Gravesham Landscape Character Assessment

May 2009
Gravesham Landscape Character Assessment and Guidelines

Document control sheet

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Introduction

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.

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.

CONTEXT

To support landscape and other planning policies, Gravesham Borough Council have commissioned Jacobs to undertake a landscape character assessment of Gravesham Borough. The aim of the assessment is to identify and describe the local landscape character areas throughout the Borough. The assessment has been undertaken in accordance with a recognised methodology, the Countryside Agency and Scottish Natural Heritage 2002 Landscape Character Assessment Guidelines.

This document is structured as follows:

- Landscape character context outlined
- Methodology described
- Existing influences on the landscape outlined, including geology and soils, land use and agriculture, cultural heritage, ecology and landscape designations
- Description of the landscape character areas with key characteristics
- An assessment of the condition and sensitivity
- Guidelines for appropriate actions to protect and enhance the landscape

The assessment aims to provide logical, robust and defensible justifications for managing pressures for change in the Borough, without diminishing the value of the landscape. It has been undertaken in accordance with a recognised methodology (see below). The study also identifies areas that require conservation, restoration, reinforcement, or improvement to enable resources to be targeted to those areas in greatest need.

The objective of the Gravesham Landscape Character Assessment is to ensure that decisions on the rural landscape are underpinned by a robust and widely accepted assessment of the landscape character. The challenge is to find ways of identifying the important characteristics of the landscape that assist the process of accommodating change, where this is both desirable and practical, whilst maintaining the links with the past and the natural environment.

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 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.

Methodology

The methodology used to undertake the landscape assessment is based on The Countryside Agency’s Landscape Assessment Guidance for England and Scotland (2002). There are essentially two elements to the appraisal. Firstly the characterisation of the landscape where the landscape character areas are defined and secondly the analysis of these areas where judgements are made about these character areas.

In the first instance the assessor interrogates the geological, soil and topographical information as well as accumulating as much information as is readily available regarding historic and cultural influences, nature conservation interests and land use. An oblique aerial photographic study of the area assists with the identification of the landscape character areas as well as assisting with the appreciation of the conclusions subsequently reached.

Having initiated the desk based research, the fieldwork was undertaken. Normally two landscape assessors working together in the field debate and define the broad character distinctions using ‘Field Assessment Sheets’ and taking photographic records as data. (A sample field sheet is provided at the rear of the document).

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
- visual unity
- ecological integrity
- condition of heritage features
- impact of built development

Landscape Character areas are defined and mapped as a series of largely homogeneous units. However, for proposals at field level, close to character area boundaries, more detailed assessment should be undertaken as changes in landscape character are sometimes subtle.

Having identified the character areas the data collected was analysed in terms of each area’s Condition and Sensitivity. Each of these words is strictly defined to avoid as far as possible any subjective interpretation, which could not be justified. The objective is also to define a standard methodology that can be used by other assessors for other landscapes so that comparisons can be made and priorities set.

Condition is strongly influenced by the impact of external factors. The assessment of condition evaluates the pattern of the landscape and the presence of incongruous features on the unity of the landscape. It also evaluates how well the landscape functions as a habitat for flora and fauna and the condition of cultural or ‘man-made’ elements such as enclosure, built elements and roads. Urban fringe areas are often under pressure that can frustrate other land uses. This often means that these areas are described as being in a poor condition whilst other more remote areas may still have the same basic features but be in a better condition. It is therefore practical to assume that condition may vary throughout a character area so that any conclusions should be regarded as a summary of the overall situation. Condition is defined by an analysis of Visual Unity and Functional Integrity and is classified as very poor, poor, moderate, good and very good.

Visual Unity is the result of an analysis of the Pattern of Elements, for example the pattern of vegetation, enclosure, settlement and the relationship of these to the landform etc., weighed against the number of Detracting Features in the landscape.
**Functional Integrity** is an assessment of how the landscape functions and considers both the influence of man (**Cultural Integrity**) and nature (**Ecological Integrity**).

**Sensitivity** is a measure of the ability of a landscape to accept change without causing irreparable damage to the essential fabric and distinctiveness of that landscape. The term change refers to both beneficial changes such as a new woodland as well as change that may be brought about by new land uses. **Sensitivity** is defined by an analysis of **Sense of Place** and **Visibility** and ranges from very low through low, moderate, high to very high.

**Sense of Place** balances **Distinctiveness** with **Continuity**. Distinctiveness is defined by how much the key characteristics contribute to a sense of place. For example in a landscape where hedgerows are a key characteristic, if the network is intact, the landscape can be described as distinct or ‘characteristic’. Some landscapes have features that may be considered unique or rare and these will obviously contribute to a strong sense of place. Continuity ranges from recent, through historic to ancient and reflects how long that landscape has taken to establish. Ancient landscapes are uncommon in Kent but include those that have had very little intervention by man or contain ancient or prehistoric features. Historic landscapes are generally from the medieval period onwards. This is when the pattern of most landscapes in Kent was established and is generally discernible today (although overlain with modern features). Recent landscapes are those where historic elements have been replaced with new elements or land management. They include reclaimed landscapes.

**Visibility** addresses the issues of **Landform** and the intercepting feature of **Tree cover**. For example an open hilltop landscape has a higher visibility than an enclosed lowland landscape.

The conclusions reached regarding each of the character areas are expressed using a matrix that encompasses Condition and Sensitivity. This analysis gives a broad indication of each area’s ability to accommodate a change in management or use without loss of overall integrity. The matrix helps to assist in the direction of any policy that might be applied to the land in question.

The combination of condition and sensitivity assessments has generated appropriate actions for each character area.

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 deciding the type and scale of development that may be appropriate whilst respecting the character of the landscape.

**Conserve** - actions that encourage the conservation of distinctive features and features in good condition.

**Conserve and reinforce** - actions that conserve distinctive features and features in good condition and strengthen and reinforce those features that may be vulnerable.

**Reinforce** - actions that strengthen or reinforce distinctive features and patterns in the landscape.
**Conserve and restore** - actions that 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 and create** - actions that conserve distinctive features and features in good condition, whilst creating new features or areas where they have been lost or are in poor condition.

**Restore** - actions that encourage the restoration of distinctive landscape features and the removal or mitigation of detracting features.

**Restore and create** - actions that 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.

**Reinforce and create** - actions that 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.

**Create** - actions that create new features or areas where existing elements are lost or in poor condition.

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. However by simplifying the conclusions into a series of generic actions it is possible to reach informed and well supported judgements on the landscape character.

Actions are offered that are locally appropriate to the character area and respond to the generic actions that have been identified. Many of these actions are not within the remit of the Local Authority to implement directly as they are not responsible for managing the land in most cases. Such references are included with the view to influencing opinions, generating support and guiding policy. In many instances certain forms of land management have a strong influence on the landscape character. These are often dependent on market forces and land management practices for their retention e.g. sheep grazing on marshland and fruit production.
Factors Shaping the Landscape

Geology and Soils

To the north of Gravesham Borough, east of Gravesend, Alluvium forms the geology of the marshes. A small area of Marine Beach/Tidal Flats is located on the south bank of the River Thames, immediately north of Higham Marshes. Soils are clay.

A swathe of Thanet Beds is located across Higham and around Shorne, with inner swathes of Woolwich Beds and central areas of London Clay. Small points of Head overlay higher points of land.

To the north west of Gravesham Borough, Upper Chalk dominates the geology, with some areas of Thanet Beds and Head. Soils are loam across Gravesend and the north east of the Borough, becoming silty across Istead Rise to the west and within bands across Luddesdown to the south east.

As land rises at Cobham, approximately central to the Borough, swathes of Clay with Flints follow the contours south to Meopham and Vigo at the southern point of the Borough boundary. Ribbons of Undivided Floodplain Gravel flow south west across Luddesdown, bordered by Middle Chalk. Isolated patches of Blackheath/Oldhaven Beds are located around Meopham. Soils from Cobham, south west to Meopham and south to Vigo are loam to clay.
Landform and Drainage

The landform within Gravesham Borough generally rises from north to south. The marshes to the north are flat and low lying, at approximately 2 metres Above Ordnance Datum (AOD). Topography becomes gently undulating towards Shorne and Lower Higham to the south, increasing to approximately 15 AOD. Pockets of steeper undulations occur around Shorne and Shorne Ridgeway where the underlying geology becomes more varied. The landform becomes steeper to the south and east of Cobham as the North Downs dip slope begins its ascent. Strong ridge and dry valley formations extend in a definite north east to south west direction across Luddesdown towards Vigo in the south. Steeper valley sides are based on Chalk, with ridges and plateaux on the Clay with Flints cap. The land plateaus above the valley sides at high points to the south of the Borough around Harvel, with high points reaching approximately 185 AOD south of Harvel.

Due to the chalky nature of the most of the Borough there are few open watercourses on the surface. The most notable is the Ebbsfleet that forms the western boundary of the Borough with Dartford. The stream emerges north of the A2 at the foot of the Ebbsfleet Valley and follows a course via the Swanscombe Peninsula to the Thames. At present the Ebbsfleet holds little water but this is partly due to dewatering to allow for extraction of chalk in Eastern Quarry to the west. In the near future, with the redevelopment of the quarry, this will no longer be necessary and the water levels in the Ebbsfleet will rise.

Other watercourses run underground beneath the dry valleys of the dipslope, although there are ponds in woodlands around Cobham and Shorne, indicating a change in geology. Streams emerge from the ground at the marshland edge, characterised by the inlets of marshland found around Lower Higham and Church Street. The marshes are then drained to the Thames through a network of man-made ditches, probably dating back to medieval times when the land was reclaimed for grazing. The man-made feature of the Thames & Medway Canal sits above the marshes and hence retains water artificially.
Historic Background

Gravesend and Gravesham have a long association with the River Thames. Since prehistoric times both the alignment and the level of the river have changed. Gravel terraces within the estuary indicate earlier courses and the river level has risen relative to the land by several metres, preserving structural remains and environmental evidence of the estuary.

Quarrying and extraction, along with major developments such as the Channel Tunnel Rail Link, have uncovered evidence of early human activity including Palaeolithic (Stone Age) flints, axes and other artefacts, and the second oldest human remains at Swanscombe in neighbouring Dartford Borough. Evidence of early life has also been found at Meopham. Later prehistoric finds include Neolithic waterlogged deposits along the course of the Ebbsfleet and Bronze Age ring ditches at Cobham and Springhead.

There is much evidence of Roman settlement in the area. The former Roman Road of Watling Street follows the approximate line of the existing A2 and a major Roman settlement was uncovered at Springhead. This is thought to have been a site of rural religious focus, with origins in the Iron Age. At the northern end of the Ebbsfleet Valley the Northfleet Roman villa has been extensively excavated, and a large Roman villa was discovered at Chalk in 1961.

Early Anglo-Saxon settlement remains have also been found at Springhead and Northfleet, including a small pagan Saxon cemetery. The Northfleet Anglo-Saxon watermill is the earliest and best preserved early medieval horizontal tidal watermill found in the country.

In medieval times the town of Gravesend was established, along with many of the villages. The structure of the present day landscape was set down with the creation of many of the villages, enclosures, tracks and roads. Links to the past are preserved through the layout of the settlements, their buildings and churches.

