

Huggens College

Landscape Appraisal

Project: 2305 Huggens College almshouse development, Northfleet, Kent
Client: The Trustees of Huggens College
April 2023
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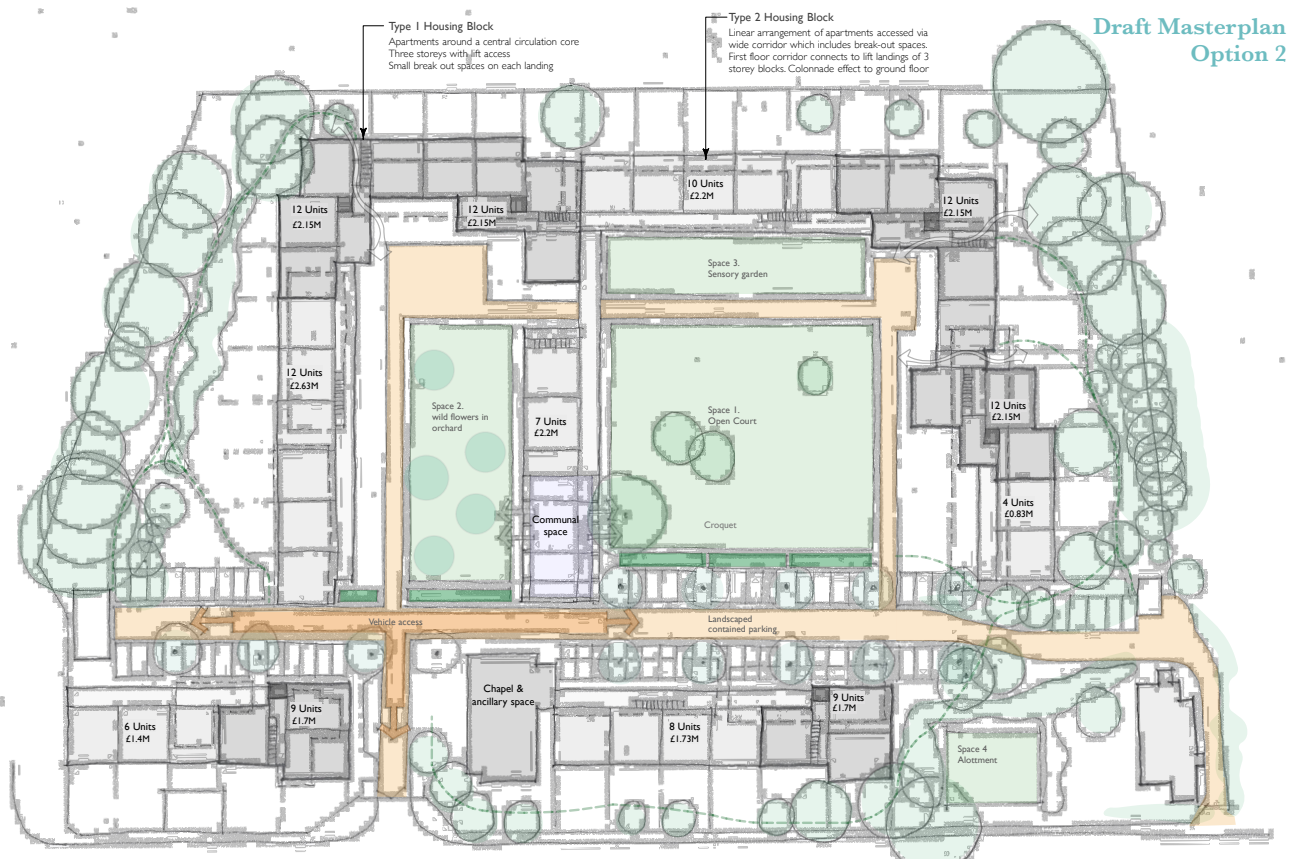


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1. Introduction

This landscape and visual appraisal was carried out by landscape architect Emily Haysom, on behalf of Huggens College, in relation to proposals for a new almshouses.

Fig. 1. Indicative Masterplan (produced by Haysom Ward Miller Architects on behalf of Huggens College)



This report examines existing landscape qualities, context and views, the potential impacts of the new development, potential ways that the design could mitigate those impacts, and further landscape opportunities.

