

An aerial photograph of a rural landscape, likely in the Ashford area. The image shows a patchwork of green fields, some with brown patches, and a central village with buildings and roads. The text is overlaid on the image.

Ashford Local Development Framework Landscape Character Study

for Ashford Borough Council & English Partnerships

SCOPING & METHODOLOGY

November 2005

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Ashford Local Development Framework

Landscape Character Study

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Scoping & Methodology Report

November 2005

122/doc/012

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Panorama over Ashford from Colliers Hill near Cheeseman's Green and the Roman Road



CONTENTS

Introduction	7
What is landscape ?	8
The Greater Ashford Development Framework	10
The Concept of Green Infrastructure and Green Services	11
Setting the extent of the study area	12
The Ashford Landscape Character Study	14
Methodology : Fieldwork - Landscape	16
Methodology : Fieldwork - Settlements	18
Methodology : Assessment	20

Introduction

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 detailed 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 superceded 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 volume setting out the scope for the Ashford Landscape Character Study is the first of a collection of 15 reports that supercede the Phase 1 study published in April 2005 in volumes 122/doc/001-009. The original scoping and methodology report (122/doc.001) has been revised to form the basis of this short first volume of the study. The data reports have been reorganised to reflect the County LaThe study area was extended to complete a zone of countryside around the whole town. Learning from our work in Phase 1, the scope of work for what was called Phase 2 was refined, the Background Study (122/doc/002) was revised and augmented and is represented as a new report 122/doc/013, and the Summary Report 122/doc/014 now presents an overview of the whole study area plus an assessment of the sensitivity of the landscape types within it. Reports 122/doc/010-011 issued in July 2005 contained data from the Phase 2 rural field work. This data has been added to the Phase 1 field work, illustrated in the same way, but now divided up into the County Landscape Areas that lie within the study area. These data along with an overview of each County Landscape Type sitting within the study area are presented in reports 122/doc/015-026. The completed set of reports are as follows:

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 summary report 122/doc/014.

This report sets out the method by which the study area was defined and the methodology used to carry out the field work and to assess the sensitivity of the landscape. To set the scene there is a short discourse on the meaning of landscape, ecology and the study team's ethos, followed by the context of the study in relation to the Greater Ashford Development Framework as this had a bearing on the level of detail entered into.

Studio Engleback has a particular interest in what we term 'ecourbanism', a holistic approach to the development of multi-dimensional sustainable communities within harmonious and balanced built environments. This includes an essential consideration of landscape which in turn requires an understanding of Ecology and Landscape in its widest sense allied to natural processes and heritage. It is, therefore, important to remember where the words landscape and ecology come from.

Studio Engleback 11/2005

What is landscape?

Etymology of 'Landscape'

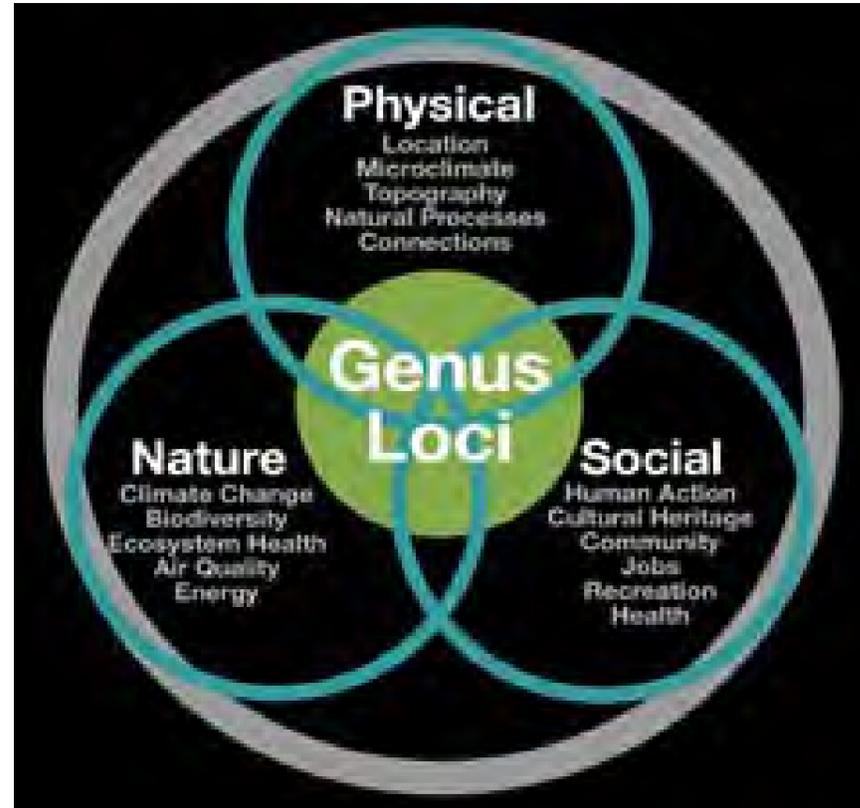
The etymology of the word Landscape was traced by Makhzoumi & Pungetti (1999), who found it to be derived from the Middle Dutch word *lantschap*, which became the Modern Dutch word *landschap*. This in turn is derived from the Germanic *land* and the suffix *schap*, which means condition or constitution. The Old English word *landscipe* and Old High German *lantscaf* had a connotation of 'region' or 'tract'. In English, *landscipe* became 16th century *landskip* and 17th century *landscape*. By this time the word meant a picture representing natural inland scenery such as can be taken at a glance from a single point of view. It should be remembered that the influence of the allegorical landscape paintings of Claude and Lorraine were realised by the English landscape gardening movement at this time. The meaning of 'Landscape' had evolved by the 19th century to mean 'a tract of land with distinguishing characteristics and features, especially considered as a product of modifying or shaping processes and agents' (Onions, 1966; Simpson & Weiner, 1989).

The word *Landscape* has since been applied whole or in its constituent parts to other situations - for example *cityscape* or *seascape*, or as a metaphor such as the *political* or *intellectual landscape*.

What is landscape?

Makhzoumi & Pungetti suggested that four landscape perspectives can be taken:

- *landscape as scenery*
- *landscape specific to place*
- *landscape as an expression of culture*
- *landscape as a holistic entity*



Landscape as scenery in the 19th century had related to a description of physical geographical aspects, implying natural scenery without human intervention. The idea of landscape being a view from one point also suggests psychological perceptions are important.

Landscape as a specific place is also a geographic issue. The comprehension of the physical processes of a 'place' can be connected to an appreciation of beauty. Beauty has been discussed in philosophy and the concept of landscape aesthetics. The essence of place, or the 'Genius of the Place' as Alexander Pope the 18th century poet exhorted the landscape designer William Kent to consult, is multi-layered. It needs to consider the relationship between landscape, place, culture and society. In his book *Place and Placedness*, Relph wrote that *landscape is not merely an aesthetic feature, but rather 'it is the setting that both expresses and conditions cultural attitudes and activities'*. This implies that significant modifications to a landscape need changes in social attitudes.

