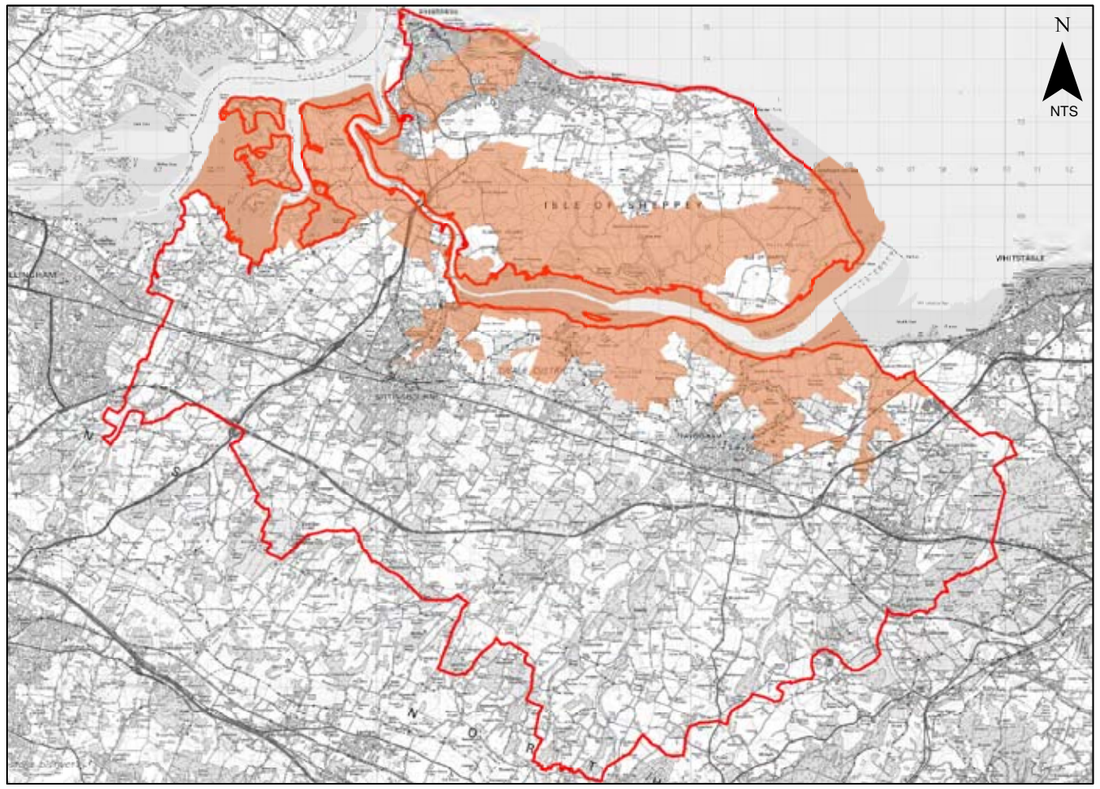


Landscape

Forming part of the Greater Thames Estuary, the marshland mainly consists of a maze of winding, shallow creeks, mudflats and broad tracts of tidal saltmarsh with sand and shingle beaches along the coast edge. Branching, meandering creeks that dissect the saltmarshes fill and empty with the tide and provide an interesting temporal and colour variation within the marsh landscape. Contrast is often provided by the extensive areas, usually lying between coastal edge and rising ground, of former marshland where draining, levelling and improvement of the soil structure has formed grazing marsh, predominantly inhabited by sheep, cattle and wildfowl. Other areas have been further improved to support arable crops such as wheat and barley. This 'improvement' process has altered many of the characteristic features of the marsh landscape such as through the creation of straight dykes and ditches in arable areas. Trees are rarities here and the small clumps that do exist help to mark the location of isolated churches and farmsteads on the pockets of higher land. Much of the southern half of The Isle of Sheppey comprises extensive areas of marsh. Here there is a strong sense of remoteness, with wide, open views and big skies.

The most significant area of ecological importance within the Borough is the Swale and Medway estuarine complex, largely designated as a:

- Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI);
- Special Protection Area (SPA) (designated under the European Commission Directive on the Conservation of Wild Birds); and
- Ramsar Site, which means that it is a wetland of international importance.

These areas, in particular the Swale, include the largest remaining areas of freshwater grazing marsh in Kent and are representative of the estuarine habitats found on the north Kent coast. The key habitats comprise intertidal mudflats and saltmarsh on the seaward side of sea defences, and freshwater grazing marsh on the landward side; the latter being intersected by extensive dykes and fleets that often contain significant corridors of reed-bed as well as open water.

The area is particularly notable for the internationally important numbers of wintering and passage wildfowl and waders such as golden and grey plover, ringed plover, pintail, bar-tailed and black-tailed godwit, shoveler, knot, dunlin and redshank. There are also important breeding populations of a number of bird species such as avocet, marsh harrier and Mediterranean gull.

Associated with the various constituent habitats of the area are outstanding assemblages of wetland plants and invertebrates. Over 350 species of invertebrate have been recorded from the mudflats alone, and the saltmarshes of the Swale are among the richest for plant life in Britain. The grazing marsh and associated dykes and sea walls support notable plants such as hog's fennel, divided sedge, and least lettuce. The grazing marsh dykes are also a key stronghold for the threatened water vole.

Climate Change

The intertidal habitats and coastal grazing marsh are habitats that are particularly susceptible to sea-level rise brought about by climate change. Much of the Swale Borough's coastline is protected by artificial sea defences such as embankments which protect low-lying land from marine inundation. This means that, as sea level rises, the extent of intertidal habitats such as mudflat and saltmarsh habitat may be reduced through 'coastal squeeze' as such habitats are prevented from forming further inland by static sea defences and associated built development. Such losses of intertidal habitats are likely to result where the long-term sea defence strategy, as defined in the Medway Estuary and Swale Shoreline Management Plan, is one of 'hold the line' (i.e. maintain the existing line of sea defence). However, where a strategy of 'managed realignment' is followed, this can allow for the dynamic migration of intertidal habitat landward of the current seas defences, thus maintaining a similar extent of such habitats in the face of climate change.

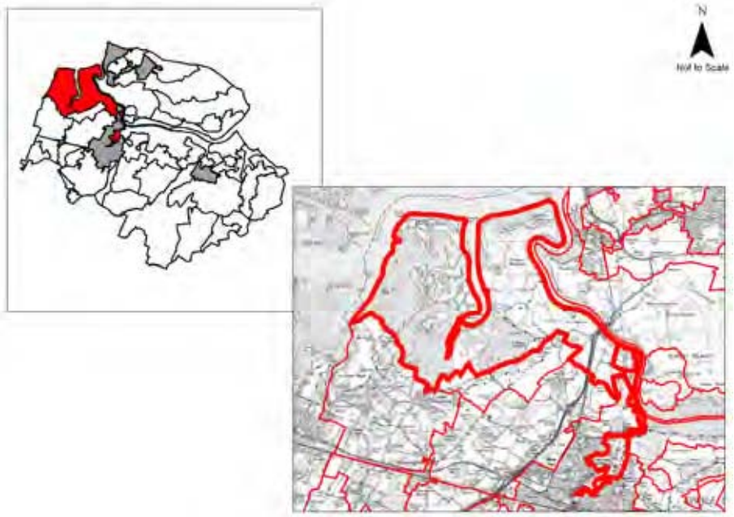
In contrast, the freshwater grazing marsh habitats, which were historically reclaimed from the intertidal zone for livestock grazing, are able to persist in situ only as long as the sea defences are maintained. Without these defences the grazing marsh will revert to intertidal habitat, particularly as sea level rises. Losses of grazing marsh may therefore result where a sea defence policy of 'managed realignment' is followed unless losses are compensated through habitat creation elsewhere.

Thus the pattern and extent of these coastal habitats are dependent to a large extent on how human society responds to rising sea level and the associated coastal processes of erosion and deposition. The preservation of intertidal habitats and a more natural dynamic coastline in Swale Borough may be welcomed, but will be at the expense of grazing marsh habitat, unless such habitat is created in other, nearby areas of low lying land. The long-term sustainability of existing coastal habitats is a key consideration for strategic landscape planning, and opportunities for extending and replacing them in the future should be sought as part of a wider sea defence strategy in liaison with the Environment Agency and Natural England. The Shoreline Management Plan process provides a mechanism for such planning, and biodiversity conservation is a key feature of this.

Generic Marshland Landscape Guidelines

- Appropriate proposals that would enable the management and extension of grazing marsh/ saltmarsh to maximise both landscape and biodiversity benefits should be supported. Consider the inter-tidal habitat benefits of managed re-alignment of sea defences as a response to sea level rise and coastal squeeze.
- Conserve and enhance the historic character of these areas (including the creation) of traditional grazing/ saltmarsh (including use of low-intensity grazing and seasonal flooding) and their distinctive network of ditches (inc. riparian vegetation), creeks, fleets and other characteristic features such as sea walls, borrow pits, counterwalls, causeways, drove tracks, salt mounds and hulks.
- Avoid any further loss of grazing marsh to arable uses, and seek opportunities to revert remaining pockets of arable land to grazing marsh or inter-tidal habitat.
- Encourage the retention and reinstatement of traditional timber wing fencing and gates, together with smaller sporadic features like windmills, sheepfolds/ washes, footbridges etc.
- The open character of most marshland landscapes accentuates the visual impact of many proposals over a wide distance as compared with more enclosed landscape types. Even small buildings and developments can be highly visible within the visually sensitive marshland. Avoid proposals that can result in the interruption of views of large open skies or horizons, or impinge on the remote undeveloped quality of marshland and its shoreline.
- Where appropriate, use ditches and earth banks to mimic characteristic flood banks.

1. Chetney and Greenborough Marshes



Key Characteristics

- *An area of traditional coastal marsh*
- *Flat grazing marsh, saltmarsh and mudflats. Natural and man-made features include ditches, fleets and counterwalls*
- *Scattered isolated patches of scrub*
- *Major transport routes and power lines cut across the marsh*
- *Large areas designated for the protection of internationally important habitats and species assemblages*
- *Atmospheric and tranquil landscape with large open and often dramatic skies*

Landscape Description

This is an area of extensive coastal marsh with all the essential characteristics of grazing marsh, mudflats and broad skylines. The flat relief has been formed from marine alluvial deposits. Further south the land rises gently away from the marsh, where London clay and Bagshot beds lay adjacent to the marsh landscape. Pockets of tidal saltmarsh are found along the river margins but the traditional land cover is coastal grazing marsh. The rough grass that distinguishes this area contains a complex system of natural and man-made ditches and fleets. Evidence of these waterways, is highlighted by the straw coloured reeds that line the banks of the ditches. Tree cover is limited to infrequent patches of scrub.

The grazing marsh is reclaimed and protected from inundation by a network of sea walls. At Barksore Marshes the saltmarsh is limited to thin slivers along the river shore, amidst the tidal mudflats of the estuarine system, physically and visually separated from adjacent land by the sea walls. The traditional land cover is coastal grazing marsh, which is limited and fragmented into small pockets by extensive creeks and ditches. Barksore Marshes are distinctive because of the presence of large areas of open water.

The large areas of saltmarsh know as Greenborough, Millfordhope, Slayhills Marshes and Burntwick Island are now isolated from the mainland, separated from Chetney marshes by Stangate Creek. Historically they were more complete and connected to the mainland. Today they form a complex network of islands divided by a huge number of sinuous creeks and ditches. Counterwalls have become fragmented and the saltwaters of the Medway Estuary are gradually inundating the land. Large open waterways, separating the mainland from these island marshes, are replaced at low tide by extensive mudflats.

The isolated and extensive nature of these estuarine saltmarshes, mudflats and grazing marsh make them an undisturbed area of international importance for nature conservation. Almost the entire character area is designated as SSSI, Ramsar and SPA due to the richness of its bird, plant and invertebrate life.

The remoteness and inaccessibility of the marshes, along with the effects of the weather, light and tides on the marshland, creates a unique atmosphere. Boats in the estuary and boat hulks around the sea walls at Bedlams Bottom add to the atmosphere and provide indications of the changing relationship between the land and sea. There is evidence of extensive Roman salt workings and pottery industry in the area.

To the south, Milton Creek extends into Sittingbourne's urban area. Here, the remote qualities which belong to the wider marshland to the north are weakened by the urban edge of Sittingbourne. Large industrial units, distribution units at Ridham Dock and along the A249, the busy A249 itself, Kingsferry Bridge, the more recent Sheppey Crossing and Kemsley Paper Mill are highly visible within the largely flat and treeless marshland. Uncharacteristic undulations on the periphery of Sittingbourne reflect former areas of landfill. The extension of intertidal and grazing marsh habitat along Milton Creek into Sittingbourne has been designated as a LWS for estuarine biodiversity interests similar to the SSSI/SPA.

Condition: Good

The condition of the Chetney and Greenborough Marshes is good. The Chetney and Greenborough Marshes are more remote and inaccessible than most and so have remained in good condition and are a haven for flora and fauna. These designated sites are considered to be in favourable condition by Natural England, reflecting the quality of the coastal habitat.

Visually, certain areas are dominated by the large-scale industries present within adjacent areas, which sit inharmoniously beside this flat open landscape. There is a particularly high impact from this industry in the east near Milton Creek and Church Marshes. Here and at Kemsley, north of Sittingbourne, the area is heavily influenced by industry, which has a direct impact on the wider landscape in terms of long-distance views.

Major transport links including the A249, the Kingsferry Bridge and the more recent Sheppey Crossing and adjacent railway divide the area, transporting traffic onto the Isle of Sheppey and serving as access routes to Ridham Docks and industrial plants on Kemsley Marshes. The overhead transmission lines that march across Chetney Marsh are another intrusive feature. All these elements have a fundamental effect on the rural quality of the landscape, but this diminishes with distance from the source.

There is little natural screening, as few trees grow and vegetation is limited to isolated clumps of scrub and ground cover. Consequently the large man made features are particularly prominent. Post and wire fencing is another feature not traditionally associated with the marshland landscape. Sea walls are occasionally maintained with inappropriate materials.

The forthcoming Sittingbourne Northern Relief Road will dissect the marshland to the south of Kemsley Paper Mill, linking the residential area of Kemsley to the industrial estate which lies east of Milton Creek. Although this will add to the urban edge influence within this area, it is not considered that it will degrade the good condition of the overall marshland landscape.

Sensitivity: High

This is a highly sensitive area with many natural features, which are highly valuable and unique in terms of biodiversity and landscape character. The impact of Sittingbourne lessens with distance and most parts still retain an isolated quality and strong sense of place. The integrity of the majority of the marsh is not significantly affected by the distant views of industry on the opposite shores and is positively enhanced by boats, shipping and the decaying hulks of historic Thames craft in the mud, which reinforce its coastal character.

The open nature of the landscape and the flat landscape make the marshes highly visually sensitive. There is a high degree of inter-visibility between the marshland and the surrounding landscape. In biodiversity terms, the area is sensitive to human disturbance and changes in agricultural land use and drainage. However the strict level of protection offered by European and UK site designation offers a high degree of legal protection from many potential impacts, particularly those related to future built development.

Guidelines: Conserve

As an area of extensive coastal marsh the guidelines for Chetney and Greenborough Marshes are to conserve the landscape.

- Consider the generic guidelines for marshland landscapes and seek opportunities to restore coastal grazing marsh, wetland and/or intertidal habitat where intensive arable production currently exists.
- Conserve the undeveloped and distinctive character of the marshland, to maintain the integrity of the wider North Kent Marshes.
- New development should be carefully sited and integrated so that it does not intrude upon areas of tranquil unspoilt marshland or significantly expand or exacerbate existing visual impacts.

Condition	low	moderate	high
good	**REINFORCE**	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	**CONSERVE**
moderate	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
poor	**CREATE**	RESTORE & CREATE	**RESTORE**

Sensitivity

Biodiversity Network Opportunity

The majority of Chetney and Greenborough Marshes are dominated by extensive grazing marsh and a network of open water channels with patches of fen and reed swamp. The statutory designations that dominate this area reflect the strategic priority to conserve the existing habitats in this area and manage them to maintain favourable condition under the guidance and consenting of Natural England. Any opportunities to buffer the designated site through appropriate habitat creation or enhancement at its margins would be of benefit, however much of this will rely on taking such opportunities in the adjacent character areas to the south. The area of Chetney Marshes surrounded by, but not itself subject to designation may have opportunity for enhancement of its marshland/wetland habitats to overcome current limitations in habitat quality.

