BOXLEY VALE

The Boxley Vale lies between the chalk scarp and the northern edge of Maidstone in a narrow wedge of land almost encircled by major roads. Nevertheless this is an attractive and anciently settled area of countryside. The scarp woodlands, although storm-damaged, have a significant amount of yew and some box, whose dark, evergreen foliage is particularly prominent in winter. To the west the traditional large fields of the scarp foot are in evidence and considerable hedgerow loss has occurred, but east of Boxley a series of small, hedge lined fields are interspersed by attractive parkland. The striking stone walls around the site of the medieval abbey at Boxley in the west add to the strong, historic feel of the landscape.

MEDWAY

The Boxley Vale lies within the larger character area of Medway within the Kent Downs AONB.

The Medway Valley, running between Maidstone and Rochester, divides the AONB into two sections. In common with the other river valleys crossing the Downs, this was one of the earliest areas of permanent settlement in Kent. The long history of human activity in this area is illustrated by the group of pre-historic sites, such as Kits Coty standing stones, which form the most important group of megalithic monuments east of the Berkshire Downs. There are several Roman sites here and the ancient trackway, now known as the Pilgrim's Way, passes through this area.

The AONB covers the scarp and the scarp foot within the Medway Valley character, but excludes the industrial valley bottom. Despite the urban developments, however, the Medway Valley provides an important rural buffer between the Medway towns and Maidstone.

The steep scarp slopes, which enclose the river valley, rise sharply up behind rolling, intensively cultivated fields. There has never been a strong hedgerow network on the lower part of the scarp foot and the few hedges that do exist are mostly narrow and gappy. It is characteristic, however, to find thicker, overgrown hedges surrounding the fields on the upper slopes above which swaths of dense, mixed woodland dominate the skyline, separating the valley and the Downs. These woodlands, and the mosaic of unimproved grassland and scrub associated with them, are of national nature conservation importance, both for their flora and fauna.
BOXLEY VALE: MEDWAY

PHOTOGRAPH

CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES
Lower slopes of scarp encircled by major roads.
Scarp woodlands with dark yew and box.
Large traditional fields with loss of hedges. Small hedgelined fields and parkland around Boxley.

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition
The coherent landscape of arable fields and shaws at the foot of the scarp is interrupted by small scale built elements, loss of hedgerow and the large scale of the rail link. The ecological interest is based within small copses and shaws, now fragmented and considered to be weak. Built form has a high positive impact; vernacular materials, recognisable settlement patterns and estate buildings all contribute to this effect. The vegetative features of tree cover, field boundaries and estate planting are variable in their condition and considered to be very vulnerable to change. The overall area is considered to be in poor condition.

Sensitivity
The high visibility of this landscape area results in it being highly sensitive. It has a moderate sense of place influenced by characteristic vegetation and settlement, and a few locally distinct features, including the Boxley Abbey ragstone barn.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

Restore cross-contour shaws to augment the areas of semi-natural habitat.
Restore the ecological interest within selected arable areas by targeting localised areas for habitat management.
Restore hedgerow and encourage hedgerow management along highways.
Restore small woodland areas to include distinct species mix, such as yew, field maple, and other appropriate species.

CONTEXT

Regional: Kent Downs AONB

Condition

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Sensitivity

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SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

RESTORE.
Restore small woodland clusters
Restore wooded shaws
Restore hedgerow along highways
Restore unintensive or habitat-sensitive management to selected networks of arable areas.
On the Folkestone and the Sandgate Beds to the east of Ashford, these gently undulating mixed farmlands extend from the outskirts of the town at Willesborough Lees to the small settlement of Lilyvale. The character area is bounded to the south by the M20 motorway.

The topography is varied ranging from the lower and flatter lands close to Ashford and the Great Stour to the undulating landscape at Hatch Park and the knoll at Brabourne Lees. The soils are generally fine and loamy but those over the sandy Folkestone Beds are better drained and of higher quality whilst the Sandgate Beds can give rise to seasonal waterlogging because of the clay beds within them.

Woodlands are locally characteristic of the landscape notably around Hatch Park, although much of this is managed for coppice. At Flowergarden Wood the acid soils have given rise to a characteristic ground flora consisting of heath bedstraw, tormentil and foxglove under a canopy of sessile oak and birch.

Also interesting are the remnants of a rich valley bog which can be found at the adjoining Willesborough Lees. This is a landscape of damp rough grazing land surrounding the marsh with its marsh violets, purple moor grass and unusual sedges and bog mosses. These Sites of Nature Conservation Interest (SNCIs) are close by the eastern outskirts of Ashford so may come under increasing pressure for recreation. At Hatch Park a large part of the south of the parkland has been lost to arable since the 1960s.

This part of the park also suffers immensely from the presence of the M20 especially from traffic noise which can be very dominant. The north of the park is designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and has many old pollards of historic and conservation interest despite losses due to the 1997 storm. Much of the grassland has been invaded by bracken and ragwort. From this higher part there are tremendous views to the North Downs to the north. Much of the surrounding woodland is chestnut coppice or is being interplanted with conifers.

To the east Brabourne Lees sits on a rise above the surrounding countryside. To the north-west the landscape is quite open with many hedges removed. The village itself sits up quite noticeably in the landscape.
CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES
Gentle undulating landscape with fine loamy soils locally subjected to waterlogging. Medium-sized woodlands locally important. Mixed farmlands. Remnant heathy habitats such as valley bogs, acid grasslands and woodlands.

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS
Condition
This is a unified landscape in which historic farmlands and woodlands co-exist with wetlands and grasslands on an undulating landform. There are very few visual detractors and the ecological integrity of the area is very strong, due to the diverse network of woods, pastures and wetland.

Built form, which includes estate cottages, has a positive impact on the landscape. Formerly widespread hedged field boundaries are mature and declining. The area is considered to be in very good condition.

Sensitivity
This is an historic landscape with the notable exception of the ancient parkland at Hatch Park. The key elements combine to give a characteristic landscape, although the heathy habitats within the deer park are considered to be rare. A strong sense of place is derived from the very varied characteristic features which include oak standards, willow and ash on stream lines, strong and varied patches of woodland, estate planting and localised detail in farm cottages. Views are intermittent over an unremarkable landform, therefore visibility is low.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS
Conserve the frequency, scale and diversity of the woodland.
Conserve the small scale of the rural landscape.
Reinforce the elements of ancient parkland by long-term management.
Reinforce hedged field boundaries by appropriate management and replanting.

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS
Condition
Pattern of elements: Coherent.
Detracting features: Few.
Cultural integrity: Variable.
Ecological integrity: Moderate.
Functional Integrity: Strong.

SENSITIVITY
Distinctiveness: Unique/Rare.
Continuity: Historic.
Sense of Place: Strong.
Landform: Insignificant.
Extent of tree cover: Intermittent.
Visibility: Low.

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS
CONSERVE AND REINFORCE.
Conserve woodland
Conserve small scale field patterns
Reinforce ancient parkland
Reinforce hedgerows
This long narrow, gently sloping character area lies on the Gault Clays east of Ashford and forms a continuation of the Hampton and Wye character areas described in The Kent Downs Landscape. The landscape is contained by the Great Stour’s alluvial valley, west of Naccolt and to the north-east by the AONB boundary.

Characterised by clayey or loamy soils subject to waterlogging the traditional crops of the area are winter cereals and short term grasslands. Small woodlands and larger plantations are also locally characteristic and with the sometime bushy hedgerows, give parts of the area a feel similar to the Low Weald. Settlement is restricted to farmsteads and small hamlets.

The land between Naccolt and Nackholt Wood is significantly wet, necessitating a series of dykes and drains to allow its use as pasture. It is significant that this area has remained under grass whilst over the past thirty years the better drained land round about has been converted to arable. Further east beyond Fords Water, the landscape becomes more open with a mix of pasture and arable.

The most significant woodlands are those north of Naccolt Farm that form a Site of Nature Conservation Interest (SNCI). These include Nackholt, Foreland and Hampton Woods. Although managed in very different ways, all these woods retain many of the features of very damp ancient woods, with oak standards and mixed coppice of hornbeam, ash, field maple, hazel and alder. Also present is a rich ground flora and many species of butterfly and moth. Elsewhere these woods have been replanted with conifers, poplars or chestnut coppice.
PHOTOGRAPH

CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES
Gentle sloping landform with poor quality soils subject to waterlogging
Mixed farmland including a large percentage of grassland
Small copses and larger woodlands locally, of high nature conservation value

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS
Condition
This area includes some woodland clusters of high nature conservation value and also some
more intensive arable farmland. Heritage features are distinctive and in good condition. The
large patches of woodland are a strong element. Notable features include distinctive red
brick farmsteads. Generally, built development has a moderate positive impact. There are
very few detractors in this rural landscape. The landscape pattern is occasionally interrupted
by the decline in field boundaries.

Visibility is very low throughout the enclosed but unremarkable landform. A strong sense of
place is derived from historic landscape elements and from a greater time depth associated
with the woodland. This landscape has a range of distinctive features from pollard ash to
mature hedgerow standards, wide road verges and long-roofed barns. It is considered to be
of moderate sensitivity.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS
Conserve the existing woodland cover and reinforce the use of broadleaf species at key
locations.
Reinforce semi-natural habitats between woodlands.
Identify and reinforce the ecological interest of wetland corridors.
Reinforce distinctive features such as pollard ash and standards in hedgerows.
Reinforce the wide verges and hedged boundaries of highways by ensuring their
reinstatement as part of engineering works.
Conserve the isolation and characteristics of historic farmsteads.

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS
CONSERVE AND REINFORCE.
Conserve and reinforce broadleaf woodlands
Reinforce wetland habitats
Reinforce mature standards in hedgerows
Conserve historic farmsteads and their settings

Prepared for Kent County Council by Jacobs Babbie
BROOKLAND FARMS

A small parcel of farmland, to the southwest of the Rhee Wall, is contained by the Rhee and the old sea walls from Lydd to Snargate. This is an area of older marshland that was re-inned after the inundations of the 13th century storms, and is characterised by the long, narrow regular fields around the village of Brookland and the sequential road system.

The Rhee Wall follows a straight, engineered line, but the old sea wall meanders along its length, indicating that it was the sum of many separate enclosures against the sea.

The farmland is flat and open, but with earth embankments in evidence. Pastures appear to lie in flat depressions between the embankments. The Appledore, Denge Ness and Romney Branch Railway was built through here in the early 19th century, entailing further embanking. The line now serves the power station.

Settlement consists of scattered farms which are more concentrated around the main village of Brookland. It is a relatively closely settled area of marsh farmland which is rural in character and is showing signs of gentrification. Some enlarged, renovated old farmhouses have a more residential use, using small pastures for horse grazing.

Utilitarian, concrete buildings, which date from the last World War, can be seen throughout the area, some used as farm buildings, some now derelict.

Brookland’s small stone church has the distinction of a separate steeple, faced with timber shingles and built on the ground next to the church.

Dwellings and farms are also centred along the sea wall such as Baynham Farm, or sit just behind the wall, sheltered from the coastal influences, such as Hook House and Midley Cottages. A 15th century public house still exists on the wall, although now only on a minor road, it must once have been on the major route encircling the inned farmland, with great views to the sea over the tidal saltmarsh.

Parish boundaries reflect the re-inning of the land as they pass straight across the Rhee Wall, encompassing long, regular parcels of land in the Brookland Farmlands, but maintaining their church buildings on the north side of the Rhee. The ruins of Midley Chapel can be seen near Hawthorn Corner.

