



CLIENT: Gravesham Borough Council
PROJECT: Cascades Leisure Centre, Gravesham
TITLE: Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment
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1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

- 1.1.1 This Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment has been prepared by Colour to accompany a full planning application for the redevelopment of the Cascades Leisure Centre site in Gravesend. The application is submitted on behalf of Gravesham Borough Council.

1.2 Study Area Location

- 1.2.1 The Site occupies 4.5 hectares of land on the eastern side of Thong Lane. The Site currently comprises an existing leisure centre building, public house, car park (providing 177 spaces & 6 disabled space), children's play area, and areas of hardstanding that were once used as tennis courts. The existing access road, which connects to Thong Lane at two points, provides vehicular and pedestrian access to the facilities within the site and also to adjacent facilities just beyond the site's boundary including indoor tennis domes, golf driving range, miniature railway track, and football pitches. The location of the site is shown on drawing GLC-COL-ZZ-XX-DR-L-6002-001: Site Context.
- 1.2.2 The study area extends 5km radius from the centre of the site in order to adequately capture the baseline condition of the Site's landscape context and to identify specific receptors that could be impacted by the Proposed Development. An assessment was then made of the effects, relative to baseline conditions, that the receptors experience as a result of the Proposed Development.

1.3 Description of the Development

- 1.3.1 The Proposed Development comprises the construction of a large leisure centre building with a unified footprint of 5478 sq m and general height of 13.5m. The leisure centre building will be complemented by a proposed new car park, younger children's play area, older children's/adults' fitness zone, and a fitness trail that wraps around the entire Site. See drawing GLC-COL-ZZ-XX-DR-L-1000: Landscape Masterplan for details of the proposed site layout.
- 1.3.2 The proposed leisure centre building is to be located on the existing leisure centre's main car park. The proposed building will house a 25m long, 8 lane swimming pool, learner pool, leisure water pool, café, clip & climb, soft play, sport halls, squash courts, community rooms, fitness suit, studios, with associated changing facilities, staff rooms and plant rooms. The building will incorporate green/brown roofs and carefully designed facades that are sympathetic to the immediate and wider landscape context of the site.
- 1.3.3 The proposed car park will be located on the site of the existing leisure centre buildings, once they have been demolished. The carpark will include a total number of 257spaces composed of 218nr regular parking spaces, 15nr Blue Badge bays, 14nr staff spaces, 3nr coach bays and appropriately designed access routes to allow cars and coaches to manoeuvre. The hard-surfaced car park will also incorporate extensive areas of planting, composed of trees, hedges, shrubs and grass, which will make a positive contribution to the broader green infrastructure network of the site and surrounding area.

- I.3.4 In order to minimise the impact of vehicular traffic on pedestrian movement, the main access road will become one way running from north to south. Only service vehicles will be allowed to pass along the route that skirts around the edge of the proposed leisure centre building, and hard-paved surfaces in this zone will be designed as pedestrian priority where necessary. In addition, the existing bus stop will be relocated approximately 50m NW of its current position, and cycle parking and visitor drop-off will be located instead next to the western façade of the proposed leisure centre building
- I.3.5 The existing children's play area will remain in its current location but will be redesigned in order to extend and enrich the play offer for younger children. The proposals will include equipped play elements (reusing existing play equipment where appropriate, and adding new items to improve the play offer) which will be complemented by less prescriptive natural play elements such as rocks, earth mounds etc, and planted areas, to create an exciting, explorable, sensory play environment for all. This will be complemented by native and sensory planting.
- I.3.6 A fitness zone for older children and adults of all ages will be created on existing grassed amenity leisure space located south of the proposed building. This triangular grassed area, which is surrounded by mature trees on all sides, is designed to provide a healthy, naturalistic environment that promotes and facilitates fitness and well-being by providing spaces and routes for a variety of passive and programmable activities.
- I.3.7 The various external spaces that comprise the site will be linked and unified by a fitness route that loops around the site, connecting to other routes that extend into the wider landscape beyond.
- I.3.8 A suite of design documents has been prepared to be read alongside this report. These documents provide further details of the Proposed Development.
- I.3.9 This report has been developed alongside the overall design for proposed building and landscape, becoming part and parcel of the design process in order to achieve an optimal solution which responds appropriately to the particular landscape and visual context of the site.

2.0 METHODOLOGY

2.1 General Approach

- 2.1.1 This Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment has been prepared based upon the Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, (Third Edition, 2013) published by the Landscape Institute and the Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment in 2013. Appendix A sets out the methodology used for undertaking the LVIA.
- 2.1.2 The physical scope of the landscape as a receptor considered by the appraisal and viewpoints included in this report have been selected using map analysis, desk-based research and field work. During the field work, panoramic viewpoint photographs were taken at 1.6m above ground level with a fixed lens digital SLR camera with a 50mm lens in accordance with GLVIA guidance for visualisation. Desktop research was carried out to understand the landscape and visual context of the Study Area in advance of the site work taking place.
- 2.1.3 From the 2013 guidance, the determination of landscape and visual sensitivity warrants consideration of landscape value and the susceptibility of the landscape receptor to the type of change proposed; and the value of views identified and the sensitivity of visual receptors to the type of change proposed. It is advised that there should be a reliance on professional judgement rather than the results of potentially complex, predetermined formulae and matrices. GLVIA 3 also stresses that the approach to the assessment needs to be proportionate to the scale of the development being assessed and the nature of the likely effects. This approach has been followed in undertaking this appraisal, with matrices being used to assist initial assessment.

2.2 Appraisal Scope

- 2.2.1 Guidance is provided by GLVIA3 on the area of landscape that needs to be covered in assessing landscape effects, referred to in the Guidance as a “Study Area” (para. 5.2 page 70):

“The study area should include the site itself and the full extent of the wider landscape around which the proposed development may influence in a significant manner. This will usually be based on the extent of Landscape Character Areas likely to be significantly affected either directly or indirectly. However, it may also be based on the extent of the area from which the development is potentially visible, defined as the Zone of Theoretical Visibility, or a combination of the two.”
- 2.2.2 Desk study and site visits were used to initially analyse the site and its surroundings in order to define the area of landscape (the Study Area) which might be influenced by the Proposed Development and to start to identify potential areas of visibility.

- 2.2.3 The scope of Study Area was ultimately determined by a number of considerations including the Site's location on relatively high ground (refer to drawing no. GLC-COL-00-XX-DR-L6002-002 Topographic survey) which sit within both the Kent Plane national character area and at the border of the Higham Arable Farmlands local character area (refer to drawing no. GLC-COL-00-XX-DR-L-6002-005 Landscape Character), potentially making the site visually prominent within the overall topography of the surrounding area (refer to drawing no. GLC-COL-00-XX-DR-L-6002-006 Zone of Theoretical Visibility). Additionally, it was determined that the Proposed Development may impact several landscape designations including London Metropolitan Green Belt, within which the site sits, and the Kent Downs AONB located 975m SE of the site (refer to drwg no. GLC-COL-00-CC-DR-L-60002-003 Heritage Designations)

3.0 LANDSCAPE PLANNING POLICY CONTEXT

3.1 National Planning Policy

- 3.1.1 The revised National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) was published in February 2021.
- 3.1.2 This is driven by a ‘*presumption in favour of sustainable development*’ (Paragraph 10) with an environmental objective (Paragraph 8) ‘*to protect and enhance our natural, built and historic environment; including making effective use of land, improving biodiversity, using natural resources prudently, minimising waste and pollution, and mitigating and adapting to climate change, including moving to a low carbon economy*’.
- 3.1.3 Section 12: Achieving Well-Designed Places contains guidance with regards to development and expected design standards, notably:

Paragraph 126:

‘The creation of high quality, beautiful and sustainable buildings and places is fundamental to what the planning and development process should achieve.’

Paragraph 127

“the creation of high quality, beautiful and sustainable buildings and places is fundamental to what the planning and development process should achieve. Good design is a key aspect of sustainable development, creates better places in which to live and work and helps make development acceptable to communities”.

Paragraph 130:

‘Planning policies and decisions should ensure that developments:

- a) will function well and add to the overall quality of the area, not just for the short term but over the lifetime of the development;*
- b) are visually attractive as a result of good architecture, layout and appropriate and effective landscaping;*
- c) are sympathetic to local character and history, including the surrounding built environment and landscape setting, while not preventing or discouraging appropriate innovation or change (such as increased densities);*
- d) establish or maintain a strong sense of place, using the arrangement of streets, spaces, building types and materials to create attractive, welcoming and distinctive places to live, work and visit;*
- e) optimise the potential of the site to accommodate and sustain an appropriate amount and mix of development (including green and other public space) and support local facilities and transport networks; and*
- f) create places that are safe, inclusive and accessible and which promote health and well-being, with a high standard of amenity for existing and future users and where crime and disorder, and the fear of crime, do not undermine the quality of life or community cohesion and resilience.’*

Paragraph 134

‘Development that is not well designed should be refused, especially where it fails to reflect local design policies and government guidance on design, taking into account any local design guidance and supplementary planning documents such as design guides and codes. Conversely, significant weight should be given to:

- a) development which reflects local design policies and government guidance on design, taking into account any local design guidance and supplementary planning documents such as design guides and codes; and/or*
- b) outstanding or innovative designs which promote high levels of sustainability, or help raise the standard of design more generally in an area, so long as they fit in with the overall form and layout of their surroundings.'*

3.1.4 Section 15: Conserving and Enhancing the Natural Environment considers the treatment of existing assets, notably:

Paragraph 174:

Planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by:

- a) protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, sites of biodiversity or geological value and soils (in a manner commensurate with their statutory status or identified quality in the development plan);*
- b) recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, and the wider benefits from natural capital and ecosystem services – including the economic and other benefits of the best and most versatile agricultural land, and of trees and woodland;*
- c) maintaining the character of the undeveloped coast, while improving public access to it where appropriate;*
- d) minimising impacts on and providing net gains for biodiversity, including by establishing coherent ecological networks that are more resilient to current and future pressures;*

3.1.5 Section 16: Conserving and enhancing the historic environment

Paragraph 189:

Heritage assets range from sites and buildings of local historic value to those of the highest significance, such as World Heritage Sites which are internationally recognised to be of Outstanding Universal Value. These assets are an irreplaceable resource, and should be conserved in a manner appropriate to their significance, so that they can be enjoyed for their contribution to the quality of life of existing and future generations.

Paragraph 197:

In determining applications, local planning authorities should take account of:

- a) the desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets and putting them to viable uses consistent with their conservation;*
- b) the positive contribution that conservation of heritage assets can make to sustainable communities including their economic vitality; and*
- c) the desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness.*

Paragraph 200

Any harm to, or loss of, the significance of a designated heritage asset (from its alteration or destruction, or from development within its setting), should require clear and convincing justification. Substantial harm to or loss of:

- a) grade II listed buildings, or grade II registered parks or gardens, should be exceptional;*

b) assets of the highest significance, notably scheduled monuments, protected wreck sites, registered battlefields, grade I and II listed buildings, grade I and II* registered parks and gardens, and World Heritage Sites, should be wholly exceptional*

3.2 Local Planning Policy

- 3.2.1 The Gravesham Local Plan Core Strategy was formally adopted on 30 September 2014.
- 3.2.2 A pre-application engagement process between the Project Team and Client, Gravesham Borough Council, has been on-going with a number of design iterations for the site layout, building and landscape discussed and refined, to reach a design solution that meets relevant Strategic and Policy Objectives within the Gravesham Local Plan. These are noted in the Appendix.

3.3 Designations

- 3.3.1 Drawing GLC-COL-ZZ-XX-DR-L-6004: Planning Context, shows the location of the proposed development in the context of local landscape, nature, historic and access designations.

3.3.2 Landscape Designations

It is important to note and worthy of assessment that outside of Gravesend and Northfleet, the Borough is predominantly rural and is where about 20% of the population lives. 78% of the Borough is designated as part of the London Metropolitan Green Belt. 40% of the Green Belt is either a Ramsar site or part of the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) (GLP 2014, para 2.3.4 p9)

Green Belt

Most notably, the Site is located within the western limit of London Metropolitan Green Belt, and its western boundary marks the interface between this designation and the urban area of Gravesham.

Relevant planning policies:

NPPF

Section 13 Protecting Green Belt Land (refer to section 3.1.4 of this report)

Gravesham Local Plan

S08 Preserve the openness of the Green Belt, maintain its national and local planning purpose and protect it from inappropriate development (refer to section 3.2.3 of this report)

CS01 Sustainable Development (refer to section 3.2.4 of this report)

CS02 Scale and Distribution of Development (refer to section 3.2.4 of this report)

The Gravesham Local Plan notes:

The eastern Green Belt boundary in Gravesham is considered to be very important as the gap between Gravesend and the Medway Towns is now one of the few barriers preventing the merging

of settlement along the southern part of the Thames Estuary and the further eastward sprawl of London. (GLP 2014, para 2.3.4 p9)

The Green Belt designation has assisted in protecting the best and most versatile agricultural land and conserving soil resources and this will continue to occur. (GLP 2014, para 4.2.22 p31)

Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

The next nearest designation is that of the nationally important Kent Downs AONB (ref 18, covering 879 sq km) the northern limit of which is located approximately 975m SE of the Site.

Relevant planning policies:

NPPF

Section 15 Conserving and Enhancing the Natural Environment considers the treatment of existing assets, Paragraph 176 (refer to section 3.1.5 of this report)

Gravesham Local Plan

SO9 Conserve and enhance the diverse rural landscape including the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and its setting (refer to section 3.2.3 of this report)

CS12 Green Infrastructure (refer to section 3.2.4 of this report)

The Kent Downs AONB is located, more broadly, on the eastern side of the Borough, extending from Shorne south to Vigo. It is designated because of its scarp slope and dry valleys which often retain a downland character. The views from the escarpment are also important, and its woodlands are also highly valued.

3.3.3 Nature Designations

Gravesham Borough contains sites of international importance for wildlife, i.e. a Special Protection Area, a Special Area of Conservation and a Ramsar site. As a result, the Core Strategy has also been subject to a Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA). (GLP 2014, para 1.7.1 p6)

3.3.4 *Gravesham Borough has a significant biodiversity resource. This includes:*

- Sites of international and national significance for wildlife, e.g. Thames Estuary and Marshes Special Protection Area (SPA) and Ramsar Site, North Downs Woodlands Special Area of Conservation (SAC), and Cobham Woods Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). Internationally significant sites are all designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest and so are protected by national legislation;*
- Species protected by European and/or national legislation, e.g. bats, great crested newts;*
- Local wildlife sites which are important for the conservation of wildlife at the county level, e.g. Ebbsfleet Marshes, Court Wood Shorne;*
- Roadside nature reserves, e.g. A226 Gravesend Road, Chalk; and*
- Priority habitats and species identified in the UK Biodiversity Action Plan, e.g. native woodland including ancient woodland, lowland calcareous (chalk) grassland. (GLP 2014, para 5.7.7 p117)*

Ramsar Sites / Special Protection Area (SPA) / SSSI

The Thames Estuary and Marshes RAMSAR site (ref UK11069) covers a large area (c.5553ha) of flat ground that extends from the Thames shore line (c.3km NE from the Site) to an inland position c.1.7km towards the Site. Most of the RAMSAR site is also a designated a SSSI (South Thames Estuary and Marshes, ref 1000286, covering 5289ha). and the more north-easterly reaches, apart from the more westerly fringes abutting urban area of Northfleet, are designated a SPA (Thames Estuary and Marshes ref UK9012021, covering 4802ha). The Proposed Development is located some 66m above this area.

Also within the Study Area, there are other SSSIs at Shorne and Ashenbank Woods (ref 1000322, 197ha) situated 975m SE of the Site, and at Cobham Woods (ref 1000267, covering 242.75ha), both of which sit within the Kent Downs AONB. Another SSSI is designated at Great Crabbles Wood (ref 1000279, covering 33ha) 3.1km located SEE of the Site.

Relevant planning policies:

NPPF

Section 15: Conserving and Enhancing the Natural Environment considers the treatment of existing assets, Paragraph 181 (refer to section 3.1.5 of this report)

Gravesham Local Plan

CS12 Green Infrastructure (refer to section 3.2.4 of this report)

The Local Plan also notes:

The Thames Estuary and Marshes Special Protection Area (SPA) and Ramsar site to the east are of international biodiversity importance, particularly for birds.

3.3.5 Historic Designations

The Borough has a rich historic built environment, much of which derives from its extensive maritime, military, industrial and transport history. This includes conservation areas in both the older parts of Gravesend and Northfleet and in a number of the rural settlements.

Assets will be assessed as potential receptors.

Conservation Areas

A number of Conservation Areas exist within the study area, the most notable of which sit within the rural villages of Thong, located c.1km SSE of the Site (and connected to the site by Thong Lane which runs roughly NNW-SSE), and Shorne, located c.2km roughly west of the Site, and Green Farm 2.5km NE of the Site. Further afield, there is a conservation area at Cobham village, 3km south of the Site. There are also urban conservation areas to the c.2.3-2.5km the NW of the Site, including Upper Windmill St, Windmill Hill, Gravesend Riverside, Milton Place Conservation Areas.

Relevant planning policies:

NPPF

Section 16: Conserving and enhancing the historic environment (refer to section 3.1.6 of this report)

Gravesham Local Plan

CS20 Heritage and the Historic Environment (refer to section 3.2.4 of this report)

Listed Buildings

There are also a large number of listed buildings in the area. The nearest are:

Church of St. Mary (ref 1089044) Grade II*, located c.1.4km NE of the Site

Baynards Cottage (ref 1252853) Grade II, located c.1.4km SE of the Site

White Horse Cottage (ref 1083901) Grade II, located c.1.1km SSE of the Site

Other listed buildings are too distant to be considered in this report as it can reasonably be assumed that their setting will not be affected by the proposals.

Relevant planning policies:

NPPF

Section 16 Conserving the historic environment, paragraph 200 considers impacts on listed buildings (refer to section 3.1.6 of this report)

Gravesham Local Plan

CS20 Heritage and the Historic Environment (refer to section 3.2.4 of this report)

Registered Parks and Gardens

Cobham Hall (grade II* ref 1000182, covering 338ha), located c.2km SE of the Site is a grade II* Registered Park and Garden which is set within Kent Down AONB. The SE portion of the Registered Park and Garden is part of Cobham Woods SSSI.

