

3 Appreciating the Context

The site has a number of important landscape features which have shaped the form of development; the main features being Captain's Wood, the East Stour River, other watercourses, hedgerows and tree groups (shaws). The key constraints to the development of the site are summarised below and shown on Figure 3.1 overleaf. The ES accompanying the planning application provides details of the likely impacts on these features.

3.1 Summary of the Key Constraints

Ecology

The site has been under agricultural use since before the early 1800s. Most of the semi-improved pasture, hedgerows and shaws have existed since at least this date. Captain's Wood has been designated probable ancient woodland on the Kent Provisional Ancient Woodland Inventory. There are no statutory designations but the site does include part of the South Willesborough Dykes Site of Nature Conservation Interest (SNCI) which encompasses Captain's Wood and the banks of the East Stour and Ruckinge Dyke.

Ecological Surveys

Detailed survey work was undertaken in late July/early August 2001 (following the lifting of access restrictions to control the spread of foot and mouth disease) and spring 2002. This is the appropriate time of year for the assessment of the majority of the flora and animal species.

The results of the surveys and proposed mitigation measures update previous survey work (1991) and are recorded in the ES (February 2002) and Addendum (April 2002). They demonstrate that the proposed development will not have a negative impact on any site of international or national importance for nature conservation. The locally designated South Willesborough Dykes SNCI is affected by the main access road, though with attention to detailed design, the impacts need not be significant.

Following approval of the outline planning application to which this Development Brief relates, the following additional surveys will be undertaken to inform the Captain's Wood Management Plan and detailed planning applications:

- Surveys for Dormice in and around Captain's Wood to be undertaken by installing nest boxes in winter and monitoring these for occupation in summer;
- A breeding bird survey within Captain's Wood requiring a minimum of two visits, early April and early June;
- A detailed flora survey of Captain's Wood to be undertaken in May when ground flora is at its best;
- A further amphibian survey requiring visits to ponds in April and May.

In the event that the additional amphibian survey reveals anything new, mitigation measures will be designed on the basis of the results and will include the creation of new habitats outside the built development area. In the case of great crested newts, fully protected under the legislation, the proposals will require consultation with English Nature and a programme of mitigation works carried out under licence from DEFRA.

The main beneficial ecological effects arising from the development include:

- The conversion of about 11 hectares of arable land to traditional wildflower grassland;
- Implementation of a management plan for Captain's Wood;
- The planting of about 1.6km of hedgerows;
- The planting of over 10 hectares of native woodland;
- The creation of drainage ditches and ponds;
- The realisation of the Borough Council's objectives to protect and enhance the "green corridors" alongside the East Stour and Ruckinge Dyke.

Agricultural Land Classification

The agricultural land quality of the site is predominantly Grade 3b: such land is defined in PPG7 as being of "moderate quality with lower yields and/or a more restricted cropping range". Along the northern boundary of the site, within the floodplain of the East Stour, lie two pockets of Grade 3a land which PPG7 defines as "good quality".

Archaeology

Although there are few known archaeological features on the site, finds and discoveries in the surrounding area reveal considerable evidence of settlement activity from prehistoric times onward. Based on present data, there is a high potential for important archaeological remains to survive within the area and archaeological investigation works will be undertaken at an early stage, prior to the finalisation of detailed designs. Such investigation works will include an archaeological and historical desktop study, comprising assessment of archaeology, historic buildings and the historic landscape, followed by appropriate fieldwork. The results of preliminary investigations will then inform and guide appropriate mitigation measures to be incorporated into the detailed designs. There will be provision for preservation in situ of important archaeological remains.

The known alignment of the Roman road along the southern boundary of the site will be maintained and any remains associated with the road preserved in situ.

Listed Buildings

The location of listed buildings are shown on Figure 3.1. The following are situated close to the site boundary:

- Swanton Court (Grade II), late 18th/early 19th century house built in red brick, set within a fine moated site;
- Swanton Mill and Mill House (Grade II*), 15th to mid 19th century timber framed buildings, clad in red brick with plain tiled roof and slated gables;



- Outhouse near Swanton Mill (Grade II), 19th century re-build or alteration of 17th century or earlier timber framed building (of group value with Swanton Mill);
- The Grange (Grade II), 16th century timber framed house clad with painted brick and weatherboarding;
- Mundy Manor (Grade II), 16th century or earlier timber framed house with painted brick and weatherboarding to first floor;
- Mundy Farmhouse (Grade II), 17th century painted ragstone and red brick house.

There are other listed buildings within the “Zone of Visual Influence” of the proposed development; the main groups being in Sevington and South Stour.

Public Rights of Way

Although the site does not contain any common land or public open space that is used by the community, it is crossed by a total of eight public rights of way. While not on the site, a bridleway (AU47) runs along the south side of the Southern Orbital Road, under the grade separated junction by the Ruckinge Dyke, and on toward the southern outskirts of Ashford.

