

2.2 URBAN DESIGN ANALYSIS

2.2.1 To meet the vision for Sittingbourne Town Centre and Milton Creek it will be essential to create an attractive, desirable and characterful place that will act as a centre for new business and investment and which will draw people in to live, work and spend leisure time. The masterplan is

thus underpinned by well-established principles of urban design (as set out in Table 2.1).

2.2.2 These objective are used to help assess the current character and form of the town. This analysis is presented in the following sections.

Table 2.1 Urban Design Objectives

Character: a place with its own identity - <i>To promote character in townscape and landscape by responding to and reinforcing locally distinctive patterns of development, landscape and culture</i>
Continuity and Enclosure: a place where public and private spaces are clearly distinguished - <i>To promote the continuity of street frontages and the enclosure of space by development which clearly defines private and public areas</i>
Quality of the Public Realm: a place with attractive and successful outdoor spaces - <i>To promote public spaces and routes that are attractive, safe, uncluttered and work effectively for all in society, including disabled and elderly people; and promotes the interests of biodiversity wherever possible.</i>
Ease of Movement: a place that is easy to get to and move through - <i>To promote accessibility and local permeability by making places that connect with each other and are easy to move through, putting people before traffic and integrating land use and transport</i>
Legibility: A place that has a clear image and is easy to understand - <i>To promote legibility through development that provides recognisable routes, intersections and landmarks to help people find their way around</i>
Adaptability: A place that can change easily - <i>To promote adaptability through development that can respond to changing social, technological and economic conditions</i>
Diversity: A place with variety and choice - <i>To promote diversity and choice through a mix of compatible developments and uses that work together to create viable places that respond to local needs</i>

Source: DETR, 2000, By Design, Urban Design in the Planning System, Towards Better Practice

2 AREA ANALYSIS

Character: A place with it's own identity

Aim: To promote character in townscape and landscape by responding to and reinforcing locally distinctive patterns of development, landscape and culture

2.2.3 Within the town centre, the Sittingbourne High Street Conservation Area is the focus of the town's historic character. The Conservation Area is the subject of a Conservation Area Appraisal being undertaken during 2010 by a partnership between the Borough Council and English Heritage. The resulting analysis will be an important factor to take into account in any regeneration proposals either within or affecting the Conservation Area. The CA contains the best examples of the materials, built forms and townscape of Sittingbourne. The rest of the High Street contains fewer buildings of quality but still reflects the area's massing, plot division, variety of heights and materials. The High Street is the pedestrian focus of the town and its character is something to be strengthened. Tree planting along Central Avenue, Bell Road and the Avenue of Remembrance add value, stature and character to those streets, reinforcing historical connections through the town.

2.2.4 North of the railway, there are substantial changes of level towards the Creek. The former trading estate, at Milton Creek has now largely been demolished and the environment remains of poor quality visually, pending redevelopment proposals.

Tree Planting, Central Avenue



Sittingbourne Industrial Estate



The Creek at low tide



The Light Railway



2.2.5 Towards the Creek at the edges of the industrial and retail estate are some of the most interesting areas of character and which have the greatest potential. However, there is no obvious public access to the creekside. The contrast of the industry and open landscape of the creek is striking, as is the concrete ground cover and poor quality buildings that have encroached to the very edge of the mudflats of the creek, leaving only small and isolated patches of

the saltmarsh plants and reeds that would once have covered the flood plain. The Creek and related saltmarsh are nevertheless sensitive in bio-diversity terms and may have a supporting role to adjacent designated areas of the Swale and Medway estuaries. Re-integrating the area into the town and any public access will therefore need to be carefully evaluated and managed.

The High Street, which displays a range of building styles and qualities



2.2.6 Leading from the Paper Mill to the east alongside the creek is the historic narrow gauge railway, which is a reminder of the industry that took place in the area. Although temporarily not functioning, it is an important element of the town's history and potential tourism offer. In addition, at the creek's furthest inlet is an interesting historic remnant of the old quay that would once have been the link between Sittingbourne and Milton Regis and the sea.

2.2.7 It can be seen from historic documents, that the creek once stretched into Milton Regis, but was truncated to this point in the 1950s with many old buildings along its original route. Sadly, this area of great potential character and historic interest is not publicly accessible, but is still in use, supporting a boat maintenance business.

2 AREA ANALYSIS

Continuity and Enclosure: A place with well defined public and private spaces

Aim: To promote the continuity of street frontage and the enclosure of space by development which clearly defines private and public area

2.2.8 As with many of Sittingbourne's best urban qualities, the High Street exemplifies good continuity and enclosure of public spaces. This is a fine street with active frontages that creates a continuous and well-defined urban route.

2.2.9 The strongly defined public environment of this street begins to break down to the north, and the definition of public and private spaces becomes confused when leaving the shopping heart of the High Street. To the rear of the High Street's buildings, streets and alleys emerge into poorly defined open areas of car parking and servicing. At these points, continuous and well-defined routes and urban qualities dissolve.

2.2.10 The breakdown of continuity and enclosure offers many opportunities to complete urban blocks with new development and provide a coherent urban fabric which draws on the character of the place.

2.2.11 The crossing beneath the railway to the west of the station is an important connection between Milton Regis and Sittingbourne. Although there are landmark buildings along the route, it is poorly defined, inhospitable, and has the character of a trunk road rather than the main pedestrian connection between two historic centres in close proximity. Buildings along this route are set back from the street surrounded by car parks, entrances and blank facades.

Existing properties backing onto car park



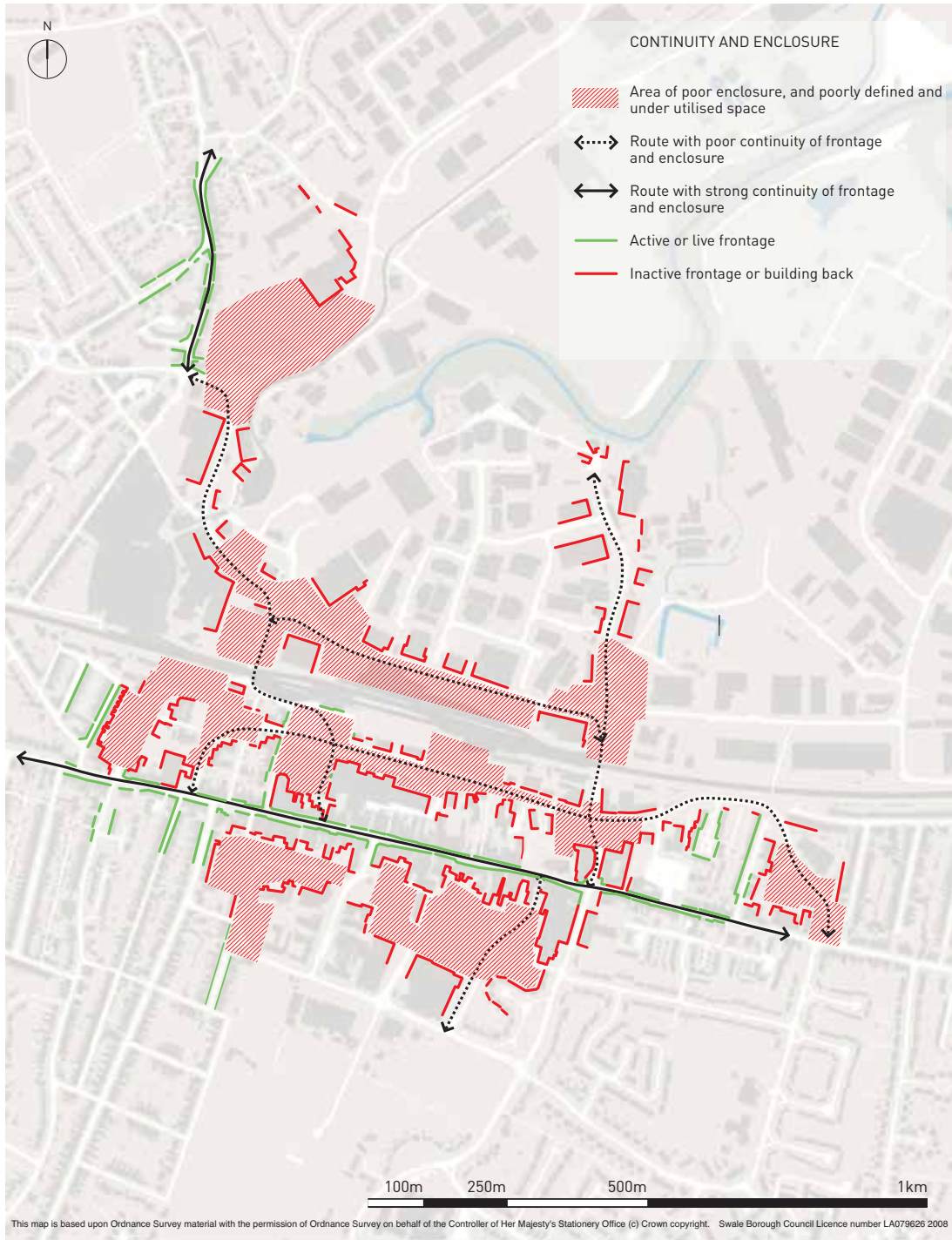
Surface car parking in the town



The blank facades of the Forum Centre



Figure 2.2 Continuity and Enclosure



2 AREA ANALYSIS

Quality of Public Realm: A place with attractive and successful outdoor spaces

Aim: To promote public spaces and routes that are attractive, safe, uncluttered and work effectively for all in society, including disabled and elderly people

2.2.12 The public realm in the town centre is generally of a poor quality, with street clutter in particular undermining the quality of open spaces. There are some areas of good quality, though these are limited. They include, for example, the tree-lined Central Avenue. However, this is poorly related to the wider network of green and open spaces in the town. The Creek, for example, has the potential to be a high quality, attractive open space (subject to consideration of the need for bio diversity protection and safeguard). At present though it is hidden from view, difficult to access and poorly maintained.

