

Ashford Local Development Framework Landscape Character Study

for Ashford Borough Council & English Partnerships

SUMMARY REPORT

November 2005

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Landscape Character Study

Landscape character overview & assessment summary report

for Ashford Borough Council & English Partnerships



November 2005

122/doc/014

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Executive Summary

Studio Engleback was commissioned by English Partnerships and Ashford Borough Council in August 2004 to produce a Landscape Character Assessment of the hinterland of Ashford town. The overall aim was to inform the Local Development Framework (LDF), but the immediate aim was to feed into the Greater Ashford Development Framework (GADF) which is a part of the LDF.

Studio Engleback lead the Environment and Sustainability Workstream for the GADF which started in February 2004, but the scope of that work was not large enough to cover a true landscape character study. An outline review of the surrounding countryside was made along with the assessment of environmental constraints and these guided the GADF zoning of potential expansion areas.

The need for a character study was raised at an early stage and discussions about what form this might take had started in June 2004. As a consequence of time scale and funding the Ashford Landscape Character study was split into two.

Phase 1 considered the landscape in, and for a 1 km hinterland around, the preferred GADF expansion zones. Since the landscape character study was started six months before the GADF final report was submitted, some essential findings were taken on board the GADF and the Strategic Design Codes studio engleback wrote for this. This was important as the work involved getting to know the whole area almost field by field providing a considerable insight into the whole area.

Phase 2 was planned from the start to fill in the gaps around the town where no development was envisaged, and to expand the field work for parcels of land that had been trimmed by the 1 km zoning for Phase 1. The field work was prepared in June 2005 and carried out between July and October 2005. Phase 2 also included the assessment for all the areas reported on in both phases of the work.

In Phase 1, the study centred around each of the proposed expansion areas. The submission comprised nine illustrated reports, which are not completely superseded by the new set insofar as they presented the data in a form directly relevant to the GADF. Following a brief introduction to the aims and methodology of the study, the Phase 1 reports provided an overview to the Kentish landscape context and the palette of landscape components existing in the countryside around Ashford. The majority of these reports focused on the key landscape elements unique to each of the six proposed extension zones: Cheeseman's Green, Sevington, Kingsnorth, Kennington, Sandyhurst and Chilmington.

This Summary Report is one of fifteen reports and should be read in conjunction with the other fourteen. These reports present the findings of both Phase 1 and Phase 2 of the study. The original scoping and methodology report and background report have been revised. The data reports have been reorganised to reflect the County Landscape Character Report published in 2004. As large parts of twelve County Landscape Areas fall with the Ashford study zone of some 100 square kilometres, there are twelve reports.

The study divided the areas into about 250 parcels of land called Landscape Description Units (LDUs). These were based on the Historic Landscape Characterisation Study of Kent published by KCC in 2001. We have grouped these areas into 58 larger units we have termed District Landscape Types based on similarity, for the assessment. Assessments were carried out by a collegium of 4 senior landscape architects and an ecologist in the field over a four day period, and checked by the same team a few days later in the studio. The findings were then checked again against the field sheets for each of the component LDUs.

A summary of each of the twelve County Landscape Areas falling within this study area is contained in this report. A more detailed assessment of the component District Landscape Types that comprise the County Areas and the data for LDUs that make up each District types is contained in twelve supplementary reports.

The assessments for each District Landscape Type were subjective based on the assessors knowledge of the area and issues, but a series of criteria were used to guide these deliberations. These criteria included: visual unity, ecological integrity, condition of heritage features (e.g. hedges) and impact of built development. The Condition and Sensitivity matrix or nine outcomes used in the County Assessment was then used. The highest score would be a straight 'conserve', the lowest would be 'create' and in between, depending on existing condition and our view on the sensitivity of the area, were a variety of outcomes such as 'restore' or 'reinforce' and mixed areas of 'restore and create' or 'conserve and reinforce'. Not surprisingly the general trend of assessments was broadly similar to the county assessment, but because those assessments were for larger areas other factors may have come into play for the final scores. In breaking down the areas to DLTs a much finer grain of assessment could be given.

Running concurrently with this was our search for landscape signatures as away of expressing the diversity, often very subtle, of the surrounding landscape. The context section of this report shows layers of landscape issues grouped into physical, landscape character and changes. These need to be read in conjunction with the assessments.

The complete set of reports are:

122/doc/012 Scoping and Methodology

122/doc/013 Background

122/doc/014 Summary Report

122/doc/015 Hollingbourne Vale

122/doc/016 Stour Gap

122/doc/017 Stour Valley

122/doc/018 Brabourne Vale

122/doc/019 Brabourne Lees Mixed Farmlands

122/doc/020 Mersham Farmlands

122/doc/021 Upper Stour Valley

122/doc/022 Aldington Ridge

122/doc/023 Old Saxon Wooded Farmlands

122/doc/024 Bethesden Farmlands

122/doc/025 Biddenden & High Halden Wooded farmlands

122/doc/026 Hothfield Heathy Farmlands

A read only pdf CD of these reports and the photographs taken in each area is located in the rear of this report.

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Section 1 Introduction

Introduction

Ashford has a subtly varied hinterland. This is because in the first instance, within an approximate 3 kilometre zone around the town, there are bands of 4 different underlying strata – Chalk, Gault Clay, Greensand, and Wealden Clay. Overlaying this is a greater patterning of soils, in part due to the network of rivers which converge on the town and then pass through it to the north. Landuse, settlement and land husbandry has its roots in the Saxon era, and this ancient influence on the modern landscape is still apparent. 14 County Landscape Character Types identified in the KCC/Babtie study for the whole county are found within our study area. We have simplified this down to twelve areas since only small areas of two county areas fell within our area of study. We broke down the study area of some 100 square kilometres into 216 Landscape Description Units plus settlements which were based on the distribution of Historic Landscape Character Types. A team of two surveyors visited each site, in line with Countryside Agency guidelines, to photograph it from various points and to record key issues. These issues included topography, enclosure, landuse, integrity, vegetation cover and composition features and detractors etc.

In a first round of evaluation, we grouped similar Landscape Description Units together to form what we have termed District Landscape Types of which there are 46, plus 12 larger settlements. It is these District Landscape Character Types that have been evaluated with regard to their sensitivity to development.

These District Landscape Character Types are in keeping with the scale of land parcel used for similar evaluation in other studies in the county. The reason that smaller landscape description units were considered for this study is partly in deference to the historic nature of the local landscape, and partly because there is a need for a finer grain of study due to the expansion of the town by 31000 homes over the next 30 years and the very considerable land take that development, and the green infrastructure that supports it will take.

There is a great desire in the Greater Ashford Development Framework to understand the local environment from a variety of perspectives which include Landscape Character, Cultural Heritage, Integrated Water Management, and Biodiversity. These key issues overlap and interact to provide very special combinations that lend a place a special distinctiveness. This distinctiveness need not be dramatic, and sometimes it depends on the speed at which it is perceived to be fully appreciated.

The idea that Ashford will grow to such an extent can seem daunting, especially as development in the town over the last 40 years has been significant, and has not always been very well considered. During this same timescale, however, the wider landscape around the town has also changed very considerably. It is often easy to forget that the landscape is a dynamic entity and never stays still, although management of it can arrest some change, and create certain qualities.

The key changes in the landscape around Ashford have included:

- national infrastructure: the M20 and CTRL corridors
- the loss of elm trees due to Dutch Elm Disease in the 1960s and 70s
- changes in agricultural subsidy leading to larger fields, often drained to raise arable crops rather than to support pastureland, and the loss of special 'kentish' crops such as orchards and hop gardens.

The key results has been a significant coarsening of the grain of certain landscapes, particularly along the greensand and river valleys. Within the study area these key elements have been lost, some areas being more badly affected than others:

- many kilometres of hedges have been removed
- ponds have been filled in, ditches lost with hedges
- woodlands and orchards lost

In many ways the loss of hedgerows has had a significant effect, because these supported hedgerow trees which, seen in close proximity, provide a wooded quality to the landscape. This was compounded by the loss of large Elm trees. We have not been able to trace any records of losses, but since elm lives on in hedges, we have a fair idea of the coverage of elm within the study area and apart from woodlands where elm was never present, it was widespread in the farmed landscape.

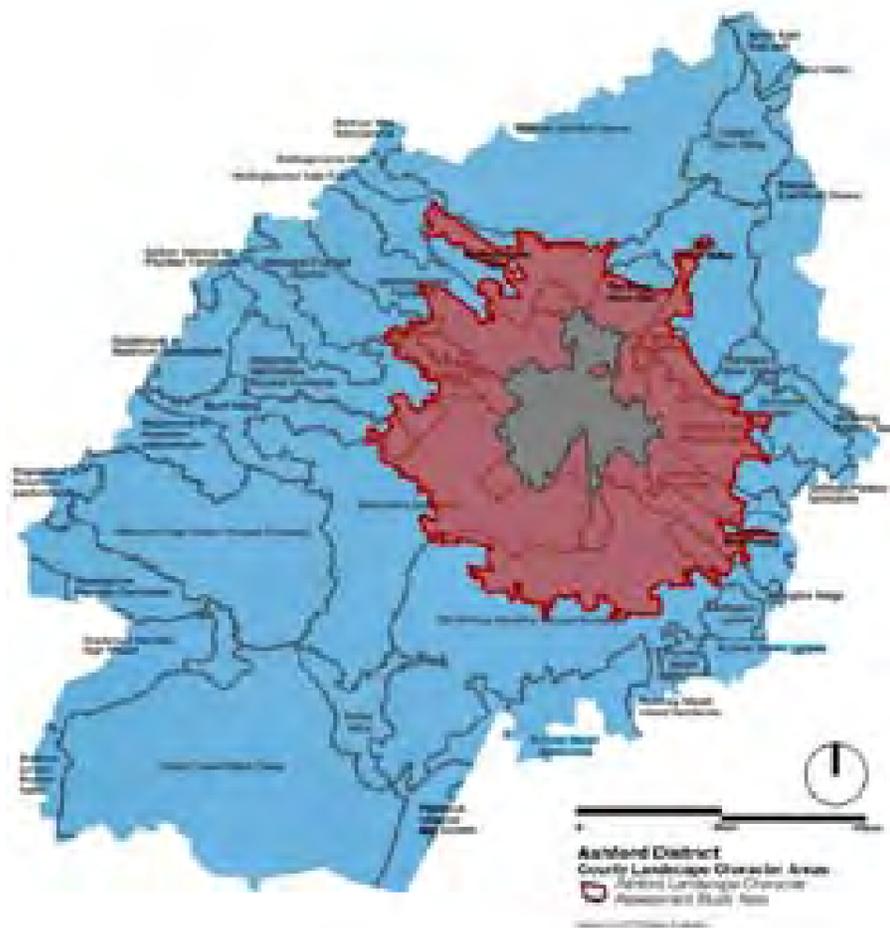
Through the identification of Local Landscape Character, and a better understanding of local processes, cultural and natural, these resources that such a close study occasions, we believe it is possible to impart particular local character to different quarters of the town through a multi-functional green network that reaches out to the surrounding landscape. These can be termed 'Blue' and 'Green' networks as a response to local hydrology and the need to consider sustainable drainage and waste water options, as well as green space. The green component may be transport corridors for pedestrians and cyclists as well as vehicles that connect urban and rural spaces. It may also encompass green infrastructure such as floodplains, biomass production as annual crops or as forestry which might be termed the 'yellow' network.

The 'yellow' network may be associated with energy and waste. For example energy conservation through shelter planting and energy production using biomass, heat pumps in green areas, or even solar collectors and macro and micro-wind turbines. This could give rise to a local energy network as seen in Wokingham. There would be impacts on the landscape character both positive and potentially negative, but also an overall benefit to the environment through reduction of carbon emissions. This could be a demonstration how conservation of viable landscapes respecting local landscape signatures can also meet the green agenda of this century. We call this approach 'ecourbanism' a holistic view to town and the countryside surrounding it.

This study is aimed at informing the Local Development Framework, of which the Greater Ashford Development Framework forms a significant part. It also needs to be read in conjunction with related studies which have been carried out such as the Strategic Environmental Assessment for the GADF, The Integrated Water management Study for Ashford, The Accessible Natural Greenspace Standards (ANGSt) study, The Ashford Green Corridors, and relevant portions of the Kent Biodiversity and Habitat Action Plans (Kent BAP and Kent HAP, Kent Habitats Survey, Kent Lifescape Study (K-LIS) and others.

The natural extension of this study would be in developing a green strategy for the town and its immediate hinterland to realise the intention in the aforementioned reports as well as aims set out in the English Nature document on Multifunctional Greenspaces in and around towns and cities and the Countryside Agency's report "Unlocking the potential of the rural urban fringe". It is essential that proposals for this 'Green Infrastructure', that will be delivering a series of 'Green Services' will be rooted in a deep understanding of the local condition and its variety of Landscape Characters.

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Study Area within Ashford District



Study Area Fieldwork Sectors



The Ashford Character Study Area

Black line shows Kent County Landscape Character Areas
Red fine lines show Historic Landscape Character Parcels used as a basis for the Landscape Description Units (LDUs) in this study
White lines show District Areas as defined in the assessment

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Section 2 Landscape Context

Landscape context

A Landscape of Layers:

General

The current landscape is a tapestry of interweaving threads which together provide the landscape character. There are physical issues historic depth of remaining features which lead to landscape characteristics, and features that have been lost over the past century that have often meant that the grain and detail of the landscape have been lost. Landscape character is not just about the aesthetic of the rural scene, but the ramifications this may have on the function and processes in the landscape. This is a complex issue that we feel is better illustrated by looking at individual and interrelated attributes or characteristics in this context section. These are summarised opposite in what we have termed *a landscape of layers*. Although all these layers (which are representative rather than exhaustive in showing issues) are cross cutting and inform each other we have divided them into to three sets of relating issues:

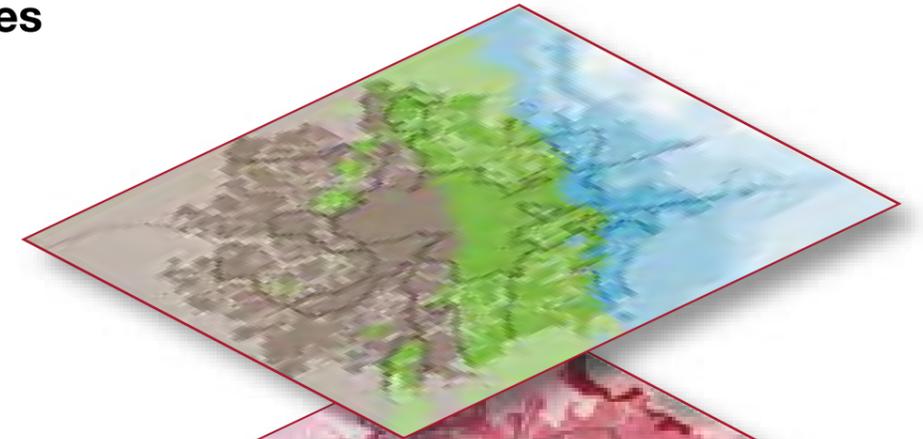
- Physical Attributes,
- Landscape Characteristics,
- Landscape Changes.

Additional plans in this section include the County Landscape Strategy and the Kent Lifescape Study (K-LIS). The former addresses issues of conservation, reinforcement or renewal of the landscape that were the outcome of the County Landscape Character Assessment. The K-LIS study combined data from the Country Habitat Survey, Topography and Geology/Soils data to suggest where particular habitats might be extended or re-created.

Each plan is shown in the following pages accompanied by observations. For this summary report we show the whole study area and make observations at that level. In the set of accompanying data reports that cover each county landscape area within the study area we zoom into the context plans to consider a finer level of detail.

Physical Attributes

Geology



Topography



Drainage



Habitats



Natural Areas



Landscape Characteristics

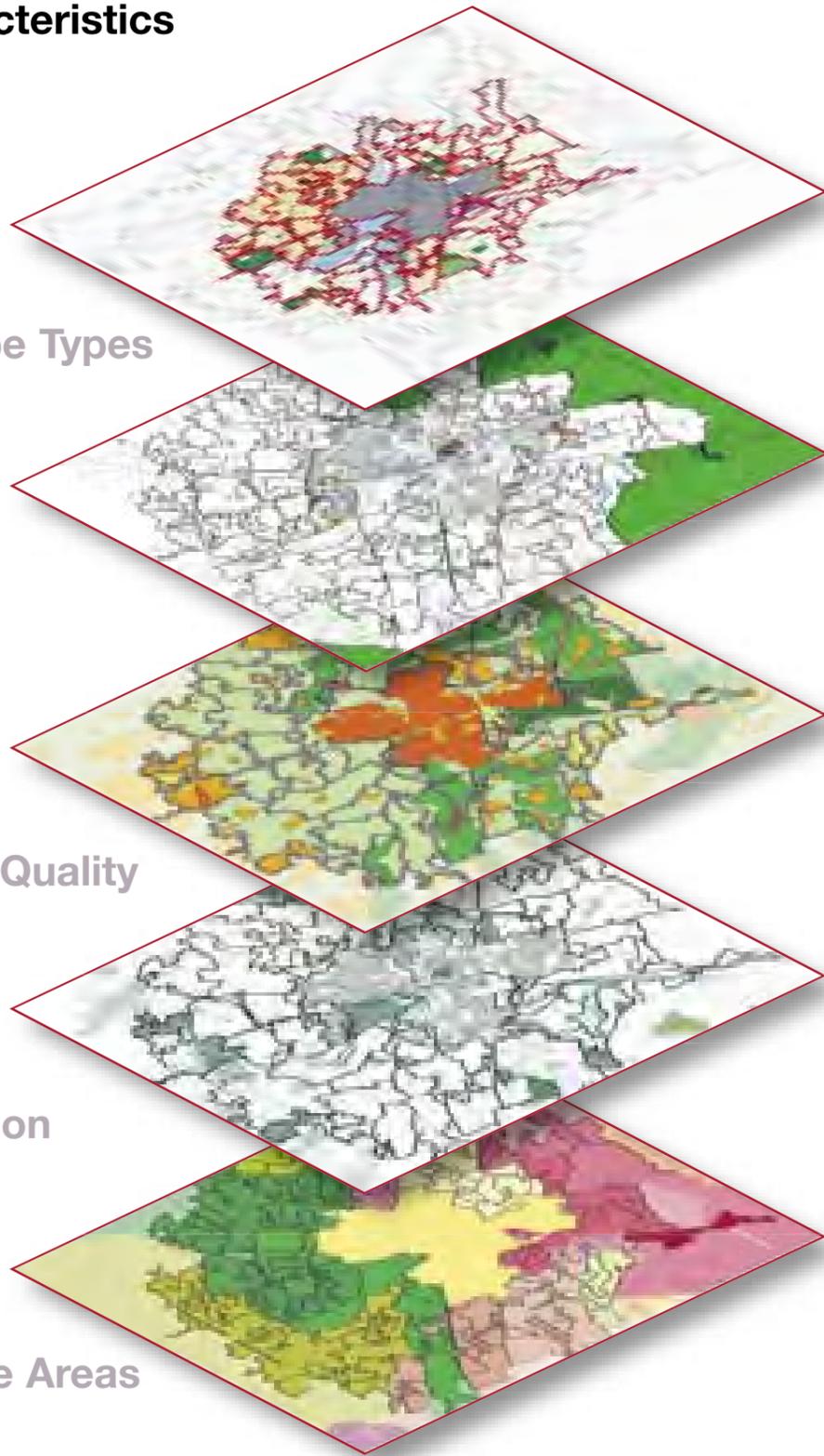
Historic Landscape Types

Heritage

Agricultural Land Quality

Nature Conservation Designations

County Landscape Areas



Landscape Changes

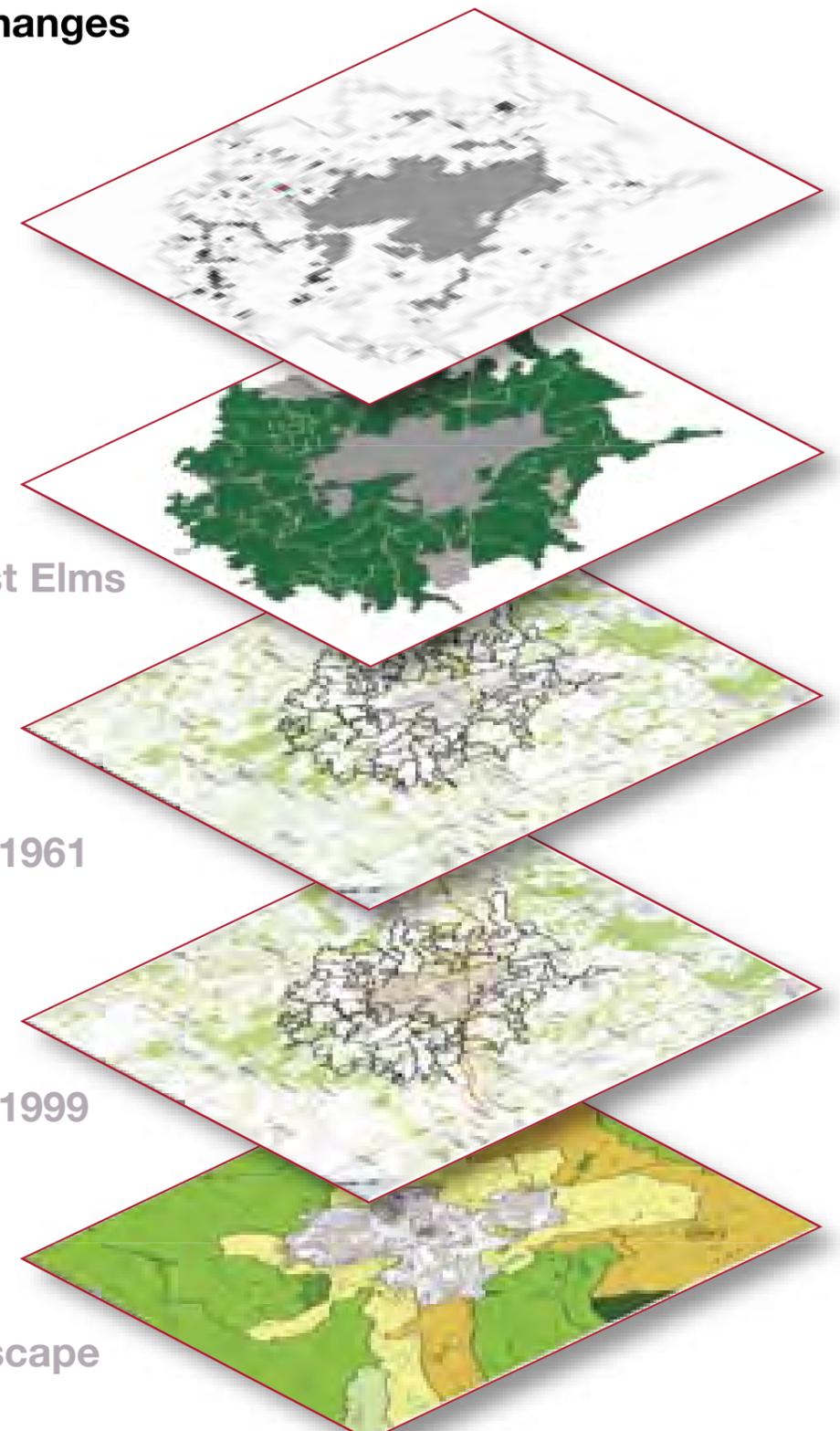
Features Lost since 1871

Areas that lost Elms

Landcover in 1961

Landcover in 1999

County Landscape



Landscape context

The Low Weald

General

The Low Weald is a broad, low-lying, clay vale surrounding the High Weald, the oldest and highest part of the Wealden anticline, on three sides. It is gently undulating but rarely more than 30-40metres AOD and many areas are as low as 15 metres AOD.

Ashford is located at the eastern end of this character area. Since much of the land is flat and wet, settlements developed on the slightly higher, drier, ground where pockets of sandstone or limestone were present. The dispersed nature of settlements that arose because of this is a feature of the Low Weald.

In general, the area is well wooded, and in historical time this was part of the Wealden Forest covering much of the South East corner of England. The impervious nature of the clay soils supports numerous small ponds and areas of alder and willow carr along riparian corridors. This is accentuated by wet grazing with willow and sallow scrub in the major river valleys.

Agriculture

Due to the heavy damp soils, agriculture was generally limited to grazed pastureland except where there are lighter drier soils on slightly higher ground, or on drift deposits of brick earths where there is arable and fruit growing. The arable landscape, especially since the 1960s, has been of larger fields suitable for large mechanical cultivation. During the 1960s and 1970s it was commonplace to see hedgerows removed, and tree cover reduced by Dutch Elm Disease as well as in connection with field enlargement. These areas provide a marked contrast to the more characteristic wooded areas. This fairly recent shift in landscape appearance has much to do with agricultural grant aid system of the green pound and later the common agricultural policy.

Historical Background

The Wealden Forest was referred to by the Romans as Sylva Anderida, becoming known as Andredsweald in Saxon times. A thriving iron industry existed in Roman times due to iron deposits and the abundance of timber to smelt it. The industry was revived in the late 15th century and this led to the management of large areas of woodland for fuel and the creation of hammer ponds.

Until the Domesday book in 1086 about 70% of the area was still wooded. Clearance for charcoal and ship building was piecemeal leaving belts of the wildwood, known locally as Shaws between fields. Other fields were cleared along woodland edges known as Assarts, and these resulted in woodlands with irregular shapes. Many hedges also had woodland origins which can still be recognised today by their species rich composition including ancient woodland 'indicator species' such as Wood Anemone *Anemone blanda*.

Due to the forest and heavy clay, the area was settled in a scattered manner, often a grouping of houses along a road, or individual cottages. A central feature of many villages are commons or village greens.

Key characteristics

- Broad, low lying and gently undulating clay vales superimposed by an intricate mix of small woodlands and a patchwork of field and hedges.
- Topography and soils vary locally according to the relationship to underlying higher, drier outcrops of limestone and sand stone which are commonly the sites for settlements.
- An abundance of ponds and small stream valleys with wet woodlands of alder and willow carr.
- Tall hedgerows with numerous trees linking copses, shaws and remnant woodlands give an overall wooded quality.
- Grassland predominates on heaviest clay soils, lighter soils on higher ground support arable crops and a more open landscape.
- Rural character of dispersed farmsteads, small settlements, including many brick and timber vernacular buildings in untouched areas, elsewhere the landscape can be dominated by recent urban development.
- Historic settlement pattern was dictated by preference for higher, drier outcrops of limestone or sandstone, with moated manor houses being a characteristic feature.
- Hop gardens and orchards are still a distinctive land use in Kent, although hop growing has declined massively over the last 40 years. This has had a knock on effect on the characteristic high hedgerows enclosing country lanes and the market for coppiced chestnut hop poles. The locally characteristic Oast Houses used to dry the hops have largely been converted into residential use and the yards and fields around them have become domestic gardens, or paddocks for ponies.
- The Kentish Low Weald is traversed by numerous narrow lanes with broad verges and ditches which are continuous with the drove roads of the North Downs. Used since ancient times to drive herds of pigs to 'pannage' or feeding on the acorns from the oak woodlands.

Wealden Greensand

General

The long curving belt of Greensand runs across Kent parallel to the North Downs through Surrey and turns south to join the Hampshire Downs and turns east running parallel to the South Downs in West Sussex. The local character varies as a result of changes in local topography, soils and land use but is unified by the underlying geology, its scarp / dip slope topography and distinctive spring-line settlements below the Downs.

There are extensive belts of woodland including ancient mixed woods and more recent coniferous plantations. In East Kent the Greensand is less distinctive than the dramatic wooded topography of the west. East from Maidstone to Ashford the landscape is less wooded and does not give the impression of intimacy so prevalent in the west, except where contained by shelterbelts and remaining hedgerows. The presence of the railway and motorway corridors in the vale between the Greensand and North Downs scarp is strong. The more open farming and heathy quality to the landscape are typified by the agricultural land around Pluckley and the acid grassland, light woodland and bogs of Hothfield Common.

Orchards and Hop Gardens are particularly prevalent around Maidstone, with associated high hedgerows or shelterbelts and areas of chestnut coppice for hop poles, but closer to Ashford these are replaced by irregular arable fields. The south eastern extreme of the belt forms a scarp forming a sea cliff giving extensive views over Romney Marshes. Panoramic views south across the Low Weald are extensive from the Greensand ridge in general.

Historical background

The soft Greensand is easily eroded and has resulted in the distinctive sunken lanes cut deeply into the rock below the surrounding land. These lanes are of historic value and are typical of the landscape, with many still used in the modern road system.

Surface water is an important feature. Streams drain off the dip slope and there are many small quarries flooded and subsequently covered by trees hiding them from distant views.

The Wealden Greensand has been occupied since earliest times with finds in the Hampshire section dating back over 7000 years to Palaeolithic and Neolithic times.

Ragstone, a distinctive local soft stone has been mined from many small quarries and in river valleys sand extraction has been a feature. Rural buildings are typically tile hung timber frame or ragstone, or weather boarded timber frame. Many of the typical Greensand cottages date from the 17th century or earlier. The ragstone becomes a tawny brown and is laid mainly in rubble courses.

Straight Roman roads radiate from Canterbury to Ashford, Lympe and Maidstone, a contrast to the winding lanes of the west. The advent of rail followed the grain of the landscape generally north west to south east from London to Dover and led to the area becoming a commuter belt of the City. The transport corridors have been emphasised recently with the M20 and Channel Tunnel Rail Link effectively bisecting the county. This area has been shown as a zone for reinforcement and new landscapes in the Kent Landscape Character Study 2004.

