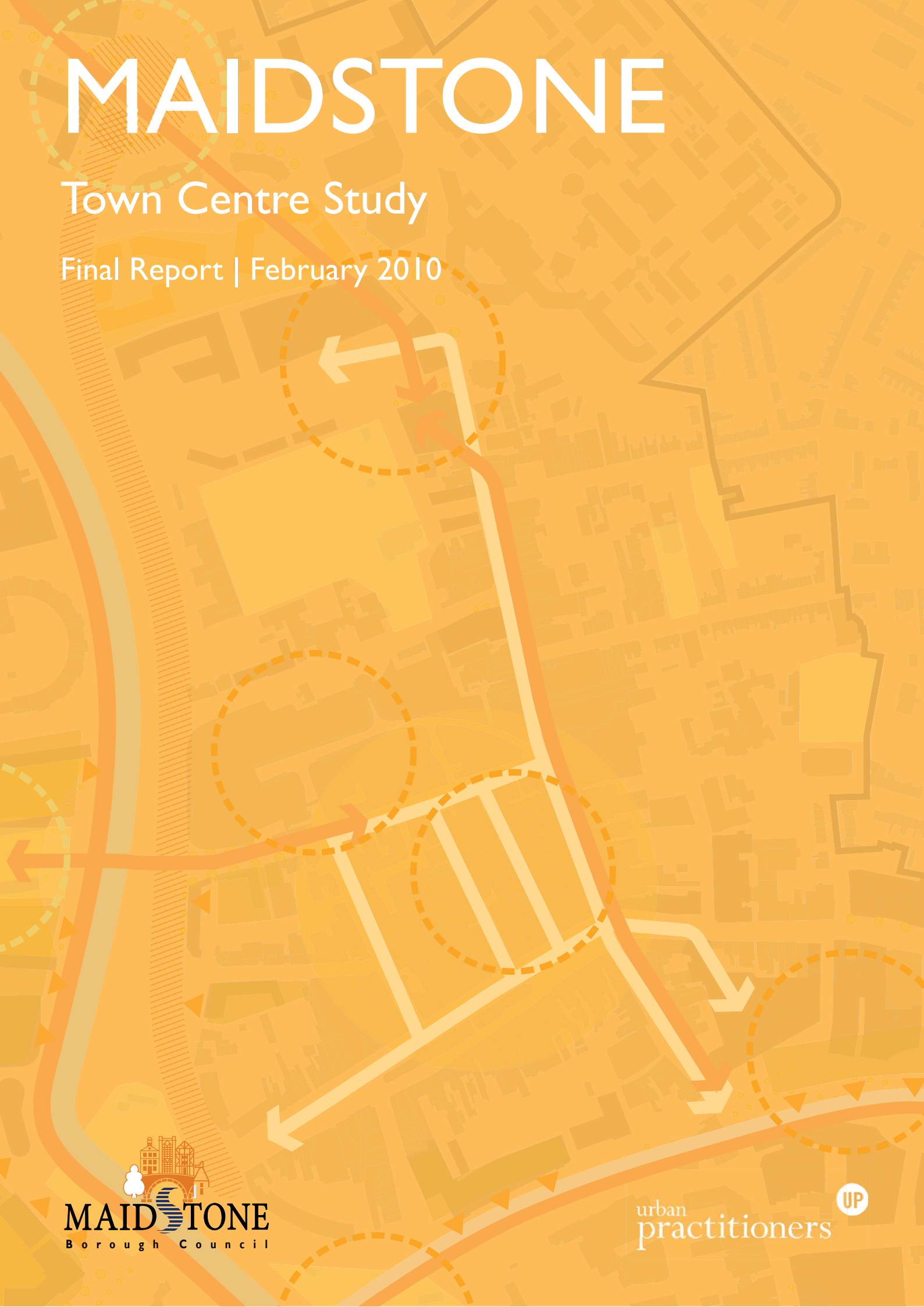
MAIDSTONE

Town Centre Study

Final Report | February 2010



MAIDSTONE
Borough Council

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1. Introduction

Background

1.1 In June 2009, Maidstone Borough Council commissioned Urban Practitioners to undertake a Town Centre Study for Maidstone town centre. The Urban Practitioners team included Colin Buchanan, who provided transport input into the study, and Knight Frank, who provided property market research and input.

1.2 The brief for the study was to make recommendations on the following for the town centre:

- Future role (and future capacity requirements);
- Town Centre boundary;
- Vision;
- Site development opportunities;
- Movement hierarchy;
- Important townscape features and opportunities for improvement;
- Separate 'quarters' and their different roles;
- Market assessment of the 'quarters' as potential locations for different land uses;
- Viability appraisals of a sample of opportunity sites; and
- Total development capacity for each land use within the Town Centre.

Purpose

1.3 The purpose of the Town Centre Study is to provide a robust evidence base to support the preparation of the Core Strategy and an Area Action Plan for Maidstone town centre. The Town Centre will define an area containing the primary land uses set out in PPS4. Consideration of the town centre is being undertaken in conjunction with the Core Strategy, which extends to 2026. However, shorter term priorities and milestones have been considered as part of the Town Centre Study.

1.4 The Town Centre Study provides an opportunity to consider a wider vision for Maidstone town centre and to give a spatial articulation to the vision. The study sets out the key opportunities for Maidstone to develop as a location for employment, retail and leisure, and provides guidance on how these opportunities could be realised by the Council and its partners.

1.5 Part One of this report summarises the findings of the baseline analysis, undertaken by the project team in June and July 2009.

1.6 The baseline analysis has included:

- Site visits and the identification of initial opportunity sites;
- A review of the statutory planning and regeneration context relevant to Maidstone town centre;
- An assessment of Maidstone's sub-regional role;
- Urban design and townscape analysis;
- Transport and traffic review;
- Property market research; and
- Identification of the key issues and opportunities for the town centre.

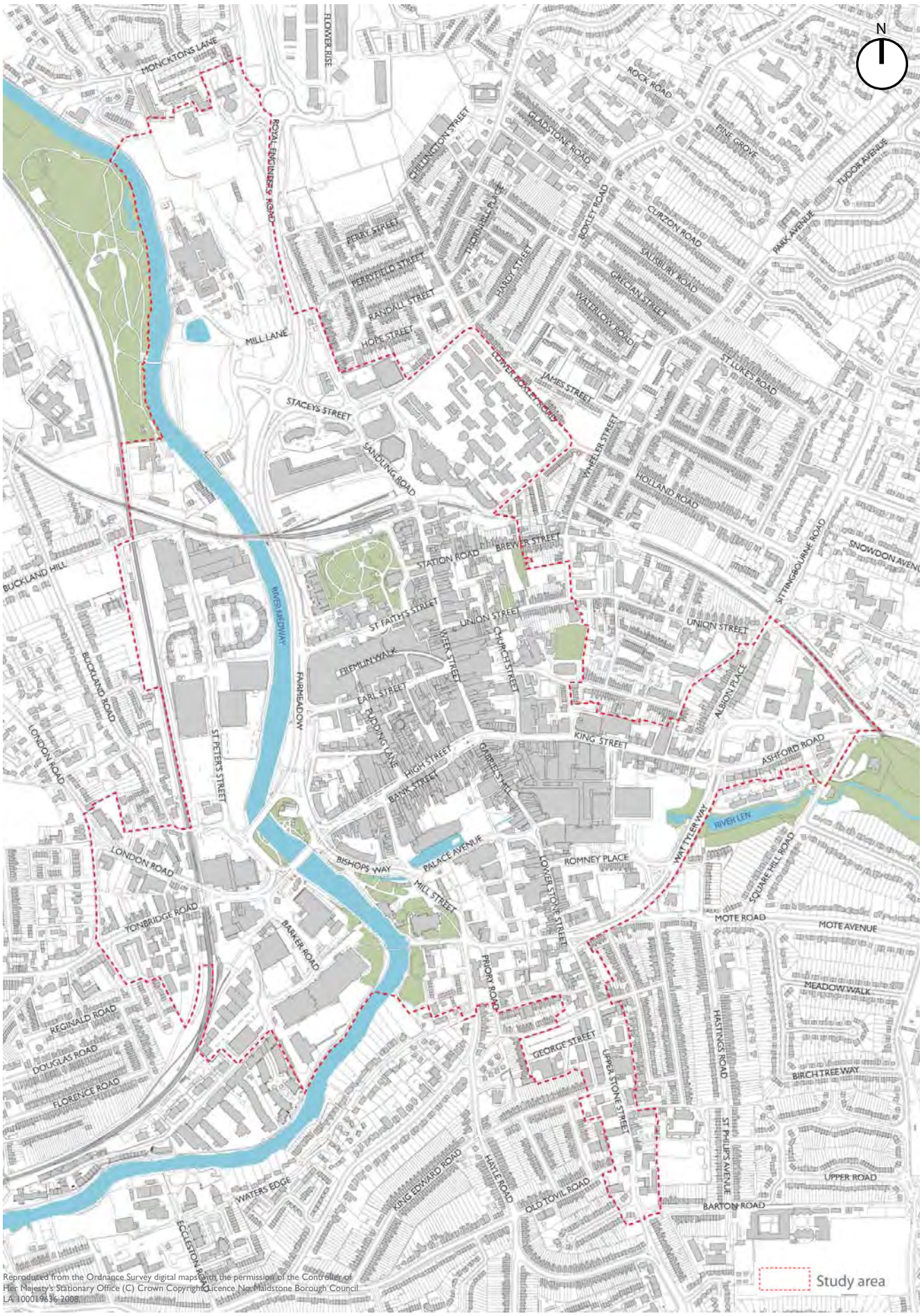


Figure 1.1 - Study area

1.7 Part Two of the report sets out the proposed strategy for the town centre. Based on the analysis and identification of opportunities, this section sets out the key changes in terms of development, green infrastructure and movement. A series of detailed planning briefs then provide guidance on how key sites should be developed to support the overarching town centre strategy.

1.8 Figure 1.1 illustrates the study area considered in both the analysis and strategy.

Maidstone strategic context

1.9 Maidstone is a strategically important town in the South East region as the County Town of Kent. The Regional Plan sets a challenge for the town to fulfil this role as the Primary Regional Centre for the County. Maidstone also has 'Growth Point' status, meaning that 11,080 additional homes will be built in the Borough by 2026.

1.10 The Study is informed by the following aspirations:

- Providing new employment of sub-regional significance with an emphasis on higher quality jobs (South East Plan, 2009);
- Regenerating town centre employment sites into higher density office and mixed use developments (Core Strategy Preferred Options, 2007);
- Enhancing the retail function of the town centre by strengthening the link between key anchors in the town, including Maidstone East railway station, Fremlin Walk shopping area and the Chequers Mall (Core Strategy Preferred Options, 2007); and
- Creating major new leisure, culture, tourism and recreation facilities and improving existing provision (Core Strategy Preferred Options, 2007).

1.11 As the County Town of Kent with a long history as a retail and business centre, Maidstone can draw on a rich heritage in helping to achieve these strategic goals. Following considerable competition from out-of-town retail centres such as Bluewater and Lakeside, the recent establishment of the Fremlin Walk shopping area has helped to revive Maidstone town centre's retail offer and raise the town significantly in the regional retail hierarchy.

1.12 In addition to this, recent studies have indicated that Maidstone provides the largest employment centre within the County (with the exception of the combined Medway towns), supporting 74,900 jobs.

1.13 These both provide positive indicators for safe-guarding Maidstone's role as a Primary Regional Centre, and the evidence base documents that have been produced for the Core Strategy support this view. The Town Centre Study will build on the evidence base documents and will set out a feasible and deliverable sites allocation, land-use and townscape strategy for the town.

Stakeholder engagement

1.14 A range of stakeholders have contributed to the development and production of the Study. Stakeholder engagement has included:

- The officer steering group, including town centre management;
- Council members through a workshop conducted by officers;
- Discussion with relevant key landowners and property agents; and
- Final input from Council members following a presentation of the draft report.

Figure 1.2 - Maidstone context

The future

This report sets out a strong vision for Maidstone town centre. It looks to realise the county town's potential as a sub-regional hub. Revitalising the centre will involve enhancing existing assets through the provision of a complete and high quality public realm network alongside the best quality new buildings which positively support the existing streetscape.

PART 1: BASELINE ANALYSIS

2. Planning and Regeneration Context

Introduction

2.1 The following section summarises the relevant planning policy and regeneration context for Maidstone town centre.

Background

2.2 Maidstone Borough Council is currently in the process of producing its Local Development Framework (LDF) which will eventually replace the Local Plan (2000). Maidstone Borough Council undertook consultation on the Core Strategy Preferred Options in 2007.

2.3 The Core Strategy will set out in general terms, how, where and when development will take place in Maidstone Borough over the next 20 years (2006-2026). The Core Strategy will include:

- A spatial vision;
- Strategic objectives which follow the vision;
- Spatial policies which will deliver the vision and objectives; and
- A key diagram, showing broad locations for strategic development, major constraints and main patterns of movement.

2.4 The South East Plan provides an important policy driver for Maidstone. Notably, it highlights the town's future sub-regional role.

Planning for the town centre

2.5 In December 2009, the Government launched a new Planning Policy Statement 4: Planning for prosperous economies, for consultation. The new document, which aims to consolidate national planning policy on economic development into a single, streamlined policy statement, replaces the existing PPS6, Planning for Town Centres, amongst other policy statements.

2.6 Policy EC1 of PPS 4 states that a robust evidence base should be prepared and maintained in order to understand both existing business need and likely changes in the market. Relevant evidence based studies for Maidstone town centre include:

- Employment Land Study Review (September 2009) – forecast a future office floorspace requirement of between 14,968m² and 40,096m² from 2006 to 2026. Further details are included within section five below;
- Retail Need Assessment Study (December 2007) and recently updated forecasts (August 2009) consider three scenarios found a requirement for between 32,450m² and 118,500m² of comparison floorspace, and up to 4,650m² of convenience floorspace up to 2026. Further details are included within section five below; and
- Maidstone Town Centre Footfall Survey (July 2008) – found that the footfall of Maidstone Town Centre had risen 5.6% between 2006 and 2008. The report comments on the increased development that has altered a wide range of sites.

2.7 Policy EC5 requires local planning authorities to set out a spatial vision and strategy for the management and growth of centres. The extent of the town centre and primary shopping area should be defined on the Proposals Map. Where growth cannot be accommodated in existing centres, town centres

should be expanded and development opportunities identified ensuring that extensions are carefully integrated with the existing centre both in terms of design and to allow easy pedestrian access.

2.8 Policy EC6 states that local planning authorities should pro-actively plan for consumer choice and promote competitive town centre environments by supporting the diversification of uses, planning for a strong retail mix, recognising the role of smaller shops, retaining and enhancing existing markets, planning for a range of tourism, leisure and cultural activities and taking measures to conserve and enhance the established character and diversity of town centres.

2.9 In selecting sites for development for town centre uses, policy EC7 states that local planning authorities should base their approach on the identified need for development, identify the appropriate scale of development, apply the sequential test to site selection, assess the impact of development on existing centres and ensure that locations are accessible and well served by a choice of means of transport. In applying the sequential approach to site selection, sites should be identified in the following order:

1. Locations in appropriate existing centres;
2. Edge-of-centre locations; and then
3. Out-of-centre sites.

2.11 The Maidstone Town Centre Plan (2008) is a non-statutory policy document produced by Maidstone Town Centre Management and supported by the Borough Council, covering a five year period up to 2013. The Plan puts forward nine key features and aspirations for the town centre, including: linked squares and public spaces; maximising pedestrianisation; celebrating the town's history; marketing Maidstone town centre as a first class traditional town centre, with character and variety; and making Maidstone the music capital of Kent.

Sub-regional role

2.12 Maidstone is the county town of Kent, and a major transportation hub. There is a need for Maidstone to continue to maintain and develop its role in the future, particularly in response to the challenges posed by other competitors within the region. The role of Maidstone as the premier shopping centre in Kent is challenged by several other towns, including Tunbridge Wells, Chatham, Canterbury and other large scale regional shopping facilities, including Bluewater.

2.13 Regional and local planning guidance aims to encourage the regeneration and improvement of Maidstone, and the provision of new high quality jobs to help enhance its role as the county town.

2.14 According to the Maidstone Borough Economic Development Strategy (Shared Intelligence, 2008) the Maidstone economy does not currently 'punch its weight'. There is a need to develop sector specialisms, create a more innovative and entrepreneurial economy, and attract and retain investment.

2.15 The Council aims to develop the retail and leisure sectors, building on the success of Fremlin Walk, by attracting more independent, high quality retailers and cultural attractions. In a sequential fashion, where appropriate space is not available within the town centre, the Council will support complementary office, industrial and warehousing activity on edge of town sites with good strategic access.

2.16 Last year, the Council successfully applied for 'Growth Point' status, and it is hoped that the additional population will itself provide a boost to the economy. The challenge is to ensure that this growth is sustainable. Within the town centre, the Council will aim to rejuvenate the office market, working with partners to tackle the oversupply of outdated office stock which is unfit for modern business, and to bring forward new high quality developments.