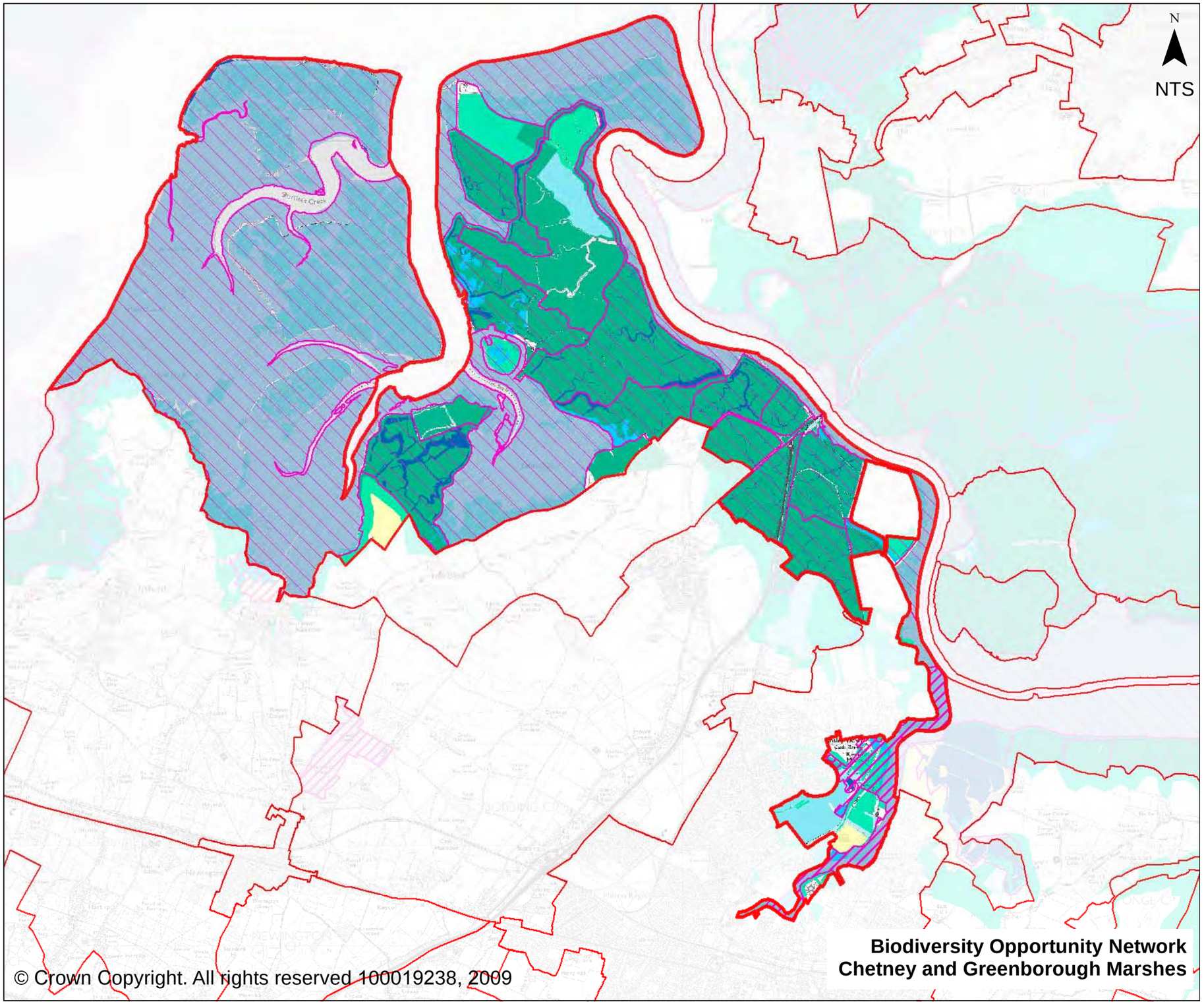
The current Shoreline Management Plan strategy for this area is largely one of managed realignment of the sea defences which would allow inter-tidal habitats to migrate inland as sea level rises in response to climate change. Whilst this strategy will help to preserve the extent of intertidal saltmarsh and mudflat into the future, it is also likely to involve losses of freshwater grazing marsh and associated species.

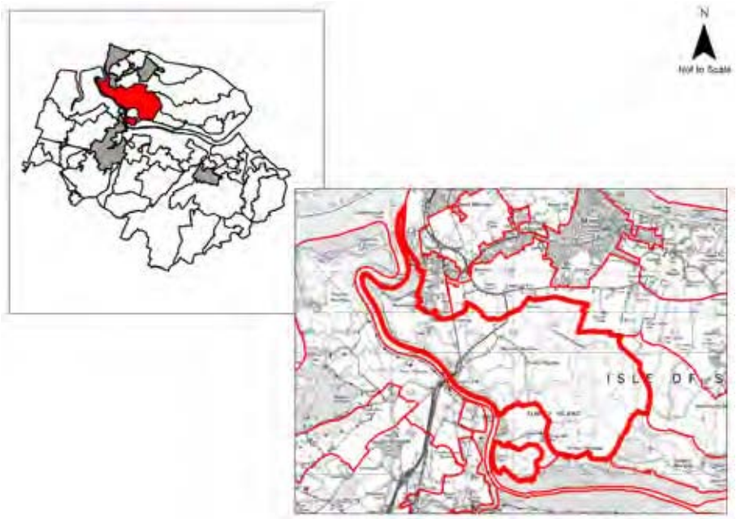
The south-west extension of this character area within Sittingbourne is partly designated as the Milton Creek LWS and adjacent to this at Church Marshes Country Park there is some opportunity for wetland/grazing marsh creation and enhancement to extend the wetland network into the urban fringe, although this may be limited due to land raising through landfill capping here. The new Northern Relief Road development here will incorporate some wetland habitat enhancement adjacent to the Country Park, either side of the new road which will benefit species such as water voles and great crested newts.

Legend: Biodiversity Opportunity Network

Note: Habitats (existing and potential) are only shown where they occur within the strategic network identified by the Kent Wildlife Trust's BOA mapping (see Figure 10 and Appendix C)

- Open water (inland) - existing
- Wetland - existing
- Wetland - potential
- Intertidal habitat - existing
- Grazing marsh - existing
- Grazing marsh & intertidal habitat- potential
- Species-rich neutral grassland - existing
- Species-rich neutral grassland - potential
- Acid grassland & heathland - existing
- Acid grassland & heathland - potential
- Chalk grassland - existing
- Chalk grassland - potential
- Ancient Woodland - existing
- Woodland - potential
- Character Areas
- Site of Special Scientific Interest
- Local Wildlife Sites





Landscape Description

The Elmley Marshes is a huge open expanse of coastal grazing marsh. It is an unspoilt, natural and tranquil landscape, epitomised by open flat land with broad skies, few landscape features and an overriding sense of remoteness and solitude that, overall, creates a unique atmosphere. Typical features include reed-filled drainage channels, rough grassland and saltmarsh vegetation, embankments, grazing animals and wetland birds. Historic man-made features include counterwalls and medieval salt mounds. Boats are present in the Swale, particularly at Queenborough where boats moored in the mud provide a strongly maritime character. The Kingsferry Bridge and the more recent Sheppey Crossing are key characteristics and are strongly evident in views standing above the marshes, straddling the Swale.

Marine alluvial deposits have created the distinctive flat marshland relief. There is no tree cover and the landscape is generally devoid of features other than those mentioned above. This places a great significance on the presence of grazing stock and wildlife, making the occasional isolated brick building incongruous in an otherwise unspoilt landscape.

Management of this area of the marshes is carried out in an ecologically sensitive manner and the rough grassland provides an important habitat for migrating wetland birds. It is an area that has been largely designated as a SSSI, NNR and SPA and is a wetland of international significance under the Ramsar Convention.

Further west, around the marshlands of Neatscourt and Rushenden, the marshes are less remote and more influenced by the industrial and urban fringe activities of Queenborough, which has been identified as a major regeneration project. These influences diminish with distance from the source, but the traditional marshland qualities are impaired, even where these man-made elements form only a backdrop.

Key Characteristics

- *Flat alluvial marshland with sinuous reed filled ditches. Traditional gates and fences leading into ditches prevent cattle crossing into other fields*
- *Atmospheric and tranquil landscape with large open and often dramatic skies*
- *Rough grassland largely used for cattle and sheep grazing*
- *Important wetland habitats designated for their internationally important assemblages of wildlife.*
- *Important transport routes A249, railway and link bridges onto island*
- *Large-scale landscape with little sense of enclosure*
- *Boats in the Swale*
- *Strong sense of place, remote and isolated*

The area has good vehicular access via a rough track that leads south to Elmley Island and by foot, beyond this point, to Elmley Marshes Nature Reserve. Elsewhere its network of ditches isolates the marsh.

Condition: Good

The Sheppey Marshes at Elmley are in good condition. The landscape is generally coherent and visually unified. The main detractors around Neatscourt Marshes in the west are the transport embankments and overhead power lines.

The ecological interest of the area is strong; ditches and grasslands are traditionally managed and well maintained for the migrating bird population. The area is particularly notable for the internationally important numbers of wintering and passage wildfowl and waders and the nature reserve here is actively managed by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB).

Isolated traditional brick farm buildings are occasional features. Closer to Queenborough the influence of industry and the urban fringe is more keenly felt. Industrial areas south of the Swale at Ridham and Kemsley intrude into views off the island to the south.

Guidelines: Conserve

Guidelines for the Elmley Marshes Character Area focus on the long-term conservation of areas of international nature conservation importance and the improved visual integration of existing developments and future proposals.

- Consider the generic guidelines for marshland landscapes and seek opportunities to restore coastal grazing marsh, wetland and/or intertidal habitat where intensive arable production currently exists.
- Conserve the undeveloped and distinctive character of the marshland, to maintain the integrity of the wider North Kent Marshes.
- Avoid urban influence of regeneration at Queenborough and Rushenden extending into the Rushenden Marshes.
- Encourage appropriate screening and softening of development at Queenborough and Rushenden (Neatscourt) to restrict the impact on sensitive views from the marshes.

Sensitivity: High

This is a highly sensitive landscape. The marshland maintains its distinct character through traditional farming practices. Features within the landscape, although rare, are highly visible where they exist due to the flat and open nature of the land.

Condition	low	moderate	high
good	**REINFORCE**	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	**CONSERVE**
moderate	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
poor	**CREATE**	RESTORE & CREATE	**RESTORE**

Sensitivity

Biodiversity Network Opportunity

The majority of Elmley Marshes is composed of existing well-managed grazing marsh with areas of fen and reedswamp and is protected by statutory designation. Therefore the priority here is conservation of the existing resource.
There is potential for extending and buffering the grazing marsh habitat to the north and north west of the SSSI/SPA. This may be an appropriate response to future losses of freshwater grazing marsh brought about by managed retreat of sea defences; itself a strategic response to losses of intertidal habitat brought about by sea-level rise. The network also reveals some minor scope for species-rich grassland development to the north-west near the Rushenden sewage works.

Legend: Biodiversity Opportunity Network
Note: Habitats (existing and potential) are only shown where they occur within the strategic network identified by the Kent Wildlife Trust's BOA mapping (see Figure 10 and Appendix C)

- Open water (inland) - existing
- Wetland - existing
- Wetland - potential
- Intertidal habitat - existing
- Grazing marsh - existing
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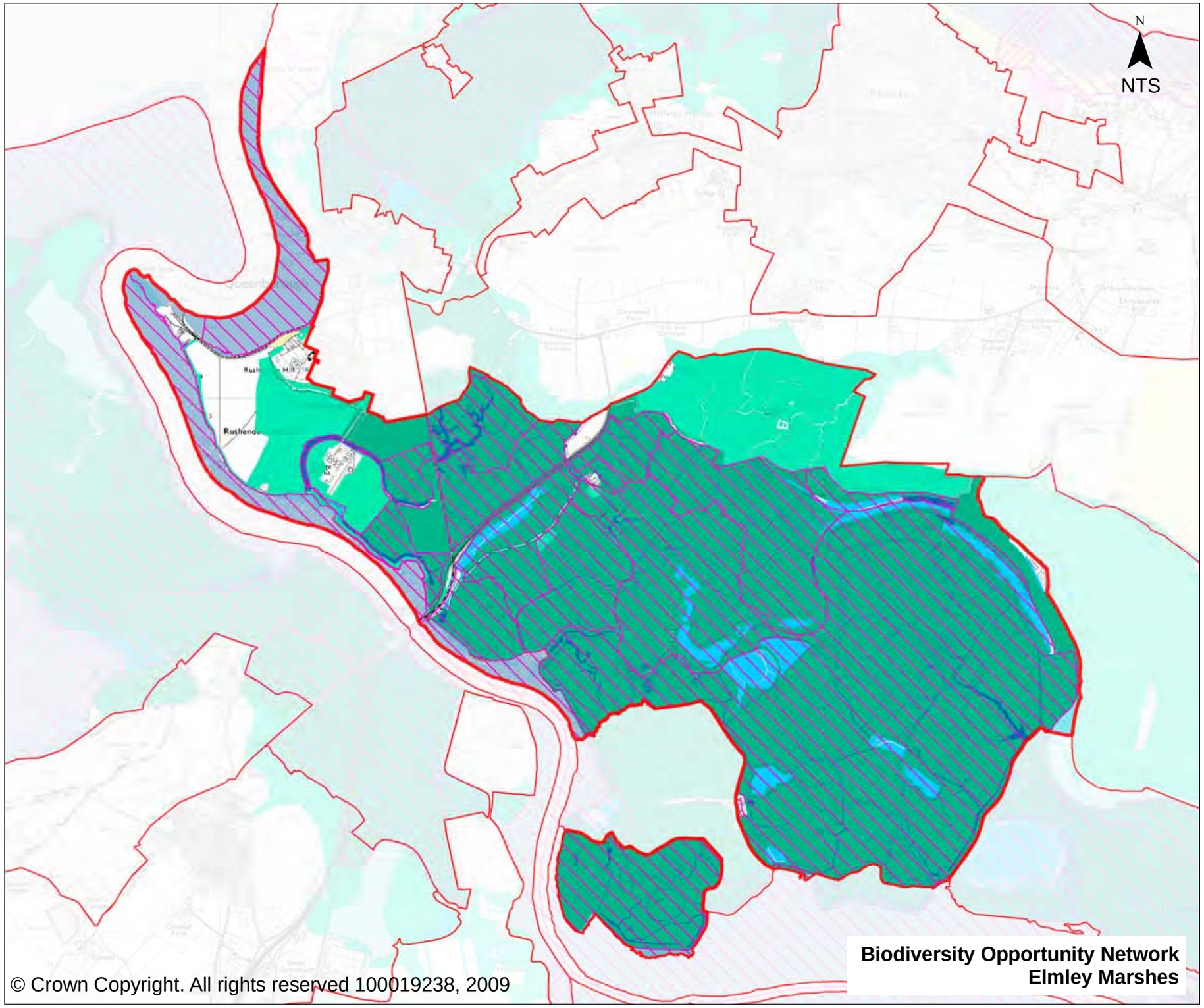
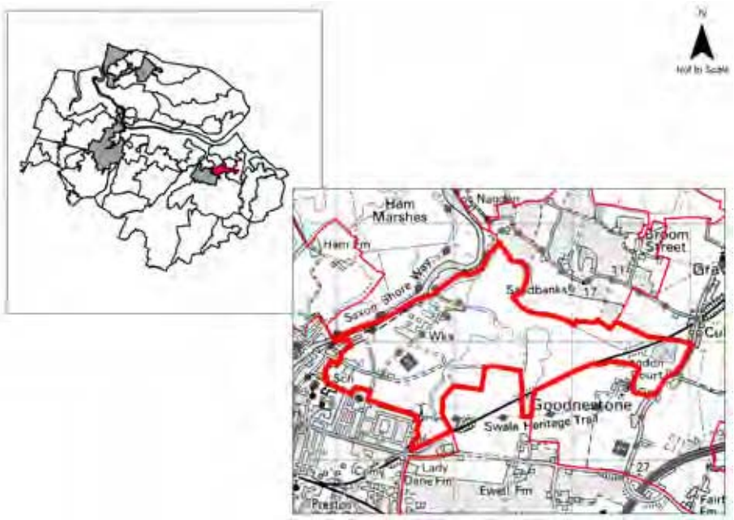


3. Goodnestone Grasslands



Landscape Description

Goodnestone Grasslands extend eastwards from the northern boundary of Faversham and include some of the peripheral buildings, the boat yard and sewage works located on the east side of Faversham Creek. From the creek a number of small streams extend into these grasslands. These sinuous ditches are wide and are believed to have been tidal up until 1840, possibly enabling small vessels to dock near to Goodnestone. Elsewhere a network of man made drainage ditches have further fragmented and drained the landscape.

