

Swale Borough Council

Swale Landscape Assessment Recommended Amendments to Landscape Designations

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0007390 24/07/2003

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1.0 Review Of Special Landscape Area Boundary

Introduction and Background

As part of the Swale Borough landscape appraisal the three Special Landscape Area (SLA) boundaries that are found within the Borough of Swale have been reviewed. These are the North Kent Marshes SLA, the North Downs SLA and the Blean Woods SLA.

Within Swale Borough the North Kent Marshes SLA boundary can be described as being a northern and southern boundary. The northern boundary stretches from Burnwick Island in the west to Leysdown in the east. The southern boundary review area runs from Upchurch in the west to Graveney in the east. The SLA area stretches across the marshes and The Swale.

The North Downs SLA review area stretches from Farthing Corner in the west to Rhode Common in the east; the northern boundary generally following the line of the M2 motorway and the southern boundary following the line of the Borough boundary.

The western boundary of the Blean Woods SLA, is the boundary between Dargate in the north and Rhode Common in the south.

The approach for the Special Landscape Area review is based on the following general methodology:

- An analysis of the Special Landscape Area criteria in place when the designation was established, together with a review of previous amendments to the SLA.
- A character based assessment to establish the natural character areas abutting and spanning the Special Landscape Area boundaries, together with an assessment of the quality of the landscape.

When reviewing the three Special Landscape Areas judgements have been made using a methodology drawn up from the analysis of the developed SLA criteria and the Countryside Agency's current guidance on landscape character assessment.

In its Landscape Character Assessment Guidance 2002, the Countryside Agency state that when defining special or designated landscapes:

'Judgements must be based on a range of different considerations. The key considerations are natural beauty, recreational opportunity and amenity. This combination of terms covers the physical landscape, but also the less tangible aspects such as remoteness or tranquillity and aspects of landscape experience which appeal to senses other than sight, such as the sound or smell of the sea.'

When judging whether an area requires special status the concept of landscape value should be considered. This refers to the relative value that stakeholders attach to different landscapes and their reasons for valuing them. The reasons may include landscape quality, scenic quality, rarity, representativeness, conservation interests, wildness associations and tranquillity.

It should be remembered that character and value are separate concepts, so character area boundaries may coincide with designation boundaries, but they do not have to and in many instances do not.

It is therefore not thought to be appropriate to base designation boundaries on character assessment alone. Judgements made on the character areas that abut or span the SLA boundary will consider the qualitative criteria used to define the SLA boundary in addition to identifying the most sensitive landscapes and those that are in good condition.

2.0 Literature Review

Introduction

Since its inception in the 1980's the concept of designating Special Landscape Areas has been gradually refined and updated in the light of changing methodologies of landscape characterisation and evaluation.

In order for this review of the three SLA boundaries to be consistent with the aims and objectives of the designation and with the latest guidance from the Countryside Agency the following background documents have been reviewed.

- The Kent Countryside Plan: Report of Survey and Issues 1980
- The Kent Countryside Plan: Written Statement 1983
- Review of the Special Landscape Areas In Kent 1993
- Blean Woods and Great and Little Stour Valleys Landscape Appraisal 2001
- Landscape Character Assessment Guidance for England and Scotland 2002

The Kent Countryside Plan: Report of Survey and Issues 1980 and Written Statement 1983

The North Kent Marshes, Blean Woods and North Downs SLAs were originally designated in the Kent County Council Subject Plan on Countryside (The Kent Countryside Plan) in recognition of their value as landscapes of strategic significance. The Kent Countryside Plan (Report of Survey and Issues 1980) discusses the methodology chosen to broadly define the SLA's that are described as areas not nationally designated as Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB's) but which are:

- Areas of Kent Countryside that are scenically important in a countywide context.

The extent of the scenically important areas was defined using a quantitative technique. For some landscape types where the flat open character or the 'lack of diversity' in the landscape resulted in clearly erroneous results, a non quantitative and more subjective technique was used to define the extents of the areas with "a unique 'special' character". In the case of the North Kent Marshes and Blean Woods SLA's the lack of diversity meant that the non-quantitative technique was employed.

Appendix 1 of the Report of Survey discusses boundary definition and states that

- Only clearly defined, stable physical features, which appear on the OS 1:50,000 base should be adopted for this purpose.

The Countryside Plan (Written Statement 1983) outlines the originally adopted limits of the three Special Landscape Areas and defines them as:

North Kent Marshes SLA

- 'Coastal marshes of the Thames, Medway and Swale that extend from Gravesend in the west to Seasalter in the east. The largest tract of undeveloped land in the County, combining an open landscape, a quality of remoteness and high scientific value.'

The plan also highlights the following factors:

- Extensive areas are notified as Sites of Special Scientific Interest or are Nature Reserve
- Nature conservation and landscape interests

- West and East Swale used for water recreation and quiet water anchorages
- Much of the coastline defined as Undeveloped Coast

North Downs SLA

- 'The prominent North Downs escarpment together with the chalk scenery of the dip slope and dry valleys to the north and the rising foreground to the south'
- Largely an area of outstanding and unspoilt scenic quality
- Considerable wildlife interest

Blean Woods SLA

- 'The belt of woodland which extends from west of Canterbury to Herne and includes both the woodland blocks and more open countryside which surrounds and intersperses them, acting as foreground.'
- One of the few heavily wooded areas in Kent
- Ancient woodland character
- Considerable wildlife interest

Review Of Special Landscape Areas In Kent 1993

In its final report of 1993, Cobham Resource Consultants reviewed the existing landscape designations within the county through a strategic level assessment of the landscape character and quality of SLA designated areas and non-designated areas.

The 1993 report recommended that the following criteria should be applied in the assessment of SLA's, summarised as follows:

- A landscape resource of at least county importance for reasons of rarity, representativeness, or variety.
- Of high scenic quality
- Generally unspoilt
- Have topographic and visual unity and a clear sense of place
- Have historical, wildlife or architectural conservation interests.
- A consensus of professional and public opinion, e.g. as reflected through painting and writings.

The North Kent Marshes

The report identifies the characteristics of the North Kent Marshes as summarised below:

- Flat open landscapes sited on alluvial or marine deposits and characterised by dykes, mudflats, reed beds and huge skies.
- Have a very distinctive exposed character.
- Much of the area is designated as SLA.

North Kent Marshes SLA is described as summarised below:

- Has a special and unusual character, which is rare in the county and national context.
- Characteristically wild, untamed and remote.
- Highly valued by many members of the public.
- An area unspoilt, although it is seen against a backdrop of industry across the Thames and at the Isle of Grain.
- The marshes themselves are of national or indeed international wildlife interest.
- Notwithstanding the visual intrusion from outside the area, the marshes special landscape interest is fairly clear.