3.2 Hydrology

Extent of the Floodplain

The extent of the floodplain of the East Stour River and the Ruckinge Dyke was the key determinant of the amount of land available for development and hence the design of the master plan. The Environment Agency’s view on what flood design criterion should be used to determine the extent of the floodplain was that built development should lie outside the 100 year undefended floodplain; that is the floodplain which existed prior to construction of the Aldington Reservoir on the East Stour upstream of the site.

On behalf of the Environment Agency, consultants Peter Brett Associates have recently completed hydrological

modelling work on the East Stour. This has determined the extent of both the 1 in 100 year floodplain boundary and a floodplain with a 20% increase to allow for climate change.

This floodplain map is similar in places to an initial estimate made by Atkins, but with certain differences. Changes have been made to the master plan to accommodate these differences.

Assessment of Flood Risk

PPG25 states that the Government expects local planning authorities to apply a risk-based approach to their

decisions on development control through a sequential test. Developers seeking sites for housing are also to have regard to this test. Built development at East Stour Village accords well with the sequential flood risk test set out in PPG25. In line with the requirement of the Environment Agency, all built development (with the exception of the principal access road) lies outside the 1 in 100 year undefended floodplain (see Figures 3.2 and 3.4).

As the principal access road crosses the flood plain, flood compensation will be provided. An area of land has been identified, currently outside the floodplain, where there is sufficient space for providing this compensation.