2.17 The South East Plan (Government Office for the South East, 2009) is the Regional Spatial Strategy for the South East of England, and sets out the long term spatial planning framework for the region from 2006-2026. For Maidstone, the Plan includes provision for 11,080 net additional dwellings between 2006 and 2026.

2.18 Maidstone is defined as a regional hub which has the potential to accommodate significantly higher levels of development than other urban settlements located outside the sub-regional strategy areas. As a regional hub, Maidstone needs to provide: a focus for investment in multi-modal transport infrastructure; new investment in economic activity and regeneration; new market and affordable housing; and new major retail and employment development.

2.19 Policy TC1 defines a strategic network of town centres across the South East. Maidstone is classified as a Primary Regional Centre.

2.20 The South East Plan seeks new provision for employment of sub-regional significance, with an emphasis on higher quality jobs to enhance Maidstone's role as the county town and a centre for business. The Plan promotes retail, leisure and service uses within the town centre, and encourages the regeneration of town centre employment sites into higher density office and mixed use developments.

New residential development adjacent to the River Medway

Other key documentation

High Street Ward Regeneration Study

2.21 A Regeneration Study was produced by Urban Initiatives on behalf of Maidstone Borough Council in February 2007. It sets out a strategy for the regeneration of the High Street Ward of Maidstone, on the edge of the town centre area.

2.22 The report sets out a vision for High Street of:

> "A place that proudly recognises and cherishes its remarkable historic assets and seeks to use these as key drivers for Maidstone's renaissance. In so doing, High Street Ward will become a home to a stable and mixed income community, be the location of choice for business and attract visitors both nationally and internationally to enjoy Maidstone's unique offer."

2.23 The report identifies a series of topics with objectives, proposals and next steps:

- Transport and movement - sets out a street strategy, including proposals for the All Saints link road alignments and widening for Upper Stone Street;
- Housing and social infrastructure - considers regeneration as a mixed income new community and the potential for new residential development;
- Open space, greening and tourism - includes proposals for the new Archbishop's Palace quarter;
- Employment and development - sets out proposals for a new Commercial Quarter, adjacent to Wat Tyler Way and Gabriel's Hill;
- Retail - considers addressing the problems of the southern end of Gabriel's Hill and Lower Stone Street; and
- Tourism - taking forward tourism within Maidstone as a far more high profile initiative.

Air quality

2.24 The Maidstone Town Centre Air Quality Action Plan (Maidstone Borough Council, 2007) was produced following the declaration of the town centre as an Air Quality Management Area (AQMA) in January 2005. The Action Plan proposes a range of direct measures to improve air quality, including: traffic rerouting; new road infrastructure; junction improvements at Maidstone Bridge Gyratory; High Street pedestrianisation; emissions standards for public service vehicles; public transport (bus corridor) improvements; enhancement of park and ride schemes; and a sustainable parking strategy.

Summary

2.25 In light of PPS4 a robust evidence base should be prepared and maintained to understand both existing business need and likely changes in the market. Where growth cannot be accommodated in existing centres, town centres should be expanded and development opportunities identified. In selecting sites for development for town centre uses, the sequential test to site selection should be applied.

2.26 To enhance its role as the county town, Maidstone needs to develop sector specialisms, create a more innovative and entrepreneurial economy, attract and retain investment, and attract more independent, high quality retailers and cultural attractions (Shared Intelligence, 2008).

2.27 According to the South East Plan (2009) as a regional hub and a Primary Regional Centre, Maidstone needs to provide a focus for investment, new market and affordable housing and new major retail and employment development. Retail, leisure and service uses within the town centre should be promoted and the regeneration of town centre employment sites into higher density office and mixed use developments encouraged.

3. Urban Design Analysis

Introduction

3.1 The high quality historic built fabric and medieval urban grain, along with the River Medway, give Maidstone much of its distinct identity and set it apart from many places within the region. This section sets out the urban design appraisal of Maidstone town centre undertaken as part of the baseline analysis. The key issues addressed within the section are:

Pattern of growth:

- Historical analysis; and
- Conservation Areas and listed buildings.

Townscape analysis:

- Legibility (including building heights);
- Land use;
- Built form;
- Topography;
- Frontages;
- Open space and public realm; and
- River Medway and its floodplain.

3.2 Plans analysing each of these issues are set out, with accompanying commentary.

3.3 This analysis provides a context for the identification of town centre 'quarters', and discussion of further key issues in section six of this report.

Pattern of growth

Historical analysis

3.4 The historical analysis has been referenced from the following sources, in addition to the collection of anecdotal evidence:

- All Saints Conservation Area Study (Maidstone Borough Council, undated)
- All Saints Conservation Area Appraisal (Maidstone Borough Council, 2003)
- Historical Maidstone maps (Ordinance Survey)
- Maidstone Centre Conservation Area Appraisal (Maidstone Borough Council, 2009)
- Maidstone Holy Trinity Conservation Area Character Appraisal (Maidstone Borough Council, 2007)

Beginnings

3.5 The Roman Road from Rochester to Hastings passed through Maidstone. This is marked by the line of Week Street, Gabriel's Hill and Stone Street in the town centre, and determined the form of development which has resulted in a predominantly linear town centre street pattern.

3.6 There is no firm evidence of a settlement existing in Roman times, despite the fact that the Maidstone area is rich in remains from the Roman period. The earliest evidence is for a Saxon settlement dating back to circa 975 AD. There is also an entry in the Domesday Book, 1086, for 'Meddestane'. The first recorded use of the current spelling is in 1610.

3.7 By 1200, Maidstone was a recognisable town, with its focus on the higher land on the north side of the River Len. It is possible that the High Street and market place were developed around this time, together with the grid plan layout to the north (its northern edge probably marked by the second medieval church of St. Faith).

3.8 By the early 14th Century it is thought that the population of Maidstone had reached about 2000. Occupations recorded for the population around this time include tailors, shoemakers, skinners/tanners, barbers and masons. The range of tradesmen suggests a thriving town catering for many of the needs of its inhabitants and of the surrounding rural hinterland. It is probable that the first bridge over the Medway from the bottom of the High Street was built sometime during the 14th Century, replacing the old crossing near All Saints' Church.

3.9 By 1446 it is known that Middle Row had been developed, infilling the central market space of the High Street. Gabriel's Hill and Wren's Cross are also first recorded by their modern names during the 15th Century. Maidstone's charter was first confirmed in 1549.

3.10 The importance of Maidstone as a trading centre increased significantly during the 17th Century. Key industries included thread making, paper making and brewing, all of which made use of the river.

Figure 3.1 - Maidstone 1819 (with railways inserted in 1892) (Source: Ordnance Survey)

3.11 Roads radiating from the town connect Maidstone with Sevenoaks and Ashford (the A20), Hastings and the Medway towns (A229), Tonbridge (A26) and Tenterden (A274).

Development

3.12 Maidstone experienced significant rebuilding and new building during the 18th Century, and as a result the importance of retailing to the town increased considerably.

3.13 The town has had a right to a gaol since 1614, and the present prison was completed in 1819 and is located in the north of the town centre (see Figure 3.2).

3.14 By the late eighteenth century the dominance of the river for travel was beginning to be challenged. By the 19th century, Maidstone was served by frequent coach services to London and the Medway towns. The medieval bridge at the foot of the High Street was widened in 1808 to ease traffic congestion at the sole river crossing into the town.

Figure 3.2 - Maidstone North 1866 (Source: Ordnance Survey Kent Sheet 42.03)

3.15 The construction of a railway line to serve the town centre was initially opposed, which resulted in the line being built far to the south of town. It was soon realised that whilst this prevented the loss of the historic fabric and character, the commercial attractiveness of Maidstone was being threatened by the lack of a rail connection, and that this was boosting the fortunes of rival towns such as Tonbridge and Ashford. As a result, Maidstone West Station was opened in 1844 and Maidstone East Station in 1874.

3.16 There are two principal railway stations: Maidstone East which connects with London and Ashford; and Maidstone West which is on the Medway Valley Line.

3.17 There has been a military presence in the town since 1797, when army barracks were first built. Maidstone Barracks railway station is located on the Medway Valley Line to the north of Maidstone West Station, and was opened in 1874.

River Medway

3.18 The River Medway runs through the town centre, linking Maidstone to Rochester and the Thames Gateway. The river has historically been responsible for the growth and development of Maidstone, due to its capacity to transport goods both into and out of the town. The relationship between the river and the location of development within the northern part of the town is evident in Figure 3.2 above.

3.19 Economic activity along the River Medway greatly expanded in the 17th Century. Several riverside industries were particularly important to the historical development of the town, including brewing, milling, distilling, and barge building.

Recreation on the River Medway

Figure 3.3 - Pattern of growth

Pattern of growth

3.20 Figure 3.3 shows Maidstone's broad pattern of urban development. The medieval development around Week Street, Gabriels Hill, Stone Street and the High Street has gradually grown along the main routes of the town towards the Barracks, the Prison and Maidstone East station to the north and out to the west over the River Medway around Maidstone West station. By the late nineteenth century, industrial development occurred along both sides of the river, including timber yards, gas works and the brewery. Development continued throughout the Victorian, inter-war and post war periods and a number of office and retail developments in the town centre were completed in the 1960/70/80s. Today, the western side of the River Medway is predominantly home to recent development consisting of large retail sheds and residential apartments. New developments in the town centre include Fremlin Walk and new residential apartments adjacent to Brenchley Gardens.

Chequers Mall

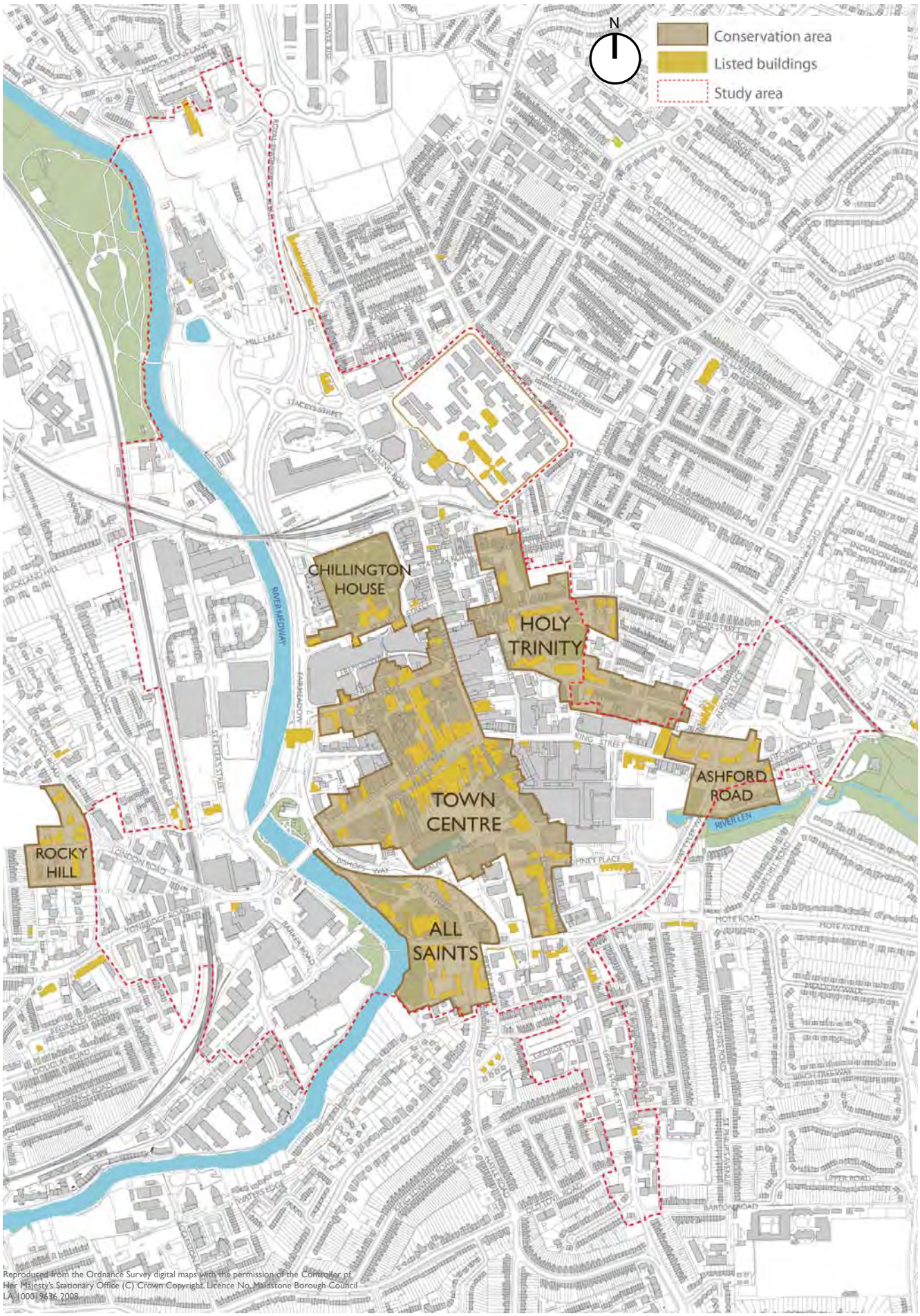


Figure 3.4 - Conservation areas and listed buildings

Conservation Areas and listed buildings

3.21 Several Conservation Areas have been designated either within or adjacent to the study area:

- All Saints Conservation Area;
- Maidstone Centre Conservation Area;
- Holy Trinity Conservation Area;
- Maidstone Ashford Road Conservation Area;
- Maidstone Rocky Hill Conservation Area; and
- Maidstone Chillington House Conservation Area.

3.22 A Conservation Area Appraisal has been produced for All Saints Conservation Area (2003), located within the southern section of the study area. The appraisal acknowledges that the remarkable survival of buildings and remains in the conservation area represents a considerable asset and is central to the tourist and educational aims of the town, giving Maidstone a sense of place and identity. The appraisal identifies important views of the Palace and the All Saints Church from Maidstone Bridge, the River Medway and the new footbridge. The importance of the trees in terms of townscape and character is also highlighted.

3.23 A Conservation Area Appraisal has been produced for Maidstone Centre Conservation Area (2009), located within the centre of the study area. The appraisal identifies the fine example of a medieval planned new town development which retains its original gridded street plan and a high concentration of historic buildings, both listed and unlisted, which give it a strong historic character despite modern redevelopments. The appraisal recognises that many of the original medieval burgage plots survive which results in a characteristic small-scale grain to development and a variety of street frontages and that most development is two to four storeys in height with only a few exceptions. The appraisal includes a detailed street and buildings analysis which identifies the value of individual buildings and sites. The redevelopment of those of lesser value would be appropriate in principle, where it is of suitable scale, form and quality and takes into account its context within the street and its relationship with adjacent buildings. The appraisal states that it is unlikely that development above four storeys in height will be considered acceptable in any location. The appraisal also states that new development will need to adhere to the established historic building lines and respects the grain and rhythm of the existing townscape and that good quality building materials should be used, preferably those which are currently predominant (red or yellow stock bricks, render/stucco, clay tiles, slates).

3.24 The appraisal identifies a number of areas which merit investigation regarding the enhancement of the Conservation Area. Such areas include investigating possibilities for further partial pedestrianisation, seeking general elevational improvements to buildings, seeking to maximise the use of upper floors and rear extensions/outbuildings and continuing to look at ways of reducing the impact of heavy traffic on historic streets.

3.25 A Conservation Area Appraisal has been produced for Holy Trinity Conservation Area (2007), located within the eastern section of the study area. The appraisal acknowledges the fine example of the late Georgian expansion of Maidstone between 1800 and 1850. The appraisal recognises the significant damage which has been caused by the demolition of properties to form car parks which are particularly detrimental to character in Brewer Street and Church Street. The appraisal states that where redevelopment is appropriate that buildings should be of two or three storeys and adhere to established building lines and should not be set back from the street by any great distance, they should respect the current rhythm of streets and that they should utilise good quality materials which reflect those currently predominant (red or yellow stock bricks; clay tile or slate roofs).

High Street, in Maidstone Centre Conservation Area

3.26 A Conservation Area Appraisal has been produced for Ashford Road Conservation Area (2008), located within the far eastern section of the study area. The appraisal identifies the area as an example of a late Georgian/early Victorian well-to-do suburb just outside the confines of the medieval town which exhibits a very consistent character in terms of building materials, scale, architectural style and layouts, The appraisal recognises that the major damage caused by the gyratory road system of Wat Tyler Way and Andrew Broughton Way which cut across the grain of Ashford Road via a large junction resulting in a considerable amount of highway paraphernalia and opening up views of the rear of properties. The appraisal identifies all buildings except for the flats in River Bank Close as 'essential' or 'positive' and therefore redevelopment proposals will be inappropriate. However, the appraisal states that some small scale development may be appropriate in Brooks Place to form a street frontage to improve the character of the street. The appraisal identifies the need for improvements to paving surfaces, a programme of re-instalment of original boundary railings and improvements/rationalisation of road traffic signage, street lighting and safety railings to improve the conservation area.