2.2.13 Sittingbourne's High Street and in particular the street furniture gives a poor impression of the street. The street itself appears cluttered and there are instances where street furniture blocks routes.

2.2.14 The public realm has active ground floor uses facing the street along the High Street but this soon falls off when approaching the Railway Station to the north or the civic facilities (Library, Swimming Pool, Police Station etc) to the south.

2.2.15 The 'out of town' retail park along Eurolink Way is designed to be accessed solely by private car and has an environment that does not encourage pedestrian access. Access for all is almost impossible given its location and the lack of pedestrian crossing points along Eurolink Way. Around the town as a whole there are a preponderance of surface car parks which contribute little to the quality of the public realm.

The High Street



Routes through to the Forum from the High Street



Eurolink Way



Ease of movement: A place that is easy to get to and move through

Aim: To promote accessibility and local permeability by making places that connect with each other and are easy to move through, putting people before traffic and integrating land uses and transport.

2.2.16 Well designed streets encourage people to use them and move through them. Logical patterns of development designed around the needs of the pedestrian allow access for all based on their needs. This is further supported by ensuring good access to public transport.

2.2.17 While some of Sittingbourne's Town Centre streets encourage ease of movement for all users, other streets in the town are biased towards vehicle traffic movement at the expense of the cyclist and pedestrian. In Eurolink Way and St. Michael's Road the environment does not encourage ease of movement for the pedestrian. Access routes associated with the railway station, pedestrian guard railing and series of staggered pedestrian crossings here make for difficult pedestrian links to the railway station.

2.2.18 The east west orientation of the town forms a major barrier to north south movement. In particular, St. Michael's Road and the service / access roads alongside this associated with the Forum Centre and car parking, the railway line and Eurolink Way all form major barriers to movement and bisect the town. In addition, the town centre, Milton Creek and Milton Regis are physically separated from each other.

2.2.19 At present, movement between the town centre and Milton Creek is by two underpasses, both of which are narrow and have an unattractive pedestrian environment. This further discourages movement between the areas. In the Milton Creek area, pedestrian links are particularly

poorly defined and access to the Creek is limited, with ownership boundaries around the industrial estate restricting access to this local asset.

St Michael's Road



Links under the railway



Pedestrian route between the Forum and railway station



2 AREA ANALYSIS

Figure 2.4 Ease of Movement

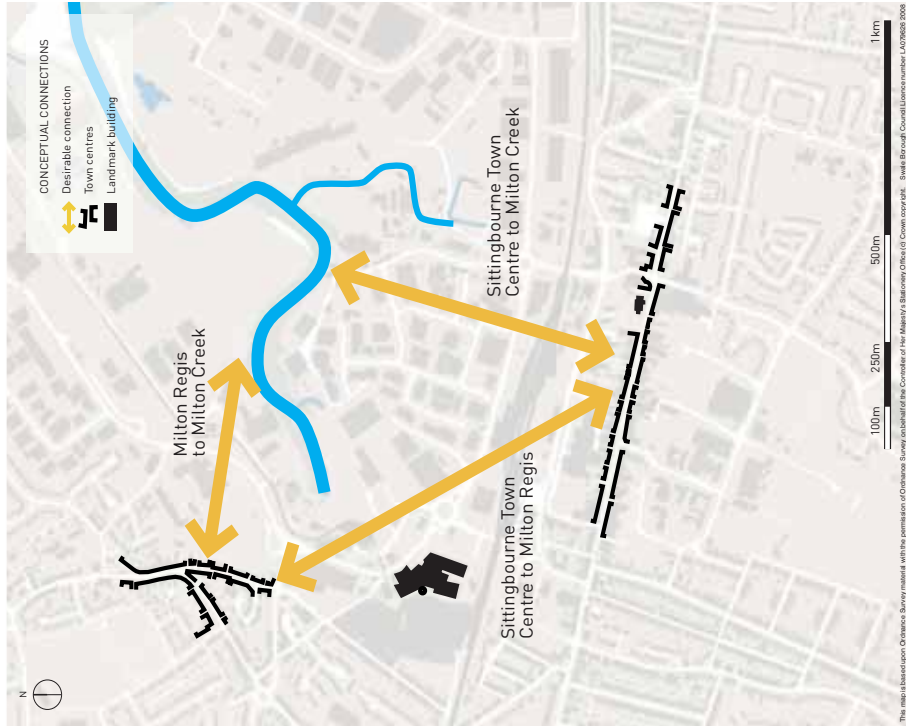
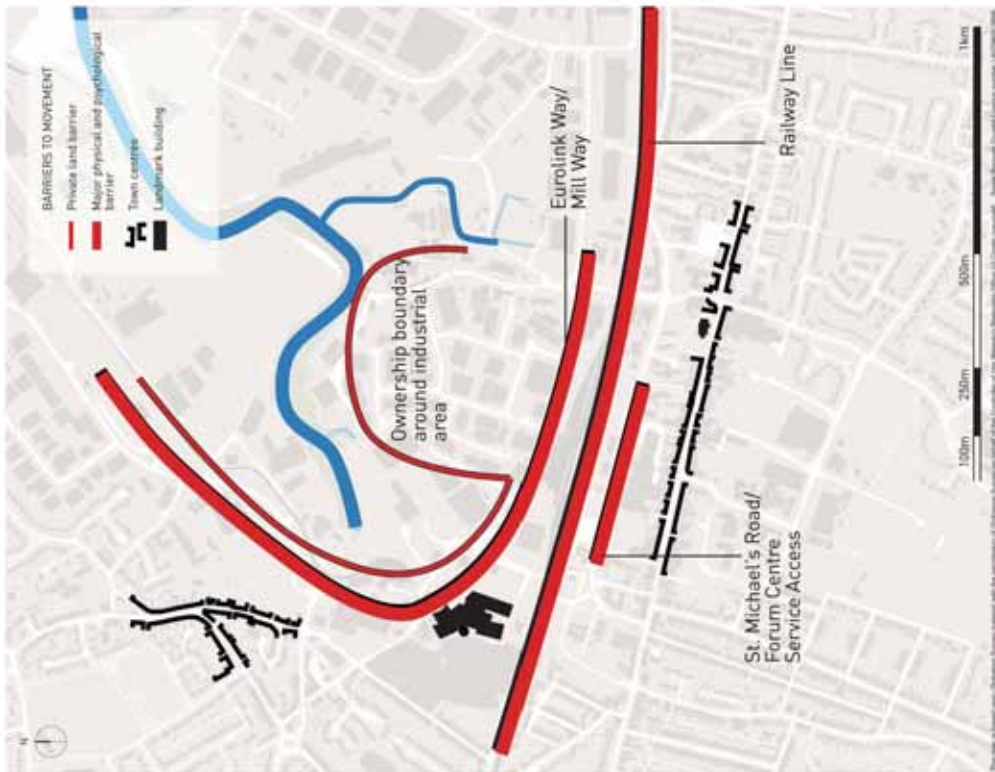


Figure 2.3 Ease of movement



Legibility: A place that has a clear image and is easy to understand

Aim: To promote legibility through development that provides recognisable routes, intersections and landmarks to help people find their way around

2.2.20 A successful and attractive town however does not always make immediate sense. Much urban interest and charm comes from surprise. And so, whilst every alley and side street does not need to be anchored to a landmark, streets and other linkages should nevertheless provide a clear pattern for movement through the town. A route must lead somewhere and should not end confusingly. Important connections should make sense. Sittingbourne does not always give a clear message for either pedestrian or driver. Roads, streets and alleys should give clear information to their users.

View towards the Paper Mill



2.2.21 While Sittingbourne's High Street is legible – a linear shopping street with landmarks (such as St. Michael's Church) and clear visible routes and destinations - other parts of the town are not. For visitors arriving by train, the town centre's location is unclear and separated from the station by obstacles including car parks, parallel streets and service access and a generally uninformative built environment. Once these obstacles have been negotiated, the route becomes narrow, blocked by a public toilet block and street furniture, including a bus stop blocking the route directly onto

the High Street. Prior to the building of the current Forum Centre there was a network of streets between the High Street and the station. The design for the core town centre area could seek to reinstate some of this pattern. The routes south from the High Street are similarly unclear as they pass straight into large areas of car parking with no landmarks beyond.