Much of the land is classified as Grade 1 agricultural, with very large fields nearer to Lydd. Current land use, however, is variable; the patchwork effect of cereals is interspersed with vegetable crops, turf cultivation, and cattle and sheep rearing. Sheepfolds are frequently seen, especially near the sea wall; and some are in use. The drainage ditches are less in evidence, being generally fewer in number on this part of the marsh, but are intensively scoured.

Unusually in the marsh, some views are filtered by tall, mature vegetation which grows on the embankments. Around Brookland, mixed hawthorn and willow hedgerows enclose the narrow lanes which run along the top of the banks. These are windblown and contoured by the elements, but there are also some mature trees which foster a smaller scale, more rural influence in the landscape. There are dense scrub and mature trees around many parts of the old sea wall, especially around Hook House, which has a very settled atmosphere.
BROOKLAND FARMS

PHOTOGRAPH

CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES
Well-settled farmland with scattered farms, rural and historically rich. Flat, open, large
embankments, historical sea defences and sunken pastures. WWII buildings now used for farm buildings, some derelict.
Wide views from top of sea wall

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition
A flat, open landscape, relatively few intermittent trees and a strong visual unity. Wide views from the visually prominent sea wall. Historically a well-settled area, clusters of farmsteads, some scattered farms and dwellings on the edges of dykes and sandy banks. Brookland is fringed with large massed willows, mostly brick built vernacular, with a distinctive stone church and separate timber steeple. New build housing and village enlargement is of unremarkable design and detracts from the townscape. Some WWII buildings converted to farmsteads, but others are derelict. Other scattered or clustered farmsteads are brick vernacular or unremarkable contemporary buildings. The pattern of ditches and hedges between arable fields and pastures is strong with relatively few detracting features. Hedgerows are often unmanaged and in decline, and some dykes are scoured of vegetation. The land is intensively farmed and mature trees and well vegetated ditches are fragmented, providing limited ecological interest. The willows and poplars are vulnerable because there are few young trees in the structure.

Sensitivity
The dominant flat, open landscape, with intermittent tree cover, has a high visibility with an historic time depth, but the landscape is becoming indistinct through the loss of pollarded poplars and willows, the decline in hedgerows and the loss of ditch side and aquatic vegetation and the presence of unremarkable new buildings. This creates a weak sense of place.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

Encourage the conservation of the existing ecologically interesting areas of aquatic vegetation, ponds, hedgerows, trees and pastures through appropriate management. Reinforce the network of hedgerows and ditches to link with and extend existing ecologically interesting areas through appropriate management and replanting. Around Brookland, encourage the intensive planting of characteristic willows and poplars and create new, well-vegetated dykes to reinforce the village edge and create a more distinctive sense of place. Conserve the remote feel of isolated or scattered farmsteads and encourage sensitive design and siting of new farm buildings to contribute to the landscape.

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

CONSERVE AND REINFORCE.
Conserve ponds, hedgerows, trees and pastures. Reinforce hedgerows and ditches. At Brookland, encourage willows and poplars and dykes to reinforce the village edge. Conserve the remote feel and sensitive design of farmsteads.

CONTEXT

Regional: Romney Marsh

Condition

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Sensitivity

Low | Moderate | High

Prepared for Kent County Council by Jacobs Babbage
This narrow finger of North Downs landscape falls into two distinct landscapes. Firstly, the dramatic scarp and valley forms to the north. Secondly, rolling open plateau landscape in the centre and to the south. Remnant chalk grassland on the steepest slopes to the north lead into small fields of arable and pasture then ever larger arable units in the southernmost section. Blocks of deciduous woodland are a distinct feature throughout this Local character area providing much needed containment for the open arable landscape to the south. There is a significant lack of development within the area itself but extensive urban areas are located on all but the southern boundary, this area is distinctly rural in character. However, there are definite indications of the development pressures these urban areas are putting upon this valuable and vulnerable landscape.

The alternating bands of chalk and head deposits in the northern part of this character area create a dramatic incised landscape comprising a series of ridges and valleys. The southern and central plateau is formed from clay with flints creating a softer more rolling landscape. Two of the valleys, demarcated by Shawstead Road and Lidsing Road, extend further to the south and bound this central plateau.

Land cover to some extent is governed by landform in that on the steeper scarp slopes, where true chalk soils occur, are predominantly rough pasture with encroaching scrub vegetation. Remnant chalk grassland is the natural landcover for the chalk scarps and would have been a more prevalent at one time. On the shallower slopes and the plateau landform, with its covering of clay with flints, deciduous woodland blocks of mixed species introduce variety in the form of colour and texture. Land use would have been predominantly pasture but arable cultivation has on the whole replaced this on all but the steepest slopes. The decline of grazing of these steeper slopes is resulting in invasion by chalkland scrub. These changing land use patterns threaten the unique landscape and wildlife value of these open chalk grasslands.

Amenity and other urban land uses are beginning to encroach on this character area, as well as fringe influences such as horse pasture in combination with the encroaching development of Hempstead on the eastern edge.

The majority of the existing woodland is listed on the Ancient Woodland Inventory. These mixed deciduous woodlands have considerable ecological value that is not always reflected by official designation. Darland Bank is a Local Nature Reserve (LNR) and a Site of Nature Conservation Interest (SNCI) with key habitats of grassland, woodland and scrub. South Wood is a candidate for LNR designation and is already designated as a SNCI for grassland as well as woodland. Ambley, Hook and Holt Woods are designated as SNCIs. Also of significant ecological value are the areas of remnant chalk grassland. However, these are in decline and are threatened by invasion of scrub vegetation.

The landscape is perhaps best remembered for its association with Dickens who set several works in and around the towns of Chatham and Rochester.
### CAPSTONE DOWNS

#### PHOTOGRAPH
![Photo of the area]

#### CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES
- Steep ridges and valleys with open plateau to south.
- Woodland and pasture-scrub invasion. Remnant chalk grassland.
- Arable cultivation on plateau.
- Urban context and encroachment of urban edge.

#### LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

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#### CONTEXT
- **Regional:** Thames Gateway

#### SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

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- **Pattern of elements:** Coherent.
- **Detracting features:** Many.
- **Visual Unity:** Interrupted.
- **Cultural integrity:** Poor.
- **Ecological integrity:** Weak.
- **Functional Integrity:** Very Weak.

#### LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

- **Restore cultural and visual integrity to the area by recreating a continuous wooded edge to the ridge tops, to follow contours and minor valleys.**
- **Restore the ecological interest to selected areas of open grassland by conservation management.**
- **Restore hedged boundaries to the road network.**
- **Restore the rural view by using broadleaf woodland and shaws as screening for industrial buildings.**

#### SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

**RESTORE.**
- Restore the wooded edge to ridge tops where it is currently eroded
- Restore selected areas of species-rich chalk grassland
- Restore hedged boundaries to roads and other highways

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Prepared for Kent County Council by Jacobs Babtie
CHALLOCK: MID KENT DOWNS

To the east of Doddington, the open arable plateaux take on an increasingly important role in shaping the character of the landscape. Many of the fields have no clear boundaries between them, forming instead great sweeps of cultivation, through which the tiny lanes pass almost unnoticed. This sense of exposure, however, produces an airy, invigorating landscape, where large flocks of plovers wheel overhead and there are long, northern views. In the south east, the huge expanse of Challock Forest, still managed largely as coppice, blankets the slopes above the Stour Valley. Between Challock and Perry Hill there is a distinctive pattern of trimmed hedges and hedgerow trees, interspersed by small orchards.

MID KENT DOWNS
Challock lies within the larger character area of the Mid Kent Downs.

The long spine of the Kent Downs in this area stretches from Chatham in the west to the Stour Valley in the east. Although there are local variations in the appearance of the landscape, there is a strong underlying pattern to the landform, which imparts an overall character to the region. Throughout the length of the chalk ridge a series of narrow, steep-sided dry valleys carve their way down the gentle northern dip-slope of the Downs to the flatter land of the North Kent Fruit Belt, around Sittingbourne and Faversham.

The historical poverty of this area resulted largely from the stiff clay-with-flints soils, which overlie the solid chalk. Despite their striking, rich-red colour, these soils are relatively poor and difficult to cultivate, especially as they occur on the exposed upper plateaux of the Downs. Edward Hasted, writing in 1798, consistently describes the area in terms such as “an unpleasant dreary country, the soil of which is very poor, being chalky, and much covered with flint-stones”. In his day the land was used widely for sheep grazing, interspersed by arable on the lower slopes and large blocks of woodland. Today appreciation of the landscape of the landscape has changed and the remote, undeveloped ridges and valleys, which resulted from the historical poverty of the soils, are considered one of the most beautiful features of the AONB. Although mechanised farming over the last hundred years has seen an increase in the area of arable land, much of the original ancient woodland survives, walling in the arable plateaux and enclosing the rounded, valley bottoms.
CHALLOCK: MID KENT DOWNS

PHOTOGRAPH

CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES
Open arable plateau, sweeping landform with few boundaries and long views, large coppice wood at Challock Forest.
Orchards and trimmed hedgerows between Perry Hill and Challock.

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

This is a unified landscape with a coherent pattern of landform and elements and few detracting features. It has a moderate ecological interest based on coppice, plantation woodland and pasture which are found around relatively reduced areas of interest in the open arable fields. Heritage features are in variable condition. Woodlands occur in large blocks but there is much single-age plantation; woody shaws have declined and the remaining fragments are considered to be vulnerable. Built form is of mixed quality but includes vernacular detail and isolated settlements, and has a moderate positive impact. The condition of the area is considered to be good.

Sensitivity

Key characteristics of the landscape, such as shaws and field boundary hedges, are now in serious decline. The form of many of the roads is no longer apparent as they have been widened. Traditional orchards have also declined. Woodland cover remains a characteristic feature with a strong time depth. Settlement does not contribute to a strong sense of place, despite occasional vernacular building. The landform here is apparent and views are intermittent, giving a moderate visibility. The sensitivity of the area is considered to be moderate.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

Conserve large areas of woodland cover, ensuring that the appropriate species are used, using mixed broadleaf species as visual buffers to plantation woodland.
Conserve and manage beech stands and ensure the continuation of these landscape features by replanting them.
Reinforce woodland edges and shaws by replanting.
Reinforce the visual distinction of existing settlement.
Reinforce the settings of vernacular building.
Reinforce ecological interest by the management of selected grasslands and arable fields.

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Pattern of elements: Coherent.
Detracting features: Few.
Cultural integrity: Variable.
Ecological integrity: Moderate.
Functional Integrity: Coherent.

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

CONSERVE AND REINFORCE.
Conserve broadleaf woodland
Reinforce woodland edges
Reinforce shaws and beech stands
Reinforce the localised and characteristic design and pattern of settlements.
Reinforce ecological interest of grasslands and arable fields.

Prepared for Kent County Council by Jacobs Babbie
CHATHAM OUTSKIRTS: MID KENT DOWNS

This landscape is a mosaic of deciduous woodland, large arable plateau and steep, rolling valleys, which support a patchwork of small pastures, neglected grassland and scrub. A number of mainly derelict orchards dot the slopes, set within a matrix of overgrown hedges and small, scrubby shaws. Fruit cultivation used to be widespread in this area. The arable plateau are intensively farmed, with few hedges, and are contained in the distance by belts of woodland.

