



# State of Medway Report

## Natural Assets and Open Space

Updated January 2012

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# State of Medway Report: Natural Assets and Open Space

## November 2008

State of Medway Reports.....	1
1. Introduction .....	1
2. Natural Areas .....	2
3. Internationally and Nationally Important Sites for Nature Conservation.....	4
— Special Protection Areas, Ramsar Sites and Special Areas of Conservation .....	4
— Sites of Special Scientific Interest .....	5
4. Regionally Important Geological and Geomorphological Sites .....	7
5. Local Nature Reserves.....	8
— Other Nature Reserves .....	10
6. Local Wildlife Sites .....	10
7. Ancient Woodlands .....	11
8. Landscape.....	12
— Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty .....	12
— Landscape Character Areas .....	13
9. Open Space .....	18
Appendix	
Maps.....	22

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## State of Medway Reports

This is one of a series of factual reports that were first produced in 2008 to inform the preparation of Medway's Local Development Framework or LDF. Each deals with a specific topic and draws together available information from a variety of sources.

The reports were intended to establish the current position and a baseline for further work. They also helped in highlighting gaps in the information base.

Each was updated in January 2012 to provide an updated baseline and inform the independent examination of the Medway Core Strategy.

To monitor progress being made on the LDF please regularly check our website at [www.medway.gov.uk/ldf](http://www.medway.gov.uk/ldf).

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### 1. Introduction

- 1.1 Medway has a rich mixture of natural assets and open spaces, which plays an important part in the lives of its residents as well as helping to define its sense of place. The scale of these areas varies from the broad sweep of the downs, estuaries and Marshes to the parks, greens and allotments found throughout the urban area. As well as providing a valuable resource for recreation and learning, this network also provides an important habitat for wildlife.
- 1.2 This report provides an inventory of natural assets and open space, or a snapshot of what is currently present. It draws upon original sources for the designations and descriptions of the area's landscapes and habitats which, although separately categorized, in reality overlap, showing that landscape and habitat are inextricably linked. The report does not attempt to identify every area of open space which is used for recreation due to the sheer number of sites involved but draws instead, upon the findings of the Council's Countryside and Open Space Strategy, which groups the sites together and draws conclusions on their overall provision and condition.
- 1.3 The essential characteristics of each landscape and habitat area are set out and, where available, their condition is explained. The sites are

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shown in a series of maps in the Appendix. Although these sites will be the subject of policies for protection and enhancement, the policies themselves and the measures required to implement them are considered in the Issues and Options report.

- 1.4 Green Belts and Strategic Gaps are not included because they are areas designated to prevent the coalescence of settlements rather than areas of importance for landscape or wildlife habitats. Special Landscape Areas and Areas of Local Landscape Importance (ALLI) have not been included because the Government wishes to see them replaced with generic policies rather than retaining designations. However, if a special justification can be made, they may be retained (see PPG7 para.25 page 15). In order to fully evidence local generic landscape policies in the Medway Core Strategy and other following local development framework documents the Council has produced a Medway Landscape Character assessment; approved in March 2011.

## 2. Natural Areas

- 2.1 Natural England has examined the local distinctiveness of each part of England, to identify their characteristic wildlife and natural features, and used this to define a comprehensive series of Natural Areas. Their boundaries are based upon the distribution of wildlife and natural features, and on the land use pattern and human history of each area. They are not confined to administrative boundaries and are not designations. The approach provides a way of identifying priorities for nature conservation areas with ecological and landscape integrity and setting objectives which reflect those priorities.
- 2.2 Parts of three Natural Areas (See Map 1) cover the whole of the Medway unitary area. These are:
- Greater Thames Estuary
  - North Kent Plain
  - North Downs.
- 2.3.1 **The Greater Thames Estuary Natural Area** comprises the tidal Thames and most of the Essex coast to the River Stour. It reflects the geographical extent of a number of estuarine habitats, plants and insect communities, coastal processes, geomorphological features and internationally important bird populations.
- 2.4 A number of habitats are present within the natural area in Medway. These are:
- a. Grazing marsh and associated habitats including sea walls and other grassland, reedbeds, ditches, pools and saline lagoons;
  - b. Intertidal sand and mud flats;
  - c. Saltmarsh
  - d. Arable farmland

<http://www.english-nature.org.uk/science/natural/profiles/naProfile67.pdf>

2.5 **The North Kent Plain Natural Area** is a strip of land between the North Downs and the Thames Estuary containing some of the most productive farmland in southeast England. It also includes large areas of woodland and marshland and the junction between it and the Greater Thames Estuary Natural Area is not always clearly defined. It stretches from the east Kent coast at Sandwich to the outskirts of London.

2.6 There are two habitat types that predominate in the Medway area. The first is farmland, utilising highly fertile, easily worked, mainly Grade 1 agricultural land. It is an important part of the character of the area but does not have high nature conservation interest. The second is woodland, much of which is of high nature conservation interest, particularly a number of ancient woodlands.

<http://www.english-nature.org.uk/science/natural/profiles/naProfile68.pdf>

2.7 **The North Downs Natural Area** extends from Farnham, in Surrey, to Dover and forms one of the most striking landscape features in the southeast. The chalk soils, the warm and dry climate, and long established farming and management practices have produced an area of outstanding nature conservation interest. The Downs have a south facing scarp slope and a dip slope to the north, which is cut through by a number of rivers, including the Medway. These valleys are treated as part of the same natural area. Throughout the area, dry coombes and winterbourne valleys break up the topography. Some large settlements, including Medway, have spread up the dip slope, but generally, this is a landscape of small villages linked by narrow lanes.