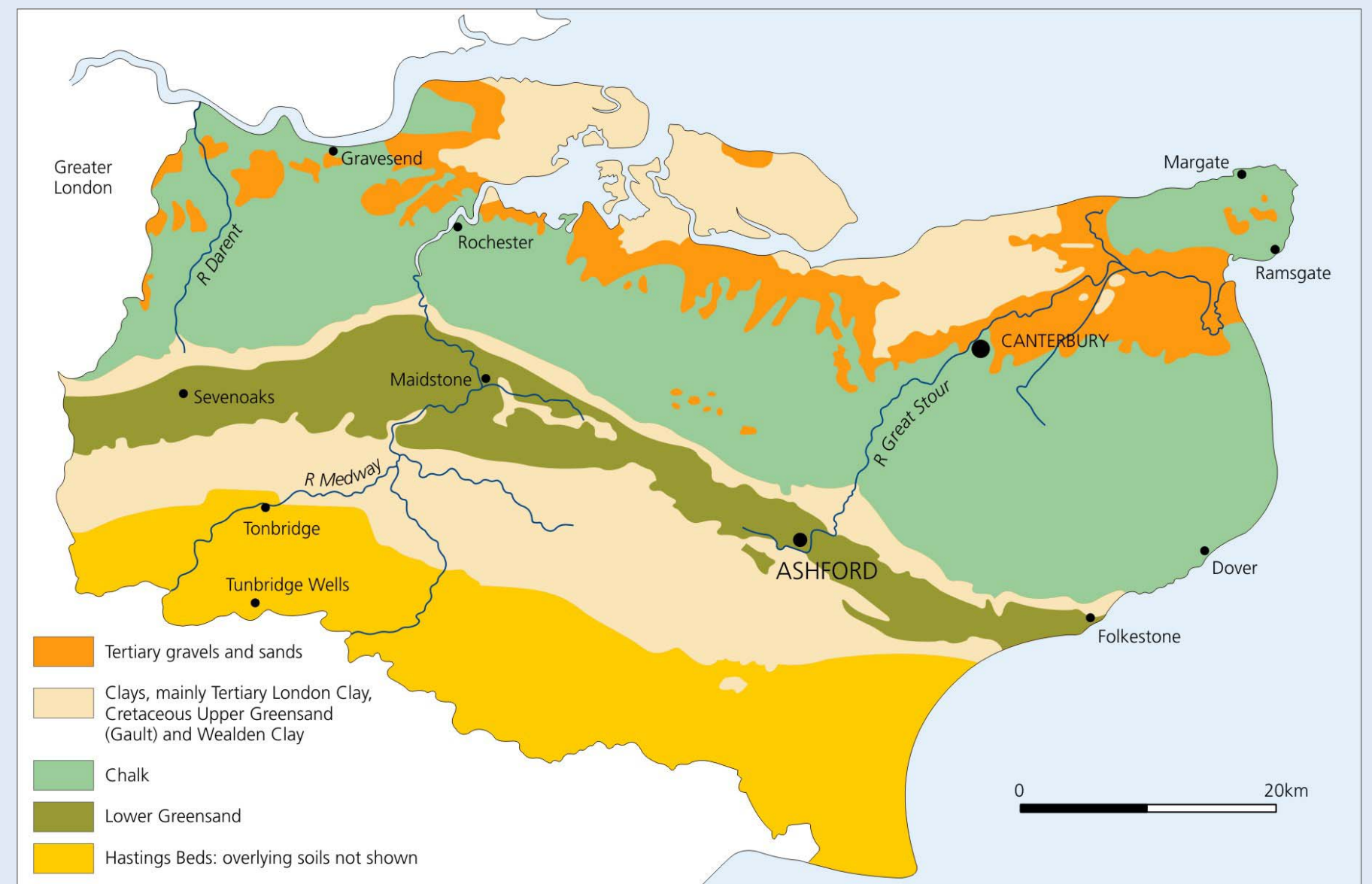
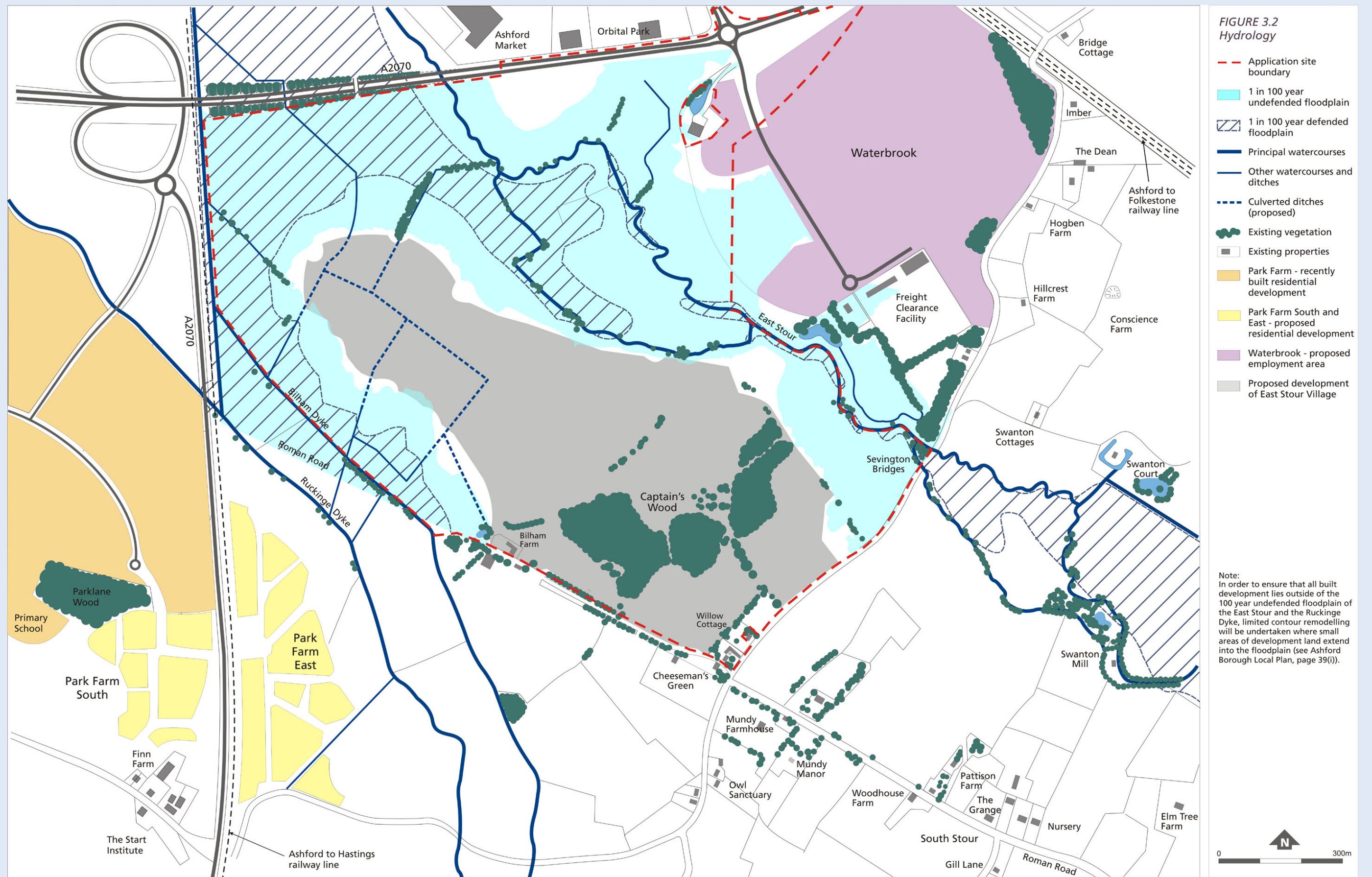
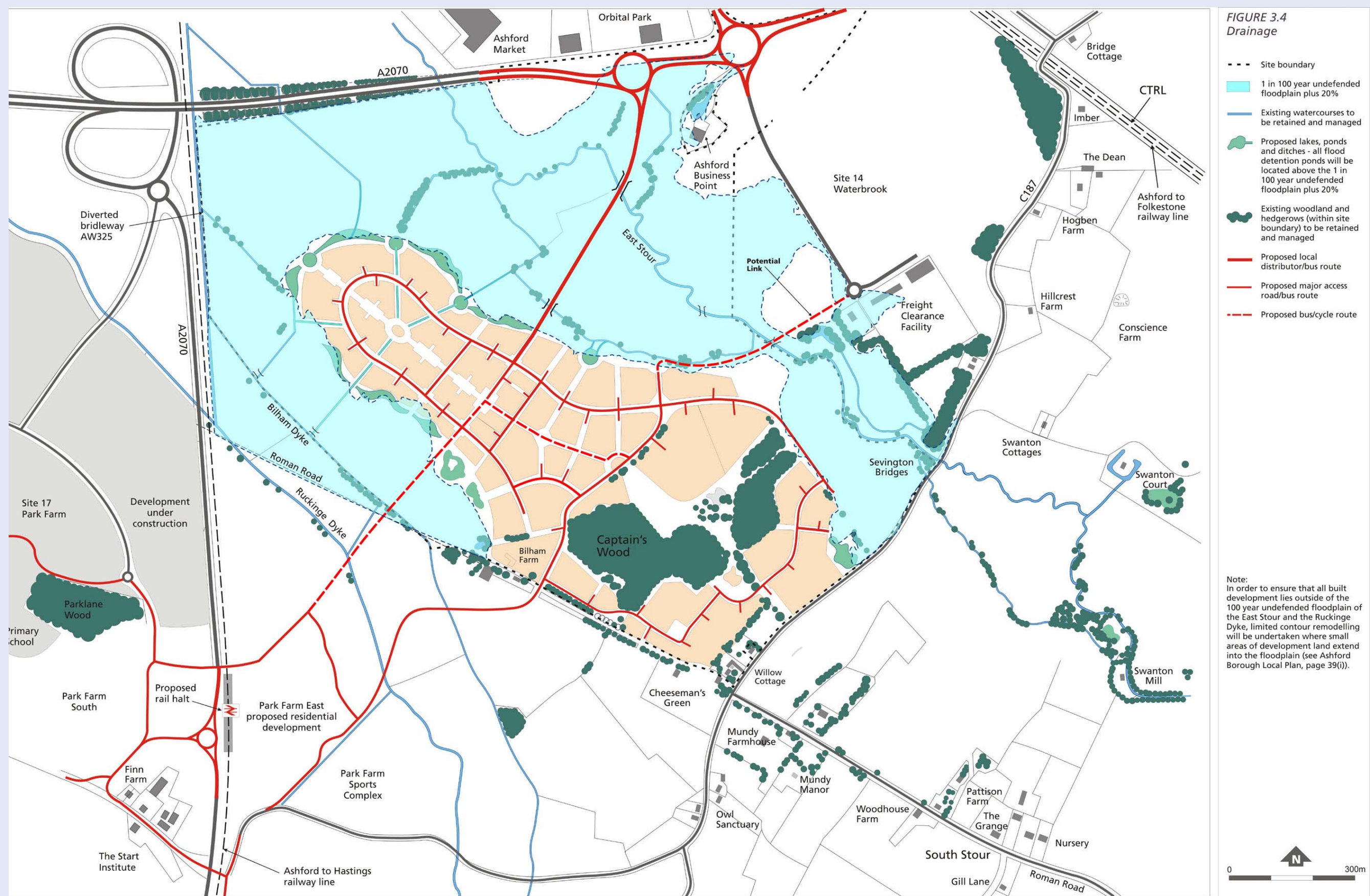


