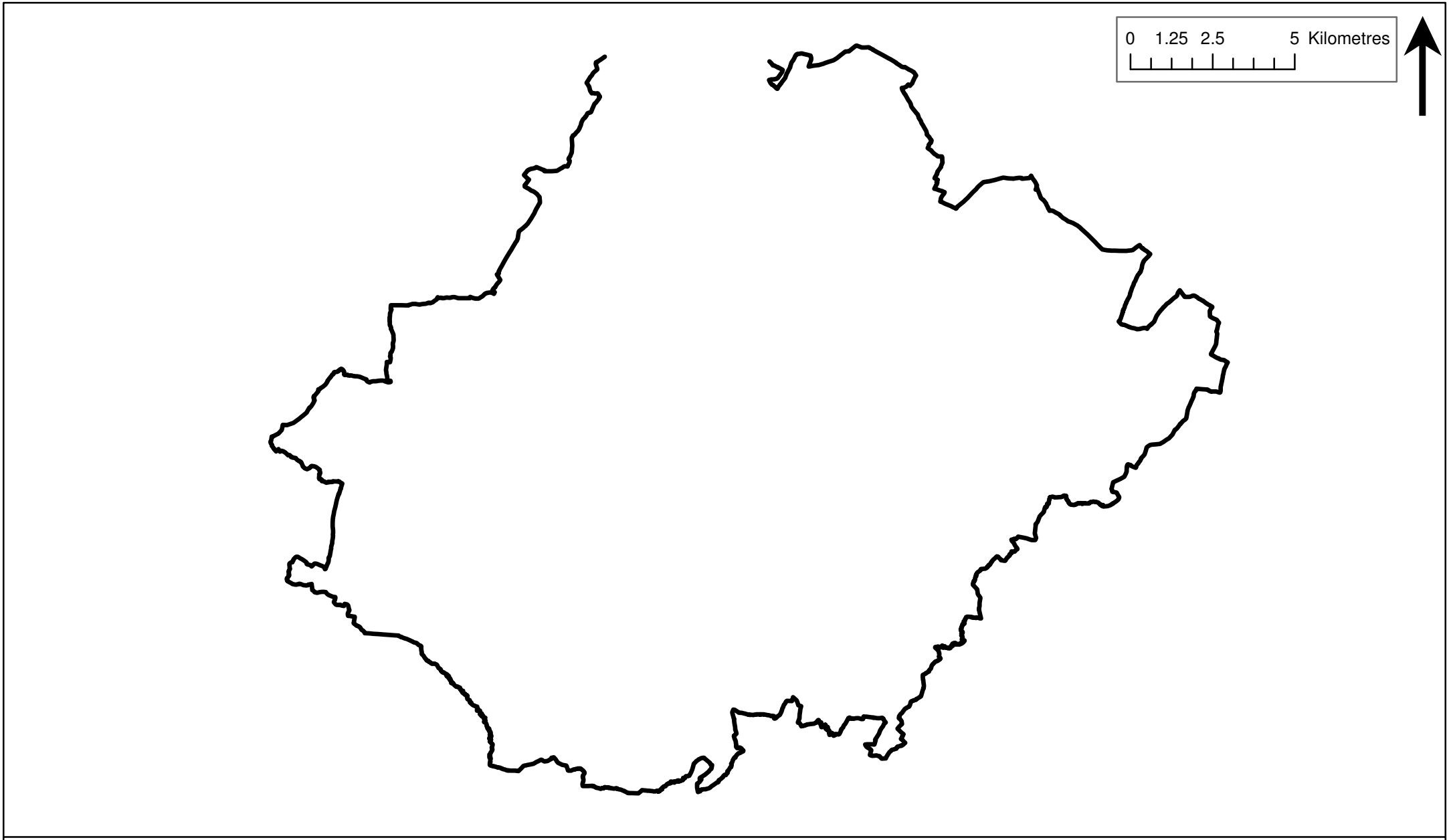
To the north of the study area bands of Upper, Middle and Lower Chalk run in a south east to north west direction forming the North Downs. The highest part of the Downs at the top of the scarp and the dip slope are formed by the Upper Chalk, with significant areas of higher ground capped with deposits of clay-with-flints. Shallow soils are found over the dry valleys of the dip slope especially on brows and steeper slopes, with head deposits in the valley bottoms and at the valley heads, with other areas supporting well drained calcareous fine silty soils over chalk or chalk rubble. Middle Chalk forms the scarp itself. Here the soils are especially thin on the steep chalk scarp and occasionally the chalk is visible where there are old quarries or in localised areas of erosion. In contrast to the steep scarp of the Middle Chalk, the Lower Chalk forms distinctive undulating foothills at the foot of the scarp supporting well drained calcareous silty soils.

The second distinct geological region is Gault Clay. Differential erosion on the softer clay has created a wide clay vale that extends the full breadth of the borough along the foot of the North Downs scarp. Soils range in the Gault Clay Vale from the calcareous chalk soils to the north, through to heavier clays and a mix of clay and sandy soils where they meet the Greensand to the south. Typically these soils are:

- **Deep loam to clay**
  Some well drained and fine loamy over clayey soils, and some course and fine loamy over clayey soils with slowly permeable sub soils and slight seasonal water logging.
- **Seasonally wet deep clay**
  Slowly permeable seasonally waterlogged clayey soils with similar fine loamy over clayey soils. Some fine loamy over clayey soils with only slight seasonal water logging and some slowly permeable calcareous clayey soils.

The Lower Greensand is found throughout the central belt of Maidstone Borough, including the area covered by the Maidstone town and its surrounding landscape. It predominantly constitutes Hythe Beds (sandy limestone and calcareous sand) punctuated by pockets of Sandgate Beds (silty clay and fullers earth) and Folkestone Beds (sand), the latter of which being particularly prominent to the north east of the town. The Greensand is overlain with soils of loam over limestone, constituting some deep well drained coarse and fine loamy soils (with slowly permeable subsoils and slight seasonal water logging), and occasional shallower calcareous soils. Deep loam to clay is situated across the top of the ridge where the land plateaus. Pockets of Wealden Limestone and Atherfield Clay (clay and sand) are exposed along the tributaries of the River Medway, overlain with drifts of alluvium. Extensive drift deposits of head are situated on the highest section of the Greensand Ridge where the landform plateaus above the steep scarp face that falls south to the Low Weald.

South of the Greensand Ridge, Wealden Clay extends over most of the southern part of the borough across the Low Weald. Here, soils comprise seasonally wet loam to clay over shale, with deep loam to the east of Marden. The Upper Medway, Beult and Teise Rivers dissect this area and are associated with alluvial deposits and slowly permeable soils, and drifts of brickearth and First Terrace River Gravel.



Legend

Maidstone Borough Boundary

Detailed Study Area

Drift

- Alluvium
- Brickearth
- FirstTerrace River Gravel
- FourthTerrace River Gravel
- Head
- Head Brickearth
- Clay-with-Flints

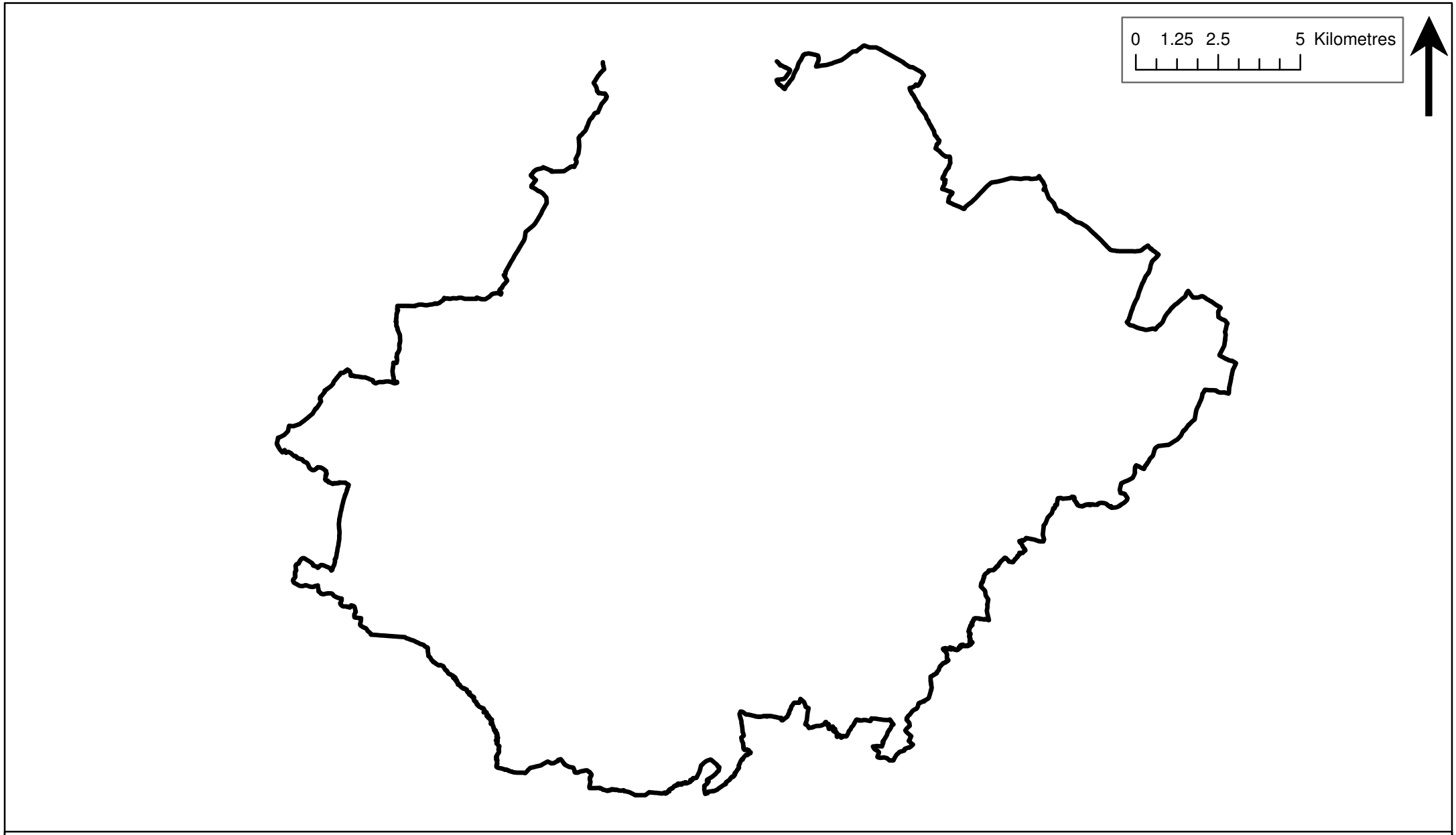
Solid

- Lenham Beds
- Thanet Beds
- Upper Chalk
- Middle Chalk
- Lower Chalk
- Melbourn Rock
- Upper Greensand
- Gault Clay
- LG Folkestone Beds
- LG Sandgate Beds

LG - Lower Greensand; W - Wealden

- LG Hythe Beds
- LG Atherfield Clay
- W Weald Clay
- W Sand in Weald Clay (Sandstone)
- W Large 'Paludina' Limestone

Figure 2 Geology



Legend

- Maidstone Borough Boundary
- Detailed Study Area
- Silt over chalk
- Deep silty
- Deep loam
- Lake or water body
- Deep loam to clay
- Loam over limestone
- Loam over sandstone
- Seasonally wet deep clay
- Seasonally wet loam to clay over shale
- Seasonally wet deep clay
- Shallow silty over chalk
- Seasonally wet deep loam

Figure 3 Soil Types

Section 3 Factors shaping the landscape

Landform and drainage

Due to the distinctive geomorphology of the Maidstone area (refer to Geology and Soils), a clear landform division occurs between the North Downs and the Low Weald. In general, the harder Greensand and chalk stand out in the landscape as ridges, and the Gault Clay forms low ground in between, with the Low Weald forming much of the southern part of the borough. Thus, travelling in a north - south direction, Maidstone and its surrounding landscape begins as the dip slope then scarp of the North Downs and progresses into a Gault Clay Vale the rises again to the Greensand Ridge before dropping down to the Low Weald to the south.

Being high ground, the steep south facing chalk scarp of the North Downs (stretching north east of Maidstone) forms a dramatic topographical feature in the area that overlooks the Wealden Greensand (Figure 4). However, except in the numerous quarries, natural exposures of pure chalk are rare on the steeper slopes.

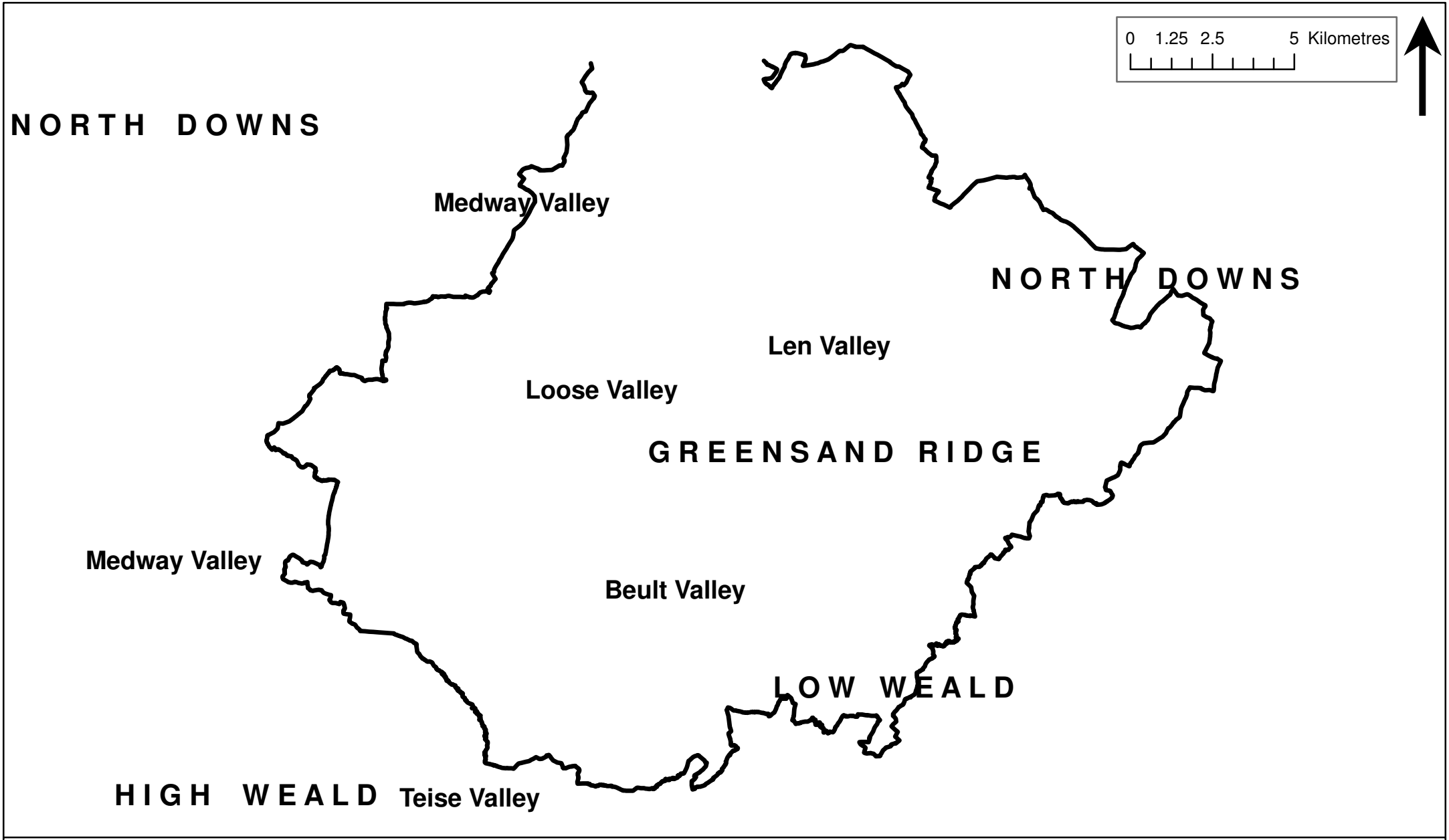
To the north of the Downs, dry valleys drain from the high ground northwards towards the Medway and Swale Marshes outside of the borough boundary. To the south of the North Downs scarp a series of springs emerge at the scarp foot where the porous chalk meets the Gault Clay – the spring line is marked by early settlements and farmsteads, notably at Boarley, Boxley, Thurnham and Hollingbourne. These small watercourses eventually feed into the River Len, which is characterised by numerous mill ponds, via a series of small streams and ditches.

