

## **Swale Urban Extension Landscape Capacity Study**



**JACOBS<sup>TM</sup>**

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## Introduction

### Background

As part of its Core Strategy, Swale Borough Council (SBC) needs to consider the landscape significance of any proposals to extend the Borough's principal urban areas and whether urban extensions should be contemplated.

The principal urban areas are:

- Faversham
- Sittingbourne (including the potential growth area at Kent Science Park)
- Iwade
- Minster
- Sheerness
- Queenborough

The extent of proposed urban extension Study Areas that have been assessed in terms of their capacity to accommodate change are described in the following section and illustrated on Figure 1.

### Study Areas

The 27 Study Areas have been defined following a desktop analysis of the following information:

- Urban edges defined by SBC which are to be assessed in terms of urban extension capacity;
- The extent of Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA) sites as submitted in 2008;
- The extent of potential employment sites as shown in the Employment Land Review as submitted in 2008;
- Landscape, heritage and biodiversity designation constraints;
- Swale Landscape and Biodiversity Appraisal landscape character areas (Third Draft February 2010);
- Clear landscape boundaries, including infrastructure routes and field boundaries.

The Study Areas are numbered and named in accordance with their geographical locations as follows:

- Study Area 1 – North of Faversham
- Study Area 2 – North East of Faversham
- Study Area 3 – East of Faversham
- Study Area 4 – South East of Faversham
- Study Area 5 – South West of Faversham
- Study Area 6 – West of Faversham
- Study Area 7 – South of Sittingbourne
- Study Area 8 – South of Sittingbourne
- Study Area 9 – South of Sittingbourne
- Study Area 10 – South of Sittingbourne
- Study Area 11 – South West of Sittingbourne
- Study Area 12 – West of Sittingbourne
- Study Area 13 – West of Sittingbourne
- Study Area 14 – North of Sittingbourne
- Study Area 15 – South East of Sittingbourne
- Study Area 16 – East of Sittingbourne
- Study Area 17 – North West of Sittingbourne
- Study Area 18 – East of Iwade
- Study Area 19 – South West of Iwade
- Study Area 20 – North West of Iwade
- Study Area 21 – West of Rushenden
- Study Area 22 – North of Queenborough
- Study Area 23 – South East of Sheerness and North West of Minster
- Study Area 24 – South of Minster
- Study Area 25 – North East of Minster
- Study Area 26 – South East of Minster
- Study Area 27 - South East of Minster

### Faversham

To the north of Faversham, Study Area 1 falls entirely within the Stone Arable Farmlands landscape character area. Similarly to the north west, Study Area 2 falls almost entirely within the boundaries of the Goodnestone Grasslands

## **Introduction**

landscape character area. Study Area 1 and part of Study Area 2 are contained by the Ham Marshes to the north, which are heavily designated for their biodiversity value.

To the south and east of Faversham, Study Areas 3, 4 and 5 fall within the Faversham and Ospringe Fruit Belt. The landscape to the south of the M2 is not included within the proposed Study Areas because this forms a clear boundary, beyond which the fruit belt landscape forms the rural setting of the Kent Downs AONB.

To the west of Faversham, Study Area 6 forms part of the Doddington and Newnham Dry Valleys landscape character area, although the A2 forms the southern boundary where it provides a strong physical boundary in the landscape.

### **Sittingbourne and Iwade**

Study Areas 7, 9, 10 and 11 fall within the Tunstall Farmlands landscape character area. Study Area 11, which includes a number of SHLAA sites, Bapchild and the edges of the Teynham Fruit Belt landscape character area, extends southward to the periphery of Borden and Hearts Delight. The Study Area does not extend further south because it is considered important to maintain the rural situation of the historic villages which form part of the setting of the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). Study Area 9 addresses the landscape between Sittingbourne and the Kent Science Park at Woodstock. Study Area 10 covers the landscape surrounding the south, east and western extents of the Kent Science Park at Woodstock. This Study Area extends south of the M2 into the Kent Downs AONB because of the proposed employment site which has been submitted to the Council's Employment Land Review in this area. Study Area 7 is contained by the edge of the Rodmersham and Milstead Dry Valley landscape character area. Here the landscape character changes, and Study Area 8 covers this landscape as it extends to the southern periphery of Sittingbourne.

North of Sittingbourne, Study Area 14 falls within the southern reaches of the Chetney and Greenborough Marshes landscape character area. The northern

boundary of the area is clearly defined by the existing urban edge of Sittingbourne and the edge of the Luddenham and Conyer Marshes landscape character area, which extend eastwards and are heavily designated for their biodiversity value.

