

Chapter 2: The Spatial Strategy for Kent and Medway

Introduction

2.1 Kent is characterised by its pattern of large and medium sized towns and cities together with a 'peopled countryside' of historic market towns, villages and hamlets. These settlements are set in the midst of a rich and diverse natural environment. The role of the Structure Plan is to preserve this distinctiveness while responding to the specific needs of different parts of the county and re-balancing investment and development pressures across it.

Key Spatial Issues

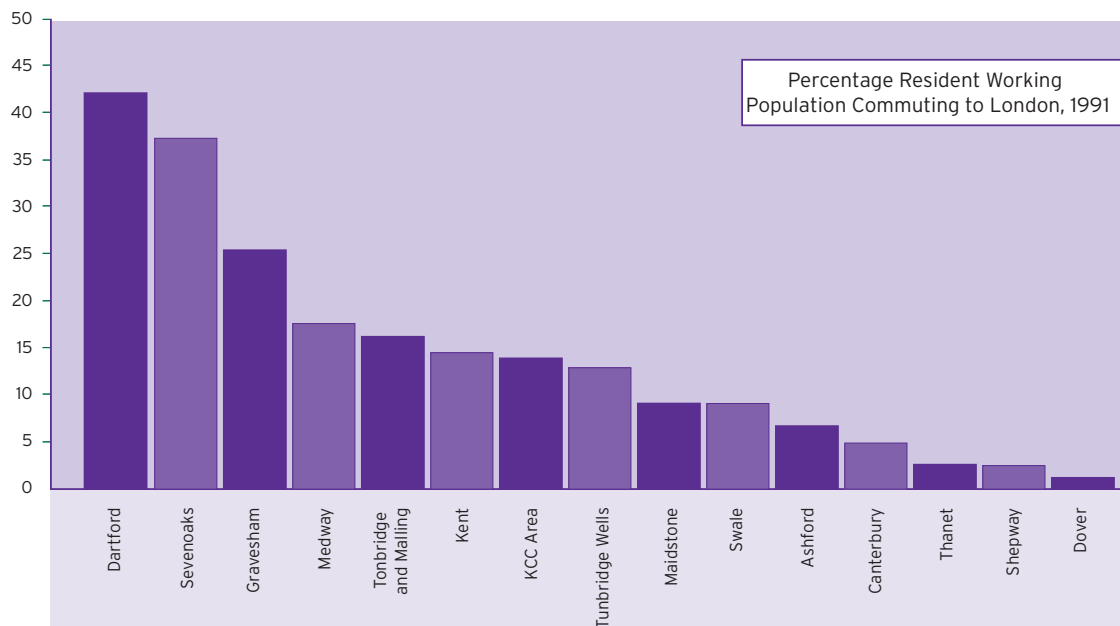
- An imbalance of development pressures and wealth and investment across Kent

- Responding to the decline of town centres
- The impact of London on housing markets
- Accommodating growth pressures in a sustainable way
- Responding to the decline in rural services
- Resisting development pressures on the countryside

Spatial Strategy

- Concentrating development and investment in North Kent and East Kent including Ashford and Shepway.

- Concentrating development at the principal urban areas, particularly the major urban areas of Kent Thameside, Medway, Thanet, Ashford and Maidstone/Medway Gap.
- Concentrating necessary rural development at rural service centres.
- Adopting a sequential approach to the location of development by first using previously used land and buildings.
- Conserving and protecting the countryside
- Maintaining the Metropolitan Green Belt.
- Maintaining and defining Strategic Gaps to maintain the separation of major settlements.



Kent and Medway: External Relationships

2.2 Whilst coastline and the sea forms the greater part of Kent's boundary, the future of Kent and Medway will be significantly influenced by their relationship with surrounding areas particularly London, neighbouring counties and the European mainland.

London

2.3 The prosperity of Kent and Medway is closely linked with that of London. A significant proportion of the capital's working population commutes from Kent into central and outer London. Almost 100,000 (12% of the Kent and Medway workforce) commute to London with the proportion as high as 38% (15,900) in Dartford and 34% (18,900) in Sevenoaks.

2.4 It is important for the social and economic vitality of Kent's communities that the number of commuters leaving the county each day to work elsewhere should not become too large. Increased levels of commuting would also place further pressure on Kent's transport system, particularly the rail service, which is already stretched. The proximity of London creates particular pressures of housing demand and cost in West and North Kent. It is difficult to provide an adequate range of housing, particularly affordable housing and accommodation for key public and private sector workers. A sufficient range and quality of job opportunities provided locally can lessen the need for people to commute to work and help to counter any trend towards dormitory settlements. Balancing the provision of jobs and housing in London is essential in managing pressures in Kent.

