DARTFORD BOROUGH COUNCIL

LOCAL PLAN AND STRATEGY REVIEW

District priorities for nature and the wider environment from the local plan and other strategies

To note: The Environmental Improvement Plan 2023, Environmental goals, have been used to categorize the district's environmental targets in this review.

SECTION 1: THREATS AND PRESSURES ON THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

1.1 Population pressures (Dartford Local Plan,2024)

The Local Plan needs to respond to a range of key Borough social and economic factors including:

• A rapidly growing population needing new local infrastructure, particularly for health and education.
• A population profile that includes a high percentage of children and young adults who will require sufficient educational, employment and leisure opportunities, and access to housing, to meet needs for the future.
• A sizeable labour workforce with high employment rates but a limited choice of local high order/ professional local job opportunities.
• Requirements to support healthy living with the potential for greater walking and cycling, promoting clean air and access to the countryside and greenspace.
• An ageing population that should have the right kind community infrastructure easily available to meet needs.

1.2 Flood Risk (Dartford Local Plan,2024)

The Dartford Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA) identifies that fluvial and tidal flooding are the main sources of flood risk in the Borough, though surface water, groundwater and sewer flooding are also a potential risk.

The fluvial flood risk mainly arises from the River Darent, and the tidal flood risk mainly arises from the River Thames and extends into the lower reaches of the River Darent.

It is important that development in flood risk areas does not increase flood risk or displace flood water and that development is designed to incorporate flood resilience measures such as raised finished floor levels and flood dispersal openings. It should be noted that flood dispersal openings do not include underfloor void areas.

There is a network of tidal and fluvial flood defences in the area. The Dartford Barrier and flood defences along the River Thames frontage protect the Borough from tidal flooding. Climate change will lead to changes to rainfall and sea levels as well as increasing the likelihood and severity of more extreme wet, dry and storm events. The SFRA considers the potential impact of climate change on flood risk in the Borough.

1.3 Transport Pressures (Dartford Local Plan,2024)

Dartford Railway Station has become the busiest station in Kent with an annual passenger usage of 4.66 million in 2019/202. Between 2019 and 2020, usage continued to grow. More people use Dartford railway station than Ebbsfleet

International and all the other stations in the Borough put together. Swanscombe and Stone Crossing stations have recently seen particular proportionate growth in use.

The A282/ M25 Dartford Crossing and the arterial A2 London-Dover routes generate high volumes of traffic flow through the Borough. This can be attributed to be the principal cause of the Borough's higher carbon emissions per capita than the regional average, given that the majority of emissions are from transport sources

High levels of mobility that puts pressure on public transport and creates traffic/ congestion in the Borough contributing to pollution levels.

SECTION 2: TARGETS AND PRIORITIES FOR NATURE RECOVERY (GOAL 1)

Unless otherwise stated, the following information in section 2 came from the Dartford local plan, 2024.

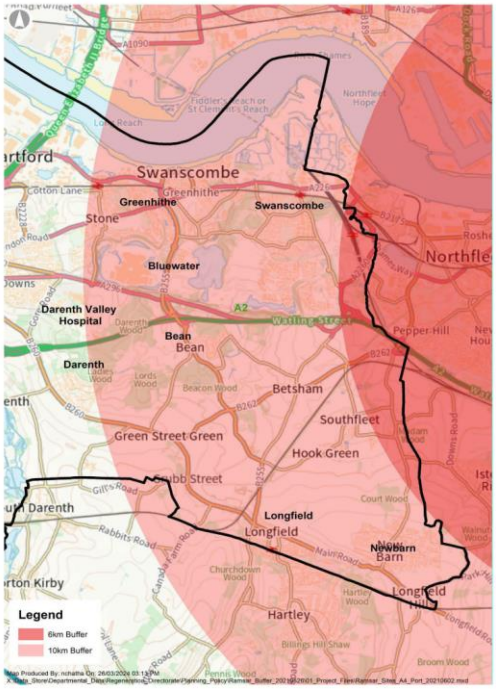
2.1 PROTECTING HABITATS

2.1.1 Internationally Designated Sites

The Thames Estuary and Marshes, Medway Estuary and Marshes and The Swale Special Protection Areas (SPAs) and Ramsar sites, which comprise wetland sites of international biodiversity importance, are located outside the Borough but have the potential to be affected by some proposals in the eastern part of the Borough. Studies have shown declines in the numbers of birds using these sites which could be caused by human disturbance from recreational use of the marshes. The evidence shows that residential development within 6km and larger residential development between 6km and 10km of the SPAs and Ramsar sites could lead to an increase in recreational use. Both the 0-6km and 6km-10km zones affect proposed residential developments in the east of Dartford Borough.

Under the Habitats Regulations, there is a need for the local planning authority to screen for and, if necessary, carry out appropriate assessment for all proposed developments which have the potential to affect the biodiversity interest of SPAs and Ramsar sites. The assessments need to show if the development would have any potential significant impacts on the integrity of the SPAs/ Ramsar sites. If there are, the assessment needs to show how these would be avoided, mitigated, managed and funded.

<u>Access within 6km or 10km of the North Kent SPAs and RAMSAR Sites</u>



2.1.2 Nationally designated sites

Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs):
The Borough's existing SSSIs include the Swanscombe Skull site (which is also a National Nature Reserve) and the ancient semi-natural woodland at Darenth Wood. The recently designated Swanscombe Marine Conservation Zone supports scarce species.

Marine Conservation Zones are areas that protect a range of nationally important, rare or threatened habitats and species. The Swanscombe Marine Conservation Zone was designated in May 2019.

The protected features are:
• Intertidal mud, a broadscale marine habitat
• Tentacled lagoon worm, a species of marine fauna.

The Metropolitan Green Belt
The Green Belt encompasses more than half the Borough, nearly all of Dartford's countryside: extending across the south into Sevenoaks and Gravesham, and also a less large area at the River Darent's approach to the River Thames, maintaining the openness of north Dartford from London. An outcome of this has been to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment and to protect Dartford's valuable agricultural land. It has also, to some extent, contributed to preserving the setting and historic character of some villages and rural settlements in the Borough. Moreover, the Green Belt has assisted in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.

Policy M12: Green Belt

> *1. Dartford Borough's Green Belt is shown on the Policies Map, and its essential characteristics are its openness and permanence. Inappropriate development in the Green Belt will be resisted in accordance with national planning policy.*
>
> *2. Inappropriate development is by definition harmful to the Green Belt and will only be approved in very special circumstances. Very special circumstances will not exist unless potential harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm, is clearly outweighed by other considerations.*
>
> *3. In assessing other harm, the following criteria will be included in the local planning authority's consideration:*
>
> *a. The extent of intensification of the use of the site;*
> *b. The impact of an increase in activity and disturbance resulting from the development, both on and off the site, including traffic movement and parking, light pollution and noise;*
> *c. The impact on biodiversity and wildlife;*

d. The impact on visual amenity or character taking into account the extent of screening required; and e. Impacts arising from infrastructure required by the development.

