

**Maidstone Borough Council**

**Maidstone Borough Local Plan**

**Spatial Strategy Topic Paper 2016**





Affordable housing,  
Armstrong Road, Maidstone



Scania Depot, Brooklyn Yard



Lenham Village Square



Langley Park, Maidstone



Kent Institute of Medicine  
and Surgery, Maidstone



Sandling Lane, Penenden  
Heath, Maidstone



Captain Nolan Sculpture,  
Old Ophthalmic Hospital



Mote Park, Maidstone



Marden



Fremlin Walk

## **1 Introduction**

1.1 The evolution of the spatial strategy is included in the Local Plan (Paras 1.8 - 1.16) and the SA/SEA (in particular within Section 10 - Strategic Approach to Housing Growth and Section 11 - Strategic Approach to Employment Development).

1.2 This Topic Paper sets out the justification for the spatial strategy of the Local Plan.

1.3 In particular, the Topic Paper relates to Policy SS1; the Spatial Vision and Spatial Objectives of the Local Plan.

1.4 The Topic Paper is structured as follows:

- Section 2 outlines the approach to meeting objectively assessed needs
- Section 3 explains the settlement hierarchy in the Borough
- Section 4 sets out the constraints to development
- Section 5 acknowledges the infrastructure constraints
- Section 6 sets out the Maidstone Borough Local Plan Spatial Strategy
- Section 7 reviews the Sustainability Appraisal of the Spatial Strategy, and
- Section 8 concludes that the Spatial Strategy is the most sustainable and deliverable strategy for the plan period

## **2 Meeting Objectively Assessed Needs**

2.1 The Borough's objectively assessed housing need is identified in the SHMAA (2014) and subsequent updates in 2014 and 2015 (HOU 002, 003 and 004). The objectively assessed employment need is identified in the Economic Sensitivity Testing and Employment Land Forecast report (January 2014) (ECON 001). Local Plans should meet objectively assessed needs unless any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in the National Planning Policy Framework ("the Framework") taken as a whole; or specific policies in this Framework indicate development should be restricted.

2.2 Maidstone Borough Council ("the Council") recognises the environmental constraints operating within the Borough (see Section 4 below). However, there

are sufficient areas without landscape or other environmental designations or actual physical constraints which have been made available by landowners. As such, there is no fundamental environmental constraint that would justify reducing the OAN figure. Similarly, the Council recognises the potentially significant infrastructure constraints associated with a step change in the amount of development needed (see Section 5 below). Nevertheless, consistent with Planning Practice Guidance (PPG)<sup>1</sup>, the Council has endeavoured to overcome such constraints through practical infrastructure provision and mitigation measures in order that need can be met.

2.3 Consequently, not meeting the Borough's objectively assessed housing or employment need and seeking assistance from adjacent local authorities is not considered to be a reasonable option. The Local Plan has been prepared based on a strategy which seeks to meet objectively assessed development need in the most sustainable way.

### **3 Settlement Hierarchy**

3.1 In order to consider the spatial strategy for the distribution of development across the Borough it is important to understand the existing settlement hierarchy within the Borough which has a population of 155,143 (2011 Census) and covers 40,000 hectares.

#### **Maidstone Town**

3.2 Maidstone is the county town of Kent and located in the north west of the borough. Approximately 70% of the Borough's population live in the urban area. The urban area provides approximately 43,500 jobs<sup>2</sup>

3.3 The Borough is dominated by the town of Maidstone which contains the highest population, most job opportunities (including potential growing business sectors) and higher order services such as the district general hospital; shopping centres and leisure, cultural and entertainment venues.

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<sup>1</sup> Ref ID: 3, paragraph 022

<sup>2</sup> 2011 Census Middle Level Super Output Areas for Maidstone Borough (excludes home working; people who have no fixed place of work, vacancies - rounded to nearest 100)

3.4 The town centre contains one of the largest shopping areas in South East England and acts as the focus for retail provision throughout the borough and beyond. Cultural, leisure and tourism facilities are an important contributor to the success of the town centre.

3.5 Maidstone town also provides the best range of transport options in the borough. The town has three central rail stations (Maidstone East; Maidstone West and Maidstone Barracks) as well as a central bus station at The Mall. The principal rail route serving Maidstone town is the London Victoria to Ashford International line (also referred to as the Maidstone East Line) with an average journey time to London of an hour.

### **Rural Service Centres**

*Harrietsham; Headcorn; Lenham; Marden; Staplehurst*

3.6 The population of each parish is shown in Appendix 1. The average parish population for the Rural Service Centres is some 3,700 residents with Harrietsham the lowest at just over 2000 and Staplehurst the largest at almost 6,000 (2011 Census). All rural service centres have significant employment opportunities. Harrietsham and Lenham combined have approximately 3000 jobs; Headcorn has approximately 2000 jobs (this also includes Sutton Valence); Marden has approximately 3500 jobs (this includes Yalding and Coxheath) and Staplehurst has 1500 jobs<sup>3</sup>.

3.7 This group of rural service centres provide a good range of local services to serve settlement and the surrounding rural area. All RSCs have a primary school; nursery school; place of worship; village/community hall; library; doctor's surgery; recreation ground/ sports pitches; general store / newsagent; post office; hairdresser; other convenience shopping; a bank (Headcorn; Marden and Staplehurst only); at least one public house; restaurant; takeaway (except Harrietsham) and cafes (except Harrietsham and Marden).

3.8 All are served by 4+ Bus Journeys/Weekday and a frequent train service. Harrietsham and Lenham lie on the Ashford International - Maidstone East - London Victoria line. Headcorn, Marden and Staplehurst lie on the Ashford

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<sup>3</sup> 2011 Census Middle Level Super Output Areas for Maidstone Borough (excludes home working; people who have no fixed place of work, vacancies - rounded to nearest 100)

International - Tonbridge - London Charing Cross and London Cannon Street lines.

3.9 Lenham provides a good range of local facilities and is the only rural service centre with a secondary school. The service centre has access to employment opportunities locally; good rail and bus links to Maidstone and Ashford towns; and easy access to the A20 leading to Junction 8 of the M20 motorway.

### **Larger Villages**

*Boughton Monchelsea; Coxheath; Eyhorne Street (Hollingbourne); Sutton Valence; Yalding*

3.10 The population of each parish is shown in Appendix 1. The average parish population for the Larger Villages is some 2,500 residents with Eyhorne Street (Hollingbourne) the lowest at just under 950 and Coxheath the largest at just over 4,000 (2011 Census). All provide some local employment opportunities.

3.11 This group Larger Villages generally have fewer services than rural service centres, but can still provide for the day-to-day needs of local communities and to some extent the wider hinterland. All Larger Villages have a range of basic facilities (primary school; nursery school; nursery; place of worship; village/community hall; library; recreation ground/ sports pitches; general store/newsagent; post office; hairdresser and at least one public house (with the exception of Coxheath). Coxheath; Sutton Valence and Yalding have doctor's surgeries. Coxheath and Sutton Valence have some additional shopping provision.

