

# Chapter 5: Promoting Quality of Life in Town and Country

5.1 This Plan seeks to make towns and villages in Kent vibrant places in which to live, work, and take leisure. This Chapter looks to support an 'urban renaissance' in Kent and the revitalisation of rural communities. It focuses upon those policies which affect the quality of places including, design, density, the protection of Kent's wealth of built heritage, community services and infrastructure. Policies for the protection and enhancement of the countryside and coast, their landscapes and wildlife are equally important dimensions of quality of life. These are addressed in Chapter 4.

5.2 These policies are at the heart of improving economic, social and environmental well being and were strongly supported by public consultation on the Vision for Kent and Mapping out the Future, which formed the basis of this Plan.

## Key Issues for Kent:

- Ensuring new development is designed to a high quality
- Preserving the separate identities of different settlements
- Making towns and villages more attractive, safer, places in which to live, work and spend time
- Securing more efficient use of land
- Encouraging mixed uses in our towns and other centres
- Conserving our built and man made heritage
- Enhancing community and other infrastructure

- Providing better facilities and opportunities for sport and recreation

## The quality of development and design in town and country

5.3 Kent has a valuable legacy of attractive and historic built environments. However, some towns and villages have unexceptional or poor townscapes because of heavy industry, the poor design of more recent development and the impact of traffic which causes pollution and makes pedestrian movement difficult.

5.4 The intrinsic character and setting of Kent villages and small rural towns is valuable. It helps to mould the image of the county and contributes to the quality of life for everyone who lives in and visits Kent. Structure Plan policies have protected the countryside and rural settlements from inappropriate development and must continue to do so. Any development in the rural areas must respond carefully to its location and environment.

5.5 There is now a clear expectation that the planning system will promote sustainable and well designed development and this is reflected in a range of national planning policy guidance notes and other Government publications<sup>2</sup>. It is important that development responds well to the distinct character of each settlement. This character is formed by the buildings, open spaces landscape, street pattern, landmarks, materials used and other features. Each town or village therefore has a different set of



physical design problems and opportunities. Achieving good design means looking at the function, convenience and context of a development as well as the appearance and appropriateness of its architecture. It must address the public domain including the space between buildings and the needs of the community as well as those directly involved with the project to contribute to reaching decisions.

5.6 Good design can often be achieved at no overall extra cost. Using good urban design and management to focus more attention on street maintenance, public open space and pedestrian

<sup>2</sup> For example : Better Places to Live by Design : Companion Guide to PPG3  
By Design : Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment

routes can result in economic benefits to an area as well as making places more attractive. The Kent Design Guide has been prepared as Supplementary Planning Guidance by Kent's local authorities. It advocates high quality design for new development making sure it is in harmony with its surroundings but without stifling innovation.

### The benefits of good design:

Good urban design and high quality architecture will help to deliver strategic planning policies in Kent in a number of ways:

- by providing Kent residents with a higher quality environment in which to live;
- by making towns more attractive, through high quality building and landscape;
- by satisfactorily accommodating higher density and mixed use development, and integrating new uses for vacant sites, thus contributing to the targets for development on previously used land;
- by increasing the confidence to invest, particularly in town centres and the inner parts of our urban areas;
- by making it easier and safer to move around on foot or by bicycle and reducing dependence on the car;
- by bringing together different housing types and local services, and encouraging community development;
- by producing buildings and layouts which consume less energy and water

- by adopting design measures that contribute to public health and safety, and reduce crime;
- by making buildings flexible enough to be adapted and extended throughout their life to meet changing needs and requirements;
- by reducing physical isolation and encouraging social inclusion, for example by making areas more accessible and better connected and by encouraging the design of dwellings to meet the "homes for life" standard;
- by adopting design which complements local architecture and contributes to urban and village character.