The Greensand Ridge provides yet another distinctive landscape. The Wealden Greensand is generally characterised by sunken lanes and hidden valleys. Within the Lower Greensand, the Hythe Beds form a prominent geomorphologic feature. Travelling in a southerly direction, a clear transition exists from the low lying Gault Clay to the undulating Greensand Ridge which provides panoramic views southwards to the Low Weald.

In terms of drainage, the Medway Valley is the largest catchment in the borough (and indeed the whole of Kent) and the River Medway is an example of a classic lowland river. The river cuts through the Greensand Ridge beyond Yalding and reaches its tidal limit at Allington Lock, before cutting through the chalk and flowing northwards to the Rochester estuary. Flooding has historically been a problem for settlements within the Medway floodplains. Today, Medway flows are controlled by sluice gates and flood storage areas. In addition, inland flood defences such as banks, structural walls and impounding reservoirs help to protect land within the floodplains.

The Rivers Beult and Teise rise from the east and south of the borough respectively merging and joining the Upper Medway near Yalding prior to continuing as the River Medway through Maidstone and on to the Medway Towns before issuing into the Thames Estuary.

All rivers and streams in the area are under increasing threat from the pressures of abstraction, river channel modifications and management, decreases in water quality, development, agriculture and climate change. Aquifer protection zones have been designated in the north and east of the study area.



Legend

- Maidstone Borough Boundary
- Detailed Study Area
- River Valleys

Contours (metres)

- 0 - 50
- 51 - 100
- 101 - 150
- 151 - 200

Figure 4 Landform and Key Landmark Topography

Section 3 Factors shaping the landscape

Historic background

Physical underlying features have influenced the pattern of development and land use throughout the borough. It is likely that the North Downs and Wealden Greensand areas have been occupied since prehistory, with the majority of settlements occurring along the river valleys and only slow colonisation of the exposed areas of the upper Downs. The Low Weald was believed until recently to be unsettled in ancient times due to its heavy clay soils and wetland characteristics, although evidence has emerged of ancient settlement - thought to be either Iron-Age or Bronze-Age. Additionally the River Medway has long been an important means of transport and communication, and Maidstone itself is thought to have been established as a crossing point in Romano-British times.

The lighter chalk soils were among the first to be cultivated in prehistoric times. Pastoralism, which was essential to the Anglo-Saxon economy, shapes the borough's landscape even today. The once dense cover of deciduous woodland on the North Downs was cleared for stock grazing and drove roads were established. Evidence exists of transhumance since pre-Saxon times in the use of seasonal woodland pastures in the Low Weald. Sheep and pigs were driven from their downland pastures in the late summer to feed in the woodlands of the Weald, returning in winter to the areas of permanent settlement. This annual pattern of movement gave rise to the many north-south routes that are such a characteristic feature of the area. Pilgrim routes and trackways (often of prehistoric origin) also traverse the area along the contours – notably the Pilgrim's Way and North Downs Way.

Spring line villages and farmsteads, such as Boarley, Boxley, Thurnham, and Hollingbourne, were established along the foot of the North Downs scarp where the permeable chalk meets the Gault Clay, also taking advantage of the gently undulating fertile south facing slopes. However the stiff blue marine mud of the Gault Clay Vale was generally too heavy for cultivation in the past.

Further south the light soils of the Greensand areas were created from sea-deposited sands and clays. This fertile and productive area has long been attractive to settlers and is pivotal to the construction of Leeds and Allington Castles in the 12th and 11th centuries respectively. Particularly characteristic of the Greensand area are oast houses and hop gardens which are a quintessential Kentish feature. Hops were first imported (from Holland) in the early 15th century and by 1500 hopped beer was ubiquitous. They are a labour intensive crop at every stage of production and in the 19th century especially, great numbers of Londoners travelled to Kent each year for the hop picking season. The oast houses were developed to dry the hops prior to brewing, and consist of a kiln - round or square - and stowage, both on two floors. This form did not take shape until the 19th century but lasted through until the 1960's. Although the majority of remaining oast houses in the borough have been converted to domestic residences, their sheer number testifies to the importance of hops in the agrarian history of south and east England.

Section 3 Factors shaping the landscape

The hops supported several breweries which continued alongside the Medway in central Maidstone until the 1970's. The last to be demolished was the former Fremlins Brewery that was recently demolished to make way for Fremlins Walk Shopping Centre.

In the southern part of the borough the heavy clay soil and dense forest of the Low Weald were unwelcoming and, whilst there is some earlier evidence of small scale settlement, it only began to be opened up and occupied from about the 8th century onwards. Even at Domesday few settlements were recorded here. The rich pastures were ideal for sheep grazing and in the 16th century Flemish Walloons fleeing persecution by Philip of Spain settled in Kent and introduced the manufacture of linen, silks and woollens and the art of dyeing. Gradually, cloth making spread out over the Low Weald. Fullers earth was essential to the industry (for removing grease from newly woven cloth) and was found in highly prized deposits between Boxley and Maidstone. World-wide exports of cloth continued until the close of the 17th century; linen thread was used in Kent for making hop bags well into the 18th century. The presence of numerous ponds in the Low Weald is likely to be due to the extraction of clay for marling (the process of spreading fertilizer made from clay mixed with carbonate or lime), and/or for watering of livestock.

There are numerous moated sites, which are typical of the Low Weald. The heyday for their construction was the 13th and 14th centuries, although they continued to be constructed into the 15th century. Moats were probably multi-functional – they served to alleviate drainage on the heavy clay soils, but also for "defensive" purposes (probably more as a safe refuge for livestock than in a military sense); they were also something of a status symbol, particularly with regard to the later examples. They are often found associated with other features such as fishponds (e.g. Coldbridge Castle, Lenham).

Paper making, as a water-dependent industry, was focused on the Rivers Len, Loose and Medway. Turkey Court in Maidstone is a fine example of a fulling cloth (cloth thickening) and later a paper mill, which only ceased production in 1976. Whilst technologies have changed the paper making tradition continues today at Aylesford, which is now one of the largest paper mills in Europe.

Quarrying has had a sizeable impact on land use from an early period. Ragstone and chalk/lime extraction (from the North Downs) began during the Roman period, and continued throughout the Medieval period and modern times. Fullers earth workings occur across the borough (particularly around Boxley and Bearsted), there are sandpits in several locations (including Bearsted and Hollingbourne) and local clay diggings for brick and tile manufacture on a small scale.

Religion has also influenced land use and settlement patterns, including the location of Maidstone itself. St. Mary's Church (on the site of All Saints) was a very early foundation, probably some time in the 7th century, and likely to have been on land gifted to the Archbishop of Canterbury by the Kentish king. The manor which later developed into the Palace is thought to have formed part of the same gift. It was a Minster church which is recorded in the 11th Century (pre-Conquest) as having been "mother church" to 17 daughter foundations – drawing a line around these subservient churches encompasses an area strikingly similar to that of the present Borough. So its position as a central place and its early importance as a religious centre was established early

on, and this would have had at least some impact on the development of radial routes. The radial nature of routes centred on Maidstone probably dates originally from the pre-Conquest period. It was later reinforced by the development of Maidstone as a service and market centre for the cloth trade and agriculture. It was a two way process – imported goods brought by barge down the Medway were off-loaded at Maidstone for distribution out into the Weald. It is thought that the road from Sutton Valence to Headcorn (now the A274) achieved its current straight route during the Napoleonic Wars. Others such as the A20, the A26 and the A249 were straightened/rerouted as turnpikes in the 18th and early 19th centuries.

The location of Boxley Abbey, created extensive landholdings reaching up on to the North Downs, plus various impacts closer to it. The Cistercians were great sheep farmers and were probably instrumental in the clearance of woodland from the top of the North Downs above the abbey – one of their granges was situated on the hilltop above the village and its farmhouse still survives (Boxley Grange). However not all woodland may have been cleared, as Monkdown Wood still survives immediately north east of Boxley Grange. Another grange (Lower Grange Farm) was sited to the south of the abbey complex (now on the opposite side of the M20). The complex of mill ponds and the (recently burnt down) mill at Sandling are quite likely associated with the monastic landholdings.

Leeds Priory was another major religious establishment. It is thought to have been instrumental in the pattern of development of Leeds village (the separate groups of Upper and Lower Street), but wider landscape impacts are now difficult to discern. Within Lenham the manor was owned by St. Augustine's Abbey, Canterbury, which was the reason for the two large 14th century barns at Court Lodge Farm (only one of which survives as a grade I listed building).

Fruit cultivation in Kent arguably began with the Romans, who are recorded as introducing apple and grapes to England and continued through the Middle Ages with advances being made as a result of the Norman invasion in 1066. However, it wasn't until the 16th century that the industry became significant when Richard Harris, fruiterer to Henry VIII was charged with developing orchards for the king's table. This, together with the expansion of the colonies across the world, sparked the development of many cultivars of apples, pears, cherries and plums during the 16th and 17th centuries. Wars and shifting economies saw the orchard industry rise and fall over the 18th and 19th centuries. Old orchards were traditionally undergrazed and mixed in terms of the number of different types of fruit grown. Traditional combinations included cherry, damson, plum and sheep; apple, blackcurrant and chickens. Wild and cultivated fruit trees such as damsons, bullaces, plums, cherry plums and crab apples were commonly grown in the hedgerows as linear orchards for additional crops and as wind breaks. Local preferences led to particular patterns developing such as damson hedges in Kent. Old orchards suffered serious decline from the 1960's when many were grubbed up and either replaced by modern dwarf rootstocks or converted to arable land or pasture.

The 19th century saw fruit growing increase in importance as a more reliable alternative to hops, predominantly found on the Greensand but also on the lower dip-slope of the Downs in the north of the borough. This included top and soft fruit with the main varieties grown being apples, cherries, plums, damsons, pears, currants and gooseberries. Kentish cobnuts were also grown in combination with the fruit trees on the Greensand and a handful of nut platts remain today.

Cobnuts were cultivated locally from at least the 16th century but it became a significant local industry in the 19th century when many new cultivars were bred and coincided with the expansion of the railway network. Cobnut production increased greatly across the country but particularly in the Home Counties where the picked product could be taken to London by train and sold at markets. In Kent, cobnuts were traditionally grown on plantations (or 'platts') together with apples and blackberries.

Cobnut cultivation is a labour intensive activity but labour costs were cheap and by 1913 plantations across England extended to over 2830ha. Most of these lay in Kent, the prime location being in a triangle lying between Sevenoaks, Maidstone and Tonbridge on the Greensand Ridge. After the First World War, many growers changed to more profitable horticultural products (partly reflecting the increase in labour costs) and significant acres began to disappear. Today there are around 100ha left in England, most of which are centred around Plaxtol, with the rest in isolated pockets across the Greensand[1].

Viticulture was introduced to England by the Romans and continued until the beginning of the 16th century. The climate then was warmer and favoured the growth of grapes. From the second half of the 16th century though, temperatures dropped and viticulture retreated from northern and eastern Europe. Here it was replaced by the production of beer (from barley and hops), cider and perry (from pears). Viticulture began a resurgence in Kent in the 1960's and vineyards are becoming a more regular sight.

During the 19th century improvements in road and rail travel brought strong east-west transport links into the area, and Maidstone expanded considerably to become by far the largest settlement within the borough, as well as the county town and administrative centre of Kent. Elsewhere, however, the scattered small villages and hamlets remained linked only by wooded, deep-set lanes that defy modern transport requirements; they have retained their rural integrity and diversity of agricultural uses. Further development of transport infrastructure in the 20th century has had a considerable impact on the Gault Clay Vale through the construction of the M20 motorway and the Channel Tunnel Rail Link.

[1] Ref: Kentish Cobnut Association

Section 3 Factors shaping the landscape

Settlement and land use

Within the borough there is a strong contrast between the conurbation of Maidstone itself, with its 19th and 20th century development around the historic core, and the rural hinterland with its scattering of small villages and hamlets. Only in the few larger settlements, on the fringes of Maidstone town and along the commuter 'rat runs' does the presence of modern development dominate. This is particularly noticeable in terms of the transport infrastructure. To the north of Maidstone the landscape is dominated by the motorway/railway corridor containing the M20, A20, Maidstone-Ashford railway and Channel Tunnel Rail Link, that links London to the south coast ports. This corridor gives way, almost immediately, to a network of narrow, often twisting lanes. The intermediate infrastructure is almost absent and occasions a loss of tranquillity where it does occur, as along the A249, A274 and B2163.

The North Downs is largely a rural landscape, with no large settlements within the borough despite the proximity of the transport corridor, and the urban-edge influence of Chatham to the north. Small villages are scattered through this area, with tree-lined, narrow, deep-set lanes running diagonally down the scarp, offering only restricted views. Chalk itself is rarely used for building due to its softness. However, flint from the dip slope and scarp summit is used as the dominant local vernacular material, and typically can be seen in combination with orange-red brick in buildings and boundary walls. Yellow stock bricks are commonly used towards Stockbury to the north of the borough, indicative to the proximity to the brickearth beds found in adjacent Swale Borough.

The use of ragstone is most dominant on the Greensand, often used within older structures and sometimes within village boundary walls. Ragstone is also occasionally found in some older buildings with Maidstone. Here timber-framed buildings and weatherboarding are frequently used, with the weatherboarding mostly painted white. Settlements are larger, frequently dominated by buildings dating from the 17th century, despite their earlier origins. Country houses set within parkland are a feature of the Greensand Ridge scarp, while closer to Maidstone there are many large 19th century houses set in extensive grounds, especially to the east. Ragstone is also commonly used in the Gault Clay Vale, often used with brick and occasionally with flint to the north nearer the scarp.

On the Weald, red brick and timber frame are typical traditional building materials for the isolated

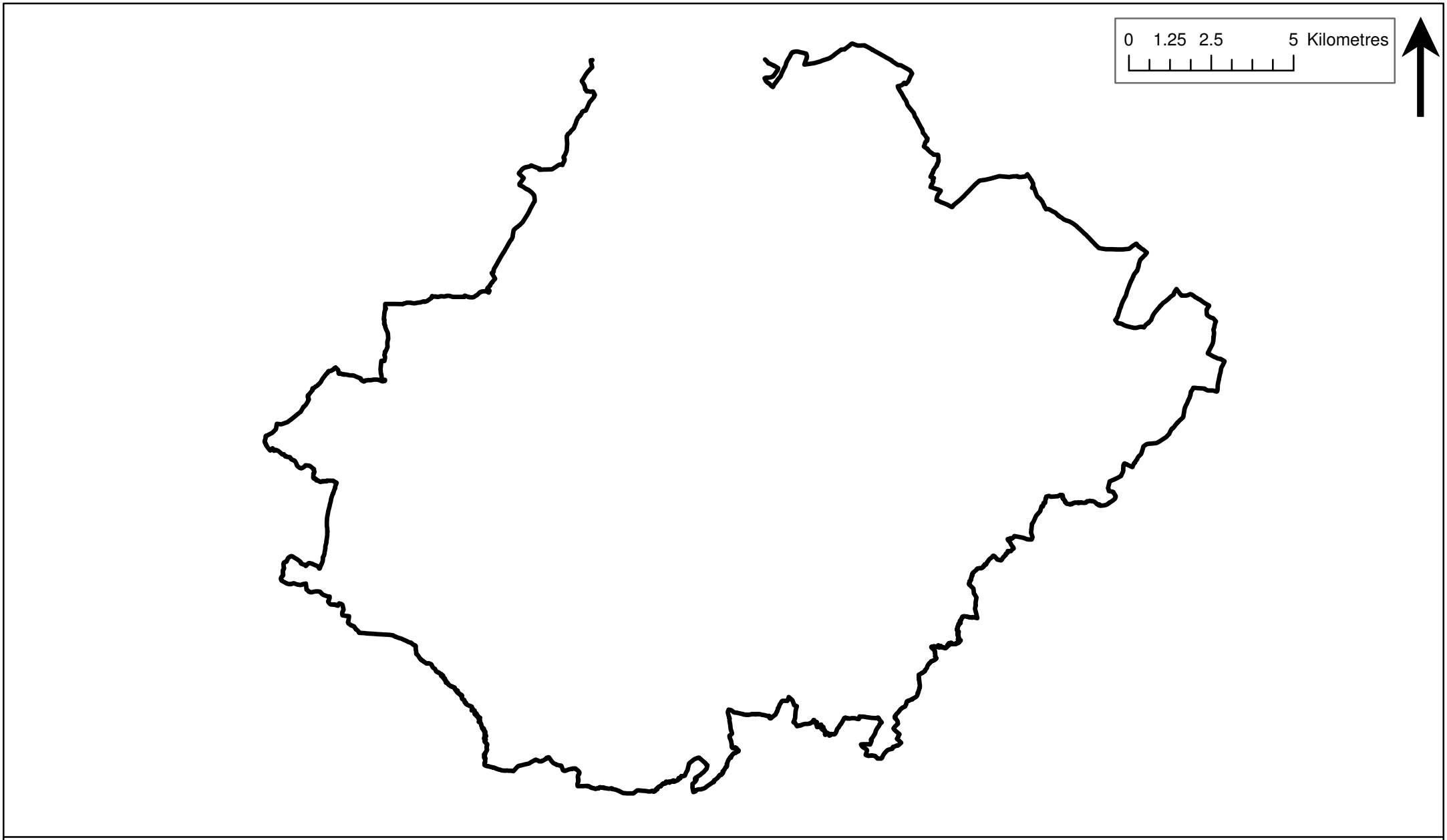
farmhouses that dot the plain. The traditional Wealden Hall House is characteristic in this area, typically located within a hedged pasture and often associated with a pond. The few settlements, such as Staplehurst and Headcorn, have 20th century fringes around 15th to 19th century cores.