3.12 None of the larger villages have banks or a secondary school.

3.13 Whilst all except Eyhorne Street (Hollingbourne) are served by 4+ Bus Journeys/Weekday, only two Eyhorne Street (Hollingbourne) and Yalding) are served by railway stations. Eyhorne Street (Hollingbourne) lies on the Ashford International - Maidstone East - London Victoria line. Yalding lies on the Medway Valley Line, Paddock Wood - Maidstone West - Maidstone Barracks - Strood.

## Summary

3.14 Based on their scale; role and existing services, the hierarchy of settlements in Maidstone Borough is as follows:

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>County Town</b> Maidstone</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Rural Service Centres</b> Harrietsham, Headcorn, Lenham, Marden and Staplehurst</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Larger Villages</b> Boughton Monchelsea, Coxheath, Eyhorne Street (Hollingbourne), Sutton Valence and Yalding</p>
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3.15 It is considered important that new development should be located at the most sustainable towns and villages where employment, key infrastructure, services and facilities, together with a range of transport choices, are available. The focus for new development should therefore be at the County town with smaller scale contributions from first the Rural Service Centres as a whole and then, at a more limited scale, the Larger Villages as a whole.

## 4 Constraints

4.1 The distribution of development within the Borough is influenced by a number of constraints.

4.2 The Framework contains a presumption in favour of sustainable development. For plan-making this means that Local Plans should meet objectively assessed needs unless:

- any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in this Framework taken as a whole; or

- specific policies in this Framework indicate development should be restricted.<sup>4</sup>

4.3 In evolving the preferred spatial strategy for meeting objectively assessed needs, the Council has sought to distribute development in accordance with the specific policies in this Framework which indicate development should be restricted. In particular, in terms of restrictive policies, the Framework makes specific reference to:

- Green Belt
- Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
- Floodplain
- Special Area of Conservation and Sites of Special Scientific Interest
- Designated heritage assets

### **Metropolitan Green Belt**

4.4 A small part of the Borough encompasses a section of the Metropolitan Green Belt (1.3%).

4.5 The Framework states (at paragraph 83): *"Once established, Green Belt boundaries should only be altered in exceptional circumstances."*

4.6 An analysis of the Green Belt in Maidstone Borough (Metropolitan Green Belt Review, January 2016 – STR 001) shows that it has maintained its openness and continues to perform some of the purposes of the Green Belt. The settlement hierarchy and the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment show that the Green Belt land in this location is neither available nor represents a sustainable location for development to meet objectively assessed need.

4.7 The Metropolitan Green Belt Review and Local Plan evidence base does not establish the exception circumstances for reviewing the Green Belt boundaries within Maidstone Borough and, accordingly, the MBLP does not propose any alterations to the existing Green Belt boundaries. It is therefore proposed to

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<sup>4</sup> NPPF, paragraph 14



continue to restrict development in this location in accordance with the Framework.

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

4.8 Part of the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) runs across the north eastern part of the Borough – generally north of the M20 corridor – and comprises 27% of the Borough.

4.9 The Government gives great weight to conserving landscape and scenic beauty in Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, which have the highest status of protection in relation to landscape and scenic beauty.<sup>5</sup> Within the AONB, planning permission should be refused for major developments except in exceptional circumstances and where it can be demonstrated they are in the public interest.<sup>6</sup> For these reasons, the Local Plan seeks to protect the Kent Downs AONB from major development and does not allocate such development within the designated area.

4.10 The Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plan 2014 – 2019 states that proposals which would affect the setting of the AONB are not subject to the same level of constraint as those which would affect the AONB itself and that the weight to be afforded to setting issues will depend on the significance of the impact.

4.11 The importance of the Kent Downs AONB setting has been recognised in the AONB Management Plan 2009 -2014. This includes policies to protect the AONB from inappropriate developments in its setting unless they could be satisfactorily mitigated:

4.12 Sustainable Development Policy SD11 states: *"Where it is decided that development will take place that will have a negative impact on the landscape character, characteristics and qualities of the Kent Downs AONB or its setting,*

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<sup>5</sup> NPPF, paragraph 115

<sup>6</sup> *ibid*, paragraph 116

*mitigation measures appropriate to the national importance of the Kent Downs landscape will be identified, pursued, implemented and maintained."*

4.13 The northern edge of the Maidstone urban area; the M20 and associated motorway junctions already have an urban influence on the setting of the AONB in this area. The Rural Service Centres of Harrietsham and Lenham and the Larger Village of Eyhorne Street (Hollingbourne) are all located at the foot of the North Downs scarp.

4.14 In seeking to meet identified need in the Borough, the principle of development within the setting of the Kent Downs AONB has not been an overriding constraint. However, any new development which forms part of the setting of the AONB should minimise its impact on the landscape character, characteristics and qualities of the setting of the Kent Downs AONB and ensure that mitigation measures appropriate to the national importance of the Kent Downs landscape will be identified, implemented and maintained.

### **Floodplain**

4.15 With five main rivers amounting to approximately 70km in length Maidstone Borough has an extensive network of watercourses through the Borough. The River Medway is the main river, flowing through the centre of Maidstone town, with major tributaries, the River Beult and the River Teise joining at Yalding, upstream of the town. The River Lesser Teise, River Len and River Loose are also tributaries of the River Medway. In addition, the a short length (approximately 5km) of the Great Stour flows from the east of Lenham before flowing south east out of the Borough towards Charing.

4.16 Inappropriate development in areas at risk of flooding should be avoided by directing development away from areas at highest risk, but where development is necessary, making it safe without increasing flood risk elsewhere (NPPF Para 100).

4.17 The Local Plan is supported by a Strategic Flood Risk Assessment. Very recently completed modelling of the River Medway and its tributaries together with updating of the effects of climate change has been undertaken by the

Environment Agency and an updated Strategic Flood Risk Assessment incorporating these results will support Maidstone Local Plan. In order to ensure the results of the recent updating were taken into account during the preparation of the Local Plan, the Council has ensured close liaison with the Environment Agency in assessing all sites allocated in the Local Plan.

4.18 The Local Plan has applied a sequential, risk-based approach to the location of development to avoid where possible flood risk - steering new development to areas with the lowest probability of flooding. In a limited number of cases where it has not been possible, or consistent with wider sustainability objectives, to locate all development in areas with a lower probability of flooding, the Environment Agency has been consulted.

### **Special Areas of Conservation and Sites of Special Scientific Interest**

4.19 One of the core planning principles set out in the Framework is to contribute to conserving and enhancing the natural environment.<sup>7</sup> In relation to restricting development, the Framework specifically refers to Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) and Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). Within the Borough, part of the North Downs is of international conservation status and is designated a SAC. The Borough also has 11 sites of Species Scientific Interest.

In accordance with the Framework:<sup>8</sup>

- Special Areas of Conservation should be given the same protection as European sites.
- Proposed development on land within or outside a Site of Special Scientific Interest likely to have an adverse effect on a Site of Special Scientific Interest (either individually or in combination with other developments) should not normally be permitted.

4.20 The Local Plan seeks to protect any direct and indirect impacts on such designated areas by not allocating development which would have an adverse impact on them (in relation to Special Areas of Conservation, see Habitat Regulations Assessment, 2016 – ENV 016).