Landscape as an expression of culture relates to how the environment has been modified from its natural state by the action of man. At a regional scale the landscape can be defined as an area comprising a distinct association of physical and cultural forms. So landscape has been replaced sometimes by the words *environment* or *area* to mean *place for people*. J.B.Jackson (the Vernacular Landscape from landscape meanings and Values ed Pening-Rowsell + Lowenthal 1986) conjectured that *'landscape is not a natural feature of the environment, but a synthetic space, a man-made functioning system and evolving not according to natural laws, but to serve a community'*. The cultural landscape is the natural landscape that has been formed by the physical effects of landform, water, soil and vegetation, and modified and managed by man for woodland, agricultural land, settlements and infrastructure.

Landscape as a holistic entity. A group of writers: Naveh + Lieberman, Thomas, and Troll, presented the **landscape as an integral study of natural environment that comrehends all the ecological factors involved not only with natural science, but also in land use, urbanisation and society.** Thomas in his contibution to 'Landscape Politics and Perspectives' (1993) noted that the idea of landscape unites different disciplines, wheras the different aspects of the landscape (e.g. scienfital and ecological, social and cultural) tends to break up these disciplines into to different and specific agendas. The geographer Cosgrove wrote that the term **'landscape' relates ideas about cultural significance of land to ways in which it is, materially appropriated and used'** (Landscape and Social Formation 1984).

The Rhythm of the Landscape

Landscape is a concept that implies a certain way of seeing the land that also embraces natural, economic and social processes.

The Genus Loci, important since ancient times, is the result of an overlapping of a series of landscape layers; yet, whilst the different ways of appreciating the spatial component of landscape have been discussed, there is also the temporal aspect of the living entity. Landscapes are dynamic, and a series of rhythms overlay what we see. This fundamental must be appreciated in the consideration of landscape character. There are the seasons and how these are expressed in different landscape types e.g. arable land as opposed to pastoral or woodland, or issues like the seasonal hydrological regime. There is the slightly longer time frame of crop rotation, although modern farming techniques have somewhat reduced the effect of this rhythm. Then there are the silvicultural rythms - hedge trimming and laying, regular pollarding of willows, the faster coppice rotation of sweet chestnut compared to that of hornbeam, plantation woodland as opposed to coppice with standard trees and so on. A snapshot in time will see this dynamic landscape at only a moment in its rolling programme. An appreciation of the character must take into account these processes.

Ecology

Ecology, the term, first appeared in 1866 as *Oecologie*, coined by the leading German disciple of Darwin, Ernst Haeckel. He saw it as the science of the relationship between living organisms to the external world and their habitat. This idea was developed in the early 20th century to embrace the concept of the *ecosystem*, its function and structure. The concept of the relationship of ecosystem function and structure within the system can be applied to urbanism - or ecourbanism. This informs our approach to understanding landscape character.

The Greater Ashford Development Framework

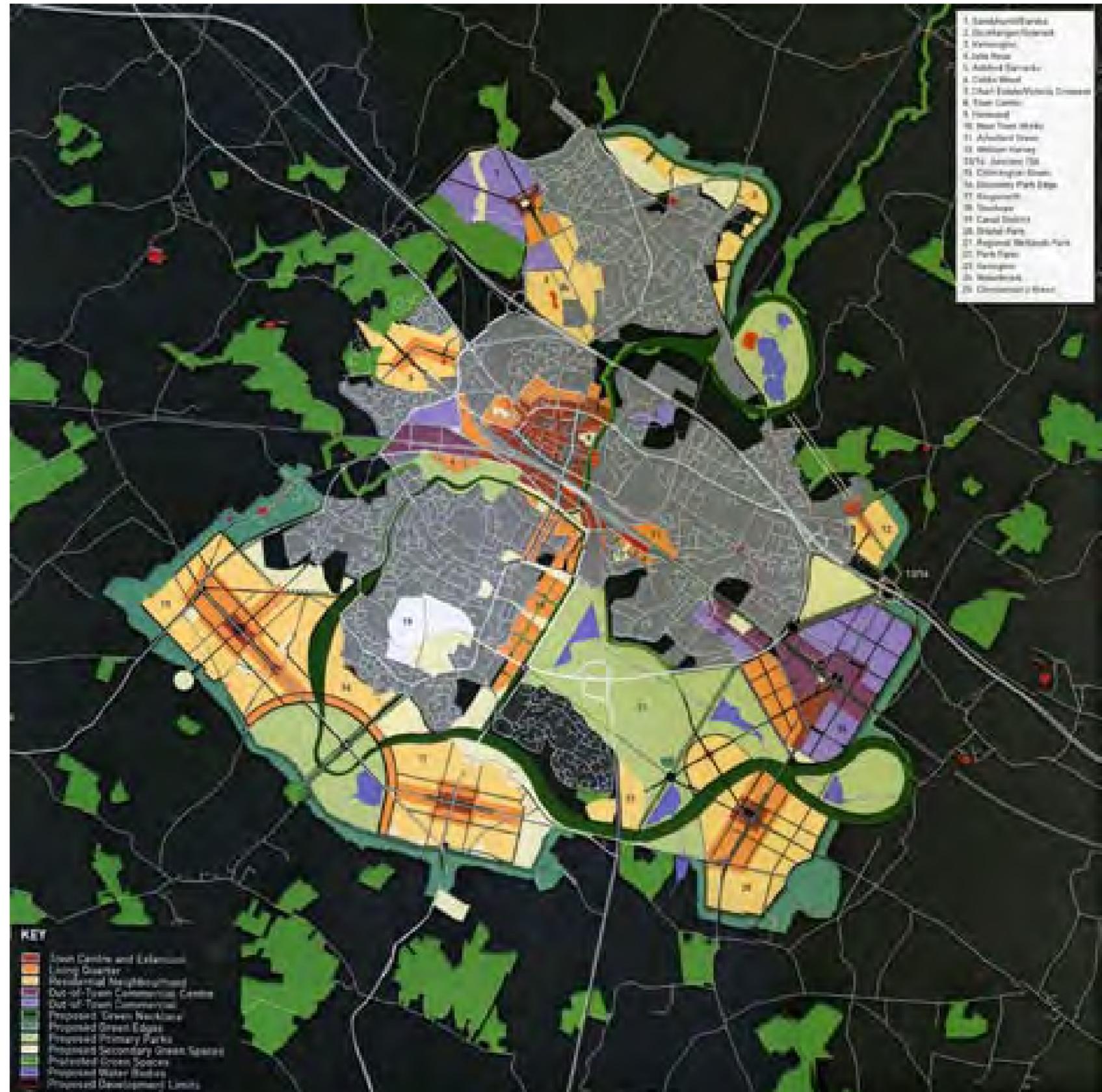
Context - The growth of Ashford

Ashford is due to double in size over the next 25-30 years, to provide for 31 000 new homes and 28 000 new jobs. Effectively, the current market town will be transformed into a small city the size of Cambridge or Leiden in Holland. Part of this aspiration will be accomplished by denser development and through in-filling existing development spaces within the current town limits, but the major residential and workplace expansion areas will have to be located outside the current town boundary on greenfield sites. The areas involved vary depending on the density for the development. Planning Policy Guidance 3 (PPG 3 - DETR 2000) recognised that *“more than half of new housing is built at less than 20 dwellings per hectare. That represents a land take that is historically very high and which can no longer be sustained”*. If Ashford were to grow at this low density more than 16 square kilometres would be required for the housing and employment areas.