FIGURE 3.3 Geology





3.3 Local Building Vernacular

The site lies within the Low Weald character area (as defined by the Countryside Agency) but is also close to the Wealden Greensand character area. The North Downs and Romney Marshes character areas are also within 5km to the north east and south of the site respectively, see Figure 3.5.

The Low Weald is characterised by individual farmsteads set within a patchwork of fields, separated by hedgerows, copses and larger woods. Many of the farmsteads started life in the seventeenth century, or even earlier. They made use of the ready supplies of local timber for construction and clay for bricks. The strong iron content of the Wealden clay gives bricks and tiles a red, orange and vermillion colour which are particularly attractive in a green landscape. The tiles are often used to clad the upper storeys as well as the roof, which is typically steeply pitched to support the heavy clay tiles. It became common practice in Kent to pitch the ends of the roof inwards, producing “hips” at the angles to the main slopes. A hipped roof reduced the effect of wind pressure. Frequently, the house is set off by tall, impressive chimney stacks, often in pairs, with the top courses of brick set at an angle to the rest. Houses were timber framed, using locally felled oak, and often built as hall-houses. As an alternative to tile hanging, houses were also weatherboarded, and painted white or black.

The stratum of Lower Greensand near the site (see Figure 3.3) produces a form of limestone called Kentish Rag. Although this is neither easy to work, nor durable, it is used locally for walling, sometimes combined with flint. Plaster, a waterproof mixture of lime and sand with a binding material such as cow hair, was also occasionally used as an infilling to timber framed walls.

A characteristic of Kent villages is the diverse roof forms and combinations of building materials which contribute to exceptional, but locally characteristic,

street scenes and building clusters. Although the local vernacular produces distinctive buildings, it can be the way they are put together, unconsciously or not, that creates such satisfying places.

An assessment of the urban form of a selection of small towns and villages in Kent was undertaken to inform the design process. The settlements visited included Wye,

Tenterden, Lenham, Yalding and Elham. The series of annotated photographs and sketches on the following pages illustrate the main findings of the assessment.

Contemporary schemes, have also been examined, both in Kent, such as New Ash Green and in the wider context of best practice. Examples of best practice in contemporary design are also illustrated in the following pages.