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<sup>7</sup> *ibid*, paragraph 17

<sup>8</sup> *ibid*, paragraph 118

## **Designated heritage assets**

4.21 Another of the Core Planning Principles set out in the Framework<sup>9</sup> is to conserve heritage assets in a manner appropriate to their significance, so that they can be enjoyed for their contribution to the quality of life of this and future generations.

4.22 Designated heritage assets include Conservation Areas, Listed Buildings, and registered parks and gardens. The Borough includes 41 conservation areas, over 2,000 listed buildings, 28 scheduled ancient monuments and 15 parks and gardens important for their special historic. Such designations do not necessarily prevent development but, the more important the asset, the greater the weight is given to its conservation. The significance of a designated heritage asset can be harmed or lost through alteration or destruction of the heritage asset itself or development within its setting.

4.23 In accordance with the Framework, the Council has identified and assessed any designated heritage asset that may be affected by a proposed allocation, including by development affecting its setting (as set out in the Strategic Housing and Economic Development Land Availability Assessment) (SHEDLAA). 2016 – HOU 007) and have sought to avoid or minimise conflict between the heritage asset's conservation and any aspect of the proposal (Para 129).

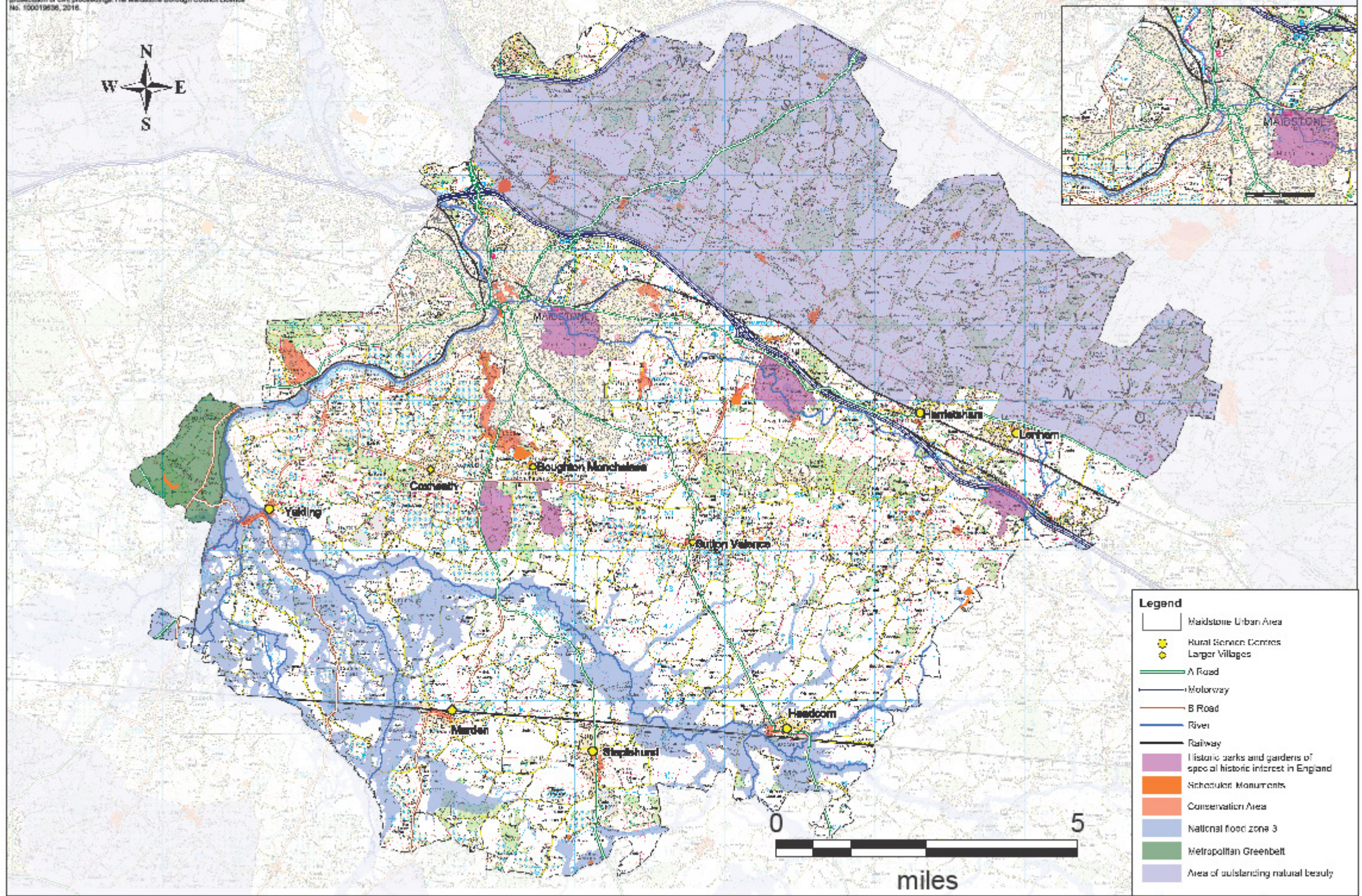
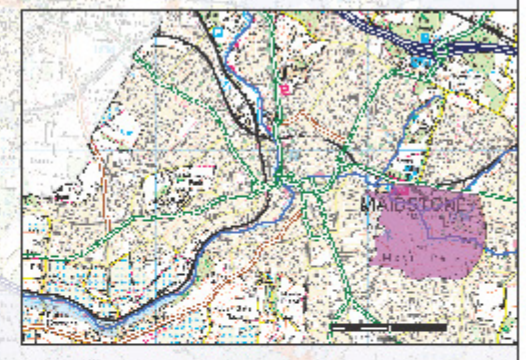
4.24 The location of the areas where development should be restricted in accordance with paragraph 14 of the Framework is shown on Map 1 below)

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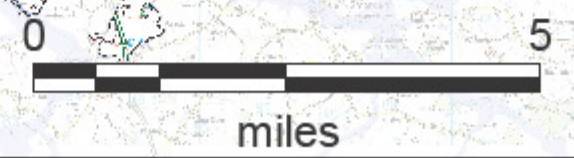
<sup>9</sup> *ibid*, paragraph 17

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# Map 1- Areas where development should be restricted



- Legend**
- Maidstone Urban Area
  - Rural Service Centres  
Larger Villages
  - A Road
  - Motorway
  - B Road
  - River
  - Railway
  - Historic parks and gardens of special historic interest in England
  - Scheduled Monuments
  - Conservation Area
  - National Grid zone 3
  - Metropolitan Greenbelt
  - Area of outstanding natural beauty



### **Other Green Infrastructure:**

4.25 The Framework states that planning system should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by, amongst other things, protecting and enhancing valued landscapes and minimising impacts on biodiversity, providing net gains in biodiversity where possible.<sup>10</sup>

4.26 In preparing plans to meet development needs, the aim should be to minimise adverse effects on the local and natural environment. Plans should allocate land with the least environmental or amenity value, where consistent with other policies in the Framework.<sup>11</sup>

#### *Biodiversity*

4.27 Planning permission should be refused for development resulting in the loss or deterioration of irreplaceable habitats, including ancient woodland and the loss of aged or veteran trees found outside ancient woodland, unless the need for, and benefits of, the development in that location clearly outweigh the loss.<sup>12</sup>

4.28 As well as the SAC and SSSIs already referred to, 7% of the Borough is covered by areas of ancient woodland and there are 63 local wildlife sites and 3 local nature reserves.