Today the area has a tranquil and unspoilt character, despite the presence of the Faversham to Whitstable railway line, elevated here above the alluvial marshland soils. The landscape is low lying and climbs to a maximum of 10m on the north and south sides where the soils become more fertile and better drained.

The primary land use is sheep grazing and towards Faversham it is a popular informal recreation area. The landscape is distinguished by its long grasses and riparian vegetation, which includes reed lined ditches and occasional clumps of mature poplars and alders. Views are long, but interrupted by peripheral features such as shelterbelts and buildings associated with adjacent character areas, the urban fringe and also by the railway embankment.

Key Characteristics

- *Area of drained alluvial grazing marsh*
- *Slightly elevated land to north and south containing more fertile soils*
- *Natural meandering and straight man-made drainage ditches*
- *Tranquil unspoilt landscape with limited access*
- *High ecological value*
- *Limited areas of mature woodland*
- *Typical riparian vegetation of reed filled ditches and scattered groups of poplar and alder*
- *Few buildings and no public highways*
- *Railway embankments provide additional wildlife corridor*
- *Grade I and II listed barns at Abbey Farm, which is also a Scheduled Monument*

Isolated woodlands do exist but are very limited in extent. These are small mixed woodlands containing deciduous species such as alder, poplar, oak, hornbeam, birch, willow and blackthorn as well as conifers such as larch and pine. Elsewhere vegetation is limited to scattered clumps of scrub and riparian vegetation.

The limited development within the area makes it attractive to wildlife. The area is plentiful in bird life and the song of the skylark can be heard over the distant hum of traffic in high summer. The western half of the area forms the Abbey Fields LWS, comprised of rough grassland and scrub. This site is described as being of SSSI quality for scrubland birds. It also has a high invertebrate diversity, as well as water voles and reptiles. In the east of the character area, part of the Graveney Dykes and Pasture LWS is present, containing a mixture of grassland, woodland and ditch habitats of county importance. To the west, this character area is bounded by part of the Swale SSSI/SPA at Faversham creek.

The area provides a setting for Faversham and buildings within the area are limited to the western boundary along Faversham Creek. The creek side townscape offers a diversity of buildings amongst them modern and traditional waterside buildings. Close to the boat yard a traditional farmstead and recent developments are partially screened by mature trees and have little effect on the wider landscape character. The two barns at the Abbey farmstead are among the few surviving buildings of Faversham Abbey, founded by King Stephen and his Queen Matilda in 1147. Henry VIII dissolved the abbey in 1538. The minor barn (1425) is listed as Grade I whilst the major barn (1476) and the 14th century Abbey Farmhouse are Grade II*. The Medieval Stables are Grade II* and the other buildings on the site are Grade II. The recent arabilisation of land surrounding Abbey Farm has altered its historic setting. Elsewhere, Goodnestone Church provides a distinctive feature, together with its field setting.

Condition: Good

Goodnestone Grasslands are generally in good condition, although pockets of landscape used for horse grazing to the east have become degraded. It is an enclosed area of drained marshland with a distinctive riparian character including well-maintained open ditches with reed filled banks and occasional clumps of mature scrub and trees. It is an area semi-enclosed by mixed mature woodland and vegetation within adjacent character areas. The long grasses are a home for wildlife as well as used for grazing and consequently it has become a haven for flora and fauna. The limited access additionally promotes its ecological value.

Buildings are very limited in extent and do not visually detract from the overall scene. The sewage works is a municipal development that has little impact of the landscape since it is enclosed by grass bunds. The railway may be considered the greatest visual detractor, but this is another valuable wildlife corridor as the embankments are covered in bramble and other wild flora. In Goodnestone, localised field sub-division for equine activity detracts from the grassland setting of the Church.

Sensitivity: High

This is a highly sensitive and locally very distinct landscape. Particularly interesting is the fact that it remains largely undisturbed and inaccessible despite its close proximity to Faversham town centre. In spite of the limited enclosure provided by the railway line and small amount of mature vegetation, visibility across the landscape is high and the urban edge of Faversham is visible.

Guidelines: Conserve

- Consider the generic guidelines for marshland landscapes.
- Conservation is a priority for this landscape.
- Conserve and maintain (including water management) the distinctive and tranquil landscape character formed by long grasses, colonising trees, reed lined ditches, occasional shelterbelts, small mixed woodland, together with the landscape setting to Faversham and its landmark buildings and historic activity.
- Conserve the landscape setting to Faversham and its landmark buildings and historic activity.
- For new hedges and hedgerow trees - hawthorn, field maple, dog rose, dogwood, oak and ash, for mixed woodland or other planting - pedunculate oak, hornbeam, birch, alder, willow, blackthorn and field maple.

Condition	low	moderate	high
good	**REINFORCE**	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	**CONSERVE**
moderate	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
poor	**CREATE**	RESTORE & CREATE	**RESTORE**

Sensitivity

Biodiversity Network Opportunity

Goodnestone Grasslands falls within the strategic habitat network. It holds significant potential for grazing marsh and/ or intertidal habitat creation/restoration to support the wider existing marsh network. This opportunity lies between two designated sites and therefore offers potential for local linkage of high quality grazing marsh habitat. The Shoreline Management Plan strategy for this area is one of 'hold the line', and therefore this area may have the capacity to compensate for losses of grazing marsh to managed realignment of sea defences in other character areas. To the south, on higher ground, there is also opportunity to develop the species-rich neutral grassland network.

Legend: Biodiversity Opportunity Network

Note: Habitats (existing and potential) are only shown where they occur within the strategic network identified by the Kent Wildlife Trust's BOA mapping (see Figure 10 and Appendix C)

- Open water (inland) - existing
- Wetland - existing
- Wetland - potential
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- Grazing marsh & intertidal habitat- potential
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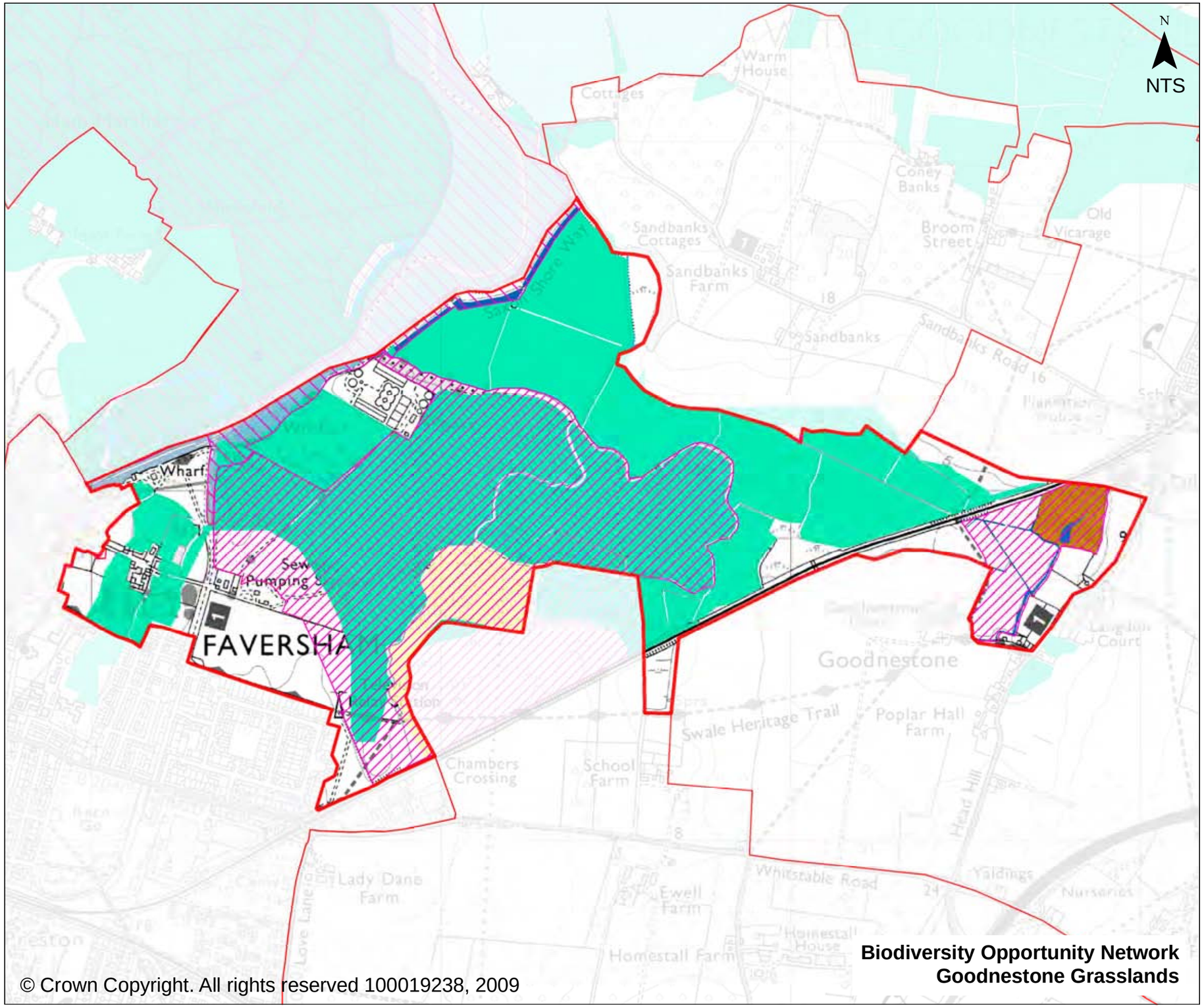
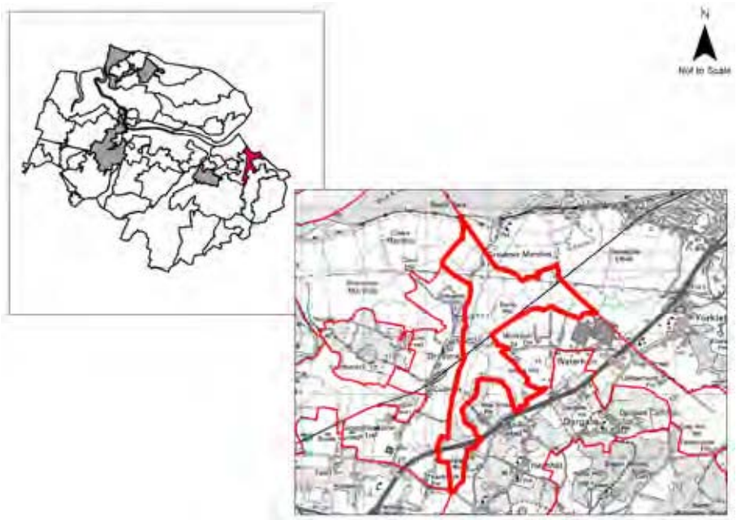


Biodiversity Opportunity Network
Goodnestone Grasslands

4. Graveney Grazing Lands



Key Characteristics

- *Marine alluvial deposits and small raised outcrop of London clay*
- *Open expansive grazing marsh and intimate valleys, managed for grazing livestock.*
- *Vegetation limited to grass, reed filled ditches and scattered scrub. Isolated small-scale deciduous and coppice woodlands and wet pasture valley to the south*
- *Transportation corridors includes railway, A and B roads*
- *Atmospheric and tranquil landscape with large open and often dramatic skies*

Landscape Description

Graveney Grazing Lands are an extension of the adjacent Graveney Marshes located to the north. Marine alluvial deposits have created the distinctive flat marshland relief. Only the clay outcrop at Denly Hill and the pre-Roman saltworks are slightly elevated above the surrounding landscape.

To the north the landscape is more typical of the huge open expanses of grazing marsh with rough grass and tufts of rushes. Further south the character is more intimate, where alluvial valleys extend into the more fertile adjacent landscapes of mixed geology and steeply sloping topography. In these valleys, the field pattern is small-scale and divided by many drainage ditches. On the open ground further north, the fields are larger and drainage ditches more sinuous. In common with other marshland areas it shares a sense of remoteness and tranquillity. The large skies reflect changes in climate and light.

Management of this area is entirely for grazing livestock. Landscape features are generally limited to scattered mature scrub and small clumps of trees at field margins as well as reed filled ditches. Thus there are long uninterrupted views to north and south, including distant views of the Blean and the coast. To the south of the A299, small areas of deciduous and coppiced woodland, mature trees and wet pastures form a distinctive feature of intimate character in a shallow valley.

The majority of this area is covered by some form of biodiversity designation. To the north of the railway, the marshland forms part of the Swale SSSI/SPA and is therefore of international importance, particularly for the bird assemblage it supports. To the south of the railway, the extension of the marsh forms the majority of the Graveney Dykes and Pastures LWS which is of county importance primarily for its ditch network and associated wetland features.

This area cannot be described as remote as it contains a number of transport links including the Faversham to Whitstable railway line, the A299 and B roads. It penetrates into areas of more formal agricultural management and habitation is not far away. Nevertheless it is tranquil, undisturbed and has a traditional character.

Condition: Good

This landscape is in very good condition. Its uniform field pattern and method of enclosure provide strong visual continuity. Visual detractors include the huge pylons seen on the more remote northern marshlands, the railway and post and wire fencing along the roadside, guardrails around some ditches and some minor conifer planting. The large sub station for an offshore windfarm, located outside the character area at Cleve Hill, is visible from the marshland to the north.

The ecological interest of the area is strong and the cultural integrity has been maintained in the traditional land management practices. Ditches and long grasses on the open marsh are available for the migrating bird population. Whilst most of the Swale SSSI is reported to be in favourable condition for biodiversity, the north-east part of this character area, within the SSSI, is in unfavourable condition according to Natural England, due to fly-tipping and a lack of grazing and ditch management.

Isolated woodlands and coppice provide additional varied habitats located within the sheltered valley adjacent to the A299.

Sensitivity: High

This is a highly sensitive landscape both in visual and ecological terms. The marshland maintains its distinct character through traditional farming practices. Features within the landscape, although rare, are highly visible where they exist due to the flat and open nature of the land.

Guidelines: Conserve

Guidelines for the Graveney Grazing Lands Character Area focus on the long-term conservation of the areas.

- Consider the generic guidelines for marshland landscapes.
- Conserve the undeveloped and distinctive character of the marshland, to maintain the integrity of the wider North Kent Marshes.
- Conserve the distinctive landscape character formed where the Graveney Dykes meet rising ground and at the wet pasture valley to the south of the A299.

