

# Boughton and Dunkirk Neighbourhood Plan

## Background document BD 9 - Rural Landscape Area Assessments

### EXTRACT FROM SWALE LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT

In the Swale Landscape Character Assessment 42 landscape character areas were identified, described and their key characteristics noted. An analysis was undertaken to identify the condition and sensitivity of the landscape and following the methodology, guidelines for each area are proposed. It should be noted that changes in the natural landscape are often gradual, relating closely to changes in geology and soil type. It is therefore common to find some characteristics of one area overlapping into another.

Not all areas within a landscape character area exhibit all the characteristics of that area and it is usual to have some pockets with very few distinctive features. Often this is due to changes in land use that have resulted in the loss of landscape features, or the addition of features not typically associated with that area. The proximity of the built environment often affects the condition of the landscape, particularly on the boundaries where pressures are greatest.

Around Boughton and Dunkirk, three main character areas are identified, and guidelines for each area are proposed which are taken into account in the Neighbourhood Plan:

- Faversham and Ospringe Fruit Belt (20)
- Hernhill and Boughton Fruit Belt (23)
- Blean Woods West (33)

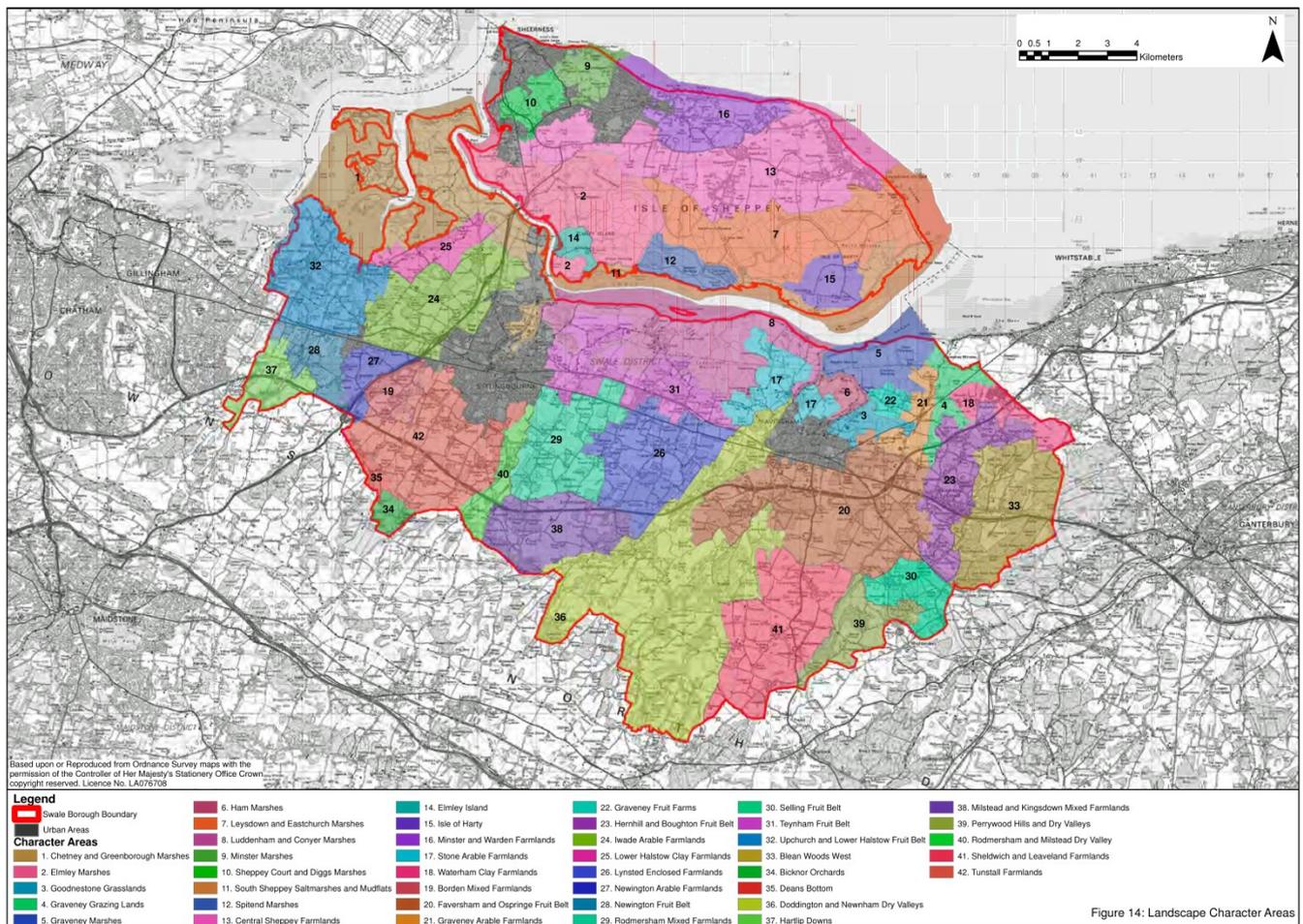


Figure 14: Landscape Character Areas

## **Faversham and Ospringe Fruit Belt**

- Key Characteristics
- Gently undulating landscape that steadily climbs southwards
- Mixed geology of head brickearth, Thanet beds drift, clay-with-flints and chalk
- Small to medium-scale orchards and large open arable fields
- Woodland shaws and new plantation
- Mature fragmented hedgerows supplemented with post and wire fencing
- Many fine historic buildings in local vernacular style
- Motorways, A and B roads, narrow winding lanes. Many lanes of historic interest including former drovers' routes and the A251, a former turnpike road

Forming part of the North Kent Plain and lying upon the fine loam soils found between the London Clay underlying the Greater Thames Estuary to the north and the North Downs chalk to the south, fruit belt areas are indicative of the traditional landscapes and ways of working that was once widespread across North Kent and, alongside the growing of hops, they are important in terms of historical reference.

However, many traditional orchards been replaced with dwarf stock that is in turn being turned over to arable crops. Large areas of former fruit production are now used for arable crops, perhaps with shelterbelts or hedgerow lanes the only sign of the former land use. In some areas the orchards have changed to arable altogether and the shelterbelts largely gone. Poplar or Alder dominated shelterbelts particularly characteristic of these landscapes.