North Downs

The report identifies the North Downs as:

- Chalk, with extensive drift deposits of clay with flints on most areas except the scarp face and dry valleys of the dip slope.
- Almost all is designated AONB or SLA
- Long distance views from scarp to north and south
- Scarp woodland serves to emphasise landform
- Areas of open chalk grassland on crest of scarp
- Strong blocks of woodland, coppice and hedgerows
- Dominated by oak, sweet chestnut and hazel
- Mixed pasture and arable land

North Downs SLA is described as:

- Escarpment probably the most striking feature of the county
- Scarp face woodland and grasslands chalk landscapes of national conservation interest
- Area of recreational value
- Fringing SLA areas valuable in providing setting for major towns

Blean Woods

The report identifies the Blean Woods as:

- A mainly woodland area, on London Clay north of Canterbury
- Much of the area is designated SLA
- Low rolling ridgelines tending SW to NE
- Heavy acid soils which are difficult to work
- Hornbeam and oak coppice with chestnut
- Small areas of pasture and arable land within the woodland

Blean Woodland SLA is described as summarised below:

- One of the few remaining heavily wooded parts of Kent
- Includes ancient and well managed woodland and wood pasture
- Close proximity to the sea creates a distinctive sense of place
- Designation based primarily on the unspoilt woodland character, unique in Kent.

The report infers that the North Kent Marshes, North Downs and Blean Woods SLAs are confirmed as meeting the majority of the criteria set out in the report as appropriate for SLA designation and the report raises no reservations about the designation.

The report also concludes that:

- A large increase in the SLA designated areas could devalue designation and could lead to increased pressure on undesignated countryside.

The work informed the 3rd Review of the Structure Plan, which introduced Policy ENV4:

‘Special Landscape Areas are defined as follows:

The local planning authority will provide long term protection for these areas through local plans and development control and will give priority to the conservation and enhancement of the natural beauty of the landscape over other planning considerations, whilst having due regard to the economic and social well being of the area. The detailed boundaries of the SLA will be defined through the local plan process.’

Landscape Character Assessment Guidance for England and Scotland 2002

The Countryside Agency and Scottish Natural Heritage produced the latest national guidance in 2002 and its recommended methodologies have been used to assess the SLA boundary.

The document provides up to date guidance on the criteria and methodology to be adopted where a landscape needs to be designated or recognised as having special value. The Countryside Agency confirms that designation has been a key plank of landscape conservation and management. The document identifies several criteria, which can be used in the identification of a valued landscape as set out below:

Criteria used in the identification of valued landscapes

Natural beauty Encompasses flora, fauna, geological and physiographical features.

Recreational opportunity Opportunities afforded for open-air recreation having regard both to landscape character and position in relation to centres of population.

Landscape quality Is based on judgements about the physical state of the landscape, and about its intactness, from visual, functional and ecological perspectives. It also reflects the state of repair of individual features and elements which make up the character in any one place.

Scenic quality The term that is used to describe landscapes that appeal primarily to the visual senses.

Rarity The presence of rare features and elements in the landscape, or the presence of a rare landscape character type.

Representativeness Whether the landscape contains a particular character and/or features and elements which are felt, by stakeholders to be worthy of representing.

Conservation interests The presence of features of particular wildlife, earth science or archaeological, historical and cultural interest can add to the value in their own right.

Wildness The presence of wild character in the landscape that makes a particular contribution to sense of place.

Associations With particular people, artists, writers or other media, or events in history.

Tranquillity In addition to these landscape related criteria 'tranquillity' is a composite feature related to low levels of built development, traffic, noise and artificial lighting.

These criteria can be used at a national or more local scale to identify landscapes that are highly valued and may be candidates for some form of designation or recognition. They can be used either individually or in combination.

One or more criteria can be used to select a broad area of search and boundaries can then be determined by assessing the character and quality of the landscape that should or should not be included.

3.0 Methodology

In producing a methodology for assessing the boundary of the SLA a desktop study of the documents as set out above has been carried out and the latest guidance from the Countryside Agency is employed. The designated area was examined in the field as part of the character area study in order to assess each parcel of land. The methodology is developed as follows:

Definition of the Special Landscape Areas

The original definition of the SLAs described here, as set out in the Kent Countryside Plan should remain as the basic foundation of designation. The North Kent Marshes, North Downs and Blean Woods are now well accepted by a broad consensus of professional and lay opinion as valued landscapes of countywide significance.

3.1 North Kent Marshes SLA – Swale Area

The Swale coastal marshlands extending from Upchurch in the west to Graveney in the east, over the Swale estuary across the Sheppey Marshes and south across the Conyer, Luddenham, Graveney and Chetney Marshes.

They are part of the largest tract of undeveloped land in the County, combining an open landscape, a quality of remoteness and high scientific value. Extensive areas of the land are notified as Sites of Special Scientific Interest or are nature reserves.

Key Characteristics

In order to take on board the current thinking on landscape character assessment, a further refinement of the definition of the Swale Marshes SLA adopts a landscape classification approach.

Within the existing SLA, the character assessment indicates that there are two broad landscape character zones and these have formed the areas of search in defining the boundary to the SLA. It is not considered appropriate to extend the SLA to include areas that do not meet the character requirements.

The following two zones with differing character criteria are used to define the North Kent Marshes SLA – Swale Area.

- Marshes Character Zone
- Hill and Ridge Character Zone

Marshes Character Zone

The marshes include areas of unimproved salt marsh occurring beyond the sea wall, with traditional grazing marsh occupying more extensive areas. These areas are characterised by rough grassland, grazing animals and a wild and natural sense of place. A network of dykes, creeks and channels cut through the landscape so that the area contains a wealth of wildlife habitats.

Most of the area is under positive management with nature conservation as a priority, but recently large areas of former grazing marsh, in the east of Sheppey and on the Graveney Marshes, have been ploughed and converted to arable cultivation. These areas are prairie like in their scale and uniformity. The absence of grazing animals and wild birds and the uniformity of texture and colour makes them less natural and somewhat sterile in appearance. Despite this the visual integrity of the marshland remains.

The following characteristic features have been identified:

- Flat open landscapes generally less than 10m high sited on alluvial or marine deposits and characterised by dykes, marshes, mudflats, reed beds and huge skies.
- Characteristically wild, exposed and remote.
- Wealth of unimproved grazing marsh and salt marsh of particular importance to wildlife at a national and international level.
- Large areas of reclaimed marshland used for arable cultivation.
- Historical features include remnants of salt mounds, extensive counter walls, gun powder works, ancient ferry crossing points across the Swale, oyster beds and wrecks.
- Highly valued by many members of the public.
- Generally have a tranquil, unspoilt character.

Hill and Ridge Character Zone

Certain high areas within and along the SLA boundary are included as part of the SLA, to provide a backdrop to the main marsh character zone. These areas provide the marshes SLA in Swale Borough with its distinct character. Formed from outcrops of chalk or London clay, they have produced distinctive landscape features such as the Isle of Harty, which have a prominence out of all proportion with their modest relief.