Sites for possible expansion were shown in RPG9 as a series of satellite developments in a great semi circle to the south of the M20 connected by a major outer southern ring road. One argument for this arrangement of expansion areas is that historically, the settlements in Kent have been dispersed within an ancient, Saxon influenced, landscape so this distinctive characteristic might be replicated. However, modern living and the possible pressures of development at low density in the future, could lead to the irresistible coalescence of these new settlements.

Apart from concerns about making a viable town extension that would be less car-dependent, a critical mass in a population sub-centre is also required to support viable key amenities including regular public transport. The RPG 9 proposal would have had a greater impact on the countryside than the compact urban model being promoted in the Greater Ashford Development Framework (GADF) team lead by Urban Initiatives for Ashford's Future. This is because it would not only have presented a far greater peripheral urban-rural interface, it would also have created pressure on a semi rural area between the satellites and the town. In addition, the noise and visual intrusion of an outer ring road would further reduce the qualities of tranquility that are a part of the landscape character enjoyed in some of these areas at present.

Studio Engleback lead the Environment input to the GADF and wrote into the strategic design codes required not only for new urban areas, but also for *‘Green Infrastructure’* that delivered *‘Green Services’* to the town. These multi-functional landscapes can employ local *‘landscape signatures’* that reflect local rural heritage, and so reinforce a sense of place particular to a particular part of Ashford.

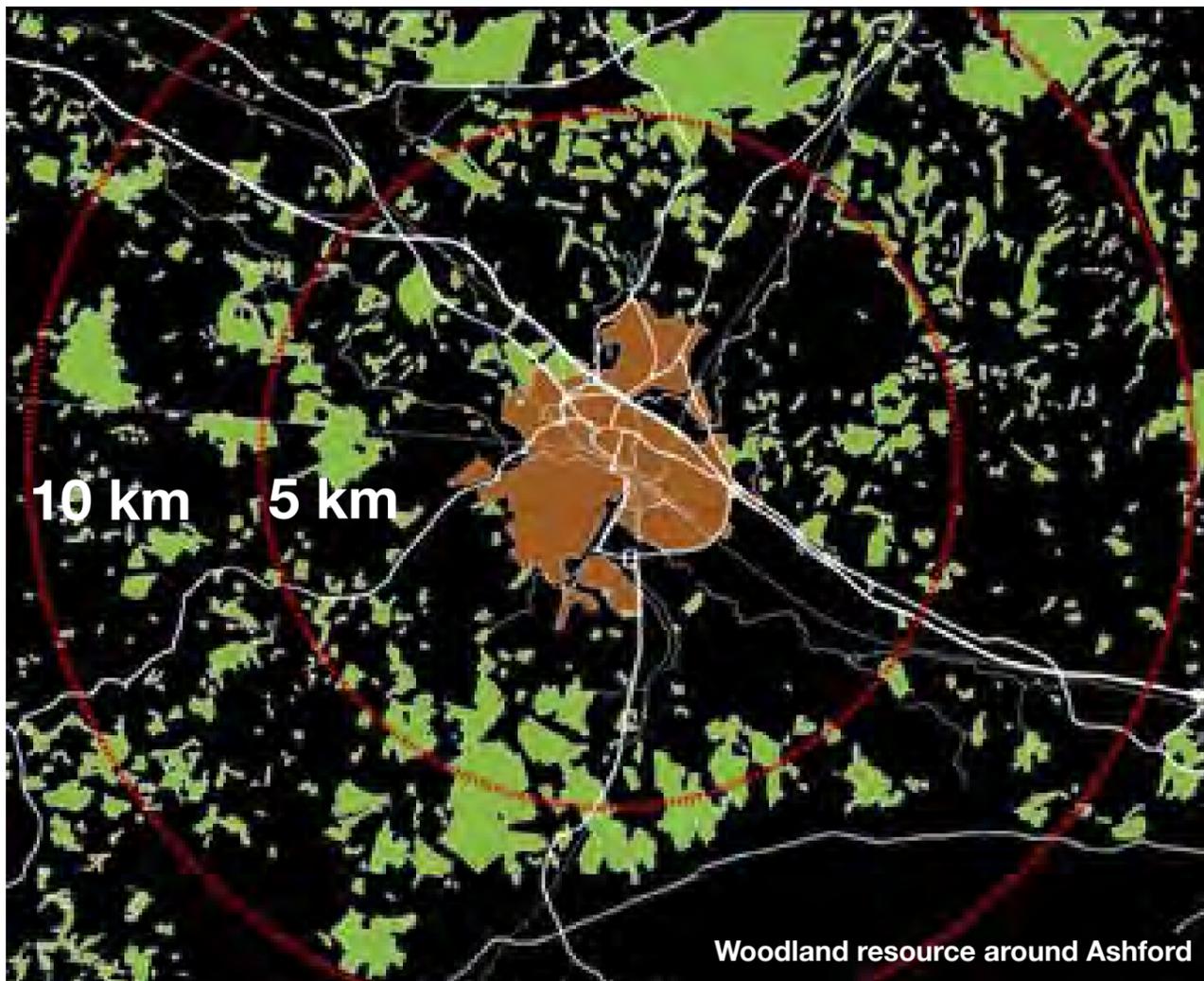


Greater Ashford Development Framework

Graphic from Urban Initiatives

The Concept of 'Green Infrastructure' providing 'Green Services'

Graphic adapted from Urban Initiatives GADF original



Landscape Signatures could also be used to repair areas of currently reduced landscape quality, or to inform the new urban rural interface. This idea is sometimes referred to as the 'green grid'. The term 'grid' sounds rather rigid and perhaps 'matrix' is a better. We might therefore talk of green, blue and yellow matrices, interweaving and overlapping through and around the town that deliver 'green services' with regards to landscape character and biodiversity, integrated water management, and energy conservation and local supply.

The diagrams on this page are an examples of our thought processes and how a landscape character study might be used. The worst case scenario PPG3 lowest density development for 31 000 home plus space for 28 000 new jobs is shown in 1 km squares next to an outline of the existing town outline. In this scenario 14 km² would be needed for the new development, but this does not include space for dealing with the urban rural fringe.