Condition	low	moderate	high
good	**REINFORCE**	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	**CONSERVE**
moderate	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
poor	**CREATE**	RESTORE & CREATE	**RESTORE**

Sensitivity

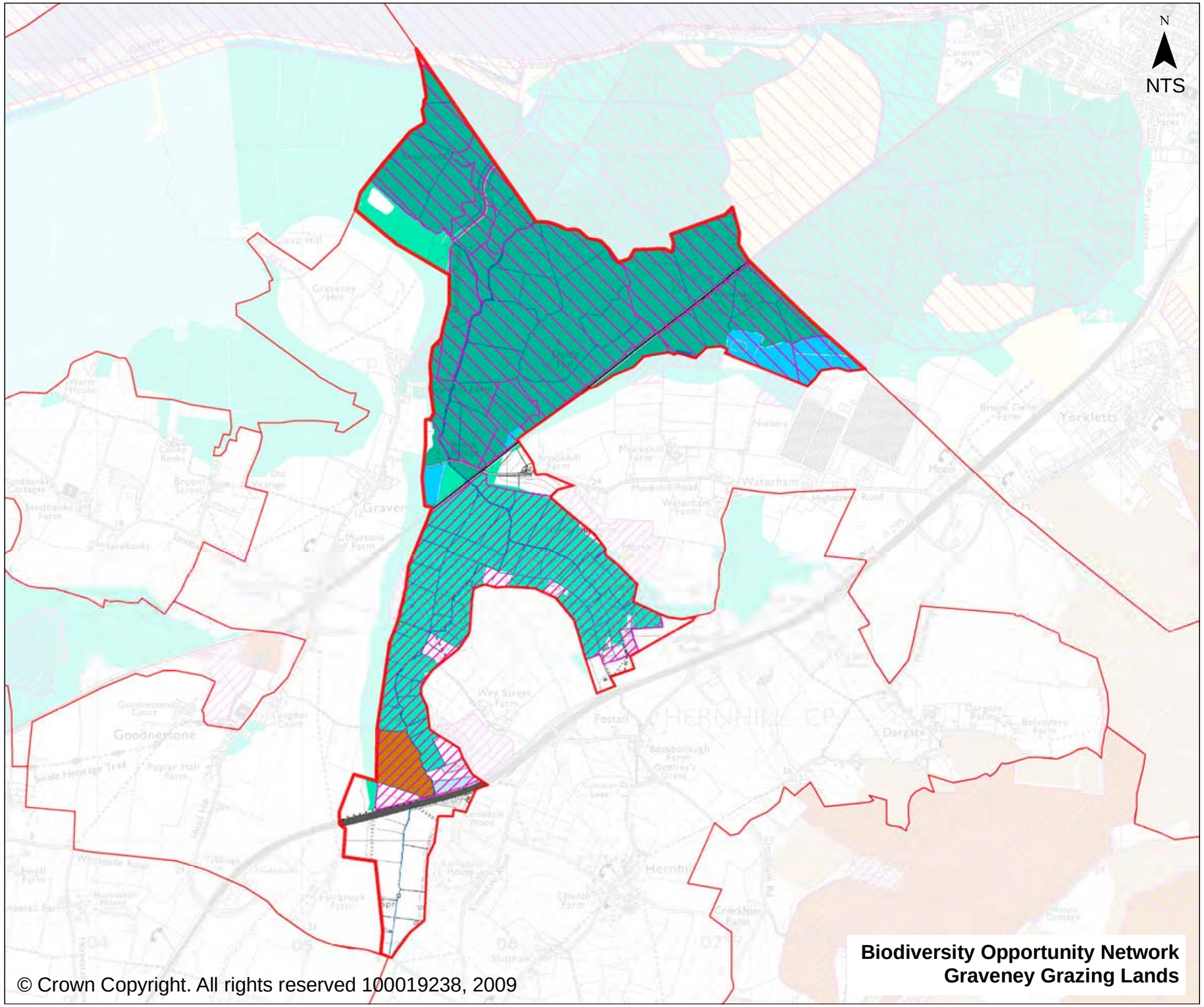
Biodiversity Network Opportunity

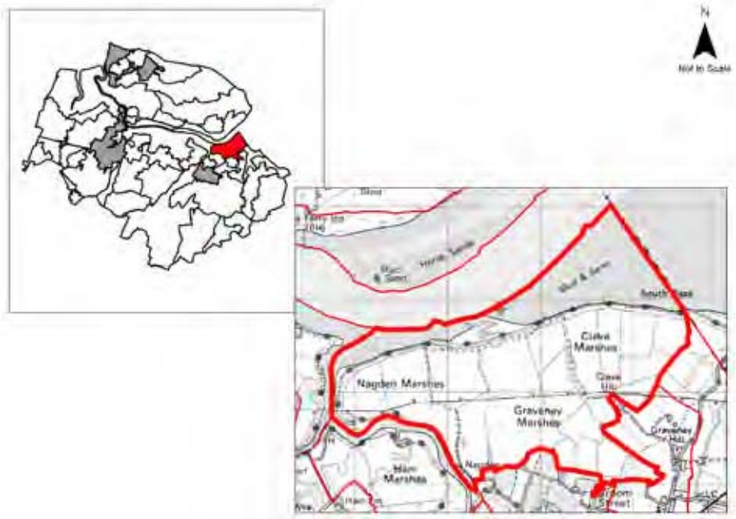
The northern part of Graveney Grazing Lands, within the Swale SSSI/SPA consists of existing grazing marsh and reedswamp. The southern half, which is already locally designated, has potential to restore and extend this internationally important grazing marsh habitat, which would extend the key interests of the Swale SSSI southwards. Open water channels create some aquatic linkage across the whole area.

Legend: Biodiversity Opportunity Network

Note: Habitats (existing and potential) are only shown where they occur within the strategic network identified by the Kent Wildlife Trust's BOA mapping (see Figure 10 and Appendix C)

- Open water (inland) - existing
- Wetland - existing
- Wetland - potential
- Intertidal habitat - existing
- Grazing marsh - existing
- Grazing marsh & intertidal habitat- potential
- Species-rich neutral grassland - existing
- Species-rich neutral grassland - potential
- Acid grassland & heathland - existing
- Acid grassland & heathland - potential
- Chalk grassland - existing
- Chalk grassland - potential
- Ancient Woodland - existing
- Woodland - potential
- Character Areas
- Site of Special Scientific Interest
- Local Wildlife Sites





Key Characteristics

- *Large open area of alluvial marshland*
- *Large-scale arable fields divided by long straight drainage ditches*
- *Typical features ditches, sea wall, estuarine saltmarsh, sand and mudflats*
- *Atmospheric and tranquil landscape with large open and often dramatic skies*

Landscape Description

This is a huge open expanse of alluvial coastal marsh located to the north of Graveney and east of Faversham Creek. It contains little semi-natural vegetation and is bleak and windswept in the winter months. During the twentieth century, the landscape has been transformed from an area of traditional grazing marsh to one of monoculture. The landscape has been divided via long straight drainage ditches, into vast fields that now accommodate large-scale cereal production. Significant engineering works have been carried out so as to prevent flooding. This includes the enormous sea wall that surrounds the coastline and creek. Behind the flat farmed expanse, the higher ground at Cleve Hill and Broom Street, within the adjacent character areas are evident; whilst beyond, the Blean provides a back drop on the horizon.

The terrestrial landscape is so intensively farmed that it now has limited value in terms of biodiversity. Within the arable landscape itself, ditches are the principal features of interest, although the arable land supports the nationally declining bird species, corn bunting.

Beyond the sea wall, the ecological interest is more enduring. Here, along the coastline and Faversham Creek are significant areas of saltmarsh. Indeed the coastal saltmarsh is designated as part of the Swale SSSI/SPA. These areas are particularly interesting in terms of their bird life and the unique variety of plants. These include varieties such as golden samphire, sea lavender and sea purslane and are said to be at their best within Faversham Creek. On the landward side of the steep sea wall many wild flowers grow, including wild carrot and restharrow. The mudflats and tidal waterways of the Swale Estuary have an abundance of shellfish, worms and certain specialist plants.

This is a largely inaccessible landscape. Agricultural vehicles are limited to a single track and pedestrians are limited to the coastal path of the sea wall and one other footpath between Faversham Creek and the nature reserve. This provides the marsh with a sense of remoteness but the intensive land use makes it less wild in nature than the more traditional grazing marshes of Sheppey and Luddenham. Areas of scrub are found scattered along marshland tracks. Otherwise the area contains no mature native vegetation and is consequently extremely exposed. However, there are panoramic views inland and to the Swale, the Isle of Sheppey and Whitstable.

This area is unsettled, except for one isolated modern bungalow, recently built on the bank of Faversham Creek that shows no recognition of the traditional vernacular styles found in the adjacent landscape or any maritime character.

Condition: Moderate

Overall the landscape is in moderate condition, however it should be noted that within the seawall the agricultural landscape is in a poorer condition, whilst outside of the sea wall the natural landscape is in good condition.

Within the sea wall this is a largely featureless landscape with a coherent pattern of monoculture. The main detracting feature is a significant one; that being the overhead power cables and pylons that march across the open fields. The large sub station for an offshore windfarm, located outside the character area at Cleve Hill, is visible in open views across the marshland. Ecological integrity is generally poor landward of the sea wall, with the exception of the many long drainage ditches and associated reed filled banks.

Outside the sea wall and on its high internal banks, the nature conservation value is good and designated habitats are reported by Natural England to be in favourable condition.

The cultural integrity of the area has been entirely removed by modern farming practices and the only building is not of vernacular character.

Sensitivity: Moderate

This is a moderately sensitive landscape. Modern farming practices have weakened the area's sense of place by removing any signs of its traditional agricultural character and any distinctive features. The vast open flat landscape and minimal scrub vegetation, means that views are extensive, uninterrupted and panoramic. Overall visibility is therefore very high.

Guidelines: Conserve and Create

Guidelines for Graveney Marshes aim to conserve existing features of value and create traditional elements that been lost.

- Consider the generic guidelines for marshland landscapes.
- Conserve the undeveloped and distinctive character of the marshland, to maintain the integrity of the wider North Kent Marshes.
- Seek opportunities to restore coastal grazing marsh, wetland and/or intertidal habitat where intensive arable production currently exists.

Condition	low	moderate	high
good	**REINFORCE**	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	**CONSERVE**
moderate	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
poor	**CREATE**	RESTORE & CREATE	**RESTORE**

Sensitivity

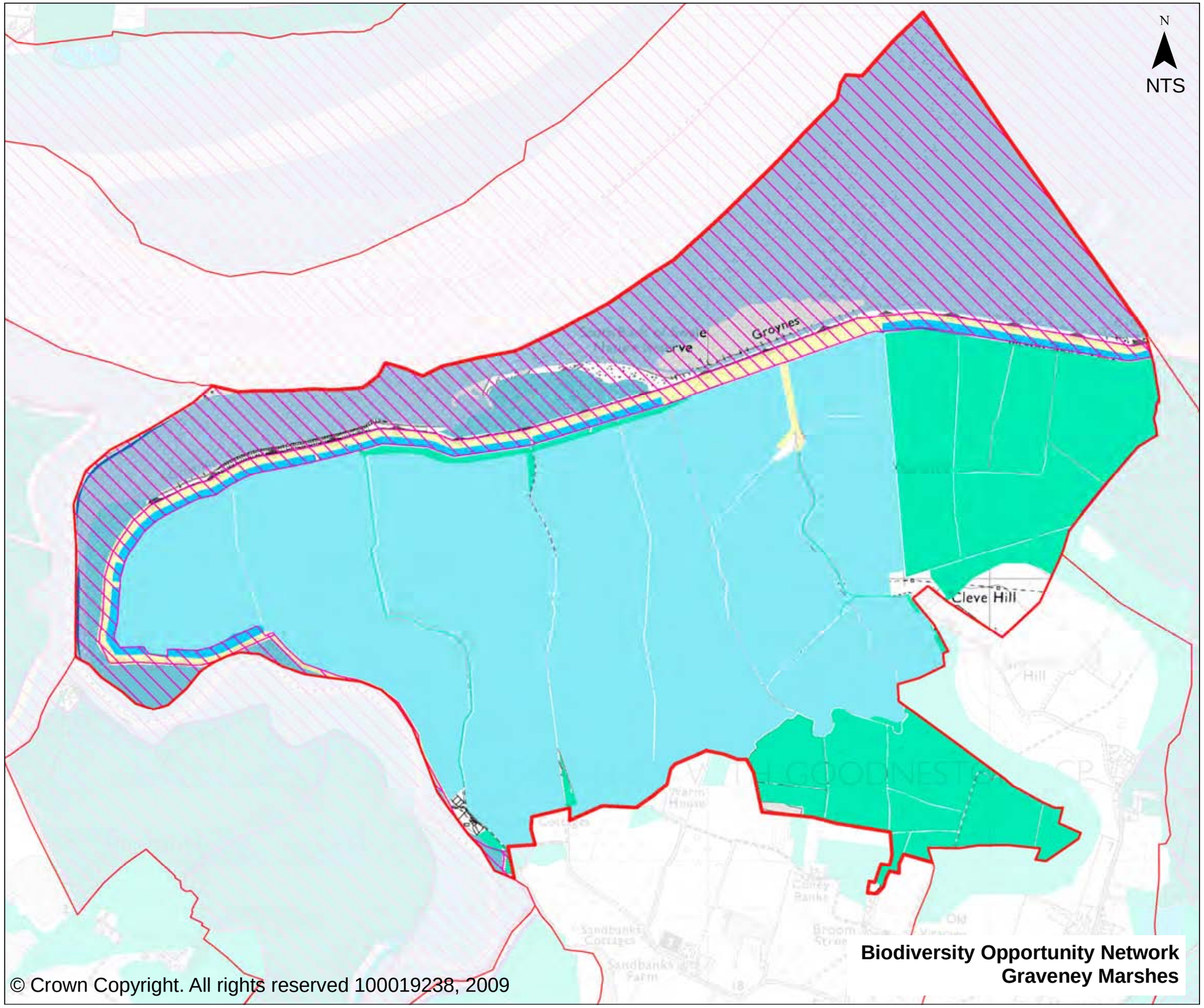
Biodiversity Network Opportunity

The fact that this part of the north Kent marshes near Graveney has suffered from such intensive agricultural improvement means that there is great potential here to restore and extend the inter-tidal/grazing marsh wetland network. The Living Landscapes model reveals that nearly all of the area landward of the sea wall has such potential, and thus forms an important area of biodiversity opportunity within the Borough which would help to buffer and extend the interest of the internationally important Swale SSSI/SPA.

Legend: Biodiversity Opportunity Network

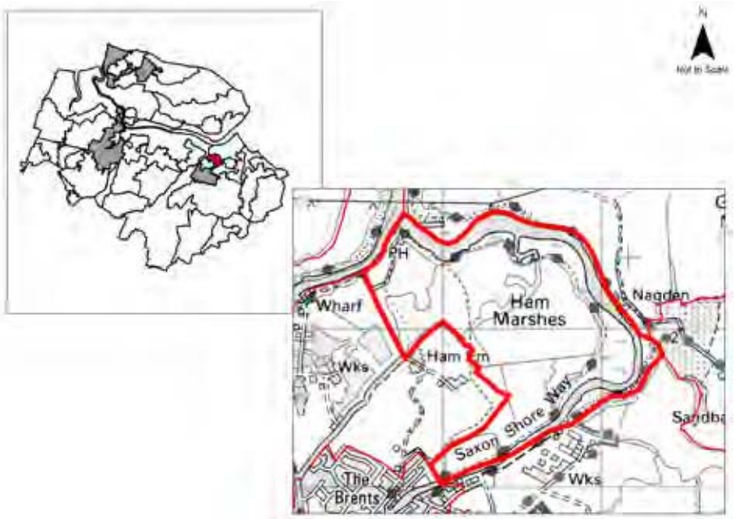
Note: Habitats (existing and potential) are only shown where they occur within the strategic network identified by the Kent Wildlife Trust's BOA mapping (see Figure 10 and Appendix C)

- Open water (inland) - existing
- Wetland - existing
- Wetland - potential
- Intertidal habitat - existing
- Grazing marsh - existing
- Grazing marsh & intertidal habitat- potential
- Species-rich neutral grassland - existing
- Species-rich neutral grassland - potential
- Acid grassland & heathland - existing
- Acid grassland & heathland - potential
- Chalk grassland - existing
- Chalk grassland - potential
- Ancient Woodland - existing
- Woodland - potential
- Character Areas
- Site of Special Scientific Interest
- Local Wildlife Sites



Biodiversity Opportunity Network
Graveney Marshes

6. Ham Marshes



Key Characteristics

- *Flat alluvial marshland with sinuous reed filled ditches. Traditional gates and fences prevent livestock crossing into other fields*
- *Large open landscape and dramatic skies*
- *Rough grassland used for cattle and sheep grazing*
- *Important wetland habitats*
- *Boats in the Swale and creeks*
- *Minor access lanes and footpaths*
- *Atmospheric and tranquil landscape with large open and often dramatic skies*

Condition: Good

Ham Marshes are an unspoilt landscape in good condition. It has a strongly unified landscape pattern with extensive meandering ditches and long unbroken views. Traditional features such as timber wing fencing at ditch crossing points are on the whole very well maintained. Vehicular access is very restricted and the marshes have as a result retained a very tranquil and remote nature.

Detracting features are limited to post and wire fencing used to supplement field enclosure, although the extensive views enable views of large pylons outside the character area where they cross Graveney Marshes. The ecological integrity of the area is strong. It is designated as SSSI/SPA for its importance to biodiversity and is in favourable condition. The saltwater creeks and freshwater ditches provide important and diverse habitats.

The cultural integrity of the area is relatively strong. Despite 20th century land drainage and flood defence, it maintains an essentially natural character and the single historic building is of traditional vernacular character.

Sensitivity: High

It is a highly sensitive landscape. Traditional farming practices maintain its very distinct character. The highly visible nature of this open area means that unnatural features would be incongruous and inappropriate.