Key characteristics

- Scarp / dip slope topography and extensive belts of ancient mixed woodland comprising hazel, oak and birch plus more recent coniferous plantations
- Large sections of winding Upper Greensand escarpment noted for their steep 'hanger' woodlands with areas of remnant heath and wet heath
- Settlements generally scattered villages and hamlets linked by deep, overhanging, winding lanes with some small irregular fields remnant of Saxon clearances
- In East Surrey and Western Kent there are many wooded commons, or 'Charts' with Oak/birch woodland
- In East Kent the Wealden Greensand has a gentler more open aspect and is more marked by development and communications corridors
- Fruit growing is still a characteristic feature of Kent Greensand
- Older Deer parks and more recent 18th century parklands are distinctive features of the Wealden Greensand with extensive views out over the Low Weald

Landscape context

A Landscape of Layers: GEOLOGY

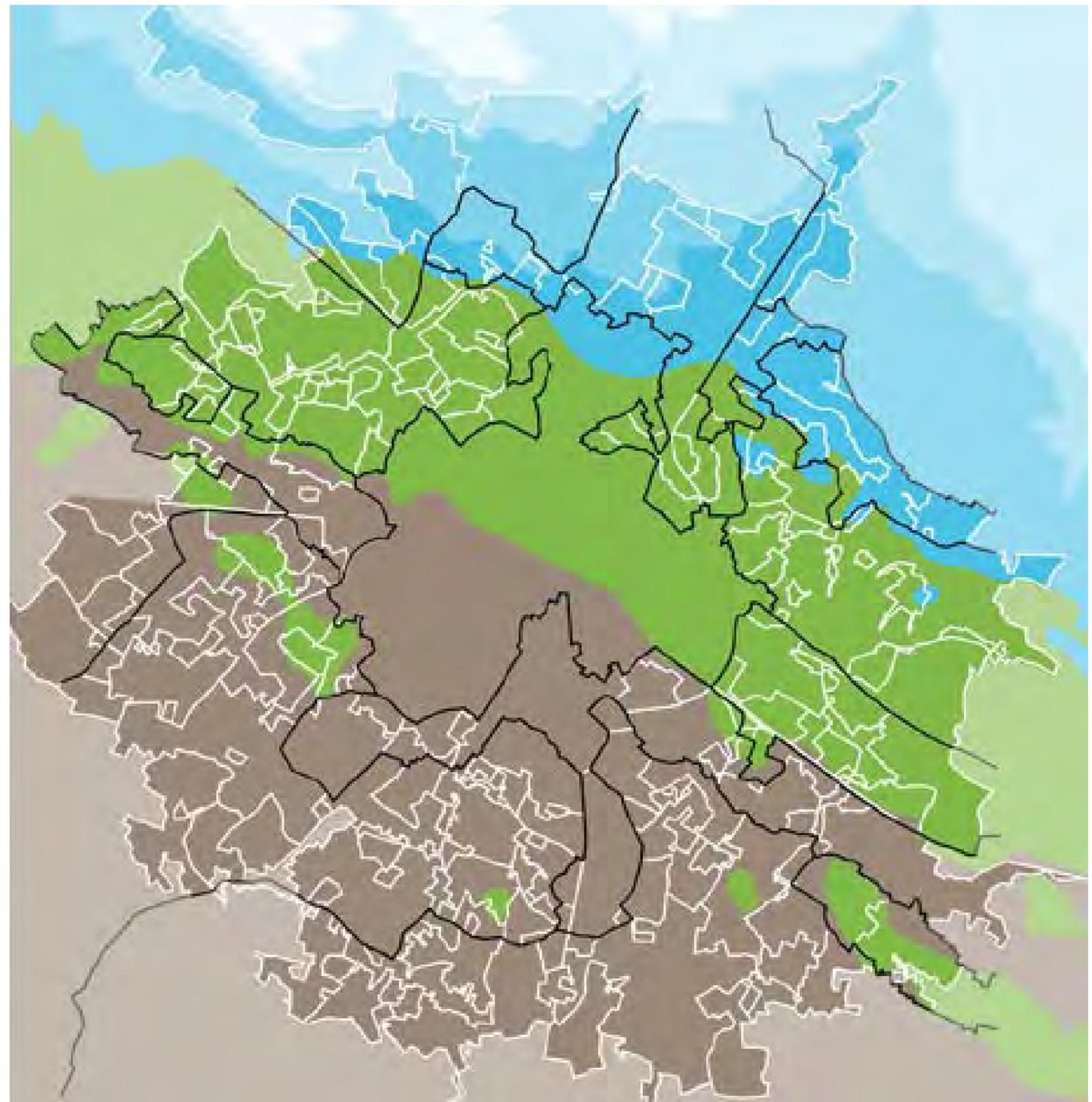
General

Ashford and its immediate surroundings traverse bands of differing underlying sedimentary rocks of the Wealden Anticline - wealden clay, greensand, gault clay and chalk. The pH ranges from around neutral on clay, to acid on the greensand, and alkaline on the chalk. These bands of rock are then overlaid by alluvial deposits from the river network. There is an overlap of rocks, and this is seen most clearly where green sand emerges as 'islands' in the wealden clay forming local high spots - Goldwell, Great Chart, Singleton, Chilmington, Kingsnorth, and the Aldington Ridge. It is no coincidence that these higher, drier areas are also old settlements.

The landscape character, therefore, has local subtleties due to vegetation types typical of a given rock/soil type, and due to the proximity of these types, there is some mixing (e.g. clematis a lime loving plant can be seen in hedgerows on the greensand ridge near Pluckley).

The low lying, poorly drained nature of the clay areas, coinciding with rivers gave rise to wet woodlands and afforestation by oaks which grow well on heavy soils. In time, the river areas became wooded pastures. Drainage is key to working the land so drainage dykes and ditches are a feature. The heavy soils were good for pasture, but not until the advent of field drainage assisted by government grant aid in the post war period was this particularly useful for arable crops. Marl, found in pockets was used to fertilize the fields leaving a pattern of flooded borrow pits. These ponds are a particular feature of the Beult catchment in the western section of the study area. Other ponds are located at spring heads and may be seasonal, their presence often heralded by willows or alders. Invasion of the Saxon population by Vikings and others led to moat defences to farmsteads and manors, many are still in evidence to day, the clay soils being ideal for retaining water.

The map opposite shows county landscape types outlined in black, some of which include different underlying rock types. The white divisions are the Landscape Description Units (LDUs) based on historic landscape types that were surveyed individually in this study.



■ Wealden Clay ■ Greensand ■ Gault Clay ■ Lower Chalk ■ Middle Chalk ■ Upper Chalk

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Landscape context

A Landscape of Layers: NATURAL AREAS

General

There are eight natural areas in Kent. The Ashford study area crosses three 'Natural Areas':

- Wealden Greensand
- Low Weald
- North Downs

In addition there are two adjacent natural areas to the south:

- High Weald
- Romney Marshes

Some of the County Landscape Areas within the Ashford study area cross natural areas including:

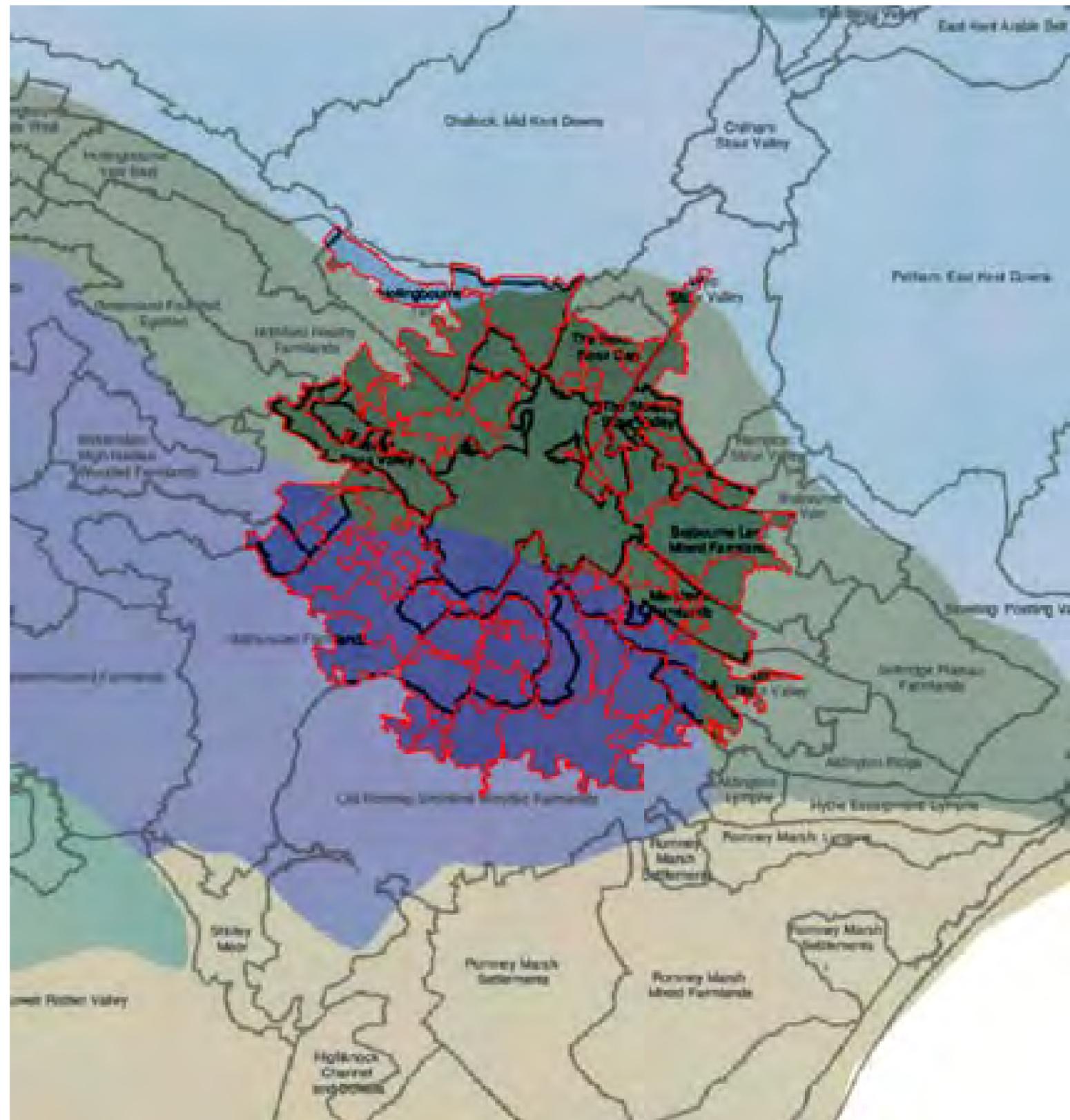
Low Weald / Wealden Greensand

- Biddenden & High Halden Farmlands
- Upper Stour Valley
- Bethesden Farmlands
- Aldington Ridge

Wealden Greensand / North Downs

- Hollingbourne Vale East
- Hollingbourne Vale
- Wye – Stour Valley

It is the twilight zone between natural areas and land uses that provides the particular level of subtle changes of landscape character seen in the hinterland of the town.



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Landscape context

A Landscape of Layers: TOPOGRAPHY

General

The map opposite shows altitude at 50m intervals, emphasizing the predominantly low-lying nature of the study area. The higher areas correspond to the greensand and chalk and the gault clay.

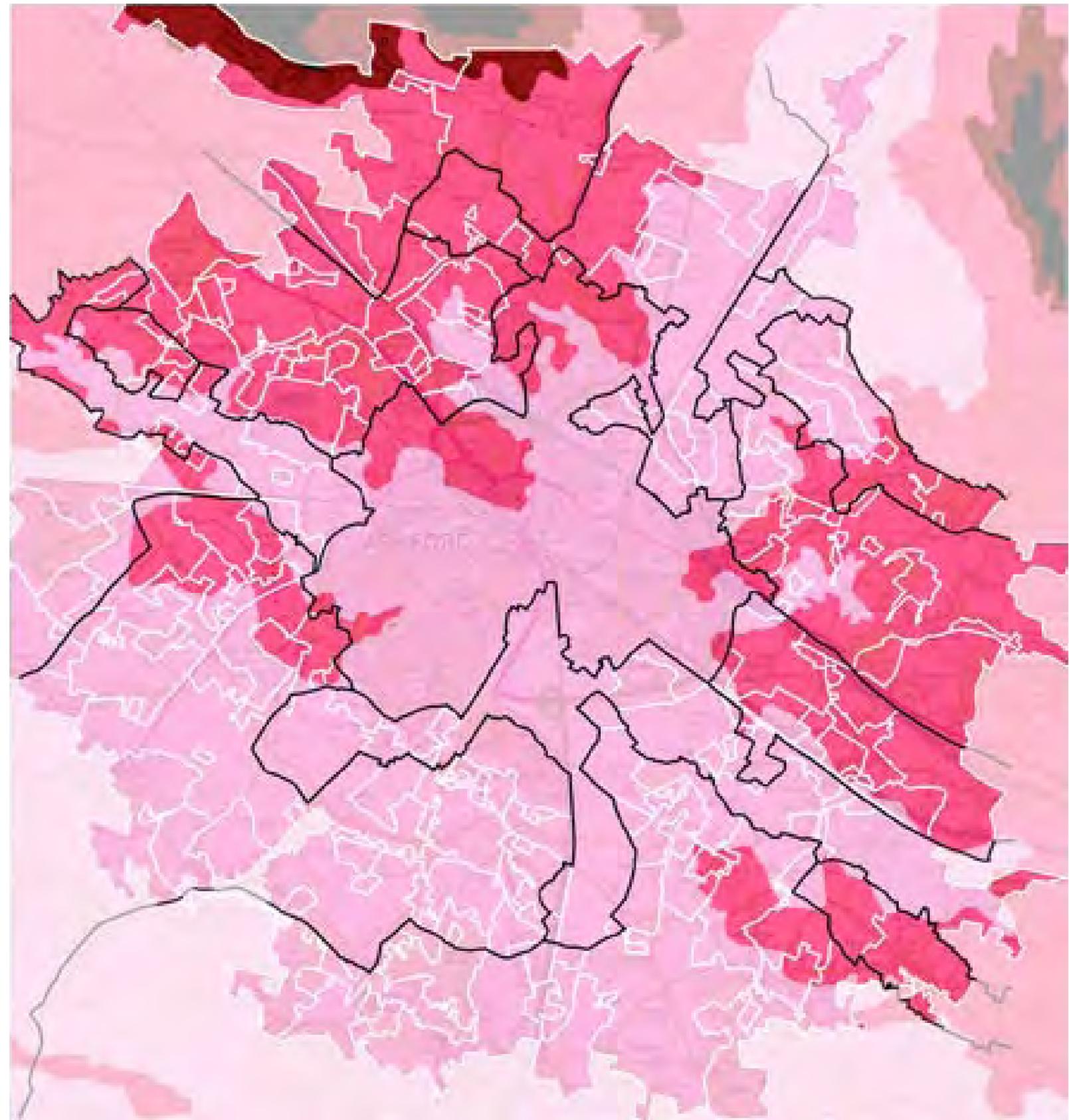
Only one Country Landscape Area falling within the Ashford study area is entirely below the 50 metre contour - the eastern section of the Upper Stour Valley, followed by the greater part of the Bethesden Farmlands. The highest area is Hollingbourne Vale is at or above the 50m contour rising to over 140m on the Pilgrims Way north of Westwell, with the North Downs continuing to rise to 190m beyond the study area.

Elsewhere local high spots include:

- Colliers Hill (74m) and Clap Hill (+80m)
- Chilmington/Singleton Hill (+70m)
- Goldwell (72m)
- Mitchell Farm (+70m)
- ButlersToll & Foxenhill Toll, Hothfield Common (+80m)
- Balls Wood, Godinton (+85m)
- Quarrington Wood (+75m)
- Hinxhill (+70)
- Mersham Ridge (+70m)

The Stour Gap, cutting northwards through the North Downs is thought to have formed when the river, then flowing from significantly higher ground, eroded the chalk. A similar former river route flowing north can be seen at Ide Hill on the greensand in West Kent. Here there is only a 'nick-point' indicating the former river valley as this is now the watershed between the Medway and Darent river catchments.

Whilst the macro-topography provides the setting for Ashford and the distinctive kentish landscape of ridges, it is the meso and micro topography that provides the basis for the particular local landscape character, for example the sharp edges to the floodplain north of Ashford, or the sunken lanes in the greensand.



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Landscape context

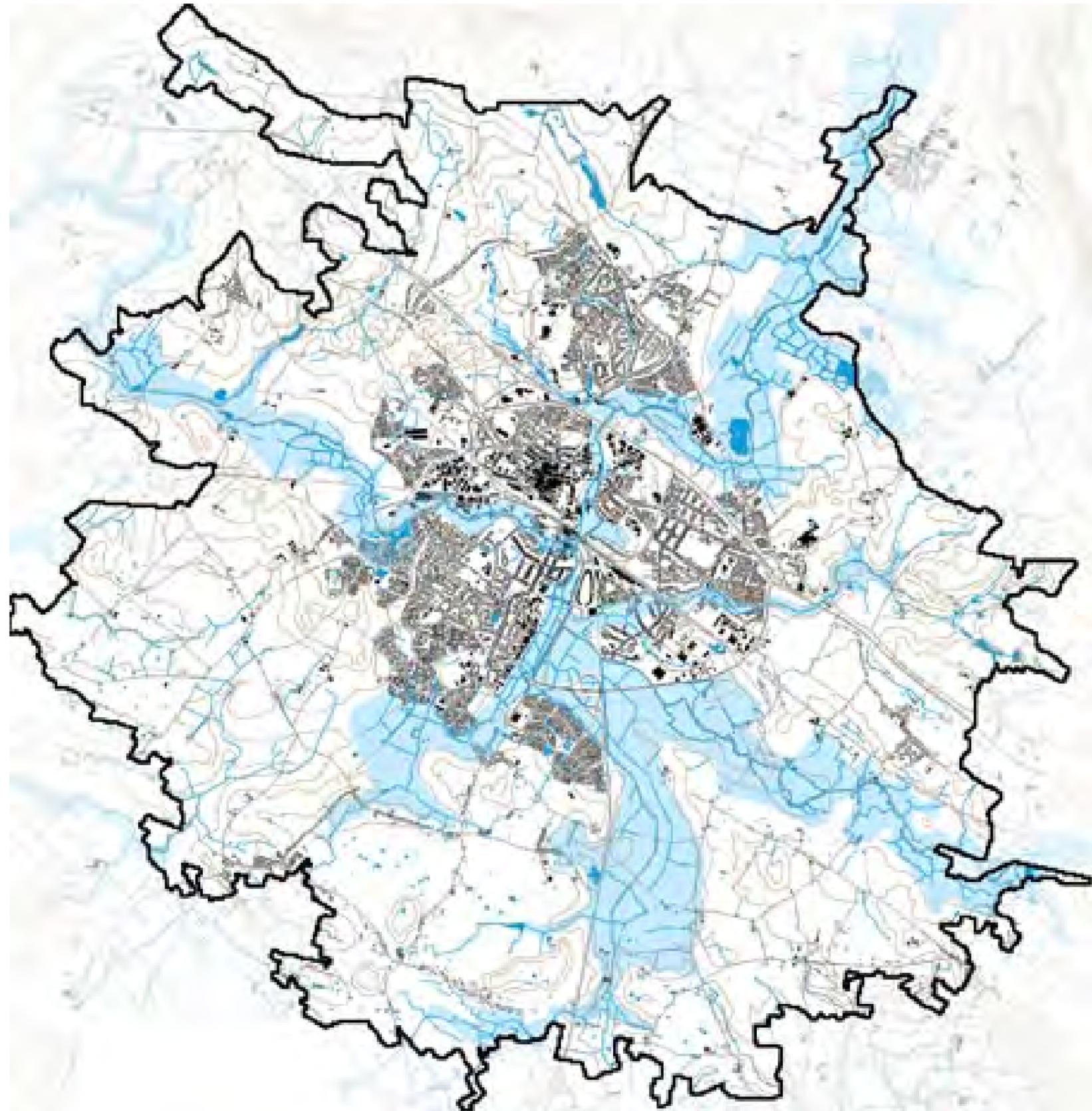
A Landscape of Layers: DRAINAGE

General

The study area sits mainly in the River Stour catchment, the great Stour and East Stour flowing generally parallel to, and on the southern side of, the Wealden Greensand ridge converging in the centre of Ashford and then flowing north. To the south west of the study area are the upper reaches of the river Beult which is part of the Medway catchment

The river Stour rises on the impervious Wealden Clay and streams draining the Wealden greensand ridge to the east and west of Ashford, passing through the Wealden Green sand at the centre of the town, and then through North Downs. At this point the character of the river changes to that of a 'chalk stream' where water temperatures are constrained by ground water from the chalk bedrock. The clay upper catchment means that the river is liable to rapid or 'flashy' responses to heavy weather events

Five 'main rivers' (Environment Agency terminology) pass through the town and have been subject to repeated flooding since the 1960s (Black and Veatch/EA Integrated Water Management Study 2004). Flood defences have been constructed across the flood plain near Hothfield to attenuate peak flows from the Great Stour, and near Aldington to do the same to the East Stour and so alleviate flood risk in the floodplains passing through the town. In the autumn of 2000, three heavy rain events within three weeks led to these flood barriers being overtopped because the intervening period between storms had been insufficient to drain the temporary reservoirs formed behind the flood barriers. This led to the worst floods in Kent since 1927. If one considers the significant loss of hedges and change of use from cattle pasture to either sheep pasture or drained arable land in this catchment, along with, presumably a net work of ditches and ponds, it may not be surprising that the rise in flood events seem to coincide to when the grain of the land was altered by modern farming techniques. Furthermore, many of these same areas have been shown in the county landscape strategy as having lost much of their former character and have been designated areas for new or restored landscapes. Natural processes and the over arching function of the landscape, along with climate change should inform any improvements.



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Landscape context

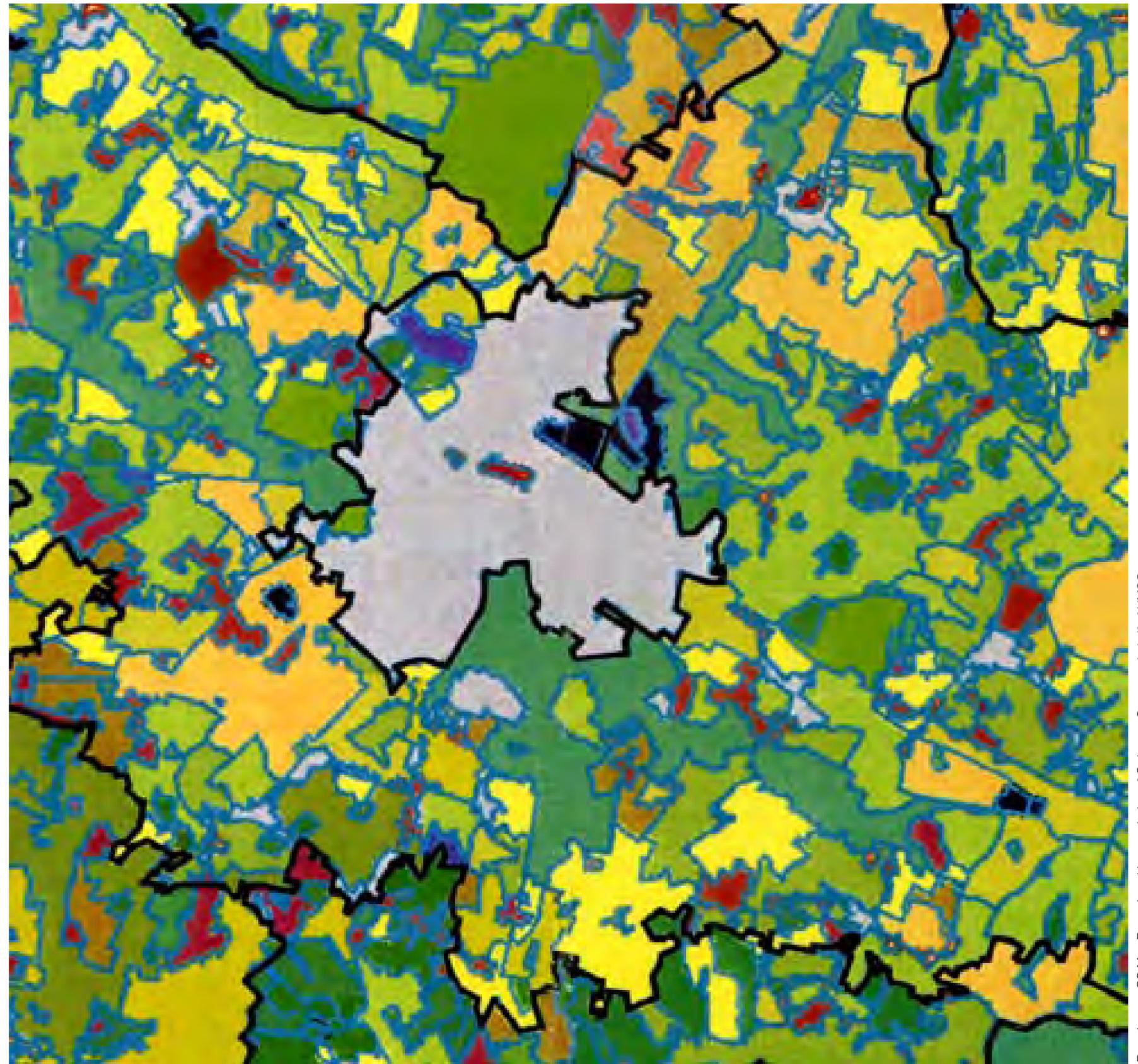
A Landscape of Layers: HISTORIC LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

General

Historic landscape characterisation involves recognising the ways in which the present physical landscape reflects how people have exploited, changed and adapted to the physical environment through time, with respect to different social, economic, technological and cultural factors. In 2001 KCC and English Heritage published the 'Kent Historic Landscape Characterisation' carried out by the Oxford Archeological Unit (OAU) that defined a total of 87 Historic Landscape Types (HLTs) within 14 broad categories in Kent. We used these HLTs to define our landscape description units as a basis for the field work at the heart of this study.

Within our study area there are nine broad categories out of the fourteen found in the county as a whole. A few areas should have different designations now - i.e. a large tree nursery near Hothfield now occupies 'Prairie fields' and arguably the M20 and CTRL corridors should be designated under (13.0) Inland Communication Facilities. A total of 29 historic landscape sub-types, or one third of all the categories found in Kent can be found in the immediate hinterland of Ashford

- **(1.0) Field Patterns** - 10 of 17 types
- **(2.0) Commons** - 1 of 5 types
- **(3.0) Horticulture** - 1 of 6 types
- **(4.0) Woodland** - 6 of 9 types
- **(7.0) Valley Floor & Water Management** 3 of 8 types
- **(9.0) Settlements** 3 of 9 types
- **(10.0) Parkland & Designed Landscape** 1 of 3 types
- **(11.0) Recreation** - 2 of 3 types
- **(12.0) Extractive & other industry** 2 Of 3 types



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Landscape context

A Landscape of Layers: COUNTY LANDSCAPE AREAS

General

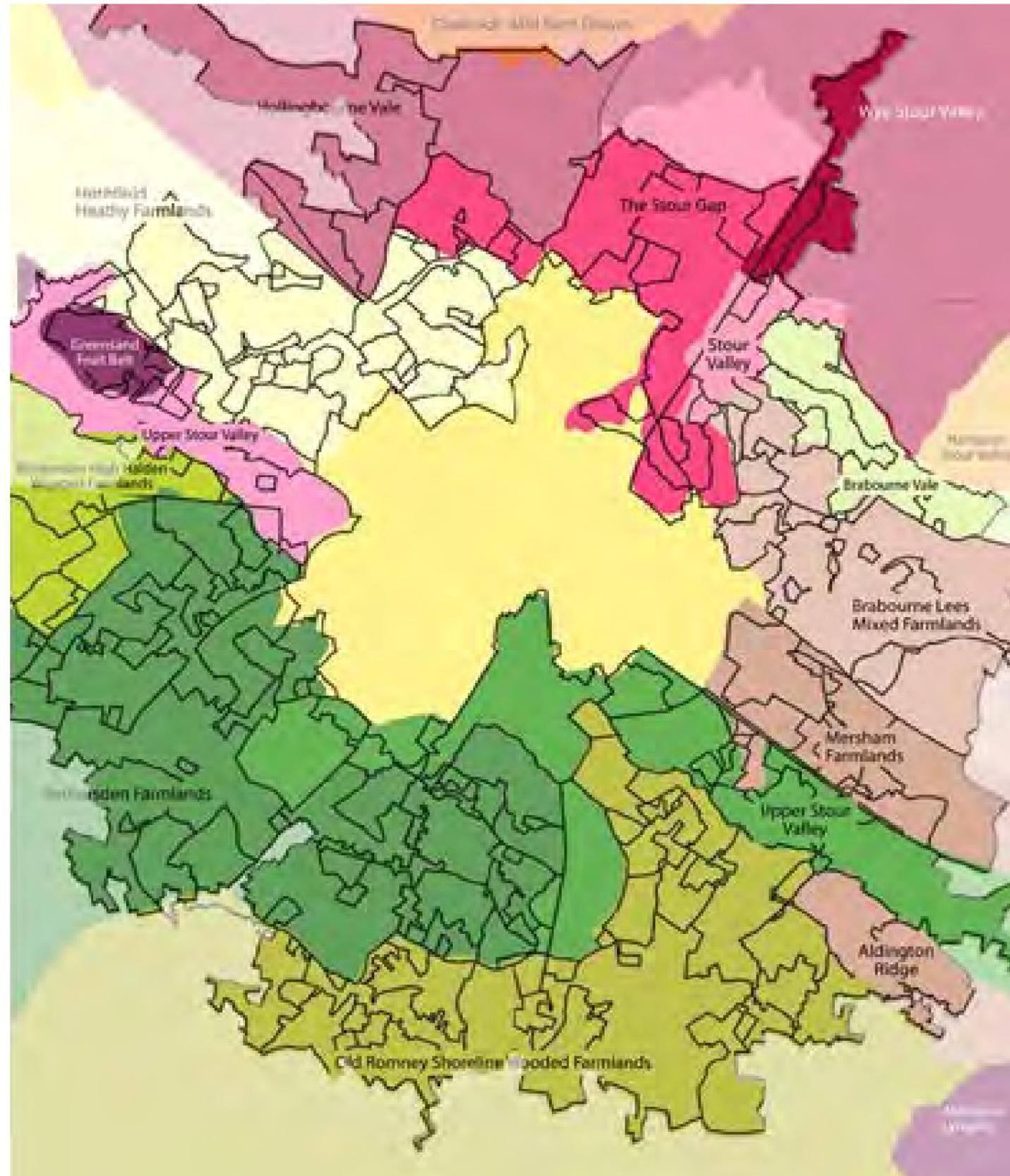
There are 150 County Landscape Areas described in the Landscape Assessment of Kent. Fourteen of these fall entirely or partly within the study area which covers around one hundred square kilometers including:

- Bethersden Farmlands (approx 40%)
- Biddenden & High Halden Wooded Farmlands (+/-20%)
- Beult Valley (<5%)
- Upper Stour Valley (>90%)
- Hothfield Heathy Farmlands (+/-40%)
- Hollingbourne Vale (+/-25%)
- Stour Gap (+/- 75%)
- The Stour - Stour Valley (100%)
- The Stour - Wye Stour Valley (<5%)
- Brabourne Vale (+/-40%)
- Brabourne Lees Mixed Farmlands (+/-80%)
- Mersham Farmlands (+/-80%)
- Aldington Ridge (+/-25%)
- Old Romney Wooded Farmlands (+/-30%)

In addition, a further three country areas border the study area:

- Hollingbourne Vale - East
- Challock - Mid Kent Downs
- Hampton Stour Valley

This provides an example of the subtly diverse landscape characters with about three kilometres of the current town limits. The 250 plus Landscape Description Units investigated in this study were based on the historic landscape character parcels and then grouped into 58 larger areas we have termed District Landscape Types. During this exhaustive process we felt that the boundaries of the county areas needed to be altered on a parcel basis to better reflect the overall county type as we understood them. These changes are shown and the rationale for the amendments described in the supporting data reports for this Ashford Landscape Character Assessment.