The Faversham and Ospringe Fruit Belt extends from the southern boundary of Faversham to the foot of the North Downs dip slope. The area is characterised by its gently undulating landscape that steadily climbs southwards. Around Faversham the soils are largely a mixture of head brickearth, Thanet beds drift and chalk. On the lower dip slopes the soils become clay-with-flints and chalk. As would be expected, fruit production tends to be on the more fertile soils and arable areas on the poorer chalk and clay areas. The mixed geology has led to varied modern farming practices. Traditional fruit and hop production is now less common, with arable being the primary land use.

Settlement includes small historic villages and many scattered isolated farms. Traditional buildings abound with cottages and farmhouses dating from the 15th to 20th century. Oasts are another traditional feature, but many have been lost as a result of disuse. In places formerly derelict oast houses have been converted to residential dwellings. A number of traditional farm buildings have gone or are under threat as a result of conglomeration of some farmsteads. Churches are built in flint and houses generally in the brick that has been extracted locally for centuries.

The urban edge of Faversham is generally well defined and, whilst some urban influences have spread south of the A2, there is a particularly quick transition between the urban and rural areas along the east and south eastern urban boundaries. In summary it is a tranquil landscape with a strong traditional character. It contains many fine historic properties and ancient lanes. It is also a valuable landscape in terms of biodiversity due to the varied habitats and wildlife corridors that exist here.

Guidelines: Conserve and Reinforce

- Consider the generic guidelines for fruit belt landscapes and on landmark buildings. Refer to the Kent Downs AONB Management Plan 2009 - 2014 (First Revision 2009) for policies relating to the management of the Kent Downs AONB and its setting.

- Conserve the rural setting of the Kent Downs AONB.
- Actions within this character area should be undertaken in accordance with the Core Strategy Natural Assets Policy which aims to conserve and enhance the AONB.
- Conserve the largely rural setting of the small market town of Faversham and St Mary's Church.
- Conserve the rectilinear landscape pattern and look for opportunities to reinforce the continuity of hedgerows, shaws and shelterbelts, whilst maintaining the openness of areas that have never been enclosed and conserving the intimate, orchard covered and enclosed landscape character around the valley forms at Whitehill and Plumford.

