MAIDSTONE 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 Development pressures

As a result of increasing development pressures in the past, many of the borough's biodiversity assets have been lost, damaged or fragmented. In response to this decline the council has acted in partnership with other bodies to undertake surveys of the borough's habitats and ancient woodlands. (Maidstone Local Plan, 2024)

There is a risk that development would result in increases in nitrogen related emissions and associated nitrogen deposition on parts of the North Downs Woodlands SAC. (Habitats Regulation Assessment)

1.2 Recreational and urban pressures

Two European sites are sensitive to recreation pressure: North Downs Woodland SAC and Medway Estuary & Marshes SPA/Ramsar site.

Residential development within 6km of Medway Estuary & Marshes SPA/Ramsar site has been found through visitor surveys to contribute to disturbance of birds at the site. The potential effects of recreation at North Downs Woodland SAC are less certain but it is considered that residential development within 7km of this site could contribute to adverse effects from recreation pressure. (Maidstone Local Plan, 2024)

There is a continuing pressure for expansion of the urban areas to meet economic and social needs to build on open areas, such as gardens, school fields, allotments, open spaces and on urban fringes, which, if not managed carefully through the planning process, can lead to a loss of urban wildlife habitats and fragmentation. Road improvements and new roads have direct effects on habitats by causing disturbance to, or loss of, roadside verges, hedgerows, trees, ditches and farmland. Large numbers of street trees have been lost across Maidstone Borough to road widening, cable damage, wind-blow and disease. Infilling within and between rural settlements is also a threat to habitats such as unimproved pastures, wetlands and scrub. (Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy, 2016)

1.3 Water Quality

The availability and quality of water is becoming a major issue. Agriculture, industry and residential areas all produce pollutants which can affect the quality of wetlands, open water bodies and flowing waters. The ecological status of the River Medway is listed in the Thames River Basin District Management Plan as (Moderate), the River Beult (Poor), the River Teise and Lesser Teise (Moderate) and the River Len (below) (Bad). Some of the domestic water supply in the Borough is abstracted from underground and Source Protection Zones are in place to protect vulnerable groundwater areas. These zones show the risk of contamination from any activities that might cause pollution in the area. (Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy, 2016)

The Stodmarsh SAC/SPA/Ramsar site is sensitive to increases in nitrogen and phosphorous arising from the River Stour. SACs/SPAs/Ramsar sites downstream of Maidstone borough may also be affected by changes in water quality or quantity, via abstraction or discharge into rivers or groundwater. Developments discharging wastewater into or extracting water from the River Medway catchment or extracting groundwater may also affect water quality and quantity at coastal and estuarine European sites downstream of Maidstone borough. (Maidstone Local Plan, 2024)

1.4 Flood Risk

The Water Cycle Study 2014, the Kent Water for Sustainable Growth Study 2017, and the 2020 SFRA indicate that a number of the rural service centre catchment areas have at least some known problems with surface water which have a subsequent impact on the sewerage network. (Maidstone Local Plan, 2024)

Maidstone Borough has experienced a number of historic surface water / drainage related flood events, which have been attributed to a range of sources. The primary source of surface water flooding was attributed to heavy rainfall overloading highway carriageways and paved areas, drains and gullies, but other sources of flooding were perceived to be from blockages and high water levels impeding free discharge from surface water drains and gullies. Increased development without due care could lead to increased run off and consequently flooding.It is therefore important that surface water run- off from new development does not make this problem worse. (Maidstone SFRA, 2020)

The majority of flood risk from watercourses within the borough is from fluvial flooding. In the vicinity of Allington there is also a risk of tidal flooding. Some areas of Maidstone town are within the functional floodplain of the River Medway, River Len, River Loose and their tributaries and are therefore at risk from frequent flooding. Historically the centre of Maidstone has flooded both in the November 1960 and September 1968 floods and 70 people were also affected by the floods in Maidstone in October 2000. (Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy, 2016)

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

Unless otherwise stated, the following information in section 2 came from the Maidstone Local Plan, 2024.

2.1 PROTECTING HABITATS

2.1.1 Designated Sites

Many sites are important for their nature conservation and geological interest and are designated for their protection. (Maidstone Local Plan, 2024)

Special Area of Conservation (SAC) (Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy, 2016):

Within the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, the North Downs Woodlands is designated as Special Area of Conservation due to its existing and regenerating chalk grassland and mature beech and yew woodland - features that are threatened or rare in a European context.

Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) (Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy, 2016):

Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) represent Britain's finest sites for fauna, flora, geology and physiographical features and are protected by legislation. There are nine SSSI sites within the borough including chalk grassland and woodland sites on the Kent Downs, the clay River Beult environment and geological SSSI's at quarries such as at Allington and Lenham.

National Landscapes (Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy, 2016):

Just over a quarter of the borough is within the Kent Downs National Landscape (27%). The National Landscape is a visually prominent landscape that contributes significantly to the borough's high quality of life. It is an important amenity and recreation resource for both Maidstone residents and visitors and forms an attractive backdrop to settlements along the base of the Kent Downs scarp. It also contains a wide range of natural habitats and biodiversity. Designation as an National Landscape confers the highest level of landscape protection and one which the council has a statutory duty to conserve and enhance.

POLICY LPRSS1 – MAIDSTONE BOROUGH SPATIAL STRATEGY

14. The green and blue network of multi-functional open spaces, rivers and water courses, the Kent Downs National Landscape and its setting, the setting of the High Weald National Landscape, and landscapes of local value will be conserved and enhanced.

SPATIAL OBJECTIVES:

3. PROTECTION OF THE BUILT AND NATURAL HERITAGE, INCLUDING THE KENT DOWNS NATIONAL LANDSCAPE AND ITS SETTING, THE SETTING OF THE HIGH WEALD NATIONAL LANDSCAPE AND AREAS OF LOCAL LANDSCAPE VALUE;

Great weight will be given to conserving and enhancing the Kent Downs and High Weald National Landscapes. Development will conserve and enhance the landscape and scenic beauty of the Kent Downs and High Weald National Landscapes. Development within the setting will conserve and enhance the landscape and scenic beauty of the Kent Downs and High Weald National

Landscapes and should be sensitively located and designed to avoid or minimise adverse impacts on the designated areas. Development will also conserve and enhance other distinctive landscapes of local value and heritage designations whilst facilitating the economic and social well-being of these areas, including the diversification of the rural economy.

Metropolitan Green Belt (Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy, 2016)

A small area (1.3%) to the west of the borough lies within the Metropolitan Green Belt, incorporating the villages of Nettlestead and Nettlestead Green. The key purposes of the Metropolitan Green Belt include preventing urban sprawl and to assisting in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment.

2.1.2 Locally Designated Sites

Maidstone borough also has four Local Nature Reserves (LNR), four Wildlife Trust Reserves (WTR) and two community nature areas (CNA) which are publicly accessible reserves of local/regional wildlife value where enjoyment by the public is actively promoted. Non-statutory nature conservation sites, known in Maidstone as Local Wildlife Sites (LWS), are regionally and locally important nature conservation sites. Maidstone borough has approximately 59 sites that occur within its boundary, which cover approximately 2629 hectares. The majority of habitat found in LWS within the borough is lowland mixed deciduous woodland. (Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy, 2016)

The NPPF encourages the protection of valued landscapes. For Maidstone, these landscapes are identified as the Greensand Ridge, the Low Weald, and the river valleys of the Medway, the Loose and the Len, which are afforded protection in policy SP14(a).

2.1.3 Green and Blue Infrastructure Network

Green and blue infrastructure (GBI) is a network of natural components of open space and water which lie within and between the borough's towns and villages and which provide multiple social, economic and environmental benefits. Maidstone borough contains a wide range of green open spaces together with a number of rivers and streams.

Key assets include the Kent Downs National Landscape, the River Medway and its tributaries, Mote Park, and the distinctive green corridors which help shape Maidstone town. Amongst other things, these green spaces and blue corridors provide reservoirs for biodiversity and recreation; act as corridors for the movement of animals, plants and people; and provide opportunities for the protection and enhancement of the local landscape and historic assets, water management, green education, and the mitigation of climate change impacts.

The combination of the centre's historic fabric, riverside environment and accessible green spaces helps give the town its distinct and attractive character. The town centre benefits from the select number of green spaces interspersed through it, such as Brenchley Gardens and Trinity Gardens, and further afield the substantial, award winning facilities of both Whatman Park and Mote Park.