2.5 Kent has reasonable but slow access to London by rail. Long rail journey times from East Kent to London are a particular issue. Road links are poor and congested. Access from the west of London to the centre is very much better than from the east and this disadvantage needs to be tackled. London can have the effect of 'blocking' Kent from the rest of the country, particularly the Midlands, the North and Eastern England, thus heightening the effect of the county's peninsular location. It is important to improve transport links with the rest of the UK to allow the county's businesses and European traffic to more easily reach wider markets.

2.6 Kent receives both direct and indirect economic benefits from its proximity to London. Some businesses relocate to Kent or expand into the county from London and continue to require access to the capital. Kent also provides services for residents of London (such as retailing at Bluewater and other centres). Kent's attractions and service providers also benefit from the custom of visitors and tourists travelling through Kent en route to the capital.

2.7 Kent's relationship with London is important in delivering key national and regional policies, such as the Thames Gateway initiative. Environmental issues such as air pollution, estuary management, habitat and open space networks need an integrated approach from the strategic authorities involved including the Greater London Authority. Kent has, in the past, dealt with a proportion of London's domestic waste for disposal to landfill but a move towards greater self-sufficiency in waste management means both areas will need to manage and dispose of the majority of their waste locally.

Neighbouring Areas

2.8 Kent's relationship with neighbouring counties is less strong than with London, although cross boundary traffic movement and commuting have increased in recent years. With the exception of Tunbridge Wells/East Sussex and Dartford/South Essex cross-border job markets are weak. Retailing within parts of Kent, particularly Bluewater (in Dartford) and to a lesser extent Tunbridge Wells,

does exert wider influence on neighbouring counties.

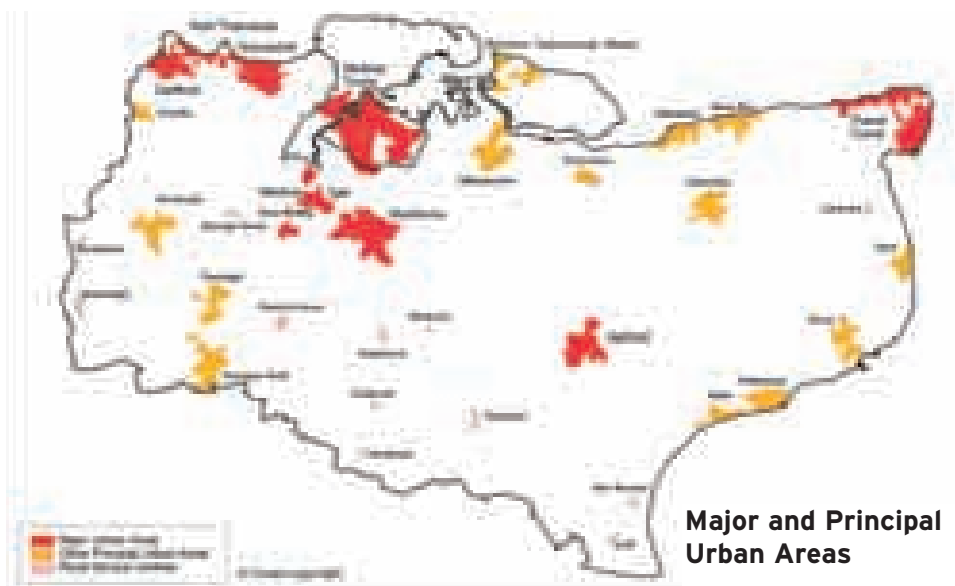
2.9 Common issues shared with neighbouring authorities include housing demands and pressure on transport infrastructure as a consequence of commuting to London. There are also common transport issues such as management of orbital transport movement around London including prospective additional crossings of the Thames east of London and movement along the South Coast.

Europe

2.10 Kent is at the heart of the most economically successful and densely populated part of Europe which gives businesses ready access to large markets. The European Union has encouraged Kent and the Nord-Pas de Calais region to share issues of common concern through successive rounds of the Interreg programme, but there is scope to increase co-operation between Kent and the rest of Europe.