To the west of Sittingbourne, Study Areas 13 and 17 form subdivisions of the Iwade Arable Farmlands landscape character area. Sheppey Way, which runs parallel with this section of the A249 west of Sittingbourne, forms a clear landscape boundary which defines the extent of these Study Areas. Whilst the A249 forms a stronger landscape boundary, the area between Sheppey Way and the A249 is included within the Study Areas because such narrow strips of infrastructure are often under pressure for infill development.

To the south of Sittingbourne, Study Area 11 is defined by the edges of the Borden Mixed Farmlands landscape character area, the periphery of Borden and School Lane. The area does not extend into Chestnut Street Conservation Area because the settlement would be sensitive to change.

To the east of Sittingbourne, Study Area 15 has been determined as a result of the potential location of the M2 Bapchild link road. Study Area 16 is situated to the east of Sittingbourne, and is defined by the northern edge of Bapchild and the edges of Teynham Fruit Belt landscape character area.

Study Areas 18, 19 and 20 surround Iwade. Study Areas 18 and 19 fall within, and are defined to the north west by, the edge of the Iwade Arable Farmlands landscape character area. Sheppey Way and the A249 mark the south eastern boundaries, beyond which Study Area 17 covers the landscape adjacent to the western edge of Sittingbourne. The edge of the Chetney and Greenborough Marshes landscape character area marks the northern boundary of Study Areas 18 and 20, which are heavily designated for their biodiversity value. Study Area 20 falls within the Lower Halstow Clay Farmlands landscape character area, although the western boundary is broadly formed by the Saxon Shore Way. West of this boundary the landslopes downwards towards Bedlams Bottom and the Barksore Marshes, and development would be highly visible from the sensitive marshland.

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### **Minster, Sheerness and Queenborough**

To the north east of Minster, Study Area 25 does not extend northwards into Sheppey Cliffs and Foreshore Site of Special Scientific Interest because of its national significance. To the east of Minster, Study Area 27 falls within the Minster and Warden Farmlands. To the east, the Study Area extends to the B2008 and follows the eastern and northern peripheries of a SHLAA site which is located around Kingsborough Farm.

To the north west of Minster, Study Area 23 falls entirely within the boundaries of Minster Marshes landscape character area which is bordered by the urban extents of Minster and Sheerness.

To the north of Queenborough, Study Area 22 is bordered to the north by the A249, which forms a strong landscape boundary within the marshland landscape. To the west of Rushenden, Study Area 21 covers Rushenden Hill which rises above the Rushenden Marshes. The change in topography provides a strong landscape boundary, and the Study Area does not extent into the marshes which are considered to be visually sensitive.

To the south of Minster, Study Areas 24 and 26 fall within the Central Sheppey Farmlands landscape character area. The B2231forms the southern boundaries of these study areas, because it provides a definitive feature within the landscape.