Due to the heavy soils, the Gault Clay area has been cultivated only where sands from the Greensand have been washed downwards to produce lighter soils. Thus, the Gault Clay area has predominantly become an area of pasture and, more recently, of arable farmland.

The Gault Clay area is unsuitable for development and so has dictated the location of the M20 and Channel Tunnel Rail Link transport corridors on the acid sands and loams of the Greensand immediately to the south. Further south, each layer or 'bed' of the Greensand has distinct properties, leading to local variations in land use along the outcrop. For example, the Hythe beds produce the Kent ragstone that is widely used as a building material and has allowed ragstone built churches to become quintessential to Kent. Furthermore, ragstone erodes to produce fertile soils frequently allowing such areas to be planted as fruit orchards.

The Sandgate Beds are a further distinct layer within the Greensand that support more fertile soils with a higher lime content and gently rolling relief. In contrast other Greensand areas, such as the Folkestone Beds, contain nutrient-poor acid soils which have created free-draining level plateaux and sterile heaths. However, in locations where rivers have cut through the Greensand, surface deposits of silt have created fertile areas of alluvium, giving a wide variation of soil activity and fertility and a consequent diversity of agriculture. This is illustrated in Figure 5, which shows an Agricultural Land Classification[2] of Grade 1 west of the study area and alongside the River Medway. Figure 5 also illustrates the relatively poorer quality soils, and hence lower agricultural land classification, provided in the Gault Clay soils to the north east of the study area.

[2]The Agricultural Land Classification system divides land into five grades, Grade 1 being excellent quality and Grade 5 being very poor quality.



Legend

- Maidstone Borough Boundary
- Detailed Study Area
- Urban
- Non Agricultural
- Grade 1
- Grade 2
- Grade 3
- Grade 4
- Grade 5

Figure 5 Agricultural Land Classification

Section 3 Factors shaping the landscape

Biodiversity

Where rivers have cut through the Greensand, surface deposits of silt have created fertile areas of alluvium, giving a wide variation of soil activity and fertility and a consequent diversity of semi-natural habitats. The tributaries, banks and marginal vegetation act as key habitats and corridors for a variety of wildlife in an area of high agricultural activity.

Natural Areas

In 2005, Natural England (assisted by English Heritage) updated the Joint Character Areas which were originally defined by The Countryside Agency in 1996, to produce National Character Areas which coincide with the Natural Areas identified by English Nature (now Natural England). Five Natural Areas fall across Maidstone Borough – the North Kent Plain, the North Downs, Wealden Greensand, the Low Weald and the High Weald (Figure 6).

North Kent Plain

The North Kent Plain is an open, low and gently undulating landscape characterised by high quality, fertile, loamy soils. The land use is therefore dominated by agricultural land uses although habitats include woodland, grassland, marshes and wetlands.

North Downs

The North Downs is a land of chalk soils, with a warm and dry climate that has been fashioned by its land use to produce an area of outstanding nature conservation interest. Chalk grassland is the most distinctive of downland habitats, along with scrub and woodland.

Wealden Greensand

To the south, the Wealden Greensand comprises mostly lowland heath. Many ancient woodlands have survived throughout the Natural Area, though often fragmented and on steeper slopes. The Wealden Greensand also includes several river valleys, which support a series of habitats with drainage ditches, marshy grassland, reedbeds and wet woodlands.

Low Weald

The Low Weald comprises a small scale and intimate landscape enclosed by an intricate mix of small woodlands and a patchwork of hedgerow enclosed fields. Ancient woodland and pasture, the historic network of hedgerows and shaws, unimproved grassland, grazing marsh, rivers, streams and ponds provide a rich habitat network.

High Weald

The High Weald is a well wooded landscape that rises above the Low Weald and is deeply incised in places to give a complex pattern of ridges and steep stream valleys. Habitats are provided by woodland and shaws, gill woodlands and streams, hedgerows, heathlands, exposed sand rock faces, parklands and ponds.

Designated sites

Ecological designations are scattered throughout the study area and are illustrated on Figure 7. Such designations exist at international, national and local (county) level and include:

- **European Sites** – a collective term for sites designated under the Conservation (Natural Habitats &c) Regulations 1994 such as **Special Areas of Conservation (SAC)** and **Special Protection Areas (SPA)**. Often wetland sites designated under the international **Ramsar** Convention are also included with these in practice. These international sites are almost always covered by the Site of Special Scientific Interest designation as well (see

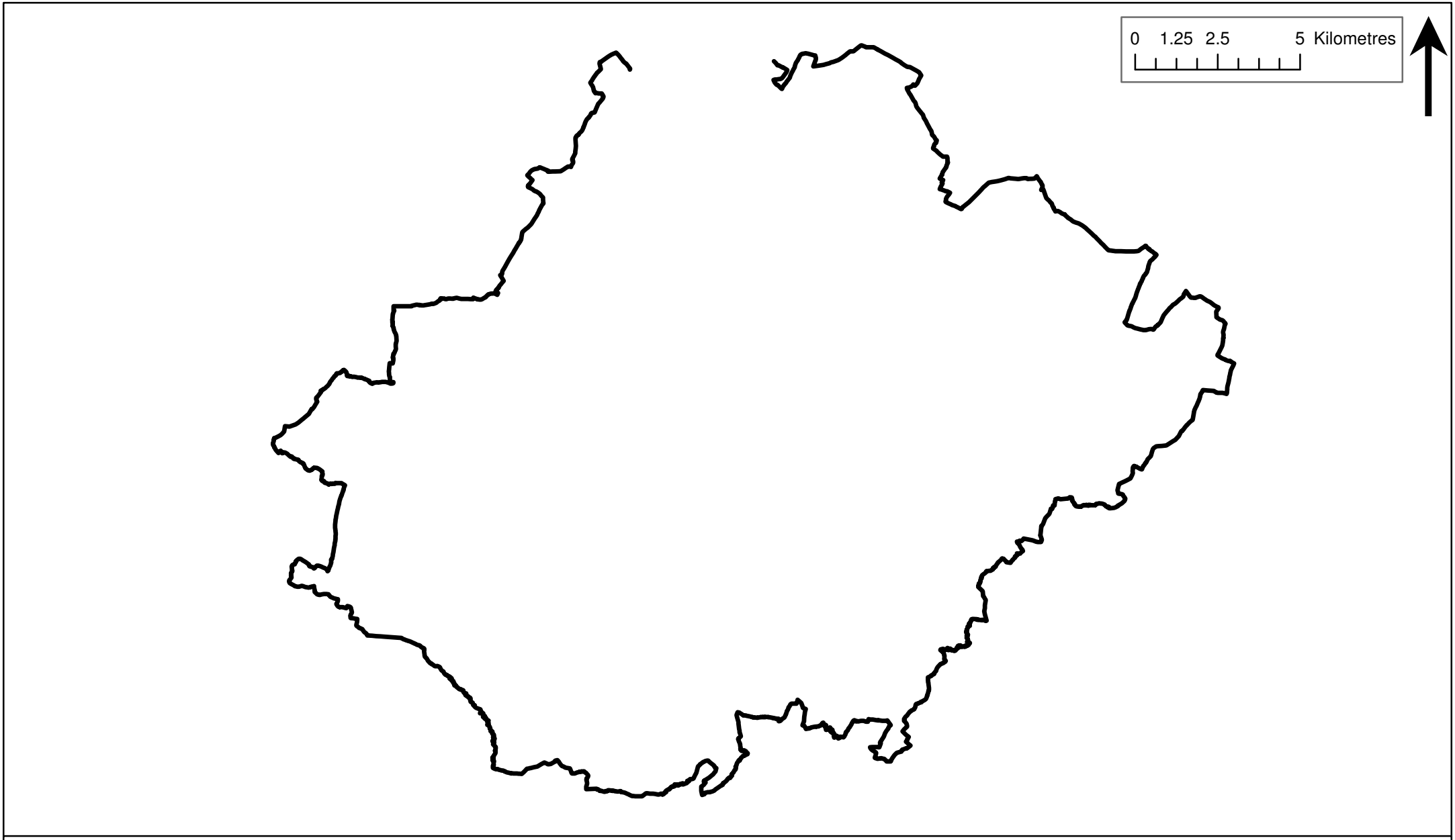


Figure 6 National Landscape Character Areas (Countryside Character, Countryside Agency 1999)

below). North of Boxley, the North Downs Woodlands are designated as a Special Area of Conservation. There no Special Protection Areas or Ramsar sites within Maidstone Borough.

- **Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)** – a statutory UK designation under the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981. Designated by Natural England, these represent the very best wildlife sites in the country. Within Maidstone Borough, sites designated as SSSI include some quarries, sections of downland, meadows, part of Oaken Wood and the River Beult.
- **National Nature Reserves (NNR) -** are almost always SSSI thus receiving statutory protection, but are also either owned or controlled specifically for wildlife conservation by Natural England or held by approved bodies such as Wildlife Trusts. There are no National Nature Reserves within Maidstone Borough.
- **Local Wildlife Sites (LWS)** – formerly known as Sites of Nature Conservation Interest (SNCI), a non-statutory County designation, administered in Kent by the Kent Wildlife Trust and ratified by the Kent Biodiversity Action Plan Partnership. Throughout Maidstone Borough there are numerous Local Wildlife Sites which are focused on areas of woodland, heathland, lengths of stream and other wetland habitats, meadows and pasture.
- **Local Nature Reserves (LNR)** - are designated by local authorities for both people and wildlife. They are semi-natural places that are of special interest locally and can be managed as such. They offer people opportunities for nature study or informal enjoyment. They may include sites that have one of the other designations listed above. Vinters Valley Park and Boxley Warren are designated as Local Nature Reserves.

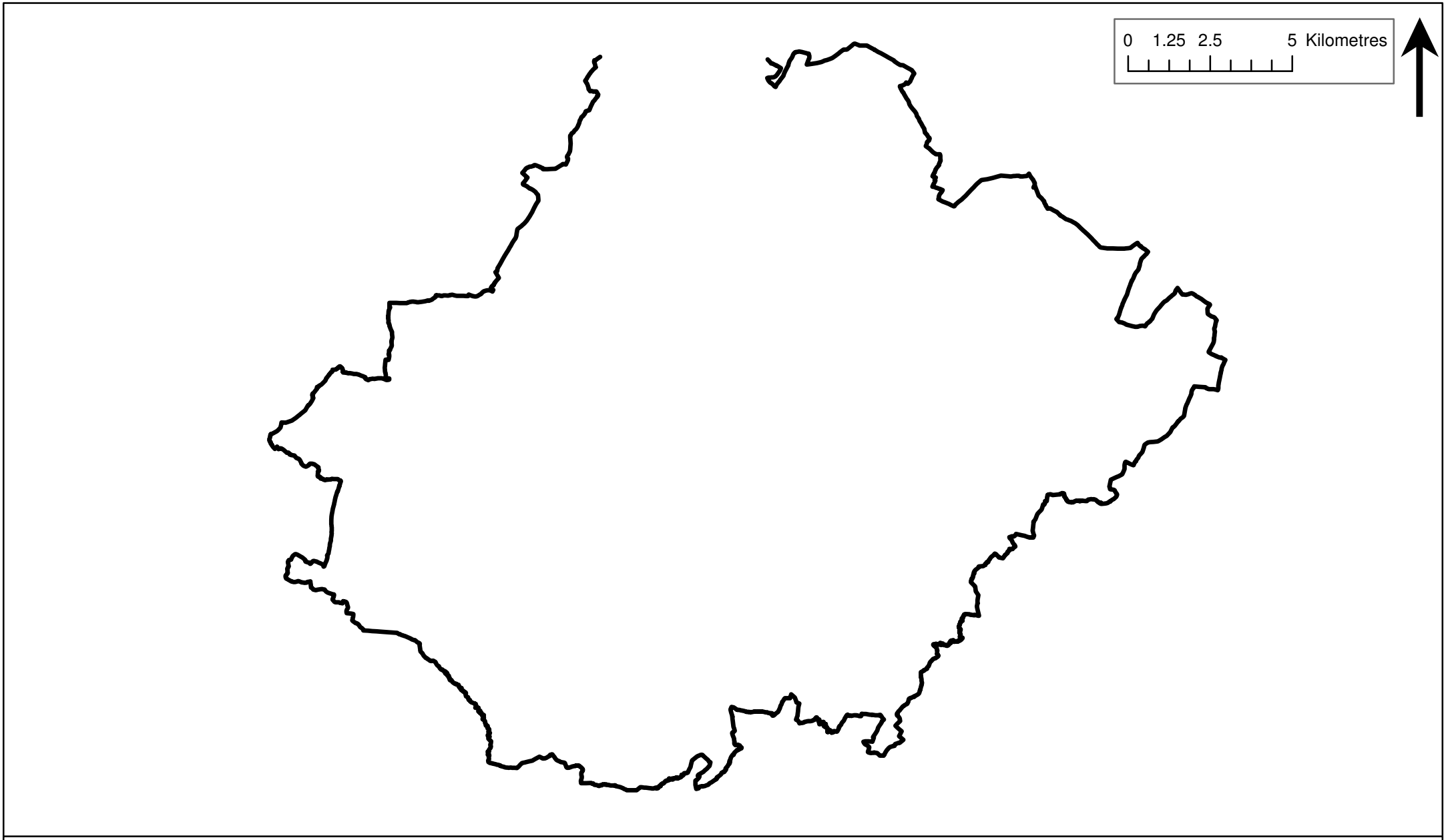
The above sites are afforded protection in the planning process, either through legislation (for statutory sites such as SSSI and European Sites) or through planning policy (for local, non-statutory sites such as Local Wildlife Sites).

Biodiversity Action Plan habitats and habitat networks

Figure 8 provides a map of Maidstone Borough's existing habitats based on the Kent Habitat Survey (2003). This survey work is currently being updated by a new Kent-wide survey, the results of which are expected in 2012.

The UK Biodiversity Action Plan identifies priority species and habitats that are most under threat and develops measures for their conservation. These measures are in addition and complimentary to the process of site designation and protection. The conservation of Biodiversity Action Plan habitats has a statutory basis under the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 and is also enshrined in Government Planning Policy. In addition to the UK Biodiversity Action Plan, Local Biodiversity Action Plans also exist at County and District level. The draft Maidstone Biodiversity Action Plan (LBAP) (http://www.maidstone.gov.uk/leisure_and_culture/parks_and_open_spaces.aspx) is informed by the Kent Biodiversity Action Plan (http://www.kentbap.org.uk/) and the UK Biodiversity Action Plan, with the objective of providing a local focus for action.