#### *Areas of Local Landscape Value*

4.29 Parts of the substantial rural area within the Borough has been identified as having high landscape quality and have been designated in the Local Plan as Areas of Local Landscape Value. Development proposals within landscapes of local value should, through their siting, scale, mass, materials and design, seek to contribute positively to the conservation and enhancement of the protected landscape.

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<sup>10</sup> *ibid*, paragraph 109

<sup>11</sup> *ibid*, paragraph 110

<sup>12</sup> *ibid*, paragraph 118

### *Public Open Space*

4.30 Access to high quality open spaces and opportunities for sport and recreation can make an important contribution to the health and well-being of communities<sup>13</sup> and the Council has sought to protect the different types of public open space (amenity green space; equipped play areas, outdoor sports facilities, allotments and natural/semi-natural) within the Borough.

### *Maidstone Town's Green and Blue Corridors*

4.31 A characteristic of Maidstone urban area is the way tracts of rural and semi-rural land penetrate into the urban area. This feature results from the way the town has developed from its centre along radial routes and river corridors enveloping the land of former country estates. These green and blue corridors have a variety of functions in addition to the contribution they make to the setting of the town, including a local anti-coalescence function by maintaining open land between areas of development spreading out from the town; providing residents with access to open green space and the wider countryside; as well as providing biodiversity corridors. The Local Plan seeks to maintain this network of green and blue infrastructure, whilst recognising that a limited amount development may offer opportunities for enhancement provided the function of the corridors is not compromised.

### *Coalescence of Settlements*

4.32 The Local Plan spatial strategy should not compromise the individual identity and character of settlements by development that results in unacceptable coalescence including between Maidstone and surrounding villages, and Maidstone and the Medway Gap/Medway Towns conurbation. This approach does not mean that there should be no development at all between existing settlements. Rather, that any development should avoid coalescence between settlements and be of a scale, siting and character that it would not compromise the individual identity and character of the settlements. The Spatial Strategy has maintained this approach.

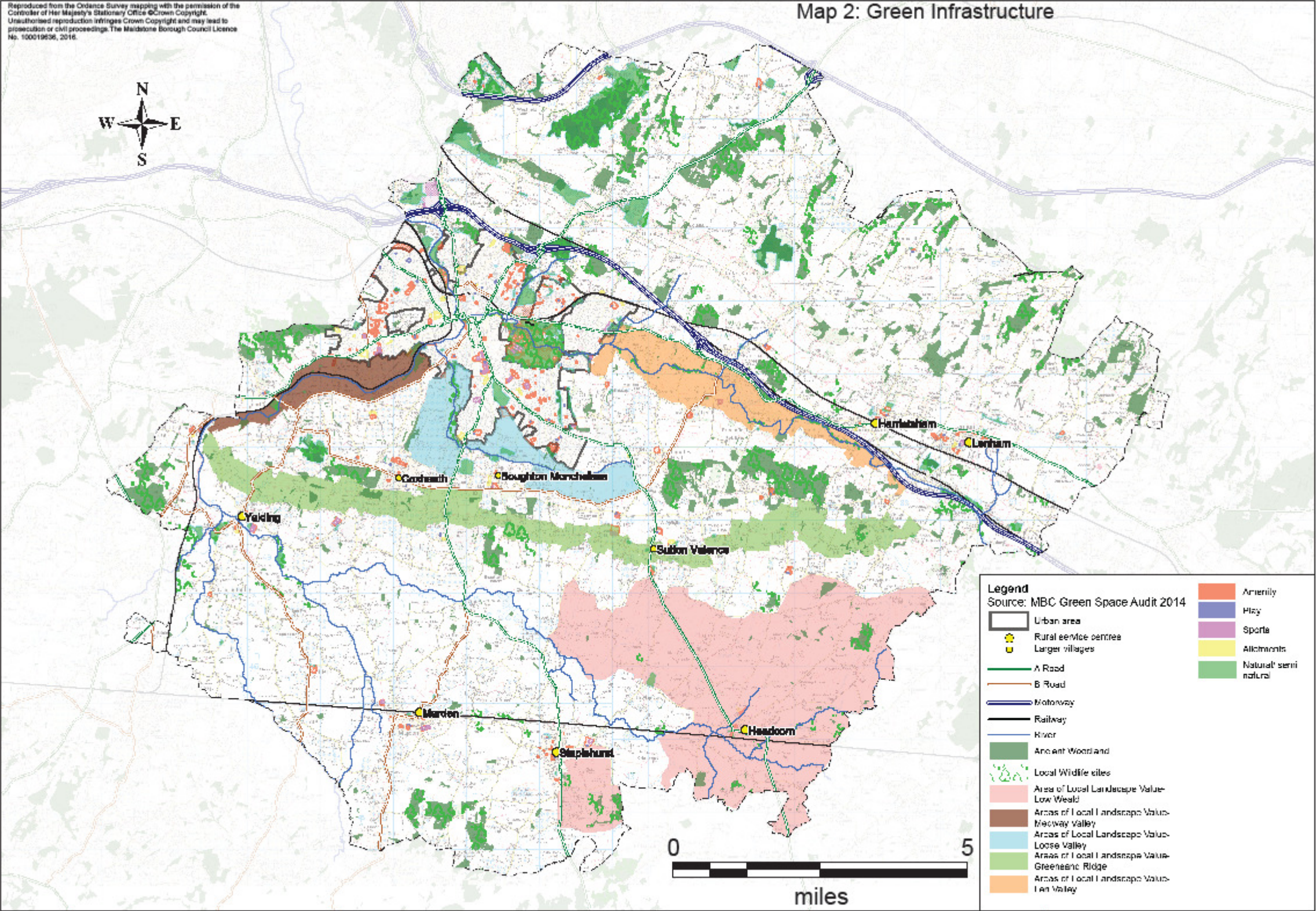
Map 2 below shows the distribution of green infrastructure within the Borough.

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<sup>13</sup> *ibid*, paragraph 73

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Map 2: Green Infrastructure



**Legend**  
Source: MBC Green Space Audit 2014

Urban area	Amenity
Rural service centre	Play
Larger villages	Sports
A Road	Allotments
B Road	Natural semi-natural
Motorway	
Railway	
River	
Ancient Woodland	
Local Wildlife sites	
Areas of Local Landscape Value - Low Weald	
Areas of Local Landscape Value - Medway Valley	
Areas of Local Landscape Value - Loose Valley	
Areas of Local Landscape Value - Greening Ridge	
Areas of Local Landscape Value - Iken Valley	





## **5 Infrastructure Constraints**

5.1 In preparing the Local Plan, the Council has been aware of the significant development required to meet objectively assessed needs and the constraints of existing infrastructure (including transport; education; sewage treatment works).

5.2 As the Infrastructure Delivery Plan (SUB 011) demonstrates, the Council has worked hard with infrastructure providers to seek to overcome these constraints.

5.3 The spatial strategy in the Local Plan seeks to build on existing infrastructure and support existing services (such as community facilities, shops and village/ neighbourhood facilities) wherever possible.