2.8 Only a relatively small part of the North Downs is located within Medway, containing a number of habitat types, including chalk grassland, woodland, rivers and former chalk quarries.

<http://www.english-nature.org.uk/science/natural/profiles/naProfile69.pdf>

2.9 In 1997, English Nature published **Profiles** for each of the three Natural Areas, which included a detailed description of their habitats, species, landscape and geological features, the pressures on them which threatened them and a set of objectives for measures to maintain, restore and, where possible, to enhance them. Those Profiles can be found on the Natural England website.

### **3. Internationally and Nationally Important Sites for Nature Conservation**

#### **Special Protection Areas, Ramsar Sites and Special Areas of Conservation**

- 3.1 As a member of the European Union, the UK has agreed to, and is bound by, the EC Directive of 1979, on the Conservation of Wild Birds. Under it, the Government is required to take measures to preserve a sufficient diversity of habitats for all species of wild birds naturally occurring within England in order to maintain the birds' populations.
- 3.2 The Directive also requires that member states take special measures to conserve the habitats of rare and migratory birds. In particular, the Government is required to designate the most suitable areas for these bird species as 'Special Protection Areas' (SPAs). Within these SPAs the Government is required to take appropriate steps to avoid any significant pollution or deterioration of the habitat or any significant disturbance to the birds, except where there is an over-riding public interest.
- 3.3 The UK is also a signatory to the 1971 'Convention on the Conservation of Wetlands of International Importance, Especially as Waterfowl Habitats'. This is an international treaty, agreed in Ramsar, in Iran and has been adopted by countries all over the world. Areas designated under this Convention are known as RAMSAR sites. This is a voluntary agreement rather than an obligation arising from membership of the European Union. The boundaries of SPA and RAMSAR sites in Medway generally coincide with SSSIs and are protected through existing SSSI and Planning Legislation.
- 3.4 There are two SPA/RAMSAR sites in Medway. The Medway Estuary and Marshes was Classified as a SPA and listed as a RAMSAR site in 1993. The Thames Estuary and Marshes was Classified as a SPA and listed as a RAMSAR site in 2000 (See Maps 2 and 3). Both areas form part of the Greater Thames Estuary Natural Area defined by Natural England. They are wetlands of international importance comprising intertidal habitats, saltmarsh, coastal grazing marshes, and saline lagoons and lagoon type habitats. They provide wintering and breeding habitats for important groups of wetland bird species, particularly wildfowl and waders as well as supporting migratory birds in passage. Each regularly support over 20,000 waterfowl with an average peak count of 53,900 and 49,400 birds respectively. Each supports over 30 different species of national or international importance.

<http://www.jncc.gov.uk/pdf/RIS/UK11069.pdf>  
<http://www.jncc.gov.uk/pdf/RIS/UK11040.pdf>

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- 3.5 The condition of these habitats has been assessed by Natural England as part of a wider assessment of all SSSIs. The findings are set out in the next section of this paper.
- 3.6 The EC Habitats Directive of 1992 requires member states to create a network of protected wildlife areas, known as Natura 2000. This consists of Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) and Special Protection Areas. SACs provide increased protection to a variety of wild animals, plants and habitats. The Secretary of State formally designated the 236 English sites in April 2005. All such sites are also SSSIs.
- 3.7 There is only one SAC in Medway in the Medway Valley near Upper Halling. This forms a small part of the North Downs Woodlands SAC, the majority of which lies within Gravesham. It is important for its beech forest and yew forest, which are both one of the best areas in the United Kingdom. Closely associated with these are semi-natural dry grasslands, other woodlands and scrubland (See Map 4).

[W:\Reg\\_Env\Plans\Plans\\_R\\_IDPR\\_work\R&I\\_work\Env&Rural\\_issues\SACs](W:\Reg_Env\Plans\Plans_R_IDPR_work\R&I_work\Env&Rural_issues\SACs)

### **Sites of Special Scientific Interest**

- 3.8 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) are notified under section 28 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act, 1981. There are over 4000 SSSIs in England constituting the country's very best wildlife and geological sites and of these, there are eight in Medway. These are:
- South Thames Estuary and Marshes (See Map 5);
  - Medway Estuary and Marshes (See Map 6);
  - Cobham Woods (See Map 8);
  - Northward Hill (See Map 5);
  - Dalham Farm (See Map 5 );
  - Chattenden Woods (See Map 7);
  - Tower Hill to Cockham Wood (See Map 6 );
  - Halling to Trottiscliffe Escarpment (See Map 9).
- 3.9 A brief description of the characteristics of each site, which warranted its notification, and its current condition are set out below. Natural England has carried out an assessment of the condition of all SSSIs in England and divided them into five categories; favourable, unfavourable recovering, unfavourable no change, unfavourable declining and part destroyed or destroyed. The Government has a target of bringing 95% of all SSSIs into favourable condition by 2010. Currently, 58% of SSSI land is in favourable or recovering condition and 42% is in unfavourable condition. Natural England recognises an urgent need to address that 42% in partnership with a wide range of organisations and individuals.