Relevant planning policies:

NPPF

Section 16 Conserving the historic environment, paragraph 200 considers impacts on registered Parks and gardens (refer to section 3.1.6 of this report)

Gravesham Local Plan

CS20 Heritage and the Historic Environment (refer to section 3.2.4 of this report)

3.3.6 Access Designations

Footpaths / Strategic Routes / Country Parks / Village Greens

There are a number of public rights of way (PROW) within the study area. Local footpaths (PROW) run throughout the rural landscape surrounding the northern, eastern and southern regions of the Site. These footpaths connect the urban area of Gravesham to surrounding villages and onwards to Country Parks to the south and east. PROWs (footpaths) in the vicinity of the Site include:

NG7 with NS164 – running NW to SE, connecting Northfleet urban area to Shorne village
NG8- running SW to NE, connecting Thong Lane/Vigilant Way to A226, Crematorium and Church Lane

NG9 NS165 connecting Upper Ifield to NG7

NS163 connecting Shorne to NS165 and Upper Ifield

NS163 border woodland at the western side of Shorne village, and connecting to NS163

PROW NG2 corresponds with Route Number 1 of the National Cycle Network runs alongside the railway track c.2.4km north of Site, and England Coast Path Route (Grain to Woolwich, GWO-2-S051) follows the shoreline of the Thames Estuary, c2.5km north of the Site.

Shorne Wood Country Park (ref1421979, covering 129.45ha), located 1.2km SE of the Site, and Jeskyns Country Park (ref1443027, covering 149.84ha) located c1.9km south of the Site publicly accessible and provides routes for walking and cycling.

There are a number of Village Greens (designated 1994) within the vicinity of Shorne village, namely Shorne Common (1.01ha), Shorne Common and Chestnut Common, (1.94ha), Post Office Green (0.02ha), Shorne Green Recreation Ground.

Relevant planning policies:

NPPF

Section 8 Promoting healthy and safe communities, paragraph 100 considers public rights of way

Gravesham Local Plan

CS11 Transport

CS12 Green Infrastructure

CS19 Development and Design Principles

4.0 LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL BASELINE

4.1 Landscape Baseline

4.1.1 Landscape Character

4.1.1.1 The Spatial Vision of the Gravesham Local Plan states:

*Regeneration and development will have conserved and enhanced the Borough's rich historic built environment, **landscape character** and biodiversity as well as respected its distinctive local character...* (GLP 2014, para 3.1.9 p17)

4.1.1.2 The Gravesham Local Plan also notes:

*The Council can only make informed and responsible decisions on the management and planning of landscapes if it pays proper regard to their existing character. A Landscape Character Assessment for the urban fringes and rural area of Gravesham has been produced. This sets out **11 local landscape character areas**. For each area, there is an assessment of condition and sensitivity and guidelines for appropriate actions to protect and enhance the landscape. In addition, it contains generic guidelines for different types of landscape and development. This will be used to inform future decisions on proposals affecting the urban fringes and rural area.* (GLP 2014, para 5.7.15 p119)

4.1.1.3 Moreover, it notes:

*The Council's strategy is to conserve and enhance the landscape character and valued landscapes of the Borough...Proposals affecting the **urban fringe and rural area** will be expected to take into account landscape character. All developments will be expected **to protect and enhance landscape features** as part of Gravesham's green infrastructure network.* (GLP 2014, para 5.7.15 p119-20)

4.1.1.4 Policy CS12 Green Infrastructure states:

*"The overall landscape character and valued landscapes will be conserved, restored and enhanced. The greatest weight will be given to the conservation and enhancement of the landscape and natural beauty of the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and its setting. Proposals will take account of the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plan, the **Gravesham Landscape Character Assessment**, and the Cluster Studies where relevant."* (GLP 2014, para 5.7.26 p122)

4.1.1.5 The starting point for the defining landscape character in the County is the National Character Area (NCA) profiling carried out by Natural England. Three of the defined NCAs fall within the Study Area, namely:

- NCA 113: North Kent Plain (the Site sits within this NCA)
- NCA 81: Greater Thames Estuary (the southern reaches of this NCA are situated 1.8km north of the Site)
- NCA 119: North Downs (the northern reaches of this NCA are situated c.780m SSE of the Site)

4.1.1.6 Gravesham Landscape Character Assessment (2009) sub divides the three NCAs into 11 Landscape Character Areas (LCAs), each of which has a detailed profile.

The following landscape character studies are of relevance to this appraisal (see drawing GLC-COL-ZZ-XX-DR-L-6002-005):

- National Character Area (NCA) Profile 13: North Kent Plain, Natural England, 2015

4.1.2 National Landscape Character Areas

- 4.1.2.1 The Proposed Development is situated within character area NCA 13: North Kent Plain which is broadly described as:

...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.

A more detailed description, taken from Natural England's Character Area profile, noting the NCA's key characteristics, can be found in the Appendix.

- 4.1.2.2 Cultural Services of the NCA 113

- This NCA has **significant recreational opportunities** for both residents and tourists, with extensive areas of quality green space linked by a network of local recreational paths and strategic routes such as the North Downs Way...Green infrastructure in and around surrounding towns provides an important resource for existing residents.

- 4.1.2.3 Sense of place / Inspiration in of the NCA 113

- A sense of place is provided by **expansive views over the open and extensive gently undulating agricultural landscape.**
- The historical importance of arable agriculture is marked by large-scale fields, which developed from the Iron Age onwards, as well as courtyard farmsteads, with large barns dating from the medieval period.
- Senses of inspiration and escapism are further likely to be associated with the ancient woodland, the chalk cliffs and other undeveloped stretches of coastline.

- 4.1.2.4 Biodiversity of the NCA 113

- The NCA has a number of SPA, SAC, Ramsar, SSSI and local site designations (refer to the 'Key facts and data' section of this document), supporting a range of rare habitats and species.

4.1.3 County Landscape Character Areas

4.1.3.1 Kent Landscape Assessment 2004

4.1.3.2 The Kent Landscape Assessment is a landscape character study that draws together existing landscape character assessments of the county. It has been used to develop character-based strategies that will ensure the continued distinctiveness of the County's landscape.
<https://www.kent.gov.uk/about-the-council/strategies-and-policies/environment-waste-and-planning-policies/environmental-policies/countryside-policies-and-reports/kents-landscape-assessment>

4.1.3.3 Generally, for development proposals, the most detailed / local landscape assessment should be referred to in the first instance. Conversely, when developing land based strategies at a regional scale a top down approach may be more appropriate. ((KentLA 2004 para 1.14 p8)

4.1.3.4 The Site sits within RCA **Hoo Peninsula RCA**. Neighbouring RCAs are Shorne RCA to the east and Southfleet Arable Lands RCA to the SW and Cobham West Kent Downs RCA to the SE

4.1.3.5 Hoo Peninsula RCA

Characteristic Features

- Prominent hills and low-lying alluvial marshes.
- Flat/undulating farmland. Decline in orchards and mixed farmland with shelterbelts.
- Intensive, open farmed arable land. Intrusive influence of industrial development.

Condition: Poor

- There is very little coherent landscape pattern
- Visual detractors in the landscape occur on a large scale (industrial horizon) and detailed scale (industrial farm buildings).
- Isolated patches of woodland provide clusters of semi-natural habitat, but there is very little opportunity for ecological interest within the open arable fields.
- The occasional large brick farmhouse and the nature of the alluvial marshland augments the cultural and functional integrity of the area, but overall it is considered to be weak.

Sensitivity: Moderate

- There is very little coherent landscape pattern.
- The historic framework to this landscape is mainly indistinct.
- The highways retain some characteristic features.
- Brick farmsteads, and isolated development associated with the railways contribute to local distinctiveness in a minor capacity.
- **The sense of place is considered to be weak.**
- The contrast of the low hills against the surrounding marshland is an apparent feature in the open view.
- **Views are long and visibility is high.**

Landscape Actions: Restore and Create

- Restore pockets of small scale farmland in the area and, where it is appropriate, around existing settlement.
- New landscape elements may need to be created around new settlements, using characteristic elements adapted to developing uses of the land - to include large-scale agriculture, transport and residential uses.

- Create new ecological bases within the farmland which may also act as recreational
- Create new ecological bases within the farmland which may also act as recreational resources for residential areas.
- Create woodland links within the farmland in order to develop wider networks with the existing hilltop woodland areas.
- Restore the integrity of the coastal fringe by linking the remaining undeveloped flatlands together, finding design opportunities within the peripheral built areas to reflect the ecological and visual qualities of the surrounding marshland.
- **Create new ecological/recreational resources such as regenerative woodland** in farmland.
- Restore small pockets of heritage landscape around existing settlement
- Restore the physical coherence of the coastal marshland.

4.1.4 Local Landscape Character Areas

4.1.4.1 Landscape: Gravesham Landscape Character Assessment and Guidelines (GLCA&G) 2009

4.1.4.2 *There is a need to retain pattern and diversity in the landscape to ensure that character and local distinctiveness are maintained. This is not necessarily about keeping the landscape as it is but is more about preventing everywhere becoming the same. In addition, we need to ensure that landscapes are visually satisfying and give enjoyment to those who visit them, and those who live and work in them. (GLCA&G 2009 p3)*

4.1.4.3 Government policy requires that planning authorities should ensure that the quality and character of the wider countryside is protected and, where possible, enhanced. (GLCA&G 2009 p3)

4.1.4.4 General factors Shaping the Gravesham Landscape, as noted in the GLCA&G, are listed in the appendix.

4.1.4.5 Landscape Character Areas

4.1.4.6 The following Local Character areas fall wholly or partly within the Study Area:

- Higham Arable Farmlands
- Shorne & Higham Marshes
- Shorne Woodlands
- Shenbank & Cobham Parkland
- Gravesend Southern Fringe, Instead Arable Farmlands

4.1.4.7 LCA 3: Higham Arable Farmlands

Key Characteristics

- Very gently undulating topography
- Open arable farmland
- Views out to the marshes and the River Thames in the north
- Original Saxon village of Lower Higham and more recent development to the south
- Marsh side hamlets and settlements
- Isolated farmsteads and scattered properties with locally distinct styles and materials
- Pockets of orchards and garden nurseries

- *Historic sites including a Priory and Gad's Hill, once home to Charles Dickens*
- *Thames and Medway Canal (disused) runs to Lower Higham*

Condition: Poor

- *The main physical elements of the landscape, such as the topography and general field pattern, are consistent.*
- *However land use provides an element of fragmentation, such as small areas of orchards and garden nurseries set within the dominating context of open arable farmland.*
- *Large pylons to the north, rail sidings, poly tunnels and polythene covering nursery stock provide some visually detracting features.*
- *Overall, visual unity is coherent.*
- *Agriculture is generally intense with large arable fields and few hedgerow boundaries.*
- *Overgrown orchards, shelterbelts, gappy hedgerows and small areas of open water provide weak ecological integrity.*
- *Isolated properties and farmsteads provide local distinctiveness, in contrast with more recent development within Higham and Lower Higham.*
- *There is a modified cultural integrity and the overall, functional unity is weak.*
- *The condition of the landscape is therefore assessed as being poor.*

Sensitivity: Moderate

- *Distinct landscape elements comprise isolated buildings and farmsteads that contribute towards local distinctiveness through their traditional style and use of materials.*
- *Enclosure lines provided by ditch lines and remaining hedgerows provide historic features.*
- *Cultural associations, particularly with the life and writings of Dickens are strong in this area and locally there are pockets of distinctive landscape such as the dry valley south east of Higham.*
- *However much of the modern landscape comprises gappy hedgerows, limited woodland and indistinct recent buildings and, on average, features and elements within the landscape are indistinct and the sense of place is weak.*
- *The open character of the landscape and gently undulating landform provide high visibility across the character area.*
- *On balance, the sensitivity of the landscape is moderate.*

- *Guidelines: Restore and Create*

Guidelines for the Higham Arable Farmlands focus on restoring landscape elements in poor condition, whilst safeguarding it as a prominent landscape feature within the wider landscape.

- *Restore and create field boundary hedgerows.*
- *Restore and create ecological networks by linking existing isolated woodland clumps and orchards.*
- *Create design standards for new developments in the area.*
- *Resist proposals that introduce extensive or obtrusive elements within visually sensitive areas of the open landscape.*

- Create areas of regenerative woodland within farmland to create woodland links.
- Restore small pockets of heritage landscape around existing settlement.
- Improve footpaths and access throughout the area to link woodlands to marshlands.
- Raise awareness and promote awareness of the cultural associations of the landscape.

4.1.4.8 LCA 4: Shorne Woodlands

Key Characteristics

- Undulating topography
- Chestnut coppice woodland
- Strong sense of enclosure
- Traditional village greens
- Varied building style and age
- Chequered brickwork and ornamental brickwork
- Few highways with busier roads along character area boundaries
- Condition: Good
 - The pattern of elements is coherent, with the extent of coppice woodland providing a unifying feature throughout the area.
 - Overhead wires are visible in part and there is a small amount of fly tipping.
 - The high proportion of woodland provides a strong ecological framework.
 - Woodland management, and therefore condition, is stronger around Shorne Wood Country Park than woodland to the east.
 - Some 20th century development does not respect the local vernacular although buildings within the village centres exert a definitive sense of place and provide traditional cultural integrity.
- Sensitivity: Moderate
 - The area is very much characterised by the extent of coppice woodland, which therefore contributes significantly towards local distinctiveness.
 - The traditional village centres and properties within Shorne and Shorne Ridgeway are distinct and also promote a strong sense of place, although some hedgerows, field boundaries and highways are less distinct.
 - The combination of landform and tree cover provides an enclosed character and subsequent low visibility within the character area.
 - However, there are extensive views out of the area from vantage points at the woodland edge, particularly to the north across the marshland to the Thames.
 - The sensitivity of the landscape is assessed as being moderate.
- Guidelines: Conserve and Reinforce
 - Guidelines for Shorne Woodlands aim to conserve areas in good condition and reinforce the distinctive features and elements of the landscape.
 - Conserve and reinforce wooded character by continued coppice management.
 - Conserve and reinforce ecological interest of the woodland.

- *Manage access arrangements to balance the need for recreation whilst controlling unauthorised access and anti-social uses, and respecting ecological sensitivity.*
- *Encourage local native species within the woodland.*
- *Encourage the use of traditional fencing materials and native hedges on field boundaries to create woodland links within arable fields.*
- *Conserve traditional features in village centres e.g. red phone boxes, street furniture, village signs and post boxes, and reinforce character through the use of vernacular materials and elements.*
- *Control highway approaches into villages to reinforce the character of historic settlements.*

4.1.4.9 LCA 1: Shorne and Higham Marshes

Key Characteristics

- *Flat grazing marsh with a lack of vegetation*
- *Sense of remoteness with extensive views across marshes*
- *Network of ditches and meandering waterways divide the marshes in an irregular pattern leaving parcels of land of a medium scale*
- *No roads and limited development*
- *Features of historic interest including Shornemead Fort*
- *Extensive views across the River Thames and to higher ground to the south*
- *Condition: Good*
 - *There is strong visual unity, with a unified pattern of landscape elements.*
 - *The flat topography, limited vegetation and pattern of ditches and waterways provide consistency and strength of character.*
 - *Apart from electricity pylons crossing the south of the character area there are relatively few visual detractors within the marshes, although there are views of visually detracting industrial buildings to the north of the Thames.*
 - *There is strong ecological integrity with the comprehensive network of ditches forming wildlife corridors.*
 - *Mud flats on the riverside of the river defence wall also provide strong habitat opportunities.*
 - *Overall the condition of the character area is assessed as being very good.*
- *Sensitivity: High*
 - *This is a simple landscape comprised of few landscape elements. It is characteristically un-vegetated and unsettled and is likely to have remained largely unchanged for many centuries.*
 - *The ditches that segregate fields are very distinct and historic.*
 - *It is more fortunate than many areas of such marshland in North Kent in that it has managed to maintain the traditional grazing marsh pastures and, with the exception of a few fields in the west, has not been drained and converted to arable.*
 - *The absence of vegetation combined with the flat landscape mean that it is highly visually sensitive both to changes within the area and in the views beyond it, particularly the treatment of the urban edge to the east of Gravesend.*

- Overall the marshes are considered to be very distinct and possess a strong sense of place.
- They are considered to be of high sensitivity in terms of their character, distinctiveness and visibility.
- Guidelines: Conserve
 - Conserve marsh, grassland and wetland habitats, unimproved and grazing marsh.
 - Conserve the historic ditch and river defence pattern to maintain landscape character and enhance ecological potential.
 - Promote sensitive management of grasslands, encouraging grazing marsh and unimproved grasslands to re-establish.
 - Conserve and manage flood defences and counter walls.
 - Restrict development proposals that encroach onto the marsh from the urban fringe surrounds, seeking opportunities to improve the appearance of the urban edge.
 - Conserve and enhance the Thames and Medway Canal along its former line from Gravesend town centre to the Higham – Strood Tunnel.
 - Promote opportunities for public access particularly alongside the Thames and former canal.

4.1.5 Gravesham Landscape Sensitivity and Capacity Study

4.1.5.1 The Gravesham Landscape Sensitivity and Capacity Study (GLSCS) study, commissioned by GBC and published in 2016, provides an assessment of the landscape and visual sensitivities within defined assessment parcels around existing defined settlements and hamlets within Gravesham Borough. From this, the study makes judgements on the capacity of the existing landscape within the Borough to accommodate new built development.

4.1.5.2 The GLSCS identifies 72nr geographical areas within the borough that it terms “parcels”.

4.1.5.3 The assessments note any major variations in landscape capacity within each parcel.

4.1.5.4 The GLSCS notes that any individual site would require a specific assessment of landscape and visual impacts, alongside other potential environmental effects, on the basis of specific development proposals.

4.1.5.5 The Cascades Leisure Centre site falls with Landscape Parcel GR4 – Riverview Park east. This Parcel is described as:

- Thong Lane, or houses fronting onto it, forms the eastern boundary to the urban area south of the A226.
- The northern part of the parcel is open, arable farmland whilst the southern part is given over to recreational uses such as Thamesview School playing fields, the **Cascades Leisure Centre**, a golf centre and the Southern Valley Golf Course.
- The outer edge of the parcel follows the golf course perimeter and a field boundary between arable fields.
- Aside from buildings associated with the various leisure facilities there are a few isolated houses, two caravan sites and an agricultural storage building within the parcel, on the A226 Rochester Road and on Thong Lane.

- From a plateau in the south-western part the parcel's terrain slopes downhill into a fairly narrow valley to the east, and more broadly to the north, with several shallow north-south ridges and valleys.
- The golf course terrain has been reshaped at a localised scale, to create fairways, tees, greens and bunkers.
- Hedges and trees, where they exist, are mostly indistinct features in this open landscape other than along the Gravesend Road boundary, and where they provide containment around the playing fields and leisure [centre] and golf centre.

4.1.5.6 Assessment criterion and Sensitivity description:

Physical and natural character

- The steeper slopes forming the head of the valley on the golf course are part of a distinctive valley, the main part of which lies to the east (in parcel SH6), and can be considered **sensitive**.
- The undulating slopes to the north are more consistent with the landform on which housing to the west is located; there is a **degree of sensitivity** associated with a narrow north-south valley adjacent to the urban edge, but this feature is contained within the wider landscape.
- There is **no particular landscape sensitivity** associated with any other landscape elements within this parcel.

Settlement form and edge

- The edge of Gravesend is quite exposed between the A226 Rochester Road and the Thamesview School playing fields (see View GR4a), where both sides of Thong Lane have housing, but the north-south valley noted above helps to define the settlement edge.
- The urban edge is also exposed where the golf course abuts the road, to the south of the leisure centre. In between, **the trees/hedgerows around the playing fields and leisure centre provide containment**.