Although the original definition makes no mention of these higher ground areas in its description of the North Kent Marshes SLA, their inclusion is evident and so we have included a definition of these areas here.

The following are the characteristic features identified:

- Outcrops of London clay and head brickearth on higher ground rising to 30m.
- Relict landscape features such as former islands or headlands or areas of high ground overlooking the marshes forming a backdrop to the landscape.
- Areas with an often distinct and remote character.
- Evidence of historic and cultural association.
- Long panoramic views across the marshes.

Many of these higher areas that provide a background to the marshes, have already come under pressure from agricultural change from the traditional grazing to large-scale arable use.

3.2 North Downs SLA

'The North Downs SLA comprises the prominent North Downs escarpment together with the chalk scenery of the dip slope and dry valleys to the north and the rising foreground to the south.'

North Downs SLA – Swale Area

The following key characteristics have been identified:

- Wide northern dip slope of open rolling downland and steep-sided dry valleys.
- Valleys of chalk with upper part of the dip slope capped with extensive drift deposits of clay-with-flints on most other areas.
- Land use is a mixture of pasture and arable land.
- Wooded valleys and open chalk grasslands of ecological value.
- Strong blocks of woodland, coppice and hedgerows are dominated by ash, oak, sweet chestnut and hazel.
- Considerable potential for informal recreation, by virtue of extensive views and small pockets of Grade 4 land where steep slopes limit agricultural use.
- Historic parks and gardens scattered through area.

The area of study lies within the dip slope of the North Downs. The landscape here is gently rolling open farmland, rising to 180m at its highest point, with steep sided dry valleys carved into the dip slope.

Woods and shaws along the numerous dry valleys help to emphasise the landform, where agricultural cultivation is limited by the terrain. Elsewhere large tracts of woodland have been lost or reduced in area due to agricultural intensification. The hedgerows have been reduced for the same reason so creating a more open landscape. Occasionally there are areas of traditional grazing still practiced and small pockets of land are being managed with nature conservation as the priority. Coppicing is still practiced in some woodlands maintaining habitat diversity. Oak and ash are typical of the upper part of the dip-slope while a mix of beech, ash and maple are commonly found on the chalk soils of the dry valley sides.

Much of the Special Landscape Area is contained within the AONB but fringing areas of SLA extend northwards where dip slope valleys occur. The importance of the chalkland landscapes is linked to the national conservation interest of the scarp face woodlands and grasslands and to the areas recreational value. The fringing SLA areas are not only valuable in their own right but provide the landscape setting for several major towns.

3.3 Blean Woods SLA

The Blean SLA is ‘the belt of woodland which extends from west of Canterbury to Herne and includes both the woodland blocks and more open countryside which surrounds and intersperses them, acting as foreground.’

Within the existing SLA, the character assessment indicates that there are two broad landscape character zones (a composite of several local character areas), which are regarded as typical of the Blean SLA and have formed the area of search in defining the boundary to the SLA. It is not considered appropriate to extend the SLA to include areas that do not meet the character requirements

The following two zones with differing character criteria are used to define the Blean Woods.

- Core Woodland Character Zone
- Surrounding Farmland Character Zone

Core Woodland Character Zone

The following characteristic features have been identified:

- Upper portions of the domed outcrop of London Clay
- Heavily wooded areas with intractable soils not generally suited to agriculture
- Presence of ancient woodland, coppice and wood pasture with high ecological interest
- Time depth indicated by the presence of historic ground features such as hedgebanks
- Cultural references for example archives in Canterbury Cathedral and other ecclesiastical documents

The ancient origins and the ecological importance of the Blean Woods have already been discussed. Because the heavy soils were never easily converted to agriculture there is a long history of woodland cover in the area. Although there has been some reduction in woodland cover in the recent past, the visual integrity of the woodland cover remains. Much of the woodland area is under positive management with nature conservation as a priority. Coppicing is important in some areas and has been practised there for centuries producing a rich ground flora and habitat for nightingales. Areas of true wood pasture are rare, with agricultural land adjoining the main woodland blocks being converted to open pasture or arable with standard oaks creating a parkland feel and standing as a reminder of the area's varied history. There are conifer plantations in Clowes, West Blean and Thornden Woods, but in general the visual impression is of a dense deciduous woodland cover. Recently areas of

conifer have been cleared in East Blean and Church Woods, and these will be replaced by naturally regenerating broad-leaved trees.

The main areas of existing woodland are easily identified and form the central core within the SLA. Other areas within the central core may have been cleared of woodland and no longer exhibit the key characteristic features. They may be regarded as currently in poor condition. However such areas may be important in maintaining an intact and sustainable core of the SLA, for instance because of their historical or cultural associations, or their topographical and visual relationship with adjoining characteristic areas.

Surrounding Farmland Character Zone

The countryside on the lower areas of London Clay often provides a setting and foreground for the woodland edges of the core area. These views of the woodland edge and of the woodland in its broader landscape setting are also important to the distinctive character of the SLA and are of countywide importance. Thus the distinctive and unique core woodland landscape is not only experienced from within the woodland itself, but from adjoining countryside. This was recognised when the original designation was awarded on the basis of the original definition

- ‘...both the woodland blocks and more open countryside which surrounds and intersperses them, acting as foreground.’ (Kent Countryside Plan)

The following characteristic features have been identified:

- Lower areas of London Clay- with poorly drained soils and undulating topography
- Agricultural land visually dominated and enclosed by Blean Woodlands on the higher ground forming a backdrop to the landscape
- Remnant Blean ‘satellite’ and ‘outlier’ woodlands
- Distinctive sea views in areas to the north of the woodland edge

In common with much of lowland Britain the farmland, which acts as a foreground to the woodlands, is under pressure from agricultural change. The traditional agricultural practice has been dairy farming with some cereals. Nowadays cereals and rape crops are dominant. Although there usually exists a well-developed field system, with the conversion to arable there has been loss of hedgerows, hedgerow-trees and woodland and a move to larger field sizes. Occasionally there are areas of sheep pasture, a remnant of former farming practice.

There are rarely isolated pockets of orchards on pockets of Head Brickearth and other more free draining soils, but orchards are not considered distinctively characteristic in this landscape, but rather are more typical of the fruit belt character areas to the south and west.

Landscape Quality

Whilst the protection of the countryside for its own sake is important, the designation of a ‘special’ or ‘valued’ landscape at a strategic level implies that the landscape quality is significant at a county level. Landscape quality is clearly considered to be related to landscape character. Quality is based upon two major contributors to the characterisation process:

Strength of character – a combination of:

- Distinctiveness and continuity

Landscape condition – a combination of:

- pattern of elements and presence of detracting features
- cultural integrity and ecological integrity.