2.2.22 Routes are also illegible going north from the High Street. Walking routes in particular are very unclear and navigation across St. Michael's Road is difficult, because of level changes and guard railing. Glimpses of the landmark Paper Mill water tower are the only aid to navigation and it is expected that this site will be redeveloped on the short to medium term.

2.2.23 Making good pedestrian connections to the north of the railway will require a carefully designed bridge and a number of street connections. Bridging the railway presents challenges in terms of safety, accessibility and scale in relation to the town. On the north a new urban structure must co-exist with the rest of the town. Glimpses of destinations, extending active and varied frontages and street surfacing and furniture are methods of drawing movement along new streets and spaces.

2 AREA ANALYSIS

St Michael's Church

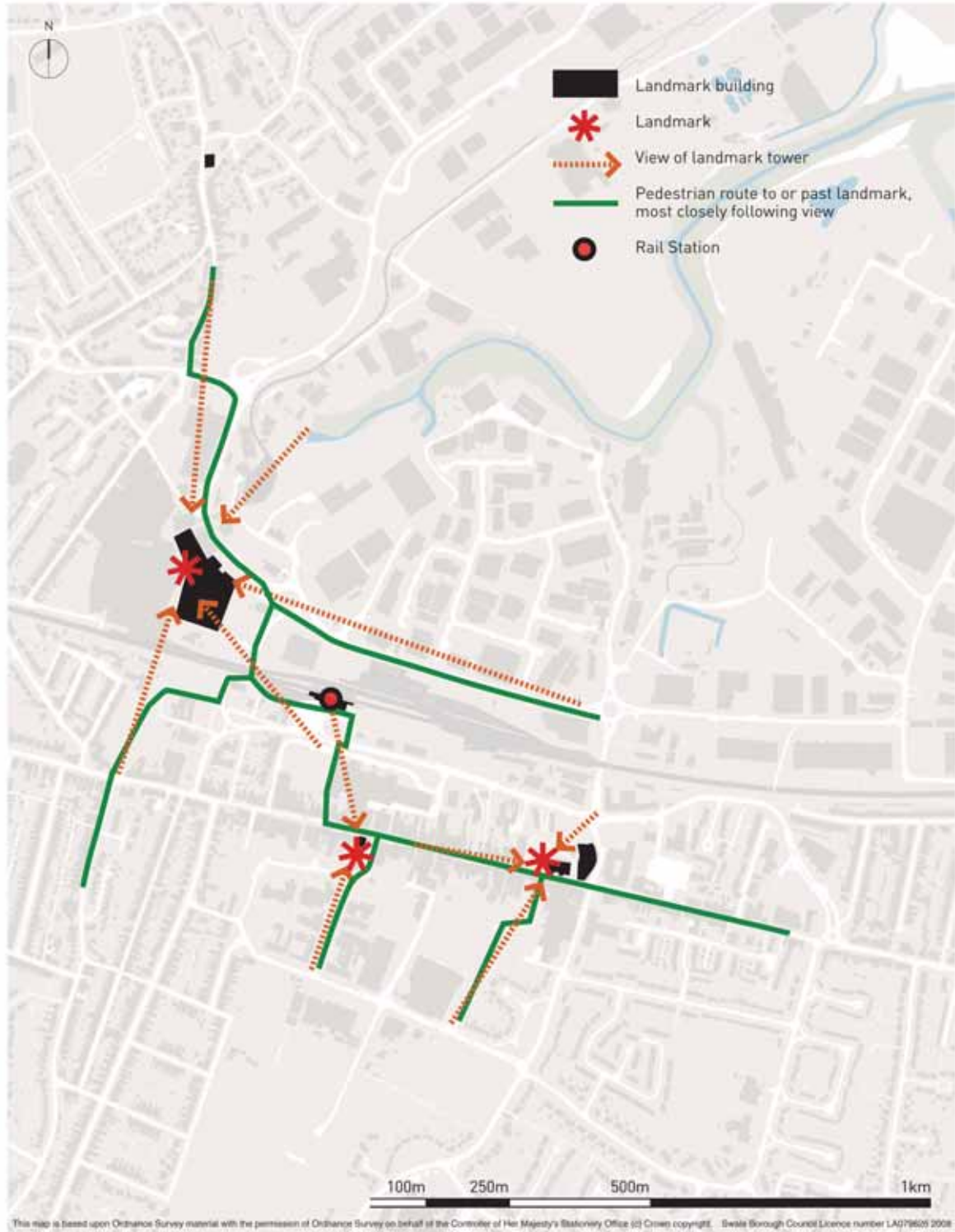


Adaptability: A place that can change easily

Aim: To promote adaptability through development that can respond to changing social, technological and economic conditions

2.2.24 The vitality of Sittingbourne High Street will depend on its versatility and ability to change with changing demands from retailers. Buildings that can quickly adapt to changing demands and small-scale changes bring flexibility through affordable changes.

Figure 2.5 Legibility



2 AREA ANALYSIS

2.2.25 There are very few modern retail units in the town centre, with the High Street characterised by small footplates. Although these are relatively deep in places the frontages are quite narrow. The High Street area has a fine urban grain and buildings are generally of three storeys. The Forum Centre, Bell Centre and Sainsburys stores represent some of the largest development blocks in the town. Much of the town centre has been taken up by surface car parking and highway infrastructure, resulting in a number of unattractive and unuseable spaces throughout the town

2.2.26 Parts of Sittingbourne have been designed for a very specific purpose. The industrial estate north of the railway is made up of buildings designed for a specific use, which have a short lifespan built in. The roads and landscape around them are inflexible as they are designed to connect only the buildings and uses originally planned.

2.2.27 Elsewhere, whilst an overall plan did at one point exist for the cluster of civic buildings to the south of the High Street this was never completed in accordance with the Plan. The uses therefore appear to exist in their own right without relationships to each other and generally sit within car parking that overlaps between different building functions.

Diversity: A place with variety and choice

Aim: To promote diversity and choice through a mix of compatible developments and uses that work together to create viable places that respond to local needs.

2.2.28 Successful, interesting and vibrant urban areas often support a great variety of uses from residential and retail to small offices and workshops. The variety of compatible uses enliven their areas throughout the day, and work together in mutual support. Sittingbourne High Street has a vertical mix in its buildings with shops

often on the ground floor and a variety of uses above. Its narrow plot frontages concentrate activity and allow small-scale businesses to thrive. However, there are a lack of uses that support and sustain a vibrant and varied evening and night time economy.

2.2.29 Elsewhere in the town larger retail and industrial “sheds” with associated car parking has brought about large areas with none of the activity and vitality associated with mixed use urban development; and has resulted in urban character of unremarkable diversity and character. Locations for this type of development should be limited to appropriate locations. Single use development should be avoided in town centres. “Out of town” style retail and industrial character in the core of the town, with vast expanses of car parking serving a single use development represents an inefficient use of the land.

2.3 TRANSPORT AND MOVEMENT

STRATEGIC CONTEXT

2.3.1 Sittingbourne is located at the eastern end of the Thames Gateway development area. It is located on the South Eastern rail line stretching from London Victoria and Cannon Street to various destinations in Kent through to Dover Priory. With the advent of High Speed 1 domestic rail services in December 2009, existing journey times to London dropped from approximately 70 minutes to just under 60 minutes. This creates a catalyst for regeneration as the town could become more attractive to London commuters looking for cheaper housing and a less urban environment. The effects of this may not be clear for a while until the economic downturn has passed and scheduling clashes with regular services to London Victoria have been resolved.

2.3.2 Sittingbourne also has a well-established road network with strong connections to London via the M2 to the south, and connections through to Kemsley and Sheerness on Sea provided by the A249 to the west. The A2 links the A249 in the west to Canterbury via Sittingbourne Town Centre. The Sittingbourne Northern Relief Road will when complete, provide an alternative route to the commercial areas to the north of the town, from the A249 Grovehurst interchange, over the Creek and then join the A2 in the vicinity of Bapchild. It will result in significant reductions in traffic volumes for Sittingbourne Town Centre, providing opportunities for the balanced re-allocation of road space and the reduction of the impact of traffic on the amenity of the town.

and waiting environments will also be required to stimulate a modal shift away from private car use.

PUBLIC TRANSPORT

2.3.3 Sittingbourne's railway station is a small Victorian facility that currently suffers from entry and exit congestion at peak times. With usage anticipated to increase by 24% to 2.4 million passengers per year by 2014 associated with the delivery of High Speed Rail, improvements will be required that improve not only station capacity (particularly at ticket gates) but also the quality of the overall experience offered. The external station forecourt is decidedly small and is dominated by a large roundabout, vehicular circulation and car parking, detracting from the overall pedestrian experience. Direct connections will need to be provided to the High Street, and to areas north of the rail line.