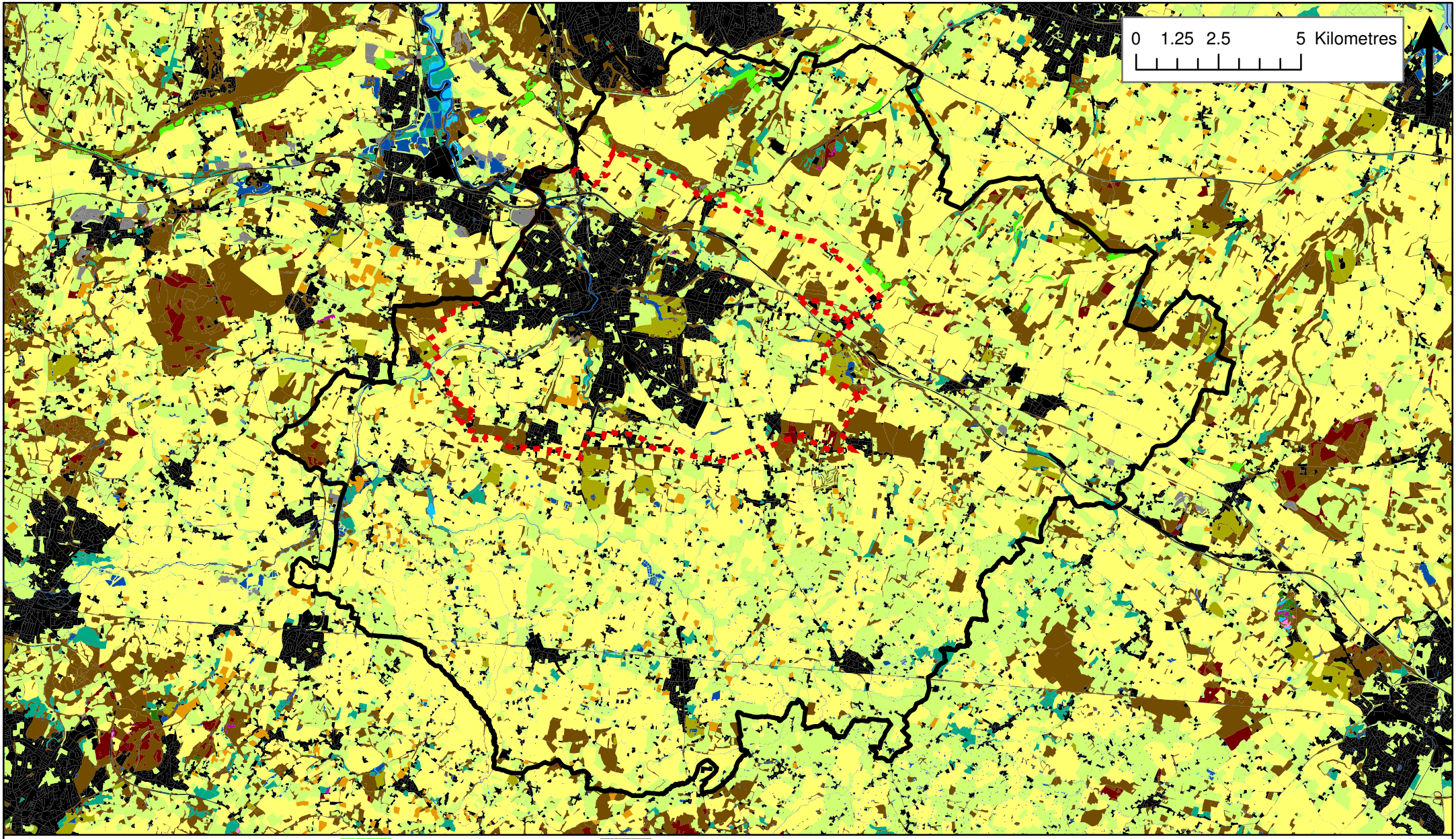
A key element of the Maidstone LBAP is the linking together of key habitats to form wider landscape-scale networks across the borough and beyond. This reflects the core approach of the Kent Living Landscape/Biodiversity Opportunity Area project developed by the Kent Biodiversity Partnership (see Appendix C). This project has identified a number of Biodiversity Opportunity Areas (BOA) across the county, five of which occur in Maidstone namely Greensand Heaths and Commons, Medway Low Weald Grassland and Wetland, Medway Gap North Kent Downs, Mid Kent Downs woods and Scarp, and Mid Kent Greensand and Gault (see Appendix D). Targets for the Maidstone LBAP and BOA should be considered in conjunction with the summary of actions for each area and generic guidelines for each landscape type.



Legend

- Maidstone Borough Boundary
- Detailed Study Area
- Special Area of Conservation (SAC)
- Statutory Local Nature Reserve (LNR)
- Local Wildlife Site (LWS)
- Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)
- Ancient Woodland

Figure 7 Ecological Designations



Legend

- Maidstone Borough Boundary
- Detailed Study Area
- Built-up Areas
- Arable and Intensive Horticulture
- Grassland - Acid
- Grassland - Calcareous
- Grassland - Improved
- Grassland - Neutral
- Heathland
- Bracken
- Exposed Rock (Quarry/Spoil)
- Open Water
- Wetland
- Woodland - Coniferous
- Woodland - Broadleaf and Mixed
- Non-Intensive Orchards
- Wood Pasture/Parkland

Information based on Kent Habitat Survey 2003 (Kent County Council)

Figure 8 Existing Habitats in Maidstone Borough (2003)

Section 3 Factors shaping the landscape

Landscape and heritage designations

A number of landscape and heritage designations (Figure 9) cover Maidstone Borough, and are detailed below.

Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)

The northern extent of Maidstone Borough, north of the M20, lies within the Kent Downs AONB, which is a national landscape designation made under the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949. The primary aim of the designation is the conservation and enhancement of natural beauty. Kent Downs AONB Management Plan (First Revision April 2009) 2009 – 2014 should be used as a material consideration alongside the Maidstone Landscape Character Assessment.

Scheduled Monuments

Scheduled Monuments are defined under the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979 and are designated by English Heritage. There are several Scheduled Monuments within Maidstone Borough, such as remains of historic buildings, moated sites, earthworks and historic bridges. These are designated for their historic significance of national importance and it is an offence to carry out, without consent, any works resulting in the demolition, destruction, damage, alterations or repair to any Scheduled Monument.

Conservation Areas

Conservation Areas are a local designation, which aims to protect special architectural or historic interest, made by Local Planning Authorities under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990. There are 41 Conservation Areas throughout Maidstone Borough, which are often focused around traditional settlement centres. As trees make a significant contribution to the character of an area, all trees with a trunk diameter exceeding 75mm at 1.5m above ground level are legally protected within Conservation Areas. In general, it is an offence to carry out any tree work within Conservation Areas without giving a formal six weeks notice to the Local Planning Authority in advance of carrying out the work.

Listed buildings

Listed buildings are traditional and/or architecturally significant buildings that are designated by

Section 3 Factors shaping the landscape

English Heritage under the Planning (Listed buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990. There are three categories of listed buildings, with grade I being the most important followed by grade II* and lastly grade II. A listed building may not be demolished, extended or altered without Listed Building Consent from the Local Planning Authority. There are over 2000 listed buildings in Maidstone Borough, concentrated within traditional settlements and scattered in a more isolated fashion throughout the wider rural landscape.

In addition, in the Maidstone and Tovil areas there are currently 46 entries for locally listed buildings which cover a total of 133 properties. Locally listed buildings do not have any statutory protection but they have been notified to the local authority as being buildings possessing local architectural or historic interest which should be treated as an important planning consideration when dealing with any applications for planning permission made in respect of them. Locally listed buildings are now to be treated as non-designated heritage assets and as such are subject to the requirement for the inclusion of a statement of significance in any application affecting them in the same way as statutorily listed buildings are – this extends to impacts on their setting as well as direct impacts on the physical structure of the building. Up to date information about listed buildings in Maidstone Borough can be found at
http://www.maidstone.gov.uk/environment_and_planning/planning/listed_buildings_register.aspx

Registered parks and gardens
A Register of Landscapes, Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest has been maintained by English Heritage since the 1980's. Although not yet statutory, such sites form a material consideration within the planning process. Within Maidstone Borough there are several registered sites, comprising Mote Park, Leeds Castle Estate, Linton Park, Chilston Park and Boughton Monchelsea Place.

Kent Compendium of Historic Parks and Gardens
A garden listed in the Kent Compendium of Historic Parks and Gardens is an identified heritage asset recorded on a local list, which is defined and supported by PPS5: Planning for the Historic Environment. A number of such historic parks and gardens are situated throughout Maidstone.

Ancient woodland
Ancient woodland in England is defined as an area that has been wooded continuously since at least 1600 AD and may be ancient semi-natural woodland (ancient woodland sites that have retained the native tree and shrub cover that has not been planted, although it may have been managed by coppicing or felling and allowed to regenerate) or ancient replanted woodland (where the original native tree cover has been felled and replaced by planting, usually with conifers and usually this century)[3]. Fragments and swathes of ancient woodland are strewn across Maidstone Borough, with particularly large ancient woodland blocks at Oaken Wood to the west and at Kings Wood to the east.

Ancient woodlands have had a long time to acquire species and form stable flora and fauna communities. They are an important part of our natural heritage because such areas, as well as wood pastures and aged or veteran trees found outside ancient woodland, are valuable

[3] Provisional Ancient Woodland Inventory for England, 1991.

biodiversity resources. Ancient woodlands usually contain a diverse array of animal and plant species, a high proportion of which are rare and are unique to such sites as well as natural features which rarely survive in an agricultural setting such as streams in their natural watercourses. They also represent a link to the original 'wildwoods', which once covered most of England in pre-Neolithic times. Ancient woodlands provide important social, historical and cultural links and can be as important to the identity of a village community or parish as some older buildings. Once lost, ancient woodland cannot be recreated.

The variety of woodland structure can be diverse, and may incorporate pockets of species rich heathland, grassland and marsh within the overall area of woodland. This diversity of species and ecosystems means that ancient woodland does not constitute a habitat in its own right. Rather, areas of ancient woodland are to be found within other Maidstone Biodiversity Action Plan priority habitats, namely wet woodland, lowland beech and yew woodland, lowland mixed deciduous lowland, and wood pasture and parkland.

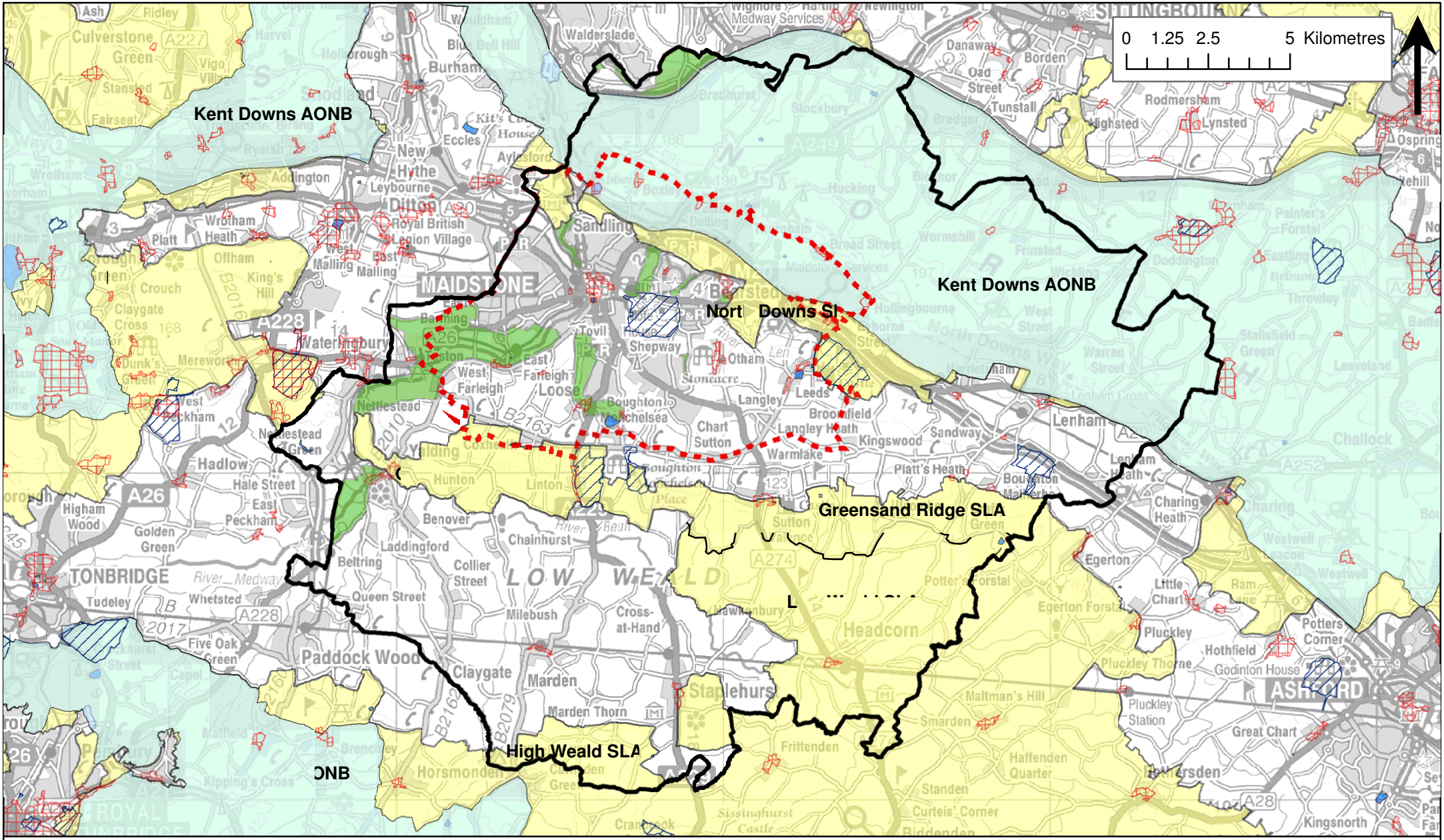
Ancient woodland is currently under represented in much of the south east. Our understanding of the habitat comes from surveys carried out from the end of the 1980's. One failing of this, and other previous surveys, is that many smaller woods under 2ha in size are not identified. To rectify this, work on revising the Ancient Woodland Inventory for Maidstone Borough, which will seek to identify woodlands under 2ha, is currently underway. Based on preliminary findings, it is anticipated that many small, ancient, linear shaws and ancient successional woods occupying former marl pits across the Low Weald will be identified, along with small interconnected fragments of ancient woodland across the North Downs.

Tree Preservation Orders

A Tree Preservation Order is an order made by the Local Planning Authority to protect trees which are considered to have a significant impact on their local surroundings. In general, it is an offence to carry out any work to a protected tree without the formal written consent of the authority. Up to date information about Tree Preservation Order in Maidstone Borough can be found on the council's web pages (http://www.maidstone.gov.uk/leisure_and_culture/parks_and_open_spaces/tree_preservation_orders.aspx).

Local landscape designations

Special Landscape Areas and Areas of Local Landscape Importance were designated by Maidstone Borough Council and formed part of the Maidstone Borough Wide Local Plan 2000. Four Special Landscape Areas are designated within Maidstone Borough - North Downs, Low Weald, High Weald and Greensand Ridge - and the designation aims to protect and conserve the scenic quality and distinctive character of the landscape. Areas of Local Landscape Importance are identified along river valleys and within areas of open space amidst urban development. The aim of this designation is to maintain open space and the character of the landscape. The regional South East Plan (adopted 2009) did not support local landscape designations, but supported a criteria based approach to protecting local areas of landscape. However the South East Plan was revoked in July 2010, and Maidstone Borough Council are currently in the process of considering the future of local landscape designations.



Legend

- Maidstone Borough Boundary
- Detailed Study Area
- Kent Downs AONB
- Historic Parks and Gardens
- Conservation Areas
- Scheduled Monuments
- Special Landscape Areas*
- Areas of Local Landscape Importance*

*NB: Local landscape designations defined in the Maidstone Borough Wide Local Plan 2000 are saved policies.