Settlement setting

- The valley between Gravesend and Shorne (View GR4b), centred on the southern edge of this parcel and the northern edge of parcel SH6, is a distinctive landscape feature, the lack of development within which contributes to the settings of, and gaps between, Gravesend and Shorne and the wooded AONB hills to the south.

Views

- A number of public footpaths cross this area, linking Gravesend to Shorne and linking across the A226 to Church Lane.
- There are open views across the large arable area, but away from the urban edge on the eastern side of the parcel the rolling terrain provides only a narrow view of housing along the urban edge.
- There are longer views between the edges of Gravesend and the wooded hills around Shorne.
- Gravesend presents only a narrow built edge in views from the east and south-east, as it slopes away westwards beyond the Riverview Park estate, and development beyond the Thames at Tilbury is more prominent.
- Openness within the parcel is important in preserving uninterrupted views of the sequence of landscapes from wooded hills, through undulating arable farmland to marshland and the Thames.

Perceptual qualities

- On the eastern side of the parcel the limited visibility of housing noted above helps to retain a **degree of rural character** despite the presence of the golf course to the south, the A226 to the north and pylons to the east.
- These elements, and proximity to the urban edge through much of the parcel, **limit any sense of rural tranquillity but do not detract from the general sense of openness.**

Cultural or historical value

- The flat plateau area in the south-western part of the parcel, together with land to west (now built on) and south-west (in parcel GR5), was formerly an airfield which, during WW2 as RAF Gravesend, played a key role in the Battle of Britain. There are no remaining features which have any effect on landscape/ cultural heritage sensitivity.
- Thong Lane is a long-established route between Watling Street (now the A2) and the edge of the Thames-side marshes at Chalk, but as a result of post-war development it retains little of its former rural character.
- The church of St Mary the Virgin (Chalk Church, Grade II* listed building) lies just outside of the parcel to the north, but its separation from the urban edge is an important characteristic. Its tower is also a prominent local landmark, and openness within the parcel contributes to its visual setting.

Key Sensitivities to development

- The distinctive open valley which provides strong separation between Gravesend and the wooded high ground around Shorne.
- Limited visibility of Gravesend from the east and south-east.
- Contribution of openness in the parcel to the setting of Chalk Church.

In response to the scale of potential future development scenarios the GLSCS notes:

Small scale development:

- There is also some potential to advance the development edge across Thong Lane to the south of the leisure centre **without having a major impact on openness**, and there is potential for screening planting that links up to the tree cover around the **leisure centre**.

Medium scale development:

- Development of medium-scale buildings would be likely to have significant adverse landscape and visual impact due to visual openness across the valley landscape to the east.

Large scale development:

- Development of large-scale buildings would be likely to have significant adverse landscape and visual impact due to visual openness across the valley landscape to the east.

4.1.6 Site Description

4.1.6.1 Gravesham has a diverse rural landscape, from the marshes around the Thames in the north, arable farmlands to the south and east of Gravesend, and downs and woodland in the south. Part of the nationally important landscape of the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) is located on the eastern side of the Borough (GLP 2014, para 5.7.14 p119) **LANDSCAPE**

4.1.6.2 The Site, covering 4.5ha is located on eastern side of Thong Lane, Gravesham, and within the Gravesham Borough, Riverview Ward.

4.1.6.3 The Site is situated at the edge of the urban area of Gravesham, in an area designated as London Metropolitan Green Belt.

4.1.6.4 The Site is owned by Gravesham Borough Council and is operated mainly as Cascades Leisure Centre which provides a number of facilities including a swimming pool, leisure pool,

sports hall, and indoor sports courts. Externally, there is an equipped children's play area and two redundant tennis courts.

- 4.1.6.5 Site access is gained via two points (access and egress) accommodating a one way through road that connects to Thong Lane at two points located c.165m apart. On-site car parking is provided along the north stretch of the access road and within a main car park south of the existing leisure centre complex.
- 4.1.6.6 Adjacent to the Site, there are additional sports/recreational facilities including two indoor tennis domes to the east, a golf driving range to the north, and football pitches to the NE. The former Southern Valley Golf Club abuts the Site's south-eastern boundary.
- 4.1.6.7 Vegetation within the Site is generally limited to close-mown grassed areas and mature trees that line both the access road and the boundary with Thong Lane, and which form wooded areas on the southern and eastern boundaries, together with a wooded block on a sizeable engineered earth mound located immediately south of the main car park. There are also two short sections of hedgerow, which is identified as a Habitat of Principal Importance in the Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA).
- 4.1.6.8 The mature trees and clusters of existing buildings within and in close proximity to the Site serve to screen much of the Site from the houses on Thong Lane and the wider landscape to the north, east and south. The sense of existing enclosure / self-containment of the Site and adjacent off-site sport/leisure facilities to the north and north-east, brought about by the existing mature trees, contrasts with the openness of the golf course and rural landscape to the north, east and south.
- 4.1.6.9 The wider landscape beyond the sport facilities is generally open in character, with few trees. The golf course is set on relatively flat ground, as per the Site, with only localised, undulations that comprise the design of the course. Beyond the golf course, the landscape is composed of large arable fields, broken slightly by hedgerows which are tall in places but also feature many gaps. The landscape remains very open, heading in a northerly direction towards the Thames Estuary. To the east, the mature woodland of Shorne Woods, set on ascending valley sides, screens views of built-form at and around Shorne village. There is inter-visibility between the Site and houses situated immediately opposite, on Thong Lane, but these properties also obscure views from/to regions any further west.
- 4.1.6.10 Thong Lane connects Rochester Road (A226) in the north to the A2 (formerly Watling Street) to the south, and also provides access to the Kent Downs AONB including Cobham Woods, and Keskyns Community Woodland, both south of the A2.
- 4.1.6.11 There are a number of PROWs that cross agricultural fields to the north, east and south of the Site, which connect Gravesham to villages of Shorne and Thong. In addition, there is a circuit of permissive paths passing around the football pitches, golf driving range and redundant golf course, which appears to be well-used by local people.

4.1.7 Historic Development

- 4.1.7.1 Historic maps and potted histories of the area describe the Site as agricultural land until 1932 after which it was used as an airfield for Gravesend Airport. Soon after, during WWII, the airfield was taken over by the Air Ministry as a satellite of Biggin Hill from which Blenheims, Hurricanes and Spitfires of various squadrons operated. The airstrip was rendered too hazardous to operate by 1944 due to the risks posed by V1 rockets. In 1956, Gravesend Airport and RAF station were decommissioned.

- 4.1.7.2 In 1957 Dolphin Development Company were granted planning approval to build the Riverview Park housing estate on the 9 ha site, immediately west of Thong Lane. This residential area still exists, and has since expanded further northwards, too.
- 4.1.7.3 In 1969 the area east of Thong Lane was developed as a sports centre which, following refurbishment and the addition of a sizeable leisure pool in 1988, changed its name to “Cascades”. This building complex and associated car park, play area, landscape spaces and public house, comprise the Site today.
- 4.1.7.4 In 1999, 56 ha of land abutting the Site’s eastern boundary became Southern Valley Golf Club. After operating for 23 years, the club closed in the summer of 2022 purportedly due to uncertainty over its long-term existence, resulting from the proposals comprising the Lower Thames Crossing (LTC).
- 4.1.7.5 The LTC southern tunnel entrance and road link to the A2/M2 is proposed on the former golf course situated immediately SE of the Site. The excavations for LTC will extend some metres either side of the proposed road as it cuts several metres below the existing topography. Adjacent areas will be remediated with open landscaping and a new public park.
- 4.1.7.6 Since the leisure centre was constructed, trees that were planted in rows along its boundary with Thong Lane and to internal access roads, and also as woodland blocks along its eastern edge (which now forms a boundary with the former golf course) have matured considerably, creating a substantial screen around much of the Site.
- 4.1.7.7 For historic maps of the Site and surrounding area, refer to the landscape section of the Design and Access Statement.
- 4.1.7.8 The heritage assets within the study area (refer to section 3.3.5) are located some distance from the Site, and share no intervisibility with it, and are therefore considered to be of low sensitivity.

4.1.8 Topography

- 4.1.8.1 The topography of the Study Area is heavily influenced by the path of the River Thames, the estuary of which runs west to east, c.2.5km north of the Site (see GLC-COL-ZZ-XX-DR-L-6002: Topographical Plan 3km Radius).
- 4.1.8.2 The Site sits on a plateau of relatively high ground at 65.5m AOD. The northern ridge of the plateau, located approximately 500m from the Site, gradually falls to the Thames Estuary c.2km further north.
- 4.1.8.3 The plateau extends c.850m to the east before forming a shallow valley and rising again to the village of Shorne, situated c.900m to the east.
- 4.1.8.4 Land starts to rise again at Shorne Woods and Cobham Woods (both within the Kent Downs AONB) situated c.800m and c.2.1km, respectively, SW of the Site.
- 4.1.8.5 The residential area west of the Site is set at ground elevations very similar to those of the Site. However, the housing lining the northern reaches of Thong Lane, between its junction with Leander Drive and, further north, Rochester Road (A226), follow the downward sloping ground typical of the dip slope to the Thames Estuary.
- 4.1.8.6 Taking nature and scale of the proposed development into consideration, the sensitivity of the Site’s topography is considered to be low.

4.1.9 Arboriculture/ Vegetation

- 4.1.9.1 Within the Site, there are many mature trees which line both the access road, boundary with Thong Lane, and which also form woodland blocks along the Site's south-eastern boundary, and on an engineered earth mound immediately south of the main car park. Blocks of woodland also extend around the football pitches, northern reaches of the redundant golf course, and driving golf range. These trees provide significant screening to the Site from the landscape beyond.
- 4.1.9.2 The Arboriculture survey has revealed that there are no A Category trees on Site, with the rest being composed of B Category and C Category trees.
- 4.1.9.3 Taking the quantity and quality of the existing trees into consideration, their overall sensitivity is considered to be medium.

4.1.10 Ecology

- 4.1.10.1 The Preliminary Ecology Appraisal (Lloydbore 6183-LLB-RP-EC-0001, Nov 2022) notes the following:
- There are two statutory designated sites of importance for nature conservation located within relevant distance of the application site;
 - The on-site **hedgerow (H1)** qualifies as a **Habitat of Principal Importance**;
 - The application site supports suitable habitat for common reptile species, nesting birds, foraging and roosting bats, badgers and hazel dormice;
 - A subsequent bat emergence survey of the leisure centre was completed in September 2022.
 - The survey confirmed a likely absence of roosting bats. Full detail of the results of this survey are provided within the Bat Report (Lloyd Bore, 2022a);
 - A badger field sign survey found no evidence of use of the site by this species; and
 - To minimise the ecological impacts of the proposed development, and thereby minimise planning risks, development timeline risk and costs, impacts upon the on-site hedgerows and scrub habitats have been avoided and minimised by design.
- 4.1.10.2 Taking the quantity and quality of the existing habitat into consideration, its overall sensitivity is considered to be low.

4.1.11 Drainage

- 4.1.11.1 Existing surface water run-off from buildings and hard-paved areas is currently directed to sewers.

4.1.12 Other Relevant Projects

- 4.1.12.1 The most significant project proposed within the vicinity of the Site, with likely landscape and visual impacts on the Site and wider study area, is the potential Lower Thames Crossing (LTC) project. The proposed LTC road would be offset from the Site's southern boundary by c.550m, with the southern tunnel entrance c.800m to the NE. Intervening landscape areas would undergo remediation through the creation of a public park, and road embankments are likely to be planted with trees that will mature over time.

4.2 Visual Baseline

- 4.2.1 The visual appraisal has explored the nature of the existing visual amenity of the area, seeking to establish the approximate visibility of the site from surrounding locations and receptors.
- 4.2.2 An initial Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV) model was generated for a radius of 5km from the site based on a new property set at a floor level of 65.5m and height of 13.5m to assist in the identification of locations of receptors from which the Proposed Development might be visible.
- 4.2.3 This radius was chosen to account for the position of the Proposed Development on a relatively high plateau within a broader landscape that is generally visually open to the NE and SE.
- 4.2.4 Given that the Site sits on a plateau, with much lower ground to the north and higher ground to the SE, the ZTV radius was chosen to ensure that potential receptors located on both the lower and higher ground would be included, when studying the effects of the Proposals on longer range views.
- 4.2.5 The following terminology is used when describing approximate distance between the viewer and the proposals.
- Short: up to 1km from the centre of development
 - Medium: 1-3.5km from the centre of development
 - Long: over 3.5-7.5km from the centre of development
- 4.2.6 The bare earth ZTV suggests that the Proposed Development could be visible in short-range views from Thong Lane, where it runs alongside the Site, and from a number of short to mid-range views within the rural landscape to the north, east and south of the Site.
- 4.2.7 Desk study identifying rights of way, highways, residential properties, listed and scheduled historic features (as summarised in Section 4.1) and any other receptors from which the Proposed Development could potentially be visible was then overlaid onto this ZTV along with the plotting of features that might limit visibility (woodlands/ plantations) to identify an initial long list of potential visual receptors. Refer to GLC-COL-00-XX-DR-L-60002-001 Site Context, and GLC-COL-00-XX-DR-L-60002-003 Heritage Designations and in Appendix Two.
- 4.2.8 A more localised study was also undertaken at a 3km radius to the site to encompass the main area of theoretical visibility and allow more detailed identification of potential receptors – summarised on drawing GLC-COL-ZZ-XX-DR-L-60002-006 Zones of Theoretical Visibility.
- 4.2.9 Site visits were then undertaken in October 2022 to each of these potential receptors to check their validity and to identify alternative visual receptors where necessary. From this visit a representative series of photographic viewpoints were chosen illustrating views towards the Proposed Development, as summarised in Appendix Two. These viewpoints were discussed and agreed with Gravesham Council at a Preapplication meeting 15.11.2022.

4.2.10 Whilst viewpoint photography does not demonstrate winter views when canopy coverage is at a minimum, the actual assessment does account for seasonal screening and will reflect a 'worst-case scenario' (where existing vegetation is not in leaf) in terms of visual impacts.

4.2.11 The primary receptors identified as likely to be subject to visual effects comprise:

- Viewpoint 09 – Thong Lane / Vigilant Way junction
- Viewpoint 12 – Thong Lane / Whinfell Way Junction
- Viewpoint 13 – Thong Lane / Southern Site entrance
- Viewpoint 15 – Near Golf Club House
- Viewpoint 16 – Pitches NE of Site
- Viewpoint 17 – PROW west of Shorne
- Viewpoint 20 – PROW south east of Southern Valley Golf Course

4.2.12 Photographic sheets GLC-COL-ZZ-XX-DR-L-6050 to 6057 illustrate views from these receptors.

5.0 LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL EFFECTS

5.1 Assessment of Landscape Effects

- 5.1.1 The Proposed Development, comprising new leisure centre building and car park, together with play and fitness facilities, will replace the existing leisure centre complex, car park and play area. All internal facilities will be consolidated into one building which will have a smaller footprint than the existing building complex. The new building will be constructed on the existing carpark allowing the existing leisure centre to function during the construction period. Once the old leisure centre complex is demolished, the new car park will be built on its former site.
- 5.1.2 During the demolition period, parking will be located on an area of existing hardstanding NE of the northern entrance to the Site.
- 5.1.3 The proposals also include a complete refresh and extension of the existing play area, located between the western Site boundary and the existing access road. The play area will be reconfigured, reusing existing equipment where appropriate, and extending and enriching the play environment for younger children. The area will include themed play, drawing on the Site's history, natural play items and planting.
- 5.1.4 The expanse of grass in the southern reaches of the Site will be repurposed as a fitness / well-being zone for older children and adults of all ages.
- 5.1.5 The car park will be designed with extensive areas of planting including trees. A 20m wide native woodland visual buffer is proposed along the northern boundary of the car park, providing medium and long term screening from the north.
- 5.1.6 The whole site will be linked by a hard-surfaced three lane fitness loop which will also connect to existing pedestrian routes, particularly the permissive paths that run around the football pitches and NW portion of the redundant golf course, beyond the Site boundary.
- 5.1.7 The layout and design of the Proposed Development has paid cognisance to design requirements contained within statutory guidelines.
- 5.1.8 The landscape effects brought about by the Proposed Development are set out in summary form in Appendix 3, which notes the sensitivity of the identified landscape receptors, and the magnitude of the landscape effects upon the receptors.
- 5.1.9 The criteria for the determination of sensitivity and magnitude of landscape effects are set out in Appendix 1.
- 5.1.10 The following paragraphs summarise the landscape effects in respect of each main landscape receptors.

5.2 Landscape Character

- 5.2.1 The Proposed Development is of the same Use Class as that of the existing Site and, as such, merely represents an upgrade and improvement of the existing leisure centre facilities, without further expansion.
- 5.2.2 It follows, therefore, that the effects on landscape character are likely to be no greater than those imposed by the existing use of the Site. Indeed, with the proposed sensitive design of the facility in terms of breaking down of massing and toned down earthy colours, there is likely to be betterment.
- 5.2.3 The visual and physical containment provided the existing mature trees within and surrounding the Site ensures that the most marked changes to landscape character remain within the Site itself.
- 5.2.4 The scale and nature of the Proposed Development relative to the North Kent Plain NCA (defined by Natural England National Character Area Profile, 2015), and to the Hoo Peninsula RCA (defined by Kent Landscape Assessment, 2004), within which the Site sits, is such that it is reasonable to conclude that it will be readily absorbed into the existing landscape character of both the NCA and the RCA.
- 5.2.5 At a national and regional level the anticipated landscape effects of the Proposed Development are therefore assessed as negligible.
- 5.2.6 At a local level, the effect on landscape character areas (defined by the Gravesham Landscape Character Assessment and Guideline, 2009), is potentially greater due to the smaller scale of the established landscape character areas.
- 5.2.7 Landscape effects are, however, limited to the LCA within which the Proposed Development sits since neighbouring LCAs are physically remote and visually separated from the Site by distance, landform, tree cover and, to a lesser extent, hedgerows.
- 5.2.8 The landscape effect that the Proposed Development exerts on LCA 3 Higham Arable Farmlands is not marked as it differs little from the existing situation in which built-form is screened to a very high degree by existing trees in and around the Site. The main difference between existing and proposed buildings relates to building character, position, height and footprint which, on balance, sit more sympathetically within the Site and defining characteristics of the LCA albeit with a slight increase in building height but with a reduction in overall building footprint and massing. All aspects considered, the landscape effect on LCA 3 Higham Arable Farmlands, is assessed as negligible.
- 5.2.9 Similarly, the effects on Local Landscape Parcel GR4 (defined by Gravesham Landscape Sensitivity and Capacity Study, 2016) which shares many of the defining characteristics of LCA3, is assessed as negligible.

