

DARTFORD LOCAL PLAN

**Green Infrastructure
Paper**

September 2021

DARTFORD
BOROUGH COUNCIL

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1 INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

Purpose of Report

- 1.1 This report sets out the justification for the approach towards Green Infrastructure in the second Pre-Submission Local Plan September 2021. Many of the statutory and policy designations and policy approaches remain the same as in previously adopted Core Strategy 2011 and Development Policies Plan 2017. This report provides some background and justification for these and focusses on proposed changes in approach and designations.
- 1.2 Whilst different sections of the report refer to different types of Green Infrastructure, it should be recognised that this is often multifunctional and has a number of overlapping roles so it needs to be considered as a whole. Section 2 relates to open space, in particular the green grid/ green and blue infrastructure, the provision of open space within new development, protected local green spaces and Borough Open Space. Section 3 focusses on playing pitches. Section 4 relates to biodiversity, in particular internationally and nationally designated sites, nature improvement areas, local wildlife sites and biodiversity net gain. Section 5 provides information on the landscape characteristics of the Borough and the justification for the approach towards landscape and trees in the Pre-Submission Local Plan. Finally, section 6 sets out the conclusions.

2 OPEN SPACE

Green Grid/ Green and Blue Infrastructure

National Policy

- 2.1 Paragraph 20 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) states that strategic policies should make sufficient for a number of things, including the conservation and enhancement of green infrastructure. Paragraph 92 states that planning policies should aim to achieve healthy, inclusive and safe places which (amongst other things) enable and support healthy lifestyles. It refers to the provision of safe and accessible green infrastructure and sports facilities in this respect. Furthermore, national policy states that plans should take a strategic approach to maintaining and enhancing networks of habitats and green infrastructure (paragraph 175 of the NPPF).

Local Plan Policy

- 2.2 The Green Grid network was established in the adopted Core Strategy 2011 (policy CS14) and continued through references in the adopted Development Policies Plan 2017. Pre-Submission Local Plan policy S2 (Infrastructure Planning Strategy) criterion 6 continues the longstanding approach of upgrading and expanding the Borough's Green Grid network which is in accordance with national planning policy.

- 2.3 The Pre-Submission Local Plan includes the following relevant definitions:

Green Grid: An interconnected multi-functional network of *Green and Blue Infrastructure*, habitat/landscape corridors, footpaths, cyclepaths and non-motorised public rights of way. The Grid enables people and wildlife to be well connected: within the urban area in the north of the Borough; to and along the Rivers Thames and Darent and other watercourses; to and from the countryside to the south; and to *Green and Blue Infrastructure* networks beyond the Borough's boundary.

Green and Blue Infrastructure: Green and blue (water) spaces, many of which form part of the *Green Grid* and serve many purposes. These include: designated nature conservation sites (including *Sites of Special Scientific Interest* and Local Wildlife Sites); priority habitats (as defined in the UK Biodiversity Action Plan); Biodiversity Opportunity Areas; roadside nature reserves; rivers/ lakes; *Protected Local Green Spaces*; *Borough Open Spaces*; open spaces within new development; other green open, landscaped and amenity spaces (including filled and grassed former landfill sites); and more urban landscaped public realm areas.

- 2.4 Diagram 3 in the Pre-Submission Local Plan indicatively shows the strategic Green Grid. This includes areas of significant recreational and/or biodiversity value including Dartford and Swanscombe Marshes, Dartford Heath, Joyden's Wood, Beacon Wood and Darent Country Parks, Swanscombe Heritage Park, and rivers/waterbodies. It also shows key existing footpath/cycle links including the Darent Valley Path, National Cycle Route 1 and England Coast Path as well as potential new footpath/cycle links, particularly in and around Ebbsfleet Garden City. The Policies Map shows the following elements of the Green Grid network: Protected Local Green Space; Borough Open Space; Sites of Special Scientific Interest; Ancient Woodland; Local Wildlife

Sites; Biodiversity Opportunity Areas; and the Marine Conservation Zone. It should be noted that not all elements of the Green Grid network are shown on the Policies Map.

- 2.5 Policies M14 (Green and Blue Infrastructure and Open Space Provision), M15 (Biodiversity and Landscape) and M17 (Active Travel, Access and Parking) set out more detail on retaining and enhancing the various elements the Green Grid network in the Borough. Some elements of this are discussed in further detail below.

Provision of Green and Blue Infrastructure within New Development

- 2.6 Criterion 1 of policy M14 (Green and Blue Infrastructure and Open Space Provision) sets out the requirements for the provision of Green and Blue Infrastructure in new development as follows:

- Sites of 20ha and over: at least 30% of the site area
- Sites of between 2ha and 20ha: at least 20% of the site area
- Sites of less than 2ha will be considered on a site by site basis for a proportionate contribution

This should include multi-functional land, providing opportunities for formal and informal recreation, habitats and corridors for wildlife, native trees/ landscaping, and other measures to reduce the impacts of climate change. On-going maintenance and management of such areas will need to be demonstrated.