Use local and vernacular materials appropriate to the location: for boundaries - local red or yellow stock brick, estate iron railings, red brick and flint or hedgerows, for roofs - Kent-peg tiles and occasional thatch or slate and corrugated sheeting on outbuildings and for building walls - weatherboarding, timber frame and plaster infill, flint, red or yellow stock brick and white/rendered painted brick. For new hedges and hedgerow trees - hawthorn, hazel, field maple, blackthorn, dog rose, crab apple, bullace, elder, damson and dogwood, for mixed woodland, shaws or other planting - pedunculate oak, ash, hornbeam, hazel, field maple and wild cherry. Additionally, within developed areas - pedunculate oak, ash, horse chestnut, older fruit tree varieties and beech, box, holly or yew hedging. Shelterbelts - poplar or alder. Other - fruit orchards.

## **Hernhill and Boughton Fruit Belt**

- Key Characteristics
- Traditional rolling Kentish landscape of orchards, overshadowed by Blean Woods
- Good quality, well drained, deep loam soils
- Predominantly fruit production with occasional arable and hop gardens
- Small to medium-scale field pattern, with strong network of shelterbelts, hedgerows and scattered woodlands
- Well-managed landscape intensively farmed
- Strongly Kentish form and character
- Traditional vernacular buildings. Large oast houses. Large country houses Mount Ephraim with its house and fine gardens

This is a distinctive, small-scale, enclosed landscape situated in the vicinity of Hernhill and Boughton under Blean, West of the Blean Woodland complex. Predominantly a fruit producing area, it also contains isolated hop gardens and small arable fields. It is an area of mixed geology that includes numerous fertile drift soils, which are deep, well drained and support a mosaic of productive orchards and some hops covering the distinctly folded topography. A strong but irregular field pattern, of small to medium-scale, is emphasised by the poplar windbreaks and mature hedgerows of mixed native species. This pattern is exaggerated by the uniform rows of orchard trees.

Small sections of neighbouring Local Wildlife Sites extend into the margins of this character area. This includes a small part of the Graveney Dykes and Pastures LWS to the northwest and a small area of the Blean Woods South LWS south of Boughton.

There are extensive views northward towards the marshes and beyond from certain vantage points, whilst the Blean Woods form a backdrop to the area and enclose it to the south. At the fringes of the area, where it abuts marshland and tree cover, a strong sense of place is formed. Transport routes include major trunk roads, the A2 and A299, B roads and narrow lanes. The A roads do not significantly detract from the overall character as they tend to be well screened. The Canterbury to Faversham rail link and Selling Station mark the southern boundary of this area. Settlement pattern comprises the large linear village of Boughton, which now extends into Horslees.

Recent housing development along Boughton is increasing the density of development. Elsewhere scattered small-scale nucleated villages are set around lane junctions, Hernhill, for example, represents the textbook Kentish village. These are generally unspoilt and very rural in character. Scattered farmsteads and clusters of cottages, as well as large historic country houses also feature. All settlements are distinct in their strong local character and have fine historic centres. Buildings are irregularly grouped and vary in scale and character. Commonly observed distinct vernacular building styles include timber frame, weatherboard, brick and tile hung and can be dated from 14th century to modern day. Oasts are a common feature, some large and some small, some reclaimed and converted to residential or commercial premises and some derelict. Churches are typically constructed of local flint. Hernhill church provides a local landmark, visible across a fairly wide area.

Whilst use of local vernacular materials and building styles is abundant throughout the area, many of the houses within the larger settlements are indistinct, modern houses of inappropriate style. These have to a small degree diluted the otherwise very strong character. The house and gardens at Mount Ephraim originally date from the early 1700s and were rebuilt and extended in 1880. The gardens are renowned for their park-like grounds and scattered exotic trees and shrubs, with later terracing,

balustrades and topiary in a more formal Edwardian style. The overall picture is one of typical traditional Kentish countryside, undulating fields with an abundance of orchards, some hop production, and scattered traditional settlements.

Sensitivity: High - This is a very distinct landscape containing a strong network of shelterbelts, orchards, hop gardens and many traditional buildings. The field pattern is historic although there has been a shift from large-scale hop production to fruit.