4. In assessing harm, development proposals will need to accord with, the objectives, purposes and essential characteristics of the Green Belt, particularly in terms of preserving permanent openness. Developments will also be assessed against the following criteria where applicable.

Objectives for a green and attractive environment:

G1: Protecting Green Belt land to maintain a distinct and enduring open environment for the Borough and the positive setting of Dartford's villages and rural heritage assets, retaining overall countryside character and openness of the Green Belt.

2.1.4 Locally designated sites

Local Wildlife Sites (Green Infrastructure, 2021):

Local Wildlife Sites (LWSs) are areas which are important for the conservation of wildlife in the administrative areas of Kent and Medway. They may support threatened habitats, such as chalk grassland or ancient woodland, or may be important for the wild plants or animals which are present.

Open Spaces

Policy M13: Green and Blue Infrastructure and Open Space Provision

1. New development will be required to contribute to the Green and Blue Infrastructure network as follows:
• Sites of 20ha and over: at least 30% of the site area
• Sites of between 2ha and 20ha: at least 20% of the site area
• Sites of less than 2ha will be considered on a site by site basis for a proportionate
contribution

This should include multi-functional land, providing opportunities for formal and informal recreation, habitats and corridors for wildlife, native trees/ landscaping, and other measures to mitigate and adapt to the impacts of climate change. Ongoing maintenance and management of such areas will need to be demonstrated.

Where the provision of on-site Green and Blue Infrastructure or public realm open space is not appropriate or feasible, contributions may be sought for offsite improvements of open space in the vicinity of the site.

Existing Open Space & Green Space

2. Protected Local Green Spaces as defined on the Policies Map will be retained (or enhanced) to maintain their openness or special local role. They must continue to provide high quality spaces to support attractive, distinctive and sustainable neighbourhoods. Development of Protected Local Green Spaces will be refused unless very special circumstances apply, considering national and Dartford Green Belt policy (particularly Policy M12 criteria 1-3 and 13-14).

3. Borough Open Spaces will maintain their overall green environmental value. Development on Borough Open Space will not be permitted unless it is clearly demonstrated that one of the following criteria is satisfied:
a. Where the space will be retained in its current primary function, with development limited to a small proportion of land, the proposal must support or enhance the existing space in this overall green infrastructure role. The proposal must not lead to any significant loss or deterioration in quantity and level of open space provision.
b. Where development will result in a significant loss in the quantity of open space, like for like re-provision must be delivered within easy, safe and secure walking distance of the site, unless it is clearly demonstrated that the existing provision is surplus to current and future requirements for biodiversity and/ or the amenity and health/ wellbeing of residents. The replacement must be shown to be of an equivalent type and of equal or greater quantity and quality to that being lost.

4. Development of other public amenity space will only be permitted where a convincing justification is made. This must take account of:
a. the quality, quantity and function of the space relative to alternative provision in the locality; and
b. the benefits/ disbenefits arising from the proposed development

Borough Open Spaces (Green Infrastructure Paper, 2021):

The Council is also proposing to designate new BOS sites, amend some existing ones and delete the whole or part of six existing BOS designations. The list of sites and the justification for the changes is included in Appendix 1. In this respect:

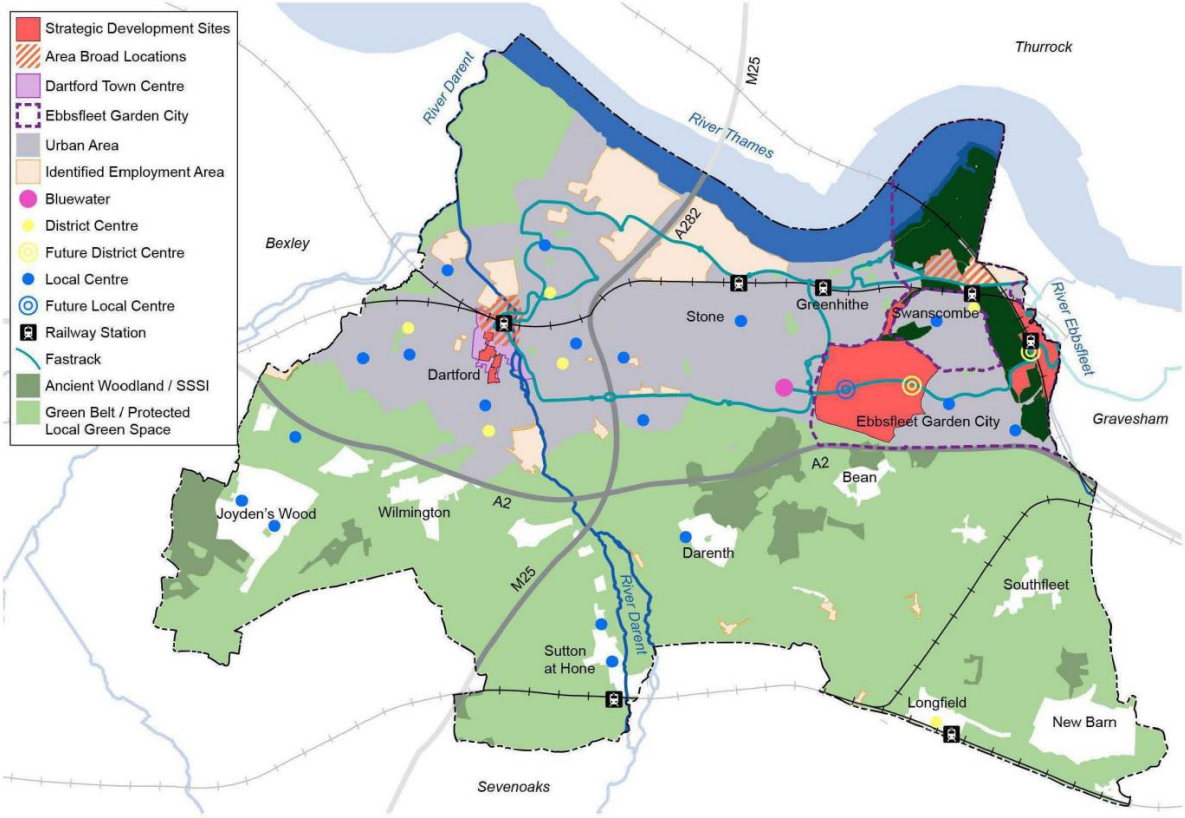
• The new sites largely relate to new open spaces already provided or in the process of being provided within new developments but they also include two areas of woodland within established residential areas.

• The amended sites take on board implementations of road layouts within new development and changes to Wildlife Site boundaries.

• The whole or parts of BOS sites proposed for deletion are those that are already designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest which provides strong protection to the biodiversity interest plus Glentworth Club on Lowfield Street and Land at Applegarth Drive at Questor, Wilmington. The deletion of the latter two sites is

justified on the basis that they are used for parking/ servicing and employment premises respectively and neither comprises open space.

Key Diagram:



2.1.5 Green Infrastructure Network

Borough Green Grid

The Borough has a network of multi-functional green space and water bodies (Green and Blue Infrastructure) which contributes to the wider Green Grid. It includes parks, playing pitches, rivers/ lakes, sites and habitats which are important for wildlife, other green areas and more urban landscaped public realm areas. Alone or in combination, they are essential to accommodating development that maintains the character of the Borough, with informal recreation, sport, amenity, landscape and biodiversity value, as well as having the potential to mitigate the efects of climate change.