Where the provision of on-site Green and Blue Infrastructure or public realm open space is not appropriate or feasible, contributions may be sought for off-site improvements of open space in the vicinity of the site.

- 2.7 This is largely a continuation of the longstanding strategy set out on policy CS14 of the adopted Core Strategy 2011. One wording change is the requirement for a proportionate contribution of Green and Blue Infrastructure on sites of less than 2ha. This clarifies the Council's expectation that smaller sites should also seek to make provision for Green and Blue Infrastructure. The amount of provision will depend on the size of the site and, in cases where it would be difficult to provide on-site, consideration will be given to whether appropriate provision could be made off-site instead.
- 2.8 The approach in criterion 1 of policy M14 is justified on the basis that the definition of Green and Blue Infrastructure is very broad (see paragraph 2.3 above) and the provision of this within new developments is a key way in which the Borough will achieve an improved strategic Green Grid network of habitats and green infrastructure in accordance with national planning policy.

Protected Local Green Spaces

National Policy

- 2.9 The NPPF (paragraph 101) allows Local Plans to designate Local Green Spaces and that policies for managing development within them should be consistent with those for Green Belts (paragraph 103). Paragraph 102 states that this designation should only be used where the green space is:
- in reasonably close proximity to the community it serves;
 - demonstrably special to a local community and holds particular local significance, for example because of its beauty, historic significance, recreational value (including as a playing field), tranquillity or richness of its wildlife; and

- local in character and is not an extensive tract of land.

Local Plan Policy

2.10 The adopted Development Policies Plan 2017 included Policy DP23 on Protected Local Green Spaces (PLGS) and the Policies Map showed the areas designated under this policy. These were justified in the Dartford Open Space Report 2015/16. Both the policy and the designated PLGS were found by the Inspector to comply with the NPPF. Potential PLGS were assessed and scored according to the following criteria in line with the NPPF:

- Size
- Beauty
- Historic
- Recreation
- Tranquillity
- Wildlife

2.11 Policy M14 criterion 2 of the Pre-Submission Local Plan 2021 closely reflects the text in policy DP23 of the adopted Development Policies Plan 2017, with some very minor amendments. It is not proposed to change the PLGS designations.

Sites

2.12 In response to the Preferred Options Local Plan consultation in January 2020, Code Development Planners Ltd objected to the Protected Local Green Space at Joyce Green Lane. They stated that there is no adequate evidence to support this designation and it does not comply with paragraph 102 of the NPPF. The following should be noted in relation to this site designation:

- As set out in paragraph 2.10 above, the PLGS designations were accepted by the Inspector during the preparation of the Development Policies Plan 2017.
- This site was included as PLGS in the Development Policies Plan 2017 as it passed the score threshold for designation, scoring particularly well for its recreation value.
- The Council has not received any representations to suggest that PLGS designations in the Borough are inappropriate in response to consultations on the new Local Plan.
- It is not proposed to change the PLGS designation at this or any other site.
- The objector has not provided any evidence to justify the removal of the PLGS designation at Joyce Green Lane.

2.13 During the plan period, additional PLGSs may come forward through Neighbourhood Plans. These will also need to demonstrate compliance with the criteria set out in the NPPF.

Borough Open Space and Other Existing Spaces

National Policy

2.14 Paragraph 98 of the NPPF recognises that access to a network of high quality open spaces and opportunities for sport and physical activity is important for the health and well-being of communities. It further states that planning policies should be based on assessments of need to determine what facilities are needed, which plan should then seek to accommodate. Paragraph 99 requires that existing open space, sports and

recreational buildings and land, including playing fields, should not be built on unless certain specified circumstances exist.

Local Plan Policy

- 2.15 Criterion 3 of policy M14 (Green and Blue Infrastructure and Open Space Provision) of the Pre-Submission Local Plan subsumes the criteria set out in paragraph 99 of the NPPF into the requirements for development affecting Borough Open Space. This is a continuation of the approach from policy DP24 (Open Space) of the adopted Development Policies Plan 2017 which identified Borough Open Spaces on the Policies Map. The justification for these was set out in the Dartford Open Space Report 2015/16. Both the policy and the designated BOS were found by the Inspector to comply with the NPPF.
- 2.16 It is considered that the BOS designation remains robust and consistent with national policy. Sites identified as BOS meet one or more of the following criteria:
- Civic amenity (parks, formal gardens, outdoor sports facilities, amenity greenspaces, equipped children's play areas, allotments, cemeteries/ crematoria and churchyards)
 - Biodiversity (natural and semi-natural greenspaces including woodlands, urban forestry, scrub, grasslands, wetlands)
 - Linear and other features (green corridors including rivers, road and railway verges, cycleways, rights of way, cliffs)
- 2.17 The supporting text to policy M14 of the Pre-Submission Local Plan and the BOS definition in the glossary are intended to provide further clarity on the purposes of BOS. Unlike some environmental designations, it is not intended to be tightly concentrated to any one particular type of usage. This reflects the multifunctional nature of much green infrastructure. For this reason, it is not considered that BOS sites should overlap with Sites of Special Scientific Interest which are designated for their biodiversity and geoaarchaeological value. BOS is defined as follows in the Pre-Submission Local Plan:
- Green spaces that have identified environmental (e.g. landscape and/or biodiversity, recreational, or amenity) value. Some are publicly accessible but others have no public access. They include parks, playspaces, allotments, churchyards/cemeteries, current and former sports pitches, linear green features or other sites with features of potential biodiversity value such as railway embankments, and well landscaped public realm areas.