Despite the rolling topography and many high points, the numerous shelterbelts, orchards, hedges and woodlands all contribute to the landscape's moderate visibility.

Settlements and planting associated with major trunk roads and lane sides further contribute to this enclosure. Any changes in management that would result in loss of vegetative cover would increase visibility of the landscape. Thus the landscape may be considered highly sensitive to changes in farming practice which have occurred since 2005.

Condition: Good - This fruit belt area is in very good condition. Infrequently arable fields and small areas of woodland fragment the unity of the orchards and hop gardens. Post and wire fencing occasionally features where horse grazing has replaced more traditional land uses. Modern residential estate development has not always taken account of the traditional character of the settlements in which they have been built. More recently local vernacular style is beginning to feature in early 21st century housing. Small belts of woodland, mature intact hedgerows of mixed native species and orchard windbreaks are well linked and thus provide good ecological networks in this otherwise intensely farmed landscape. Elsewhere mature standard oaks are scattered across open fields. However, the landscape is so directly related to its land use that the area is particularly sensitive to changes in farming practice. Many traditional buildings indicate the rich cultural heritage of this landscape. From the large manor houses to the oast houses, many examples of traditional historic architecture are found here and are largely in good condition.

#### Sensitivity Guidelines:

Conserve the traditional landscape character and built environment of Hernhill and Boughton under Blean should be conserved.

- Consider the generic guidelines for fruit belt landscapes, landmark buildings and historic parkland.
- Conserve the intimate landscape character formed by the small-medium-scale field pattern with a strong network of shelterbelts and hedgerows, together with woodland, orchard and hop cover.

Additionally, look for opportunities, in localised denuded areas, to reinstate such features.

- Conserve the distinctive landscape character formed at the boundaries with other character areas, such as where orchard and pasture meet, or form, the setting to the Blean wood complex, or where rising ground immediately adjoins the Graveney Dykes.
- Use local and vernacular materials appropriate to the location: for boundaries - red (almost predominantly) stock brick walls, estate iron railings, chestnut diamond spile or hedgerows, for roofs - Kent-peg tiles and occasional thatch or slate and corrugated sheeting on outbuildings and for building walls - weatherboarding, tile hanging, timber frame and plaster infill, flint, red or yellow stock brick and white/ rendered painted brick, some stone and flint. For new hedges and hedgerow trees - hawthorn, hazel, field maple, dog rose and dogwood. For mixed-woodland or other planting - pedunculate oak, hornbeam, hazel and birch, scattered oak standards in open fields. Additionally, within developed areas - yew, older fruit tree varieties and beech, box, privet, holly or yew hedging. Shelterbelts - poplar. Other - mixed fruit orchard, hop gardens.

## **Blean Woods West**

### Key Characteristics

- Gently to steeply sloping landscape supporting ancient woodland
- Heavy clay soils and fertile loams
- Ancient woodland designated as SSSI, SAC and NNR
- Part of the most extensive seminatural woodlands in the south east of England
- Areas of woodland cleared for grazing, with extensive views
- Fragmented mature hedgerows along lanes - A and B roads and narrow winding lanes with few passing places
- Enclosed landscape
- Occasional long views from higher ground of Whitstable, the sea and wind turbines
- Linear village, scattered isolated cottages and farms
- 20th century residential dwellings, flint church. Victorian red brick cottages and farm buildings
- Sense of remoteness and quiet rural lanes

This area is part of the larger Blean woodland complex. The land rises steeply on its western boundary from 40 to 124m.

Similarly steep slopes are found at the southern and northern boundaries; elsewhere the ground is gently sloping and rounded.

An outcrop of London clay defines the area. The soils found here are slowly permeable and seasonally waterlogged. On the steeper peripheral slopes small areas of more fertile loamy soils overlay the clayey base soils. Deciduous woodlands are dominant on the higher ground and these include many areas of managed hornbeam and chestnut coppice. More recent conifer plantations also feature but are less extensive. The domed high ground is dominated by ancient woodland or ancient replanted woodland. The coppice woodlands harbour the few remaining colonies of the rare heath fritillary butterfly.