Figure 9 Landscape and Heritage Designations

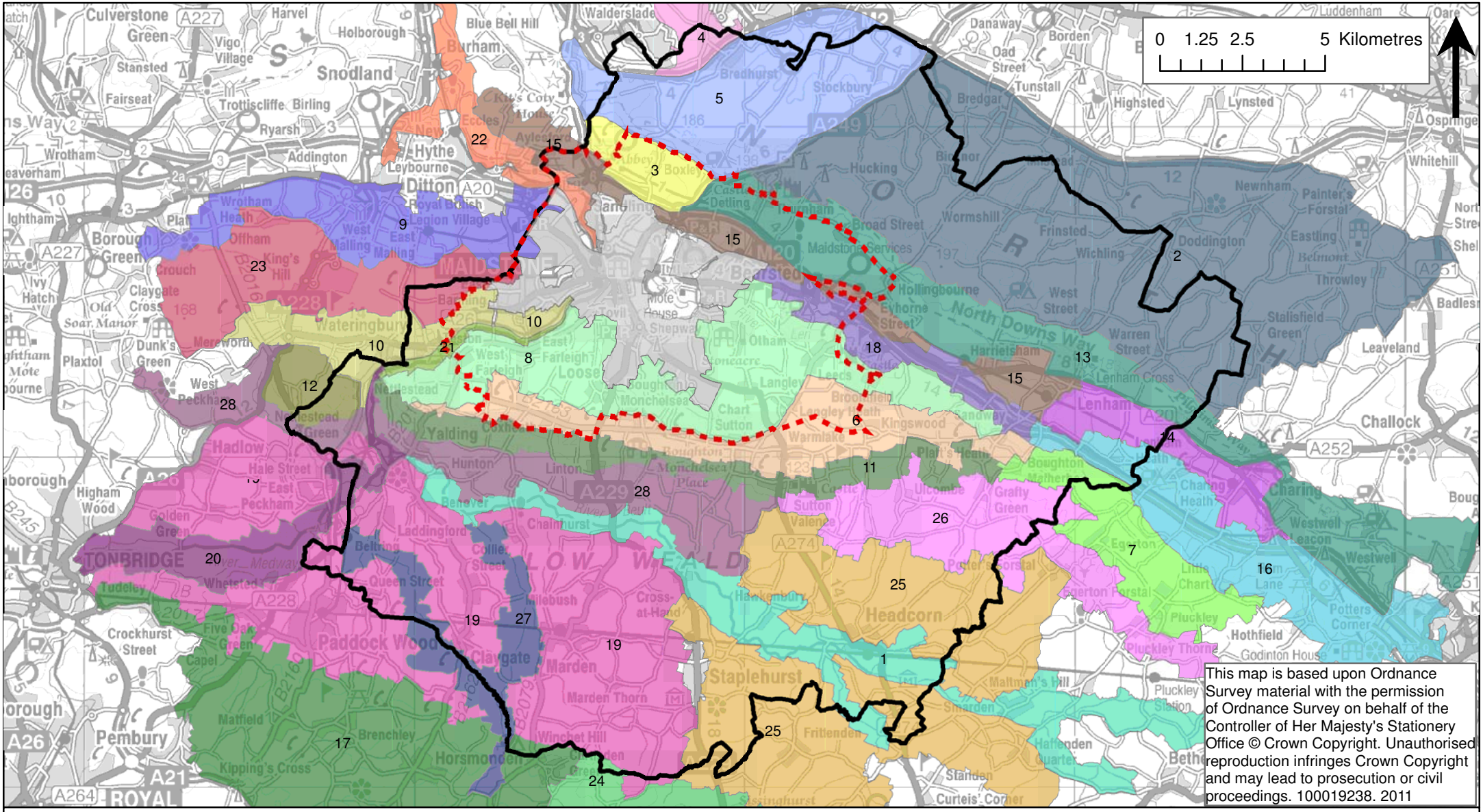
Section 4 Landscape characterisation and evaluation

General context

At the national level, Natural England (assisted by English Heritage) have mapped and described National Character Areas across the country. In Kent these areas are coincident with the Natural Areas described under Factors Shaping the Landscape: Biodiversity. Maidstone Borough falls within five of these areas (Figure 6). To the very north of the borough, the landscape falls within the North Kent Plain. To the north of Maidstone and the M20, the landscape falls within the North Downs. The urban area of Maidstone sits within the Wealden Greensand, and to the south the landscape falls within the Low Weald. To the very south, the landscape falls within the High Weald.

At the county level (Figure 10), Kent County Council have further refined and subdivided these character areas in the Landscape Assessment of Kent. It should be noted that the landscape areas defined within the Kent Downs AONB are taken from the Kent Downs Landscape (published by the Countryside Commission, 1995), and are at a slightly larger scale. The following character areas fall wholly or partly within the defined study area:

- Beult Valley
- Bicknor: Mid Kent Downs
- Boxley Vale: Medway
- Capstone Downs
- Chatham Outskirts: Mid Kent Downs
- Coxheath Plateau Farmlands
- Greensand Fruit Belt: Egerton
- Greensand Fruit Belt – Maidstone
- Greensand Fruit Belt – Malling
- Greensand Fruit Belt – Wateringbury
- Greensand Ridge – Maidstone
- Greensand Ridge – Plaxtol
- Hollingbourne Vale
- Hollingbourne Vale East
- Hollingbourne Vale West
- Hothfield Heathy Farmlands
- Kent Fruit Belt: Kentish High Weald
- Leeds – Lenham Farmlands
- Low Weald Fruit Belt
- Medway Valley
- Medway Valley Lower
- Medway Valley Upper
- Mereworth Woodlands
- Sissinghurst Wooded Farmlands
- Staplehurst – Headcorn Pasturelands
- Sutton Valence to Pluckley Mixed Farmlands
- Teise Valley
- Valeside Farms and Parklands



Legend

- Maidstone Borough Boundary
- Detailed Study Area
- Urban Area
- 1. Beult Valley
- 2. Bicknor: Mid Kent Downs
- 3. Boxley Vale: Medway
- 4. Capstone Downs
- 5. Chatham Outskirts: Mid Kent Downs
- 6. Coxheath Plateau Farmlands
- 7. Greensand Fruit Belt - Egerton
- 8. Greensand Fruit Belt - Maidstone
- 9. Greensand Fruit Belt - Malling
- 10. Greensand Fruit Belt - Wateringbury
- 11. Greensand Ridge - Maidstone
- 12. Greensand Ridge - Plaxtol
- 13. Hollingbourne Vale
- 14. Hollingbourne Vale East
- 15. Hollingbourne Vale West
- 16. Hothfield Heathy Farmlands
- 17. Kent Fruit Belt: Kentish High Weald
- 18. Leeds-Lenham Farmlands
- 19. Low Weald Fruit Belt
- 20. Medway Valley
- 21. Medway Valley Upper
- 22. Medway Valley Lower
- 23. Mereworth Woodlands
- 24. Sissinghurst Wooded Farmlands
- 25. Staplehurst-Headcorn Pasturelands
- 26. Sutton Valence to Pluckley Mixed Farmlands
- 27. Teise Valley
- 28. Valeside Farms and Parklands

Figure 10 Landscape Assessment of Kent Landscape Character Areas

Section 4 Landscape characterisation and evaluation

A summary of the key characteristics of each of these areas is given below:

Beult Valley

- Flat, low lying land around incised river channel with frequent small ponds in upper floodplain
- Slow flowing river of high ecological value and with many historic bridging points
- Rural open landscape of mixed farming
- Sparse but historic settlement

Bicknor: Mid Kent Downs

- Chalk ridge with wide arable fields contained by dense belts of woodland
- Small sunken lanes
- Scattered villages
- Historic parkland, hops and orchards

Boxley Vale: Medway

- Lower slopes of scarp surrounded by major roads
- Scarp woodlands with dark yew and box
- Large traditional fields with few hedges
- Small hedge lined fields and parkland around Boxley

Capstone Downs

- Steep ridges and valleys with open plateau to south under arable cultivation
- Woodland and pasture-scrub invasion
- Remnant chalk grassland
- Urban context and encroachment of urban edge

Chatham Outskirts: Mid Kent Downs

- Large arable plateau and steep, rolling valleys, scarp slopes
- Patchwork of small pastures, grass and scrub
- Derelict orchards and few hedges
- Urban-edge influence with long views to the industrial edge

Coxheath Plateau Farmlands

- Sloping landscape with poor quality soils
- Medium sized coppice woodlands with plantation
- Mixed farmlands including residual orchards
- Expanded 20th century villages

Greensand Fruit Belt: Egerton

- Gentle undulating landform and well-drained loams
- Mixed farmland including orchards and residual shelterbelts
- Steeply sloping Greensand scarp with expansive views over the Low Weald
- Vernacular buildings of ragstone and brick

Greensand Fruit Belt – Maidstone

- Mixed farmland deeply dissected by the Medway and its tributaries
- Residual orchards and shelterbelts
- Ragstone buildings and walls in villages, farmsteads and oasts

Greensand Fruit Belt – Malling

- Flat to gently undulating landscape on good quality loams
- Mixed farmlands including orchards
- Residual tall hedgerows and shelterbelts associated with the fruit. Long views to the Kent Downs

Greensand Fruit Belt – Wateringbury

- Gently undulating landscape deeply incised by the River Medway
- Good quality loam soils
- Shelterbelts and hops
- Ragstone buildings and large houses

Greensand Ridge: Maidstone

- Steep south-facing slopes
- Residual orchards and nut platts
- Scattered historic settlement and historic parklands
- Extensive views overlooking the Low Weald
- Narrow winding lanes

Greensand Ridge: Plaxtol

- Steep south-facing slopes
- Residual orchards and nut platts
- Scattered historic settlement and historic parklands
- Extensive views overlooking the Low Weald
- Narrow winding lanes

Hollingbourne Vale

- Rolling landscape of mixed farmland overlooked by yew-dominated scarp
- Thick hedges along Pilgrim's Way
- Large, scarp-foot arable fields
- Historic springline villages

Hollingbourne Vale East

- Gently undulating landscape on heavy clay soils
- Small streams draining east to Great Stour
- Mixed farmland of small sheep-grazed pasture and larger arable fields
- Locally extensive loss of hedgerows and woodland
- Scarp foot villages
- Chalk scarp dominating views to north

Hollingbourne Vale West

- Undulating landscape on wet clay soils
- Small broadleaf woodlands and irregular pastures
- Infrequent settlement
- Small streams (the head waters of the River Len) draining west to Maidstone
- Chalk scarp dominating views to north

Hothfield Heathy Farmlands

- Undulating landscape of mixed farmlands
- Heathland or heath characteristics on the Folkestone Beds
- Historic parkland

Kent Fruit Belt: Kentish High Weald

- Small-scale intimate enclosed valleys and ridges
- Small scale orchards and high hedges
- Mixed woodland, intensive cultivation and some hops
- Small lanes, many small villages and dense settlements

Leeds – Lenham Farmlands

- Undulating farmland development on well-drained sandy loams
- Small copses with heathy characteristics
- Historic parklands
- Mineral extraction and transport corridor

Low Weald Fruit Belt

- Flat or gently undulating mixed, farmed landscape of dwarf fruit trees, arable, hops and pasture
- Remnant alder or poplar windbreaks
- Broad-verged lanes with ditches
- Frequent groups of oasts

Medway Valley

- Flat, open, mainly arable landscape
- Few settlements or roads in floodplain due to seasonal flooding
- Historic bridging points

Medway Valley Lower

- Tidal river with well-developed meanders
- Residual unimproved grasslands and reedbeds forming important areas for nature conservation
- Well developed industrial mineral and urban sites particularly on the west bank

Medway Valley Upper

- Steep sided valley cut into the Greensand
- Picturesque rural landscape
- Historic bridges and locks

Mereworth Woodlands

- Plateau landscape with poor quality soils
- Extensive broadleaf coppice woodlands
- Narrow shady winding lanes and sparse settlement

Sissinghurst Wooded Farmlands

- Multicoloured enclosed patchwork of fields, well-wooded
- Long views to Greensand
- Small scale hops and orchards, oasts and weatherboarded barns
- Slopes to north from ridge, undulating into wooded ghylls and enclosed pastures

Staplehurst – Headcorn Pasturelands

- Flat, low lying and wet, small scale intimate landscape of pastoral farming with numerous field ponds
- Small to medium sized fields enclosed by hedgerows and hedgerow trees
- Winding historic lanes, broad verges and flowery ditches
- Dispersed settlement including historic farmsteads and villages

Sutton Valence to Pluckley Mixed Farmlands

- Undulating or sloping landform
- Enclosed to north by Greensand Ridge with extensive views to the south
- Mixed farmland including sheep-grazing and remnant orchards, shelterbelts and hedgerows

Teise Valley

- Flat, low-lying land
- Open rural landscape of arable crops
- Sparse settlement or road access giving tranquil atmosphere

Valeside Farms and Parklands

- Undulating mixed farmlands, residual orchards, hop gardens and pasture
- Historic parklands straddling the Greensand boundary
- Strong enclosure from Greensand Ridge
- Views over the Beult Valley

Section 4 Landscape characterisation and evaluation

Landscape character types and areas

Landscape types (Figure 11) have broadly similar patterns of key physical elements such as geology, landform, soils, vegetation, land use, settlement and field pattern. These common characteristics can be discerned both from looking at maps and during site surveys. Within Maidstone Borough, these are:

- Dry Valleys and Downs
- Chalk Scarp Landscapes
- Gault Clay Vale
- Greensand Orchards and Mixed Farmlands
- Greensand Ridge
- Valleys
- Low Weald

Borough wide landscape character areas

The landscape types have been subdivided into 58 smaller 'borough wide' landscape character areas (Figure 12), which are unique and individual geographical areas. Landscape character areas share generic characteristics with other areas within the same landscape type, but have subtle differences and their own particular identity.

It should be noted that whilst the current guidance suggests that smaller scale landscape character areas should nest within larger scale landscape character areas, the landscape character areas defined within Maidstone Borough do not nest within all of the county scale areas defined within the Landscape Assessment of Kent (Kent County Council, 2004). This is because some of the character areas in the Landscape Assessment of Kent that fall across Maidstone Borough are derived from earlier studies. These studies are The Kent Downs Landscape (Countryside Commission 1995), The Low Weald Landscape Assessment and Guidelines (Kent County Council 1997) and The Greensand Belt Landscape Assessment and Guidelines (Kent County Council 1998). These assessments predate the current Landscape Character Assessment Guidance for England and Scotland (2002) and, whilst judgements (condition, sensitivity and guidelines) made in Landscape Assessment of Kent accord with the current guidance, the character areas that they are based upon were defined by these earlier assessments rather than based on the true character area boundaries.

Landscape character areas do not necessarily stop along borough boundaries, and usually extend across them. The relationship between the landscape character areas within Maidstone Borough and landscape character areas within adjoining boroughs (where they have been published) has been considered in terms of boundary alignment to ensure consistency.

Detailed landscape character areas

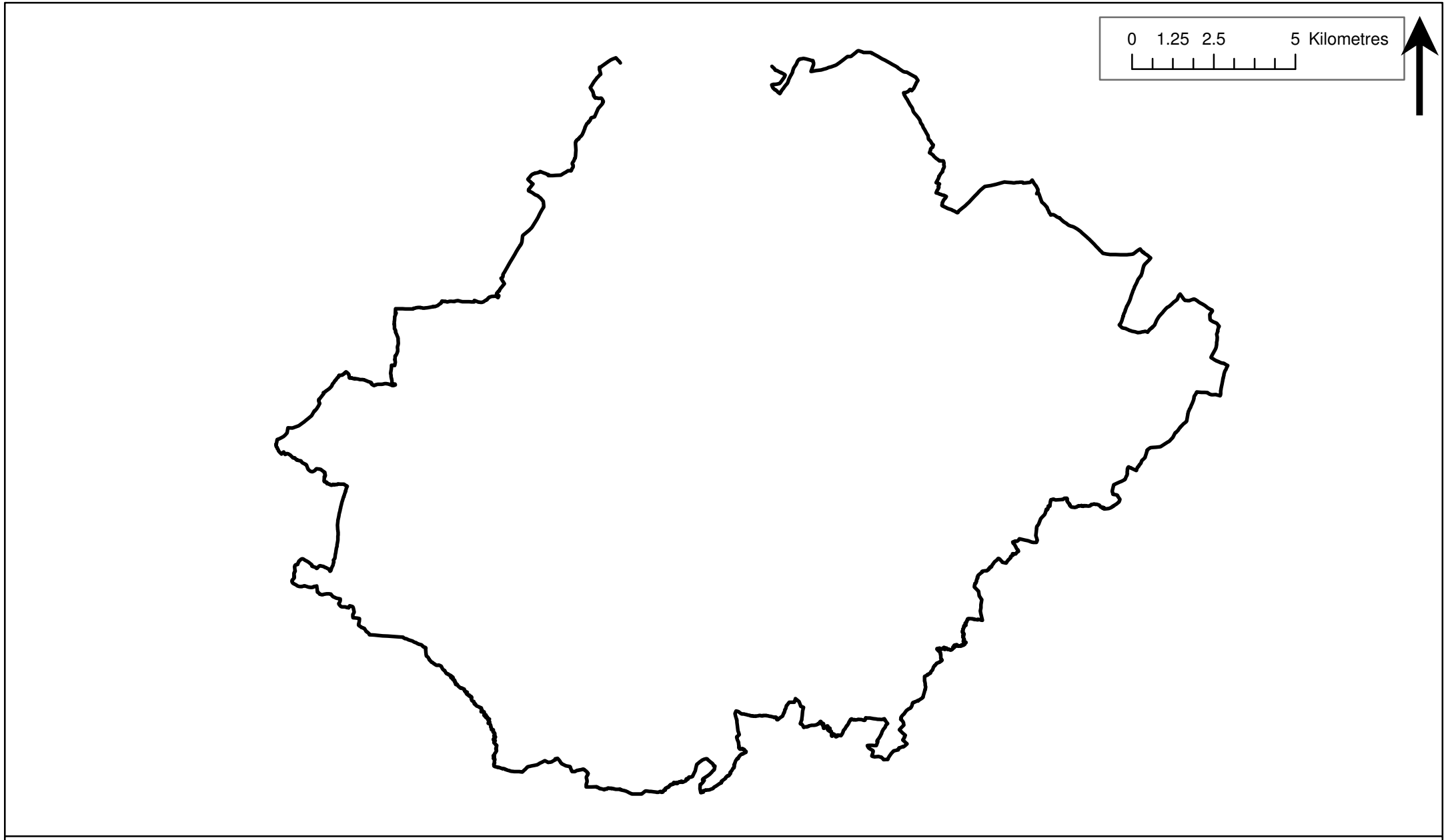
Within the detailed study area (Figure 1), 12 of the borough wide landscape character areas have been subdivided into 51 detailed landscape character areas (Figure 13). These detailed landscape character areas have derived from a more refined, finer grained study of the borough wide landscape character areas and 'nest' within these broader character areas and landscape types.