Desk study involved looking at existing national and local policy and guidance, existing mapping data, and landscape character assessments. A site visit carried out on 31st March 2023 to assess the site and surroundings.

2 Policy and guidance context

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

Ch 8. Promoting healthy and safe communities

92 *Planning policies and decisions should aim to achieve healthy, inclusive and safe places which:*
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, local shops, access to healthier food, allotments and layouts that encourage walking and cycling.*

Ch 15. Conserving and enhancing the natural environment

179. *To protect and enhance biodiversity and geodiversity, plans should:*

a) *Identify, map and safeguard components of local wildlife-rich habitats and wider ecological networks, including the hierarchy of international, national and locally designated sites of importance for biodiversity; wildlife corridors and stepping stones that connect them; and areas identified by national and local partnerships for habitat management, enhancement, restoration or creation; and b) promote the conservation, restoration and enhancement of priority habitats, ecological networks and the protection and recovery of priority species; and identify and pursue opportunities for securing measurable net gains for biodiversity*

180. d)... *opportunities to incorporate biodiversity improvements in and around developments should be encouraged, especially where this can secure measurable net gains for biodiversity.*

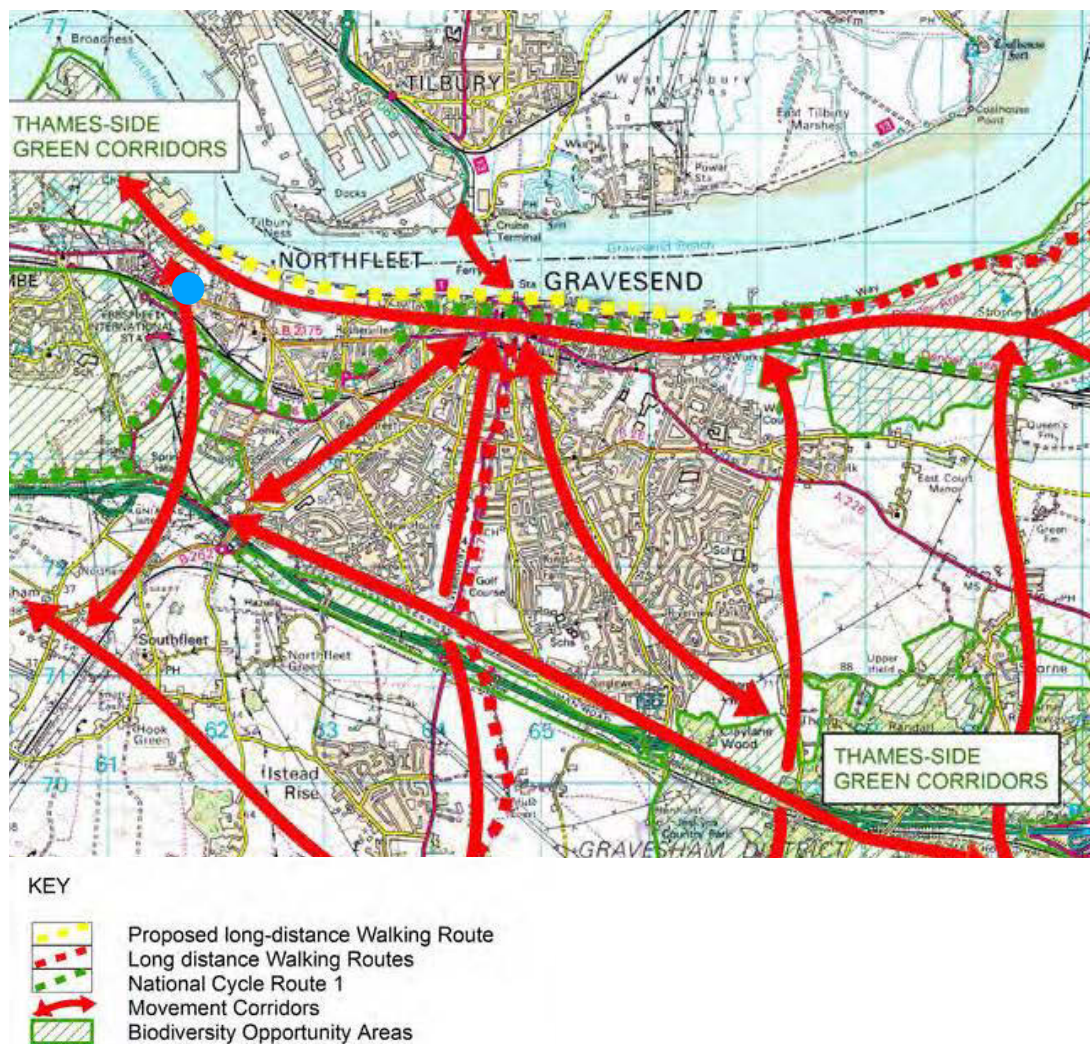
Gravesham Local Plan Core Strategy - September 2014