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<http://www.english-nature.org.uk/Special/sssi/search.cfm>

- 3.10 **South Thames Estuary and Marshes:** The description of the site is the same as that for the SPA/RAMSAR site covering the same area, which is set out above.
- 3.11 Over 96% of the area is in favourable or recovering condition and thus meets the target of 95%. The reasons for the remaining unfavourable condition include inappropriate weed control and undergrazing, the adverse effects of agricultural practices, inappropriate ditch management and scrub control, and coastal squeeze.
- 3.12 **Medway Estuary and Marshes:** The description of the site is the same as that for the SPA/RAMSAR site covering the same area, which is set out above.
- 3.13 Over 99% of the area is in favourable or recovering condition and so exceeds the target. The small remaining area has some inappropriate ditch management and cutting/mowing and undergrazing.
- 3.14 **Cobham Woods:** This woodland and old parkland is representative of woods in North Kent that occur in part on acidic Thanet Sands and in part on chalk soils. One nationally rare plant species occurs in the arable land close to the woods and an outstanding assemblage of plants is present. The site is also important for its breeding birds.
- 3.15 Only 67% of the area is in favourable or recovering condition. The reason for the remaining 33%, which is in unfavourable/no change condition, is the lack of appropriate forestry and woodland management.
- 3.16 **Northward Hill:** This site contains a heronry with over 200 pairs and is the largest in Britain. There is a diverse breeding bird community and the insect fauna is of interest, particularly moths and butterflies. The site consists of mixed deciduous woodland and scrub with some areas of open grassland and bracken. A number of small ponds are present and a few open ditches. Overall, the wood has a diverse flora with over 200 plants recorded, including the trees and shrubs. Its condition is 100% favourable. It was declared a *National Nature Reserve* in 1951 under the name High Halstow Nature Reserve and is managed by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds.
- 3.17 **Dalham Farm:** Dalham Farm is one of the very few undisturbed areas that show mass movement on low-angled, inland slopes of London Clay. The effects of landslipping are visible as a series of ridges and small scarps crossing the slope. The site illustrates what is possibly the lowest angled slope failure in Great Britain and is important in demonstrating slope degradation in the absence of coastal erosion and removal of material from the base. It is assessed as having 100% unfavourable/no change condition due to inappropriate scrub control.

- 3.18 **Chattenden Woods:** This woodland is representative of coppice with standards woodland on the London Clay, which is a scarce habitat in Kent away from the Blean Woods. The site is also of importance for its breeding birds. Rough Shaw, which is an area of neutral grassland with scattered scrub forms a valuable addition to the woodland and contains several uncommon plant species which are not found in more improved grassland. Its condition is 100% favourable.
- 3.19 **Tower Hill to Cockham Wood:** This site is of both biological and geological interest. It contains woodland representative of that on Tertiary deposits in Kent and supports a rich insect fauna. About a third of all British species of bees and wasps are found here, including seven nationally rare species. In addition, Upnor Quarry exposes a complete tertiary stratigraphic sequence and is a vital site to be viewed in comparison with other Palaeogene localities in the eastern London Basin. It is identified as having 100% favourable or recovering condition.
- 3.20 **Halling to Trottiscliffe Escarpment:** This site consists of an extensive area of the North Downs west of the Medway Gap. It is representative of chalk grassland in west Kent and beech woodlands on the chalk. Outstanding assemblages of plant and invertebrates are present. It is the only location in Britain for one type of moth and several other very scarce moths, beetles and grasshoppers also occur. The site supports a wide variety of birds, particularly woodland birds.
- 3.21 80% of the area is in favourable or recovering condition. Reasons for the unfavourable condition include undergrazing, inappropriate scrub control, game management, inappropriate woodland and forestry management and overgrazing.

## 4 Regionally Important Geological and Geomorphological Sites

- 4.1 Regionally Important Geological and Geomorphological Sites (RIGS) were established in 1990 by the Nature Conservancy Council and continue to be supported by Natural England. They are important sites, which underpin and complement the SSSI coverage. Local voluntary RIGS groups, in accordance with the following nationally agreed criteria, select them:
- The value of the site for educational purposes in life long learning:
  - The value of a site for study by both amateur and professional earth scientists:
  - The historical value of a site from an earth science perspective:
  - The aesthetic value of a site from an earth science perspective.

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- 4.2 RIGS do not have the formal, statutory, protection afforded to SSSIs but their importance is recognised in national planning policy PPS9 and criteria based policies are required to be included in local development documents to enable the impact of development upon them to be judged.
- 4.3 The Kent RIGS Group notified Medway Council of four sites in its area at Halling, Cliffe and Fort Amherst in 2006. (See Maps 10 to 12).
- 4.4 **Bores Hole, Halling:** is designated because it contains a key interval of the Middle Chalk that cannot be easily studied elsewhere in the Medway Valley and for its historical importance. Sites within the Medway Valley show significant differences to the coastal sections in Kent. During the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, important fossils were discovered at the pit.
- 4.5 **Francis Chalk Quarry, Cliffe:** is designated because it demonstrates the distinctive nature of the Upper Chalk in the Thames Estuary region and because of its historical significance. The site also has good educational potential particularly because of its proximity to the RSPB reserve. Certain flint bands and beds of fossils allow detailed correlation within Kent and throughout the Anglo-Paris basin. The site was an important source of fossils when it was worked in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.
- 4.6 **Halling Chalk Pit:** is designated because it provides access, in the Medway Valley, to key plenus marls, which are infrequently exposed between the Kent coast and outcrops north of the Thames. The grey chalk beneath the marls is fossiliferous with small brachiopods and corals. The marls can be traced throughout the Anglo-Paris basin.
- 4.7 **Fort Amherst:** is designated because it provides a high quality exposure of the infrequently exposed Rochester Hardground and the East Cliff Semitabular Flint. It has good educational potential for study of the higher part of the Kent chalk sequence. The Rochester Hardground is a submarine mineralised erosion surface that represents a significant break in sedimentation. The absence of 10 metres of strata above the Hardground indicates local tectonic activity in the Medway area and a sea level fall during this part of the Cretaceous period. The overlying fossiliferous chalk contains flints, which are a distinctive marker bed that extends throughout the Anglo-Paris basin.