5.7 The overall character and identity of a settlement is of importance both to its economic well being and for the quality of life of its residents. Investors are influenced by the cultural, leisure and retailing vitality of settlements. Applying good urban design principles helps to make towns more attractive and successful places in which to live and work. High quality urban design has an important part to play in delivering wider community objectives. In particular, the Structure Plan and Community Strategies aim to encourage journeys by foot and cycle, improve health and safety and reduce crime. An important contribution can be made to improving the quality of life in these areas through programmes for pedestrian and cycle priority and circulation, for the appearance and treatment of open spaces and the spaces between buildings and townscape improvement particularly in town centres.



### Policy QL1: Quality of Development and Design

- (i) All development should be well designed and be of high quality. Developments, individually or taken together, should appropriately reflect the scale, layout pattern and character of their local surroundings. Development which would be detrimental to the built environment, amenity, functioning and character of settlements or the countryside will not be permitted. Existing built environment of high quality and character will be protected and enhanced.**
- (ii) Local authorities and others will:**
- (a) ensure that the distinctive character of towns and villages is conserved and improved;**

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- (b) apply the principles of the Kent Design Guide when determining planning applications and preparing site-specific development guidance;
- (c) require that a design statement accompanies proposals for development with accurate illustrations of the development in its surroundings;
- (d) develop design policies for their area based on an analysis of the quality, character and significance of the surrounding built and natural environment. This will include:
  - (i) identification of areas where local design policies will apply to take account of their special character;
  - (ii) provision of design guidance within development briefs and master plans for major development sites and areas of change.
- (iii) The design of development should:
  - (a) consider the needs of all sections of the community;
  - (b) provide for a healthy, safe and secure environment;
  - (c) enhance the public realm;
  - (d) protect the amenity of residents;
  - (e) incorporate sustainable construction techniques including provision for recycling facilities, water conservation and energy efficiency.

### **Policy QL2: Priorities for the Public Realm**

A concerted effort will be made to improve the appearance, design and ambience of the public realm including streets, squares, walkways, green space and vistas in both town and country. This will be implemented by:

- (i) programmes of investment in new and refurbished public spaces;
- (ii) the improvement of townscapes including environmental enhancement;
- (iii) improved maintenance of streets, squares and other open spaces;
- (iv) adoption of measures that foster community safety and security;
- (v) encouragement, as appropriate, of retail, leisure, cultural and civic activity to bring vitality to the central areas of our towns and cities.



### **Policy QL3: Movement and Accessibility in the Public Realm**

Local authorities will establish priorities and programmes for:

- a) pedestrian priority and reduced traffic speeds within town centres, in existing residential areas and in major new development areas;
- b) the provision of safe pedestrian and cycle routes to schools;
- c) a network of high quality, direct and convenient pedestrian and cycle routes linking public open space, safe streets and parks in urban areas, residential areas with community facilities/services and the principal urban areas with the surrounding countryside;

Where directly related, contributions from developments to the implementation of such programmes may be required.

### **Policy QL4: Maintaining the identity of settlements**

The separation of settlements will be maintained including:

- a) Safeguarding of the open and undeveloped character of the countryside around and between settlements, including the use of landscape buffers;
- b) The allocation of land on the edge of settlements for uses which maintain or enhance their setting;
- c) The protection of important features and views.

## Making effective use of development land

5.8 It is important to make best use of development land. The greater part of most Kent towns has not been developed to a high density and land is not always used efficiently. There are opportunities to increase the density of residential and commercial development for example, through redeveloping single storey buildings or changing the way parking is provided. This can create more interesting and lively townscapes, while conserving the best character of Kent's towns. New development or intensification can use loft space, extra storeys, basements and terracing to make the most efficient use of the land available. Higher densities can be achieved without compromising wider design objectives or the quality of development.

5.9 There will in future be more one and two person households in younger and older age groups who will require smaller dwellings close to public transport and community services. Higher densities can be assisted by providing less car parking, especially where there is good access to good quality public transport.



### Policy QL5: Quality and the Density of Development

**In appropriate locations and in conjunction with the delivery of high quality development, new development will be subject to average net densities\* as follows:**

- 30 dwellings per hectare for residential use;
- 50 dwellings per hectare for residential use in central urban areas or close to major public transport nodes;
- 3500 sq. metres per hectare for business uses (Use Classes B1-B8).