Historically, the town of Gravesend is associated with the Thames, and in particular with the embarkation and disembarkation of custom-house officers and pilots, and is also attached to ships sailing to and arriving from foreign ports. Trade between Gravesend and London began as early as 1293 and flourished as a result of connections with London via steamer and railway. The town has a strong industrial history of fishing, boat building, iron founding, soap making and brewing. Coal and timber were largely imported and chalk lime from quarries was exported. During its history Gravesend has also suffered much damage as a result of fire, in 1380, 1727, and again in 1850.

The surrounding land use was largely for producing large quantities of fruit and vegetables for the London market. Within this rural landscape milling was popular with at least eight mills being used over the centuries in the Meopham area and the last still standing near Meopham Green.

The 18th and 19th century saw many changes in the Borough. These include the turnpiking of many roads including the road from Gravesend to Wrotham in 1825. Cobham Hall and its historic park dates from the late 18th and early 19th century, much of the present park being laid out by Humphrey Repton.

The defence of the Thames from attack was also a priority during this period. Shornemead Fort, located on the Shorne Marshes, is one of three Thames Side Forts that were designed to defend the Thames Estuary from Napoleonic attacks. Construction began in 1847 but it was not completed until six years later as the ground the fort was built on was incapable of supporting the original structure, and rebuilding was necessary. The fort was disarmed by 1904, as it was decided that it could not withstand an attack. It was used in World War II as a gun emplacement. Its remains are now part of a shooting range for the Metropolitan Police.
To the east of the town the Thames and Medway Canal, or Gravesend and Rochester Canal, was completed in 1824 and linked the Thames at Gravesend to the Medway near Rochester Bridge via the Higham - Strood Tunnel. It runs through the traditionally unsettled Shorne and Higham Marshes, which were (and still are) used as grazing marshes for nearby villages and farmsteads. The canal was developed to reduce navigation to the Medway for smaller vessels, but proved to be largely unsuccessful. The canal was later purchased by the North Kent Railway Company and was adopted in part for their line.

The development of the railway network improved connections to London, starting the commuter process and also providing access to the Kent coast. Gravesend and many of the villages expanded in this period.

The north of the Borough in particular also changed dramatically from a rural landscape to an industrial landscape in the later 19th century and 20th century. William Aspdin first began to make Portland Cement at Northfleet in 1834, inaugurating an industry that had a major impact on the landscape as well as the economy of this part of Kent. Large quarries were excavated and industrial structures were erected, and many existing villages increased greatly in size with planned streets. Some of the chalk quarries have been used for landfill such as within the Ebbsfleet Valley. More recently the decline of the cement industry has resulted in the redevelopment of many of the quarries and former cement works.

The area has many cultural associations. Shakespeare refers to Gads Hill in Higham and its relationship with highway robbery in his Henry IV Part I. Gads Hill is however better known as the home of Charles Dickens, who lived there in later life until he died in 1870. He is associated with many of the villages in the area including Cobham where he often walked, and Chalk where he spent his honeymoon. Dickens often used buildings and the landscape of the area as references within his literature.

Gravesend is also known as the burial place of the Native American princess, Pocohontas who died aboard ship on the Thames.
Land Use and Agriculture

Land uses within Gravesham Borough are influenced by the underlying geology and topography, historic patterns and urban encroachment.

At the north of the Borough, the low lying and subsequently wet landscape of the marshes is predominantly uninhabited and used as traditional grazing for sheep. Large arable fields with little tree cover dominate the land use east and south of Gravesend. Few hedgerows separate the landscape as a result of agricultural intensification. Crops mainly comprise wheat, but some smaller and more enclosed grazing paddocks are situated around settlements. Large pylons are located throughout the fields to the north of the Borough, which are highly visible in the flat and relatively treeless landscape.

Land use immediately surrounding Gravesend is heavily influenced by the urban development and the major infrastructure of the A2, other large scale roads and the Channel Tunnel Rail Link (CTRL). Within the urban fringes, arable land is contained within small fields divided by the surrounding development and infrastructure routes. Parcels of land within ownership of the Highways Agency and CTRL have been recently disturbed and support limited vegetation.

There has been a trend to locate out-of-town retail and commercial development on the former industrial and warehouse areas along the Thames rather than on the urban edge. This means that in many locations around Gravesend the rural landscape abuts the urban area with very little in the way of transition and farmland remains reasonably intact. The agricultural landscape extends into the urban area in the valley feature north of Tollgate. The urban fringe is characterised by recreational use including the Cascades Leisure Centre, golf courses, Shorne Country Park and the Jeskyns Farm.

Historic remains of orchards are scattered mostly around the north eastern boundary of the Borough, with a more recent and well managed fruit orchard east of Cobham. The small pockets of older orchards are often poorly maintained and overgrown, with many trees dead or dying.

As the landform rises to the east and south, woodland and tree cover increase. Much woodland around Shorne and Vigo comprises dense coppice woodland in varied states of management and subsequent
condition. Historic native woodland lies within Cobham Park and mature native parkland trees populate the landscape, which is used primarily as a golf course. Parkland trees include Oak and Beech and some ancient pollarded Ash trees mark woodland boundaries in places.

As the landform becomes more undulating with the ridge and valley formation of the downland landscape to the south of the Borough, woodland comprises native species. Areas of woodland and woodland clumps form a distinct network, with native hedgerows linking wooded areas. Species include Oak, Ash, Beech, Hawthorn, Holly and Ivy. Land use across the south eastern side of the Borough is mostly pasture, with small clustered historic settlements located within valleys.

To the west of the Borough the Meopham area supports mostly medium sized arable fields. A series of settlements follow the contours from north to south, with minor roads spreading east and west. Around the fringes of developed areas, smaller paddocks are used primarily for equestrian related activities.

At the south of the Borough, around Culverstone and Harvel, land is wooded but supports a multitude of small housing plots. Many properties have small adjoining paddocks used for accommodating a small amount of livestock. Woodland is coppiced in places, with larger swathes surrounding Vigo to the south.

This is generally a rural landscape, which is heavily influenced by the urban fringes of Gravesend to the north. The character of the landscape changes dramatically from north to south, in terms of landform, land use and levels of development.
Biodiversity

The varied vegetation patterns across Gravesham Borough provide a range of habitat types. The flat, low lying grazing marshes to the north offer an important habitat for birds, whilst woodland areas further south support birdlife, insects and mammals. Fragmented clumps of woodland vegetation and larger swathes of woodland are scattered throughout the Borough, with more substantial woodland blocks to the south. Pockets of orchards and areas of coppiced woodland support a variety of habitat types. Hedgerows and shelterbelts between agricultural fields provide wildlife corridors and link woodland areas. The range of habitats across the Borough is reflected by several ecological designations, which are scattered throughout Gravesham.

The Countryside Agency’s national landscape character areas coincide with Natural Areas identified by English Nature. Three of English Nature’s Natural Areas fall across Gravesham - the Greater Thames Estuary, the North Kent Plain and the North Downs span the Borough. These areas are identified by their physical, natural and land use features.

Greater Thames Estuary

A ribbon of land to the north of the Borough falls within the Greater Thames Estuary Natural Area. Soft sediments, forming a narrow strip of saltmarsh and mudflats, are found along the intertidal zone on the riverside of the Thames flood defence. The low-lying land on alluvial soils to the south of these man-made walls supports freshwater grazing marsh. The value of this landscape is recognised in the designation of undeveloped parts of the North Kent coast as Environmentally Sensitive Areas.

North Kent Plain

The middle swathe of the Borough falls within the North Kent Plain. This land, derived from the Tertiary deposits, includes some of the most fertile and productive farmland in southeast England. It also includes large areas of woodland of outstanding conservation interest. The predominant land uses of the North Kent Plain are intensive arable farming and horticulture, but on heavier clay soils there are woodlands.
North Downs

At the southern end of the Borough, 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.

Ecological Designations

The marshes to the north support several designations, reflecting their ecological importance. A large proportion of the marshes are designated as a Ramsar site, which is an international treaty to protect important wetland sites. To the east of Gravesend, an area of the marshes is designated as a Local Wildlife Site (LWS), called Canal and Grazing Marsh, Higham. The marshes are also designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), which are nationally recognised for their flora, fauna and geological features. Higham Marshes are also designated as the Thames Estuary and Marshes Special Protection Area (SPA). The marshes are important for birds during spring and autumn migration periods and also support wintering water birds including grebes, geese, waders and ducks.

Further south, LWS and SSSI are scattered across the Borough. There are several areas of woodland identified in consultation with Kent Wildlife Trust as LWS across the Borough. These strategically important wildlife sites are mostly concentrated within pockets of woodland east of Shorne and southwards throughout the Borough. Several areas of woodland are designated as SSSI. These include Great Crabbles Wood south west of Higham, Brewers Wood and Ashenbank Wood south west of Shorne, the Deer Park within Cobham Park and Red Wood along the eastern boundary of the Borough.

A Special Area of Conservation (SAC) is located on the eastern boundary of the Borough, south of Luddesdown and Hatch Hill, comprising woodland. SAC aim to conserve natural habitats and other habitats containing certain animals and plants under the EC Habitats Directive.

Fragments and swathes of ancient woodland are strewn across the landscape, with a high concentration surrounding Vigo to the very southern end of the Borough.
Relevant Planning Policies and Designations

Thames Gateway
The area north of the A2 is part of the Kent Thameside area of the Thames Gateway. Regional Planning Guidance 9a (RPG9a) promotes a range of environmental improvement initiatives throughout the Thames Gateway and acts as a supplement to Regional Planning Guidance in the southeast. There is an overall emphasis on improving and enhancing environmental quality, such as promoting habitat creation as an integral part of new development. The area is also part of the Thames Gateway Parklands - a concept that promotes a vision of development within a landscape framework. More locally this is interpreted through the Kent Thameside Green Grid that identifies, promotes and enhances open spaces within the area along with the links between them and the wider countryside.

Thames Estuary 2100
Gravesham’s Thameside location means that it will need to consider the effects of climate change, and in particular the potential flood risk. The Thames Estuary 2100 (TE2100) Project is an initiative of the Southern, Anglian and Thames Regions of the Environment Agency to develop a Flood Risk Management Plan for London and the Thames Estuary for the next 100 years. The Plan aims to be risk-based, taking into account all existing and future flood defence needs, be sustainable (environmentally, socially and economically) and be inclusive to stakeholders. It will also address flood risk in the context of a changing climate and the varying socio-economic scenarios that may develop over the next 100 years.

Metropolitan Green Belt
The Metropolitan Green Belt covers the landscape to the south of the A2 and east of Gravesend across the entire Borough, excluding the villages. Development is controlled within the Green Belt, in order to protect the open character and rural environment. Planning permission within the rural areas of the Borough is restricted to agriculture or forestry, outdoor sports and recreation, limited infilling to existing villages and limited extensions to existing dwellings.
Conservation Areas
There are several Conservation Areas throughout Gravesham Borough. These are focused around traditional settlement centres, including areas within Gravesend and the settlements of Shorne, Higham, Thong, Harvel, Meopham and the largest at Cobham. These are designated for their special architectural or historic interest, which it is desirable to preserve or enhance.

Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
Approximately 25% of the Borough’s land lies within the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), which is a national landscape designation aiming to conserve and enhance natural beauty. The eastern part of the Borough falls within the Kent Downs AONB, extending south from Shorne Ridgeway across Cobham and Luddesdown. The boundary lies east of Harvel but extends west across Vigo at the south of the Borough.
Landscape Character Context

At the national level, the Countryside Agency have mapped and described regional character areas across the country as part of their Countryside Character Programme. In Kent these areas are coincident with the Natural Areas and are known as Joint Character Areas (JCAs). Seven areas fall wholly or partially within Kent:

- Greater Thames Estuary
- North Kent Plain
- North Downs
- Wealden Greensand
- Low Weald
- High Weald
- Romney Marsh

Gravesham Borough falls within three of these areas. The marshes to the north fall within the Greater Thames Estuary. The central part of the Borough lies within the North Kent Plain. Finally the southern part of the Borough, characterised by the downland landscape, falls within the North Downs.

At the county level, Kent County Council have further refined and subdivided these character areas in the Landscape Assessment of Kent. The following character areas fall wholly or partly within Gravesham Borough:

- Dartford and Gravesend Fringes
- Southfleet Arable land
- Ash Downs
- Shorne
- Hoo Peninsula
- Eastern Thames Marshes
- Western Thames Marshes
- Cobham: West Kent Downs
- Luddesdown: West Kent Downs

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

Dartford and Gravesend Fringes: Key Characteristics

- Contained by A2 and urban edges.
- Fragmentation by roads.
- Wide scale amenity uses.
- Some farmland with remnant hedgerows and trees.

Southfleet Arable Land: Key Characteristics

- Generally open arable landscape.
- Open landscape allows views of transport routes, the A2 and Kent Thameside, pylons and settlements.
- Remnant hedgerows, shelterbelts and woodland clumps.

Ash Downs: Key Characteristics

- Pastoral valleys enclosed by wooded ridges and species rich hedgerows.
- Broad plateau tops and small valley bottoms.
- Winding network of narrow, historic lanes.
Shorne: Key Characteristics
- Wooded ridge isolated by A2.
- Rural with significant woodland.
- Residential ribbon development and hard urban edge.

Hoo Peninsula: Key Characteristics
- Prominent hills and low lying alluvial marshes.
- Flat/undulating farmland.
- Intensive open farmed arable land.
- Intrusive influence of industrial development.

Eastern Thames Marshes: Key Characteristics
- Remote, wild and quiet.
- Creeks, dykes, marsh with areas of scrub.
- Overhead power lines.
- Grazing animals.

Cobham: West Kent Downs: Key Characteristics
- Large scale, open top scarp-top landscape.
- Coppice woodland and historic parkland.
- Golf course and A2 sever the character area.

Luddesdown: West Kent Downs: Key Characteristics
- Rolling valley side pasture and extensive undulating arable fields.
- Large areas of mixed woodland dominate skyline.
- Peaceful and rural with some pressures for change from suburban influences and industrial developments.
Introduction to Landscape Character Areas

The field and desk studies have identified eleven local character areas. In the following sections these areas are described and their key characteristics noted. An analysis is undertaken to identify the condition and sensitivity of the landscape and following the methodology outlined on page 3, guidelines for each area are proposed. It should be noted that 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 areas 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.
1. Shorne and Higham Marshes

Landscape Description

Shorne and Higham Marshes lie east of Gravesend, directly south of the River Thames. The character area stretches to the eastern boundary of Gravesham Borough and to the fringe of the agricultural land to the south.

The geology of the area is Alluvium, with clay soils. The area is typical of the North Kent Marshes characterised by a sense of remoteness, flat topography, wide, open views towards the River Thames, and a lack of vegetation. The land is used predominantly for grazing sheep and cattle. There are views out towards Essex to the north of the River Thames, the Queen Elizabeth II Bridge to the west and Cliffe Fort on the headland to the east, and extensive views across the marshes from within the character area.

The river itself is concealed from views within the character area by the flood defence mound although massive ships are visible above the wall and the large industrial buildings on land to the north of the Thames. The wall provides an excellent vantage point for both views out across the Thames and inland to the wooded higher ground around Shorne and Cobham. A network of ditches and meandering waterways with traditional timber crossings divide the marshes in an irregular pattern, leaving parcels of land of medium scale. Vegetation comprises pasture, reeds within ditches and the occasional scrubby vegetation such as hawthorn. The limited vegetation types provide limited seasonal variation.

The marshland is traditionally unsettled. Inland is the Thames and Medway Canal that was completed in 1824 to link the Thames at Gravesend to the Medway near Rochester Bridge via the Higham - Strood Tunnel. It was designed to reduce navigation to the Medway for smaller vessels, but proved to be largely unsuccessful.

Shornemead Fort is located alongside the Thames in the centre of the area. It is one of the three Thames side forts that were designed to defend the Thames Estuary from Napoleonic attacks. These include Cliffe Fort and Coalhouse Fort in Essex that were built to prevent a hostile fleet reaching London via the Thames. The fort was last actively used during

Key Characteristics

- Flat grazing marsh with a lack of vegetation
- Sense of remoteness with extensive views across marshes
- Network of ditches and meandering waterways divide the marshes in an irregular pattern leaving parcels of land of a medium scale
- No roads and limited development
- Features of historic interest including Shornemead Fort
- Extensive views across the River Thames and to higher ground to the south
WWII and decommissioned at the end of the war. In the post war era, Shornemead Fort’s only use came as target practice for the Royal Engineers demolition squad, and their effectiveness is very evident by the concrete, bricks and rubble at the site; they are all that remain of the barracks and administrative buildings. The area is still used as a firing range by the Metropolitan Police.

Other small scale developments include jetties into the Thames and some buildings associated with the Thames and Medway Canal to the south.

There are no roads through the area, with roads from the south stopping at the fringes of the marshes. Access continues from these as public rights of way and farm tracks. Limited public access is allowed within a central Danger Area, used for firing and test ranges. A footpath follows the line of the Thames and Medway Canal in an east west direction through the marshes and the Saxon Shore Way follows the line of the river edge. The Saxon Shore Way is a National Trail that runs from Gravesend, around the coast to Hastings in East Sussex. Many tracks are located on the flood defences and counterwalls to provide the driest access.

The entire marshland area is also nationally designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), and is also designated as a Ramsar site. Higham Marshes to the east are designated as a Special Protection Area.

Future issues that may have significant effects on the marshland are the possibility of a Lower Thames Crossing. At present there is no adopted plan for this and no route identified but it is thought likely that it would link from the A2/M2 to Tilbury, which could have significant landscape character and visual impacts on the marshes.

Another major issue is the need to manage the effects of climate change and, in particular the Thames flood defence strategy. Options for this are being considered by the Thames Estuary 2100 (TE2100) Project.
**Condition: Good**

There is strong visual unity, with a unified pattern of landscape elements. The flat topography, limited vegetation and pattern of ditches and waterways provide consistency and strength of character. Apart from electricity pylons crossing the south of the character area there are relatively few visual detractors within the marshes, although there are views of visually detracting industrial buildings to the north of the Thames. There is strong ecological integrity with the comprehensive network of ditches forming wildlife corridors. Mud flats on the riverside of the river defence wall also provide strong habitat opportunities. Overall the condition of the character area is assessed as being very good.

**Sensitivity: High**

This is a simple landscape comprised of few landscape elements. It is characteristically un-vegetated and unsettled and is likely to have remained largely unchanged for many centuries. The ditches that segregate fields are very distinct and historic. It is more fortunate than many areas of such marshland in North Kent in that it has managed to maintain the traditional grazing marsh pastures and, with the exception of a few fields in the west, has not been drained and converted to arable. However it is reliant on the Thames flood defence wall to maintain the existing regime and is consequently sensitive to changes in sea level rise and tidal defence management. Shornemead Fort and Barrow Hill add to the distinctive and historic features.

The absence of vegetation combined with the flat landscape mean that it is highly visually sensitive both to changes within the area and in the views beyond it, particularly the treatment of the urban edge to the east of Gravesend. Overall the marshes are considered to be very distinct and possess a strong sense of place. They are considered to be of high sensitivity in terms of their character, distinctiveness and visibility. They are also vulnerable to future sea level rise.

**Guidelines: Conserve**

Guidelines for the Shorne and Higham Marshes Character Area focus on the long-term conservation of the area to maintain its traditional land use, ecological and cultural interest, open character and the current very good condition of the marshes.

- Conserve marsh, grassland and wetland habitats, unimproved and grazing marsh.
- Conserve the historic ditch and river defence pattern to maintain landscape character and enhance ecological potential.
- Promote sensitive management of grasslands, encouraging grazing marsh and unimproved grasslands to re-establish.
- Conserve and manage flood defences and counterwalls.
- Restrict development proposals that encroach onto the marsh from the urban fringe surrounds, seeking opportunities to improve the appearance of the urban edge.
- Conserve and enhance the Thames and Medway Canal along its former line from Gravesend town centre to the Higham – Strood Tunnel.
- Promote opportunities for public access particularly alongside the Thames and former canal.
2. Botany Marshes

Landscape Description

The Botany Marshes are located in the far north-west corner of the Gravesham Borough on a piece of land known as the Swanscombe Peninsula. The immediate marshland area is locally referred to as the Botany Marshes. The area sits between the River Thames to the north, the Borough of Dartford to the west and Gravesend's main industrial belt to the east. It is a remnant of the North Kent marshes that bordered the River Thames from the eastern edge of London to Swale in the east. The Swanscombe Peninsula has a long history of industrial development and more recently has been raised in some locations by the disposal of CTRL spoil. Other parts are fragmented by business parks and housing and there are major redevelopment proposals planned for Swanscombe Peninsula West in Dartford Borough, and also on the western edge of Gravesend.

Its original character would have been similar to the Shorne and Higham Marshes to the east of Gravesend and it still shares these underlying physical characteristics. The geology across the area is Alluvium and the soil structure is clay. The topography of the area is flat with a man made sea wall on the bank of the River Thames to the north and bunding between the marshland and the surrounding industry.

There are open views across the marshland and towards the River Thames, adjacent industry and towards the Dartford River Crossing Bridge, with the peninsula location providing panoramic views of the Thames at its tip. Large ships are visible on the river itself and large industry on the Essex side of the river is visible from on top of the flood defence.

The area has a poorly defined land use and is a mix of rough marshland, open water, clumps of native scrub and trees, and an area of agricultural land on the northern edge of the peninsula. A network of ditches, key characteristics:

- Flat marshland with man made sea wall on bank of River Thames
- Divided by a network of ditches, meandering waterways and small lagoons into small parcels of land
- Remnant of agricultural land on peninsula
- Limited public access to marshland
- Unified clumps of native vegetation
- Strong network of wildlife corridors within ditches and waterways, mudflat on River Thames provide good habitat opportunities
- Visual detractors including electricity pylons running across marshland and large industrial building on character area boundary
meandering waterways and small lagoons divide the marshes into small parcels of land.

There is no settlement or built form on the marshes, and large electricity pylons cross the area from the east to the west. Large recent industrial buildings of low visual quality line the eastern edge of the character area.

There are no roads throughout the area, with road access from the south east stopping at the fringes of the marshes. Access from the road continues as a footpath that runs from the industry cutting across the marshes to link with the Broadness Salt Marsh within the Borough of Dartford. Public access to parts of the marshes and the river edge is limited in parts by the adjacent industry. There are some tracks on ridges and flood defences for authorised access.

**Condition: Moderate**

This is a very small and isolated character area; however there is a coherent pattern of elements within the area, including consistently flat topography, unified clumps of native vegetation and an evident pattern of ditches and waterways. Many visual detractors are apparent including electricity pylons that run across the site and industrial buildings that edge the character area.