## 5 Local Nature Reserves

- 5.1 Local Nature Reserves are designated under section 21 of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act, 1949, by local authorities. They must be in the ownership or otherwise under the control of local authorities. They should be of high natural interest in the local context (SSSI or near equivalent) or of some reasonable natural interest and of high value for environmental education or research or for the informal

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enjoyment of nature by the public and capable of being managed with the conservation of nature and/or the maintenance of special opportunities for study or research as a priority.

- 5.2 There are currently eight Local Nature Reserves in Medway at Baty's Marsh, South Wood, Berengrave Chalk Pit, Rainham Dock (east), Darland/Ambley Wood, Darland Banks, Foxburrow Wood and Levan Strice (See Maps 13 to 18).
- 5.3 **Berengrave Local Nature Reserve:** covers an area of over 8 hectares. Chalk extraction took place at this quarry until 1931 and it was then left derelict until Gillingham Council acquired it in 1962. It was designated as a nature reserve in 1984. Its central area comprises a lake which floods into willow carr and a reedbed area. The willow carr area leads to a drier woodland area. 89 species of birds have been noted in the reserve. Over the years, 426 species of flora have been identified, including 83 types of fungi. It suffers from invasion by non-native sycamore.
- 5.4 **South Wood:** is one of the richest remaining woodland areas in Medway. It was worked for centuries for timber but is now managed as a nature reserve. The wood is particularly important as it contains a population of dormice, which are rare throughout Britain and Europe. It suffers from invasion by non-native species, pressure from recreational users departing from defined footpaths and local nutrient enrichment.
- 5.5 **Darland Banks:** is mostly chalk grassland, edged with thorn scrub and woodland. It contains many rare and beautiful plants and the grassland supports over twenty species of butterfly. Glowworms are also present. Cattle are grazed in the winter in order to keep grass growth in check and prevent invading scrub. Medway Council and the Kent Wildlife Trust jointly manage it. It suffers from dog attacks on grazing animals and nutrient enrichment.
- 5.6 **Rainham Dock (east):** is a historical industrial landscape where natural regeneration has produced unusual flora. It lies adjacent to the Motney Hill reedbed SSSI and views across it are popular with bird watchers. It suffers from a lack of recent active management.
- 5.7 **Darland/Ambley Woods:** contains ancient woodland and its associated woodland flora. It is used for informal recreation and provides access to the adjacent Darland Banks. There is pressure from the loss of woodland habitat on the boundary due to fragmentation and localised nutrient enrichment from dog faeces.
- 5.8 **Foxburrow Wood:** contains ancient woodland and its associated flora. It is used as a route to school and has occasional use for educational visits. It suffers from invasion from non-native sycamore, local nutrient enrichment and general pressures on the flora from extensive but legitimate public use.

- 5.9 **Levan Strice:** contains ancient woodland with its associated flora. It suffers from invasion by non-native sycamore, local nutrient enhancement and general pressure on the flora from extensive but legitimate public use.
- 5.10 **Baty's Marsh:** is a saltmarsh habitat that provides access to the natural environment on the edge of a larger recreational open space. The Saxon Shore Way runs through the site. There are fluctuations in the mudflat/saltmarsh extent resulting from natural processes. Footpath access could be improved.

### Other Nature Reserves

- 5.11 In addition to National and Local Nature Reserves, other nature reserves may also be established independently from Natural England and the local authorities. In Medway, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds purchased **Cliffe Pools** on the Hoo Peninsula (see Map 19) in 2001 and is developing visitor and education facilities. This is a winter roosting site for thousands of birds. The RSPB also manages the national nature reserve at **Northwood Hill** (See Map 5).

## 6 Local Wildlife Sites

- 6.1 It is recognised that the protection and conservation of sites of significant nature conservation interest outside the network of statutorily protected sites is essential to the maintenance of the UK's natural heritage. Such sites are identified as local wildlife sites and in Kent they have been known as Sites of Nature Conservation Interest.
- 6.2 The primary purposes of the Local Wildlife Sites system are:
- To help secure the protection of nationally and locally threatened habitats and species;
  - To identify sites of substantive nature conservation value which should be protected from damaging development;
  - To provide a framework for targeting of management work, advice, grant aid and other activities;
  - To provide a clearer understanding of the nature and importance of Kent's wildlife habitats.
- 6.3 Local wildlife sites are designated by the Kent Wildlife Trust and although the sites not statutorily protected, they are generally recognised by local authorities, included in development plans and offered protection through policies in those plans. Designation is subject to defined technical standards.
- 6.4 In Medway there are seventeen local wildlife sites, which are identified as SNCIs in the Medway Local Plan, 2003. (See Maps 20 to 26) These are:

