

### 1 Introduction

#### 1.1 Background to the Proposed Development

This Development Brief is submitted in support of an outline planning application by The Church Commissioners for England relating to the proposed development of East Stour Village on land known as Cheeseman's Green, in Ashford in Kent. The Development Brief which accompanied the submission of the planning application was redrafted in response to a series of Planning and Design workshops with key stakeholders facilitated by the Kent Architecture Centre (KAC): two workshops in Ashford on 10 and 17 July 2002, were followed by six focus workshops. The process concluded with a follow-up event on 12 September, to agree on solutions to the issues identified. These were incorporated into a revised Development Brief, together with a range of new recommendations and suggestions.

Further changes were made to the Development Brief in response to representations received from consultation bodies on the revised document and in the light of comments made during (and after) a series of consultation events which were held on 18, 21, 22 and 28 November 2002 in Mersham and Kingsnorth.

The brief was adopted as Supplementary Planning Guidance by Ashford Borough Council on 27 February 2003.

The site of the proposed development occupies some 168ha (415 acres) of land on the south eastern outskirts of the town. With the exception of Bilham Farmhouse and land in the vicinity of the Ruckinge and Bilham Dykes, the site is owned by The Church Commissioners and forms part of their landholding in this area.

The site is part of a larger area of land, known as Development Site 13, which is identified in the Ashford Borough Local Plan as the location for a new residential

and business community (see Figure 1.1 on page 4). The Local Plan, which was adopted in June 2000, envisages that the new community will be built over a number of years and will provide for a substantial part of the development land that is needed in the Borough, which is being promoted as a key location for attracting new inward investment to East Kent.

The Church Commissioners are a charity that supports the mission of the Church of England and provides pensions for the clergy. They are answerable to Parliament and follow the law governing the activities and investments of charities.

The Commissioners are a long term investor in land and have a property department to provide specialist estate management and development skills reflecting the diverse nature of their responsibilities, ranging from heritage buildings to modern commercial investment property.