There are a variety of ways of dealing with sewage from 31 000 new homes other than by construction of a huge centralised facility with all the inert infrastructure that needs. The most space hungry of the alternatives is using willow coppice, but this also has the by product of biomass for heating and energy. If a 100% willow option was taken 8km² would be needed, and might form the basis of a green girdle around the town. This area would also provide 33% of the space heating for the new development. It follows that approximately 24km² of coppice woodland might be needed to provide all the heating requirements, or 24 km². If one looks at the existing woodland resource in 5 and 10 km bands from the current town limits it is clear that there is already a major resource available and in need of management.

This scenario is illustrative only, but it makes the point that rural repair, and character reinforcement or conservation can be linked directly to the needs of the town. We also believe the same is true for surface water management. Flooding in Ashford appears to have become a problem from the 1960s onwards. This also happens to be when there were significant changes to the agricultural regime and thus the carrying capacity of the surrounding land to hold water and so regulate water flows. This is the green infrastructure that the town needs and it suggests that town and country are much more closely linked than many people believe.

Setting the extent of the study area

Establishing the extent of Study Area

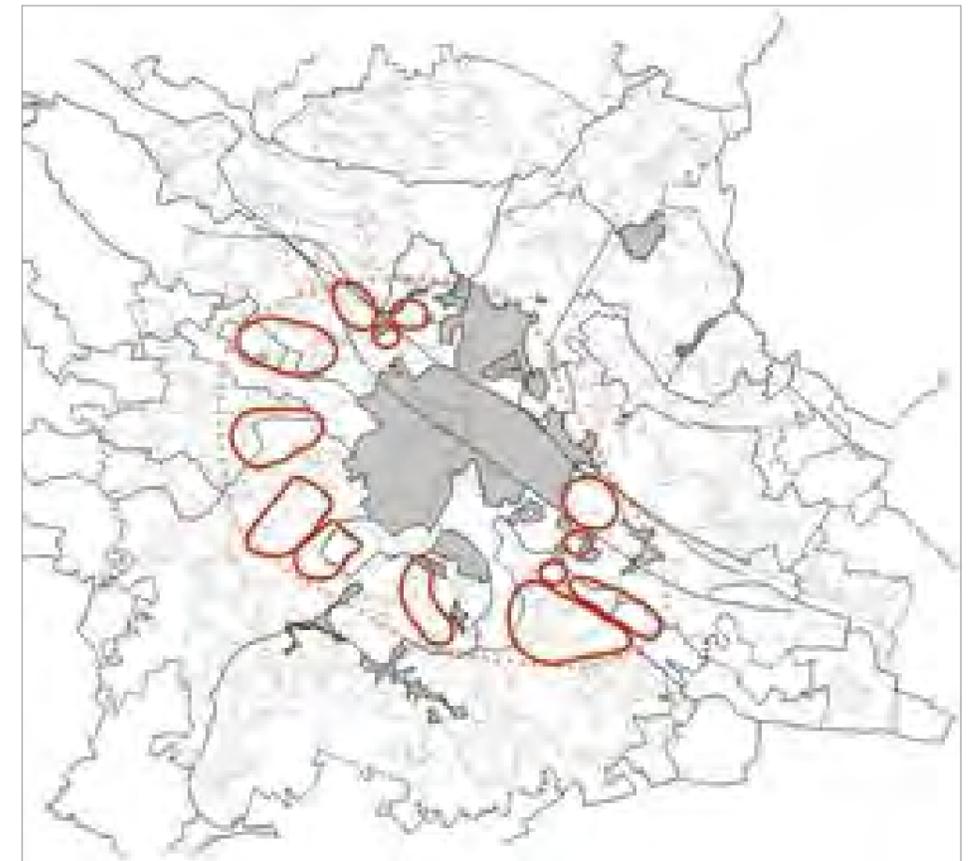
The study area is limited by the time and funding available, and the season, since shorter days make an impact on field work. The starting point for the study is set down below, and this was revised when the time required to carry out the area of search was insufficient. A key issue has been producing some outputs to feed into the GADF spatial plan and design codes and for the Local Development Framework. The study area was, therefore, pulled in and divided into two phases in order to produce the data most needed for the GADF work according to that programme.

Initially, the following criteria applied to define a study area:

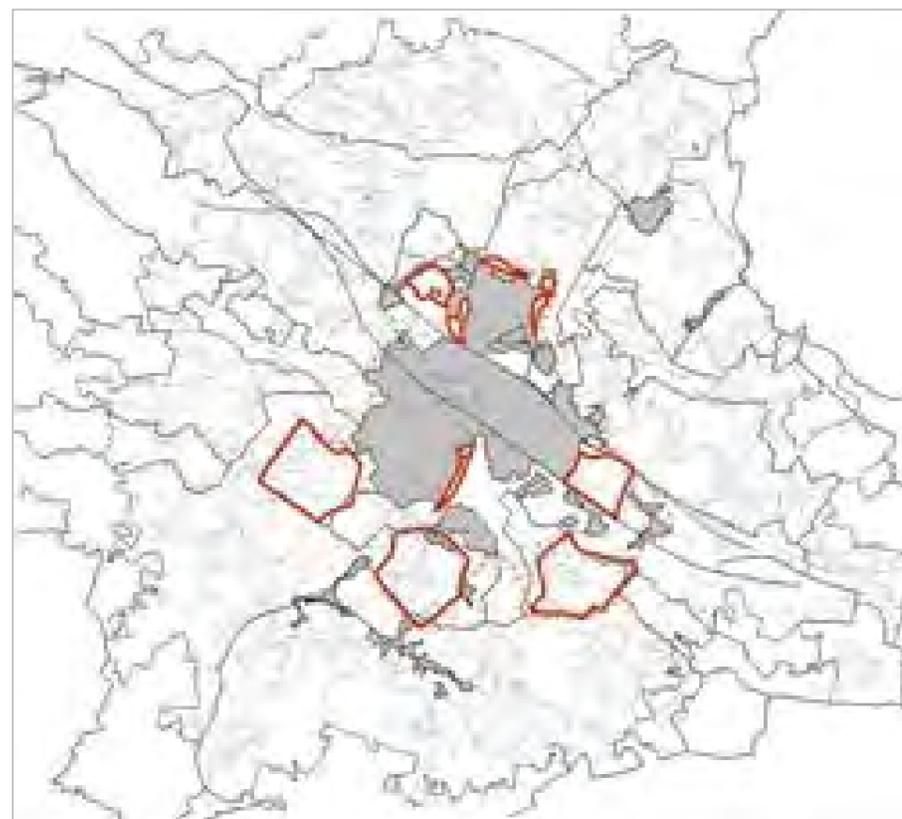
- A crude Zone of Visual Influence based on the ridge lines of the surrounding hills, and large forest edges on the North Downs and low ridge to the south
- The RPG 9 expansion areas for Ashford (further out than current thinking)
- The GADF expansion areas
- A 5km band around the current edge of the town
- A 5 minute travel time for major corridors to Ashford with a 1 km view either side assuming the following:
 - 150mph for the eurostar
 - 70 mph for the M20
 - 60 mph for the other train lines
 - 60mph for the A2070
 - 40 mph for the twisting 'A' roads from A28 from Tenterden and Canterbury (these fit within the 5km zone)