Sites

- 2.18 In response to the Preferred Options Local Plan consultation in January 2020 and the first Pre-Submission (Publication) Local Plan consultation in February 2021, the Council received objections to a limited number of Borough Open Space designations. The table below sets out information about these sites and the Council's response to the objections. In addition, in response to the Preferred Options, both Natural England and the Environment Agency did not object to land currently designated as BOS but were concerned about the potential impact of development on Swanscombe Peninsula on wildlife. Natural England stated that this would have the potential to directly impact on open mosaic habitat in the Thames Estuary in north Kent which is often very rich in the diverse assemblages of brownfield invertebrates they support. This has now been superseded by the notification of the Swanscombe Peninsula Site of Special Scientific Interest in March 2021.

2.19 The Council is also proposing to designate new BOS sites, amend some existing ones and delete the whole or part of six existing BOS designations. The list of sites and the justification for the changes is included in Appendix 1. In this respect:

- The new sites largely relate to new open spaces already provided or in the process of being provided within new developments but they also include two areas of woodland within established residential areas.
- The amended sites take on board implementations of road layouts within new development and changes to Wildlife Site boundaries.
- The whole or parts of BOS sites proposed for deletion are those that are already designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest which provides strong protection to the biodiversity interest plus Glentworth Club on Lowfield Street and Land at Applegarth Drive at Questor, Wilmington. The deletion of the latter two sites is justified on the basis that they are used for parking/ servicing and employment premises respectively and neither comprises open space.

Site	Objector	Principal Reason for Original/ Previously Proposed Designation	Council's Response
Land East of Telephone Exchange, London Road, Greenhithe	Imperial Corporate Capital Plc	Originally Designated in the adopted Development Policies Plan 2017 Group B: Biodiversity Category 2b: Semi-natural greenspace – biodiversity Designated due to woodland on the site	Much of the woodland has been removed, and now the site is currently subject to a planning application for residential development (ref 19/01557/FUL). It forms part of a wider BOS area that provides linear provision in the urban area, N.B. These parts of the BOS designation have not been contested. It is premature to amend this BOS designation prior to development proposals being approved/ implemented. However, the residential proposals include provision for replacement landscaping and a small play area. The plans show the provision of wild meadow planting, native tree planting and green roofs. It is considered that these measures could contribute to the biodiversity and linear interest and the BOS designation should be retained, and any full review/ boundary refinement should be after proposals have materialised.
Woodland adjacent to Orchard Terrace, Cotton Lane, Stone	Bellway Homes	Originally Designated in the adopted Development Policies Plan 2017 Group B: Biodiversity Category 2b: Semi-natural greenspace – biodiversity Category 5b: informal recreation space – civic amenity Designated due to woodland on the site – protected by a Tree Preservation Order	This is an important block of deciduous woodland, protected by a TPO and shown as a priority habitat on DEFRA's Magic Map. It provides amenity and biodiversity value which is in accordance with the purposes of BOS. As such, the BOS designation for this site should be retained.
Dartford Marshes	Code Development Planners Ltd	Originally Designated in the adopted Development Policies Plan 2017 Comprises two BOS sites Group B: Biodiversity	The marshes are important for biodiversity. Much of the area is shown as priority habitat on DEFRA's Magic Map. This includes coastal saltmarsh, coastal and floodplain

Site	Objector	Principal Reason for Original/ Previously Proposed Designation	Council's Response
		<p>Category 2b: Semi-natural greenspace – biodiversity</p> <p>Designated due to it being marshland in the north west of the Borough. Part of it is a Local Wildlife site and part is not. Both are within a Biodiversity Opportunity Area</p>	<p>grazing marsh and deciduous woodland but there are also areas of open mosaic habitat. As such, the BOS designation should be retained.</p>
Swanscombe Marshes	Swanscombe Development LLP, London Resort Company Holdings Ltd	<p>Proposed for extension and name change in the first Pre-Submission (Publication) Dartford Local Plan February 2021 on the basis of its role as semi natural greenspace</p>	<p>The area proposed by the Council as an extension to an existing Borough Open Space in the first Publication Dartford Local Plan February 2021 has since been notified by Natural England as part of the Swanscombe Peninsula Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). On this basis, there is no need for the extended Borough Open Space designation on the basis that the SSSI provides strong protection to the biodiversity interest of the area. The existing Borough Open Space known as Footpath DS1 along Swanscombe Marshes will be retained.</p>

3 PLAYING PITCHES

National Policy

- 3.1 National planning policy which applies to playing pitches is contained in paragraphs 98 and 99 of the NPPF. Further information is set out in paragraph 2.14 above.