Policy CS12: Green Infrastructure

5.7.22 *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. The key parts of the network are identified on (the) Strategic Green Infrastructure Network. p.122 [See Fig 2 and Appendix A]*

According to the Strategic Green Infrastructure Network plan, Huggens College lies between 'Biodiversity Opportunity Areas', and is in the line of a wildlife movement corridor (red line with arrows show wildlife movement corridors; blue circle approximate location of Huggens College).

Fig. 2. Section from Strategic Green Infrastructure Network plan with added blue circle showing location of Huggens College. [see p121 of Gravesham Local Plan 2014, Appendix A]



National Design Guide

Of the ten design characteristics of the National Design Guide, the following are particularly pertinent to landscape:

Context

C1 understand and relate well to the site, its local and wider context

C2. Value heritage, local history and culture

Identity

I1 Respond to local character and identity

I3 Create character and identity

Movement

M2 Active travel

M3 Well-considered parking, servicing and utilities infrastructure for all users

Nature

N1 Provide a network of high quality green open spaces with a variety of landscapes and activities, including play

N2 Improve and enhance water management

N3 Support rich and varied biodiversity

Public spaces

P1 Create well-located, high quality and attractive public spaces

P2 Provide well-designed spaces that are safe

P3 Make sure public spaces support social interaction

3. Baseline study

Landscape Features and character:

Huggens College is situated in Northfleet, on a rise in the landscape with the land falling away to the north towards the River Thames and west towards Swanscombe peninsular.

The River Thames has an active industrial frontage here, visible from College Road. Flint walls indicate the chalk geology. Huggens College is surrounded by heavy industry, cement works, and quarries. A map of 1869 shows cement works adjacent to Huggens College, active wharves along the river, and the railway line (<https://maps.nls.uk/view/102343462>). Chalk cliffs and old quarries are visible in the surrounding area.

The immediate surroundings of Huggens College have an urban feel, dominated by hardscape and signage. There are a couple chicken shops across the road on the High Street. A small shopping precinct 'The Hive' lies within 150m east of Huggens College, which includes a library, hairdresser and convenience store. Wallis Park is a large housing estate of flats that wraps around the site to the north and west, behind the small hill on which Huggens College is situated. The disused community room relating to Wallis Park abuts the site along the west boundary.

The Site lies between National Character Areas 113 North Kent Plain and 81 Thames Estuary in an area of flux: between water and land, national and international transport networks, earth-moving through industry and new development. It is an area that speaks of flux: the creek to the north reflects the flux of water and nature, the harbour and wharves, a long history of industry and transportation; the heavy industry of cement and the new development of Ebbsfleet mark the constant physical movement of earth.

NCA 113 North Kent Plain

Statement of Environmental opportunity (SEO)3: Protect the distinct wooded areas of the landscape:

- *Thickening and expanding shelter belts, 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.

SEO4 Protect and enhance the strong character and heritage of the urban areas:

- *Targeted planting of areas of broadleaved woodland, building the urban and peri-urban green infrastructure around towns where appropriate...In addition, conserving the existing urban treescape and seeking opportunities for urban tree planting, helping to regulate climate change.*
- *Creating community allotments*

Public transport

Huggens College is very well connected to public transport routes. It is 200m (5 minute walk) to Northfleet Station with on a direct line between London and Chatham. It is 900m from Ebbsfleet International station with connections to Continental Europe. There are bus stops on the High Street, within 200m of Huggens College with regular buses between Dartford and Gravesend and beyond.

Community

Huggens College is 200m from Northfleet Central, a community centre that offers daily community activities from Pilates, creative workshops, wellbeing groups and a lunch club.

http://www.northfleetbiglocal.com/?page_id=14

The local library is 150m away at the Hive.

