

We  
Made  
That

# Otham Community Facilities

Final Report  
22.03.2022



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**01**

**Context**

**Otham Parish  
Development Landscape  
Current and Future Population**





## Otham Parish

Otham is a rural parish located in Maidstone Borough. The parish has a long farming tradition and a historical village at its' heart. With substantial recent and new development, the village will soon be partly absorbed into Maidstone's main urban area.

As of 2011 census, the permanent population of the parish was 523, with 193 dwellings. Most dwellings were located in the historical village core and adjacent pre-war development on White Horse Lane, Honey Lane and Simmonds Lane triangle. Depending on season, estimated 100 farm workers also live in Otham, and many more in neighbouring parishes.

In recent years, a number of new dwellings has been completed on the south-western edge of the parish and more is under construction. The new developments will result in a multi-fold increase in the population of the parish and connect the historical village with Maidstone's main urban area.

The majority of the parish is characterised by open farmland lying alongside mature wooded hills. Thanks to its position to the east of Maidstone's Mote Park, the central part of the parish forms a green corridor connecting urban Maidstone with open countryside. The parish is connected to its surroundings by a network of footpaths and bridleways.

Otham has significant heritage value. The village is first described in 1086 Domesday Book, and the oldest buildings in the parish include a 12th century parish church of St Nicholas (Grade I), 14th-century Otham Manor (Grade I), and 15th-century farmer's houses Synyards (Grade I) and Stoneacre (Grade II\*). Stoneacre is a National Trust property and will re-open to visitors in 2022.

The active farms in Otham include Greenhill Farm, Stoneacre Farm, and W.B. Chambers & Son of Oakdene Farm. The dominant use of Otham's farmland is fruit farming.



Stoneacre



Recent development in Otham



Fruit farming in Otham

# Development Landscape

Otham will soon have 1075 new dwellings above the 193 dwellings recorded in the 2011 census. There is a new retail centre on the parish boundary, but no community facilities will be delivered through approved developments in the parish.

The ancient core of Otham Village is a designated conservation area.

The south-western part of Otham Parish overlaps with Maidstone's designated south east strategic development location which consists of 5 large housing allocations. Three of these, allocations H1(6), H1(7) and H1(9) are located in the parish, alongside additional site allocation H1(8). The local plan review (currently underway) also proposes another site allocation SA172 in the parish.

There are approved planning applications on all of the existing site allocations in the parish. Construction on some of them finished already and other developments are on site. Construction on the remaining sites will commence soon.

In total, 1075 dwellings have been approved on the four site allocations, consisting from the most part of multiple-bedroom family houses. 175 of the 1075 dwellings are already finished.

In addition, approximately 1600 dwellings were recently finished or are under construction on allocated sites adjacent to Otham Parish.

The site allocation SA172 proposed in the local plan review is for 75 dwellings, some of these in the boundary of Otham Parish.

The spatial distribution of site allocations in and around Otham is shown on the map on page 8. The table on page 9 shows the split of approved dwellings by site allocation and number of bedrooms.

## Community Facilities

The approved schemes on site allocations H1(6), H1(7), H1(8) and H1(9) do not deliver any community facilities and Otham Parish Council objected to the development on these grounds. In the representation, Otham Parish Council cites concerns over social cohesion and increased number of car trips.

A new local retail centre with a convenience store, a pub and a cafe has been built on site allocation H1(5), outside the parish boundary.

## Planning Policy





Key planning policy documents include the adopted Maidstone Borough Local Plan 2017, Local Plan Review, and the Otham Parish Neighbourhood Plan 2020-2035.

The Neighbourhood Plan Policy CL1 states that the development of a new village hall in the Plan area will be supported subject to ensuring good walking and cycling accessibility, satisfactory mitigation of impact on surrounding amenities, and if design reflects local vernacular and enhances the village character.

The Local Plan 2017 and Reg 19 Local Plan state a local priority to locate new or improved community facilities in defined rural service centres and larger villages. However, new facilities may be permitted in small villages provided a clear need is demonstrated.

**There are four housing site allocations in Otham. Across these, planning applications have been granted for the development of 1075 new dwellings.**

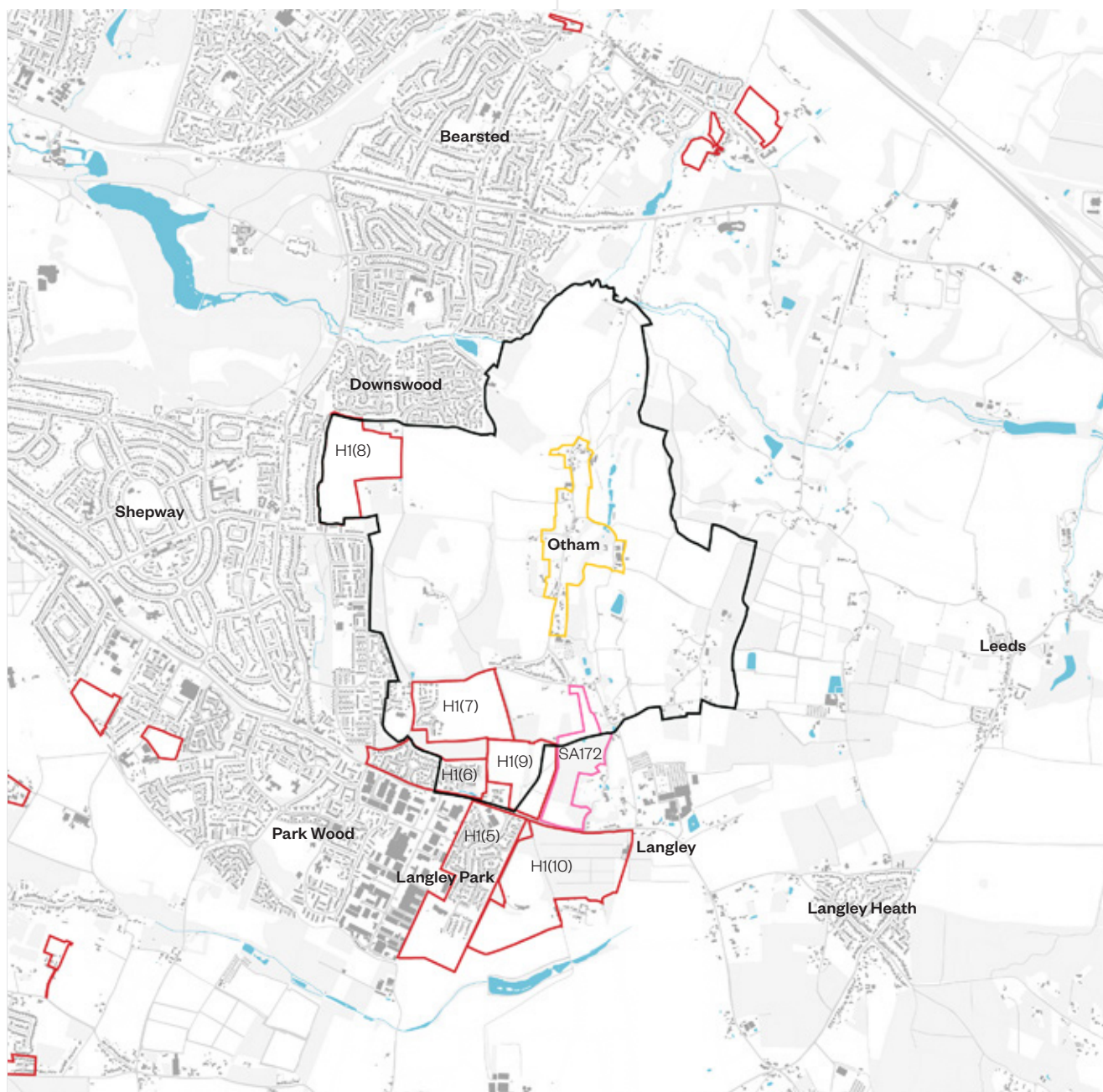
**Key**

-  Conservation Area
-  Local Plan Site Allocations
-  Local Plan Review Site Allocation 172
-  Otham Parish Boundary



0

1km





Site Allocation	Planning Status	Homes Total		Homes Split		
		Otham	Adjacent	Typology	Otham	Adjacent
H1(6)  289 homes	Finished	100	186	1 bedroom 2 bedrooms 3 bedrooms 4 bedrooms	12 24 30 34	0 74 68 44
H1(7)  190 homes	On site	250	0	1 bedroom 2 bedrooms 3 bedrooms 4 bedrooms	10 64 87 89	0 0 0 0
H1(8)  440 homes	On site	421	0	1 bedroom 2 bedrooms 3 bedrooms 4 bedrooms	54 123 163 81	0 0 0 0
H1(9)  335 homes	On site	302	0	1 bedroom 2 bedrooms 3 bedrooms 4 bedrooms	17 78 101 106	0 0 0 0
H1(5)  600 homes	Finished	0	ca. 600			
H1(10)  800 homes	On site	0	ca. 800			
LPRSA172  75 homes	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

## Current and Future Population

At the time of the 2011 Census, Otham Parish had 523 residents. With 1075 recent and new dwellings within the parish on site allocations H1(6) to H1(9), the population of Otham will increase to more than 4000 by 2026.

With number of dwellings already finished, the current population of Otham is in the region of 1000. In addition, estimated 100 farm workers alive live in Otham.

