



**CLEARSTONE
ENERGY**

DARTFORD ENERGY HUB

LVIA - APPENDIX B

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LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT
(LVIA)

Landscape Character Assessments (Extracts)

December 2024

Extracts From:

Natural England – National Character Area Profile 113: North Kent Plain

Kent County Landscape Character Assessment: Southfleet Arable Lands

Introduction & Summary

Description

Opportunities

Key facts
and data

Landscape
change

Analysis



www.gov.uk/natural-england



Summary

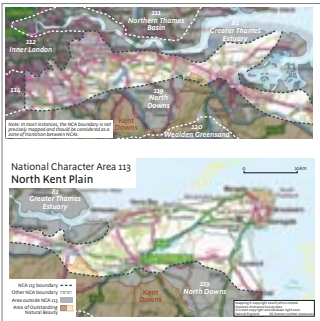
The North Kent Plain National Character Area (NCA) is the strip of land between the Thames Estuary to the north and the chalk of the Kent Downs to the south. The area is open, low and gently undulating. It is a very productive agricultural area with predominantly high-quality, fertile loam soils characterised by arable use. Traditional orchards, soft fruits and other horticultural crops exist in central and eastern areas giving rise to the use of the title ‘Garden of England’. There is an extensive area of ancient woodland around Blean, plus significant ancient woodlands further west. However, it is generally an open landscape: characteristic shelterbelts occur within the fruit-growing areas, but the agricultural land is mostly devoid of hedgerows.

The NCA meets the sea between Whitstable and Deal, changing from a north-facing to an east- or south-facing shore. There is a great diversity of coastal habitats, including chalk cliffs around Thanet, and soft cliffs between Herne Bay and Reculver – and also at Pegwell Bay. There are also areas of intertidal sand and mud, salt marshes (especially at Pegwell Bay), sand dunes (notably Sandwich Bay), shingle beaches (at Minnis Bay and near Deal), brackish lagoons and maritime grasslands on cliff-tops and sea walls.

The area has a strong urban influence, with several built-up areas, including coastal towns and these occupy a substantial part of the area with significant development around London and the Medway towns, which has a strong influence in the west of the NCA. Canterbury is world-renowned, and was designated as a World Heritage Site in 1988. The Site includes Canterbury Cathedral and Precincts, St Augustine’s Abbey and St Martin’s church. These are all considered milestones in the religious history of England, and are also architecturally significant⁴.

A small proportion of the area (2.4 per cent) falls within the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). International and European designated sites are associated in the main with coastal habitats, with four Special Protection Areas (SPAs), two Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) and four Ramsar sites identified along the coast, falling either wholly or partially within the NCA. There are three inland sites: Stodmarsh SAC, SPA and Ramsar; Blean Woods SAC; and Queendown Warren SAC. The River Stour is the main catchment in the NCA, with its tributaries and associated wetlands being an important feature in the east. The Medway dissects the NCA in the west, dominated by the urban conurbations of Chatham and Gillingham, with its strong historic military associations.

This NCA is important for food production and associated services (such as soil and water regulation and management) that help to protect the area’s natural assets. In addition, flood protection is an important consideration along the rivers and coastline. The NCA has significant opportunities for tourism and recreation. Green infrastructure opportunities are important for securing benefits to local communities, especially through the provision of accessible natural green space in urban areas. Development pressures (and the associated infrastructure) are likely to present significant challenges as the area responds to an increasing population and the demands of economic development and a changing climate. In response to these challenges, it will be important to maximise the opportunities for society and the natural environment in a balanced and co-ordinated manner.



⁴ Canterbury World Heritage Site, Statement of Outstanding Universal Value (SOUV), English Heritage

Click map to enlarge; click again to reduce.

Statements of Environmental Opportunity:

- **SEO 1:** Maintain the historic character and long tradition of a farmed landscape, creating habitats to establish more resilient and coherent ecological networks within the farmed and peri-urban areas, benefitting biodiversity and geodiversity, and helping to regulate water and soil quality. Protect traditional practices including the longstanding associations of the fruit belt, maintaining a strong sense of place and reinforcing Kent's reputation as the Garden of England.
- **SEO 2:** Plan for and manage the effects of coastal change, by allowing the operation of natural coastal processes and improving the sustainability of current management practices, to maintain and enhance the local landscape character and the area's biodiversity assets. This can lead to habitat creation, flood-risk reduction to built-up areas, and opportunities for recreational activity.
- **SEO 3:** Protect the distinct wooded areas of the landscape, particularly through the management of nationally important, ancient semi-natural woodlands, increasing the area of broadleaved woodland where appropriate, while increasing the connectivity of the mosaic of associated habitats notably wooded heath and semi-improved grassland while enhancing the recreational resource.
- **SEO 4:** Protect and enhance the strong character and heritage of the urban areas. Plan for the creation of significant new areas of green space and green corridors to provide a framework for new and existing development in urban areas and along major transport routes.