5.3 Landscape and Heritage Designations

- 5.3.1 The site is located within designated Green Belt Land.
- 5.3.2 The fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open; the essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and their permanence (NPPF Paragraph 137).
- 5.3.3 In the assessment of the impact of the proposals on the Green Belt the following elements have been considered:
- Spatial openness – nature of existing vs proposed (visual openness is addressed in the next section)
 - Built form
 - Extent of proposals
 - Degree of activity generated
- 5.3.4 While the Proposed Development does represent development in the Green Belt, it does not represent a Change in Use, compared to existing land use, and it is of comparable size and scale to the existing leisure centre complex.
- 5.3.5 The proposed building consolidates, under one roof, many of the facilities that are currently spread over a larger building footprint in the existing structures. However, the Proposed Building is taller than existing and located 80m further south within the Site, to enable the existing facilities to continue functioning while the new facilities are constructed. Its closer proximity to the Site boundary, together with its increase in height, compared to the existing building complex, make the proposed building a little more visually prominent from a few short-range viewpoints within the Green Belt to the south-east. It is not considered that this materially affects the sense of openness of the Green Belt which, in this locality, is more strongly defined by the sizeable belt of mature trees that run along the south-eastern boundary of the Site and extend alongside adjacent football pitches and redundant golf course to the north-east.
- 5.3.6 Mitigation will be provided by way of building design which breaks down the overall massing and will include facades that incorporate sympathetic colours and material to visually soften the appearance of the Proposed Building amongst boundary trees and the wider rural green belt setting.
- 5.3.7 Impacts are therefore considered to act upon the immediate setting of the Site with no adverse effect on the overall spatial openness of the wider Green Belt. To this end, the anticipated landscape effect of the Proposed Development on the Green Belt is assessed as **negligible** and **neutral**.
- 5.3.8 Other landscape designations that have been identified within the Study Area and considered in the assessment include Kent Downs AONB, Thames Estuary Ramsar Site, SPA, SSSI, Shorne & Ashenbank Woods SSSI, and PROWs NG2, NG7, NG8, NG9, NS163, Country Parks of Shorne Wood and Jeskyns, and the various Village Greens within the environs of Shorne village.

- 5.3.9 Due to the effects of distance combined with the screening capacity of intervening topography, woodland cover, hedgerows and, in some instances, built-form and road infrastructure, the Proposed Development does not exert any landscape effects on the above designations is, therefore, assessed as having **NO IMPACT** upon them.
- 5.3.10 Heritage designations within the study area include Conservation Areas at Thong village and Shorne village, listed buildings of Church of St Mary, Baynards Cottage and White Horse Cottage, Cobham Hall Registered Park & Garden.
- 5.3.11 Again, the long distances between the Site and potential receptors, together with the screening effects of intervening topography, woodland cover, hedgerows, built-form and road infrastructure, result in the Proposed Development exerting **NO IMPACT** upon any heritage designations.

5.4 Landscape Features

- 5.4.1 Only landscape features within the Site will be affected by the Proposed Development. The most pronounced impacts will affect the existing car park and existing leisure centre building which will be developed for the proposed leisure centre building and proposed car park, respectively (effectively flipping their positions within the Site). The change will be transformative and its magnitude will be high. However, the proposed design for both the building and car park will constitute a significant improvement on that of their existing counterparts, representing a major, positive effect overall.
- 5.4.2 Public open space within the Site will be similarly upgraded and improved, with new play equipment and other stimulating features added to the young children's play area, and fitness and well-being elements added to the southern amenity leisure space. Proposals also include a fitness trail that will link the various external spaces within the Site while also forming connections with permissive footpaths beyond. The changes to the POS provision is assessed, from a landscape perspective, as **minor, positive**.
- 5.4.3 Reordering the Site, as per the Proposed Development, will result in some limited conflicts between existing and proposed Site features. More specifically, the relocation of the leisure centre building and associated car park will require the removal of 26nr existing trees. Of these, only 6nr B Category specimens would be lost, with the rest being C Category. While every attempt has been made to minimise tree loss, a strategy of tree replacement has been developed, by way of compensation. The proposed car park will therefore feature an appropriate number of replacement trees which will not only replace those lost but will serve to mitigate the visual effects of built form in and around this area. On balance, the significance of the effect of the Proposed Development on existing Site trees is assessed as **minor, negative**.
- 5.4.4 The Site also features planted areas that are considered potential habitats for wildlife, although no badgers or bat roosts have been identified by the Preliminary Ecological Appraisal. Of these habitat areas, the PEA identifies one hedgerow as a Habitat of Principal Importance. Though the Proposed Development has been configured so that it largely avoids destroying and disrupting habitat areas, the northern portion of the aforementioned hedgerow, equating to 50 lin m, is to be removed to accommodate the proposed building. The southern portion of the hedgerow will, however, be conserved and positively managed to encourage wildlife. To compensate for the loss of hedgerow, the proposal include the planting of 200 lin m new native hedgerow along the southern and eastern boundaries of the fitness zone, at its interface with existing tree belts/groups. Once established, this new hedgerow will augment the existing habitat of the adjacent trees. The resulting effect on habitats is therefore assessed as **minor, negative**.

5.5 Construction Phase

- 5.5.1 Construction works will be carried out to best practice guidelines under the supervision of suitably qualified construction professionals.

- 5.5.2 Landscape impacts will be minimised for example by providing suitable protection to existing features to be retained to the site boundaries (trees/ hedgerows) to British Standards.

5.6 Assessment of Visual Effects

- 5.6.1 Photographic Views on drawings GLC-COL-ZZ-XX-DR-L-6020 to 6027 illustrate visual receptors that may potentially be affected by the Proposed Development.

The receptors considered to be subject to potential effects comprise:

Viewpoint 09 – Thong Lane / Vigilant Way junction

Viewpoint 12 – Thong Lane / Whinell Way Junction

Viewpoint 13 – Thong Lane / Southern Site entrance

Viewpoint 15 – Near Golf Club House

Viewpoint 16 – Pitches NE of Site

Viewpoint 17 – PROW west of Shorne

Viewpoint 17 – PROW west of Shorne

Viewpoint 20 – PROW south east of golf course

- 5.6.2 Each view is accompanied by a table and a location plan. The table describes the location and details of the viewpoint; the existing components of the view within the photograph; the components of the view during construction and upon completion of the Proposed Development. The assessment of the visual effects generated by the Proposed Development at each viewpoint are also included in these tables. This assessment uses the methodology set out in Appendix One.
- 5.6.3 The viewpoint photography does not demonstrate winter views; when canopy coverage is at a minimum; the assessment does, however, account for seasonal screening and will reflect a 'worst-case scenario' (vegetation not in leaf) in terms of visual impacts.
- 5.6.4 In general, views of the Proposed Development are limited across the Study Area, with only a small number of Viewpoints being identified where construction activity and the completed development will be visible.
- 5.6.5 Although long distance views are theoretically possible within the study area, the combined influence of topography, woodland cover, hedgerows and built-form (mainly residential) combine to limit the visibility of the Site and Proposed Development to only a few localised viewpoints. Most of these viewpoints are publicly accessible, although those on the adjacent golf course (now redundant), and from nearby houses on Thong Lane are private.
- 5.6.6 The furthest viewpoint (VP17) is located on a PROW (footpath NS163) c1.4km NE of the Site. Though the Site is situated on a relatively high plateau, it is difficult to discern due to the substantial belt of mature trees that line the Site's south-eastern boundary. This belt extends in a north-easterly direction alongside the football pitches and around the redundant golf course to its north-west, defining the skyline to the south-west. Existing houses lining Thong Lane can be seen beyond the Site and to its south (left). The proposed building is higher than existing and also closer to the existing boundary trees, making it a little more visible to the discerning viewer than the existing leisure centre building. However, the visual effect is not much greater than that of the existing houses beyond the Site on Thong Lane, and constitutes a relatively minor, somewhat unnoticeable addition to

the open panoramic view since the roofline is no higher than the adjacent belt of mature trees. The resulting effect is assessed as **negligible, neutral**.

- 5.6.7 Similar views of the Proposed Development would be experienced from a few other viewpoints on the footpath network NE of the Site (on which viewpoint 17 is located) but as walkers move closer to the Site, potential views of the proposed building become increasingly obscured by the topography of the shallow valley (and vegetation) which runs roughly NE to SW parallel to the eastern edge of the golf course. Viewpoints from PROWs NG7 and NG9 to the north and north-east of the Site are largely screened by the tall overgrown hedgerows that they run alongside and/or by the previously mentioned belt of trees that follows the south-eastern boundary of the Site and football pitches and which also wraps around the north-western portion of the golf course.
- 5.6.8 Views of the Proposed Development are generally afforded from short-range vantage points to the south of the Site. This includes glimpsed views from the PROW that runs alongside the eastern edge of the redundant golf course, and within the golf course itself, as well as from the roadside on Thong Lane where its boundary with the golf course is visually open due to the absence of any hedge or tree planting.
- 5.6.9 Views from these southern viewpoints are made possible by the slight break in the extent of mature tree cover on the Site's south-eastern boundary, which is at the point that equates to the SW corner of the proposed building. The resulting views from these localised southern regions, as represented by VP 9 and VP20 are generally glimpsed and oblique. The views will be limited to the upper south-eastern corner of the proposed building, together with its rooftop plant room. The building will appear slightly higher than the existing leisure centre complex as the proposed building is both taller and situated 80m closer to the Site's south-eastern boundary. However, the proposed building does not exceed the height of adjacent tree canopies. The extent of visible building, relative to the baseline, is slightly greater in VP20 than VP9, which are assessed, respectively as **minor, negative** and **moderate negative**, though the visible extent of the proposed building in each view is quite similar.
- 5.6.10 Viewpoint 15 is also situated south of the Site but its close proximity to the Site's well-vegetated boundary results in better screening, to the extent that the Proposed Development will not be seen. Consequently, the visual effect experienced at VP15 is assessed as **no impact**.
- 5.6.11 The greatest visual effects will be experienced immediately opposite the Site at its southern entrance, where direct, close-range views of the Proposed Development are afforded. This is represented by VP13. The proposed view will be transformed by the proposed building which is situated 80m closer to the Site's southern entrance than the existing leisure centre complex, occupying the previously open space of the existing car park. The south-western corner of the building (including a good portion of its eastern and southern elevations) will be directly visible, though it will also be set – and visually softened – by existing mature trees and hedges to the south and west. Though the resulting visual effect is assessed as **major**, the report considers the effect **positive** since the proposed building is designed to a high architectural standard, and its closer proximity to the Site entrance will improve overall legibility and security on the Site.

- 5.6.12 Viewpoint 12, which is also located on Thong Lane in close proximity to the Site, experiences rather different visual impacts to those of VPI3 by virtue of the screening effects provided by the Site's boundary fence together with existing mature trees that run along its inner side and along either side of the internal access road. These features combine to disrupt and partially screen existing structures and other Site features. Since they are to be preserved, these existing features will continue to provide the same screening effects for the Proposed Building. Despite this, the proposed building is, however, likely to be more visible than the existing complex as its western façade is orientated towards, and sits in closer proximity, to the viewpoint. The overall effect - which factors in the visual disruption/screening provided by existing fencing and trees together with proposed features comprising the renovated play area - is assessed as **minor**, and **positive** due to the high quality of proposed architecture.
- 5.6.13 Viewpoint 16 represents short-range views from the permissive footpath to the north of the Site. From this vantage point, the proposed building will appear no higher than the roofline of the main building of the existing leisure centre complex. The overall building footprint will be reduced and the overall form will be seen to contract, relative to the baseline situation, in an easterly direction (to the left in the view). Around half of the building will be screened by the tall dense row of evergreen Leyland Cypress trees located south-west (right) of the existing tennis domes. Further screening / visual softening will be provided by additional tree planting within the proposed car park which is to be located north (in front) of the proposed building. The overall effect will be **minor**, **positive**.
- 5.6.14 In summary, though the Site sits on an elevated plateau above the Thames Estuary and below higher ground to the SE, it is very well-screened by existing mature trees on and around the Site and by those that extend around neighbouring sport facilities to the north and east. This limits visibility of the Proposed Development to a number of viewpoints. These include viewpoints on the local network of PROWs situated on high ground near Shone village to the north-east. From these viewpoints, only the upper reaches of the building will be seen amongst the Site's existing tree belt which, itself, is set within the wider context of the open panoramic view that takes in the disparate landscape of Thames Estuary. Other views within the rural landscape are restricted to views from the PROW to the SE of the Site which runs through the redundant golf course. From this location only the upper SE corner and rooftop plant room of the proposed building will be visible in glimpsed, oblique views. Proposed built form in these views is only a little more prominent than the baseline situation, due to the taller building being set closer to the Site's south-eastern boundary. Similar views are experienced from viewpoints from urbanised parts of Thong Lane, south of the site. Where Thong Lane runs alongside the Site's western boundary, views into the Site and towards the proposed building are generally disrupted by intervening boundary fencing and mature trees located in and surrounding the Site. The only exception is the direct view into the Site through the open gates of the Site's southern entrance, from which the Proposed Building will be very legible. This view will, by design, have operational benefits for the leisure centre. Views from the urban area to the north of the Site will be completely screened by existing mature trees situated within and outside the Site boundary.

5.7 Cumulative Effects

- 5.7.1 A major project that is proposed (but yet to be consented) within the vicinity of Cascade Leisure Centre Site, is the Lower Thames Crossing, the southern tunnel of which is will be situated c.1km NE of the Site. The proposed road, which will connect the crossing to the A2/M2, will pass c.0.5km almost parallel to the Site's south-eastern boundary. If approved, this project will transform the existing rural landscape north, south and east of the Site.

6.0 LANDSCAPE STRATEGY/ MITIGATION

- 6.1 The landscape and visual context of the Site is summarised illustratively in diagram GLC-COL-ZZ-XX-DR-L-6002-007 Landscape Framework
- 6.2 This landscape and visual assessment demonstrates that the layout and design of the Proposed Development has taken the existing landscape and visual context of the Site into consideration and has sought to minimise adverse landscape and visual impacts. It should be emphasised that the masterplanning process has worked iteratively with the findings, at both baseline and assessment stages, of this report.
- 6.3 Residual impacts are limited to visual effects experienced at viewpoints south of the Site, where the proposed building will be a little more visually prominent than the existing leisure centre complex, due to its increased height and closer proximity to the Site's south-eastern boundary. These impacts are unavoidable as they result from the need to house leisure facilities within a smaller building footprint on a more physically restricted area that does not conflict with the operation of the existing building (which will remain open during the construction period) or result in the removal of valued Site assets including existing mature trees. In mitigation, the building has been broken down in massing and its façade has been carefully designed using colours and materials that are sympathetic to the naturalistic character of the adjacent tree belt/groupings and the wider rural setting within the Metropolitan Green Belt.
- 6.4 Additional tree planting will be incorporated in and around the proposed car park, serving to visually break-up this area, while also helping to visually screen and soften the proposed building from northern viewpoints. These trees will also compensate for the loss of a small proportion of existing trees that are to be removed to enable construction of the proposed building, car park and service road.
- 6.5 A sensitive lighting scheme has been developed for the Site which seeks to balance the safety and security needs of people using the Site with broader ecological considerations, paying particular regard to bats and other nocturnal animals that use adjacent tree belts/grouping as habitat and foraging routes.
- 6.6 The proposed building will be illuminated within, and appropriate external lighting will be established around the service route to ensure that the building curtilage is safe and secure, bearing in mind its proximity to tree/vegetation together with its Green Belt designation and close proximity to the rural landscape beyond the Site's south-eastern boundary

7.0 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

7.1 Introduction

- 7.1.1 The Proposed Development site occupies approximately 4.5 hectares of land on a plateau above the Thames Estuary, located to its north. The Site is currently used as a leisure centre and includes an access road with two gated entrances on Thong Lane, sizeable main car park, existing pub with residential accommodation above and adjacent servicing paraphernalia, equipped play area and amenity grassed area to its south. The Site is bounded on its south-eastern side by a belt of mature trees which provides an effective screen between the existing leisure centre complex and the rural landscape beyond. Mature trees within the Site also screen potential views of the Site from residential areas to its north and provide filtered views from Thong Lane as it passes alongside the Site's western boundary. Additional off-site sport facilities – including two private indoor tennis domes and a number of football pitches are located north-east of the Site, while an outdoor golf driving range is located immediately to its north. A private golf course, located immediately beyond the tree belt on the south-eastern boundary has recently closed due to uncertainty over its long-term viability caused by the proposed Lower Thames Crossing, the southern tunnel and access road of which are proposed within its land, north-east and south-east of the Site.
- 7.1.2 The Proposed Development comprises a complete upgrade of existing leisure centre complex, which involves the construction of a single building that house all internal facilities, plus associated car park, younger children's play, and health and fitness facilities for older children and adults of all ages. The proposed building will be located on the existing car park while the proposed car park will be constructed on the site of the existing leisure centre complex once demolished.
- 7.1.3 The proposed building footprint is smaller than that of the existing leisure centre complex, but the overall height is increased. The proposed building is also set 80m further south than the main building of the existing leisure centre complex.

7.2 Landscape Effects

- 7.2.1 Landscape effects that would be caused by the Proposed Development are limited to landscape character and to the Green Belt designation, both of which are assessed as experiencing a negligible effect.
- 7.2.2 The very limited landscape impact is a function of the net limited change that the Proposed Development constitutes. The proposals retains the Site's Use Class and overall character as a leisure facility, and simply seeks to improve existing facilities by reordering and consolidating the existing functions of Site. The Proposed Development will be more efficiently organised and its overall architectural and landscape character will be of a higher quality than that of the existing Site. A slightly negative consequence of the redesign is that the proposed building will be taller and closer to the south-eastern boundary than is currently the case, with a marginally greater visibility within off-site areas to the south. This, however, imposes only negligible effects on the immediate local character area and London Area Green Belt.

- 7.2.3 Nature designations including the Ramsar site, SPA and SSSI of the Thames Estuary and SSSI of local woodlands, show no impact from the Proposed Development.
- 7.2.4 Landscape designations relating to historic features such as listed buildings, Registered Parks and Gardens, or other designations relating to natural beauty including the Kent Downs AONB, show no impact from the Proposed Development.
- 7.2.5 There are no impacts on nearby Country Parks.
- 7.2.6 Overall, landscape designations and landscape character will be maintained.

7.3 Visual Effects

- 7.3.1 Visual effects resulting from the Proposed Development are very limited, largely due to the inherent screening ability of mature trees within and around the Site.
- 7.3.2 The most significant visual effects are experienced at close range at the Site's southern entrance on Thong Lane, which provides direct views along the access road towards the proposed building, located on the existing car park. The resulting visual effects are significant but considered positive as they fit sympathetically with the urban context of this portion of Thong Lane, as well as addressing broader issues relating to Site legibility and safety.
- 7.3.3 Viewpoints south of the Site, which tend to afford glimpsed oblique towards the existing leisure centre, will register the slight increase in building height as the Proposed Building appears through the gap in the, otherwise, tall trees on the south-eastern boundary of the Site. However, most of the building will be screened and visible parts will be set no higher than the canopies of most adjacent trees. The visual effect will be further mitigated by the design of the building facades, the colour and materiality of which will be sympathetic to the surrounding vegetation and character of the nearby rural landscape.
- 7.3.4 Distant views of the proposed building are very limited due to the screening effects of intervening topography, woodland cover, hedgerows and buildings. Only the discerning eye will be able to pick out the roof line of the proposed building which will, otherwise, be well-screened by the adjacent belt of boundary trees. The proposed building will be seen in the broader context of the various, somewhat disparate, features that comprise Thames Estuary landscape.