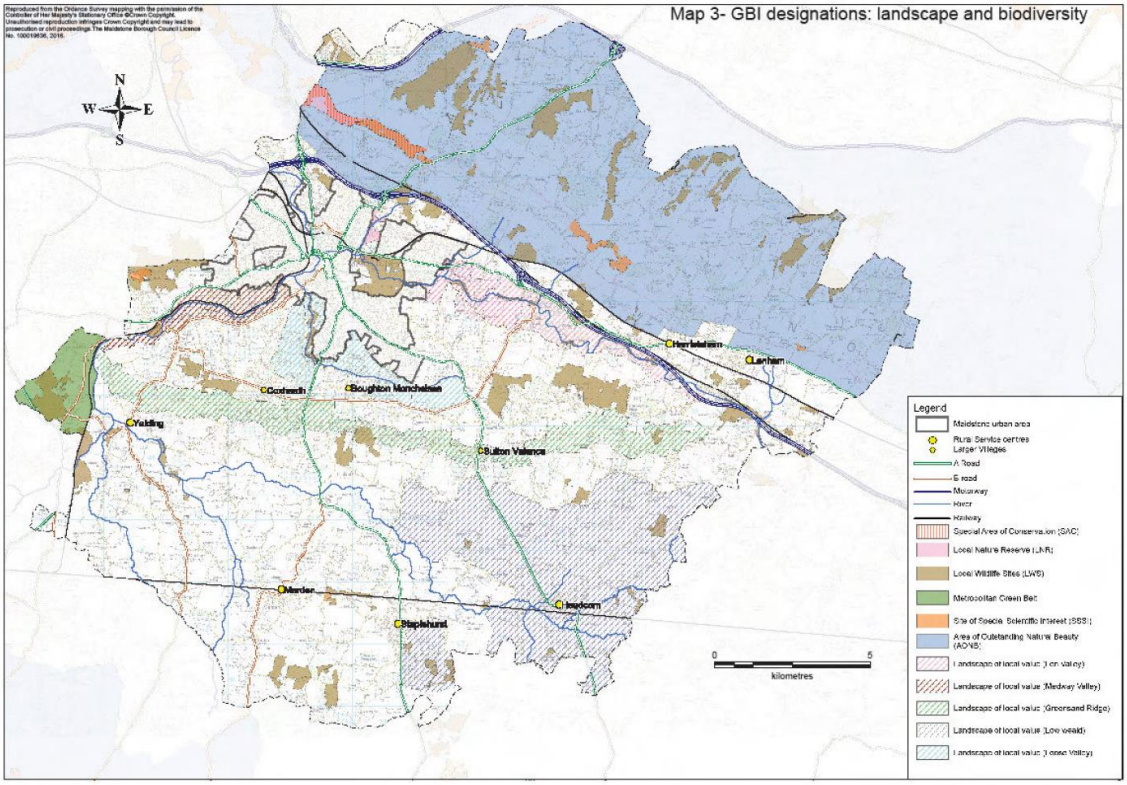
<u>SPATIAL OBJECTIVES:</u>

5. PROTECTION AND ENHANCEMENT OF BIODIVERSITY, AND PROTECTION AND PROMOTION OF THE MULTI-FUNCTIONAL NATURE OF THE BOROUGH'S OPEN SPACES, RIVERS AND OTHER WATERCOURSES;

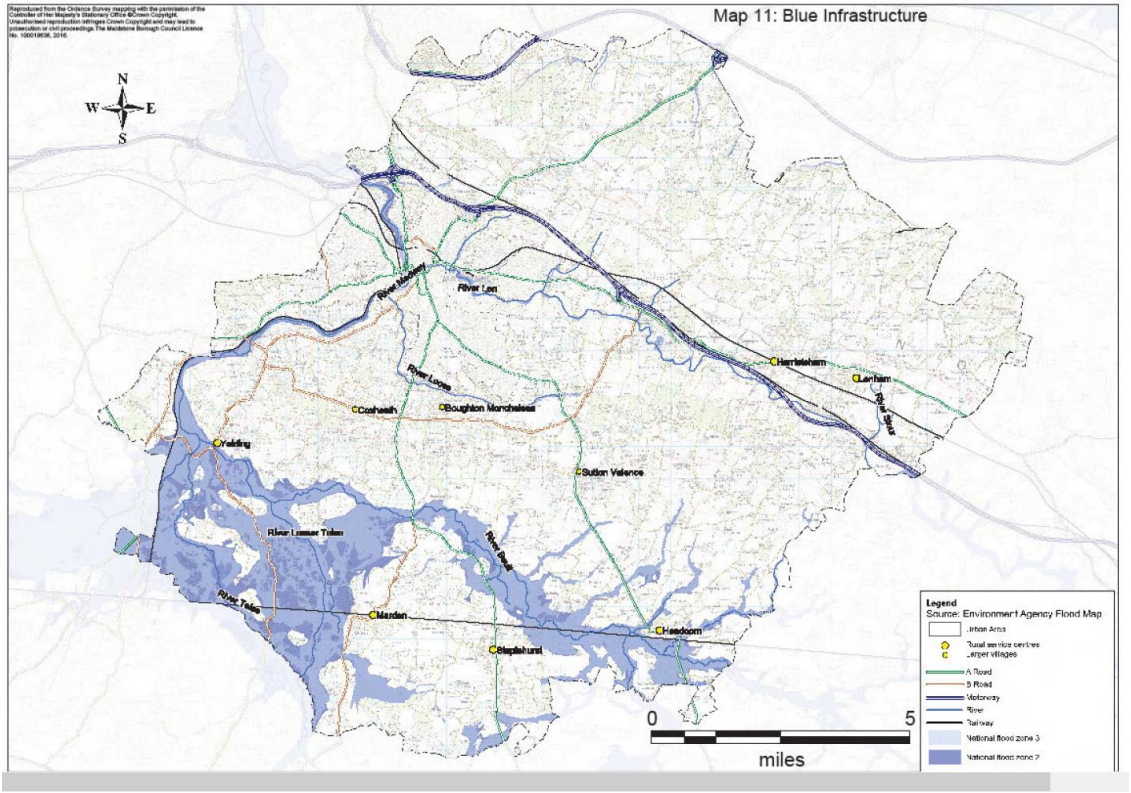
• To recognise the biodiversity emergency through protection and enhancement of biodiversity. To retain and enhance the character of the existing green and blue infrastructure and to promote linkages between areas of environmental value;

• The delivery of the Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy will develop and enhance a high-quality network of green and blue spaces building on the assets that already exist

GBI designations: landscape and biodiversity (Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy, 2016):



Blue Infrastructure (Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy, 2016):



With five main rivers amounting to approximately 70km in length Maidstone Borough has an extensive network of blue infrastructure providing a distinctive landscape and benefits for people and wildlife, but it also has the risk of flooding. The main watercourse through the borough is the River Medway with major tributaries, the River Beult and the River Teise joining the Medway at Yalding, upstream of Maidstone town. The River Lesser Teise, River Len and River Loose are also tributaries of the River Medway. In addition, the Great Stour is a watercourse within the Maidstone Borough boundary under riparian ownership and is part of the Kentish Stour catchment area. The source of the Great Stour is located near Lenham.

2.1.6 Agricultural Land

POLICY LPRENV 2: CHANGE OF USE OF AGRICULTURAL LAND TO DOMESTIC GARDEN LAND

> *Significant swathes of the borough, particularly in the Medway valley and Greensand fruit belt, are graded as high-quality agricultural land under the DEFRA classification. The NPPF recognises the benefits of best and most versatile agricultural land. Where agricultural land is highly graded (grade 1 or grade 2) and is functionally well located for agricultural purposes, such that future agricultural use is feasible, the council will seek to resist its irreversible loss to domestic use.*

2.1.7 Ancient Woodland (Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy, 2016)

Ancient woodland in England is defined as an area that has been wooded continuously since at least 1600 AD. Fragments and swathes of ancient woodland are strewn across Maidstone Borough, with particularly large ancient woodland blocks at Oaken Wood to the west and at Kings Wood to the east.

Oaken Wood is categorised as a Plantation on ancient woodland site (PAWS). PAWS are ancient woods that have been felled and replanted, often with non-native trees that retain ancient woodland features, such as undisturbed soil, ground flora and fungi. Being an ancient woodland, the soils of Oaken Wood are relatively undisturbed, and may preserve distinct species communities and natural ecological processes, such as decomposition and nutrient cycling. The soils and veteran (ancient) trees in ancient woods are important carbon stores and may help to reduce net carbon emissions.

2.1.8 Wildlife disturbance

Medway Estuary & Marshes SPA/Ramsar site

Residential development within 6km of Medway Estuary & Marshes SPA/Ramsar site has been found through visitor surveys to contribute to disturbance of birds at the site and a mitigation strategy is in place to apply developer contributions to the management and monitoring of visitor pressure at the site. The Council will continue to support Natural England in the review of the mitigation strategy as new visitor survey data becomes available, to ensure that the strategy continues to be appropriate.

The Stodmarsh SAC/SPA/Ramsar site is sensitive to increases in nitrogen and phosphorous arising from the River Stour. Natural England has agreed a mitigation strategy that requires developments within the Stour catchment to demonstrate that they will not result in a net increase in nitrogen and phosphorous at the Stodmarsh SAC/SPA/Ramsarsite. Developments in and around Lenham, including Heathlands Garden Settlement and the Lenham Broad Location for growth, will be required to meet the requirements of the mitigation/offsetting strategy, as set out in Natural England's advice note on Nutrient Neutrality issued in November 2020, or any updates to that advice.