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Landscape context

A Landscape of Layers: AGRICULTURAL LAND QUALITY

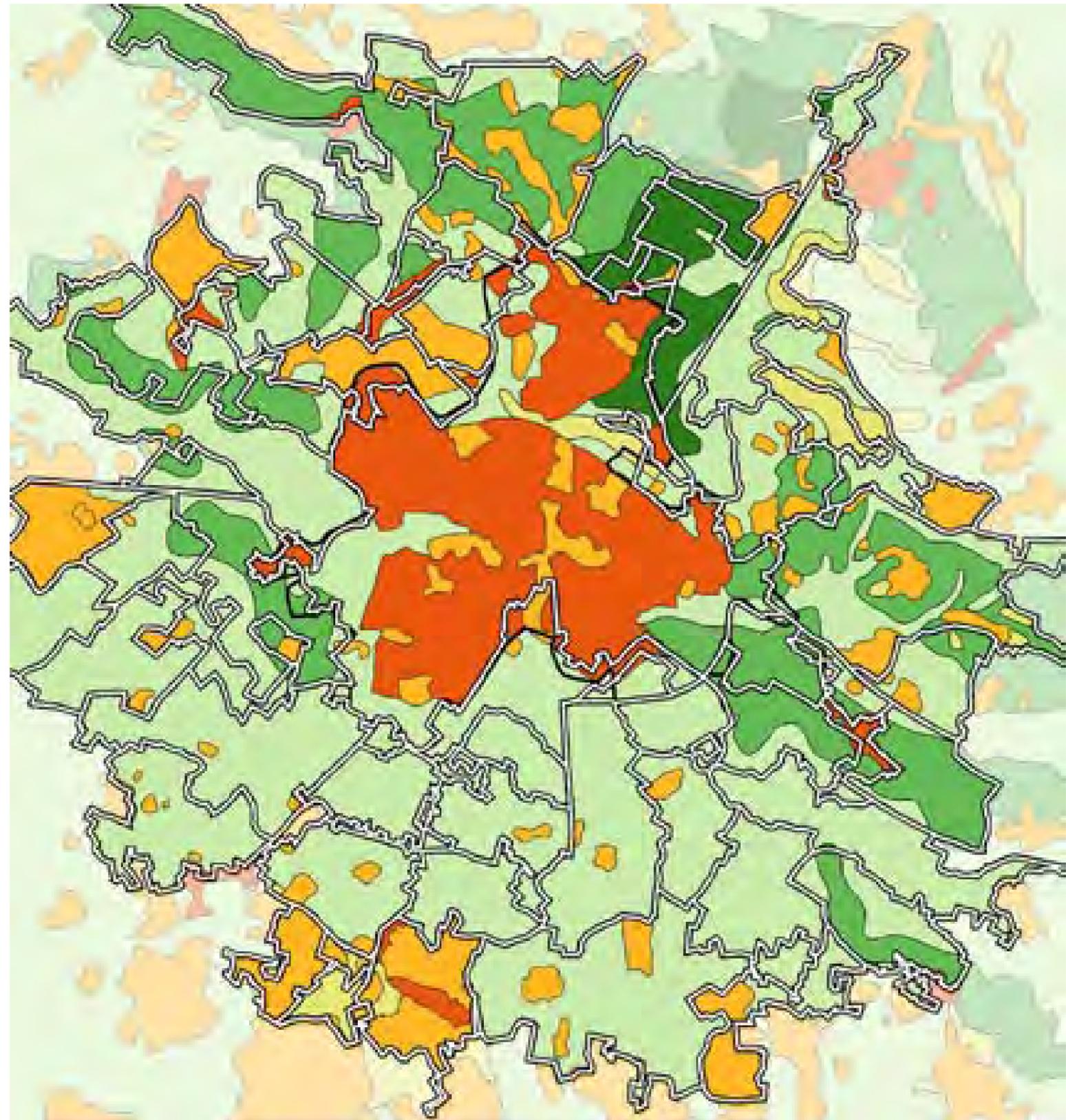
General

The plan opposite is based on the MAFF Agricultural Land Quality map of 1957 and reprinted in 1964. The map has not been updated, but the designation of grade 3 has now been split between grade 3a, which along with grades 1 and 2 is considered to be a nationally important resource, and grade 3b which is not. Non agricultural land is generally woodland, but also includes mineral workings and recreational space.

There is a clear north south divide between land of higher agricultural quality on the Greensand Ridge and in Stour Gap, and low values to the south. This coincides with the heavy wealden clay to the south of the town, which is fine for woodland and livestock. Farm improvement in the post War era have meant that the land has been drained to support intensive arable cropping

Since the early 1960s, the town has grown considerably. New areas to the south have been on grade 3 land, but extensions around Kennington have been at the expense of grade 1 land.

Agricultural land quality is linked to landscape character insofar as the higher grades relate not only to fertility and workability of the soil, but also ease of use of the land. It is not surprising, therefore, that the best agricultural land for arable crops also coincides with large fields easily worked by large machines.



Landscape context

A Landscape of Layers: HERITAGE

Landscape Designations

The North Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty is the back drop to this landscape, and provides the high points from which the study area can be seen. Godinton Park is a Special Landscape Area

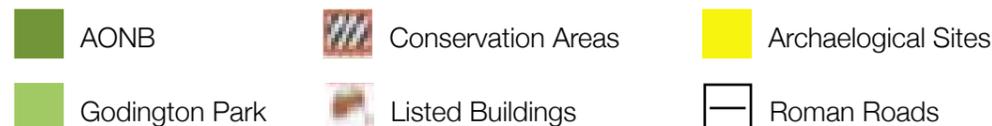
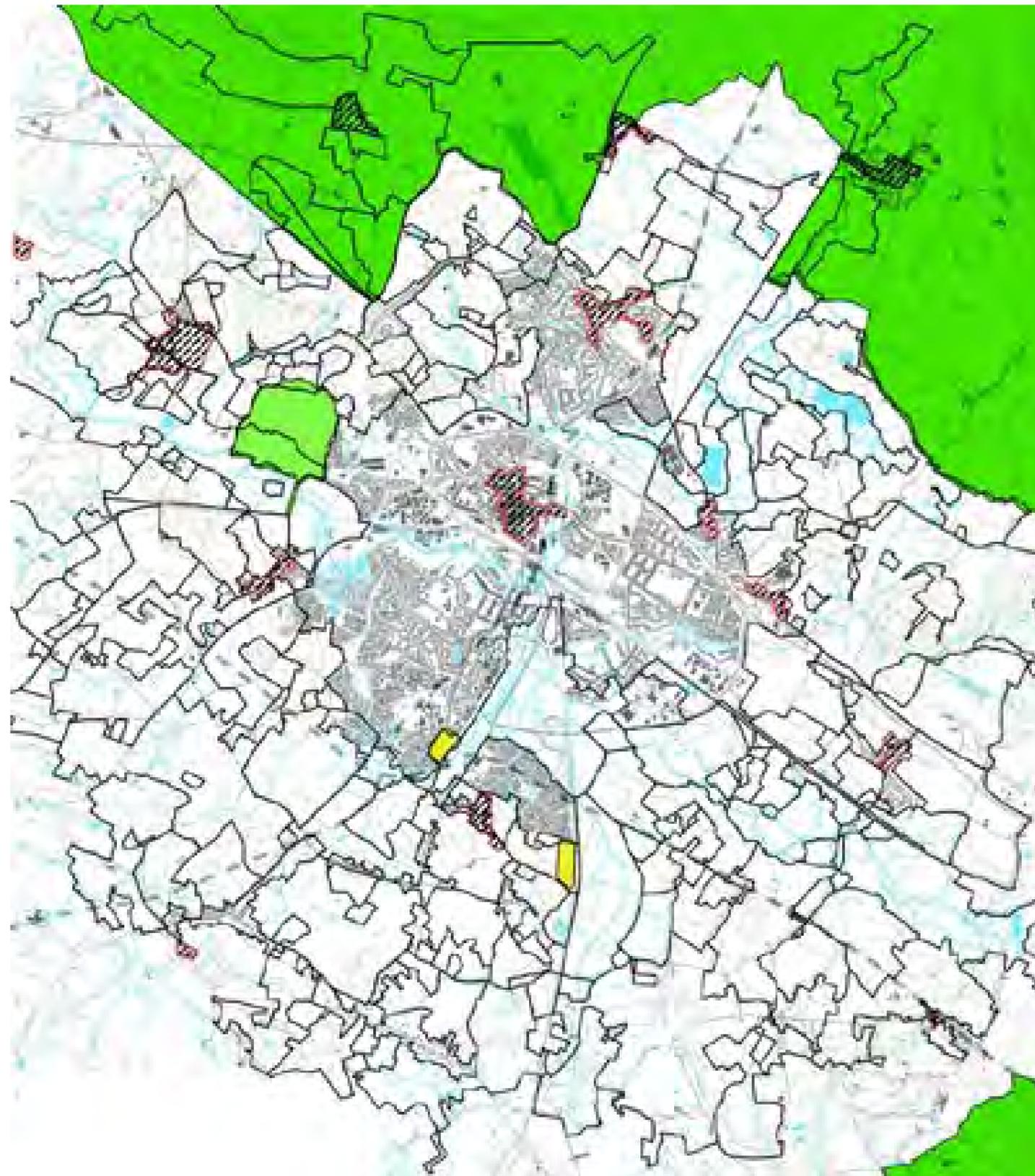
Built Heritage Designations

There are twelve conservation areas in the study area that are essentially the historic centre of settlements. These have been assessed in this study outside Ashford. The scattered settlements are typical of Kentish settlements generally.

The area as a whole has a rich history, but there is little easily recognizable evidence of settlements due to the soils and materials used for the construction of older dwellings and settlements. Archeological digs have so far unearthed evidence of a Roman settlement and earlier bronze Age settlement to the south of the town. There may well be additional sites yet to be discovered. It is significant that two Roman Roads cross the study area, and in the north there is the Pilgrims Way which may have been part of a pre historic human trackway dating back to the time of the land bridge to northern France.

Historic features abound, although they may not be designated. These include a number of moats, woodland boundary banks, a former hammer pond at Eastwell, mill ponds and mill races, green lanes, sunken/hollow lanes and old woodlands. This survey has not looked at hedgerows in detail, but it is likely that there are ancient hedgerows. The county as a whole was not affected greatly by the parliamentary enclosures seen in the midlands, so many field boundaries may date back to medieval times. A rule of thumb aging of hedges relates the number of woody species found in a 100m stretch to the number of centuries that field boundary has been present. It was clear to us that there were many hedges in which a large number of species were present in a short stretch, particularly those associated with lanes.

There are a large number of listed buildings in the area using a variety of locally sourced materials. The distinctive orange brown tiles with either brick, timber or ragstone is an important ingredient to the local distinctiveness of the study area.



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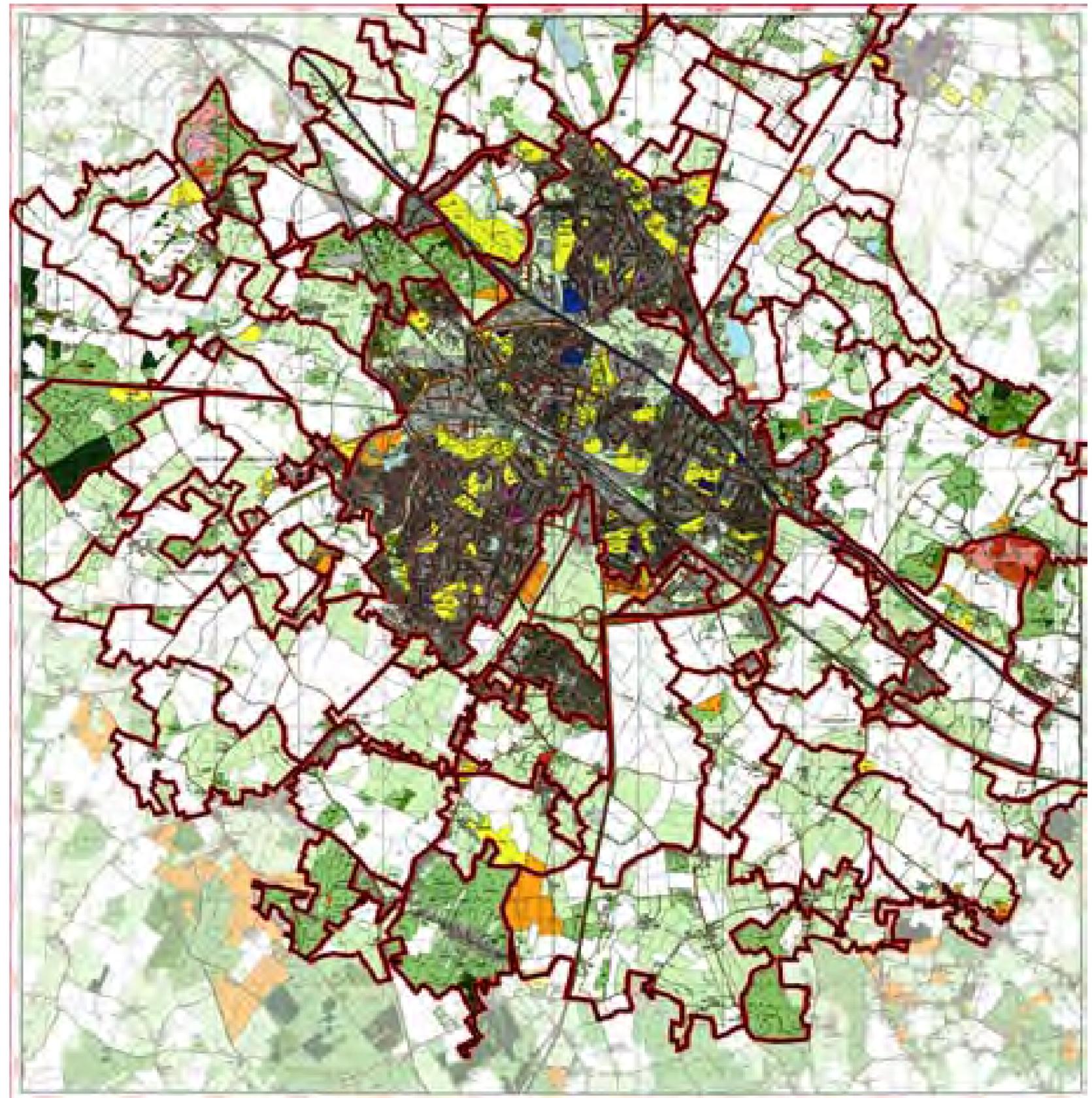
Landscape context

A Landscape of Layers: HABITATS

Kent Habitat Survey

The 2003 Kent Habitat Survey reproduced in part opposite shows the preponderance of arable or improved grassland around the town and improved amenity grassland within it. Habitats of note in the study area that are European and Biodiversity Action plan priority habitats include:

- Lowland Hay Meadows
(e.g. near Bromley Green/Singleton Chilmington/the Warren/Willsborough Dykes)
- European dry heaths
(e.g. Hothfield Common / Hatch Park)
- Reedbeds/Fens
(e.g. Hothfield Common / Julie Rose / Hatch Park)
- Wet Woodland / Residual Alluvial Forests / Oak-Hornbeam Forests / Lowland Beech and Yew Forests
(e.g. Woods north of Godinton / Hoads Wood / Old Romney Shoreline Woods / Hinxhill / Hatch Park)



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Landscape context

A Landscape of Layers: ECOLOGICAL DESIGNATIONS

General

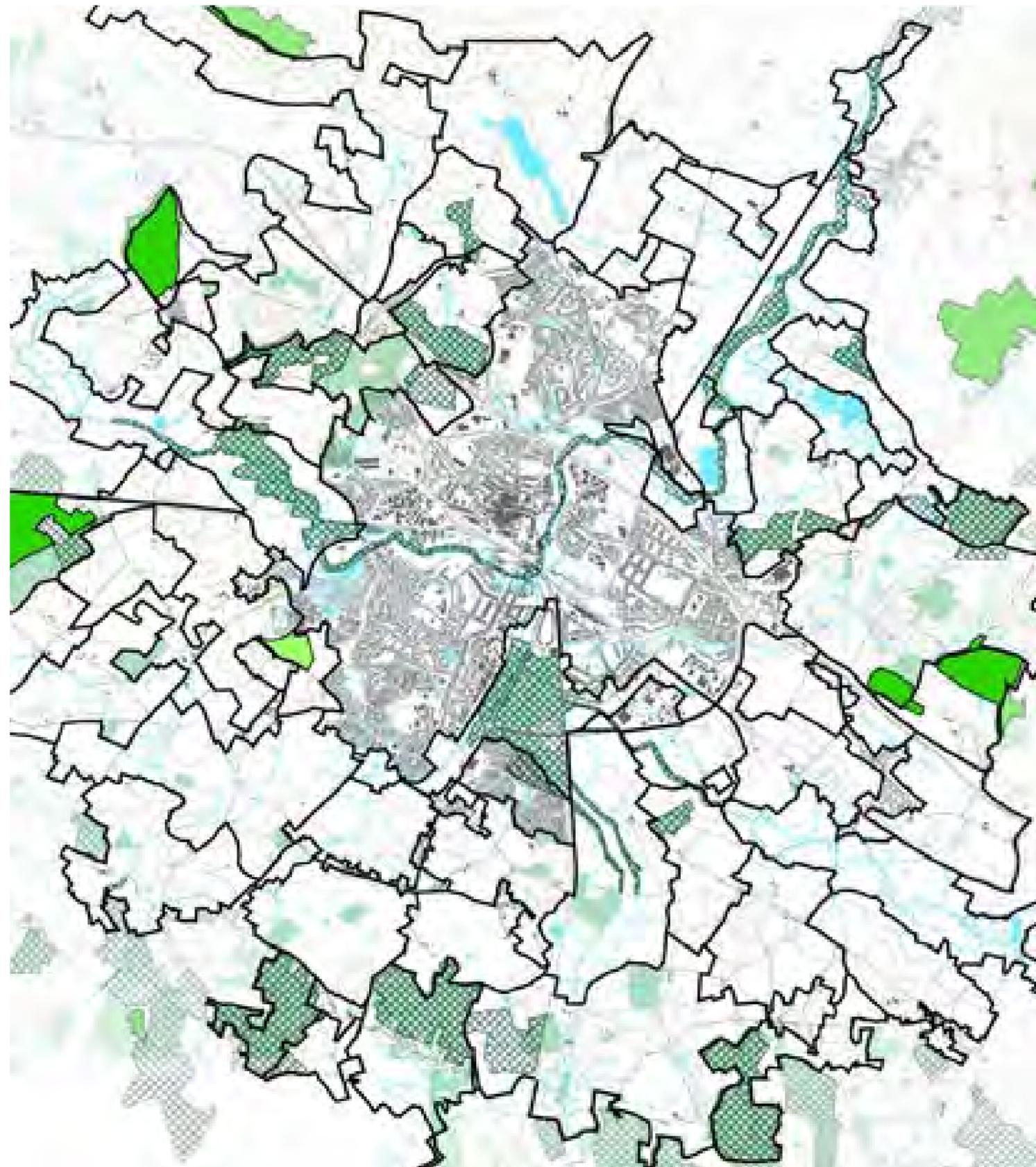
The highest designation in the study area is **Site of Special Scientific interest (SSSI)**:

- Hothfield Common
- Hoads Wood
- Hatch Park

The County designation **Site of Nature Conservation Interest (SNCI)** include woodlands, acid grassland, riverine margins and wet grazing. Examples include:

- Old Saxon Shoreline Woods and the Warren (woodlands)
- Eureka Business Park (remnants of Acid Grassland)
- The Great Stour, East Stour and Stour (riverine margins)
- Willsborough Dykes (wet grazing)

There in addition some Woodland Trust Sites in the Old Saxon Shoreline woods, and the newly created Millennium Wood near Singleton.



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Landscape context

Landcover Changes

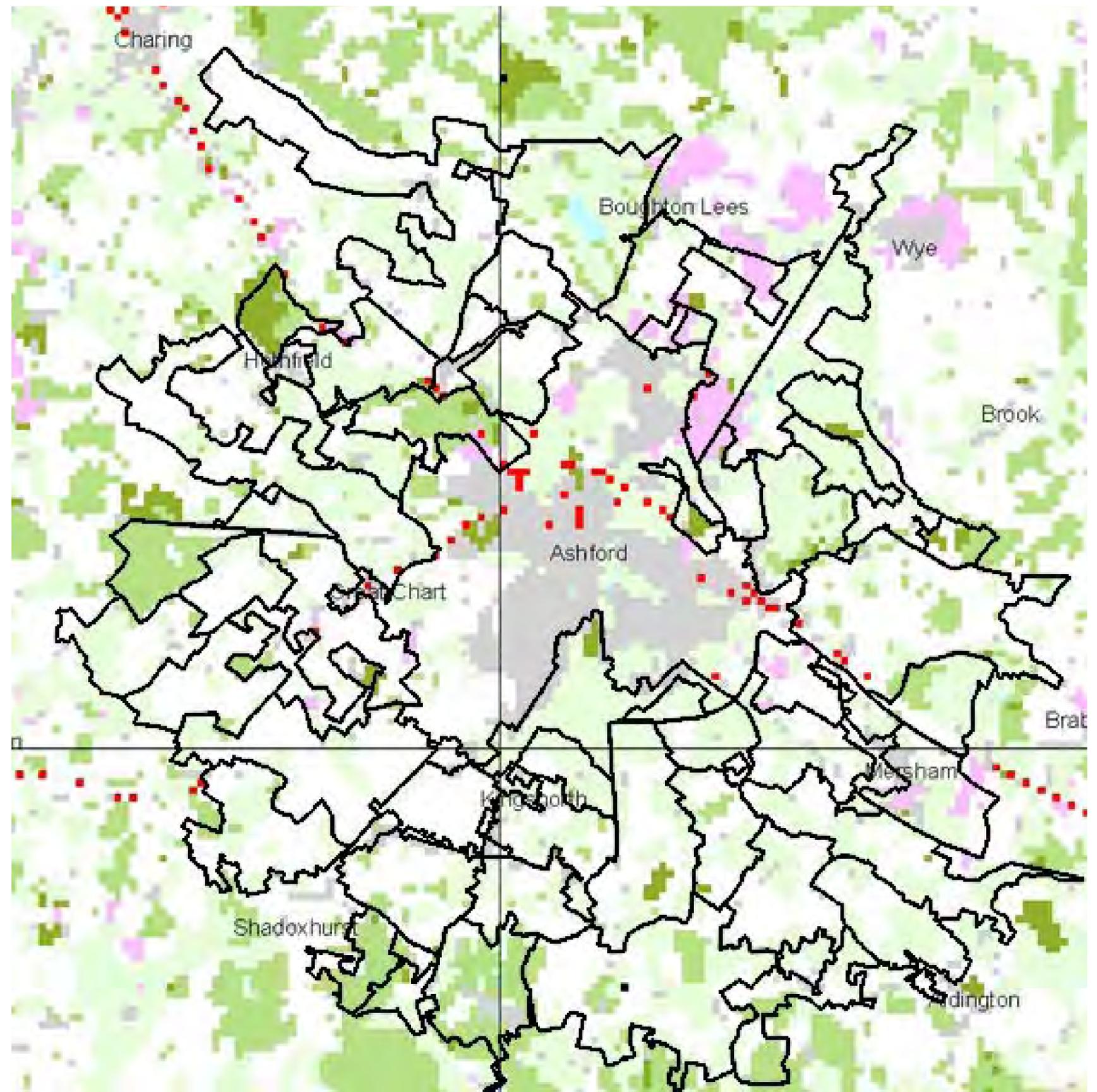
The Kent Landcover study highlights significant changes to the rural scene between 1961 and 1999. The mapping from KCC opposite shows landcover by 1x1 km tetrads.

Generally in the Greensand there has been a loss of heath, and existing open heathland commons, such as Hothfield, are being compromised by encroaching birch scrub, oak and pine due to the reduction in traditional land husbandry. Some landscape managers have suggested the reintroduction of grazing as a more sustainable way of managing these heaths (such as use of Dexter Cattle), but in built up areas this has often been objected to by residents. Eventually, the encroachment of climax woodland cover will obscure views from the tops of hills.

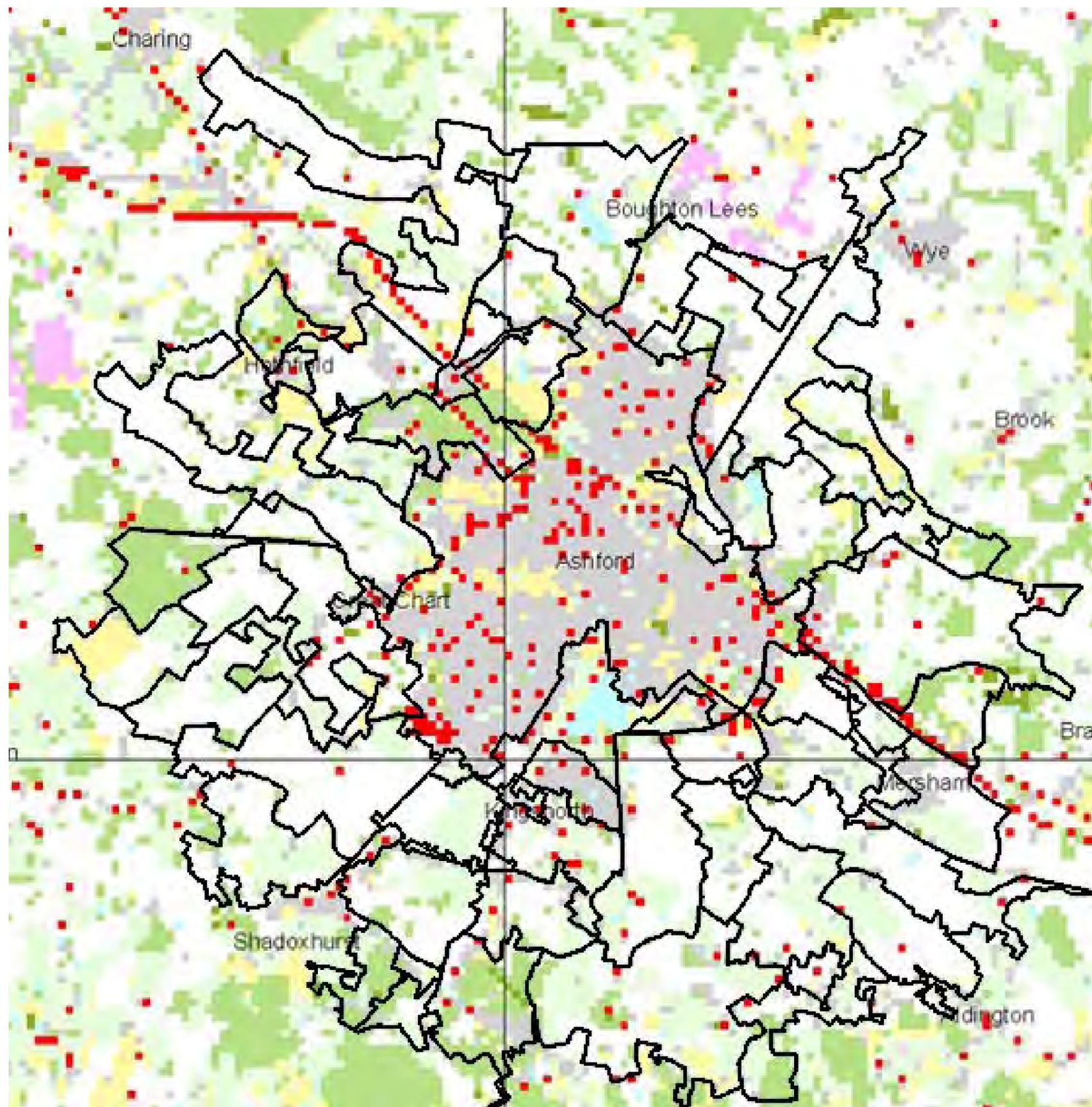
There has been neglect of traditional woodland coppice, fruit orchards and hedgerows. The market for coppice wood has declined, but new markets are possible for both biofuels, fencing and building cladding, and these may provide the catalyst for maintaining this distinctive landscape. Traditionally managed orchards have largely disappeared with the introduction of dwarf fruit tree varieties, and most Hop gardens have disappeared with drinkers choosing pilsner lager and alcopops instead of traditional English beers. The consequence has been the loss of the distinctive high hedgerows needed to shelter these crops. In the last 50 years, agriculture has also become more mechanised leading to a loss of hedgerows which reached its peak in the 1970s. Remnants of hedges can be seen in lines of hedgerow trees without hedges crossing large arable fields.

The Great Storm of 1987, caused significant loss of large trees, but in the intervening period there has been significant regeneration. It is important to note that predicted climate change is likely to increase the incidence of severe storm events and this may have a significant impact on exposed areas, suggesting a need to reinforce weakened features through planting and appropriate management. This is particularly so in many historic designated parklands.

There has been a general degradation of major river-floodplain landscapes in the Greensand due to mineral extraction and changes in agriculture. This is an essential feature of the landscape east of Ashford.



1961



- Arable
- Grassland
- Grassland & Scrub
- Orchard and Hop
- Scrub
- Woodland
- Urban
- Roads
- Rivers, Standing Open Water & Wetland
- Coastline

Each square represents one hectare (100m x 100m)
Source: KCC County Landcover Survey leaflet

1999

Landscape context

A Landscape of Layers: Time Depth in Historic Character

The KCC / English Heritage Historic Landscape Characterisation report incorporates some definite chronological thresholds and typological distinctions to provide some broad patterns illustrating the development of the Kent Landscape. The mapping opposite from that report do not represent a picture of the landscape at any particular period but show areas that may potentially contain identifiable remains of early landscape characteristics. This may be important when considering the means to conserve a landscape, or at least to be aware of the living cultural heritage that could be lost for ever.