2.3.4 Bus routing through the town centre is extremely circuitous due to the existence of the one way street network on the High Street and the one way gyratory at the town's western end. Efforts will be needed to greatly simplify bus routing, potentially consolidating services onto two way routes, that are more efficient in terms of distance travelled, and more legible for bus users. High quality bus facilities such as shelters, real time information (where appropriate)

2 AREA ANALYSIS

Figure 2.6 Sittingbourne: Transport Context

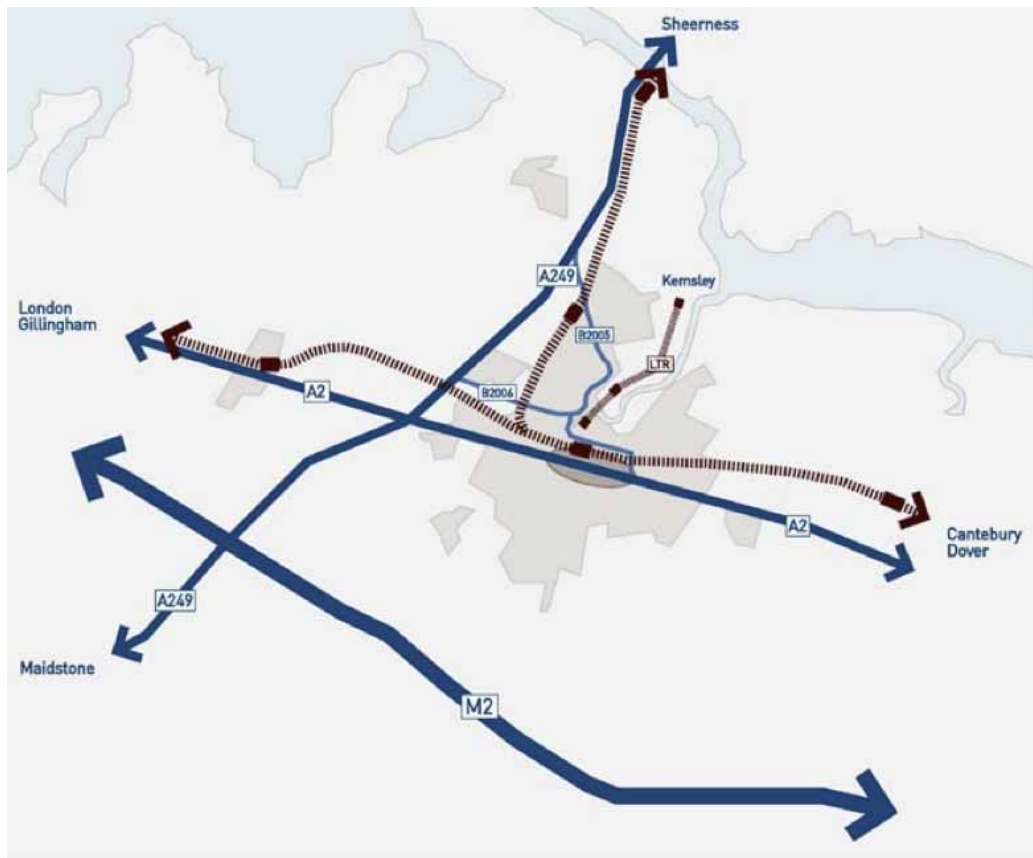


Figure 2.7 Transport Context

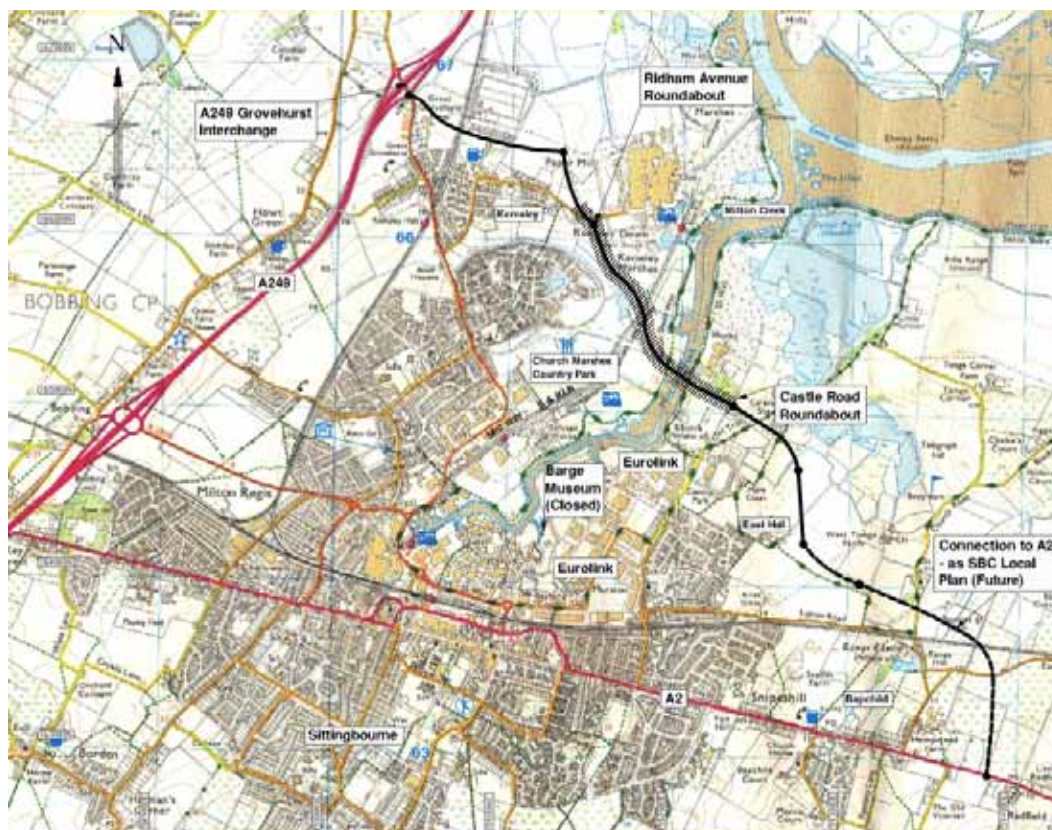
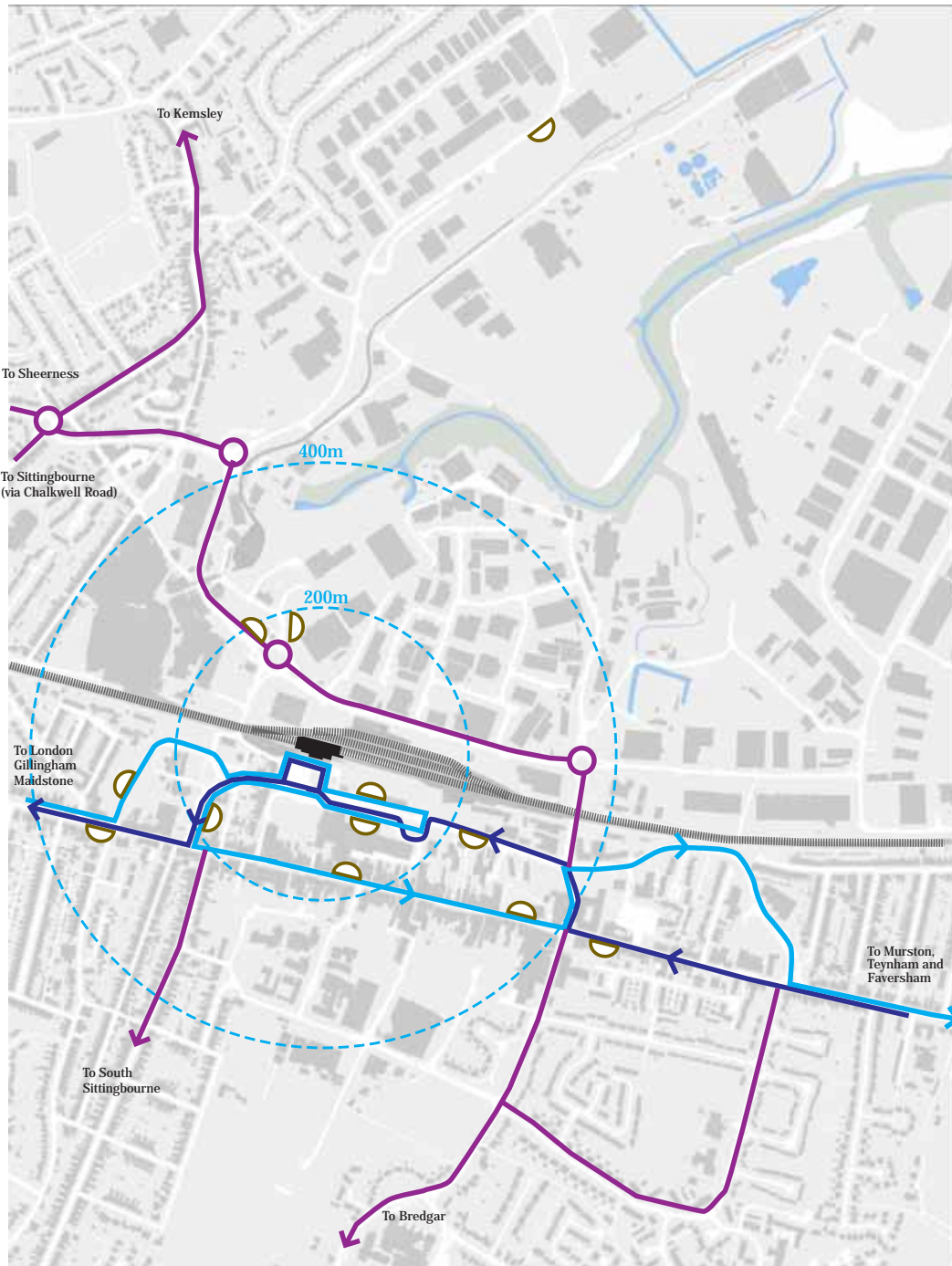