3.27 This study recognises the importance of the conservation area appraisals to help preserve and enhance the conservation areas and Maidstone Town Centre and supports the recommendations contained within the four appraisals above, particularly:

- improving the public realm and rationalising street clutter including road traffic signage;
- the importance of views of the Palace and All Saints Church, particularly from the River Medway and the emphasis this places on improvements around the river;
- supporting appropriate redevelopment of a suitable scale and form which reflects historic building lines and is within recommended building height ranges;
- maximising the use of upper floors and rear extensions for suitable uses; and
- reducing the impact of heavy traffic on the streets.

Figure 3.5 - Built form and urban grain

Townscape analysis

Built form and urban grain

3.28 Figure 3.5 shows the morphology, or urban grain, of Maidstone town centre. The tightest grain is focussed around the Medieval core of the town, particularly Week Street, High Street and Gabriels Hill. This grain is based around narrow burgage plots providing a good degree of enclosure and definition to the streets and a unique sense of place to this area of Maidstone.

3.29 The town centre includes retail blocks which consist of a relatively large footprint with internal routes, such as Royal Star Arcade and the Mall. The recent development of the Fremlin Walk Shopping Centre has taken on part of this character, albeit with a more traditional street pattern and without a covered roof.

3.30 The urban grain within the town centre becomes more fragmented and dispersed the further away from the Medieval core, particularly around the River Medway. More contemporary buildings including large retail sheds and the Lockmeadow Entertainment Centre fail to provide an attractive and legible urban form.

3.31 To the north and south of the Medieval core, the tight grain around Week Street and High Street disperses to provide a less well-defined and enclosed street pattern with larger plot widths compared to the narrow burgage plots, in part due to development of a number of buildings during the 1960s/1970s, with buildings set in space rather than defining streets. This is particularly evident in the office buildings surrounded by Romney Place, Lower Stone Street and Mote Road, and the area to the north of Maidstone East station.

Tight urban grain in the town centre

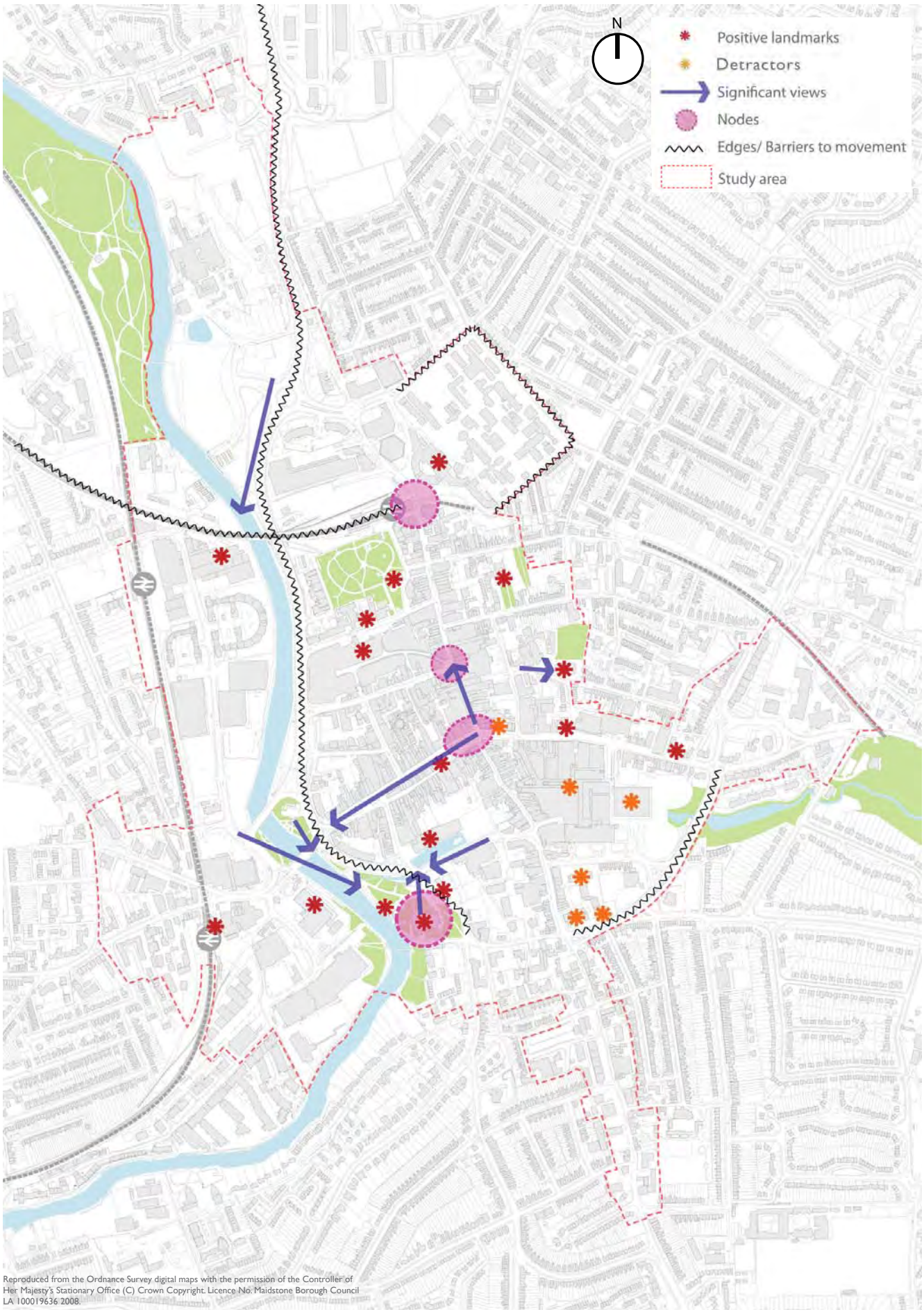


Figure 3.6 - Legibility

Legibility and building heights

3.32 Week Street and the High Street operate as the main spines for Maidstone Town Centre and their confluence marks the heart of the town. A number of important key routes connect to Week Street including Gabriels Hill and Lower Stone Street from the south, King Street and Union Street from the west and Earl Street and St. Faiths Street from the east.

3.33 Figure 3.6 summarises some of the key factors which influence the legibility of the town centre. The strong urban grain of the historic town centre core (as highlighted in Figure 3.5) provides a good basis for the centre's legibility. Beyond the historic core of the town, its legibility reduces due to the more fragmented urban form, particularly around the River Medway. The Fairmeadow (A229) road acts as a significant barrier to east-west pedestrian movement whilst the legibility and attractiveness of the routes along the River Medway is relatively poor.

3.34 A number of positive landmarks have been identified which include All Saints Church, Archbishop's Palace, Len House and Sessions House which help aid the legibility of the town. A number of detractors to the quality of the environment of the town have also been identified which include a number of 1950s/1960s/1970s office buildings visible from Week Street, Gabriels Hill and Stone Street.

3.35 A number of key areas of activity within the town have been identified, including the area around Week Street/Fremlin Walk, the area around Week Street/High Street, and the Archbishop's Palace and All Saints Church.

3.36 A series of significant long and short views have been identified. These views not only provide a unique sense of place, but also aid the pedestrian in orienting and navigating around the town. Whilst providing scenic outlooks, these view lines also create visual links between key nodes within Maidstone town centre helping to strengthen the pedestrian circuit and facilitate movement.

The Powerhub building looking south towards the town centre

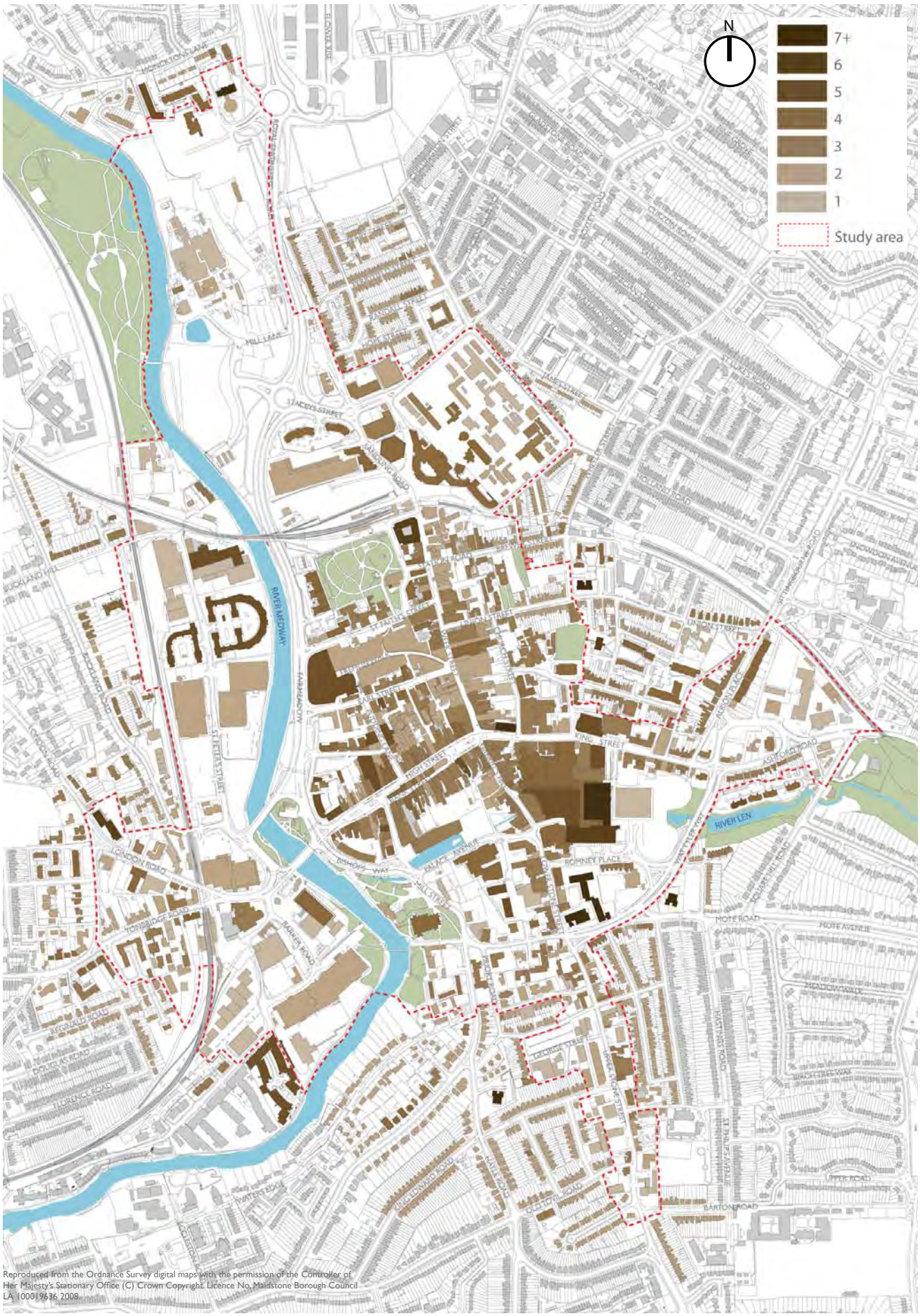


Figure 3.7 - Building heights

3.37 Building heights in Maidstone follow a typical urban pattern, with taller buildings in the centre of the town and lower buildings in the surrounding, more residential or mixed use areas. Three or four storeys is the predominant building height within the town centre, punctuated with taller buildings which tend to be situated on key routes, such as a number of tall office buildings visible when travelling along Week Street, Gabriels Hill and Stone Street. A cluster of tall office buildings is located on an island of development surrounded by Romney Place, Lower Stone Street and Mote Road. Adjacent to this, on the north side of Romney Place is the Mall which is approximately six storeys in height at its highest. The majority of the taller buildings were built in the post-war period, are of relatively poor architectural and urban design quality and detract from the historic setting and skyline.

3.38 The majority of the new retail sheds built along the western side of the River Medway are the equivalent of around two storeys, whilst newer residential buildings tend to be around six storeys high within or close to the town centre. The Fremlin Walk Shopping Centre rises from two storeys to the equivalent of around five or six storeys towards the River Medway using the natural slope of the land towards the River to provide undercroft car parking in its western end, which distorts the natural pattern of topography and building height.

3.39 The height of new development is a careful consideration in the town, particularly considering the topography of the area and the conservation areas and historic buildings. It is considered that the most appropriate locations for tall buildings (in excess of five storeys) could be around Maidstone East Station to help create a new gateway and arrival point from the station and when entering an leaving the town from the north. However, the sensitivity of views across from the riverside could constrain this. Careful consideration should be given to the impact of tall buildings on the Palace and All Saints Church and existing important views.

Taller office buildings around Lower Stone Street

Figure 3.8 - Land use and activity

Land use and areas of activity

3.40 An analysis of land uses within Maidstone town centre indicates a focused retail core, with shops on the ground floor and mixed uses above. The centre has a reasonably effective retail circuit and a number of good independent shops as well as the majority of national high street chains. Most of the retail uses are contained within the historic core of the town and in purpose built shopping centres such as the Mall and the recent Fremlin Walk. The only retail activity outside the core is along the western side of the river, which includes more bulky uses and one or two warehouses.

3.41 Civic uses are dispersed around the town; Kent County Council and Maidstone Prison are located in the northern part of the town centre, near Maidstone East Station, and Maidstone Town Hall is located in the historic core of the town on the High Street. Maidstone Borough Council is located to the east along King Street. The Police Station is located on Palace Avenue and the Crown Court fronts the River Medway on the western side of the river.

3.42 Employment activities generally surround the retail core, but are focused to its north and south. The majority of the cultural uses are based around the historic core of the town, including the Hazlitt Theatre on Earl Street, and the Archbishop's Palace, All Saints Church and Maidstone Carriage Museum to the south of the High Street. Additional cultural and tourist uses include Maidstone Museum and Art Gallery to the north on St Faiths Street within a short walk of Maidstone East station and the Museum of Kent Life which is outside of the study area to the north, beyond Whatman Park. Lockmeadow Entertainment Centre, including Maidstone Market, is located in the south west area of the town centre on the western side of the River Medway.

3.43 Available footfall data indicates that Week Street, Fremlin Walk, Gabriels Hill and the High Street stand out as the fingers of activity with predominantly retail uses at the ground floor. Daytime activity is greatest on central Week Street on a Saturday. Routes connected to Week Street and the High Street are also relatively busy active routes and include King Street, Mill Street and Earl Street. The general pattern of pedestrian footfall is shown in Figure 4.4.

3.44 During the evening, the largest concentration of activity is around Lockmeadow, High Street, Gabriels Hill and the restaurants in Earl Street.

Shopping along Fremlin Walk

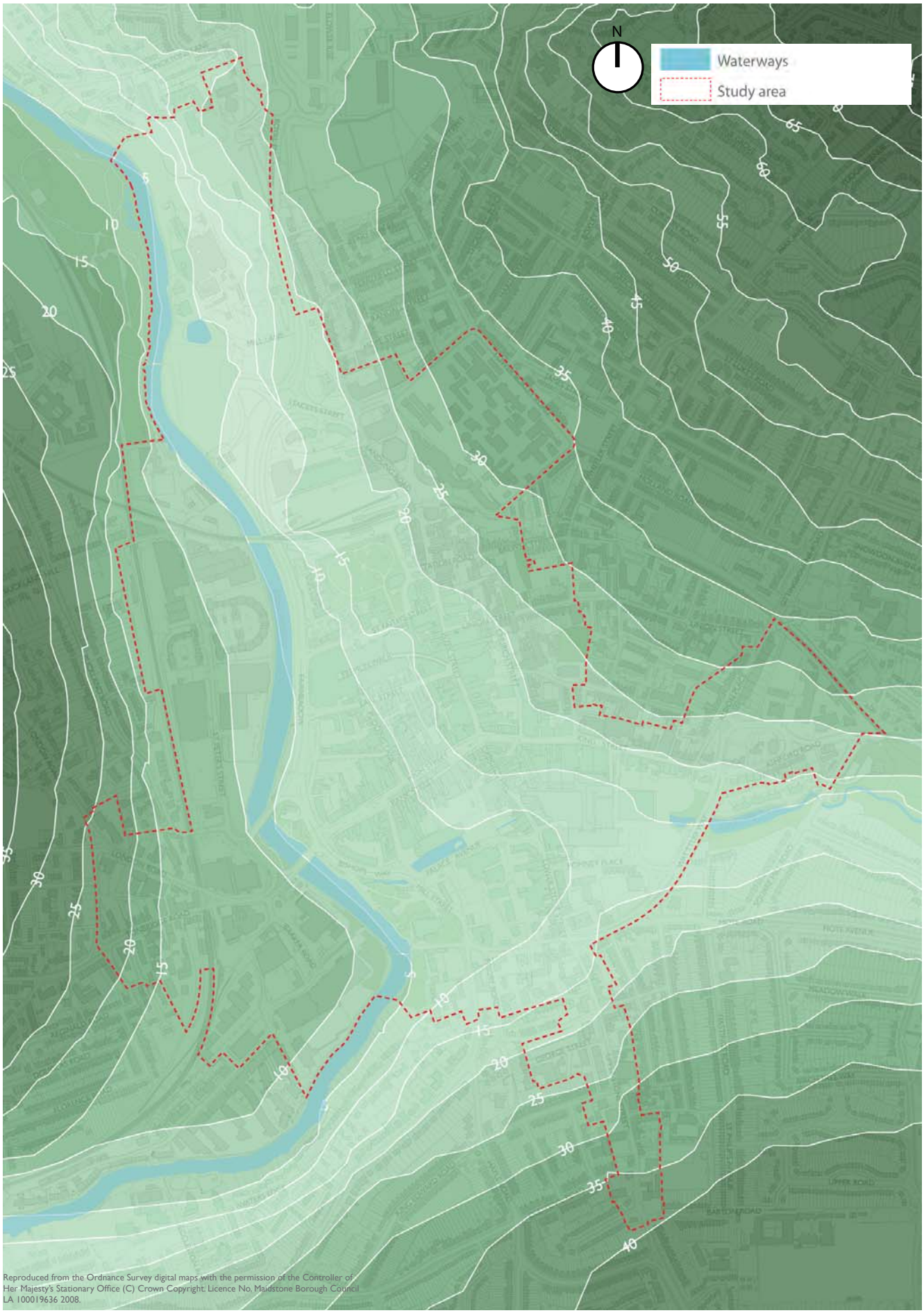


Figure 3.10 - Topography

Topography

3.45 Figure 3.10 shows the topography of Maidstone town centre. The topography is a key determinant in Maidstone's local character as the town occupies a site on two opposite hills. The hills rise from the River Medway and River Len, a tributary running east to west towards Mote Park; the historic core of the town is situated on the easterly hill which gives important views up and down Week Street, adding to the unique character of the town. The land rises further to the north east of the historic core, beyond County Hall and the Prison towards Penenden Heath. The form and height of new development will need to consider carefully the topography of the town and existing important views .