Local Plan Policy

- 3.2 In Dartford Borough, current and former pitches are included within the Borough Open Space designation (see paragraph 2.17 above). Criterion 3 of policy M14 (Green and Blue Infrastructure and Open Space Provision) of the Pre-Submission Local Plan will apply to proposals which may affect sports pitches. Opportunities will be taken to ensure that new playing pitches are provided within large scale developments as part of overall green infrastructure provision requirements set out in criterion 1 of policy M14 (see also paragraph 2.6 above). This is a continuation of the approach set out in policy CS14 (Green Space) of the adopted Core Strategy 2011 and policy DP24 (Open Space) of the adopted Development Policies Plan 2017. There may also be other opportunities for providing new playing pitches for public use, for example, community use of sports pitches provided within the grounds of new schools, pitch provision on land owned by the Council or parish/town councils.

Update

- 3.3 The Council consulted Sport England on the Preferred Options Local Plan but did not receive a response.
- 3.4 A Playing Pitch Study was carried out in 2016 to support the submission of the Dartford Development Policies Plan. This focussed on the supply, quality, and current and future demand for cricket, football, hockey, and rugby union pitches. The Study has not been updated but there have been some planning permissions granted for new provision and pitches implemented since the Playing Pitch Study was carried out. These are shown in the table below.

Site	Pitch Provision
Atlas Park, London Road, Stone	Permission granted on 14 September 2020 for seven pitches to include full-size football, 9 a-side, 7 a-side and 5-a-side and a clubhouse (ref 18/01611/FUL). The central pitch would be artificial 3G with floodlights. Not yet implemented.
Bexley Sports and Social Club, Calvert Drive, Dartford	Permission granted for an Artificial Grass Pitch, relocation and addition of cricket nets, relocation of floodlit grass rugby training area and adjustment of summer and winter playing pitches on 27 July 2020 (19/01364/FUL). Not yet implemented.
River Mill School, Central Road, Dartford (within Northern Gateway)	Permission granted for an all weather playing pitch (Multi Use Games Area), a large grass football pitch and two smaller pitches available for use for the community (refs 18/01480/FUL and 20/00223/CDNA). Under construction.
Stone Lodge, Cotton Lane, Stone	Permission granted for two floodlit rugby pitches on 19 April 2018 (ref 17/02105/FUL). The 4G pitch has been provided and the grass pitch will be implemented later in 2021.

- 3.5 Since 2016, there has been one planning application which could have resulted in the loss of a former cricket pitch at North Kent College (ref 18/01176/FUL). However, this was refused on a number of grounds, including the loss of open space formerly used as a playing field without sufficient justification in accordance with policy DP24 of the Development Policies Plan 2017.
- 3.6 In addition to the above, there are several sports pitches planned as part of major developments in the Borough. These have been agreed via Section 106 agreements. Within Ebbsfleet Garden City, at the former Eastern Quarry site, six dual use pitches will be delivered at the education campus, which includes a running track/athletics field and an all-weather pitch. There is also an obligation to deliver two sets of two community pitches. At Ebbsfleet Green, there is a commitment to deliver a 3G pitch. The Bridge site has commitments to provide 2ha of sports facilities.
- 3.7 The implementation of the pitches outlined in paragraphs 3.4 and 3.6 above will go some way to addressing the shortfalls of junior and mini football pitches identified in the Playing Pitches Study.
- 3.8 It should also be noted that the Submission Stone Neighbourhood Plan 2020 includes reference to the Stone Recreation Ground Masterplan. Whilst this does not propose any changes to the existing pitches on the site, it includes an aspiration to provide improved changing facilities for those using the pitches.
- 3.9 No pitches have been lost to development since the Development Policies Plan was adopted in 2017. As set out above, it is clear that net gains in provision are occurring.

4 BIODIVERSITY

- 4.1 Below section focusses on where there have been changes since the Development Policies Plan and Policies Map were approved in 2017.

National Policy

- 4.2 The NPPF makes clear that the planning system/ planning policies should:
- help improve biodiversity (paragraph 8);
 - protect and enhance sites of biodiversity value (paragraph 174);
 - minimise impacts on and provide net gains for biodiversity, including by establishing coherent ecological networks that are more resilient to current and future pressures (paragraph 174);
 - distinguish between the hierarchy of international, national and locally designated sites (paragraph 175);
 - take a strategic approach to maintaining and enhancing networks of habitats and green infrastructure (paragraph 175);
 - identify, map and safeguard components of local wildlife-rich habitats and wider ecological networks, including the hierarchy of international, national and locally designated sites of importance for biodiversity, wildlife corridors and stepping stones that connect them, and areas identified by national and local partnerships for habitat management, enhancement, restoration and creation (paragraph 179); and
 - promote the conservation, restoration and enhancement of priority habitats, ecological networks and the protection and recovery of priority species, and identified and pursue opportunities for securing measurable net gains for biodiversity (paragraph 179).

