

## Strategic Policy

### Policy SP 17 The Countryside

The countryside is defined as all those parts of the plan area outside the settlement boundaries of the Maidstone urban area, rural service centres and larger villages defined on the policies map.

1. Provided proposals do not harm the character and appearance of an area, the following types of development will be permitted in the countryside:

i. Small-scale economic development, including development related to tourism and open-air recreation, through:

- a. The re-use or extension of existing buildings;
- b. The expansion of existing businesses; or
- c. Farm diversification schemes;

d. Development within designated Economic Development Areas located within the countryside.

ii. Small-scale residential development necessary to:

- a. Meet a proven essential need for a rural worker to live permanently at or near their place of work;
- b. Meet a proven need for Gypsy and Traveller accommodation; or
- c. Meet local housing needs; and

iii. Development demonstrated to be necessary for agriculture or forestry.

~~2. Where proposals meet criterion 1, development in the countryside will be permitted if:~~

~~i. The type, siting, materials and design, mass and scale of development and the level of activity maintains, or where possible, enhances local distinctiveness including landscape features; and~~

~~ii. Impacts on the appearance and character of the landscape can be appropriately mitigated. Suitability and required mitigation will be assessed through the submission of Landscape and Visual Impact Assessments to support development proposals in appropriate circumstances.~~

~~3. The loss of local shops and community facilities which serve villages will be resisted. In all cases, another beneficial community use should be sought before permission is granted for the removal of these facilities;~~

2. Proposals will be supported which facilitate the efficient use of the borough's significant agricultural land and soil resource provided any adverse impacts on the appearance and character of the landscape can be appropriately mitigated;

~~4. The distinctive character of the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and its setting, the setting of the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and the extent and openness of the Metropolitan Green Belt will be rigorously conserved, maintained and enhanced where appropriate;~~

3. The landscape and scenic beauty of the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty will be conserved and enhanced;

4 Proposals should not have a significant adverse impact on the setting of the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty;

5 The extent and openness of the Metropolitan Green Belt will be rigorously protected;

6. The distinctive landscape character of the Greensand Ridge, Medway Valley, Len Valley, Loose Valley, and Low Weald as defined on the policies map, will be conserved, maintained and enhanced where appropriate as landscapes of local value;

7. Development in the countryside will retain the setting of and separation of individual settlements; and

9. Natural and historic assets, including characteristic landscape features, wildlife and water resources, will be protected from damage with any unavoidable impacts mitigated.

Account should be taken of the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plan and the Maidstone Borough Landscape Character Guidelines supplementary planning document.