Figure 2.8 Existing Public Transport Provision



- Eastbound bus routes
- Westbound bus routes
- North south bus routes
- - - Rail station walk bands
- ◐ Existing bus stops
- ▨ Rail station

Project Sittingbourne SPD
 Client Swale Borough Council
 Drawing Existing bus network
 Scale at A3 NTS
 Date 21st May 2008
 Drawing No. 2906/210508/03
 Rev. -

Urban Initiatives
 1 Fitzroy Square, London, W1T 5HE
 tel +44 (0)20 7380 4545 fax +44 (0)20 7380 4646
 www.urbaninitiatives.co.uk

2 AREA ANALYSIS

STREETS AND PARKING

2.3.5 Sittingbourne's existing town centre is dominated by its highways network. As discussed above, burgeoning growth in motor vehicle traffic necessitated the provision of a new vehicular deviation to the north of the High Street on to what is now the A2 St Michael's Road. In turn, constraints at the western edge of the town resulted in the delivery of a one way gyratory around Dover Street and St Michaels Road. There is another one way system at the eastern end of the town at East Street / Crown Quay Lane. Eurolink Way provides east west access to the adjoining industrial estates and to Milton Regis in the north. As a result of these vehicular dominated design responses, the character of Sittingbourne's streets has suffered accordingly, particularly for pedestrians and cyclists, necessitating some concerted efforts in the future.

2.3.6 Sittingbourne's network of streets has been classified in terms of the function of each street as follows:

- District Street: A variable standard road carrying mixed strategic traffic with some frontage access and more than two roads per km
- Neighbourhood street: Busy street carrying predominantly local traffic, with frontage activity including loading and unloading
- Neighbourhood street special purpose: A street with specific traffic control devices implemented to filter various modes, prioritising bus, cycle or pedestrian access. This can enable bus priority and high pedestrian flows at intersections with higher order streets, and possible use of bus gates to remove vehicle continuity
- Local street: Either residential or commercially focused local street with some traffic movement for neighbourhood and local access.

- Local lane: Quiet residential or commercial lane with low traffic/pedestrian flows
- Pedestrian and/or cycling only routes

2.3.7 Sittingbourne has approximately 2,000 parking spaces with an overall occupancy of 62% on a weekday and 52% on Saturdays ⁽¹⁾. Parking activity is focused around two activities in the town centre – commuter activity adjacent to the station and parking associated with retail destinations such as the Forum. These areas are very constrained in the weekday, however rail station parking demand falls off dramatically at the weekend. Future weekday commuter demand is expected to increase significantly from 225 spaces to over 300.

WALKING AND CYCLING

2.3.8 Sittingbourne has direct east west connectivity for pedestrians along the four routes of Avenue of Remembrance, the High Street, St Michael's Road and Eurolink Way, the quality of these streets is quite mixed. North south connectivity is however poor. In the town centre itself, links from the High Street to St Michael's Road are disconnected and unclear with the exception of the paths through St Michaels Church yard. Links under the railway line are also constrained to two vehicle dominated streets and one pedestrian and cyclist path to the east of the centre. As well as providing better connections to the Milton Industrial estate, the more strategic links to Milton Regis, the Creek and the Saxon Shore Way will need to form an integral part of the towns walking network in the future.

2.3.9 Cycling is an under performing mode at present. Conditions on Sittingbourne's vehicular dominated street network are poor, most notably due to the roundabouts and one way street networks,

1 Source: BBP Parking Survey for Swale BC, 2007

and do not support cycling for other than the most confident commuter cyclists. Facilities include a short length of shared cycleway / footway on the eastern side of Mill Way. As part of a framework for streets, concerted design guidance will be required to ensure that the needs of cyclists are incorporated in any street improvements to deliver a network of cyclable streets along

side providing more strategic connections to and from Milton Regis, the Creek and the Saxon Shoreway. Once the bridge section of the Sittingbourne Northern Relief Road is complete, National Cycle Route 1 will be re-routed with the NRR to avoid the town centre, but could be connected back to the Milton Creek area.

Figure 2.9 Existing Street Network



2 AREA ANALYSIS

Figure 2.10 Weekday parking in Sittingbourne (source: BBP parking survey for Swale BC 2007)

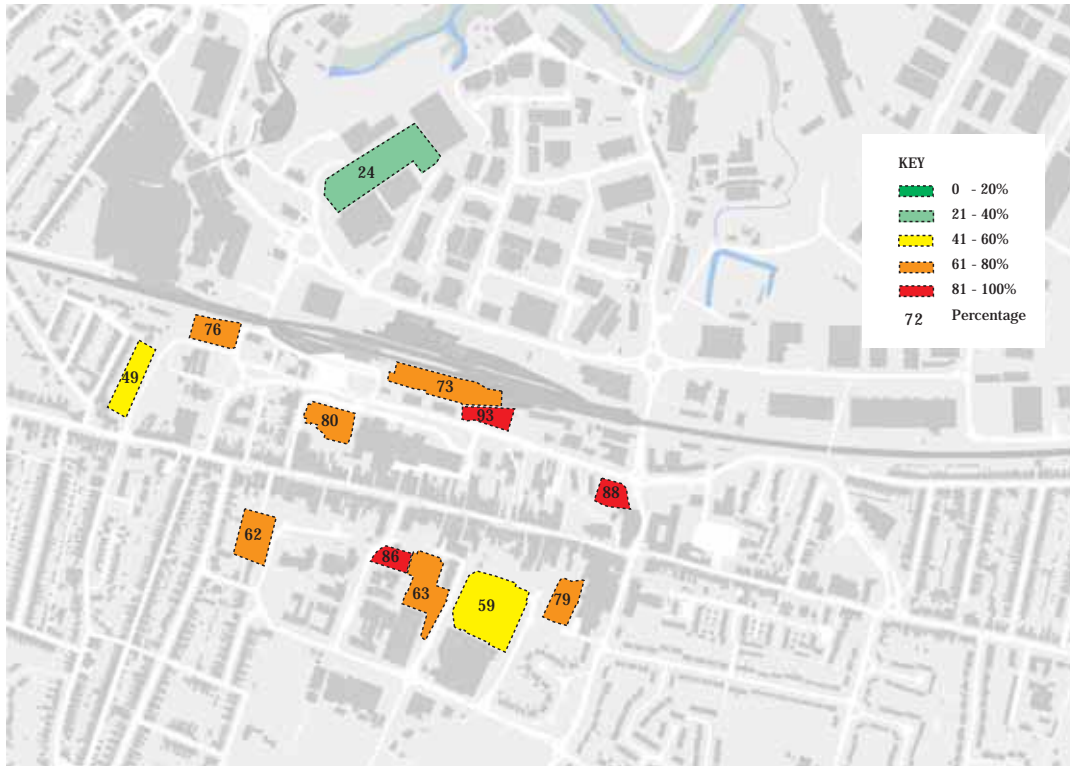


Figure 2.11 Weekend (Saturday) parking in Sittingbourne (source: BBP parking survey for Swale BC 2007)