The new suburban development attracts younger population including many families with children, and the demographic profile of Otham is changing as a result. This corresponds to a shift in lifestyle and the type of community provision sought after. Future demand will be more focused on childcare and provision for children and young people including sports or performing arts classes.

The table overleaf shows a provisional housing-based population projection up to 2026.

Site	Status	Homes	Typology		Q	Residents	Population
2011 Census		204	N/A		N/A	523	523
H1(6)	Finished	100	1 bedroom	12	1.5	18	336
			2 bedrooms	24	2.5	60	
			3 bedrooms	30	3.5	105	
			4 bedrooms	34	4.5	153	
H1(7)	On site	250	1 bedroom	10	1.5	15	3258
			2 bedrooms	64	2.5	160	
			3 bedrooms	87	3.5	305	
			4 bedrooms	89	4.5	401	
H1(8)	On site	421	1 bedroom	54	1.5	81	
			2 bedrooms	123	2.5	308	
			3 bedrooms	163	3.5	571	
			4 bedrooms	81	4.5	365	
H1(9)	On site	302	1 bedroom	17	1.5	26	
			2 bedrooms	78	2.5	195	
			3 bedrooms	101	3.5	354	
			4 bedrooms	106	4.5	477	
<b>Total</b>							<b>4117</b>

02

# Community Facilities

Scope

Community Facilities Mapping  
Current Provision





# Scope

Of the different uses that fit under the umbrella term ‘community facilities’, the focus of this study includes community halls, local shops, pubs or restaurants, and cafés or bistros.

The scope of the study was established through an iterative process in conversation with Maidstone Borough Council and Otham Parish Council. The final scope as presented in the table below reflects current gaps in evidence.

The future need for libraries, leisure facilities, education facilities and health facilities is assessed separately to this study as part of the Local Plan Review. These typologies are therefore not part of the scope of this study. However, they were included in some of the mapping in order to explore potential synergies in future provision.

Dedicated faith spaces do not form part of the scope of this study. However, they were included in some of the mapping in recognition of their ancillary community functions. In addition, some of the community halls included in the mapping are also regularly used by faith groups, both for worship and for other community purposes.

	Typology	Description
Included in the Study	Community hall	Space where members of a community can meet and gather for group activities and functions, social support, information, and other purposes.
	Local shop	Space for small retail business and services such as a convenience store, pharmacy, and post office.
	Pub or restaurant	Space where food and drinks are prepared, sold or consumed on the premises that is quite large, such as a pub or restaurant.
	Cafe or bistro	Space where food and drinks are prepared, sold or consumed on the premises that is quite small, such as a cafe and a bistro.
	Faith space	Space primarily used by a faith group, either for worship or other community purposes.
Assessed Separately	Library	Space where a library and associated community services are located.
	Leisure facility	Indoor or outdoor space for sports and leisure including playing pitches and leisure centres.
	Education facility	Space primarily used and operated as a schools or nursery.
	Health facility	Space where medical treatment and advice for outpatients are provided, including a GP and dental clinic.

# Community Facilities Mapping

There are few community facilities in Otham, reflecting the rural character of the parish. Many community facilities used by Otham's residents are located in the urban neighbourhoods to the west and north of the parish.

The mapping on pages 15 and 16 shows community facilities in Otham and within 10 minutes drive from the village centre. The map on page 15 shows the typologies forming the scope of this study. The map on pages 16 shows other community facilities mapped to explore potential synergies in future provision.

Otham Village Hall is the only community facility in the parish as per the scope of this study. St Nicholas Church, on the border of Otham and Downwood parishes, is also used for community events. The White Horse Inn, now closed, was a pub located in proximity of the historical village as well as the new developments on site allocations H1(7) and H1(9).

Community facilities in the wider area are clustered in several key locations, including Sanacre Square, Downwood, Langley Park Centre, Park Wood, Madginford, and Bearsted. The distance of these locations from different parts of the parish differ, but current residents generally rely on car trips to access these. This is in part due to a lack of safe pedestrian access from Otham.

Apart from Otham Parish Hall, the closest community hall is in Downwood. The Downwood community hall is well used, with a number of regular activities and limited free availability.

The closest local shop and restaurant are located in the new Langley Park Centre, delivered through development on site allocation H1(5). There are numerous bistros in Sanacre Square, Downwood, and Langley Park Centre.

The map on page 16 shows the locations of libraries, leisure facilities, education facilities and health facilities in Otham and the surrounding areas.

Two leisure facilities, Bearsted Football Club and Rumwood Cricket Club, are located in Otham Parish. Bearsted Football Club has an outdoors football pitch and serves 350 to 400 children from Otham and nearby areas.

Maidstone Skills Centre is a community college at the edge of the parish. The facilities can be booked for regular evening or weekend uses. At present, the community college facilities are used by Stagecoach Performing Arts School and Connect Church.

Adjacent to Maidstone Skills Centre is St Hilary's Nursery School. Otham Village Hall is also used as a nursery.

There are no libraries or health facilities in Otham, nor in Langley Park and other parts of Maidstone's south-east strategic development location. The nearest libraries are in Shepway, Madginford, and Bearsted. Nearest health facilities are located in Shepway, Bearsted and Park Wood.

**There are no local shops and cafés or bistros in Otham, reflecting the rural character of the parish. The only pub, the White Horse Inn, is now closed.**

**Key**

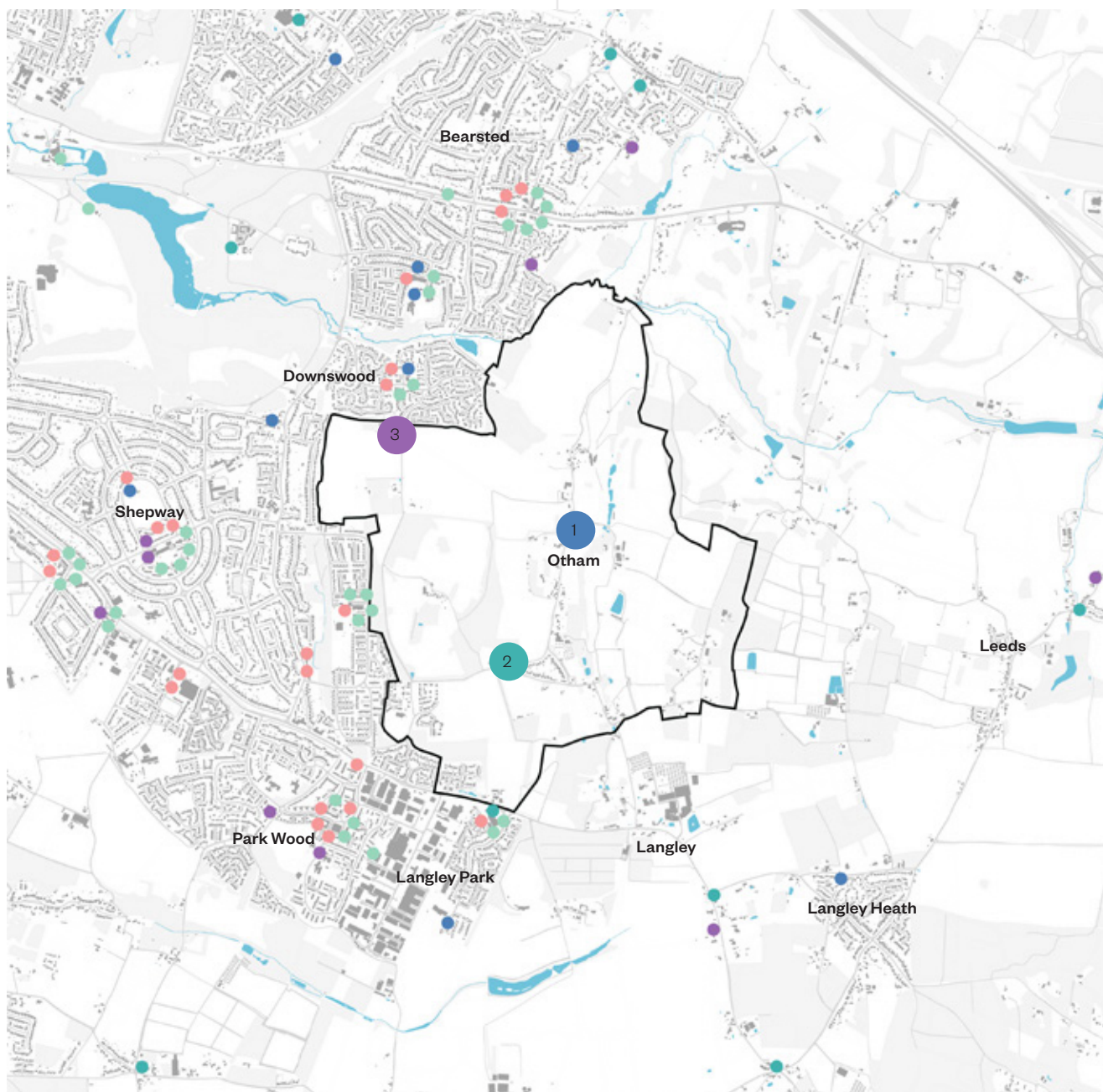
- 1 Otham Village Hall
- 2 The White Horse Inn (Closed)
- 3 St Nicholas Church

- Community hall
- Local shop
- Pub or restaurant
- Cafe or bistro
- Faith space

□ Parish boundary



0 1km



Otham’s residents travel outside of the parish to access libraries as well as education and health facilities.