5.4 The need for investment in significant new infrastructure associated with a new settlement would be likely to affect the delivery of the Local Plan. As well as land assembly and lead times necessary before construction could commence, a new settlement would rely to a large extent on the provision of new infrastructure. The range, scale and timing of such infrastructure, whilst retaining a viable development, is likely to mean that this alternative would not deliver the step change in development required to meet objectively assessed need in the plan period and that the comprehensive package of infrastructure required to serve the development would be reduced in scale or delayed.

5.5 Building on existing infrastructure and services by locating the majority of development at settlements with the greatest range of infrastructure is likely to lead to a more sustainable and deliverable Local Plan. Following this strategy, it is clear that, whilst development will need to be accompanied by new infrastructure provision, this need not provide an overriding constraint to meeting objectively assessed needs.

## **6 Maidstone Borough Local Plan Spatial Strategy**

### **Maidstone Borough's Spatial Strategy**

6.1 Development must be delivered at the most sustainable towns and villages where employment, key infrastructure, services and facilities, together with a range of transport choices, are available.

6.2 Based on the hierarchy of settlements and the identified constraints to development, the Council's spatial strategy is to maximise brownfield land use where possible and to focus development at the Maidstone urban area, with proportionate growth at the Rural Service Centres and Larger Villages, whilst identifying Lenham as a broad location for longer term growth. The proportion of growth located at each settlement is related both to the scale, role and existing services of the settlement and the suitable and available site opportunities present. Thus, there is not a precise match between the position of a settlement in the hierarchy and the proposed scale of development at the settlement and, for example, not every Rural Service Centre will accommodate exactly the same scale of development. Rather, an assessment has been made as to whether the scale of development on the suitable and available sites at a settlement could be accommodated within the scale, role and existing or enhanced services of a settlement.

### **Optimising the Potential of Brownfield Sites**

6.3 In terms of making the most use of brownfield sites before accepting the need to allocate greenfield sites, the Council revisited all sites within the built up areas which were identified in the Urban Capacity Studies (2002 and 2009), the Employment Land Review (2013); the Town Centre Study (2010) and the Qualitative Employment Site Assessment Maidstone Borough Council Final Report – Appendix V - Town Centre Office Stock (2014). All sites put forward through these exercises have been included in the Strategic Housing and Economic Development Land Availability Assessment (SHEDLAA) 2016 or broad locations unless:

- they had been implemented;

- they had planning permission;
- there is no landowner interest (despite contact from the Council);
- they are not deliverable.

6.4 Extensive 'call for sites' opportunities for both housing and employment have been held as comprehensively set out in the Strategic Housing and Economic Development Land Availability Assessment, January 2016 (HOU 007).

6.5 In order to maximise the potential of brownfield sites, all sites put forward through these exercises were included as allocations or broad locations if they are suitable, available and achievable. Broad locations for future housing growth have been identified on brownfield sites within the town centre boundary and at Invicta Park Barracks, Sandling Road, Maidstone.

6.6 Consequently, despite every effort to identify suitable, available and achievable sites, only a proportion of the borough's objectively assessed housing need can be met on brownfield land, so greenfield sites have been allocated in the Local Plan to facilitate the step change required to meet this need.

6.7 Similarly, in relation to employment development, the Local Plan seeks to encourage the retention, intensification, regeneration of the existing industrial and business areas identified as Economic Development Areas and to regenerate the town centre. Nevertheless, it has been necessary to allocate greenfield sites to help meet the specialist needs of identified business sectors.

### **Focusing Development at the Maidstone urban area**

6.8 As the largest and most sustainable location for development, Maidstone town is the focus for a significant proportion of new housing and employment development in the borough. This focus is aimed at making effective use of brownfield sites; maximising the use of existing infrastructure and supporting, and assisting the regeneration of, the town centre and other areas in need of regeneration.

6.9 Whilst optimum use has been made of brownfield opportunities within the urban area (including the allocation of a town centre site for office based development and two broad locations for future housing growth within the town centre and at Invicta Park Barracks) further suitable sites are available at the edge of the urban area which can contribute significantly to meeting the required housing and job growth.

6.10 Strategic greenfield locations for housing development are identified to the north west and south east of the urban area in order to maximise the use of existing infrastructure and to minimise the impact on landscapes and habitats. In relation to strategic development to the north west of the town, the proposed development within the Plan area would not cause coalescence between Allington (Maidstone) and the Medway Gap (Tonbridge & Malling). In relation to strategic development to the south east of the town, care has been taken to prevent the coalescence of Maidstone and the small settlement of Otham through specific landscape requirements set out in the policies of allocated sites, including landscape buffers along the eastern boundaries of allocated sites (H1(7) and H1(8)), and general requirements for on-site open space.

6.11 Strategic greenfield locations are also identified for accommodate the needs of identified business sectors at Junctions 7 and 8 of the M20. The sites are well connected to the motorway network and will provide for a range of job needs up to 2031, and help to diversify the range of sites available to new and expanding businesses in the borough to help accommodate future demand. The former is identified as a location for the expansion of medical facilities to create a cluster of associated knowledge-driven industries that need to be in close proximity to one another. Whilst the sites are well located to fulfil their purpose, they lie within the setting of the Kent Downs AONB and away from the town centre and consequently significant mitigation measures together with Travel Plans to demonstrate how development will deliver significantly improved access by sustainable modes are sought in the Local Plan.

## **The role of rural service centres - Harrietsham, Headcorn, Lenham, Marden and Staplehurst**

6.12 In order to continue to support these settlements in serving their local area by retaining vital services<sup>14</sup> and reducing the need to travel<sup>15</sup>, some appropriately scaled development is proposed at these locations. This will help meet identified need, including for affordable housing, and provide a wider choice of housing locations – assisting deliverability of the Local Plan. Employment opportunities within existing Economic Development Areas or through extensions to the existing EDA at Marden and a site close to Headcorn are also considered appropriate in building on and expanding existing provision in these locations. Other employment opportunities will also be available within the adjoining countryside, through home working or in locations well connected by public transport.

6.13 Rural service centres have constraints to development. Harrietsham and Lenham are located within the setting of the AONB, whilst parts of Headcorn, Marden and Staplehurst are fringed by Landscape of Local Value. Headcorn is located within the Low Weald LLV; surrounded on three sides by the functional floodplain of the River Beult and its tributaries and additional capacity will be required in the sewer network and may be required at the wastewater treatment works in the period to 2031. Nevertheless, the scale and facilities available at the settlements makes them suitable for some development which takes these factors into account in the selection of sites.

6.14 Table 1 below shows the proposed distribution of development between Rural Service Centres. Lenham and Harrietsham contribute less though the role of Lenham as a broad location would add significantly to the capacity of the former. Overall, Rural Service Centres accommodate almost 2000 dwellings and 26,800 sqm of business floorspace.