POLICY LPRSP14(A) – NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

> *11. Any development within 6km of the Medway Estuary and Marshes SPA and Ramsar will be required to make a financial contribution to mitigate against additional recreational impact arising from development.*

North Downs Woodland SAC

The potential effects of recreation at North Downs Woodland SAC are less certain but it is considered that residential development within 7km of this site could contribute to adverse effects from recreation pressure. New residential developments within 7km of the SAC will be required to make developer contributions and the Council will work with Natural England to monitor and if necessary, mitigate any recreation pressure or air pollution effects at this site, with a strategy in place prior to adoption of the Local Plan.

Pollution

Careful consideration is required through the planning process to ensure that increased light pollution from urban expansion does not impact on the biodiversity of local green and blue infrastructure. Adverse effects can potentially include causing migratory birds to collide with lit buildings, false dawns which disrupt bird behaviour,

moth deaths, and the disruption of tree and plant biological mechanisms that are controlled by day length.

Noise pollution is also increased through urban expansion and can cause stress to animals, interfere with delicate predator-prey interactions, and cause detrimental effects on mating behaviour of animals. Such considerations need to be addressed through ecological appraisals as part of the planning application process.

2.1.9 Protection from the negative impacts of development and infrastructure

Green Infrastructure:

POLICY LPRSP14(A) – NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

> *8. Development proposals will give weight to the protection of the following designated sites for biodiversity, as shown on the policies map, which will be equal to the significance of their biodiversity/geological status, their contribution to wider ecological networks and the protection/recovery of priority species.*

Development proposals will be expected to demonstrate the protection of natural landscape assets including Ancient Woodland, veteran trees, hedgerows and features of biological and geological interest.

Development proposals will be expected to be supported by an initial survey of on-site assets. Surveys must be undertaken at the appropriate time of year for the relevant habitats, species, flora and fauna. Where harm to protected species or habitats is unavoidable, developers must ensure suitable mitigation measures are implemented to enhance or recreate the features, either on or off-site, and bring sites into positive conservation management. Sufficient information to assess the direct and indirect effects of development on protected sites, species, biodiversity or geology, and any proposed prevention, mitigation or compensation measures must be provided. Proposals should particularly seek to avoid damaging and fragmenting existing habitats. Opportunities to contribute towards the UK priority habitats and species in Maidstone and any additional Maidstone LBAP habitats and species should be maximised.

Specifically, planning policy and decisions should:

•Protect green space in the flood plain from development
• Require developers to create new habitats focusing on the 12 priority BAP habitats as part of green infrastructure planning and design in new developments;
• Ensure that existing habitats and protected species are accommodated and any loss appropriately mitigated in all new development and that development within

Biodiversity Opportunity Areas do not significantly increase the fragmentation of wildlife habitats or neutralise significant opportunities for habitat restoration or recreation;
• Conserve and enhance the distinctive character of the Kent Downs National Landscape and its setting; the setting of the High Weald National Landscape and the Greensand Ridge, Medway Valley, Len Valley, Loose Valley and Low Weald as landscapes of local value;
• Encourage developers of large sites in locations with a history of orchards to provide appropriately managed community orchards as part of their proposal;
• Require developers to conserve and enhance existing publicly accessible green space within development sites;
• Ensure developers of new housing sites provide for all types of publicly accessible open space to a specified standard where there is insufficient accessible open space already provided; and
• Ensure developers provide details of how green and blue infrastructure will be managed and maintained to a high quality over the long term.
(Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy, 2016)

Blue Infrastructure:

The Water Cycle Study 2014, the Kent Water for Sustainable Growth Study 2017, and the 2020 SFRA indicate that a number of the rural service centre catchment areas have at least some known problems with surface water which have a subsequent impact on the sewerage network. It is therefore important that surface water run- off from new development does not make this problem worse. All new developments should include the implementation of sustainable drainage systems (SuDS) that reduce surface water run-off. To ensure consistency across each rural service centre with respect to the Strategic Flood Risk Assessment, a detailed flood risk assessment is required prior to any development with the obvious intention of ensuring new development is located outside areas liable to flooding.

Enhancing and increasing biodiversity actions (Biodiversity and Climate Change Action Plan, 2023):

Action 6.2 Ensure sustainable urban drainage schemes (SuDS) maximise biodiversity potential.

SACs/SPAs/Ramsar sites downstream of Maidstone borough may be affected by changes in water quality or quantity, via abstraction or discharge into rivers or groundwater. All major developments will be required to demonstrate that there is sufficient capacity in water supply and treatment infrastructure.

Recent advice from Natural England has highlighted the impact that new development can have on waterways, whether these be within or downstream of the

borough. It is necessary for new development to demonstrate that it can achieve net nutrient neutrality in the Stour Catchment.

Developments discharging wastewater into or extracting water from the River Medway catchment or extracting groundwater may also affect water quality and quantity at coastal and estuarine European sites downstream of Maidstone borough. Water abstraction and discharge is regulated through permitting, and South East Water's Water Resources Management Plan 2019 plans ahead to 2080 to ensure that water infrastructure can meet requirements for housing growth as well as environmental protection.

2.2 RESTORING AND ENHANCING HABITATS

2.2.1 Green Infrastructure

Green and blue infrastructure has the capacity to deliver a wide range of positive outcomes in line with the objectives of the council and to help meet the aims of the strategy and action plan including:

• Maintaining and enhancing biodiversity, water and air quality;

• Promoting distinctive landscapes and townscapes;

• Helping to mitigate and adapt to climate change; and

• Creating healthier communities

A green and blue infrastructure approach represents a means to positively tackle these issues. It can offer alternative flood mitigation strategies, such as Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) and the creation of water meadows. It is able to provide the means to capture and store rainwater, as well as help improve water quality.

It is clear from an analysis of local strategies that green and blue infrastructure can play a major role in delivering a wide range of benefits within the borough, particularly (Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy, 2016):

• Mitigating and adapting to climate change.

• Integrating sustainable movement and access for all

• Promoting a distinctive townscape and landscape

• Maintaining and enhancing biodiversity, water and air quality

• Providing opportunities for sport, recreation, quiet enjoyment and health

• Retaining and enhancing a quality environment for investment and through development, and

• Providing community involvement and opportunities for education

Key principles and opportunities for Maidstone Borough's green and blue infrastructure (Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy, 2016):

Conserve and improve:

• Conserve and enhance existing green spaces and water environment assets, maximising their benefits.

• Conserve and restore green spaces and water environment as flood storage next to rivers and restrict development on floodplain.

• Deliver the river catchment improvement plan actions in partnership led by Medway Valley Countryside Partnership and Kent High Weald Partnership.

• Continue Stewardship Schemes with farmers and landowners to create new or improved wildlife corridors in the rural area.

Enhancing and increasing biodiversity actions (Biodiversity and Climate Change Action Plan,2023):

• Develop Supplementary Planning Documents for Garden community and other strategic development sites that ensure are exemplar for biodiversity and deliver semi natural open space.

• Work with local farms and landowners to deliver landscape scale biodiversity initiatives Nature Recovery Strategy – including reconnection of habitats, floodplain restoration, reduced chemical inputs and reintroduction of lost native species.

• Increase borough canopy cover expanding ancient forests and reconnecting of existing woodland including urban woods, and greening town centres.

2.2.2 Blue Infrastructure

Enhancing and increasing biodiversity actions (Biodiversity and Climate Change Action Plan,2023):

• Enhance and expand wetland coverage across the Borough to support nutrient neutrality, flood prevention, and enhance biodiversity.

• Implement a Nature Recovery Strategy, linking habitat restoration and creation to improve flood protection and water quality.

The Water Framework Directive (WFD) looks to improve the local water environment for people and wildlife and promote the sustainable use of water. The Directive applies to all surface water bodies, including lakes, streams and rivers as well as groundwater. The overall aim of the WFD is for all water bodies to reach good status by 2027. In Maidstone this would mean improving their physical state, preventing

deterioration in water quality and ecology, and improving the ecological status of water bodies. The WFD introduced the concept of integrated river basin management and such plans should influence development plans. Maidstone lies within the Thames River Basin District and in December 2009 the Environment Agency published the Thames River Basin Management Plan (RBMP).

The council will continue to work in partnership with the Environment Agency and other bodies to help achieve the goals of the WFD and actions of the Thames RBMP. The council will also actively encourage development proposals to include measures to mitigate against the deterioration of water bodies and adverse impacts on Groundwater Source Protection Zones, and/or incorporate measures to improve the ecological status of water bodies as appropriate, and to incorporate Water Framework Directive mitigation measures into existing waterbodies.

2.2.3 Biodiversity Opportunity Areas (BOAs)

The Borough includes four Biodiversity Opportunity Areas (BOA's) identified by the Kent Nature Partnership, comprising Greensand Heath and Commons, Mid Kent Greensand and Gault, Mid Kent Downs, Woods and Scarp and Medway and Low Weald Wetlands and Grasslands. The 2015 BOA maps indicate where the delivery of Kent Biodiversity Strategy targets should be focused in order to secure the maximum biodiversity benefits. The BOA maps also show where the greatest gains can be made from habitat enhancement, restoration and recreation, as these areas offer the best opportunities for establishing large habitat areas and networks of wildlife habitats. Many areas outside the designated areas 33 and identified BOAs also have substantial biodiversity interest, and include a number of ancient woodlands and other areas of habitats. It will still be necessary to maintain, enhance, buffer and extend areas of wildlife habitat outside the mapped areas in order to maintain the wildlife interest and richness of the wider countryside.