Key

4

Bearsted Football Club

5

Maidstone Skills Centre

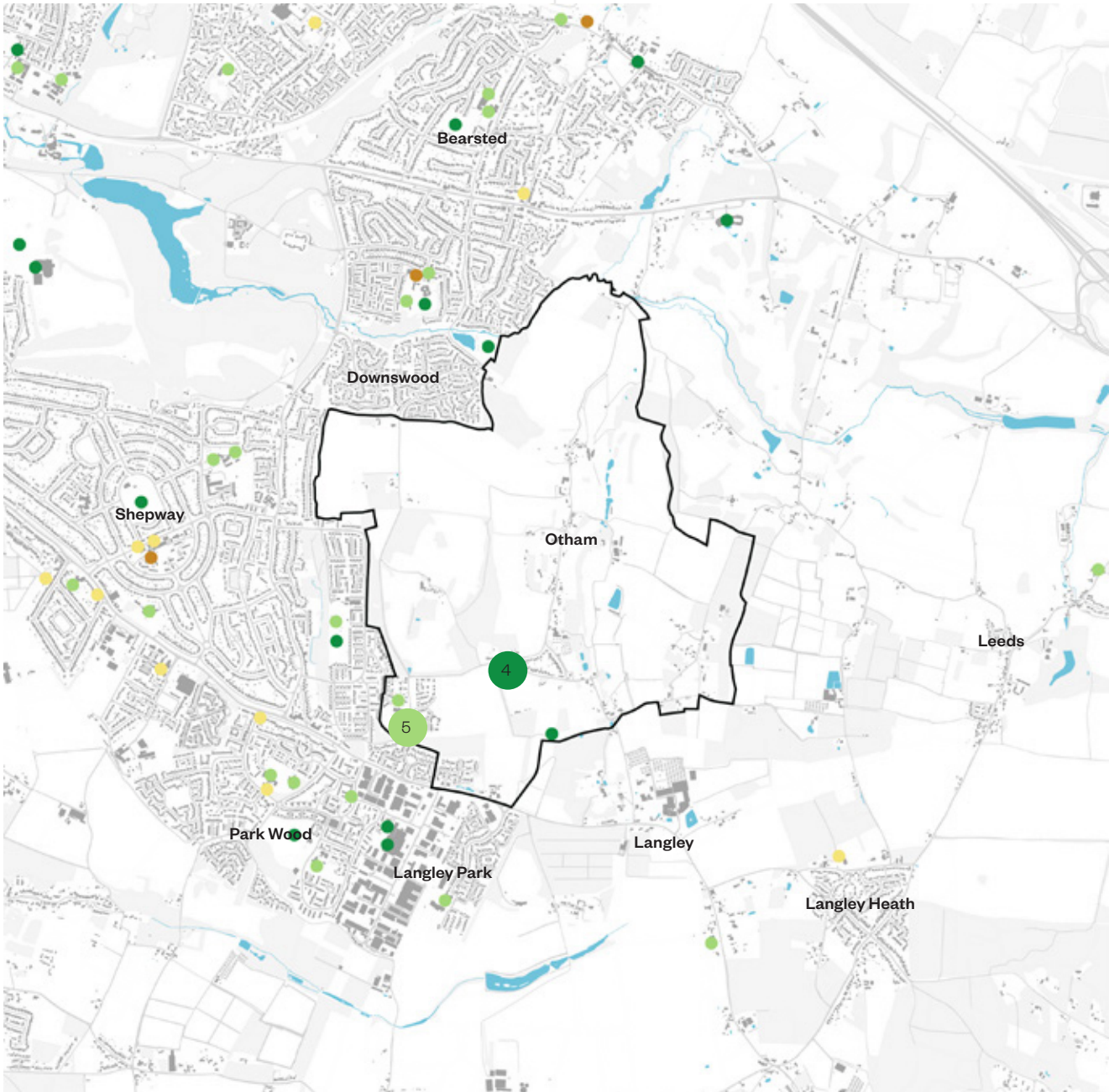
Library

Leisure facility

Education facility

Health facility

Parish boundary





## Otham Village Hall

Otham Village Hall has historically been the centre of the civic life in the parish. Today, the hall is in need of refurbishment and does not serve the community well. This is in part due to its location, complicated access, and small number of parking places.

The village hall, also called Otham Institute, is located in a Victorian-era building comprising of a hall, a small kitchen, toilet, and an entrance area. The dimensions of the hall are approximately 10x6m, and the dimensions of the kitchen are approximately 4x3m.

The building is in need of overall refurbishment. Among the most pressing are issues with heating and ventilation. The windows do not open, and the main hall is heated by wall mounted heater lamps. The kitchen and toilet areas have no permanent heating; they are currently heated using portable fan heaters.

Otham Institute is located on Otham Street in the centre of Otham's conservation area. Otham Street is a narrow lane with hedges and walls, and as a result pedestrian or cycling access to the hall is unsafe and complicated. There are three parking places adjacent to the village hall building. A consultation is currently underway to provide more parking on the nearby village green.

A village hall could be much better used, there could be afternoon activities, functions, weekend events.

As Otham has grown to the south of the ancient village, Otham Institute is no longer in the centre of the present day village. With recent and forthcoming developments in the south-western part of the parish, the village hall will become relatively uneasy to access for majority of Otham's residents.

The hall currently operates at a loss. It is used as a nursery, a polling station, and annually on remembrance day. It is also used by Otham Parish Council for meetings. There are no other regular uses and the hall is rarely booked for events.

The nursery in the village hall operates during school terms between Monday and Friday, from 9am to 2.30pm. Normally, the nursery has between 2 and 7 children, coming mostly from the finished new developments in Otham and nearby areas. The capacity of the nursery is 16 children, and there is a potential for nursery in Otham to grow as more developments are finished.

The nursery relies on a quick drop-off. With limited parking and morning traffic, there is no time to chat with parents and get to know each other.

When people hear what the parking situation is, they are no longer interested in hiring the hall for event.





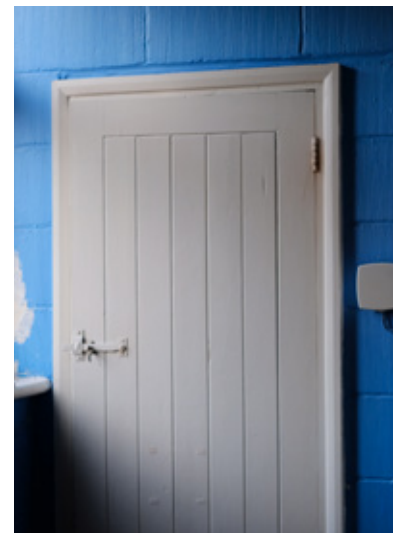
Hall



View from Otham Street



Hall



Toilet area



Toilet area



Kitchen area

## The White Horse Inn

Now closed, The White Horse Inn used to be a pub and B&B in Otham. The building is strategically located in between the historical village and the new developments on site allocations H1(7) and H1(9).

The White Horse Inn was built in 1909. It is a two storey building with an outdoors seating area and generous parking provision. Historically, a small local shop used to be located in the rear of the building.

The White Horse Inn is located on the junction of White Horse Lane and Honey Lane, two narrow country lanes with no footpath and frequent traffic. It also is adjacent to Otham's bus stop and Bearsted Football Club football pitches. It is in proximity of both the conservation area and the new developments in the south-western part of the parish.

The building is privately owned, but Otham Parish Council applied to Maidstone Borough Council to list The White Horse Inn as asset of community value.



View from White Horse Lane



Outdoor seating area



Adjacent parking



# St Nicholas Church

The 12th century church is located at the boundary of Otham and Downswood parishes, and serves the areas of Otham, Langley, Downswood, Willington and Madginford.

St Nicholas Church is Grade I listed building, and the oldest building in Otham. The nave is Norman, and its approximate dimensions are 15x5 meters.

The church is located approximately a kilometre from the historical village, in the north-western part of the parish near Downswood. It is accessed via Church Road, a narrow country lane with frequent traffic, and is also connected to Otham by a footpath.

The church serves Otham and Downswood, as well as neighbouring areas of Langley, Willington and Madginford. Apart from regular services, the nave of the church is also used for community events including regular tea parties and occasional community markets.



View from Church Road



Preparations for Christmas Market inside St Nicholas Church



Church entrance

## Bearsted Football Club

Bearsted Football Club is an established football club with 25 teams on land adjacent the former White Horse Inn. Facilities are located in ageing cabins and need substantial improvements.

Bearsted Football Club is one of the oldest clubs in Kent, founded in 1895. It has 25 teams ranging from age 5 to semi-professional men's football. It serves between 350 and 400 children, some from Otham but mostly neighbouring areas.

The club is centrally located in proximity of new residential developments on site allocations H1(7) and H1(9) as well as the historical village. It has a large parking area and is accessed via a narrow country lane with no footpath and frequent traffic.

The club has a grass pitch and occupies 3ha of land next to the former White Horse Inn. Facilities, including a kitchen and cafe area, 4 changing rooms, toilets, and showers, are based in ageing cabins. The existing facilities need substantial improvements, and new facilities including additional changing rooms are needed to accommodate the club's needs.