*Planning and Design workshops, September 2002*

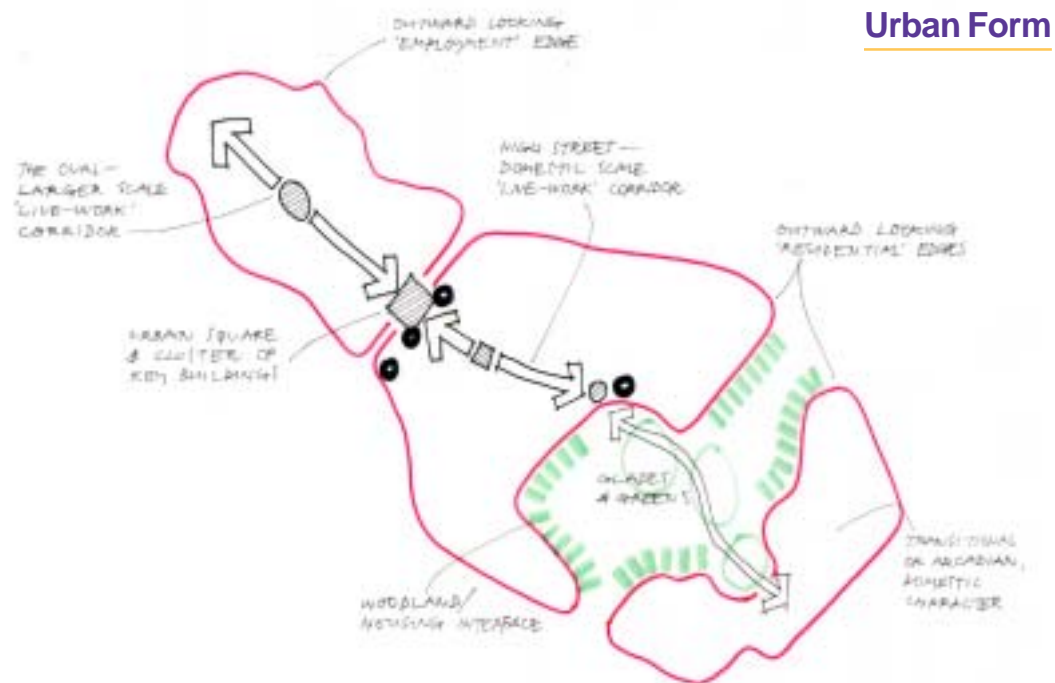
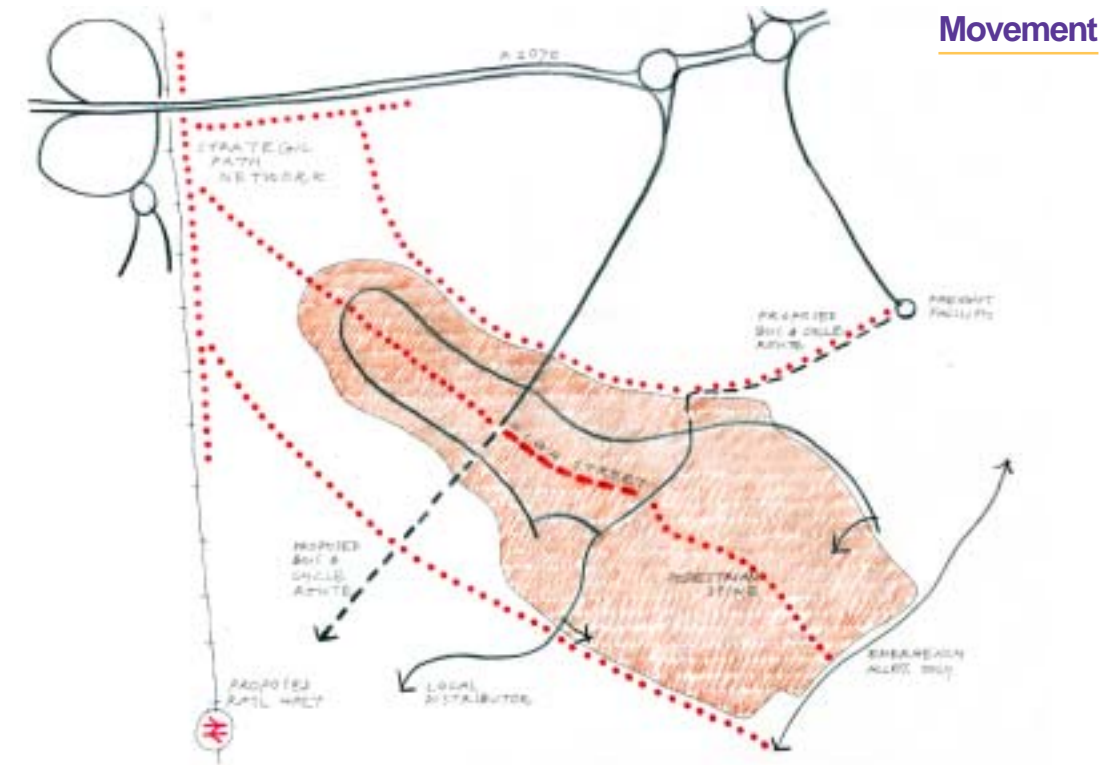
#### 1.2 The Vision

An important outcome from the Planning and Design workshops was the emergence of a clear vision and a commitment from all parties to work together to build, both physically and socially, a long term, sustainable community on the site.

The Church Commissioners take their responsibilities as landowners very seriously. They recognise that in developing their physical assets there are social, environmental and economic consequences which bring with them benefits as well as obligations. They are committed to high quality sustainable development and the best environmental practice. In the belief that it is important that these tangible benefits are secured for the people of Ashford, they are committed to the phased development of East Stour Village as a sustainable development and on the basis discussed at the Planning and Design workshops. They are also committed to both retaining and nurturing their long term interest in their land holding.

A strong vision for the development of East Stour Village emerged from the Planning and Design workshops:

- **Sustainability** - a real commitment to putting this at the top of the agenda, from the broad strategic issues around transport and environment, through to the detail, such as providing for recycling, reduced energy consumption and conservation of habitats;
- **Community** - putting people first, from participation in the development process through to accessibility;
- **Affordability** - promoting a diverse and inclusive community integrating different forms of tenure, a wide range of house types and low running and maintenance costs;
- **Safety** - arrangements of private and public spaces in such a way as to discourage crime and anti-social behaviour, provide natural surveillance and hence security;
- **High quality design** - creation of a sense of place with a strong identity.



The Church Commissioners are fully in agreement with the sentiments expressed in this vision and are committed to creating a new sustainable community, both at one with its environment and enjoying a distinct and vibrant identity, where people will want to live, work and play. It is not simply that East Stour Village would be attractive and in keeping with its immediate environment and the wider character of Kent. Beyond that, it has been designed with living in mind.

The Commissioners proposals have been developed to create a level of vitality that goes beyond bricks and mortar, to underpin the day to day life of the community as a whole. As well as providing a safe, attractive environment and a good range of community facilities, the village would offer both jobs and homes for people of all types and ages. It would be accessible by public transport, cycling and walking, as well as by car. And it would be able to adapt to changing circumstances as the years go by.