The more strategic areas of Green and Blue Infrastructure in the Borough include Dartford Park, Dartford Marshes, Beacon Wood and Darenth Country Parks, Dartford Heath, Joyden's Wood, River Darent and Sutton at Hone lakes.

The designated sites, priority habitats, key water bodies and Biodiversity Opportunity Areas form part of the Green Grid network.

It is expected that development will avoid any adverse impacts on existing biodiversity features, including designated sites, priority habitats and species, and waterbodies. Where impacts cannot be avoided, they should be minimised, mitigated and, as a last resort, loss or damage should be compensated in accordance with the biodiversity mitigation hierarchy (Policy S3).

Tree Coverage

The south of the Borough generally is open, low and gently undulating. It includes significant areas of woodland, much of which is ancient woodland. The rivers are key landscape features, with the River Thames forming the northern boundary of the Borough and the valleys of the Rivers Darent and Ebbsfleet running from south to north.

Policy M14: Biodiversity and Landscape

> *5. In all development proposals, including works to trees protected under a Tree Preservation Order, existing tree coverage, hedgerows and other landscape features should be retained wherever possible. If retention is demonstrated not to be feasible and/ or removal is justified, replacement provision should be of an appropriate native tree species or landscape feature which reflects the maturity, canopy cover and location of that being replaced.*

Green and Blue Infrastructure Vision (Draft Net Zero Strategy, 2023):

Existing green spaces, habitats, and tree coverage will be protected and enhanced, and new provision will be made, to absorb carbon dioxide, support biodiversity and reduce surface water runoff. The biodiversity mitigation hierarchy (avoid, reduce, mitigate, compensate) will apply, with the priority being to protect, enhance and integrate existing features of biodiversity interest. Achieving biodiversity net gain will play an important part in delivering this strategy.

Corporate Themes- Environment (Corporate Plan, 2024):

Objectives:

- To encourage a more responsible approach to consumption of resources and the management of waste
- Protect, enhance and increase green space for the benefit of people, wildlife and effective sequestration of carbon
- Existing green spaces, habitats, and tree coverage will be protected and enhanced, and new provision will be made, to absorb carbon dioxide, support biodiversity and reduce surface water runoff

- Protect good quality trees which contribute to the green environment and also absorb CO2 and provide urban cooling and plant new trees and landscaping where appropriate and opportunities arise

Key Actions:

- Ensure planning policy protects urban open spaces and green infrastructure from development and maintains a Green Belt from inappropriate development
- Use of Tree Preservation Orders to protect trees where appropriate

Climate Change Strategy:

The Borough includes a number of important natural environments, including some extensive Sites of Special Scientifc Interest. In order to provide resilience to wildlife affected by rising temperatures, it is essential that the network of habitats is protected and improved. The natural environment as a whole has an important role to play in mitigating the impacts of climate change.

New legislation will be applied to optimise biodiversity net gain in Dartford, potentially assisted by the identified Biodiversity Opportunity Areas. In addition to strategic policies in this plan, development management provisions apply, including Policies M13 (Green and Blue Infrastructure) and M14 (Biodiversity and Landscape). These recognise, amongst other interventions, that trees absorb carbon and tree planting is strongly encouraged, and that new/ enhanced green spaces are required, including to provide areas where rain and floodwater can percolate, reducing the risk that properties will flood.

2.1.6 Blue Infrastructure

The Rivers Thames and Darent are important parts of the Borough's character, the Green Grid, and require close climate change consideration (Policy S3). They provide attractive environments to encourage walking/ cycling, as well as forming wildlife corridors and a landscape resource. In some locations, there is also potential for water based leisure activities such as sailing.

There is a network of tidal and fuvial food defences in the area. The Dartford Barrier and food defences along the River Thames frontage protect the Borough from tidal fooding. Climate change will lead to changes to rainfall and sea levels as well as increasing the likelihood and severity of more extreme wet, dry and storm events. The Dartford Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA)[31] considers the potential impact of climate change on food risk in the Borough.

Regard should also be given to the Water Framework Directive and opportunities to protect and enhance UK Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) priority habitats in development design. (Dartford Local Plan,2021)

The Thames Estuary 2100 (TE2100) Plan

The Thames Estuary 2100 (TE2100) Plan sets out a high level programme of food defence infrastructure improvements which will be required over the next 100 years to manage rising sea levels and increased food events.

In the very long term before 2070, TE2100 includes options to improve the existing Thames Barrier or construct a new downstream barrier at Long Reach within Dartford Borough. Diagram 2 shows a strategic food defence zone to indicate the broad area in which this could be located. This is largely within the Green Belt and part of the employment area at Littlebrook. The Council would need to consider the implications of any future plans for a new barrier in this location on the Green Belt designation in this area.

The South East Marine Plan

The South East Marine Plan was adopted in June 2021. This Plan includes some policies which will apply to riverside development coming forward along the River Thames and the tidal part of the River Darent.

The Lower Darent Riverside Strategy (Infrastructure Delivery Plan, 2023):

The Lower Darent Riverside Strategy is scheduled for completion in 2024 when consideration will be given on how take the recommendations forward including any specific infrastructure improvements proposed.

Identification of new flood risk management works along the river Darent likely to be required as a result of climate change. Opportunities to deliver flood defence improvements through planned development along the river identified in Dartford's Local Plan. Environmental enhancements along the river and improvements to accessibility both along and across the river

Darent and Cray Catchment Plan (Darent Action Plan)

Darent and Cray, the Partnership have created a Catchment Plan.. This plan outlines the Aims, Objectives and Actions required to achieve our shared Vision, restoring the Darent and Cray rivers back to health.

2.1.7 Priority Habitats

Priority habitats cover a wide range of semi-natural habitat types and were identifed nationally on the basis of being the most threatened and requiring conservation. The Borough hosts a number of priority habitats, not all of which are protected by designations. These include the deciduous woodland at Beacon Wood Country Park.

Priority species are those which are the most threatened and require conservation nationally. In Dartford Borough, these include bats, dormice and great crested newts.

The Kent Biodiversity Strategy focuses on certain priority habitats and species, with objectives and targets for improving them. In considering development proposals, the Council will ensure that priority habitats and species are conserved and, where possible, enhanced.

2.1.8 Protection from the negative impacts of development and infrastructure

Flood Risk management

There are a number of important wetlands and water bodies in the Borough, including the River Darent and Dartford marshes. Protecting and improving the ecological quality of these will contribute to achieving the objectives of the Water Framework Directive and the Darent and Cray Catchment Plan. Development located close to water bodies should ensure that any potential adverse impacts are avoided or mitigated and that opportunities are taken to enhance them. Measures could include recreating the ecology of waterbodies where this has been lost and/ or establishing a significant natural habitat resource.