Landscape Description

This is an extensive flat open area of unimproved fresh water grazing marsh. The geology is exclusively alluvial with tidal mudflats in Faversham and Oare Creeks. It is an extremely tranquil landscape with unrestricted panoramic views. Tree cover across the area is limited to occasional isolated groups of mature riparian species adjacent to buildings and along the boundary of adjacent arable fields. Scattered patches of scrub vegetation and isolated thorn bushes also feature.

The field pattern may be described as small-scale and divided by a combination of natural and man-made drainage ditches. The ditches are wide and in places lined with reeds. Elsewhere they are edged with grass and therefore not always obvious from a distance. Clumps of rush add texture to the vast grass levels.

The high levee that surrounds this marshland and additional man-made drainage ditches have been designed to prevent the area from flooding. Oare Creek and Faversham Creek enclose Ham Marshes and converge at its northern tip. They meander northwards from Faversham and meet in the north before joining the Swale. These are navigable waterways that become mudflats with a very narrow central channel at low tide.

The wide meandering banks of Faversham Creek are formed of tidal saltmarsh, an important and unique habitat. It is particularly interesting in terms of its bird life and their unique plant palette. These include varieties such as golden samphire, sea lavender and sea purslane. On the landward side of the levee grasses and many wild flowers are left to grow. The mudflats and tidal waterways of the Swale Estuary have an abundance of shellfish, worms and certain specialised plants.

The area is unsettled, but does contain a historic pub at Hollowshore that is built in an isolated position at the confluence of the two creeks. It is reached via a narrow, post and wire lined track that borders Ham Marsh. The pub is of traditional vernacular character and clad in white washed weatherboarding. Adjacent to the pub is pedestrian access to the public footpath that runs along the levee. Here, the maritime character is strongly enhanced by the presence and sounds of a large number of leisure craft.

Guidelines: Conserve

Guidelines for Ham Marshes focus on the long-term conservation.

- Consider the generic guidelines for marshland landscapes.
- Conserve the undeveloped and distinctive character of the marshland, to maintain the integrity of the wider North Kent Marshes.
- Conserve the landscape setting to Faversham and its landmark buildings and historic activity.

Condition	low	moderate	high
good	**REINFORCE**	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	**CONSERVE**
moderate	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
poor	**CREATE**	RESTORE & CREATE	**RESTORE**

Sensitivity

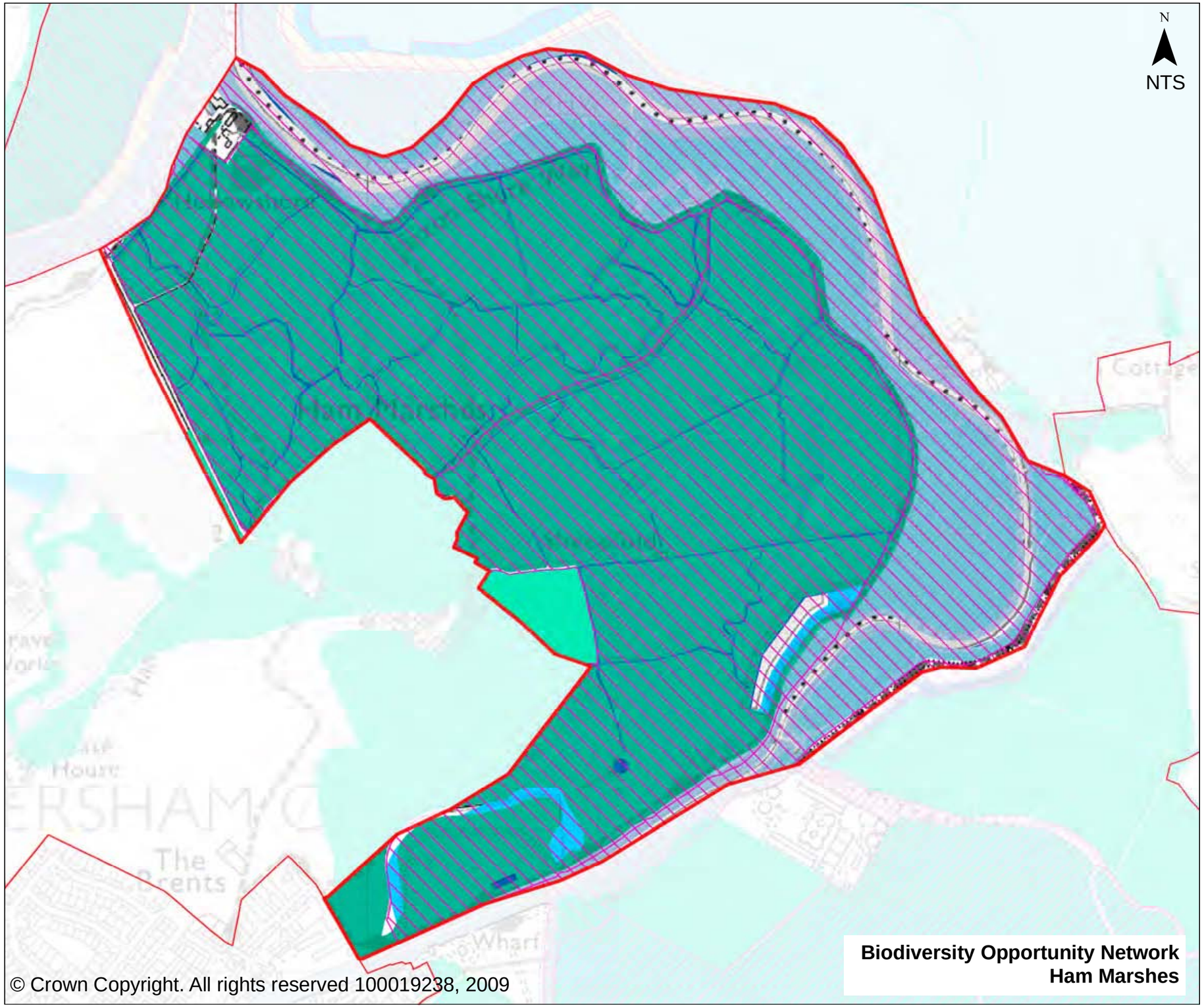
Biodiversity Network Opportunity

Ham Marshes' strategic habitat network consists mostly of existing grazing marsh and intertidal habitat which is designated as part of The Swale SSSI/SPA. This habitat is considered to be in favourable condition, and therefore the priority here is to conserve the existing interest in consultation with Natural England. The Shoreline Management Plan strategy for Ham Marshes is largely one of managed retreat, which means that the intertidal habitat of Faversham Creek may expand westwards in the future, replacing some of the freshwater grazing marsh.

Legend: Biodiversity Opportunity Network

Note: Habitats (existing and potential) are only shown where they occur within the strategic network identified by the Kent Wildlife Trust's BOA mapping (see Figure 10 and Appendix C)

- Open water (inland) - existing
- Wetland - existing
- Wetland - potential
- Intertidal habitat - existing
- Grazing marsh - existing
- Grazing marsh & intertidal habitat- potential
- Species-rich neutral grassland - existing
- Species-rich neutral grassland - potential
- Acid grassland & heathland - existing
- Acid grassland & heathland - potential
- Chalk grassland - existing
- Chalk grassland - potential
- Ancient Woodland - existing
- Woodland - potential
- Character Areas
- Site of Special Scientific Interest
- Local Wildlife Sites



Key Characteristics

- *Large open area of alluvial marshland*
- *Large-scale fields divided by long straight drainage ditches and post and wire fencing*
- *Typical features include creeks, ditches, counter and sea walls*
- *Capel Fleet*
- *Mixed agricultural land use*
- *Limited settlement along coastline and scattered farmsteads*
- *Atmospheric and tranquil landscape with large open and often dramatic skies*
- *Remote hamlet of Shellness overlooking a shell and shingle beach*

Landscape Description

This is a large open expanse of alluvial marshland situated between the higher ground of the Isle of Harty to the south and the gentle slopes of the agricultural farmlands to the north. It includes Eastchurch Marshes, Leysdown Marshes and Harty Marshes and the mudflats to low water mark.

Man's influence on these marshes is more marked than elsewhere reflecting that the marshes were well managed and maintained in early medieval times to support a considerable woollen trade exported to Europe through the staple port of Queenborough. Evidence includes larger scale fields, divided by long straight drainage ditches. Significant engineering works have been carried out so as to prevent flooding beyond Capel Fleet. This has included manipulation of the fleet and construction of sluice gates, pumps and counterwalls.

The land use is of mixed arable and improved grassland for grazing livestock. Further west there is a larger proportion of grazing meadow, where the marsh is managed in a less commercial manner, for the mutual benefit of biodiversity and grazing stock. Enclosure of fields is by post and wire fencing as well as ditches. Hedges are limited and fragmented where they exist and there are patches of scattered scrub. Generally there is an open and exposed feeling to the landscape, reinforced by the fact that the wire fencing is visually quite insignificant.

The area is relatively inaccessible with only one narrow lane, traversing the marsh en-route to the Isle of Harty. Elsewhere access is limited to tracks and footpaths. This provides the marsh with a sense of remoteness and a tranquil atmosphere, although its land use means that it is less wild in nature than the marshes to the west.

Interesting historic features present reinforce the character of the marsh. These include the counterwalls, which are a haven for biodiversity, the many small medieval mounds that indicate salt workings and the impressive Capel Fleet that formerly made the Isle of Harty just that. The Capel Fleet and a narrow band of adjacent grazing marsh in the centre of the area is designated for biodiversity, forming a narrow extension of the Swale SSSI/SPA. The inter-tidal zone to the east of this area is similarly designated.

Leysdown Country and Coastal Park looks out over the beach and extensive mudflats that appear at low water. Muswell Manor is noted as the clubhouse for some of the earliest aviators with many experimental flights from the flying ground at Shell beach between Leysdown and Shellness.

Condition: Good

The Leysdown and Eastchurch Marshes are in good condition. The natural and man-made features that make up the visual pattern are coherent with limited detracting features, such as post and wire fencing. The landscape is typically largely devoid of hedgerows, which helps to emphasise the open and exposed nature of the marsh. It is an area largely used for intensive cultivation and this does detract from the natural character of the landscape. Agricultural buildings are built outside the area on the higher ground to the north.

In common with many of the other marshland areas, the visual impact of buildings and industry outside of the character exert a negative influence. The prisons at Standford Hill dominate views to the east with large blocks of buildings and enclosures. At night the strong lighting contrasts with the relative darkness of the marshes.

Sensitivity: High

This is a highly sensitive landscape, largely because of the extensive visibility enabled by the flat and treeless landscape. There is plenty of evidence of modern influence over the landscape; this is largely limited to intensive arable land use. The sensitivity has increased to high from moderate as a result of the review because it was felt that, along with the high visibility, the lack of built development provokes a remote and tranquil character similar to other areas of marshland. Historic features are generally intact and maintained.

Guidelines: Conserve

Guidelines for the Leysdown and Eastchurch Marshes are to conserve remaining areas of grazing/saltmarsh.

- Consider the generic guidelines for marshland landscapes.
- Seek opportunities to restore coastal grazing marsh, wetland and/or intertidal habitat where intensive arable production currently exists.
- Conserve the undeveloped and distinctive character of the marshland, to maintain the integrity of the wider North Kent Marshes.

Condition	low	moderate	high
good	**REINFORCE**	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	**CONSERVE**
moderate	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
poor	**CREATE**	RESTORE & CREATE	**RESTORE**

Sensitivity

Biodiversity Network Opportunity

The habitat network map below illustrates that the majority of this area has extensive potential to restore grazing marsh and/or inter-tidal habitat, interspersed with species-rich grassland opportunity on drier ground and reed-swamp opportunity on wetter ground. This would compliment and significantly extend the designated habitats of grazing marsh and reed swamp running centrally through the character area along the Capel Fleet channel and to the east and west of this area.

The long term shoreline management policy of managed realignment along much of the area's coastline here may increase inter-tidal habitat at the expense of freshwater grazing marsh opportunity

Legend: Biodiversity Opportunity Network

Note: Habitats (existing and potential) are only shown where they occur within the strategic network identified by the Kent Wildlife Trust's BOA mapping (see Figure 10 and Appendix C)

- Open water (inland) - existing
- Wetland - existing
- Wetland - potential
- Intertidal habitat - existing
- Grazing marsh - existing
- Grazing marsh & intertidal habitat- potential
- Species-rich neutral grassland - existing
- Species-rich neutral grassland - potential
- Acid grassland & heathland - existing
- Acid grassland & heathland - potential
- Chalk grassland - existing
- Chalk grassland - potential
- Ancient Woodland - existing
- Woodland - potential
- Character Areas
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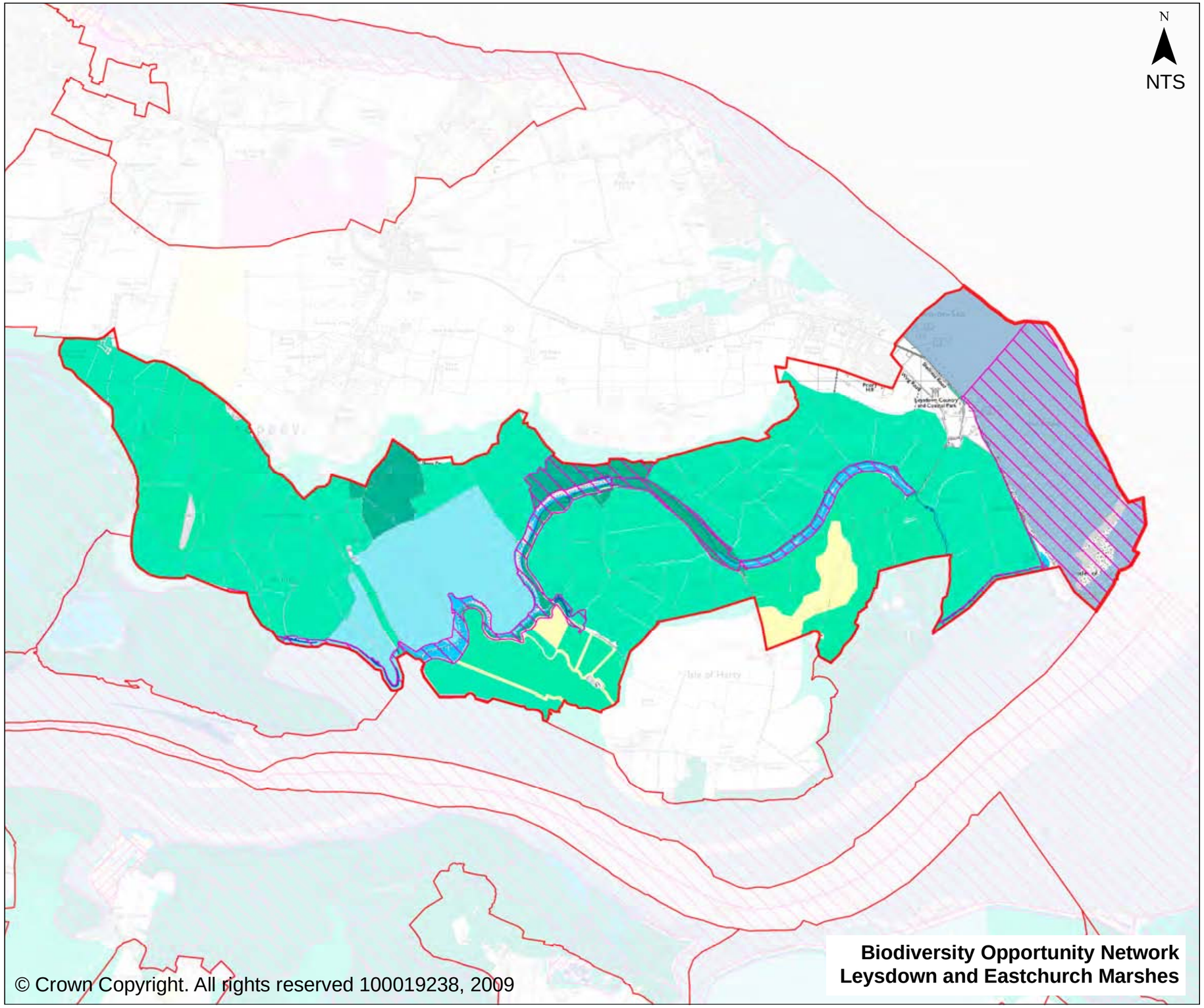
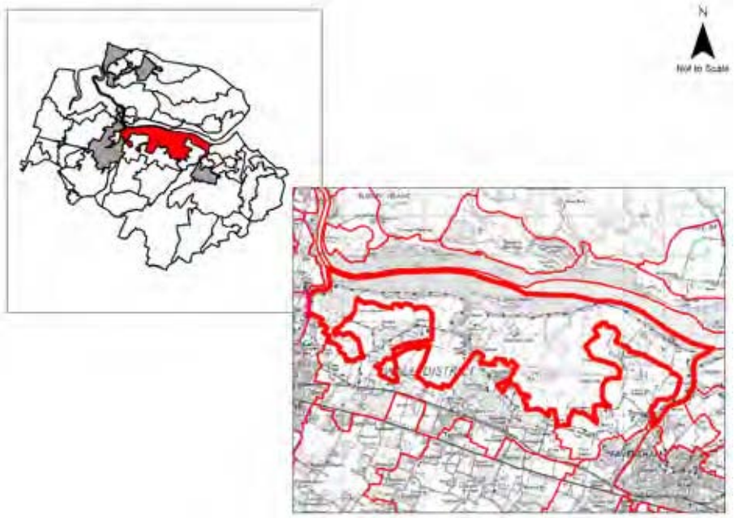
- Local Wildlife Sites





Key Characteristics

- *Flat alluvial marshland with sinuous reed filled ditches. Traditional gates and fences leading into ditches prevent cattle crossing into other fields*
- *Large open and often dramatic skies*
- *Rough grassland largely used for cattle and sheep grazing*
- *Important wetland habitats*
- *Access routes limited to Harty Ferry approach and Conyer*
- *Boats in the Swale and creek*
- *Large-scale landscape with little sense of enclosure*
- *Strong sense of place, remote and isolated*

Landscape Description

This is an extensive flat open area of unimproved fresh water grazing marsh. The geology is almost exclusively alluvial marshland with tidal mudflats in the creeks and the Swale. On the slightly elevated ground around Conyer the soils are a mixture of Woolwich beds, London clay and Oldhaven beds. It is a peaceful scene with views that are generally wide and unrestricted. Tree cover across the marshes is limited to occasional isolated patches of scrub vegetation.