Blean Woods is one of the few areas in Britain that supports the heath fritillary butterfly.

Description

Physical and functional links to other National Character Areas

The North Downs are to the south of this National Character Area (NCA) and form a distinctive backdrop, with the boundary delineated between the Chalk and the Eocene deposits (although some Chalk also outcrops at Thanet). The underlying Chalk aquifer (an important source of groundwater abstraction) creates a functional link to surrounding NCAs. To the north is the alluvial Greater Thames Estuary. The area's western boundary is defined by Inner London and the Thames Basin Lowlands.

The River Darent drains from springs in the Wealden Greensand through the North Downs, and then runs through the western part of the NCA and north into the Thames. The Medway and Stour rivers drain north through the North Downs into the NCA, the Medway running north into the sea via the Greater Thames Estuary and the Stour flowing east directly into the North Sea.

Coastal processes of sedimentation and erosion provide a functional link between this NCA and, for example, the Greater Thames Estuary NCA to the west and the North Downs NCA to the south: as such, management of the coastal frontages cannot be considered in isolation. There are differences in the coastal processes on either side of the North Foreland: the moderately strong tidal streams ensure that the sand deposits are quite mobile.

The North Kent Plain NCA is an important transport corridor, with major rail and road links connecting Kent's coastal towns with London. These (and the area's proximity to the capital) have resulted in numerous economic, cultural and functional links with the City of London.

Distinct areas

- Thanet

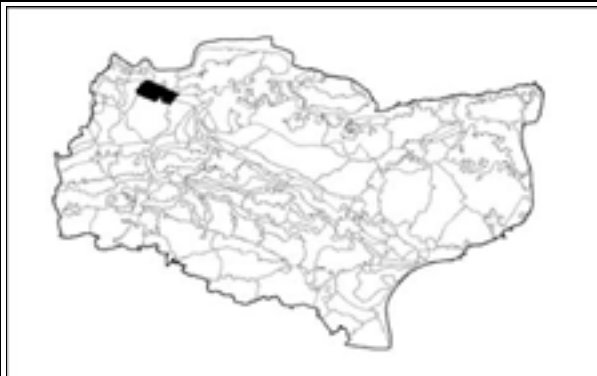


Chalk cliffs at Pegwell Bay are of geological and biodiversity interest. The diverse coastline in this NCA provides good recreational opportunities.

Key characteristics

- An open, low and gently undulating landscape, characterised by high-quality, fertile, loamy soils dominated by agricultural land uses.
- The area's geology is dominated by Palaeogene clays and sands, underlain by the Chalk.
- Geologically a chalk outlier – and historically an island separated from the mainland by a sea channel – Thanet forms a discrete and distinct area that is characterised by its unity of land use, arising from the high-quality fertile soils developed in thin drift deposits over chalk.
- A diverse coastline (both in nature and orientation), made up of cliffs, intertidal sand and mud, salt marshes, sand dunes and shingle beaches. Much of the coastal hinterland has been built on, and the coast itself has been modified through the construction of sea walls, harbours and piers.
- Large arable/horticultural fields with regular patterns and rectangular shapes predominating, and a sparse hedgerow pattern.
- Orchards and horticultural crops characterise central and eastern areas, and are often enclosed by poplar or alder shelterbelts and scattered small woodlands.
- Woodland occurs on the higher ground around Blean and in smaller blocks to the west, much of it ancient and of high nature conservation interest.
- The Stour and its tributaries are important features of the eastern part of the NCA, draining eastwards into the North Sea, with associated wetland habitats including areas of grazing marsh, reedbeds, lagoons and gravel pits. The River Medway cuts through the NCA as it flows into the Thames Estuary.
- Other semi-natural habitats include fragments of neutral, calcareous and acid grassland, and also heathland.
- The area has rich evidence of human activity from the Palaeolithic period. Key heritage assets include Roman sites at Canterbury, Reculver and Richborough; the Historic Dockyard at Chatham; military remains along the coast; and historic parks and buildings.
- Large settlements and urban infrastructure (including lines of pylons) are often visually dominant in the landscape, with significant development around Greater London and the Medway Towns, as well as around towns further east and along the coast. Major rail and road links connect the towns with London.

SOUTHFLEET ARABLE LANDS



This local landscape area forms part of the county-wide character area of the North Kent Agricultural Belt developed on the good quality soils of the sands, gravels and clays of the Tertiary Beds overlying the chalk. It is a mix of flat and undulating landform which is sloping generally towards the Thames estuary at Gravesend and Dartford from the edge of the Darenth Downs at Betsham.