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<sup>14</sup> *ibid*, paragraph 55  
<sup>15</sup> *ibid*, paragraph 34

*Table 1 – Development proposed at Rural Service Centres*

<b>Rural Service Centre</b>	<b>Housing Allocations (approx dwellings)</b>	<b>Employment Allocations (approx floorspace sqm)</b>
Harrietsham	242	
Headcorn	423	5,500
Lenham	165	
Marden	447	21,300
Staplehurst	710	
<b>Total</b>	<b>1987</b>	<b>26,800</b>

6.15 Lenham provides a good range of local facilities and is the only rural service centre with a secondary school. The service centre has access to employment opportunities locally; good rail and bus links to Maidstone and Ashford towns; and easy access to the A20 leading to Junction 8 of the M20 motorway. The setting of the Kent Downs AONB and the need to avoid coalescence between Lenham and neighbouring Harrietsham are important considerations in designating the centre as a broad location for development but, on balance, Lenham is considered strategically the most suitable of all the rural service centres to accommodate the most housing development. Masterplanning of the proposed development will be required to minimise its impact on the landscape character, characteristics and qualities of the setting of the Kent Downs AONB and ensure that mitigation measures appropriate to the national importance of the Kent Downs landscape will be identified, implemented and maintained. Similarly, masterplanning will need to avoid coalescence between Lenham and neighbouring Harrietsham.

### **The role of Larger Villages - Boughton Monchelsea; Coxheath; Eyhorne Street (Hollingbourne); Sutton Valence; Yalding**

6.16 Whilst this group Larger Villages are generally of a smaller scale and have fewer services than rural service centres, they are still appropriate locations to provide for a limited amount of housing development – helping to support existing facilities and services (NPPF Para 55) whilst helping meet identified need, including for affordable housing, and providing a wider choice of housing

locations – assisting deliverability of the Local Plan. Employment opportunities are generally more limited in Larger Villages but a mixed housing and employment allocation is made at Yalding to make optimal use of a brownfield site within the floodplain.

6.17 Table 2 below shows the proposed distribution of development between Larger Villages. Coxheath contributes the most whilst Eyhorne Street (Hollingbourne) and Sutton Valence contribute less. Overall, Larger Villages accommodate just over 1000 dwellings.

*Table 2 – Development proposed at Larger Villages*

<b>Larger Village</b>	<b>Housing Allocations (Approx Dwellings)</b>	<b>Employment Allocations (approx floorspace – sqm)</b>
Coxheath	506	
Boughton Monchelsea	193	
Eyhorne Street (Hollingbourne)	39	
Sutton Valence	40	
Yalding	265	
<b>Total</b>	<b>1043</b>	

### **The role of the Countryside**

6.18 One of the Core Planning Principles within the Framework is recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside and supporting thriving rural communities within it.<sup>16</sup> It is important that the character, beauty and biodiversity of the countryside outside of settlements in the hierarchy is protected and enhanced whilst at the same time allowing for opportunities for sustainable development that supports traditional land based activities and other aspects of the countryside economy, and makes the most of new leisure and recreational opportunities that need a countryside location.

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<sup>16</sup> *ibid*, paragraph 17

## Summary

6.19 Table 3 below summarises the quantum of housing and employment allocations within the settlement hierarchy. Maidstone urban area accommodates the highest proportion (64%) of dwellings located on allocated sites and at broad locations. Rural Service Centres together accommodate a much reduced proportion (28%) of dwellings located on allocated sites and at the broad location of Lenham. Finally, Larger Villages together accommodate 8% of dwellings located on allocated sites with an employment site located in Yalding.

*Table 3 - Summary of housing and employment allocations within the settlement hierarchy*

<b>Location</b>	<b>Housing Allocations (dwellings)</b>	<b>Employment (Business Use Class) Allocations</b>
Maidstone urban area	1,813	
Maidstone broad locations (town centre; barracks)	2,290	Mote Road office allocation
Maidstone strategic development locations (Housing: NW and SE) Employment: Junctions 7 and 8	3,808	M20 Junctions 7 and 8
<b>Sub total</b>	<b>7911 (64%)</b>	
RSCs	1,987	Headcorn Marden
Lenham broad location	1,500	
<b>Sub total</b>	<b>3,487 (28%)</b>	
Larger Villages	1,053 <sup>17</sup>	Yalding
<b>Sub total</b>	<b>1,053 (8%)</b>	
<b>Total</b>	<b>12,451</b>	

<sup>17</sup> includes Policy H1(68) Bentletts Yard, Claygate Road, Laddingford (10 dwellings)



6.20 For completeness, Table 4 below shows the distribution of completions since 2011 and extant planning permissions as at 31 March 2016. Monitoring is by ward and Table 4 below illustrates the ward figure rather than the settlement figure. This means that a direct comparison with Table 3 is not possible.

Nevertheless, it can be seen that the proportion of completions; extant consents and allocations between the Maidstone urban area; Rural Service Centres and Larger Villages has been, and will remain, relatively consistent across the Plan period from 2011 – 2031.

*Table 4 - Summary of housing completions and extant planning permissions within the settlement hierarchy*

<b>HOUSING</b>	<b>Completions April 2011- March 2016 (Dwellings)</b>	<b>Extant permissions March 2016 (net) (Dwellings)</b>	<b>TOTAL (Dwellings) (%)</b>
<b>Maidstone Urban Area</b>	<b>2154</b>	<b>3491</b>	<b>5645 (65%)</b>
<b>Rural Service Centres</b>			
Harrietsham and Lenham	157	330	
Headcorn	130	459	
Marden and Yalding	117	522	
Staplehurst	106	59	
<b>Total</b>	<b>510</b>	<b>1370</b>	<b>1880 (22%)</b>
<b>Larger Villages</b>			
Boughton Monchelsea and Chart Sutton	26	16	
Coxheath and Hunton	36	212	
Sutton Valence and Langley	80	630	
Eyhorne Street (North Downs ward)	19	17	
<b>Total</b>	<b>161</b>	<b>875</b>	<b>1036 (12%)</b>
<b>Other</b>			
Leeds	35	27	
<b>Total</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>62 (1%)</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>2860</b>	<b>5763</b>	<b>8623 (100%)</b>