Week Street looking north gently rising towards Fremlin Walk

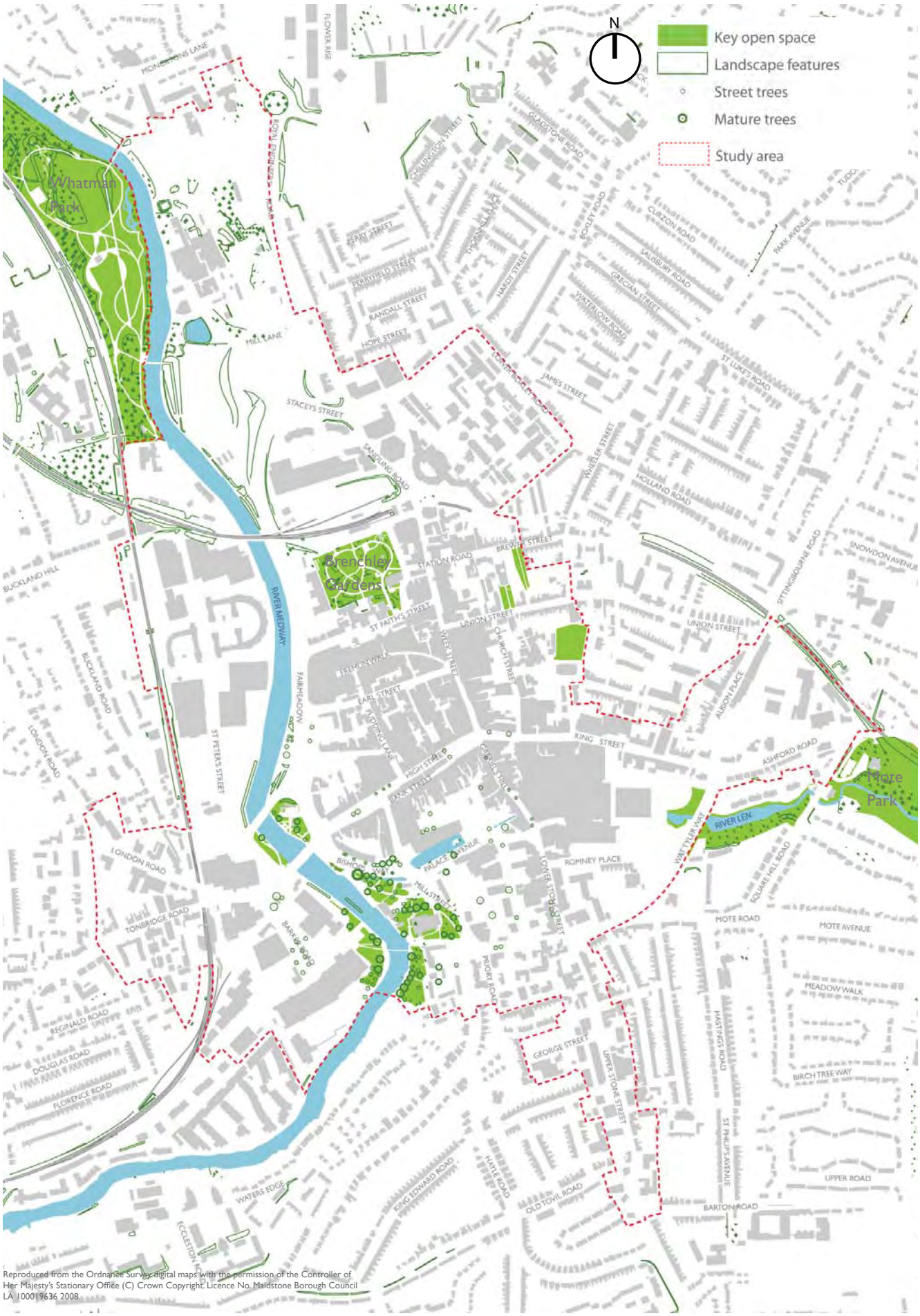


Figure 3.11 - Open space and public realm

Open space and public realm

3.46 The quantity and quality of green space surrounding Maidstone town centre appears good. Whatman Park is located to the north west of the town centre and Mote Park to the south east, which includes a significant number of sports facilities and a lake in the middle of the park. Within the town centre, the main area of green open space is Brenchley Gardens, located within the northern section of the town adjacent to Maidstone East station. Other green open space can be found around the Archbishop's Palace and All Saints Church which includes an amphitheatre constructed for the Millennium.

3.47 Maidstone has a significant asset in the River Medway, which flows to the west of the historic core of the town and provides the key natural landscape feature within the town centre. However, the river is often hidden or obscured with a number of recent buildings turning their back to it.

3.48 The River Len, a tributary to the River Medway, also runs through the town centre. The River Len was used to drive numerous watermills and the resultant mill ponds, such as the one on the corner of Mill Street and Palace Avenue, are a prominent and integral feature of the landscape and character of Maidstone.

3.49 It is considered a key priority for the vision to explore ways of utilising both rivers more effectively, to enhance Maidstone's unique sense of place and help create a more attractive, greener and sustainable town centre.

3.50 Street trees are located around High Street and King Street but there is a notable lack elsewhere within the town centre. Week Street has wire pagoda planting in an effort to increase the green cover. More mature trees are located around the All Saints area, along the river and within Brenchley Gardens. As identified within the Green Spaces Strategy, there is a lack of key linkages of green spaces to create linear routes, green and wildlife corridors.

3.51 Existing and proposed green infrastructure will play a key role in helping Maidstone to respond to the challenge of climate change, both in terms of reducing carbon emissions and adapting to a changing climate. Green infrastructure plays a key role in absorbing water from heavy rainfall, cooling the air and providing shade.

3.52 There is the potential to improve significantly both rivers within the town to enhance the green infrastructure by creating green links along the rivers, and throughout the main streets linking Whatman Park, to Mote Park. Both rivers also provide an attractive feature for future development to front helping enhance Maidstone's natural features and its unique sense of place.

Whatman Park

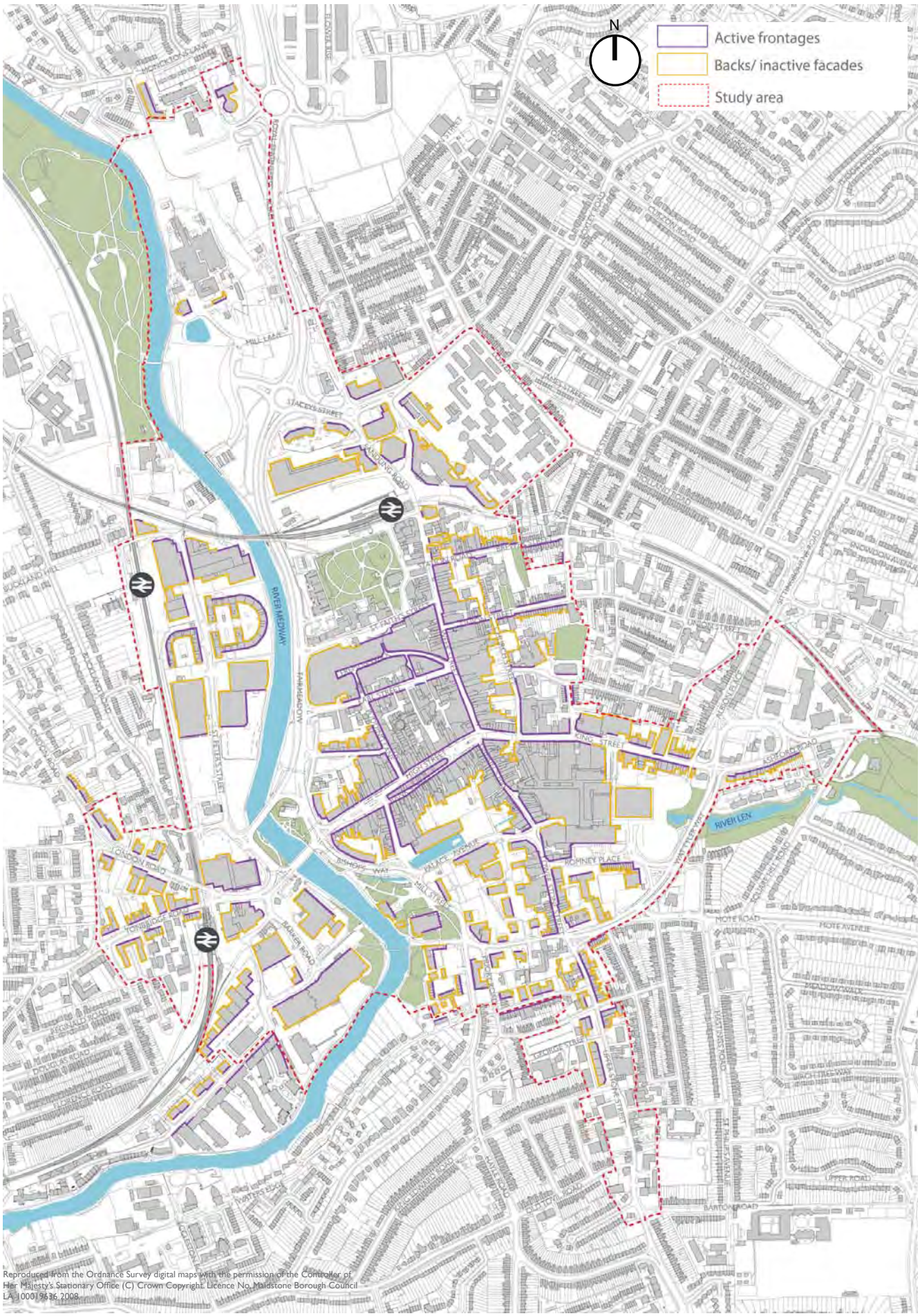


Figure 3.9 - Frontages

Frontages

3.53 The analysis of building frontage in Maidstone town centre highlights that the key streets in the core of the town centre generally have high levels of active frontage, particularly along Week Street, Fremlin Walk and the High Street. This breaks down, however, in the areas immediately behind the main retail streets, particularly the area to the west of Week Street towards the River Medway around the corners of St Faiths Street, Earl Street and Medway Street with Fairmeadow which has a particularly poor environment with inactive frontage or backs. Whilst this is in part due to the Fairmeadow (A229), there are some unrealised opportunities to create an attractive and safe environment along the River Medway. Furthermore, there is an historic legacy of unclear block arrangement around the northern part of Week Street, Brenchley Gardens and the railway line leading to Maidstone East Station.

3.54 Some recent developments along the western side of the River Medway also fail to provide active frontage, including Lockmeadow Entertainment Centre and a number retail sheds. Some recent residential development, however, between Hart Street and the River Medway is more successful at providing frontages and natural surveillance.

Inactive frontage of Bingo Hall

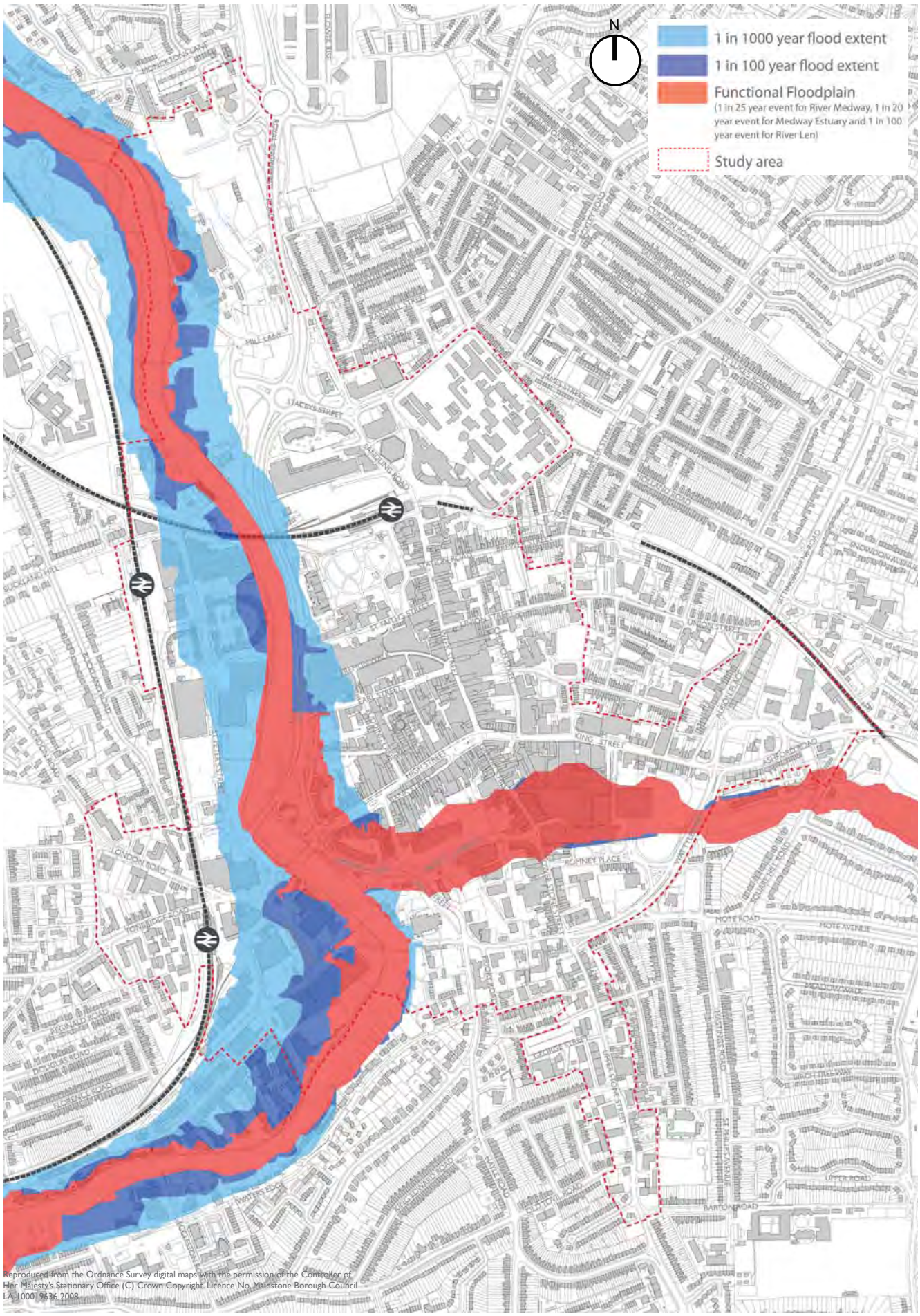


Figure 3.12 - Flood risk (SFRA, 2008)

Figure 3.13 - Change in annual mean temperature 2080s (°C) - central estimate (Source: UKCP09)

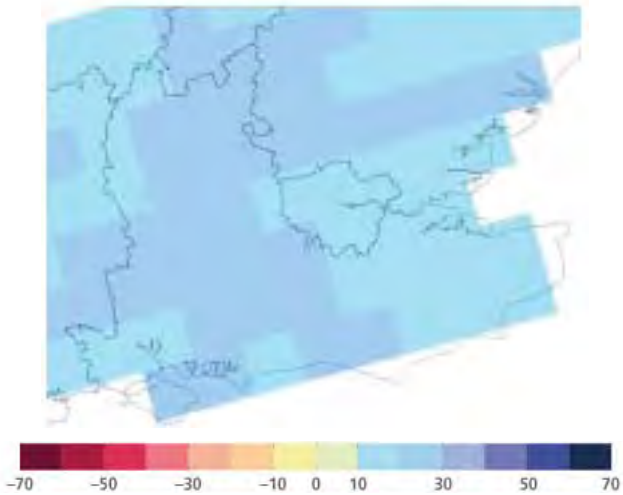


Figure 3.14 - Change in winter precipitation 2080s (%) - central estimate (Source: UKCP09)

Climate change

3.55 As a result of global climate change Maidstone will experience a more volatile climate in the medium and longer term with an increase in extreme weather events, hotter summers and wetter winters. The challenge will be to ensure Maidstone can adapt to future scenarios to ensure long term sustainability, and it is vital that this sits as a core priority within any proposals for future development.