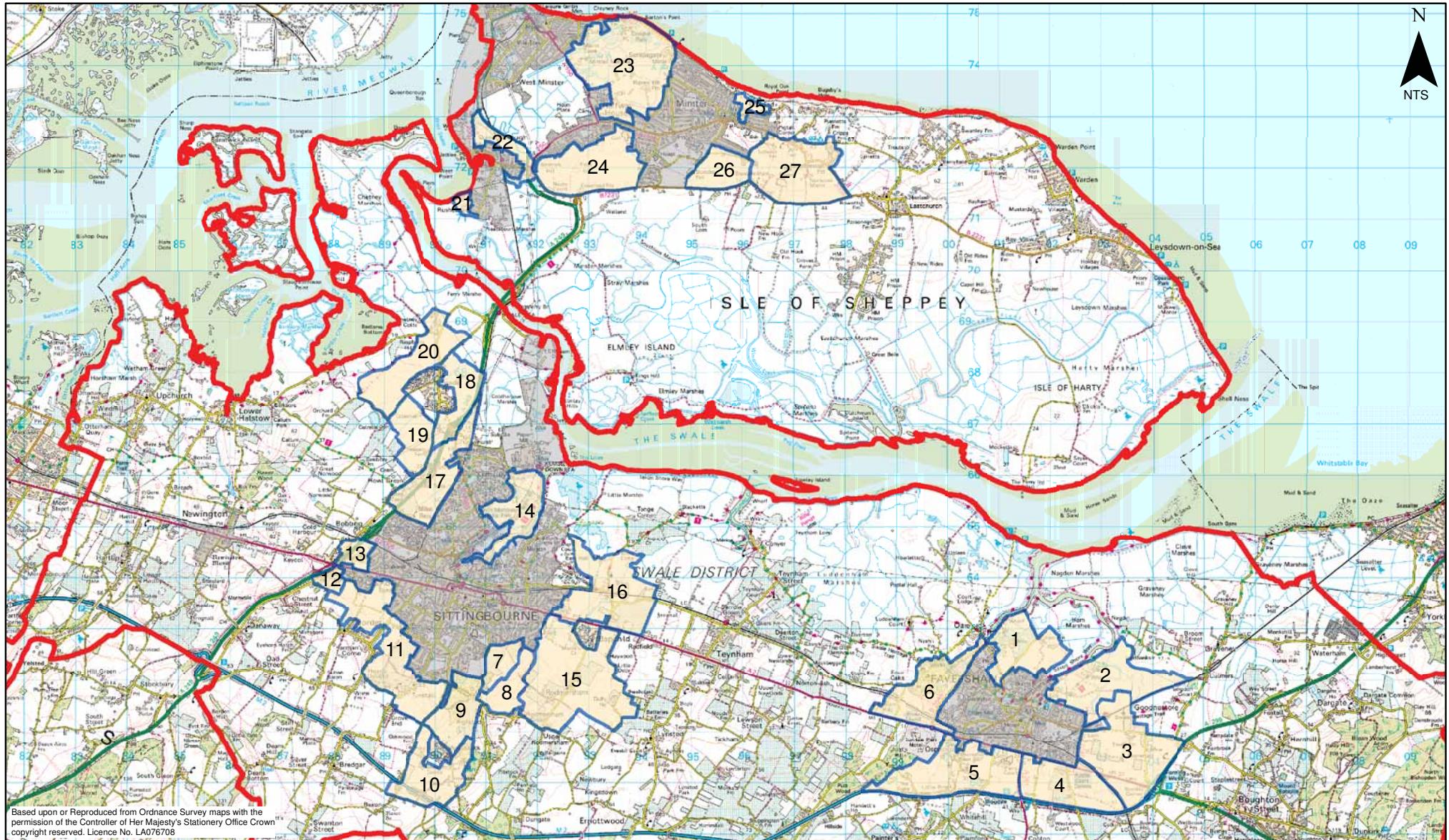


Figure 1 Urban Extension Study Areas

## Methodology

This report provides an examination of the landscape capacity to accommodate change within each Study Area, without causing significant adverse effects on its character. In order to assess the capacity to accommodate change, the landscape sensitivity is often assessed in accordance with a particular type of change or development. In this study the type of change is not specified, although where scope for development is identified the type of development which would be suitable will be discussed.

The methodology is based on current guidance set out within *Landscape Character Assessment Guidance* (1999) and *Topic Paper 6: Techniques and Criteria for Judging Capacity and Sensitivity* (2004), Countryside Agency and Scottish Natural Heritage.

*Topic Paper 6: Techniques and Criteria for Judging Capacity and Sensitivity* states that:

*'Landscape capacity refers to the degree to which a particular landscape character type or area is able to accommodate change without significant effects on its character, or overall change of landscape character type. Capacity is likely to vary according to the type and nature of change being proposed.'*

Landscape capacity to accommodate change combines the assessment of Landscape Sensitivity and Landscape Value.

Landscape Sensitivity is a measure of the ability of a landscape to accept change without causing irreparable damage to the essential fabric and distinctiveness of that landscape. The term change refers to both beneficial changes such as a new woodland as well as change that may be brought about by new land uses.

Landscape sensitivity is defined by an analysis of Sense of Place and Visibility and ranges from very low through low, moderate, high to very high.

Sense of Place balances Distinctiveness with Time Depth. Distinctiveness is defined by how much the key characteristics contribute to a sense of place. For example in a landscape where hedgerows are a key characteristic if the network is intact the landscape can be described as distinct or 'characteristic'. Some landscapes have features that may be considered unique or rare and these will obviously contribute to a strong sense of place. Time Depth ranges from recent, through historic to ancient and reflects how long that landscape has taken to establish. Ancient landscapes are uncommon in Kent but include those that have had very little intervention by man or contain ancient or prehistoric features. Historic landscapes are generally from the medieval period onwards. This is when the pattern of most landscapes in Kent was established and is generally discernible today (although overlain with modern features). Recent landscapes are those where historic elements have been replaced with new elements or land management. They include reclaimed landscapes.

Visibility addresses the issues of Landform and the intercepting feature of Tree Cover. For example an open hilltop landscape has a higher visibility than an enclosed lowland landscape.

Localised pockets of landscape set within a broader landscape character area may vary in Landscape Sensitivity. Therefore whilst landscape sensitivity is given for the landscape character areas defined within Swale Landscape and Biodiversity Appraisal (Third Draft February 2010), these have been reviewed because the Study Areas often form subdivisions of the borough wide character areas. For the purpose of this study, Landscape Sensitivity has been assessed in terms of the inherent sensitivity rather than sensitivity to a particular type of development. Table 1 illustrates how the Landscape Sensitivity of each Study Area has been assessed.