**More efficient use of land should be achieved through redevelopment of low density uses, especially within the central parts of the major/principal urban areas.**

*\* Ratios apply to the area of land used for residential and business use excluding major roads and landscaping, and other uses.*

### Vibrant mix of uses

5.10 Developments with a mixture of land uses can have strong advantages over large areas given over to a single use. They can reduce the need for travel to work or to reach services and they can improve the prospects for investment, by spreading risk and maximising value. Mixed use also creates more interesting environments, while a range of house types fosters more balanced communities. Significant new land releases including major regeneration sites should provide mixed uses capable of creating communities with good access to a full range of services, either within themselves, or by association with existing development. Major allocations or developments based on a single land use should, where practicable, be reviewed with a view to introducing a wider mix of uses as long as this would not conflict with other Structure Plan policies or adversely affect meeting strategic development requirements for housing or new employment.



### **Policy QL6: Mix of uses on sites**

- a) New large scale developments will include a mix of residential and employment uses, unless an appropriate mix can be achieved through proximity to, and integration with, existing development. They will incorporate appropriate community and other services if not available within walking distance or if they cannot be provided in extended facilities nearby;**
- b) Opportunities should be taken to introduce an appropriate mix of uses into existing developed areas and on major sites currently planned for single use where this would lead to a better balance in the mix of development;**
- c) Consideration of proposals for other sites should assess their potential contribution to mixed use, either within the development site itself or by complementing surrounding uses.**

### **Heritage**

5.11 Kent's historic environment is an irreplaceable asset which contributes greatly to the character of the county but which is vulnerable to damage or destruction. There is a duty of care for once lost, components of the historic environment can never be replaced. The conservation of our heritage has economic and social benefits. It helps to maintain varied and attractive places in which to live and work, provides historic places to visit and enjoy and encourages investment in, and re-use of, old buildings. Features and areas of archaeological or

historic importance should be protected, conserved and enhanced where possible. Some of these features are protected by statute, for example Scheduled Ancient Monuments, Listed Buildings or Conservation Areas, while others are recognised as being of more local importance.

### **Conservation Areas**

5.12 Kent's most important areas of special architectural or historic interest have been designated as conservation areas (there are almost 500 such areas in Kent and Medway). Designation helps to ensure protection against harmful development and encourages environmental improvement. The sense of history and the type and quality of buildings, spaces, trees and other features contributes to the special character of these areas.

5.13 The variety of building styles dating from different historical periods can add to character and interest within a conservation area. New buildings do not always have to copy their older neighbours to be successful. Innovative design of new buildings may be appropriate provided it is of high quality and is sensitive to the character of the conservation area.

5.14 It is important to take into account the impact of proposals outside conservation areas where these might affect important views into, and out of such areas. Highway improvements and maintenance will be carried out in a manner which is sensitive to their surroundings in order to minimise adverse

environmental impacts on conservation areas. Co-ordinated environmental improvement schemes will be carried out in appropriate locations.

### **Policy QL7: Conservation Areas**

**The primary planning policy towards conservation areas is to preserve or enhance their special character and appearance.**

**Development within conservation areas should preserve and enhance the character of the conservation area. Development which would harm the character of a conservation area will not be permitted.**

**District Planning authorities should:**

- (i) include policies within local development documents that protect within conservation areas the plan form, buildings, architectural features, archaeological sites, trees, streets and spaces, and the relationships between these features, which contribute to their special character and setting;**
- (ii) review the boundaries of existing conservation areas and, where appropriate, amend them and/or identify new conservation areas;**
- (iii) carry out conservation area appraisals to identify important features or characteristics which need to be protected and develop strategies for the enhancement of conservation areas.**

### **Archaeological Sites**

5.15 Kent has a wealth of archaeological sites, ancient monuments and historic landscapes. These provide valuable information about the past and make an important contribution to education, leisure and tourism. Because of its location close to mainland Europe, Kent was historically well placed for trade and for receiving new ideas, but at the same time vulnerable to invasion. This is reflected in the county's archaeology. From earliest times Kent supported prosperous, as well as socially and politically advanced, communities. Along the coastline are the remains of defensive works dating from the Roman period through to the Second World War. It is strategic policy to preserve, record and promote this rich archaeological heritage.