The land is privately owned, and Bearsted Football Club has 15 years left on lease. The length of lease limits the club's access to funding options, including funding from Football Association's Facilities Fund which has a minimum requirement of 25 years left on lease.

Bearsted Football Club has a difficult relationship with Otham Parish Council, however is open to exploring potential synergies in the provision of facilities in Otham.



Football club entrance



Football club facilities and adjacent parking



Adjacent cricket ground and pavilion



# Maidstone Skills Centre

Maidstone Skills Centre is a community college operated by Catch 22. It is located at the border of Otham Parish, and the facilities can be booked for regular out-of-hours community uses.

The facilities available for evening and weekend hire at Maidstone Skills Centre include the following:

- Activity hall
- Classroom
- Construction workshop
- Meeting room
- Motorbike workshop
- ICT suite
- Accessible toilet and shower facilities
- Refreshments including tea, coffee and buffet lunches

The facilities can be booked for regular uses, and currently host Connect Church and Stagecoach Bearsted Performing Arts School. Spaces can also be hired out for other uses, such as the large hall for social occasions and sports and meeting rooms for smaller meetings/ gatherings.

The community college is located on the south-western border of the parish, at the edge of Maidstone's main urban area prior to the current development on site allocation H1(7). A recent footpath has been constructed which affords easy, safe access on foot from sites H1(6) and H1(7).



View from Titchfield Road



Performing arts classes in Maidstone Skills Centre



Side of building and adjacent land



Approach  
Key Trends  
Community Aspiration  
Benchmarks  
Comparisons  
Key Takeaways



## Approach

The provision of good quality community facilities is one of the important ingredients for a successful community. However, each community has different needs that local provision needs to reflect.

Community facilities provide space for the social life of a community and help to develop social cohesion. In diverse ways, they support health and learning and often provide access to a range of key services. Some community facilities provide the backbone of the local economy. The importance of community infrastructure became ever more apparent during the pandemic. Some community halls were turned into sites of mutual aid such as food banks, and people increasingly sought the services of local shops.

However, the role that community facilities play differs from place to place, and so do community needs. Approaches that try to arrive at a universal measure of square meters of community facilities needed for a community to thrive are of little use as they fail to capture the important local context.

As outlined in the following diagram, our approach is based on a thorough understanding of place and community aspiration, and comparison with other successful communities comparable both in size and in character. We also use information about the average size of the population that supports different types of facilities regionally or nationally as an indication of what facilities Otham can sustain.

### Wider trends

Our approach is based on an understanding the current context of development on urban fringes and trends in the provision of community facilities.



### Community aspiration

The need for community facilities is grounded in the aspiration of the community and its specific needs.



### Benchmarking for indicative viability

Information about the average size of the population that supports different types of facilities provides an indication of what facilities Otham can sustain.



### Comparison with other successful communities

Comparing Otham to other successful communities reveals what an appropriate level of facilities provision would be.

# Key Trends

## Current trends in development on urban fringes and common challenges

The recent and new development in Otham Parish demonstrates many characteristic features of urban extensions, including mass changes of land use to accommodate growing urban populations.

Well designed urban extensions can encourage and accommodate highly sustainable patterns of living. However, the development on urban fringes in the UK is often characterised by relatively low housing density, high car dependency, and limited local access to key services and facilities. Comparisons between towns and cities in the UK with their counterparts in mainland Europe show that significantly fewer people in the UK live in dense urban areas, in areas with good public transport networks, and in areas where they can meet their day-to-day needs within walking distance from their home.

This pattern of development poses significant challenges, particularly in terms of meeting the UK's climate targets. The lack of social infrastructure in some new developments undermines community cohesion, and the sprawling character of suburban development is known to act as a barrier to local economic development. These UK-wide trends constitute an urgent call for action on the side of local planning authorities and demonstrate the need for positive management of development on urban fringes.

Successful models emphasize well-planned infrastructure including access to a range of community facilities ranging from schools to local shops to community and leisure facilities within walking distance, alongside development at appropriate densities and in locations with good transport links.

## Contemporary approaches to community facilities provision

Faced with rapid population growth and rising infrastructure costs, local infrastructure providers continue to find better ways to plan, deliver, and manage community facilities.

### Shared use arrangements

Facility sharing can increase the intensity of use, allowing for a more cost-effective provision. In addition to the economic rationale, a mix of uses can also facilitate new encounters and help to build cohesion in the community. Successful examples include the integration of statutory services with other community uses, as well as different community-based organisations coming together to share a facility.

### Revenue-generating opportunities

Successful community facilities often rely on revenue-generating opportunities, for example operating a cafe, a shop, or a nursery on-site, as well as hiring space for classes or private functions. Commercial opportunities can be key to the long-term financial sustainability of a facility, but they are also an integral part of local community provision.

### Ownership and management

There are boundless ownership and management models, often involving multiple stakeholders including charities, local government, private individuals and entire communities. Increasingly often in rural contexts, local facilities ranging from shops to pubs to libraries are being purchased and sometimes managed directly by the local community. Such facilities deliver a variety of positive social outcomes and tend to show greater financial stability and longevity.

## Community Aspiration

Otham is experiencing a multi-fold increase in population and the ancient village will soon be absorbed in Maidstone's urban area. By the time the current developments are completed, there will be many more residents in the new homes than there are in the old village.

As expressed in the Otham Parish Neighbourhood Plan 2020-2035 and in conversation with the Parish Council, the overarching objectives for the growing community include:

1. Cultivating cohesion and a sense of togetherness in the growing community.
2. Where possible, reducing the number of car trips on the already busy lanes in the parish.
3. Preserving Otham as a green oasis for the residents of the parish as well as the wider population of Maidstone.
4. Preserving Otham's rural character and agricultural activities, which are an important part of its centuries-old heritage.

These objectives provide an overarching framework for community development in the parish, and the need for community facilities and potential delivery options should be judged against these.

### Otham Parish Neighbourhood Plan 2020-2035

The neighbourhood plan expresses community aspiration to "create a new, larger, multi-use village hall for the local community that will cater for current and new social groups and activities. It will be flexible enough to support existing social activities and space for new ones. This may include a larger multi-use hall, kitchen, WCs, bar and associated parking. It will cater for new indoor sports activities, private hire, community events, social clubs and village meetings".

### Neighbourhood surveys

Otham Parish Council conducted two village surveys in 2015 and 2018. Key findings are:

1. 94% of residents believe that a village hall in Otham is vital, important or nice to have (2015).
2. 34% of residents think that the current village hall should be maintained, but 56% support the construction of a new community hall (2018).
3. Many residents would like to see additional facilities in Otham. The most desired are a local or community-run shop, a farm shop, and a small cafe (2015).

### Stakeholder engagement

Additional findings emerged from the engagement key stakeholders:

1. A community facility in Otham could co-locate multiple uses such as a community hall, local shop, or a cafe.
2. Local community provision should be small in scale to meet the needs of local residents without attracting more car traffic.
3. Location is crucial to ensure good accessibility by walking and cycling from different parts of the parish.

## Benchmark: Village Hall

Otham has sufficient population to support a community hall.

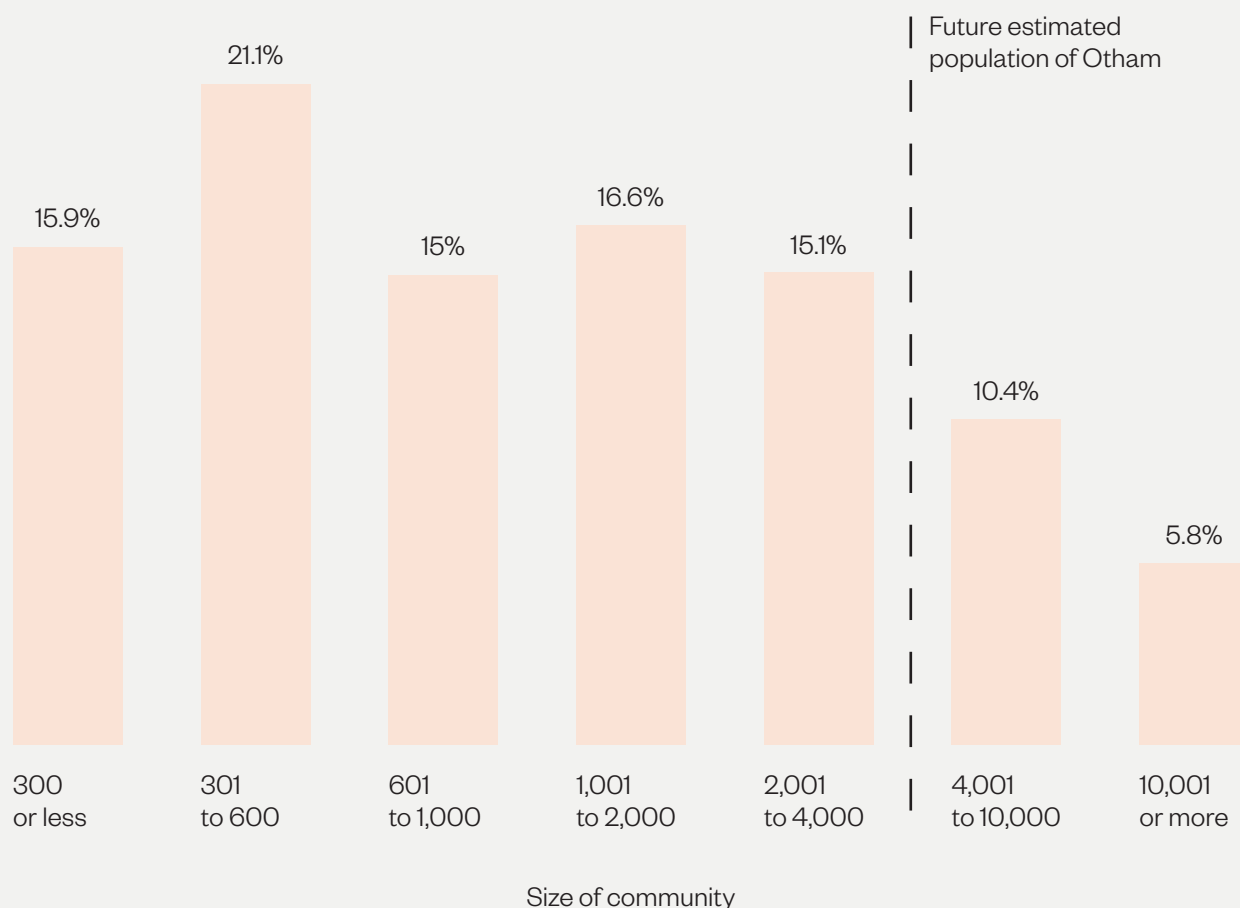
1 in 2 halls in England are located in smaller communities than the current population of Otham, and 4 in 5 are in communities smaller than the future population of Otham.