On the remnant wooded hill-tops the lanes are deeply cut and old villages such as Betsham nestle in a seemingly tranquil rural landscape. Elsewhere, the landscape is more open with a mix of remnant orchards and a few shelterbelts, but increasingly the landcover is a mix of cabbages and arable crops. The flatter land is particularly open with many hedgerows removed or neglected.

This openness results in the busy A2(T) dominating both visually and audibly over a wide area extending into the northern tip of the Ash Downs. Elsewhere, in the elevated, wooded farmlands to the east of the area, it is the noise that is the most intrusive and detracting element. Some attractive views looking back towards the Downs can be seen from this higher land.

North of Southfleet, the landscape is heavily influenced by transmission lines and development on the rises at Northfleet and the Gravesend suburbs. With many hedges removed, the arable fields, old windbreaks and roadside lighting all stand out. Southfleet and Hook Green retain their tiny vernacular centres, partly due to their conservation status, but a gradual clutter of 20th century development has spread out along the lanes.

Before the 6th century the North Kent Agricultural Belt was substantially forested, although much of the good quality soils were subsequently cleared and cultivated. By the 1960's most of the land north of the railway line was a mix of arable land combined with a high percentage of orchard around Betsham and south-west of Green Street Green. By 1990, the arable land had grown at the expense of the orchard, which has almost disappeared.

The Channel Tunnel Rail Link (CTRL) is located adjacent to the A2, skirting Gravesend, before swinging north to travel under the Thames. This has resulted in a trapped section of land (termed the 'sandwich land') between the road and the rail-link. A spur route down the disused railway linking Gravesend to the Longfield line passes close to Southfleet and Betsham. The rail link impacts on these communities on the eastern boundary of this character area.

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SOUTHFLEET ARABLE LANDS

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Good quality soils developed on the Tertiary Beds overlying the chalk. A generally open arable landscape.
Open landscape allowing transport routes, pylons and settlement to dominate many areas. Remnant unkept hedgerows, shelterbelts and woodland copses giving a scruffy and unmanaged feel.
Long views to the busy A2 (T) and Kent Thames-side beyond

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

This is a coherent landscape where the large-scale rural land use reflects the good quality soils. There are, however, many visual detractors which dominate the view, such as transmission pylons, trunk road, and CTRL. Remnant rural heritage features such as hedgerows, orchards and shelterbelts are few and are in poor condition. The 20th century development of historic village edges gives a high negative impact on the view. This area is considered to be weak ecologically - there is much intense arable cultivation which is relieved only by minimal, unmanaged patches of remnant hedgerow. The condition of this area is considered to be very poor.

Sensitivity

The undulating landform is apparent in the open views over the landscape area. Visibility is therefore high.
The main inherent characteristics which make up the landscape pattern have become indistinct. The historic features of hedgerow enclosure and the more recent shelterbelts are now indistinct elements of the landscape. Building forms on the edge of settlements do not contribute to local distinctiveness and there is very little time-depth to the landscape's current dominant features. The routes of established highways, which are considered to be of ancient origin, no longer have a great impact on the landscape.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

This is a large-scale landscape which has become fragmented with redundant and diverse elements, and denuded of characteristic features. It requires simplification, but also acknowledgment of new functions.
Create a large-scale landscape based on large blocks of woodland and large blocks of arable cultivation. Create ecologically-rich corridors along transport routes. Create an urban edge which restores some characteristic enclosure features, using appropriate species which may be innovative.
Restore the impact of the original highway network, creating appropriate management plans to restore 'managed' characteristics to the landscape.

CONTEXT

Regional: North West Kent

Condition

good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE
moderate	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
poor	CREATE	<u>RESTORE & CREATE</u>	RESTORE
	low	moderate	high

Sensitivity

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition	Very Poor.
Pattern of elements:	Coherent.
Detracting features:	Many.
Visual Unity:	Interrupted.
Cultural integrity:	Poor.
Ecological integrity:	Weak.
Functional Integrity:	Very Weak.

Sensitivity

Sensitivity	Moderate.
Distinctiveness:	Indistinct.
Continuity:	Historic.
Sense of Place:	Weak.
Landform:	Apparent
Extent of tree cover:	Open
Visibility:	High.

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

RESTORE AND CREATE.

Create a simplified pattern within the landscape using large blocks of woodland, large areas of arable fields
Create an edge to the urban area - restore some enclosure, using characteristic rural features
Create functional agricultural features
Create ecologically rich corridors
Restore the positive impact of historic highway features
Restore open and controlled views across open farmland

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