Against the profiles for the appropriate character zones these criteria have been evaluated (from desk top study and field assessment) for each landscape description unit in the area of search adjoining the SLA Boundary.

In assessing the SLA boundaries it should be noted that a very large increase in their extent might devalue the designation. However, significant areas have been identified which currently hold Local Landscape Area status, that require upgrading because of the high qualities provided by these landscapes.

Detailed Boundary Delineation

Boundary delineation is often problematical, as in many cases both landscape character and landscape quality are a continuum and there is not necessarily an abrupt change at a precise edge or boundary. Within a designated area there will be some variations in landscape quality with pockets of exceptionally high quality and other areas of lower quality landscape. These areas are not considered to be of sufficient size to significantly detract from the higher quality area, but still serve a useful function in visually linking other areas of significant quality to form a larger and visually coherent whole.

In particular landscape condition is not necessarily uniform across a character area and there may be discrete zones affected by linear detracting features such as major roads and power lines for example. Some areas may suffer from uncharacteristic intrusive features, possibly reflecting a particular land ownership or activity – for example the removal of hedgerows and woodlands in order to increase field size when converting to intensive arable production, or the development of a quarry in an open landscape.

Another important consideration is that there is a general consensus that only clearly defined, stable physical features which appear on the OS 1:50,000 base (e.g. roads) should be adopted for boundary definition. Adopted boundary features should be readily identifiable on the ground and unlikely to change in the foreseeable future.

A reasoned and systematic approach has been adopted to explain and substantiate the proposed boundary taking the above factors into consideration. We have used the following terms:

Boundary amendment:

Where the main intention is to produce a more defensible boundary to protect the existing SLA.

Addition:

Where the main intention is to extend the SLA because of the appropriate character and quality of the landscape and/or the area of land serves to visually link other areas within the SLA to form a visually coherent whole.

Deletion:

Where the main intention is to delete an area from the SLA because the character is not appropriate, or the landscape quality is no longer sufficient to merit designation and the area of land does not serve to visually link other areas to form a visually coherent whole.

4.0 Assessment

Discussion of the SLA Boundary Recommendations

The following character areas, which abut or straddle the existing SLA boundaries, have been examined for their suitability for designation in terms of appropriate landscape character and quality. Within the character areas we have looked at local variation in character and quality to determine a revised boundary to the SLA consistent with the methodology.

4.1 NORTH DOWNS SLA

Many of the character areas identified in this study straddle the North Downs SLA boundary. Consequently all of the following character areas were assessed in the vicinity of the boundary:

1. Hartlip Downs
2. Newington Fruit Belt
3. Newington Arable Lands
4. Tunstall Farmlands
5. Rodmersham and Milstead Dry Valley
6. Milstead and Kingsdown Mixed Farmlands
7. Lynsted Enclosed Farmlands
8. Doddington and Newnham Dry Valleys
9. Faversham and Ospringe Fruit Belt
10. Hernehill and Boughton Fruit Belt

Within the character areas listed three areas were identified as strong candidates for additional designation. These include an area of arable farmland south east of Hartlip village, Highsted Valley and Ospringe Valley. Prior to carrying out the fieldwork, other areas were considered for possible inclusion, due to their general character being similar to that found on the south side of the M2. In practice, however, it was found that very few areas were equal in quality to that found south of the motorway. In addition certain areas were excluded on the grounds that the motorway embankment destroys visual unity.

In areas where the landscape was seen to have the required elements to be included as SLA, careful consideration was given to the status of the landscape. To reiterate, the following was taken into account: that the areas should have resources of at least county level importance, high scenic quality, to be generally unspoilt, to have topographic and visual unity and a clear sense of place, historical or wildlife interests, a consensus of professional and public opinion. With regard to the last point stakeholder interests were an important consideration and comments provided by Parish Councils provided useful support in the designation process.

HARTLIP DOWNS CHARACTER AREA

SUMMARY

Character: High conformity with character of the dip slope landscape of the North Downs SLA.

Landscape Quality High quality around Old House Farm

Recommendation: 1. Include additional designated area at Old House Farm

This is an open, rolling, downland landscape falling to the west, into a valley managed for grazing meadow and horse pasture. The geology of the area is similar to that found elsewhere in the SLA; mainly Head with Chalk outcrops. The land is used for arable production and is of a quality similar to that found to the south of the motorway. It is an area that is strongly enclosed from the south by the surrounding fruit production and to the west by

the Hartlip valley. Although the fields have been enlarged for arable production, hedgerows along lanes remain strong and intact.

The inclusion of this area within the SLA is recommended by virtue of the strong topographic and visual unity with the landscape to the south of the motorway. The quality of the landscape is considered to be no different to this neighbouring area. It is generally unspoilt with a clear sense of place and historical references provided by the traditional farm buildings. Therefore it is recommended that the boundary be extended to Old House Lane and Lower Hartlip Road.

The valley at Hartlip is an area of landscape also considered to be of fairly good quality and potentially valuable in terms of ecology. However it has not been recommended for inclusion because it is isolated from the rest of the dip slope valley due to the imposing nature of the motorway bridge. Also the geology is less like that of the dip slopes and more similar to the fruit producing areas, with high-quality, fertile loamy soils of Head Gravel and Thanet Bed deposits.

TUNSTALL FARMLANDS CHARACTER AREA RODMERSHAM and MILSTEAD DRY VALLEY CHARACTER AREA.

SUMMARY

Character: High conformity with the chalk scenery of the dip slope dry valleys and open rolling downland.

Landscape Quality Variable - see text below,

Recommendation:

1. Upgrade Local Landscape Area (LLA) designation to Special Landscape Area.
2. Include additional designated area west of Sittingbourne Research Centre.

The SLA boundary is unique in this area, in that a significant portion of land is designated beyond the boundary of the M2 corridor. It currently extends to the north side of Cromer's Wood. Beyond this point the Local Landscape designation is adopted.

It is now proposed that the LLA designation be upgraded to SLA status and that the boundary be extended to include the former parkland that surrounds Sittingbourne Research Centre.

The landform is consistent with the North Downs SLA rolling topography and steep sided dry valleys. Characteristic geology includes chalk along the valley bottom and also on the higher ground west of the research centre. Elsewhere there are deposits of Clay-with-flints and Head. Towards Sittingbourne the land becomes more fertile and consequently the land use more mixed. However recent loss of a number of orchards has reinforced the strength of character of Highsted Valley at its northern boundary.

The area of arable and grazing farmland to the west and north of the research centre maintains features indicative of its historical use as private parkland. The mature field boundaries, copses of standard oaks and scattered small scale woods of Highsted and Oakwood all help to maintain the visual unity and unique quality of this area, which is currently undesignated.

North of Broadoak Road and the Research Centre, farmland has been lost to recreation and sports fields and the quality of the landscape is not in keeping with the SLA criteria. This area is to remain undesignated.