Topography and crude Zone of Visual Influence



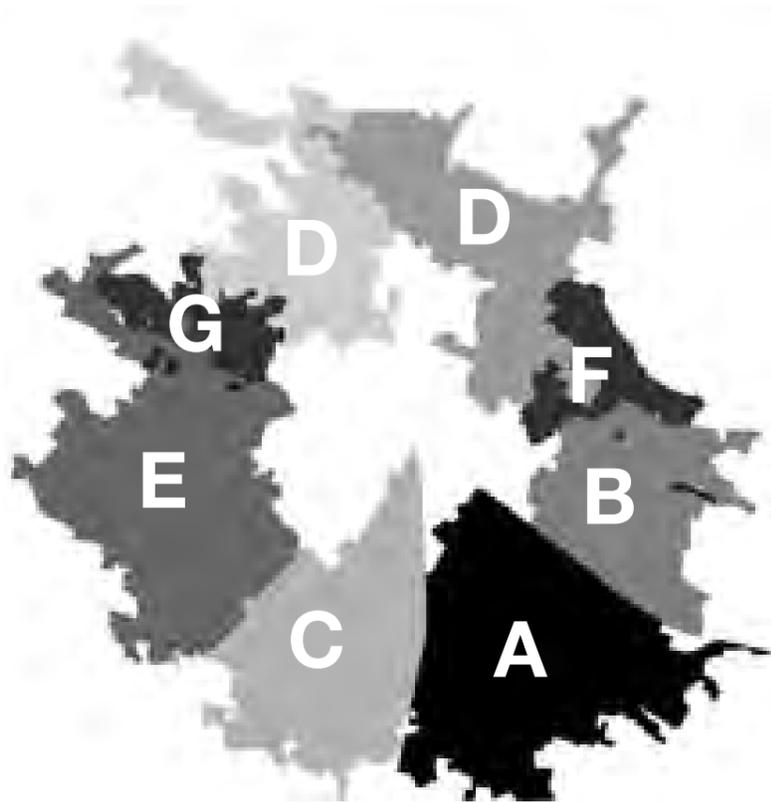
RPG 9 proposed expansion zones



GADF proposed expansion zones

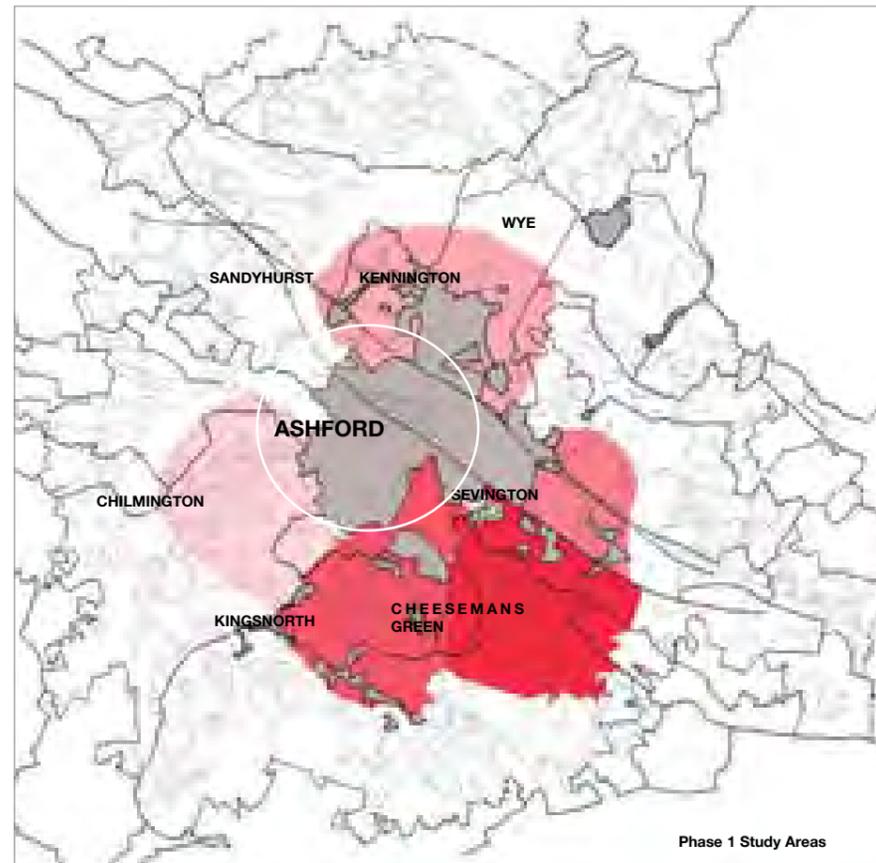


5 minute travel time + 5km hinterland



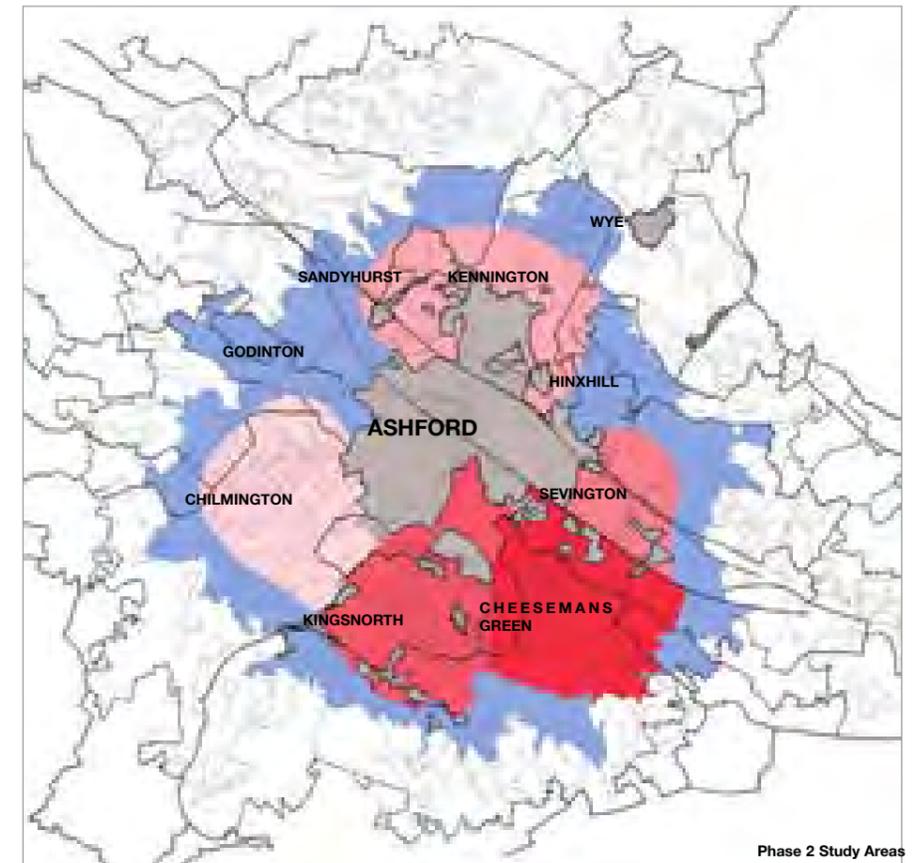
Study Area Fieldwork Sectors

Originally a 5 km band around the town was considered, but this was too large for the funds and time available. There were some 680 historic landscape types depending on how areas were included. We settled for an approximate 3km band, which nonetheless included over 100 square kilometres of countryside and some 250 historic landscape character type units. The study area was divided up into sectors for the field work with a letter given to each area. The Landscape Description Areas within each sector were then numbered prior to going into the field. Some areas seemed to be in need of adjustment, so this occurred as a consequence of fieldwork, but rather than add new numbers, the sequence was retained and names were added for clarity.