To the rear of the sea wall, the field pattern may be described as small to medium-scale and divided by a combination of natural and man made drainage ditches. Evidence of historic flood control is seen in the fragmented earthworks that are scattered across the marsh. Like the other marshes in the Borough there is a remote and tranquil atmosphere to the marshes, which responds to changes in the weather, light and tides. For example, in summer, only the waters lapping against the sea wall interrupt the peaceful environment.

A number of significant waterways penetrate the marshlands in this area. Oare Creek meanders northwards away from Faversham and is unspoilt by development. Conyer Creek is located centrally extending southwards to Conyer village. This is an isolated settlement, its character strongly formed by its relationship with the sea, seen today in its quaysides and leisure boats which provide visual interest and the characteristic sound of the wind blowing through mast tackle and rigging. Most of the cottages date from the 19th century with 20th century infill. Recent private development along the creek side has taken greater consideration of local vernacular building style than has previously been the case. Here mixed brick and whitewashed town houses have been constructed in a traditional maritime style. At the Swale itself, sailing craft provide a graceful element in the landscape.

These marshes are rich in living history. Oare marshes are of particular interest, in that they contain the remains of the former marsh gunpowder works. The numerous small brick built sheds, which stand formally separated from one another in straight rows, are a unique and unscreened feature of this landscape. Adjacent to these buildings a narrow lane runs north from Oare to the Swale, where it abruptly stops at the top of the sea wall.•

Here is the former crossing point of the Harty Ferry, which for centuries transported passengers and goods across the Swale to the Isle of Sheppey. This is now recognised as an area of international significance for biodiversity and in particular birdlife and is designated as part of the Swale SSSI/SPA/Ramsar site. Adjacent to the SSSI which dominates the area, a small brownfield site known as Conyer Pits has been designated as a LWS. This supports a rich flora and is known for its invertebrate and bird interest.

Significant areas of the marsh north of Sittingbourne have been used for the extraction of gravel. This has created a series of ponds that are now recognised and protected as nature conservation areas. In the past at least one of the ponds was used as Oysters beds, a once important local industry.

With the exception of Conyer, the marshes are largely unsettled. There are notable exceptions however, around the scattered village of Luddenham, where traditional buildings include Luddenham Court dating from the 1500s but refaced during the Georgian period, oast houses dating from the 18th and 19th century and the now redundant St. Mary's church dating from the 12th century. Detached from this group but close by is another isolated farmhouse called Hawks and Beetles, which is timber framed and dates from the 15th century.

Condition: Good

The landscape is largely unspoilt and is considered to be in good condition. The vast isolated marshlands have a coherent visual unity, with extensive meandering ditches and long unbroken views. Traditional features such as timber bridges and wing fencing at ditch crossing points are on the whole very well maintained. Vehicular access is very restricted and the marshes have as a result retained a very tranquil and remote nature. Natural England have assessed the SSSI which covers most of this area as being in favourable ecological condition.

There are some detracting features and these include the enormous electricity pylons that march across the open marshland. Post and wire fencing used for field enclosure, is not always in good condition. Isolated animal barns and corrugated sheep pens are infrequent features in an otherwise unspoilt traditional scene.

The condition deteriorates in some of the western parts of the area towards Sittingbourne. Here there has been disturbance through previous gravel extraction and views of built development and industry in neighbouring areas has a negative impact

The condition of the built form is variable. Traditional buildings are generally well maintained and of vernacular character. In Conyer, twentieth century development has been less sensitive. However, recent development shows recognition of vernacular architectural style.

Sensitivity: High

This is a highly sensitive landscape. The marshland maintains its distinct character through traditional farming practices. Features within the landscape, although rare, are highly visible where they exist due to the flat and open nature of the land. The integrity of the majority of the marsh is not significantly affected by the distant views of industry and its coastal character is reinforced by boats, shipping and the decaying hulks of historic Thames craft in the mud.

The open nature of the landscape and the flat landscape make the marshes highly visually sensitive. There is a high degree of inter-visibility between the marshland and the surrounding landscape.

Guidelines: Conserve

Guidelines for Luddenham and Conyer Marshes focus on the long-term conservation of areas of international nature conservation importance.

- Consider the generic guidelines for marshland landscapes including seeking opportunities to restore coastal grazing marsh, wetland and/or intertidal habitat where intensive arable production currently exists.
- Conserve the undeveloped and distinctive character of the marshland, to maintain the integrity of the wider North Kent Marshes.
- Conserve the distinctive maritime, exposed and remote landscape character around marsh and creekside settlements.

Use local and vernacular materials appropriate to the location: for boundaries - red or yellow stock brick walls or hedgerows, for roofs - Kent-peg tiles and occasional slate and for building walls - weatherboarding, red or yellow stock brick and white painted/rendered brick, very occasional flint and ragstone, corrugated iron animal sheds. For vegetation – localised thorn and scrub across marshland and on the edges of the ditches. Reeds to ditches.

Condition	low	moderate	high
good	**REINFORCE**	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	**CONSERVE**
moderate	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
poor	**CREATE**	RESTORE & CREATE	**RESTORE**

Sensitivity

Biodiversity Network Opportunity

The majority of Luddenham and Conyer Marshes lies within part of the Swale SSSI/SPA and is in favourable condition. Therefore a strategy of conservation of existing habitats is appropriate here. However between and to the south of these designated areas, there is potential to extend the grazing marsh or intertidal network into non-designated land as shown in the map below. The shoreline management strategy here is largely one of managed retreat in response to climate induced sea level rises and future erosion. Therefore much of the existing grazing marsh may be replaced by inter-tidal habitat in the future. Any opportunities to create additional grazing marsh habitat inland would help to compensate for such changes

Legend: Biodiversity Opportunity Network

Note: Habitats (existing and potential) are only shown where they occur within the strategic network identified by the Kent Wildlife Trust's BOA mapping (see Figure 10 and Appendix C)

- Open water (inland) - existing
- Wetland - existing
- Wetland - potential
- Intertidal habitat - existing
- Grazing marsh - existing
- Grazing marsh & intertidal habitat- potential
- Species-rich neutral grassland - existing
- Species-rich neutral grassland - potential
- Acid grassland & heathland - existing
- Acid grassland & heathland - potential
- Chalk grassland - existing
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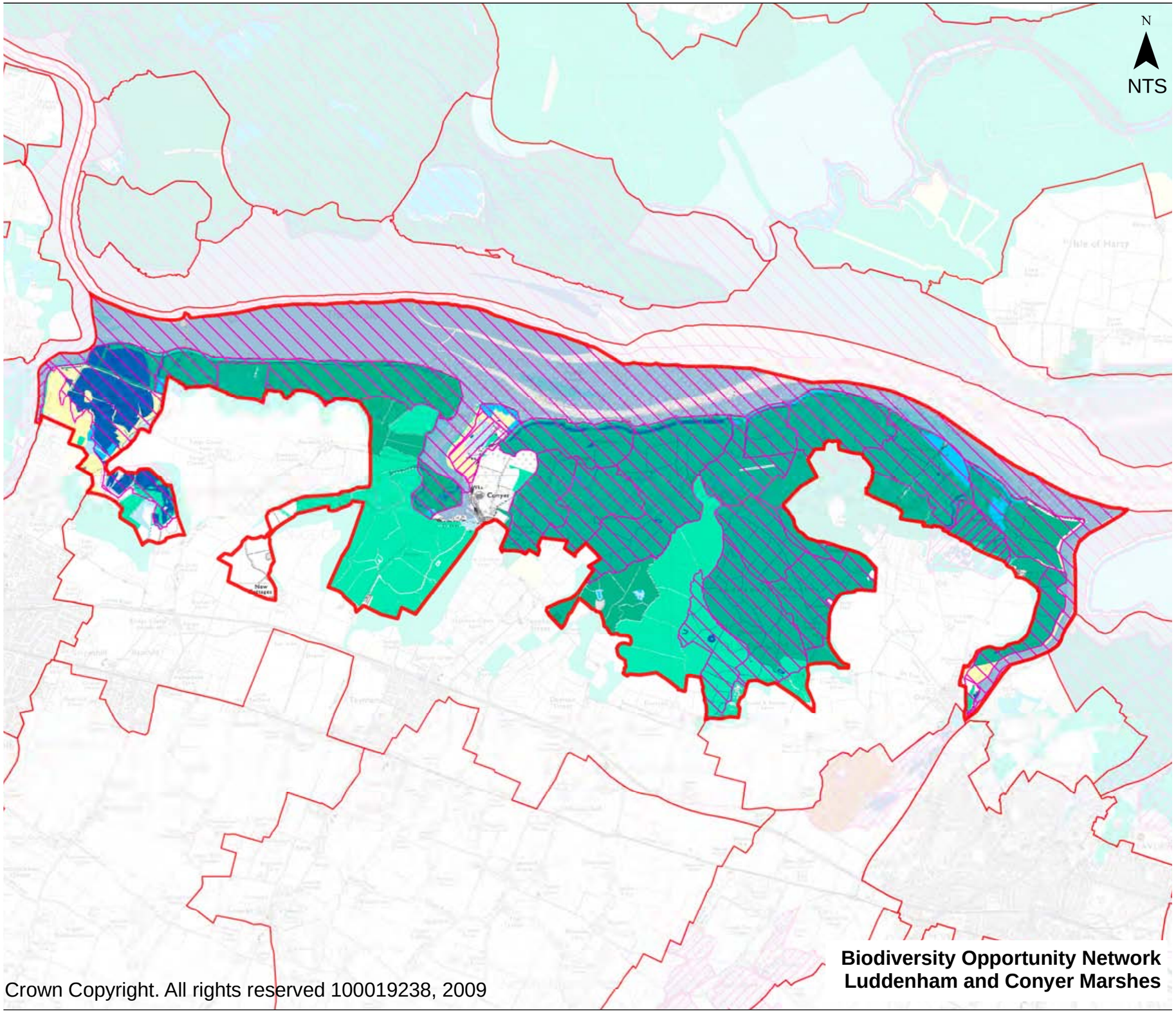
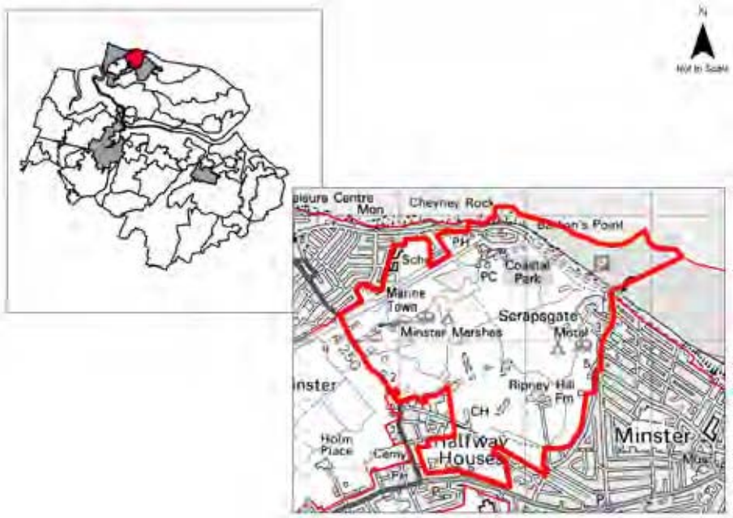
- Ancient Woodland - existing
- Woodland - potential
- Character Areas
- Site of Special Scientific Interest
- Local Wildlife Sites



Biodiversity Opportunity Network Luddenham and Conyer Marshes

9. Minster Marshes



Key Characteristics

- *Low lying alluvial marshland*
- *Generally flat but gently rises to the south east*
- *Long uninterrupted views*
- *Limited tree cover includes scattered mature standard poplars and willows as well as scattered blocks of scrub*
- *Small-scale irregular field pattern enclosed by sinuous drainage ditches*
- *Remnant marsh containing historic elements such as ditches, counterwalls and medieval salt mounds*
- *Abbey Rise is an important feature in the local landscape*
- *Important function of visually and physically separating Minster, Halfway and Sheerness*

Condition: Poor

Overall this landscape is in poor condition. Whilst the basic fabric of the traditional landscape is still largely present, the many disparate elements and lack of visual screening has greatly undermined the character of this area. Many conflicting recreational facilities create an incoherent character. A main road, chain link and post and wire fencing all assist in degrading the quality of the landscape.

Ecologically the area is relatively rich, since ditches are maintained, ponds and lakes have been developed and grassland habitats are managed in a variety of ways although in a different manner to traditional grazing.

The cultural integrity of the area has been largely undermined, with the influence of urban recreational facilities and their associated buildings, however, one isolated farmstead does still exist and the historic landscape features are largely intact.

Sensitivity: Moderate

The landscape has been degraded by the activities that it now supports and its proximity to the urban area. However it retains many qualities of the traditional marshlands, including its open and exposed nature. Visibility is high although views within the area are sometimes contained by development. Whilst visibility is high the marshes lack the scale and remote tranquil atmosphere of the rest of the North Kent Marshes. Hence they are considered to be indistinct and have a weak sense of place. When balanced against the high visibility the area is considered, overall, to be moderately sensitive.

The Minster Marshes are included within the North Kent Marshes Environmentally Sensitive Area and are locally designated for their nature conservation value. They form an important area of remnant habitat and open space, separating the urban areas of Sheerness and Minster but are under considerable pressure from these areas. They have limited capacity to absorb further development without further degradation of the marshland character.

Landscape Description

The rural landscapes to the north west of the island are low-lying alluvial marshlands. This landscape is generally flat but gently rises to the south east with the underlying London clay and forms a distinctive mound at Abbey Rise. The Minster Marshes lie to the east of the A250 and are quite different in character from some of the more remote surrounding Marshes. The flat terrain affords long views that are interrupted by urbanisation. The tree cover in this area is limited to scattered mature standard poplars and willows along the urban fringe and scattered blocks of mature scrub. The field pattern is largely irregular and small-scale, generally divided by sinuous drainage ditches. Close to the urban fringe field enclosure is more regular and on a smaller scale adjacent to Ripney Hill Farm and Halfway Houses.

This landscape is an area of remnant marshland, which retains elements of its original character, such as ditches, counterwalls and medieval salt mounds, but which is substantially affected by the urban and industrial land-uses that surround and contain it. The northern part of the area is designated as the Minster Marshes LWS and is notable for its grazing marsh, ponds, ditches and scrub habitats. The recreational facilities, holiday parks, industrial works and occasional large-scale agricultural sheds have a localised urbanising effect.