This remains one of the most extensive semi-natural woodlands in the south east of England containing many varied habitats of National and International importance reflected in their designations. However, significant areas have been cleared to make way for horse related activities, grazing livestock and dairy farming. Mature standard oaks are commonly seen scattered across these open grazing fields. Many field boundaries are defined by post and wire fencing, with fragmented mature hedgerows found along the narrow lanes and minor roads. This is an area largely enclosed by topography and woodland but views are present from the higher domed open grazing land. Where available, these long panoramic views extend over the northern marshes to the Isle of Sheppey, Whitstable, and the sea and wind turbines.

The A2 divides the area north-south and immediately north of this major trunk road lays the main settlement of Dunkirk. This is a linear village located on the high ground east of Boughton under Blean. Many of the residential dwellings of Dunkirk are of mixed style, date from the mid 20th century and bear no relation to local vernacular character. Otherwise the area possesses a sense of remoteness, accessible only by quiet lanes.

Settlement is limited to isolated farms and cottages, many dating from the 1800s are, built in brick and of a vernacular style. At Dunkirk there are a number of structures that were part of a chain of radar stations that played an important role in the Battle of Britain. These are Scheduled Ancient Monuments. Surprisingly, the impressive mast is not part of the SAM but it is a grade II listed building.

Condition: Good - The landscape of the Blean Woods West is in good condition. Whilst there are some detracting features, including the highly prominent telephone mast at Dunkirk village and the post and wire fencing of stock fields, the scene is generally unified. Woodland encloses and screens visually detracting features so that their impact is lessened.

Overall ecological integrity is extremely strong, with areas designated for their nature conservation value. The vast array of woodland types and features are considered exceptional and are the result of centuries of varied management practices. At various times areas have been managed as coppice with standards, pure coppice, high forest, and with areas containing woodland pasture. Recently, conifer plantation has become a feature. As a result the ground and under stories are diverse and rich in flora and fauna. Outside the woodlands, majestic specimen oaks are commonly seen scattered across the open pastures.

However, whilst mature hedgerows are generally in good condition along lanes, many internal field boundaries have been formed from post and wire fencing.

Although many of the buildings found within this character zone are of mixed 20th century styles, adjacent woodland screening means that they have only a moderate impact on the surrounding landscape. Numerous historic farm buildings do exist and are in vernacular style. Unfortunately some are declining in condition and require work.

#### Sensitivity: Moderate

This is a moderately sensitive landscape. The extensive woodland area is a distinct feature and historic in origin. Visibility is low due to the degree of enclosure afforded by the extensive woodland cover. However, where woodland clearance has occurred on high ground, these areas are more visually sensitive. The area's ecological sensitivity is high. The area possesses a strong sense of place, with a feeling of remoteness partly created by limited vehicular access along quiet rural lanes.

#### Guidelines: Conserve and Reinforce

The Western Blean woodland character should be conserved and reinforced.

- Consider generic guidelines for woodland landscapes.
- Conserve the largely undeveloped and heavily wooded character of the landscape which forms part of the wider Blean Woods complex.
- Resist further woodland clearance - eg for horse related activities and grazing livestock.
- Create stronger ecological networks by linking ancient woodlands through new woodland planting and hedgerow restoration in appropriate areas, whilst conserving key views over the northern marshes to Whitstable and the sea.
- Conserve the distinct and tranquil landscape character of ancient and semi-ancient woodland complex (including ditches, streams and ponds, scrub, dry and wet heath), together with its setting of wood pasture, open slopes (inc. views) and the rural character of the area's network of narrow winding lanes, enclosed by mature hedgerows. Additionally look for opportunities that would enable woodland to be created.

Use local and vernacular materials appropriate: for boundaries - red or yellow stock brick or brick and flint, iron railings, timber paling or picket fences or hedgerows, for roofs - Kent-peg tiles and occasional slate for roofs and for building walls - weatherboarding, red or occasional yellow stock brick or occasional brick and flint. For new hedges and hedgerow trees - hawthorn, hazel, blackthorn, dog rose, field maple and dogwood, for mixed-woodland or other planting - pedunculate oak, alder, holly, beech, sweet chestnut, hornbeam, beech, hazel, ash and birch. Mature oak across open farmland. Additionally, within developed areas - beech for hedging.

Other - isolated orchards.