The proposals have also been greatly influenced by environmental considerations and the scheme consciously aims to minimise adverse effects on people and the natural environment, at the same time taking full advantage of opportunities for improvement.

### 1.3 Purpose of the Brief

It is intended that this Development Brief will be adopted by the Borough Council as Supplementary Planning Guidance to guide the overall development of the site and ensure continuity in design proposals between different phases of the scheme and with neighbouring developments. It is expected that the scheme will be implemented in a series of phases by a number of housebuilders and developers, with The Church Commissioners retaining overall control and responsibility for bringing forward the required infrastructure when it is needed.

This Brief and the scheme which is the subject of the outline application are the result of co-ordination with a

number of interested parties, including Ashford Borough Council and adjoining landowners, and forms part of a wider, comprehensive strategy for South Ashford and the linked major areas of development at Park Farm and Waterbrook.

Particular emphasis has been placed on current planning and design guidance to devise a scheme, which meets the following objectives of sustainable urban design, as set out in *Development Briefs: A Guidance Note, Supplementary Planning Guidance to Ashford Borough Local Plan*:

- “The need to embrace principles of sustainable development in settlement layout and density to make best use of both green and brownfield land;
- The importance of learning from and incorporating good practice from elsewhere to establish quality, contemporary, design standards;
- The need for innovation and flexibility to cater for long development timescales and the proper use of design standards;
- The key importance of establishing a ‘sense of place’ through design and of minimising any negative impact on local residents;
- The need for continuity in design proposals over different land ownership boundaries.”

The final form of the proposals, recommendations and suggestions detailed in this Development Brief, has also been greatly influenced by the issues raised at the July 2002 Planning and Design workshops facilitated by KAC and by the solutions agreed at the follow-up event in September 2002.

The main parties represented at the workshops will each have essential and clearly defined roles in taking the proposals forward and it is important that they are brought together in an inclusive manner. Ashford Borough Council is of central importance as the leader of

the overall process of planning strategically for the future and will need to take the lead in realising the proposals for East Stour Village. However, the specialist expertise provided both by the statutory agencies and The Church Commissioners’ consultants will continue to be essential, as will the active engagement of the communities, both groups and individuals, in and around Ashford .

### 1.4 Structure of the Development Brief

**Chapter 2: The Planning Application**, sets out the key parameters of the planning application, and demonstrates the conformity of the proposals with national and local planning policy, and the principles of sustainable development.

**Chapter 3: Appreciating the Context**, provides a site analysis and an appreciation of the development context. It also considers the character of existing settlements in this part of Kent, and summarises the environmental objectives underlying the scheme design.

**Chapter 4: Creating the Urban Structure**, describes the key determinants of the master plan and the objectives and principles of urban design on which it has been based.

**Chapter 5: Landscape, Ecology and Open Space**, sets out the landscape, ecological and open space strategies which underpin the design of the new community.

**Chapter 6: Making the Connections**, details the movement and transportation aspects of the development.

**Chapter 7: Detailing the Place**, describes the approach which will be adopted towards the detailed design of neighbourhoods, buildings and the public realm.

**Chapter 8: Implementation and Delivery**, details the phasing of the development, the provision of community facilities, and outlines the next stages in the design process.