- **Grain Pit**
- **South Hill and Houlder Quarry**
- **River Medway and Marshes, Wouldham**
- **Cuxton Wood (Mill Wood)**
- **Cuxton Pit**
- **River Medway between Cuxton and Temple Marsh**
- **Bridge Woods, Burham**
- **Luton Banks**
- **Hook Wood, Walderslade**
- **Great Lines**
- **Darland Banks**
- **Ambley and East Hoath Woods**
- **Grove Wood**
- **South Wood**
- **Berengrave Pit**
- **Yaugher Woods**
- **Princes Avenue**

## **7 Ancient Woodlands**

- 7.1 Ancient woodlands are those where there is believed to have been continuous woodland cover since at least 1600 AD. Before this, planting was uncommon, so a wood present in 1600 was likely to have developed naturally. Ancient semi-natural woodland is composed of native trees that have not obviously been planted although it may have been managed by coppicing or felling and allowed to regenerate naturally. Planted ancient woodland sites are ancient woods in which the former tree cover has been replaced, often with non-native trees. Important features of ancient woodland often survive in many of these woods, including characteristic flora and fauna, and archaeology.
- 7.2 As the terrestrial habitat most representative of original natural stable conditions, ancient woodland is home to more threatened species than any other habitat in the UK e.g. More than twice as many as chalk grassland and almost three times as many as lowland heathland.
- 7.3 Long, undisturbed ancient woodlands can also be historically important for Bronze and Iron age earthworks, Saxon range boundaries, ancient park boundaries, ridge and furrow, and woodbanks which give a picture of past land use. Old coppice stools and pollards point to past woodland management practices and charcoal pits, ore furnaces and kilns are clues to local industrial history. Furthermore, ancient woodlands are places of great beauty and tranquillity
- 7.4 Ancient woodlands vary in size and may be free standing or part of a wider area of woodland that is not ancient. The ancient woodlands in Medway are shown on Maps 27 to 29.

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[http://www.english-nature.org.uk/pubs/gis/tech\\_aw.htm](http://www.english-nature.org.uk/pubs/gis/tech_aw.htm)

<http://www.magic.gov.uk/>

## **8 Landscape**

### **Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty**

- 8.1 Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty are nationally important landscapes that have a similar status to National Parks. There are 37 AONBs designated throughout England. The Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty was designated in 1968, under the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act, 1949. It covers 878 sq. km. and stretches from the Surrey/Greater London Border to the Strait of Dover. It forms part of the North Downs ridge of chalk, which extends westwards to Farnham in Surrey. That part of the AONB that lies within Medway is identified on Map 30.
- 8.2 The primary purpose of designation is to conserve and enhance natural beauty. This includes flora, fauna and geological or physiographical features. As well as the visual or scenic elements of the landscape, natural beauty includes historic and cultural heritage. Social and economic activity is fundamental to shaping the future of the AONB.
- 8.3 The Kent Downs' topography consists of impressive south facing scarps of chalk and greensand, hidden dry valleys, expansive open plateaux, broad, steep sided river valleys and dramatic white cliffs and foreshore. Long distance panoramas are afforded as well as more intimate, enclosed vistas in the valleys. Overlying this landform are diverse natural and man made features creating local distinctiveness.
- 8.4 A rich mosaic of habitats, plant and animal communities is supported, although many are isolated or fragmented in a modern agricultural landscape. These include chalk grassland, woodland, cliffs, rivers, pasture, hedgerows, field margins and road verges. Expansive arable fields are located on the lower slopes, valley bottoms and plateaux top whilst ribbons of permanent grassland run along the steep scarps, valley sides and on less productive land.
- 8.5 A number of large woodland blocks are present but the majority of woodlands are small, fragmented and in disparate land ownership and management. Over half the sites are ancient woodlands, having been continuously wooded for at least 400 years. These support nationally important plant and animal species.
- 8.6 There is a rich legacy of historic and built heritage, ranging from the Neolithic age, through Roman towns and villas, medieval villages, post medieval stately homes and defensive structures from Norman times to the twentieth century. Architectural distinctiveness is present in

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scattered farmsteads, oasthouses and barns, churches and country houses.

- 8.7 The AONB has faced severe pressure from the development of transportation, infrastructure, communications and housing, as well as the pressures of intensive agriculture and forestry. Pressure also comes from increased recreational use, as well as illegal activities such as fly tipping.

### **Landscape Character Areas**

- 8.8 In 2004, Kent County Council commissioned a study of landscape character areas throughout Kent, including Medway. For each character area, it provided a description of the landscape and a landscape strategy that directly reflected the condition and sensitivity of the area. Within Medway, it identified nine character areas, some of which were subdivided. A summary of the findings for each area is set out below (See Map 31).

[http://extranet7.kent.gov.uk/klis/resources/landscape-assessment/Landscape Assessment of Kent October 2004.pdf](http://extranet7.kent.gov.uk/klis/resources/landscape-assessment/Landscape%20Assessment%20of%20Kent%20October%202004.pdf)

- 8.9 **Eastern Thames Marshes:** This area encompasses a mix of traditional grazing marsh, arable production and areas of mineral workings. Its aspect significantly influences its character over the Thames Estuary towards the heavily industrialised Canvey Island. The extraction of underlying chalk in the Cliffe area and the resulting creation of lakes and wetlands has had a significant impact on the landscape character.
- 8.10 There has been a decline in the area of traditional grazing marsh over the past 40 years due to conversion to arable production. However, extensive grazing areas still survive. Most archaeological finds date from Roman times when salt panning and potteries were the main industries. Culturally, the area has connections with Charles Dickens whose "Great Expectations" was set here.
- 8.11 The area forms part of the wider North Kent Marshes area of international importance for nature conservation that is designated as a Special Protection Area and RAMSAR site. Part of the area is also an Environmentally Sensitive Area.
- 8.12 The area is considered to be in moderate condition. The ditches are of varying condition and there are many visual detractors ranging from small structures such as tipping, post and wire fences and bird hides, to urban and industrial developments
- 8.13 **Medway Marshes:** This area is typically low lying and flat with huge open skies and extensive views. To the north of the river, the massive industrial complexes of Grain and Kingsnorth dominate the marshes.