2.11 Kent is the UK's main gateway to Europe. Since the opening of the Channel Tunnel in the 1990s, the volume of international freight transport passing through the county has risen greatly and further growth is expected. Most of this freight travels on Kent and Medway's two east-west motorways which results in significant environmental pollution, particularly noise and poor air quality, as well as considerable congestion. The gateway role does, though, provide significant benefits for tourism and commerce. Promoting alternative routes outside

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Kent, together with a shift to less environmentally damaging methods of transport within the county such as rail would help to relieve the pressure on the county's trunk roads and communities.

Concentration of development at the urban areas

2.12 Urban areas are home to 70% of Kent's population. The county has four relatively large urban areas - Medway, Dartford with Gravesend/Northfleet (Kent Thameside), Maidstone, (together with the urban areas within the Medway Gap) and Thanet. In addition Ashford is identified in Regional Planning Guidance as a focus for accelerated growth. These urban areas offer the best prospects for successful public transport and greater self-sufficiency for jobs and services, reducing the need for longer journeys. They will provide the majority of development opportunities in Kent and Medway within the 20-year time scale of this Plan. Furthermore the Government expects the growth areas (Thames Gateway and Ashford within Kent) to be drivers of change and increased prosperity for the whole region.

2.13 Twelve other principal urban areas have similar but less pronounced advantages. In order to take advantage of the facilities in these towns and to reduce pressure for development in the countryside, new development should also be focused on these urban areas, although generally on a smaller scale. There are numerous small to medium sized towns in

Kent. They provide services for the rural community as well as for their own residents but many are too small to support a full range of specialised services.

2.14 There are exceptional opportunities in Thames Gateway, Thanet and other East Kent coastal towns to tackle deprivation and improve the economic, social and environmental well-being of residents. If these opportunities are to be fully effective it is vital that major developments benefit existing communities as well as new ones.

2.15 The spatial strategy seeks to concentrate development in the 5 major or 12 other principal urban areas listed in Table SS1 and identified on the Key Diagram. The re-use of previously developed land will be a priority, particularly within the central parts of our towns and through many of the strategic locations for development identified by this Plan. Developments should aim to encourage a mix of uses with new housing provided at a higher density than has been the case in recent years and supported by public transport facilities. New releases of greenfield land will be kept to a minimum and be at a reduced level in comparison with recent years although there will be a continuing need for some additional greenfield land e.g. to support the growth of Ashford. Overall the strategy will serve to resist pressure on the urban fringe and avoid suburbanisation of the countryside.

Table SS1: Major and Principal Urban Areas in Kent

SUB AREA	MAJOR URBAN AREAS
North Kent	Kent Thameside <i>[Dartford/Stone/Greenhithe/Swanscombe]</i> <i>[Gravesend /Northfleet]</i> Medway Towns
East Kent Triangle	Thanet Towns <i>[Margate, Ramsgate, Broadstairs]</i>
Channel Corridor/West Kent	Ashford Maidstone/Medway Gap* and Kings Hill
OTHER PRINCIPAL URBAN AREAS	
North Kent	Sittingbourne Sheerness/Queenborough/Halfway/Minster Faversham
East Kent Triangle	Canterbury Herne Bay and Whitstable Dover Deal
Channel Corridor	Folkestone/Hythe
West Kent	Sevenoaks Swanley Tonbridge Tunbridge Wells

* including Aylesford, Ditton, Larkfield, New Hythe, Snodland and Leybourne

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2.16 Other than at the principal urban areas and the strategic development locations identified by this Plan (Area Based Policies, Chapter 3), any significant development will be concentrated at the rural service centres (identified on the Key Diagram and in Table SS2). These centres have been identified on the basis of not only their size but also the range of day to day services and facilities that they support. Proposals to support the local rural economy or address local housing needs at other, smaller rural settlements, capable of supporting a sustainable pattern of development, will be identified through Local Development Documents.

Table SS2: Rural Service Centres

Borough Green	New Romney
Cranbrook	Paddock Wood
Edenbridge	Sandwich
Hawkhurst	Staplehurst
Headcorn	Tenterden
Hoo St Werburgh	Westerham
Lydd	West Malling

Policy SS1: Spatial Priorities for Development and Investment in Kent

Strategic policy in Kent will be focused upon the promotion of development and investment in North Kent, Ashford and East Kent (including Shepway) and on a general re-balancing of housing pressure from the west towards these areas.

Policy SS2: Role of Major Urban Areas, Other Principal Urban Areas and Rural Service Centres.