There is a strong urban-edge influence in this area, characterised by dereliction, dumping and high security fences. Many of the hedges are in poor condition and the woodlands are scrubby and largely unmanaged.

MID KENT DOWNS

the Chatham Outskirts lie within the larger character area of the Mid Kent Downs.

The long spine of the Kent Downs in this area stretches from Chatham in the west to the Stour Valley in the east. Although there are local variations in the appearance of the landscape, there is a strong underlying pattern to the landform, which imparts an overall character to the region. Throughout the length of the chalk ridge a series of narrow, steep-sided dry valleys carve their way down the gentle northern dip-slope of the Downs to the flatter land of the north Kent fruit belt, around Sittingbourne and Faversham.

The historical poverty of this area resulted from the stiff clay-with-flints soils, which overlie the solid chalk. Despite their striking, rich-red colour, these soils are relatively poor and difficult to cultivate, especially as they occur on the exposed upper plateau of the Downs. Edward Hasted, writing in 1798, consistently describes the area in terms such as "an unpleasant dreary country, the soil of which is very poor, being chalky, and much covered with flint-stones". In his day the land was used widely for sheep grazing, interspersed by arable on the lower slopes and large blocks of woodland. Today appreciation of the landscape has changed and the remote, undeveloped ridges and valleys, which resulted from the historical poverty of the soils, are considered one of the most beautiful features of the AONB. Although mechanised farming over the last hundred years has seen an increase of arable land, much of the original ancient woodland survives, wailing in the arable plateau and enclosing the rounded, valley bottoms.
CHATHAM OUTSKIRTS: MID KENT DOWNS

PHOTOGRAPH

CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES
Large arable plateau and steep, rolling valleys, scarp slopes.
Patchwork of small pastures, grass and scrub.
Dereelit orchards, few hedges.
Urban-edge influence. Long views to the industrial edge.

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

This is a large scale landscape with a coherent pattern, but there are many detracting features which are associated with unsympathetic land uses. Large blocks of woodland are interspersed with areas of intense arable cultivation - the latter reduces the ecological interest of the landscape area. There is a strong influence from the urban edge. The cultural integrity and the condition of heritage features is poor. Built form has a negative impact on the view.

Sensitivity
The sense of place within this landscape is strong. Key characteristics such as cross-contour and ridgeline roads, and beech/yew woodland, contribute to the strong sense of place, and also have a very strong time depth. Settlement and built form, however, do not greatly contribute to local distinctiveness.

The plateau itself has an insignificant landform, but this area also includes some of the top of the scarp and some of the steeper sided valleys. The landform is therefore considered to be apparent in the view. Enclosure by woodland is intermittent: the sensitivity of the landscape is therefore high.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

A smaller scale landscape may be restored around settlements where this is appropriate to agricultural use. This may be achieved by planting hedgerow to enclose highways, fields and settlements, and by ensuring that fields are small scale. Encourage mixed agricultural use of the farmland.

RESTORE.

Restore woodland links from the ridge into the large arable areas.
Restore hedgerow along selected highways and around settlements.
Restore areas of broadleaf woodland.
Restore a smaller-scale framework to the landscape around settlements.

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition

Pattern of elements: Coherent.
Detracting features: Some.
Visual Unity: Coherent.
Cultural integrity: Poor.
Ecological integrity: Moderate.
Functional Integrity: Weak.

Sensitivity

Distinctiveness: Characteristic.
Continuity: Ancient.
Sense of Place: Strong.
Landform: Apparent.
Extent of tree cover: Intermittent.
Visibility: Moderate.

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

REINFORCE CONSERVE & CREATE

CONSERVE & CREATE

CONSERVE & RESTORE

RECREATE

CONSERVE

RESTORE
North of Bilting, the Stour Valley becomes increasingly enclosed. The rolling sides of the valley support large arable fields in the east, while sweeps of parkland belonging to Godmersham Park and Chilham Castle cover most of the western slopes. On either side of the valley, dense woodland dominate the skyline and a number of substantial shaws and plantations on the lower slopes reflect the importance of game cover in this area. On the valley bottom, the river is picked out in places by waterside alders and occasional willows. The railway line is obscured for much of its length by trees.

Chilham lies within the larger character area of the Stour Valley within the Kent Downs AONB.

The Great Stour is the most easterly of the three rivers cutting through the Downs. Like the Darent and the Medway, it too provided an early access route into the heart of Kent and formed an ancient focus for settlement. Today the Stour Valley is highly valued for the quality of its landscape, especially by the considerable numbers of walkers who follow the Stour Valley Walk or the North Downs Way National Trail.

Despite its proximity to both Canterbury and Ashford, the Stour Valley retains a strong rural identity. Enclosed by steep scarps on both sides, with dense woodlands on the upper slopes, the valley is dominated by intensively farmed arable fields interspersed by broad sweeps of mature parkland. Unusually, there are no electricity pylons cluttering the views across the valley. North of Bilting, the river flows through a narrow, pastoral floodplain, dotted with trees such as willow and alder and drained by small ditches. To the south around Wye, however, the floodplain widens out and the pastures along the immediate riverside are surrounded by intensively cultivated arable fields on the rich, well-drained brick earth soils. The field pattern is picked out by a network of narrow, trimmed hedges and lines of mature trees, such as poplars.

On the valley sides, many of the arable fields are surrounded by thick shaws and dense, overgrown hedges which extend down from the woodlands on the upper slopes. Hedgerow trees, in particular oak and ash, are frequent and much of the woodland along the east side of the valley is of national importance for its plant, insect and other animal communities.
CHILHAM: STOUR VALLEY

PHOTOGRAPH

CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES
Gentle, enclosed valley sides, wooded skyline. Sinuous riverside pastures, sweeping parkland. Shaws, game cover plantations and riverside trees on valley bottom. Chalk scarp to NE.

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

The area incorporates the river valley and upper floodplain which have a unified pattern of elements and some small scale visual detractors associated with remnant fruit growing and the management of landscape features. Estate houses, historic farmsteads and local building materials (including flint) have a positive impact on the area. Rural heritage features of woodland and hedgerow are considered to be poor, but the diversity of the land use and the strong ecological corridor of the river itself result in a strong ecological base.

Sensitivity
This area has a characteristic historic time depth. It includes notable features such as the parkland at Godmersham. Vegetative features within the river valley tend to be recent, such as poplar plantations, or contribute little to the local sense of place, such as hedgerow and remnant orchards. The sensitivity of the area is considered to be moderate.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS
Conserve and reinforce the distinction between valley floor and the upper floodplain by conserving managed hedged boundaries on the higher land, and the copse/pasture/arable pattern on the valley floor.
Conserve and reinforce historic parkland features.
Reinforce the river corridor with selected areas of riparian vegetation and plantations.

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

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Sensitivity
Distinctiveness: Characteristic.
Continuity: Historic.
Sense of Place: Moderate.
Landform: Apparent.
Extent of tree cover: Intermittent.
Visibility: Moderate.

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

CONSERVE AND REINFORCE.
Conserve and reinforce small scale woodland plantation and riparian vegetation on the valley floor
Conserve historic parkland
Reinforce hedgerows and field patterns in the upper valley
In the north around Cobham, the character of the landscape begins to change. The dominance of farmland gives way to parkland and extensive mixed woodlands around Cobham Hall. These in turn give way to the actively worked coppice woodlands of Shorne Wood and the heathy vegetation which reflects a local change in the underlying geology.

The character of Cobham Park is threatened by the gradual decay of existing ornamental tree features and the ploughing up of areas of the parkland. Other activities, such as landfill and golf, further damage the integrity of the parkland, which relies on the belt of trees along its northern boundary to screen it from the busy A2 trunk road and the CTRL.

Cobham lies within the larger character area of the West Kent Downs.

The south-facing, chalk scarp between the Medway and the Darent provides a strong visual boundary, dividing the Kemsing Vale from the deep, dry valleys and wooded plateau of the West Kent Downs. This sense of separation is increased by the extensive tracts of ecologically valuable deciduous woodlands along the top of the scarp.

Woodland is very significant in this landscape, providing an important backdrop for the rolling landform, the network of small country lanes, the scattered settlements and the extensive valley pastures. In the east, around Luddesdown, the fields are contained by thick walls of woodland, and strips of remnant coppice, or shaws, occur frequently along the steeper valley sides. Hidden away among the trees are several medieval buildings, such as Luddesdown Court, constructed from the local Kentish ragstone, while the villages of Vigo and West Kingsdown are set deep in the woodlands themselves.

The clay-with-flints soil on the plateau and ridge tops is reflected in the pasture and woodland dominating these areas; in the valleys, the extent of the finer silt soils is reflected by the predominance of arable cultivation. The downland becomes increasingly open in the north, where the intimate character of the scarp top gives way to a large-scale landscape of intensively farmed, rolling valleys and large blocks of deciduous woodland. West of Rochester, the mature woodlands and historic parkland of Cobham Hall are severed from the deciduous coppice woodlands of Shorne Wood Country Park by the busy A2 trunk road and the Channel Tunnel Rail Link (CTRL).
## Characteristic Features
Large-scale open scarp-top landscape. Intensively farmed rolling, coppice woodland and historic parkland, some fruit growing. Landfill, golf course and A2 sever the character area.

## Landscape Analysis

### Condition
This landscape area has a coherent pattern of elements which relate to the scarp-top landform. There are some visual detractors such as the trunk road and approaches, Channel Tunnel Rail Link, and recent fringe residential development. There are strong, extensive clusters of ecological interest associated with the woodland, but this is countered by the weak ecological interest of the open landscape which has intensive open arable and amenity uses such as the golf course. The condition of rural heritage features such as tree cover is good, and appears to be well-managed within the parkland setting. Field boundaries are in poor condition. In general, the built form of estate houses and small village settlements have a positive impact on the landscape and the cultural integrity is strong. The area is considered to be in good condition.

### Sensitivity
Visibility is low due to the unremarkable landform and the intermittent tree cover. Historic features are characteristic of the landscape, such as woodland, parkland and vernacular building styles. The estate parkland and estate management of the area influences the distinctive character and gives an historic time-depth. Highways and field boundaries do not currently contribute significantly to local distinctiveness; this is due to the modification of many of the existing roads, and to the recent use of post and wire field boundaries within the parkland. Shelterbelts do not tend to be a widespread feature. The sensitivity of this area is therefore considered to be moderate.

## Landscape Actions
Conserve and reinforce the parkland character of the area, emphasizing and co-ordinating the localised features (fencing, highways, rural buildings) associated with the management of a central estate.
Conserve and reinforce woodland cover, extending woodland planting to existing open areas to the west of Cobham village.
Reinforce the rural characteristics of the local highways, using hedgerow enclosure to enhance narrow, winding routes. Hedgerow may also be reinstated within the smaller-scale fruit-growing areas around villages.
Vernacular detail is a noticeable feature and should be conserved and reinforced in any new development.