Section 4 Landscape characterisation and evaluation

Considerations

There will always be some minor anomalies between different scales of landscape character assessment (in terms of the analysis of sensitivity, condition and guidelines) because the areas are not the same and landscape analysis takes an average across the area in question. The analysis for detailed landscape character areas will often therefore differ from the wider borough wide landscape character areas that they sit within. However as a general rule, where assessments are based on the same version of guidance, the more local assessment will provide the greatest level of detail and accuracy.

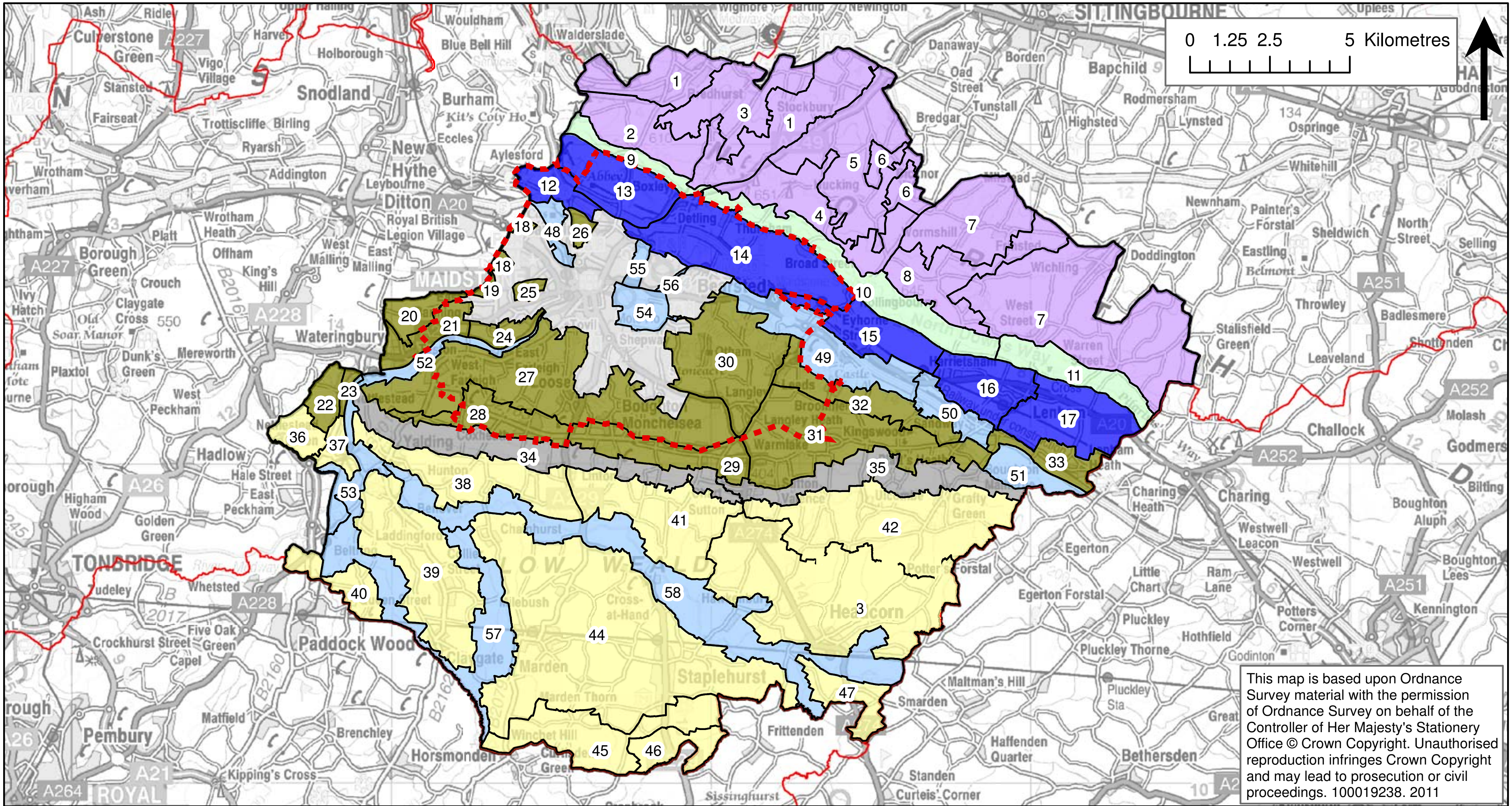
Changes in the natural landscape are often gradual, relating closely to changes in geology and soil type. It is therefore common to find some characteristics of one area overlapping into another. Not all parts within a landscape character area exhibit all the characteristics of that area, and it is usual to have some pockets with very few distinctive features. Often this is due to changes in land use that have resulted in the loss of landscape features, or the addition of features not typically associated with that area. The proximity of the built environment often affects the condition of the landscape, particularly on the boundaries where pressures are greatest. The landscape character areas therefore identify common characteristics across an area rather than grouping areas that are identical. Where there are marked changes across an area these are described and, where appropriate, different guidelines are provided.



Legend

- Maidstone Borough Boundary
- District/Borough Boundaries
- Detailed Study Area
- Urban Area
- Chalk Scarp Landscapes
- Dry Valleys and Downs
- Gault Clay Vale
- Greensand Orchards and Mixed Farmlands
- Greensand Ridge
- Low Weald
- Valleys

Figure 11 Borough Wide Landscape Character Types



Legend

- Maidstone Borough Boundary
- District/Borough Boundaries
- Detailed Study Area
- Urban Area

Dry Valleys and Downs

- 1. Bredhurst and Stockbury Downs
- 2. Westfield Sole Downs
- 3. Bredhurst Dry Valleys
- 4. Friningham Downs
- 5. Hucking Dry Valleys
- 6. Bicknor and Hazel Street Orchards
- 7. Wormshill, Frinstead and Otterden Downs and Dry Valleys
- 8. Ringlestone Downs

Chalk Scarp Landscapes

- 9. Boxley Scarp
- 10. Thurnham, Hollingbourne and Harrietsham Scarp
- 11. Lenham Scarp

Gault Clay Vale

- 12. Sandling Vale
- 13. Boxley Vale
- 14. Thurnham Vale
- 15. Eyhorne Vale
- 16. Harrietsham to Lenham Vale
- 17. East Lenham Vale

Greensand Orchards and Mixed Farmlands

- 18. Barming Greensand Fruit Belt
- 19. Barming Heath Arable Land
- 20. Oaken Wood
- 21. Teston Valley Side
- 22. Nettlestead Wooded Farmlands
- 23. Nettlestead Valley Side
- 24. East Barming Orchards (locally known as Medway Valley Orchards)
- 25. Oakwood Park
- 26. Invicta Park
- 27. Farleigh Greensand Fruit Belt
- 28. Coxheath Plateau
- 29. Boughton Monchelsea to Chart Sutton Plateau
- 30. Langley Heath Undulating Farmlands
- 31. Kingswood Plateau
- 32. Broomfield Undulating Farmlands
- 33. Lenham Heathy Farmlands

Greensand Ridge

- 34. Linton Greensand Ridge
- 35. Sutton Valence Greensand Ridge

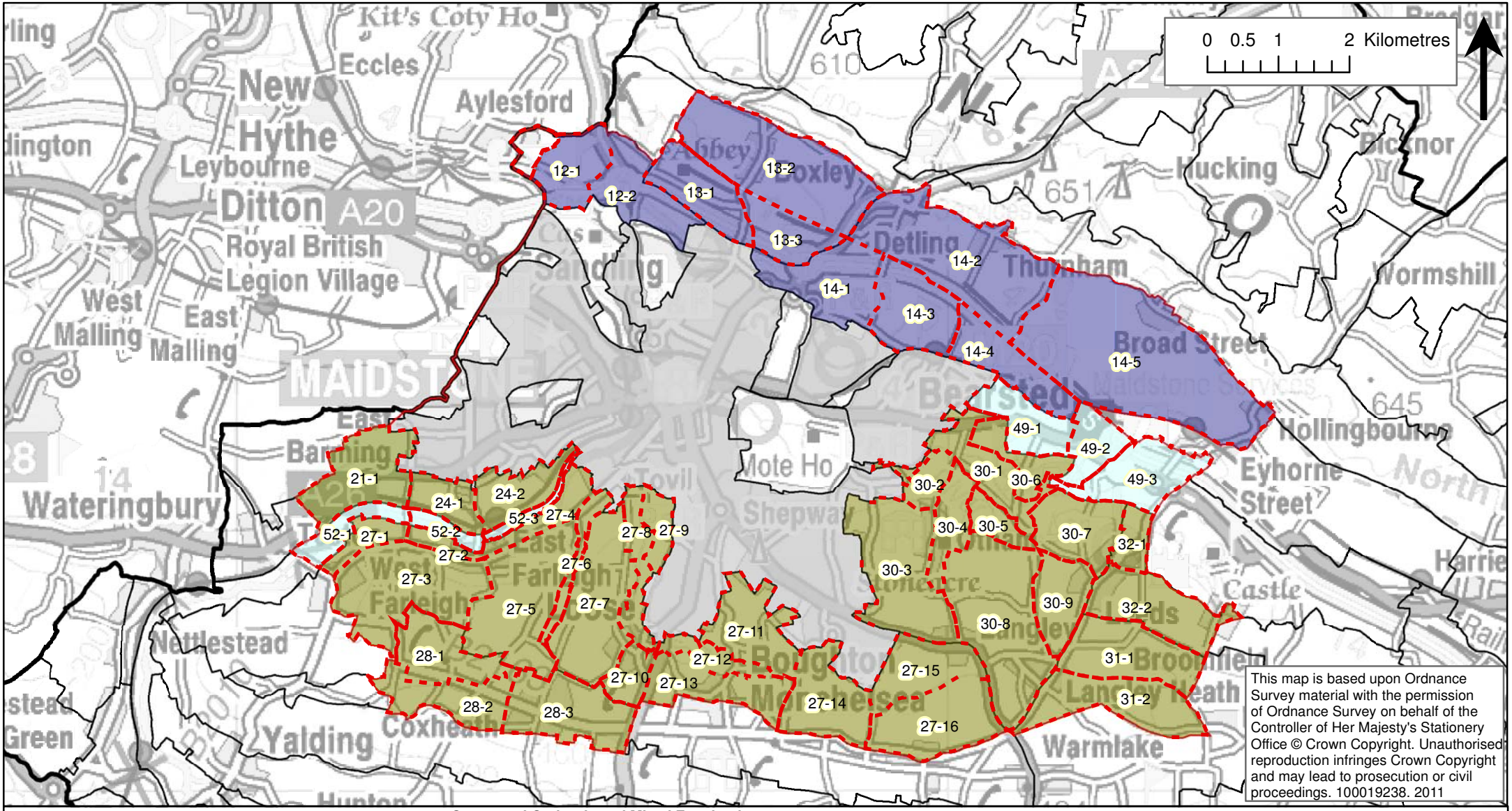
Low Weald

- 36. Nettlestead Woodlands
- 37. Nettlestead Green Farmlands
- 38. Yalding Farmlands
- 39. Laddingford Low Weald
- 40. Beltringe Grasslands
- 41. Linton Park and Farmlands
- 42. Ulcombe Mixed Farmlands
- 43. Headcorn Pasturelands
- 44. Staplehurst Low Weald
- 45. Sherenden Wooded Hills
- 46. Knoxbridge Arable Lowlands
- 47. Waterman Quarter Low Weald

Valleys

- 48. Medway Valley Allington
- 49. Leeds Castle Parklands
- 50. Harrietsham Vale
- 51. Chilston Parklands
- 52. Medway Valley - Maidstone to Wateringbury
- 53. Medway Valley Yalding
- 54. Mote Park
- 55. Vinters Park
- 56. Fauchon's Valley (locally known as Banky Meadow)
- 57. Teise Valley
- 58. Beult Valley

Figure 12 Borough Wide Landscape Character Areas



Legend

- Maidstone Borough Boundary
- Borough Wide Landscape Character Areas
- Detailed Study Area
- Urban Area

Gault Clay Vale

- 12-1. Cobtree Manor Park
- 12-2. Sandling Woodland and Heath
- 13-1. Boxley Abbey Fields
- 13-2. Boxley Farmlands
- 13-3. Boxley Wooded Parkland
- 14-1. Weavering Fringes
- 14-2. Thurnham Farmlands
- 14-3. Bearsted Golf Course
- 14-4. Water Lane Arable Land
- 14-5. Hollingbourne Wooded Arable Land

Greensand Orchards and Mixed Farmlands

- 21-1. Barming Slopes
- 24-1. Rectory Lane Orchards
- 24-2. Fant Orchards
- 27-1. West Farleigh Medway Valley Side
- 27-2. East Farleigh Slopes
- 27-3. Farleigh Green Greensand Dip Slope
- 27-4. Bydews Slopes
- 27-5. Dean Farmlands
- 27-6. East of Dean Valley
- 27-7. Loose Greensand Orchards and Pasture
- 27-8. Loose Valley
- 27-9. Hayle Estate
- 27-10. Loose Greensand Orchards
- 27-11. Boughton Farm
- 27-12. Boughton Quarries
- 27-13. Boughton Green Farmland
- 27-14. Park Wood Horticultural Land
- 27-15. Langley Park Farm
- 27-16. Langley Loch Farmland
- 28-1. Gallants Flats
- 28-2. Quarry Woodlands
- 28-3. Coxheath Orchards
- 30-1. Len Valley
- 30-2. Otham Open Land
- 30-3. Gore Court Farm
- 30-4. Stoneacre Spring
- 30-5. Caring Fruit Slopes
- 30-6. Milgate Park
- 30-7. Upper Len
- 30-8. Langley Fruit Plateau
- 30-9. Leeds Farmlands
- 31-1. Leeds Fields
- 31-2. Kingswood Ridgeline Woodlands
- 32-1. Ashbank
- 32-2. Leeds Slopes

Valleys

- 49-1. Caring Pastures
- 49-2. White Heath Farmlands
- 49-3. Ashbank Fields
- 52-1. Medway Pasture
- 52-2. Quarry Wood Valley
- 52-3. Medway Valley Walk

Figure 13 Detailed Landscape Character Areas

Section 4 Landscape characterisation and evaluation

Table 1 Landscape character types and areas

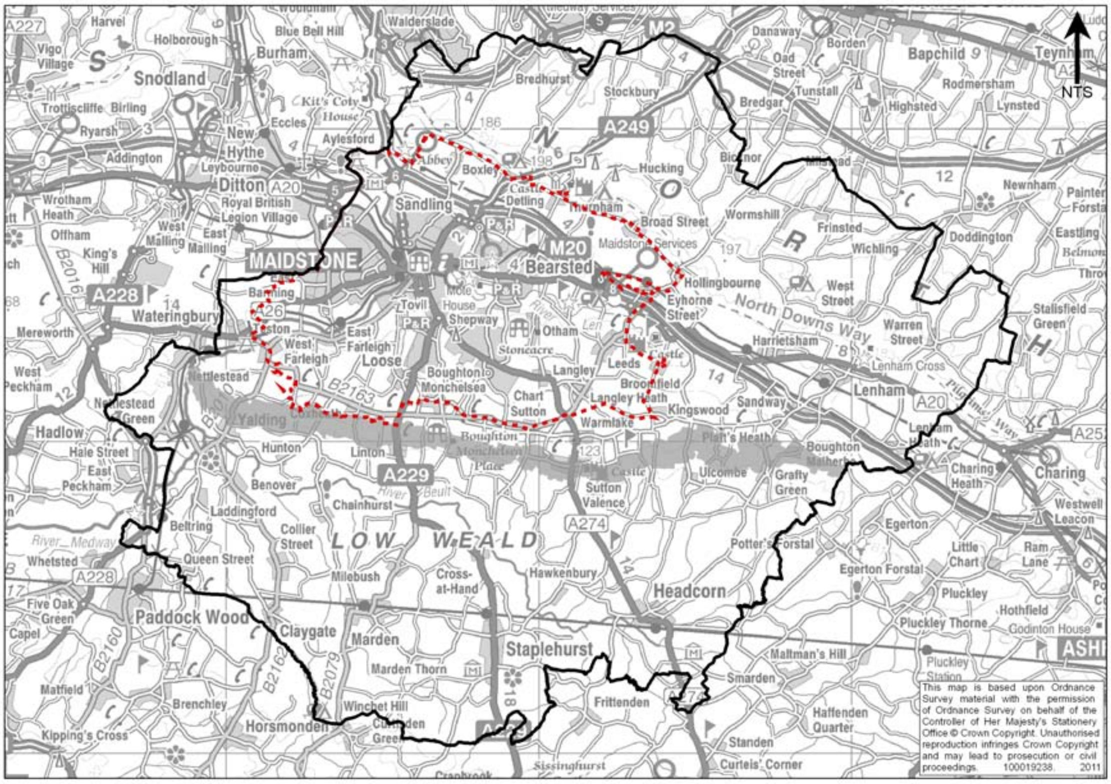
Landscape Type	Borough wide landscape character areas	Detailed landscape character areas
Dry Valleys and Downs	1. Bredhurst and Stockbury Downs	
	2. Westfield Sole Downs	
	3. Bredhurst Dry Valleys	
	4. Friningham Downs	
	5. Hucking Dry Valleys	
	6. Bicknor and Hazel Street Orchards	
	7. Wormshill, Frinsted and Otterden Downs and Dry Valleys	
	8. Ringlestone Downs	
Chalk Scarp Landscapes	9. Boxley Scarp	
	10. Thurnham, Hollingbourne and Harrietsham Scarp	
	11. Lenham Scarp	
Gault Clay Vale	12. Sandling Vale	12-1. Cobtree Manor Park 12-2. Sandling Woodland and Heath
	13. Boxley Vale	13-1. Boxley Abbey Fields 13-2. Boxley Farmlands 13-3. Boxley Wooded Parkland
	14. Thurnham Vale	14-1. Weavering Fringes 14-2. Thurnham Farmlands 14-3. Bearsted Golf Course 14-4. Water Lane Arable Land 14-5. Hollingbourne Wooded Arable Land
	15. Eyhorne Vale	
	16. Harrietsham to Lenham Vale	
	17. East Lenham Vale	
Greensand Orchards and Mixed Farmlands	18. Barming Greensand Fruit Belt	
	19. Barming Heath Arable Land	
	20. Oaken Wood	
	21. Teston Valley Side	21-1. Barming Slopes
	22. Nettlestead Wooded Farmlands	
	23. Nettlestead Valley Side	
	24. East Barming Orchards (locally known as Medway Valley Orchards)	24-1. Rectory Lane Orchards