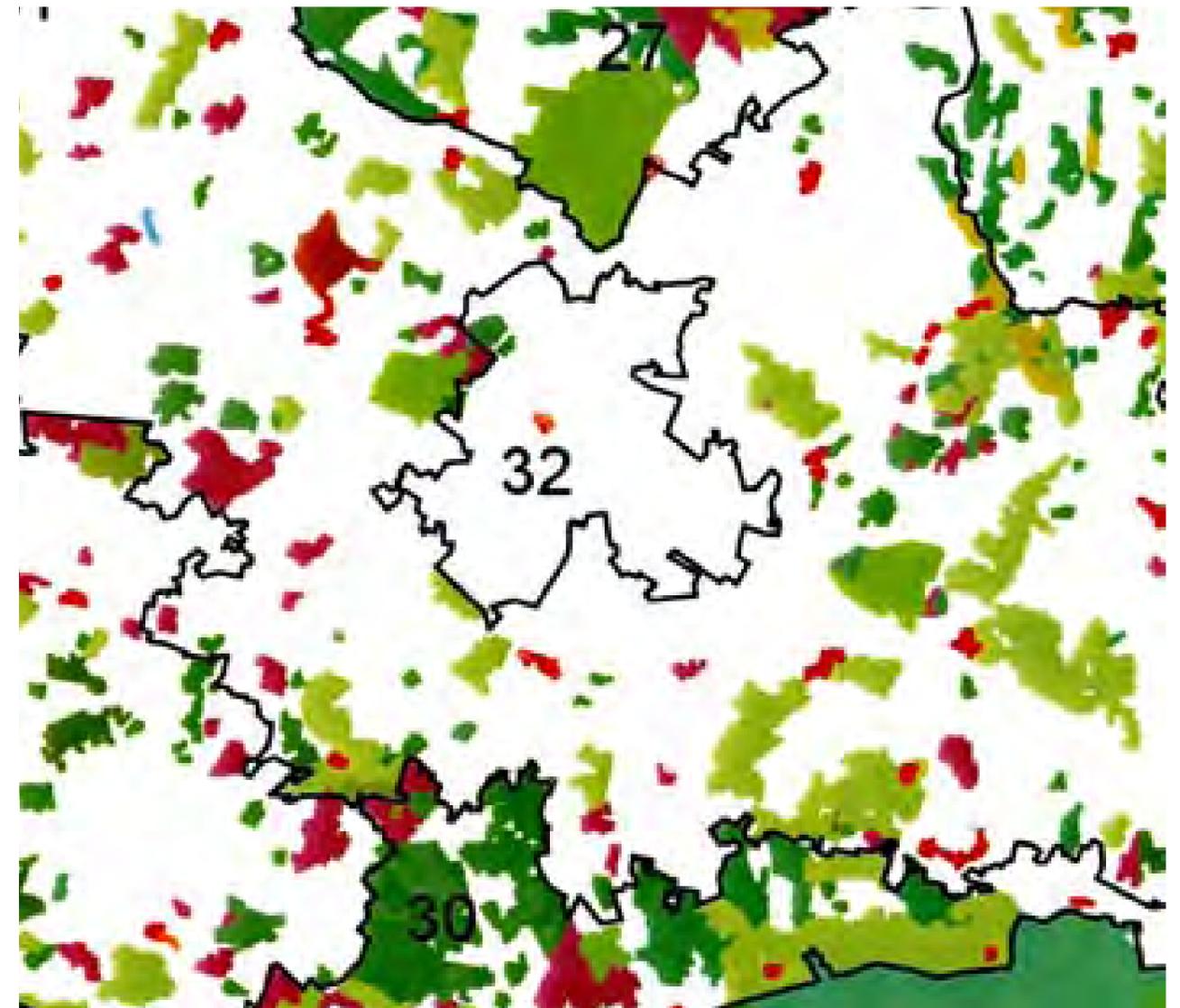
The first map shows those features that are most likely to retain morphological attributes characteristic of changes and developments that may have occurred in the medieval and early post medieval period even though much of the detail such as individual houses in settlements and trees in woods are likely to be more recent. Intensive agriculture and urban expansion have had a negative impact on the survival of these features.

The central map shows areas added to the post medieval map that are mostly likely to retain attributes or morphological traits characteristic of changes in the centuries between the post medieval period and the start of the nineteenth century. The overall pattern reinforces the view that much of the Kent landscape has potentially early origins for its basic form and character, although significant elements of it have been radically altered from the late nineteenth century to the present day.

The last map adds features to the early 19th century map to show areas likely to retain those attributes or changes that took place in the nineteenth century, but excluding the post 1801 urban development, much of which occurred in the twentieth century.

Of interest in this study area is coppice woodland - an ancient craft still practised in the modern landscape and with modern applications. Although few new coppices were planted in the last 100 years, it is possible that areas of coppice were planted or converted from woodland in the last two centuries; however it was assumed that all coppice is early in date.

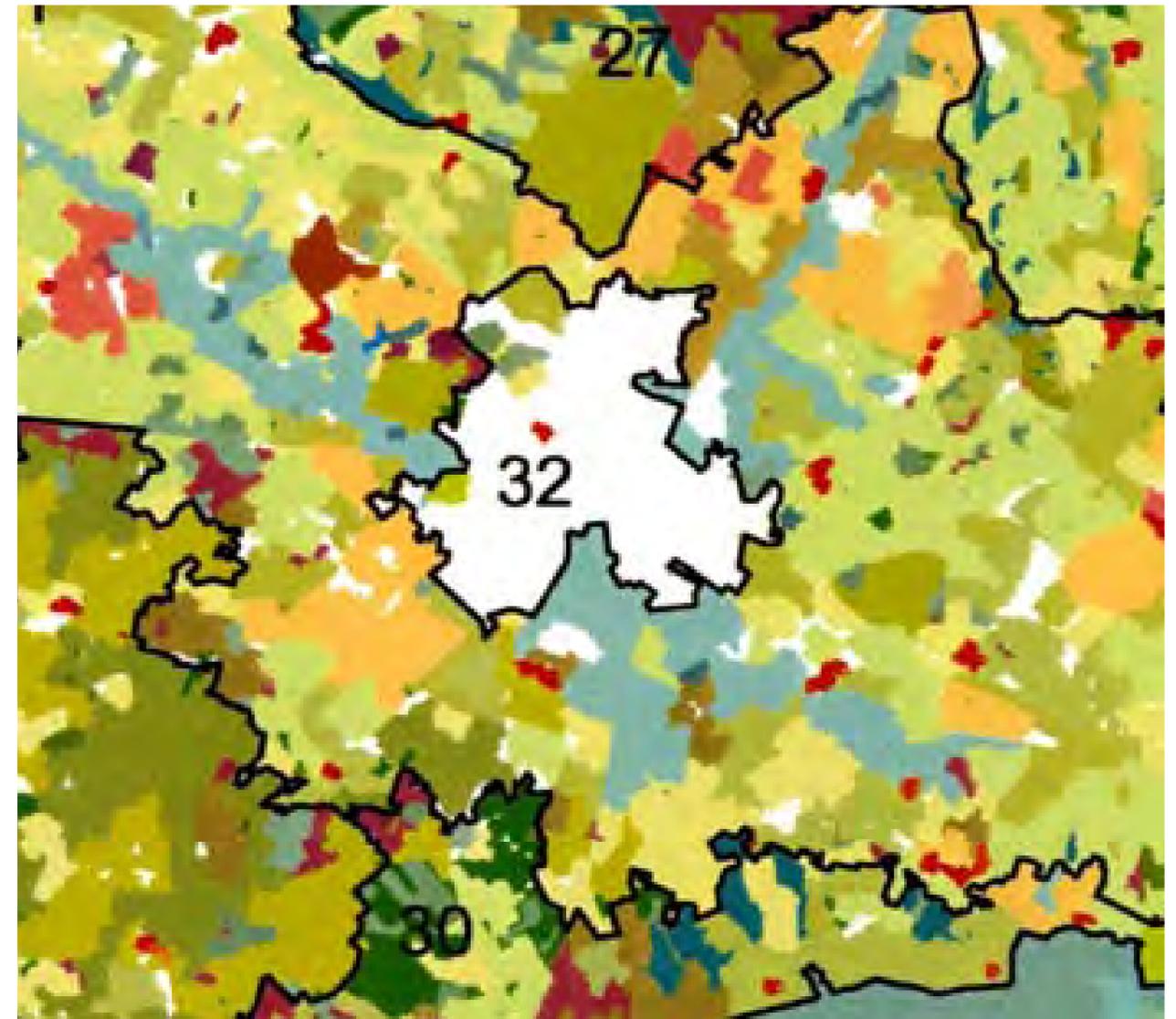
Overall Kent is an ancient landscape. Elements of the southern part of the county have undergone slow and gradual change since the establishment of permanent settlement. There is a deep and complex time depth to this landscape which needs to be considered in landscape and conservation management policies, and ought to be reflected in new and restored landscapes.



Time Depth to post Medieval Period



Time Depth to early 19th century



Time Depth to late 19th century

FIELD PATTERNS	
1.1	Small Assarts
1.2	Medium Assarts
1.3	Large Assarts
1.4	Regular Assarts
1.6	Large Wavy Boundaries
1.7	Irregular Straight Boundaries
1.8	Regular Ladder Fields
1.9	Small Regular
1.10	Medium Regular
1.11	Large Regular
1.12	Graded Regular
1.13	Prairie Fields
1.14	Fields Bounded by Tracks
1.16	Small Wavy Boundaries
1.18	Small Wavy Bounded Fields with Ponds
1.17	Large Wavy Bounded Field with Ponds

COMMONS	
2.1	Common Heathland
2.2	Downland Common
2.3	Other Commons & Greens
2.4	Wooded Over Commons
2.5	Rough Ground
HORTICULTURE	
3.1	Orchards
3.3	Nurseries with Glasshouses
3.5	Vineyards
3.6	Plant
WOODLAND	
4.1	Assarts Pre-1801
4.2	Replanted Assarts Pre-1801
4.3	Other Pre-1801

4.4	Other Replanted Pre-1801
4.5	Post-1801 Plantations
4.6	Pre-1801 Wooded Scarps & Gills
4.7	Post-1801 Wooded Scarps & Gills
4.8	Post-1801 Coppice
4.9	Pre-1801 Coppice
4.10	Pre-1801 Wood Pasture
4.11	Post-1801 Wood Pasture

DOWNLAND:

7.3	Marsh and Rough Grazing
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SETTLEMENTS	
8.1	Pre-1801 Scattered Settlement
8.2	Post-1801 Scattered Settlement
8.3	Pre-1801 Common Edge Settlement
8.4	Post-1801 Common Edge Settlement
8.6	Post-1801 Settlement
8.7	Village / Hamlet 1801 Extent
8.8	Town & City 1801 Extent
8.11	Caravan Sites and Holiday Chalets
8.12	Prisons

PARKLAND AND DESIGNED LANDSCAPE	
10.1	Pre-1801 Parkland
10.2	Post-1801 Parkland
10.3	Deer Parks

RECREATION	
11.1	Racetracks
11.2	Golf Courses
11.3	Sports Fields

EXTRACTIVE AND OTHER INDUSTRY	
12.1	Chalk and Ragstone Quarries
12.2	Gravel and Clay Quarries
12.3	Factories
12.4	Large Scale Industry
12.5	Water Treatment
12.6	Dockyards
12.7	Abandoned Industry

Landscape context

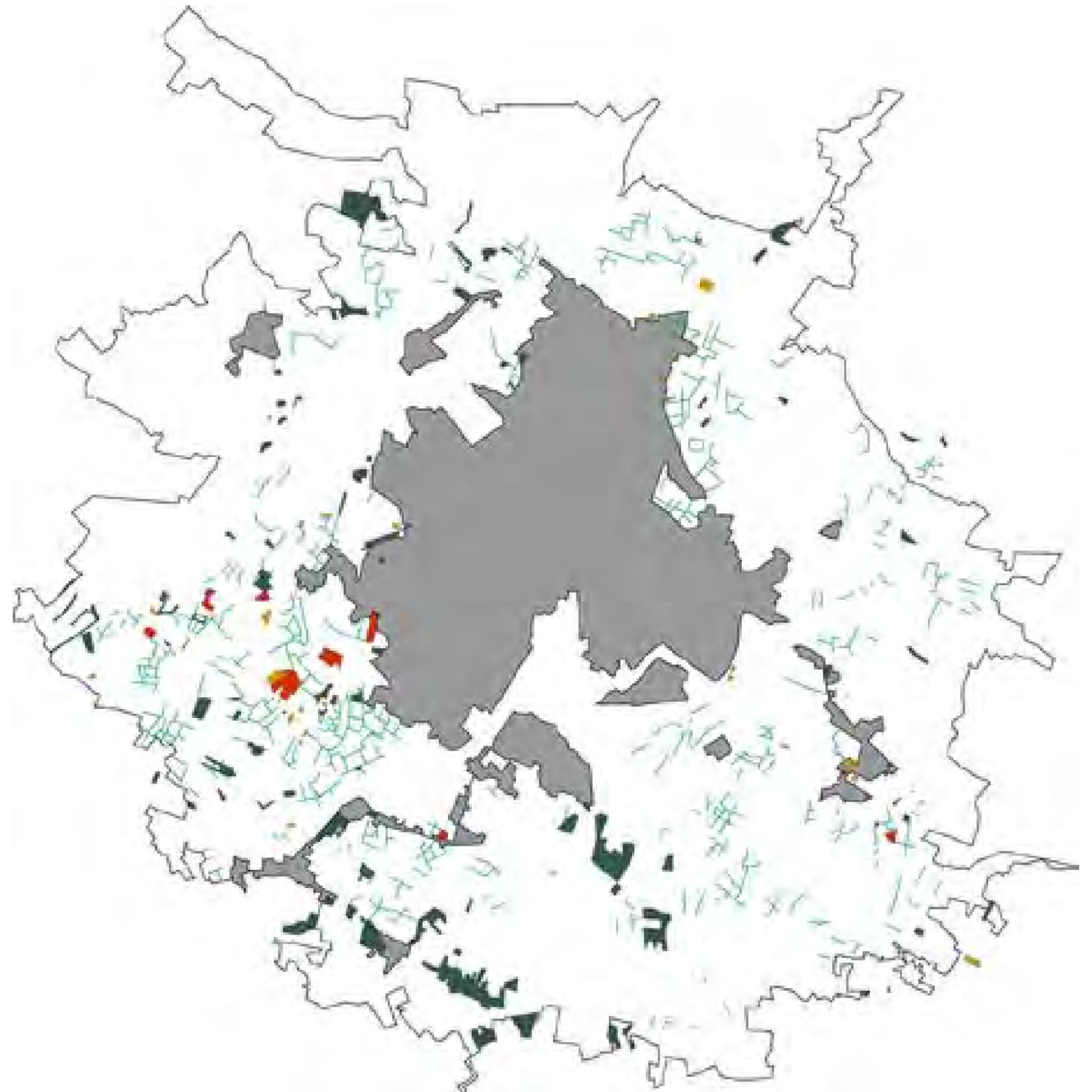
A Landscape of Layers: Landscape detail lost since 1871

Field Boundaries, Woods, Orchards

The Landscape is ever changing and reflects the economy, agricultural subsidies, leisure activities, infrastructure and so on. Significant changes occurred following the end of the Second World War with the mechanisation of agriculture and subsidies aimed at increasing yields. The first Ordnance Survey maps of the area date from 1871, and these show a greater level of detail in the landscape - smaller fields, more woodland, more orchards. The distribution of oast houses in the study area, built as round kilns and so dating from between 1830 and 1890, suggest that hops were also grown as a cash crop for a period too.

The OS maps do not show what type of field boundaries there were, although lone, often stag headed, hedgerow trees present in large arable fields suggest hedgerows. Hedges needed for hop gardens and orchards were maintained as high wind breaks to protect crops. These hedges gave a distinctive quality to even level areas of landscape, restricting long views. Such management also affected the ecology of the hedgerows. This grain was lost when hedges were removed post 1960, or reduced in height. The map opposite illustrates the loss of detail and the opening up of the landscape.

It is certain that damp areas were drained and ponds filled in; some field boundaries and spinneys in the floodplain have also made way for drained arable land. Together these actions have not only erased the grain of the landscape, but also the capacity of the land to deal with natural forces - reducing surface water run off during winter, and retaining moisture during dry summers for example. The new Rural Development Service Environmental Stewardship programme provides an opportunity to address adverse changes in the rural scene.



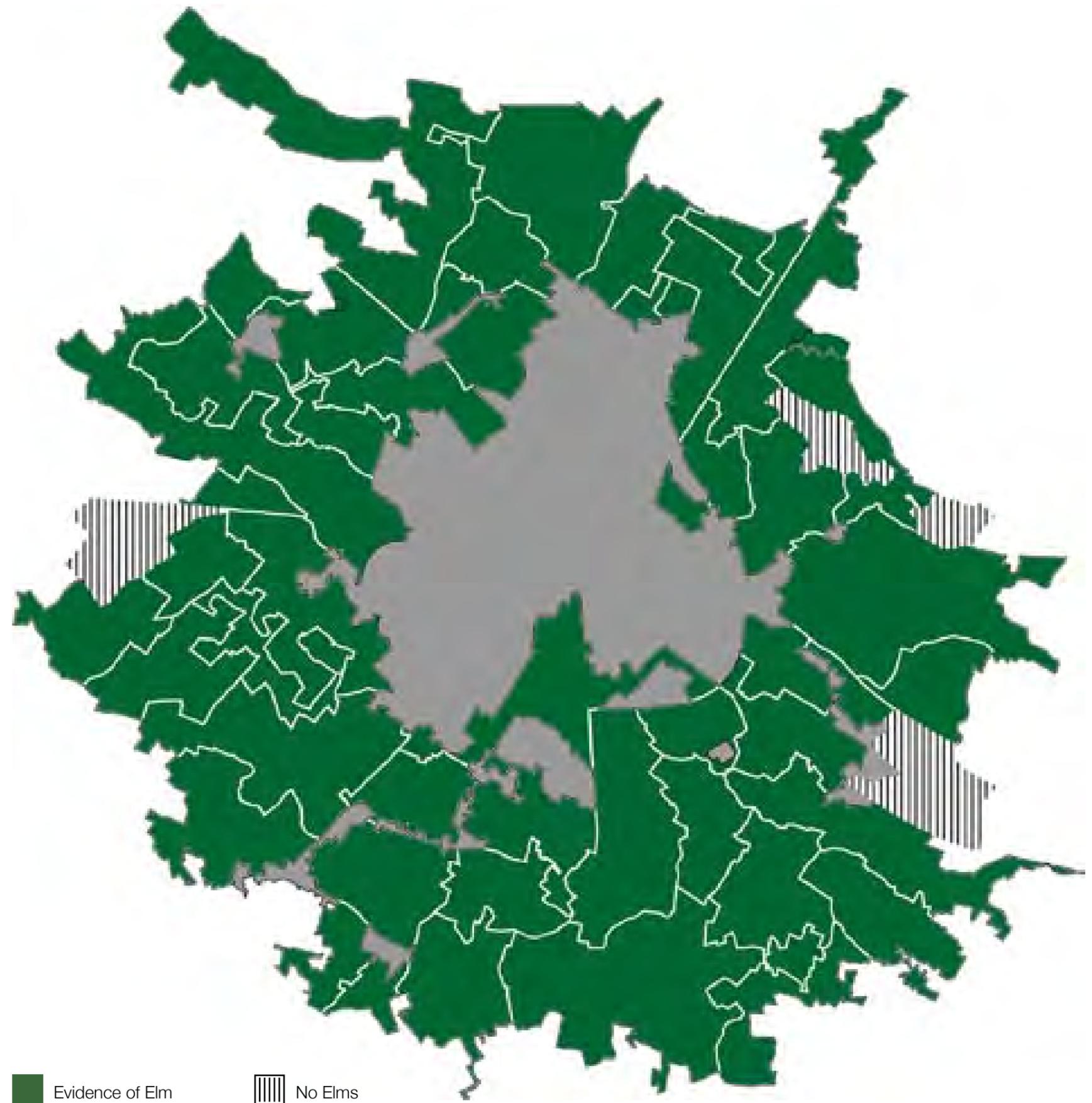
Woodlands – 1871/72 Orchards – 1871/1872 Orchards – 1907/1908 Hedgerows lost since 1870's Ashford urban areas

Landscape context

A Landscape of Layers: Evidence of hedgerow elms

General

Elms were a significant feature in the lowland English farmed landscape for centuries. Introduced from a single source by the Romans, the genetically similar makeup of all elms made them particularly susceptible to the ravages of the Dutch Elm disease in the 1960s and early 1970s which effectively wiped out this major landscape feature. Elms were not found in woodlands as far as we know as they were a planted tree, the timber being very durable when in contact with water. Today we see elms as young trees that have suckered up from ancient roots and which live to about 20 years before falling prey for the disease leaving stark twigs in an otherwise verdant summer landscape. During our field work we looked for evidence of elms in hedgerows where they survive well and the sand paper textured leaved are displayed in distinctive zig zag fronds against the sky. Nearly the whole area has some evidence of elm in the hedge rows, although some areas had more than others. Often these hedgerow trees were not replaced when they died and so point to a loss in the landscape grain of the area.

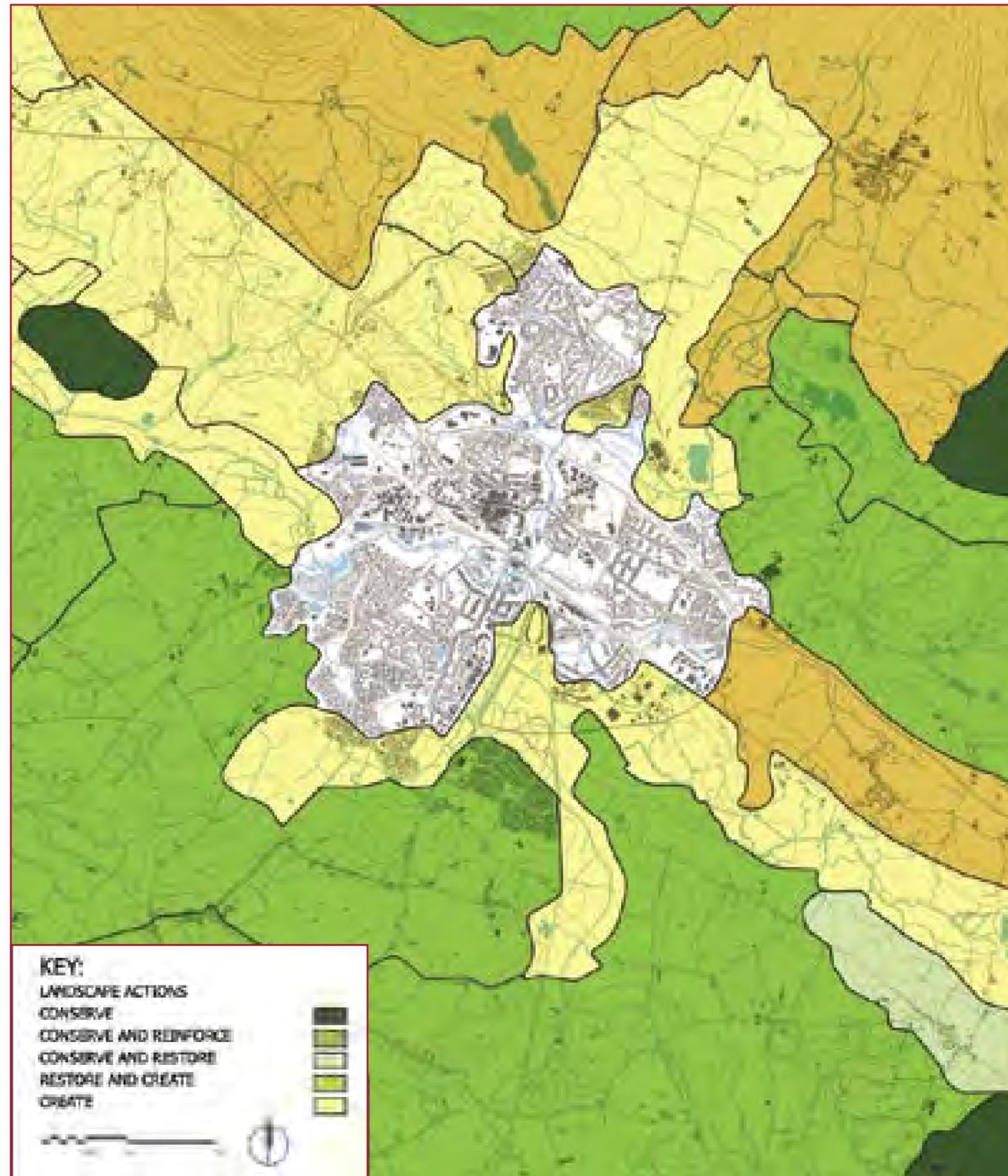


Landscape context

A Landscape of Layers: COUNTY LANDSCAPE STRATEGY

General

The KCC / Babbie Landscape Character Assessment of Kent divided the county into 150 landscape areas that displayed similar characteristics. These areas were assessed for their sensitivity in the same way that we have assessed smaller parcels within those county areas for this study. The result was a landscape strategy map. Very little of the landscape around Ashford was judged to be worthy solely of conservation, the notable exception being Hothfield Common. Areas to the south, and the farmland east of Hinxhill was given a 'conserve and restore' rating. Great swathes running through the town roughly along the Wealden Greensand ridge, plus the southern slopes of the Downs were considered to have lost much of their essential characteristics and were given either a 'create' rating - particularly in the zone occupied by the major national transport infrastructure of the M20 and CTRL corridors, or a 'restore and create' designation. These broad categories were applied for the whole of the county areas as an average. In our study, because we looked at a finer grain and smaller parcels of land, and because generally only part of the country type fell within the study area, we added a more detailed assessment. These have been summarized in this document and are more fully recorded in the accompanying supplementary data sets for each country type falling in the Ashford study area.



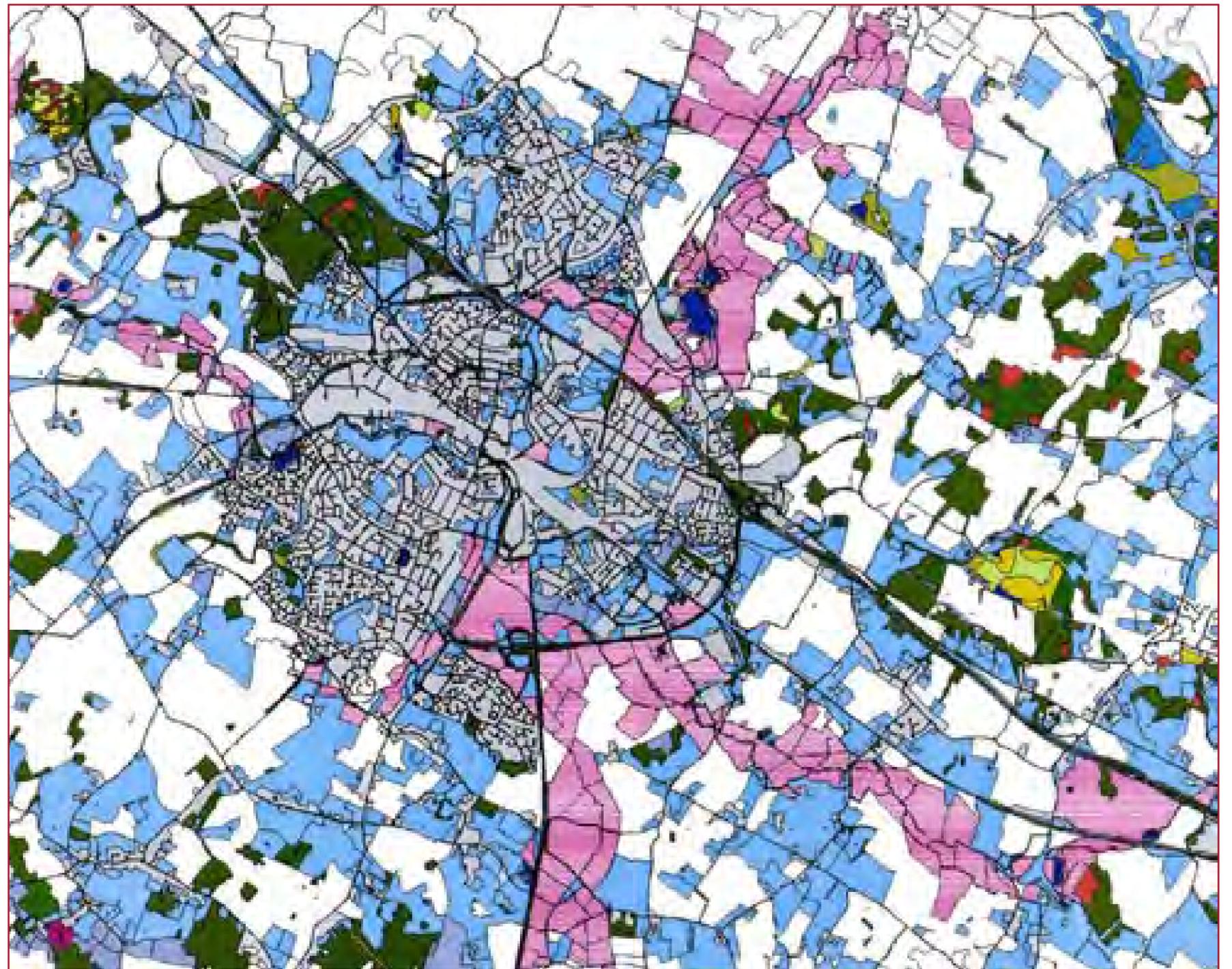
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Landscape context

A Landscape of Layers: KENT LIFESCAPES STUDY (K-LIS)

General

The Low Weald is a broad, low-lying, clay vale surrounding the High Weald, the oldest and highest part of the Wealden anticline, on the effect on the characteristic high hedgerows enclosing country



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Section 3 Appreciation of character

Appreciation of character

Detail and Delight

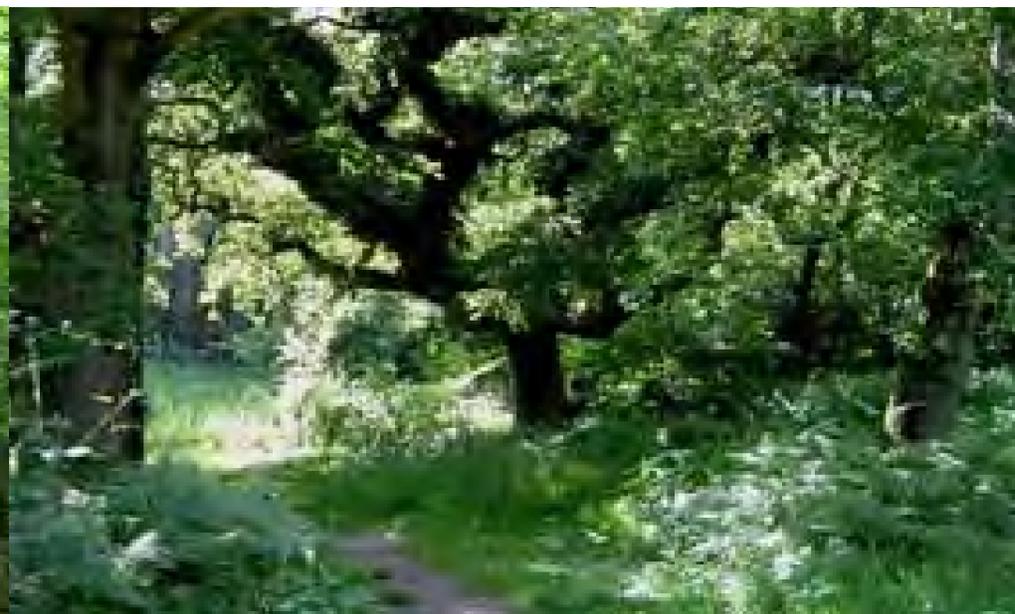
In examining the components of the landscape of the Low Weald a key aspect is the composition of spatial volumes created between blocks of woodlands, green tunnels, or by hedges and shaws. Whether experiencing the landscape at a leisurely pace on foot when the greatest detail can be appreciated, or slightly faster on bicycle or horseback when the sequence of spaces and layers of hedges can appear like stage scenery 'flats', or at the modern pace by car, time is an important component of the experience.