The character area has a strong functional integrity heavily influenced by a strong network of wildlife corridors within the ditches and waterways. The mud flats on the edge of the River Thames also provide good habitat opportunities. There are signs of the recent immediate surrounding industry having a negative impact on the marsh and therefore the condition of the area is assessed as being moderate.

**Sensitivity: High**

There are few landscape elements within the marshes to assess, with little established vegetation, no settlements and no roads. It is likely the marshland has remained unchanged for many years. The area is reliant on the Thames flood defence to maintain its existing state and is sensitive to changes in sea level rise and tidal defence management. The ditches and waterways that divide the marsh are distinct and historic and provide a moderate sense of place. As a result of the flat open landscape and limited tree cover the visibility within the marshland is high and causes the area to be visually sensitive to change both within and surrounding the marshland. Heavily influenced by the high visual sensitivity the overall sensitivity of the character area can be assessed as being high.
Guidelines: Conserve and Restore

The Botany Marshes are an area to be conserved and restored.

- New development should be carefully sited and integrated so that it does not intrude upon areas of tranquil unspoilt marshland or significantly expand or exacerbate existing visual impacts.

- Existing network of ditches and waterways should be conserved.

- Resist encroachment from surrounding industrial development.

- Retain and promote opportunities for public access particularly alongside the Thames, and linking into wider access network.

- Control and restrict fly tipping.

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Sensitivity

Gravesham Landscape Character Assessment and Guidelines
3. Higham Arable Farmlands

Landscape Description
Higham Arable Farmlands are located east of Gravesend and south of Shorne and Higham Marshes.

The geology is made up of Upper Chalk to the west of the character area. To the north and south, there are some ribbons of Thanet Beds and Woolwich Beds, with a small amount of London Clay to the north around the Thames and Medway Canal. Soils are loam across the majority of the area, with some silty soil directly east of Gravesend.

The landform is very gently undulating, and generally rises from north to south. Adjacent to the marshes the land levels out, although inland it retains a Downs dipslope character for example the distinctive dry valley feature east of Higham. There are extensive views across open arable land from within the character area and views out of the character area, towards the marshes and the River Thames in the north, from some higher vantage points and areas near the boundary line. The gentle topography and goods soils, combined with the relative proximity to London and the River Thames means there has historically been a rich agricultural landscape. As a consequence there is little tree cover, allowing extensive views across an arable landscape. There are some remnant areas of orchards indicating a former agricultural use, often overgrown with trees in poor condition. There are some garden nurseries to the south, with smaller fields and distinctive crops such as rhubarb, and white poly tunnels. Shelterbelts, fence lines, gappy hedgerows and ditches provide an element of enclosure. Despite these features, there is an open character as a result of the extensive views and lack of tree cover. There is a regular pattern of medium to large fields throughout the area, with some smaller paddocks adjoining properties east of Higham.

Higham and Lower Higham are the main settlements in the area. Higham has developed as two parts, with the original Saxon village of Lower Higham to the north and a more recent development to the south around...

Key Characteristics
- Very gently undulating topography
- Open arable farmland
- Views out to the marshes and the River Thames in the north
- Original Saxon village of Lower Higham and more recent development to the south
- Marsh side hamlets and settlements
- Isolated farmsteads and scattered properties with locally distinct styles and materials
- Pockets of orchards and garden nurseries
- Historic sites including a Priory and Gad's Hill, once home to Charles Dickens
- Thames and Medway Canal (disused) runs to Lower Higham
the main road linking Gravesend to Rochester. Isolated farmsteads and scattered properties throughout the remaining area contribute towards local distinctiveness, with oast houses, thatch roofs and converted timber barns. Alongside the boundary with the marshes, there are marsh side hamlets and settlement, including the Site of a Priory (Benedictine Nuns) at the northern end of Church Street. The Church has one of the oldest pulpits in Kent, dating from the 14th Century. The Larkin Memorial is located on Telegraph Hill and is visible from the valley to the east of Higham and along the Wainscott bypass. It was constructed in 1835, and repaired in 1869, in the memory of Charles Larkin, an auctioneer from Rochester. Gad’s Hill, south of the A226, holds historical reference, once home to Charles Dickens and mentioned by Shakespeare.

In general, few roads cross the area. There is a contrast in scale of road size and use. Gravesend Road, the A226, severs the character area in part. This provides a busy route in contrast with some of the other roads in the area. The Wainscott bypass follows the valley floor and edge of the character area to the east of Higham. The Thames and Medway Canal (disused) and railway line run through the northern part of the character area to Lower Higham. Several footpaths and roads used as public paths cross the arable farmland.

Condition: Poor

The main physical elements of the landscape, such as the topography and general field pattern, are consistent. However land use provides an element of fragmentation, such as small areas of orchards and garden nurseries set within the dominating context of open arable farmland. Large pylons to the north, rail sidings, poly tunnels and polythene covering nursery stock provide some visually detracting features. Overall, visual unity is coherent.

Agriculture is generally intense with large arable fields and few hedgerow boundaries. Overgrown orchards, shelterbelts, gappy hedgerows and small areas of open water provide weak ecological integrity. Isolated properties and farmsteads provide local distinctiveness, in contrast with more recent development within Higham and Lower Higham. There is a modified cultural integrity and the overall, functional unity is weak. The condition of the landscape is therefore assessed as being poor.
Sensitivity: Moderate

Distinct landscape elements comprise isolated buildings and farmsteads that contribute towards local distinctiveness through their traditional style and use of materials. Enclosure lines provided by ditch lines and remaining hedgerows provide historic features. Cultural associations, particularly with the life and writings of Dickens are strong in this area and locally there are pockets of distinctive landscape such as the dry valley south east of Higham. However much of the modern landscape comprises gappy hedgerows, limited woodland and indistinct recent buildings and, on average, features and elements within the landscape are indistinct and the sense of place is weak. The open character of the landscape and gently undulating landform provide high visibility across the character area.

On balance, the sensitivity of the landscape is moderate.

Guidelines: Restore and create

Guidelines for the Higham Arable Farmlands focus on restoring landscape elements in poor condition, whilst safeguarding it as a prominent landscape feature within the wider landscape.

- Restore and create field boundary hedgerows.
- Restore and create ecological networks by linking existing isolated woodland clumps and orchards.
- Create design standards for new developments in the area.
- Resist proposals that introduce extensive or obtrusive elements within visually sensitive areas of the open landscape.
- Create areas of regenerative woodland within farmland to create woodland links.
- Restore small pockets of heritage landscape around existing settlement.
- Improve footpaths and access throughout the area to link woodlands to marshlands.
- Raise awareness and promote awareness of the cultural associations of the landscape.
4. Shorne Woodlands

Landscape Description

Shorne Woodlands is located to the south east of Gravesend. The combined corridor of the Channel Tunnel Rail Link and the A2 form the southern boundary, with the A289 forming the boundary to the east.

The geology of the area is varied, with Thanet Beds underlying Shorne and much of the perimeter of the area. A band of Woolwich Beds follows the contours on slightly higher ground. Shorne Ridgeway is underlain with Blackheath and Oldhaven Beds, and London Clay underlies the highest point west of Shorne Ridgeway within Randall Wood. Soils are loam throughout the character area.

The topography is undulating, with high points around Shorne Ridgeway and within Randall Wood. Land falls away towards the east of the character area, with the A289 running within a dip. Views out of the character area are varied because of the undulating landform and significant areas of woodland. From Gravesend Road along the northern boundary of the area there are views out to the marshes and the River Thames, whilst from the centre of the area views are more limited. Tree cover is dominant, with native coppice providing a strong sense of enclosure throughout much of the area.

Woodland is extensive to the west of Shorne, with Brummerhill, Shorne, Randall and Brewers Woodlands. Some open arable fields surround Court Wood and Great Crabbles Wood to the east. Shorne Wood Country Park lies to the south west, with a recent sustainable building surrounded by extensive car parks and well managed coppice woodland. Within settlements, more recent ornamental garden planting provides a gardenesque character.

Settlement is concentrated within Shorne and Shorne Ridgeway. Building style and age is varied, with older vernacular style properties within the village centres and more recent 1960’s -1970’s development and some Victorian terraces further towards the village edges. Traditional building materials include flint, chequered brickwork and Kent peg tiles. There is also a strong use of ornamental brickwork along boundary walls and adjacent to gateway entrances. Village greens form a strong characteristic.

Key Characteristics

- Undulating topography
- Chestnut coppice woodland
- Strong sense of enclosure
- Traditional village greens
- Varied building style and age
- Chequered brickwork and ornamental brickwork
- Few highways with busier roads along character area boundaries
with traditional features including unique signs and traditional red telephone boxes.

There are few highways, with busier roads along the character area boundaries and less major roads running through Shorne and linking Higham with the A2. A small network of public footpaths is concentrated to the north of Randall Wood, as well as there being some public footpaths running through open arable land to the east of Shorne and around the perimeter of Great Crabbles Wood.

**Condition: Good**

The pattern of elements is coherent, with the extent of coppice woodland providing a unifying feature throughout the area. Overhead wires are visible in part and there is a small amount of fly tipping. The high proportion of woodland provides a strong ecological framework. Woodland management, and therefore condition, is stronger around Shorne Wood Country Park than woodland to the east. Some 20th century development does not respect the local vernacular although buildings within the village centres exert a definitive sense of place and provide traditional cultural integrity.

**Sensitivity: Moderate**

The area is very much characterised by the extent of coppice woodland, which therefore contributes significantly towards local distinctiveness. The traditional village centres and properties within Shorne and Shorne Ridgeway are distinct and also promote a strong sense of place, although some hedgerows, field boundaries and highways are less distinct. The combination of landform and tree cover provides an enclosed character and subsequent low visibility within the character area. However there are extensive views out of the area from vantage points at the woodland edge, particularly to the north across the marshland to the Thames.

The sensitivity of the landscape is assessed as being moderate.

**Guidelines: Conserve and Reinforce**

Guidelines for Shorne Woodlands aim to conserve areas in good condition and reinforce the distinctive features and elements of the landscape.

- Conserve and reinforce wooded character by continued coppice management.
- Conserve and reinforce ecological interest of the woodland.
• Manage access arrangements to balance the need for recreation whilst controlling unauthorised access and anti-social uses, and respecting ecological sensitivity.

• Encourage local native species within the woodland.

• Encourage the use of traditional fencing materials and native hedges on field boundaries to create woodland links within arable fields.

• Conserve traditional features in village centres e.g. red phone boxes, street furniture, village signs and post boxes, and reinforce character through the use of vernacular materials and elements.

• Control highway approaches into villages to reinforce the character of historic settlements.
5. Ashenbank and Cobham Parklands

The Ashenbank and Cobham Parklands are located to the east of Gravesham Borough, and include the small village settlement of Cobham, Ashenbank Woods, Cobham Woods and the historic Cobham Hall. Cobham Hall is an Elizabethan Manor House set in a Humphrey Repton designed parkland landscape. The hall and much of the parkland are currently used as a private school and associated grounds. The area has been part of a major landscape restoration project through the Cobham Ashenbank Management Scheme (CAMS).

The geology predominantly consists of Upper Chalk and Clay with Flint stretching from beneath Cobham village east towards Cobham Hall. Ribbons of Thanet beds and Woolwich Beds and Blackheath / Oldhaven Beds circle the area to the north. Soils across the area are loam with loam to clay across higher areas.