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- The southern marshes are much smaller and fragmented and have a much less coherent character. The majority of the marshland is reclaimed and protected from tidal inundation by coastal walls, although fragments of saltmarsh persist within the estuary and as islands.
- 8.14 The traditional land cover is coastal grazing marsh and low lying pasture with a characteristic patterning of creeks and dykes still remaining to the west of the Isle of Grain. The Romans established extensive salt and pottery workings. Clay was extracted from the shoreline and the marshes were of strategic military importance as illustrated by the blockhouses at Darnet Fort and Grain Tower.
- 8.15 The area forms part of the north Kent estuarine and marshland habitat, which is of international importance and the grazing marshes between Allhallows and the Isle of Grain form part of the North Kent Marshes Environmentally Sensitive Area.
- 8.16 The condition of the area is considered to be poor. The industrial complexes cause fragmentation and there are many visual detractors, including industrial lighting and residential development. The potential for semi-natural habitats is reduced in areas of arable cultivation and the ecological integrity is therefore thought to be moderate.
- 8.17 **Hoo Peninsula:** Although land uses are typical of the North Kent Horticultural Belt, a distinctive character results from its relative geographical isolation and to the influence of the coastal marshes and the industrial landmarks of Grain and Kingsnorth. This elevated area includes a complex of hills and valleys in the vicinity of Chattenden and forms a visual barrier between north and south. Other prominent features are Beacon Hill and Northward Hill.
- 8.18 The landscape is dominated to the east by large-scale arable cultivation, largely devoid of hedges and trees. Chattenden Ridge is clothed in woodland mixed with areas of pasture. To the west of the ridge is a more traditional pattern of orchards, shelter belts and mixed cropping, although this is being lost and the landscape is opening out. Settlement comprises scattered farms, small villages, the larger village of Hoo St. Werburgh and the army barracks. Notable buildings are Cooling Castle and Cliff Church.
- 8.19 The most important features of nature conservation importance are the areas of broadleaved woodlands, which include four SSSIs at Chattenden, Northward Hill, Beacon Hill and Tower Hill.
- 8.20 Overall the condition of the area is considered to be poor. There is very little consistent landscape pattern, and visual detractors occur on both a large and detailed scale. Isolated patches of woodland provide clusters of semi-natural habitat but there is very little opportunity for ecological interest within the open arable fields.

- 8.21 **Fruit Belt:** This area, to the east of Rainham, forms part of a larger agricultural landscape characterised by a complex landscape pattern of orchards, shelter belts, fields of arable and pasture and horticultural crops, divided by small blocks of woodland. The area contains small scattered villages and farms that contribute to its rural character and landscape diversity. The A2 has a local urbanising effect. The gently rolling landscape to the south of the A2 gives way to a flatter landform to the north as the Medway Marshes are approached.
- 8.22 Woodlands are the main ecological resource. Yaugher Woods and Fox Burrow Woods are listed in the Ancient Woodlands Inventory. Other elements of potential ecological and wildlife value are the shelterbelts that provide a more consistent framework of wildlife corridors than the patchy hedgerow cover.
- 8.23 Overall, the condition of the area is very poor. There is an incoherent landscape pattern which has many detracting suburban and industrial influences and transport corridors. There are isolated shelterbelts and remnants of old orchards. Woodland cover is limited and the ecological integrity of the area is considered to be weak.
- 8.24 **Mid Kent Downs – A. Outskirts of Chatham:** The Chatham Outskirts and the Nashenden Valley lie within the larger character area of the Mid-Kent Downs. The landscape is a mosaic of deciduous woodland, large arable plateaux and steep, rolling valleys, which support a patchwork of small pastures, neglected grassland and shrub. A number of mainly derelict orchards dot the slopes, set within a matrix of small, shrubby shaws. The arable plateaux are intensively farmed, with few hedges and are contained in the distance by belts of wood.
- 8.25 There is a strong urban edge influence, characterised by dereliction, dumping and high security fences. Many of the hedges are in poor condition and the woodlands are scrubby and largely unmanaged.
- 8.26 Overall the condition of the area is poor. There are many detracting features, which are associated with unsympathetic land uses. The areas of intense arable farming reduce the ecological interest of the area. There is a strong influence from the urban area, built form has a negative impact on views and the condition of heritage features is poor.
- 8.27 **Mid Kent Downs – B. Nashenden Valley:** This area lies within the wider character area of the Mid Kent Downs. To the west of Walderslade a series of tiny, steep sided valleys run northeast into the Nashenden Valley. The M2 motorway, which runs along the northern side of this valley, forms the boundary between the AONB to the west and Rochester. This is an open, sweeping landscape of huge arable fields and large blocks of dense, deciduous woodland. Despite the proximity of the motorway (and now the high speed rail link), and Rochester, this area still retains a strong rural character. However, the