The character of the rural scene is more than the topography, field size, enclosure for at a more detailed level the natural plant communities and the way they are managed have a significant impact on the experience of the countryside. Soils and drainage influence plant communities in the first place, and this is modified by land husbandry and the human hand. In the following section the different plant communities that form a palette of colours and textures from which the rural scene is composed are described in aesthetic terms rather than a strictly geographical or ecological way since this is how most people experience the countryside.

Not everyone is alive to the detail as were writers such as Edmund Blunden or HE Bates who were so inspired by this particular landscape, but it is important to seek out the landscape 'signatures' so that strategies can be put forward to reinforce existing qualities, or to extend or recreate them in the context of urban expansion around Ashford.



Green tunnel experienced by car



The play of light and shade on a woodland walk



A vole emerges from the hedgerow



The poetics of landscape

*'How beautiful through April time and May
The woods look, filled with wild anemones!
And every little spinney now looks gay
With flowers mid brushwood and the huge oak trees.'*

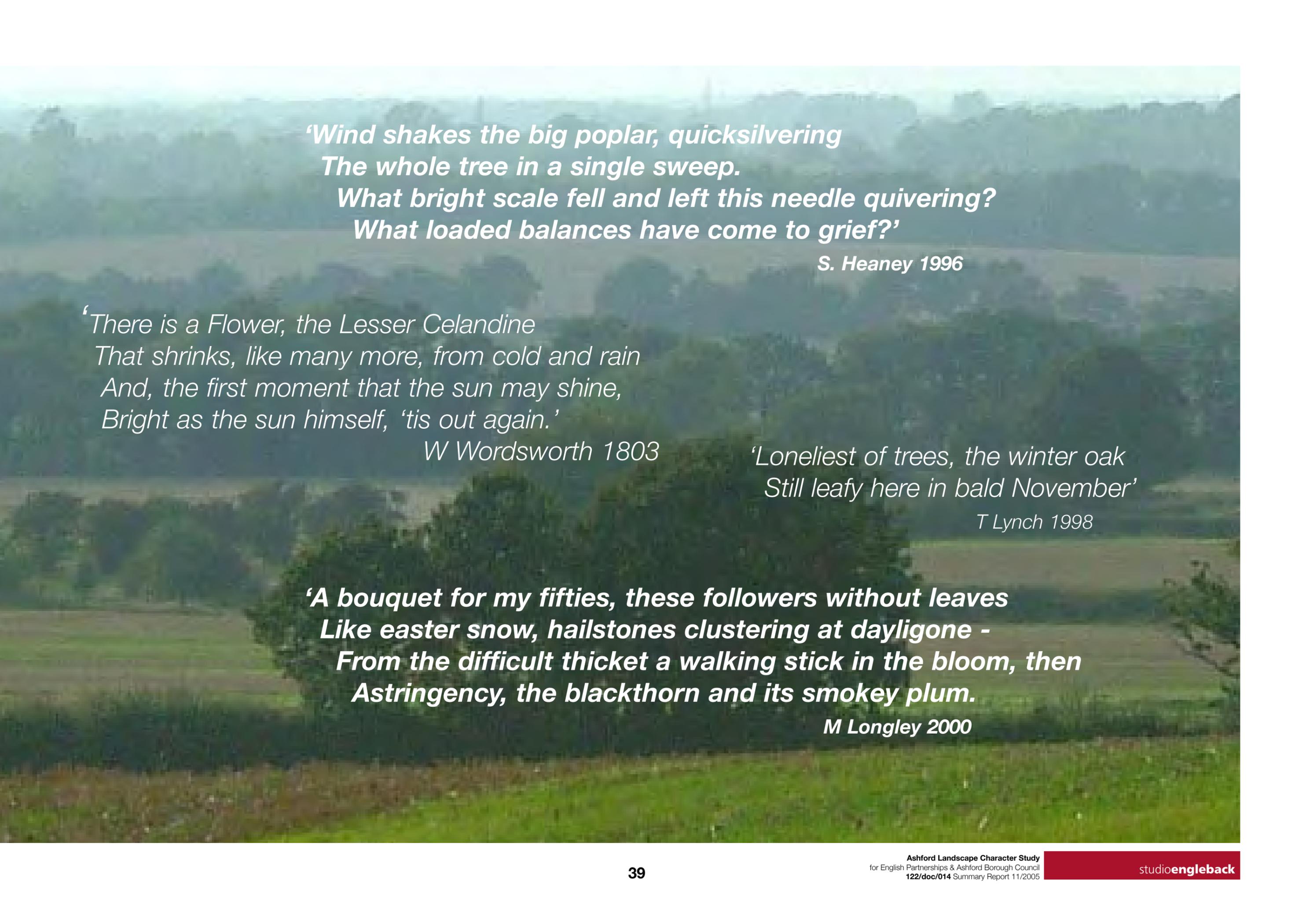
J Clare 1850 about the wood anemone

***'The every lawn, the wood, and spinney through,
Mid creeping moss and ivy's darker green;
How much thy presence beautifies the ground:
How sweet thy modest, unaffected pride
Glows on the sunny bank, and wood's warm side'***

J Clare 1820 about the primrose

*'The poplars are felled; farewell to the shade
And the whispering sound of the cool colonnade
The winds play no longer and sing in the leaves.'*

W Cowper 1785



***'Wind shakes the big poplar, quicksilvering
The whole tree in a single sweep.
What bright scale fell and left this needle quivering?
What loaded balances have come to grief?'***

S. Heaney 1996

*'There is a Flower, the Lesser Celandine
That shrinks, like many more, from cold and rain
And, the first moment that the sun may shine,
Bright as the sun himself, 'tis out again.'*

W Wordsworth 1803

*'Loneliest of trees, the winter oak
Still leafy here in bald November'*

T Lynch 1998

***'A bouquet for my fifties, these followers without leaves
Like easter snow, hailstones clustering at dayligone -
From the difficult thicket a walking stick in the bloom, then
Astringency, the blackthorn and its smokey plum.***

M Longley 2000

Appreciation of character

Seasonal Changes

There is a succession of colour in hedges starting, where present with the yellow catkins of the hazel in January and February, followed by the silver down and golden haze of the Pussy Willow in March, by which time the Blackthorn produces prodigious clouds of white blossom before the leaves break bud.

Hawthorn, also known as May because of the timing of its flowers follows. Guelder Rose flat white blooms appear briefly in late May as do the less significant Dogwood flowers in early June followed by the white Field Rose and pink Dog Rose. The link to autumn commences in August with the Haws on the Hawthorn turning red and Sloes of the Blackthorn starting to turn dark blue with a characteristic glaucous bloom, along with the red then black fruits of the blackberry *Rubus fruticosus*, and the translucent red berries of the Guelder Rose and the Wood Bryony. The Field Maple has

the showiest autumn colour of translucent butter yellow, which for a while starts to light up the shady lanes, and this is followed by the dark red and dull purple of Dogwood, where present, leaving red twigs in winter.

At verge and ditch level another seasonal succession of detail is played out that should be seen in the context of the woodland floor in early spring. Together they are one of the glories of the Low Wealden Landscape, and rely to a great extent on the management of this landscape, such as the timing of verge cutting and the maintenance of the coppice rotation.

During May in woodlands, and along hedges and shaws that are remnants of woodlands, 'indicator species' of ancient woodlands, the Wood Anemone *Anemone blanda* carpets the area in delicate

white flowers on soft green foliage, followed immediately by the Wood Anemone *Anemone blanda* carpets the area in delicate white flowers on soft green foliage, followed immediately by carpets of Bluebells *Endymion non-scriptus* which start as deep blues becoming lighter as the weeks pass, and with the flowers, a strong perfume from this wild hyacinth. By contrast in damper areas, the strap like glossy leaves of Ramsons or Wild Garlic *Allium ursinum* with showy drifts of white flowers gives a pungent scent that hangs heavy in wooded hollows. Where coppice has been managed, there are flashes of pink and purple from the tall flower spikes of Foxglove *Digitalis purpurea* and Rosebay Willowherb *Epilobium angustifolium* which take advantage of the flood of light to the woodland floor for the early years of the coppice regrowth.



WINTER orange willow twigs.....**EARLY SPRING** alder catkins & cones.....**MARCH** silver/gold/green willow.....**EARLY APRIL** celendine in verges....**LATE APRIL** anemone woodland carpet...primrose on banks....bluebell woodland carpet.....reeking ransomes.....

Damp ditch locations are favoured by Milk Maid or Cuckoo Flower *Cardamine pratensis* which emerge in small pale pink colonies and primrose *Primula vulgare* and the shiny yellow flowers of Lesser Celandine *Ranunculus ficaria*. In April the small white starlike flowers of Lesser Stitchwort *Stellaria graminea* emerge at the base of hedges along with Violets *Viola spp.* and Ragged Robin *Lychnis flos-cuculi*. About this time is a two week period when Dandelions reach their flowering peak on the drier verges along roadsides before becoming grey 'dandelion clocks'.

In late April and early May, rapid progress is made by Cow Parsley *Anthriscus sylvestris* attaining over a metre in height within 2-3 weeks and a very light, lacy foam of flowers bring light to the rapidly darkening lanes. As the tree canopy becomes denser during May and June there are fewer verge flowers in contrast to the open lanes.

The darkening mass of oak foliage is leavened in spring by Bird Cherry *Prunus avium* in flower. Cherry colours up well in autumn often in orange and purple tints. More rarely, the rich red and orange colouring of the Chequer Tree *Sorbus torminalis* is an occasional highlight of woodland edges; this uncommon tree is only native to the south east of England.



MAY

JUNE

SEPTEMBER

.....orchard apples, woodland cherries....hawthorn...cowparsley lined lanes....yellow flag/silver willows....honeysuckle starts...wild rose over so quickly.....bullaces, hips, haws, guelder rose berries

Appreciation of character

Quality of Place

As much of the area is wooded, and country lanes tend to have high hedges, and long views within the area are often restricted to panoramas from surrounding high ground. These elevated areas, particularly the North Downs around Ashford, and the Greensand around Pluckley also form an important backdrop. A typical feature of many roads and lanes are over-arching trees forming green tunnels of foliage often quite dark in the height of summer. Hedges and lower branches trimmed by frequent traffic give a manicured effect, whereas byways have a softer, looser bucolic quality. As a consequence of the tight landscape where, often, only small patches of sky can be seen, small settlements are often well hidden and the countryside has a remote quality where it is far from main roads and railways.

Notwithstanding the enclosed character of many roads and lanes, gateways, often set back from the road allow framed views of the countryside, often made more dramatic in the context of

the shaded lanes. Narrow lanes with broad verges, ditches and hedges, are a remnant of the drove roads used to drive swine to pannage (feeding on acorns in oak woodlands) in autumn. As the area was wet, these trackways were also wide to allow horse drawn vehicles to avoid boggy areas.

A notable variation to the Low Weald character is the urban sprawl on the low-lying, more open land around Gatwick Airport. There are similarities, on a smaller scale, with this area and the open, level land south of Ashford which has been designated for that town's growth in RPG 9. Here vast prairie fields have been created by the removal of field boundaries. A similar degraded landscape can be seen in the Willsborough Dykes where canalisation for the river, levees and poor grazing are further compromised by elevated, noisy ring roads. This forlorn area contrasts with the richness of the floodplain at Bybrook, or even areas near Captain's Wood.

Wealden Clay is heavy, poorly drained and nutrient poor, and is used mainly for pasture. Much of this grassland has been improved with the consequent loss of the diverse meadow flower species still common in the 1960s. The clay has been the basis of a thriving brick and tile industry, the closest to Ashford being at Pluckley, where there is a large clay pit adjacent to the railway.

The damp clay soils have produced a rich verdant landscape which contrasts with the warm orange-red of the bricks and peg tiles produced from the local clay or white painted weather boarding on many of the timber framed houses in this part of Kent. Traditional barns tend to have hipped gables and creosote treated weather boarding. Oast houses with their distinctive conical roofs and white cowls, often in groups of two or three provided a very typical vertical accent. Although hop growing was never a major concern here, there are oast houses that hark back to the heyday of hop gardens in Kent at the end of the Victorian era.



Mock Lane at Chilmington contrasts with the vast agro-industrial plain south of Ashford with dying reminders of what had articulated this landscape.....undulating grazing at Colliers Hill

The variety of habitats and the inter-connectedness of landscape features means that the area has a high nature conservation value. Where these elements have been removed through intensive arable farming there is a corresponding loss in the landscape character and wildlife value. The K-LIS project points to areas that could form a strategic enhancement of this resource. Bird song and butterflies in summer may be an ephemeral aspect of the landscape character, but it is an important one that has suffered in the last 30 years. Although not a permanent physical feature, the sound of birds is always present, if not as 'loud' as in the recent past due to the fall in populations of birds, formerly quite common. This is the link between assessing landscape character and peoples' appreciation of rural qualities and more scientific assessment of natural processes and habitats.

The tranquility of the landscape is also a vital factor. The Countryside Agency and CPRE produced a tranquility map of England in 1996 showing the marked difference between the early 1960s and the early 1990s. A tranquil area was defined as being 4 kilometres from the largest power stations, 3km from the most highly trafficked roads, large towns and industrial areas, 2km from motorways and major trunk roads, 1km from medium disturbance roads (approximately 10 000 vehicles per day) and some main line railways. A tranquil area also lies beyond military and civil airport noise. In the Ashford context this is a key consideration, as the M20 and CTRL as well as the elevated ring roads through the Willsborough Dykes affect adjacent areas significantly. Much of the M20 is in a deep cutting through Ashford limiting its effect, but the combination of heavy use and elevated status of the ring road and Romney Marsh Road with the open nature or the Willsborough Dykes unrelieved by vegetation means that the sound carries to the detriment of enjoying the area.

Overall, the combination between the visual, aural, and olfactory senses, an appreciation of cultural history of the landscape and the cultural heritage of buildings and other features with a seasonal timescale, add up to the quality of place and placedness which can be appreciated at different levels depending on the speed at which these qualities are perceived.



rolling fields at Sevington contrast with the floodplain & river near Bybrook, or the farmed floodplain near Captains Wood, which are richer than the canalised river in the Willsborough Dykes



Section 4 Landscape Signatures

Landscape signatures

WOODLANDS

Ashford District is the contains has the largest cover of woodland in Kent. Woodland cover varies according to the original level of forest clearance for agriculture and subsequent silvicultural husbandry. The tree lined hedges which link small copses and woodlands enhance the wooded character of the area. Many of the woodlands are 'ancient' i.e. undisturbed since pre-1600.

The Kent Habitat Survey does not give much detail on woodland types, yet, as can be seen on this page, there is a great variety of woodland types around Ashford. The character of the woodland changes by the season, and from outside to inside. Woodland blocks contain landscape spaces in the lowland creating edges if different textures and hues, there are different responses to breezes - poplars and willows shimmer, birches catch the light and reveal white trunks, whilst oaks are more solid and pines are much darker, both these with greater difference of light and deep shade.

Large coppice stools and boundary woodland banks and ditches are characteristic. Oak is the main component of Low Wealden woodland, often with an understorey of Hazel coppice (although there is little in the study area), a form of management known as coppice with standards, this also extends in some places to the husbandry of Sweet Chestnut as well. In areas where there is base rich soil overlying limestone outcrops there is Ash, Field Maple and Hazel. Birch, a short lived pioneer species, often invades older coppices and acid grassland on the Greensand like Hothfield Common. Goat Willow, Hawthorn and Holly are often the shrub species associated with woodland edge conditions.

Much of the woodland around Ashford has been managed as coppice, but there is a difference in the quality of place and character between different coppice woods. most of the coppice is either Sweet Chestnut, a vigourously growing crop with large mid green

shiny leaves casting a heavy shade. In spring many of these woodlands have a ground cover of white wood anenomes followed shortly after by carpets of bluebells before the canopy closes for the summer. These are ancient woodland indicator species and show that the area has been maintained as woodland for many centuries. Chestnut produces a tight sheaf of stout timbers from the coppice stool, in constrast to the slower growing, denser hornbeam, which appear more spindly. the hoen beam has a smaller, more translucent leaf creating a green haze above dark stems and a russet woodland floor of leaves, similar to a beechwood. We found some oak coppice, which is much rarer and perhaps not typical. In wet flushes, particularly north of Hatch Park there is Alder coppice. Alder, like chestnut, grows rapidly. the medium sized leaves are dark green and cast a particular dappled shade. Due to the damp nature of the land the understory has more ferns and rush in it, and the steam are more silvery in colour.



Broadleaf Woodland edge Plantation in winter Mixed Woodland edge Poplar shelterbelt stream side white willows Regenerating woodland Birch woodland

The range of woodland starts with regenerating woodland in which there is a preponderance of bramble scrub with trees fighting their way to the light. Light and airy birch woodland, anarchic verdant wet willow woods rampant with vegetation, to the stately cool oak woodlands in which small grassy glades provide welcome pools of light. Plantation woodland is generally less interesting, especially serried ranks of pines, where all light is excluded from the woodland floor which become springy with carpets of pine needles.

Because so much woodland around Ashford is coppice wood. it is also vital to recognise the cycle of woodland husbandry, even though in recent decades this has slowed to almost a halt. The cycle allows some plants to flourish until the canopy is too dense, or as a consequence of disturbed soils. Newly coppice woodland not only show off bluebells and anemones, but may also sport

bright patches of foxgloves and rosebay willowherb. Finding new markets for timber, especially as part of a zero carbon fuel policy may provide the momentum needed to manage existing woods and to plant new ones.

In wintertime there is a distinction too. Birch woodlands tend to have a reddish brown tinge of fine twigs, Alder carrs and coppices a fine tracery of twigs and little cones (strobili), Chestnut has lighter, fatter, more uniformly upright twigs compares to the fined detail of hornbeam, the often orange tinge of willows or the more craggy oak.

It is important to recognise these distinctions, for they are essential ingredients of the specific landscape characters around the town.



Oak coppice (rare) in autumn

Alder coppice (damp areas)

Hornbeam coppice

Chestnut coppice

Damp Woodland - Willow flush

Oak woodland interior

Landscape signatures

A PALETTE OF TREES

Oak form solid, stocky hedgerow trees in the main with typically short trunks and heavy branches ending in a filigree of twigs, although in some areas they can grow to a great size. The summer foliage is especially heavy due to the dark mid-green, and relatively small size, of the leaves and their distribution throughout the crown of the tree. By contrast, the Ash has a more elegant trunk, often of a light silver colour, with ascending branches and fewer more solid twigs. In winter this gives a very different tracery against the sky to that of the oak, and in summer the lighter green, pinnate, leaves which are mainly distributed on the outside of the crown give a light texture. In breezes, the lighter underside of the leaves is clearly visible giving a shimmering quality. Ash has one of the shortest seasons in leaf, often amongst the last to burst into leaf and the first to colour up and drop leaves in autumn.

A local adage relating to weather – Oak before Ash and we're in for a splash; Ash before Oak and we're in for a soak, has been

observed by this author as surprisingly true. In 2003 the buds of the oak burst some weeks before the ash and the summer was very dry, but in 2004 the reverse was true and August 2004 was one of the wettest summers on record!

Sweet Chestnut *Castanea sativa*, Hornbeam *Carpinus betulus*, and Hazel *Corylus avellana*, coppice is a regular feature. Hazel tends to be grown in association with Oak woodlands, but also features widely in high hedgerows, the yellow catkins being the first sign of spring, and the large ovate mid-green leaves contrasting with the finer texture of other hedgerow shrubs like Hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna* and Blackthorn *Prunus spinosa*.

Sweet chestnut is traditionally harvested on an 8-9 year rotation giving a rhythm to the rural scene and opening up the wooded quality of the rural scene making carpets of white wood anemones followed by bluebells all the more telling. The light green, large shiny leaves have a translucent quality that is particularly attractive with sun shining through them. The late light yellow flower spikes appearing in June giving a foaming appearance to chestnut coppices at a time when the oak woods have started to get a darker more solid feel.

Hornbeam coppice is less common and grows more slowly. In common with Beech a notable feature of the hornbeam forest floor is the rich russet carpet of leaves and the relative absence of vegetation. The leaves are small and light green and give a fine gauze



Mature oaks



Stag head oak



Veteran oak pollard



Oak standards in coppice



Veteran sweet chestnut



Willow pollards

like quality to the canopy from late May onwards, contrasting with the clearly defined multiple stems. In late May - June they produce copious pale green, hop-like flowers which turn light brown by early August and bare wind borne seeds in early autumn. There is a fine example near Pluckley.

In many places the Chestnut and Hornbeam coppice is a relic of the Wealden industrial heritage of charcoal burning to fuel the iron and glass production of pre Industrial Revolution England. Shaws, linear woods that are remnants of the wildwood are another typical feature, and combined with the tree lined hedgerows and small field patterns gives rise to a predominantly wooded quality to the landscape.

In damper areas and along riparian corridors, Willow and Alders are commonplace. They have very different characters. The various willow species tend to have light foliage ranging from the silver top with white undersides of White Willow *Salix alba* which shimmers in breezes, to the yellowy green of Osier and Cricket Bat Willow *Salix viminalis* and *Salix alba var. caerulea* and the rounded grey leaves of Goat Willow *Salix Caprea*. Winter stems tend to be light yellow or even orange. By contrast, alders have very sombre green foliage with slightly glossy leaves giving a more solid appearance. Alders are frequently managed cut to a stool producing multiple stems. In winter the fine tracery of twigs and fruiting strobili (like small fir cones) have a sculpted quality against the sky compared to willow scrub.

Orchards were never a key landscape component around Ashford itself, although there are remnants of an orchard near Sevington and there is a greater intensity of orchards on the greensand nearer to Pluckley and towards Smarden. Modern orchards use dwarf stock trees to facilitate harvesting, older apple, and especially cherry orchards used much taller trees, pruned in a characteristic manner giving a wide domed form. These orchards were often grazed by sheep to manage the grass. Tall hedges or low shelter belts of grey alders or poplars are used to protect the orchard from wind.



Alder Carr at a springhead



Green tunnel through a hornbeam coppice



Water side osiers and white willows



Apple Orchard

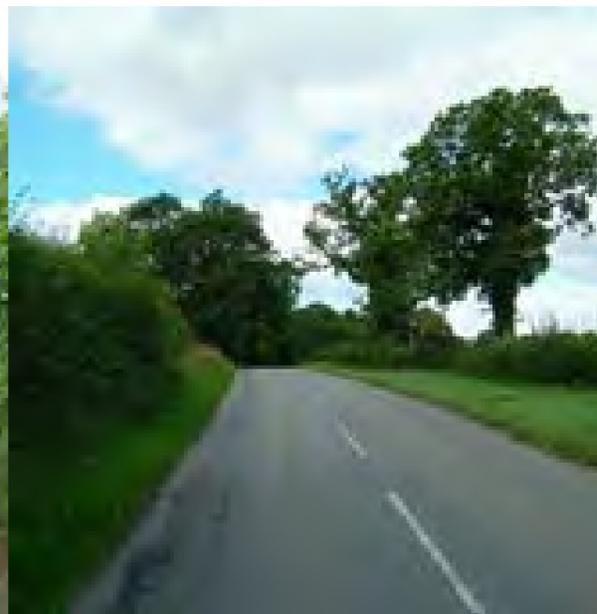
Landscape signatures

HEDGES

Hedgerows are frequently tall uncut hedges, lower square cut, or in places laid, containing mature trees such as Oak *Quercus robur* and Ash *Fraxinus excelsior*, with Field Maple *Acer campestre* and Holly *Ilex aquifolium* also appearing as smaller trees. Predominantly comprising thorn species Blackthorn or Sloe *Prunus spinosa* and Hawthorn *Crataegus monogynya*, some hedgerows have a great variety of species including Dogwood *Cornus sanguinea*, Guelder Rose *Viburnum opulus*, and Dog Rose *Rosa canina*. Woodland edge remnants such as Hazel and Field Maple are common, along with vestiges of English Elm *Ulmus procera* whose mature trees were wiped out by dutch elm diseases 30 years ago, but whose suckering stems may reach 4-5metres high before succumbing to disease. The number of species found in a hedge is frequently a sign of great age of these features. High uncut hedges frequently contain Pussy Willow *Salix caprea*. also known as Goat Willow.



Sunken lane with hedges



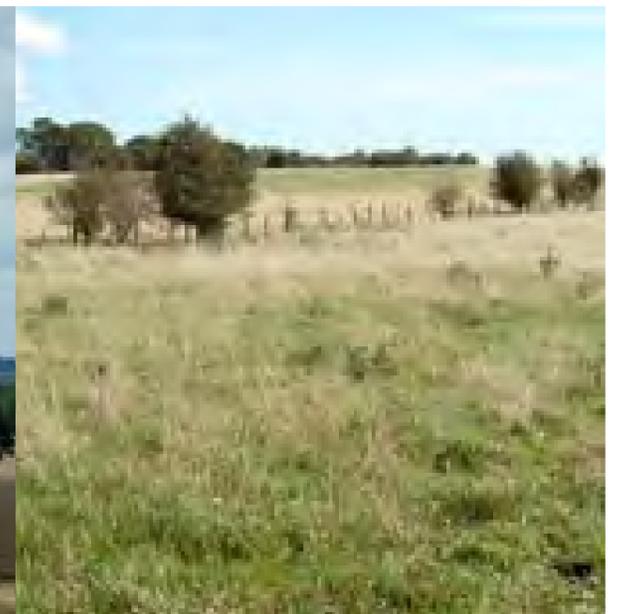
Well maintained high and low hedges with hedgerow trees and grassy verge



Hedgerow trees & poached hedge



Relic hedgerow trees in enlarged arable field



Relic hedge



Newly laid hedge



Remnant of laid hedge



Hedge & Ditch



High orchard hedge



Ash hedgerow

Landscape signatures

THE PRODUCTIVE LANDSCAPE

Early accounts of the Ashford landscape write of 'Cows belly deep in buttercups'. There is little evidence of this today. Where there is grazing it tends to be for sheep. Cattle are raised at Chilmington and there are also rough pastures with horses. Otherwise this is mainly an arable landscape. Agricultural improvements over the last 4 decades have seen the removal of miles of hedges and filed boundaries and the filling of ponds giving large open landscapes that reflect the seasons - ploughed land the haze of shoots from new winter wheat, various hues of green depending on crops - oil seed rape, wheat for example. Then the ripening in summer to light gold followed by the fleck of straw on the soil after harvest.

In many ways the arable landscape expresses the seasons more dramatically than the pastoral scene.



Arable field in winter



Seed drill machinery



Arable field in spring



Arable field in summer



Set-aside



Sheep Pasture



Paddocks



Rush mire

Landscape signatures

Water in the landscape : RIVERINE

The Low Weald is heavily dissected by rivers and streams with ponds frequently located in the edges of fields or in woodlands. Many are now apparently in the middle of large fields, suggesting the location of former field boundaries and hedgerows. Of these many are silted up or have moved to a willow carr climax, yet others have been filled in (example of Mr Wolverton's land at Chilmington – formerly 5 ponds on site now gone). Some of these ponds are the result of past quarrying for clay to manufacture bricks, marl pits, or the early iron industry. Due to the impervious nature of the soils, much of the area is subject to localised flooding.



Mill Race



Drainage Dyke



Ditch in the floodplain



Canalised river



Great Stour at Singleton



The Ashford Green corridors north of the town centre



open wetland near Bybrook



The Stour flowing towards Wye

Landscape signatures

Water in the landscape : PONDS, MOATS & DYKES

Ponds take several forms - farm ponds with hard edges, hammer ponds used to power the hammers in the old iron industry, borrow pit ponds, woodland ponds and more recently the balancing pond. A feature of the Ashford area are the number of moats still extant, although many are forgotten as at Singleton. Lakes at Singleton and Julie Rose derived from workings and mature quickly.



Mill Race



Drainage Dyke



Ditch in the Floodplain



Singleton Lake



Woodland Pond at the Warren Modern Balancing Pond



The Moat at Park Farm



Farm Pond



Landscape signatures

Water in the landscape : WETLANDS

Water, manifests itself as springs leading to wet flushes, bogs and mores. Wet woodland is a feature of the Low Weald - alder or willow carr, both with distinct characteristics. Poplar groves in shallow basins are enhanced by lush understory of damp species and water in winter. Some streams on the clay are seasonal and leave only a stream bed as evidence (see woodland below). Working water is seen at Swanton Mill and in Central Ashford as mill races, elsewhere the low lying ground in the floodplain has been drained with ditches and dykes. Some are wet all year round others marked by lush vegetation.

The East and Great Stour converge into the centre of the town near the Station. The East Stour rising on more open ground, and flowing through a broad floodplain, compared to the Great Stour that flows through a more dissected landscape. The green corridors through the town are a major asset with lush vegetation. The river is broader north of the town in open intensively farmed country.



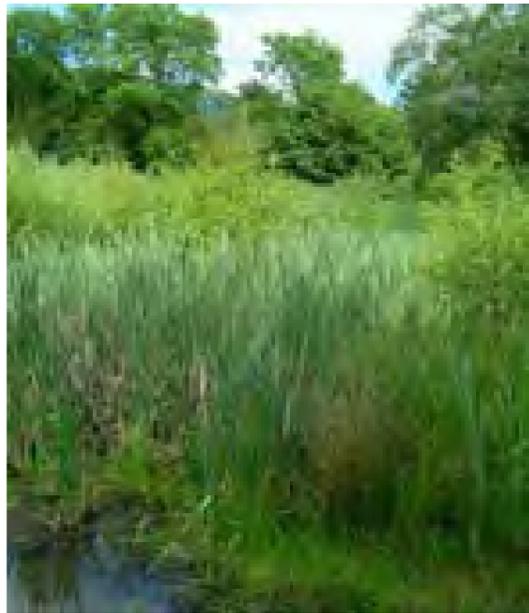
Wet Woodland

Wet Poplar Grove

Seasonal Woodland Stream

Springhead Alder Carr

Acid Mire



Acid Bog



Wetland



Reed Beds



Damp Meadow



Wet Grazing

Landscape signatures: vernacular building material colours

Buildings in the landscape

Bricks and tiles are the dominant building materials in hues of reds, yellows and browns. Tiles are typically used for those parts of the building that would be exposed to the elements.