Internationally Designated Sites

- 4.3 Whilst there have been no changes to the internationally designated sites within the sphere of influence of development within Dartford Borough, an updated Habitats Regulations Assessment was been produced to support the first Pre-Submission Local Plan. This recommended that the Local Plan provide clarification on which sites will be subject to Habitats Regulations screening and, if necessary, assessment due to their potential impacts on Thames Estuary and Marshes and Medway Estuary and Marshes Special Protection Areas (SPAs) and Ramsar sites. This clarification is included in the supporting text to policy M15 of the Plan. A further update to the Habitats Regulations Assessment has been produced to support the second Pre-Submission Local Plan but this did not include any further recommendations.
- 4.4 The Council has also updated the “Habitats Regulations and Large Sites in Dartford Borough – Guidance for Developers (September 2021)” which applies to residential developments of over 15 dwellings within 6-10km of the SPAs and Ramsar sites. This amends the previous approach to reflect the fact that mitigation measures cannot now be taken into account in when screening proposals on the need for Habitats Regulations Assessment following the outcome of the “People over Wind” case. It also provides greater clarity of approach and updates the relevant tariff rate for applicable proposals. The updated Guidance is also available as part of the evidence base to support the Plan.

Nationally Designated Sites

4.5 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) are areas of land which are of special interest by reason of their flora, fauna, or geological or physiological features. They are nationally important sites. The Swanscombe Peninsula SSSI (an extension to the previous Bakers Hole SSSI) was notified by Natural England in March 2021 and a decision on its designation will be made by December 2021. The features of special interest are:

- Geology
- Vascular plants
- Invertebrates
- Breeding birds

4.6 Marine Conservation Zones are areas that protect a range of nationally important, rare or threatened habitats and species. The Swanscombe Marine Conservation Zone was designated in May 2019. The protected features are:

- Intertidal mud, a broadscale marine habitat
- Tentacled lagoon worm, a species of marine fauna

Further information is available at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/marine-conservation-zones-swanscombe>

4.7 Pre-Submission Local Plan policy M15 (Biodiversity and Landscape) protects sites designated for their biodiversity value and the supporting text makes clear that this includes SSSIs and Marine Conservation Zones which are of national importance. The proposed changes to the Policies Map include the Swanscombe Peninsula SSSI and the Swanscombe Marine Conservation Zone.

Nature Improvement Area

4.8 Nature Improvement Areas (NIAs) were established to create joined up and resilient ecological networks at a landscape scale. The Greater Thames Marshes was one of the 12 identified NIAs areas. The projects started on 1 April 2012 and the funding ended on 31 March 2015 though the projects were able to carry on using their own resources. The Greater Thames Marshes NIA has not continued and so the designation will be removed from the Policies Map.

Local Wildlife Sites

4.9 Local Wildlife Sites (LWSs) are areas which are important for the conservation of wildlife in the administrative areas of Kent and Medway. They may support threatened habitats, such as chalk grassland or ancient woodland, or may be important for the wild plants or animals which are present. LWSs are selected by reference to a clear set of criteria, based on the importance of the sites for particular wildlife habitats or wild species. Landowners and local authorities are consulted before any land is designated as a LWS. Kent Wildlife Trust manages the LWS system in Kent, but the Kent Nature Partnership Board makes the final decision on the criteria by which sites should be chosen, and on the selection of individual sites.

4.10 LWSs have no protection in law. The owner of land which has been designated as a LWS is not obliged to carry out work to protect or maintain the land's wildlife interest.

However, it is hoped that owners and managers of LWSs will want to consider wildlife when making their management decisions.

- 4.11 Since the Policies Map was produced, there have been some minor boundary changes to the following LWSs:
- DA03 Sutton at Hone Lakes – field at north end removed from the site
 - DA09 Woods at Wilmington – residential curtilages removed from the site
- The proposed amendments to the Policies Map reflect these amended boundaries.