Development will be sequentially located in areas at lower risk of flooding, from any source unless the development demonstrably provides specific wider sustainability benefits and will be safe for its lifetime. Planned development in flood risk areas will fully mitigate flood risk impacts. Development will be planned to deliver/ maintain existing and future local and strategic flood defences, and major development will provide sustainable drainage systems which reduce surface water flood risk and benefit the green infrastructure network. (Net Zero Strategy, 2024)

Policy S3: Climate Change Strategy

Flood Risk Management:

4. Development will be sequentially located in areas at lower risk of flooding, from any source unless the development demonstrably provides specific wider sustainability benefits and will be safe for its lifetime. Planned development in flood risk areas will fully mitigate flood risk impacts.

5. Development will be planned to deliver/ maintain existing and future local and strategic flood defences, and major development will provide sustainable drainage systems which reduce surface water flood risk and benefit the green infrastructure network.

Sustainable Design

6. Development will efficiently manage and re-use natural resources and waste, including through the use of water efficiency measures.

7. The design, location and construction of development will: minimise energy consumption; regulate internal temperatures; provide appropriate natural shading on buildings, at street level and in open spaces; incorporate

Policy M4: Flood Risk and Riverside Design

1. Development with a frontage along the Rivers Thames or Darent will be expected to fully explore the potential for improving: the riparian landscape; biodiversity; access and appeal for pedestrians and cyclists; and opportunities for river based recreation. This should be planned along with securing any flood defence infrastructure that may be required under criterion 2.

2. Development which is proposed on sites which fall partly or wholly within the tidal flood defence raising zone must not constrain the future management, maintenance and upgrading of flood defences and, where feasible, development must seek to contribute to the delivery of the Thames Estuary 2100 plan.

3. Planning permission for development will only be granted where:

a) It can be demonstrated that the site is safe from all types of flooding, now and for the lifetime of the development, taking into account the effects of climate change; and
b) It does not materially displace flood water or worsen flood risk elsewhere.

4. Where development is within an area at risk of flooding from any source, it will be required to:

a) Locate the most vulnerable development in areas of lowest flood risk unless there are overriding reasons for not doing so;
b) Include measures which reduce the overall level of flood risk at the site, where possible;
c) Provide a safe means of access and egress; and
d) Incorporate flood protection and resilience measures.

5. Development which is proposed on sites with a riverside frontage or providing access to flood defences must make sufficient space for the defences and for future river levels available where necessary, and provision for the future management, maintenance and upgrading of the defences.

6. All major development must incorporate multi-functional Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) to reduce surface water run-off and ensure that it does not increase flood risk elsewhere. Infiltration SuDS will only be acceptable where they will not lead to deterioration of groundwater quality in Groundwater Source Protection Zones. Where possible, SuDS should be multi-functional and deliver benefits to green infrastructure.

Policy M14: Biodiversity and Landscape

> *1. Development on sites designated for their biodiversity value will not be granted planning permission unless it can be clearly demonstrated that the biodiversity value will not be adversely affected by the proposals. Proposed development located on or in close proximity to designated sites, priority or other irreplaceable habitats or priority species, or with potential effects on them, must demonstrate that it will not adversely impact on the biodiversity value or ecological pathways.*

2.2 RESTORING AND ENHANCING HABITATS

2.2.1 Green and blue Infrastructure

Objectives for a green and attractive environment

• G2: Securing quality and sustainable built design, public streets, and good open and amenity space provision in new development, and recognising and respecting heritage and green assets so that Dartford's historic environments and new neighbourhoods are enjoyed by current and future generations.

• G3: Ensuring the Borough is able to adapt to the effects of climate change and contributes towards reducing Dartford's carbon footprint through an increase in the proportion of water efficient buildings, the uptake of domestic and small scale renewable energy, and promoting environmental resilience, new greenspace and tree planting.

• G4: Promoting sustainable local environments and habitats, achieving biodiversity net gain and active and healthy living, at new developments and through greenspace and landscape protection and provision, enhancing the green grid of footpaths, public rights of way, cycle routes, wildlife corridors, rivers and countryside links.

• G5: Acting to ensure no increase in flood risk in the Borough, and creating attractive and accessible riversides, encouraging sensitive recreation and travel on and alongside the Rivers Thames, Darent and Ebbsfleet.

Amenity Spaces

There may also be a need to retain more localised public amenity spaces which are not identified on the Policies Map. These include communal or small recreation/ play/ green spaces within residential areas. The need to retain such public amenity spaces will be more acute where there is limited usable alternative provision in the neighbourhood which is accessible on foot, or alternative provision is of demonstrably inferior quality or size. Where there are proposals which affect these spaces, the local planning authority will have regard to the need for the proposed development and the quality, quantity and function of the spaces in accordance with criterion 4 of the policy.

Landscape and tree coverage

It will be important for new development to reflect the characteristics of the local and wider landscape (criterion 3). Key characteristics of the Borough's urban landscape include the large undeveloped former landfill sites that provide green breaks in development and trees located on ridges that provide a backdrop to views from the Thames riverside. There are also marked changes in levels including cliff faces as a result of previous quarrying operations in the area. The south of the Borough generally is open, low and gently undulating. It includes significant areas of woodland, much of which is ancient woodland. The rivers are key landscape features, with the River Thames forming the northern boundary of the Borough and the valleys of the Rivers Darent and Ebbsfleet running from south to north.

Trees and hedgerows contribute to the appearance of the urban environment and rural landscape as well as increasing resilience to climate change and improving air quality. Tree coverage, hedgerows and other landscape features will be safeguarded as part of new development (criterion 4). Landscaping schemes will be expected to set out appropriate planting, management and maintenance strategies.

Green Space (Net Zero Strategy, 2024)

Protect, enhance and increase green space for the benefit of people, wildlife and carbon capture

Key Targets:

- Produce and adopt a Biodiversity Strategy
- Continue to champion biodiversity net gain on new developments through the Local Plan
- Improve access to open space, food growing and wildlife through land management, community gardening and habitat creation
- Produce a Tree and Woodland Management Policy and Action Plan to establish the carbon capture potential in the Borough.

Orchard and Wildflower Meadows (Corporate Plan, 2024)

Increase the number of orchards and wildflower meadows across the borough.

Rivers (Corporate Plan, 2024)

Enhance the environment around the Rivers Thames and Darent whilst maintaining their food and ecological functions of the land adjacent

2.2.2 Biodiversity Opportunity Areas (BOAs)

Some areas of the Borough have been identifed as Biodiversity Opportunity Areas (BOAs) on the basis that they have good potential for biodiversity improvement and for connecting nature conservation sites, habitats and species. The BOAs include a variety of statutory and non-statutory wildlife sites, woodland, lakes, marshes, heathland and brownfeld sites which are known to provide important habitats for invertebrates. These sites are set in an area which is fragmented by urban development and transport corridors.

The designated sites, priority habitats, key water bodies and Biodiversity Opportunity Areas form part of the Green Grid network.

2.2.3 Green Grid

The Green Grid will continue to be upgraded and expanded by the Council and through new development to help prioritise and deliver connected green and blue infrastructure and active travel improvements. It enables people and wildlife to move and make connections within the urban area, to and along rivers and other watercourses, to the countryside and to networks beyond the Borough.