Existing flood risk

3.56 As illustrated by Figure 3.12, a significant proportion of Maidstone town centre is already subject to flood risk.

3.57 For areas which could be subject to river flooding (dark blue), there is a one in one hundred or greater chance of flooding occurring each year. For outlying areas which are shown to be subject to extreme flooding (light blue), there is a one in one thousand or greater chance of flooding occurring each year.

3.58 As a result, there are significant implications for future development throughout much of Maidstone town centre, particularly for areas in close proximity to the River Medway or River Len. Where development does occur in areas which are susceptible to flooding, measures to reduce the impact of flooding should be incorporated, such as sustainable drainage systems, flood storage and a presumption against residential development at ground floor level.

3.59 The extent of the flood risk boundaries have been derived from the Environment Agency Flood Map, and are for illustrative purposes only.

3.60 Managing existing and future flood risk will be particularly important for Maidstone town centre. PPS25 requires a sustainable approach to flood risk management. Any proposed development will therefore be subject to a sequential test and this will avoid any residential development being developed in existing and future areas of risk. Only water-compatible uses will be permitted in areas of high flood risk which act as functional floodplain.

Future climate scenarios

3.61 The United Kingdom Climate Projections (UKCP) have been created to help the UK to plan for a changing climate. The projections contain information on observed and future climate change, based on the latest scientific understanding.

3.62 UKCP09 is the fifth generation of climate information, and provides updated and improved climate change projections for the UK. The projections show that all areas of the UK will get warmer (particularly in summer). The overall level of precipitation will remain unchanged, but an increased proportion of this will fall in the winter. The impact of the rise in sea levels is predicted to be greater in the south of the UK than in the north.

3.63 UKCP09 includes the following predictions for South East England in the 2080s, under the medium emissions scenario:

- increase in winter mean temperature of 3°C;
- increase in summer mean temperature of 3.9°C;
- change in winter mean precipitation of 22%;
- change in summer mean precipitation of –22%;.

3.64 These figures represent the central estimates, and are illustrated by Figures 3.13 and 3.14 above.

3.65 Designs for future development in Maidstone town centre should incorporate measures to respond to the changing climate, avoid vulnerable locations, and ensure they are flexible to future changes. The existing

town centre built environment will also need to be adapted in order to support viability across the town centre.

3.66 The choice of materials and designs should respond to a future increase in temperature and changing patterns of precipitation. At the same time there will be an imperative to deliver low and zero carbon development to support reduced carbon emissions.

Summary

3.67 This section has set out the urban design appraisal of Maidstone town centre and has identified a number of key issues to be considered and taken forward in Stage Two. The key issues and opportunities addressed within the section are:

- Maidstone Town Centre has a high quality historic built fabric and medieval urban grain which, along with the River Medway and River Len, give Maidstone much of its distinct identity and set it apart from many places within the region.
- The study area contains a number of conservation areas; their appraisals include recommendations to help preserve and enhance these areas and should be considered when developing proposals for the area.
- The relationship between the River Medway and the town is poor and fractured; Fairmeadow creates a barrier between the two. There is an opportunity to bring the under-utilised rivers back into the heart of the town.
- Recent development adjacent to the River Medway fails to provide an attractive and legible urban form and make the most of the riverside setting; development often turns its back on the river providing inactive frontages.
- The topography is a key determinant in Maidstone's local character as the historic town is situated on the easterly hill, rising up from the River Medway and River Len.
- A significant proportion of Maidstone town centre is subject to flood risk; measures to reduce the impact of flooding should be incorporated, such as sustainable drainage systems, flood storage and a presumption against residential development at ground floor level.
- The centre has a reasonably effective retail circuit and a number of good independent shops as well as the majority of national high street chains. Most of the retail uses are contained within the historic core of the town and in purpose built shopping centres such as the Chequers Mall and the recent Fremlin Walk.
- Three or four storeys is the predominant building height within the town centre. The majority of the taller buildings were built in the postwar period and are of relatively poor architectural and urban design quality and generally fail to aid legibility of the town, whilst detracting from the historic setting and skyline. It is considered that the most appropriate locations for tall buildings (in excess of five storeys) could be around Maidstone East Station to help create a new gateway and arrival point from the station and when entering an leaving the town and along the River Medway.

4. Transport

Introduction

4.1 This section sets out the baseline transport conditions for Maidstone town centre, for which the highway authority is Kent County Council. The report is structured as follows:

- Movement framework
- Principal road network
- Cycling
- Buses
- Park and ride
- Rail
- Parking
- Summary

Movement framework

4.2 Maidstone Borough Council has agreed a movement framework with Kent County Council based on the existing movements of vehicles, cycles, buses and pedestrians in Maidstone town centre. The main distributor roads are:

- to the east Sittingbourne Road (A249), Wat Tyler Way, Knightrider Street, Lower Stone Street, Mill Street and Bishops Way
- to the west, Tonbridge Road (A26) and London Road (A20)
- to the south, Upper Stone Street (A229) and Hayle Road (A229)
- to the north, Fairmeadow (A229) and Engineers' Road (A229).

4.3 The main pedestrian areas are Week Street, Gabriel's Hill and Fremlin Walk. There are also pedestrian linkages over the River Medway via footbridges, the railway bridge, St Peter's Street and Broadway.

4.4 The principal bus corridors access the town centre along A20 London Road, A26 Tonbridge Road, A229 North, A20 Ashford Road, Sittingbourne Road and A229 South. Within the town centre, the bus routes operate on a figure of eight configuration, with High Street the principal corridor. Park and Ride bus routes operate from the town centre to the north west, north east and east of Maidstone. The bus station is located on Pad's Hill within the Mall Shopping Centre.

Principal road network

4.5 The A229 is the main distributor road extending between Maidstone town centre and junction 6 of the M20 to the north of Maidstone. The A229 becomes Fairmeadow at the Royal Engineers' Road/Stacey's Road roundabout and provides a useful link to the town centre, via Earl Street, Medway Street, St Faith's Street and the High Street. This road does not solely function as a through route.

4.6 Fairmeadow is predominantly a two-way dual carriageway providing approximately 3,200 two-way vehicle trips during peak periods. All movements off Fairmeadow to St Faith's Hill and Earl Street are feasible. Northbound vehicles along Fairmeadow are able to turn right into St Faiths Hill and Earl Street. Fairmeadow extends along the west side of the town centre along the River Medway and provides connections to the A20, A249 and A26 at the St Peter's Bridge / Broadway gyratory.

4.7 Traffic flows throughout the town centre are similar in the AM and PM peaks, with the only real difference being a higher proportion of southbound traffic travelling down Upper Stone Street in the PM peak (1,231 vehicles in the AM peak as opposed to 1,910 vehicles in PM peak). There is a low volume of traffic on Sittingbourne Road to the east of Maidstone, with the highest concentrated amount of traffic along the town centre areas of Knightrider Street, Bishops Way, College Road and Mill Street. Figures 4.2 and 4.3 display the AM and PM peak flows respectively.

4.8 A major issue is the severance affect Palace Avenue / Lower Stone Street / Knightrider Street / Mill Street have on pedestrian access between the retail core to the north and the more mixed use residential, industrial and retail land uses to the south. This severance effect restricts pedestrian access to the historic area focused on the Archbishops Palace, the river and central car parks within the boundary of these roads.

4.9 There are limited connections along the stretch of the River Medway within Maidstone, with the only vehicle access points across the river being via St Peter's Bridge and Broadway.

4.10 During the peak hours the main areas of congestion occur on the main approaches to the town centre with long queues developing in the morning peak and around the central gyratory of Bishops Way, College Road, Palace Avenue, Mill Street, Lower Stone Street, Knightrider Street and Upper Stone Street.

4.11 Primary and secondary routes to the town centre have been identified based on the Ordnance Survey classification of 'A roads' (primary routes) and 'B roads' (secondary routes). Primary and secondary servicing routes have also been identified based on the location of large (primary) and small (secondary) retail stores throughout the town centre. Figure 4.1 displays the road hierarchy for Maidstone.