Landscape Type	Borough wide landscape character areas	Detailed landscape character areas
Greensand Orchards and Mixed Farmlands		24-2. Fant Orchards
	25. Oakwood Park	
	26. Invicta Park	
	27. Farleigh Greensand Fruit Belt	27-1. West Farleigh Medway Valley Side Slopes 27-2. East Farleigh 27-3. Farleigh Green Greensand Dip Slope 27-4. Bydews Slopes 27-5. Dean Farmlands 27-6. East of Dean Valley 27-7. Loose Greensand Orchards and pasture 27-8. Loose Valley 27-9. Hayle Estate 27-10. Loose Greensand Orchards 27-11. Boughton Farm 27-12. Boughton Quarries 27-13. Boughton Green Farmland 27-14. Park Wood Horticultural Land 27-15. Langley Park Farm 27-16. Langley Loch Farmland
	28. Coxheath Plateau	28-1. Gallants Flats 28-2. Quarry Woodlands 28-3. Coxheath Orchards
	29. Boughton Monchelsea to Chart Sutton Plateau	
	30. Langley Heath Undulating Farmlands	30-1. Len Valley 30-2. Otham Open Land 30-3. Gore Court Farm 30-4. Stoneacre Spring 30-5. Caring Fruit Slopes 30-6. Milgate Park 30-7. Upper Len

Section 4 Landscape characterisation and evaluation

Landscape Type	Borough wide landscape character areas	Detailed landscape character areas
Greensand Orchards and Mixed Farmlands	30. Langley Heath Undulating Farmlands	30-8. Langley Fruit Plateau 30-9. Leeds Farmlands
	31. Kingswood Plateau	31-1. Leeds Fields 31-2. Kingswood Ridgeline Woodlands
	32. Broomfield Undulating Farmlands	32-1. Ashbank 32-2. Leeds Slopes
	33. Lenham Heath Farmlands	
Greensand Ridge	34. Linton Greensand Ridge	
	35. Sutton Valence Greensand Ridge	
Low Weald	36. Nettlestead Woodlands	
	37. Nettlestead Green Farmlands	
	38. Yalding Farmlands	
	39. Laddingford Low Weald	
	40. Beltring Grasslands	
	41. Linton Park and Farmlands	
	42. Ulcombe Mixed Farmlands	
	43. Headcorn Pasturelands	
	44. Staplehurst Low Weald	
	45. Sherenden Wooded Hills	
	46. Knoxbridge Arable Lowlands	
	47. Waterman Quarter Low Weald	
Valleys	48. Medway Valley Allington	
	49. Leeds Castle Parklands	49-1. Caring Pastures 49-2. White Heath Farmlands 49-3. Ashbank Fields
	50. Harrietsham Vale	
	51. Chilston Parklands	
	52. Medway Valley – Maidstone to Wateringbury	52-1. Medway pasture 52-2. Quarry Wood Valley 52-3. Medway Valley Walk
	53. Medway Valley Yalding	
	54. Mote Park	
	55. Vinters Park	
	56. Fauchon's Valley (locally known as Banky Meadow)	
	57. Teise Valley	
	58. Beult Valley	

Greensand Ridge: introduction

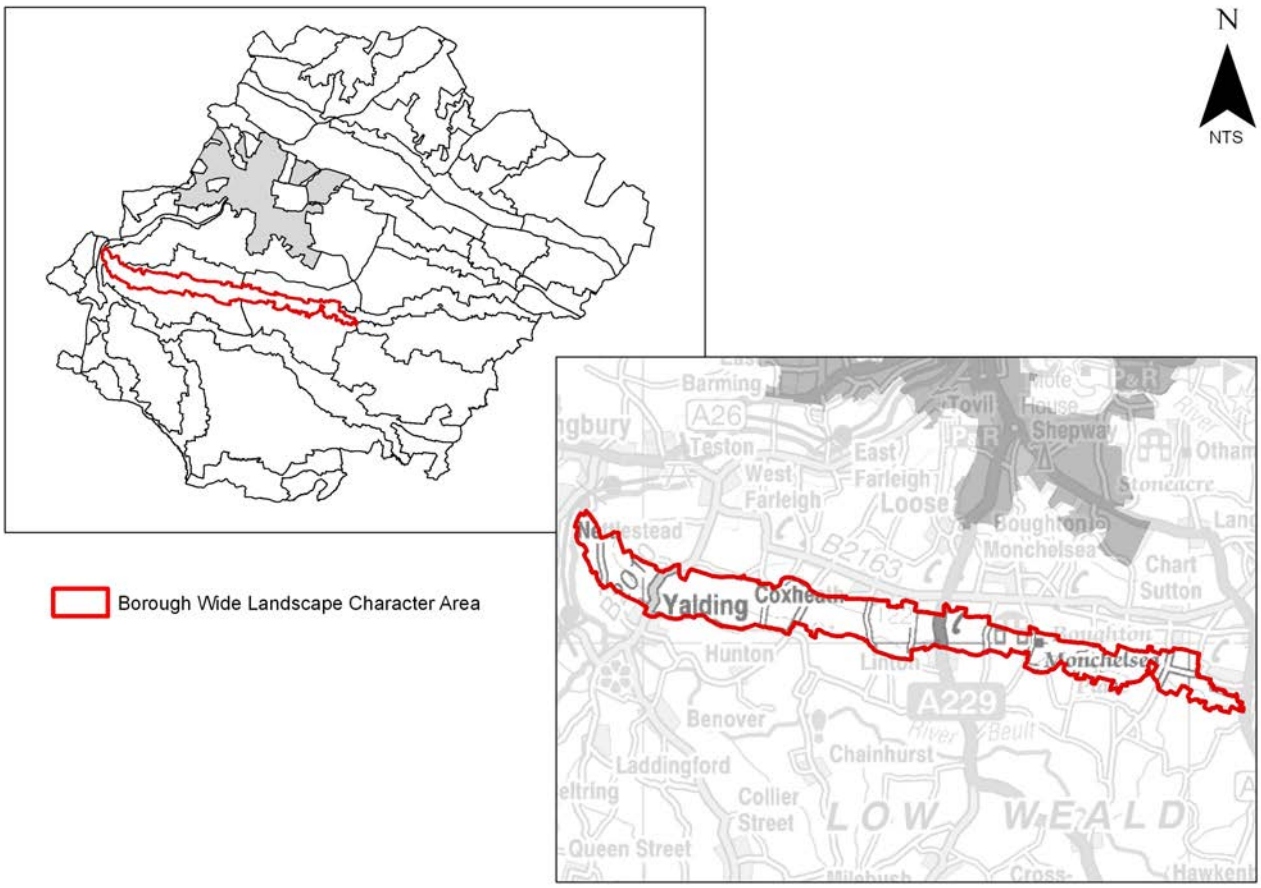


The Greensand Ridge comprises the scarp face of a long and curved belt of Wealden Greensand that runs across Kent parallel to the North Downs. Along this section of the Greensand Ridge, the steep landform is dramatic, affording spectacular panoramic views across the Low Weald landscape to the south. Narrow, winding and woodland enclosed lanes run against the contours, often sunken into the Greensand with tree roots binding the earth banks together. Loamy soils support much fruit production with associated poplar shelterbelts, and some traditional hop gardens with chestnut coppice for hop poles. Deer parks and more recent 18th century parklands form a distinctive feature of the Wealden Greensand, with large manor houses often raised above the parkland along the elevated ridge. The Greensand Way promoted Long Distance Path runs along the contours of the ridge and although this is not a historic route, it forms a distinctive path because of the raised topography and the long open views across the Low Weald landscape to the south. The scarp is incised by regular secluded Wealden Clay valleys, and a series of springs emerge across the slope.

Greensand Ridge: generic guidelines

- Conserve and appropriately manage woodlands and traditional areas of coppice
- Conserve and appropriately manage orchards and hop gardens and the traditional small scale field pattern within which they are set
- Conserve characteristic parkland landscapes and plant new parkland trees to maintain this characteristic landscape feature, whilst managing ageing specimens for ecological benefit
- Avoid agricultural intensification and conserve the sense of enclosure and the field pattern provided by native hedgerows
- Conserve the species rich hedgerow boundaries and promote enhanced species diversity within hedgerows where this has been weakened
- Conserve the rural setting of traditional buildings and small settlements
- Conserve the narrow, enclosed lanes and avoid highway improvements which may weaken this characteristic
- Conserve and strongly promote the use of ragstone as a key material
- Consider the views towards any proposals across this exposed and elevated landform from the Low Weald to the south

34. Linton Greensand Ridge



KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- Scarp face of the Greensand Ridge
- Extensive views across the Low Weald to the south
- Orchards set within small scale field pattern
- Historic parkland
- Very distinctive and historic built environment
- Series of narrow lanes that run against the contours

Location

34.1 Linton Greensand Ridge lies to the south of Maidstone, and forms part of the scarp face of the Greensand Ridge. It is, therefore, the topography that most clearly defines the extent of this area. The lower, flatter landscape of the Low Weald defines the southern boundary and the more level landscape at the top of the Ridge forms the northern boundary. The periphery of Sutton Valence defines the eastern extent, and east of this valleys become more prominent where they cut into the scarp. To the west the foot of the scarp meets the River Medway Valley, which defines the western extent of the area.

34. Linton Greensand Ridge

LANDSCAPE DESCRIPTION

34.2 Throughout this area the land use is dominated by orchards, and occasionally soft fruit is produced in polytunnels. There has been widespread replacement of old stock and the orchards, enclosed by native hedgerows and poplar shelterbelts, provide an extensive amount of tree cover. Bands of native broadleaf woodland define the narrow drains, small mixed woodland blocks are scattered across the scarp and there is a significant amount of tree cover within the upper section of Linton Park. Although extensive views across the Low Weald to the south give a certain sense of exposure in wider views, the traditional, small scale field pattern provides a strong sense of enclosure locally. This enclosed field pattern gives regularity to much of the landscape, although areas of parkland landscape contrast with this. Towards the lower slopes of the Greensand Ridge, springs emerge from the ground and a number of reservoirs are peppered along the lower slopes. A series of characteristically steep, narrow lanes, often sunken into the Greensand and enclosed, are located across the scarp.

34.3 The built environment is unique and steeped in history. There are numerous very attractive listed buildings along this section of the Greensand Ridge, often affording exceptional views across the Low Weald to the south. Development mostly comprises scattered large farmhouses and there is a strong use of ragstone within buildings and also within walling which is found throughout the area. Other frequent materials comprise weather boarding and chequered red and grey brick.

34.4 Thought to have originated in the 1200's, the tiny village of Linton provided labour to the quarry at Boughton Monchelsea to the east. Designated as a Conservation Area, this section of the village comprises a collection of historic buildings that climb the steep Linton Hill in a striking and characteristic fashion.

34.5 Linton Park and Boughton Monchelsea Place, both grade I listed buildings and recorded on the national Register of Historic Parks and Gardens, are situated along the scarp. Whilst much of the parkland at Linton Park extends across the Low Weald landscape to the south, the 18th century mansion and formal gardens are situated along the higher Greensand Ridge. Built in 1730 for Robert

34. Linton Greensand Ridge

Mann, Linton Park served as headquarters to the army encampment at the neighbouring Coxheath during the late 18th and early 19th centuries. The mansion is accessed from the north off Heath Road, along an avenue of beech, sycamore and recent lime. The immediate grounds are very ornamental, with mown grassland and cedars and redwoods, and to the south are the remains of an elaborate Victorian terraced garden with panoramic views of a lake set within parkland that extends across the Low Weald. The site is now under mixed corporate and private ownership, and a school and modern place of worship have been built within the grounds to the north along Heath Road. Similarly, east of Linton Park, the 16th century grade I listed ragstone manor house of Boughton Monchelsea Place stands on the higher Greensand Ridge, allowing panoramic views across its deer park to the south. Fallow deer graze the semi improved parkland, which is scattered with mature trees and native woodland and is noted for its value for wildlife through its designation as a Local Wildlife Site. A pond and boat house are also situated within these grounds, further typifying the parkland landscape.

Geology, soils and topography

34.6 The solid geology across the scarp comprises a wide band of Lower Greensand Hythe Beds along the higher slopes. A narrow belt of Lower Greensand Atherfield Clay buffers the Hythe Beds, and fringes of Wealden Clay are situated around the lower contours to the south. There is little drift, although the periphery of head is located to the north of the area where the higher contours form the top of the scarp. Deep loam to clay soils are situated across the highest contours at the top of the scarp, although the steepest part of the slope comprises loam over limestone. To the south, across the lower contours, soils are seasonally wet loam to clay over shale. The topography is defined by the distinctive steep scarp slope of the Greensand Ridge, which rises to the north.

Views

34.7 There are extensive, panoramic views across the Low Weald to the south from this elevated landscape along the Greensand Ridge. Frequent large oak trees are dotted across the rural landscape, and a series of reservoirs across the lower ground stand out in these views. Views within the area are restricted at times by intervening vegetation, although there are some views within the area across orchards with the backdrop of the Low Weald beyond.

34. Linton Greensand Ridge

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

34.8 There is a unified pattern of elements, mostly provided by the continuity of the scarp face landform, the subsequent panoramic views across the Low Weald, the scattered vernacular style properties and the widespread orchards. There are few visual detractors comprising agricultural barns and storage boxes in association with fruit production, heavy traffic on Linton Hill, pylons and polytunnels. The ecological integrity is strong, owing to the lack of intensively farmed arable land and the coherent habitat network and strong connectivity provided by the orchards, shelterbelts, woodland blocks (some of which are ancient) and hedgerows, springs and ditches. The cultural integrity is good. Orchards are well maintained and there has been widespread replanting of new stock. Hedgerows, shelterbelts and ragstone walling are intact and in good condition. Built development has a positive impact on the landscape. The numerous striking examples of traditional buildings respect local vernacular, and the sense of place is epitomised by the situation on the scarp face of the Greensand Ridge and the subsequent panoramic views across the Low Weald to the south.

Sensitivity

34.9 It is the situation along the scarp face of the Greensand Ridge, and the subsequent availability of panoramic views across the Low Weald, which gives this area such a strong sense of place. Adding to this, the historic parkland of Linton Park and Boughton Monchelsea Place, the traditional and regular small scale field pattern containing orchards, the exceptionally striking selection of locally distinct and historic buildings, and the abundance of ragstone walling provide continuity throughout the landscape and very strong local distinctiveness. Visibility is high, owing to the scarp topography and subsequent availability of views to and from this landscape.