The Minster Marshes perform an important function in visually and physically separating the settlements of Minster, Halfway and Sheerness and provide a valuable area of remnant habitat and open space. To the north, the beach is shingle.

Abbey Rise is an important area of public open space that was created in association with the residential development of Scrapsgate Road. It represents one of the few areas of higher ground between Minster and Halfway, and as such is an important local feature.

Guidelines: Restore and Create

The Minster Marshes still strongly retain their open and undeveloped character, but they are in need of restoration and creation.

- Consider the generic guidelines for marshland landscapes.
- Protect, from further loss or visual/physical degradation and restore (including the creation of) traditional features, particularly characteristic scrub and trees (e.g. crack willows along ditches), together with their method of management (pollarding).
- Avoid changes to a more formalised grassland management that would be more associated with amenity/leisure use.
- Link lines of trees and areas of scrub woodland with native scrub planting so as to provide visual continuity and reduce the unnatural effect of isolated planting.
- Avoid proposals that can impinge on the sense of openness between otherwise developed areas or be unduly prominent on undeveloped rising ground or in locations that offer views across open low-lying land.

Condition	low	moderate	high
good	**REINFORCE**	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	**CONSERVE**
moderate	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
poor	**CREATE**	RESTORE & CREATE	**RESTORE**

Sensitivity

Habitat Network Potential

Minster Marshes contains extensive designated grazing marsh habitat which has potential for extension southwards around the golf course and eastwards near the chalet and caravan park. To the west within the holiday village there are smaller areas that have opportunity to add to a species-rich grassland network

Legend: Biodiversity Opportunity Network

Note: Habitats (existing and potential) are only shown where they occur within the strategic network identified by the Kent Wildlife Trust's BOA mapping (see Figure 10 and Appendix C)

- Open water (inland) - existing
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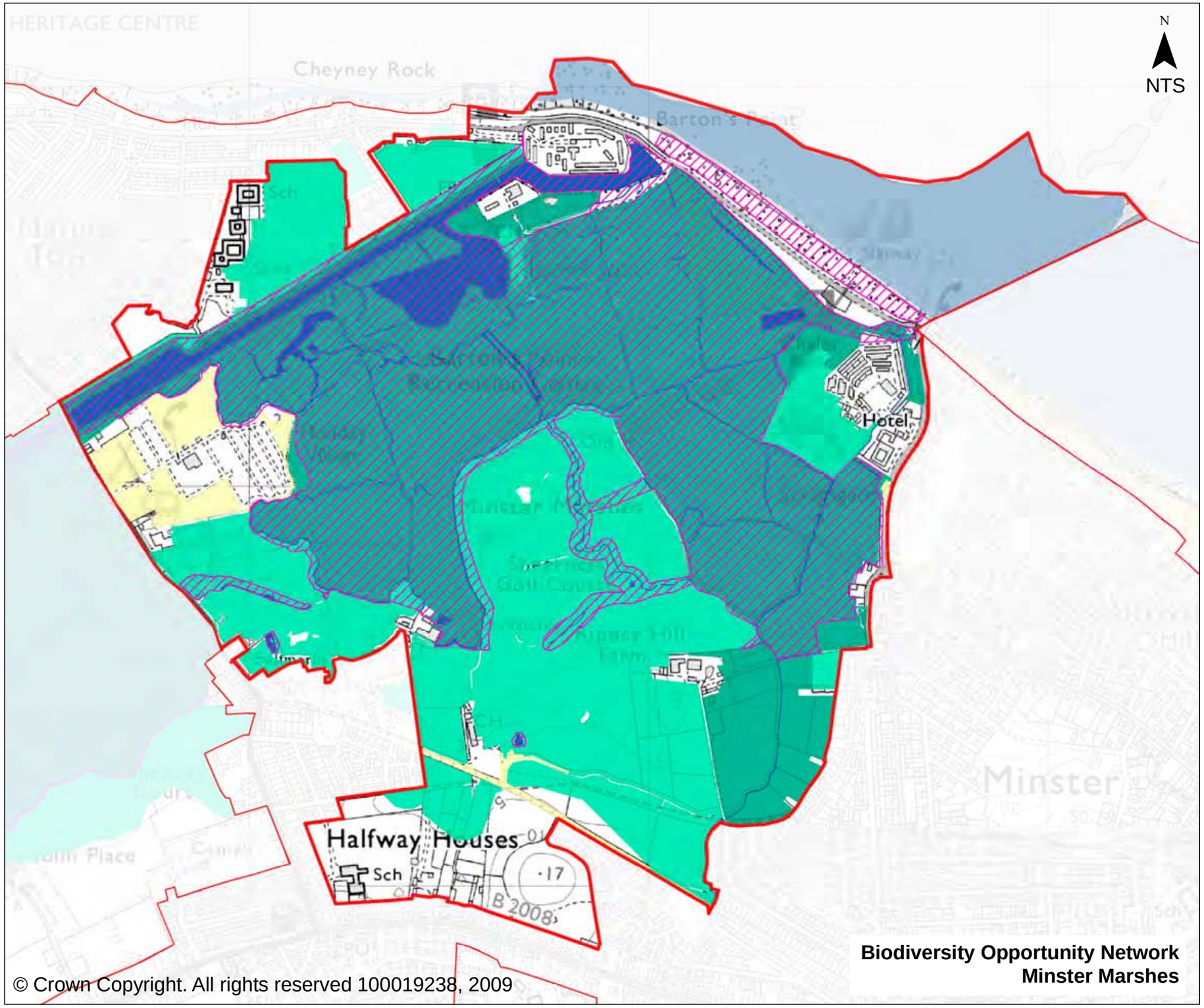
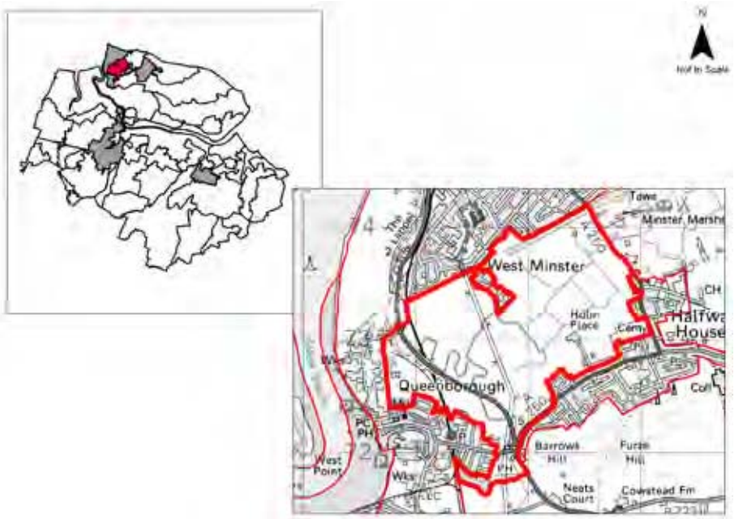


Biodiversity Opportunity Network
Minster Marshes



Key Characteristics

- *Flat open alluvial remnant marshland with urban fringe and industrial development at its margins*
- *Retains many typical marshland features including ditches, creeks and counterwalls*
- *An ecologically important habitat, part of the North Kent Marshes Environmentally Sensitive Areas*
- *Limited tree and scrub vegetation*
- *Long open views interrupted by major transportation routes and overhead cables that stretch across the natural landscape*
- *Important function of visually and physically separating Minster, Halfway and Sheerness*

Condition: Moderate

Overall this landscape is in moderate condition. Sheppey Court Marsh is in good condition and managed in the traditional way through grazing. It is strongly influenced by the urban fringe at its margins, where inappropriate materials such as post and wire fencing are used. Nevertheless it retains characteristic marshland features and is generally in good condition. By contrast the Diggs Marshes have suffered the effects of local industrial activity and urbanisation. The landscape in this area has been severely depleted by major transport routes, overhead transmission lines and large-scale industrial buildings.

Sensitivity: Moderate

Many of the traditional marshland features have been lost or overshadowed by introduced features which have reduced the distinctiveness of the area. The landscape sensitivity is moderate (rather than high like other marshland areas) because of the loss of traditional marshland features and the visual influence of the surrounding urban edges which weaken the sense of place. This confuses the area's identity and undermines its sense of place. Parts of the landscape have been greatly eroded over the latter half of the 20th century. Visibility is very high although interrupted in places by the road and railway embankments.

The area is included within the North Kent Marshes Environmentally Sensitive Area and is designated as a LWS for its nature conservation value. It forms an important area of remnant habitat and open space, separating the urban areas of Sheerness, Queenborough and Halfway, but is under considerable pressure from these areas. It has limited capacity to absorb further development.

Similar to the Minster Marshes, whilst visibility is high, the marshes lack the scale and the remote tranquil atmosphere of the rest of the North Kent Marshes. Hence they are considered to have weak sense of place. When balanced against the high visibility the area is considered, overall, to be moderately sensitive.

Landscape Description

This is an area of alluvial marshland that is largely flat but gently rises to the south east where the underlying London clay meets the alluvial soils. The Sheppey Court and Diggs Marshes are located to the west of the A250 and south of Sheerness. At its southern boundary the marsh meets the urban fringe of Queenborough and Halfway Houses. The flat terrain affords long views that are interrupted by the urban fringe and major transportation routes to the west.

This remnant marshland retains many elements of its original character but it substantially affected by adjacent urban and industrial land uses. These influences are most extreme at the western end of Diggs Marsh where roads, railways and pylons cross the marsh and peripheral housing and industry are very visually intrusive, dominating the marshland character. The A249 in particular provides a dominant severance through the Diggs Marshes to the west. Nevertheless the marsh still retains remnants of its former character, including features such as creeks and counterwalls and supports grazing animals, flora and fauna. Further east on the Sheppey Court Marshes the character is more typical of grazing marsh and less degraded. Much of the area is locally designated as the Diggs and Sheppey Court Marshes, Queenborough LWS.

Tree cover is limited to scattered mature standard poplars and willows along the urban fringe and scattered blocks of mature scrub. The field pattern is small to medium-scale and irregular in nature, generally divided by meandering drainage ditches. The area has an open and exposed nature with extensive long views, foreshortened only by the transport embankments and urban edge. From within, the Sheppey Court Marshes have a tranquil and isolated character.

Like the Minster Marshes the Sheppey Court and Diggs Marshes perform an important function in visually and physically separating the settlements of Minster and Sheerness.

Guidelines: Conserve and Create

Sheppey Court and Diggs Marshes retain much of their former character that should be conserved, with the marshland character extended by the creation of new areas.

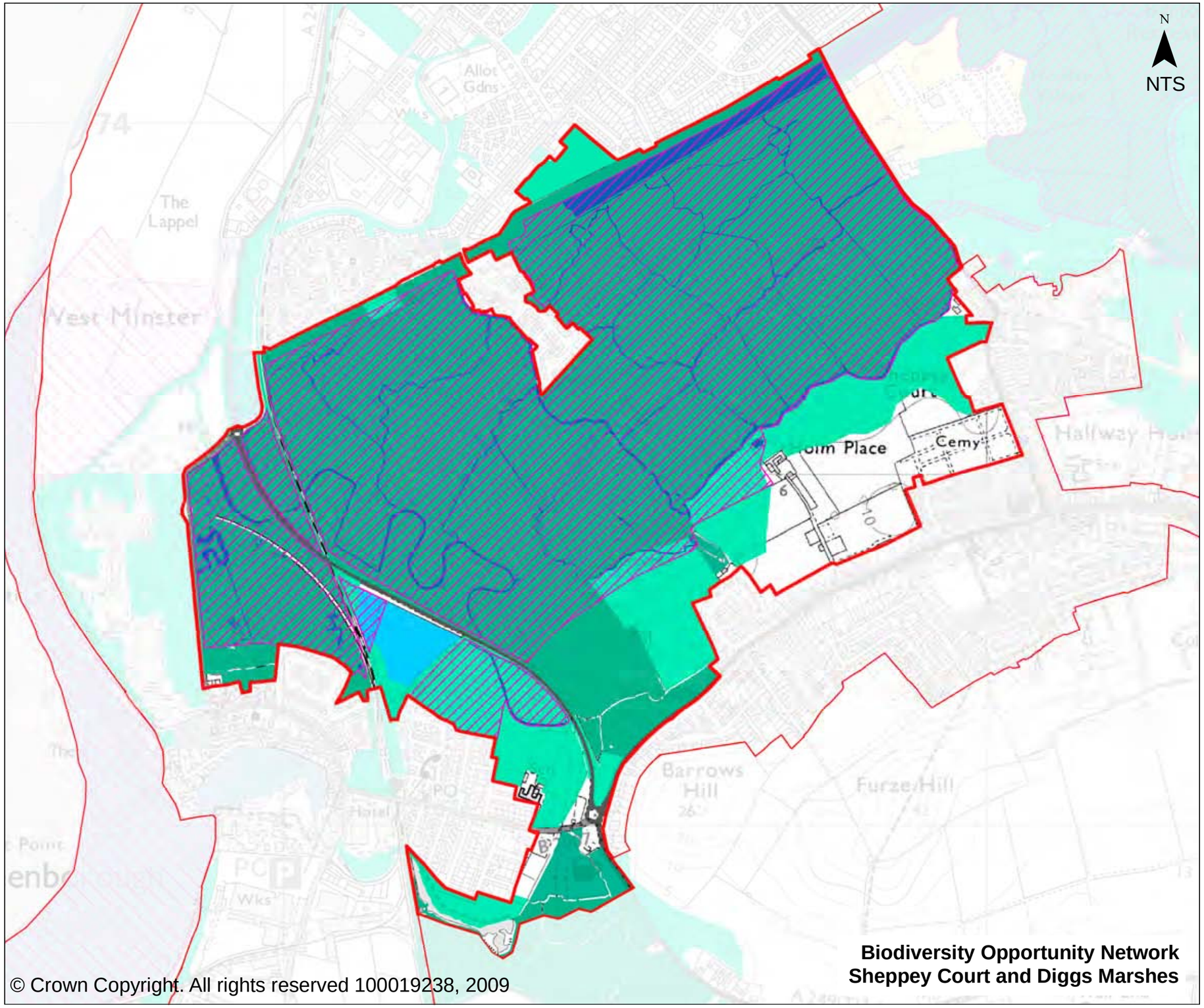
- Consider the generic guidelines for marshland landscapes and seek opportunities to restore coastal grazing marsh, wetland and/or intertidal habitat where intensive arable production currently exists.
- Avoid proposals that would impinge on the sense of undeveloped openness between otherwise developed areas.

Condition	low	moderate	high
good	**REINFORCE**	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	**CONSERVE**
moderate	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
poor	**CREATE**	RESTORE & CREATE	**RESTORE**

Sensitivity

Biodiversity Network Opportunity

The vast majority of Sheppey Court and Diggs Marshes comprises existing grazing marsh which has been locally designated. Therefore conservation and enhancement of the existing habitat resource is the key strategy here. There is some potential to create or restore more of this habitat southwards but this potential may be limited by rising ground.



Legend: Biodiversity Opportunity Network

Note: Habitats (existing and potential) are only shown where they occur within the strategic network identified by the Kent Wildlife Trust's BOA mapping (see Figure 10 and Appendix C)

- Open water (inland) - existing
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- Chalk grassland - existing
- Chalk grassland - potential
- Ancient Woodland - existing
- Woodland - potential
- Character Areas
- Site of Special Scientific Interest
- Local Wildlife Sites

11. South Sheppey Saltmarshes and Mudflats

Key Characteristics

- *Vast, atmospheric and tranquil landscape with large, open and often dramatic skies, with extensive uninterrupted panoramic views*
- *Alluvial soils on land, tidal mudflats and marine beaches in estuary*
- *Sea walls form the only man made element within the landscape*
- *Unique flora and fauna specially adapted to harsh environmental conditions*
- *Vegetation limited to coarse, hummocky groundcover in rusty browns, green and pink*
- *Largely unsettled with limited pedestrian access*

Landscape Description

South Sheppey Saltmarshes and Mudflats are a vast and complex area of varied character. They are a remote, open, flat landscape extending the entire length of the southern Sheppey coastline and isolated from the adjacent freshwater marshlands by the substantial sea walls that have been built to prevent inundation. From the sea walls vast panoramic views extend over the Swale to the mainland.