Highsted dry valley is generally unspoilt with a sense of remoteness that is astonishing when one takes into account its proximity to the urban boundary. It is similar in character, though less wooded, to the area currently designated. In order to maintain continuity in designation it is therefore recommended that the whole valley becomes SLA. The former parkland is to be added to this on the basis of high landscape quality, rarity, historic references and importance

for wildlife. The valley provides the landscape setting for this area of Sittingbourne. SLA status will ensure that this is maintained in the long term.

DODDINGTON AND NEWNHAM DRY VALLEYS CHARACTER AREA

SUMMARY

- Character:** High conformity with the character of steep sided dry valleys.
- Landscape Quality** Variable - see text below,
- Recommendation:**
1. Upgrade Local Landscape Area designation to Special Landscape Area.
 2. Extend designation to area between the A2 and railway line.
 3. Extend designation along southern boundary using more distinct and permanent boundary features.

Ospringe Valley is recommended to be upgraded to Special Landscape Area. It is apparent from information collected in the field and from stakeholders that this area contains many exceptional features that easily distinguish it as SLA.

In the field there is apparently no change in the quality or character of the landscape from that presently designated in the area south of the M2. The geology is more typical of the horticultural belt than Downs landscape and this is reflected to some degree, in small isolated pockets of traditional hop production. However, the steep topography and thin strips of chalk extend along the length of the valley and characteristics of the Downs dry valleys dominate. These include extensive woodlands and open chalk grassland of ecological value.

Within the valley bottom is an important orchid site where the plants are positively managed and protected. The woodland blocks are largely managed as chestnut coppice, with areas of mature mixed species scattered throughout. Their long-term management is evident by the large coppice stumps. For centuries the production of timber has been used locally for fencing and as hop poles. The woodland is well managed and very accessible with many tracks used for walking.

There are many important historic features of countywide importance within the area that need to be protected in their landscape context. These include Syndale Park, mature parkland of extremely high scenic quality that once housed Judd's House. This site is particularly important, however, because it was the site of a Roman Fort that overlooked the Roman settlement of Durolevum and the original Roman Watling Street. Recent archaeological digs have established that the area is of outstanding archaeological interest.

Located between the A2 and the Faversham to Sittingbourne railway line, are the remains of Stone Church, which is a scheduled ancient monument currently under the care of English Heritage. It has been disused since 1547 after an interesting history. Excavations in 1967 revealed a 4th century Romano-British pre-Christian mausoleum.

To the north of the railway line Bysing Wood overlooks the site of the historically important former gunpowder works. Bysing Wood is an important area of mature oak woodland with large areas of managed sweet chestnut and hazel coppice. The woodland is an SSSI and therefore protected through nature conservation designations. The site of the gunpowder works had become overgrown since it ceased to be used prior to the Second World War. However, in recent years clearance works have begun and the site provides an important historical reference.

The current LLA extends in part to the M2 but excludes the Oaks and the fields that surround it. It is intended for the purpose of adopting a more permanent boundary, to run the SLA along Coxett Hill to meet the existing SLA boundary at the M2. There are strong visual links across the motorway from Coxett Hill and the open arable landscape is of similar quality to that found to the south of the current boundary.

It is recommended that the SLA boundary be extended to the north of Bysing Wood and to the northern most point of the former gunpowder works to abut the North Kent Marshes SLA. To the south the proposed SLA boundary will join seamlessly with the existing along the M2.

4.2 BLEAN WOODS SLA

WESTERN BLEAN CHARACTER AREA

SUMMARY

Character: High conformity with surrounding farmland character zone.

Landscape quality: High

Recommendation: 1. Continue designation as SLA
2. Boundary amendments at Dargate, Boughton Hill and Oversland.

The area of study is the western Blean boundary. The woodlands here are the satellite and outlier woodlands of the Blean group. The countryside on these lower areas provides a setting and foreground for the woodland edges.

The areas reviewed are generally lower areas of London Clay, with poorer drained soils and undulating topography. However, in this review we have also identified areas with mixed soils of Thanet beds, Head Brickearth and River Gravel Terraces. These are of a higher quality, deep and well drained and have been converted from fruit to arable production. Where such areas have been opened up they have become candidates for inclusion in the SLA.

Dargate Road

Recommendation: Addition of fields adjoining Dargate Road.

To the south of Dargate Road, the land adjoining Clay Hill is currently excluded from the SLA. The landform is rolling and the geology is predominately London Clay. It is open grazing land, enclosed on three sides by Blean Wood, which dominates the site. This area is currently used as grazing pasture and is in good condition, with a mature shelterbelt along the roadside of mixed deciduous tree species commonly found within the Blean. A stream cuts through the field and a small woodland shaw of riparian species increases the ecological diversity provided by this piece of land.

The inclusion of this field within the SLA is recommended. Dargate road provides a permanent feature for the re-designation of the boundary line.

Dargate Common

Recommendation: Addition of area at Dargate Common.

South of Dargate Village centre is a footpath leading from Butlers Hill directly into Blean Woods. The footpath crosses a small open field of grassland, which is managed for conservation purposes. It provides a defensible boundary between other areas of foreground that have been fragmented by horse grazing, or where fruit farming runs up to the woodland edge. The land gently rises to the south where it meets the woodland that dominates the site. The geology characteristically is London Clay.

Although the northern boundary is a hedgerow rather than a more clearly defined, stable physical feature, which is usually adopted for boundary definition, it is recommended for inclusion within the SLA as a valuable area of open land separating Dargate Village from the woodland edge.

Butlers Hill

Recommendation: Addition of field adjacent to the road Butlers Hill.

This is an area of rolling open grazing land, similar to that found to the south and separated from that piece of grassland by a thin strip of woodland. Adjoining this area on its western boundary is another piece of land of similar character and quality, which is also included within the SLA. The area is sited on ground that falls away from the outlier woodland strips to the north of Holly Hill. The grassland forms foreground to the dominant woodland blocks on the slopes above. The quality of the landscape is similar to that of adjoining areas and as a whole forms a strong sense of place. Field boundaries are in good condition, as is the grazing meadow. The area is distinctive and characteristic of the grazing land found elsewhere within the Blean complex and is comparable to many high quality grazing areas already designated. It is recommended that this area be included as an additional area within the SLA. The boundary of the designated area should be extended as shown to follow the road.

Boughton Hill

Recommendation: Addition of heath scrub and properties to the east of the road called Woodside.

This is an area of developing heathland scrub typical of other parts of the Blean complex, where dry acid sands support species such as hawthorn, blackthorn, gorse and bramble. It is located beside an area of scrub that has a similar character and there is no obvious boundary to separate the two areas. The geology is part of the London Clay outcrop that makes up the whole of the Blean woodland area and subject to future maintenance, will eventually develop to become mature oak woodland. The area currently increases the local mosaic of habitats and the nature conservation interest. It is therefore recommended that the SLA boundary be redrawn to run along the road called Woodside, which will provide a more permanent boundary than the one currently adopted.