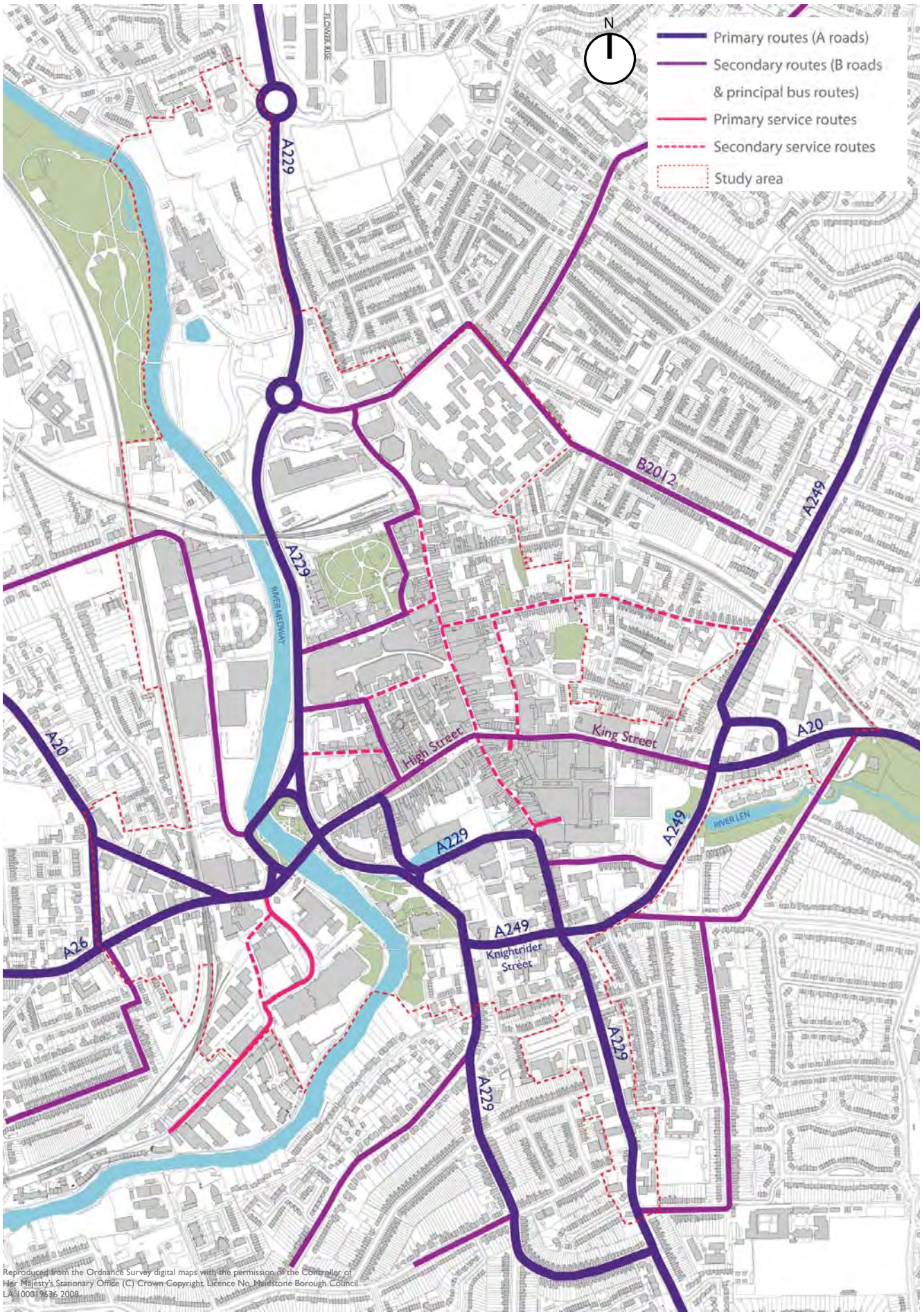


Figure 4.1 - Road hierarchy

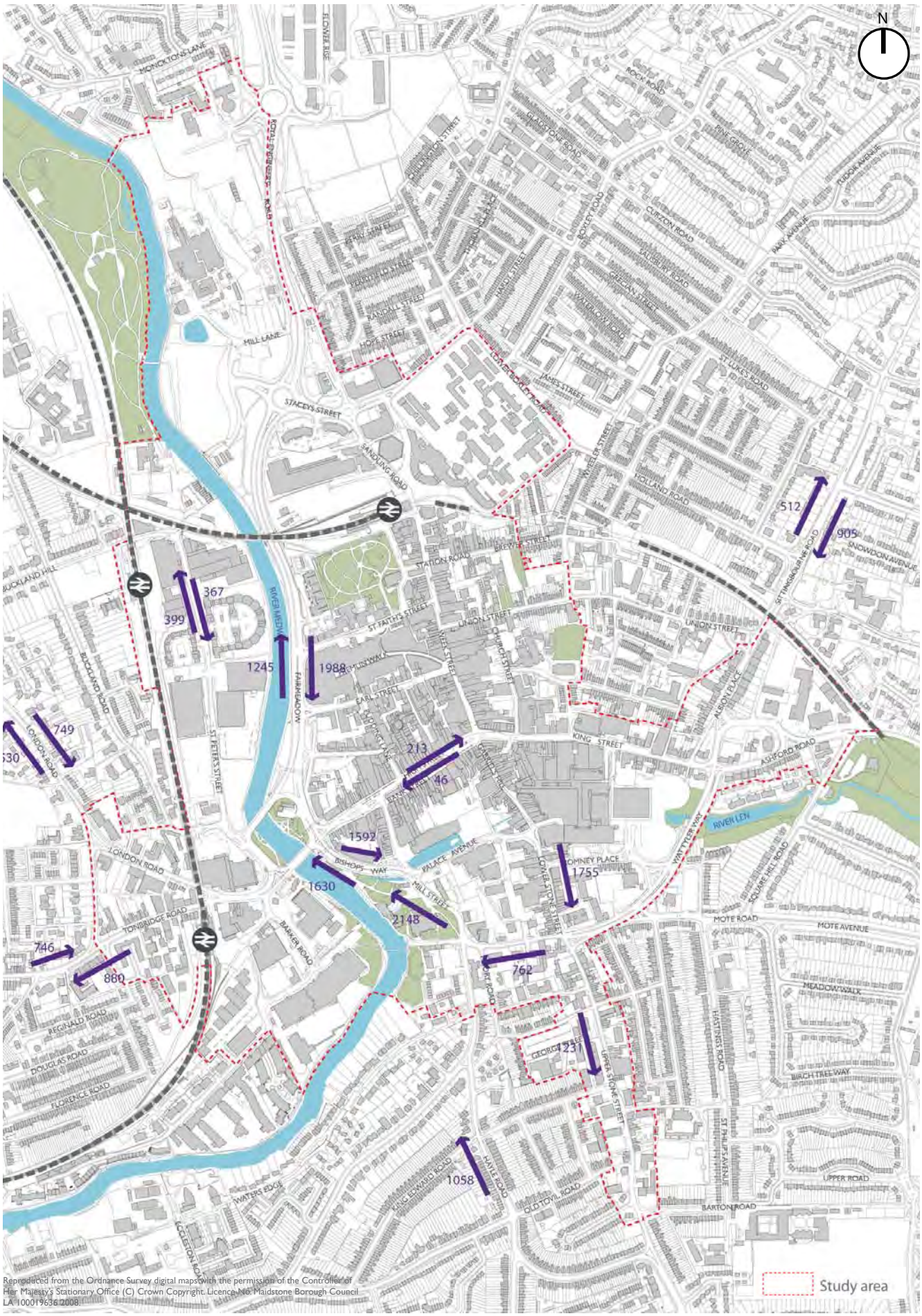


Figure 4.2 - AM peak traffic flows

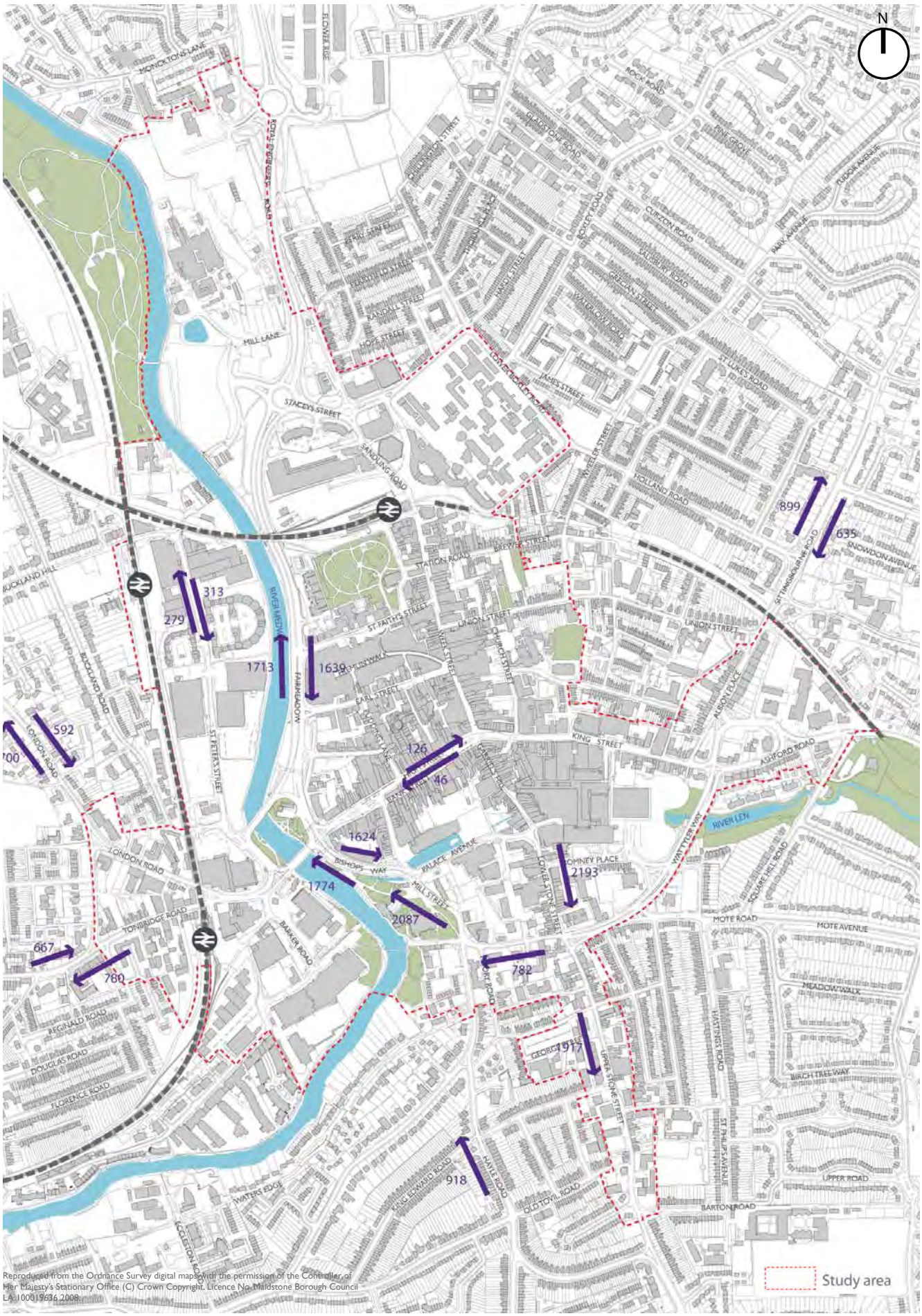


Figure 4.3 - PM peak traffic flows

Pedestrian routes

4.12 Pedestrian activity is significant in the core of the town centre. Figure 4.4 illustrates the areas of highest footfall. Some key pedestrian routes exist and can be summarised as:

- To the north of the High Street, Week Street and Fremlin Walk provide the main pedestrian accesses to the town centre retail core.
- Lockmeadow access to town centre via the Millennium footbridge (although access to town centre prevented by Mill Street / Knightrider Street and Palace Avenue).
- Gabriel's Hill is used as the main pedestrian route linking pedestrian movement south of King Street with northerly movement via Week Street. Disabled drivers and goods vehicles have restricted access to the pedestrianised routes. These vehicles can access the pedestrian zones along Gabriel's Hill, Bank Street and Week Street from 5.30pm to Midnight and from Midnight to 10.30am Mon-Sun.

4.13 Within Maidstone town centre, there are also six bridges which cross the River Medway to the west. Of these, three are limited to pedestrian / cycle access only. St Peter's Bridge and Broadway offer two pedestrian and vehicle accesses between the High Street and the west side of the river. The Maidstone East to London railway line also provides a pedestrian route, along its southern side, across the A229 and the River Medway. This pedestrian route is well used during the day, giving access to the northern end of the town centre and Maidstone East station. However it is not attractive as a connection after dark. Much of this narrow footpath is concealed by a wall on the northern side, due to the railway line, and shrubs/metal fencing on the southern side. Apart from the lack of aesthetic view, many pedestrians would also consider this unsafe to use. It is, however, covered by CCTV.

4.14 The location and volume of traffic along Fairmeadow and Bishops Way further restrict pedestrian movement between the town centre and the areas to the west including Maidstone West station. Subways have been provided but they are predominantly unattractive to use.

4.15 The severance effect that Palace Avenue / Lower Stone Street / Knightrider Street / Mill Street have on pedestrian access to the historic area is a major issue.

Cycling

4.16 There are minimal designated cycle lanes through Maidstone town centre. However, a number of cycle routes have been identified by Kent County Council. Designated cycle lanes have been provided along Sandling Road, adjacent to Maidstone East rail station. This route extends to the south west along Station Road, St Faith's Hill and Fairmeadow, where there is a connection with the riverside footpath at the Fairmeadow / St Peter's Bridge interchange. This route forms part of a longer route that runs between Allington and Rochester. Figure 4.5 illustrates cycle routes within Maidstone town centre.

4.17 King Street and Union Street extends from Week Street in the west to Sittingbourne Road in the east and have also been designated as a cycle routes by the Council.

4.18 There is a low level of on street cycle parking throughout the town centre. There are four Sheffield stands located at the junction of Palace Avenue and Gabriel's Hill, with the predominant areas of cycle stands located at the existing retail car parks and at the rail stations. More secure parking at the rail stations could help encourage cycle use.

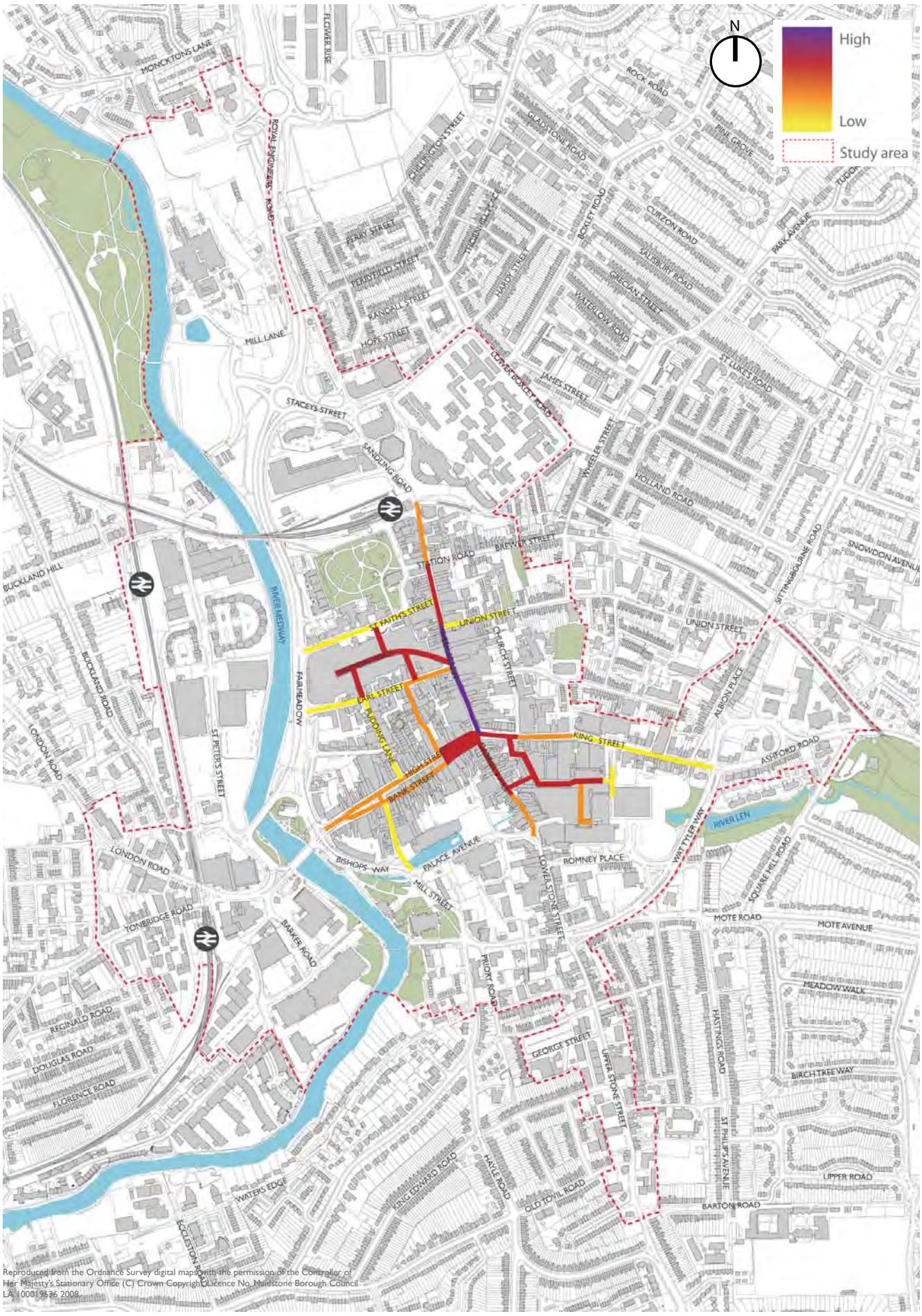


Figure 4.4 - Pedestrian footfall

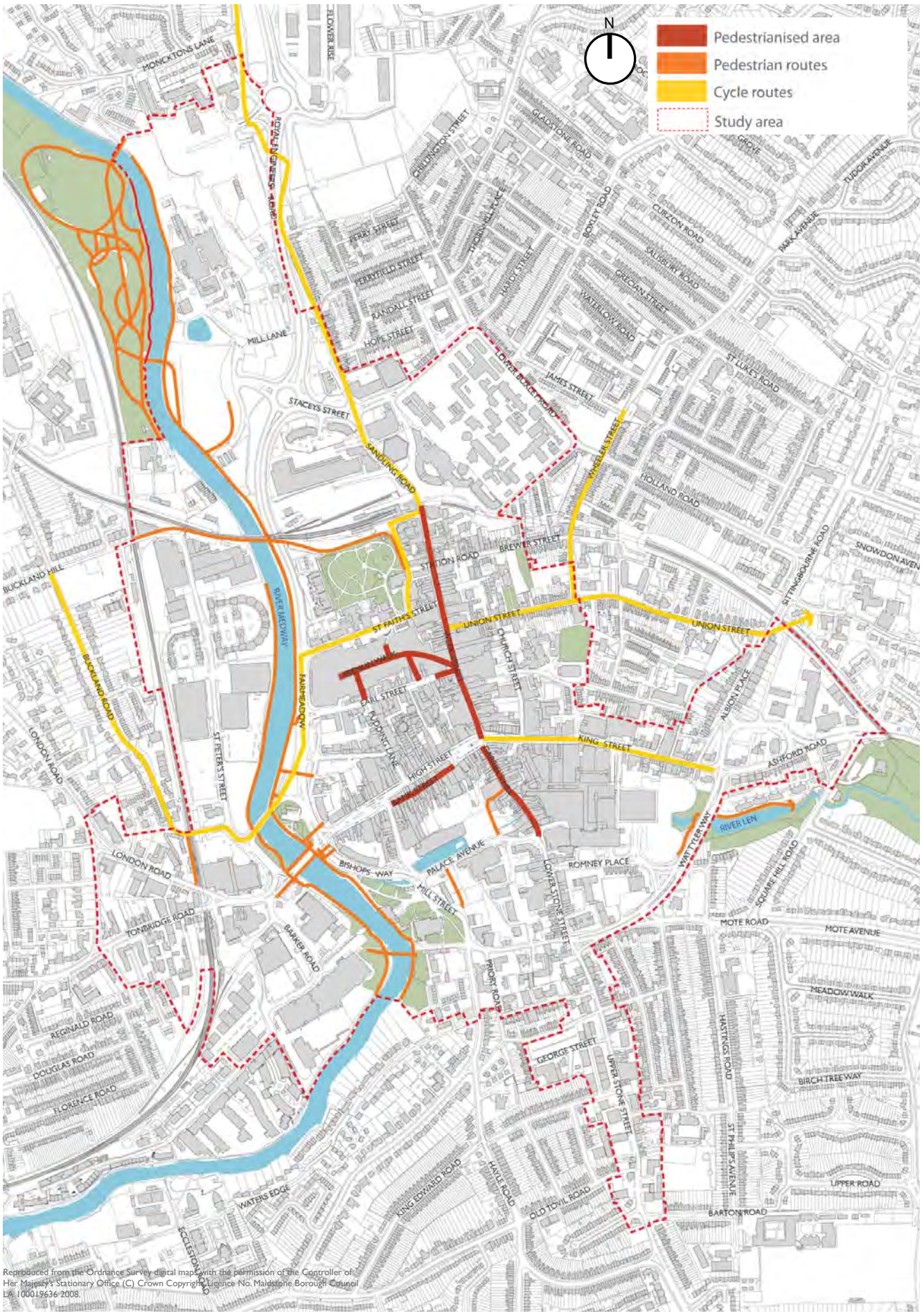


Figure 4.5 - Pedestrian and cycle routes

Buses

4.19 There is a total one-way frequency of 76 buses per hour in the PM peak along King Street / High Street as displayed below in Table 4.1. The predominant movement of outbound buses is westerly along King Street (43 buses), with inbound buses returning to the bus station via Bishops Way, Mill Street, Palace Avenue and into Romney Place. In additional 33 operate west to east. Figure 4.6 displays the routing of major bus services through Maidstone.

4.20 Maidstone is well served by 50 public bus routes which operate through the town centre each day. However, some of these services operate intermittently. Geographically, the more infrequent bus services link the town centre with inaccessible locations outside of the urban area of Maidstone and are subsidised by the local authorities.

4.21 Kent County Council currently supports (wholly or partially) 32 bus services and Maidstone Borough Council supports the Park and Ride services.

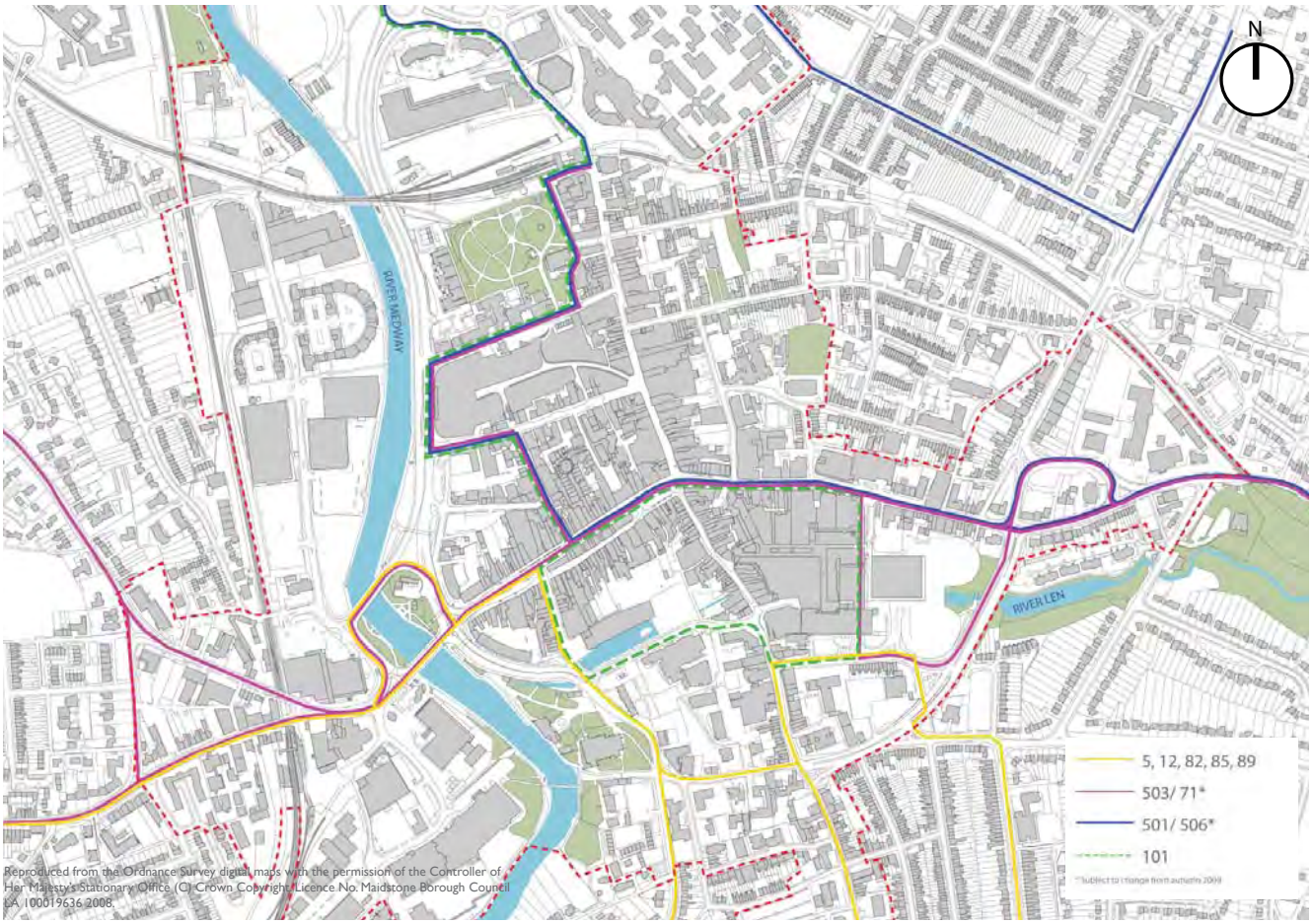


Figure 4.6 - Bus routes

4.22 A total of nine bus companies operate public services throughout Maidstone town centre. The operators are:

- Arriva, who operate 33 routes, including all the major (most frequent) routes identified in Table 4.1
- Nu-Venture Coaches, who operate 16 routes (five of which are shared with Arriva)
- Kent Top Travel, who operate five routes
- Chalkwell, Countryliner, Stagecoach (East Kent) and National Express who operate one route each.