The Harbour Village development is opposite Huggens College across College Road. Large scale strategic development of Ebbsfleet Garden Village will open up walks along the river and at Robin's Creek (350m from the College), access to public green space and other community facilities and additional local transport links in the immediate environs of the site.

Huggens college, whilst an enclosed safe space for elderly residents is very well connected to transport networks and community networks.

Sites of Special Scientific interest (SSSI) near to proposed site

The site falls into the impact zones for two SSSI sites:

Swanscombe Peninsular SSSI lies 700m to the north west of the site. It is separated from this site by heavy industry, topography, and roadways. Swanscombe Skull SSSI lies 550m to south west of the site and is separated by railway lines and roadways.

Woodlands

There is a deciduous wood north and west of Wallis Park, 80m from Huggens College grounds. This appears to be remnant woodland. Another deciduous wood lies 300m east which appears to be emergent woodland relating to quarries alongside Factory Road. Whilst Huggens College is currently separated from key nature areas by industrial activities and infrastructure, trees and tree lines are likely to be important features in connecting the site to wider green corridors

Historic Designation

300m north of Huggens College lies Aspdin's Kiln, a scheduled monument the features in other proposals for wider strategic development in the area, as a site of interest. There are no designations relating to the site itself.

Flood Risk

Due to the topography the site is in Flood Zone 1, meaning it has a low probability of flooding, 'less than 0.1% chance of flooding from rivers or sea' (flood-map-for-planning.service.gov.uk)

Site Character

Mature trees create a wooded feel to the grounds. A significant line of horse chestnuts bounds the south of the site, a couple of cedars grace the south west corner and a large Scots pine provides a welcome at the front gate. A graceful group of birches provide shade and high wildlife value in the central green.

There are some large mixed mature trees either side of the fence along the west boundary with Wallis Park, including a few Scots pine across the fence. A line of Lombardy poplars dominates the north boundary. The poplars strike an odd note. Whilst providing screening that may be beneficial to the residents and to those of Wallis Park they seem out of character with the local flora. Likewise the occasional cypress in the boundary. Mature trees and large park trees, such as the horse chestnuts and cedars may date to the original almshouse grounds.

The existing housing is centred around a green with group of birches, small blossom trees, and herbaceous beds. Most frontages have informal seating - a couple of seats and table for sitting and enjoying looking out over the green. Some have tended pots and beds. Those with back gardens enjoy gardening them. There are various raised beds in communal areas where residents enjoy growing food, and there are various small fruit trees which are dispersed around the site.

The walls around Huggens College create a sheltered world, much like a walled garden.