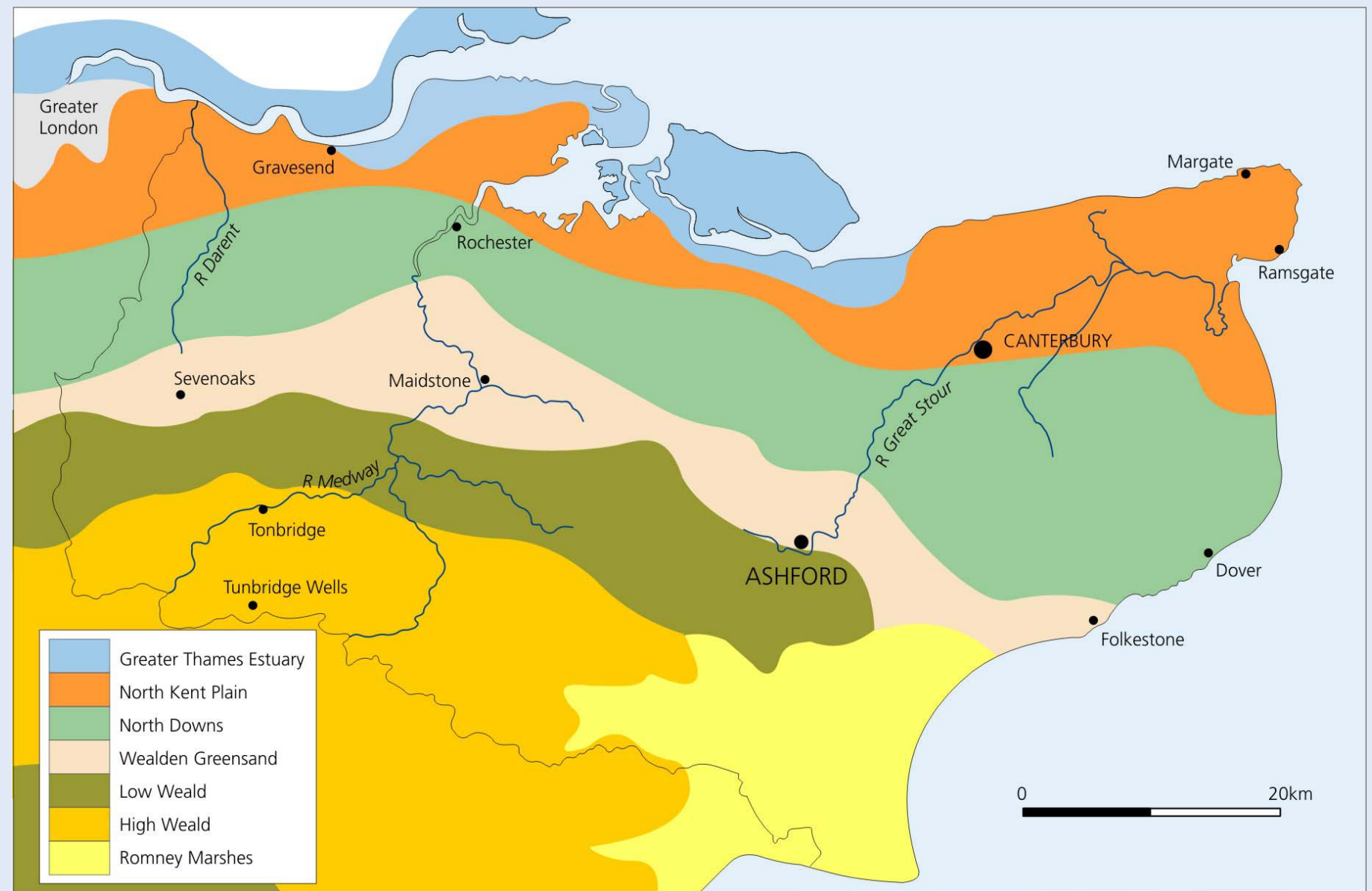


FIGURE 3.5 Countryside Character Areas

Traditional use of materials with brick, painted rendered walls and tile hanging.

The building - street height to width ratio is 1:1 with a strong sense of enclosure

Wye



Traditional pedestrian street fronting onto an open space.

Traditional arrangement with house fronting onto open space to create a solid edge.