Further to Policy SS1, the development proposed in this Plan will be concentrated at the major urban areas, as shown on the Key Diagram:

- in North Kent at Kent Thameside (within Dartford and Gravesham Boroughs) and the Medway Towns;
- in the East Kent Triangle at the Thanet Towns;
- at Ashford as a regional growth point;
- at Maidstone and the urban areas of the Medway Gap.

Elsewhere provision for development will be concentrated at the principal urban areas, as shown on the Key Diagram.

Development at rural settlements, justified through Policy SS3, should be concentrated at the rural service centres identified on the Key Diagram. Proposals for development at other rural settlements, identified in Local Development Documents, should demonstrate

that such development would be sustainable.

The primary emphasis will be upon the redevelopment of previously developed land including large-scale opportunities within the Thames Gateway and the Medway Gap.

The strategic development requirements of this Plan should be met in a manner that provides for balanced and timely residential, employment, leisure and community development and infrastructure provision while at the same time conserving and enhancing the quality of Kent's environment.

A Sequential Approach and prioritising use of previously developed land

2.17 This Plan endorses the aim of using previously developed land and buildings, before developing green field sites as a key ingredient in bringing new life to urban areas, particularly in town centres and inner urban areas. Regional Planning Guidance suggests that at least 60% of all new development outside London should be provided on previously developed land or by converting or reusing existing buildings. The scale and character of Kent's urban areas and the prospects for the use of previously developed or damaged land have played an important part in arriving at the strategic distribution of development requirements within Kent. Policy targets for the use of previously developed land for housing are included elsewhere (Policy HP3). The release of new greenfield land will be kept to a

minimum and will be phased, so that it does not undermine the successful development of previously developed land in each area.

Policy SS3: Priority for previously developed land and a sequential approach to the location of development

- (a) Development requirements, not met by sites with existing planning permission, should be provided through the consideration of, firstly, previously developed land or buildings and then greenfield land.**
- (b) In each case assessment of development locations should reflect the sequential consideration of the county's major/principal urban areas, rural service centres and smaller rural settlements that can provide a sustainable form of development.**

Town Centres and Inner Urban Areas

2.18 Town centres should be lively and prosperous. The central parts of our urban areas need upgrading to make them better places in which to live, work and enjoy leisure time. Town centres and inner urban areas, which have a choice of transport and good access to services and jobs, are ideal locations for mixed-use development at relatively high densities.

2.19 Within these areas retail, leisure, and housing uses may compete for available sites. Retail and leisure development should have priority in the core of town centres, which should be defined in Local Development Documents. They require convenient access from a wide area, benefit from being close to one another and add to the attractiveness of centres.

2.20 Local Development Documents should also establish a pattern of mixed use which protects and improves residential amenity and public safety. Existing non-conforming industrial or service uses can make it more difficult to use land effectively or to plan for mixed use development in inner urban areas particularly if they do not sit happily alongside residential development. Provision should be made for such non-conforming uses to be relocated elsewhere.

Policy SS4: Mixed use in town centres and inner urban areas

Development which assists Kent's town centres to be prosperous, safe, vibrant and with high standards of design and maintenance will be supported.

Within the core of town centres first priority should attach to retail, service and leisure uses. Office, community, cultural and residential uses should also be provided, where practicable, as part of mixed use developments.

Elsewhere within town centres and edge of town centre locations a diversity of land uses will be

encouraged including residential development providing for a mix of dwelling type and size.

Alternative locations should be identified for the relocation of non-conforming uses which cause serious environmental disruption for residential use.

Suburban Communities

2.21 The legacy of past under investment in some of our communities, often in suburban areas, can be seen in degraded environments and an absence of facilities. Piecemeal development can add to their disjointed appearance. Developers, local authorities and public service providers should seek to improve the way that such areas function and to enhance their environment and traffic management.

Policy SS5: Enhancing existing communities

Measures will be taken to improve the physical environment, functioning and appearance of the suburbs of the major/principal urban areas including landscaping, traffic management and the provision of services and facilities that serve local needs.

Rural Communities

2.22 Rural communities need concerted action to bring about their revitalisation. Planning policies can help to create more balanced and self-contained rural communities and reduce the need for travel but they need to reflect the diversity within Kent's rural areas.

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Accessibility to the jobs and services in the county's network of urban areas are important influences. Within rural communities key issues are access to housing, retail and community services and public transport.