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- lack of hedges or shaws to provide screening, makes it vulnerable to the visual impact of development.
- 8.28 The overall condition is considered to be good, although wooded edges to arable areas are felt to be vulnerable.
- 8.29 **Capstone Valley:** This extension of the North Downs has a dramatic scarp and valley form to the north with rolling open plateaux in the centre and to the south. Remnant chalk grassland on the steepest slopes in the north lead into small fields of arable and pasture then into larger arable units to the south. Extensive urban areas are located on all but the southern boundary and are putting development pressures on the area.
- 8.30 The steeper slopes have rough pasture with encroaching scrub vegetation, which is threatening the unique landscape and wildlife value of the open chalk grassland. On the shallow slopes and plateaux deciduous woodland blocks introduce variety in the form of colour and texture. Amenity and other land uses are beginning to encroach on the character of the area as well as fringe influences such as horse pasture and the development of Hempstead on the eastern edge.
- 8.31 The majority of the existing woodland is listed in the Ancient Woodlands Inventory and has considerable ecological value. Darland Banks is a local nature reserve and a local wildlife site (LWS). South Wood is a candidate for LNR designation and is also a LWS, as are Ambley, Hook and Holt Woods. The remnant chalk grasslands are also of ecological value.
- 8.32 The condition of the landscape is considered to be very poor due to visual detractors such as urban and industrial development and busy traffic routes. Only fragments of hedged field boundaries are occasionally visible in the areas of intense arable cultivation and semi-natural habitats are limited to woodland areas, often close to the urban edges. The ecological integrity is therefore considered to be weak.
- 8.33 **West Kent Downs:** This area is located to the west of the Medway Valley and forms a plateau extending westwards. It forms a rich agricultural patchwork of rolling, valley-side pastures and extensive, undulating arable fields. Large areas of mixed woodland dominate the skyline and form thick walls around fields, giving them a strong definition. Extensive hedgerow removal, for arable cultivation, has increased the importance of these woodlands, giving structure to the landscape.
- 8.34 The condition of the area is considered to be good. There are very few visual detractors, and the woodlands provide a strong and extensive ecological base.

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- 8.35 **Kent Downs Medway:** The Kent Downs AONB Medway Valley character area covers the scarp and scarp foot but excludes the flatter areas bordering the river. The steep scarp slopes rise sharply up behind rolling, intensively cultivated fields. There has never been a strong hedgerow network on the lower slopes and the few hedges that remain are narrow and gappy. However, thicker, overgrown hedges are found on the upper slopes, above which dense mixed woodland dominates the skyline. These woodlands are of national nature conservation importance, both for their flora and fauna.
- 8.36 The Medway Valley was one of the earliest areas of permanent settlement in Kent and this is illustrated by a group of prehistoric sites such as Kits Coty standing stones, an important Megalithic monument. There are several Roman sites and the ancient trackway, the Pilgrims Way, passes through the area.
- 8.37 The eastern scarp is considered to be in very poor condition. Field boundaries have declined, there are many visual detractors and longer views are interrupted by industrial development in the lower valley. The ecological interest is very weak and built development has a negative impact. The western scarp, which is more extensive within the Medway administrative area, is considered to be of moderate condition although visual detractors include tipping, quarries and views of the motorway and industry beyond. Intensive arable cultivation and the few and variable field boundaries limit the ecological integrity of the area.
- 8.38 **Medway Valley:** In addition to the scarp slopes that are included within the AONB, the study identified two further character areas within the Medway valley. These covered the flatter areas bordering the river (identified as Kent Downs-Medway Western and Eastern scarps and Medway Valley Lower.) For the purposes of this paper, these have been combined here.
- 8.39 On the lower slopes, the landscape is open, with large fields and few hedgerows. Much of the area has been transformed by chalk quarrying. The white scars of the former quarries are slowly being colonised with scrubby growth, although a pit near Halling contains a strikingly blue lake. Large cement works with tall chimneys dominate the west bank at Halling and there are plans to extend the works at Holborough.
- 8.40 The condition of this area is considered to be very poor due to visual detractors, a weak network of semi-natural habitats, intensive arable coverage, fragmented hedgerows and limited tree cover. Characteristic historic settlements on the river are mostly overwhelmed by 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century development.
- 8.41 The Medway Valley Lower area extends from Allington Lock, near Maidstone, to Halling. Thus, most of it lies outside Medway. The area displays similar characteristics to the lower slopes but it includes the

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river itself that forms an important and distinctive feature. Within Medway the river forms part of a Site of Nature Conservation Interest that extends into the Wouldham Marshes, which lie within Tonbridge and Malling. At the river's margins areas of reeds, other common emergents, mudflats and wading birds at low tide, contrast strongly with the more industrialised areas to the south. New development is proposed at Peter's Pit and new bridges across the river are likely to affect the relative isolation of this part of the area.

- 8.42 The overall condition of the area is considered to be poor due to fragmentation of the landscape and ecological interest by industrial works, floodplain management structures, new riverside residential developments and valley side quarries.