Sandstones are used for building blocks or split into roof tiles. Kentish Rag or Ragstone, a coarse textured brittle limestone is irregularly bonded and rubbly.

The chalk of the North Downs was dressed and used for the quoins of Norman churches and provided the durable flints that could be split or 'flint-knapped' and set into walls with the split faces showing. Later flints were squared to reduce the amount of mortar necessary and improve strength.

Caen oolitic limestone was also imported from Normandy and used for the finer details of church buildings such as the traceries and finials.

Wood was also an important building material, typically oak and sweet chestnut used in the construction of half timbered buildings especially in the Wealden Area. These were often plastered over with wattle and daub or partly covered with huge tiles or re-fronted with brick. Where the timbers were left exposed lath and plaster was used sometimes with a brick nogging herringbone infill.

Weather boarding initially painted white or cream is characteristic of the Weald area which weathers to a distinctive silvery grey.



Ragstone

Knapped Flints

Brick

Hung tile wall

Peg tile roof



Brick and tile



Tile & untreated weatherboard



**Painted weatherboard
Brick and peg tiles**



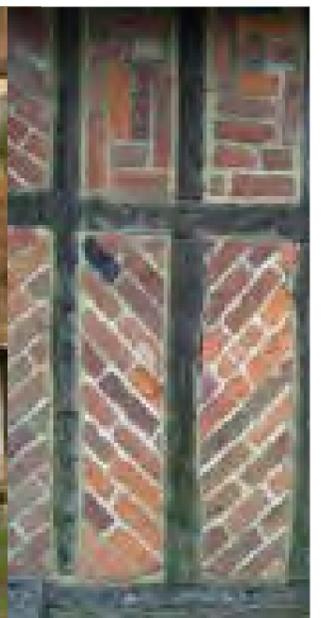
**Weathered creosote
treated weatherboard**



Weathered timber barn



Timber frame+ render



**Timber frame +
brick infill**

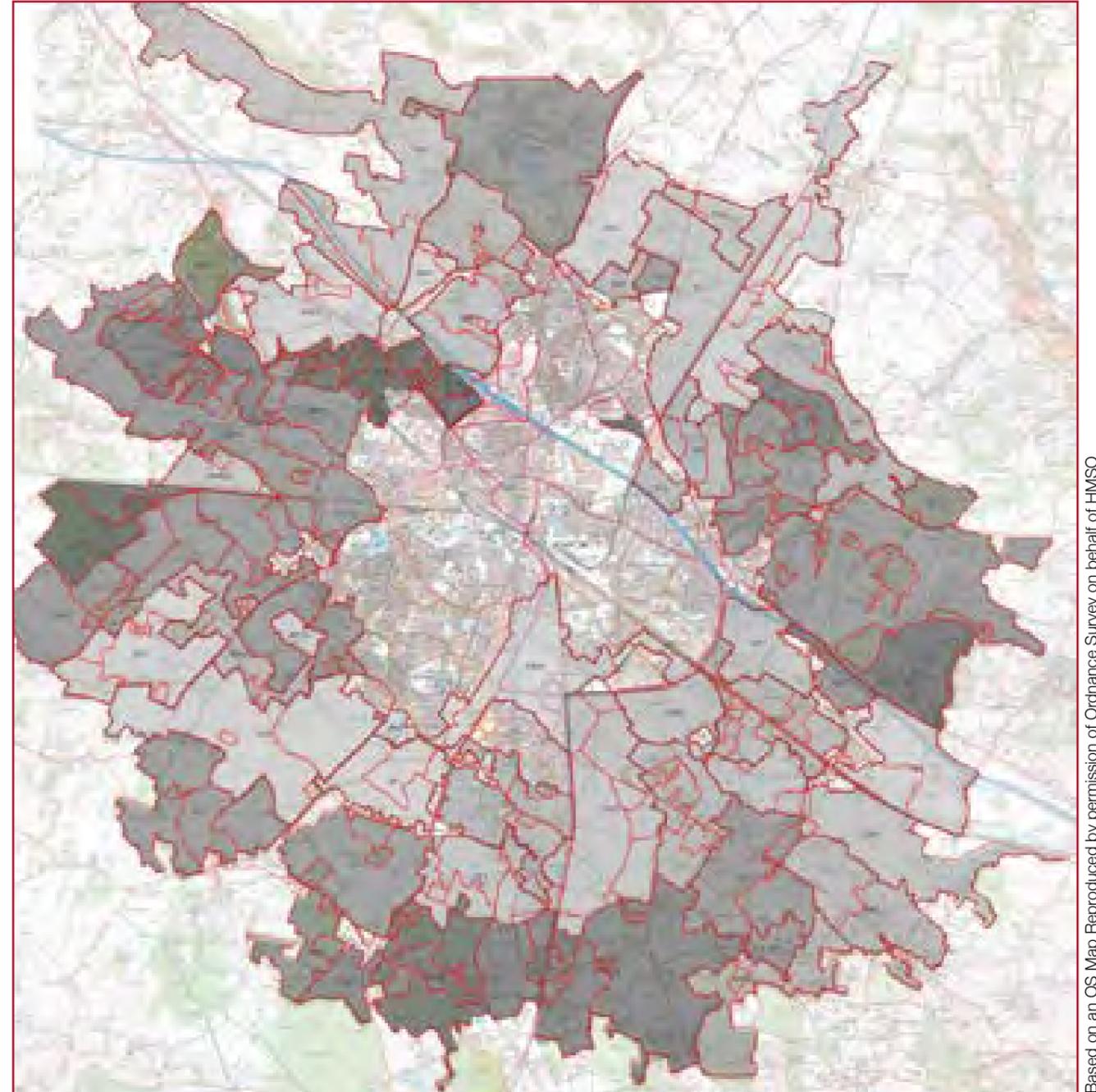


Section 5 Summary of Findings



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Study Area & County Areas



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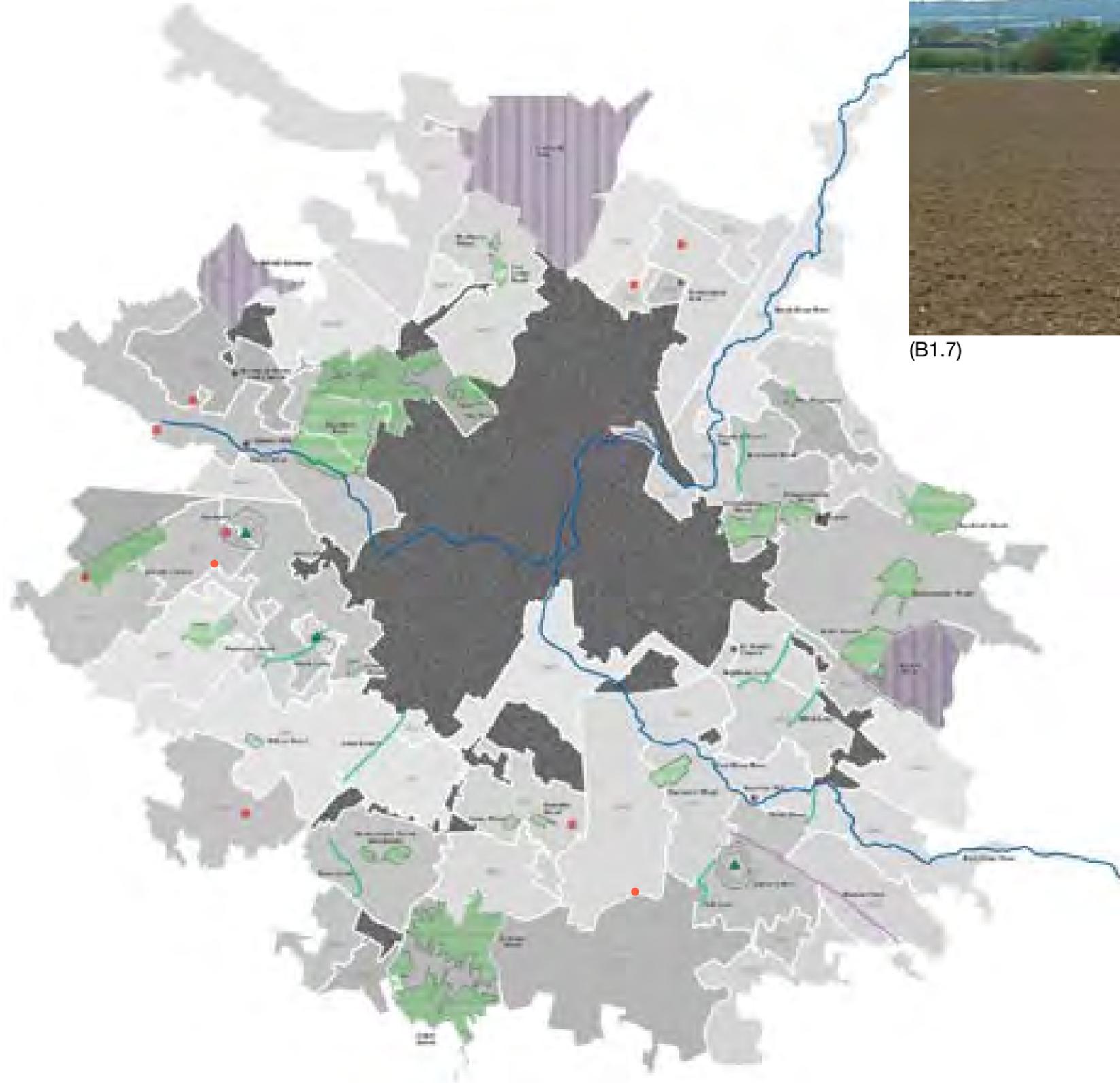
Study Area & Landscape Discription Units



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Study Area & District Types

Distinctive Elements

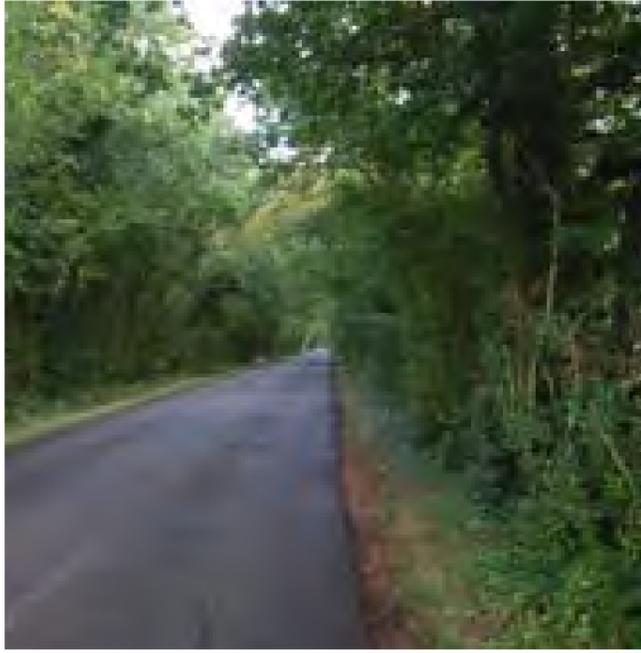


(B1.7)



Photograph courtesy of The Environment Agency

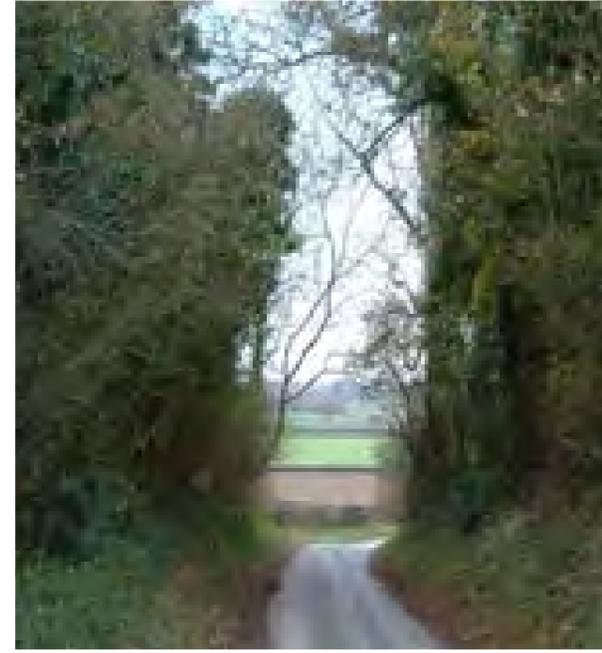
Throughout the study we have highlighted what we considered to be distinctive elements in a given area. This is a purely subjective response, but made by the team and discussed in order to come to a consensus. The plan shows the distribution of these elements which range from tracts of countryside such as Hatch Park or Hothfield Common, functional elements such as the flood plain, green elements such as local high points or old lanes, or landmark buildings, often churches, but also oasts which are prominent. A selection of photos is shown here as an example, more detail is shown in each landscape area report.



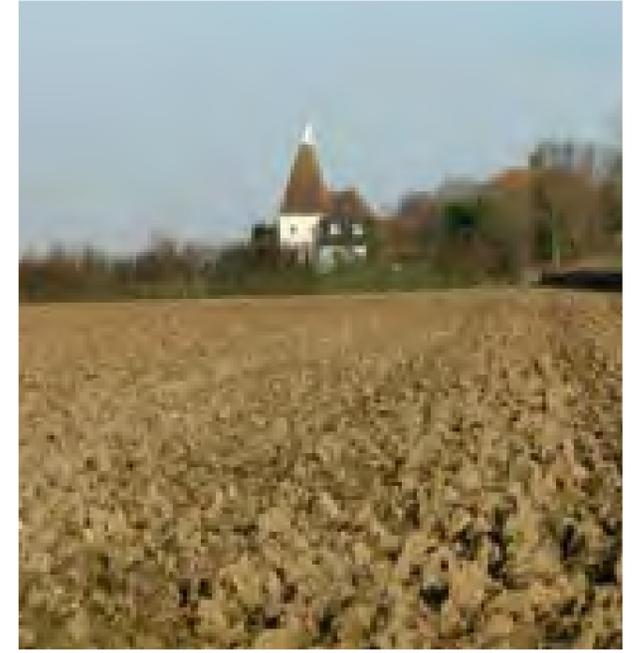
(C5.7)



Great Chart Church



(E37.5)



(E16.14)

Key Detractors



(B19.7)



(A5.1)

Throughout the study we have highlighted what we considered to be detractors in a given area. This is subjective but rarely contentious. The Waterbrook Lorry Park is an intrusion into the floodplain and the floodlights are seen for miles around at night. The CTRL is a major infrastructure cut through the landscape, as is the M20. Because they are often in close proximity to each other, despite remedial planting this is a major scar that affects the ears as well as the eyes, for the aural impact affects the tranquillity of other attractive areas. Factories and old quarries with associated clutter of functional buildings or attracting dumping can be improved by a strong planting strategy which takes account of longer range views, and through management. The plan shows the distribution of these elements which are mainly infrastructure corridors. Where these elements are elevated in a level landscape - such as the southern ring road the aural intrusion has a wider affect than the visual intrusion. A selection of photos is shown here as an example, more detail is shown in each landscape area report.



(E37.6)



M20 North (B11)

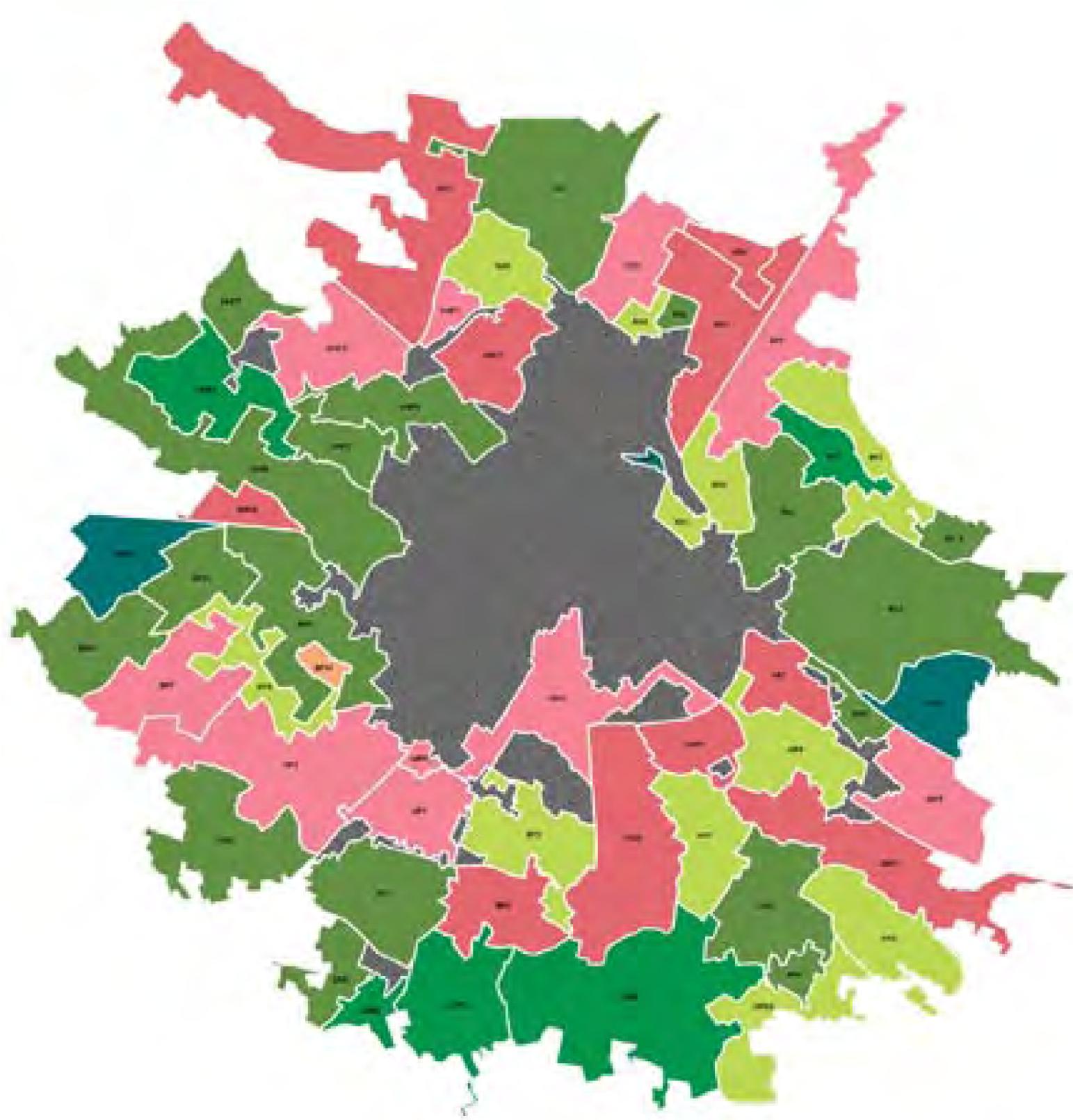


(D1.8)



(E37.9)

Assessment



reinforce	conserve & reinforce	conserve
create & reinforce	conserve & create	conserve & restore
create	restore & create	restore

The assessments for each District Landscape type were subjective based on the assessors knowledge of the area and issues, but a series of criteria were used to guide these deliberations and a simple marking system from one to three was given to indicate high, medium or low values. The process of landscape assessment provides a robust methodology based on current best practice.

The physical attributes of the landscape are considered in conjunction with the historical and cultural influences, nature conservation interests and landuse. These factors are analysed further in the field to determine the key characteristics, aesthetics, visual unity, ecological integrity, condition of heritage features and impact of built development. The condition and sensitivity of each character area is then determined.

Condition describes the integrity and unity of the landscape such as its functional integrity and visual unity - for example an urban fringe with many detracting elements and loss of unifying features will be of poor condition.

Sensitivity of the landscape refers to its overall character and quality and the extent to which these factors will be tolerant of change in general.

Capacity determines the ability of the landscape to accommodate change without causing loss of the essential character and local distinctiveness. Capacity will vary according to the type and nature of change being proposed.

The matrix, shown opposite, combines condition and sensitivity which indicates the area's ability to accommodate change and the appropriate land management or use, and will assist in the overall policies or development that might be appropriate to a particular area.

These criteria included: visual unity, ecological integrity, condition of heritage features (e.g. hedges) and impact of built development. The Condition and Sensitivity matrix or nine outcomes used in the County Assessment was then used. The highest score would be a straight 'conserve', the lowest would be 'create' and in between, depending on existing condition and our view on the sensitivity of the area, were a variety of outcomes such as 'restore' or 'reinforce' and mixed areas of 'restore and create' or 'conserve and reinforce'.

The overall score from the on-site assessments would give a guide indicating two or three possible choices. Whilst still on site these options were discussed and one choice made. A few days later the assessors reconvened in the studio to look at all the assessments together marked on a plan, and examining each in turn, and with

the benefit of all the fieldwork data to hand, decided whether the decisions were correct or needed to be adjusted. A consensus was arrived at for the whole study area.

The matrix forms taken in note form on site were written up, again with reference to the field work. We feel this makes a robust process. The summaries of each County Landscape Area falling in the study area are presented in this report, the assessments for the component District Landscape Character Types are illustrated in separate report for each County Area.



Section 6 Overview of Each Area

Aldington Ridge

This county area follows the greensand ridge to the south east of Ashford at Clap Hill which affords panoramic views over Romney Marsh to Dungeness.

We have made some major adjustments to the Kent CLA boundary by including the area extending from Aldington Frith, north to Cheesemans Green and Captains Wood, and including Colliers Hill an outlier of greensand. The Roman Road continues to follow this higher ground and the enclosure pattern is more akin to the Aldington Ridge CLA than it is to the Old Romney Shoreline Wooded Farmlands.

Closest to Ashford is the area around Cheeseman's Green with generally open, mainly flat arable land with cluster of farms around Cheeseman's Green, small hamlet at South Stour and high hedgerows to lanes. Captain's Wood, an ancient oak and ash woodland with some hornbeam coppice and associated semi-improved grassland is distinctive within the landscape. The ragstone, hung tile and shiplap buildings and lanes with high hedges contribute to the sense of place. Views are variable - to the north there are generally long distance views to Ashford fringe whereas to the south there are intermittent views to Colliers Hill and Aldington Ridge.

South of South Stour the arable farmland rises to distinctive knoll at Collier's Hill and falls to the East Stour river at Swanton Mill. The large fields have lost hedgerows and are intensively farmed and treecover is limited to the hedgerows along the Roman Road and farmsteads and pollarded willows at Swanton Mill.

Colliers Hill and the Roman Road give a distinctive feel and orientation to the area and a strong sense of place. From Colliers Hill there are panoramic views over greatly enlarged arable fields to the north to the East Stour floodplain and to the south views towards the Old Saxon ridgeline and woodlands. The Roman Road extends along the ridgeline with large arable fields and extensive views north to Mersham, west and north west to Ashford and the North Downs and south to Dungeness.

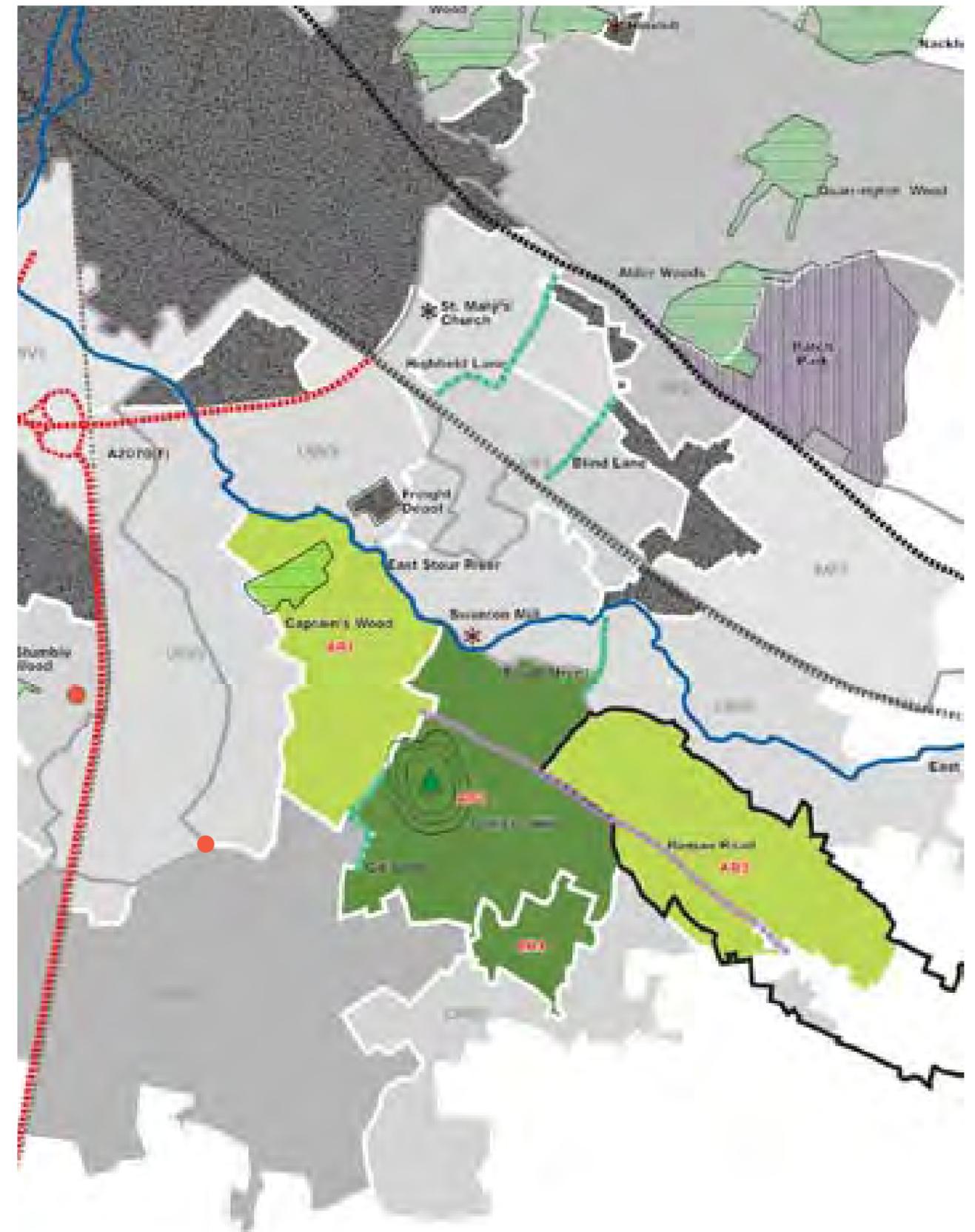
South of the Roman Road the farmland is a close grained landscape of gentle folds and sunken lanes contained with high hedges and trees which absorbs much of the development of Aldington Frith. The heart lies around the Frith Road/ Priory Road crossroads with a collection of traditional Kentish style buildings, with newer properties to the lanes and scattered farmsteads. The surroundings are mixed farmland with paddocks and hedges, and more open arable farmland. The sunken lanes, high hedges and traditional style ragstone, red brick and weather boarding buildings give distinctive character and strong sense of place. The rolling topography and high hedges restrict visibility and views are generally short and intermittent.



Location of Aldington Ridge

reinforce	conserve & reinforce	conserve
create & reinforce	conserve & create	conserve & restore
create	restore & create	restore

Policy recommendation





View northwest from Colliers Hill towards Cheeseman's Green (A13.1)



Typical view from lane near Cheeseman's Green towards Captain's Wood (A10.3)



Local vernacular at South Stour (A12.3)



Lane near Aldington Frith (A26.10)

CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

	AR1	AR2	AR3	AR4
Landuse				
Farming	○	○	○	○
Recreation				
Parkland				
Woodland	○			
Business Park				
Industry				
Topography				
Flat	○			
Gently undulating				
Rolling				○
Steeply sloping		○	○	
Lakes/ ponds				
Streams/ dykes				
Vegetation cover				
Intact hedgerows	○		○	○
Hedgerow trees				○
Feature trees		○		
Evidence of hedgerow clearance	○	○		
Evidence of woodland loss				
Farming type				
Predominantly arable	○	○	○	
Mixed farming				○
Mainly pasture				
Wet meadows				
Local vernacular				
Ragstone, pegtiles, ship lap	○			○
Oast house				
Visibility				
Open long distance	○	○	○	
Intermittent				○
Restricted				

Bethersden Farmlands

This county area extends to the south west of Ashford covering the areas around Great Chart, Chilmington Green, Shadoxhurst and Kingsnorth.

We have made some minor adjustments to the Kent CLA boundary by including part of the ridgeline rising to Goldwell, the open arable area to the south east of Chilmington Green which has more in common visually with the adjacent open arable landscape south west of Magpie Hall Lane, and some minor changes to the boundary at Bishop's Wood.

Extending between Daniel's Water, Chilmington Green and Long Length are large prairie style arable fields where hedgerow removal has been particularly marked especially around Chilmington Green. The isolated former coppice woodlands of Purchase Wood, Willow Wood, Bayley Wood and Coleman's Kitchen Wood are prominent features in the open landscape, likewise the pollarded willows near Great Chilmington and the 'green tunnel' of Long Length with mature hedges are distinctive. Associated with the scattered farmsteads around Purchase Farm and bungalows along Sandy Lane are smaller scale paddocks with grazing and evergreen/ poplar tree belts, in addition to small business enterprises.

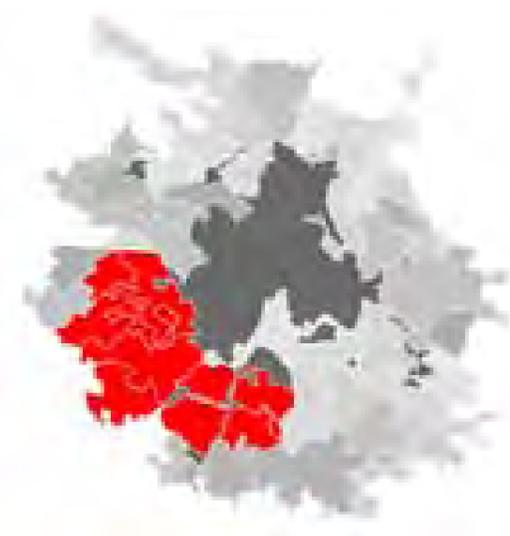
To the north of Shadoxhurst and south of Magpie Hall Lane the land is farmed less intensively with small to medium sized pasture, paddocks and arable fields with generally strong hedgerows and mosaic of scattered woodlands such as Coldblow Wood and Coxland Wood comprising oak/ ash woodland and former hornbeam coppice. The rich mix of woodland blocks and associated ponds within the farmed landscape provides a good network of semi-natural habitats, including an old byway to the north of Coxland Wood and creates a distinctive intimate and timeless character. There is a fine oast at Criol Farm.