The ten-year survey of village and community halls in England collects information about halls across the country, including the size of population served by the hall (see the figure below). The response rate of the survey is 21% of all known halls.

Other interesting findings from the survey include:

- 60% of halls are the only meeting place in their community
- 90% of respondent halls have broadband and WiFi access
- Only 16% of halls do not have a car park

### Village halls in England by the size of the community they serve



Source: The English Village and Community Hall Survey, 2020

## Benchmark: Convenience Store

The future population of Otham will be sufficient to support a convenience store.

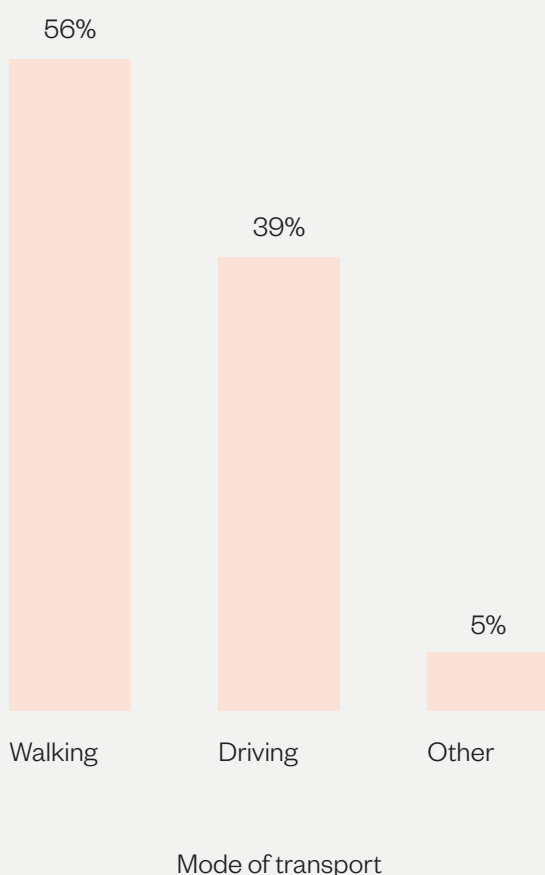
There is one convenience store for each 1,605 people in the South East of England. Other regions of the UK have even more convenience stores.

The figure comes from the 2021 Local Shop Report by the Association of Convenience Stores. The annual report draws on primary research and a survey of 2,400 independent retailers in addition to multiple and co-operative businesses representing over 6,200 stores.

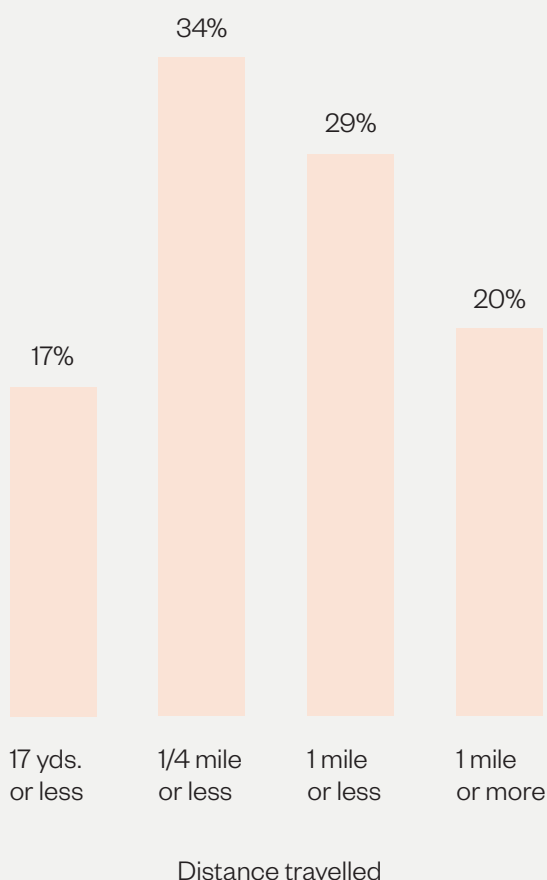
Other interesting findings from the report include:

- 56% of customers in mainland UK walk to their convenience store (see the figure below)
- 51% of customers in mainland UK travel less than 1/4 mile to their convenience store (see the figure below)

### Customers of local shops by transport they use



### Customers of local shops by distance from home



Source: The Association of Convenience Stores, 2021



## Benchmark: Pub or Bar

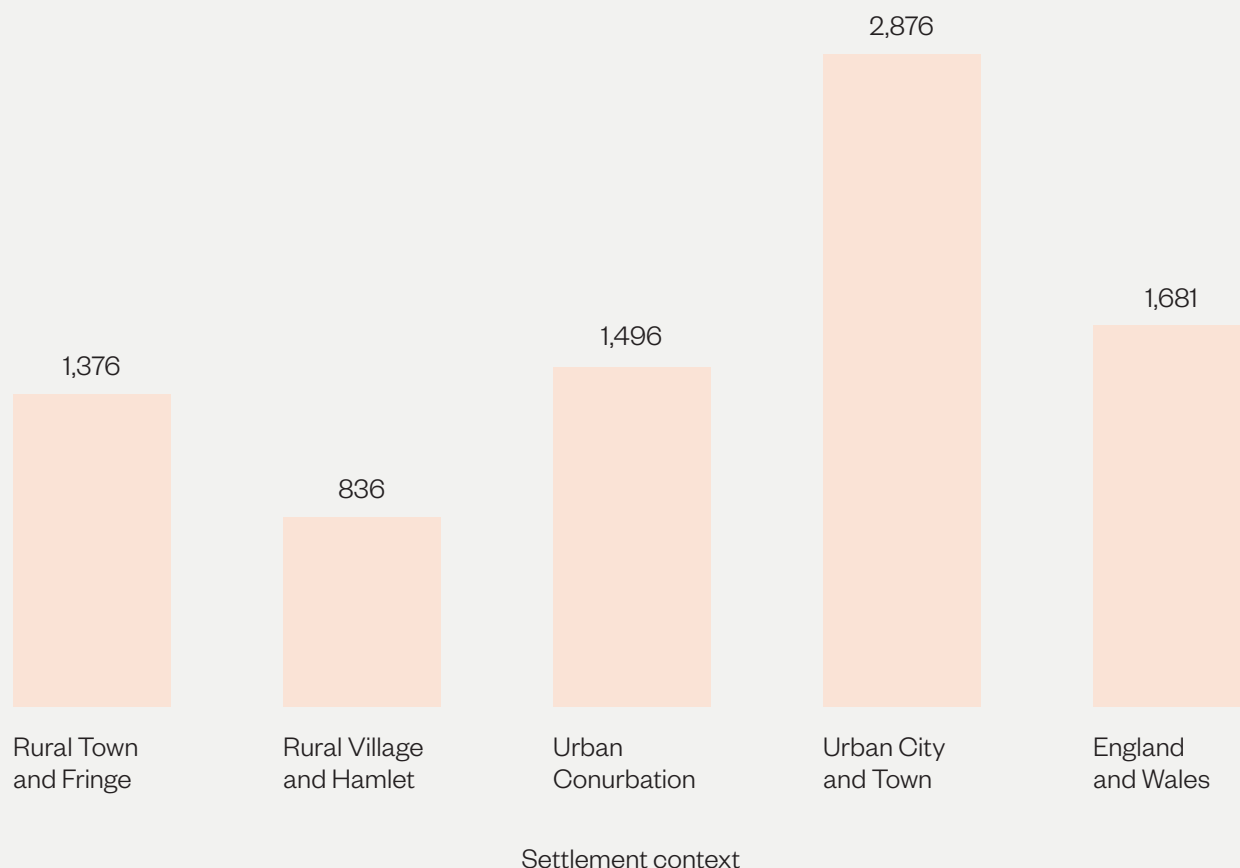
The future population of Otham will be sufficient to support a pub.