## Summary of Analysis

### Context
- **Regional:** Kent Downs AONB

### Condition
- **Good:** REINFORCE, CONSERVE & REINFORCE
- **Moderate:** CREATE & REINFORCE, CONSERVE & CREATE
- **Poor:** CREATE, RESTORE & CREATE, RESTORE

### Sensitivity
- **Low:** Moderate, High

### Summary of Actions
- **Conserve and Reinforce:**
  - Reinforce the parkland features and encourage management which enhances the parkland characteristics
  - Conserve and manage parkland trees and woodland cover
  - Reinforce the rural highway characteristics
  - Reinforce the hedgerow enclosure of agricultural land
  - Conserve and reinforce the use of vernacular detail

---

Prepared for Kent County Council by Jacobs Babtie
This landscape is composed of the flat to gently sloping land of medium to poor quality soils associated with the head drift deposits on the dip slope of the Hythe Beds. It is a narrow character area from Quarry Wood in the west to Fairbourne and Platt’s Heath in the east. It is in part densely wooded with chestnut coppice or plantation as found at Abbey Wood or the pure stands of chestnut coppice seen near Boughton Malherbe. This wooded landscape is similar to the Mereworth Woodlands in this latter respect.

Although their extent would have been much greater in the past, these woodlands are now fragmented into small to medium sized blocks and the rest of the land farmed or developed, mainly this century, for housing.

The farmlands are a mix of arable crops such as cereals and rape, with residual orchards and some pasture including paddocks for grazing horses.

The large scale rape fields are replacing the traditional smaller, grid-like pattern of orchards surrounded by their bushy hedgerows or shelterbelts. Fortunately, many of the roadside hedges remain to give some structure to the landscape that has been lost with the tall orchard trees. These hedgerows and the dense coppice woodlands also help to contain the substantial 20th century village settlements of Coxheath, Boughton Monchelsea, Langley Heath and Kingswood, especially from views to the south, that have grown up on this flat accessible land close to Maidstone.

Very strikingly the B2163 follows the ridge top in a near straight line east to west. A feature of much of this road is the intermittent housing, garden centres, leisure facilities and horse paddocks, most of which has sprung up this century, which gives the roadside an irregular appearance. Scattered housing has also grown up along Gravelly Bottom Road on plots through Abbey Wood.

North of the B2163, however, several narrow enclosed rural lanes link this road to the Medway and Loose valleys through the Maidstone Fruit Belt. They are under pressure from commuter traffic at certain times of the day and exhibit signs of erosion.

To the south the woodlands merge into the steeply sloping land of the Maidstone Ridge with its orchards and parklands and occasional nut platt. A feature are the narrow, steep, shady lanes running off at right angles at regular intervals, following the old drove roads into the Weald.
COXHEATH PLATEAU FARMLANDS

PHOTOGRAPH

CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS
Condition
This area, which is defined by the clear, ridgeline road through the centre, reflects the underlying soil conditions and ancient settlement influences in the existing diverse agricultural and settlement patterns. There are some visual detractors due to commercial and linear 20th century built development which interrupt the overall visual unity. An intensity of land use is developing, and tree cover is variable, being limited to large coppice plantations to the south of the ridge-top. Hedged field boundaries appear to be strong and functioning with the current land use. The extent of semi-natural habitats is limited. Built development has a high negative impact on the landscape, and the condition of the landscape is considered to be poor.

Sensitivity
Intermittent enclosure, created by tall hedgerow and occasional coppice woodlands, reduces the visibility over the unremarkable landform. Landscape features have an historic time-depth, but with many recent urban influences. The ridgeline road is a characteristic feature, but is not considered to have rare or unique distinctions.

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS
Condition
Pattern of elements: Coherent.
Detracting features: Some.
Visual Unity: Coherent.
Cultural integrity: Variable.
Ecological integrity: Weak.
Functional Integrity: Weak.

Sensitivity
Distinctiveness: Characteristic.
Continuity: Recent.
Sense of Place: Weak.
Landform: Insignificant.
Extent of tree cover: Intermittent.
Visibility: Low.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS
The present function of the landscape is divided between agricultural and urban elements. It is therefore desirable to create new features which reflect the inherent character and the new uses of the landscape.
Create an urban edge using managed fruit growing area characteristics where these adjoin other fruit belt areas, such as tall hedges.
Create new woodland in small blocks. This may be away from the main built development, but within the farmland, linked to existing coppice, to augment the ecological interest.
Create new characteristics which reflect the significance of the ridgeline road, such as the continuation of wooded edges, managed verges, tree lines in urban areas, or other linear features which continue through urban and rural areas alike.
Encourage the reinstatement of managed fruit farming on the slopes towards the fruit belt.

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS
CREATE.
Create small patches of broadleaf woodland and manage these in order to enhance the ecological interest.
Create urban edges with managed features associated with agricultural enclosure.
Reflect the significance of the ridgeline road in landscape features.

prepared for Kent County Council by Jacobs Babtie
CRANBROOK: KENTISH HIGH WEALD

CRANBROOK

The characteristic charm of this area is in the jumble of little lane and strips of coppice woodland, interspersed with roughly grazed meadows and small orchards. Many of the fields in the south and west are fringed by overgrown hedges, whose branches are laden in the spring with white may-blossom, whilst clumps of cow parsley lean out of the verges into the roads. In the east, towards Rolvenden, extensive views south over the Rother valley open up, whilst to the north the land becomes flatter and the horizon is confined by the dense sweep of Hemsted Forest. There are extensive arable fields here with occasional hedgerow trees, whilst the skyline is dominated near Rolvenden by West Cross windmill.

Although there are some elegant areas of parkland, such as Hole Park, near Benenden, and a considerable number of pony paddocks, this area nevertheless retains a strong agricultural tradition. Hops are still grown here and there are large orchards where in winter, twisted black-barked apple trees crouch over the land like enormous spiders. Between these orchards, warehouses and occasional conifer windbreaks dispel any illusions that this is a purely ornamental landscape.

KENTISH HIGH WEALD

Cranbrook is part of the larger character area of the Kentish High Weald.

The Kentish High Weald stretches from Pembury to Rolvenden, including Lamberhurst, Bewl Water and Bedgebury Forest. This landscape has a general north easterly orientation and, from the higher land between Pembury and Lamberhurst, around the southern edge of Bewl Water and between Goudhurst and Benenden, long views stretch out over the Kent Weald towards the North Downs. Kent is known as the Garden of England and the Kentish High Weald plays an important part in this tradition. This is a richly textured landscape, where the angular patterns of the orchard and hop garden contrast with smooth sweeps of arable or intensively grazed pasture. Despite a continuing decline in fruit cultivation, this area still owes its gardenesque feel to the abundant orchards and hop gardens. Once, however, this landscape was famous, not for its fruit but its cloth. Flemish weavers, settling here in the 14th century, built up a thriving woollen industry centred on Cranbrook. Until the 17th century, this industry remained a major source of employment and wealth accumulated by the wool merchants is evident from the substantial medieval houses in the town.

This tapestry of land uses is set within a framework of dense shaws, thick hedges and stretches of broad-leaved woodland, some of which are still coppiced. The large conifer forests at Bedgebury, Hemsted and around Bewl Water, uphold the tradition of commercial timber production in the High Weald, their expanses of deep green enriching the countryside during the winter. This is a well-settled area, where it is rare to be out of sight of farmstead or cottage, Oasthouses dot the landscape, some tiled and some asphalted, and in the east windmills form occasional local landmarks. Many of the villages are of picture-postcard quality, their rose-covered cottages clustering around a pond or tiny green, the local pub sharing its tourist trade with the stone-built church beyond. Nevertheless, this charming image conceals a landscape under pressure, as agriculture becomes increasingly difficult to sustain.

Several minor ridges, running north-west from Pembury and south-east to Tenterden, define this area. The River Teise cuts through these ridges at Lamberhurst and Goudhurst, whilst to the south Bewl Water is enclosed by gentle ridges. In the fruit belt around Matfield there are a number of small ghylls, whilst the ground gradually becomes flatter and more open towards Cranbrook.
CRANBROOK: KENTISH HIGH WEALD

PHOTOGRAPH

CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Undulating gentle ridges, a jumble of small scale fields with strips of coppice, overgrown hedges. Meadows, hops and small orchards, arable fields around Rolvenden. Strong agricultural tradition. Farm buildings and warehouses.

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition
The small-scale rural landscape retains a coherent pattern of varied farming uses and displays the area's formerly strong farming tradition. Recent diversification of farms and farm buildings, and scattered suburban development have introduced some visually detracting forms into the landscape. Functionally, the area performs relatively well - heritage landscape and built features are widespread and have a positive impact, although woodland and hedgerow are declining as their role in the farmed landscape becomes less important. The remaining ecological bases are found in a weak network of plantation woods, broadleaf copses and streams, further weakened by the development of some larger arable areas. The condition of this area is considered to be good.

Sensitivity
This well-settled area has some unique historic features associated with historic settlement and the built form. One key characteristic of the historic rural landscape is the hedgerow and shelterbelt pattern, with mature standards; this is considered to be vulnerable or already indistinct in some areas as the small-scale and the variety of the landscape use changes. Wide-verged highways are another characteristic feature which contribute to a moderate sense of place. The landform is a relatively insignificant part of the perception of this landscape and views are partially enclosed by blocks of woodland and some hedgerow. Visibility is therefore low.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

Reinforce the rural heritage features, defining the areas which have small-scale rural uses and encouraging the management and replanting of hedgerow, shelterbelts and small broadleaf copses, and narrow strips of woodland in these areas. Within these features reinforce the ecological interest by sensitive management of woodland and understorey and cultivation techniques which respect the growing conditions of hedges and other peripheral habitats. Identify those areas of arable cultivation which may be appropriate for less intensive use and the subsequent encouragement of arable-land habitats. Reinforce the variety of landscape cover and the small-scale of land use parcels. Reinforce the highway characteristics of narrow lanes with wide verges, and the hedgerow enclosure of these roads.

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

REINFORCE. Reinforce the small-scale enclosure where it is appropriate to the land use Reinforce ecological bases by the replanting and management of hedges, woodland and copses Reinforce the ecological interest in arable areas Reinforce highway characteristics

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS


Sensitivity

CONTEXT
Regional: High Weald AONB

Condition
- good: REINFORCE
- moderate: CREATE & REINFORCE
- poor: CREATE & RESTORE
- low: RESTORE & CREATE
- moderate: CONSERVE & REPLACE
- high: CONSERVE & RESTORE

Sensitivity
- low
- moderate
- high

Prepared for Kent County Council by Jacobs Babilie
Over time, the erosional cutting power of the River Darent has created a broad but steep-sided valley carved out of the chalk. Unlike the more intimate, enclosed valley bottom in which the river meanders over its flat alluvial bed, and the wooded ridge and valley landscapes of the Ash and Knockholt Downs, the chalk slopes have a smooth open, arable character more reminiscent of the North Kent Agricultural Belt.

This landscape extends from Horton Kirby and South Darenth to the Ash Downs in the east and from the A225 up to Farningham Wood, Hextable and Wilmington. Farningham and Joydens Wood and Swanley form part of a separate character area developed on the sands, gravels and clays of the Tertiary deposits.

Whilst being mainly an agricultural landscape with few settlements, the landscape is far from tranquil and is often marred by discordant elements. These include the busy M20/A20 corridor that marks the southern boundary, the A2(T) that crosses to the north, and the M25 and A225 that cut through the middle of the character area.

The few lanes that cross this open landscape into the valley bottom are marred by eroded edges and gappy hedgerows, and often give vistas past pylons or to the built or damaged landscapes of Kent Thames-side.
DARENTH DOWNS

PHOTOGRAPH

CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES
Smooth, open arable landscape on the chalk.
Crossed by major transport routes.
Scattered settlement.
Long views to the Kent Thames Gateway.