Enhancing and increasing biodiversity actions (Biodiversity and Climate Change Action Plan,2023):

• Review Maidstone Borough Council non-operational land to assess potential for enhancing biodiversity including allowing community groups to take responsibility for management.

Biodiversity Action Plan (Biodiversity Strategy):

We will:

•Require biodiversity net gain on new developments with an emphasis on semi open natural spaces
•Agree and implement a Biodiversity Strategy
•Implement a plan to increase tree cover by at least 46 hectares
•Deliver at least one new wetland project each year

•Work with partners to implement a Nature Recovery Strategy
•Work with local landowners to deliver landscape scale biodiversity initiatives
•Assess potential of our land for enhancing biodiversity including allowing community groups to manage it to enhance biodiversity

2.2.3 Within development and infrastructure

In addition to green blue infrastructure, specific policies can ensure that new development is designed to ensure that its impact on climate change is reduced, and that resilience to climate change is increased.

POLICY LPRSP14(A) – NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

> *Development proposals will enhance, extend and connect habitats to enhance the borough's network of sites that incorporates designated sites of importance for biodiversity, priority habitats, Local Wildlife Sites and fragmented Ancient Woodland; support opportunities for the creation of new Biodiversity Action Plan priority habitats; create, enhance, restore and connect other habitats, including links to habitats outside Maidstone borough, where opportunities arise:*
>
> *a. Provide for the long-term maintenance and management of all natural assets, including landscape character, associated with the development;*
>
> *b. Mitigate for and adapt to the effects of climate change; and*
>
> *c. Positively contribute to the improvement of accessibility of natural green space within walking distance of housing, employment, health and education facilities and to the creation of a wider network of new links between green and blue spaces including links to the Public Rights of Way network.*

POLICY LPRSP13 – INFRASTRUCTURE DELIVERY

> *8. Open space development will be expected to be delivered meeting the following criteria:*
> *a. Development which contributes to the creation of, or enhancement of the existing fabric of open spaces within the borough will be supported.*
> *b. All new development should make a contribution, either on site, or where not feasible, off- site to improving the borough's open spaces.*
> *c. On some strategic sites, open space will be allocated as a part of the land uses required within the site allocation.*
> *d. Existing local open spaces fitting the definition in NPPF Para 1023 will be protected.*
> *e. Unless stated in a site allocation, new developments should make a contribution towards increasing and improving open space as set out in INF1.*

2.3 HABITAT CREATION

2.3.1 Green and Blue Infrastructure

Gaps in the connectivity of green and blue infrastructure resources (Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy, 2016):

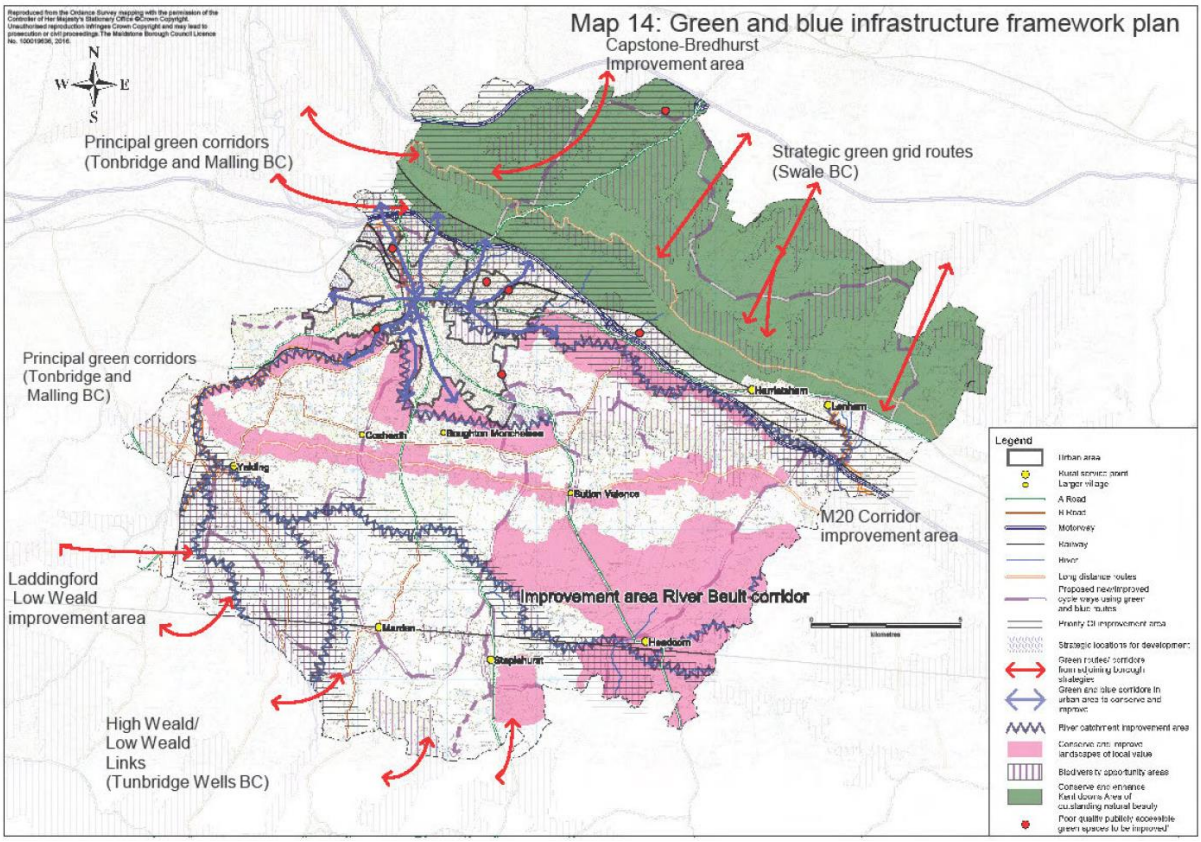
• There is a relative lack of green and blue infrastructure within the more densely built up area of Maidstone's town centre.

Green and blue Infrastructure Framework Plan (Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy, 2016):

•The framework plan identifies and prioritises four broad areas where green and blue infrastructure interventions will have the most impact on achieving the strategy objectives: the Capstone-Bredhurst area, the M20 corridor, River Beult corridor and Laddingford/Low Weald area. In addition it highlights designated Biodiversity Opportunity Areas, river catchment improvement areas and the eight poorest quality publicly accessible green space sites, which should be a priority for improvement.

•Maidstone urban area is also a priority for improvements due to the high population levels, level of multiple deprivation and need to mitigate effects of air pollution through tree planting and encouraging active, sustainable travel. The framework plan indicates green and blue corridors in the urban area to conserve and improve to help achieve these objectives. Developing more detailed green and blue infrastructure plans for the Maidstone urban area will be an important next step and is included in the strategy action plan.

•Map 14 the Green and Blue Infrastructure Framework Plan identifies where spatially specific proposals for Maidstone Borough's green and blue infrastructure will interact and link with green infrastructure proposals of adjoining districts, including Tunbridge Wells Council's High Weald/Low Weald links project, Tonbridge & Malling Council's 'Principal Green Corridors' and Swale Council's 'Strategic Green Grid Routes'.



Create new opportunities (Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy, 2016):

• Reinforce the 'connectivity' and 'accessibility' of green and blue infrastructure resources to form a robust network for wildlife, integrated with networks in adjacent authorities. • Carry out targeted planting of hedgerows to link habitats and counter habitat fragmentation.

• Require creative use of sustainable drainage systems sensitive to ecological needs in new development to help reduce flood risk.

• Plant more trees within the existing built up areas including the centre of Maidstone town, areas of multiple deprivation, and along the M20 corridor - particularly larger forest species trees, to help store carbon, filter pollutants and keep the urban area cool.

• Promote and create sustainable wildlife friendly green spaces and landscape areas as well as green roofs living walls, bird and bat boxes within new development and in urban areas providing more stepping stones for wildlife and making them more resilient to climate change.

• Develop the potential for biomass in Maidstone Borough through the Kent Pathfinder Project in partnership with the Forestry Commission.

• Encourage local food growing schemes and ensure sufficient supply of allotments and community gardens.

Wild spaces proposed actions (Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy, 2016):

• Deliver outstanding actions in Maidstone LBAP habitat action plans.

• Targeted planting of hedgerows to link habitats and counter habitat fragmentation especially Medway and Len River Valleys, dip slope of Kent Downs AONBNational Landscape and Greensand Ridge.

• Continue to resource and extend the Kent and Medway Road Verge Project and manage roadside nature reserves to promote biodiversity and management of wildflower meadows and grassland through the Save Our Magnificent Meadows project and prioritise the Low Weald and urban areas.

• Engage with businesses, local authorities and the forestry/ woodland sector to ensure the sustainable management of woodland in the Kent Downs and Greensand Ridge – beyond minimum standards and develop the potential for sustainable woodland management through fencing and building material and biomass through the Kent Pathfinder Project.