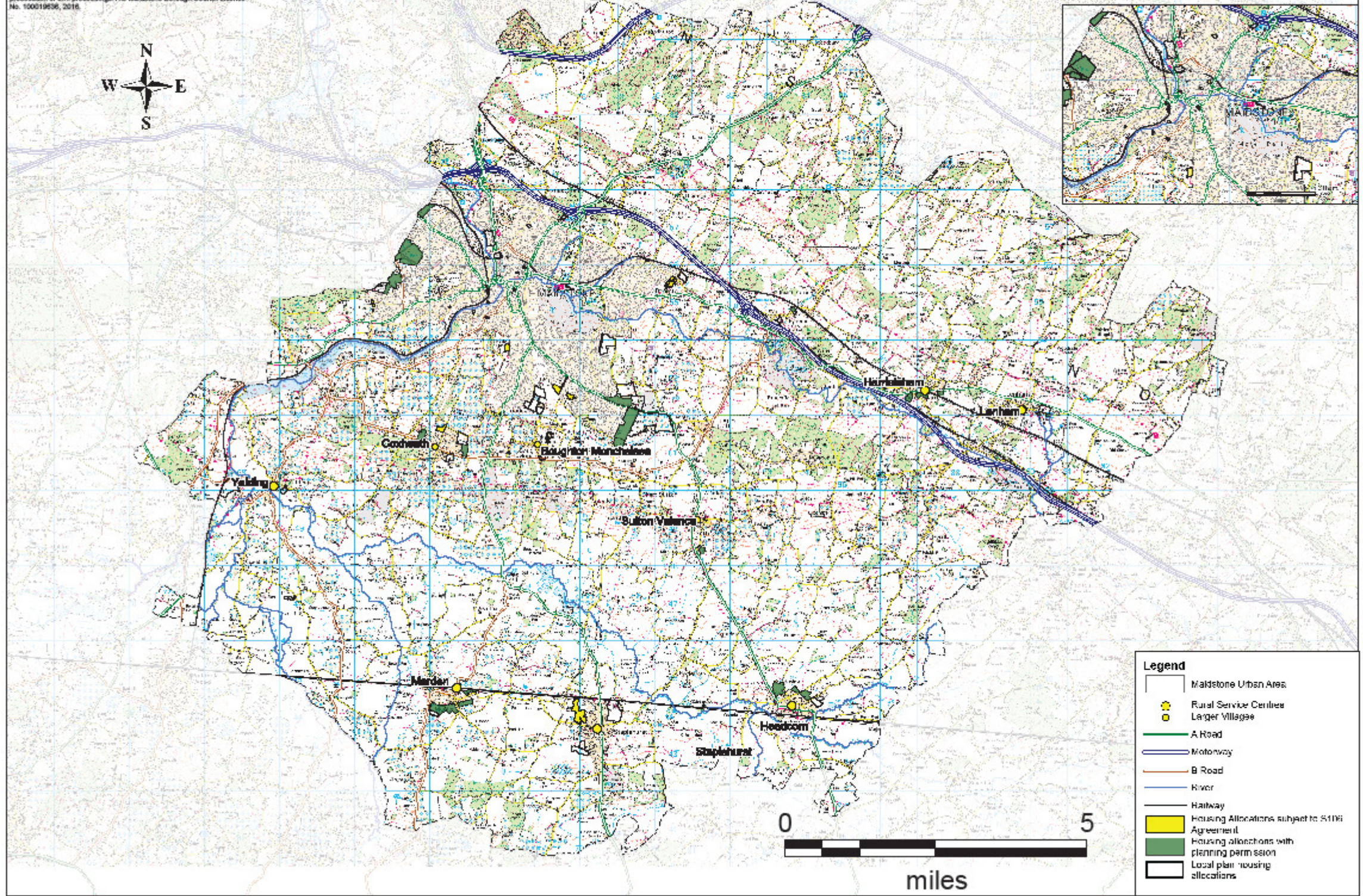
6.21 The distribution of windfall sites is, by definition, not possible to predict precisely. Nevertheless, given the relative scale of each settlement and therefore the relative potential for windfall opportunities, it is likely that the distribution of windfall development would broadly follow the distribution of allocated sites.

### **The Distribution of Housing and Economic Development Site Allocations**

6.23 Map 3 below shows the distribution of housing allocation sites which have resulted from the Local Plan's spatial strategy. The map also illustrates the good progress being made in granting planning consent on the site allocations.

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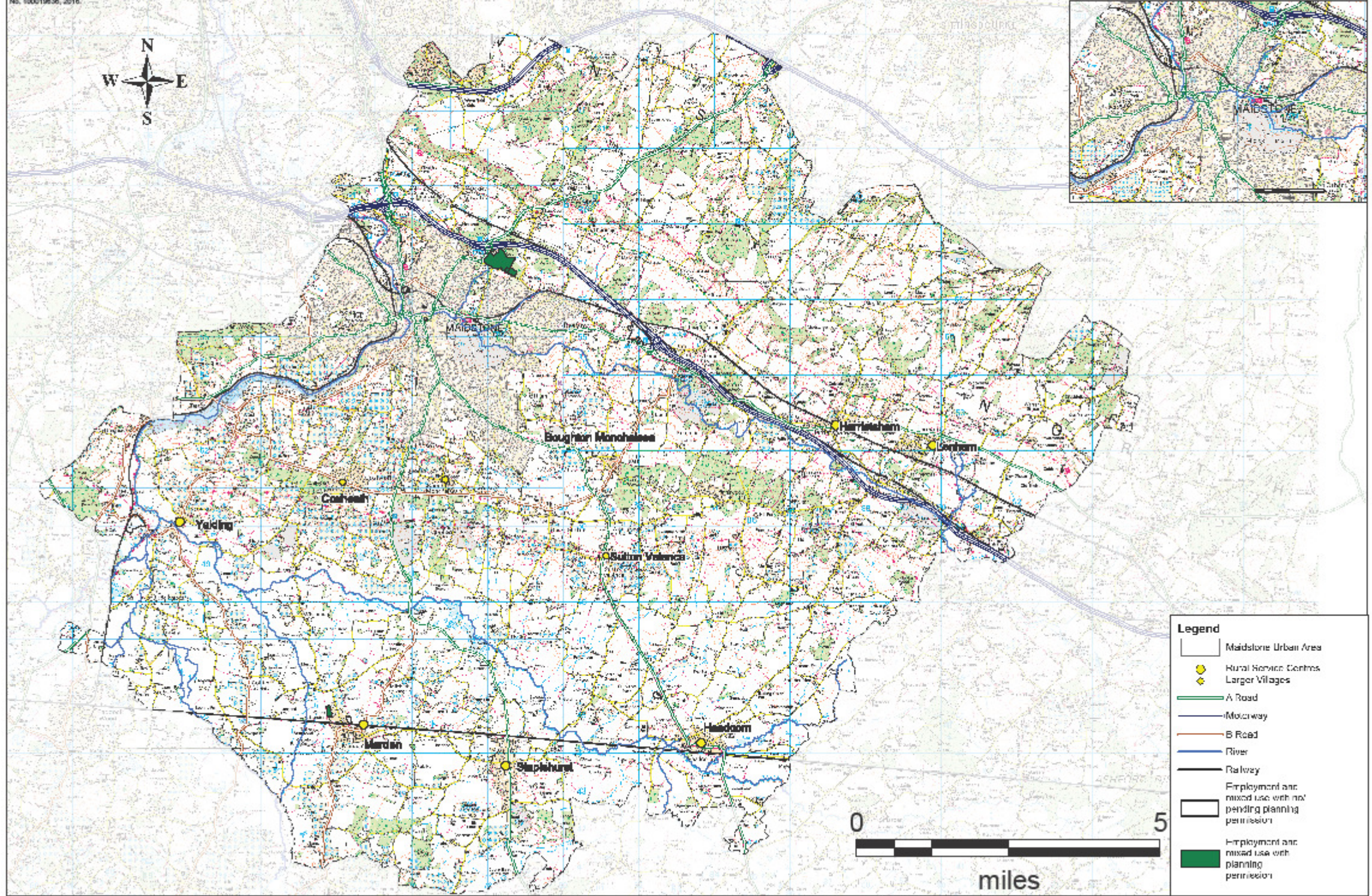
### Map 3. Submission local plan housing allocations



6.24 Map 4 below shows the distribution of economic development allocation sites which have resulted from the Local Plan's spatial strategy. The map also illustrates the progress being made in granting planning consent on the site allocations.