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition
The landscape pattern remains coherent but many of the landscape elements are skeletal or redundant in use. The open, arable farmland is quiet, denuded of the more vulnerable heritage features such as hedged field boundaries. There are many detracting features: the urban edge intrudes into most views and the landscape pattern is subject to major interruptions from motorway transport routes. Suburban land uses and neglected land around settlements are also common detractors. The extent of woodland cover is insignificant except that it marks the tops of hills in isolated clumps; the unusual characteristics of some acid woodland upgrades the ecological interest of the area, which is otherwise intensively cultivated in areas of agricultural land use. Culturally, the enlarged, suburban development of formerly ancient and historical settlements have a high negative impact on the landscape.

Sensitivity
This area is considered to be of moderate sensitivity. The rounded, chalk landform is apparent in views of the landscape and visibility is high due to the openness of the countryside. Historic and ancient landscape features such as boundaries and woodlands are weak and indistinct. Some remnant hedges exist by the roadside, although the regenerative elm within these is known to be very vulnerable. There is very little sense of local distinctiveness or continuity of time in the current landscape elements.

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

Create positive landscape features that are appropriate to the evolving land uses. This may include the creation of a cohesive urban edge which incorporates suburban land uses and appropriate pools of sustainable vegetation. Within agricultural land, field patterns should be created based on the cultural need and actual use of the land, but ecological interest may be augmented by the encouragement of less intensive cultivation techniques. Broader woodland cover may be restored on hill-tops, reflecting either the acid soils or chalk, depending on localised conditions. Wooded shaws may also be reintroduced, linked to wooded tops, following depressions in the chalk landscape, ideally in association with the less intensive areas of arable cultivation. Restore the historical features of the road pattern, recreating banked and hedged boundaries which link with vegetation on the new urban edge and the augmented wooded hilltops. Create major new woodland links and habitats along the motorway corridor.

RESTORE AND CREATE.
Create an edge to the urban area
Create field patterns based on the integrity of current use and in response to the landform and soils
Restore woodland on tops of hills and in depressions on the chalk slopes
Create areas of acid woodland
Restore road pattern and features
Create new ecologically rich vegetative cover/woodland adjacent to motorway corridor
Restore ecological interest in the arable areas

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Pattern of elements: Coherent.
Detracting features: Many.
Visual Unity: Interrupted.
Cultural integrity: Poor.
Ecological integrity: Moderate.
Functional Integrity: Weak.

Context
Regional: North West Kent

Condition

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Sensitivity

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These are essentially pockets of land that have become isolated from the wider countryside to the south by the A2 and which are now sandwiched between the road and the extensive urban edges of Dartford and Gravesend and have become influenced, to varying degrees, by urban fringe land uses and features. Although the land uses vary, these areas have in common the A2 route corridor which forms the southern boundary, containment by hard urban edges on all other boundaries and strong urban influences both within and/or on their peripheries.

The underlying geology is predominantly Thanet Beds, chalk and London Clay. The chalk results in the most distinct landform with strongly rolling forms (e.g. Fleet Downs) and prominent scarpes (e.g. on the southern edges of Swanscombe). Large-scale chalk quarries are a dramatic and prominent feature of the landscape to the south of Swanscombe. The Thanet Beds and London Clay result in a softer undulating landscape.

This area has lost most of its former agricultural uses, woodland and orchards. Although a relatively small tract of land, compared to some of the other character areas in the study, its fragmented nature and the varying pressures and needs of the adjoining urban areas has resulted in a varied pattern of landcover. This is composed of isolated pockets of arable farmland, that seem somewhat incongruous in their built settings; woodland, Darenth Wood in particular is a significant landscape feature; heathland, Dartford Heath is the most significant tract; amenity grassland, i.e. golf courses and sports fields; working landscapes, e.g. mineral workings disused and extant, resulting in complete destruction of landcover and landscape structure; restored landfill sites e.g. at Ebbsfleet and Stone; industrial uses, including refuse and recycling; and retail use e.g. plant nurseries.

Dartford Heath is designated as a Site of Nature Conservation Interest (SNCI) with key habitats of woodland, heathland and scrub. Darenth Wood and part of Ladies Wood are of high nature conservation value (designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and listed in the Ancient Woodland Inventory, together with Parkhill Wood). Ebbsfleet Marshes is a Local Nature Reserve and a Site of Nature Conservation Interest (SNCI) with key habitats of open water, marsh, grassland and scrub. Other valuable landscape and ecological features include scrub vegetation on scarpes along the southern edge of Swanscombe and regeneration of grassland, scrub and woodland in chalk quarries.

This area possesses one of the highest densities of Palaeolithic, Mesolithic and Neolithic finds in Kent as well as a high concentration of Roman finds. The oldest human remains in Britain were found near Swanscombe. In the 17th century Daniel Defoe noted the quarrying of chalk in this area. The quarries around Northfleet were first worked in 1834. A prominent historical feature is the fourteenth century Stone Castle which is constructed of flint.

Each isolated pocket of landscape within this character area has its own discrete character but all fall generally into the transitional, 'fringe' categories because of the pervasive influences of the urban or suburban context within which they are located. They are distinguished partly by land use differences but, at times, it is the degree and type of management imposed which is more influential on character. This ranges from intensively managed grassland, e.g. golf courses, to semi-natural heathland with minimum intervention.
### Photograph

![Photo of Dartford and Gravesend Fringes](image)

### Characteristic Features

- Contained by A2 and urban edges.
- Some semi-natural heathland and woodland.
- Some farmland with remnant hedgerows and trees.
- Landfill sites. Fragmentation by roads.
- Wide scale amenity uses.

### Landscape Analysis

#### Condition

- **This area is intensely physically fragmented, and the relationship between landform and landscape elements is obscured by urban development and the transport corridor. Semi-natural habitats such as Dartford Heath and exposed chalk faces (quarries) provide ecological interest, but these are few and specialised and do not form a coherent network. Heritage features associated with remnant chalk farmland are limited - some redundant hedges remain. The tightly-knit residential development is of mixed age and has a high negative impact on the area. Other, more recent features associated with land use include the planting and earthworks of reclaimed quarries, which are in variable condition. Overall, the landscape is considered to be in very poor condition.**

#### Sensitivity

- Visibility is moderate as the landform is unremarkable but views are generally unenclosed. There is very little continuity of time-depth in the landscape - historic cores to settlements are no longer apparent and very little characteristic farmland remains, most of which has only remnant hedgerow and tree cover. The lack of distinctive features which could be associated with the current dominant elements of the landscape, such as road networks and urban development, devalues the sense of place. Because the sense of place is weak, the sensitivity of the area is considered to be low.

### Landscape Actions

#### Summary of Actions

**CREATE.**

- Create a new landscape framework to the existing and reclaimed farmland.
- Create an edge to existing urban areas.
- Create semi-natural habitats such as acid woodland and scrub.
- Create areas for amenity uses.
- Create cohesive landscape elements which enhance the nature of the underlying landform and embrace the urban nature of the area.
- Create links between existing natural habitats into developed areas.

---

**Prepared for Kent County Council by Jacobs Babtie**
DUNGENESS SHINGLE

'Dungeness is a magical location. When you visit, tread softly, for many choose to live here for the solitude and silence....' preface to 'Derek Jarman's Garden'.

Dungeness is now a National Nature Reserve. The surface shingle stretches along the coastline from Greatstone-on-Sea to the point of Dungeness, and west beyond the county boundary. Inland it is evident as far as Lydd.

Towards the coast, the deep shingle covers the land exclusively with thin acid soils hidden between stones. Long, domed corrugations of grey-yellow shingle run successively inland from the coast, marking the edges of fossil shorelines with banks of flints, up to 30 metre wide and running the length of the foreland. Inland, nearer to Lydd in the area known as Denge Marsh, the ploughed farmland and pasture becomes increasingly soil-based, strewn with the rounded flints.

The dominant landscape element here is the unique landform and its coastal and climatic influences. Views are significant towards inland features such as Lydd Church. The tip of the cusparse foreland is marked by the power station and the two lighthouses.

This area can feel hostile due to the overpowering effect of the unusual vast stone beaches and extreme weather. It can also be exhilarating and breathtakingly desolate. The intense light is reflected on the stone and colours change from dramatic 'seaside' bleached orange with bright blue sky, to complete grey skies, mist and grey stone in unfavourable weather conditions.

There is no tall tree cover. Scrub vegetation such as broom, holly, blackthorn, blackberry and the smaller woodsage grows on the stone ridges. The pale grey foliage of willow scrub grows in pits or around excavations. The windswept shapes of the woody scrub reflect the extreme climate. The most strikingly characteristic plant is sea kale which has a rounded and compact form and bright green summer foliage, contrasting greatly with the stone.

Herbaceous vegetation on the shingle is seasonally colourful and varied, supporting numerous and rare invertebrates like the Sussex Emerald and white-spot moth. These unique habitats have been extended to include those of the wet gravel pits, which also attract a variety of seabirds, migrants, waders and shingle-nesting species of birds. The area of pure shingle, including the wet pits, is designated as a Special Protection Area (for birdlife) and is now a candidate Special Area of Conservation (for wild flora and fauna habitats). The coastal zone is proposed as a candidate Ramsar Site, of international importance for birdlife.

The promontory is an internationally important landfall for migrating birds and provides special habitats for shingle-nesting species such as common terns. In general, birds are an integral part of the landscape, especially the gulls with their sudden, piercing cries.

Settlement was traditionally extremely scarce, limited to scattered weather-boarded fishermen’s huts and a few isolated farmhouses on Denge Marsh. Boats drawn up on the beach, near the huts, are an extremely picturesque feature. Today, some holiday camps along the coast encroach on the shingle.

The celebrated garden of Prospect Cottage, a former fisherman’s hut, can be found among the miscellany of huts, shanties and old railway carriages that are scattered on the shingle at the edge of the Ness. There are no visible boundaries between the huts.

Concentrated at the point of the Ness is a cluster of large, cohesive, specialised buildings including the power station, the coastguard building and the 1904 and 1960 lighthouses. The narrow lines of the eccentric miniature railway run across the shingle, terminating at the 1904 lighthouse.

The coastline to the south of these buildings is artificially maintained by shingle-feeding; replacing shingle which is constantly eroded by the sea. This arrests the dynamic system of coastal erosion and deposition, preventing the power station from being engulfed by the sea.

The deep bed of rounded flints is also a valuable aquifer and can be likened to a giant sponge, holding large volumes of good quality fresh water. It is an essential domestic supply for the Folkestone area, but is currently a subject of concern due to the falling water levels.

The centre of the character area is marked by vast areas of disturbed shingle, security fencing and flooded mineral workings which have destroyed the original landform and habitats, but have created new ones. The disturbed shingle around current gravel extraction works is being contoured to ameliorate the ravaged landscape.

The open space which characterises Dungeness has been exploited for uses such as Lydd Airport and the Lydd military firing ranges. The latter is discernable by the peripheral security fencing and the sounds of activities within. Dark silhouettes of the unique colony of stunted and wind-shaped hollies can be seen through the fencing.
DUNGENESS SHINGLE

PHOTOGRAPH

CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES
Dominant landform, flat with microrelief of long shingle ridges. Remote, exposed coastal location, constant wind or breeze, extremes of climate. Specialized vegetation. Big skies and atmospheric quality of light. Few roads, very inaccessible. Scarce settlement, unusual buildings, few boundaries to dwellings.