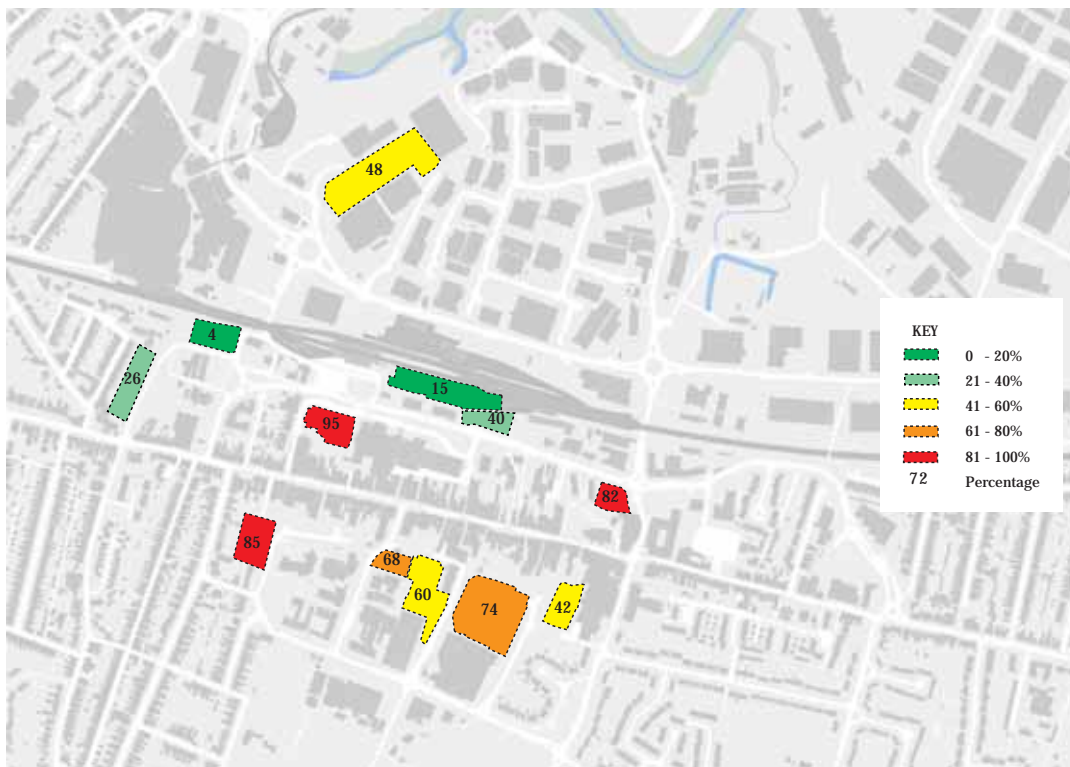
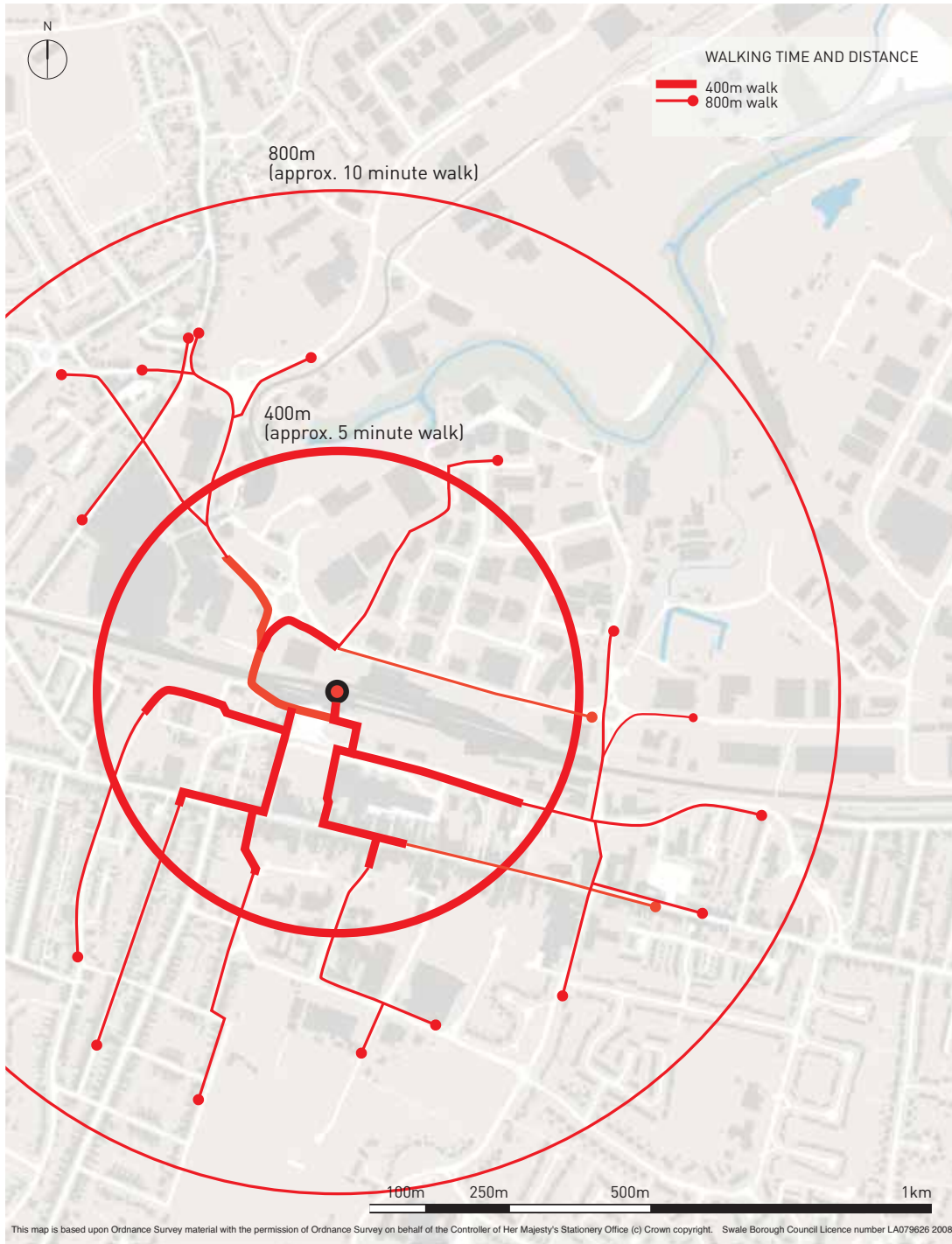


Figure 2.12 Walking Catchment (measured from the Railway Station)



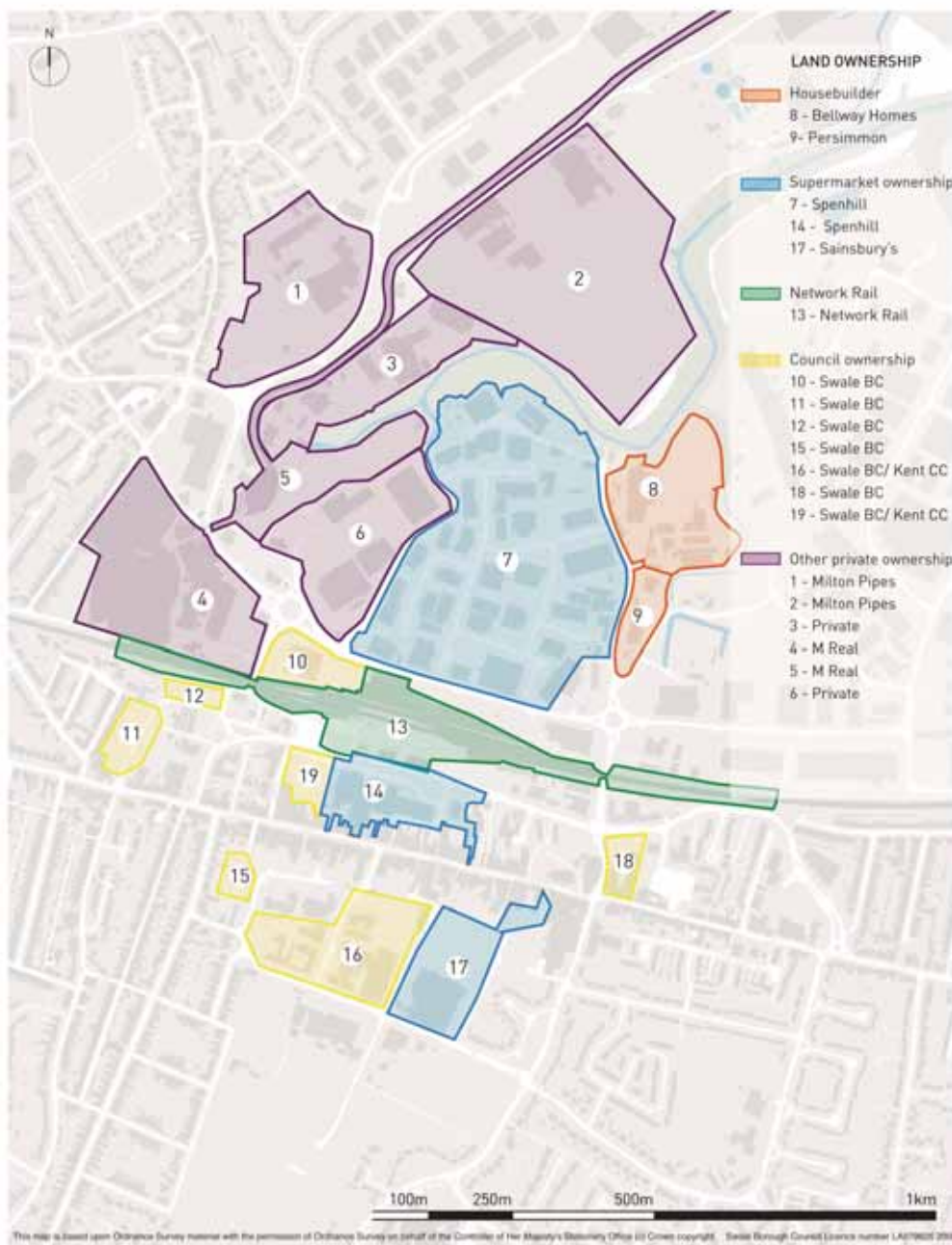
2 AREA ANALYSIS

2.4 LAND OWNERSHIP

2.4.1 Like most historic towns, land ownership in Sittingbourne is fragmented. Historic urban centres are traditionally built up around complex land ownership patterns and it is these interests that help to form the character and layout of town centres. The owners of freehold interests in