• Increase reed beds for nitrate removal and provide phosphate removal in the River Len (designated as 'Bad' quality under the Water Framework Directive) as a whole river project to prevent nutrient enrichment across the catchment and enhance alder carr and other vegetation along the corridor of the river.

2.3.2 Within development and Infrastructure

The Environment Act will introduce a requirement for new development to deliver 10% Biodiversity Net Gain. The Council are keen to demonstrate its commitment to enhancing biodiversity in the borough to align with the Climate Change and Biodiversity Action Plan, and viability testing has indicated that the delivery of 20% net gain can be achieved. Developments will be expected to deliver a minimum of 20% biodiversity net gain as measured using the latest Natural England Biodiversity metric.

The open space or other requirements of any site allocation do not take into account the potential spatial requirements of any necessary response to biodiversity net gain or mitigation. In most instances the Council does not consider it appropriate to overlay both accessible amenity and biodiversity/habitat requirements due to the conflict which arises between recreation and habitat creation/preservation.

Enhancing and increasing biodiversity actions (Biodiversity and Climate Change Action Plan,2023):

Monitor Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) to adopted 20% standard.

POLICY LPRSP14(A) – NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

To enable Maidstone borough to retain a high quality of living, protect and enhance the environment, and to be able to respond to the effects of climate change, developers will ensure that new development incorporates measures where appropriate to:

a. Deliver a minimum 20% biodiversity net gain on new residential development, having regard to Biodiversity Opportunity Areas and/or Nature Recovery Networks. Biodiversity net gain should be calculated in accordance with the latest Natural England/DEFRA biodiversity metric or equivalent. Where 20% biodiversity net gain is demonstrated not to be financially viable, together with other policy costs, then the statutory minimum net gain provision will be secured;

b. Protect positive landscape character, including Landscapes of Local Value, areas of Ancient Woodland, veteran trees, trees with significant amenity value, important hedgerows, features of biological or geological interest, ecosystem services and the existing public rights of way network from inappropriate development and avoid significant adverse impacts as a result of development through the provision of adequate buffers and in accordance with national guidance;

c. Avoid damage to and inappropriate development considered likely to have significant direct or indirect adverse effects on:

i. Internationally, nationally and locally designated sites of importance for biodiversity (either within or beyond the borough); and
ii. Local Biodiversity Action Plan priority habitats and species;
d. If significant harm to habitats and biodiversity cannot be avoided, then the mitigation hierarchy should be followed:
i. Internationally, nationally and locally designated sites of importance for biodiversity (either within or beyond the borough); and
ii. Local Biodiversity Action Plan Priority habitats.

2.4 SPECIES SPECIFIC

2.4.1 Great Crested Newts (Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy, 2016)

Parts of the borough fall within the Wealden Great Crested Newt Important Area for Ponds (IAP) identified by the Environment Agency (Important Areas for Ponds in the Environment Agency Southern Region, 2009). Great Crested Newt populations thrive where there is high pond density and a well-connected landscape. This helps ensure the survival of populations even if sub-populations are affected by, for example, pond desiccation or fish introductions. The IAP covers the whole of the Weald but within this large area there are ‘hotspots’ with clusters of Great Crested Newt populations including in Marden and Staplehurst which have a high density of pond.

SECTION 3: WIDER ENVIRONMENTAL BENEFITS

3.1 GOAL 2: AIR QUALITY (Local Plan, 2024)

POLICY LPRSP14(A) – NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

> *9. The Council will work with Natural England to assess, monitor and if necessary mitigate any recreation pressure or air pollution effects at North Downs Woodland SAC.*

Spatial objective:

> 7. IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF AIR WITHIN THE AIR QUALITY MANAGEMENT AREA (AQMA)
>
> Developments within, and with the potential to adversely impact the boroughs AQMA will be required to mitigate their impact, including on human health, having regard to both on-site design and travel patterns and modes of travel.

One area currently exceeding guideline values (exceedance areas) and has an Air Quality Action Plan (AQAP) in place in order to identify measures aimed at reducing air pollution at these locations. Located on Upper Stone Street, Maidstone. The AQMA, updated in 2017, covers the main arterial road network in Maidstone and a section of the M20 motorway in recognition of the nature of road networks and traffic movements. This action plan contributes to the delivery of the national air quality strategy.

The latest annual status report (2020) indicated that air quality in Maidstone has improved over recent years 2017-2019 to the extent that a number of areas previously identified as air quality ‘hotspots,’ for example, the High Street and Well Road, no longer appear to exceed the NO2 annual mean objective.

HRA of the Local Plan Review identified that three European sites are sensitive to air pollution from traffic in the borough: North Downs Woodland SAC. All This site is within 200m of the A229. Work has been undertaken to assess whether the Local Plan would result in increases in traffic on these roads of more than 1,000 AADT (or 200 HDVs), either alone or in combination with other plans or projects, in line with good practice guidance. An air quality assessment has been carried out by the Council to assess the effects on the SAC/SPA/Ramsar sites and mitigation is required to avoid adverse effects on the integrity of this site. Appropriate strategies will be developed in agreement with Natural England before the Local Plan is adopted and these will be implemented prior to adverse effects on integrity occurring; developer contributions would be used to support this.

3.2 GOAL 3: CLEAN AND PLENTIFUL WATER

POLICY LPRSP14(A) – NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

> *3. Development proposals will control pollution to protect ground and surface waters where necessary and mitigate against the deterioration of water bodies and adverse impacts on Groundwater Source Protection Zones and principal aquifers, and incorporate measures to improve the ecological status of water bodies as appropriate; Major developments will not be permitted unless they can demonstrate that new or existing water supply, sewage and wastewater treatment facilities can accommodate the new development.*

3.3 GOAL 4: MANAGING EXPOSURE TO CHEMICALS AND PESTICIDES

3.4 GOAL 5: MAXIMISE OUR RESOURCES, MINIMISE OUR WASTE

Enhancing and increasing biodiversity actions (Biodiversity and Climate Change Action Plan,2023):

•Investigate recycling strategies in the Town centre.

•Ensure MBC offices and buildings have recycling facilities

3.5 GOAL 6: USING RESOURCES FROM NATURE SUSTAINABLY

Enhancing and increasing biodiversity actions (Biodiversity and Climate Change Action Plan,2023):

Ensure Sustainability DPD as part of larger Development Plan requires on-site renewables on all types of new developments and identify indicators that align with strategic planning and monitor implementation.

3.6 GOAL 7: MITIGATING AND ADAPTING TO CLIMATE CHANGE

Net Zero Commitment (Biodiversity and Climate Change Action Plan,2023):

We have committed to achieving Net-Zero for our own operations by 2030 and our long-term aspiration is to become carbon negative or a footprint less than neutral, so that we have a net effect of removing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere.

At a borough wide-scale, in accordance with national government targets, and based on Tyndall Centre data, we have set out carbon reduction milestones to reduce CO2 emissions by -13.4% each year across the borough to reach near to Net-Zero by 2041. However, it must be noted that the fairness of this target is contingent on many aspects and not the sole responsibility of the council due to economic factors, private sector, transport sector, and wide-scale public behaviour change.

Enhancing and increasing biodiversity actions (Biodiversity and Climate Change Action Plan,2023):

• Deliver policy as part of design and sustainability DPD and future Development Plan evolution for long term climate change adaptation in new developments to flooding, heatwaves, and drought and ensure longer term climate impacts are being considered as part of planning and policy decisions. Identify indicators that align with strategic planning and monitor implementation.

•Identify actions to mitigate climate change in existing developments.

•Conduct Borough Climate Impact Assessment and

1) identify natural flood management (nature-based solutions and sustainable urban drainage),

2) build local communities' resilience,

3) support business continuity management, and

4) priorities and strengthen power and water supply and other critical infrastructure ensuring more resilient communities.

POLICY LPRSP14(C) – CLIMATE CHANGE (Local Plan, 2024)

To ensure that development in the borough mitigates and adapts to climate change, the council will:
1. Adopt a strategy for growth which delivers development in sustainable locations, well supported by or capable of delivering better services and public transport which will minimise the need to travel.
2. Encourage the delivery of sustainable buildings and a reduction of CO2 emissions in new development, having regard to the Kent and Medway Energy and Low Emissions Strategy.
3. Encourage and support the delivery of low carbon energy and low carbon heat networks in new developments.
4. Support the provision of renewable energy infrastructure within new development.
5. Require the integration of blue-green infrastructure into major new development in order to mitigate urban heat islands, enhance urban biodiversity, and to contribute to reduced surface water run off through the provision of SuDS.
6. Require development involving the creation of new dwellings, retail, and/or employment space to encourage a shift towards sustainable travel through:
a. prioritising active travel by ensuring good provision and connectivity of walking and cycling routes;
b. ensuring public transport accessibility; and
c. through the provision of electric vehicle infrastructure.
7. New dwellings should be built to ensure that wholesome water consumption is not greater than 110 litres/person/day.

8. Require new development involving the creation of new dwellings, retail floorspace and/or employment floorspace to plan for and respond to the impacts of climate change.
9. Require new development to include a Flood Risk Assessment where the site is located within Flood Zones 2 or 3 or is over 1 hectare in size.
10. Require development to have regard to surface water management plans.