"Kent Countryside 2000" found that:

- Jobs in traditional rural industries continue to decline and rural services have to compete - often unsuccessfully - with larger towns.
- People living in rural areas travel to urban areas and London for work.
- House prices have risen beyond the means of many local people and there is very limited social housing.
- Some sections of the rural community suffer deprivation and the problems of isolation are made worse where public transport is poor.

2.23 Rural service centres have an important role to play because they provide community facilities as well as jobs and hence reduce the need to travel to urban areas. They are, or could be, a focus for public transport. Fourteen significant rural service centres have been identified (see Table SS2 and Key Diagram). Other settlements may also be capable of fulfilling this role especially those which have good public transport. These should be identified in partnership with District Councils through preparation of Local Development Documents. Through application of the sequential approach provided for under Policies SS3 and HP4, small scale housing, retail, employment and community facilities development may be appropriate

in these settlements if it would provide greater local choice and can support local services.

2.24 Other larger rural settlements have grown as commuter or industrial areas but without strong local services. The priority in these settlements should be to improve local services to support a more sustainable pattern of living. Their specific requirements should be established through an assessment against rural service needs and be identified in Local Development Documents.

2.25 At a small number of rural settlements, a greater scale of housing and employment may, in exceptional circumstances, be justified in order to improve local services and infrastructure, to bring about improvements to the environment or to help revitalise communities that have lost their original economic role. These include Aylesham and Hawkinge, identified as Strategic Development Locations in this Plan.

Policy SS6: Development at rural service centres and other rural settlements

Other than at Strategic Development Locations identified by this Plan, development at, but outside the built confines of rural settlements, should be small scale and identified in a Local Development Document or be supported by a special local justification. This may include the provision of affordable housing, community facilities or the expansion of an established business.

a) Rural Service Centres, as identified on the Key Diagram, will be the focus for community services, improved public transport and small scale housing and employment serving their areas;

b) Smaller rural settlements capable of functioning as Rural Service Centres may be identified in Local Development Documents as suitable for small scale development if they meet the following criteria:

- good road and public transport access and connectivity; and
- an existing core of employment and community services

c) For large rural settlements which lack local services, a rural services standards assessment should be undertaken. The need for and provision for service improvements should be identified in community strategies and Local Development Documents.

2.26 Beyond the rural service centres many smaller rural settlements offer a limited range of facilities and services. The emphasis here will continue to be on restraint beyond the limits of existing built development. Small scale development may, in exceptional cases, be justified if it provides affordable housing to meet an identified need within an individual community, and/or improves community infrastructure, allows a farm business to diversify or supports an appropriate expansion of an established rural enterprise (see Chapters on Fostering Prosperity and Housing Provision). Within the Green Belt provision for such uses will be governed by Policy SS9.

Policy SS7: Development in the countryside

Housing development in the countryside will be subject to Policy HP6.

Non residential development in rural Kent other than at rural settlements should:

- (i) be demonstrated to be necessary to agriculture, forestry, the winning of minerals or other land uses for which a rural location is essential; or
- (ii) be the re-use, adaptation or redevelopment of an existing rural building or institution, where the change is acceptable on environmental, traffic and other planning grounds; or
- (iii) provide a public facility for which a rural location is justified; or
- (iv) allow for the business diversification of an existing farm in accordance with Policy FP7.

MANAGING AND RESTRAINING GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT Metropolitan Green Belt

2.27 The Metropolitan Green Belt in Kent has a major role to play in:

- Preserving open country between the edge of Greater London and the urban areas of Medway, the Medway Gap and Tunbridge Wells;



- Near London, curbing the growth of Dartford and Swanley and the settlements in the Darent Valley and preserving their separate identities.
- Maintaining the separation between Gravesend and the Medway Towns;
- Restricting the expansion of settlements south of the A2 to prevent further suburbanisation and preserve their identity;
- Restraining expansion between and around Tunbridge Wells, Southborough and Tonbridge;
- Containing the western edge of the Medway Gap urban area and limiting development in the transport corridor towards London;
- Preventing Sevenoaks and settlements in the Weald from expanding outwards.

2.28 No significant changes to the Green Belt are proposed in this Plan. The extent of the approved Green Belt lies some 12 to 15 miles from the built up edge of Greater London, as shown on the Key Diagram and defined in Policy SS8. Detailed boundaries are defined in local plans/local development documents. The Dartford Borough Local Plan Review applies Policy MGB2 of the 1996 Kent Structure Plan and includes changes to the boundary of the Green Belt to exclude Eastern Quarry, and consequentially, St Clement's Valley.