Phase 1 study areas related to key GADF growth area

The first phase considered a hinterland of about 1 kilometre around each of the proposed expansion areas in the 'Option 5' scenario for GADF (September 2004). This limited the number of Landscape Description Units to about 160.-170, thus making the field work feasible before Christmas 2004.



Phase 2 proposed study areas to complete the Ashford hinterland

Phase 2 areas are shown in blue. Two areas not being proposed for development were not included in the first phase which we have named Godinton and Hinxhill. In addition large LDUs that were only partially covered in the phase 1 work were completed along with other smaller LDUs so that an approximately 3 km hinterland around the current town limits has been studied. This brought key assets such as Hothfield Common and the northern area of the Hamstreet Woods into view.

The Ashford Landscape Character Study

The Purpose

The purpose of this Landscape Character Study is to feed into the Ashford Local Development Framework and GADF. It is also part of a county wide series of studies of local landscape character.

Following preliminary work to establish the scope of this work starting in June 2004, Studio Engleback was commissioned by English Partnerships and Ashford Borough Council in September 2004 to carry out a study of the immediate environs of the town. This was to have particular regard to the proposed GADF expansion zones in the first instance, but with a later extension of the remit to include a study of a swathe of countryside around the whole of Ashford. Ideally, this study would have been carried out before the GADF work had started earlier in 2004, but the ground for this detailed study had already been broken by the Studio Engleback input to the GADF and this had fed into the option appraisals for the possible expansion areas starting in April 2004. The output for the first phase of the study did feed into the the GADF stage 4 work, but this was still in advance of the completion of this study which includes assessments of sensitivity of landscape areas within the study area.

Although there are guidelines set out by the Countryside Agency for carrying out a landscape character study, and there is also long history of landscape impact assessment, we did not want this to be a two dimensional study that promoted the negative in planning. By seeking out and understanding 'landscape signatures' as well as through assessing landscape sensitivity, we can produce the tools for a variety of positive outcomes to inform the conservation, reinforcement, restoration or creation of landscapes. These may be in the wider countryside, the rural-urban fringe, or the potential green grid for Ashford that will be based on the existing green corridors that thread through the town.

The Process

The Studio received various studies from Ashford Borough Council (ABC) over the last half of August 2004 following meetings with planning officers Sharon Banks and Kathy Putnam in Ashford. We also received the important historic data from Lis Dyson at Kent County Council (KCC).

A revised draft scoping and methodology was issued to the client in September 2004 and discussed at a series of meetings to refine the terms of reference for this study. Following agreement with the methodology and field study sheet format, eight personnel from studio engleback were engaged in detailed site work and the production of a desktop study of existing information from mid September to early December 2004.

The field sheets written completed in the field were typed up and issued in 6 volumes of draft data sets along with a CD of site for comment by the client in December 2004 along with drafts of the background report and landscape character study. The Phase 1 study was then discussed at meetings with ABC prior to delivery of its final revisions in April 2005. During this time discussions were held as to possible refinements for the completion of the whole landscape character study.

The Phase 2 work was lead by Ashford Borough Council Officers Ian Grundy and Liz Walker starting in May 2005, following the preparation of new maps and record sheets, field work started in earnest during July 2005 and the first data sets from this work were issued in August 2005 followed by a complete set of data that included settlements and a CAD plan of the landscape description units in September 2005.

Assessments were carried out in October in the field and checked at consensus meetings in the studio.

Point of Departure

The following breakdown of landscape zones is based on three documents:

- Volume 7 of the character of England's natural and man made landscape: The Countryside Character of the South East and London (Countryside Agency 1999)
- The Landscape Assessment of Kent Babbie for KCC June 2004
- Kent Historic Landscape Characterisation OAU for KCC May 2001

At a regional scale, Ashford straddles two national landscape character areas, the Greensand Belt and the Low Weald, with the Kent Downs to the north and the High Weald and Romney Marshes to the South.

The Landscape Assessment of Kent sub-divides these areas into County Landscape Character Areas, seven of which impinge on the town at present:

- The Upper Stour (running from north west to south east through the town)
- Hothfield Heathy Farmlands
- The Stour Gap
- The Stour Valley
- Brabourne Lees mixed Farmlands
- Mersham Farmlands
- Bethersden Farmlands

All or part of 14 County Landscape Character Areas fall within the proposed study zone.



Based on an OS Map Reproduced by permission of Ordnance Survey on behalf of HMSO License No LA077038 © Crown copyright. All rights reserved.

Establishing Landscape Description Units

The Historic Landscape Character Areas are a broad designation, with Ashford located within the Central Valley Area, and flanked by the Marling Weald and Weald-Romney Border immediately to the south and the Stour Valley Parkland to the north. These areas were been sub-divided into Historic Landscape Types. We proposed that for the purpose of this scoping these ‘types’ are used as a basis for the Landscape Description Units within the landscape character areas described in the Babtie report. These areas are shown divided by red lines on the plan opposite.

Prioritising Areas of Study

The 5km zone produced too many areas to be studied in the time frame and within the budget provided. The study therefore reduced a potential 680 LDUs to about 250. Initially time was needed to familiarise the surveyors with the area and the scope of decisions to be made to ensure a level of consistency.

District Landscape Types

To facilitate assessments, LDUs were grouped by similarity into larger units. We have called these District Landscape Types (DLT), the areas are shown with white lines opposite. These DLTs sit within the County Landscape Areas shown with black borders.

Methodology : Fieldwork - Landscape

In Landscape Character Assessment – Guidance for England and Scotland produced by The Countryside Agency in 2002, an outline methodology is set out for Landscape Character Assessment, and we propose to use this as a basis for this study.

There are six steps which are to be divided between two phases. The scoping and Desk Study of background data, plus the half of the fieldwork fell within the first phase. The weight of the Classification and Judgements fell in the second phase once all the remaining LDUs had been surveyed.