Oversland

Recommendation: Addition of field adjacent to Scoggers Hill and woodland edge area to the south.

Adjacent to Scoggers Hill and South Street is a piece of land surrounded on all sides by narrow lanes. It rises gently to the west, where it meets with Winterbourne Wood. The geology of the area is mainly the free draining Thanet Beds and has traditionally been used as orchard. Recently, however, the fruit trees have been grubbed out. The result is an open rolling field of medium scale with hedgerows generally in good condition. The field rises up to the woodland, which dominates the space from the rear, in the typical character of the surrounding farmland character zone. It lies within an area of small-scale outlier woodlands that currently stretch out into adjacent fruit fields. This area is moderate to good quality and its condition is moderate.

To the south east of Oversland is Rhode Common and between the two settlements is an area of woodland periphery that currently lies outside the SLA. Once again the geology of the area is mainly fertile Thanet Beds and Head Brickearth, which are generally associated with intensive agricultural use. However, here pockets of mature outlier woodland are the dominant feature. The woodland becomes less dense on the western side where there are open areas of foreground. The characteristic features are common to both the surrounding farmland and the core woodland zones. The small woodland blocks and areas of open space provide locally important habitats for a diversity of flora and fauna. Although the footpath that crosses the area provides good access for recreational purposes, this is a relatively isolated area that maintains a sense of tranquillity.

It is recommended that the SLA boundary be redrawn to include both areas as shown.

Waterham Clay Farmlands SUMMARY

Character:	Some conformity with Core Woodland and Surrounding Farmland Character Zones
Landscape Quality:	Moderate quality
Recommendation:	Include additional designated areas within the SLA at Clay Hill

Clay Hill is a continuation of the Blean London Clay ridgeline, rising up to over 85m at its summit. It has been cleared of woodland in recent years, thus its character is strictly that of the Core Woodland Zone, but it may be regarded as in moderate condition. However, it is important in maintaining an intact and sustainable core to the SLA because of its historical woodland associations and its topographical and visual relationship with adjoining core woodland character zones.

The heavy clay soils of Clay Hill are now cultivated for cereals. There are few boundaries within the character area and where they do exist, tend to be post and wire fences of recent origin and fragmented hedgerows. The stream that runs across the western side of the hill is the only distinct physical boundary, so this should become the new SLA boundary.

Clearly Clay Hill does bear some strong relationships with other areas within the SLA. The striking geomorphology of the domed clay landform is characteristic. Visually it provides an open setting to the woodlands at Dargate, North Bishopden Wood and Ellenden Wood within Canterbury. It serves as a beneficial visual link between important blocks of woodland within the core of the Blean Woods SLA and it is recommended that the additional area is designated.

4.3 NORTH KENT MARSHES SLA

The boundary review of the marshes indicated a number of areas where revision was felt to be appropriate. Once again all of the character areas that abut or straddle the current SLA boundary were surveyed. These character areas are listed below:

1. Graveney Grazing Lands
2. Graveney Arable Farmlands
3. Graveney Fruit Farms
4. Goodnestone Grasslands
5. Ham Marshes
6. Stone Arable Farmlands
7. Teynham Fruit Belt
8. Luddenham and Conyer Marshes
9. Chetney Marshes
10. Leysdown Marshes
11. Elmley Marshes

Revisions to the boundary line are recommended in the following areas:

Graveney Fruit Farms

SUMMARY

Character:	Does not conform to Marsh or Hill and Ridge Character Zone.
Landscape Quality:	Not a candidate for SLA inclusion because it is not characteristic.
Recommendation:	Boundary amendment at Sandbanks Farm in line with definable boundary.

At this point the SLA boundary currently runs in an apparently arbitrary fashion across a former orchard where there is no physical boundary on the ground. There is a distinct difference in the characters of the adjoining Graveney Marshes and the Graveney Fruit Farms and it is this line that defines the SLA boundary elsewhere. It is therefore suggested that the

line should be moved to the shelterbelt of mature poplars that run along the edge of the marsh, to the north side of the fruit field. This is a clearly defined point in the landscape and visibly joins the boundaries on either side to form a strong and continuous line around the marsh.

Luddenham and Conyer Marshes

SUMMARY

Character: Conformity with Hill and Ridge Character Zone
Landscape Quality: Variable
Recommendation: 1. Include additional designations around Bax Farm.
2. Include additional designation at Blacketts Farm.

Bax Farm:

Two areas are recommended for inclusion within the SLA. The first is located on low-lying grazing marsh, divided up by ditches. It is located to the east of Bax Farm and north west of Teynham. The alluvial soils are typical of the rest of the marshland and the quality of the landscape similar to that found elsewhere on the fringes of the marsh.

At this point the SLA boundary line presently runs across the centre of a field where there is no definable physical feature. There is a mature woodland shaw to the south of the current boundary line and it is suggested that the boundary be pulled back to this point.

The second area is the large area of high ground to the north of the Bax Farm house and the narrow strip of marshland that sits between the two high ground areas. This promontory forms a visual background to the marshes, much the same as other high ground areas included within the SLA. It is recommended that this area which is currently designated a Local Landscape Area should be upgraded to SLA which will result in the realignment of both boundaries.

Blacketts Farm:

The farm is located on land that gently rises above the surrounding marsh. The geology includes small outcrops of London Clay, typical of other areas situated to the immediate south of the marsh, which are included within the Hill and Ridge Character Zone. The SLA boundary currently follows the line of the marsh ditches. In order to maintain continuity in the method of designation, realignment of the boundary is considered appropriate.

The land here gently slopes towards the marsh providing long panoramic views and the limited access provides a sense of isolation. These well-managed fields of improved grazing pasture form a background to the marshes. Combined, these elements lead to the conclusion that the fields should be given SLA status.

Luddenham and Conyer Marshes

SUMMARY

Character: Does not conform to Marsh Zone or Hill and Ridge Character Zone.
Landscape Quality: Poor
Recommendation: 1. Remove SLA designation from area to north of Sittingbourne Industrial Estate.

The reason for the designation of land north of Sittingbourne's industrial estate is unclear. The boundary follows no discernable physical features and so the assumption is made that the boundary is based on a physical reference that no longer exists. The character of the former marshland to the north of the Marshall works has been altered by past industrial activity. The character is considered not to be in keeping with the SLA marshland character zone and so it is recommended that the boundary be relocated around the southern lake edge and then south along an existing access track and the edge of a new development site to meet the northern end of Church Road.