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition
Landform and landscape elements are strongly unified in this unique coastal landscape. However, there are many visual detractors of large-scale gravel extraction, security fencing, transmission towers and the power station. The unique and diverse semi-natural habitats of shingle, tidal, salt and freshwater areas provide almost total coverage of the area. The condition of heritage features is variable - stunted hollies and willow carr are unique, but the hollies are mature and felt to be vulnerable. Built form includes localised structures such as the lighthouse and fishermen's huts, and also large corporate buildings and small scale temporary buildings. These have an overall negative impact on the large scale landscape.

Sensitivity
The sensitivity of this area is considered to be very high due to the high visibility over the dominant landform, and the many unique features. The cluster of defence installations, power station and holiday properties on the spit, specialised coastal and shingle-based vegetation, all contribute to a very strong sense of place.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS
This area has a strong sense of place, but is in a moderate condition due to the condition of heritage features and the impact of visual detractors. Conserve the unique features and restore open views where possible. Reduce small scale landscape clutter such as fencing, signs and temporary buildings. Restore the minimal impact of highways and access roads by using sensitive highway details and materials.

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

CONSERVE AND RESTORE.
Conserve and restore open views
Conserve all wildlife habitats
Restore simple views by removing landscape clutter
Restore simplistic highway characteristics

CONTEXT
Regional: Romney Marsh

Sensitivity

Condition

Pattern of elements: Unified.
Detracting features: Many.
Visual Unity: Coherent.
Cultural integrity: Poor.
Ecological integrity: Coherent.
Functional Integrity: Coherent.

Distinctiveness: Unique/Rare.
Continuity: Ancient.
Sense of Place: Very Strong.
Landform: Dominant.
Extent of tree cover: Open.
Visibility: Very High.

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Dominant landform, flat with microrelief of long shingle ridges. Remote, exposed coastal location, constant wind or breeze, extremes of climate. Specialized vegetation. Big skies and atmospheric quality of light. Few roads, very inaccessible. Scarce settlement, unusual buildings, few boundaries to dwellings.

Prepared for Kent County Council by Jacobs Babbie
The East Kent Arable Belt is a large character area situated on the chalk downs outside the AONB to the south-east of Canterbury. It stretches from Bekesbourne in the west, north to Eastly and south to Sibertswold and Whitfield, bounded in the south by the Kent Downs AONB boundary, and to the east by the outskirts of Deal. The land rises from 20 metres at its junction with the lower, flatter Tertiary Beds up to 120 metres in the south-east as it bounds the AONB, not in an even manner but, as elsewhere in the Downs, in a distinct series of dry valleys. The soils are generally well-drained chalky, loamy soils over the chalk, being variously shallow or deep soils in places. Traditionally these good quality soils of the open downs and valleys supported winter cereals, or cereal and grassland in rotation and occasional horticultural crops. Otherwise, fine soils, sometimes flinty, over clay with slight seasonal waterlogging are found associated with the clay with flints in the south and south-east of the character area. Cereals, permanent grassland and deciduous woodland are all traditional on these poorer quality soils of the higher ridges.

Typical of the open downs country is the ploughed landscape of the Adisham Downs which gives long, rural views. This picture is repeated throughout this character area, being most extreme in the far east of the Downs, on Sutton Downs, for instance, where the open, remote, rural landscape, whilst simple, can be awesome. Less extreme are the open landscapes south of Northbourne with its empty, winding lanes, quiet but for the wind and the skylarks. South of Eastly too are wide views but with blocks of woodland and hedgerows scattered in them, providing greater visual interest and variety. The narrow network of winding lanes, so characteristic of the Downs, must have an charm from the tradition paths that led between one pasture or farmland and another, either in pre-Norman times or after the Conquest. When they joined up to form major roadways they continued to follow their original sinuous pattern. Occasionally, as at Betteshanger, they follow a Roman road or prehistoric trackway. The dualling of the A256 near Betteshanger has now severed the Roman road there, as the creation of the estate in a previous century had already started to do. Betteshanger is one of many old parklands in this part of the Downs that provide distinctive features within the otherwise open landscape.

Betteshanger Park was once a sub-manor of nearby Northbourne Court. The new park may date from the rebuilding of the house in 1733 but it was Lord Northbourne who invited George Devey to enlarge the existing house and create the rambling mansion now used as a school. Many of the parkland trees survive although the playing fields now occupy the parkland grazing land, and much of the parkland to the east of the Roman Road has been ploughed up. The higher ground on all sides is thickly wooded and includes such species as Scots pine, larch, yew and Holm oak. It is very wooded around Betteshanger with one boundary of the estate being marked by a spectacular avenue of Holm oaks. The parkland at Fredville is very handsome; a secluded park near Snowdown Colliery with a drive leading through beech clumps and chestnuts to the wilderness on the top of the hill and then through pastures to a thatched lodge cottage in the south. Although set in a generally arable landscape, this encompasses a mix of large and smaller fields divided by hedgerows and shaws, through which the winding lanes meander. The estate itself is in part wooded.

Another group of parks is scattered across the Downs east of the A2, many of which were visited by Jane Austen in the 18th century. The best example is perhaps Goodnestone; a neat estate village developed around a medieval core and standing at the gates of Goodnestone Park. The house is predominantly 18th century but with additions set amongst terraced gardens. A similar pattern of mansion and church and cul-de sac is found at Knowlton, but here there is no village, just a cluster of farm buildings and estate cottages. The gardens here were laid out by Sir Reginald Blomfield, one of many old parklands in this part of the Downs that provide distinctive features within the otherwise open landscape.

Many place-names in the Downs date from the 13th century, and those incorporating 'Wald' are particularly common in east Kent. This includes Waldershare, Womenswold ('the woodland of the estate of Wingham'), Sibertswold as well as Waldershare, Waltham, Ringwould, East Studdal, West Studdal, and Wadding Wood. These all bear evidence of present or past extensive woodland. Altogether place names with 'wood' in them, in various local forms, appear fifteen times in this small stretch of the east Kent Downs. Taken with the surviving woodland in this part of the Downs and the AONB, they contribute to the theory of one great forest at one time that stretched from above Wye to the outskirts of Deal and the cliffs above Dover. Although substantially removed many hundreds of years ago, the extent of woodland and parkland has declined in this part of Kent, as elsewhere, over the last 30 years. In the 1960s there were some large blocks of broadleaf woodland at Betteshanger, as at Eastly Woods, in association with coniferous and mixed woodland. By this current decade, the woodland and parkland had been fragmented, partly due to 1987 storm damage, notably at Fredville Park and Waldershare.

Although a large percentage of the countryside here was arable by the 1960s, there was a substantial scattering of pasture at Knowlton Court, Nonington and north-west of Adisham. By the 1990's some of the large areas of pasture had been fragmented but in contrast other larger blocks had been created, as at Uffington Court. The orchards which developed around Malain's Farm, Eythorne and Ratling Court have now been removed. The pattern of historic small villages, such as Barfrestone, Ratling, Frogham and Eythorne has been changed by the additions of the colliery villages at Aylesham and Elvington. The small, dispersed settlements with the older houses built in brick and tile or occasionally stone or knapped flints, contrast strangely with the bleak and regular forms of the mining villages.

The dramatic steep slopes of the Lydden Valley (north-west of Dover) are a classic grazed landform which is characteristic of the adjacent downland in the 'East Kent Downs' character area of the Kent Downs AONB. This isolated area is dominated by a long, steep scarp and narrow valley, but is excluded from the AONB which follows the boundary of the railways line.
EAST KENT ARABLE BELT

PHOTOGRAPH

CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES
Open, rolling landform with large arable fields and well-wooded hilltops. Simple pattern to the landscape.
Narrow, winding lanes and dispersed settlement.
Parkland trees and 18th century estate villages.
Pine trees on field boundaries.
Disused collieries, and associated colliery villages.

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition
This is a simple, unified landscape with long views and relatively few detracting features - some of which are associated with the former collieries and the redevelopment of colliery sites. The area also comprises the gently rolling dip slope of the North Downs to the south of Canterbury. Large blocks of broadleaf woodland, grassland and frequent copses provide a strong ecological framework for the large arable fields. To the south of Canterbury, remnant shelterbelts are apparent in the large arable fields. Estate landscapes contribute some localised detail, such as conifer and parkland trees. These provide a more recent historical dimension which are in accord with the large scale of the rural and natural elements. This area is considered to be in good condition.

Sensitivity
The intermittent views within the rolling landscape contribute to a high sensitivity, despite the presence of large, occasional blocks of woodland. It is the ancient nature of the tranquil landscape, overlain with parkland features such as avenues of holm oak, which makes this a very distinct and unique landscape, sensitive to change. The large scale of the landform, and the tiny scattered hamlets where flint is much in evidence as a building material, link with more recent historical changes such as the Light Railway and the colliery buildings which are now an intrinsic part of the area’s character.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS
Conserve the large scale and manage the woodlands to promote wildlife interest.
Upgrade the ecological value of some of the arable land by reverting selected areas to grasslands.
Conserve the tranquillity and remote quality of the area.
Restore and reinforce ancient features which are part of the woodland character. Manage the historic estate and parkland, re-creating the occurrences of features such as avenues to a similar frequency and using elements of estate design in new development.
Conserve and interpret the heritage of colliery sites.
Conserve the remote settings of small hamlets and villages.

CONTEXT
Regional: North East Kent

Condition

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Sensitivity

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<td>RESTORE &amp; CREATE</td>
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</table>

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Pattern of elements: Unified.
Detracting features: Few.
Visual Unity: Strongly Unified.
Cultural integrity: Variable.
Ecological integrity: Moderate.
Functional Integrity: Coherent.

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

CONSERVE AND REINFORCE.
Conserve large blocks of broadleaf woodland, allowing no fragmentation of woodland areas.
Reinforce the ancient characteristics of the woodland
Conserve tranquil, open views across the rural landscape
Conserve pastures and unimproved grasslands, linking with other such areas on adjacent Downs
Conserve and reinforce the characteristics of narrow roads
Conserve features associated with historic parkland
Conserve remote village settings
Conserve historic colliery sites

prepared for Kent County Council by Jacobs Babbie
This generally flat, farmed character area is derived from the Tertiary Beds, most notably the Thanet Beds in east Kent that overlie the chalk. This is a mixed landscape that fringes the chalk lands on their northern boundary east of Herne Bay, around Maypole, Hersden, Stodmarsh, Wingham, Ash and Woodnesborough. The belt ranges from three to seven kilometres wide and corresponds approximately to the 10-40m contours.

The Tertiary Beds are fine-grained grey and brown sands with local silty clays. Elsewhere, Head Brickearths, derived from loamy parent-rock such as the Thanet and Sandgate Beds, and also from Aeolian origins, are found extensively in association with the Thanet Beds around Wickhambreaux, Wingham Green, Littlebourne and Patrixbourne, corresponding to many of the former fruit-growing areas. Extensive deposits of Head Brickearths are found north of Ash, around Knowlton, and at Worth.

These drifts have produced deep silty soils, often affected with groundwater. Areas of waterlogging occur south of Wingham and Ash. Those soils with groundwater problems traditionally support cereals, potatoes and field vegetables. Significant areas of orchard and horticultural crops occur on the better drained, higher grade soils at East Stourmouth, Preston, Elmstone, Westmarsh, Upper Goldstone and Perry and to the east at Woodnesborough.