The topography is slightly undulating with a strong presence of man made landforms including the Cobham and Rochester Golf Course and the Repton parkland. The landform gently increases in height beneath woodland on Williams Hill located within Cobham Park Deer Park and beneath woodland to the north of Cobham Hall, which lies above the remains of a Roman Villa.

The landform and its woodland limit views both within and out of the character area, however Cobham Hall is visible from the majority of open space. The landscape contains large established parkland trees on historic hedgerow boundaries, and the remains of a tree lined avenue that leads from Cobham village to the Hall. In addition to parkland and the golf club there is some arable farmland to the south. Types of boundary include hedgerows with hedgerow trees, timber fences and traditional three bar black iron parkland fencing closer to the hall.
The woodland found at both Ashenbank Woods and Cobham Woods is ancient and forms an important part of the area’s SSSI status. Ashenbank Wood once would have formed part of the parkland that belongs to Cobham Hall. The wood contains some items of archaeological and historical interest including World War Two bunkers and a Bronze Age Burial Ground. Cobham Wood is the larger of the wooded areas and is mostly made up of dense native species with a high number of veteran trees.

The style of architecture within Cobham varies from traditional styles in the centre, typical of that found in north Kent, to more recent residential architecture on the village edge. Cobham Hall’s Elizabethan red brick frontage is very distinct and dominates the immediate landscape. Other buildings include the Darnley Mausoleum, traditional thatch gatehouse, two isolated farmsteads and the Cobham Park Golf Course Club House to the north-east.

Halfpence Lane is the only highway that runs through the centre of character area and connects Cobham with the Cobham A2 road junction to the north. A number of footpaths and byways run across the parkland, golf club and through the woodland.

The area forms part of the North Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and is designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).

**Condition: Good**

The divide between parkland, golf course and farmland is visually evident, and the areas of open parkland and golf course are largely uninterrupted. The woodland and large parkland trees that are scattered through the landscape provide coherency. Many of the parkland trees are in poor condition and have received heavy surgery as a result of their age or extreme weather conditions. There are relatively few visual detractors within the character area apart from the Cobham junction with the A2 that is visible to the north of the parkland.

Established woodland, hedgerows and parkland trees provide a strong ecological base, however the ecological value of the mown grass within the parkland and golf club is low. Cultural integrity is high due to the traditional buildings found in Cobham village and the historic nature of Cobham Hall and its parkland.

The overall condition of the landscape can be assessed as being very good as visually the landscape is strongly unified and the area has a very strong functional integrity.
Sensitivity: Moderate

The historic nature of the woodland, the parkland landscape and the boundary treatment is very distinct and contributes towards a strong sense of place. The area contains some very distinct buildings that contribute towards the local character.

Visibility within the character area is low due to the undulating nature of the topography and the areas of dense woodland, parkland trees and native hedgerows, limiting views of the wider and in parts the immediate landscape.

Although the area has a historic and distinct sense of character the low level of visibility within the area would limit the impact of change to the landscape. It can be concluded that the sensitivity of the character area is moderate.

Guidelines: Conserve and Reinforce

The landscape character and existing good condition of the Ashenbank and Cobham Parklands should be conserved, through the continuation of landscape restoration in the area.

- Conserve parkland trees and woodland cover through continued effective woodland management.
- Reinforce parkland character by emphasising and co-ordinating locally distinctive features (fencing, highways and rural buildings).
- Reinforce character by planting standard native tree species within parkland to replace older veteran trees, and create and maintain wood pastures.
- Manage access arrangements to balance the need for recreation whilst controlling unauthorised access and anti-social uses, and respecting ecological sensitivity.
- Conserve and restore historic buildings and their settings.
- Encourage the use of vernacular materials and characteristic features within new developments.
6. Istead Arable Farmlands

Landscape Description

Istead Arable Farmlands lies to the south of Gravesend and the Channel Tunnel Rail Link (CTRL). It stretches from the western boundary of Gravesham Borough, to the edge of Cobham and Ashenbank Wood in the east.

Upper Chalk dominates the geology of the area, with some small areas of Thanet Beds and Clay with Flints to the east. Soils are mostly silty, with a small amount of loam to the north west of Istead Rise and loam to clay around Sole Street to the east.

The topography is gently undulating, allowing wide, open views out towards the urban edge of Gravesend and the CTRL to the north. To the north west the landscape is dominated by open arable agricultural land, divided by tracks and roads. To the south east there are native hedgerows and occasional poplar shelterbelts. Fields are medium to large and form a regular pattern with boundaries running distinctly from north to south and east to west. Minor clumps of native woodland appear sporadically across the landscape, reducing the vastness of the open arable landscape. To the east fruit orchards, with pollarded hedgerow boundaries, are the dominant land use. There is a stronger sense of enclosure within the orchards.

The area surrounding Jeskyns Farm, west of Cobham, has recently been planted by the Forestry Commission. In the long term this will create a much more enclosed landscape in this area. Once mature the increased enclosure may change the character of this area to such an extent that it may be appropriate to redefine this part of the area - possibly as part of the Ashenbank and Cobham Parklands or, perhaps the Gravesend Southern Fringes if this develops as a recreational landscape character.

Roads are open yet infrequent and are all minor with the exception of the slightly busier A227 Wrotham Road that runs north south, linking Gravesend with Meopham. A section of the Wealdway, a 129km national

Key Characteristics

- Gently undulating topography with open arable fields
- Fields divided by tracks, roads and occasional hedgerows
- Orchards to the east
- Minor native woodland clumps
- Few roads, which are open in character
- Istead Rise modern housing development
- Clusters of properties and farmsteads
- Large pylons
trail, linking Gravesend with Eastbourne, runs through the character area to the east of Istead Rise. A network of public footpaths crosses the land, often running diagonally across arable fields.

Istead Rise, to the west, comprises a modern housing area. Other more traditional buildings include clusters of houses, isolated farmsteads, oasts and occasional small churches and chapels. Large pylons, running north west to south east, form a dominant feature and are widely visible in the open arable land.

**Condition: Poor**

The pattern of elements within the landscape is coherent, with regular shaped fields and a network of tracks along field boundaries. There is some fragmentation in terms of land use. Whilst the majority of the area is under intensive arable use, fruit orchards dominate the eastern corner of the area. However, other factors are consistent throughout the area, including the topography, infrequency of roads. Electricity pylons dominate the area and although there are few other detractors, the scale and frequency of the large pylons is a significant visual detractor within the landscape. Visual unity is interrupted.

The ecological integrity of the area is poor because of the dominance of arable land and limited amounts of hedgerow and woodland clumps. There are few heritage features visible within the landscape and the overall condition of the landscape is assessed as poor.

**Sensitivity: Moderate**

Distinct landscape elements comprise isolated buildings and farmsteads that contribute towards local distinctiveness through their traditional style and use of materials. Enclosure provided by ditch lines and remaining hedgerows provides historic features. However, many features and elements of the landscape are indistinct and recent, and overall there is a weak sense of place. The open character of the landscape and consequential high visibility across the character area provide a moderate level of sensitivity overall.

**Guidelines: Restore and Create**

Guidelines for the Istead Arable character area are to restore distinctive features and patterns of the landscape, whilst creating landscape elements that support the landscape character.

- Restore traditional field structure and enclosure with native hedgerows and boundary planting.
- Restore the landscape through the removal of detracting features, in particular seek opportunities to relocate electricity cables underground.
• Consider possible mitigation planting to limit visual impact of A2 and CTRL infrastructure.

• Create design standards in keeping with local character for new developments within the area.

• Create a positive edge to the urban area.

• Restore and create an access network linking urban areas with existing and proposed recreational opportunities including Jeskyns Farm and the wider landscape.
7. Gravesend Southern Fringe

Landscape Description

The Gravesend Southern Fringe is a linear character area that runs along the southern edge of Gravesend with an additional area that feeds into the urban edge and is encompassed by Gravesend suburbs. The majority of the character area is sandwiched between the urban edge and the realigned A2 trunk road and the Channel Tunnel Rail Link (CTRL).

Originally this area would have been part of the Istead Arable Farmlands, with the countryside abutting the southern edge of Gravesend and reaching in towards the town centre along the valley feature north of Tollgate. The location of the CTRL away from the urban edge and relocation of the A2 adjacent to it have cut off this area from its traditional context and, whilst sharing the physical characteristics of the countryside to the south, the influence of the urban edge and dominance of the infrastructure have been so great that it is appropriate to consider this as a separate character area.

The majority of the geology is made up of upper chalk and areas of Thanet beds at the edge. Soils are silty with areas of loam towards the north west of the character area. The landform is very gently undulating and generally rises from north to south. A distinct dry valley feature leads towards the town centre bringing the countryside into the urban area and creating an attractive approach to the town. From within the linear section of the character area there are extensive internal views running east and west. In addition there are extensive views looking out of the character area towards the countryside in the south and across Gravesend towards the River Thames to the north.

The A2 has recently been relocated adjacent to the north side of the CTRL and the old carriageways and some of the open space between the new A2 and the urban edge has been remodelled to create a new recreational landscape or linear park including a footway and cycleway running its entire length. Footpaths also cross the area linking the town to the countryside.

Key Characteristics

- Dominant settlement on urban edge of Gravesend
- Very gently undulating topography rising from north to south
- Small arable fields historically part of Istead Farmlands landscape
- Man made golf course landscape acts as visual detractor
- Limited tree cover mostly consisting of small clumps of non native tree material on golf course
- Wire Fence lines and gappy native hedgerows
- Landscape dominated by large roads, Channel Tunnel Rail Link and associated infrastructure
Where agricultural land remains it consists of arable and grazing farmland. The farmland is broken down into a series of small regular shaped fields, the shape of which has been dictated by the surrounding roads, railway lines and urban edge.

To the north of the former A2 corridor, the eastern side of the valley is dominated by a large golf course. There is limited tree cover within the area, mostly consisting of small clumps and individual species located on the golf course, most of which are non-native. Some roadside vegetation, mostly scrubby in nature, exists on the edge of the former A2 and around its junctions.

There is a limited element of enclosure provided by railings along Wrotham Road, along with less distinct wire fences, security fencing and native scrub, gappy native hedgerows and hedgerow trees.

Settlement is dominant, with the urban edge of Gravesend running the length of the northern boundary of the character area. Housing dates mostly from the 20th Century and includes terraces, semi detached and detached properties built at suburban density. Built form within the character area includes a golf club house and a traditional thatched roof cottage.

The approximate line of the former A2 marks the Roman Watling Street that linked London with the coast. The A2 is a major busy road that cuts across the length of the character area whilst the A227 acts as a busy connection between Gravesend and villages to the south. A network of smaller residential roads link into adjoining housing areas. The CTRL runs the length of the area’s southern boundary and includes various large items of related infrastructure. Several footpaths and public rights of way, including the Weald Way, run across the area from the urban edge, crossing the A2 and Rail Link and dispersing into the adjacent character area.

The area north of the former A2 is within the Thames Gateway, which brings pressures for development and recreation. The whole area is also identified as part of the Kent Thameside Green Grid. To the south of the former A2 the land is designated as Metropolitan Green Belt.