5.16 The emphasis should be on preserving archaeological sites 'in situ' (i.e. in their original position). If this is not appropriate or possible, then an archaeological investigation for the purposes of 'preservation by record' will be required before the site is developed. This is likely to involve a full archaeological excavation and recording of the site, conservation of any finds, and publication of the results. Provision should be made for the long-term storage of the site archive and finds, for future generations. Displays, both temporary and permanent, can help people to appreciate the value of archaeology and can provide a sense of history for new and existing communities.

The Kent Extensive Urban Archaeology Survey provides an overview of the archaeological resources of Kent's historic towns and sets out a framework for taking this into account in assessing development proposals. This will be adopted as Supplementary Planning Guidance.



### **Policy QL8: Archaeological Sites**

**The archaeological and historic integrity of scheduled ancient monuments and other important archaeological sites, together with their settings, will be protected and, where possible, enhanced.**

**Where important or potentially important archaeological remains may exist, developers will be required to arrange for archaeological assessment and/or field evaluation to be carried out in advance of the determination of planning applications.**

**Where the case for development affecting an archaeological site is accepted, the archaeological remains should be preserved in situ. Where preservation in situ is not possible or justified, appropriate provision for preservation by record will be required.**

### **Buildings of Architectural or Historic Importance**

5.17 Kent has the second highest number of historic buildings of any shire county with more than 18,000 Grades I, II\* and II listed buildings in Kent and Medway. They make a valuable contribution to tourism and the cultural heritage of Kent. It is important to protect them and their settings.

5.18 Generally, the best way to secure the upkeep of historic buildings is to retain them in the use for which they were originally intended, or in their

current use. A proposed change of use for a listed building may be acceptable if it offers the best way of retaining or refurbishing it.

5.19 Demolition of buildings of special architectural or historic interest will require a very strong case to be made. In such cases there is a legal requirement to allow English Heritage reasonable access to a building to make a record of it prior to demolition. The local authorities will seek to reduce the number of listed buildings 'at risk' and to identify ways to reduce the number recorded at risk on the Buildings at Risk Register maintained by English Heritage.

5.20 Alteration of a historic building can involve the destruction of important features and should be avoided. Before work is carried out a suitable record should be prepared. Where demolition or alteration would damage part of the structure of a building of special architectural or historic interest, applicants may be required to document fully the impact of the proposed works on the historic fabric of the building before the application can be determined.

5.21 Kent's built heritage can be identified by the use of local stones, bricks and tiles made from locally produced clay, as well as by the use of flint, thatch, oak and weather boarding. The use of similar materials for alterations, repair and new build can help to maintain and enhance the character of the county's buildings of historic or architectural interest, conservation areas and other visually sensitive areas.

### **Policy QL9: Buildings of Architectural or Historic Importance**

**Listed Buildings will be preserved and their architectural and historic integrity and the character of their settings will be protected and enhanced. Changes of use will be permitted where these will provide the best reasonable means of conserving the character, appearance, fabric, integrity and setting of listed buildings.**

The demolition or partial demolition of a listed building will require exceptional justification. Where demolition, partial demolition or alterations would damage part of a listed building, appropriate arrangements for the investigation and recording of its historic fabric may be required.

### **The Historic Landscape**

5.22 The historic landscape of Kent includes World Heritage Sites, historic parks and gardens, historic battlefields as well as the wider landscape itself (as recognised by Policy E3). Historic landscape features are special because of their contribution to the character of the urban and rural historic environment. The settings of historic landscapes and views into, and out of, them are also important and should be protected.

5.23 The “Register of Parks and Gardens of special historic interest in England” is compiled by English

Heritage. Its main purpose is to help ensure that the special features and qualities of these assets are safeguarded. There are other parks and gardens which are of local importance (for example as listed in the Kent Gardens Compendium), and these may also deserve protection.