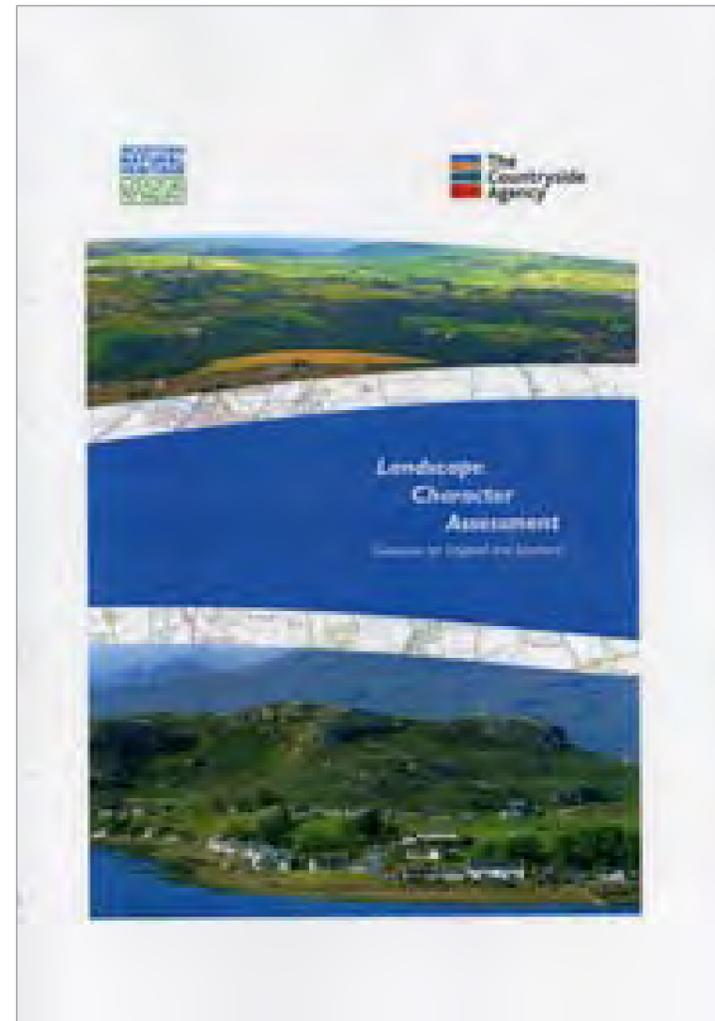
General Field work set up

A team visit to the area to establish recording methods and complementary approach to judgements, was made at the start of each phase of the study

The fieldwork was carried out in pairs as recommended by the Countryside Agency. We teamed a 'wise head' with a younger member of staff in a 'buddy system' to collect field data. The fieldwork teams comprised landscape architects and ecologists. The field tasks involved visiting each parcel from an average of three points. Large areas were checked from more points, small woods or units from less.

The field sheets opposite show the field sheets that were filled in on site. This was by hand as although some teams used cars, other teams were entirely on foot and the length of the day on site was not compatible with computer battery life. These sheets were put onto the computer in the studio shortly after the field work was carried out, and site photos were numbered and filed at this time too.

Teams met in the evening to discuss progress and findings. Mobile phones were used for any queries.



Mark Goddard, ecologist - in the field

Development Area:			
County Landscape Character Area:			
Historic Landscape Type:			
Boundaries:			
TOPOGRAPHY	Dominant Apparent Insignificant	Landform	Views out (long/short/restricted)
TREE COVER	Dominant Apparent Insignificant	Key visual elements	Views within (filtered/framed/open/restricted)
ENCLOSURE PATTERN	Dominant Apparent Insignificant Unenclosed	Key visual elements	Pattern and scale
SETTLEMENT & BUILT FEATURES	Dominant Apparent Insignificant Unsettled	Key visual elements	Pattern
LANDUSE	Dominant Apparent Insignificant	Key visual elements	Seasonal variation
KEY CHARACTERISTICS – in what way do the following contribute to local distinctiveness?			
Natural features	Rivers/ knolls/ ponds		Species associations
Landuse/farm type	Primary		Other
Woodlands	Coppice/plantation		Species
Tree cover	Groups/linear/hedgerow/scattered/shelterbelt		Species
Field boundaries	Hedges/ditches/stock fence/electric		Species
Highways and footpaths	Major road/railway/local road/footpath/no public access		Other features (such as tree-lined lanes)
Built features	Villages/settlements/farms/churches/oasts		Urban edge/pylons/masts/new housing
Other features (such as moats)			

Reference:

Brief summary description:				
Visual context and unity – assess the views, outlook, adjacent landuses and overall unity of the landscape and note any detracting features and their significance				
				Intact Interrupted Fragmented
Ecological integrity – how well does this area of countryside function as a habitat for wildlife?				
Extent of semi-natural habitat and patches	Ecological corridors and networks		High Moderate Low	
Intensity of land use and habitat trend				
Condition of heritage features – assess current condition and make note of vulnerability to change				
Tree Cover	Age structure			Good Variable Poor
Field Boundaries	Survival of historic field pattern and condition			Good Variable Poor
Other features				Good Variable Poor
Impact of built development – how well does modern development respect local vernacular, character and sense of place				
Type	Siting	Design	Extent	High Moderate Low

Methodology : Fieldwork - Settlements

The settlements required a different field record sheet to the Landscape, although the technique of carrying out the survey in pairs was the same. Two site visits were made by the assessment team and Professor Ellison to gauge the difference between the old settlements and ribbon development, before amending field sheets.

Some fields remained from the Landscape Sheets such as location/parcel type, landform, and tree cover. Form or layout was separated into linear, clustered or sprawling, and the age and condition of the areas was also recorded to give an idea of appearance.

Key to assessing the character was the use of materials, colours etc and particularly the street scene. The edge condition, verges and boundaries are the main distinctive points between rural dwellings and townscape. Especially as viewed from public rights of way. Occasionally the backs of houses can be seen from footpaths. Some villages or hamlets fall in between these designations and in a number of cases use of kerbs and foot ways allied to railings or leylandii hedges give a suburban quality to the countryside even if they occupy a ribbon of land along roads, as compared to timber picket fencing and thorn hedging.

The perception of place was particularly subjective, but made as a consensus of two experienced landscape architects. Clearly it was a snapshot in time. Since the settlement surveys were all completed within a week this was also comparative of places within the study area.

Adapted fields from the Landscape sheets included integrity and condition of heritage features. The latter was more apparent in the ribbon development of course where parts of field hedges or hedgerow trees still exist.

All the field sheets for this work were made directly onto laptop computers.



Great Chart Church



Mersham Residential

ASHFORD LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT FIELD STUDY SHEET 1
Settlement/ Edge conditions

Development Area:		
County Landscape Character Area:		
Historic Landscape Type:		
Boundaries:		
SETTLEMENT & BUILT FEATURES	Dominant Apparent Insignificant Unsettled	Key visual elements
TOPOGRAPHY	Dominant Apparent Insignificant	Landform
TREE COVER	Dominant Apparent Insignificant	Key visual elements
FORM & LAYOUT	Linear Clustered Sprawling	
AGE & CONDITION	Pre-war Post-war 1960-70's 1980-1990's Recent	
KEY FEATURES – in what way do the following contribute to the local distinctiveness of the settlement?		
Building style	Roof & materials/ scale	
Street Scene	Frontage/ verge/ boundaries/ materials	Planting/ signage/ lighting
Edge condition	New housing	
Other features (include detractors)		
PERCEPTION of the place – is it tranquil/ safe/ pleasant/ legible/ accessible?		