**Condition: Poor**

The landform is the strongest and most robust landscape feature, particularly the dry valley into Gravesend, providing a constant in this changing landscape. The field pattern and planting types are disjointed and contribute towards an incoherent pattern of elements. The area has many visual detractors including pylons, the A2, major road junctions and the CTRL and various items of infrastructure. The reinstatement of the former A2 to the landscape locally improves this area however the fragmentation and dominance of the infrastructure in the wider character area remains.

In the valley to the north of the former A2, the weak hedgerow structure and introduced elements on the golf course, including sand bunkers and non-native tree planting, act as visual detractors. The dissected nature of the landscape, vast areas of mown grass and ornamental and evergreen planting within the golf
club, accompanied by gappy hedgerows and a lack of native tree cover contribute to a weak ecological integrity. Major infrastructure also limits the ecological integrity of the area reducing its connectivity to the wider landscape. A lack of vernacular architecture and traditional landscape elements means that the cultural integrity of the area is incoherent. A weak functional integrity and lack of visual unity means that the overall condition of the landscape is assessed as being poor.

**Sensitivity: Moderate**
The majority of landscape elements including field layout, boundaries and planting are indistinct and recent, the character area has a very weak sense of place. The landscape elements are mostly dictated by road, CTRL or urban development.

The undulating topography and limited tree cover means there is high visibility within the character area.

The combination of high visibility and a weak sense of place mean that the sensitivity of the character area is assessed as being moderate.

**Guidelines: Restore and Create**
The Gravesend Southern Fringe is an area whose traditional agricultural origins are being eroded and fragmented. To ensure a positive use for this area for the future, the area needs to find a new function to meet the demands of the adjacent urban area and a buffer to the rural landscape south of the CTRL.

- Create a new landscape identity and function appropriate to its urban edge location and status as gateway to Gravesend and Kent Thameside.
- Restore the fragmented landscape, restoring and creating landscape structure in parcels of land cut off by the major transport routes.
- Consider ways to integrate new and existing development into the landscape using traditional landscape elements.
- Restore field structure within retained agricultural land through the use of native hedgerows and field boundary planting, thus creating links between natural habitats into developed areas.
- Improve design standards for new development within the area and consider ways to reduce impact of visual detractors and infrastructure.
- Manage access arrangements to balance the need for recreation whilst controlling unauthorised access and anti-social uses, and linking to wider access network.
8. Meopham Downs

Landscape Description

Meopham Downs is a large character area, stretching from the centre to the south of Gravesham Borough along the eastern edge of Sevenoaks District.

The majority of the geology comprises Upper Chalk and a wide band of Clay with Flint, stretching from north to south. An area of Blackheath / Oldhaven Beds sits beneath the large village of Meopham and an area of Claygate Beds sits west of the neighbouring village Meopham Green. Soils across the character area are silty, with loam to clay across high areas.

The topography is gently undulating with clear views across the immediate landscape and occasional wider views from the main road towards the residential settlements of Istead Rise and New Barn. The dominant land use is agricultural, with a mixture of grazed pasture and arable use. Small clumps of woodland, neglected orchards and commercial horticulture exist in parts. There is a presence of horse related activity scattered throughout the landscape.

Field shape and size differs, with a neat pattern of small square fields in the south and broader irregular shaped fields to the north. Field boundaries are distinctly formed by native hedgerows, with hedgerow trees.

The large village of Meopham is located to the north of the area, with Meopham Green located at the centre of the area and Culverstone Green to the far south. Traditional architecture surrounds village greens in both Meopham and Meopham Green, providing a strong sense of place and local vernacular. All three settlements comprise dense clusters of buildings that have formed along the A227 that runs from north to south and links all three villages. In addition the small recent settlement of South Street is located to the north-east.

Small traditional clusters of isolated farmsteads can be found to the east and west. Small traditional Victorian red brick architecture and elements of flint are common, reflecting their locality within the Kent landscape. Meopham Windmill, located along Wrotham Road, provides a unique and

Key Characteristics

- Gently undulating topography with a mixture of arable and pasture farmland
- Neat pattern of small square fields in the south
- Broader irregular shaped fields to the north
- Narrow lanes and roads lined with hedgerows
- Three large settlements located along A227 running east and west
- Traditional architecture surrounding village greens provide local vernacular
traditional attraction within the area. Overhead wires run across the landscape near the small settlement of Henley Street.

The A227 is the areas largest highway and acts as a busy link between the north and south. Narrower, winding, hedge lined roads and lanes run east and west from the A227 into the adjacent landscape.

**Condition: Good**

The pattern of landscape elements is coherent, with few visual detractors. Established hedgerows and small woodland clumps limit the visual impact of detractors. Hedgerows are native and in good condition, providing ecological corridors along field boundaries. Woodland clumps are mostly native and mature and vary in condition, whilst the remains of orchards are in poor condition. In general the ecological integrity of the area varies.

Both Meopham and Meopham Green have Conservation Areas at their centres with traditional buildings and village greens. In general the uses of the landscape are traditional, however the quality of the landscape and land development to the south is of a lower quality than that to the north. Taking into consideration the traditional architecture, land use, coherent pattern of elements and the lack of visual detractors the condition of the landscape can be assessed as being good.

**Sensitivity: Moderate**

The key characteristic elements of the landscape are distinct, providing coherency and a strong sense of place within the landscape. Although woodland is restricted to small woodland clumps, hedgerows that run along field boundaries are historic and distinct. Both the settlements of Meopham and Meopham Green have distinct traditional village centres. In addition, traditional vernacular architecture can be found scattered across the landscape. The other two remaining settlements have more recent architecture that is less in keeping with the local vernacular. Strength of character and visibility are moderate, providing a moderate sensitivity overall.

**Guidelines: Conserve and Reinforce**

The key landscape elements characteristic of the Meopham Downs should be conserved and reinforced.

- Conserve and reinforce the traditional landscape structure and where necessary introduce new elements they should respect and enhance the pattern.

- Conserve characteristic narrow winding lanes and dense native hedgerows.
- Conserve traditional character of built environment by drawing on traditional building materials and techniques for new development.

- Reinforce village identity, keeping villages distinct and separate from one another.

- Reinforce the enclosure of settlements within wooded areas.

- Conserve and reinforce broadleaf woodland cover and wooded edges to arable plateau.

- Encourage the use of local produce to support traditional land uses such as orchards.

- Explore new horticultural land uses.

- Conserve and reinforce agricultural land use.

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Gravesham Landscape Character Assessment and Guidelines
9. Luddesdown Downs

**Landscape Description**

Luddesdown Downs lies on the eastern boundary of Gravesham Borough, covering the settlements of Luddesdown and Lower Luddesdown. The area forms part of the North Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

The geology comprises Chalk with Flints to the south, with areas of Upper and Middle chalk flowing across the valley sides. Ribbons of Undivided Flood Plain Gravel follow the central lines of Middle Chalk. Soils across valley sides are silty, with loam to clay across higher areas and plateaus.

The topography is very undulating, with views along dry valleys and wider views out to the urban edge of Gravesend and large electricity pylons to the north from higher parts. The land is a mixture of grazed pasture and arable land. Field shape and size is varied because of the topography. Tree belts, native hedgerows with mature hedgerow trees form distinct boundaries. Woodland blocks add to the structure of the landscape, providing enclosure in parts and defining field edges. Woodland is generally native with some conifers in places.

The settlements of Luddesdown and Lower Luddesdown are situated within a valley and buildings are traditional, providing a strong sense of place and definite local vernacular. The settlements comprise few buildings, clustered around lane junctions. Development within the wider character area is sparse, with some properties and farmsteads scattered along the lanes. Timber framed buildings and Kent peg tiles are common, along with flint that reflects the geology of the Downs. Luddesdown Court is a notable Grade I building. Overhead wires cut across the landscape, following the line of Buckland Road in part.

Roads are narrow and winding and follow the contours of the downland landscape. Buckland Road runs through a valley known as the Bowling Alley. Footpaths are mostly concentrated around Luddesdown, with the Wealdway running north south linking Luddesdown with Great Buckland.

**Key Characteristics**

- Very undulating topography with farmland used as arable and pasture
- Irregular field pattern, with fields of various shapes and sizes
- Fields divided by native hedgerows
- Areas of native woodland
- Narrow winding lanes which follow contours
- Properties and farmsteads along lanes
- Small settlements within valleys
- Traditional timber framed buildings and Kent peg tiles

Gravesham Landscape Character Assessment and Guidelines
Condition: Good

The pattern of landscape elements is unified, with few visual detractors. Tree clumps and the undulating landform minimise views of the overhead wires. Overall, the visual unity is defined as strongly unified. Hedgerows form ecological corridors and are dense and complete along some boundaries and contain gaps along others. Native woodland is in good condition and the mixture of pasture and arable farmland increases ecological potential. Built development generally respects local vernacular and provides a distinct sense of place. There is strong ecological integrity and cultural integrity is traditional. The condition of the landscape is very good.

Sensitivity: High

This is a landscape that is likely to have remained largely unchanged in structure since medieval times. Settlements and buildings are generally traditional and distinct, providing coherency and a strong sense of place within the landscape. The landscape is recognised as an AONB. Hedgerows and woodlands are ancient and the lanes have derived from ancient routes. Landform is apparent and tree cover is open in places allowing high visibility along valleys. Therefore, the sensitivity of the landscape is assessed as very high.

Guidelines: Conserve

The distinctive features that make up the Luddesdown Downs should be conserved to protect and maintain its character and quality.

- Conserve and manage ancient characteristics including woodland blocks and hedgerows.
- Conserve mix of hedgerow species.
- Conserve and maintain characteristic narrow lanes.
- Assess development proposals within the area to maintain the character of sparse and distinctive built development.
- Conserve the isolation and small-scale farmsteads and hamlets.
- Encourage the use of vernacular materials and techniques for buildings and built elements, particularly the use of flint and Kent peg tiles.
10. Harvel Wooded Downs

Landscape Description
The Harvel Wooded Downs lie to the south of Gravesham Borough, encapsulating the historic settlement of Harvel and the more recent surrounding settlements.

The geology comprises Upper and Middle Chalk with deposits of Clay-with-Flints on the ridges and plateaux, and ribbons of Undivided Flood Plain Gravel following the central lines of the valley floor. Soils across valley sides are silty, with loam to clay across higher areas and plateaux.

The landform is characteristic of the North Downs dipslope featuring a series of dry valleys and ridges. Harvel, to the south, is situated on a higher and flatter plateau. Views both within and out of the character area are limited because of the combined effect of topography and the heavily wooded character of the landscape. Tree cover is dominant, with mostly chestnut coppice woodland creating a very enclosed landscape with limited views. There are also areas of ancient woodland, and some evergreen and ornamental garden planting is associated with settlements.

In the mid 20th Century the land to the north of Harvel was divided into a multitude of small plots that has resulted in sporadic and piecemeal development. These plots are enclosed by a variety of boundaries including fencing, hedgerows and other materials, or defined by clearings in the woodland to create a haphazard mosaic of small scale housing plots within the woodland. The style of properties is varied in terms of size, scale and style. Many plots accommodate derelict caravans adjacent to small brick bungalows. Security gates and fencing are dominant throughout the area. Many properties appear to have small adjoining paddocks accommodating a small amount of livestock and associated equipment.

Key Characteristics
- Varied topography with steep valley sides and plateaux
- Ancient woodland, chestnut coppice and small paddocks and pasture
- Traditional historic settlement of Harvel set around village green
- Occasional traditional farmsteads
- Haphazard mosaic of residential plots and small holdings set within the woodland
Occasional traditional farmsteads and the village of Harvel itself form a contrast in settlement character to the small plots within woodland. The historic settlement is set around a village green and properties are of a traditional style. Buildings provide strength of character through the use of locally distinct vernacular materials including flint and thatch.