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**Table 1 Landscape sensitivity**

Sense of Place				Visibility					
Distinctiveness	Unique/rare	Moderate	Strong	Strong	Moderate	High	High		
	Distinct	Weak	Moderate	Strong	Landform	Dominant	Low	Moderate	High
	Indistinct	Weak	Weak	Moderate	Insignificant	Apparent	Low	Low	Moderate
	Recent	Historic	Ancient	Enclosed	Intermittent	open			
	Continuity			Tree Cover					

Sensitivity			
Sense of Place	Strong	Moderate	High
Strong	Moderate	High	High
Moderate	Low	Moderate	High
Weak	Low	Low	Moderate
	Low	Moderate	High
Visibility			

Landscape Value is a measure of the relative value that is attached to different landscapes. It can be recognised through landscape designation, as well as perceptual aspects such as remoteness, tranquillity, conservation interests, wildness or scenic beauty. Table 2 illustrates how the Landscape Value of each Study Area has been assessed.

**Table 2: Landscape Value**

Value	Typical Criteria
<b>High</b>	<p>These landscapes have one or more of the following characteristics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Designated at an international/national level for landscape, cultural heritage or ecological value</li> <li>• Landscape which provides the setting for nationally valued buildings or cultural heritage features</li> <li>• Very attractive and rare scenic quality/strong sense of remoteness and tranquillity</li> </ul>
<b>Moderate</b>	<p>These landscapes have one or more of the following characteristics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Designated at a local or regional level for landscape, cultural heritage or ecological value</li> <li>• Value expressed through cultural associations or through land use such as public open space, a significant number of public rights of way or promoted public rights of way</li> <li>• Commonplace landscape with some areas of attractive scenic quality/strong sense of remoteness and tranquillity</li> </ul>
<b>Low</b>	<p>These landscapes have one or more of the following characteristics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Generally undesignated landscape for landscape, cultural heritage or ecological value</li> <li>• Although certain landscape elements/features may be worthy of conservation, the landscape would generally benefit from restoration or enhancement</li> <li>• Degraded/damaged/poor quality landscape with a poor sense of remoteness and tranquillity</li> </ul>

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The Landscape Sensitivity and Landscape Value have been combined to provide the Capacity to Accommodate Change as follows:

Landscape Value	High	Moderate	Low
Moderate	Moderate	Low	Low
Low	High	Moderate	Low
	Low	Moderate	High
	Landscape Sensitivity		

It has to be recognised that whilst the process adopts a complex but logical critique of the landscape many of the individual decisions are still based on the trained but subjective judgements of the assessors. Topic Paper 6 states that,

*'It is entirely possible for a valued landscape to be relatively insensitive to the particular type of development in question because of both the characteristics of the landscape itself and the nature of the development. It may also be the case that the reasons why value is attached to the landscape are not compromised by the particular form of change. Such a landscape may therefore have some capacity to accommodate change, especially if the appropriate, and hopefully standard, steps are taken in terms of siting, layout and design of the change or development in question.'*

*For example, a capacity study may show that a certain specified amount of appropriately located and well-designed housing may be quite acceptable even in a highly valued and moderately sensitive landscape. This is why capacity is such a complex issue and why most capacity studies need to be accompanied by guidelines about the ways in which certain types of change or development can best be accommodated without unacceptable adverse effects.'*

Therefore the Capacity to Accommodate Change does not relate closely to the type and scale of appropriate development. For example within a Study Area of high Capacity to Accommodate Change, the type and scale of appropriate development might be low density. This report aims to give an indication of the type and scale of development which would perhaps be appropriate within each Study Area.

### Limitations and Assumptions

- It should be noted that landscape considerations are just one element to be considered in the overall acceptability for development, and these may conflict with other non – landscape factors.
- This study does not accept the inevitability of development, but assesses which Study Areas could best accommodate development in landscape terms should there be an overriding need to release land for development.
- This study does not assess the acceptability of development specifically within individual SHLAA and potential employment sites, but considers the general Capacity to Accommodate Change within each Study Area. In areas where SHLAA/potential employment sites coincide with areas which are considered appropriate for development, this does not suggest that the entire SHLAA/potential

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employment site is considered appropriate for development. The description of the Capacity to Accommodate Change should be considered alongside the Guidelines and Mitigation.

- Where the Capacity to Accommodate Change is low, areas which are suggested to be appropriate for development are those in the event of there being an overriding need for development.
- Landscape Sensitivity is an average across each Study Area and there are local variations within each Study Area. These are noted within the analysis of individual Study Areas where applicable.
- Appropriate building heights are not specified within each study area because this very much depends on the type, extent and location of a development. However, storey heights are referred to throughout the document in cases where taller buildings would clearly be inappropriate in terms of conflicting with the existing character of development, or where taller buildings may encroach visually on other sensitive areas by becoming visible above landform for example.