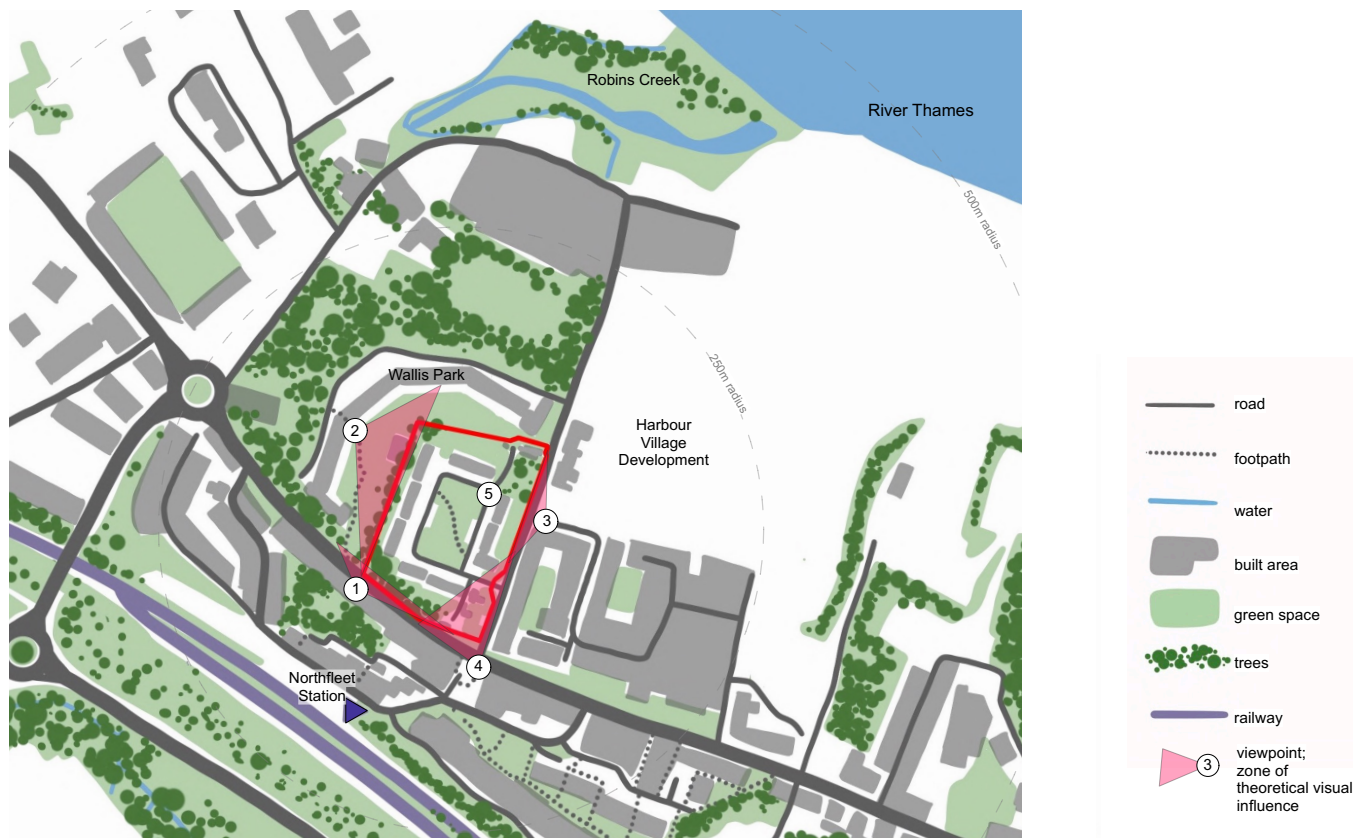
The positive aspect of the walled boundary is that it creates a safe environment for older residents in which to live. The negative aspect of the wall is the perception of separation from the wider community. A higher level of security is increasingly a necessity for older people. Currently the gate is managed by individuals and locked at night with residents having their own keys. On a practical level, as residents get older and their care needs increase, the gate needs to be easily accessible for carers coming on to the site to enable people to continue living independently.

The Chapel

The Chapel is a key element of the site and underpins the shared Christian ethos of the residents. Services on a Sunday and midweek bring residents together, with people from the wider community welcome to join in. The Chapel is linked to a community room and reading room and together they form a warm heart to the College. This pattern of life extends outwards, as residents are also active in local churches and community groups.

Views

Fig.3 Zone of theoretical visual influence



The numbered view points on figure 3 have been identified through desk study of arial views and OS maps.

[For Viewpoint Photographs and detail see Appendix B]

Viewpoints 1-5 were assessed on a site visit on 31st March 2023

Viewpoint 1

South of Site, (B2175/Northfleet High Street), approach from west towards College Road.
Large horse chestnut trees grace this boundary, creating a leafy approach to the High Street.

Proposal: This edge should remain tree lined, soft and green. An understory of shrubs could be added to this.

Viewpoint 2

View from footpath, Wallis Park, west of the Huggens College - boundary trees visible behind disused community centre building.

Viewpoint 3.

View from Warwick Place looking at the outer wall along College Road. Existing chapel (left), bungalows and trees, Chaplain's house and Wallis Park visible to the right.
Due to the four storey apartments opposite Huggens College the Site is only visible to this extent from Warwick Place. The apartments screen the development from distant views.

Proposal: Key trees are to be retained along this boundary. There is an opportunity for taller buildings along this boundary to balance the four storey buildings opposite, on College Road. However, heights

of new buildings should be varied, to create character, and to avoid creating a tunnel effect with the existing apartments.

Viewpoint 4.

View from corner of College Road, approached from the east, from Northfleet High Street. There will be clear views of the new development from this vantage point.

Proposal: Currently the historic brick wall separates Huggens College from the street. On this corner there is an opportunity for a focal building, using sympathetic local materials and ambitious design to bring cohesion to a part of the High Street that currently consists of disparate elements (- an off-licence, chicken shops, public car park, a mix of residential terraced houses and apartments).