4.23 Whilst the majority of services operate to/from the town centre there are a number that operate cross town to provide links to the hospital (approximately 2.5km west of the town centre) and various educational establishments. As a result bus routing in the town centre is complex.

4.24 There is potential to rationalise bus routing throughout Maidstone, although this should not affect sustainability targets or make the car a more attractive option for town centre travel. Local access needs for residents outside of Maidstone town centre must also be taken into account.

Bus Route Number	Route	Frequency per hr AM peak	Frequency per hr PM peak	Frequency Sat 1-2pm	Operating times Mon-Fri
71	Maidstone – Ditton - Larkfield	12	6	6	0610-2310
82	Maidstone – Sutton Rd – Park Wood	6	6	6	0525-2254
85	Maidstone Hospital – Maidstone - Shepway – Senacre Wood	6	6	6	0537-2316
89	Maidstone – Hospital - Loose - Coxheath	4	4	3	0635-2316
101	Maidstone – Chatham -Gillingham	4	4	4	0640 - 2310
501 P&R	Maidstone – Willington St P&R	4	4	4	0703 - 1832
503 P&R	Maidstone – London Rd P&R	4	4	4	0715 - 1830
506 P&R	Maidstone – Sittingbourne Rd P&R	6	6	4	0701-1830
Total no. of services p/h		**46**	**40**	**37**	

Table 4.1 - Major bus route frequencies

4.25 The existing bus station is located under the Mall, along St Pad's Hill. This station can be accessed two-way by buses via King Street and Romney Place. The station is in a prominent location within the heart of the public realm. However, there are two main issues with its current location:

- Pedestrians access to the bus station is via the Mall. However, the legibility of the station is currently poor and uninviting for potential public transport users.
- Bus circulation and general traffic movement through the town centre is predominantly via King Street / High Street / Mill Street / Palace Avenue / Lower Stone Street and Romney Place. This results in congestion and decreased air quality along these routes throughout the town centre.

4.26 There may be potential to move the location of the existing bus station, taking into account bus service routing and traffic circulation, and aiming to improve sustainability. This is a particularly important issue given the plans for increased park and ride and pubic bus services in the longer term.

Park and Ride

4.27 The Park and Ride utilisation statistics have been obtained from two sources: the 'Park and Ride Strategic Review' (January 2007); and Maidstone Borough Council (2009). The Park and Ride Strategic Review was conducted while the Coombe Quarry Park and Ride site was operational, and therefore reflects the utilisation rates during the operation of four Park & Ride sites within Maidstone.

4.28 Maidstone Borough Council subsidises three park and ride sites, which are operated by Arriva Southern Counties.

4.29 To the north east, Sittingbourne Road park and ride has recently been expanded to over 500 car parking spaces. The average daily demand has decreased from 100% (in 2007, prior to the expansion) to around 78% at present. The 2007 survey indicted that the average number of vehicles parking in each bay during the day was at 1.33 vehicles. This figure is higher than for the other two sites due to its more intensive use by commuters.

4.30 Willington Street park and ride is located to the east of Maidstone town centre and provides 370 car parking spaces. The daily average capacity level is at 90%, indicating the car park is almost full. The 2006 survey identified that 1.08 vehicles, on average, parked in each bay during the day.

4.31 London Road park and ride is located to the north west of Maidstone town centre and accounts for 510 spaces. The daily average capacity level has increased from 68% (in 2007) to 78% at present. The 2006 survey indicted that 1.23 vehicles, on average, parked in each bay during the day.

4.32 Recent ticket sales on the Park and Ride services (2009) indicate that around 40% of the passengers travel during the peak period and 60% in the off peak.

4.33 The locations of all park and ride sites are displayed in Figure 4.7 and routing of buses is displayed in Figure 4.6.

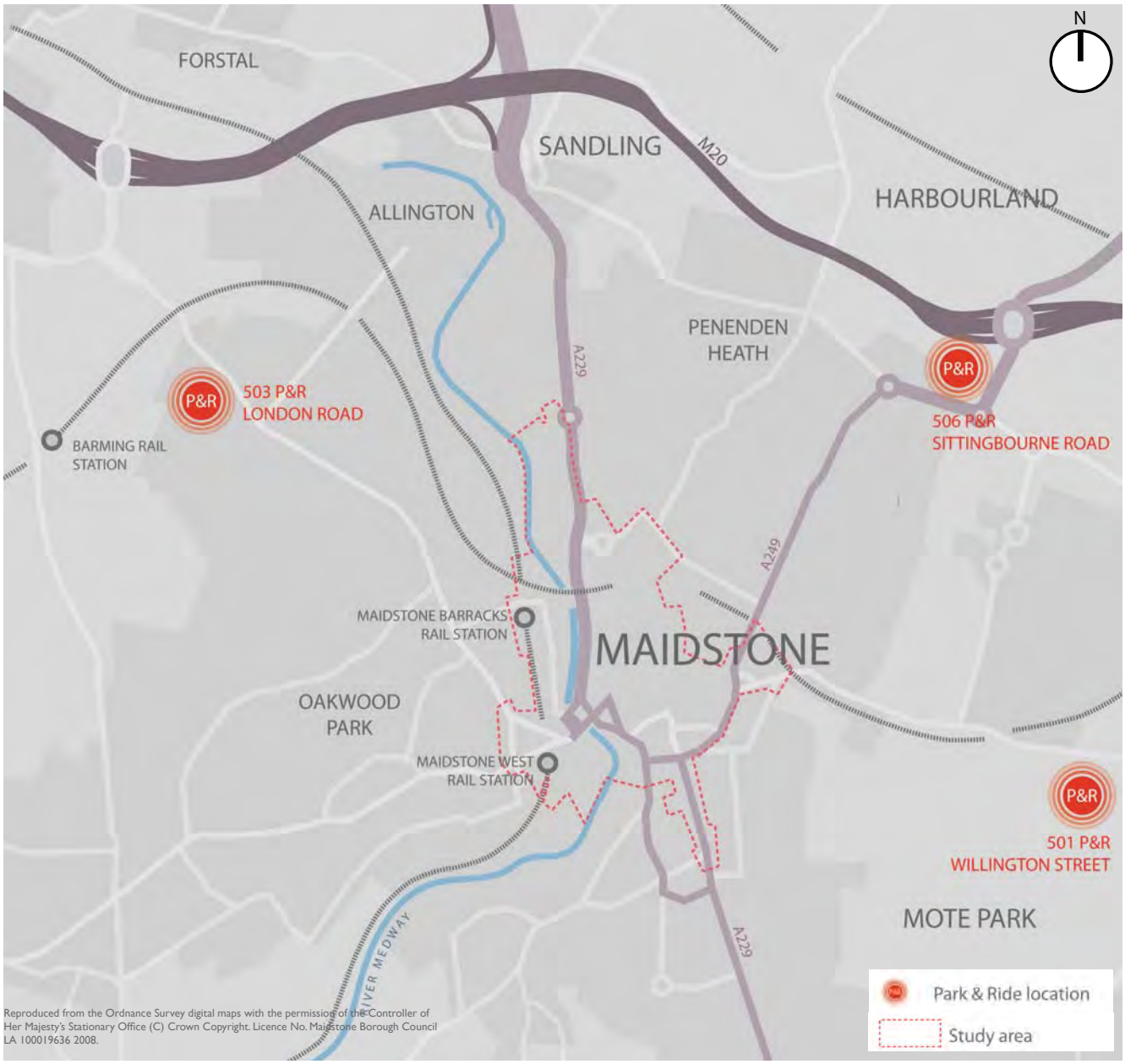


Figure 4.7 - Park and ride locations

Rail

4.34 Maidstone East is the main rail station within Maidstone located to the north of the town centre. Network Rail owns the station and the associated car park. The rail line runs from London Victoria and Charing Cross in the west to Ashford, Canterbury and Folkstone in the east and south east. During peak hours, the typical journey time from Maidstone East to London is around 60 minutes. Ashford can be accessed within 30 minutes and Canterbury and Folkstone can be accessed within 1 hour from Maidstone East. This rail station is well located within the town centre, being close to Week Street and the A229.

4.35 Maidstone West is also located on the rail line which extends from Strood in the north to Tonbridge in the south. This station is poorly located to west side of the river, away from the major retail / commercial core. Frequencies for these rail services are displayed below in Table 4.1.

4.36 Maidstone Barracks station is the next train stop on from Maidstone West, in a northerly direction on the rail line, which operates between Strood and Tonbridge. This station is also poorly located on the north-west side of the town, with poor proximity to the town centre, though there is a pedestrian route from Maidstone East via the high level bridge.

4.37 Rail service frequencies in Maidstone are lower than comparable towns of this size and have been cited as a disincentive for investment.

4.38 The key issues that effect train services from Maidstone are:

- The capacity constraints of London Bridge affecting services to London Bridge, Charing Cross, Blackfriars and Cannon Street.
- The capacity constraints imposed by the two track section between Tonbridge and Orpington stations.
- The difficulties in linking the routes with spare capacity to create usable train routes to London Victoria.
- The journey time to London Victoria.
- Short stations on the Maidstone East line effects capacity improvements to increase the length of services (Maidstone East platforms can only be extended to eight cars).

4.39 The following committed interventions are proposed or underway:

- The introduction of a new timetable in December 2009. This is the most significant re-cast of timetables in the Kent area for a generation.
- The timetable is driven by the introduction of High Speed Services to Kent in December 2009.
- The construction of the Phase 1 extension to East London Line which will reduce passenger congestion at London Bridge by providing alternative routes to East London.
- The Thameslink programme is currently underway. However, the improvement of London Bridge station and associated tracks will only commence after the Paralympics in 2012. This will result in significant disruption to Kent services until 2015.

4.40 Network Rail has drafted the Kent Rail Utilisation Strategy for the period up to the end of 2014 (the end of the current franchise period) and for the period 2015 to 2019. Consultation on this document closed on the 23rd July 2009. Network Rail will initiate the tendering process for a new post 2014 franchise agreement in 2012.

4.41 Network Rail issued the Kent Rail Utilisation Strategy for the 30 year period to 2040. Network Rail will initiate the tendering process for new post 2014 franchise agreements in 2012.

Station	Weekday AM Peak (0800-0900)	Weekday PM Peak (1700-1800)	Sat Peak (1200-1300)	Average Peak Hour Journey Times
Maidstone East to London	4	3	3	1hr 8mins to Victoria
London to Maidstone East	2	3	2	1h 4mins from Victoria
Maidstone West to Tonbridge	1	2	1	33mins
Tonbridge to Maidstone West	1	1	1	39mins

Table 4.2 - Rail frequencies

4.42 The strategy proposes the following services by 2015:

- Two trains per hour from Ashford to London Victoria via Maidstone East;
- Two trains per hour from Maidstone East to Thameslink network (to run fast from Bromley South via the Catford Loop);
- Two trains per hour Paddock Wood (which may be extended to Ashford) to Thameslink network; and
- Introduction of High Speed trains on the Medway Valley line between Maidstone West and St. Pancras via Ebbsfl eet and Stratford International.

4.43 This strategy has the following potential impacts for Maidstone:

Benefits:
- All-day service to the Thameslink route from 2015, in addition to services to Victoria providing 4 trains/hour overall.
- Most peak trains from Maidstone East to eight car by end of 2014, subsequent possibility of peak 12-car services to Victoria with Selective Door Opening (to accommodate short stations).
- Consideration of line speed improvements between Maidstone East and London terminals.
- Alternative indirect route to Thameslink network via Maidstone West and interchange at Paddock Wood or Tonbridge.
- Potential for peak services (two trains per hour) and all day service to St Pancras from Maidstone West via the Medway Valley line, Strood, Gravesend, and CTRL, subject to further analysis.
- Direct trains off-peak from Maidstone West to Tonbridge from December 2009, not requiring a change at Paddock Wood.
- Increasing capacity of station car parks at Maidstone East and West to accommodate demand.
- Consideration of bus links to Ebbsfleet for International services.

Disbenefits and mitigation:
- Fast hourly off-peak services to Cannon Street withdrawn from December 2009, mitigated from 2015 by the Thameslink service described above.
- Direct services to Canterbury withdrawn in December 2009, possible reintroduction in the longer term.

Parking

4.43 In 2006, Maidstone Borough Council conducted a comprehensive parking survey throughout the town centre. The results were published by Maidstone Borough Council in their report entitled 'Off Street Car Parks and Park and Ride Strategic Review January 2007'. This survey provided an assessment of Maidstone's immediate and future needs in relation to short stay and long stay parking.

4.44 The survey identified a total of 21 off street car parks in the town centre which are available for a mix of public use, retail customer use and rail customer use, making up a total of approximately 3,853 car parking spaces. These do not include the park and ride sites. Off street car parking is distributed as follows:

- Maidstone Borough Council provides seven short stay (maximum stay of four hours) and 11 long stay off street public car parks. Short stay and long stay parking provide a total of 477 and 1,246 car parking spaces, respectively.
- A further three off street car parks are available for shared retail customer and public use (Sainsbury's, Fremlin Walk and Chequers Mall). These offer a total of 2,130 car parking spaces.

4.45 The survey identified parking patterns, distribution and reasons for public car park utilisation. Usage was divided into four categories: Business, Shopping, Appointment and Sightseeing. The results of this survey demonstrated:

- Customers originating from Maidstone contributed to 63% of all customers using the short stay car parks, of which 37% were mainly from the rural areas of the town. No customers intended to stay for sightseeing.
- Customers originating from Maidstone contributed to 40% of all customers using the long stay car parks, of which 28% were from the rural areas of Maidstone.
- A total of 52% short stay customers used the car parks for shopping, particularly in the Medway Street Area. Business users contributed to 40% of short stay car parking usage.
- A total of 67% of long stay customers visited Maidstone for business purposes requiring a stay for longer than 4 hours. Shoppers using these car parks accounted for 21% of the up-take.

4.46 Maidstone Borough Council also conducted a parking beat survey (in 2006), which identified the off street car parking occupancy. A summary table of results are displayed in Table 4.3 below.