There is a comprehensive network of winding, often sunken, narrow lanes throughout the area. Footpaths and byways run throughout the area, particularly to the west.

**Condition: Moderate**

The uncharacteristic and sporadic settlement of small plots within coppice woodland is a dominant element within the area creating an incoherent landscape. There are many visual detractors, including derelict buildings and caravans, overgrown gardens, poor fencing, disjointed fencing materials and fly tipping. The visual unity is significantly interrupted, although the wooded nature of the area conceals much of the visual clutter from wider views.

Ecological integrity is strong, with areas of woodland and overgrown gardens and boundary planting. Cultural integrity is assessed as modified, with some more traditional properties scattered within more recent dwellings. The traditional settlement of Harvel contrasts with the more recent housing plots within the surrounding area. Functional integrity is strong and the overall landscape condition is therefore moderate.

**Sensitivity: Moderate**

There are several contrasts in distinctiveness throughout the area. Away from the plot lands the woodland, narrow lanes, traditional settlements and farmsteads are very distinct and contribute towards a strong sense of place. However, in contrast, the more recent plots and buildings are indistinct and enclosed by mismatched fencing or suburbanised walls, gates and railings. Some of these incongruous elements are also replacing more traditional features through the modernisation of vernacular buildings. There is a distinct sense of place and continuity is historic. Overall the sensitivity of the traditional elements is assessed as being moderate.
The combination of vegetation and topography create a very enclosed landscape of low visually sensitivity with a high capacity for the landscape to absorb inconsistencies within its woodland, and the existing variety in styles and materials. Awareness of the undulating landform is reduced as a result of the high proportion of woodland cover. Balancing the effects of these contrasting elements means that the Harvel Wooded Downs are assessed as moderately sensitive overall.

**Guidelines: Conserve and Create**

The strong landscape elements within the Harvel Wooded Downs should be conserved, whilst design standards should be defined to halt the erosion of the area with inappropriate development.

- Conserve and manage woodland.
- Conserve and maintain characteristic narrow lanes.
- Conserve and maintain traditional and distinct buildings, materials and elements.
- Assess development proposals throughout the area to modify variety in building styles and materials.
- Create design standards for new developments in the area.
- Resist proposals that introduce inappropriate designs and materials.
- Improve and soften new development using characteristic landscape elements such as woodland blocks and hedgerows.
- Conserve enclosure of settlements within wooded areas.
- Conserve wooded edges to arable plateau.

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**Sensitivity**

Gravesham Landscape Character Assessment and Guidelines
11. Vigo Scarptop Woodlands

Landscape Description
The Vigo Scarptop Woodlands are located to the south of the Meopham Downs, Culverstone Valley and Luddesdown Downs Character Areas and sit on the boundary between the Boroughs of Gravesham and Tonbridge and Malling.

The geology is Upper Chalk, overlain with Clay with Flints throughout the majority of the area with the exception of a small area near the Daniel Chambers Woods to the north east of the character area. The resulting soils are silty to clay across the majority of the area.

The area sits at the top of the North Downs scarp, which is located to the south of the area outside of Gravesham Borough. The landform is fairly level across the character area. Views within the area are largely limited by a dense covering of established native coppice woodland, and a complex network of houses which sit within the woodland to the north-west. Some views into clearings of arable land within the neighbouring Culverstone Valley and Meopham Valley are possible from the northern fringes of the character area.

There is a definite divide between the residential area which runs along the north-west to north-east, and the woodland which runs from the south-west to the east. A collection of sports fields is located to the north that forms the largest open space within the area.

To the north-west of the area the established settlement of Vigo dominates the land use that consists of recent housing of a uniform character. Its residential buildings are mostly brick fronted two storey properties with white boarded fronts and are uncharacteristic of more traditional architecture found within other villages within the Borough. A small village centre exists with a limited collection of local amenities.

Few roads cross the area with uninterrupted woodland to the east, whilst a complex network of quiet suburban scale roads and cul-de-sacs form the basis of the residential area to the north west. Harvel Road runs across the north of the area and is busier but yet feels more rural in character. Several footpaths and roads used as public paths cross the woodland;

Key Characteristics
- Relatively level topography across character area
- Large areas of uninterrupted dense native coppice woodland
- Complex network of uniform housing located within woodland to north west
- Built form uncharacteristic of local traditional architecture
- Non native species intermixed with woodland throughout residential area
- Limited views due to dense housing and woodland
some of which provide access to Trosley Country Park and the Pilgrims Way, which are located in Medway to the south outside of the character area.

The area forms part of the North Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

**Condition: Moderate**

There is a coherent level of visual unity within the character area. The topography across the area is consistent and there are some visual detractors including a water tower, areas of fly tipping and other detractors commonly associated with the residential area. The visual appearance and special layout of the residential streets and cul-de-sacs throughout the area are very similar.

The ecological integrity within the area is variable. The condition of the woodland ranges from being well managed, with evidence of management currently being undertaken, to areas showing signs of neglect. Areas of ornamental planting are present within the residential areas and large clumps of non-native species including Rhododendron exist throughout much of the woodland, all of which are of little ecological value. The majority of land uses found such as the residential areas are a modification of traditional land uses. Overall the condition of the area can be assessed as being moderate.

**Sensitivity: Low**

Buildings are mostly recent brick fronted two story properties with white boarded fronts and are uncharacteristic of more traditional architecture found within other villages in the Borough. The large clumps of established woodland that continue from the surrounding woodland throughout the residential area create a strong contrast providing a distinctive character. The coppice woodland that traditionally covered much of the Kent landscape has historic value, much of it is ancient woodland. The combined effect of the very distinct and historic woodlands and the recent, indistinct buildings gives a moderate sense of place overall.

Visibility within the area is very low because of the close nature of the built development and the dense nature of the native coppice woodland. Overall the sensitivity of the landscape is assessed as being low due to the degree of enclosure.
Guidelines: Create and Reinforce

The quality of the landscape within the Vigo Character Area should be improved and existing strong landscape elements should be reinforced.

- Resist planting further non native plant species.
- Conserve and manage coppice woodland.
- Consider reviewing coppice management programme to allow for greater ecological integrity.

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Gravesham Landscape Character Assessment and Guidelines
Landscape Character Generic Guidance

This section provides, firstly, a summary of the overall landscape type of each of the identified character areas, together with its overall condition, sensitivity and guidelines. Secondly, generic landscape issues are identified across each broad landscape types found in the Borough, and, lastly, broad guidelines are provided that should be applied to types of development. Each should be read in conjunction with the guidelines for the character area concerned.

Summary of Landscape Character

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Landscape Guidelines Map

Gravesend Landscape Character Assessment and Guidelines
Generic Issues
The assessment identifies some common issues across the landscape character areas. These are summarised below and, where appropriate guidelines are provided.

Marshland Landscapes
Forming part of the Greater Thames Estuary, the marshes to the north of the Borough consist of grazing marsh segregated by a network of ditches and waterways. There is very little development and no roads. Access is based on footpaths and tracks that are raised on flood defences and counterwalls. The marshes support a limited variety of vegetation, with areas of scrub and reeds along waterways. As well as the lack of vegetation and very few trees, the marshes are characterised by the flat topography and extensive views across the River Thames. Flood defence strategies for the River Thames are likely to be the major issue that could affect the future management of the marshlands.

Guidelines:
• Appropriate proposals that balance the need for effective Thames flood defence mechanisms and enable the management of grazing marsh to maximise both landscape and biodiversity benefits should be supported.
• Conserve and enhance the historic character of areas of traditional grazing/saltmarsh and their distinctive network of ditches (inc. riparian vegetation) and other characteristic features such as flood defences, counterwalls, and drove tracks. Arable land reversion should be avoided and opportunities taken to revert remaining pockets of arable land to grazing marsh.
• Encourage the retention and reinstatement of traditional timber wing fencing and gates, together with smaller sporadic features like sheepfolds/washes, footbridges etc.
• The open character of most marshland landscapes accentuates the visual impact of many proposals over a wide distance as compared with more enclosed landscape types. Avoid proposals that can result in the interruption of views of large open skies or horizons, or impinge on the undeveloped quality of marshland.
• Where the urban fringe has significantly reduced the quality and rural character of these areas, the landscape would benefit from screening using appropriate wetland species (i.e. reeds) on adjacent non-marshland areas. Where appropriate, use ditches and earth banks to mimic characteristic flood banks.

Arable Landscapes
Forming part of the North Kent Plain and lying upon the fine loam soils found between the London Clay underlying the Greater Thames Estuary to the north and the North Downs chalk to the south, these areas are amongst some of the most productive agricultural areas in Kent. Large areas are used for arable crops, with occasional shelterbelts or hedgerow lanes as a sign of former land uses as orchards or hop gardens. Trees are rarities here and the small clumps that do exist help to mark the location of isolated churches and farmsteads. Many public footpaths cross the agricultural landscape and form important links between urban and rural areas, and woodlands and marshlands. Pylons and infrastructure are highly visible in these open landscapes.

Guidelines:
• In order to maintain the traditional fabric of these areas in continued agricultural use, appropriate proposals to encourage these activities should be supported.
• To maintain the economic viability of this pivotal land use, fragmentation of landholdings should be avoided as far as possible.
• These farmland landscapes are generally in moderate or poor condition where the arable landscape dominates. Opportunities should be sought to enhance natural features such as the enclosure pattern to improve landscape structure.
• Opportunities should be sought to improve access networks through the arable landscape recognising the vital role they play in linking urban areas to the countryside.

• Where open field patterns exist, the built environment is more obvious, particularly at the urban fringe. Care should be taken in the planning and design of proposals both on the urban edge, within rural villages and the wider character areas. These include the enhancement of the landscape through the application of appropriate design through the planning process and land management initiatives.

• Opportunities to relocate cables underground and reduce the impact of pylons on the landscape should be supported.

Dry Valleys and Downs

The North Downs escarpment runs to the south of the Borough. Within the Borough, the broad dip slope gradually drops towards the Thames. The feature that gives unity to the character of the North Downs landscape is the strong chalk topography and the rolling downland. This strong landform is emphasised further by the pattern of woods and interlocking hedgerows. Land use is dominated by traditional downland grazing. It is a rural landscape with scattered flint-walled houses and farmsteads. Settlements are mainly traditional villages, comprising clusters of dwellings often located within valleys.

Guidelines:

• Many of these landscapes contain a rich diversity of valuable habitats contributing to biodiversity, including, coppice and mixed native woodlands and chalk grassland that should be conserved and enhanced.

• Dry valleys are distinct features of the natural landscape that should be conserved. The steep valley sides and numerous woodland blocks create a landscape of enclosure.

• The nature of traditional settlements and farmsteads located within valleys should be maintained and expansion of these villages should be avoided.

Trees and Woodland

Trees and woodland can be found throughout the Borough, ranging from downland woodland on the chalky dipslopes and valley sides to those on the more acidic and heavier soils. Elsewhere large veteran trees stand in historic parkland, such as around Cobham. The repeated felling and re-growth of the coppice cycle has characterised some woodlands for centuries and are strongly representative of cultural and economic activity.