Sittingbourne include private individuals, pension funds, property companies and retailers. Many of these interests are leased to occupying tenants. The public sector – Swale Borough Council and Kent County Council – also have large and important land holdings in the town centre, much of which is strategically placed and includes car parks, streets and civic uses.⁽²⁾

Figure 2.13 Land Ownerships



2 Note that land shown as owned by M-Real in Figure 2.13 is now owned by Essential Land

2.5 FLOODING

2.5.1 Flood risk is a significant constraint to development. The redevelopment of existing built-up areas could potentially help manage flood risk: open space and informal recreational areas are generally compatible with and can help manage flood risk by making space for water. So, whilst the floodplain in the masterplan area is a constraint on one hand it could also be seen as an opportunity on the other. Redeveloping areas to include a greater amount of open space and reducing the amount of hard standing could have benefits for the floodplain.

2.5.2 In order to appraise risk and to ensure that it is understood and managed effectively, a Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA) has been undertaken for the Swale area in partnership with the Environment Agency. This work included Level 2 assessments for strategic sites including Sittingbourne Town centre and Milton Creek. Proposals for development within the SPD area will need to refer to the findings of this study, in particular the advice on preparing site specific flood risk assessments to support planning applications (Swale Borough Council Strategic Flood Risk Assessment Level 1 & 2 Assessment October 2009).

2.5.3 The broad findings of the SFRA for the town centre area are that it is at very low risk of tidal flooding and some care needs to be taken in the management of groundwater levels following the closure of Sittingbourne Mill. Southern Water have assumed this role. For the Milton Creek part of the SPD area, significant areas are medium flood risk (Zone 2). The northern parts are high flood risk (Zone 3a) forming the previously developed part of the flood plain; and Zone 3b which is the undeveloped or functional part of the flood plan - no built development is likely to be permitted on the latter.

2.5.4 In preparing the SPD, the Borough Council has applied the sequential test for development as set out on PPS25 (Flooding). Given the fact that there is a need for town centre regeneration identified by the adopted Local Plan, the ability for the Borough Council to reasonably locate the regeneration elsewhere at lesser risk of flooding does not exist. Consequently, the council must apply the three parts of the 'Exceptions' Test set out in PPS25.

2.5.5 In accordance with part a), there are substantive regeneration and sustainability benefits arising from the proposals outlined in the SPD sufficient to outweigh flood risk. These include:

- a significant upgrade in the environmental quality of the Milton Creek area, including the creation of a major area of functional floodplain taken from currently developed land;
- expansion of the town centre in the only practical direction available to it; and
- developing housing and other facilities in a sustainable central location close to high speed travel links and town centre facilities.

2.5.6 In accordance with part b) of the PPS25 test, development of the site comprises previously developed land.

2.5.7 In order to comply with part c) planning applications will be required to submit a detailed flood risk assessment and demonstrate that development will be safe, without increasing flood risk elsewhere, and where possible will reduce flood risk overall. In order to guide this, the following development principles should apply:

- A sequential approach to locating development with the site should be applied;
- Any residential development that cannot be steered away from Zones 2

2 AREA ANALYSIS

and 3 will be restricted to 3-storey townhouses;

- All living accommodation should be at least 300mm above the predicted 200 year flood level (with climate change) and all sleeping accommodation should be at least 600mm above this level. Levels should be derived from Swale's Strategic Flood Risk Assessment, October 2009, and are available from the Environment Agency;
- Between development blocks surfaces shall be permeable, whilst swales and other sustainable drainage systems shall be deployed, subject to the results of contamination investigations for the sites; and
- Safe access and egress to and from new development in flood risk areas is provided and developers should ensure the appropriate evacuation and flood response procedures are in place to manage the residual risk associated with an extreme flood event. This will need to be determined to the satisfaction of the Local Planning Authority in consultation with the Local Authority's Emergency Planner, the Environment Agency and the Emergency Services.

2.5.8 In its 'Guide for Developers', the Environment Agency (EA) provides advice with regard to planning in flood-prone areas. The EA requires that development must be safe from flooding and must not increase the risk of flooding elsewhere. Schemes should thus be designed that avoid flood risk or reduce the likelihood and consequence of flooding (and also, where possible, enhance the quality of the environment). This may involve the need for compensatory storage. The strategic flood risk defence strategy for the Swale Strategic Shoreline Management Plan which includes Milton Creek is to hold the line of current defences. It will therefore be necessary to ensure that defences are refurbished and raised to protect any

proposed housing development. Further detailed design guidance is also contained on the Swale Strategic Flood Risk Assessment for the various flood risk zones. This is locally specific and aids compliance with part c) of PPS25 which requires a detailed Flood Risk Assessment to be submitted with planning applications.

2.5.9 These ideas will need to be explored in greater detail by developers in consultation with the Borough Council and the Environment Agency when developing detailed proposals for the Milton Creek area, with more design work and flood modelling undertaken to understand the impact of development on the floodplain and the ways and means that this can be managed and mitigated.

GROUND CONDITIONS

2.5.10 The Environment Agency also recommend that (in accordance with PPS 23) preliminary risk assessments with regard to ground contamination from current or historical uses are sought at outline application stage in view of the extensive industrial history of much of the SPD area.

WATER SUPPLY AND WASTE WATER

2.5.11 Investment will be required to the local water distribution and sewerage systems to provide additional capacity for the new development. A detailed assessment of foul and combined sewer capacity will need to be carried out and there is likely to be a need for increased capacity in the sewerage system and the need for separation of foul and surface water drainage. Long term management arrangements for SUDs are also likely to be required.

2.5.12 A strategic water main is currently being installed around East Sittingbourne and the indications are that the water

supply system serving the town is robust, subject to detailed checks as individual development proposals come forward.

2.6 HOUSING

Strategic Housing Requirements – the Role of Sittingbourne

2.6.1 The Swale Borough Local Plan (2008) identified sufficient housing land to meet an annual delivery target of 606 dwellings between 2001-2016. The Swale Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (December 2009) has identified a 17 year housing land supply assuming an annual average dwelling delivery of 540 dwellings per annum. The Local Plan also envisages that some 90% of new housing will be provided in the Kent Thames Gateway part of the Borough - of which Sittingbourne forms part. As part of the Kent Thames Gateway growth area, the strategic housing requirement is set above what would be required from locally arising need. The SPD area has the potential to make a significant contribution to the new housing provision for the Borough.

2.6.2 The priority for the area is economic regeneration and for Sittingbourne to consolidate its position as principal town in the Borough through the step change in provision of retail and service offer. New housing provision concentrated in the Thames Gateway part of the Borough, especially at Sittingbourne, is an integral part of the regeneration of the area. It will also ensure maximum use of previously developed land and ensure a more sustainable development pattern by minimising journeys between home and work locations. In addition, Sittingbourne has benefitted from enhanced public transport to London with the Domestic High Speed CTRL service from late 2009. This will open up job opportunities in London for Sittingbourne residents and may also encourage new residents and investors to Sittingbourne.

2.6.3 It is likely that there will be capacity to provide for approximately 3000 dwellings within the area covered by the SPD and this figure also allows for a contribution from the substantial former paper mill site which abuts the SPD area (although this site should have a separate master plan in due course). The potential distribution of new housing is discussed further in the districts in section 5.

2.6.4 New housing as part of the regeneration of the Town Centre and Milton Creek therefore offers a significant opportunity for regeneration and raising the profile of the town through creating new neighbourhoods with quality and distinctive character, as well as providing more choice and an element of affordable housing to meet demand from local people. The quality, type and quantity of housing to be provided therefore needs to be carefully planned to maximise the benefits of these opportunities.

2.6.5 All new housing will be expected to achieve high standards of energy efficiency and sustainable design and construction methods which are explained further in Chapter 7 of this SPD.

Market Housing

2.6.6 The Swale Borough Local Plan (2008) strategic policy for housing is focused on meeting local demand for smaller homes and more affordable homes, but also recognises the need to provide for some at the higher end of the market.