7.4 Conclusion

- 7.4.1 Development of land always results in change, some of which will generate landscape and visual impacts which will vary in degree depending on the sensitivity of the receptor and the magnitude of the change brought about by the proposals.
- 7.4.2 The Proposed Development, which constitutes an upgrading of existing leisure facilities without any Change in Use, will have minimal adverse effects on landscape and visual receptors identified within the Study Area.
- 7.4.3 Landscape impacts are limited to negligible effects on the London Metropolitan Green Belt and on the local character area within which the Site sits.
- 7.4.4 Visual impacts of any significance are limited to short-range viewpoints situated south of the Site, though these are glimpsed and experienced obliquely.
- 7.4.5 Landscape and visual effects result largely from the increased visibility of the proposed building, generated by the position of the proposed building within the Site together with its increase in height, relative to baseline conditions. Both aspects are functions of the approach taken to the design and construction phases of the project which has sought to accommodate all internal facilities within a single building (making it higher than the existing leisure centre complex, but with a corresponding reduction in building footprint), in a location on Site which enables the existing leisure centre to remain open during the construction period.
- 7.4.6 To mitigate any residual landscape and visual effects, the proposed building has been designed such that its facades fit sympathetically within the context of the surrounding mature trees that are visibly very present within and around the Site, and with the rural landscape beyond. Additional tree planting will be included within the proposed car park, situated on the northern side of the proposed building, to mitigate the removal of a small proportion of trees that will be lost to construction, and to visually soften the proposed built-form.
- 7.4.7 In conclusion, this appraisal does not consider that there are any unacceptable or overriding landscape or visual effects that should preclude the Proposed Development.

DRAWINGS

Gravesham Borough Council

APPENDIX ONE METHODOLOGY

The methodology used for both the landscape and visual assessments has been based upon the Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, third edition (GLVIA3), published by the Landscape Institute and the Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment, in 2013.

In summary, the GLVIA3 states:

“Landscape and Visual impact assessment (LVIA), is a tool used to identify and assess the significance of and the effects of change resulting from development on both landscape as an environmental resource in its own right and on people’s views and visual amenity.” (GLVIA3 paragraph 1.1.)

GLVIA 3 states that when undertaking an LVIA, this should consider assessment of both landscape and visual effects and be clear about the difference between them.

The guidelines explain that both landscape and visual effects are dependent upon the sensitivity of the landscape resource or visual receptors and the magnitude of impact.

As defined in GLVIA 3, in this LVIA the terms 'impact' and 'effect' are used as follows:

- "impact, defined as the action being taken"
- "effect, defined as the change resulting from that action"

Methodology for the Appraisal of Landscape Effects

Susceptibility to Change

This is defined as the ability of the landscape receptor (whether it be the overall character or quality/condition of a particular landscape type or area, or an individual element and/or feature, or particular aesthetic and perceptual aspects) to accommodate the proposed development without undue consequences for the maintenance of the baseline situation and/or the achievement of landscape planning policies and strategies (see paragraph 5.40 of GLVIA 3).

Susceptibility is combined with landscape value (see below) to determine the overall sensitivity of a landscape receptor / receptor landscape to the type of change proposed.

Table 1, below, explains how criteria are applied to arrive at an assessment of susceptibility to change, in this appraisal.

Table 1: Criteria for the Assessment of Susceptibility to Change	
Level	Typical Criteria
High	Key characteristics of the landscape are highly vulnerable to change. The nature of the development would result in a significant change in character.
Medium	Some of the key characteristics of the landscape are vulnerable to change. Although the landscape may have some ability to absorb some development, it is likely to cause some change in character.
Low	Few of the key characteristics of the landscape are vulnerable to change. The landscape is likely to be able to accommodate development with only minor change in character.
Negligible	Key characteristics of the landscape are robust and would not be adversely affected by development.

Landscape Value

Assessment of value is concerned with the relative value attached to different landscapes by society. A consideration of value at the baseline stage informs judgements on the level of effects. Landscapes can be valued by different people for different reasons connected to a range of factors including landscape quality (condition), scenic quality, rarity, representativeness, conservation interests, recreation value, perceptual aspects and associations (see GLVIA 3 Box 5.1 for definitions).

This consensus can be recognised at a local, regional or national or international scale. Table 2 explains how criteria are applied to arrive at an appraisal of landscape value for this project.

Value	Typical criteria	Typical scale	Typical examples	Typical Capacity for Change
High	High Importance, Quality, Condition and Rarity. Non or limited potential for substitution	International, National	World Heritage Site, National Park, AONB, Registered Parks and Gardens	None or limited
Medium	Medium Importance or Reasonably Good Quality, Condition and Rarity. Some potential for substitution	Regional, Local	Special Landscape Area, Areas of Great Landscape Value, Areas of Landscape Importance, Local Nature Reserve, Local Wildlife Site Or Undesignated but valued e.g. demonstrable of use	Change possible without harm
Low	Low Importance, Quality, Condition and Rarity	Local	Areas identified as having some redeeming feature or features and possibly identified for improvement. Areas identified for recovery	Change could be beneficial

Landscape Sensitivity

As noted above, landscape sensitivity combines judgements on the susceptibility of landscape receptors to change of the type proposed, with the value attached to the landscape. Generally, a higher sensitivity will be ascribed to landscapes which have a high value, and which are highly susceptible to change, and vice versa. However, as GLVIA 3 (para. 5.46) recognises, these relationships are complex, particularly when considering change within or adjacent to designated landscapes.

For the purposes of this appraisal, landscape sensitivity is defined through the application of the typical criteria set out in Table 3, below.

Table 3: Criteria for the Assessment of Landscape Sensitivity	
Level	Typical Criteria
High	An area of particular distinctive sense of place, in good condition, or highly valued for its scenic quality and/or landscape / townscape with low tolerance to change of the type identified.
Medium	An area with a clearly defined sense of place and / or character in moderate condition; an area valued at a local or regional level. An area that is partially tolerant of change of the type identified.
Low	An area with a weak sense of place, or low quality landscape character, in poor condition, often not valued for its scenic quality. An area, which is tolerant of substantial change of the type, identified.

Magnitude of Landscape Impacts

Criteria for the assessment of the magnitude of landscape impacts is derived from the following Table 4:

Table 4: Criteria for the Assessment of Magnitude of Landscape Impacts	
Level	Typical Criteria
High	• Total loss/ major change to key features or perceptual aspects of the baseline and/or the addition of new features considered to be totally uncharacteristic of the receiving landscape • Impacts would be of a large scale influencing several landscape character types/areas • Impacts would be long term and/or irreversible
Medium	• Partial loss/ change to key features or perceptual aspects of the baseline and/or the addition of new features that may be prominent but not necessarily be considered to be substantially uncharacteristic of the receiving landscape • Impacts would be at the scale of the landscape character type/area within which the proposal lies • The impacts would be medium term and/or partially reversible
Low	• Minor loss/ alteration to key features or perceptual aspects of the baseline and/or the addition of new features that may not necessarily be considered to be uncharacteristic of the receiving landscape • Impacts would be at the level of the immediate setting of the site • Impacts would be short term and/or reversible
Negligible	• Very minor loss/ alteration to key features or perceptual aspects of the baseline and/or the addition of new features that are not uncharacteristic with the surrounding landscape - approximating the 'no change' situation • Impacts would be at the site level, within the development site itself • Impacts would be very short term and/or reversible
None	No loss or alteration to the key characteristics/ features - 'no change'.

Level of Landscape Effects

Predicted effect is determined by considering the sensitivity of landscape receptors with the magnitude of impact on them from the Proposed Development.

This methodology assigns them a level on a scale as follows:

Table 5: Criteria for Determining the Level of Landscape Effects	
Major	The proposed development, without mitigation measures, will have a substantial impact on the environment in comparison to the baseline
Moderate	The proposed development, without mitigation measures, will have a noticeable impact on the environment in comparison to the baseline
Minor	The proposed development, without mitigation measures, will have a small impact on the environment in comparison the baseline
Negligible / no impact	The proposed development, without mitigation measures, will have little or no impact on the environment in comparison with the baseline

Informed professional judgement is then used to determine whether the effects are **positive, negative or neutral**.

The matrix below has been used to initially assess the relationship between sensitivity and magnitude of impact for each receptor to reach the level of effect, however this approach can be too formulaic in some instances (as noted in GLVIA3), therefore this has been used alongside a more detailed consideration of each effect with notes/ descriptions provided where required:-

Table 6: Assessment of Significance of Effect relative to Sensitivity of Receptor and Magnitude of Change				
Sensitivity of receptor	Magnitude of Change			
	High	Medium	Low	Negligible
High	Major	Major	Moderate	Negligible / No Impact
Medium	Major	Moderate	Minor	Negligible / No Impact
Low	Moderate	Minor	Minor	Negligible / No Impact

Methodology for the Appraisal of Visual Effects

Sensitivity of Visual Receptors

Visual receptors include the public or community at large, residents, people visiting promoted landscapes or attractions, people passing through on roads or non-vehicle forms of recreation.

The types of viewers, the numbers, duration of the view and the importance of the view contribute to defining the sensitivity of a visual receptor.

For the purposes of this appraisal, visual sensitivity is defined through the application of the typical criteria set out in Table 7, below.

Table 7: Criteria for the Assessment of Visual Sensitivity	
Level	Typical Criteria
High	Viewers with proprietary interest and/or prolonged viewing opportunities and / or who have a particular interest in their visual environment, for example residents, visitors to protected landscapes, users of outdoor recreational facilities/ routes whose interest would be focussed on the landscape
Medium	Viewers with a moderate interest in their visual environment for example those travelling through/ past on transport routes, users of outdoor recreational facilities/ routes whose interest is not primarily focussed on the landscape
Low	Viewers with passing or momentary interest in their everyday surroundings, for example motorists or people at their places of work whose attention is focussed on other activities and are therefore less susceptible to change.

Magnitude of Visual Impacts

Criteria for the assessment of the magnitude of landscape impacts is derived from the following Table 8:

Table 8: Criteria for the Assessment of Magnitude of Visual Impacts	
Level	Typical Criteria
High	• Total loss/ major change to views and/or the addition of new features that would be incongruous, very prominent, and/or would greatly contrast with the existing view • Full, open views, experienced at a location or for the majority of a journey • The views would be close, direct and/or totally occupied by the Proposed Development
Medium	• Partial loss/ change to views and/or the addition of new features that would be prominent, and/or would contrast with the existing view • Partial views, experienced for part of a journey or activity • The views would be middle distance, partially oblique and/or partially occupied by the Proposed Development
Low	• Minor loss of/ change to views and/or the addition of new features that would not be prominent, and/or would not contrast with the existing view • Glimpsed views, experienced for a small part of a journey or activity • The views would be distant, oblique and/or only a small part of the view would be occupied by the proposed development
Negligible	• Very minor loss of/ change to views and/or the addition of new features that are unlikely to be readily perceived

	• Very brief glimpsed views • The views would be very distant, very oblique and/or only a tiny part of the view would be occupied by the proposed development
None	• Barely discernible alteration to views and/or the addition of new features that would be almost imperceptible - 'no change' situation • Views are not possible

Magnitude can vary greatly due to differing seasonal or weather conditions, changes in light at different times of the day, and whether a development is seen against the background of the sky or the landscape. The appraisal takes into account a worst-case scenario.

The following terminology is used when describing **duration of effects**:

- Short term: 6months -1 year
- Medium term 1 -5 years
- Long term 5-10 years

Reversibility is an evaluation of the ability and practicality of an effect being reversed in for example a lifetime. As an example housing is considered permanent however elements of the construction procedures and compound of the contractors can eventually be reduced, removed and land restated.

The following terminology is used when **describing approximate distance between the viewer and the proposals**.

- Local: up to 1km from the centre of development
- Medium: 1-3.5km from the centre of development
- Long distance: over 3.5-7.5km from the centre of development

The number of viewers or users who experience the view are factors in making a judgement of significance. The terminology used are:-

- LOW - very few people experience the view, or the view is rarely experience
- MEDIUM - a moderate number of people experience the view, often
- HIGH - Many people experience the view, frequently

Level of Visual Effects

Predicted effect is determined by considering the sensitivity of visual receptors with the magnitude of impact on them from the Proposed Development.

Table 9: Criteria for Determining the Level of Landscape Effects

Major	The proposed development, without mitigation measures, will have a substantial impact on the environment in comparison to the baseline
Moderate	The proposed development, without mitigation measures, will have a noticeable impact on the environment in comparison to the baseline
Minor	The proposed development, without mitigation measures, will have a small impact on the environment in comparison the baseline
Negligible / no impact	The proposed development, without mitigation measures, will have little or no impact on the environment in comparison with the baseline

Informed professional judgement is then used to determine whether the effects are **positive, negative or neutral**.

The matrix below has been used to initially assess the relationship between sensitivity and magnitude of impact for each receptor to reach the level of effect, however this approach can be too formulaic in some instances (as noted in GLVIA3), therefore this has been used alongside a more detailed consideration of each effect with notes/ descriptions provided where required:-

Table 10: Assessment of Significance of Effect relative to Sensitivity of Receptor and Magnitude of Change

Sensitivity of receptor	Magnitude of Change			
	High	Medium	Low	Negligible
High	Major	Major	Moderate	Negligible / No Impact
Medium	Major	Moderate	Minor	Negligible / No Impact
Low	Moderate	Minor	Minor	Negligible / No Impact

Photographic Methodology

Photography was undertaken in accordance with Visualisation Type I recommendations within 'Visual Representation of Development Proposals Technical Guidance Note 06/19' by the Landscape Institute (2019).

Photographs taken during the field survey assessment have been taken using a Sony digital SLR camera with a fixed 50mm lens to avoid distortion and tripod with a panoramic node point head. The node point tripod head eliminates parallax errors and aids the stitching process. These photographs were downloaded directly as high quality jpegs.

GPS co-ordinates for the location of each photograph have been established using a Garmin GPS Etrex handheld GPS for each Key View and verified through detailed analysis of mapping data.

Individual photographs have been spliced together to create the viewpoint images using Hugin panorama photo stitching software. Photographs have been taken with approximately a 50% overlap, in line with guidance listed above.

Viewpoints illustrate a maximum of 80 degree curved panoramic view and are equivalent to 2 frames in landscape and 3 frames in portrait format. This angle of view allows the view to be represented in a way which is representative of the view as seen on site by the human eye. This places the development at the correct scale within the surrounding landscape context. This is important, as it allows the development to be read correctly in relation to existing elements within the landscape setting. In order to accurately view the View Points when the drawing is printed at full size (A3 landscape), a viewing distance of 250mm must be maintained. This will allow for a correct representation of the development and surrounding elements when printed.

Viewpoints are intended for illustrative purposes only. Although these tools are technical in their creation, they are not a substitute for field study and site visits. They should not be used as a true to life visualisation of the development, and their use relies on interpretation based on experience of the likely impacts.

APPENDIX TWO LOCATIONS OF VISUAL RECEPTORS

The table below summarises the short list of potential visual receptors that were tested during site visits

Locations are identified on drawing GLC-COL-ZZ-XX-DR-L-6013 Locations of Potential Visual Receptors.

Location Nr	Location	Grid Ref Easting / Northing	Viewing Directi on	Visual Receptor(s)	Viewpoint Selected?	Comments
09	Thong Lane / Vigilant Way junction	E 567125 N 171296	351°	Pedestrians, residents, drivers	Yes	Road junction, intervening small/medium trees, mature trees within Site and on SE boundary, provide extensive screening with only one sizable gap
12	Thong Lane / Whinfell Way Junction	401273 / 560311	352.7°	Pedestrians, residents, drivers	No	Site boundary fence and trees disrupt/obscure views into Site
13	Thong Lane / Southern Site entrance	401195 / 559723	355°	Pedestrians, residents, drivers	Yes	Site boundary fence and trees disrupt/obscure views into Site. Direct views into existing carpark (site of proposed building)
15	Near Golf Club House	401003 / 562464	352.4°	Users of golf course site	Yes	Golf course no longer in use. Existing buildings on Site not visible, but repositioned proposed building potentially visible.
16	Pitches NE of Site	400551 / 563446	21.3°	Users of permissive footpath	Yes	Existing Site buildings visible. Proposed building would be set further back.
17	PROW west of Shorne	400692 / 563304	57.8°	Users of PROW	Yes	Elevated, long-range view from well-used PROW with panoramic views across wider landscape setting (Green Belt), including views towards south-eastern boundary of the Site.
20	PROW running NE-SW on southern side of golf course	567248 / 171359	53.5°	Users of PROW	Yes	Oblique views towards vegetated south-eastern boundary of the Site with glimpsed partial views of existing leisure centre building's roof.