Guidelines:

• Support appropriate proposals that enable the conservation of landscape character to continue through diverse woodland/forestry management practice.

• Important woodland and trees within the landscape, especially ancient semi-natural woodland should be protected, appropriately managed and, where possible, expanded and enhanced. Veteran trees should be protected and appropriately managed.

• At planted ancient woodland sites, explore opportunities to plant appropriate native trees and shrubs as continuous cover to enable pockets of ancient woodland species to spread and flourish. Where appropriate, replace coniferous plantation with native deciduous trees.

• Create ecological networks by linking isolated woodlands.

• New woodland planting should be targeted in areas where there are high concentrations of ancient woodland and designed to buffer and extend these habitats.
Urban Fringe

Urban fringe influence is particular dominant in the north of the Borough. Pressure on the surrounding countryside is heightened by the Thames Gateway status of the area. Changes to the infrastructure and the use of the landscape, fragmentation in addition to the impact and demand on the surrounding rural landscape for access and recreation are changing the traditional function of these landscapes.

Guidelines:

- Where traditional land uses are no longer appropriate create a new function, structure and identity to landscapes appropriate to their urban edge location and Thames Gateway status.
- Ensure Green Grid principles are embodied in new proposals for these areas.
- Manage access arrangements to balance the need for recreation (including walking, cycling, equestrian), whilst controlling anti-social uses and unauthorised access (including fly tipping).
- Ensure that new development on the urban edge is sensitive to its location adjacent to the rural landscape and creates a positive edge to the built up area.

Buildings and settlements

Many villages of great charm and antiquity exist throughout the Borough. Their conservation is central to overall landscape character. Uncharacteristic built elements in the landscape, particularly in the plot lands, are having a suburbanising effect on traditional rural character. This has the effect of eroding landscape character by degrees and is often beyond control of planning authority.

Guidelines:

- Ensure that proposals respect (but do not extend) the clustered character of settlements and avoid the creation, expansion, or consolidation of more scattered farmsteads and cottages.
- Building materials, layout and style should reflect the local vernacular character as appropriate. Landscape proposals should also reflect local character, using appropriate form, structure and species.

Landmark Buildings and Features

Across the Borough are a large number of buildings and features that have become part of the landscape, frequently occupying isolated, elevated, or open aspects in the landscape. They may be reference points of past activities that remain only in fragmented pockets of the modern landscape. Examples include isolated churches, oast cowls, windmills and perhaps isolated farmsteads. Other landmark features include the memorials, former Thameside defences and built elements associated with historic parklands such as at Cobham Hall.

Guidelines:

- Conserve and enhance landmark buildings and features, together with their setting and views and restore the visual and if possible, the historic integrity in the landscape.
- Conserve and restore features associated with historic parklands, including estate buildings such as lodges, memorials, follies and fencing.
Generic Guidelines for development types

All development

- Should submit a site landscape assessment or statement, depending upon the size and type of development. These should provide an analysis of the site and its context and demonstrate how development has responded to the Gravesham Landscape Character Assessment.

- Should relate to settlement pattern – i.e. linear, clustered etc. Consider plot size and shape and the relationship of the buildings within the plot and to each other. Small-scale proposals are more likely to be sympathetic to landscape character.

- Landscapes that have a strong established landscape structure (e.g. field patterns with natural boundaries such as hedges, woodlands, shelterbelts, ditches etc) with a diverse mix of uses should, as a general rule, better accommodate change than simple landscapes with an open structure. Look for targeted opportunities to enclose most landscape types (i.e. create new natural connecting landscape structure), whilst avoiding the opening up of enclosed landscapes.

- Respect local vernacular and distinctiveness when considering massing, form, height, detail, colour and texture, blending innovation with tradition. Use materials in their traditional manner e.g. avoiding prefabricated flint panels.

- Minimise the number of new vehicular accesses and use minimum acceptable width. Access tracks/roads should relate to landform and field patterns, with materials appropriate to the locality.

- The re-use of, or grouping of buildings, is likely to have the least impact on the landscape, as opposed to the isolated positioning of buildings in exposed or prominent locations such as ridgelines or hilltops. Avoid: straight lines or regimented buildings on the settlement edge; extending the linear form of settlements; the creation, expansion, or consolidation of more scattered farmsteads and cottages.

- Protect settlement setting, important views and spaces and avoid intrusion onto ridgelines, prominent slopes, hillsides and tops, open fields and valley sides and bottoms.

- Avoid proposals that would impinge on the sense of undeveloped openness between settlements vulnerable to coalescence.

- Retain key landscape features – e.g. woodland, shaws, hedgerows, orchards, trees, watercourses and ponds. Where possible, extend and buffer key habitats from new developments and intensive agricultural practices.

Residential

- Generally avoid close board fencing or other suburban features such as walls, gates, lighting, bollards, block paving, concrete kerbs and ornamental planting. Provide the minimum acceptable width access and use timber gates, with a minimal driveway of (normally) bound gravel. Retain vegetation and make use of grass, hedgerow planting and existing natural features.

- Limit domestic curtilage extensions where settlements depend upon the surrounding field pattern, landscape form, cover, or boundary treatment, for their distinctiveness. Where extended, look for opportunities to re-instate traditional landscape features e.g. hedges and avoid over-suburbanising the garden with ornamental plants and structures.

Commercial (including Agriculture, Equine, Tourism and Leisure)

- Avoid the use of chainlink, weldmesh, close board and other fencing and gates associated with urban industrial sites.
• Use neutral colours for buildings and limit open storage and lighting. Creative use of colour can be used to reduce the apparent scale of larger commercial buildings.

• For new stables (including non-commercial) and ménages/exercise areas, re-use or locate buildings as part of existing building group or in field corners and avoid the proliferation of buildings and other structures. Use natural folds in the landscape, existing vegetation, or copses. Use dark matt colours for stables and surfaces or (preferably) local materials. Black weatherboarding should be used in historic landscapes, historic groups of buildings or on traditionally designed ‘barns’. Avoid overgrazing and excessive field sub-division with post and rail fencing/wire/white tape. Look for opportunities to plant hedgerows around and between the fragmented fields (including replacing evergreen belts) and to replace/supplement fencing with hedging.

• Golf course design should work with existing landscape form and pattern, avoiding hilltops, hill and valley sides. Look for opportunities to naturalise their appearance by use of traditional landscape elements such as hedgerows, shelterbelts, shaws, woodland and large areas of rough grassland. Consider the colours and textures of grass seeding. Reintroduce native planting in intensively farmed areas. Consider English Heritage guidance on golf in historic landscapes. Avoid floodlighting.

Infrastructure

• New roads often contrast with landscape pattern so design and landscaping should integrate the road with the surrounding landscape and extend beyond the road corridor.

• For highway works and management, conserve hedges, grass verges/banks, trees, walls, bridges and roadside features like finger posts or milestones, whilst avoiding concrete kerbing, standardised ‘features’, excessive sight-lines and lighting, especially between settlements. Make restrained use of coloured surfaces and road markings.

• For masts, avoid breaking open skylines or intruding into sensitive views. Site on lower slopes against a backdrop of trees.

• With the exception of marshland, flatter large-scale landscapes can generally better accommodate overhead cabling where associated with existing structures. Often, the use of underground cabling will be the most appropriate.
Summary and Conclusion

The landscape assessment has been undertaken based on the methodology promoted by the Countryside Agency through their Countryside Character Programme and Landscape Assessment Guidance 2002. In addition to the characterisation of the landscape, judgements have been made on its condition and sensitivity to generate guidance to assist Gravesham Borough Council in targeting resources and actions to those areas with greatest need.

The landscape assessment has identified eleven landscape character areas across the Borough. Each of these areas has physical and cultural characteristics that are distinct and identifiable from the others. Some of the changes between the character areas are not immediately apparent until they are broken down to their basic landscape components. The transition between the areas on the ground may be quite gradual in some places but the essential characteristics are quite distinct from each other. Some character areas appear to change quite dramatically within themselves. These changes may be due to either very local variations or more typically due to changes in condition or land management.

The assessment of landscape character shows Gravesham Borough as having a diverse landscape ranging from low lying marshes in the north, to higher, undulating, chalk downland in the south with a more wooded character. Within these landscapes are many attractive villages with traditional, vernacular, historic buildings that complement the natural environment and reflect its historic past.

Many farming landscapes are under pressure due to intensification of arable cultivation. However, there are still areas of landscape with a well-developed traditional patchwork of hedgerow enclosure and woodlands. Such elements of the landscape should be conserved, whilst there are opportunities to restore landscape structure in other areas through the actions of landowners or developers, as part of agri-environmental schemes, or through the actions of conservation organisations.

Landscape character is not static. In Gravesham Borough these changes can be seen on the ground particularly to the south of the town where new infrastructure and recreational venues are currently under construction. Pressures for changes that evolve from the expansion of urban areas and road networks are heightened here due to the Thames Gateway status, and whilst a substantial portion of the Borough lies outside of the designated area, the pressures and demands on the surrounding countryside are evident. Construction activity, commercial urban fringe developments, large pylons and fly tipping provide visual detraction throughout the area and erode rural amenity.

There is a need for a clear and co-ordinated plan to look at the pressures and opportunities on the rural landscape, in particular balancing the need for access and recreation within a viable agricultural landscape. It is hoped that this document and its guidance will assist that process.
Glossary of Terms

AOD
Above Ordnance Datum. Mean sea level is calculated from observation taken at Newlyn, Cornwall and used as the official basis for height calculation on British maps.

Character
A distinct, recognisable and consistent pattern of elements in the landscape that makes one landscape different from another, rather than better or worse.

Characteristics
Elements, or combinations of elements, which make a particular contribution to distinctive character.

Elements
Individual components that make up the landscape, such as trees and hedges.

Features
Particularly prominent or eye catching elements, like tree clumps, church towers, or wooded skylines.

Characterisation
The process of identifying areas of similar character, classifying and mapping them and describing their character.

Condition
The assessment of condition evaluates the pattern of the landscape and the presence of incongruous features on the unity of the landscape. It also evaluates how well the landscape functions as a habitat for flora and fauna and the condition of cultural or ‘man-made’ elements such as enclosure, built elements and roads.

Sensitivity
This is a measure of the ability of a landscape to accept change without causing irreparable damage to the essential fabric and distinctiveness of that landscape. The term change refers to both beneficial changes such as a new woodland as well as change that may be brought about by new land uses. Landscape assessment considers sensitivity on an area’s sense of place and its visibility.

Sense of Place
Sense of place is the term used to describe the individuality and distinctiveness of a particular place or area. It is about the common identity and perception of a particular place to groups or individuals.

Continuity
Continuity reflects how long that landscape has taken to establish. Ancient landscapes are uncommon in Kent but include those that have had very little intervention by man or contain ancient or prehistoric features. Historic landscapes are generally from the medieval period onwards. This is when the pattern of most landscapes in Kent was established and is generally discernible today (although overlain with modern features). Recent landscapes are those where historic elements have been replaced with new elements or land management. They include reclaimed landscapes.

Guidelines
These actions should be applied to each character area to ensure that its unique character is maintained. Often more than one option may be the appropriate solution to achieving the ultimate objective. For example a degraded urban edge where the landscape objective is identified as create, the improvement could be through the creation of new woodland to screen the poor edge or to create a new urban edge through appropriate development. As most landscape character areas experience local variations in their condition and sensitivity, many of the policy objectives will involve a combination of the objectives.
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