To the east of Ashford Road and to the south of Kingsnorth the undulating mixed farmland is dotted with many hornbeam coppice woodlands such as Isaac Wood, Park Wood, Stumble Wood, Sticket Wood and Park Lane Wood. The area between Park Farm and Kingsnorth is designated as a country park with new planting and pond. The urban fringe of Ashford is visible to the north and the oast at Finn farm is locally prominent. The mix of gently undulating topography, farmed landscape and woodlands gives the area some sense of continuity over time, especially to the east which is smaller in scale, although the sense of place is somewhat eroded by the loss of field boundaries and larger arable fields, and especially to the north around Park Farm.

To the north of Bishop's Wood is a gently undulating landscape of variable landuse and mixed character comprising mixed farmland of arable and grazing, Broadhembury Holiday Park (caravan park), Homelands Golf course, Old Stacians Cricket Club recreation ground and a brick and tile depot and former iron works. The diversity of landuse gives a piecemeal incoherent feel to the overall landscape, and lack of distinctive character and the former tile works, now derelict is a local eyesore.

Around Great Chart and Singleton there are gently sloping large fields of predominantly arable land with some pasture and mixed use with horse paddocks, recreational areas and community woodland. There are elevated views eastwards towards Ashford. The land rises along the greensand outlier of Mock Lane which is well vegetated and sunken in part giving elevated views southwards towards Chilmington Green. The area comprises a working gravel/ sand quarry, travellers site (with dumping) and former landfill site (now grazed by horses). Coleman's Kitchen Wood to the south is a distinctive hornbeam/ hazel coppice on an outlying knoll of greensand.

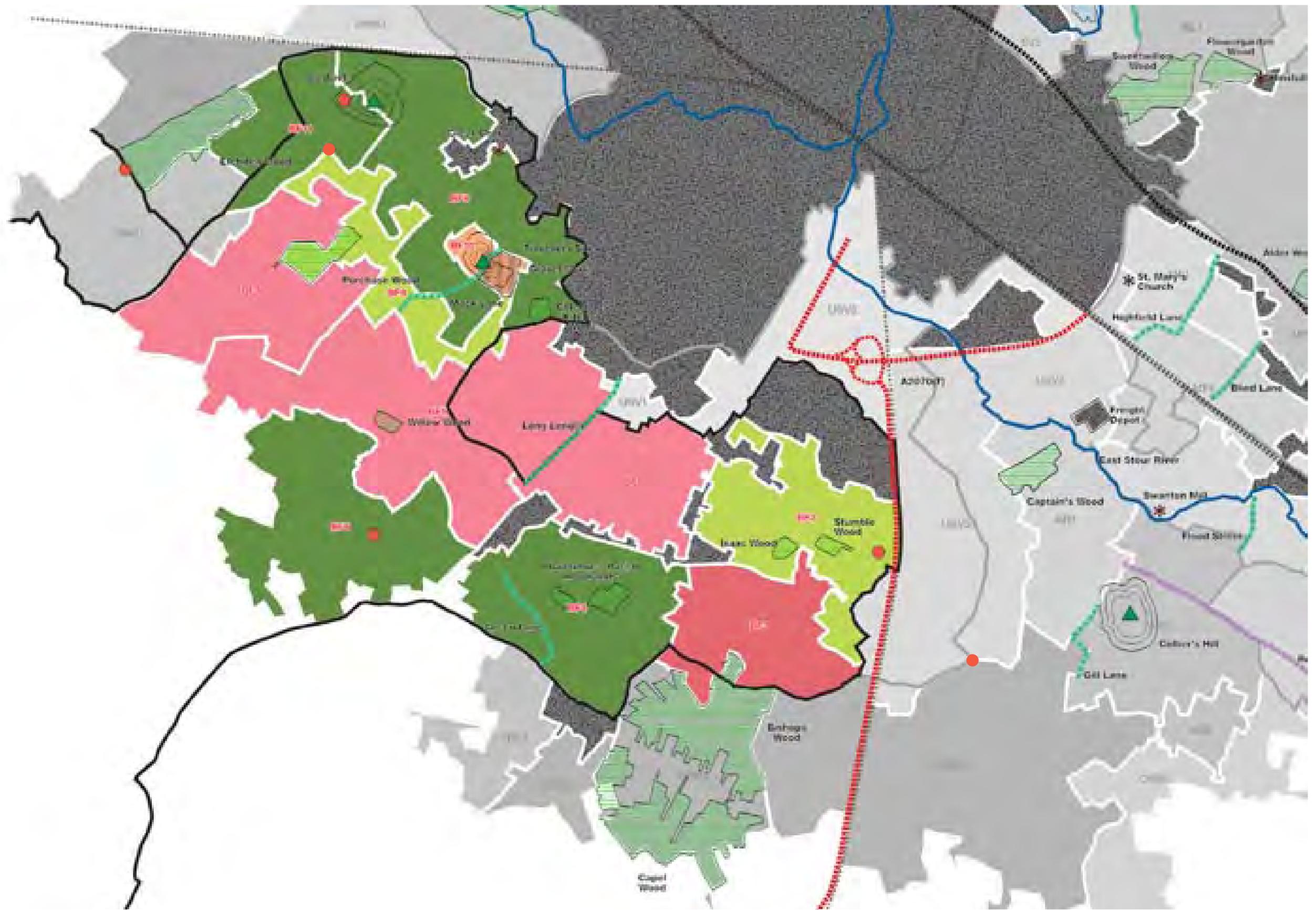
To the north west of Great Chart the land gently rises to the ridgeline and prominent knoll with oast at Goldwell. The large arable fields are intensively farmed and hedgerows have been removed giving extensive views.



Location of Bethersden Farmlands

reinforce	conserve & reinforce	conserve
create & reinforce	conserve & create	conserve & restore
create	restore & create	restore

Policy recommendation





Prairie style fields to southeast of Chilmington Green looking along the Greensand Way to Long Length in the far distance (E33.1)



Mixed farming to south of Magpie Hall Lane near Stubb's Cross with strong hedgerows and woodland blocks (C29.1)



View north towards Chilmington Green Farm and Coleman's Kitchen Wood on the knoll (E39.1)



Arable fields rising towards Goldwell knoll (E12.1 main)



Lane near Purchase Farm to the north of Purchase Wood (E15.1)



Court Yard Farm and open arable fields to the south of Daniel's Water (C29.2)



View southwest from Mock Lane (E31a.3)



View down Long Length (C5.1)

CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES	BF1	BF2	BF3	BF4	BF5	BF6	BF7	BF8	BF9	BF10	BF11
Landuse											
Farming	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○		○
Recreation		○	○					○	○		
Parkland											
Woodland		○		○		○		○	○		
Business Park											
Industry			○							○	
Topography											
Flat				○	○		○			○	
Gently undulating	○	○	○			○		○	○		○
Rolling											
Steeply sloping											○
Lakes/ ponds											
Streams/ dykes											
Vegetation cover											
Intact hedgerows	○	○	○	○		○	○	○	○	○	
Hedgerow trees	○	○	○	○		○				○	
Feature trees					○						
Evidence of hedgerow clearance	○	○		○	○		○				○
Evidence of woodland loss											
Farming type											
Predominantly arable					○		○		○		○
Mixed farming	○	○	○	○		○		○			
Mainly pasture											
Wet meadows											
Local vernacular											
Ragstone, pegtiles, ship lap								○			
Oast house		○				○					○
Visibility											
Open long distance	○				○				○		○
Intermittent		○		○			○	○		○	
Restricted			○			○					

Biddenden High Halden Wooded Farmlands

This county area extends northwards from Daniels Water to the west of Ashford within the Beult Valley. The railway line cuts through the northern sector.

We have made some minor adjustments to the Kent CLA boundary by adding the small settlement of Daniel's Water and excluding the part of the ridgeline rising to Goldwell.

This is gently undulating mixed farmland with enlarged arable fields around Daniel's Water and smaller scale enclosure pattern to the north with pasture and paddocks around Etchden Wood. The area has a farming backwater feel and generally a unified character especially to the north, however to the east around Daniel's Water the pattern is more fragmented with a mix of agricultural and suburban residential elements. In particular the large modern agricultural sheds and leylandii hedges detract from the rural scene. Where the land is less intensively farmed with high hedges along lanes and traditional buildings, such as the oast house and moat at Etchden Farm, there is a sense of continuity and strong sense of place.

Etchden Wood which forms a wooded backdrop to the north is an extensive area of pre 19th century coppiced woodlands with good mix of trees, scrub and field layer and particularly overmature hornbeam coppice with oak standards. An ancient bank lies to both sides of the Etchden Lane (probable old drove road) enclosed by the tree canopy. The southern extent has a high proportion of conifers interspersed throughout with small fields of improved grassland to the north. The lanes (possibly old drove roads in places) with high hedgerows linking to Etchden Wood, ponds and pasture combine to form a good network of semi-natural habitats.

North of the railway the land falls to Worten Home Farm on the edge of the Great Stour Valley and is fragmented in character with arable fields and rough grazing (probable old land fill site). There are long distance views to the north and Ashford to the east.



Location of Biddenden High Halden Wooded Farmlands

reinforce	conserve & reinforce	conserve
create & reinforce	conserve & create	conserve & restore
create	restore & create	restore

Policy recommendation





Oast at Etchden Farm (E24.5)

Etchden Wood (E19.3)



View east towards Ashford from north of railway line (E9.3)



Paddocks and high hedges around Daniel's Water (E21.3)

Arable fields near Etchden Farm (E24.7)

CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES	BHH1	BHH2	BHH3
Landuse			
Farming	○		○
Recreation			
Parkland			
Woodland		○	
Business Park			
Industry			
Topography			
Flat			
Gently undulating	○	○	○
Rolling			
Steeply sloping			
Lakes/ ponds	○		
Streams/ dykes			
Vegetation cover			
Intact hedgerows	○		○
Hedgerow trees			
Feature trees			
Evidence of hedgerow clearance			
Evidence of woodland loss			
Farming type			
Predominantly arable	○		
Mixed farming	○		○
Mainly pasture			
Wet meadows			
Local vernacular			
Ragstone, pegtiles, ship lap	○		
Oast house	○		
Visibility			
Open long distance	○		○
Intermittent			
Restricted		○	

Braebourne Lees Mixed Farmlands

This county area extends from the eastern fringes of Ashford around the historic settlement of Hinxhill and is bounded to the south by the M20.

We have made a minor adjustment to the Kent CLA boundary by excluding the area to the north of Blackwell Farm.

This is an undulating farmed landscape with scattered woodlands and distinctive pattern of linear tree cover and copses, with large arable fields that have lost some internal boundaries. The woodlands comprise sweet chestnut and hornbeam copse, wet woods and mixed plantation – many are managed for pheasant rearing and game. The lanes are sunken in places, bounded by species rich mature hedgerows and together with the series of springs and streams with flushes of willow and wet meadows create a good network of semi-natural habitats. There is a feeling of continuity over time and strong sense of place. Views are slightly elevated towards the fringes of Ashford across the Great Stour floodplain and north to the North Downs.

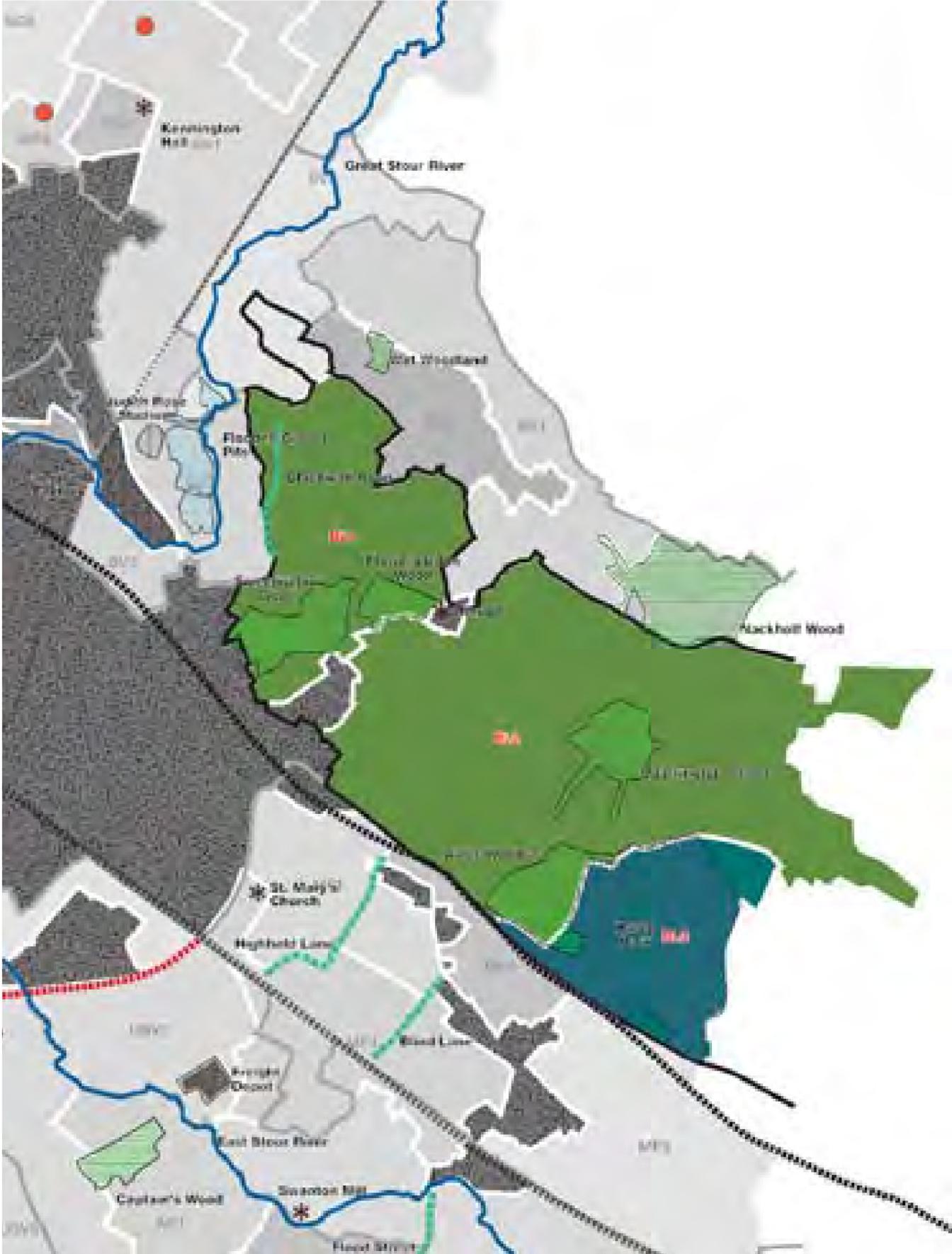
Hatch Park is an old deer park with woods, springs, lakes and pasture. Many veteran trees remain and the north of the park is designated SSSI. There has been some loss of the southern part to arable and this area is also affected by noise from the M20. This is a historic landscape and has a strong sense of place. Visibility is intermittent but there are extensive views from the higher parts to the North Downs.



Location of Braebourne Lees Mixed Farmlands

reinforce	conserve & reinforce	conserve
create & reinforce	conserve & create	conserve & restore
create	restore & create	restore

Policy recommendation





Breeches Wood (B15.1)



Typical view near Boarfield Wood towards the North Downs (F12.16am)



Hatch Park (B14.4, B14.9 & B14.13)

CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES	BL1	BL2	BL3
Landuse			
Farming	○	○	
Recreation			
Parkland			○
Woodland	○	○	○
Business Park			
Industry			
Topography			
Flat			
Gently undulating	○	○	○
Rolling			
Steeply sloping	○		
Lakes/ ponds			○
Streams/ dykes	○	○	○
Vegetation cover			
Intact hedgerows	○		
Hedgerow trees			
Feature trees		○	○
Evidence of hedgerow clearance		○	
Evidence of woodland loss			
Farming type			
Predominantly arable		○	
Mixed farming	○		
Mainly pasture			○
Wet meadows			
Local vernacular			
Ragstone, pegtiles, ship lap			
Oast house			
Visibility			
Open long distance	○		
Intermittent		○	○
Restricted			

Braebourne Vale

This county area sits to the north of Hinxhill extending from Nacolts on the edge of the Great Stour floodplain to Nackholt Wood in the south.

We have made no changes to the Kent CLA boundary.

The land gently falls to the floodplain and lies on Gault Clay. The soils are easily waterlogged and have been drained by a series of dykes creating large fields predominantly for sheep pasture but with some arable. The dykes are marked by flushes of crack willow and ash with a good network of hedges to lanes. Blocks of wet willow woodland are linked to surrounding network of wetland habitats and species rich wet meadows. The wetwoodlands and species rich wet meadows give a feeling of continuity over time and strong sense of place. There are fine views across the Wye Valley and towards the North Downs and glimpsed framed views to south.

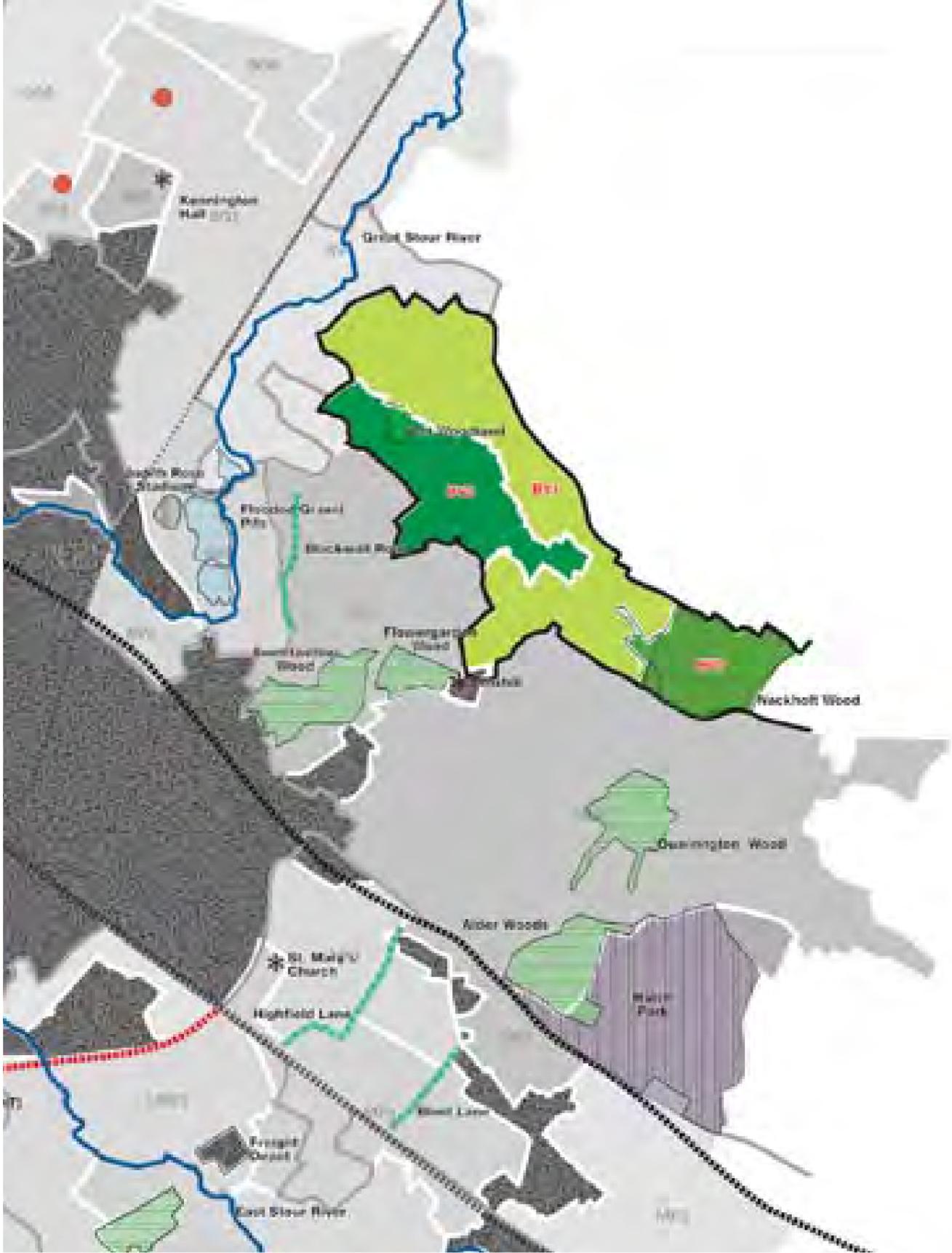
Nackholt Wood, designated SNCI comprises mixed use woodland with tall stands of poplars and pond to west, mature wet woodland with ditches and dense hazel coppice. Veteran oaks adjoin the lane to south and open wet flower meadows. The conifer plantation within is well screened with good hedgerow corridors to north west and southern boundaries.



Location of Braebourne Vale

reinforce	conserve & reinforce	conserve
create & reinforce	conserve & create	conserve & restore
create	restore & create	restore

Policy recommendation





Views across Naccolt farmlands towards North Downs (F7.20am)



Wet woods with species rich grasslands near Bourne Dyke (F5.1am)



Nackholt Wood (F13.23)

CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES	BV1	BV2	BV3
Landuse			
Farming	○	○	
Recreation			
Parkland			
Woodland		○	○
Business Park			
Industry			
Topography			
Flat			
Gently undulating	○	○	○
Rolling			
Steeply sloping			
Lakes/ ponds			
Streams/ dykes	○	○	
Vegetation cover			
Intact hedgerows	○	○	
Hedgerow trees			
Feature trees	○		
Evidence of hedgerow clearance			
Evidence of woodland loss			
Farming type			
Predominantly arable			
Mixed farming			
Mainly pasture	○	○	
Wet meadows		○	○
Local vernacular			
Ragstone, pegtiles, ship lap			
Oast house			
Visibility			
Open long distance	○		
Intermittent		○	
Restricted			○

Hollingbourne Vale

This county area forms the northern extent of our study area to the north and east of Westwell, including Eastwell Park.

We have made no adjustment to the Kent CLA boundary.

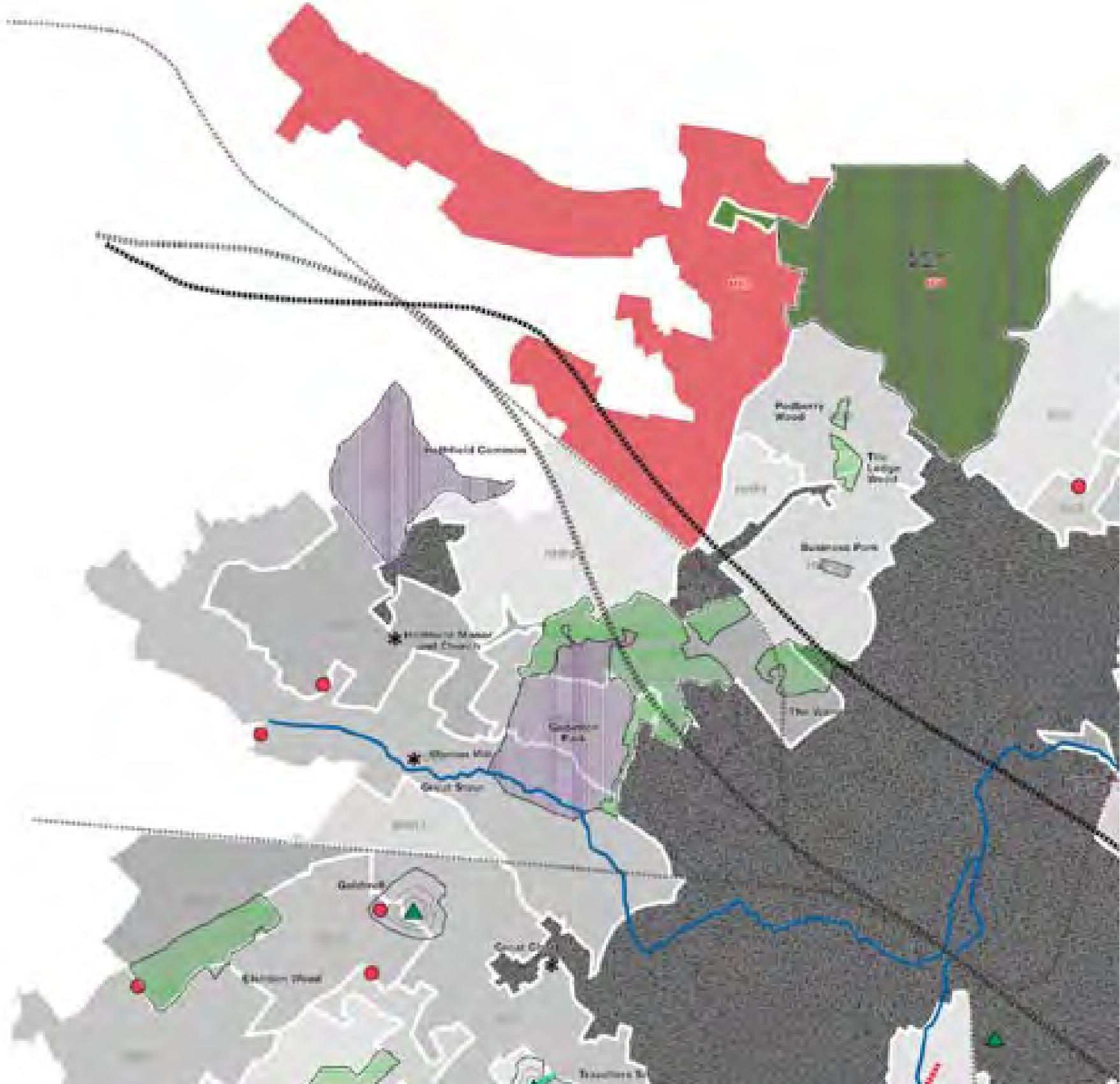
The scarp slope of the Downs is intensively cultivated with large rectilinear arable fields with panoramic views towards Ashford and the M20. There are few hedges but those that do exist are associated with the narrow lanes. Eastwell Park has retained some of its original features such as the hammer pond and remnant parkland trees but the intrusion of hotel and intensive arable farming has eroded much of its parkland character. There are some long range views from the north to the North Downs.



Location of Hollingbourne Vale

reinforce	conserve & reinforce	conserve
create & reinforce	conserve & create	conserve & restore
create	restore & create	restore

Policy recommendation





Eastwell Park (D23.4 & D23.3)



View near Crouchers Manor looking towards North Downs (D32.1main)



Southerly view across Westwell Farmlands (D33.a8) and typical lane nearby (D33.a4)

CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES	HV1	HV2
Landuse		
Farming	○	○
Recreation		
Parkland	○	
Woodland	○	
Business Park		
Industry		
Topography		
Flat		
Gently undulating	○	
Rolling		
Steeply sloping		○
Lakes/ ponds	○	
Streams/ dykes		
Vegetation cover		
Intact hedgerows		
Hedgerow trees		
Feature trees	○	
Evidence of hedgerow clearance		○
Evidence of woodland loss		
Farming type		
Predominantly arable	○	○
Mixed farming		
Mainly pasture		
Wet meadows		
Local vernacular		
Ragstone, pegtiles, ship lap		
Oast house		
Visibility		
Open long distance	○	○
Intermittent		
Restricted		

Hothfield Heathy Farmlands

This county area extends from the north western suburbs of Ashford to include Godinton Park and Hothfield Common and is crossed by both the M20 and the CTRL.

We have made a minor adjustment to the Kent CLA boundary by including the outlier of Greensand Fruit Belt CLA.

The overriding feature of the Hothfield Heathy Farmlands is its variable topography, landuse and character. To the north of Sandyhurst and to the south of the M20 are large gently undulating arable fields with thick hedgerows to lanes (probable old drove roads). Old maps reveal a loss of woodland and internal field hedges in these areas. To the north of the M20 and adjacent to Ashford the landuse is mixed with farmland, business park and golf course, whereas to the south of the M20 there are extensive coppice woodlands including Hoad's Wood and The Warren.

Godinton Park is a Special Landscape Area on the greensand ridge but has suffered decline over the years. Hothfield Common is an acid valley bog remnant of a larger heathland that at one time extended further along the greensand, and is designated SSSI.

To the south of Hothfield the farmland is gently sloping with a mix of medium sized arable fields and pasture with scattered woodland shelter belts and isolated farmsteads with traditional pre 19th century houses, including Hothfield Manor with medieval church, walled garden and extensive estate wall. There is an oast at Paddocks Farm. This coherent pattern of elements reflects the former fruit production within the Greensand Fruit Belt.

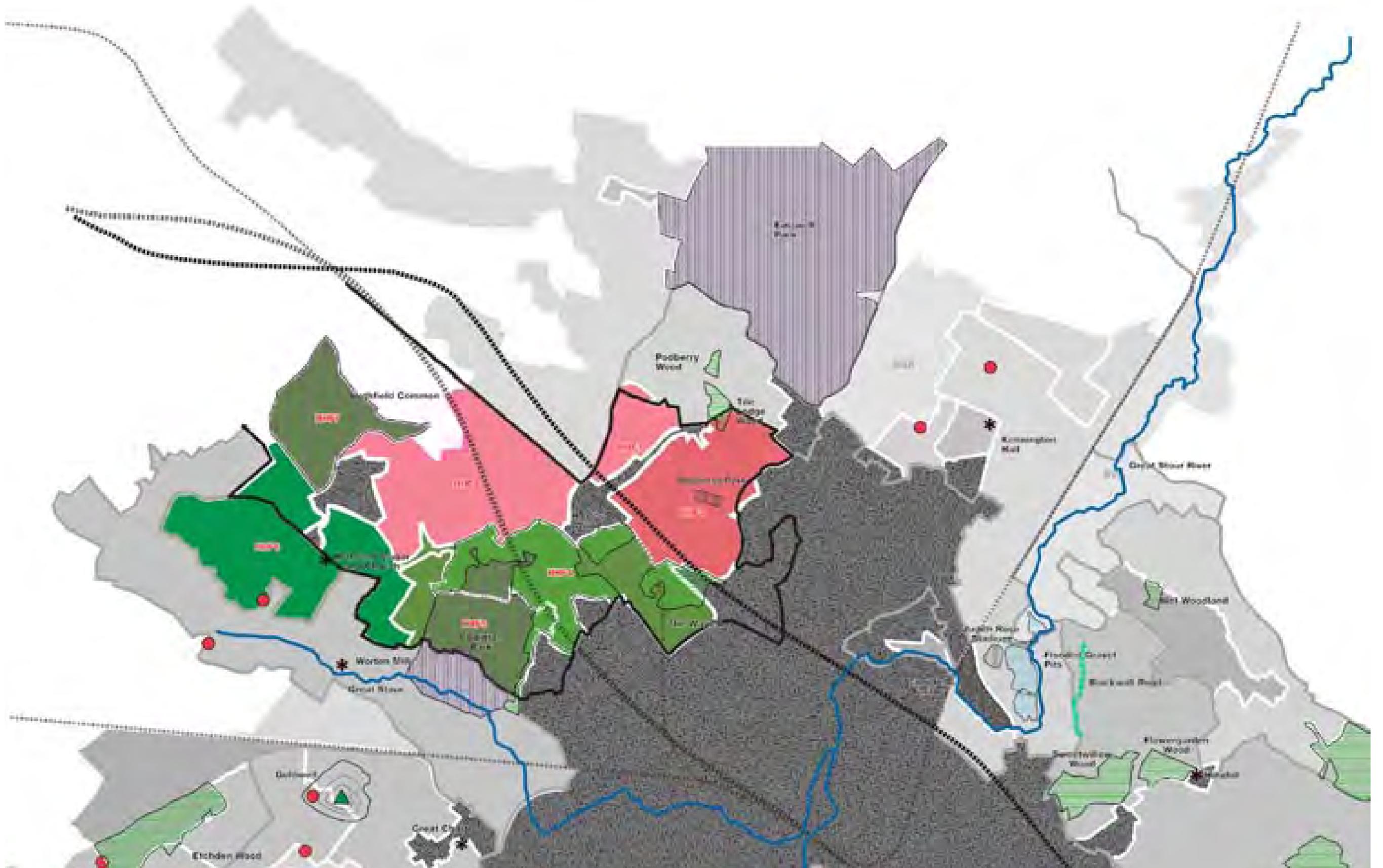
There are glimpsed views to the North Downs and south to the Great Stour Valley. The M20 and CTRL are audible throughout much of the area.