APPENDIX THREE ASSESSMENT OF LANDSCAPE EFFECTS – TABLES

Resource	Description/ Rationale for Judgement	Susceptibility to Change	Landscape Value	Sensitivity of Receptor to Change	Magnitude of Effect	Overall Significance of Effect	Category of Effect
National Landscape Character Area defined by Natural England National Character Area Profile 2015							
NCA13: North Kent Plain	<i>The character area is described as:</i> <i>...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.</i> <i>Large arable/horticultural fields with regular patterns and rectangular shapes predominating, and a sparse hedgerow pattern</i> <i>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.</i> <i>The built environment also exerts a strong influence on the open</i>	Negligible The Proposed Development involves the replacement and upgrading of an existing community facility, with no Change of Use implications. The Proposed Development is small in scale compared to the extent of the NCA, and fits within the structure of the existing landscape. Key characteristics of the landscape would be conserved and would not be adversely affected by development.	Medium Parts of the NCA, such as the Kent Downs AONB are highly valued, but the Proposed Development is located in a per-urban area (albeit in London Area Green Belt), which is of mixed quality. The green infrastructure within the Site and surrounding leisure facilities makes a positive contribution to character of the urban edge of Gravesham,	Medium The NCA is valued locally and regionally	Negligible The Proposals do not exert impacts on the character of the wider landscape.	NEGLIGIBLE	NEUTRAL

	<i>farmland character, with associated infrastructure such as pylons dominating in expansive vistas. Discrete but significant areas of woodland provide contrast on the higher ground around...Shorne,</i> <i>The impact of development is exacerbated by the expansive and open nature of the low lying landscape.</i>		providing an important buffer between the town and rural area beyond. This green infrastructure network is considered to be of good quality and of value locally.				
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Resource	Description/ Rationale for Judgement	Susceptibility to Change	Landscape Value	Sensitivity of Receptor to Change	Magnitude of Effect	Overall Significance of Effect	Category of Effect
Regional Landscape Character Areas (RCA) defined by Kent Landscape Assessment, 2004							
Hoo Peninsula	<i>Intensive, open farmed arable land. Intrusive influence of industrial development.</i> <i>Flat/undulating farmland. Decline in orchards and mixed farmland with shelterbelts.</i> <i>Prominent hills and low-lying alluvial marshes.</i> <i>There is very little coherent landscape pattern.</i> <i>Views are long and visibility is high.</i>	Negligible The landscape character of this RCA is not particularly strong. The Site already includes a leisure centre, which will be replaced and upgraded by the Proposed Development. The historic framework to this landscape is mainly indistinct. The sense of place is considered to be weak	Low	Low	Negligible The Proposed Development will have no effect on the landscape character of the RCA in comparison to baseline conditions	NEGLIGIBLE	NEUTRAL

Resource	Description/ Rationale for Judgement	Susceptibility to Change	Landscape Value	Sensitivity of Receptor to Change	Magnitude of Effect	Overall Significance of Effect	Category of Effect
Local Landscape Character Areas (LCA) defined by Gravesham Landscape Character Assessment and Guidelines, 2009							
LCA 3: Higham Arable Farmlands	<i>Very gently undulating topography</i> <i>Open arable farmland</i> <i>Views out to the marshes and the River Thames in the north</i> <i>The main physical elements of the landscape, such as the topography and general field pattern, are consistent</i> <i>Land use provides an element of fragmentation, such as small areas of orchards and garden nurseries set within the dominating context of open arable farmland.</i> <i>Large pylons to the north, rail sidings, poly tunnels and polythene covering nursery stock provide some visually detracting features</i>	Negligible The condition of this LCA is considered to be poor. The Site is located within this LCA. The Proposed Development constitutes the replacement and upgrading of the existing leisure centre currently within the Site, suggesting that the LCA can accommodate this type of development.	Low This LCA is indistinct at a local level, but for the fact that it covers areas that are within the designated London Area Green Belt. <i>There is a modified cultural integrity and the overall, functional unity is weak</i>	Low	Negligible The Proposed Development will have no effect on the landscape character of the LCA in comparison to baseline conditions	NEGLIGIBLE	NEUTRAL

Resource	Description/ Rationale for Judgement	Susceptibility to Change	Landscape Value	Sensitivity of Receptor to Change	Magnitude of Effect	Overall Significance of Effect	Category of Effect
Local Landscape Character Areas (LCA) defined by Gravesham Landscape Character Assessment and Guidelines, 2009							
LCA 4: Shorne Woodlands	<i>Undulating topography</i> <i>Chestnut coppice woodland</i> <i>Strong sense of enclosure</i> <i>Varied building style and age</i> <i>Few highways with busier roads along character area boundaries</i> <i>The combination of landform and tree cover provides an enclosed character and subsequent low visibility within the character area</i>	Low The condition of this LCA is good. The Site, which is located c.800m west of the LCA, already includes a leisure centre, which will be replaced and upgraded by the Proposed Development. This indicates that the LCA can accommodate development of this type.	High The LCA is distinct both locally and regionally, and includes woodland that falls within the Kent Downs AONB. <i>The pattern of elements is coherent, with the extent of coppice woodland providing a unifying feature throughout the area...[and] contributes significantly towards local distinctiveness</i>	Medium The LCA is sufficient distance from the Proposed Development for it not to be affected directly by the type of changes proposed. The respective regions share a degree of intervisibility, though this is very limited due to the enclosure created by existing woodland within the LCA and the belts of mature trees around the Site.	Negligible The Proposed Development will have no effect on the landscape character of the LCA in comparison to baseline conditions	NEGLIGIBLE	NEUTRAL

				<i>there are extensive views out of the area from vantage points at the woodland edge, particularly to the north across the marshland to the Thames</i>			
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Resource	Description/ Rationale for Judgement	Susceptibility to Change	Landscape Value	Sensitivity of Receptor to Change	Magnitude of Effect	Overall Significance of Effect	Category of Effect
Local Landscape Character Areas (LCA) defined by Gravesham Landscape Character Assessment and Guidelines, 2009							
LCA 1: Shorne and Higham Marshes	<i>Flat topography, limited vegetation and pattern of ditches and waterways provide consistency and strength of character</i> <i>This is a simple landscape comprised of few landscape elements. It is characteristically un-vegetated and unsettled and is likely to have remained largely unchanged for many centuries</i> <i>Apart from electricity pylons crossing the south of the character area there are relatively few visual detractors within the marshes, although there are views of visually detracting industrial buildings to the north of the Thames</i> <i>Sense of remoteness with extensive views across marshes</i>	Negligible The condition of this LCA is considered to be very good. The Site, which is located c.1.3km south of the LCA, already includes a leisure centre, which will be replaced and upgraded by the Proposed Development. This suggests that the LCA, can accommodate this type of development	High The LCA is of high value from a ecological and historic perspective, having undergone very little developmental change, in contrast to many other areas of marshland in Kent	High <i>Overall the marshes are considered to be very distinct and possess a strong sense of place</i> <i>They are considered to be of high sensitivity in terms of their character, distinctiveness and visibility</i>	None The Proposed Development will have no effect on the landscape character of the LCA in comparison to baseline conditions	NO IMPACT	NEUTRAL

Resource	Description/ Rationale for Judgement	Susceptibility to Change	Landscape Value	Sensitivity of Receptor to Change	Magnitude of Effect	Overall Significance of Effect	Category of Effect
Local Landscape Character Areas (LCA) defined by Gravesham Landscape Sensitivity and Capacity Study, 2016							
GR4	The northern part of the parcel is open, arable farmland whilst the southern part is given over to recreational uses such as Thamesview School playing fields, the Cascades Leisure Centre, a golf centre and the Southern Valley Golf Course From a plateau in the south-western part the parcel's terrain slopes downhill into a fairly narrow valley to the east, and more broadly to the north, with several shallow north-south ridges and valleys. Hedges and trees, where they exist, are mostly indistinct features in this open landscape other than along the Gravesend Road boundary, and where they provide containment around the playing fields and leisure [centre] and golf centre The outer edge of the parcel follows the golf course perimeter and a field boundary between arable fields	Negligible The condition of this parcel is considered to be poor. The Site, which is located within GR4, already includes a leisure centre, which will be replaced and upgraded by the Proposed Development. This suggests that GR4, can accommodate this type of development	Medium The value of the parcel results from the open space it creates at the eastern edge of Gravesham, and the containment of the urban edge that the existing woodland belt provide The valley between Gravesend and Shorne...is a distinctive landscape feature, the lack of development within which contributes to the settings of, and gaps between, Gravesend and Shorne and the	Low The undulating slopes to the north are more consistent with the landform on which housing to the west is located; there is a degree of sensitivity associated with a narrow north-south valley adjacent to the urban edge, but this feature is contained within the wider landscape There is no particular landscape sensitivity associated with any other landscape	Negligible The Proposed Development will have little to no effect on the landscape character of the LCA in comparison to baseline conditions	NEGLIGIBLE	NEUTRAL

	<i>Thong Lane, or houses fronting onto it, forms the eastern boundary to the urban area south of the A226.</i>		<i>wooded AONB hills to the south.</i> <i>The urban edge is also exposed where the golf course abuts the road, to the south of the leisure centre. In between, the trees/hedgerows around the playing fields and leisure centre provide containment</i>	<i>elements within this parcel.</i>			
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Resource	Description/ Rationale for Judgement	Susceptibility to Change	Landscape Value	Sensitivity of Receptor to Change	Magnitude of Effect	Overall Significance of Effect	Category of Effect
Landscape Designations							
Green Belt	Designated to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open; the essential characteristics of Green Belts as defined by the NPPF are <i>their openness and their permanence</i> . Openness has both spatial and visual aspects – note that visual impact on openness is not considered in this assessment of landscape effects.	Low The Site, which is located within Green Belt, already includes a leisure centre, which will be replaced and upgraded by the Proposed Development. This is compliant with the exception the NPPF grants to general Green Belt policy: <i>the replacement of a building, provided the new building is in the same use and not materially larger than the one it replaces;</i> Perceived encroachment upon the countryside will be limited to the building	Medium	Medium	None No loss or alteration to the defining characteristics of the London Area Green Belt Gravesham Local Plan policy CS01 would remain unaffected inasmuch as the proposal: <i>Assist[s] in safeguarding the countryside by minimising the expansion of the Borough's rural settlements</i>	NEGLIGIBLE	NEUTRAL

		moving 80m closer to the south-eastern boundary of the Site, while its height increases slightly. However, the overall footprint of the proposed building will become smaller compared to existing. The setting and special character of historic towns or villages will be unaffected. The existing leisure centre site will, effectively, be 'recycled', in accordance with national Green Belt policy.			while the Proposed Development also supports the objectives of policy CS01 in its aims to: assist in concentrating development on underused, derelict and previously developed land in the urban area of Gravesend and Northfleet And also the objective of policy CS02 by prioritising the redevelopment and recycling of underused, derelict and previously developed land		
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					<i>in the urban area...</i>		
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Resource	Description/ Rationale for Judgement	Susceptibility to Change	Landscape Value	Sensitivity of Receptor to Change	Magnitude of Effect	Overall Significance of Effect	Category of Effect
Kent Downs AONB	Nationally important and designated to conserve and enhance landscape and scenic beauty of the area. The conservation and enhancement of wildlife and cultural heritage are also important. More specifically, The Kent Downs AONB is designated because of: <i>its scarp slope and dry valleys which often retain a downland character. The views from the escarpment are also important, and its woodlands are also highly valued</i> In addition, policy CS12 of the Local Plan states: <i>The overall landscape character and valued landscapes will be conserved, restored and enhanced. The greatest weight will be given to the conservation and enhancement of the landscape and natural beauty of the Kent Downs</i>	Negligible <i>NPPF states:</i> <i>The scale and extent of development within...designated areas should be limited, while development within their setting should be sensitively located and designed to avoid or minimise adverse impacts on the designated areas.</i> However, the scale/nature of the Proposed development and its remoteness from the AONB result in no intervisibility or other potential influences	High <i>NPPF states:</i> <i>AONBs...have the highest status of protection in relation to these issues [conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty]</i>	High The AONB is an area of particular distinctive sense of place, in good condition, and is highly valued for its scenic quality	None	NO IMPACT	NEUTRAL

	<i>Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and its setting.</i>						
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Resource	Description/ Rationale for Judgement	Susceptibility to Change	Landscape Value	Sensitivity of Receptor to Change	Magnitude of Effect	Overall Significance of Effect	Category of Effect
Nature Designations relating to the Thames Estuary							
Ramsar /SPA /SSSI	These designations aim to protect natural habitats. In addition, policy CS12 of the Local Plan states: <i>Sites designated for their biodiversity value will be protected, with the highest level of protection given to internationally designated Special Protection Areas, Special Areas of Conservation and Ramsar sites, followed by nationally designated Sites of Special Scientific Interest, followed by Local Wildlife Sites and then by other areas of more local importance for biodiversity.</i>	Negligible The Proposed Development is remote from the Thames Estuary and its scale and nature is such that it will not impose any direct influence on the associated habitat protected by these designations.	High The Local Plan also notes: <i>The Thames Estuary and Marshes Special Protection Area (SPA) and Ramsar site to the east are of international biodiversity importance, particularly for birds</i>	High The designated areas of the Thames Estuary are particularly distinctive places in good condition which are highly valued for their ecology and other scientific reasons	None	NO IMPACT	NEUTRAL

Resource	Description/ Rationale for Judgement	Susceptibility to Change	Landscape Value	Sensitivity of Receptor to Change	Magnitude of Effect	Overall Significance of Effect	Category of Effect
Nature Designations relating to the Shorne and Ashenbank Woods							
SSSI	These designations aim to protect natural habitats. In relation to woodland, Section 15 of the NPPF notes: <i>Planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by.. recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, and the wider benefits from natural capital and ecosystem services – including the economic and other benefits of the best and most versatile...trees and woodland.</i> <i>It further states:</i> <i>...development resulting in the loss or deterioration of irreplaceable habitats (such as ancient woodland and ancient or veteran trees) should be refused...</i>	Negligible The Proposed Development is remote from Shorne and Ashenbank Woods and its scale and nature is such that it will not impose any direct influence on the associated habitats protected by these designations.	High The designation is of regional and national importance	High	None	NO IMPACT	NEUTRAL

	In addition, Policy CS12 of the Local Plan states: <i>Sites designated for their biodiversity value will be protected, with the highest level of protection given to internationally designated [sites] followed by nationally designated Sites of Special Scientific Interest.</i>						
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Resource	Description/ Rationale for Judgement	Susceptibility to Change	Landscape Value	Sensitivity of Receptor to Change	Magnitude of Effect	Overall Significance of Effect	Category of Effect
Historic Designations: Conservation Areas							
Thong CA & Shorne CA		Negligible The Site does not affect the setting of the Conservation Areas at Thong village or Shorne village as it does not experience any intervisibility with either due to the combined screening effects generated by intervening topography, woodland cover and hedgerows. The Site does not affect the setting of the Conservation Areas within the urban area of Gravesham due distance and the combined screening effects of topography and built-form	Medium	High Conservations areas are characterised by their particular distinctive sense of place, which are good condition, and they are highly valued for their scenic quality They have a low tolerance to change.	None	NO IMPACT	NEUTRAL

		screening effects and distance					
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Resource	Description/ Rationale for Judgement	Susceptibility to Change	Landscape Value	Sensitivity of Receptor to Change	Magnitude of Effect	Overall Significance of Effect	Category of Effect
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Historic Designations: Listed Buildings

Church of St. Mary, on Church Lane off Rochester Road		Negligible	Medium	Medium	None	NO IMPACT	NEUTRAL
Baynards Cottage, near on Shorne Ilfield Road		The Site does not affect the setting of any listed buildings as it does not experience any intervisibility with them due the distance between them and the combined screening effects generated by intervening topography, woodland cover and hedgerows	Listed buildings are valued at local and regional levels	Listed buildings are in moderate condition			
White Horse Cottage, in Thong village							

Resource	Description/ Rationale for Judgement	Susceptibility to Change	Landscape Value	Sensitivity of Receptor to Change	Magnitude of Effect	Overall Significance of Effect	Category of Effect
Historic Designations: Registered Parks & Gardens							
Cobham Hall park & garden covering 338 ha.		Negligible The Site does not affect the setting of the Registered Park & Garden as it does not experience any intervisibility with it due the distance between them and the combined screening effects generated by intervening topography, woodland cover and hedgerows	High Registered Parks and Gardens are valued at local, regional and national levels	High The listing is in good condition	None	NO IMPACT	NEUTRAL

Resource	Description/ Rationale for Judgement	Susceptibility to Change	Landscape Value	Sensitivity of Receptor to Change	Magnitude of Effect	Overall Significance of Effect	Category of Effect
Access Designations: Footpaths & Strategic Routes							
PROWs: NG2 NG7 NG8 NG 9 NSI63		Negligible The Site does not have any physical influence over the PROWs or Strategic Route	Medium PROW and Strategic Routes are of Local and Regional importance	Low The PROWs are tolerant of the change proposed	None	NO IMPACT	NEUTRAL

Resource	Description/ Rationale for Judgement	Susceptibility to Change	Landscape Value	Sensitivity of Receptor to Change	Magnitude of Effect	Overall Significance of Effect	Category of Effect
Access Designations: Country Parks							
Shorne Wood Country Park		Negligible	Medium	Low	None	NO IMPACT	NEUTRAL
Jeskyns Country Park		The Site does not affect the setting of the Country Parks as it does not experience any intervisibility with either designation due the distance between them and the combined screening effects generated by intervening topography, woodland cover and hedgerows	The Country Parks of local and regional importance	The Country Parks are tolerant of the change proposed			

Resource	Description/ Rationale for Judgement	Susceptibility to Change	Landscape Value	Sensitivity of Receptor to Change	Magnitude of Effect	Overall Significance of Effect	Category of Effect
Access Designations: Village Greens							
All within the vicinity of Shorne village: Shorne Common Shorne Common and Chestnut Common Post Office Green Shorne Green Recreation Ground		Negligible The Site does not physically affect the Village Greens nor their setting as they are physically separated and there is no intervisibility between them and the Site due to the distance between them and the combined screening effects generated by intervening topography, woodland cover and hedgerows	Low The village greens are of local importance	Low The village greens are of local importance tolerant of the change proposed	None	NO IMPACT	NEUTRAL

Resource	Description/ Rationale for Judgement	Susceptibility to Change	Landscape Value	Sensitivity of Receptor to Change	Magnitude of Effect	Overall Significance of Effect	Category of Effect
Landscape Features							
Existing main car park on Site	The existing car park will be completely replaced by the proposed leisure centre building and service road that wraps around its curtilage.	High The proposals would amount to a change in function and character of the existing car park, though it would be understood that the change forms an essential component of the leisure centre facility.	Medium The car park is a useful community facility which will be re-provided and improved upon in the area currently covered by the existing leisure centre building. There will be no net loss in parking provision within the Site.	Medium The overall Site can tolerate change of the type identified.	High The character of the car park will be completely transformed by the proposed building and associated service road.	MAJOR	POSITIVE The redeveloped car park and its relocation several meters to the north is considered to be beneficial to the overall function and character of the Site.

Resource	Description/ Rationale for Judgement	Susceptibility to Change	Landscape Value	Sensitivity of Receptor to Change	Magnitude of Effect	Overall Significance of Effect	Resource
Landscape Features							
Existing building complex (including public house) on Site	The existing building complex will be completely replaced by the proposed car park, once the proposed leisure centre is operational.	High The proposals would amount to a change in function and character of the building complex, though it would be understood that the change forms an essential component of the wider leisure centre facility.	Medium The leisure centre complex is a useful community facility which will be re-provided and improved upon in the area currently used as the Site's main car park. There will be no net loss in facilities provision within the Site.	Medium The overall Site can tolerate change of the type identified.	High The character of the existing leisure centre building will be completely transformed by the proposed car park, which will be visually more open though planted with trees and shrubs	MAJOR	POSITIVE The redeveloped leisure centre complex and the relocation of facilities in the proposed building located several meters to the south is considered to be beneficial to the overall function and character of the Site.