## **9 Open Space**

- 9.1 In 2007, Medway Council published a comprehensive Countryside and Open Space Strategy, which included the results of an audit of open space within the area. This examined the quantity and quality of a wide range of types of open space. The results of this audit are summarised below.
- 9.2 PPG 17 states that open space should be taken to mean all open space of public value, including areas of water such as rivers, canals, lakes and reservoirs which offer important opportunities for sport and recreation, as well as acting as a visual amenity.
- 9.3 Open spaces are typically characterised either according to size or to function. Medway has a significant amount of green open space: 1,909.63ha. There are also significant areas of privately owned open space such as Dean Ridge, Gillingham Golf Course and Rochester Forest that are not included in this figure. Total open space per thousand population in Medway is thus approximately 7.6 ha. This is a relatively high figure compared to other areas.
- 9.4 It is also important to consider the distribution of open space and its accessibility. The open space provision by Ward has been calculated by simply dividing the ward population by the area of open space in hectares. The wards with the lowest level of provision are: Gillingham South, Rochester East, Rainham Central, Strood North, Chatham Central, Rainham South, Walderslade and Princes Park. All of these Wards provide less than 2.4ha of open space per 1000 population (the NPFA standard). Two of these wards, Chatham Central and Princes Park, are amongst the 20% most deprived wards in England according to the Index of Multiple Deprivation.
- 9.5 Open space provision in Medway by function is summarised below on the basis of the typology contained in PPG17. Reference is also made to quantity and quality.

Typology	Quantity (2006)	Quality
(i) Parks and gardens - including urban parks, country parks and formal gardens, countryside sites and Country Parks.	25 urban parks and gardens with an average size of 2.2ha. The largest is at Broom Hill, Strood. Rochester has the greatest concentration of parks with seven.	33% of the Local Parks (2-20ha) scored as below average.
(ii) Natural and semi-natural urban greenspaces - including woodlands, urban forestry, scrub, grasslands (eg downlands, commons and meadows) wetlands, open and running water, wastelands and derelict open land	78 areas of accessible natural greenspaces – this figure includes non-Medway Council owned sites such as RSPB reserves and Parish owned sites.  Medway Council supports 48 Countryside Sites and 3 Country Parks. The Habitat Survey, 2003, identified: Tidal Waters (1858 ha), Marshes (142ha), Chalk grassland (50ha), Saltmarsh (484ha), Mudflat (4305ha)	Overall, the natural green spaces are of poor to average quality, with almost 70% scoring less than 50% on quality ratings.
(iii) Green corridors – including river and canal banks, cycleways, and rights of way.	The Green Grid draft Strategy identifies key green corridors across Medway. The River Medway and Thames Estuary are important accessible river banks. Medway has nearly 400km of public right of way.	The Thames Estuary and River Medway are important assets with varying degrees of accessibility. The Saxon Shore Way recreational walk promotes both these important assets.
(iv) Outdoor sports facilities, including tennis courts, bowling greens, sports pitches, golf courses, athletics tracks, school and other institutional playing fields, and other outdoor	There are 92 identified outdoor sports and leisure facilities totalling 335ha.	Eleven of the identified outdoor sports and leisure facilities spaces have private or restricted access. 'Very poor' pavilions were recorded at Beechings Way and

Typology	Quantity (2006)	Quality
sports areas.		APCM Cliffe, and a 'poor' pavilion at Cliffe Woods. Beechings Crossing pavilion was recorded as 'excellent'. Six sports pitches were only ranked as 'acceptable' and none were 'excellent'.
(v) Amenity greenspace (most commonly, but not exclusively in housing areas) – including informal recreation spaces, greenspaces in and around housing, domestic gardens and village greens	There are 62 amenity spaces most being under 2ha in size	40% of amenity space scored 4 out of 5 for quality.
(vi) Provision for children and teenagers - including play areas, skateboard parks, outdoor basketball hoops, and other more informal areas (eg 'hanging out' areas, teenage shelters)	There are 125 sites covering 11.35ha. This figure includes 9 Local Areas of Play 66 Local Equipped Areas of Play, 36 Neighbourhood Areas of Play and 14 individual teenage play facilities covering 11.35ha. NPFA requirement (based on 0.2ha per 1000) equates to 49.27ha illustrating a 37.92 ha shortfall.	The Play Area Assessment showed that 69% of play areas complied with national standards for quality and accessibility, 7% failed to meet the standard due to accessibility, 7% were not applicable and 17% failed due to insufficient equipment. Medway is well served by Locally Equipped Areas for Play (LEAPS) but has fewer Neighbourhood Equipped Area for Play (NEAPS) and 35% of NEAPs failed to meet expected equipment standards. The vast majority of play areas are considered to be of good quality (83%) although user experience lessened due to acts of

Typology	Quantity (2006)	Quality
		vandalism.
(vii) Allotments, community gardens, and city (urban) farms	33 allotment sites (28 Medway owned and 5 Parish Council owned); best coverage is in the north and west of urban Medway comprising a total of 30ha. Sites range from 0.06ha with only 3 plots up to 4.02ha with 166 plots. Not evenly distributed across Medway –homes in the more recently developed parts of Medway, such as Lordswood, Parkwood and Walderslade, have limited access to allotments	Allotment quality varied from average to poor. The larger sites tend to be of better quality. All allotments suffer from acts of vandalism, arson, theft and fly tipping.
(viii) Cemeteries and churchyards	16 churchyards and cemeteries ranging up to 10.5ha (Small Local to Local).	These spaces are well maintained and are frequently of historic value; six are located in Conservation Areas.

[http://www.medway.gov.uk/wildlife\\_strategy\\_08-4.pdf](http://www.medway.gov.uk/wildlife_strategy_08-4.pdf)