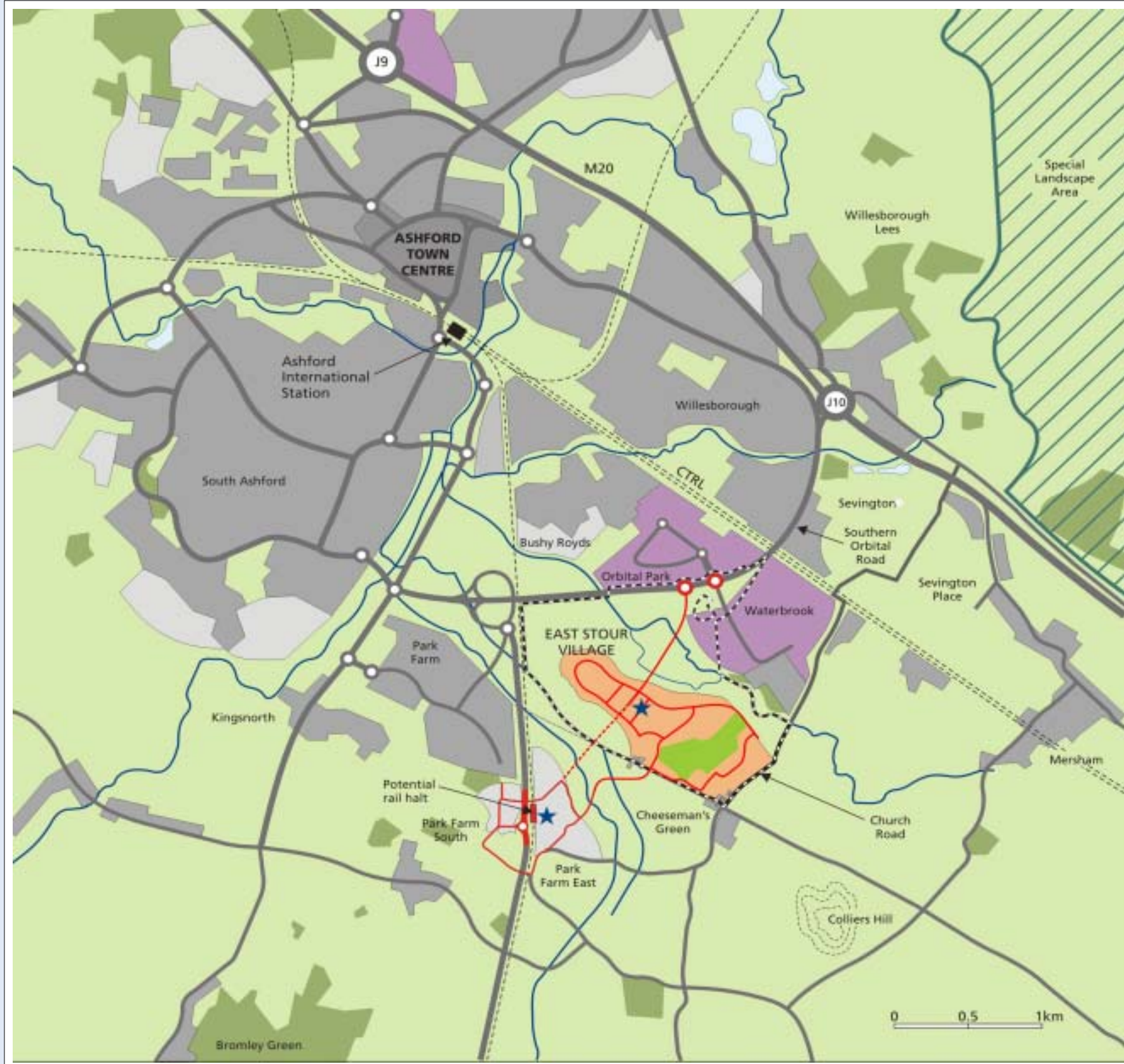
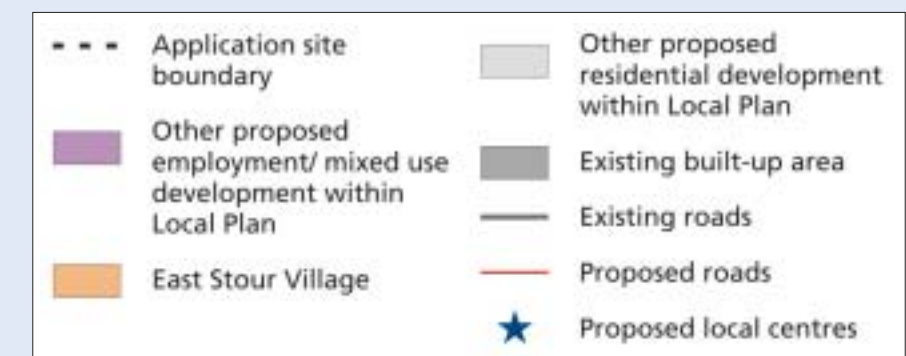


FIGURE 1.1 Strategic Context

1.5 Strategic Context

The site forms part of the wider South Ashford development area. This includes the Bryant Homes (formerly Pelham Homes) development at Park Farm East to the west (Site 17 in the Local Plan) which was the subject of an Enquiry by Design exercise in March and May 2001 and which could share a number of recreation facilities with the proposed East Stour Village. The Waterbrook development (Site 14) promoted by Eurotunnel Developments Limited is located to the east. It is anticipated that the design of this development will be important in view of its proximity to the East Stour Village site and the emphasis given to design issues in South Ashford.

One of the key constraints holding back development in this part of Ashford has been transport infrastructure. For that reason, The Church Commissioners were founding members of the group of public authorities and landowners which was created to carry out the South of Ashford Transport Study (SATS), the results of which were reported by consultants in August 2000.