Resource	Description/ Rationale for Judgement	Susceptibility to Change	Landscape Value	Sensitivity of Receptor to Change	Magnitude of Effect	Overall Significance of Effect	Resource
Landscape Features							
Existing POS on-Site	The play provision and character of the existing play areas will be improved, and fitness/well-being facilities will be created in the grassed area in the southern corner of the Site. A fitness trail will run around the whole Site forming a pedestrian route that links all external spaces on Site.	Low These landscape areas are likely to be able to accommodate development with only minor changes in character	Low Though only locally important, the POS does present the only local facilities for outdoor equipped play/fitness	Low The spaces in question already function as play/recreational environments and their upgrading will be tolerated of the type of change proposed	Low	MINOR	POSITIVE

Resource	Description/ Rationale for Judgement	Susceptibility to Change	Landscape Value	Sensitivity of Receptor to Change	Magnitude of Effect	Overall Significance of Effect	Resource
Landscape Features							
Existing Site trees	Every effort has been made at the design stage to conserve as many Site trees as possible. The proposed reordering of the Site (essentially flipping the current positions of the leisure centre building and car park in order to maintain operational continuity of the leisure facilities during construction) will result in the loss of 26nr trees. These trees are of varying maturity, quality and value.	Low The change would be seen in the context of the wider preservation of most other Site trees, and the proposals to provide replacement tree planting within the proposed car park.	Medium Site trees have amenity value at a local level and all contribute to creating a vegetated zone around the leisure centre complex. Tree planting visually softens built form and provides a more sympathetic interface between the urban area and rural environment including the regionally important Green Belt designation.	Medium The Site is in area that is partially tolerant of change of the type identified.	Low Impacts would be at the level of the immediate setting of the site	MINOR	NEGATIVE

Resource	Description/ Rationale for Judgement	Susceptibility to Change	Landscape Value	Sensitivity of Receptor to Change	Magnitude of Effect	Overall Significance of Effect	Resource
Landscape Features							
Existing habitats	There are a number of existing habitats on Site or within relevant distance of the Site, as noted in the Preliminary Ecology Appraisal including: Two statutory designated sites of importance for nature conservation An on-site hedgerow which qualifies as a Habitat of Principle Importance The Site supports suitable habitat for common reptiles species, nesting birds, foraging and roosting bats, badgers and hazel dormice, though surveys have confirmed the likely absence of roosting bats, and found no evidence of the use of the Site by badgers.	Low Impacts upon the on-site hedgerows and scrub habitats have been avoided and minimised by design. There will be some tree loss as noted above.	Medium The Site contains a hedgerow which qualifies as a Habitat of Principle Importance and has habitat areas that could potentially support wildlife.	Medium Proposed Development is within an area that is partially tolerant of change of the type identified.	Low There will be a minor loss of trees	MINOR	NEGATIVE

APPENDIX FOUR PLANNING POLICY EXTRACTS

Relevant Planning Policy

Section 8: Promoting healthy and safe communities

Paragraph 92

Planning policies and decisions should aim to achieve healthy, inclusive and safe places...

c) enable and support healthy lifestyles, especially where this would address identified local health and well-being needs – for example through the provision of safe and accessible green infrastructure, sports facilities...and layouts that encourage walking and cycling.

Paragraph 93

To provide the social, recreational and cultural facilities and services the community needs, planning policies and decisions should:

plan positively for the provision and use of shared spaces, community facilities...sports venues...

Paragraph 93

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, and can deliver wider benefits for nature and support efforts to address climate change.

Paragraph 99

Existing open space, sports and recreational buildings and land, including playing fields, should not be built on unless:

b) the loss resulting from the proposed development would be replaced by equivalent or better provision in terms of quantity and quality in a suitable location;

Paragraph 100

Planning policies and decisions should protect and enhance public rights of way and access, including taking opportunities to provide better facilities for users, for example by adding links to existing rights of way networks including National Trails.

Section 9: Promoting sustainable transport

Paragraph 100

Planning policies should:

d) provide for attractive and well-designed walking and cycling networks with supporting facilities

Section 13: Protecting Green Belt land

Paragraph 137

The Government attaches great importance to Green Belts. The fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open; the essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and their permanence.

Paragraph 138

Green Belt serves five purposes:

a) to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas;

- b) to prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another;
- c) to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment;
- d) to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns; and
- e) to assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.

Paragraph 149

A local planning authority should regard the construction of new buildings as inappropriate in the Green Belt. Exceptions to this are:

- b) the provision of appropriate facilities (in connection with the existing use of land or a change of use) for outdoor sport, outdoor recreation, cemeteries and burial grounds and allotments; as long as the facilities preserve the openness of the Green Belt and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it;
- d) the replacement of a building, provided the new building is in the same use and not materially larger than the one it replaces;
- g) limited infilling or the partial or complete redevelopment of previously developed land, whether redundant or in continuing use (excluding temporary buildings), which would:
 - not have a greater impact on the openness of the Green Belt than the existing development; or
 - not cause substantial harm to the openness of the Green Belt, where the development would re-use previously developed land and contribute to meeting an identified affordable housing need within the area of the local planning authority.

Section 15: Conserving and Enhancing the Natural Environment considers the treatment of existing assets, notably:

-) preventing new and existing development from contributing to, being put at unacceptable risk from, or being adversely affected by, unacceptable levels of soil, air, water or noise pollution or land instability. Development should, wherever possible, help to improve local environmental conditions such as air and water quality, taking into account relevant information such as river basin management plans; and
- f) remediating and mitigating despoiled, degraded, derelict, contaminated and unstable land, where appropriate.

Paragraph 176:

Great weight should be given to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty in...Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty which have the highest status of protection in relation to these issues. The conservation and enhancement of wildlife and cultural heritage are also important considerations in these areas...The scale and extent of development within...designated areas should be limited, while development within their setting should be sensitively located and designed to avoid or minimise adverse impacts on the designated areas.

Paragraph 180:

- c) development resulting in the loss or 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; and
- d) development whose primary objective is to conserve or enhance biodiversity should be supported; while opportunities to improve biodiversity in and around developments should be integrated as part of their design, especially where this can secure measurable net gains for biodiversity or enhance public access to nature where this is appropriate.

Paragraph 181:

The following should be given the same protection as habitats sites:

- a) potential Special Protection Areas and possible Special Areas of Conservation;*
- b) listed or proposed Ramsar sites; and*
- c) sites identified, or required, as compensatory measures for adverse effects on habitats sites, potential Special Protection Areas, possible Special Areas of Conservation, and listed or proposed Ramsar sites.*

Local Planning Policy (Gravesham Local Plan)

Section 16: Conserving and enhancing the historic environment

Paragraph 189:

Heritage assets range from sites and buildings of local historic value to those of the highest significance, such as World Heritage Sites which are internationally recognised to be of Outstanding Universal Value. These assets are an irreplaceable resource, and should be conserved in a manner appropriate to their significance, so that they can be enjoyed for their contribution to the quality of life of existing and future generations.

Paragraph 197:

In determining applications, local planning authorities should take account of:

- a) the desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets and putting them to viable uses consistent with their conservation;*
- b) the positive contribution that conservation of heritage assets can make to sustainable communities including their economic vitality; and*
- c) the desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness.*

Paragraph 200

Any harm to, or loss of, the significance of a designated heritage asset (from its alteration or destruction, or from development within its setting), should require clear and convincing justification.

Substantial harm to or loss of:

- a) grade II listed buildings, or grade II registered parks or gardens, should be exceptional;*
- b) assets of the highest significance, notably scheduled monuments, protected wreck sites, registered battlefields, grade I and II* listed buildings, grade I and II* registered parks and gardens, and World Heritage Sites, should be wholly exceptional*

Strategic Objectives

S08 Preserve the openness of the **Green Belt**, maintain its national and local planning purposes and protect it from inappropriate development.

Key Policies

CS01 Sustainable Development

CS02 Scale and Distribution of Development

S09 Conserve and enhance the diverse rural landscape including the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and its setting.

Key Policies

CS01 Sustainable Development

CS12 Green Infrastructure

S10 Retain and where possible improve existing employment sites.

Key Principles

CS01 Sustainable Development

CS07 Economy, Employment and Skills

S11 Seek to retain and improve the provision of existing services and facilities and ensure that sufficient facilities are provided to meet the needs arising from new development at the right time and in the right place.

Key Principles

CS01 Sustainable Development

CS10 Physical and Social Infrastructure

CS13 Green Space, Sport and Recreation

S013 Protect and enhance the Borough's heritage assets and historic environment.

Key Principles

CS01 Sustainable Development

CS20 Heritage and the Historic Environment

S014 Ensure that all new development makes a positive contribution to the local character and distinctiveness of the Borough, minimises the risk of crime, responds to climate change and integrates into the existing built, historic and natural environment.

Key Principles

CS01 Sustainable Development

CS12 Green Infrastructure

CS 18 Climate Change

CS19 Development and Design Principles

S015 Improve opportunities for recreation, sport, walking and cycling.

Key Principles

CS01 Sustainable Development

CS11 Transport

CS12 Green Infrastructure

CS13 Green Space Sport and Recreation

S016 Safeguard and enhance the biodiversity of the Borough

Key Principles

CS01 Sustainable Development

CS12 Green Infrastructure

S017 Increase accessibility, minimise congestion and improve air quality through the improved provision of local public transport and the provision of local jobs and services.

Key Principles

CS01	Sustainable Development
CS11	Transport
CS07	Economy, Employment and Skills
CS08	Retail, Leisure and the Hierarchy of Centres
CS10	Physical and Social Infrastructure
CS13	Green Space, Sport and Recreation

Core Strategy Policy Objectives

CS01 Sustainable Development

*Planning applications that **accord with the policies in the development plan** for Gravesham will be approved without delay, unless material considerations indicate otherwise.*

*When considering development proposals the Council will take a positive approach that reflects the **presumption in favour of sustainable development** contained in the National Planning Policy Framework and in this Core Strategy.*

The local plan further notes:

- *The distribution of development set out in this Core Strategy has been developed in line with sustainable development principles. It is consistent with national planning policy and the current and previous regional and sub-regional policy approach to the wider Thames Gateway and Gravesham.*
- *It seeks to make the most efficient use of previously developed land, focus development in the most sustainable locations, and preserve the openness and maintain the national and local planning purposes of the Green Belt, protecting it from inappropriate development.*
- *The national aim of the **Green Belt** is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open. The extent of the Green Belt in Gravesham is defined on the Policies Map. Its local planning purposes are:*

to maintain the break in development between the eastern edge of Gravesend and the Medway Towns which is one of the few barriers preventing the further eastward sprawl of London and the merging of towns along the southern part of the Thames Estuary;

to assist in safeguarding the countryside by minimising the expansion of the Borough's rural settlements; and

to assist in concentrating development on underused, derelict and previously developed land in the urban area of Gravesend and Northfleet.

...The Green Belt has...been identified as a broad location for future growth and its boundaries will be subject to a review.

CS02 Scale and Distribution of Development

The strategy prioritises development in the urban area as a sustainable location for development. This will be achieved by...Promoting regeneration by prioritising the

redevelopment and recycling of underused, derelict and previously developed land in the urban area...

The local plan further notes:

*The distribution of development set out in this Core Strategy has been developed in line with sustainable development principles. It is consistent with national planning policy and the current and previous regional and sub-regional policy approach to the wider Thames Gateway and Gravesham. It seeks to make the most efficient use of previously developed land, focus development in the most sustainable locations, and preserve the openness and maintain the national and local planning purposes of the **Green Belt**, protecting it from inappropriate development.*

*The national aim of the **Green Belt** is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open. The extent of the Green Belt in Gravesham is defined on the Policies Map. Its local planning purposes are:*

- to maintain the break in development between the eastern edge of Gravesend and the Medway Towns which is one of the few barriers preventing the further eastward sprawl of London and the merging of towns along the southern part of the Thames Estuary;*
- to assist in safeguarding the countryside by minimising the expansion of the Borough's rural settlements; and*
- to assist in concentrating development on underused, derelict and previously developed land in the urban area of Gravesend and Northfleet.*

The Green Belt designation has assisted in protecting the best and most versatile agricultural land and conserving soil resources and this will continue to occur.

CS11 Transport

New developments should mitigate their impact on the highway and public transport networks as required.

***Sufficient parking** in new development will be provided in accordance with adopted parking standards which will reflect the availability of alternative means of transport and accessibility to services and facilities.*

*The Council will seek **improvements to walking and cycling facilities and networks** in the Borough including provision in new development as appropriate. In particular, the Council will seek the provision of pedestrian and cycle links between Northfleet and Ebbsfleet stations and along the River Thames, as part of the proposed Thames Estuary Path.*

Land required for the possible future extension of Crossrail and to protect the High Speed 1 (HS1) railway is safeguarded on the Policies Map and proposals that would prejudice these will be refused.

CS12 Green Infrastructure

A multifunctional linked **network of green spaces, footpaths, cycle routes and wildlife stepping stones and corridors** will be created, protected, enhanced and maintained. The network will improve access within the urban area, from the urban area to the rural area and along the River Thames.

Sites designated for their **biodiversity value will be protected**, with the highest level of protection given to internationally designated Special Protection Areas, Special Areas of Conservation and **Ramsar** sites, followed by nationally designated Sites of Special Scientific Interest, followed by Local Wildlife Sites and then by other areas of more local importance for biodiversity.

There will be **no net loss of biodiversity** in the Borough, and opportunities to **enhance, restore, re-create and maintain habitats** will be sought, in particular within the Biodiversity Opportunity Areas shown on the Strategic Green Infrastructure Network map and within new development.

The overall landscape character and valued landscapes will be conserved, restored and enhanced. The greatest weight will be given to the conservation and enhancement of the landscape and natural beauty of the **Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty** and its setting.

Proposals will take account of the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plan, the Gravesham Landscape Character Assessment, and the Cluster Studies where relevant.

The local plan further notes:

The focus of the **Green Grid** in Gravesham is on building a network that:

- Links green spaces to create green continuity, including ecological continuity, wherever possible;
- Improves access within the urban area, between the urban area and the rural area and along the River Thames for leisure and sustainable travel purposes; and
- Creates safe and attractive routes for walkers, cyclists and mobility-impaired people.

Biodiversity

Gravesham Borough has a significant biodiversity resource. This includes:

- Sites of international and national significance for wildlife, e.g. Thames Estuary and Marshes Special Protection Area (SPA) and Ramsar Site, North Downs Woodlands Special Area of Conservation (SAC), and **Cobham Woods Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)**. Internationally significant sites are all designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest and so are protected by national legislation;
- Species protected by European and/or national legislation, e.g. bats, great crested newts;
- Local wildlife sites which are important for the conservation of wildlife at the county level, e.g. Ebbsfleet Marshes, **Court Wood Shorne**;
- Roadside nature reserves, e.g. A226 Gravesend Road, Chalk; and
- Priority habitats and species identified in the UK Biodiversity Action Plan, e.g. native woodland including ancient woodland, lowland calcareous (chalk) grassland.

- Some previously developed sites in the urban area have high biodiversity value. The green space and green grid networks together with other areas such as school grounds and private gardens also have a role in providing and connecting habitats

Landscape

- Gravesham has a diverse rural landscape, from the marshes around the Thames in the north, arable farmlands to the south and east of Gravesend, and downs and woodland in the south. Part of the nationally important landscape of the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) is located on the eastern side of the Borough and it extends from Shorne south to Vigo. It is designated because of its **scarp slope and dry valleys which often retain a downland character and its woodlands are also highly valued**. The **views** from the escarpment are also important. Great weight should be given to protecting the landscape and natural beauty of the AONB. The Kent Downs AONB Management Plan has been adopted by the Council. It sets out a clear vision, aims and policies for the conservation, management and enhancement of the AONB and its setting up to 2019.
- The Council can only make informed and responsible decisions on the management and planning of landscapes if it pays proper regard to their existing character. **A Landscape Character Assessment for the urban fringes and rural area of Gravesham** has been produced. This sets out 11 local landscape character areas.
- Landscape features such as **trees and hedgerows** within the urban area are also important as they help to raise the quality of the environment and the quality of people's lives, as well as providing stepping stones and habitats for wildlife. Therefore, it is important that such landscape features within the urban area are retained and enhanced.
- The Council's strategy is to **conserve and enhance the landscape character** and valued landscapes of the Borough, giving greatest weight to conserving and enhancing the **Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and its setting**.
- Proposals affecting the **urban fringe** and rural area will be expected to take into account landscape character. All developments will be expected to **protect and enhance landscape features as part of Gravesham's green infrastructure network**.

Green Infrastructure Network

- Biodiversity Opportunity Areas.. includes: major green spaces, e.g. **Shorne Wood Country Park**, Jeskyns; strategic green grid corridors, e.g. Cyclopark; and most of the **Kent Downs AONB** nationally important landscape falling within Gravesham Borough.
- ... all green spaces, the Green Grid, biodiversity resources, and landscape features contribute towards the Borough's green infrastructure network. The strategy is to protect and enhance this network

Note that the Strategic Green Infrastructure Network of the Borough is illustrated on a plan (Figure 19 within the Local Plan Core Strategy), which shows Thames-Side Green Corridors running north-south, immediately east of the Site.

CS13 Green Space, Sport and Recreation

The Council will seek to make adequate provision for and to **protect and enhance the quantity, quality and accessibility of green space**, playing pitches and other sports facilities, in accordance with an adequate, up to date and relevant evidence base.

The local plan further notes:

- Gravesham, green spaces include parks, green corridors, natural greenspace and children's play areas.
- Gravesham also has a range of formal indoor and outdoor sports facilities. **Cascades Leisure Centre** in Gravesend...provide a range of facilities including swimming pools, sports halls and health and fitness facilities. There are also sports pitches, golf courses, bowling greens and a number of other public and private sports facilities which provide the Borough's residents and workers with the opportunity to take part in sport.
- ...the overall amount of all types of green space in the Borough **is sufficient** for the needs of the existing population. However, the provision of green space and access to it varies across the Borough...
- ... the overall amount of land for playing pitches in the Borough is sufficient to meet the needs of the existing population. However, whilst there is an overall surplus of adult football pitches, there are shortfalls of junior football pitches and mini-soccer pitches (significant shortfall).
- ...there are sufficient quantities of some sports facilities to meet the needs of the current population, e.g. swimming pools, sports halls. However, **more health and fitness facilities are needed** to meet the needs of the existing population. There is a need for some qualitative improvements to some facilities, e.g. multi-use games areas, indoor tennis courts.

CS 18 Climate Change

Sustainable Drainage and Surface Water Run-Off

The Council will seek to minimise the impact of drainage from new development on waste water systems. In particular, the Council will:

- Require that surface water run-off from all new development has, as a minimum, no greater adverse impact than the existing use; and
- Require the use of Sustainable Drainage Systems on all developments where technically and financially feasible.

CS19 Development and Design Principles

This policy gathers together the design requirements from a range of policies in the Core Strategy.