Biodiversity Net Gain

- 4.12 The Council received responses from statutory consultees on the Preferred Options Local Plan in relation to biodiversity net gain. Natural England advocated strategically planned and designed Green Infrastructure as a means of delivering environmental net gain, amongst other things. The Environment Agency made a number of references to achieving biodiversity net gain along river corridors and on development sites.
- 4.13 Pre-Submission Dartford Local Plan objective G4 includes reference to achieving biodiversity net gain. This is implemented through strategic policy S3 (Climate Change Strategy). At a more detailed level, Development Management policy M15 (Biodiversity and Landscape) makes clear that the new national biodiversity net gain requirements will apply to all applicable developments. It sets out that local delivery of net gains should preferably be made by enhancing existing habitats and/or creating new habitats on-site or, in cases where this is not achievable, off-site within the Biodiversity Opportunity Areas. It further states that these will need to be informed by and link to the Dartford Green Grid network and any Local Nature Recovery Strategy.
- 4.14 The forthcoming Environment Bill is expected to require most developments to deliver at least a 10% improvement in biodiversity value, i.e. 10% biodiversity net gain. The requirements in policy M15 align with this and respond to comments made on the Preferred Options by Natural England and the Environment Agency.
- 4.15 In addition, Policies M14 (Green and Blue Infrastructure and Open Space Provision) and M4 (Flood Risk and Riverside Design) address the need to consider biodiversity as part of the wider Green Infrastructure network (as advocated by Natural England) and as part of river corridors (as advocated by the Environment Agency).

5 LANDSCAPE AND TREES

National Policy

- 5.1 The NPPF (paragraph 20) states that strategic policies should make sufficient provision for the conservation and enhancement of the natural environment, including landscapes. It requires planning policies to ensure that developments are sympathetic to local character and history, including the surrounding landscape setting (NPPF paragraph 130). It also allows valued landscapes to be protected and enhanced, and sets out that planning policies should recognise the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside and the wider benefits from natural capital, including trees and woodland (NPPF paragraph 174). National policy also requires that development resulting in the loss of deterioration of irreplaceable habitats (such as ancient woodland and ancient or veteran trees) should be refused unless there are wholly exceptional reasons and a suitable compensation strategy exists (NPPF paragraph 180).

Character Areas and Landscape Assessment

- 5.2 Dartford Borough falls within the following National Character Areas:

- Greater Thames Estuary
- North Kent Plan

The Greater Thames Estuary National Character Area is predominantly a remote and tranquil landscape of shallow creeks, drowned estuaries, lowlying islands, mudflats and broad tracts of tidal salt marsh and reclaimed grazing marsh that lies between the North Sea and the rising ground inland. The North Kent Plan National Character Area is open, low and gently undulating. It is a very productive agricultural area characterised by arable use, traditional orchards and horticultural crops, with significant ancient woodlands.

- 5.3 A Landscape Assessment for Kent was carried out by Kent County Council in 2004¹. This identifies a number of character areas and the following are relevant to Dartford Borough:

- Western Thames Marshes
- Dartford and Gravesend Fringes
- Swanley Fringe
- Darenth Downs
- Lower Darent Valley
- Southfleet Arable Lands
- Ash Downs

Alongside other evidence, the Landscape Assessment was used to help assess the physical suitability of sites for residential development in the Dartford Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment 2021.

Local Plan Policy

- 5.4 Dartford Borough does not have any nationally designated landscapes and the Pre-Submission Local Plan has not specifically identified valued landscapes. However, the supporting text to policy M15 of the Pre-Submission Local Plan sets out information on

¹ <https://www.kent.gov.uk/about-the-council/strategies-and-policies/environment-waste-and-planning-policies/countryside-policies-and-reports/kents-landscape-assessment>

the key, unique characteristics of the Borough's urban and rural landscape. In addition, the Policies Map identifies tracts of ancient woodland which are a key feature of the Borough's rural landscape and also an important (priority) habitat. Many of these are protected as Sites of Special Scientific Interest or Local Wildlife Sites and/or by group Tree Preservation Orders. Other important trees are protected by individual Tree Preservation Orders.

- 5.5 As the supporting text to policy M15 of the Pre-Submission Local Plan makes clear, key characteristics of the Borough's urban landscape are the large undeveloped former landfill sites that provide green breaks in development and trees located on ridges that provide a backdrop to views from the Thames riverside. There are also marked changes in levels including cliff faces as a result of previous quarrying operations in the area. The Rivers Thames, Darent and Ebbsfleet are also key landscape features.
- 5.6 The Design for Ebbsfleet guide, referred to in Policy E2 (Ebbsfleet Garden City Development Principles), includes a review and analysis of Ebbsfleet's cultural landscapes and sets out the design narratives which will apply to developments in different parts of Ebbsfleet Garden City which reflect the landscape.
- 5.7 Pre-Submission Local Plan objective G4 includes reference to landscape protection and provision. This is implemented through criterion 3 of Development Management policy M15 (Biodiversity and Landscape) which requires all new developments to be designed and laid out in a way which is sympathetic to their landscape setting. It also sets out the requirements for landscaping schemes in major developments. Criterion 4 of the policy requires existing tree coverage, hedgerows and other landscape features to be retained wherever possible. In cases where this is not feasible or justified, suitable replacement provision should be made.
- 5.8 Whilst the Borough does not have any designated landscapes, it has unique landscape features which are important to retain and enhance to ensure that landscape character is maintained. Policy M15 seeks to ensure that this will occur throughout the Borough. Policy E2 and the Design for Ebbsfleet guide will apply specifically in Ebbsfleet Garden City. The approach set out in the Pre-Submission Local Plan is consistent with national planning policy.