ASHFORD LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT FIELD STUDY SHEET 2

Reference:

Brief summary description of settlement/ edge conditions and its siting within the wider landscape:		
Visual context and unity – assess the views, outlook, adjacent landuses and overall unity of the settlement and note any detracting features and their significance		
		Intact Interrupted Fragmented
Settlement integrity/ edge condition – how well does the settlement hold together		
Extent of settlement		High Moderate Low
Intensity of built form and trend		
Condition of heritage features – assess current condition and make note of vulnerability to change		
Local vernacular	Survival of features and condition	Good Variable Poor
Tree Cover	Age structure	Good Variable Poor
Field Boundaries	Survival of historic field pattern and condition	Good Variable Poor
Other features		Good Variable Poor
Impact of built development – how well does modern development respect local vernacular, character and sense of place		

Methodology : Assessment

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 grouped these areas into 58 larger units we have termed District Landscape Types based on similarity, for the assessment.

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

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.

The assessors were :

- Luke Engleback MLI (Chairman)
- Prof. Michael Ellison PPLI
- Gary Grant MIEEM
- Andrea Kenworthy MLI

A summary of each of the twelve County Landscape Areas falling within this study area is contained in the summary report 122/doc/014, with 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 122/doc/015-026.

The assessments for each District Landscape Type were subjective based on the assessors knowledge of the area. A series of criteria were used to guide these deliberations. The Condition and Sensitivity matrix of the outcomes used in the County Assessment was then applied.

We gave a simple score out of three for each criterion - high, medium or low. The scores for all criteria were added up to give a figure that might suggest one two or even three outcomes on the matrix. These were discussed and an on site consensus reached by the assessors in the field and later, with the benefit of having completed all assessments, the assessors were able to fine tune these judgements in the Studio.

The highest score would be given a straight 'conserve', the lowest would be 'create' and in between, depending on existing condition and the assessors view of the sensitivity of the area, there were a variety of possible outcomes such as 'restore' or 'reinforce' and mixed areas of 'restore and create' or 'conserve and reinforce'.

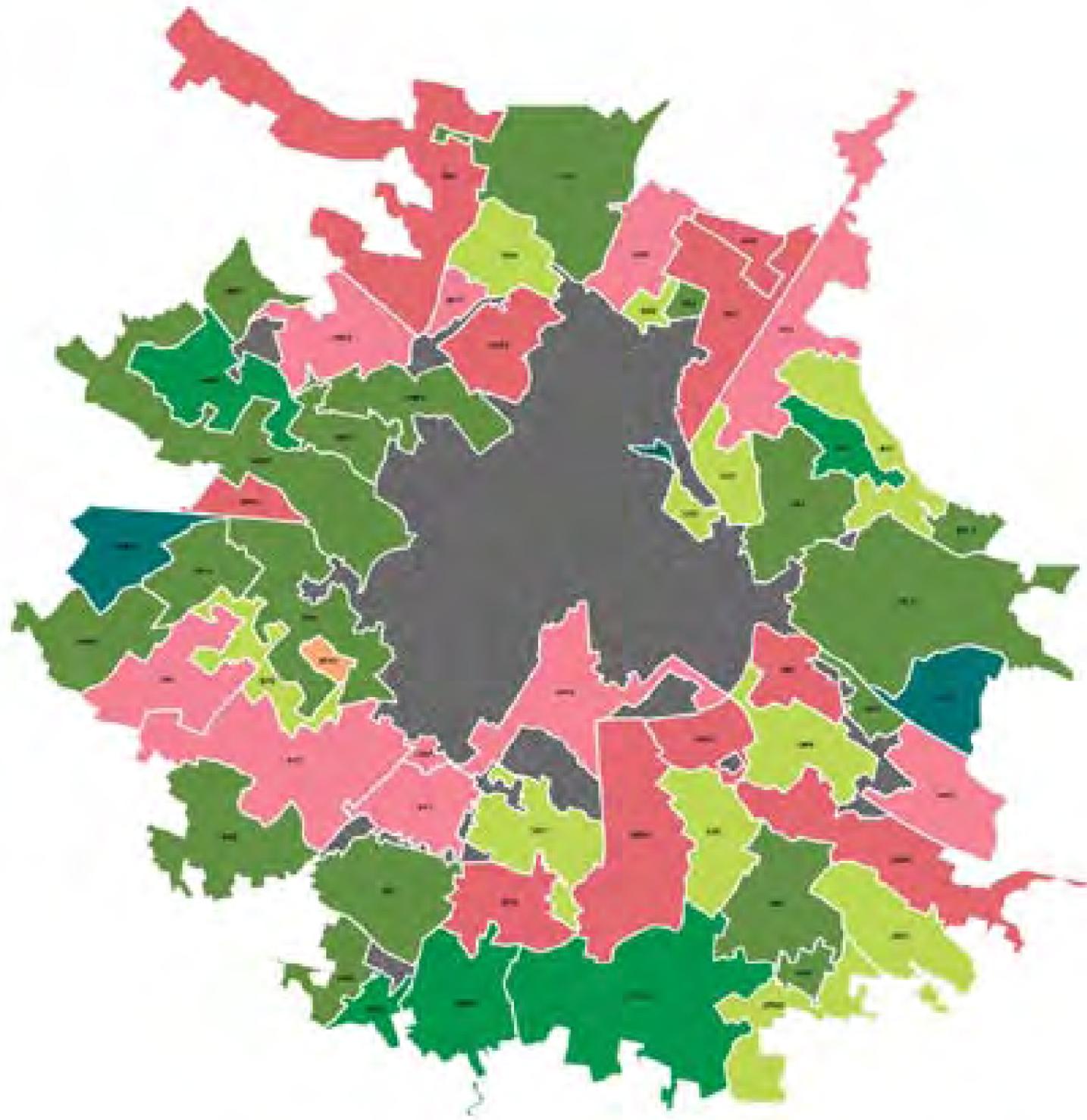
Not surprisingly, the general trend of assessments was broadly similar to the county assessment, but because those assessments were for larger areas other factors may have come into play for the final scores. In breaking down the areas to DLTs a much finer grain of assessment could be given.

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.

CONDITION	Poor	reinforce	conserve & reinforce	conserve
	Moderate	create & reinforce	conserve & create	conserve & restore
	Good	create	restore & create	restore
		Low	Moderate	High
		SENSITIVITY		



Assessment team



Summary plan of the landscape character assessment for the hinterland of Ashford

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				

Typical Matrix of characteristics and grading



Aerialm photograph: from ABC

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