Policy S2: Infrastructure Planning Strategy

> *6. The Borough's Green Grid network will continue to be upgraded and expanded to a finer grain, including through improving existing green and blue infrastructure such as open spaces and water bodies, achieving appropriate new multi-functional greenspaces, and enhancing biodiversity. Development will also contribute proportionately to green infrastructure, with larger developments making significant provision on-site.*

2.2.4 Within development and infrastructure

Policy M15: - Biodiversity and Landscape

2. Developments will be expected to protect and enhance biodiversity. In the event that development adversely affects any existing habitats, this must be replaced by compensatory habitat of a similar type, size and condition in close proximity to that which is being lost. The new national biodiversity net gain requirements will apply to all applicable developments. Local delivery of net gains should preferably be made by enhancing existing habitats and/ or creating new habitats on-site or, in cases where this is not achievable, off-site within the Biodiversity Opportunity Areas. These will need to be informed by and link to the Dartford Green Grid network and any Local Nature Recovery Strategy.

Policy M14: Biodiversity and Landscape

1. Development on sites designated for their biodiversity value will not be granted planning permission unless it can be clearly demonstrated that the biodiversity value will not be adversely affected by the proposals. Proposed development located on or in close proximity to designated sites, priority or other irreplaceable habitats or priority species, or with potential effects on them, must demonstrate that it will not adversely impact on the biodiversity value or ecological pathways.

Biodiversity Net Gain and Protection

3. Developments will be expected to protect and enhance biodiversity. In the event that development adversely affects any existing habitats, this must be replaced by compensatory habitat of a similar type, size and condition in close proximity to that which is being lost. The new national requirements for at least 10% biodiversity net gain will apply to all applicable developments. Local delivery of net gains should be made by enhancing existing habitats and/ or creating new habitats on-site or, in cases where this is not achievable, offsite within the Biodiversity Opportunity Areas or as part of agreed county-wide habitat creation, nature recovery strategies or enhancement projects. These will need to be informed by and link as best possible to the Dartford Green Grid network. Developers must be able to demonstrate that impacts on ecology and biodiversity could not reasonably be avoided or mitigated on-site before biodiversity offsetting off-site will be considered. Biodiersity Net Gain will be measured using DEFRA's latest biodiversity metric and habitats will need to be secured for at least 30 years.

Trees and Landscaping

4. All new developments should be designed and laid out in a way which is

sympathetic to their landscape setting. Major developments will be expected to deliver a landscaping scheme that is visually attractive, enhances biodiversity, uses native species, incorporates sustainable drainage measures, and helps to mitigate and adapt to climate change. This will need to incorporate the following elements:
a. New trees and other landscape features should be used to create attractive new streets and provide appropriate natural shading on buildings, at street level and on open spaces.
b. Planting of particular species should be considered to reduce the impact of air pollution.
c. Management and maintenance of the landscape for the lifetime of the development will be required to ensure that landscape and biodiversity features are maintained.
In all development proposals, including works to trees protected under a Tree Preservation Order, existing tree coverage, hedgerows and other landscape features should be retained wherever possible. If retention is demonstrated not to be feasible and/ or removal is justified, replacement provision should be of an appropriate native tree species or landscape feature which reflects the maturity, canopy cover and location of that being replaced.

New Development Principles

The opportunity needs to be seized for the development of major sites to provide high quality Green and Blue Infrastructure, public realm, connecting routes, and wildlife corridors. The longstanding strategy of requiring portions of development sites to contribute to Green and Blue Infrastructure will continue to be applied under criterion 1. This policy can be implemented guided by Local Plan evidence[39], and any further Borough guidance that may be produced supported by evidence. This will provide benefts for residents and wildlife as well as opportunities to adapt to climate change and for improved air quality.
Provision could feature, for instance:
■ Sports pitches and recreation areas,
■ Parks and landscaped public areas,
■ Communal amenity space for residents, if appropriate (see Policy M9),
■ Play facilities for children of various ages,
■ New allotments,
■ Planted woodland,
■ Areas managed for biodiversity beneft (see Policy M14),
■ Managed sustainable green drainage areas (see Policy M4).
Green active travel routes should be included (Policy S3/ Diagrams 2 and 10, and Policy M16) in support of achieving a well-connected and expanded Green Grid.

2.3 HABITAT CREATION

2.3.1 Within development and infrastructure

Policy M9: Residential Amenity Space

1. Residential development must provide sufficient and high quality amenity space to meet the health, recreation and functional needs of occupants and to contribute to good design, wellbeing and wider environmental objectives. Sites should be laid out to provide for private amenity space requirements and contribute to multi-functional green infrastructure, where possible.

2. The design of all private and communal amenity types and spaces must be attractive, enable maximum functionality for the end users and be suitable to the location and character of the development. In this respect, the applicant must demonstrate how the following, as a minimum, have been taken into consideration and provided within the design:

a) Good sunlight and fresh air;
b) Leisure and recreation space;
c) Children's play needs;
d) Storage space sufficient for the needs of likely occupiers; e) Relative privacy and tranquillity as appropriate to the setting;
f) Opportunity for food growing where possible; and
g) Accessible and secure entrances.
3. To achieve this aim, all new build residential development must provide a quantity of private amenity space that is:
a) Clearly ample for each house in a development. This should be predominantly a single area, provided through an attached (preferably spacious rear) garden; and
b) sufficient and highly usable in the form of a balcony, winter garden, terrace or garden for each flat in a development

Policy M13: Green and Blue Infrastructure and Open Space Provision

1. New development will be required to contribute to the Green and Blue Infrastructure network as follows:

• Sites of 20ha and over: at least 30% of the site area

• Sites of between 2ha and 20ha: at least 20% of the site area

• Sites of less than 2ha will be considered on a site by site basis for a proportionate contribution This should include multi-functional land, providing opportunities for formal and informal recreation, habitats and corridors for wildlife, native trees/ landscaping, and other measures to mitigate and adapt to the impacts of climate change. Ongoing maintenance and management of such areas will need to be demonstrated.

Where the provision of on-site Green and Blue Infrastructure or public realm open space is not appropriate or feasible, contributions may be sought for off-site improvements of open space in the vicinity of the site.

Policy M14: Biodiversity and Landscape

Biodiversity Net Gain and Protection

3. Developments will be expected to protect and enhance biodiversity. In the event that development adversely affects any existing habitats, this must be replaced by compensatory habitat of a similar type, size and condition in close proximity to that which is being lost. The new national requirements for at least 10% biodiversity net gain will apply to all applicable developments. Local delivery of net gains should be made by enhancing existing habitats and/ or creating new habitats on-site or, in cases where this is not achievable, offsite within the Biodiversity Opportunity Areas or as part of agreed county-wide habitat creation, nature recovery strategies or enhancement projects. These will need to be informed by and link as best possible to the Dartford Green Grid network. Developers must be able to demonstrate that impacts on ecology and biodiversity could not reasonably be avoided or mitigated on-site before biodiversity offsetting off-site will be considered. Biodiersity Net Gain will be measured using DEFRA's latest biodiversity metric and habitats will need to be secured for at least 30 years.