### **Policy QL10: Historic Landscape Features**

**Development will not be permitted which would have an adverse impact upon the historic and archaeological importance, landscape character and physical appearance of historic landscapes, parks and gardens.**

**The settings and views into, and out of, historic landscapes, parks and gardens will be protected and where possible enhanced.**

### **Enabling Development**

5.24 In certain cases funds for the repair and restoration of a ‘heritage asset’, that cannot be generated from any other source, can be provided by permitting ‘enabling development’. This ensures the preservation of the asset through cross subsidy made possible by the associated development. A ‘heritage asset’ describes any component of the historic environment, including scheduled monuments and other archaeological remains, statutorily listed historic buildings and others of more local significance, conservation areas, registered historic parks and gardens and battlefields

and other historic landscape features.

5.25 Proposals for enabling development can only be justified on the basis that the benefit to the community of preserving or enhancing the heritage asset outweighs any harm. The enabling development must preserve the asset, not detract from its archaeological, architectural, historic, landscape or biodiversity interest or harm its setting. The development must be shown to be the minimum necessary to secure the long-term future of the asset and be shown to minimise any adverse effects. Further guidance is contained in English Heritage’s Policy Statement on “Enabling development and the conservation of heritage assets” (2001).

### **Policy QL11: Heritage Assets - Enabling Development**

**Development for the purposes of protecting a heritage asset will be permitted only where this is the sole means of protecting and securing the long-term future of the asset. The scale of development shall not exceed that required to achieve this objective and be in a form that minimises dis-benefits.**

### **Community services, sport and open space**

5.26 People want to live in safer, more prosperous communities with access to good housing and public transport, improved education, health and leisure facilities and jobs. Such communities are also likely

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to have lower unemployment and less dependency on social security benefits. Through their Community Strategies the local authorities are working in partnership with service providers to improve community services, increase public safety and reduce crime. The Structure Plan can assist these objectives particularly by promoting sustainable settlements and regeneration, improving accessibility and meeting community needs for development.

5.27 A wide range of services is essential to community well being. It includes education, health, social care, sport, youth and community services, recreation and the arts. The existing pattern of development has allowed some areas to become deficient in services or only able to access them by the car. The Structure Plan can help promote a co-ordinated approach to providing community services by requiring:

- high quality urban design, which itself encourages a sense of community
- land and buildings for community services, especially to support new housing
- land for recreation and open space

5.28 The diversity of local communities must be taken into account and opportunities taken to promote social inclusion and maximise life chances and independence. People with disabilities, older people and the young are less mobile than the majority of the population but need access to a wide range of facilities. The number and proportion of

older people in the population as a whole is set to increase but new communities meanwhile have a high proportion of young people. Gender and ethnic groups also have particular needs. This diversity should be reflected in the type and design of development proposed. In particular, planning policies should ensure that no one section of the community is isolated from housing, services, employment, shopping or other support. An important reason for concentrating development in the principal urban areas is that they will be able to sustain a full range of services including good quality public transport.

### Providing for community services

5.29 Existing community buildings and open space will be protected from development where there is a continuing need for them. In other cases new facilities may be needed where growth is taking place in order to remedy existing deficiencies or to allow service providers to invest in new facilities.

5.30 Planning for community services can be complex. There are few dominant service centres among the small to medium sized towns in Kent, and rural areas rely extensively on the urban areas. Services are provided by both the public and private sectors, and must adapt to changing demands and to new arrangements for service delivery - for example by combining library, adult education and other services into a single building and by the multiple use of buildings as meeting places and local service centres. This can reduce the need to travel, make efficient use

of land and premises and at the same time make services more accessible. Health and social services will require new forms of accommodation that provide supported living, residential and recuperative care. The standard of existing service provision will be important, as will the need to respond to local requirements and provide innovative services.