The saltmarshes are formed of alluvial soils and beyond this the Swale Estuary contains tidal mudflats and marine beaches. The character area extends to the low tide mark. It is a natural and unique environment forming part of the internationally important Swale SSSI/SPA/ Ramsar site. Shellness National Nature Reserve, located at the eastern end of the area is managed specifically for nature conservation. South of Elmley Marshes a second supplementary counterwall has been built around the promontory located between Sharfleet Creek and Wellmarsh Creek. Here ditches have been widened to form a canalised waterway thus facilitating habitat diversification. Elsewhere the saltmarshes remain unmanaged.

Raised hummocky outcrops of roughly textured, low growing, brown and green vegetation sit proud of the many mud-lined meandering ditches that divide up the marsh. It is a bleak, unique and inaccessible landscape. Saltmarsh plants such as lavender and golden samphire add a splash of colour in late summer.

The saltmarsh provides a nesting site for a large colony of black headed gulls and a few pairs of common terns and the Swale Estuary is home to thousands of waders. During spring and summer the site supports one of the largest concentrations of breeding waders in lowland Britain. Short eared owls and hen harriers hunt the unmanaged banks of the sea walls. The mudflats and tidal waterways of the Swale Estuary team with shellfish and worms.

The hamlet of Shellness, which sits above the east facing shell and shingle beach, is noteworthy. It is a unique and remote settlement at the most south eastern tip of Sheppey. The buildings are small bungalows in mixed styles dating from the mid 20th century. Access is via a poorly maintained unmade road, which adds to its isolation. In summary this is an area of considerable ornithological, botanical and entomological importance.

Condition: Good

The condition of this landscape is good. There are few if any detracting features and the view is one of a strongly unified unmanaged marshland. In terms of cultural integrity it is a traditional landscape that has been unspoilt by external influences. Ecologically it is an important, extensive and unique character area containing specially adapted plant and animal life. Natural England have recorded this area as being in favourable condition for biodiversity conservation.

Whilst there are few detracting features within this area, views of development in neighbouring areas have a significant impact due to the open nature of the landscape. Industry to the north of Sittingbourne is particularly intrusive.

Sensitivity: High

This is a highly sensitive area. This historic landscape has remained unchanged despite the drainage of adjacent marshlands. It provides a valuable environment for many specially adapted species that could not survive elsewhere. It is a highly sensitive landscape that is unsheltered and highly visible from long distances.

Guidelines: Conserve

Guidelines aim to encourage the long-term conservation of areas of international nature conservation importance and its strong landscape character.

- Consider the generic guidelines for marshland landscapes.
- Conserve the undeveloped and distinctive character of the marshland, to maintain the integrity of the wider North Kent Marshes.
- Respect the character and intimate small-scale nature of Shellness when considering proposals for replacement or changes to the existing buildings.

Condition	low	moderate	high
good	**REINFORCE**	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	**CONSERVE**
moderate	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
poor	**CREATE**	RESTORE & CREATE	**RESTORE**

Sensitivity

11. South Sheppey Saltmarshes and Mudflats

Biodiversity Network Opportunity

South Sheppey Saltmarshes and Mudflats is entirely designated as a SSSI and SPA and therefore the strategic priority is to conserve the existing inter-tidal interest here in liaison with Natural England. Much of the shoreline here has been allocated a strategy of managed retreat in the local Shoreline Management Plan, and therefore a general expansion or migration of intertidal habitat inland may be significant in the future.

Legend: Biodiversity Opportunity Network

Note: Habitats (existing and potential) are only shown where they occur within the strategic network identified by the Kent Wildlife Trust's BOA mapping (see Figure 10 and Appendix C)

- Open water (inland) - existing
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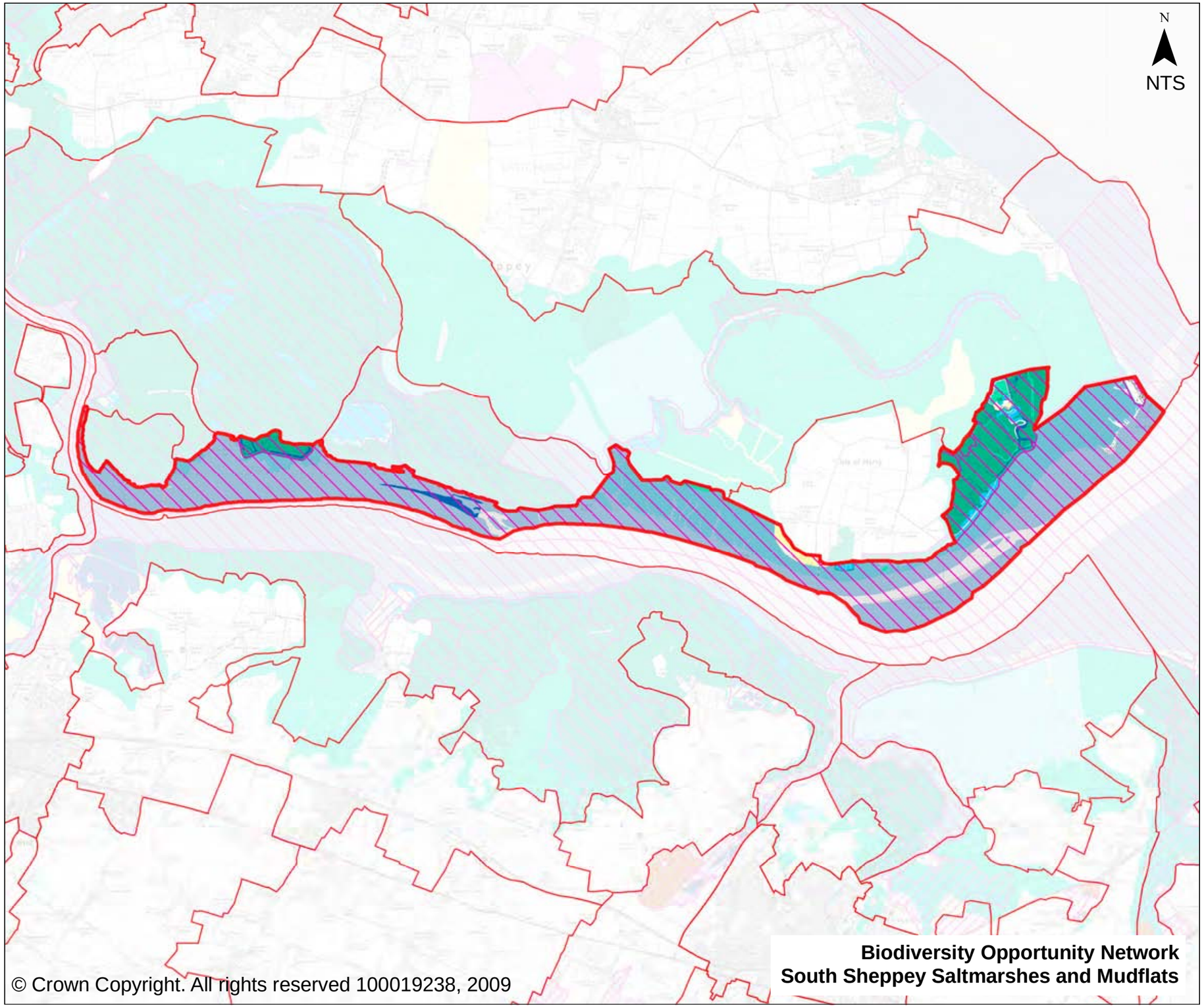
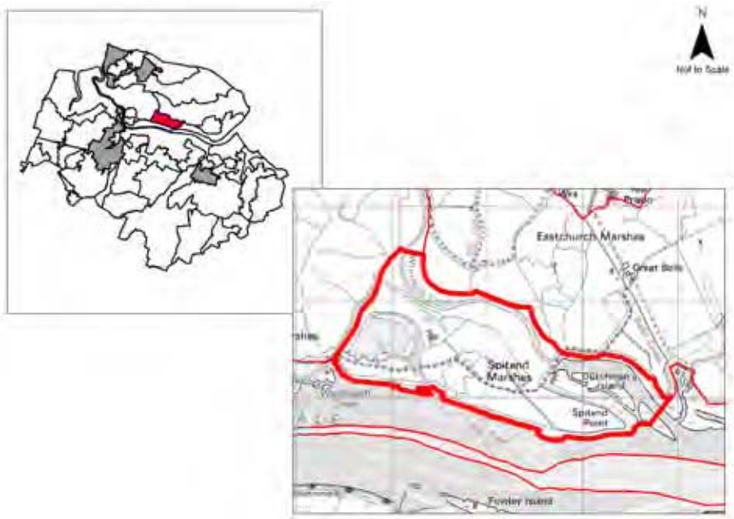




Key Characteristics

- *Flat open marshland with long views to north and south*
- *Network of counterwalls, sea walls, fleets and ditches cross the reserve*
- *Salt and freshwater marsh*
- *Management practices used to diversify landscape for the promotion of biodiversity*
- *Landscape enclosed by irregular pattern of ditches, evident by the straw coloured vegetation*
- *Atmospheric and tranquil landscape with large open and often dramatic skies*

Condition: Good

The condition of Spitend Marshes is good. There are few, if any, detracting features and the view is one of a unified managed marshland. The functional integrity is very strong with favourable management practices currently being undertaken for the promotion of biodiversity.

The cultural integrity of the area is good, with perhaps the only detracting features being the post and wire fencing. All other features are in good condition and well maintained.

Views out from the marshes to the south are marred by industry south of the Swale particularly at Ridham and Kemsley.

Sensitivity: High

This is a unique, very distinct and tranquil landscape that is highly visible from long distances. Only the counterwalls provide some sense of enclosure and foreshorten views locally. It is an extremely sensitive landscape, reflected by its biodiversity designations.

Landscape Description

Spitend Marshes is a remote, open, flat landscape enclosed by a network of counterwalls and sea walls. It is managed for nature conservation purposes as the Elmley Marshes Nature Reserve and contains a wealth of internationally important habitats reflected in its designation as part of The Swale SSSI/SPA/Ramsar Site. As well as a large area of open water, Elmley Fleet and Windmill Creek are two wide waterways that cut across the reserve and drain into the Swale. Between the network of creeks, fleets and counterwalls, are areas of traditional grazing marsh as well as a large central area with many small irregular ditches and ponds. Beyond the sea wall, to the east, is Dutchman's Island and Flanders Mare these are saltmarsh and of a very different nature to the freshwater marshes.

The bunding of the counterwalls provides a sense of enclosure locally, but there is still an overriding feeling of openness and exposure as you look north across the vast expanse of marshland beyond. It has a unique and tranquil character. Here, as elsewhere on the marsh, the enclosure pattern is irregular and dictated by the winding drainage channels. The typical marshland features include winged fences that tilt into the drainage channels, rough grassland and saltmarsh vegetation, reed-filled ditches, grazing animals and wetland birds. Other features include benches and timber clad stilted bird hides, overlooking the open water areas.

The site is home to thousands of wildfowl and waders and an important nesting ground for many birds in the summer. During spring and summer the site supports one of the largest concentrations of breeding waders in lowland Britain. Avocets prefer the flooded lagoons whilst short-eared owls and hen harriers hunt the ungrazed banks of the sea walls.

Grazing is essential to maintain grass of the correct height for birds such as the lapwing. Ditches that criss-cross the marsh are home to dragonflies, water voles and marsh frogs.

Beyond the sea wall, saltmarsh provides a nesting site for a large colony of black-headed gulls and a few pairs of common terns. The character of the saltmarsh is visually quite different from the grazing marsh found elsewhere. Raised hummocky outcrops of low growing brown and green vegetation sit proud of the many mud-lined ditches that divide up the marsh. It is a bleak, unique and inaccessible landscape. Saltmarsh plants such as lavender and golden samphire add a splash of colour in late summer.

In summary this is an area with a mosaic of habitats, of considerable ornithological, botanical and entomological importance. It is protected as an SSSI, SPA and NNR and is a wetland of international significance under the Ramsar Convention.

Guidelines: Conserve

Guidelines for Spitend Marshes aim to encourage the continued conservation of the strong landscape character.

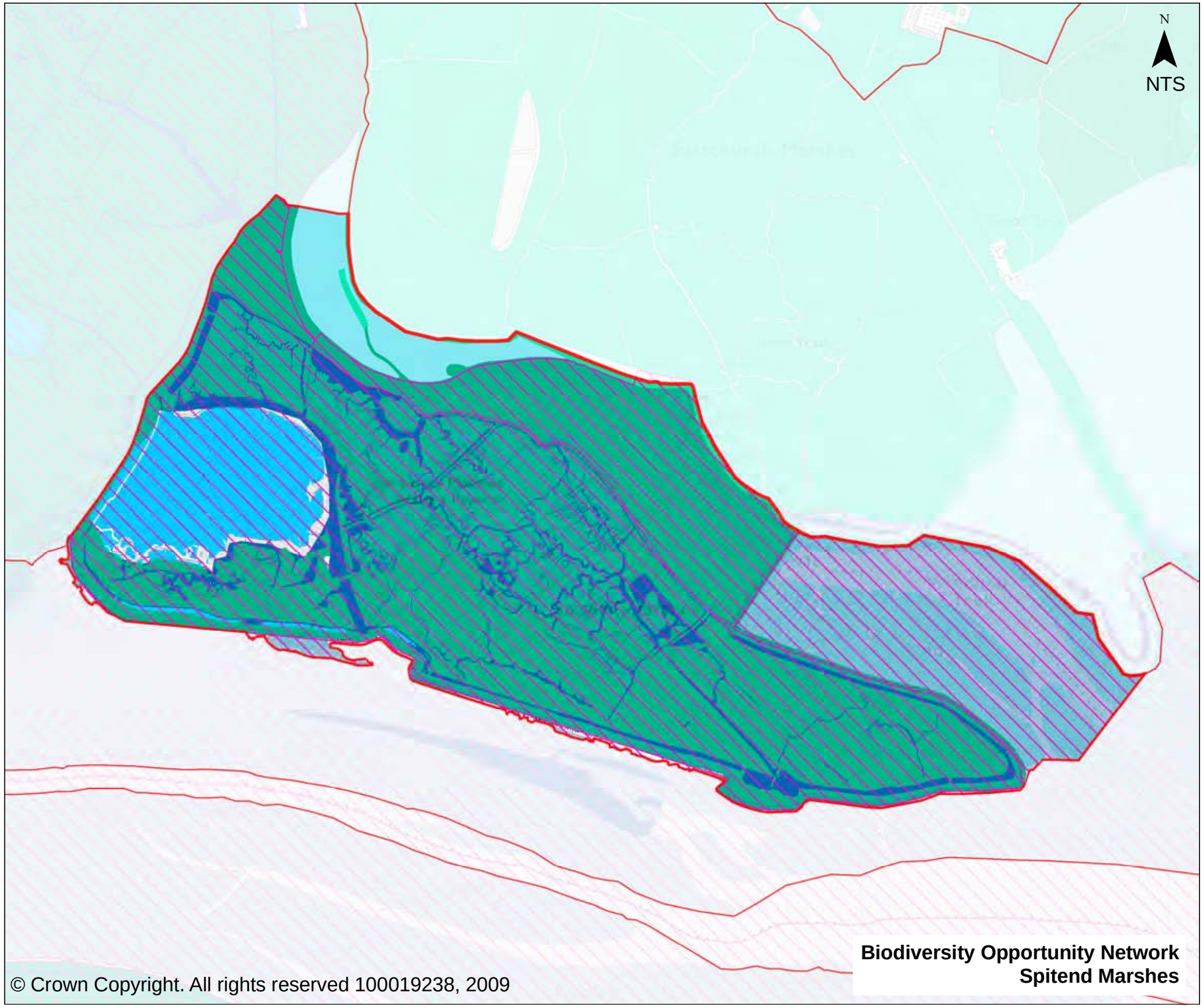
- Consider the generic guidelines for marshland landscapes.
- Conserve the undeveloped and distinctive character of the marshland, to maintain the integrity of the wider North Kent Marshes.
- Avoid proposals that would result in the accumulation of small-scale incongruous elements such as signs and hides to prevent them from becoming detracting features.

Condition	low	moderate	high
good	**REINFORCE**	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	**CONSERVE**
moderate	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
poor	**CREATE**	RESTORE & CREATE	**RESTORE**

Sensitivity

Biodiversity Network Opportunity

Most of this important area is designated as SSSI, SPA and Ramsar due to the mosaic of grazing marsh and wetland habitats which accommodate large assemblages of birds and other wildlife. Therefore the most appropriate strategy here is one of conservation of the existing interest in liaison with Natural England.



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