There is one pub for each 1,681 people in England and Wales.

The data on pubs and bars is collected by the Office of National Statistics as part of the Economies of ale series.


The data is linked to the Census Rural Urban Classification and reveals how the provision of pubs and bars changes in different settlement contexts. The most pubs and bars relative to population are in rural villages and hamlets, where there is one pub for each 836 people on average. The fewest pubs and bars relative to population is in urban cities and towns, where there is one pub for each 2,876 people on average.

### The average number of people per one pub in different settlement contexts in England and Wales



Source: Economies of ale, ONS 2020

## Comparisons



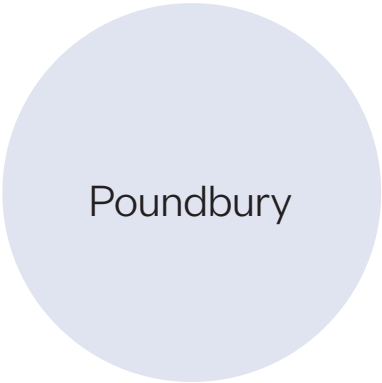
### Downswood

Population: 2,291 (2011)  
Type: Urban extension  
Construction: 1983 - 1987

### Community facilities provision

1 community hall  
2 local shops  
0 pubs or restaurants  
2 cafés or bistros  
1 faith space

Downswood is Otham's neighbouring parish. It was built in 1980s as Maidstone's urban extension, and is in many ways comparable to Otham. It is a relatively compact development on roughly the area of site allocation H1(7) and H1(9) combined. In 2011, the population of the parish was 2,291. At the centre of Downswood is a well-used community hall with a packed schedule of regular meetings and activities. Next to is a small shopping parade with a pharmacy, convenience store, and two bistros.




### Poundbury

Population: 3,500 (2018)  
Type: Urban extension  
Construction: 1993 -Present

### Community facilities provision

1 community hall  
5 local shops  
3 pubs or restaurants  
8 cafés or bistros  
2 faith spaces

Poundbury is an urban extension on the outskirts of Dorchester, Dorset. The extension is built as an experimental development inspired by traditional architecture with the endorsement of Charles, Prince of Wales. Key development principles include a focus on creating a walkable community and integrating homes with retail and other employment uses. With population of 3,500 in 2018, Poundbury already had a large number of cafés, bistros, pubs and restaurants, as well as multiple local shops.

A light blue circle containing the text "Dickens Heath".

## Dickens Heath

Population: 3,992 (2011)  
Type: New village  
Construction: 1997 - 2009

### Community facilities provision

1 community hall  
3 local shops  
5 pubs or restaurants  
3 cafés or bistros  
0 faith spaces

Dickens Heath is a new village, developed between 1997 to 2009. It was developed according to garden town and village principles, concentrating non-residential uses in a new village centre. At the time of the 2011 census, the population of Dickens Heath was 3,992. The village centre includes a community hall, 3 local shops, 5 pubs or restaurants, and 3 cafés and bistros.

A light blue circle containing the text "Otham".

## Otham

Population: ca. 4000 (2027)  
Type: Village/Urban extension  
Construction: 1400 - Present

### Community facilities provision

1 community hall  
0 local shops  
0 pubs or restaurants  
0 cafés or bistros  
1 faith space

**With over 2000 residents, Downswood has a community hall, 2 local shops, two bistros, and a nearby faith space.**

**Key**

- Community hall
- Local shop
- Pub or restaurant
- Cafe or bistro
- Faith space
- Parish boundary



0

200m







Downswood community centre



Downswood community centre

### Groups who are regularly at the Downswood community centre:

Active retirement assn. (D.O.A.R.A.) Friday afternoons	(01622)736272.
Downswood badminton club. Mon. & Thurs. Evenings	(01622) 861966.
Downswood short mat bowls. Mon. & Wed. Afternoons	0777 128 1 579.
East Sutton community youth theatre. Sat. Mornings	0788 579 0781.
Kent Karate. Friday evenings	0776 378 0006.
Kent school of bridge. Tuesday afternoon	(01622) 755852.
Kidz Kung Fu. Monday to Wednesday afternoons	0771 461 3002.
Pilates. Tuesday evenings	(01622) 738373.
Willow Rise pre-school. Weekday mornings	0785 783 5063.
Yoga. Monday morning.	0759 365 6982.
Tippee & Twinkletoes Out of School Club	0754 6143 879.
Downswood Parish Council meetings (First Tuesday every month)	(01622) 717466.
Debbie's Dance Group	0772 921 3817.

Regular activities in Downswood community centre



Downswood community centre car park



St Nicholas Church near Downswood



Downswood's shopping parade

**With under 4000 residents, Poundbury has a community hall, numerous cafés, bistros, pubs and restaurants, and multiple local shops.**

**Key**

- Community hall
- Local shop
- Pub or restaurant
- Cafe or bistro
- Faith space



0

200m





**With 4000 inhabitants, Dickens Heath has a community hall, three local shops, and numerous pubs, restaurants, cafés and bistros.**

Key

- Community hall
- Local shop
- Pub or restaurant
- Cafe or bistro
- Faith space



0

200m





## Key Takeaways

On its current trajectory, Otham is set to experience local under-provision of community facilities. If not addressed, this will be a setback for the growth of Otham as a successful community.

### **Growing Community**

The population of Otham will have increased from 500 to 4,000 by 2027.

### **Limited Provision**

The current provision of community facilities reflects its formerly small population and rural character.

### **No Planned Provision**

No new facilities are currently planned or being delivered in the parish.

### **Community Aspiration**

Local community provision is integral part of the existing community aspirations.

### **Indicative Viability**

The future population of Otham is sufficient to support any of the community facility typologies considered.

### **Comparative Performance**

Otham's development trajectory is under performing in local community provision.



**04**

# **Opportunities and Site Options**

**Key Findings**

**Longlisting Development Sites**

**Shortlisting Development Sites**



## Key Findings

The initial research identifies the following key findings with regard to existing need and future demand for community facilities.

### Existing need

The existing need for Otham shows there is a demand for the following community facilities:

- Community hall:
  - Spaces including a multi-use hall, kitchen, WCs, parking
  - Uses including events, social clubs, village meetings, nursery, indoor sports activities and private hire
- Improved accessibility:
  - Including safer walking and cycling routes

### Future demand

The future need for Otham suggests that there will likely be a demand for the following additional community facilities:

- Local shop
- Pub/ restaurant
- Cafe/ bistro

### **Key stakeholders**

#### **Otham Village Hall**

The village hall is currently under-performing with a lack of car parking and is in desperate need of modernisation. It is currently used as a nursery well below capacity, which is not sustainable in the long term.

#### **Bearsted Football Club**

The football club is also in desperate need of new and improved facilities to support the growth of the football club. It currently operates out of portable cabins that are in a poor state of repair.



# Longlisting Development Sites

The longlist of development sites for the community facilities considers a range of spaces including site allocations, existing community facilities, former community facilities, council assets, and planning applications.

**Site Allocations**

- 1. H1(6)
- 2. H1(7)
- 3. H1(8)
- 4. H1(9)
- 5. LPRSA172

**Existing Community Facilities**

- 6. Otham Village Hall
- 7. St Nicholas Church
- 8. The Village Green with Play Area
- 9. Otham Allotments
- 10. Bearsted Football Club
- 11. Rumwood Cricket Club
- 12. Maidstone Skills Centre