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### Map 4. Submission local plan development allocations



## **7 Sustainability Appraisal of the Spatial Strategy**

7.1 In relation to the distribution of housing development, the Sustainability Appraisal of the Maidstone Borough Local Plan (February 2016) tested a number of alternatives. Alternative H3 equated to the Local Plan Spatial Strategy comprising approximately 18,560 dwellings with the majority of development directed to the urban area, including urban extensions to the South East and North West. Alternative H3 also included three broad locations in the Town Centre, Maidstone Barracks and Lenham and assumed around 2000 dwellings at rural service centres and around 1000 at Larger Villages.

7.2 Alternative H3 performed well in comparison with all reasonable alternatives with **significant positive effects** on ensuring that the residents of Maidstone have the opportunity to live in a well-designed, sustainably constructed, decent and affordable home and **minor significant positive effects** on reducing poverty and social exclusion and closing the gap between the most deprived areas in the Borough and the rest; and improving accessibility to all services and facilities (although with some predicted negative implications) as well as sustaining economic growth, developing and maintaining a skilled workforce to support long-term competitiveness of the Borough. **Overall positive implications** were predicted in improving the health and well-being of the population and reducing inequalities in health and reducing crime and the fear of crime. **Minor significant negative effects** were predicted to improving efficiency in land use (but with some overall positive implications predicted) and reducing road congestion and pollution levels and ensuring air quality continues to improve. One **significant negative effect** was predicted for protecting, enhancing and making accessible for enjoyment, the Borough's countryside, open space and historic environment (but with some overall positive implications).

7.3 The Sustainability Appraisal similarly tested a number of alternatives in relation to the distribution of employment development. Alternative 3 equated to the Local Plan Spatial Strategy comprising approximately 14,394 jobs and including a high density town centre office development, strategic development at a strategic site at Junction 7 of the M20 (Medical Campus), allocation of land

at Junction 8 of the M20; extensions to two business areas within the Rural Service Centres of Marden and Headcorn, and a dispersed approach to employment development at existing employment sites throughout the borough.

7.4 Alternative 3 performed well amongst all reasonable alternatives with **significant positive effects** on four sustainability objectives: reducing poverty and social exclusion and closing the gap between the most deprived areas in the Borough and the rest; sustaining economic growth, developing and maintaining a skilled workforce to support long-term competitiveness of the Borough; improving the health and well-being of the population and reducing inequalities in health; and improving accessibility to all services and facilities (although with some predicted negative implications predicted for the latter three objectives). **Minor significant positive effects** were predicted in terms of raising educational achievement levels across the Borough and developing the opportunities for everyone to acquire the skills needed to find and remain in work. **Overall positive implications** were predicted in ensuring that the residents of Maidstone have the opportunity to live in a well-designed, sustainably constructed, decent and affordable home; reducing crime and the fear of crime and increasing energy efficiency, and the proportion of energy generated from renewable sources in the Borough. **Minor significant negative effects** were predicted to addressing the causes of climate change and ensuring that the Borough is prepared for its impacts (but with some overall positive implications predicted) and reducing the risk of flooding and the resulting detriment to public well-being, the economy and the environment. A **Significant negative effect** was predicted for protecting, enhancing and making accessible for enjoyment, the Borough's countryside, open space and historic environment (but with some overall positive implications); improving efficiency in land use and reducing road congestion and pollution levels and ensuring air quality continues to improve.

7.5 Overall the Sustainability Appraisal, 2016 supports the preferred approach to housing and employment distribution incorporated within the Local Plan whilst identifying the issues already recognised as important constraints. Where constraints have been identified, the Council has considered what action would be needed to remove them such as investment in new infrastructure or

environmental mitigation and enhancement and these have been incorporated in Local Plan policies in accordance with the PPG (Housing and economic land availability assessment)<sup>18</sup>

## **8 Conclusion**

8.1 In preparing the Local Plan the Council has positively sought opportunities to meet the objectively assessed needs of the Borough.

8.2 The existing hierarchy of settlements with their established services and infrastructure provides the most appropriate basis around which to base a spatial strategy for the Borough. In this way, the spatial strategy is able to maximise the use of brownfield land and the opportunities for regeneration within these settlement, build on existing infrastructure and support existing services (such as community facilities, shops and village/ neighbourhood facilities).

8.3 The Council recognises the environmental constraints operating within the Borough and, consistent with the Framework, the spatial strategy avoids adverse impacts on those areas where development should be restricted. Where necessary, the Local Plan proposes mitigation measures to ensure that appropriate development takes place. Similarly, the Local Plan seeks to overcome infrastructure constraints through practical provision in order that identified need can be met.

8.4 In developing the most appropriate spatial strategy, new development has generally been proportionately located at the most sustainable towns and villages where employment, key infrastructure, services and facilities, together with a range of transport choices, are available. The focus for new development is therefore at Maidstone town with smaller scale contributions from first the Rural Service Centres as a whole and then, at a more limited scale, the Larger Villages as a whole.

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<sup>18</sup> Ref ID: 3, paragraph 022



8.5 The spatial strategy results in a range and choice of housing sites in different locations – assisting deliverability – and provides affordable housing in areas of need throughout the borough. Similarly, the strategy provides a range and choice of employment sites which will also assist delivery and help meet the different requirements of specialist, potentially growing, sectors of business.

8.6 In conclusion, the spatial strategy of the Maidstone Borough Local Plan as expressed in Policy SS1 and the spatial vision and objectives is the most appropriate strategy to meet the objectively assessed needs of the Borough.

## Appendix 1

### Rural Service Centres and Larger Villages – Local Facilities matrix (April 2016)

Facilities / Village (2011 Parish Population)	Harrietsham (2,113)	Headcorn (3,387)	Lenham (3,370)	Marden (3,724)	Staplehurst (5,947)	Boughton Mon (3,313)	Coxheath (4,082)	Hollingbourne (Eyhorne St) (2,461)	Sutton Valence (1,665)	Yalding (2,418)
<b>EDUCATION</b>										
Nursery	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√		√
Primary School	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Secondary School			√							
<b>COMMUNITY</b>										
Place of Worship	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Public House	√	√	√	√	√			√	√	√
Village/Community Hall	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Library	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
<b>HEALTH</b>										
Doctor's Surgery	√	√	√	√	√		√		√	√
Other		√	√	√	√		√	√		
<b>LEISURE</b>										
Recreation	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Sport	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Other	√	√	√				√	√		√
<b>CONVENIENCE SHOPPING</b>										
General Store / Newsagent	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Post Office	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Bank		√		√	√					
ATM		√	√	√	√	√				
Other		√	√	√	√		√		√	
<b>COMPARISON SHOPPING</b>										
Hairdresser, Florist etc.	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
<b>EATING OUT</b>										
Restaurants	√	√	√	√	√		√	√		√
Take-Away		√	√	√	√		√			
Café, Tearooms		√	√		√		√		√	√
<b>TRANSPORT</b>										
4+ Bus Journeys/Weekday	√	√	√	√	√		√	√	√	√
Train Service	√	√	√	√	√			√		√

Rural Service Centre

Larger Village