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition Assessment	Very Good	Sensitivity Assessment	Very High
Pattern of elements:	Unified	Distinctiveness:	Very Distinct
Detracting features:	Few	Continuity:	Ancient
Visual Unity:	Strongly Unified	Sense of Place:	Very Strong
Ecological integrity:	Strong	Landform:	Dominant
Cultural integrity:	Good	Tree cover:	Intermittent
Functional integrity:	Very Strong	Visibility:	High

34. Linton Greensand Ridge

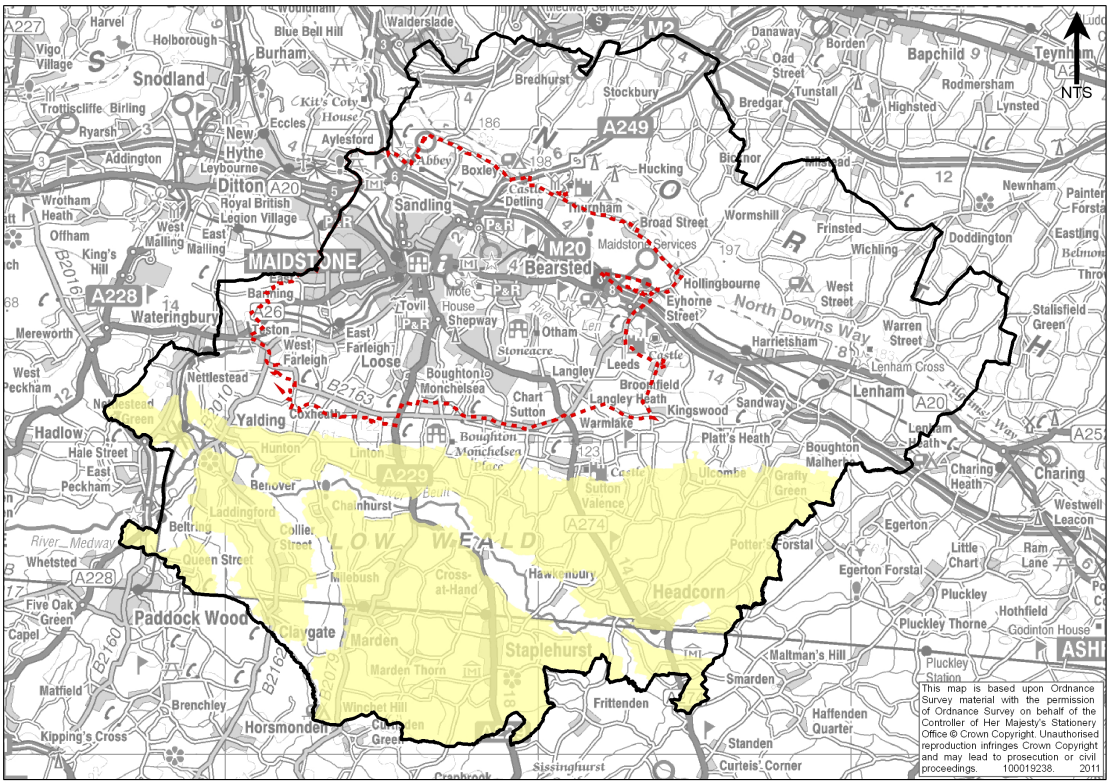
GUIDELINES CONSERVE

Condition				
	good	**REINFORCE**	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	**CONSERVE**
	moderate	IMPROVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & IMPROVE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
	poor	**IMPROVE**	RESTORE & IMPROVE	**RESTORE**
		low	moderate	high
		Sensitivity		

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

- Consider the generic guidelines for the Greensand Ridge
- Conserve orchards and the traditional small scale field pattern
- Conserve and, where opportunities arise, extend relict areas of lowland acid grassland and wood pasture
- Conserve the historic parkland of Linton Park and Boughton Monchelsea Place
- Conserve the rural setting of traditional buildings
- Conserve distinctive ragstone walling
- Conserve the undeveloped character of the landscape
- Avoid linear infill development along roads
- Soften the impact of agricultural buildings and fruit equipment storage areas with native planting

Low Weald: introduction

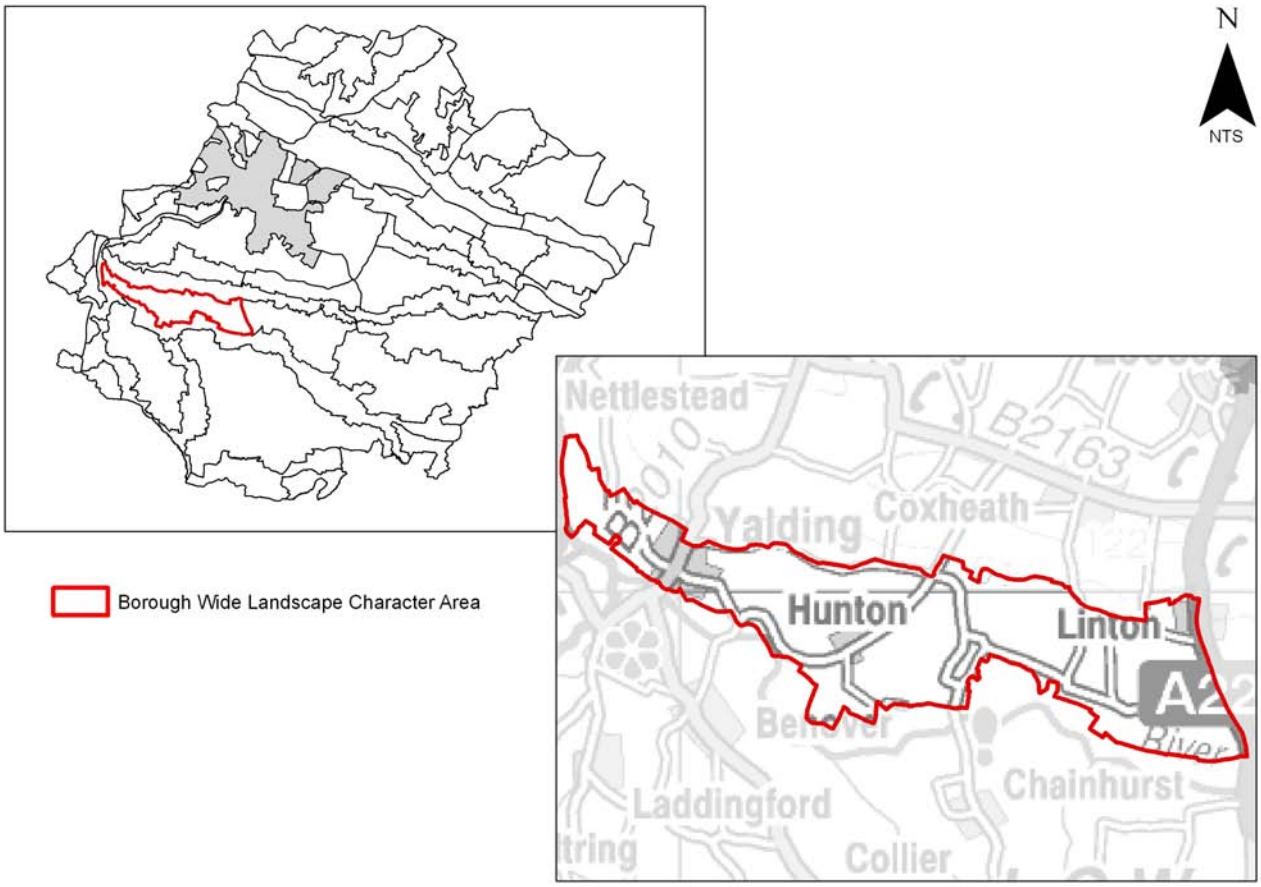


This is a well wooded landscape where small, enclosed fields have been created through woodland clearance. Chestnut and hornbeam coppice is frequent, and often reflects the Low Weald's industrial history of charcoal burning for iron and glass production. A Medieval field pattern has been maintained across much of the landscape, and the species rich hedgerows are often tall with numerous hedgerow trees and a significant amount of oak. The heavy clay soils provide a landscape which is largely pastoral or used to produce hay. The landscape is low lying and therefore rich in small ponds and streams, often defined by riparian willows and alders. Many of the ponds are marl pits, which were excavated to provide marl to spread on the fields to improve the soil. Dating back to Medieval times, the ponds served as convenient watering holes for livestock. Marl pits are common throughout both the Low and High Weald landscape, and 'marl' is often used in place names. Similarly, hammer ponds are also found throughout the landscape and these are remnant features from ancient iron workings. Other ponds could also be from extraction of brick and tile making and from the iron industry, and a series of large reservoirs are scattered along the foot of the steep scarp slope of the Greensand Ridge that rises to the north. Where the major river valleys of the Medway and Beult cross the Low Weald, the wet character is accentuated by wet grazing lands and much willow and scrub. The Low Weald is essentially rural in character, and settlements are mostly small villages and hamlets.

Low Weald: generic guidelines

- Conserve the intimate small scale Medieval field pattern, and the species rich hedgerow boundaries
- Promote enhanced species diversity within hedgerows where this has been weakened
- Avoid the use of single species hedgerows and shelterbelts within this landscape, where species rich hedgerows are so prevalent
- Conserve and promote pastoral land use and avoid agricultural intensification
- Promote the conversion of intensively managed grassland and arable land to species rich neutral grassland where there is potential
- Conserve, enhance and extend the frequent pattern of small ponds, and encourage good water quality within these and the larger water bodies at the foot of the Greensand Ridge through the promotion of sensitive management
- Conserve and increase extent of clean water ponds and small farm reservoirs
- Conserve, enhance and extend the riparian habitat contained within the Rivers Medway, Beult, Teise and Sherway and their associated tributaries, streams, canals, ditches and drains
- Conserve and promote the extension of areas of floodplain and wetland
- Conserve the abundance of English oak and wild service trees within the landscape, which are frequent as hedgerow trees and as isolated specimens across farmland. Ensure continuity of this key feature by planting new oak trees to replace ageing specimens
- Avoid widening of characteristic narrow lanes and ensure retention and appropriate management of floristically diverse verges and banks
- Conserve the largely undeveloped landscape with its scattered development pattern and isolated farmsteads
- Conserve the many examples of Medieval moated sites
- Conserve and promote the use of local materials including chequered red and grey brickwork, weatherboarding, timber framed buildings and ragstone
- Consider views towards any proposals across the Low Weald from the elevated Greensand Ridge which rises to the north and the High Weald which rises to the south west

38. Yalding Farmlands



KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- Low lying landscape which forms part of the Low Weald
- Reservoirs and water bodies along the foot of the Greensand Ridge
- Drains running southwards towards the River Beult
- Enclosed pasture
- Frequent orchards
- Parkland landscape surrounding Hunton Court
- Historic settlement of Yalding

Location

38.1 Yalding Farmland lies to the south of Maidstone, and is part of the wider Low Weald landscape. The northern boundary is defined by the foot of the scarp face of the Greensand Ridge, and the southern boundary marks the periphery of the River Beult Valley. The western boundary is defined by the River Medway Valley. To the east of the area, the landscape becomes more wooded with less orchards and this gradual transition is marked by Linton Hill.

38. Yalding Farmlands

LANDSCAPE DESCRIPTION

38.2 Small broadleaf woodland blocks are scattered frequently across the landscape, vegetation belts define a network of ditches, and further tree cover is provided by extensive orchards. Elsewhere the landscape is generally grazed, and the field pattern comprises a regular pattern of medium sized fields. Enclosure is provided by native hedgerows and strong boundaries are created by orchards. A series of large reservoirs and water bodies are dotted across the landscape at the foot of the steep scarp face of the Greensand Ridge, providing good habitat for birds in particular.

38.3 Between East Street and West Street, Hunton Court sits within early 17th century parkland of approximately 40 hectares. Although much of the original parkland has been converted to arable land, a significant swathe of open parkland still exists. Mature parkland trees including traditional lime, horse chestnut and oak, and also exotic cedars and wellingtonias, are scattered across the grazed landscape. Many of these trees are some 200 years of age. The grade II listed 13th century Hunton Court itself is set within a Victorian garden layout, with two lakes, croquet lawn, kitchen garden and many specimen trees including ginkgo, chestnuts and redwoods. The main area of the lake is surrounded by shrubberies of yew, holly and bright hydrangeas and azaleas.

38.4 Farmsteads are scattered across the rural landscape, and development is clustered at the historic settlement of Hunton, and the more significantly sized Medieval village of Yalding, which is designated as a Conservation Area. Situated near the confluence of the Rivers Medway, Beult and Teise, the built environment comprises an attractive mix of building styles and materials, including converted oast houses and timber barns, weatherboarding, ragstone, thatched roofs, red and grey chequered and herringbone brickwork. The iron industry was important to the area because Yalding was important as a main shipment point to the naval base at Chatham for cannons that were manufactured locally. Following the iron industry, the surrounding landscape resumed its original farming industries of fruit production and hops. Whilst hop production declined in the early 1990's, orchards continue to be one of the main land uses of the surrounding landscape. To the east, the southern extent of Linton is strewn along Linton Hill. Also designated as part of a wider Conservation Area, this lower section of Linton forms linear, tightly arranged development in relation to Linton Park. 19th century estate cottages are strung out in a long line along the western side of the A229.

38. Yalding Farmlands

Geology, soils and topography

38.5 The solid geology comprises Wealden Clay, and there are strong drifts of brickearth to the south of the area along the lowest contours with some smaller fringes of head brickearth. To the south soils are seasonally wet deep loams. Where the land begins to rise to the north at the foot of the scarp, soils are seasonally wet loam to clay over shale. The topography is undulating, becoming lower to the south near the River Beult Valley.

Views

38.6 There are views of the steep scarp slope of the Greensand Ridge, which rises immediately to the north of this area. There are extensive views to the south across the Low Weald where intervening vegetation allows, and from Linton there are some views east across Linton Park. Within the area there are long views across the parkland landscape of Hunton Court, and from Linton across orchards, although many intermediate views are restricted by hedgerows and boundary vegetation.

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

38.7 There is a coherent pattern of elements, provided by the consistency of the Low Weald landform, frequent orchards and reservoirs along the foot of the scarp. There are few visual detractors comprising fruit packing equipment and farms, pylons and polytunnels. The ecological integrity is strong. The frequent orchards, hedgerows, woodland blocks, ditches and water bodies provide a coherent habitat network, and there is very little arable land. The cultural integrity is good. Orchards appear to be well maintained and in good condition, illustrating low vulnerability to change. The parkland around Hunton Court appears to be in good condition and although there has been some removal, hedgerows are mostly intact. Built development has a positive impact on the landscape. There is a strong sense of place, provided by the characteristic use of local materials and local vernacular within settlements and throughout the rural landscape.

Sensitivity

38.8 There are numerous very distinctive characteristics which together provide a strong sense of place. Water bodies are often defined by clusters of vegetation and hedgerows line the lanes and enclose orchards to provide a strong sense of enclosure. The narrow, winding lanes are also characteristic because they broadly follow the contours along the foot of the Greensand Ridge and along the periphery of the Beult Valley. The situation of Yalding, positioned along the River Beult with its characteristic mixture of traditional style buildings demonstrates strong local distinctiveness. The wider pattern of isolated farmsteads and the historic Hunton Park provide a very rural character which has not been significantly altered by recent development or land use changes. Visibility is moderate because although there are some longer views, immediate views are often contained by vegetation.

38. Yalding Farmlands

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition Assessment	Very Good	Sensitivity Assessment	High
Pattern of elements:	Coherent	Distinctiveness:	Very Distinct
Detracting features:	Few	Continuity:	Ancient
Visual Unity:	Unified	Sense of Place:	Strong
Ecological integrity:	Strong	Landform:	Apparent
Cultural integrity:	Good	Tree cover:	Intermittent
Functional integrity:	Very Strong	Visibility:	Moderate

GUIDELINES CONSERVE

Condition				
	good	**REINFORCE**	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	**CONSERVE**
	moderate	IMPROVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & IMPROVE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
	poor	**IMPROVE**	RESTORE & IMPROVE	**RESTORE**
		low	moderate	high
		Sensitivity		

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

- Consider the generic guidelines for the Low Weald
- Conserve orchards and the traditional small scale field pattern
- Conserve the largely undeveloped rural landscape and the remote quality of existing development
- Conserve the historic parkland landscape around Hunton Park
- Conserve the rural setting of traditional buildings and farmhouses
- Conserve distinctive ragstone walling
- Conserve the undeveloped character of the landscape
- Resist conversion to arable land
- Avoid linear infill development along roads
- Soften the impact of agricultural buildings and fruit equipment storage areas with native planting
- Increase habitat opportunities around water bodies and ditches by promoting a framework of vegetation in these areas
- Soften the visual prominence of large agricultural barns through native planting