New development will be visually attractive, fit for purpose and locally distinctive. It will **conserve and enhance the character of the local built, historic and natural environment, integrate** well with the surrounding local area and meet anti-crime standards. The design and construction of new development will **incorporate sustainable construction standards** and techniques, be adaptable to reflect changing lifestyles, and be **resilient to the effects of climate change**. This will be achieved through the criteria set out below:

- Using the collaborative approach advocated in Building for Life 12 and in line with the guidance set out in **Kent Design**, the design, layout and form of new development will be derived from a robust **analysis of local context and character** and will make a **positive contribution to the street scene, the quality of the public realm and the character of the area**. Account will be taken of the scale, height,

*building lines, layout, materials and other architectural features of adjoining buildings. Account will also be taken of the wider site context, including **strategic views, site topography, the significance of heritage assets** and features of townscape and landscape value which contribute to local character and sense of place;*

- *New development will encourage sustainable living and choice through a mix of compatible uses which are **well connected** to places that people want to use, including the public transport network, local services and community facilities; encourage sustainable travel; **enhance Green Grid links and encourage healthier lifestyles**;*
- *New development will be located, designed and constructed to safeguard the amenity, including privacy, daylight and sunlight, of its occupants and those of neighbouring properties and land;*
- *avoid adverse environmental impacts from pollution, including noise, air, odour and light pollution, and land contamination; and*
- *not pose an unacceptable risk or harm to the water environment, including the quality and/or quantity of ground waters, surface waters, wetlands and coastal water systems;*
- *New development will be designed in an **inclusive** way to be **accessible to all** members of the community;*
- *New development will include **details of appropriate hard and soft landscaping, public art, street furniture, lighting and signage** and will **ensure that public realm and open spaces are well planned, appropriately detailed and maintained** so they endure;*
- ***Car parking** will be well related to the development it serves;*
- *New development will protect and, where opportunities arise, **enhance biodiversity and the Borough's Green Infrastructure network**. Support will be given to environmental enhancements where opportunities arise;*
- *The design and layout of new development will take advantage of opportunities to build in resilience to the effects of climate change. This will include protection against flood risk, where relevant, delivering carbon reduction, provision for low carbon and renewable energy, and minimising energy consumption and water use;*
- *The layout of new development will create a **safe and secure** environment and provide surveillance to minimise opportunities for crime and vandalism.*

CS20 Heritage and the Historic Environment

The Council will accord a high priority towards the preservation, protection and enhancement of its heritage and historic environment as a non-renewable resource, central to the regeneration of the area and the reinforcement of sense of place.

Proposals and initiatives will be supported which preserve and, where appropriate, enhance the significance of the Borough's heritage assets, their setting where it contributes to the significance of the asset and their interpretation and enjoyment, especially where these contribute to the distinct identity of the Borough. These include:

- *The Borough's **urban and rural conservation areas**; and*

- *Surviving built features and archaeology relating to the Borough's maritime, military, industrial and transport history.*

When considering the impact of a proposed development on a designated heritage asset, the weight that will be given to the asset's conservation value will be commensurate with the importance and significance of the asset. For non-designated assets, decisions will have regard to the scale of any harm or loss and the significance of the heritage asset.

The local plan further notes:

Of particular importance in defining the heritage interest of Gravesham are:

The Borough's historic villages, many of which include conservation areas at their core, and their countryside settings; and

The Borough's extensive maritime, military, industrial and transport history that is revealed in surviving built form and archaeological remains.

APPENDIX FIVE CHARACTER AREA EXTRACTS

CHARACTER AREAS

National Character Areas

The Key Characteristics of NCA 13 that are of relevance to the Study Area and Proposed Development are noted below:

- *Valleys underlain by sedimentary Carboniferous rocks comprising repetitive successions of tilted limestones, sandstones and shales, together with north-facing escarpments of Whin Sill, forming a cuesta landscape of east–west ridges.*
- *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...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.*

It also notes:

- *[Fields]...are predominantly devoid of hedgerows, and there is only limited shelter-belt planting around settlements, farmsteads, orchards and horticultural crops.*

- The west of the NCA is heavily urbanised, with large settlements and urban infrastructure dominant within the landscape.
- The proximity of the NCA to the coastal estuaries, marshes and heavy industry which characterise the area to the north has an influence on the NCA.
- Within and surrounding major towns, areas of green space provide a resource for local communities, including river corridors, woodlands and amenity greenspace.
- **The built environment also exerts a strong influence on the open farmland character**, with associated infrastructure such as pylons dominating in expansive vistas. Discrete but significant areas of woodland provide contrast on the higher ground around...Shorne,
- There are a variety of coastal habitats, with many internationally designated for their biodiversity interest.
- The rural settlement pattern predominantly consists of nucleated villages with low densities of dispersed settlement.
- The area had been largely cleared of woodland by the 11th century: it is now confined to small blocks and copses – often on higher ground – and shelterbelts of poplars that protect orchards and soft fruit.
- The only significant areas of ancient woodland are confined to pockets of higher ground with acidic clay soils, such as around Shorne...
- Rural settlement consists of a mixture of both small nucleated villages and dispersed farmsteads at low densities, villages being more of a feature to the east.
- Historically large areas of the NCA were owned by the Church, which continued to manage large estates after the dissolution of the monasteries in the 16th century.
- By national standards, the area has large numbers of medieval houses and barns – especially across the fruit belt – which testify to a class of prosperous farmers that developed on these estates from the 15th century.
- The intensification of agriculture has had an impact on the farmed landscape through arable expansion and the loss of traditional orchards.
- The impact of 20th century development is significant and includes pylons, landfill sites, mineral workings, transport networks (including the M2 and the Channel Tunnel rail link) and extensive urban expansion
- **The impact of development is exacerbated by the expansive and open nature of the low lying landscape.**

Statements of Environmental Opportunity for NCA 113 include:

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.

- Conserving and enhancing tranquillity within the National Character Area (NCA) and, where appropriate, **planting broadleaved woodland to screen development** while simultaneously linking habitats, improving ecological connectivity and resilience, and providing a source of **local community green space**.

- **Restoring hedgerow boundaries...** This will aid improvements in water quality, as well as restoring the character of native hedgerows and traditional field patterns – especially where lost in peri-urban areas.
- Adopting a landscape-scale approach to **strengthening ecological networks**. In particular, creating arable field margins and conservation headlands to help support important wintering and breeding populations of farmland birds, while increasing the habitat available for pollinators and rare arable plants. There will also be benefits for water quality and the regulation of soil erosion.
- Working in partnership and across sectors to **improve the quality of surface water and groundwater** within the NCA – especially water that currently fails to meet Water Framework Directive (WFD) objectives for good ecological status (surface water) or good status (groundwater).
- Conserving and managing the historic assets of the area – both above and below ground. Seeking to improve management, to protect archaeological remains (notably Roman). Conserving the historic parklands and their key habitats (such as veteran trees), supporting succession planting programmes, informed by the assessment of the historic design and significance of the parkland. Further, conserving vernacular and traditional built features such as historic farmsteads and oast houses, military remains and other historic urban features. Where appropriate, improving access to the historical assets of the NCA for research and tourism, and to connect communities with their local heritage.

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 grasslands and enhancing the recreational resource.

- **Thickening and expanding scattered shelterbelts**, expanding around development to enhance their **screening function** (where appropriate).
- Considering small-scale woodland creation where appropriate, for example where it buffers existing woodlands and/or contributes to habitat networks. Seeking to optimise the multiple benefits (social, economic and environmental) that woodlands and trees can provide as part of **green infrastructure in urban areas**.

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.

- **Creating or safeguarding extensive areas of multi-functional green space** – within and surrounding both towns and identified new development areas. These areas should include attractive new wetlands that form part of sustainable urban drainage systems and link into the heart of urban areas as part of green infrastructure planning.
- Targeted **planting of areas of broadleaved woodland**, building the urban and **peri-urban green infrastructure** around towns where appropriate particularly...Gravesend.
- These woodlands may provide a screening function and a further recreational resource, as well as a local source of wood fuel (where managed through coppicing). In addition, conserving the existing urban treescape and seeking opportunities for urban tree planting, helping to regulate climate change.
- Creating community allotments and potentially developing large community orchards on the edge of urban areas.

- Protecting, celebrating and promoting the heritage of the urban areas to the west of the NCA, including the strong maritime and military associations of the Medway and its significant role in the area's industrial past, present and future.
- Engaging communities with their local history and strengthening the physical links with the important historic landscapes that surround them.
- Seeking to **maintain and enhance areas of open countryside in the heavily urbanised west** of the NCA, to preserve the distinct settlement pattern.
- Ensuring that development and its associated infrastructure does not intrude on the special qualities of the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) to the south and landscape character within the AONB and its setting should be conserved, restored, reinforced or created as appropriate to reflect the ambitions of the Kent Downs AONB Management Plan.

Additional opportunities within NCA 113

Plan for a large-scale improvement in access and recreation provision within the Thames Gateway area, and seek opportunities for access improvements throughout the landscape, **For example, by:**

- Creating extensive areas of **quality green space as part of the Green Grid**, providing a continuous network of linked and accessible green space extending from east London to the east of Sittingbourne.
- Creating key recreational nodes for informal recreation, serving a wide range of needs linked to the rights of way network and providing a **safe and inviting recreational environment for families**.
- Providing sustainable transport links between urban centres and recreation provision in both the wider NCA and the AONB to the south, focusing on a reduction in car-dependency.
- Creating a **cohesive network of permissive access throughout the landscape**, linking especially to towns and villages, as well as to the North Downs Way, coastal routes and other areas of interest, promoting sustainable access for a wide range of users.

Key facts and data for NCA 113, of relevance to the Proposed Development:

- Designated nature conservation sites

The NCA includes the following statutory nature conservation designations:

- Ramsar
- Special Protection Areas (SPA)
- Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)

- Soils and Agricultural Land Classification

The soils of the North Kent Plain NCA are, for the most part, highly fertile and easily worked. The area contains a large proportion of the Grade 1 agricultural land in the county. Large parts of the NCA are on fertile, freely – draining loams, there are also areas of heavier clays, and less fertile sandy soils.

- Trees and woodlands

The NCA contains 8,699 ha of woodland (10% of the total area), of which 4,651 ha is ancient woodland. Overall, across the NCA as a whole, woodland is not a prominent feature of the landscape. However, there are discreet and significant areas of woodland confined to pockets of higher ground such as those around...Shorne...

The following general description of the Borough's landscape character is taken from Gravesham Landscape Character Area Assessment & Guidelines (2009)

Geology and Soil

- To the north of Gravesham Borough, east of Gravesend, Alluvium forms the geology of the marshes.
- As land rises at Cobham, approximately central to the Borough, swathes of Clay with Flints follow the contours south to Meopham and Vigo at the southern point of the Borough boundary.
- Soils are loam across Gravesend and the north east of the Borough...

Landform and Drainage

- The landform within Gravesham Borough generally rises from north to south.
- The marshes to the north are flat and low lying, at approximately 2 metres Above Ordnance Datum (AOD).
- Topography becomes gently undulating towards Shorne and Lower Higham to the south, increasing to approximately 15 AOD.
- Pockets of steeper undulations occur around Shorne and Shorne Ridgeway where the underlying geology becomes more varied.
- The landform becomes steeper to the south and east of Cobham as the North Downs dip slope begins its ascent.
- Strong ridge and dry valley formations extend in a definite north east to south west direction across Luddesdown towards Vigo in the south.
- Steeper valley sides are based on Chalk, with ridges and plateaux on the Clay with Flints cap.
- The land plateaus above the valley sides at high points to the south of the Borough around Harvel, with high points reaching approximately 185 AOD south of Harvel.
- Due to the chalky nature of the most of the Borough there are few open watercourses on the surface.
- Other watercourses run underground beneath the dry valleys of the dipslope, although there are ponds in woodlands around Cobham and Shorne, indicating a change in geology.
- Streams emerge from the ground at the marshland edge... The marshes are then drained to the Thames through a network of man-made ditches, probably dating back to medieval times when the land was reclaimed for grazing. The man-made feature of the Thames & Medway Canal sits above the marshes and hence retains water artificially.

Historic Background

- Since prehistoric times both the alignment and the level of the river have changed.
- ...evidence of early human activity including Palaeolithic (Stone Age) flints, axes and other artefacts... Later prehistoric finds include Neolithic waterlogged deposits along the course of the Ebbsfleet and Bronze Age ring ditches at Cobham and Springhead.
- There is much evidence of Roman settlement in the area. The former Roman Road of Watling Street follows the approximate line of the existing A2 and a major Roman settlement was uncovered at Springhead.
- Early Anglo-Saxon settlement remains have also been found...
- In medieval times the town of Gravesend was established, along with many of the villages.

- The structure of the present day landscape was set down with the creation of many of the villages, enclosures, tracks and roads.
- Links to the past are preserved through the layout of the settlements, their buildings and churches.
- Historically, the town of Gravesend is associated with the Thames, and in particular with the embarkation and disembarkation of custom-house officers and pilots, and is also attached to ships sailing to and arriving from foreign ports.
- Trade between Gravesend and London began as early as 1293 and flourished as a result of connections with London via steamer and railway.
- The surrounding land use was largely for producing large quantities of fruit and vegetables for the London market. Within this rural landscape milling was popular...
- The 18th and 19th century saw many changes in the Borough.
- Cobham Hall and its historic park dates from the late 18th and early 19th century, much of the present park being laid out by Humphrey Repton.
- To the east of the town the Thames and Medway Canal, or Gravesend and Rochester Canal, was completed in 1824.
- The canal was later purchased by the North Kent Railway Company and was adopted in part for their line.
- The development of the railway network improved connections to London, starting the commuter process and also providing access to the Kent coast. Gravesend and many of the villages expanded in this period.

Land Use and Agriculture

- Land uses within Gravesham Borough are influenced by the underlying geology and topography, historic patterns and urban encroachment.
- At the north of the Borough, the low lying and subsequently wet landscape of the marshes is predominantly uninhabited and used as traditional grazing for sheep.
- Large arable fields with little tree cover dominate the land use east and south of Gravesend.
- Few hedgerows separate the landscape as a result of agricultural intensification.
- Crops mainly comprise wheat, but some smaller and more enclosed grazing paddocks are situated around settlements.
- Large pylons are located throughout the fields to the north of the Borough, which are highly visible in the flat and relatively treeless landscape.
- Land use immediately surrounding Gravesend is heavily influenced by the urban development and the major infrastructure of the A2, other large scale roads and the Channel Tunnel Rail Link (CTRL).
- Within the urban fringes, arable land is contained within small fields divided by the surrounding development and infrastructure routes.
- Parcels of land within ownership of the Highways Agency and CTRL have been recently disturbed and support limited vegetation.
- ...in many locations around Gravesend the rural landscape abuts the urban area with very little in the way of transition and farmland remains reasonably intact.
- The urban fringe is characterised by recreational use including the **Cascades Leisure Centre**, golf courses, Shorne Country Park and the Jeskyns Farm.

- As the landform rises to the east and south, woodland and tree cover increase. Much woodland around Shorne and Vigo comprises dense coppice woodland in varied states of management and subsequent condition.
- Historic native woodland lies within Cobham Park and mature native parkland trees populate the landscape, which is used primarily as a golf course. Parkland trees include **Oak and Beech** and some ancient pollarded **Ash** trees mark woodland boundaries in places.
- As the landform becomes more undulating with the ridge and valley formation of the downland landscape to the south of the Borough, woodland comprises native species.
- This is generally a rural landscape, which is heavily influenced by the urban fringes of Gravesend to the north. The character of the landscape changes dramatically from north to south, in terms of landform, land use and levels of development.

Biodiversity

- The varied vegetation patterns across Gravesham Borough provide a range of habitat types.
- The flat, low lying grazing marshes to the north offer an important habitat for birds, whilst woodland areas further south support birdlife, insects and mammals.
- Fragmented clumps of woodland vegetation and larger swathes of woodland are scattered throughout the Borough, with more substantial woodland blocks to the south.
- Pockets of orchards and areas of coppiced woodland support a variety of habitat types.
- Hedgerows and shelterbelts between agricultural fields provide wildlife corridors and link woodland areas.
- The range of habitats across the Borough is reflected by several ecological designations, which are scattered throughout Gravesham.
- ...national landscape character areas coincide with Natural Areas identified by [Natural England, namely,] the Greater Thames Estuary, the North Kent Plain and the North Downs span the Borough.
- **Ecological Designations** - the marshes to the north support several designations, reflecting their ecological importance.
- A large proportion of the marshes are designated as a Ramsar site, which is an international treaty to protect important wetland sites.
- To the east of Gravesend, an area of the marshes is designated as a Local Wildlife Site (LWS), called Canal and Grazing Marsh, Higham.
- The marshes are also designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), which are nationally recognised for their flora, fauna and geological features.
- Higham Marshes are also designated as the Thames Estuary and Marshes Special Protection Area (SPA). The marshes are important for birds during spring and autumn migration periods and also support wintering water birds including grebes, geese, waders and ducks.
- Further south, LWS and SSSI are scattered across the Borough.
- There are several areas of woodland identified in consultation with Kent Wildlife Trust as LWS across the Borough. These strategically important wildlife sites are mostly concentrated within pockets of woodland east of Shorne and southwards throughout the Borough.
- Several areas of woodland are designated as SSSI. These include Great Crabbles Wood south west of Higham, Brewers Wood and **Ashenbank Wood south west of Shorne**, the Deer Park within **Cobham Park** and Red Wood along the eastern boundary of the Borough.
- Fragments and swathes of ancient woodland are strewn across the landscape,...

Relevant Planning Policies and Designations

Thames Gateway

- The area north of the A2 is part of the Kent Thameside area of the Thames Gateway.
- The area is also part of the **Thames Gateway Parklands** - a concept that promotes a vision of development within a landscape framework. More locally this is interpreted through the Kent **Thameside Green Grid** that identifies, promotes and enhances open spaces within the area along with the links between them and the wider countryside.

Thames Estuary 2100

- The Thames Estuary 2100 (TE2100) Project is an initiative of the Southern, Anglian and Thames Regions of the Environment Agency to develop a Flood Risk Management Plan for London and the Thames Estuary for the next 100 years.

Metropolitan Green Belt

- The Metropolitan Green Belt covers the landscape to the south of the A2 and east of Gravesend across the entire Borough, excluding the villages.
- Development is controlled within the Green Belt, in order to protect the open character and rural environment.
- Planning permission within the rural areas of the Borough is restricted to agriculture or forestry, outdoor sports and recreation, limited infilling to existing villages and limited extensions to existing dwellings.

Conservation Areas

- These are designated for their special architectural or historic interest, which it is desirable to preserve or enhance.
- These are focused around traditional settlement centres, including areas within Gravesend and the settlements of **Shorne**, Higham, **Thong**, Harvel, Meopham and the largest at **Cobham**.

Kent Downs AONB

- Approximately 25% of the Borough's land lies within the Kent Downs, which is a national landscape designation aiming to conserve and enhance natural beauty.
- The eastern part of the Borough falls within the Kent Downs AONB, extending south from Shorne Ridgeway across Cobham and Luddesdown. The boundary lies east of Harvel but extends west across Vigo at the south of the Borough.

Landscape Character Context

- In Kent the NCAs coincident with the Natural Areas and are known as Joint Character Areas (JCAs).
- Gravesham Borough falls within three of these areas; The marshes to the north fall within the Greater Thames Estuary. The central part of the Borough lies within the North Kent Plain. Finally the southern part of the Borough, characterised by the downland landscape, falls within the North Downs.

At the county level, Kent County Council have further refined and subdivided these character areas in the Landscape Assessment of Kent.