### **Policy QL12: Existing community services and deficiency**

**Existing community services\* and recreation facilities will be protected as long as there is a demonstrable need for them. Provision will be made for the development of local services in existing residential areas and in town and district centres, particularly where services are deficient. Flexibility in the use of buildings for mixed community uses, and the concentration of sports facilities at schools, will be encouraged.**

*\* community services includes schools and other education provision, social services, adult education, libraries, youth and community services, health, culture, recreation and amenity space, sport, local shopping, public utilities, and transport.*

5.31 In cases where existing community buildings do not have the capacity to serve new residential developments, standards for the provision of land for community services e.g. as set out in the KCC Guide for Developers will be used. Precise requirements for a particular development are likely to be determined in development briefs and through negotiation with

developers, but Local Development Documents should safeguard land for community purposes early in the planning process. Community services should be located wherever practicable in multi use facilities at town, district or local centres and should not depend upon transport by the private car.

5.32 The expansion of Further and Higher Education could support wider regeneration initiatives in Medway and growth at Ashford as well as building on existing strengths in these sectors at Canterbury. Housing growth will often require increased education provision both on new sites and at existing schools. Other major community needs include improved health care facilities in West Kent.

5.33 It is essential that unless there are exceptional circumstances the costs of providing new community facilities needed to support new housing or other development is met by the development in question (see also Policy IMP1, Chapter 11).

### **Policy QL13: Provision for new community services and infrastructure**

- a) Provision will be made to accommodate local community services\* within new residential, commercial and mixed use developments, and in response to growth in demand from the community as a whole;**
- b) Residential development will not be permitted**

**until the funding for the community services it requires has been identified and agreed;**

**c) Provision will be made in Local Development Documents for major new community facilities. Specifically land will be provided for:**

- **expansion of Further and/or Higher education at Canterbury and Medway and Ashford;**
- **primary and secondary schools in areas of major new dwelling provision;**
- **a new general hospital at Tunbridge Wells.**

**New community services will be located where they are accessible by walking and cycling and by public transport from the area they serve. Whenever practical they will be located in town, district or local centres.**

*\* community services includes schools and other education provision, social services, adult education, libraries, youth and community services, health, culture, recreation and amenity space, sport, local shopping, public utilities, and transport.*

### **Culture and the Arts**

5.34 Facilities for culture and the arts range from formal performance and exhibition space to the dual use of existing buildings and street festivals. They can help to bring vitality to our towns and villages, foster community spirit and preserve the heritage of Kent and its communities. In recent years several towns and cities in the UK and abroad have undergone a renaissance founded upon individual landmark buildings or a cluster of related



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developments which foster the local arts and cultural 'scene'. Innovative new buildings, of an appropriate scale and design, can help to stimulate public interest further. The proposed Turner Centre in Margate seeks to foster such a transformation in the image of Thanet.

### **Policy QL14: Cultural development and the arts**

**Proposals for cultural or arts facilities will be encouraged, particularly where located within, or close to town centres or public transport nodes. Development proposals in general should seek to promote public art, both directly and through the provision of development contributions.**

### **Provision for open space, sport and recreation**

5.35 Sport is a vital part of education and can help to develop community spirit, engender good health, enhance community safety, and contribute to regeneration. Kent has a large population and a wide range of sports facilities, although provision for the most specialised and large scale sport and recreation is hampered by the absence of a strong regional centre within the County. There are few sporting facilities of strategic significance in Kent.

5.36 High quality sports venues, which can also be used for entertainment and other purposes, have considerable value in regenerating urban areas. As a potential location for such facilities, Kent can benefit

from its proximity to London, its international and national transport links and from the areas of major growth within the County notably Thames Gateway and Ashford.

5.37 The provision of new sports facilities must have regard to minimum standards but must also be based on an assessment of local demand and the quality of existing facilities. In rural areas the possibility of creating focal points for sport and recreation by clustering facilities together should be examined. This can also add to the sustainability of key settlements. Kent's *'Strategic Framework for Sport'*<sup>3</sup> identifies deficiencies in the county in a number of single sport and multi sports facilities such as sports halls and swimming pools and recognises the role that dual use and joint provision can play in meeting those needs.