The inclusion of large trees on this corner would extend the tree corridor created by the horse chestnuts along the west boundary (View 1) and create a pleasant streetscape where there is otherwise a lot of hard standing and signage.

Viewpoint 5

Viewpoint 5. View of central green space, Huggens College, from the north east corner. Chapel steeple visible to the left.

The green creates a calm village feel within an urban location. Most bungalow porches have seating looking out at the green, there are benches in the green providing a gentle overlap between private and social space. The copse of birches and occasional ornamental trees provide habitat for wildlife and seasonal interest for residents.

Proposal: in any new design, preserve the clear enjoyment of gardens and nature, and the opportunities for relaxation and social interaction.

4. Landscape Opportunities

Creating active gardens

- A place to put one's face in the sun. Benches and seating in communal areas provide for relaxation, encourage walking (a destination and a place to rest) among those with mobility or health issues, and opportunities to meet others.
- Outdoor activities such as Pétanque would bring people together without the need for conversation.
- Immersive planting, particularly sensory planting allows people a greater connection with nature, supports memory, and general health and wellbeing.
- Opportunities for every resident to garden, to get their hands into soil, should they wish, on balconies, front and back gardens, community planting beds.

Increasing habitat and connectivity

- Mature trees are to be retained, and supplemented with native and parkland species, particularly along the boundaries to support wider tree corridors.
- Orchard trees could be included with wildflower sward to increase biodiversity.
- Permeability is to be provided for people and wildlife across the site, allowing gaps for movement.

Increasing the visual connection to the neighbourhood

- Building heights are to address adjacent buildings and contribute to the streetscape.
- Two or three trees on the corner of College Road and the High Street, would contribute to the streetscape.
- There is an opportunity to create distinctive bold architecture to bring cohesion to the disparate elements of the immediate neighbourhood

Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SuDS)

- Maximising soft landscaping over hard landscaping
- Perennial planting beds can be incorporated into rain gardens
- The use of SuDS tree pits may used in hardscaped areas
- The use of permeable paving should be used where possible

More open SuDS features (rather than relying on underground tanking) allows for much greater enrichment of biodiversity and amenity value.

5. Summary

The patterns of every day life for residents are visible in the landscape of Huggens College and speak of a strong community of people who enjoy the gardens: putting their faces in the sun, sitting in the shade of trees, putting their hands in the soil to grow food, tending their back gardens or pot plants, sitting and talking with friends. It is noteworthy that most residents sit and look out over a green, which seems to provide for reflection and sociability. The interior spaces of the Chapel and community room show a combination of quietness and an active communal life.

This character should underpin the new development to provide continuity and cohesion between new and existing residents.

The wealth of trees within the grounds extends tree corridors and provides stepping stones for nature linked to wider green networks. It is essential to retain trees where possible. Sensitive planting would help to smooth out disparate elements such as previous ad-hoc tree planting.

Open spaces and varied layers of planting would provide different habitats, enhance biodiversity and allow for amenity space. For residents less mobile, benches, focal points and accessible paths, support active lifestyles.

Consideration should be given to the balance between openness and security, managing the interface with carers, staff and visitors coming into the College, whilst avoiding creating a closed 'gated community'.