Trees and Landscaping

4. All new developments should be designed and laid out in a way which is sympathetic to their landscape setting. Major developments will be expected to deliver a landscaping scheme that is visually attractive, enhances biodiversity, uses native species, incorporates sustainable drainage measures, and helps to mitigate and adapt to climate change. This will need to incorporate the following elements:

a. New trees and other landscape features should be used to create attractive new streets and provide appropriate natural shading on buildings, at street level and on open spaces.

b. Planting of particular species should be considered to reduce the impact of air pollution.

c. Management and maintenance of the landscape for the lifetime of the development will be required to ensure that landscape and biodiversity features are maintained.

5. In all development proposals, including works to trees protected under a Tree Preservation Order, existing tree coverage, hedgerows and other landscape features should be retained wherever possible. If retention is demonstrated not to be feasible and/ or removal is justified, replacement provision should be of an appropriate native tree species or landscape feature which reflects the maturity, canopy cover and location of that being replaced

SuDS:

There are requirements for sustainable drainage systems (SuDS) set out in criterion 6. These are management and design practices which enable surface water to be drained in a more sustainable manner and to mimic the local natural drainage. The installation within developments of SuDS measures such as green roofs, rainwater harvesting, ponds and underground storage can reduce the impacts of urbanisation on flooding and reduce pollution of watercourses from run-off. They also provide opportunities to enhance biodiversity and create green spaces, contributing to the Borough's green and blue infrastructure network.

Corporate Plan (2024):

Objectives:

- To encourage a more responsible approach to consumption of resources and the management of waste
- Promote sustainable local environments and habitats, achieving biodiversity net gain and active and healthy living, at new developments and through greenspace (including urban parks and open space) and landscape protection and provision, enhancing the green grid of footpaths, public rights of way, cycle routes, wildlife corridors, rivers and countryside links
- The design, location and construction of development will: minimise energy consumption; regulate internal temperatures; provide appropriate natural shading on buildings, at street level and in open spaces; incorporate renewable or low/ zero carbon energy sources; and allow for other new sustainable technologies to be provided or readily incorporated in the future

Key Actions:

- Water efficiency: require all houses (via planning policy) to deliver the improved water efficiency of 110 litres per day to be secured through building regulations
- New development required to mitigate climate change through compliance with Local Plan and national policy
- Enhance biodiversity where new development takes place, on-site where possible or where more appropriate of-site to enhance habitats
- Require new developments to plant appropriate trees and landscaping through Local Plan policy

2.4 SPECIES SPECIFIC

Priority species are those which are the most threatened and require conservation nationally. In Dartford Borough, these include bats, dormice and great crested newts.

SECTION 3: WIDER ENVIRONMENTAL BENEFITS

3.1 GOAL 2: AIR QUALITY

Air Quality Management Areas (AQMA) in Dartford (Air Quality):

AQMA 1: A282 Tunnel Approach, declared for annual mean NO2 and 24-hour PM10 annual mean.

AQMA 2: London Road AQMA, declared for annual mean NO2 – covering the length of London Road (A226) which runs from Swanscombe at the borough boundary to where London Road crosses the A282.

AQMA 3: Dartford Town Centre and Approach Roads, declared for annual mean NO2 – covering the arterial road links leading into, and surrounding Dartford Town Centre.

Action Plans: Where an AQMA has been declared, the Council has a duty to prepare and implement a remedial Action Plan to try and improve air quality in that area.

Net Zero Strategy (2024):

Our Key Priorities and targets:

- The Council aims to reduce its organisational carbon emissions to net-zero by 2030
- Support the shift towards cleaner modes of transport and reduce car dependency with co-benefits to air quality and health.
- Improve the energy efficiency of buildings and support the shift away from fossil fuel powered heating systems to low-carbon technologies.

Key Action:

- Implement the DBC Air Quality Action Plan
- Continue to champion more sustainable development through the Local Plan (within the legal parameters allowed)

3.2 GOAL 3: CLEAN AND PLENTIFUL WATER

3.3 GOAL 4: MANAGING EXPOSURE TO CHEMICALS AND PESTICIDES

3.4 GOAL 5: MAXIMISE OUR RESOURCES, MINIMISE OUR WASTE

Net Zero Strategy (2024):

Our Key Priorities:

- Support the Borough to reduce waste, reuse, recycle, compost and encourage a circular economy.

Key Targets:

- Support residents and businesses to reduce, reuse, recycle and compost
- Improve recycling rates in the Borough
- Champion circular economy principles and the waste hierarchy of resource Reduction and Reuse before Recycling.

Corporate Plan (2024):

Objectives:

- To encourage a more responsible approach to consumption of resources and the management of waste
- Increase biodiversity and encourage sustainable development and lifestyles
- Support the generation of renewable energy across the Borough

3.5 GOAL 6: USING RESOURCES FROM NATURE SUSTAINABLY

Net Zero Strategy (2024):

Our Key Priorities:

- Support the generation of renewable energy across the Borough.

Key Targets:

- Encourage new developments to maximise opportunities for implementing renewable energy technologies, where appropriate
- Support residents and businesses to reduce energy consumption and increase renewable energy purchase and generation
- Identify opportunities for (and facilitate) community power generation in the borough

Corporate Plan (2024):

Objectives:

- Increase biodiversity and encourage sustainable development and lifestyles

3.6 GOAL 7: MITIGATING AND ADAPTING TO CLIMATE CHANGE

Planet Dartford

Our Vision:

> The Council has been working for many years to improve sustainability in the borough through the following strategic work; Dartford Local Plan, Air Quality Action Plan, Decarbonising our corporate estate, energy efficiency improvements to our housing stock and private sector housing and many more. The Council has also established several local environmental initiatives too, including; planting more trees, establishing community orchards, seeking to manage its open spaces to improve biodiversity, reducing waste and spreading the word about greener ways to live, work and travel. We're bringing these initiatives together under one banner - Planet Dartford.

Our Aims:

> Change Ourselves- We want to lead from the front on Climate Change and have set ourselves a target of reaching Net Zero by 2030
>
> Help Others To Change- Actions to tackle climate change will need action from all of Dartford's communities, businesses, groups and households. The council will support others to make good choices.
>
> Spread The Word-We will support the message that climate action is important and seek to influence millions of choices taken by tens of thousands of people in dozens of communities. Planet Dartford aim to take our climate change message to every part of the community

Net Zero Strategy (2024):

Focus:

- The Council aims to reduce its organisational carbon emissions to net-zero by 2030
- Support the shift towards cleaner modes of transport and reduce car dependency with co-benefits to air quality and health.
- Improve the energy efficiency of buildings and support the shift away from fossil fuel powered heating systems to low-carbon technologies.
- Support the generation of renewable energy across the Borough.
- Support the Borough to reduce waste, reuse, recycle, compost and encourage a circular economy.
- Protect, enhance and increase green space for the benefit of people, wildlife and carbon capture.
- Embed climate change in all decision-making and governance at the Council.
- Empower residents, businesses and communities to make informed decisions on climate change and access relevant grants.