Market gardening was first brought to the Sandwich area in Kent by the Flemish in Tudor times, and there are still farmhouses of Dutch style to be seen.

A very small pocket of hops can still be found south-east of Shatterling, but this is now a rare feature of this landscape. Some of the orchards north of Ash are now being grubbed up and the growers are diversifying, for example into viticulture; changing the character of the countryside in this area.

Otherwise the area is mainly large-scale arable with limited grassland around Richborough, Wingham, Stodmarsh, Upstreet, Maypole and Ford south-east of Hunters Forstal. In the 1960s there was a greater scattering of pasture and a wider spread of orchard. It is now mostly an open landscape which slopes gently down to the adjacent marshland and the river valley of the Stour. Views are often very long, for instance from the Roman road at Hersden across to Thanet, and from Grove Hill across to Stodmarsh and the Stour valley.

Many of the villages such as Chislet, Stodmarsh, Upstreet, Wingham, Wickhambreaux, and Ickham are of historic interest, as are the bigger settlements such as Ash and Sandwich. Wingham was formerly a small market town with houses dating from the 13th century. It is a simple one-street town, lacking a wide market place or a square.

Settlements are often found on the boundaries of parishes, indicating shared, or intercommunable pasture within formerly wooded country. Examples of this are at Twitham, which runs across the parishes of Wingham and Goodnestone. The borough and manor of Tickenhurst (the young goats wood) was situated in Heronden in Eastry and partly in Hammill in Woodnesborough, divided between two parishes.

Between Wingham and Ash is an enclosed and secluded landscape with occasional fruit and even hops scattered among the arable fields. A small-scale agricultural landscape persists around small hamlets with hedged lanes, shelterbelts and a narrow twisting road network.

The landscape is increasingly open east of Ash with long views to Richborough Power Station. The few undulations disappear, field boundaries are less in evidence, and the landscape becomes increasingly level as it grades towards the Wantsum and Lower Stour Marshes.

Small pockets of industry do occur such as the proposed business use for the old Chislet and Betteshanger Collieries.

Prepared for Kent County Council by Jacobs Babtie


## EAST KENT HORTICULTURAL BELT

### PHOTOGRAPH

![Photograph of landscape](image)

### CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Enclosed by hedgerows and shelterbelts, medium scale, gradually sloping or flat. Some contained, small-scale landscapes in the central area. Long views from higher ground. Coastal and marsh edges. Diverse agriculture with vineyards, soft fruit, orchards and glasshouses. Small isolated linear villages, some piecemeal development along roads based on original small hamlets or farms. Isolated, square, buff-coloured farm cottages. Very narrow winding roads following the field and drainage pattern. Regimented, intensive feel to the farmland. Some blocks of unmanaged land, particularly towards the marginal wetlands.

### LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

The landscape pattern continues to reflect small-scale fields of mixed use, enclosed by shelterbelts. Although increasing arable cultivation is now opening up the landscape, there are few detracting features. The area is known for ancient and historic settlement sites, but this element is not apparent in the existing small farming hamlets. The intensive agricultural and horticultural use of the farmland, in addition to limited natural habitats and some loss of vegetative field boundaries means that the ecological value is weak.

### SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

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<td>Ecological integrity:</td>
<td>Weak.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Functional Integrity:</td>
<td>Weak.</td>
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### LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

Create a new landscape pattern to embrace the evolving intensified and fragmented land use.

Create nuclei of distinctive small-scale landscape within the more open farmland.

Reinforce the historic enclosure and drainage pattern by managing existing shelterbelts and enhancing drainage channels and wetland.

Ensure that new shelterbelts/hedges are of sympathetic species.

Reinforce the character of the marsh-edge, creating wetland areas.

### SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

**CREATE AND REINFORCE.**

Create nuclei of small-scale landscapes within the area

Reinforce drainage patterns and shelterbelts as functional and visual elements within the landscape

Create an edge to the marsh areas by encouraging the development of wetland areas

---

Prepared for Kent County Council by Jacobs Babbage
This character area is part of the wider landscape of the North Kent Fruit Belt, which runs in a broad band between Gillingham and Whitstable and occupies land between the coastal marshes and the chalk landscapes of the North Downs. This is a predominantly rural, agricultural landscape characterised by a complex and highly structured landscape pattern of orchards, shelterbelts (particularly belts of poplar and alder), fields of arable, pasture and horticultural crops, and blocks of woodland. Apart from the urban area of Faversham, the area contains only small, scattered villages and farm complex which contribute to its quiet, rural character and landscape diversity. Similarly, much of the road network is rural in character but the M2, A299, and A2 have a localised urbanising effect.

Along the coastal belt, the low-lying alluvial plain upon which the marshes have developed, is framed and punctuated by outcrops of London Clay, brick earths and gravel. These create elevated landform features of hills and ridges, such as Norman's Hill, Graveney Hill, Cleve Hill and Horse Hill and also form the rising ground of the marshes, hinterland. The reduced susceptibility to flooding and more freely-drained and fertile soils, has encouraged the development of the rich pattern of orchards and productive farmland on this higher ground. Almost all of the land above five metre contour has thus been intensively cultivated, although some pockets of permanent grassland do still remain. The elevated landform has also provided a safer location for settlement and all of the study area's scattered farms and villages occupy this higher ground.

Southwards from the coastal plain, the ground rises gently along the junction of the Upper Chalk of the Kent Downs and the clays and sands of the Thanet Formation. Along this transition from the west of the area, the subtle relief is punctuated by a number of small valley forms which are only minor features in the landscape. To the south-east, however, landform becomes noticeably more complex, forming a series of hills and valleys, and reflects a more mixed geological formation of clays, sands, gravels and chalk.

Landcover is dominated by a richly varied pattern of agricultural land uses. Orchards are the most distinctive feature of the landscape and are still widespread, although there is evidence of some decline around Elverton. Mixed in amongst them are fields of pasture, arable and horticultural crops, all of which are typically defined by strong hedgerows or tall shelterbelts, within which alder and poplar are the distinctive species. Woodland generally occurs as scattered small stands within the mosaic of orchards and farmland but towards the eastern end of the study area, develops into extensive areas of predominantly semi-natural broadleaved woodland.

In general, the intensively farmed landscape of the Fruit Belt has comparatively few features of specific wildlife value. However, the fragments of woodland that occur within it, and particularly the extensive semi-natural broadleaved woodlands to the east (parts of which are designated as SSSI or SNCI) are of nature conservation importance. In addition, the strong structure of hedgerows, trees and shelterbelts that characterise the fruit belt is of some value to wildlife as cover, feeding and breeding habitat, despite its predominantly non-native character.

Evidence of prehistoric, Roman, Anglo-Saxon, and Medieval remains suggest that the area has had a long history of settlement. A particular concentration of Roman Villas, cemeteries and artefacts have been recorded around Buckland and Deerton Street and around Faversham, Ospringe and Oare. Many of the existing settlements are likely to have been in existence in Saxon times, including Faversham itself, but much of the visible archaeological evidence relates to buildings with medieval origins, such as the manor houses and churches at Teynham Street, Graveney, Goodnestone, Oare, Ewell, Hernhill, Norton and Provender. Recorded post-medieval historical features include the oasthouse at Boughton Field, the mid 19th century tower at Holly Hill and the beacon and telegraph station at Beacon Hill.
**EASTERN FRUIT BELT**

**PHOTOGRAPH**

![Image of the eastern fruit belt landscape](image)

**CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES**
- Rural character, sense of remoteness and privacy.
- Enclosed and diverse.
- Strong woodland blocks.
- Orchards and hops, shelterbelts. Large pockets of open farmland. Undulating landform.

**LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS**

**Condition**
- The landscape is coherent as a mixed farming landscape, but has lost the diversity of form associated with widespread fruit growing, and has a degraded aspect, resulting from detracting features such as post and wire fencing, redundant hedged field boundaries and dead elms. Small pockets of woodland within large areas of intensively farmed arable land represent weak clusters of ecological value. The cultural integrity of the area, however, is variable - the remote, rural character and large farmsteads remain as important features, although field boundaries and shelterbelts are declining due to the change in land use.

**Sensitivity**
- The large farmsteads and cluster villages are characteristic of this area, but do not reflect a strong time-depth in their materials or scale. Natural elements within the landscape such as field boundaries and woodlands are no longer distinctive, and the use of species such as alder and poplar in the remaining shelterbelts also reduces the historic value. Visibility is moderate as, although the landscape is relatively open, the landform is not a dominant feature in the view. The sensitivity of the area is therefore considered to be low.

**LANDSCAPE ACTIONS**
- Create a new landscape pattern which responds to the large-scale of the current land use. Within this new framework, enhance the existing tranquil areas and create new large blocks of woodland which follow the undulating landform, encompassing arable and other cultivated areas.
- Create woodland enclosure on the existing open arable areas and shelter-belt - type demarcation for rural lanes.
- Create areas of less intensive cultivation.

**SUMMARY OF ACTIONS**
- CREATE.
  - Large blocks of woodland to reflect the landform
  - Enclosure for rural lanes
  - Areas of less intensive cultivation
  - Tranquil areas
The clay vale of the Low Weald stretches along the foot of the escarpment from Riverhill to Shipbourne. As it does so, the scarp relaxes into a series of gentle, rounded slopes, among which the medieval manor of Ightham Mote, built of local timber and ragstone, lies concealed. There are very few trimmed hedges in this area but recent tree planting along the field edges around Fairlawne has imposed a strong, ornamental pattern into the agricultural landscape, complementing the more formal parkland nearby. Thick shaws of mature, deciduous trees are also prominent, the heavy Wealden clay favouring oak. In contrast with the wooded ridge, woodland occurs in small, discrete blocks, often associated with sporting uses or streams and ponds.

The Eastern Low Weald lies within the larger Low Weald character area of the Kent Downs AONB. The clay vale of the Low Weald meets the scarp of the Greensand Ridge between Crockham Hill in the west and Ivy Hatch in the east. Small springs, seeping out from between the upper layers of greensand, have cut a series of deep furrows into this scarp, before draining eventually into the flat Eden Valley in the south.

In contrast with the wooded greensand, the heavy, wet clay favours grassland and the emphasis here is on intensively grazed fields, separated by shaws. Between these woods, piecemeal hedgerow removal has left a considerable number of former hedgerow trees isolated in fields abutted by fences. However, the increasing number of horses kept in this area is reintroducing smaller fields into the landscape, but these paddocks are usually bounded by temporary fences, rather than new hedges. The clays of the Low Weald were traditionally used to construct the timber-framed buildings so typical of this area. Nevertheless, the underlying sandstones were also widely used and combinations of these materials are not unusual.
EASTERN LOW WEALD: THE LOW WEALD

PHOTOGRAPH

CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES
Gentle, rounded slopes of the clay vale. Thick shaws, discrete blocks of deciduous woodland, much mature oak. Formal parkland with strong ornamental pattern.

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition
This is a strongly unified landscape in which the location and nature of scattered farmsteads, estate houses and farming villages reflect the landform and the pattern of land use, from the undulating scarp-base to more open arable fields on the flatter land. There is a strong network of field boundaries and small woodlands, also linked with streams and pastures; this diversity of semi-natural habitats provides a robust ecological network throughout much of the area. There are very few detracting features in the landscape - some senescent oaks and over-mature parkland trees are detractors. Otherwise, built development has a high positive impact, and includes historic and vernacular building, much use of ragstone and hung tiled facing, cottages with low sloping roofs and large Georgian/Victorian frontages to some houses. The rural heritage features of tree-cover and internal hedged field boundaries are also in good condition. Overall, the area is considered to be in very good condition.