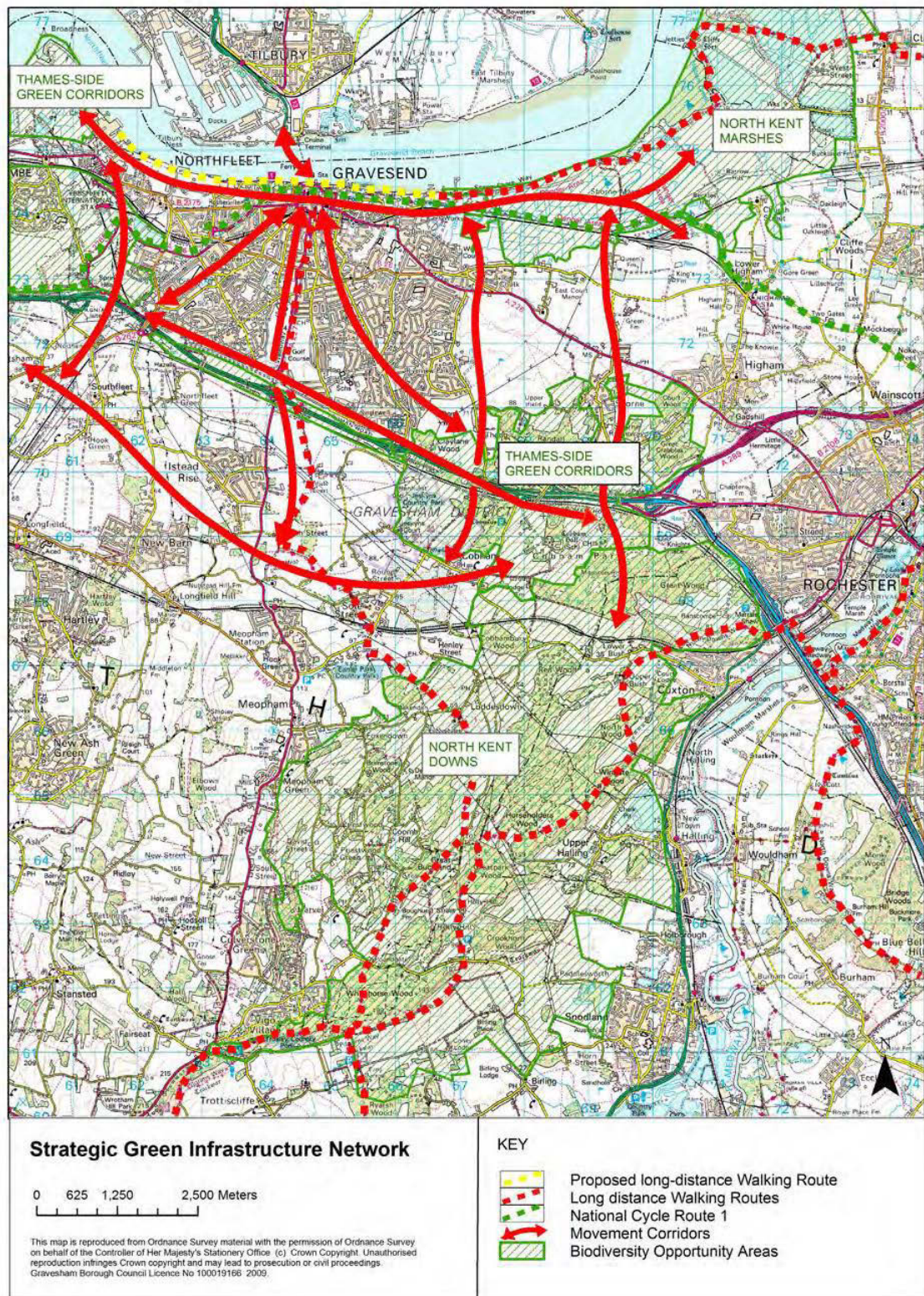
Appendices List

As attachments

APPENDIX A Strategic Green Infrastructure Network (Gravesham Local Plan)

APPENDIX B Viewpoints Detail (3 pages)