Tenterden



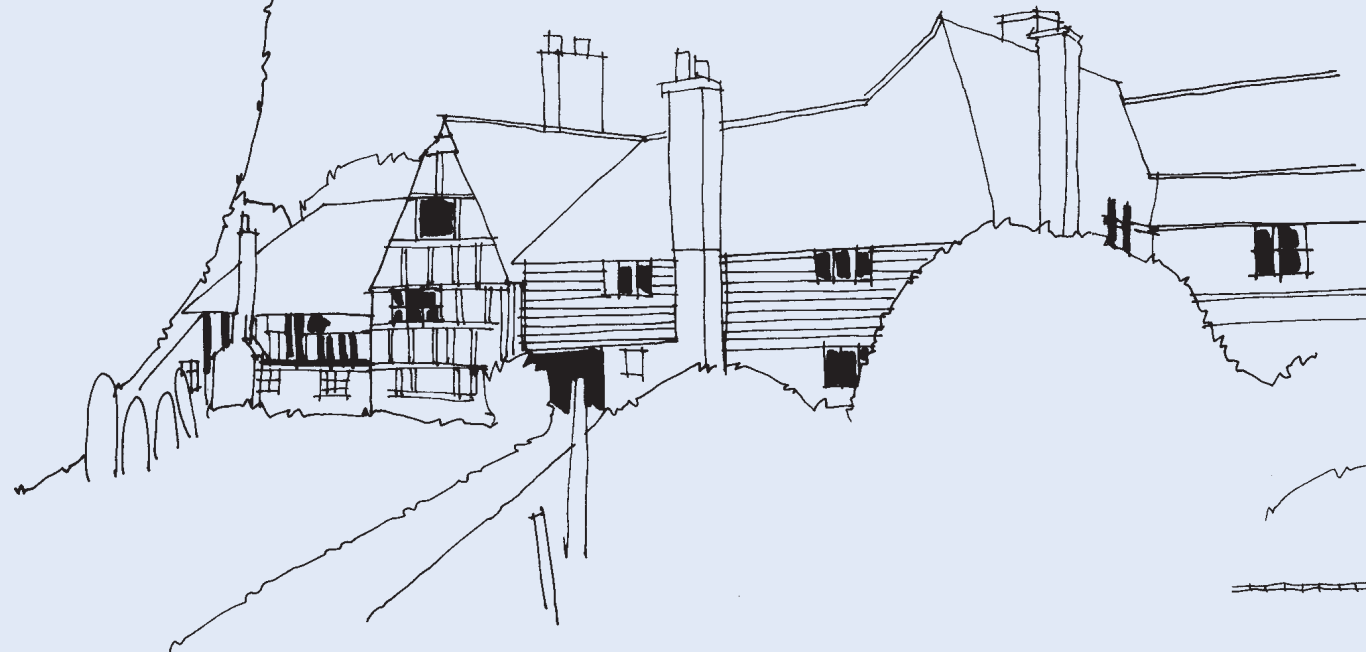
Lenham



Mix of uses; the buildings share a common building line which is closely associated with the road. This is characteristic of the historic towns in Kent.

A common building line with minimal set back. These town-houses are given a degree of privacy created by the change in level from the road and steps up to the front doors of the properties.

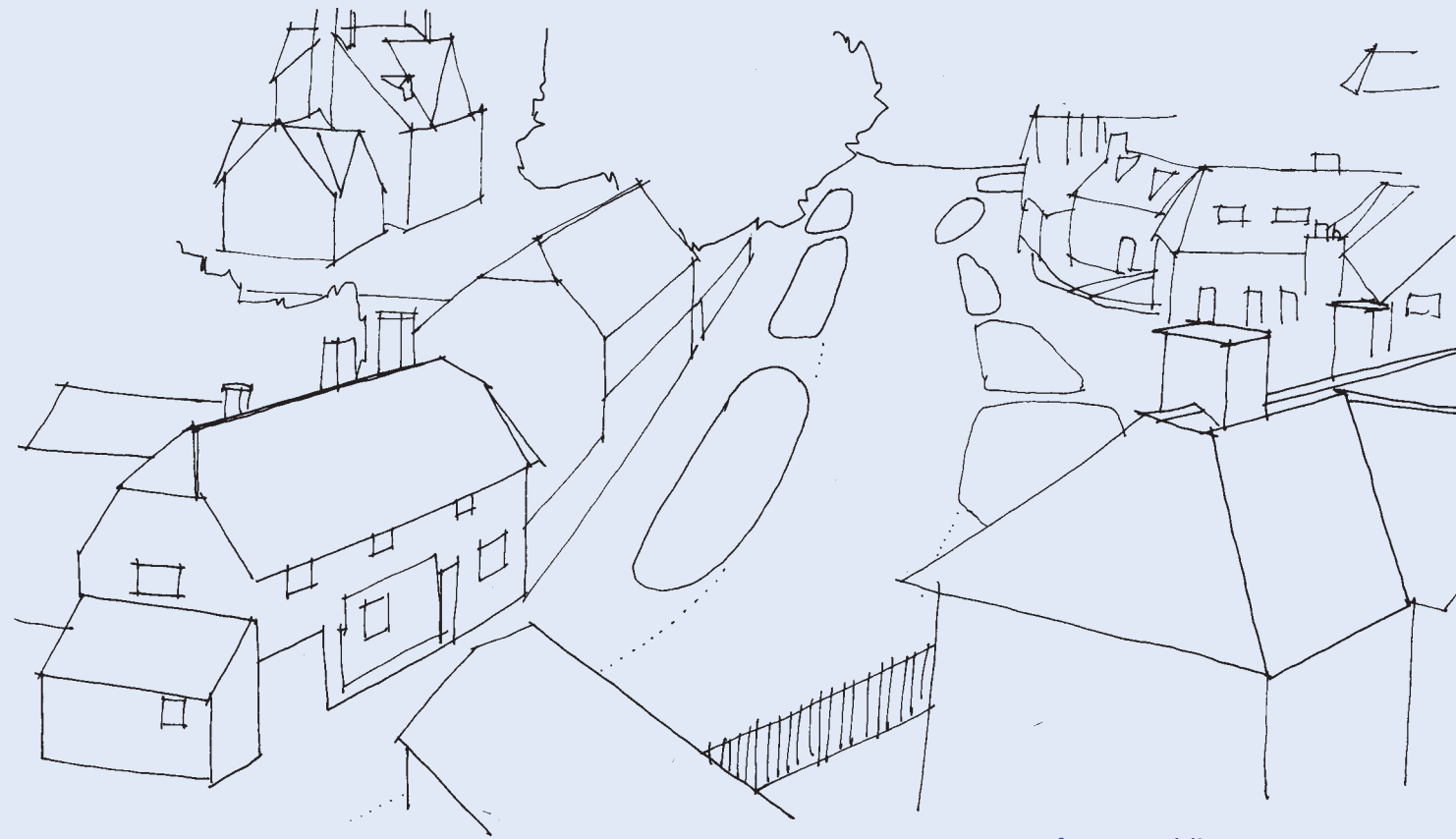
Cranbrook: rooftiles, materials, doors and windows