Sensitivity
The landform is apparent within intermittent views over the landscape; visibility is therefore moderate. The landscape pattern, based on the historic farmsteads and estate parkland, has a very strong historic influence which is evident in the built-form, the irregular small and medium scale field boundaries, the hedged highways and the relationship of the land use to the settlement patterns. Highways have a more ancient influence, and there are notable common and green areas thought to be of more ancient origin, but the majority of elements are characteristically historic.

This area is considered to be of moderate sensitivity.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

Reinforce the hedgerow network by replanting and ensuring that long-term management plans are in place to safeguard the existing small - medium scale of the enclosures. Maintain and reinforce pastoral and top-fruit land use. Reinforce the diverse use of the woodlands such as game cover, recreation, timber production, and conserve the emphasis on broadleaf cover. Reinforce the estate parkland by promoting programmes of estate tree-planting and reinforcing boundary features of ragstone walls and hedgerows with mature trees. Reinforce the instance of mature trees in all hedgerows by initiating tree-planting schemes within farmland and along highways. Conserve the isolation of historic farmsteads by conserving the rural and tranquil setting of settlements. Conserve the characteristics of the narrow roads and reinforce the occurrence of mature standards along the roadside. Conserve the settings of greens and commons.

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

CONSERVE AND REINFORCE.
Conserve broadleaf woodland
Conserve the frequency of tree cover
Reinforce the diversity of woodland use
Conserve and reinforce estate parkland - including tree cover and boundary features
Reinforce mature standards within farmland and along roads
Conserve the rural setting of settlements, and the setting of greens and commons

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

CONTEXT
Regional: Kent Downs AONB

Condition

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<tr>
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Sensitivity

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Sensitivity

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Prepared for Kent County Council by Jacobs Babtie
This area forms part of the extensive complex of coastal marshes that flanks the Swale Estuary along its southern and northern shores. Although rather less extensive than the marshes across the estuary on the Isle of Sheppey, the Eastern Swale Marshes nevertheless possess many of the same defining characteristics, such as open, flat grazing land with broad skies, few landscape features and a strong sense of remoteness, wildness and exposure.

These qualities are particularly distinct on the outer parts of the marshes where they are most remote from human influences and are closely related to the wilder landscapes of the inter-tidal zone. Inland, however, the edge of the marsh is typically defined by a sharp contrast in land use, between the open grazing land of the marshes and the complex landscape of orchards, pastures, shelterbelts and copses that characterise the fruit belt. Such pleasing and distinctive contrasts occur to a lesser extent in the Western Swale Marshes but are absent from the Isle of Sheppey, where there is typically a more gradual transition from open marshland to open arable farmland.

Landform and geology have a profound influence on the character of the marshes which, having been formed from marine alluvial deposits, have a distinctively flat relief. However, localised outcrops of London Clay produce distinctive landform features of ridges and hills (e.g., Norman’s, Cleve, Graveney and Horse Hills) which have a prominence out of proportion to their modest relief. These hills are actually located within the Fruit Belt character area but have a strong influence on the character of the marshes.

Construction of the sea wall at the outermost edge of the marshes has reduced the extent of semi-natural saltmarsh vegetation to just a narrow strip along the sides of Faversham Creek and a couple of small areas beyond the sea wall at Uplees and Nagden Marshes. Enclosure from the sea has created extensive areas of traditional grazing marsh characterised by rough grassland and patterned by a complex system of natural and man-made drainage dykes, pools and fleets which supply freshwater for stock and often support reeds and emergent vegetation. Unlike the marshes to the north of the estuary, the Eastern Swale Marshes remain predominantly under grazing management and have not been extensively ploughed and cultivated although quite extensive areas of grassland have been improved by applications of fertiliser and drainage, such as at Graveney Marshes.

Apart from some notable blocks of woodland on the enclosed marshes near Graveney, tree cover is very limited and the landscape is generally devoid of features, placing greater emphasis on the presence of grazing animals and wildfowl. However, the close proximity of the Fruit-Belt, with its strong structure of orchards, shelterbelts and copses, provides some shelter and tree cover along the inner edges of the marshes at Teynham Level and Graveney Marshes. To the north of Faversham, mineral extraction has consumed part of the former marshland at Ham Marshes, adjacent to Oare Creek, and has created areas of open water and developing wetland habitats. Further inland alongside Faversham Creek, land use is mixed and includes areas of industry, housing, allotments and riverside open space.

The nature conservation importance of the inter-tidal habitats and grazing marshes of the Swale Estuary is recognised by various national and international designations. Thus, a large part of the study area is included within a much larger, internationally important Special Protection Area (SPA)/Ramsar site and also within the national designation of Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). These designations cover most of the remaining areas of unimproved grazing marsh and the inter-tidal habitats of the estuary and its tidal creeks, parts of which are managed as a nature reserve by the Kent Trust for Nature Conservation. Some smaller pockets of reclaimed marshland to the east of Graveney are noted for their local wildlife value and designated as Sites of Nature Conservation Importance (SNCI).

These habitats are important for their flora, which contain some nationally scarce plant species, for their invertebrate populations and, most importantly, for their value for birds, supporting significant numbers of breeding, wintering and migrating wildfowl and waders. The dykes, areas of open water and seasonally flooded grassland add to the value of these areas for birds and other fauna.

The Swale Marshes have been reclaimed and used for sheep grazing since at least the medieval period when, as a result of a high incidence of flooding in the 11th, 12th and 13th centuries, the system of sea walls was built to protect the land. New defences were constructed between 1570 and 1630 and these boundaries still establish the seaward boundary of the marshes. Fishing was also an important activity in coastal settlements such as Oare and Luddenham from at least the medieval period.

The most prominent historical evidence, however, relates to industrial activities on the marshes. Evidence of medieval salt workings can be seen in the form of low mounds on Graveney Marshes while the remains of late 18th century gunpowder factories survive on the low-lying creekside areas near Oare. Remains of 19th and early 20th century windmills also survive in this area.
EASTERN SWALE MARSHES

CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES
Remote, wild and exposed.
Creekside townscape and waterside buildings.
Poorly managed fences. Intrusion of power lines

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition
The landscape has a unified pattern of elements in which visual detractors such as post and wire fencing and transmission towers are highly visible. Caravan plots are also visual detractors in some areas. The strong network of ditches and creeks defines areas of grazing marsh, and the overall ecological interest is therefore strong. The infrequent settlement has a moderately positive impact on the area. The heritage feature of the ditches varies and may respond to appropriate management in some instances. The condition of the area is considered to be very good.

Sensitivity
Whilst visibility is very high, and obviously results in the high sensitivity of the landscape, the sense of place is considered to be moderate. Settlement patterns are characteristic but the built form is largely indistinct. The general landscape pattern based on the sea defence and drainage network has a characteristically historic depth.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS
Conserve the remote quality of the landscape and isolated settlements.
Conserve the ecological interest by the sensitive management of the ditch network and the grasslands.

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

CONSERVE.
Conserve the remote quality of the area
Conserve ditches, creeks and grasslands and encourage the diversity of wildlife species by sensitive land management.
The Eastern Thames Marshes character area takes in all the lower-lying land along the northern coast of the Hoo Peninsula between the edge of Gravesend in the west and Allhallows in the east. This zone encompasses a mix of traditional grazing marsh, marshland converted to arable production, and areas dominated by mineral workings. Its particular character, however, is significantly influenced by its aspect over the Thames Estuary towards the heavily industrialised Canvey Island, with its refinery complex and port facilities. This contrasts with the generally quieter views observed from similar areas of marsh to the south.

In common with all areas of marshland, landform and geology are responsible for the very distinctive low-lying and flat character of the landscape which has developed on marine alluvium. In addition, the extraction of underlying chalk in the Cliffe area has had a significant impact on landscape character in this local area.

There has been a significant decline in the area of traditional grazing marsh over the past forty years, largely due to conversion to arable production. This has been most acute at the eastern end of the marshes. Mineral extraction around the Cliffe area has also consumed substantial areas of former marshland, replacing it with a landscape of lakes and wetlands. Extensive grazing marshes do still survive, however, at Cliffe and Shorne Marshes. Towards the edge of Gravesend, non-agricultural land uses appear, including a rifle-range, and there is an increased incidence of urban/industrial features, such as overhead power lines and railway lines.

The landscape and nature conservation significance of the Thames Marshes is widely recognised and the entire extent of this character area is included within one or more landscape or nature conservation designation (SPA, Ramsar, ESA). The most valuable areas of grazing marsh are managed by nature conservation organisations (RSPB) to maintain and enhance their value for wetland birds while the ESA designation extends across arable areas in order that opportunities for reversion to marshland can be encouraged through this mechanism.

There is evidence that this landscape has been settled since the Mesolithic period. However, most finds date from Roman times when salt panning and pottery were the main industries. The quarries at Cliffe and Higham reflect the former defensive importance of this area.

Culturally the Eastern Thames Marshes have an association with Charles Dickens who lived on their fringes. Also his well known work ‘Great Expectations’ is set here.
### Landscape Analysis

**Condition**

This is a coherent landscape which is considered to be in moderate condition. The ditches, marshland, creeks and grasslands provide a strong ecological network. However, the heritage elements, such as ditches, are in varying condition. There are many visual detractors which range from small structures on the marsh (tipping, post and wire, bird hides) to urban and industrial developments. Built development has a high negative impact on the area.

**Sensitivity**

The time depth to this landscape is extremely varied. The historic ditches and grasslands are characteristic, but there are also more recent elements such as military and industrial installations which could be considered unique, and lines of ancient tradeways which skirt the marshes. The flat landscape is the dominant element of the open view, and therefore the landscape sensitivity is very high.

### Landscape Actions

**Conserve and Restore.**

Conserve the historic ditch and sea defence pattern, using sensitive management to realise the full ecological potential of wetlands and grasslands. Restore the sensitive management of grasslands, encouraging the re-establishment of grazing marshland and unimproved grasslands.

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### Summary of Analysis

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**Prepared for Kent County Council by Jacobs Babbage**
EDEN VALLEY

A landscape of flat pasture land and more open arable cultivation, extending from Edenbridge to Penshurst station, and crossed by the meandering River Eden and its many small streams. The valley is generally unwooded, and in many places the riparian vegetation has been removed leaving little clue to the river’s presence. Some hedgerows and hedgerow trees remain but these can be infrequent. Despite this the air is filled with birdsong.

Attractive groups of vernacular farm buildings, of weatherboard and brick are scattered in the landscape, and historic farmsteads of Hall House origin, such as Delaware Farm, are also characteristic. Although there is now sometimes split ownership between houses and their land, the farming patterns are generally intact and the split has not affected the appearance of the landscape so far. The historic park of Hever Castle lies at the boundary of this character area with the neighbouring High Weald.

The London to Uckfield railway lines cross the character area east of Edenbridge, contributing to that village’s expansion into a small town. The Redhill to Ashford line crosses north of the valley and has contributed to development between the Redhill line and the B2027 at Bough Beech. Proposals to widen the track may cause intrusion in the rural landscape and attract development.

The development at Church Street, Hever and Lingfield Roads in Edenbridge are very dominant in the river valley. Elsewhere, attractive views from the valley floor often extend to the wooded High Weald beyond which folds round and encloses the landscape to the south.