APPENDIX C Site character

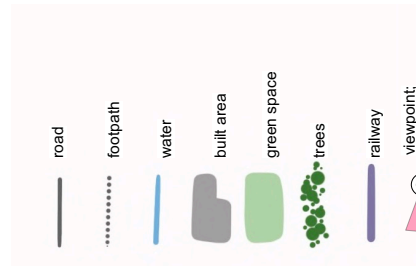
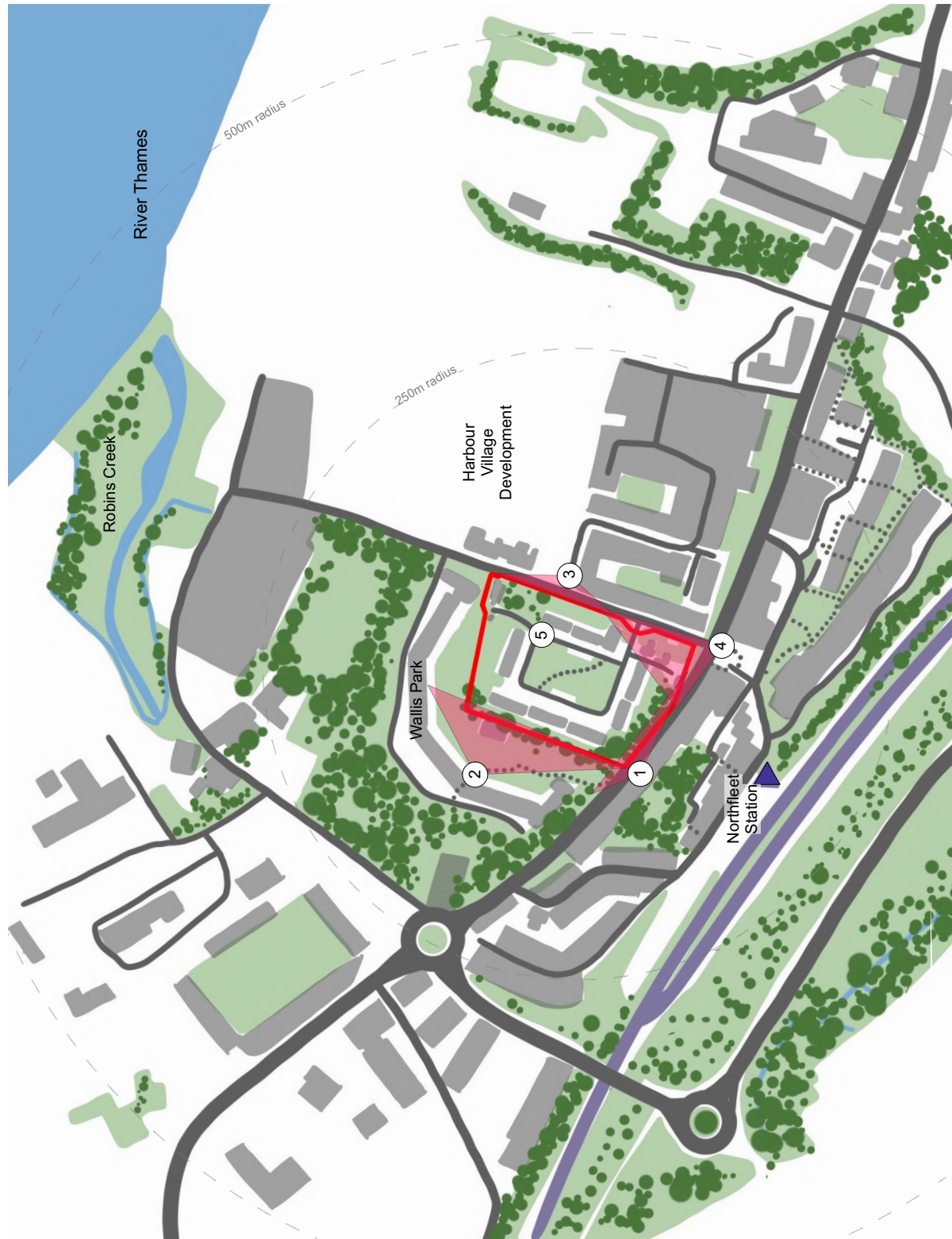


APPENDIX B Viewpoints Detail (1/3)

Zone of theoretical visual Influence MAP and Key:

HUGGENS
COLLEGE

Landscape
Context



APPENDIX B Viewpoints Detail (2/3)



Entrance to Wallis Park, west of Site



Bank on south west corner of Huggens College



Viewpoint 1 South of Site, (B2175/Northfleet High Street), approach from west towards College Road.
Photomontage
31.03.2023



Pedestrian footpath, south of Site,
leading to College Road. Wall of
Huggens College to left.

APPENDIX B Viewpoints Detail (3/3)



Viewpoint 2. View from footpath, Wallis Park, west of the Huggens College - boundary trees visible behind disused community centre building.

Photomontage

31.03.2023



Viewpoint 3. View from Warwick Place looking at the outer wall along College Road. Existing chapel (left), bungalows and trees, Chaplain's house and Wallis Park visible to the right.

Photomontage

31.03.2023



Viewpoint 4. View from corner of College Road, approached from the east, from Northfleet High Street

Google Streetview

06.04.2023



Viewpoint 5. View of central green space, Huggens College, from the north east corner. Chapel steeple visible to the left.

Photomontage

31.03.2023

APPENDIX C Site character (Huggens College Site Visit 31.03.2023)



Central green with bench and group of birches



Seating in private porches



Wooded boundaries



The Chapel and community room



View from College Road to the River Thames (flint and brick walls with mature trees)