**1.6 Site Description**

This section briefly describes those aspects of the natural and man-made environment which would be affected by the proposed development at East Stour Village. More detailed descriptions are presented in the Environmental Statement (ES) which accompanies the application. The principal features of the site, its relationship to the surrounding area, and key place names are shown on Figure 2.1 overleaf.

The proposed development site abuts the south side of the Southern Orbital Road (A2070) which is situated about 2km from Ashford town centre; the other boundaries being formed by the East Stour River (to the north east), the Ashford to Hastings railway line (to the west), drainage ditches and tracks along the line of a Roman road (to the south west) and Church Road (to the south east).

The site lies within the broad valley of the East Stour, which flows in a generally south east to north west direction joining the Great Stour in the vicinity of Ashford town centre. Situated on the opposite (western) side of the site to the East Stour is the Ruckinge Dyke, which is the largest of a number of agricultural drainage ditches, which criss-cross the land.

The site is gently undulating and lies at about 40-45m AOD; the land rises to about 65m east of the site, in the

direction of Mersham Village. The highest point in the local area, at over 70m AOD, is Collier's Hill which is situated close to Bank Road on the south east side of the site.

Most of the land is in agricultural use and of moderate quality. With the exception of sheep grazing on semi-improved grassland near a block of woodland known as Captain's Wood, the land is under arable farming. There is only one group of farm buildings on the site, belonging to the former Bilham Farm near Captain's Wood.

In addition to Ashford itself, the principal features of the local settlement pattern comprise the village of Mersham situated on higher ground over 1km to the east and several residential properties in the Bilham Farm/ Cheeseman's Green area close to the southern site boundary and in the nearby hamlet of South Stour.

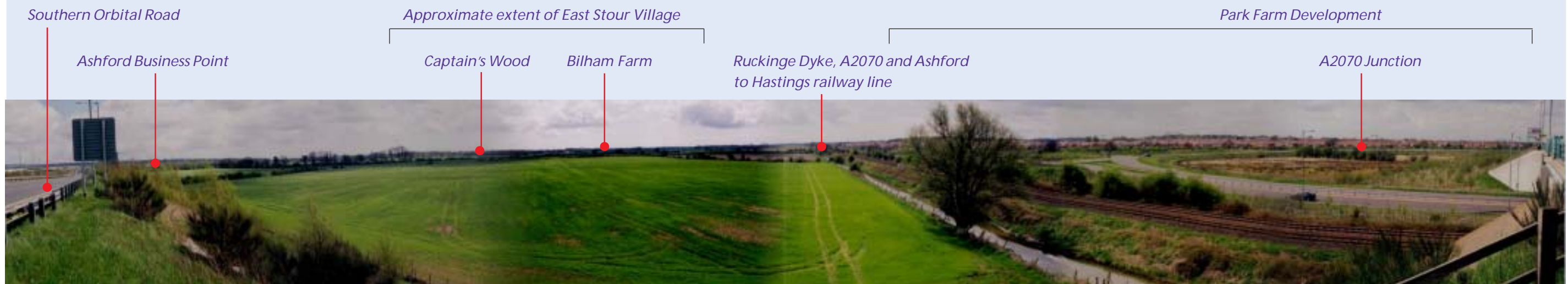
The nearest buildings which are listed as being of special architectural or historic interest are situated at Swanton Court and Swanton Mill (which are both near the East Stour) and at Mundy Manor, Mundy Farmhouse and The Grange (all in the hamlet of South Stour) on the line of the Roman road, which forms the south western boundary of the site.

As far as the main road network is concerned, the Southern Orbital Road connects to M20 Junction 10 which is located about 2km north east of the site: to the west,

the Southern Orbital Road connects to the A2042 which provides access to Ashford town centre. A network of minor roads and lanes (including Church Road, Flood Street, Blind Lane and Bank Road) provides access to villages, hamlets, farmsteads and scattered residential properties. These same settlements and properties are linked by numerous public rights of way, several of which cross the site.

Less than 1km north east of the site lies the London to Folkestone railway line, alongside which the Channel Tunnel Rail Link (CTRL) is currently under construction. The CTRL will link the Channel Tunnel to central London via the new International and Domestic Passenger Station at Ashford: this station, located close to the town centre, also serves the existing Hastings railway line which runs along the western boundary of the site.

With the exception of the main built-up area of Ashford to the north of the Southern Orbital Road, the site is surrounded by open countryside. The landscape character is expected to change as the neighbouring developments at Park Farm and Waterbrook are completed and occupied.



*View looking south from beside the Southern Orbital Road*