Our Key Priorities:

- The Council aims to reduce its organisational carbon emissions to net zero by 2030

Key Targets:

- Identify pathways to reducing emission from our corporate estate to net zero carbon by 2030
- Develop a plan to reduce emissions from travel by converting our fleet to zero emissions including contractor vehicles through the procurement process
- Promote reduction and re-use as well as recycling, and aim to become a zero waste organisation
- Ensure sustainable procurement practices throughout the council as part of the Council's Procurement Strategy
- Reduce car journeys for the commute by DBC staff and promote zero carbon transport including active transport.
- Provide Carbon Literacy training to DBC staff and Councillors

Policy S3: Climate Change Strategy

1. Development will be well located, and innovatively designed and constructed, to mitigate and adapt to the effects of climate change. Development in the Borough should contribute to minimising carbon emissions from properties and processes, and reducing the need for unsustainable travel, avoiding vulnerability and increasing resilience to the effects of climate change by a package of bespoke measures integrated within development at an early stage of design and planning, including the measures set out in criteria 2-7.

2. The use of sustainable and active travel modes will be embedded into developments; designing for walking/ cycling (particularly at locations which benefit the Green Grid), public transport and low carbon motorised personal transport (including for future electric vehicle charging points/ cabling needs). This should be designed to be adaptable to allow for future changes to technology and transport methods.

Corporate Plan (2024):

Objectives:

- To encourage a more responsible approach to consumption of resources and the management of waste
- Ensure the Borough is able to adapt to the effects of climate change and contributes towards reducing Dartford's carbon footprint through an increase in the proportion of water efcient buildings, the uptake of domestic and small

scale renewable energy, and promoting environmental resilience, new greenspace and tree planting
- Prioritise path to a Net Zero Carbon future
- Protect good quality trees which contribute to the green environment and also absorb CO2 and provide urban cooling and plant new trees and landscaping where appropriate and opportunities arise

3.7 GOAL 8: REDUCE RISK OF HARM FROM ENVIRONMENTAL HAZARDS

3.8 GOAL 9: ENHANCE BIOSECURITY

3.9 GOAL 10: ENHANCE BEAUTY, HERITAGE AND ENGAGEMENT WITH THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

3.9.1 Enhance Beauty (Dartford Local Plan,2024)

Openness characterises the Borough as a whole, as a result of riverside settings (most notably the River Thames), large urban green areas and the countryside

The Borough Vision:

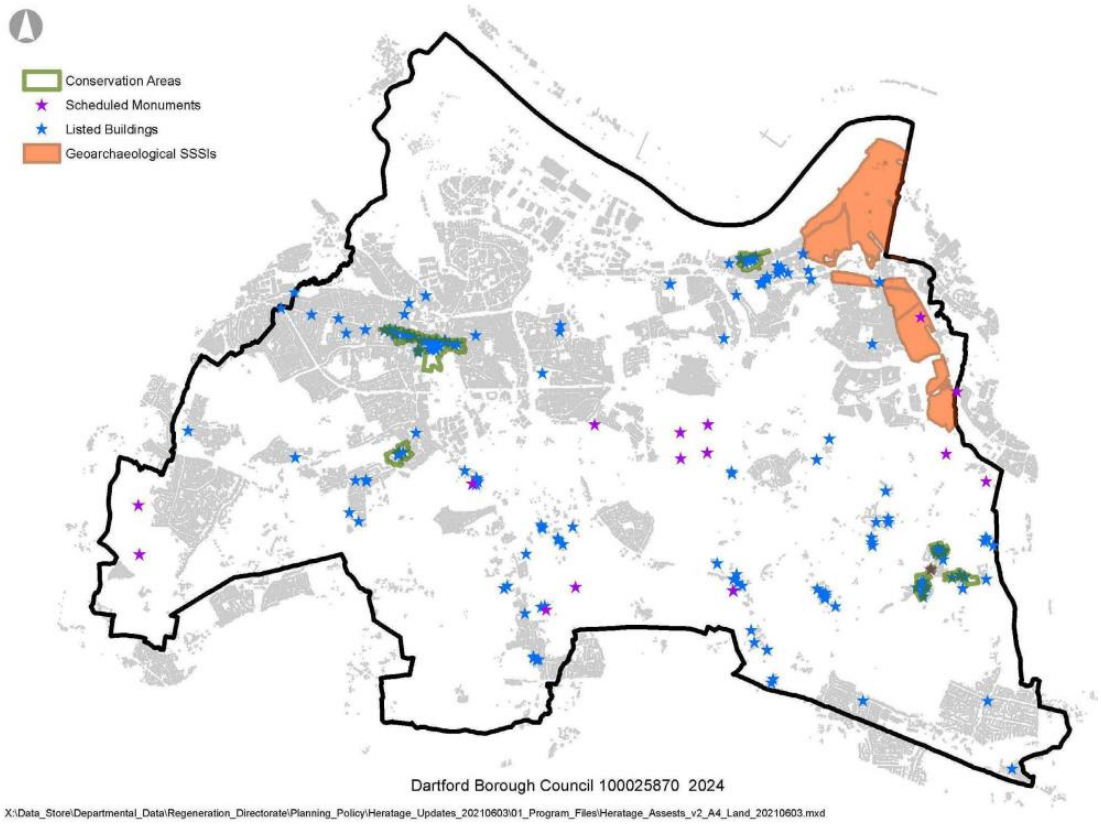
Dartford Borough will be known across Kent, the Thames Estuary and beyond as a desirable and popular place to live, work and enjoy leisure time. Dartford will be recognised as wellconnected and served by good infrastructure and facilities, with a strong economy and new and existing towns and villages of acclaimed quality of life and prosperity.

Neighbourhoods across the Borough will be attractive, healthy, secure, low-carbon and environmentally resilient, benefiting from excellent built and natural environments and improved living standards. They will afford easy access to local services, the open countryside, rivers and natural surroundings. The individual identity, and sense of place and heritage, of Dartford's established towns and villages will be retained and enhanced. Valued and sensitive local landscapes and townscapes will be suitably preserved for future enjoyment.

3.9.2 Heritage (Dartford Local Plan,2024)

Dartford Borough includes areas highly rich in history and historic character. Across the Borough, there are approximately 180 listed buildings and 12 scheduled monuments. The six Conservation Areas are found in Southfleet parish, Wilmington, Greenhithe and Dartford Town Centre.