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Policy SS8: Extent of the Metropolitan Green Belt in Kent

The Metropolitan Green Belt will extend about 15 miles from the edge of the built up area of Greater London, i.e. to the east of Gravesend, to the west of Rochester and West Malling, and to the east of Watlingbury and Nettlestead. It will also extend to the west of Paddock Wood and east of Tunbridge Wells. The detailed boundaries are established through local plans/development documents.

The boundary of the Green Belt at Dartford on the north side of the A2 is amended to exclude Eastern Quarry from the Green Belt. New boundaries are being defined through the Dartford Local Plan.

2.29 Appropriate uses within the Green Belt are well established through national policy guidance and case law. Mineral extraction need not be incompatible with the Green Belt provided that high environmental standards are maintained and sites are well restored. The location of waste management facilities within the Green Belt may also be appropriate where consistent with the 'proximity principle' for locating waste management capacity close to its source and where facilities could contribute to increased recycling/recovery of waste (for example small scale composting). Disposal of waste on land, where this represents the Best Practicable Environmental Option (see Chapter 10) need not be inappropriate development if it

maintains openness and does not conflict with the purposes of including land within the Green Belt.

2.30 There is a positive role for the Green Belt to play in providing for increased access to the countryside and for outdoor leisure and recreation. Uses should also help to protect landscape and wildlife interest, keep land in agricultural and forestry use and improve derelict or damaged land near towns.

Policy SS9: Uses Appropriate within the Green Belt

Within the Metropolitan Green Belt there is a general presumption against inappropriate development. The construction of new buildings is inappropriate unless for:

- **Agriculture or forestry;**
- **Essential facilities for sport and recreation outdoors, cemeteries, and other uses of land which preserve its openness and do not conflict with its established purposes;**
- **The limited extension, alteration or replacement of existing dwellings;**
- **Limited infilling (including affordable housing for local community needs) within existing villages identified in Local Plans/Local Development Documents as suitable for such development;**
- **Limited infilling or redevelopment of major existing developed sites identified in Local**

Plans/Local Development Documents as suitable for such development;

- **Small scale composting facilities meeting a local need where these can be accommodated without severe impact on the purposes of the Green Belt.**

The re-use of buildings is appropriate only where the openness of the Green Belt is maintained and other planning considerations are not prejudiced.

Proposals for mineral extraction must incorporate high quality environmental standards including restoration.

Any development permitted within the Green Belt should be designed and sited to maintain the open character of the area and should not conflict with the purposes of including land in the Green Belt.

Strategic Gaps

2.31 It is important to keep the urban areas of Maidstone, the Medway Gap and the Medway Towns separate by designating a 'strategic gap'. The specific purposes of the gap are to separate:

- a) the Medway Towns urban area from north Maidstone;
- b) the Medway Gap urban area from the Medway Towns;
- c) the Medway Gap urban area (at Aylesford and Ditton) from the north western edge of Maidstone.

Its role is also to:

- prevent existing settlements joining together. On the West Bank of the Medway this includes

separating Snodland from Larkfield and New Hythe to the south, and from Halling to the north;

- prevent new development areas merging with existing settlements and to ensure that development on the East Bank of the Medway keeps within areas already allocated in local plans.

2.32 This Plan also designates a 'strategic gap' to maintain the separation between the urban areas of the Medway Towns and Sittingbourne north of the M2. Its role will be:

- to restrict expansion to the east of Gillingham and Rainham;
- to restrict the westward expansion of the Sittingbourne urban area;
- to curtail development in the A2 transport corridor between Sittingbourne and Rainham;
- to separate Sittingbourne and settlements in the A249 transport corridor. This will include separating Iwade from the Sittingbourne urban area and from Ridham/Kemsley. The detailed boundaries of this strategic gap will be defined through the Local Development Documents for Medway and Swale.

Policy SS10: Strategic Gaps

Strategic gaps are designated to maintain the separation of:

- the Maidstone and Medway Gap urban areas from the Medway Towns and from each other;
- settlements on the east and west sides of the River Medway;
- the Medway Towns and Sittingbourne urban areas.

Within these gaps any development proposals which would significantly extend settlements beyond their existing limits or the areas identified for development in this Plan or current local plan allocations, will not be permitted. Detailed boundaries of the strategic gaps will be identified or revised through Local Development Documents.