SPATIAL OBJECTIVES:

4. ENSURING THAT DEVELOPMENT ADEQUATELY MITIGATES AND ADAPTS TO CLIMATE CHANGE, WHILST ADDRESSING THE ISSUES OF FLOODING AND WATER SUPPLY AND THE NEED FOR DEPENDABLE INFRASTRUCTURE FOR THE REMOVAL OF SEWERAGE AND WASTEWATER;

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 (Local Plan, 2024)

Ensuring that the borough's environmental assets such as the National Landscape, Landscapes of Local Value, the countryside and Green Belt are suitably protected and enhanced

Development will have regard to safeguarding and maintaining the character of the borough's landscapes including the Kent Downs and High Weald Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and their settings. Development will also conserve and enhance other distinctive landscapes of local value and heritage designations whilst facilitating the economic and social well-being of these areas, including the diversification of the rural economy.

3.9.2 Heritage

POLICY LPRSP14(B) – THE HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT (Local Plan, 2024)

To ensure their continued contribution to the economy, culture and image of Maidstone Borough, the characteristics, distinctiveness, diversity and quality of heritage assets will be conserved and, where possible, enhanced. This will be achieved by the council encouraging and supporting measures that secure

the sensitive restoration, reuse, enjoyment, conservation and/or enhancement of heritage assets, in particular designated assets identified as being at risk, to include: […]

Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy, 2016:

A Register of Landscapes, Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest has been maintained by Historic England since the 1980s and the designation of such sites forms a material consideration within the planning process. Within Maidstone Borough there are several registered sites, comprising Mote Park (below), Leeds Castle Estate, Linton Park, Chilston Park and Boughton Monchelsea Place.

3.9.3 Health and wellbeing

The adequate provision of open spaces within the borough is critical to the health and enjoyment of local residents and will act to draw investment into the area. It is recognised that as Maidstone's population grows, the demand for open spaces will grow proportionately. Development creates value and thus the opportunity to create new open spaces. It is recognised that as Maidstone and our villages grow, land which is "open" in character may be lost to the expanding urban area. While positive features of the rural area can be retained, development should replace larger, more rural land, with smaller, more active, higher quality open spaces for communities to enjoy.

To support the appropriate delivery of development identified in the Local Plan, the council will identify opportunities to secure new open spaces, improve existing open spaces, and improve the access to and between open spaces to meet and/or contribute towards the open space requirements in accordance with the standards set out in INF1

3.9.4 Access to nature

Key issues (Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy, 2016):

• Public Rights of Way network is fragmented and poorly connected in some areas, requiring the use of often very busy roads.

• Perceptions of safety particularly with an ageing population can be a barrier to use of footpaths.

• Significant area in the south of the borough where people do not have convenient access to larger areas of natural greenspace.

• Loss of green spaces within the built up area to development leading to a loss of urban wildlife habitats and fragmentation.

• Lack of trees within the more densely built up area of Maidstone's town centre results in a lack of stepping stones for species migration.

Biodiversity and Climate Change Action Plan (2023):

Active travel and green transportation:

Update the Integrated Transport Strategy, and work towards a Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan to prioritise walking, cycling, public transport, and electric vehicles.

The council is developing a Borough wide LCWIP to be completed Summer 2024.

POLICY LPRSP12 – SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORT (Local Plan, 2024)

> *Working in partnership with Kent County Council, National Highways, infrastructure providers and public transport operators, Maidstone Borough Council will manage any negotiations and agreements regarding schemes for mitigating the impact of development where appropriate on*
>
> *the local and strategic road networks and facilitate the delivery of transport improvements to support the growth proposed by the Local Plan Review. Scheme promoters will be expected to adopt Vision and Validate principles, in accordance with Circular 01/22, within their planning applications and to set out a Monitor and Manage strategy for each site covering all modes of transport.*
>
> *3. In doing so, the council and its partners will:*
>
> *a. Ensure the transport system supports the growth projected by*
>
> *Maidstone's Local Plan Review and facilitates economic prosperity.*
>
> *b. Deliver modal shift through managing demand on the transport network through enhanced public transport and walking and cycling improvements.*
>
> *f. Protect and enhance public rights of way;*
>
> *l. Address the air quality impact of transport;*

Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy, 2016:

Conserve and improve:

• Maintain public rights of way, long distance walks and cycleways and promoted walks and rides through the borough to a high standard with prioritisation of route maintenance influenced by local communities.

• Conserve the few surviving 'green lanes' (roads which have never been paved) and byways (similar routes managed as public rights of way) and promote their use by pedestrians, cyclists and equestrians and prevent damage by motorised vehicles.

Create new opportunities:

• Work with partners to secure new routes in areas of high demand and where possible in direct response to customer requests.

• Create improve connections along and between green corridors and Public Rights of Way particularly along the River Medway in the town centre and along other river corridors to encourage sustainable travel modes.

• Create an improved green corridor between Mote Park and Whatman Park through maidstone town centre.

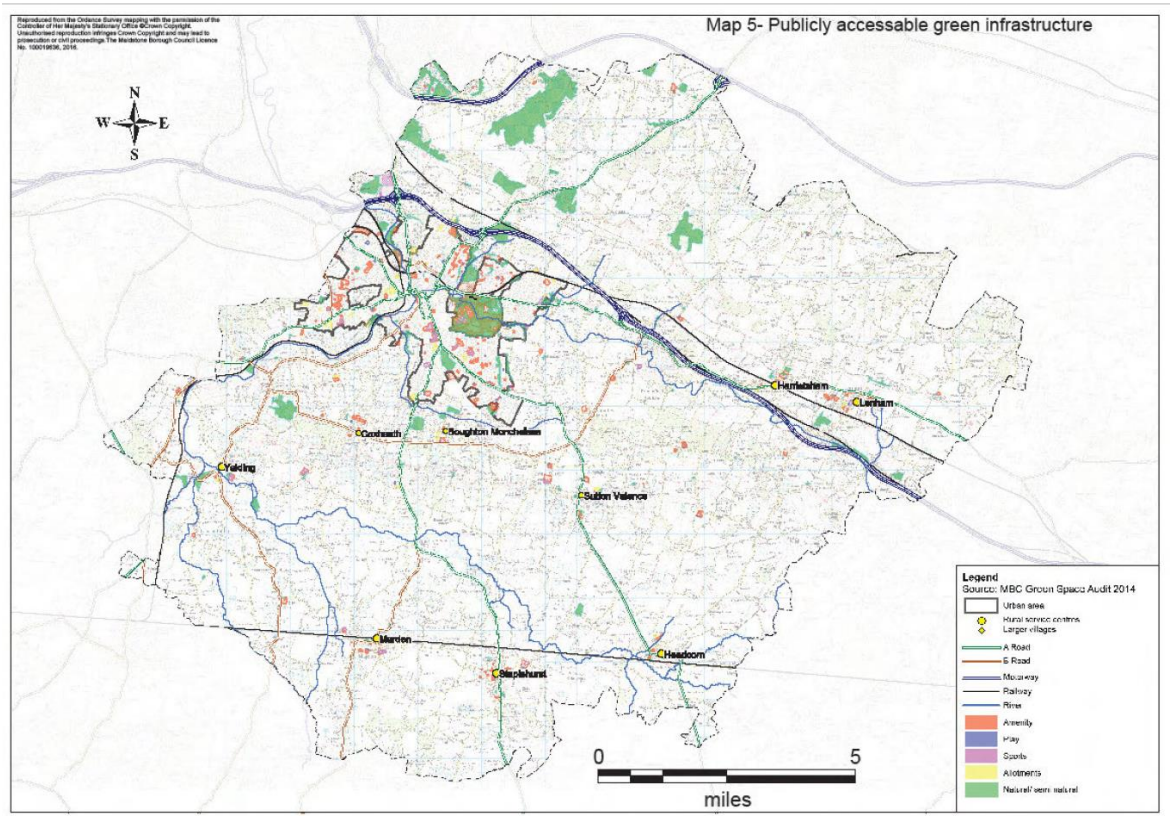
• Work towards the creation of improved green links from Maidstone town centre into the countryside utilising the green wedges.

• Incorporate multifunctional, sustainable routes (including wide inviting footpath routes through green corridors) in the design of new development and protect existing rights of way to ensure that walking and cycling can become the preferred choice for new residents.