5.0 Areas of High Landscape Value

These areas, formerly known as Local Landscape Areas, are recognised as being worthy of long-term protection. Their inclusion is dependent on conformity with the criteria set out for Special Landscape Areas but at a local level. These criteria are as follows:

- That the area contains resources of local level importance.
- High scenic quality
- Generally unspoilt
- A clear sense of place
- Historical or wildlife interests
- A consensus of professional and public opinion.

As already described, a number of areas formerly designated at this level have been upgraded to Special Landscape Areas. Others retain their status and a number of new areas are recommended. In addition there are also several small areas that are recommended to be redefined as Protected Open Space.

5.1 EXISTING AREAS OF HIGH LANDSCAPE VALUE Bapchild and Luddenham.

This is a unique landscape containing quirky features distinct to the area. To the rear of the railway line the topography is one of small hills and valleys. Numerous springs occur at the head of narrow streams, which are typically located in the small valleys and lead out onto the marshes.

The geology is a mixture of the fertile Thanet and Woolwich Beds and Head Brickearth. The deep, well-drained loamy soils support a mixed land use of well-managed orchards and arable production. Generally majestic poplar windbreaks define the marsh edge. Occasionally the narrow lanes wind out to the marsh edge to form the boundary. From such points one can survey both the vast open expanse of grazing marsh and the well-developed small-scale pattern of orchards.

Away from the marsh edge the landscape is extremely intimate and many historic buildings dating from the 15th, 16th and 17th centuries still exist and are generally in very good condition. A number of buildings date from the 11th century and are mentioned in Domesday Book 1086.

Interesting historical references within the area include the fact that during the 10th century Elverton, the chief manor in the parish of Stone, was given the monks of Christchurch, Canterbury, by King Edmund. In the 11th century Luddenham was held by Odo of Bayeux, William the Conqueror's brother.

The landscape contains other anomalies that make it special. Signs of man's influence on the landscape are indicated in areas where roads and tracks have been raised above surrounding fields. Where this has occurred orchards and arable field appears to be sunken. Elsewhere certain buildings, such as large manor houses were built on mounds. It is assumed that the reason for this has been the periodic inundation by the sea. Perhaps also there has been excavation of Brickearth from the area, which has been practiced around Faversham for centuries. Either way it has led to the creation of a particularly interesting landscape.

As described in the SLA amendments, revisions have been made to the boundary around Blacketts and Bax Farms to increase the status of these areas to SLA. Otherwise it is recommended that the boundary remain unaltered.

Hills between Iwade, Newington and Lower Halstow

Formerly this has been designated a LLA and is unique in that it is the only area of undeveloped foreshore within the Borough's marshland zone that is not designated SLA. It would be difficult to designate the area as SLA as it does not hold the same features of other marshland areas. It does however provide a backdrop to Chetney, Barksore and Greenborough Marshes. The remote nature of these areas would be badly compromised by any development in this area and so it should continue to be designated at a local level.

It is an area that rises steeply away from the foreshore to form a ridge that runs from north of Iwade and south of Lower Halstow. This high ground affords spectacular views to north and east over the marshes. The geology is predominantly London Clay with swathes of Head Brickearth and Woolwich Beds at Lower Halstow and adjacent to the shoreline at Bedlams Bottom. Brickearth has been extracted from the area for building purposes and there is a large works and disused pits scattered across the rising ground north east of Lower Halstow.

Woodland is limited to Wardwell and Hawes Wood. Scattered mature standard oaks are found along depleted roadside hedges and across some of the northern pastures. Adjacent to Bedlams Bottom, where the more fertile soils appear, a small area of orchards and associated windbreaks are a peculiar feature within a landscape largely used for grazing.

In conclusion, despite hedgerows being somewhat depleted, the large improved grazing meadows and stunning views, provide the area with a strong sense of place. Where Raspberry Hill Lane and the orchards meet the shoreline a unique and distinct character is created. This is seen nowhere else in the Borough and is therefore extremely valuable at a local level. Woodland is scarce in this part of the Borough, which makes the protection of Wardwell and Hawes wood all the more relevant. This area should retain its status as AHLV.

5.2 PROPOSED AREAS OF HIGH LANDSCAPE VALUE

Hernhill

A beautiful area located beneath the steep slopes of the western Blean woods and stretching westwards to the Thanet Way. The northern boundary encompasses Dargate village and the southern boundary is north of Boughton Street. It is a secluded area of gently rolling topography and occasional steep slopes. It epitomises the traditional Kentish fruit belt in its strong network of small scale, well-managed orchards and traditional settlements.

The development of the two major roads, to western (A229) and southern (A2) boundaries and the steep topography of the woodland edge has physically enclosed the area. As a result it has managed to retain a strong sense of place. The landscape features are in good condition and the villages of Hernhill, Dargate and Staplestreet are highly picturesque.

The many traditional features found throughout the area include the strong network of alder and poplar shelterbelts and the strong system of hedgerows that are generally in good condition and provide enclosure to the narrow winding lanes. Traditional farming practices include soft and top fruit and hop production with very small areas given over to arable production.

There are many fine examples of traditional building styles and many of the old oast houses have now been converted into offices or residential dwellings. It is not unusual to see weather boarded properties or brick and flint. At the heart of Hernhill village the quintessential character of the area is punctuated by a well-maintained green with a majestic central oak surrounded by a number of historic buildings dating from the 14th century, all in very good condition.

There is no doubt that this area holds all the qualities required to make it an Area of High Landscape Value.

Luddenham Valley

To the east of Faversham is situated the village of Luddenham. At the edge of Luddenham Level, at the end of a winding track, is a small, isolated and highly picturesque valley. The buildings here include a 15th century house and traditional farm buildings, including oasts, all set around a central enclosed yard. Adjacent to the outbuildings is Luddenham Church, now redundant and in the care of the Churches Conservation Trust. Most of the buildings here are listed but the landscape currently has no protection.

The valley is situated to the south of the farmyard. It is an extraordinarily beautiful piece of landscape bordering open marshland to the north. It is neither marshland or ridge character and so has not been considered for SLA designation. However, locally it is of such significance in terms of rarity, tranquillity, historical interest and wildlife value, that it should be made part of the adjoining Bapchild and Luddenham AHLV.

The valley is fed by a spring, which is characteristic of the Bapchild and Luddenham AHLV and in areas the stream has been widened to form ponds. The valley has obviously been tamed and partially taken as an open garden to the rear of Luddenham Court. However, the character is of an area managed for wildlife and the huge weeping willows and gentle topography provide a sense of enclosure and isolation. Footpaths provide direct access to the centre of the valley but nevertheless it remains generally unspoilt.

Sheppey Court and Diggs Marshes

This large area of traditional grazing marshland has remained intact despite residential, industrial and recreational development on all boundaries. Many of the features found on the larger coastal marshes are present here. Typically it is a flat open landscape characterised by dykes, mudflats, reed beds and historic features such as the old counter walls and an ancient salt working.