Smarden: diverse styles united by roofing in red tiles



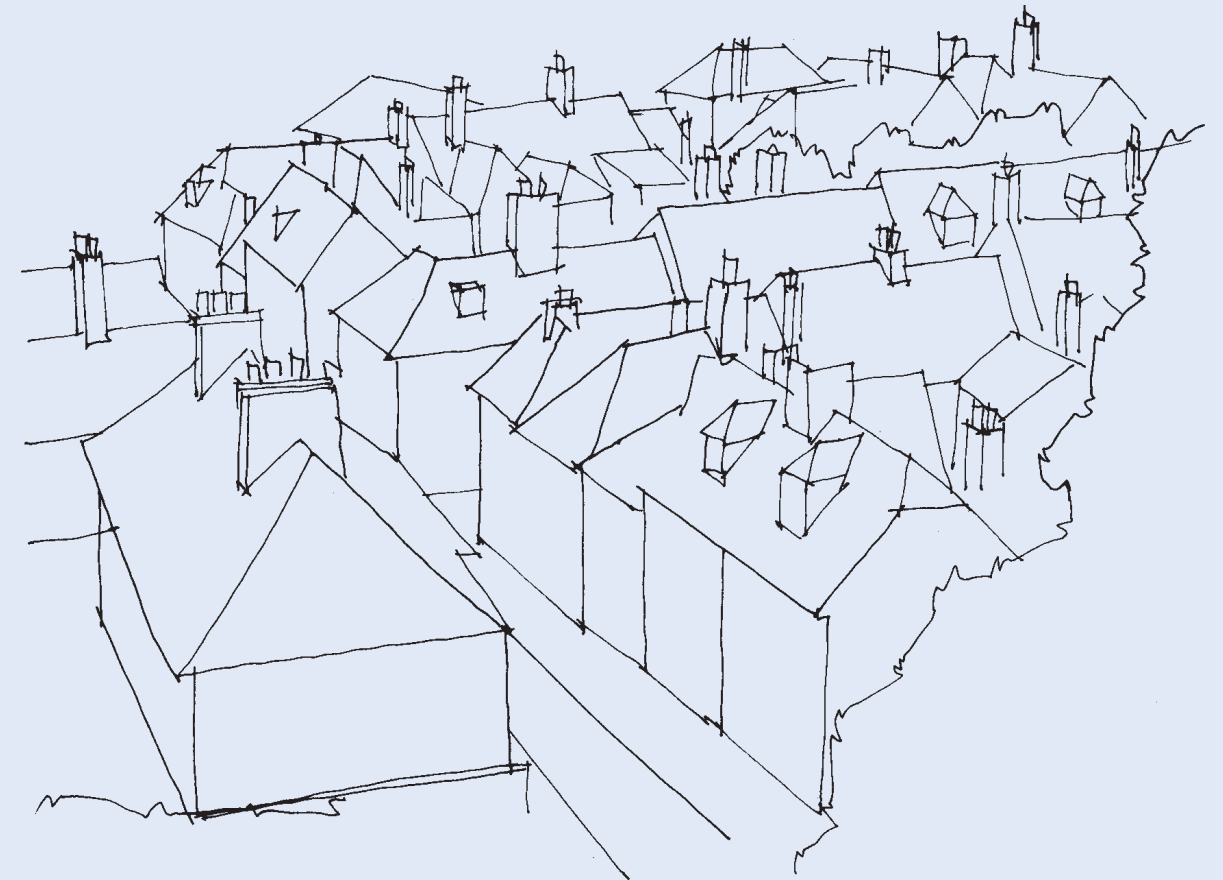
Smarden: hipped and half hipped roofs and dormers



Roofscape, Yalding



Informal building groups, Elham



Pantiled roofscape, Sandwich



Century Court, Cheltenham

The white externally insulated render makes reference to the stucco facades of Regency Cheltenham and gives good thermal performance to the building. This contemporary style of building with white facing materials would be appropriate around the perimeter of the built-up area facing onto the East Stour Valley and in mixed use areas.