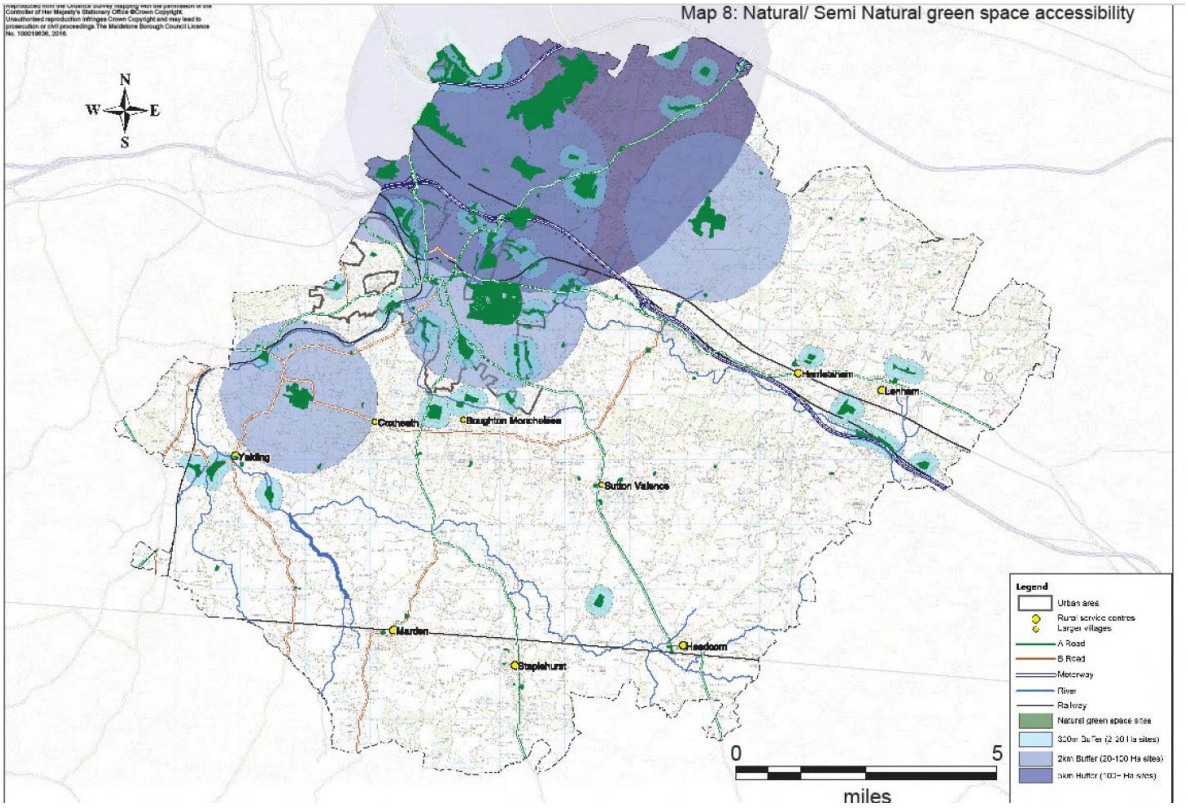
• Increase opportunities for horse riders and cyclists with access to new paths supporting their recreational needs, particularly in the south of the borough where there is a lower provision.

• Designate a network of 'quiet lanes' across the borough to help fill gaps in the fragmented public rights of way network.

Publicly accessible green infrastructure (Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy, 2016):



Natural/Semi natural green space accessibility (Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy, 2016):



3.9.5 Connection with Nature

Biodiversity and Climate Change Action Plan (2023):

Support residents (including adults, women, youths and children, faith groups, minority groups, and marginalised groups), partners, and wider stakeholders (Parish councils, farmers, and landowners) to understand the changes they can make to reduce and prepare for climate change. Including:

- Supporting residents to reduce their individual carbon footprints, upskilling and green job creation, buying local, conserve water, and with sustainable lifestyles and Eatwell guidance.
- Support residents, schools and community groups with biodiversity improvement and protection, promoting relevant schemes, such as tree planting and after care, and encouraging them to enhance biodiversity in their gardens and grounds

Provide staff awareness information of biodiversity and climate change at induction and provide job specific sustainability training to each service area.

Enable local businesses to reduce their carbon footprint by providing information on funding opportunities, carbon calculators, localised supply chains and travel plans that promote active travel and public transport, and support businesses to use the Kent Prepare website to raise awareness of how to prepare for flooding.

Sustainable decision-making processes and governance:

- Provide briefings and training for councillors and our managers on carbon, climate change, and biodiversity to create a culture change and ensure climate change and biodiversity are integrated into decision making.
- Ensure service plans consider biodiversity and climate change and monitor with performance indicators, so that managers plan their services to ensure opportunities for enhancing biodiversity and mitigating and adapting to climate change are taken.
- Establish criteria for investment in climate change and biodiversity and invest to save schemes (eg. renewables, heat networks). These will consider relative impact in terms of carbon reduction and ease of delivery, such that expenditure is focused on deliverable, affordable initiatives that maximise impact on the carbon reduction targets.

3.9.6 Open spaces and recreation

POLICY LPRSP13 – INFRASTRUCTURE DELIVERY (Local Plan, 2024)

> *4. Where there are competing demands for contributions towards the delivery of infrastructure, secured through section 106 legal agreements, the council will prioritise these demands in the manner listed below:*
>
> *Infrastructure priorities for residential development:*
>
> *i. Affordable housing*
> *ii. Transport*
> *iii. Open space*
> *iv. Education*
> *v. Health*
> *vi. Community facilities*
> *vii. Public realm*
> *viii. Waste Management*
> *ix. Public services, &,*
> *x. Libraries*
> *Infrastructure priorities for business and retail development:*
> *i) Transport*
> *ii) Public realm*
> *iii) Open space, &,*
> *iv) Education/skills*
> *5. This list serves as a guide to the council's prioritisation process, although it is recognised that each site and development proposal will bring with it its own issues that could mean an alternate prioritisation is used that includes priorities not listed above from other infrastructure providers..*

POLICY LPRSP14(A) – NATURAL ENVIRONMENT (Local Plan, 2024)

> *7. Any required publicly accessible open space should be designed as part of the overall green and blue infrastructure and layout of a site, taking advantage of the potential for multiple benefits including increased physical activity, enhanced play, wildlife, sustainable urban drainage, tree planting and landscape provision. The form and function of green and blue infrastructure will reflect a site's characteristics, nature and location.*

Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy (2016):

Using the qualitative information from the Open Spaces Quality Audit, analysing the Accessibility Maps and the quantitative analysis utilising the new (Local Plan 2016) standards shows the following current open space deficiencies by place/ward:

• Amenity Green Space Current deficiency within Maidstone - North, Fant, High Street, Bearsted, Allington and North Wards

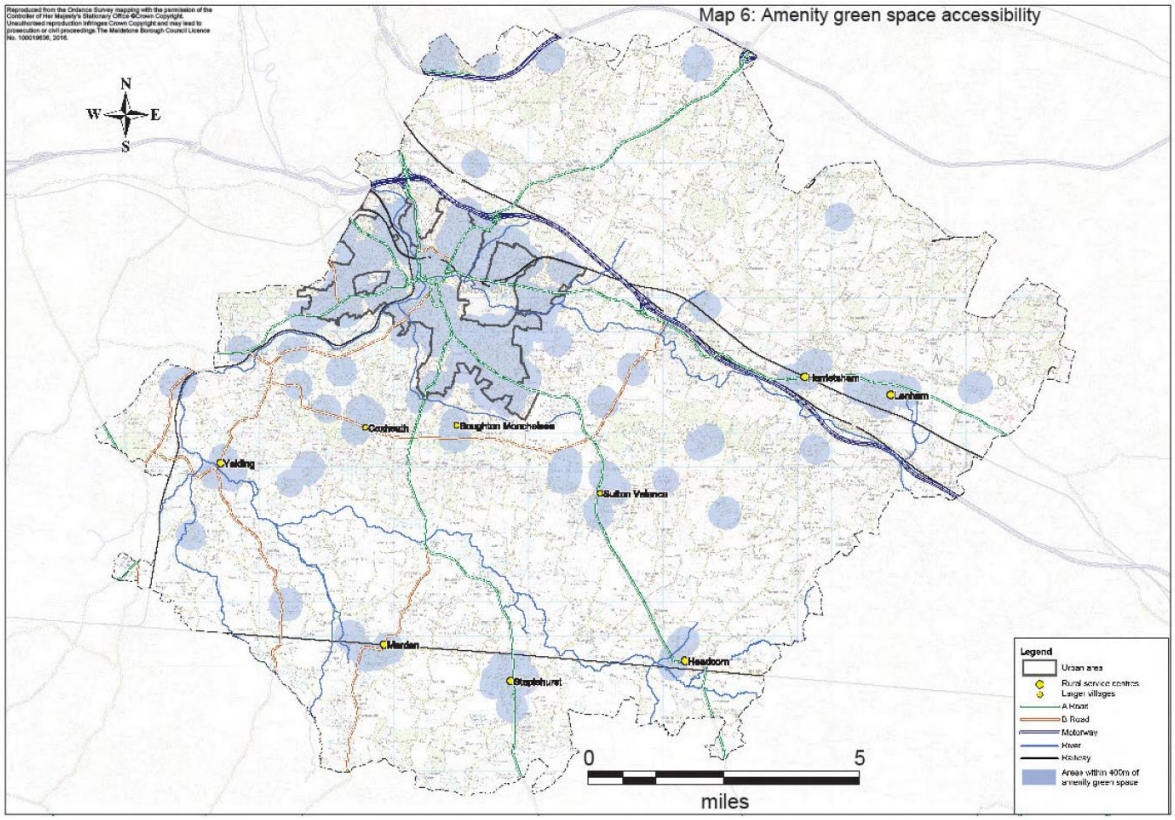
• Children's Play Space Considered as, at best ,fair in most of the borough but deficient in the urban area of Maidstone and, possibly, Marden, Staplehurst, Headcorn and Sutton Valance.