Unlike the vast expanses of the marsh to the south, the influence of the urban areas is ever present. This diminishes certain qualities that distinguish the character of the larger marshlands. For example, the horizon is interrupted by the built development. The area is less exposed, because it has been enclosed by infrastructure. The urban influence makes the area less wild and it cannot be considered remote.

The landscape qualities of the marsh itself are nevertheless similar to other more remote areas, for in fact this is a significant area of land. On a local level it is extremely important for its wildlife habitats and is highly valued by local residents. At present the area has no landscape designation and yet its location makes it particularly vulnerable. For these reasons Sheppey Court Marshes are recommended for designation as an AHLV.

6.0 Areas redefined as Protected Open Space

A number of areas formerly known as Local Landscape Areas have been reclassified as areas of Protected Open Space, since their relatively small size makes them a landscape feature rather than a landscape area. Public consultation has emphasised the high regard in which each area is held, in terms of amenity value. They make an important contribution to the built environment and fulfil a number of different roles as accessible open space, wildlife habitats and public parks. The development of such areas could lead to the loss of residential and leisure amenity and be detrimental to the quality of the built environment.

Such areas were designated for the first time in the Canterbury Local Plan, November 1998 in policy D38. Strict criteria are used to protect such sites and are recommended for use within Swale Borough.

'Proposals, which would result in the loss of protected open space, will only be permitted if:

- a) There would be no material harm to the contribution the protected open space makes to the visual or recreational amenity of the area.
- b) The loss would be outweighed by the need for the development
- c) There is no alternative site available to accommodate the proposed development and any harm that might result from the development could be offset by the provision of other open space of similar quality, size and character nearby.'

Tonge Mill and Pond

This is a popular local landmark and visitor destination. The spring, ponds and connecting stream are obviously important in terms of their wildlife interest. The remains of Tonge Castle, to the rear of Tonge Mill, provide an important historic reference.

The Bunnybanks, Eastchurch

This is one of the few remaining large areas of undeveloped land within the village and provides extensive views across the southern half of the Isle of Sheppey. The trees on the site are already recognised as being important within the landscape and are covered by a tree preservation order.

Rushenden Hill, Queenborough

This hill is important because it forms the western extremity of the Sheppey Hills and is therefore important within the wider landscape.

The Glen, Minster

This area is one of the few large areas of public open space within the built-up area of Minster and an important local amenity.

Abbey Rise

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. It is important that it is recognised as a local amenity and provided with long-term protection.

7.0 Minster Marshes Green Gap

This area has come under scrutiny in the Landscape Assessment and the decision has been reached that its protection is important, since it has come under development pressure in the past and may again in the future.

Its quality has been reduced in landscape terms due to the influences of urbanisation. Although one farm does still exist at Minster Marshes the traditional grazing activities have largely been replaced by recreational use. Features include holiday caravan parks, a garden centre and a central golf course. The large industrial works north of Halfway add to the incongruous influence of the urban fringe.

Consequently Minster Marshes cannot be considered an Area of High Landscape Value, without undermining the designation status of other areas. However, it is recognised as an important open area of marsh that retains many of the features of the more traditionally managed Diggs and Sheppey Court Marshes. Typical characteristics include a strong network of meandering ditches, areas of rough grass and long open views and like the Sheppey Court Marshes it is a Site of Nature Conservation Interest. Thus it is considered to be an extremely important resource in terms of recreational facilities and wildlife interest, as well as an established buffer, between two urban areas and any changes in the landscape could be harmful.

It is recommended that a similar policy adopted in the Canterbury Local Plan, November 1998, policy D41 is to be applied here. It is to be called the Green Gap as it provides a green wedge between Sheerness and Minster, preserving the separate identities of the two urban areas. The area is to be protected from development, which would erode its settlement separation function.

'Within the green gap, development will only be permitted where it does not:

- a) Result in a significant expansion of the built confines of the settlements of Sheerness and Minster.
- b) Significantly affect the open character or separating function of the green gap.
- c) Result in new isolated development within the green gap.

Proposals for open sports and recreational uses will be permitted subject to there being no overriding conflict with other policies and the wider objectives of the plan. Any related built development should be kept to a minimum necessary to supplement the open use and be sensitively located and to a high quality of design.'

Abbey Rise

Within the Green Gap is included Abbey Rise which is also recognised as a protected open space. It is a particularly vulnerable piece of land and so has been afforded additional protection through its inclusion in both designations.

8.0 Summary of Recommendations

CHANGES TO SLA BOUNDARIES:

AMENDMENTS TO THE NORTH DOWNS SLA:

- Hartlip Downs Character Area - Arable fields at Old House Farm to be designated.
- Tunstall Farmlands Character Area /Rodmersham and Milstead Dry Valley Character Area - Upgrade Local Landscape Area designation to Special Landscape Area.
- Include additional designated area west of Sittingbourne Research Centre.
- Doddington And Newnham Dry Valleys Character Area - Upgrade Local Landscape Area designation to Special Landscape Area.
Extend designation to area north to include site of former gunpowder works at Oare.
Extend designation along southern boundary using more distinct and permanent boundary features.

AMENDMENTS TO THE BLEAN SLA:

- Western Blean Character Area -
Continue designation as SLA
Boundary amendments at Dargate. Boughton Hill and Oversland.
- Waterham Clay Farmlands - Extension of SLA to include the whole of Clay Hill.

AMENDMENTS TO THE NORTH KENT MARSHES SLA:

- Graveney Fruit Farms - Boundary amendment at Sandbanks Farm to create a more definable boundary.
- Luddenham and Conyer Marshes - Include additional designations around Bax Farm.
Include additional designation at Blacketts Farm.
Remove SLA designation from area to north of Sittingbourne Industrial Estate.

EXISTING AREAS OF HIGH LANDSCAPE VALUE:

- Bapchild and Luddenham - Modification of boundary at Bax Farms to upgrade AHLV to SLA.

Modification of boundary to north of Blacketts Farm to upgrade AHLV to SLA.
- Hills between Iwade, Newington and Lower Halstow - No change to boundary.

NEW AREAS OF HIGH LANDSCAPE VALUE:

- Hernhill - Fruit producing area between Blean Woods the A2 and A229 to be designated as a new AHLV.
- Luddenham Valley - Valley around Luddenham Court designated.
- Sheppey Court & Diggs Marshes - Grazing marshland to north of Queenborough given AHLV status.

FORMER LOCAL LANDSCAPE AREAS REDEFINED AS PROTECTED OPEN SPACE:

- Tonge Mill and Pond

- The Bunnybanks, Eastchurch.
- Rushenden Hill, Queenborough
- The Glen, Minster
- Abbey Rise

MINSTER MARSHES GREEN GAP:

- Minster Marshes and Abbey Rise protected by designation as Green Gap.