Location of Hothfield Heathy Farmlands

reinforce	conserve & reinforce	conserve
create & reinforce	conserve & create	conserve & restore
create	restore & create	restore

Policy recommendation





View northwards from the edge of Sandyhurst towards Kingsland (D31.1)



Lodge Wood (D48.3)



Godinton Park (G10.4am)



Looking south from Maidstone Road (D36.3)



Lady's weir (G9.2am)



Farmland near Hall Farm to the west of Hothfield (G26.1a)



Godinton Lane (G7.3)



Hothfield manor church (G23.2b) and surrounding farmland with copses and shelterbelts (G26.1a1)



Hothfield Common (12 - Bracken)

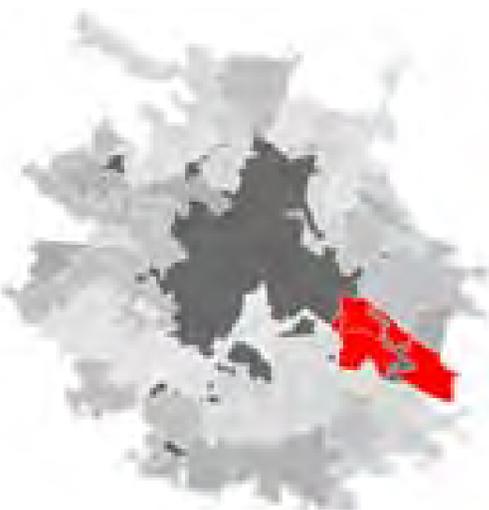
CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES	HHF1	HHF2	HHF4	HHF5	HHF6	HHF7	HHF8
Landuse							
Farming	○	○			○		○
Recreation		○					
Parkland				○			
Woodland			○	○	○	○	○
Business Park		○					
Heathland						○	
Topography							
Flat							
Gently undulating			○	○	○	○	○
Rolling	○	○					
Steeply sloping							
Lakes/ ponds		○	○				○
Streams/ dykes							
Vegetation cover							
Intact hedgerows					○		
Hedgerow trees							
Feature trees		○		○	○		
Evidence of hedgerow clearance	○						○
Evidence of woodland loss							○
Farming type							
Predominantly arable	○						○
Mixed farming		○			○		
Mainly pasture				○			
Wet meadows							
Local vernacular							
Ragstone, pegtiles, ship lap					○		
Oast house					○		
Visibility							
Open long distance	○						○
Intermittent		○		○	○		
Restricted			○			○	

Mersham Farmlands

This county area sits to the south east of Ashford and is bound- ed by the M20 to the north and the CTRL to the south. The historic settlement of Mersham sits within the centre of the area and St. Mary’s Church Sevington, with its distinctive tower is a local landmark to the west.

We have made some minor adjustments to the Kent CLA boundary to the south of the CTRL by including those higher areas that are part of the greensand ridge.

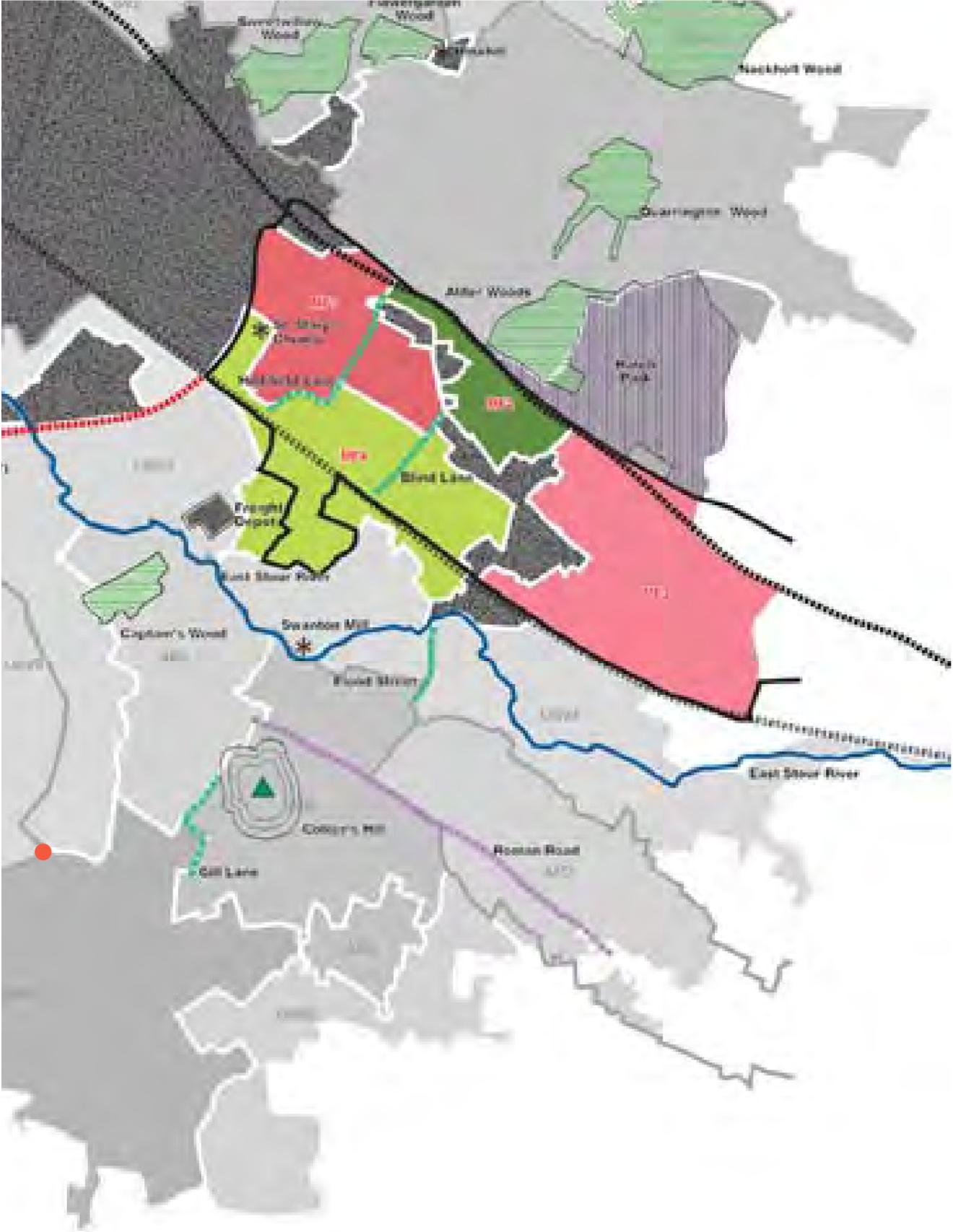
This is an open undulating farmed landscape of predominantly large arable fields that have lost hedges, but with some smaller scale pasture and intact hedges around Mersham. There are a few distinctive lanes such as Highfield Land and sunken Blind Lane with high hedges but generally hedges remaining are gappy. Generally the views are open and long distance south towards the Aldington Ridge and Colliers Hill, west towards Ashford and east towards the North Downs. The M20 and Channel Tunnel Rail Link, although in cutting for the most part is audible throughout much of the area.



Location of Mersham Farmlands

reinforce	conserve & reinforce	conserve
create & reinforce	conserve & create	conserve & restore
create	restore & create	restore

Policy recommendation





Mixed farming with intact hedges to the north of Mersham (B11.1b)



View across arable fields near Highfield lane (B1.15)



Farmland to north of Bower Road to the east of Mersham (B12.3)

CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES	MF1	MF2	MF3	MF4
Landuse				
Farming	○	○	○	○
Recreation				
Parkland				
Woodland		○		
Business Park			○	
Industry				
Topography				
Flat	○			
Gently undulating				○
Rolling				
Steeply sloping		○		
Lakes/ ponds				
Streams/ dykes			○	
Vegetation cover				
Intact hedgerows			○	
Hedgerow trees			○	
Feature trees	○		○	
Evidence of hedgerow clearance				○
Evidence of woodland loss				
Farming type				
Predominantly arable	○			○
Mixed farming			○	
Mainly pasture		○		
Wet meadows				
Local vernacular				
Ragstone, pegtiles, ship lap				
Oast house				
Visibility				
Open long distance	○		○	
Intermittent		○		
Restricted				

Old Romney Shoreline Wooded Farmlands

This county area sits to the south of Ashford on the outer edge of our study area.

There is one settlement centre - Bromley Green surrounded by mature coppice woodlands of Bishops Wood and Capel Wood.

We have made some major adjustments to the Kent CLA boundary by excluding a major part of the northern extension which is not wooded and relates better to the lower lying Upper Stour Valley or the higher ground of the Aldington Ridge.

The area is characterised by undulating mixed farmland with generally strong hedgerows interspersed with old coppiced woodlands, which give strong sense of enclosure to the landscape and a valuable network of wildlife corridors and semi-natural habitats. Overall the patchwork of small fields with mature woods and scattered farmsteads give a strong sense of place.

Historic maps indicate that there has been some clearance of woodland especially to the west and around Bliby Wood in the north. Today there is some localised weakening of woodland edge by settlement encroachment.



Location of Old Romney Shoreline Wooded Farmlands

reinforce	conserve & reinforce	conserve
create & reinforce	conserve & create	conserve & restore
create	restore & create	restore

Policy recommendation





Great Turrels Wood from Hornash Lane (C44.2)

Bishop's Wood (C35.3)



Farmlands around Bromley Green Farm (C45.7)



Farmland to the east of Bishop's Wood (C35.1)



Farmland near Little Gains Farm to the north of Aldington Frith (A34.1)

CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

	ORS1	ORS2	ORS3	ORS4	ORS5
Landuse					
Farming		○		○	○
Recreation					
Parkland					
Woodland	○		○	○	○
Business Park					
Plant Nursery					
Topography					
Flat					
Gently undulating	○	○	○	○	
Rolling					○
Steeply sloping					
Lakes/ ponds				○	
Streams/ dykes					
Vegetation cover					
Intact hedgerows		○		○	○
Hedgerow trees		○		○	○
Feature trees					
Evidence of hedgerow clearance					○
Evidence of woodland loss			○	○	
Farming type					
Predominantly arable					
Mixed farming				○	○
Mainly pasture		○			
Wet meadows					
Local vernacular					
Ragstone, pegtiles, ship lap					
Oast house					
Visibility					
Open long distance					
Intermittent					
Restricted	○	○	○	○	○

Stour Gap

This county area sits to the north of Ashford in a low lying gently undulating farmed landscape to the west of the Great Stour and bounded by the Ashford – Canterbury railway to the east. Kennington Hall, an old house with parkland and large plant nursery are situated within the eastern side.

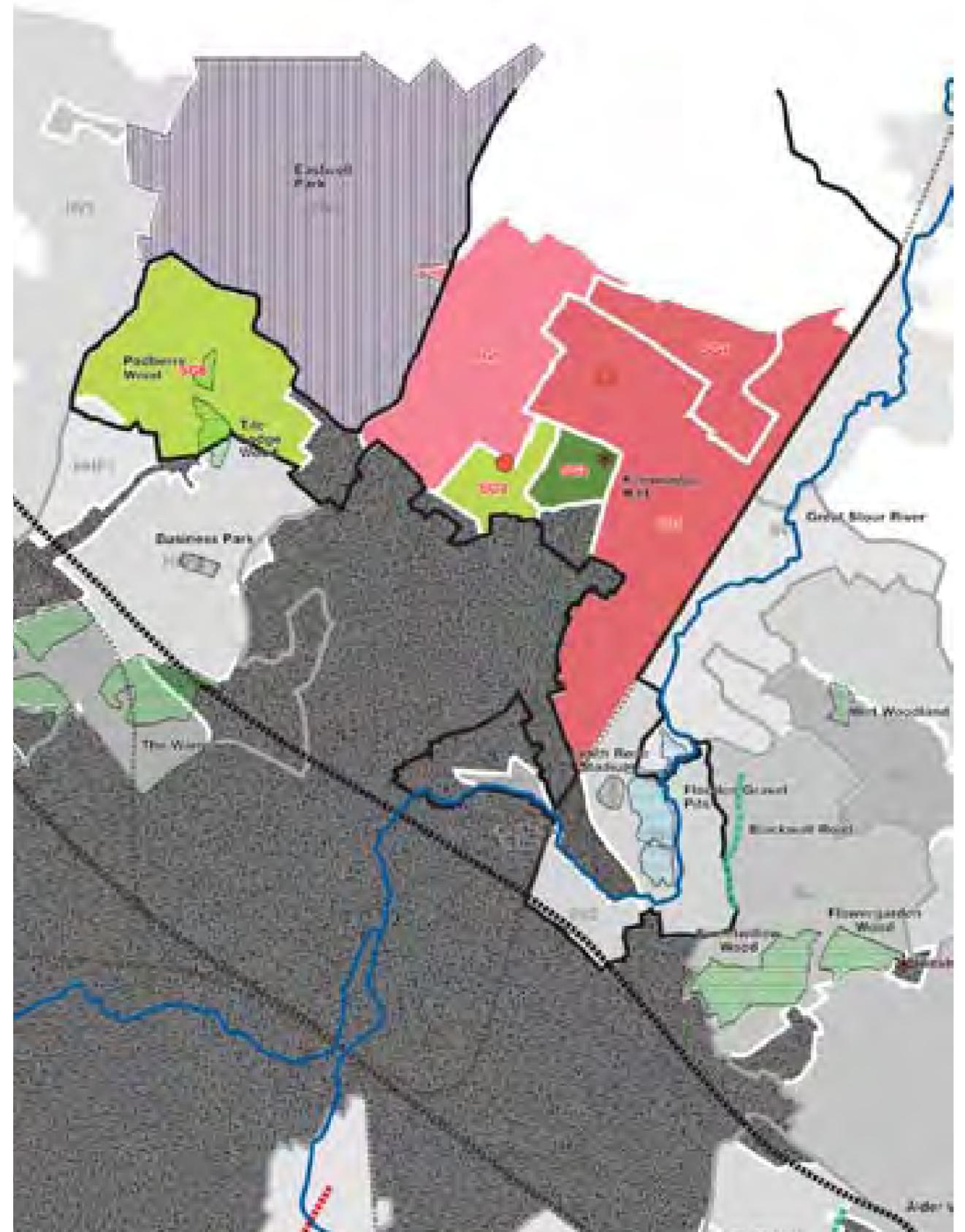
We have made some major adjustments to the Kent CLA boundary by excluding the lower lying areas within the Great Stour Valley, which relate better to the Stour Valley LCA.

The area is predominantly arable – hedgerows have been removed to give large prairie style fields with extensive views to the North Downs. Around Kennington Hall the parkland grounds and mixed plantations give a more wooded appearance and together with the mixed farming and rough grazing areas give some semi-natural habitats in an otherwise intensively farmed landscape. Similarly the Eastwell Farmlands are less intensively farmed with rolling arable and pasture enclosed in part by mature thick hedges and small isolated woodlands. To the north are poplar belts associated with the nursery.

There are 2 oast houses suggesting that the area was once a varied landscape with orchards and pasture, probably enclosed by tall hedges and divided by shelterbelts.



Location of Stour Gap



reinforce	conserve & reinforce	conserve
create & reinforce	conserve & create	conserve & restore
create	restore & create	restore

Policy recommendation



Open prairie style fields to the east of Kennington (D16.3)



Pasture near Kennington Hall (D17.2)



Poplar belts near nursery to the south of Kempe's Corner (D18.3)

CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Landuse

- Farming
- Recreation
- Parkland
- Woodland
- Business Park
- Plant Nursery

Topography

- Flat
- Gently undulating
- Rolling
- Steeply sloping
- Lakes/ ponds
- Streams/ dykes

Vegetation cover

- Intact hedgerows
- Hedgerow trees
- Feature trees
- Evidence of hedgerow clearance
- Evidence of woodland loss

Farming type

- Predominantly arable
- Mixed farming
- Mainly pasture
- Wet meadows

Local vernacular

- Ragstone, pegtiles, ship lap
- Oast house

Visibility

- Open long distance
- Intermittent
- Restricted

	SG1	SG2	SG3	SG4	SG5	SG6
Landuse						
Farming	○		○		○	○
Recreation						
Parkland		○				
Woodland		○	○			○
Business Park				○		
Plant Nursery						
Topography						
Flat	○				○	
Gently undulating		○	○	○		
Rolling						○
Steeply sloping						
Lakes/ ponds						
Streams/ dykes		○				
Vegetation cover						
Intact hedgerows			○			○
Hedgerow trees		○				
Feature trees						
Evidence of hedgerow clearance	○				○	○
Evidence of woodland loss						
Farming type						
Predominantly arable	○				○	
Mixed farming			○			○
Mainly pasture		○				
Wet meadows						
Local vernacular						
Ragstone, pegtiles, ship lap						
Oast house	○		○			
Visibility						
Open long distance	○			○	○	
Intermittent		○	○			○
Restricted						

Stour Valley

This county area sits to the north of Ashford covering part of the Great Stour Valley and bounded by the Ashford – Canterbury railway on the West. The M20 lies to the southern boundary.

We have made some major adjustments to the Kent CLA boundary by including the low lying areas on the edges of the Ashford fringe from the Stour Gap CLA as these areas follow the Stour floodplain north of Ashford, and read as part of the Stour Valley Area. Likewise we have extended the area northwards to include the valley which was part of the Wye Stour Valley CLA.

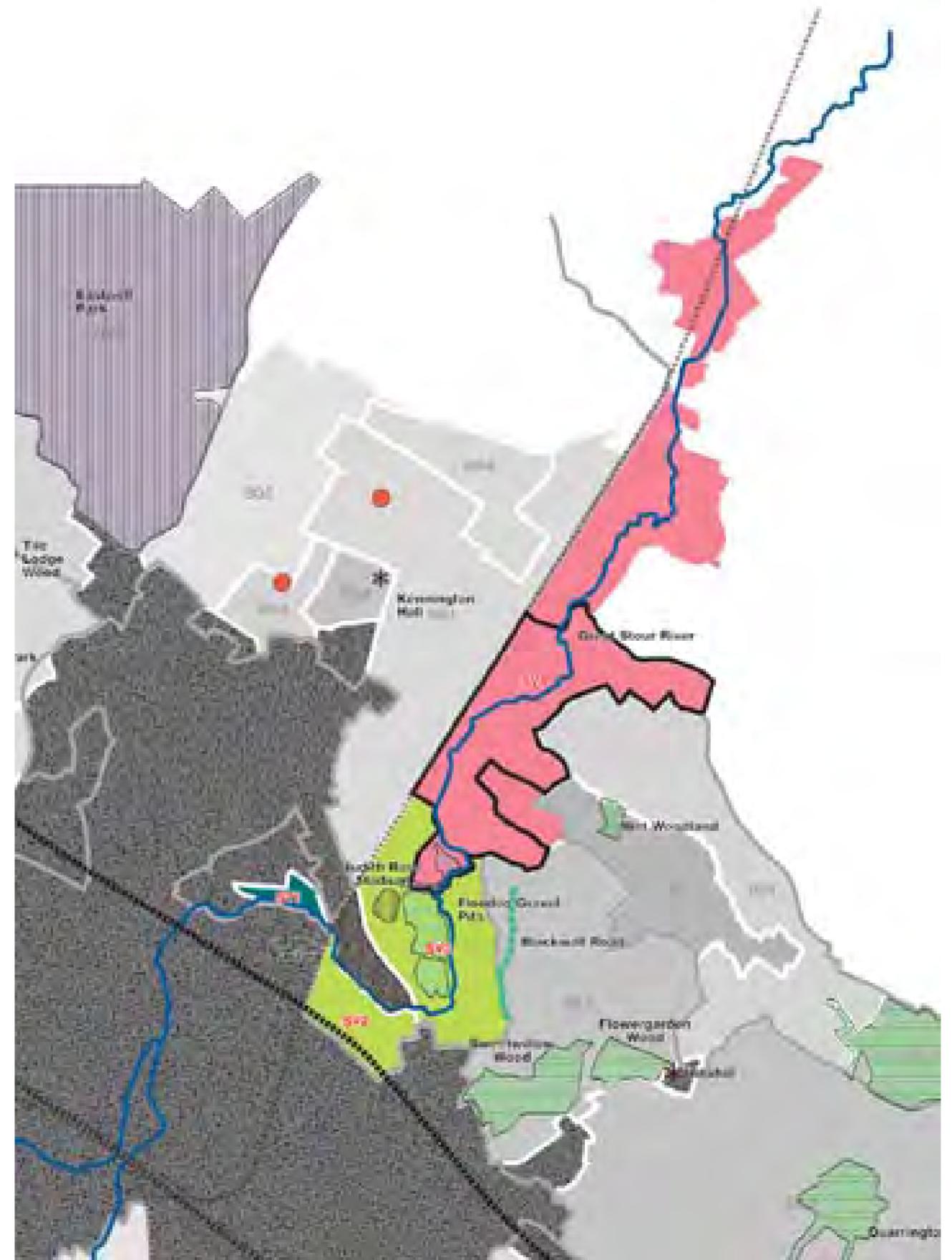
The amended Stour Valley area includes the whole of the Great Stour valley from the flooded gravel pits adjacent to the Julie Rose Stadium and northwards as the Stour meanders through farmland towards Wye. The landscape is drained by deep dykes with open large arable fields extending upto the river, which is delineated in places by mature willows. There are some discrete areas of pasture and damp alder woodland with willows and white poplar. Towards Ashford the flooded gravel pits with wet meadows and streams are an important wildlife habitat especially for over wintering birds, and the park at Bybrook is a local recreational area with pond. There are expansive views towards Ashford and the North Downs.



Location of Stour Valley

reinforce	conserve & reinforce	conserve
create & reinforce	conserve & create	conserve & restore
create	restore & create	restore

Policy recommendation





View west towards Ashford from Blackwell Road (D6.1)



Meandering Great Stour near gravel pits looking towards Ashford (D5.1)



Flooded gravel pits adjacent to Julie Rose stadium (D4.2)

CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES	SV1	SV2	SV3	SV4
Landuse				
Farming		○	○	○
Recreation	○			
Parkland				
Woodland				
Business Park				
Plant Nursery				
Topography				
Flat			○	○
Gently undulating				
Rolling		○		
Steeply sloping				
Lakes/ ponds	○	○	○	○
River/ streams/ dykes		○	○	○
Vegetation cover				
Intact hedgerows				
Hedgerow trees				
Feature trees		○	○	○
Evidence of hedgerow clearance			○	○
Evidence of woodland loss				○
Farming type				
Predominantly arable			○	○
Mixed farming				
Mainly pasture		○	○	
Wet meadows				
Local vernacular				
Ragstone, pegtiles, ship lap				
Oast house				
Visibility				
Open long distance		○	○	○
Intermittent	○			
Restricted				

Upper Stour Valley

This county area is split north west and south east of Ashford – the Upper Great Stour Valley to the north west of Ashford and the eastern Upper Stour Valley containing the East Stour, Ruckinge and White Water Dykes to the south east.

There are 2 ‘settlements’ the Waterbrook Freight Depot that projects into the floodplain, and the Forstal and Mill which are the extension of Mersham on the southern side of the CTRL and London to Dover Railway.

We have made adjustments to the Kent CLA boundary to exclude the area to the south east of Chilmington and to include a greater extent along the Ruckinge Dyke valley lying within the floodplain.

The Upper Stour Valley is an extensive open valley floor landscape of predominantly arable farming where hedgerows have been removed during the conversion to unimproved pasture and riparian vegetation lost as cultivation extends close to the river banks. This intensification with loss of vegetation and wildlife corridors is particularly evident at the East Stour Valley and Ruckinge Dyke. At Waterbrook and Willesborough Dykes there is a mix of neglected farmland, wasteland and major transport corridors which give an interrupted and fragmented character and open views to the suburbs of Ashford.

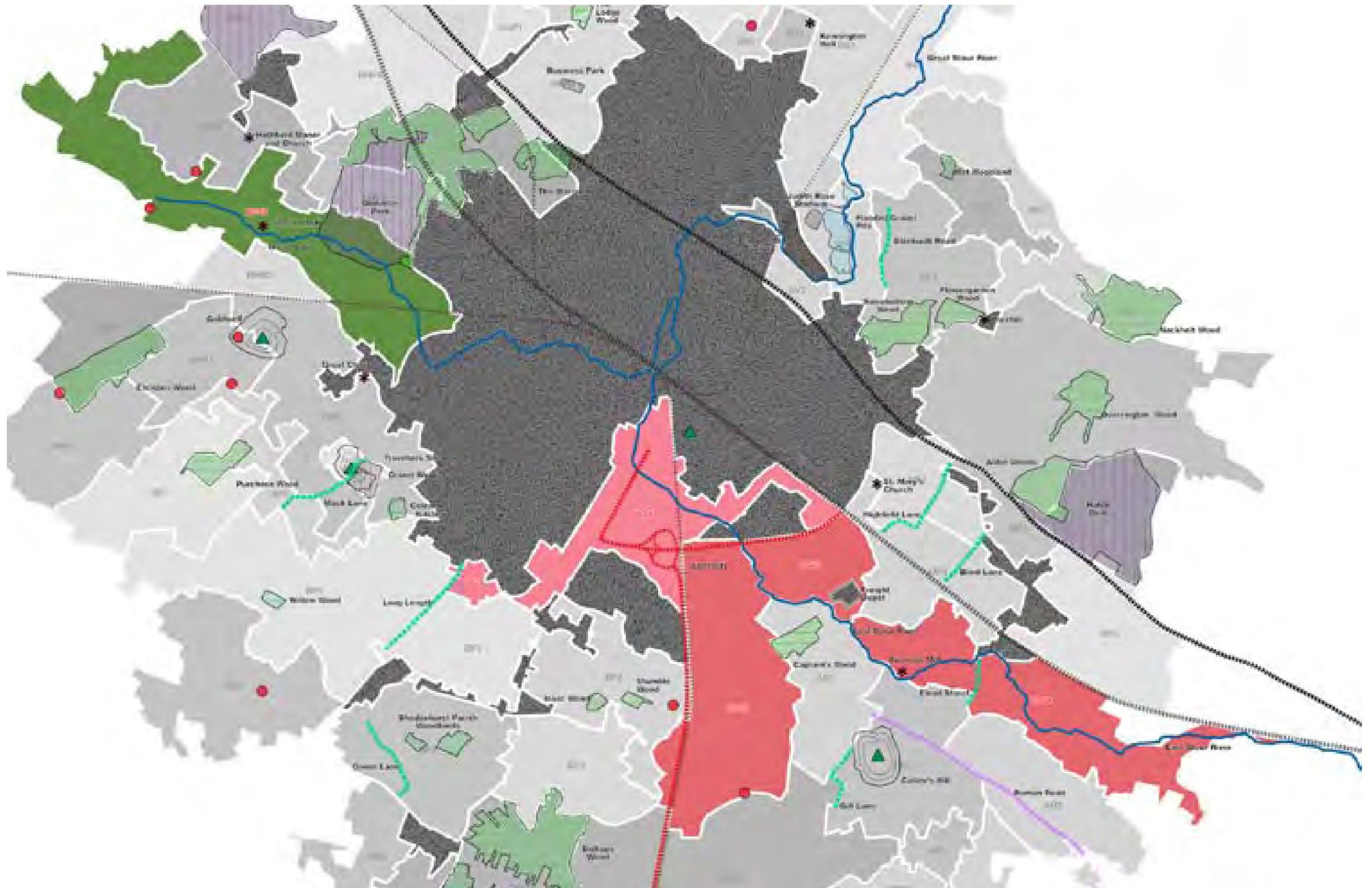
Occasionally the Great Stour tributaries and wet areas are delineated by flushes of willows or wet alder woodland which is more marked to the Upper Great Stour Valley. Here the mixed farming and strong hedgelines with discrete poplar plantations give a reticulated and more distinctive landscape.



Location of Upper Stour Valley

reinforce	conserve & reinforce	conserve
create & reinforce	conserve & create	conserve & restore
create	restore & create	restore

Policy recommendation





Near Mansion Copse (north of Worten Mill & north west of Ashford) (G17.3 & G17.4)



Moat at Aylesford Green (A2.2)



Looking south along East Stour near Outlet Village (C1.1)



Looking north towards Ashford from A2070(T) (C1.5)



East of Flood Street looking south (A2.1)



Open fields around Swanton Mill (A2.5)

CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES	USV1	USV2	USV3	USV4	USV5	USV6
Landuse						
Farming	○	○	○	○	○	○
Recreation						
Parkland						
Woodland						○
Former industrial use			○			
Freight Depot			○			
Topography						
Flat	○	○	○	○	○	○
Gently undulating						
Rolling						
Steeply sloping						
Lakes/ ponds			○	○	○	
Streams/ dykes	○	○		○		○
Vegetation cover						
Intact hedgerows	○					○
Hedgerow trees						
Feature trees				○		○
Evidence of hedgerow clearance			○	○	○	
Evidence of woodland loss					○	
Farming type						
Predominantly arable				○	○	
Mixed farming			○			○
Mainly pasture	○	○				
Wet meadows						
Local vernacular						
Ragstone, pegtiles, ship lap						
Oast house						
Visibility						
Open long distance		○	○	○	○	
Intermittent	○					○
Restricted						

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