Golden Lane Mews, Brighton

A distinctive modern infill development. Mews houses offer generous accommodation built to high standard with a significant proportion of units capable of being suitable for the disabled. This form and scale of development would be appropriate in higher density residential areas, for example within street blocks close to the village square and the High Street.



Examples of Sustainable Contemporary Design



BedZed, Hackbridge, Surrey

A high density, low rise housing project hailed as a model for green development. The principles successfully incorporated into this scheme (including the re-use of building materials, vertical south-facing glazed walls, photovoltaic panels and low flush toilets) could be particularly relevant to the mixed use areas of East Stour Village.



Ecolonia, Netherlands

Ecolonia is an environmentally conscious pilot scheme of 300 houses, developed by NOVEM, the Netherlands Governmental Agency for Energy and the Environment, where social, urban, architectural, communal and psychological aspects of ecology are integrally addressed. Nine different architectural firms were selected to design the first phase of 101 units in the development of up to three storey semi-detached and terraced houses. The scheme employs a wide range of sustainable drainage techniques and displays an imaginative use of water close to properties.





East Stour



Church Road

3.4 Environmental Objectives

From construction through to operation, environmental considerations form a key element of the proposals for the new community. These are as follows:

- Keep Captain's Wood, which is ecologically important, attractive and plays a major role in defining the character of the area, free from development and manage it as a community woodland;
- Keep the floodplain of the East Stour and the Ruckinge Dyke free from built development and adopt a sustainable approach to management of the floodplain of the East Stour and the Ruckinge Dyke;
- Protect and enhance the green corridors alongside the East Stour and the Ruckinge Dyke, helping to create a countryside setting for the development;
- Prevent the risk of increased flooding downstream of the site, and protect surface waters and groundwater from pollution;
- Where possible, retain and enhance existing features of nature conservation interest, particularly those within the South Willesborough Dykes Site of Nature Conservation Interest (encompassing Captain's Wood);
- Wherever possible, retain and protect mature trees



Mundy Manor

and hedgerows, and the agricultural drainage ditches which criss-cross the site;

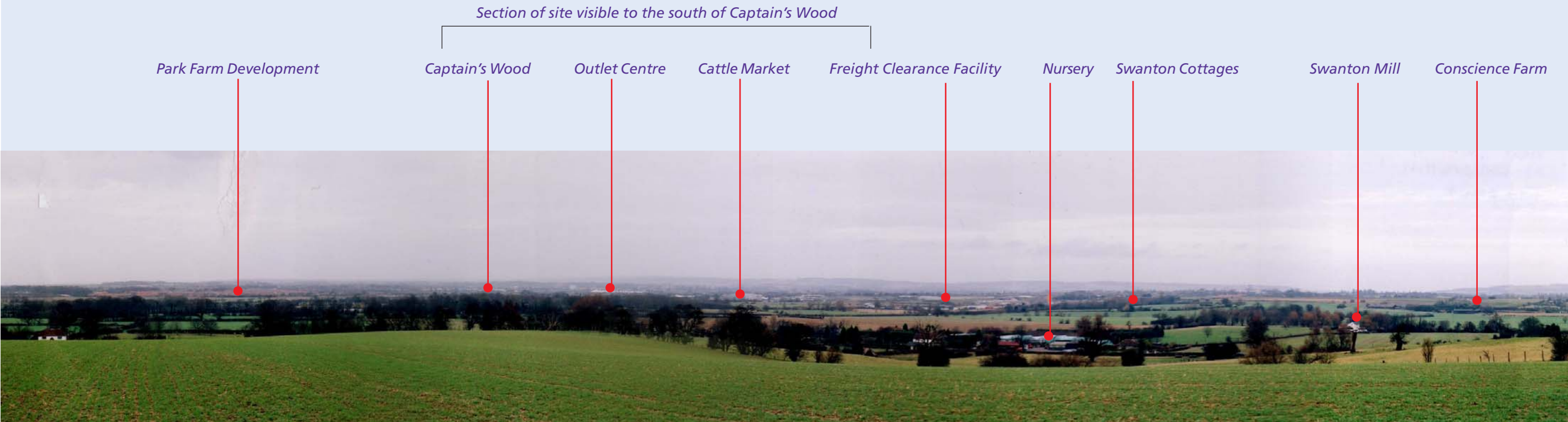
- Wherever possible, maintain the alignment of existing public rights of way;
- Enhance the visual appearance of the development through landscape design and long term estate management;
- Limit adverse visual impact as seen from nearby residential properties;
- Protect the setting of the listed buildings at Swanton Court and Swanton Mill and in the hamlet of South Stour;
- Create a network of footpath and cycle routes within the site, with connections to public transport facilities and the proposed Ashford cycleway network, so as to reduce the need to travel by car;
- Provide community/shopping/leisure facilities and higher density residential development at the heart of the scheme, so as to further reduce the need to travel by car;
- Provide a road network which encourages lower traffic speeds and discourages access on to existing local roads.



Captain's Wood



View south west from beside Swanton Cottages



View north west from Collier's Hill