6 CONCLUSIONS

- 6.1 The approach towards the Green Grid/ Green and Blue Infrastructure, its provision within new development, protected local green spaces and borough open spaces is largely a continuation of policies set out in the adopted Core Strategy 2011 and adopted Development Policies Plan 2017. The most significant change relates to the recently notified Swanscombe Peninsula Site of Special Scientific Interest. There are no proposed changes to protected local green spaces, but there are some proposed changes to the lower tier Borough Open Spaces which are set out in full in Appendix 1. Borough Open Spaces remain an important part of the approach to retain appropriate green infrastructure in the Borough, for example recognising the overall environmental contribution of many green multi-functional spaces in Dartford. Changes are largely as a result of new open spaces provided within new developments.
- 6.2 The paper has set out an update of playing pitches which have been granted planning permission and expected to be provided as part of strategic developments in the Borough. There has been no loss of existing pitches since 2015/16 and new pitches are being brought forward. The Council will maximise opportunities for the provision of additional sports pitches in the plan period, including as part of green and blue infrastructure provision within strategic developments.
- 6.3 There have not been any changes to internationally designated biodiversity sites but the potential impacts of development in the Borough on them have been considered in the Habitats Regulations Assessment. The “Habitats Regulations and Large Sites in Dartford Borough – Guidance for Developers (September 2021)” has been updated and sets out the approach to proposals for residential development of more than 15 dwellings within 6-10km of the SPAs and Ramsar sites. The recently notified Swanscombe Peninsula Site of Special Scientific Interest and the newly designated Swanscombe Marine Conservation Zone are proposed for inclusion on the Policies Map and referenced in the Pre-Submission Local Plan, and there are also some small changes to two Local Wildlife Site boundaries. The Nature Improvement Area no longer applies and has been removed from the Policies Map. In accordance with national planning policy, the Local Plan requires developments to provide biodiversity net gain and the national approach to this will be applied.
- 6.4 There are no designated landscapes within the Borough but there are some key characteristics of the landscape. The approach towards protecting the landscape, trees and other landscape features in criteria 3 and 4 of policy M15 is justified.

APPENDIX 1: BOROUGH OPEN SPACES – LIST UPDATE

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Location	Group	Category	Evidence	Notes (Description/ other designation)
Castle Hill – New Sites				
Mercer Avenue Corridor Park	Linear & other features	3 green and water corridors	Aerial Photography / Planning Mapping	Linear park – footpath and natural greenspace
Birch Green, Motte Lane	Civic amenity	5b informal recreation space	Aerial Photography / Planning Mapping	Village green
Poplars Green, Raven Close	Civic amenity	5b informal recreation space	Aerial Photography / Planning Mapping	Village green
Castle Hill Park, Cherry Orchard	Civic amenity	1c urban park/ 4 outdoor sports and formal recreation facility/ 6 equipped play provision	Aerial Photography / Planning Mapping	Park with equipped play and tennis courts

Location	Group	Category	Evidence	Notes (Description/ other designation)
Lakeside Park, west of Flint Rise	Civic amenity	1c urban park	Aerial Photography / Planning Mapping	Under construction August 2021
Castle Hill Drive, landscape space	Linear & other features	2b semi natural greenspace/ 3 green and water corridors	Aerial Photography / Planning Mapping	Semi natural linear landscape space
Ebbsfleet Green – New Sites				
Ackers Drive Landscape Space	Linear & other features	2b semi natural greenspace/ 3 green and water corridors	Aerial Photography / Planning Mapping	Semi natural linear landscape space
Glover Close Play Park	Civic amenity	6 equipped play provision	Aerial Photography / Planning Mapping	Children's equipped play park
Ackers Drive open space	Civic amenity	5a housing greenspace	Aerial Photography / Planning Mapping	Landscaped housing amenity area
Woodland and open space corridor between Ebbsfleet Green, A2 and Ebbsfleet Junction	Biodiversity	2b semi natural greenspace/ 3 green and water corridors	Aerial Photography / Planning Mapping	Semi natural linear corridor
Northern Gateway – New Sites				
East of River Darent, North of Riverside Way	Biodiversity	5a housing greenspace	Aerial Photography / Planning Mapping	Semi natural land forming buffer between river, Dartford freshwater marshes and warehouse development, contains Darent Valley Path
Creekmill Way	Civic amenity	5a housing greenspace	Aerial Photography / Planning Mapping	Housing amenity space
Riverside Walk, Priory Road	Civic amenity	5b informal recreation space/ 6	Aerial Photography / Planning Mapping	Equipped play facilities within green open space adjacent to development