**Former Community Facilities**

- 13. The White Horse Inn

**Council Assets**

- 14. Land adjacent to Maidstone Skills Centre

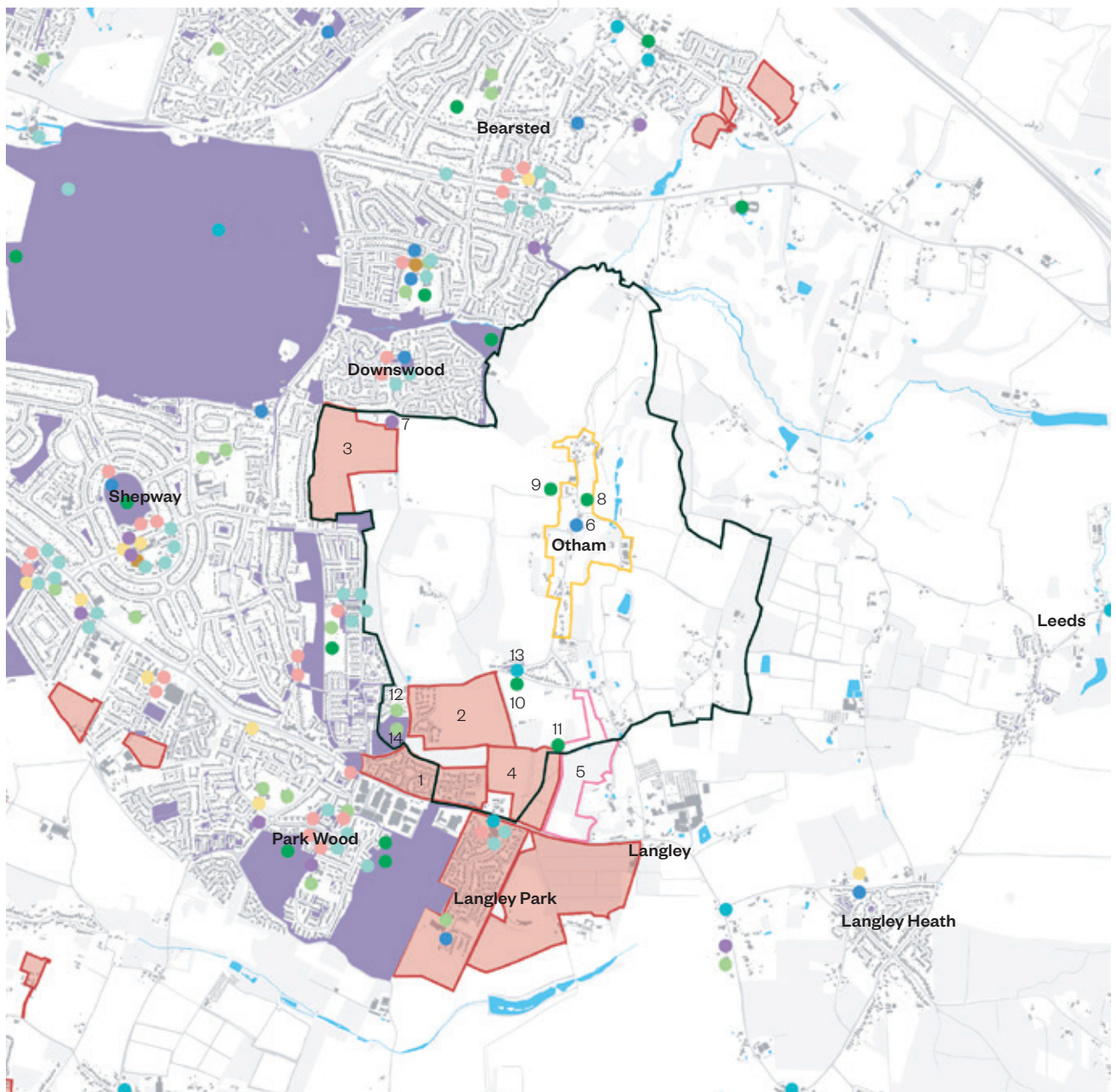
**Planning Applications/ Pre Apps**

None

**Key**

- Community hall
- Local shop
- Pub or restaurant
- Cafe or bistro
- Faith space
- Library
- Leisure facility
- Education facility
- Health facility
- Conservation Area
- Local Plan Site Allocation
- Local Plan Review Site Allocation
- MBC Ownership
- Otham Parish Boundary





# Longlisting Development Sites

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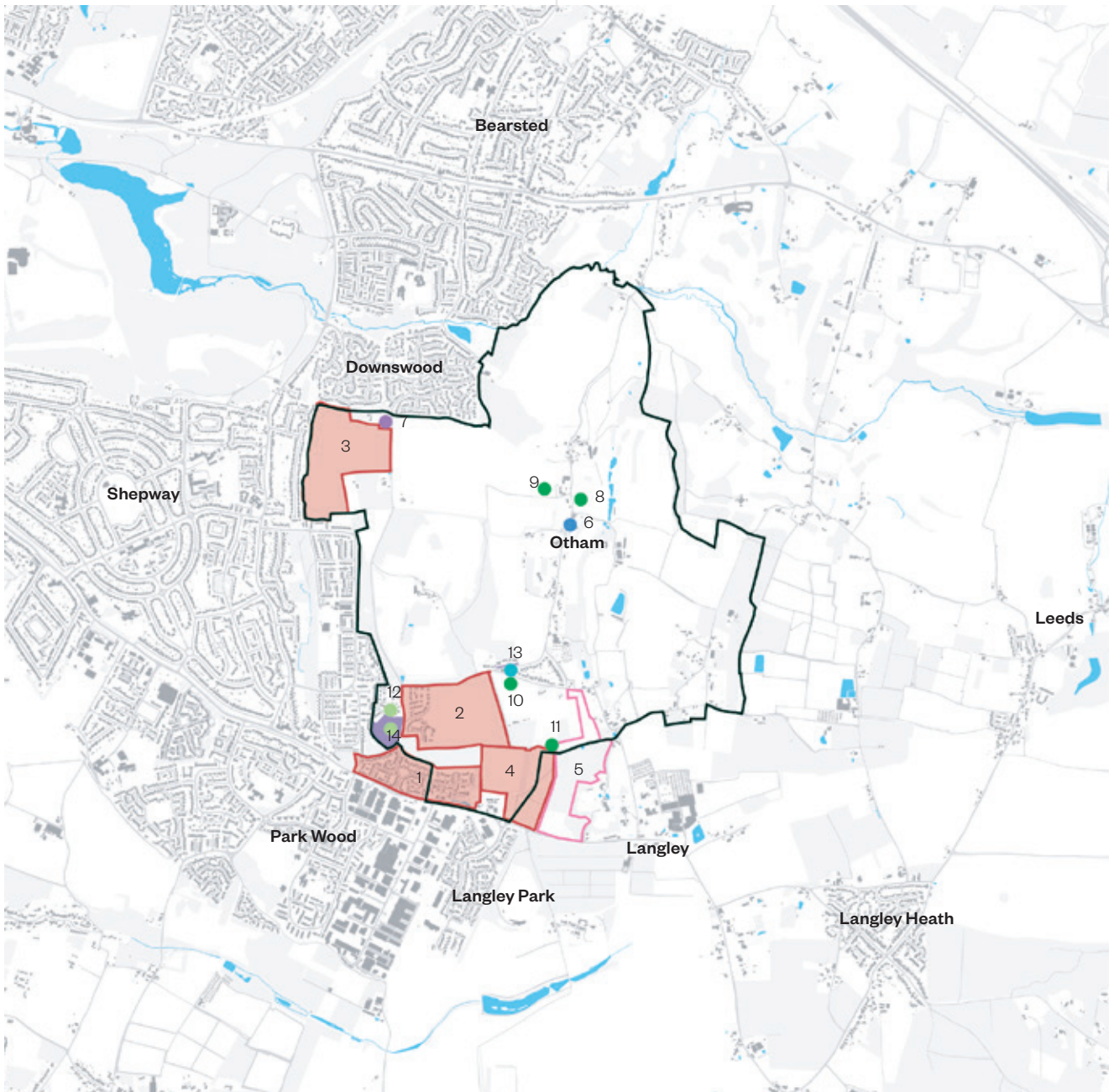
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## Longlisting Development Sites



6. Otham Village Hall



9. Otham Allotments



7. St Nicholas Church



10. Bearsted Football Club



8. The Village Green with Play Area



11. Rumwood Cricket Club





12. Maidstone Skills Centre



13. Land adjacent to Maidstone Skills Centre



14. The White Horse Pub

## Shortlisting Development Sites

The shortlist of the development sites assesses the longlist against the following assessment criteria.

### **Location**

Is the site strategically located in the centre of Otham between the conservation area and new developments?

### **Ownership**

What is the ownership of the site and is there potential for community uses?

### **Uses**

What is the existing use of the site and would it complement community uses?

### **Active community**

Is there an active community group associated with the site?

### **Development/ planning status**

What is the development status of the site and is there potential for community uses?

	Site	Location: Is the site strategically located in the centre of Otham between the conservation area and new development?	Ownership: What is the ownership of the site and is there potential for community uses?	Uses: What is the existing use of the site and would it complement community uses?	Active community: Is there an active community group associated with the site?	Development/ planning status: What is the development status of the site and is there potential for community uses?	Should this site be considered for potential new community uses?
Site Allocations	1. H1(6)	maybe	private developer	housing	N/A	recently completed	no (recently completed housing development)
	2. H1(7)	maybe	private developer	housing	N/A	recently completed	no (recently completed housing development)
	3. H1(8)	no	private developer	housing	N/A	recently completed	no (recently completed housing development)
	4. H1(9)	maybe	private developer	housing	N/A	recently completed	no (recently completed housing development)
	5. LPRSA172	no	unknown	vacant	N/A	under local plan review	maybe (not identified as site in local plan review)
Public Land and Buildings	6. Otham Village Hall	maybe	Otham Institute	village hall	yes	no future plans for development	yes (existing community facility in need of modernisation and active community group)
	7. St Nicholas Church	no	unknown	faith space	unknown	no future plans for development	no (not located in a strategic location)
	8. Otham Village Green	maybe	unknown	green space	unknown	no future plans for development	no (existing green space)
	9. Otham Allotments	maybe	unknown	allotments	unknown	no future plans for development	no (existing green space)
	10. Bearsted Football Club	yes	private owner	football facilities	yes	no future plans for development	yes (existing facilities in need of modernisation and active community group)
	11. Rumwood Cricket Club	yes	private owner	cricket facilities	unknown	no future plans for development	no (no engagement to date)
	12. Maidstone Skills Centre	maybe	KOC	education	unknown	no future plans for development	maybe (not located in a centrally strategic location)
Council Assets	13. Land adjacent to Maidstone Skills Centre	no	MBC	green space	N/A	no future plans for development	no (not located in a strategic location/ existing green space)
Private Land and Buildings	14. The White Horse Inn	yes	private owner	B&B	N/A	application for listing an asset of community value	maybe (if identified as an asset of community value)

**05**

# **Recommendations for Implementation**

**Key Recommendations  
Funding Mechanisms  
Case Studies  
Timeline for Implementation**





## Key Recommendations

The shortlist of development sites suggests two key options as potential community facilities.