• Natural/Semi natural Greenspace Whilst considered as good in general, deficient in the urban area of Maidstone and Staplehurst, Headcorn and Marden and, possibly, Lenham, Coxheath and Sutton Valence.

• Allotments Deficient in most of the Maidstone urban area and Staplehurst.

• Outdoor Sports Facilities Considered as very poor with indications of deficiencies in most of the borough but will be better informed by the Playing Pitches Strategy (2016/17).

Maidstone Amenity Greenspace (Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy, 2016):



SECTION 4: DISTRICT PROJECTS TO NOTE

4.1 Bicknor Wood Community Woodland (Bicknor Wood and email contact)

Bicknor Wood, is a cherished 8.5 acre ancient woodland nature reserve. Ancient woodland describes land that has not been disturbed or ploughed for over 400 years and areas like this are rare, covering just 2% of land in the UK. It includes many mature trees, some around 150 years old and contains an abundance of wildlife and wildflowers. This relaxing peaceful haven, now surrounded by 4 different housing developments, was purchased in 2020 by residents of the local community to protect it forever.

The woods feature 18 (and counting) species of native trees and many types of wildflowers, particularly wood anemone, primrose and bluebells, thousands of which transform the woodland each spring. 42 (also still counting) species of birds have been recorded in and flying over the wood. Most frequently seen are Blue Tit, Blackbird, Woodpigeon and European Robin. Occasionally a Tawny Owl, may be heard, but is seldom seen. At least 4 species of bats are known to occur and join rabbits, grey squirrels, fox and badger on the mammals list.The insect list is lengthy.

A community working to connect the woodland to surrounding areas through Maidstone's built up areas.

4.2 Scenic Green Trail (Email contact)

An idea that will pave the way for connectivity now and generations to come, for local people and as a co-benefit, nature. Uses existing public footpaths and short sections of quiet country roads, this means there is little outlay cost. By connecting areas of existing green space together it does not discriminate against passing through suburban, semi-rural or fully rural areas, from open farmland, historic villages, woodland, rivers, chalk hillside grasslands and much more. Possible routes provided.

Working alongside the Biodiversity team of Parish Councils in south Maidstone, some of who have walked large parts of the route to test its viability. The route will likely change slightly in just a few places based on the feedback received.

4.3 Kent Downs Woodfuel Pathfinder (KDWfP) (Woodfuel Pathfinder)

Targeted package of support coordinated by the Kent Downs National Landscape to support woodland owners and managers, biomass heating installers and fuel producers take full advantage of the expanding market for woodfuel.

4.4 The Kent and Medway Road Verge Project (Local Plan, 2024)

Managed by a partnership between Kent Highways Services and Kent Wildlife Trust this project identifies, protects and manages road verges which contain threatened habitats or wildlife. Roadside nature reserves, marked by special signs, can link existing wildlife areas, helping to reconnect and restore landscape. This benefits both people and wildlife and makes nature more resilient to future change. They provide vital wildlife corridors for many species, particularly reptiles such as slow-worms and viviparous lizards, and mammals such as badgers. The project has a road verge project officer, based with the Trust, who works with a dedicated team of voluntary road verge wardens to maintain the condition of the verges and monitor their wildlife interest.

4.5 Save Our Magnificent Meadows (Local Plan, 2024 & Magnificent Meadows)

The Save our magnificent meadows project aims to halt this decline and improve the biodiversity of meadows through a three year project which aims to increase recognition of the value of meadows within local communities and the wider population with supportive networks of meadow champions. To maximise impact the project will focus on the Low Weald which is important for its meadow habitats, particularly wet and riverside meadows, and one of the most significant lowland meadow sites in Kent, Marden Meadows SSSI. The project will be delivered primarily through a ‘community landscape approach’. This multi-faceted approach will link community engagement with landscape-scale habitat improvement, offering the maximum benefits in both areas and seeking to create lasting change. Three community landscape areas have been identified: Yalding Riverside Meadows, Low Weald Villages and Sevenoaks and Tonbridge Weald.

4.6 Heaths Countryside Corridor (Local Plan, 2024)

A local community project born out of a desire to provide places for local people to go and for wildlife to thrive now owns and manages three sites in the Lenham Heath and Charing Heath area. The objectives of the Heaths Countryside Corridor are ‘to conserve and enhance, for the benefit of the public, the natural beauty and habitats of the Greensand belt area around Charing and Lenham and to educate the public in all matters relating to the natural and physical environment and its conservation and protection’. With support from Kent Wildlife Trust, Rail Link Countryside Initiative, Kentish Stour Countryside Project and Mid Kent Downs Countryside Partnership, the project has improved footpaths, provided leaflets and education packs and on-site interpretation as well as planting and habitat management.

SECTION 5: SPECIFIC PRIORITIES WITHIN NEIGHBOURHOOD PLANS

5.1 Available Plans:

Boughton Monchelsea, Lenham, Loose, Marden, North Loose, Otham, Staplehurst.

Various neighbourhood planning groups are looking to review their plans following the LPR adoption2024.

5.2 Boughton Monchelsea Neighbourhood Plan

PWP 11. Protecting woodland areas and planting native tree and hedgerow species

> *To maintain and improve landscape and ecological value development shall incorporate native hedgerow and tree planting within landscaping schemes. Where relevant it shall preserve vistas of the rural landscape.*

5.3 Lenham Neighbourhood Plan

5.4 Loose Neighbourhood Plan

There have been several large pollution incidents involving the main stream and some of the smaller streams. There have been several incidents of sewage overflows from the wastewater pumping station onto private land and into the Loose Stream. All planning applications should consider the management of rain water run-off from buildings and hard surfaces so that pollutants are not carried into the streams and where large volumes of water are involved the streams are not overwhelmed

5.5 Marden Neighbourhood Plan

Not only is the stream important but so too is the need to protect the rest of the natural environment. Hedgerows, orchards, woodland, grassland, scrubland and meadows are all features that contribute to the attractive distinctiveness of Loose. They provide important flora and fauna habitat and movement corridors. Consideration needs to be given to the protection of these. The reduction in species such as the song thrush, bats, water vole and dormouse is evident.

The main cause of past flood incidents (in Marden) has been heavy rainfall causing surface water flooding due to inadequate drainage systems. Any increases in surface water run-off in Marden, due to future developments or increase in rainfall due to climate change will have implications on flood risk downstream.

POLICY NE5 – LANDSCAPE PLANTING

New landscape planting in Marden must be selected from native species of local provenance for landscape and visual effects and to maintain the natural rhythms of the vegetation in the surrounding area. Priority should be given to species that provide food and shelter to wildlife.

5.6 North Loose Neighbourhood Plan

5.7 Oatham Neighbourhood Plan

5.8 Staplehurst Neighbourhood Plan

SECTION 6: DOCUMENTS REVIEWED AND REFERENCED

Document reference	Link
Biodiversity and Climate Change Action Plan,2023	Our Biodiversity and Climate Change Action Plan | MBC Climate Change and Biodiversity (gogreengowild.com)
Local Plan, 2024	https://drive.google.com/file/d/1RFbWZTr3I0p893wR9-xK6r3yBdBm5rx3/view
Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy, 2016	Green-and-Blue-Infrastructure-Strategy-June-2016.pdf
Biodiversity Strategy	Maidstone Borough Council Biodiversity Strategy
North Loose Neighbourhood Plan	https://maidstone.gov.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0007/120220/North-Loose-Adopted-Neighbourhood-Plan.pdf
Loose Neighbourhood Plan	https://localplan.maidstone.gov.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0008/336950/109_Q_190528_Final-Plan_pages-changes-to-front-cover-021019.pdf
Marden Neighbourhood Plan	https://localplan.maidstone.gov.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0003/345729/Marden-Neighbourhood-Plan.pdf
Staplehurst Neighbourhood Plan	https://localplanhra.maidstone.gov.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0010/369298/Final-Staplehurst-Neighbourhood-Plan.pdf
Boughton Monchelsea Neighbourhood Plan	https://drive.google.com/file/d/1N8t0Wqb7JQaAriyIO-l_RiEZe3T_a_hB/view?usp=sharing
Lenham Neighbourhood Plan	https://localplan.maidstone.gov.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0008/405773/Lenham-neighbourhood-plan-FINAL-SUBMISSION-LNP2-WEBSITE.pdf
Otham Neighbourhood Plan	https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Syw6TYCwCAK2PoO6H1RgYeY2hGnfYpAE/view?form=MY01SV&OCID=MY01SV
Magnificent Meadows	Medway Valley | Magnificent Meadows
Woodfuel pathfinder	Kent Downs Woodfuel Pathfinder
Bicknor Wood	Introducing Bicknor Wood
Habitats Regulation Assessment	https://drive.google.com/file/d/11bryErPKeBGxrdZEWJ6RRvr8oYP7uiXm/view