Location	Group	Category	Evidence	Notes (Description/ other designation)
West of River Darent, riverside walk to Bob Dunn Way	Linear & other features	2b semi natural greenspace/ 3 green and water corridors	Aerial Photography / Planning Mapping	Semi-natural riverside corridor providing an ecological corridor. Some areas contain raised platforms for public access
Railway Embankment south of Mill Pond Road, east of Overy Street	Linear & other features	3 green and water corridors	Aerial Photography / Planning Mapping	Green corridor – railway
St Clements – New Sites				
Land at Castleridge Drive	Civic amenity	5a housing greenspace/ 3 green and water corridors	Aerial Photography / Planning Mapping	Housing amenity space with linear pond
Play area opposite 76 Castleridge Drive	Civic amenity	6 equipped play provision	Aerial Photography / Planning Mapping	Equipped play area
Play area opposite 110 Castleridge Drive	Civic amenity	6 equipped play provision	Aerial Photography / Planning Mapping	Equipped play area
Land east of Sanderling Way	Biodiversity	2b semi natural greenspace	Aerial Photography / Planning Mapping	Semi-natural linear space with trees and shrubs
St Clements Lakes North – Buffer with B235	Civic amenity	5b informal recreation space	Aerial Photography / Planning Mapping	Semi natural open space with ponds
St Clements Lakes South – Buffer with B235	Civic amenity	5b informal recreation space	Aerial Photography / Planning Mapping	Semi natural open space
The Bridge – New Sites				
Henslow Crescent pocket park	Civic amenity	5a housing greenspace	Aerial Photography / Planning Mapping	Housing Greenspace

Location	Group	Category	Evidence	Notes (Description/ other designation)
Ellingham View (opposite Lockwood Place)	Civic amenity	5b informal recreation space	Aerial Photography / Planning Mapping	Housing Greenspace
Land at 28 Ellingham View	Civic amenity	5b informal recreation space	Aerial Photography / Planning Mapping	Housing Greenspace
Land at 25 Ellingham View	Civic amenity	5b informal recreation space	Aerial Photography / Planning Mapping	Housing Greenspace
Land at 55 Halcrow Avenue	Civic amenity	5b informal recreation space	Aerial Photography / Planning Mapping	Housing Greenspace
Ellingham View Playground	Civic amenity	6 equipped play provision	Aerial Photography / Planning Mapping	Equipped Playground with informal play facilities
Northern A206 Landscape Buffer	Linear & other features	3 green and water corridors	Aerial Photography / Planning Mapping	Linear semi-natural buffer
Other New Sites				
Land fronting Elizabeth Street and Cotton Lane, Stone	Biodiversity	2b semi natural greenspace/ 3 green and water corridors	Aerial Photography / Planning Mapping	Woodland/ semi natural corridor and open space
South of Hulsewood Close, Wilmington	Biodiversity	2b semi natural greenspace	Aerial Photography / Planning Mapping	Woodland area
Amendments to Existing Sites				
Castle Hill Park Whitecliffe Castle Hill Ebbsfleet	Civic Amenity	5b informal recreation space	Aerial Photography / Planning Mapping	Minor deletions to take account of the implementation of road layouts within new development. Landscaped garden/informal recreation
Woodland between Castle Hill and Car Park D Ebbsfleet International Station	Civic Amenity	2b semi natural greenspace	Aerial Photography / Planning Mapping	Minor deletions to take account of the implementation of road layouts within new development. Woodland, Biodiversity Opportunity Area

Location	Group	Category	Evidence	Notes (Description/ other designation)
Sutton at Hone Lakes	Biodiversity	2b semi natural greenspace	Aerial Photography / Planning Mapping	Minor deletion to take account of the change to the Local Wildlife Site boundary
Rowhill Wood West of Rowhill Road Wilmington DA09 – Woods at Wilmington	Biodiversity	2b semi natural greenspace	Aerial Photography / Planning Mapping	Minor deletion to take account of the change to the Local Wildlife Site boundary
Deletions of Whole of Parts of Existing Sites				
Glentworth Ex Servicemen's Club 154 Lowfield Street Dartford			Aerial Photography / Planning Mapping	Deleted whole site as the area is used for parking and servicing and is not open space
Land at Applegarth Drive Questor Wilmington			Aerial Photography / Planning Mapping	Deleted whole site as the area comprises employment premises and is not open space
Darenth Wood			Aerial Photography / Planning Mapping	Deleted the part of the site that is designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest as this provides strong protection to the biodiversity interest of the area.
Sidcup & District Motorcycle Club Canada Heights Button Street Swanley			Aerial Photography / Planning Mapping	Deleted the part of the site that is designated as part of the Farningham Wood Site of Special Scientific Interest as this provides strong protection to the biodiversity interest of the area.
Allotments Alkerden Lane Swanscombe			Aerial Photography / Planning Mapping	Deleted the part of the site that is designated as the Swanscombe Skull Site of Special Scientific Interest as this provides strong protection to the biodiversity interest of the area.
Dartford Heath Heath Lane Dartford			Aerial Photography / Planning Mapping	Deleted the part of the site that is designated as the Wansunt Pit Site of Special Scientific Interest as

Location	Group	Category	Evidence	Notes (Description/ other designation)
				this provides strong protection to the biodiversity interest of the area.