### **Otham Village Hall**

This site is recommended as a key location for an improved community facility.

The village hall is owned by the Otham Institute and is in desperate need of modernisation and additional car parking spaces.

It is recommended that the additional car parking spaces are sought at the Village Green location to allow a greater number of users to the village hall.

With modernisation including improved heating, opening

windows, and storage facilities, the village hall could be more widely used for events, social clubs, village meetings, indoor sports activities and private hire, along side the existing nursery uses.

The drawback of this site is that it is located within the Otham Conservation Area, further from the new housing developments.

Safer cycling and walking infrastructure should be considered to provide improved connectivity to this site.

### **Bearsted Football Club**

This site is recommended as a key location for new community facility.

Bearsted Football Club is owned by a private owner and is in desperate need of new and improved facilities to support the growth of the football club. It currently operates out of portable cabins that are in a poor state of repair.

New facilities could be provided on the north western edge of the site, adjacent to The White Horse Inn. The new facilities should

include shower, changing, and club house as well as wider community spaces such as spaces for social clubs, village meetings, indoor sports activities and private hire, along side the existing nursery uses. Other facilities that could be accommodated include a local shop, restaurant and cafe.

This site is ideally located in Otham, between the Conversation Area and new housing developments to the south.

## Key Recommendations

The shortlist of development sites also suggests two further potential community facilities.

### **The White Horse Inn**

The pub is currently under private ownership, however Otham Parish Council have submitted an application to Maidstone Borough Council to have the pub listed as an asset of community value.

If this were the case, the site could offer a community pub with the potential for other complementary uses such as a small shop and/ or meeting space.

The drawback of this site is that it is dependant upon being put up for sale by the current owner.

### **Maidstone Skills Centre**

The new community college is owned by Kent County Council and offers a wide range of spaces and facilities available to hire by the local community for uses such as events, social clubs, village meetings, indoor sports activities and other private hire.

The site also has sufficient car parking as well as a new footpath to provide easy and safe access by foot from neighbouring development sites H1(6) and H1(7).



## Funding Mechanisms

The following options have been identified as potential for funding mechanisms for a new community facility.



Type	Organisation	Fund description	Funding priorities	Indicative amount available (£)
Local	Maidstone Borough Council <a href="http://www.maidstone.gov.uk/home/primary-services/communities-and-volunteering/tier-2-primary-areas/grants-and-funding">www.maidstone.gov.uk/home/primary-services/communities-and-volunteering/tier-2-primary-areas/grants-and-funding</a>	Community Resilience Fund	Community	£500 - £5000
		Kent Community Foundation <a href="https://kentcf.org.uk/funding">https://kentcf.org.uk/funding</a>	Community	Up to £12,000
		Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL)	Community, Transport, Social and Green Infrastructure	No min, or max.
	Kent County Council <a href="https://www.kent.gov.uk/leisure-and-community/community-grants-and-funding/village-and-community-hall-grant-scheme#tab-1,2,3">https://www.kent.gov.uk/leisure-and-community/community-grants-and-funding/village-and-community-hall-grant-scheme#tab-1,2,3</a>	Village and Community Hall Grant Scheme	Village/ Community Halls	Up to £30,000 Conditional on 50% match funding
National	Action with Communities in Rural England	Village Hall Improvement Grant Fund	Village Halls	Scheme funds up to 20% of eligible costs, with a grants available from £10,000 - £75,000. Overall scheme costs would be £50,000 - £375,000.
	AVIVA <a href="http://www.aviva.co.uk/services/more-from-aviva/aviva-community-fund/">www.aviva.co.uk/services/more-from-aviva/aviva-community-fund/</a>	Aviva Community Fund	Community	Up to £50,000
	Heritage Lottery Fund <a href="http://www.hlf.org.uk">www.hlf.org.uk</a>	National Lottery Grants for Heritage	Heritage, Community	£3000 - £10000
		National Lottery Grants for Heritage	Heritage, Community	£10000 - £250000
		National Lottery Grants for Heritage	Heritage, Community	£250,000 - £5,000,000
	National Lottery Community Fund <a href="http://www.tnlcommunityfund.org.uk/">www.tnlcommunityfund.org.uk/</a>	National Lottery Awards for All England	Community	£300-£10,000
		Reaching Communities England	Community	Over £10,001
	Biffa Award <a href="http://www.biffa-award.org">www.biffa-award.org</a>	Funding to community projects under four different themes.	Rebuilding Biodiversity, Community Buildings, Recreation and Partnerships	Up to £200,000
	Sport England <a href="http://www.sportengland.org">www.sportengland.org</a>	Grants to help more people play sport	Sports Facilities & Activities	£300 - £10,000
	Spacehive <a href="http://www.spacehive.com/">www.spacehive.com/</a>	Public space 'crowd funding' for community accessible space	Community	No min or max.
	Tesco Community Grants <a href="http://www.tescocommunitygrants.org.uk/">www.tescocommunitygrants.org.uk/</a>	Grants scheme open to charities and community organisations	Community	Up to £1,500
	Comic Relief Community Fund <a href="http://www.groundwork.org.uk/comic-relief/">www.groundwork.org.uk/comic-relief/</a>	Funding programme	Community	Up to £10,000
	ASDA Foundation Grants <a href="http://www.asdafoundation.org/foundation-grants">www.asdafoundation.org/foundation-grants</a>	Investing in Spaces and Places	Community	£5,000 - £25,000
	Santander Foundation <a href="http://www.santandersustainability.co.uk/the-santander-foundation">www.santandersustainability.co.uk/the-santander-foundation</a>	Funding programme	Community	Minimum of £25,000 in any one year, maximum of £150,000 over 3 years
	Foyle Foundation <a href="http://www.foylefoundation.org.uk/">www.foylefoundation.org.uk/</a>	Small Grants Scheme	Charities	£1,000 - £10,000
	NationWide Community Grants <a href="http://www.nationwidecommunitygrants.co.uk/">www.nationwidecommunitygrants.co.uk/</a>	Community Grant	Charities, Community Land Trusts and housing co-operatives	£10,000 - £50,000

# Case Studies

The following case studies illustrate examples of new and improved community facilities in other locations across the country.

## Village Hall



### Westleton Village Hall, Suffolk

Westleton Village Hall has been recently extended and refurbished in 2019 with major funding from the Big Lottery and Heritage Lottery to become a modern community facility. The village hall now boasts state of the art facilities including a new foyer and a large kitchen enabling catering for a wide variety of events.

The village hall was originally built in 1942 on a site in the centre of Westleton, as a primary school. The school served the community until the mid 1960s when there were no longer enough children to sustain the school and was closed in 1967. A group of local residents then decided to buy the school building to use as a village hall.

The hall is an important feature in the centre of the village and remains a focus for many community activities and events including table tennis, camera club, film club, art club, village fairs, village meetings, yoga and dance lessons.

## Sports/ Community Centre



### Charlwood Sports and Community Centre, Horley

In 2012, Charlwood Parish Council launched an appeal to raise money for a new sports and community centre. Over a period of three years they raised £600,000 partnership funding from John Bristow & Thomas Mason Trust, Sports England Inspired Fund, Football Foundation, London Marathon Charitable Trust, Veolia Environmental Trust and to Surrey County Council, as well as additional money raised by the local community.

The sports and community centre boasts a range of facilities including changing suites, showers, toilets, lockers, benches, and storage for the sports clubs as well as a community room with a modern equipped kitchen for the local residents that can be hired out for village meetings, functions and events.

## Community Pub



### **Trawden Arms, Lancashire**

Dubbed the heart of the village, the Trawden Arms in Lancashire served locals for 126 years before it was put up for sale by its owners in March 2020. Villagers then sought for the pub to be listed as an asset of community value, preventing developers purchasing the property as a holiday home, giving them time to raise £520,000 to buy the pub.

The pub serves a village of 2,000 residents, and pub is leased to two tenants, who run the pub on a commercial basis, but also as a community focal point.

Trawden Arms pub is not the first community asset the villagers have bought, with village residents having also communally bought, reopened and operated, a shop, library and community centre, making them the first village in Britain to do so. These are staffed from a pool of 120 volunteers working two-hour shifts.

## Timelines for Implementation

The following timelines for implementation have been suggested for the identified community facilities.

### Village Hall

**Liaise with Otham Parish Council and key stakeholders** to understand the key requirements for the refurbishment of Otham Village Hall.

**Commission a feasibility study and cost analysis** for the proposed works to explore and assess refurbishment options.

**Seek funding** for the refurbishment works (see page 16 for funding options).

**Delivery of refurbishment of Otham Village Hall.**

### Sports/ Community Centre

**Liaise with owner of Bearsted Football Club and management team** to discuss the potential for a new sports and community centre.

**Liaise with Bearsted Football Club, Otham Parish Council and other key stakeholders** to understand key requirements for a new sports and community centre.

**Commission a feasibility study and cost analysis** for the proposed works to explore and assess refurbishment options.

**Seek funding** for the refurbishment works (see page 16 for funding options).

**Further design and delivery of a new sports and community centre.**

## Community Pub

**Await outcome to application for asset of community value** to Maidstone Borough Council.

**Liaise with owner of The White Horse Pub** to understand existing and proposed uses.

**Seek purchase of pub.**

**Potential refurbishment and use as a community pub.**



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