Figure 11: Designated Heritage Assets



3.9.3 Health and wellbeing

Noting that the proportion in Dartford Borough finding their day-to-day activities limited by illness is below the English average (14%)6, there are nevertheless some clear challenges facing the health of residents including:

• Childhood obesity rates are slightly higher than the Kent average: 25% of reception year pupils and 37% of year 6 pupils are classified as overweight or obese;

• The percentage of adults who consume the recommended '5 a day' of fruits and vegetables is well below the Kent average and is the lowest of all districts;

• The number of premature deaths (under 75 years) due to cardiovascular disease or respiratory factors are both above the Kent average. (Dartford Local Plan,2024)

The average age of residents in Dartford Borough is 37.4 years, lower than the Kent and national averages of 42.2 years and 40.2 years respectively5. Compared to the Kent average, the Borough has a higher proportion of children under 15 and adults aged between 25 and 49. Figure 3 sets out the age and gender of those living in Dartford Borough compared to the average in Kent. (Dartford Local Plan,2024)

Corporate Plan (2024):

Objectives:

- Protect and enhance existing green spaces whilst encouraging improved walking environments and sporting facilities
- Continue efforts to reduce pollution across the borough and promote better air quality
- Create a practical strategy to improve the health and wellbeing of residents aged 50+ and reduce health inequalities

Key Actions:

- We will underpin all DBC policies with an understanding of the interconnected social determinants that impact Dartford residents health and wellbeing; economy, employment, education and learning, leisure and physical activity, green space, pollution, crime and personal safety, social cohesion, volunteering, governance

Net Zero Strategy (2024):

Key priority:

- Protect, enhance and increase green space for the benefit of people, wildlife and carbon capture.

Borough Vision:

The wellbeing of the Borough's communities will benefit from investment and planned development and new technology. This will provide new and upgraded services, including handy, high frequency and reliable clean transport links, appealing walking and cycling routes, and improved local community, cultural, sports and recreational resources.

Objectives for the wellbeing of communities:

- W1: Achieving cohesive, safe, walkable and attractive neighbourhoods, with a real sense of place and vitality that reflects the area's heritage and potential, and whose residents enjoy a choice of homes suited to their needs and easy access to local everyday facilities, including education and healthcare.
- W2: Improving health and wellbeing, and air quality arising from congestion, through reducing the need to travel by private vehicle, particularly by retaining and providing jobs, services, shops, community facilities and open space at suitable locations close to residential areas and where good public transport services are within easy walking distance.
- W3: Providing well-designed new housing that is genuinely mixed, affordable and of varied tenure, sustainable, and promotes healthy living, to secure the quality of life of residents and the ability for them to continue residing at their home or within the Borough.

• W4: Realising whole lifetime residential accommodation options and facilities, with accessible types and designs of living environments catering for people as their circumstances change.

• W5: Encouraging development that provides a wide range of opportunities for residents to enjoy good quality cultural, art, leisure and sports pursuits

SECTION 4: DISTRICT PROJECTS TO NOTE

4.1 Planet Dartford (Planet Dartford)

Family Trees

The Family Trees scheme was available from March 2023 to December 2023 and offered new parents a £25 voucher to be spent at one of three participating Dartford garden centres on plants or trees to create a lasting memory, help nurture local wildlife and protect the environment. The scheme was a great success and we'd like to thank everyone who participated.

Planet Dartford Green Grant Community Fund

We will be providing small grants to any organisation, group, club etc. that has an idea for a project to help reduce or offset carbon emissions. Click the link below to find out more:

New Community Orchards and Wildflower Meadows

We have established Community Orchards and Wildflower Meadows in areas across Dartford such as Alamein Gardens and Hesketh Park. This provides crop-yielding trees for the community to enjoy as well providing more diverse green spaces.

Solar Together Kent

A Kent wide scheme to offer high quality Solar PV panels through group buying, bringing households together to purchase multiple panels and benefit from larger scale savings.

4.2 Ecology Island (Ecology Island)

Ecology Island is a weekly mental health retreat in a peaceful, wooded area of Dartford's Central Park, along the River Darent. It is a collaboration between North Kent Mind and the North West Countryside Partnership, a conservation group which we support and fund. Volunteers who attend the retreat work together to learn conservation and wildlife preservation techniques.

SECTION 5: SPECIFIC PRIORITIES WITHIN NEIGHBOURHOOD PLANS

5.1 Available Plans:

Stone Neighbourhood Plan

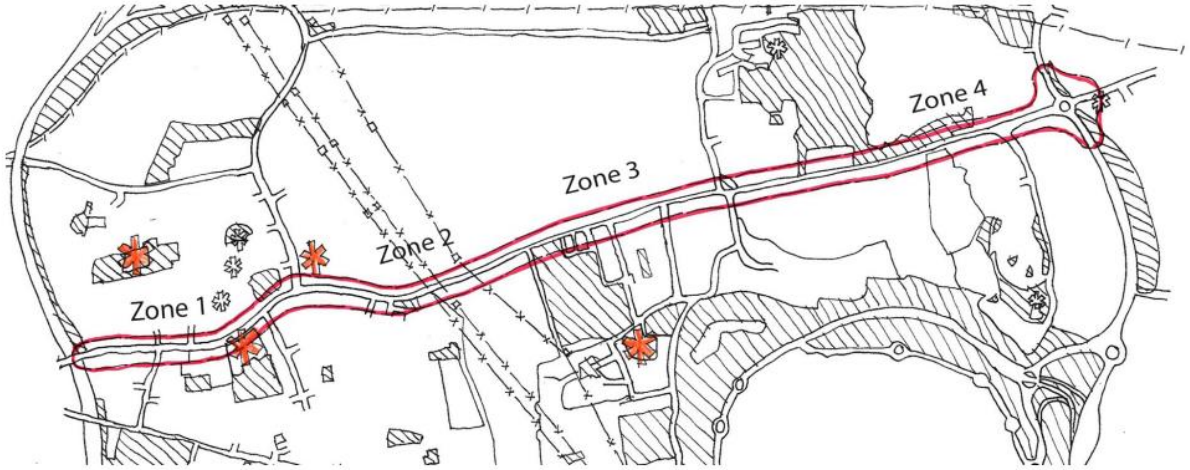


FIGURE 5. GREEN CORRIDOR ZONES

HW1 – Trees, shrubs and air quality

A green corridor is designated along London Road as shown in Figure 5. Planning applications for development should protect existing hedgerows, trees, shrubs and woodland and provide additional tree cover, shrubs and hedgerows along the London Road green corridor (Figure 5), as appropriate. Where development is approved which would result in the removal of hedgerows, shrubs or trees then equivalent and appropriate replacement planting will be required. All development proposals are expected to take account of the detailed action plans contained in LHLA's Proposed Green Corridor, London Road Air Quality Management Area, December 2018.

Supporting Local Plan policy DP5, DP25

SECTION 6: DOCUMENTS REVIEWED AND REFERENCED

Document reference	Link
Green Infrastructure (2021)	Green Infrastructure Paper
Air Quality	Air quality – Dartford Borough Council
Planet Dartford	Planet Dartford – Dartford Borough Council
Net Zero Strategy (2024)	Net Zero Strategy
Local Plan (2021)	The Dartford Plan to 2037
Corporate Plan (2024)	DBC Corporate Plan 2024-2027
Infrastructure Delivery Plan (2023)	Infrastructure Delivery Plan 2023 (dartford.gov.uk)
Darent Action Plan	Darent Action Plan | darentpartnership.org.uk
Ecology Island	Ecology Island case study - Kent County Council
Habitat Assessment (2021)	Habitats Regulations Assessment July 2021 – Dartford Borough Council
Open Space Report (2016)	Dartford Open Space Report 2015/16 Final
Stone Neighbourhood Plan	Stone Neighbourhood Plan Made Version July 2022 – Dartford Borough Council