5.38 This Plan encourages investment in local sports facilities, but also supports the provision of more specialised venues and major competition facilities that respond to county wide, regional or national requirements. There is a particular focus in this regard on the regional priority areas of Thames Gateway and Ashford.

### **Policy QL15: Provision for major sporting venues**

**The development of high quality venues for sport to serve Kent and wider regional or national requirements will be encouraged. Assessment of**

**the potential for such facilities will give particular emphasis to Thames Gateway and Ashford. Any such provision should be accessible to the County as a whole by a choice of transport and preferably be at a major or principal urban area.**

### **Policy QL16: Formal recreation/sport facilities**

**All major new formal recreation and sports facilities, including intensively used facilities in rural areas such as golf courses, should be accessible by a choice of transport and designed to avoid nuisance from traffic, noise and lighting.**

**Local Development Documents will make provision for sport, informal and formal recreation facilities taking account of the potential for dual use and/or joint provision. Where there is a continuing need, existing facilities will be protected and where these are deficient land will be identified for improvements.**

**The need for new facilities within major new residential and mixed-use developments will be assessed and appropriate provision made.**

**Where additional facilities are needed in rural areas priority should be given to clustered provision at rural service centres.**

<sup>3</sup> Kent: The Champion County: The Strategic Framework for Sport in Kent 2003-2008: Kent County Council.

5.39 Kent is an important area for water sports and recreation, due to its long coastline and to the major area of sheltered sailing close to London provided by the estuaries of the Thames, Medway and Swale. Facilities for mooring, landing and launching craft may need to be improved if this is to be capitalised upon this but congestion and conflict between users should be taken into account. There is continuing potential for inland water recreation through sensitive restoration of mineral workings. Particular considerations apply to water sports because of the sensitive nature of the areas in which they are found. While this Plan protects the undeveloped coast, opportunities to add to facilities which support water sports within existing urban areas or where existing port or commercial uses are declining should be examined.

### **Policy QL17: Water recreation**

**Development that improves or extends water recreation in Kent will be permitted provided it causes no material harm to species, natural habitats or the wider environment.**

5.40 Open space, playing fields and informal recreation areas should be protected from development. As a feature which is central to the quality of urban living it is also important to identify and greatly improve the network of open space within urban areas and its connection to the edge of towns and the wider countryside.

#### **Open spaces networks in urban areas:**

- add to the quality of development;
- encourage investment by improving the setting of development sites;
- provide a local amenity and opportunities to support wildlife;
- accommodate safe pedestrian and cycle routes - to succeed fully as communication routes they must be continuous, direct and easy to access.



### **Policy QL18: Green-space networks and rights of way**

**Local authorities will prepare open space strategies and reflect their land use requirements in Local Development Documents:**

- a) In urban areas local authorities will establish and extend green-space networks as corridors for movement by foot and cycle, as havens for wildlife and natural habitats and for leisure, amenity and recreational use. Where practicable green linkages should be encouraged from within settlements to the open countryside;**
- b) Existing open space and public rights of way will be protected and improved as part of these networks, which, where possible, should extend through major new development sites and connect directly with community facilities, employment areas and transport hubs;**
- c) In rural areas the rights of way network will be protected and enhanced.**

5.41 The major/principal urban areas of Kent Thameside and Medway and Swale in Thames Gateway and Thanet, Canterbury and Ashford in East Kent are bordered by extensive highly valued environmental assets. The establishment of 'regional conservation parks' could create a setting for the existing urban areas, provide for environmental improvement, create new leisure and recreational opportunities with improved public access to them

alongside the conservation and enhancement of these high quality countryside assets. Sustainable management of improved recreational opportunities within these areas would be an essential requirement of such proposals. The extent and definition of the parks and the way they would link with adjoining urban areas (including the green space networks within them) need closer examination on a sub regional basis.

### **Policy QL19: Potential for Regional Conservation Parks**

**The potential for Regional Conservation Parks will be investigated in North Kent and within the Stour Valley catchment in East Kent. Where appropriate, they will be defined and safeguarded in Local Development Documents.**