2.6.7 Research prepared for Sittingbourne to supplement the findings of the East Kent Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA 2009), suggests that there will be some 374 new households forming annually within the town and about 33% of these will be able to afford market housing. Just over half will be able to buy properties with the remainder renting. However, as stated above, the town is part of the Kent Thames Gateway growth area,

2 AREA ANALYSIS

so it is intended that some of the housing to be provided within the town will be for new residents to the area. Sittingbourne therefore needs to find a market niche which will build on its strengths and ability to offer a good quality environment at a more competitive cost than say London or other parts of Kent.

2.6.8 The SHMA indicates (as with other Kent towns) that there is currently little evidence of demand from the local populace for aspirational housing in the form of large apartment blocks. However, there is still a role for apartments for the upper floors in the town centre and close to the railway station for people who may be commuting up to London to work; and possibly in some of the locations adjacent to the Creek where innovative design and layout could be achieved, subject to appropriate design and layout to mitigate flood risk and bio-diversity issues. However, at the periphery of the town centre, and particularly at Milton Creek, town houses, mews and terraced type housing are more likely to deliver the choice and type of dwelling in the small – medium family dwelling range which can meet the aspirations and needs of a wide section of the market. As well as lending themselves to creating attractive and successful neighbourhoods, they represent an efficient use of land (around 70 dwellings per hectare gross) even compared with apartment blocks which must also allow for significant internal circulation space. Two or three storey units can allow for generous space standards and the possibility of garaging space on the ground floor and private garden space.

2.6.9 Design considerations are addressed in more detail in the notes for each district of the town.

Affordable Housing

2.6.10 The Swale Borough Local Plan (2008) Policy H3 indicates that the Borough Council will be seeking 30% of all housing

on sites capable of taking 15 or more dwellings as affordable, although there is some flexibility in the application of this policy according to site circumstances. Exceptionally provision may be by means of a commuted sum to a suitable alternative site. The emerging Swale Borough Development Contributions SPD (2009) explains that the affordable housing contribution is generally sought as 60% social rented and 40% shared ownership.

2.6.11 The SHMA suggests that 33% of the Borough's affordable housing need arises in Sittingbourne, which equates to a need for some 433 affordable dwellings per annum within the town over the period to 2011. The scale of need is therefore well beyond the ability of the SPD area to meet it.

2.6.12 There is a balance to be struck between affordable housing need and development scheme viability. Although the current fragility of all housing markets may make it more feasible to achieve affordable housing, large mono tenure schemes are unlikely to attract sufficient subsidy to proceed; will not make sufficient contribution to key infrastructure requirements; and don't contribute to the creation of mixed and sustainable communities.

2.6.13 The Sittingbourne SHMA research suggests that intermediate housing (shared ownership and intermediate renting) would be within reach of over 80% of all newly forming households comprising couples without children and over 50% of couples with children (assuming dual income). However, the current market for this type of property is weak, with issues around provision of sub prime mortgages and local evidence of a market backlog of shared equity properties. The role of this tenure should not be ruled out for the future, perhaps with cascading funding and appropriate arrangements to allow for their use for intermediate or social rented for as long as is appropriate.

2.6.14 Clearly, the amount of affordable housing provision in the town centre will need to be maximised where practical, and viable, bearing in mind the need to meet other regeneration objectives. It will need to operate within the context of adopted Local Plan policy, informed by the current local needs situation. A flexible approach to phasing of affordable housing within larger schemes; ensuring that all development is of a sufficiently high quality to switch between tenures; the use of arrangements such as local letting agreements and Choice Based Lettings (Kent Homechoice) will be used to facilitate flexible and practical arrangements if adverse economic conditions continue to prevail.

2.6.15 This may also have implications for distribution of affordable units throughout a site or neighbourhood. The greatest integration between tenures is achieved when social rented, intermediate rented and shared ownership units are distributed evenly through a development. Small evenly distributed clusters (ideally of no more than six units) are more likely to facilitate practical management, but again the prevailing economic climate and the practicality of being able to switch tenures may require flexible and innovative approaches to planning agreements and subsequent management of affordable housing.

2.6.16 The early involvement of Joint Commissioning Partners from the Borough Council's approved partners list is advised for any scheme, so that their expertise in scheme implementation and management can be utilised.

Type and Size of Affordable Housing Unit

2.6.17 The SHMA research for Sittingbourne suggested that of the 433 affordable units needed annually, the greatest needs numerically were for 3 bed

houses (158 units) followed by one and two bed flats (146 units); two bed houses (86 units) and 4+ bed houses (43 units).

2.6.18 Local household projections also suggest that household size will continue to fall over the next 20 years from 2.38 persons per household at 2006 to 2.15 persons per household at 2026 (this is slightly lower than the Kent and Medway average), further emphasising the focus on dwellings to meet the needs of smaller households.

2.6.19 However, because of the greater levels of turnover of smaller homes, the recommendation for prioritising affordable housing provision was to boost dwelling types with the lowest supply to need ratios in order to reduce waiting times. Priority was suggested as follows:

- 27% affordable units to be 1-2 bedroom flats (or houses)
- 20% 2 - bedroom houses
- 40% 3 - bedroom houses
- 13% 4+ bedroom houses.

2.6.20 Clearly not all sites or locations within the town centre will be suitable or viable for delivering this priority - for example houses are less likely to be deliverable in the core area of the town centre and regard will need to be had to the current waiting list.

2.6.21 In order to facilitate delivery of affordable housing in the short to medium term in the difficult prevailing economic conditions, the Borough Council is willing to consider flexible management regimes which could alter the proportion of affordable housing in different tenure types.

2.6.22 To reflect these considerations, the Borough Council will expect at least 20% of the apartments in the Town Centre Core area (including any immediately north of the railway) to be affordable. The tenure mix may be flexible, but should encompass

2 AREA ANALYSIS

management regimes to ensure a successful and high quality scheme which can be maintained for the longer term.

2.6.23 Elsewhere in the SPD area, the Borough Council will expect a minimum of 30% affordable housing in accordance with Local Plan policy and seek a minimum of this to be social rented and the remaining 40% as intermediate housing. Again flexible management regimes will be encouraged to ensure that schemes of high quality can be delivered and maintained or the longer term.

Design of Affordable Units

2.6.24 The design and layout of affordable units will be expected to meet the same standards of design, materials and public realm quality as market housing areas and any HCA government grant funding pre-requisite prevailing at the time of delivery. Developers should also refer to the Swale Housing Strategy (2010) and the Swale Developer Contributions SPD (2009).

2.7 BIODIVERSITY

2.7.1 The SPD area contains the area of high nature conservation value within the Milton Creek and Creek edge itself; and the whole SPD area is only some 1.6km from the Special Protection Areas in the Swale and Medway Estuaries, which are protected by national and European legislation and covered by the Ramsar Convention on wetland protection. These regulations also cover Special Protected Area species where they are using adjacent habitats.

2.7.2 The function of Milton Creek in supporting the designated sites in the estuaries is not well understood. Development proposals for areas in proximity to the Creek will therefore need to satisfy Swale Borough Council as local planning authority, (who will be advised by Natural England) that both the direct impacts of development and any indirect

impacts (especially arising from recreational pressures) will not adversely affect the integrity of the protected areas. Proposals which could involve disturbance of the Creek bed sediments should also be avoided.

2.7.3 The Appropriate Assessment supporting the preparation of this SPD has identified the key considerations for the area. However, it has not been possible at this stage to fully investigate all of the issues. Studies undertaken at this point in time would quickly become out of date if development is delayed for any reason; or if the type and quantum of development in a particular location varies from that envisaged; and will be unable to account properly for the cumulative effects of other development permitted or implemented in the vicinity of the SPD area between the preparation of this SPD and planning proposals coming forward. Moreover, Natural England are continuing to collect data on the key biodiversity issues for the Swale / Medway estuaries, which may be a useful source.

2.7.4 Developers will therefore need to provide supporting evidence at outline planning application stage to establish the potential impact of their proposals on European protected sites from various disturbance mechanisms. Appropriate avoidance and mitigation strategies will need to be provided. Where adverse effects on European sites and their interest features cannot be avoided or mitigated (in accordance with Policy E12 of the Local Plan (2008)), planning permission will be refused.

2.7.5 Early engagement with Natural England is recommended as essential in preparing evidence to support development proposals and appropriate avoidance or mitigation strategies.

2.7.6 Mitigation or avoidance of adverse impacts of development proposals may be best served through a consortium approach

to managing the land parcels adjacent to Milton Creek at least at the outline planning application stage. This approach would also complement flood risk mitigation strategies within the functional floodplain of the Creek.

2.7.7 Careful management of recreational activity arising from residential development within the SPD area is key for the sensitive habitat areas in and adjoining it. To a degree, this is already being addressed through the Milton Creek Parklands and Church Marshes Country Park projects. These channel and focus activity on the park and designated footpaths rather than the most sensitive areas. Detailed design and layout of development proposals will need to complement this approach.