Car park type	Total designated number of spaces throughout town centre	Usage
Short Stay	477	339
% Usage	71%	
Long Stay (With Lockmeadow)	1246	602
% Usage	48%	
Long Stay (Without Lockmeadow)	653	412
% Usage	63%	

Table 4.3 - Short and Long Stay Car Parking Usage (from Maidstone Borough Council Survey)

Map Reference Number	Car Park Name	Number of Spaces	Number of Bays Occupied	% Occupancy
	Short Stay (Maximum Stay 4 hours)			
1	Medway St	55	39	71%
2	Brewer St East	75	56	75%
3	Brewer St West	27	26	96%
4	Wheeler St	58	47	81%
5	Palace Ave	32	32	100%
6	Mote Rd	103	62	60%
7	Mill St	127	77	61%
8	Church St*	Site Not Identified in Council Survey		
	TOTAL	**477**	**339**	**71%**
	Long Stay			
9	Barker Rd	71	53	75%
10	Brooks Place	13	12	92%
11	Brunswick St	71	29	41%
12	College Rd	70	58	83%
13	Lucerne St	18	18	100%
14	Sittingbourne Rd	93	43	46%
15	Union St East	51	39	76%
16	Union St West	31	22	71%
17	Well Rd	22	19	86%
18	Lockmeadow	593	190	32%
19	King St	213	119	56%
	TOTAL	**1246**	**602**	**48%**
	Retail Car Parks		Approximate Totals	
20	Sainsbury's	370	350	95%
21	Fremlin	760	450	59%
22	Chequers	1000	800	80%
23	Maidstone East Station*	493	488	99%
24	Maidstone West Station*	74	21	28%
25	Wicks*	210	50	24%
26	Homebase*	237	50	21%
27	B&Q*	92	20	22%
28	Matalan*	300	150	50%
29	Incentra*	200	Weekends Only	
30	LA Fitness*	180	50	28%
	TOTAL	**3916**	**2429**	**62%**

Table 4.4 - Off street car park and utilisation (from the Maidstone Borough Council Survey, issued Jan 2007)

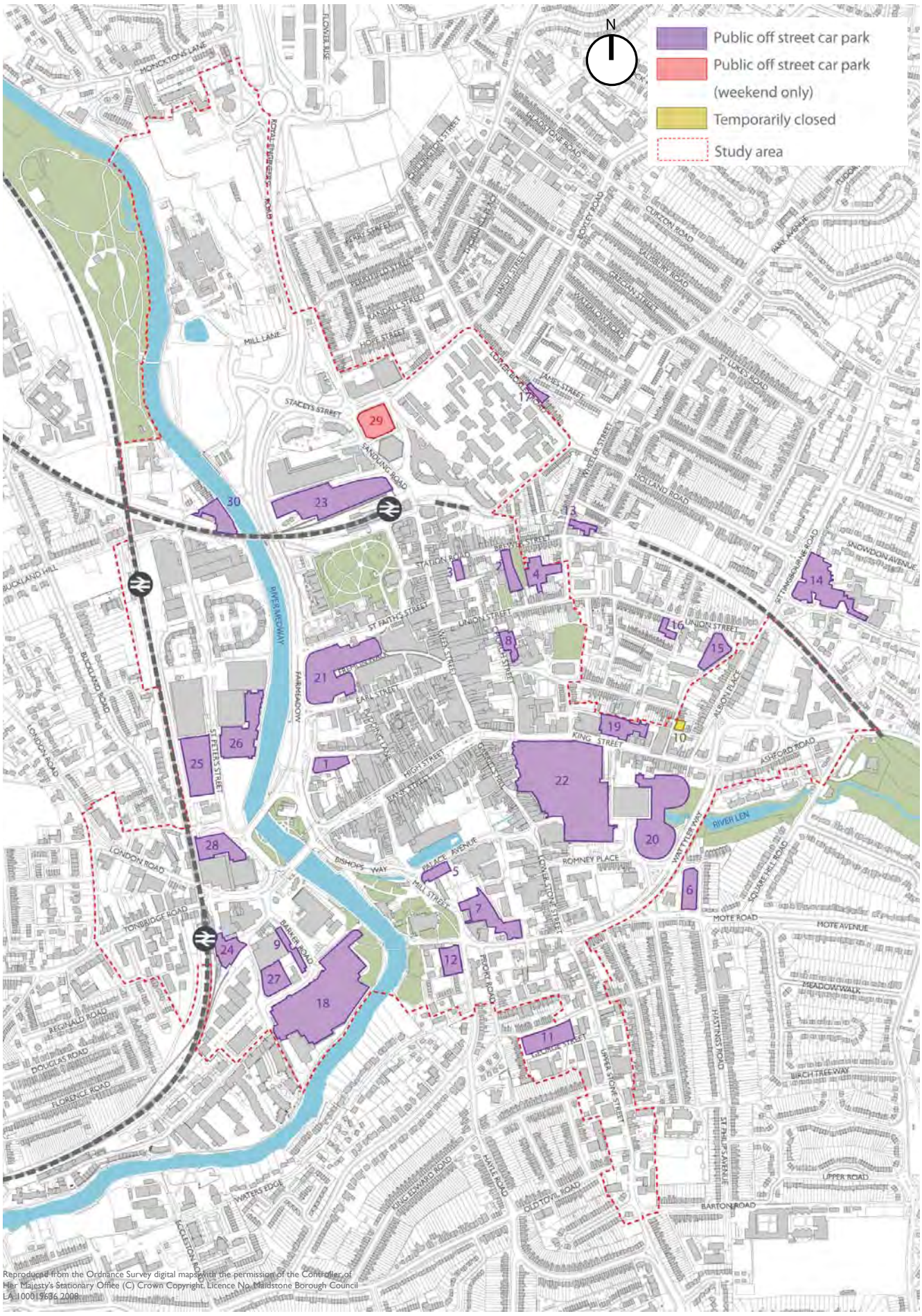


Figure 4.8 - Car park utilisation

4.47 The surveys revealed that the total occupancy of short stay and long stay car parks was 71% and 48% full, respectively. However, the long stay occupancy total includes the utilisation of the Lockmeadow car park, which contains 593 car parking spaces and is only busy during evenings and market days (Tuesdays and Saturdays). If the Lockmeadow car park is removed from the analysis data, then 63% of the long stay car parking was utilised at the time of survey.

4.48 The Council survey further describes King Street car park as having 'a limited lifespan'. It identifies this site as having no local value, with £258 income per space per year, as opposed to Lower Brewer Street car park making £2,377 per space per annum. At present the Council is considering how best to take forward the any potential redevelopment. However, this site is well located for vehicles approaching from the east, avoiding the busy vehicle corridors.

4.49 Colin Buchanan (CB) conducted a similar beat count and occupancy survey on Wednesday 13th May 2009. This survey revealed additional off street car parking sites and the results broadly corresponded with the results from the council parking study. The extra sites identified in the CB study are:

- Maidstone East and Maidstone West provide 493 and 74 car parking spaces respectively. Colin Buchanan conducted a vehicle capacity study on the Maidstone East car park in December 2008. The survey identified that approximately 52% of occupants at this car park utilise the railway and a further 46% park there to access employment opportunities within the vicinity of the site. Only 2% parked at the station car park to visit Maidstone town centre. The survey also revealed that the station car park was 68% full at its peak.
- Church Street short stay car park, which provides 36 car parking spaces and was 56% utilised.
- Kent County Council offers an extra 200 car parking spaces to the public at evenings and weekends only. This car park is located on Sandling Road at the County Council's Invicta House offices.
- There are also an additional five off street car parks (Wickes, Homebase, B&Q, Matalan and LA Fitness) which are available for retail users only. These provide a total of 1,019 car parking spaces.
- 145 car parking spaces were identified at the Brunswick Street long stay car park. This differs from the previous council survey, which identified 71 spaces at the same site.

4.50 The CB survey also discovered that Brooks Place car park has recently closed, thus losing 13 car parking spaces from the previous council surveys. Figure 4.6 displays the off street car park locations and utilisation rates based on the CB survey.

4.51 Overall, there is a considerable amount of parking within Maidstone, with approximately 5,639 car parking spaces available for public use. The survey has revealed that approximately 3,370 spaces are utilised at any one time, leaving 2,269 car parking spaces vacant.

Summary

4.52 Maidstone town centre is a strong node for routes of all modes as one would expect. However, a number of headline issues combine to undermine the quality and integration of different modes of travel:

- The town centre core is constrained by major vehicular routes which dissect the core from its fringe areas. The almost continuous route of Whatman Way, Mill Street and Fairmeadow single-handedly separates the core from its hinterland to the east, south north and west.
- The River is an important asset in the town, but one which is afforded little pedestrian and cycle access and is therefore undervalued – in many cases it acts more as a barrier than an attraction.
- Bus access is helpfully focused on King Street and High Street, but the tenuous routes which buses are forced to take along with an unattractive bus station mean the use of buses is not as appealing as it could be.
- Despite the plethora of rail stations, access by rail could be much better. The travel time and frequency of services from London mean Maidstone is much less accessible than its nearby rivals.
- There are a significant number car parks, many of which are relatively small. This means the penetration of cars to all areas of the town centre not pedestrianised is more extensive than it perhaps need be.

4.53 Some specific issues and opportunities have been identified as part of the movement analysis and are as follows:

- Fairmeadow is the principal vehicle corridor for traffic access to Maidstone town centre. This route primarily provides an important link for vehicular and servicing access the town centre retail core, while also acting as a through road to the southern areas of Maidstone.
- Pedestrian linkages across Fairmeadow to the banks of the River Medway could create a more welcome environment to improve pedestrian access to the west of the town centre. Currently there is good pedestrian access along both sides of the river, although they are not continuous. There is a potential to consider a wider pedestrian route alongside Fairmeadow by re- allocating road space to other modes. However this must not compromise the function of Fairmeadow.
- Pedestrian access to the south of the town centre is restricted due to the severance created by the one-way gyratory of Palace Avenue / Mill Street / Lower Stone Street/ Knightrider Street / Mill Street. These roads create an awkward island surrounding the existing museum and Palace Avenue and Mill Street car parks, which further restrict pedestrian access. Traffic flows during the peak periods throughout this gyratory are high. There is potential for improved crossing facilities along Fairmeadow, Knightrider Street and Upper and Lower Stone Street to aid pedestrian movement.
- The existing footbridges over the River Medway are poorly aligned with current pedestrian desire lines. A new crossing should be considered to address the lack of pedestrian access to Fremlin Walk from the west and any further proposals for the town centre.
- If the All Saints link road does not go ahead, then more modest solutions to the existing traffic issues

to the south of the town centre will need to be addressed.

- Maidstone park and ride has proved to be successful in traffic management, environmental and strategic terms. The three park and ride sites have significantly reduced the amount of cars parking within the town centre at peak times. However, a subsidy is required to operate the park and ride sites, reducing Council revenue. The recent introduction of Fremlin Walk car park has also encouraged car-borne shoppers back into the town centre. Nevertheless, there is still a considerable amount of parking in Maidstone which is under-utilised.
- The existing bus station located within the Mall is affected by both the poor legibility and the uninviting aspect of its subterranean location. The potential to relocate the bus station could be considered, but this must address the operational requirements, the visual impacts and the air quality impacts on the public realm, in addition to the requirement to attract more bus passengers by providing improved access to the town centre. Similarly, any rationalisation of bus routes to address the total number of buses using High Street and King Street must consider similar issues.
- Maidstone has poor access to frequent and fast train services to London and other destinations. However, Network Rail's draft Kent Rail Utilisation Strategy 2009 seeks to address these issues by improving the number of services from Maidstone East to London to four trains per hour by 2015.
- From December 2009, it will be possible to travel direct to Tonbridge without changing at Paddock Wood. From 2015, there will also be two trains per hour from Paddock Wood to Thameslink. Post 2015, there is the potential to extend Ebbsfleet shuttle from St Pancras to Maidstone West via the Medway Valley line in peak hours.
- Moreover, the capacity of the routes will be improved by lengthening the services to eight car by the end of 2014, and possibly 12 car by 2019. Consideration will be given to improving line speeds in the period 2015 to 2019. The platforms at Maidstone East can only be extended to accommodate a six car configuration, so further capacity improvements will have to be accommodated by Selective Door Opening systems. Any development at Maidstone West and East stations would have to consider either increasing station car parks or enhancing public transport interchange to allow for the increased passenger demand.
- The car parking survey undertaken by Maidstone Borough Council revealed that a total of 2,696 spaces are vacant and available for public use throughout Maidstone. A considerable number of these vacant spaces are in retail car parks on the outskirts of the town centre, including Lockmeadow, Brunswick Street and in the retail site car parks on St Peter's Street.
- Fremlin Walk, Chequers Mall and Sainsbury's car parks are well utilised, in addition to the smaller central open off street car parks such as Brewer Street, Palace Avenue, Lucerne Street and Union Street. However, these smaller car parks are in desirable locations for development within the town centre.
- There is potential to improve parking, possibly through rationalising the existing unused parking spaces while implementing additional management measures. However, any rationalisation of car parking must consider the revenue implications, sustainability goals, increased rail passenger demand, and the accessibility and desirability of each location.

5. Property market review

Introduction

5.1 This property market review has been informed by:

- An initial inception meeting with the Council, together with an Initial Stage One meeting;
- A detailed inspection of the town centre paying attention to the future high quality development sites referred to within the Council's Town Centre Plan, sites with unimplemented planning consent, sites where there had been recent expressions of interest and sites with medium to longer term potential as well as other potential development opportunities noted by the consultants as being capable of accommodating development of a significant scale;
- A review of background documents referred to in the Project Brief, including:
    - Employment Land Study Final Report (July 2008);
    - Employment Land Review 2009;
    - Retail Needs Assessment Study (December 2007, Addendum April 2008, Update 2009);
    - Maidstone Borough Economic Development Strategy; and
    - Office Viability Study (January 2009).

5.2 Other relevant published reports and online databases have also been reviewed. In addition, local agents active across the various market sectors have been consulted.

5.3 The property market review is presented on a sector-by-sector basis focusing on the:

- Retail and Leisure market;
- Office market; and
- Residential market.

5.4 The analysis focuses on the current provision, occupier demand and values. An overview of the key background documents referred to above is provided alongside some general conclusions regarding future opportunities.

5.5 Before focussing on the various market sectors, some brief introductory comments are given, together with a review of a number of relevant background documents.

Location

5.6 Maidstone is the administrative centre of Kent. Located in the Borough of Maidstone, it is close to the M20, approximately 65 km (40 miles) to the south east of Central London and has an estimated population of 98,000 with a population for the Borough at circa 140,000 . The town benefits from excellent communications being located 3 km (2 miles) south of Junctions 6 and 7 of the M20, which links directly to the M25. The M25 lies 30 miles to the north west, with Dover being 41 miles to the south east. The A229 dual carriageway links with the M2 approximately 8km (5 miles) to the north. The M26 to the west of Maidstone also provides access to the M25.

5.7 In terms of public transport, Maidstone benefits from a frequent railway service to Central London, from Maidstone East, with a journey time of approximately 1 hour to London Victoria, London Bridge and Cannon Street Station. There are also stations at Maidstone West and Maidstone Barracks with services to Strood and Paddock Wood.

Socio-economic profile

5.8 The Borough of Maidstone has an above average proportion of adults categorized in the most affluent social group AB, ranking 35th of the PROMIS Centres on the PMA Affluence Indicator. The Borough is a strong employment area in the South East with a less than average proportion of the population registered as unemployed. Figures for Q1 2009 show that 1.87% of the workforce was registered as unemployed compared to the national rate of 3.34%. This affluence is reflected by the above average percentage of home owners (70%, source Census 2001) and similarly the higher average house price. The average national house price for the period 2008 / 2009 was £190,100 and for Maidstone Borough was £231,200. This employment profile is also reflected by the age of Borough's primary catchment population which includes a relatively high proportion of older working aged adults aged 45-64, with a smaller proportion of young adults aged 15-24 and retired aged 65+. Population estimates show that the Borough's population is projected to increase by approximately 8.5% over the 10 year period 2008-2018 and by 16% to 2027.

5.9 In terms of employment groupings, in 2007 the service sector accounted for 75% of total employment in the Borough. Within this sector, financial and business services account for 19% of total employment. The local economy is dominated by services reflecting its administrative role for Kent, these include public sector employers such as the Borough and County Councils, HM Prison Service and Inland Revenue. The manufacturing sector accounts for 6% of total employment, significantly below average. (Source: UK National Statistics)

5.10 Before presenting our detailed analysis of the Maidstone property market, we set out in the next section an overview of the key relevant background documents from a property market perspective.

Review of key background documents

5.11 This section provides an overview of a selection of the key relevant background documents, from a property market perspective.

i) Retail Needs Assessment Study for Borough of Maidstone

5.12 In planning for retail development in Maidstone town centre, it is important to give consideration to the latest retail needs/capacity assessment, as this is used to formulate retail planning policies through the development plan process.

A 'Retail Need Assessment for the Borough of Maidstone' was produced by Kent County Council in December 2007 with an Addendum published in April 2008. An Update Report was produced in August 2009 to take account of more recently available information.

Week Street

5.13 The original report available for Maidstone is the 'Retail Need Assessment Study for Borough of Maidstone' produced by Kent County Council as at December 2007 with an Addendum dated April 2008. The report highlights the fact that, within Kent County Council's administrative area, Maidstone is the largest "traditional town centre", attracting £549m of turnover, and second only to Bluewater for combined convenience and comparison goods shopping spend.

5.14 The borough as a whole retains 73% of its own residents' spend on convenience goods, 62% of available core comparison expenditure, and 52% of available bulking goods expenditure.

5.15 The Update Report presents a series of forecasts for the anticipated 'retail need' for convenience, bulky comparison and core comparison goods up to 2026.

5.16 The table below shows these figures, which showed significantly reduced forecast capacity, relative to the previous set of figures prepared in April 2008. These figures take account of existing commitments. While the study provides retail capacity forecasts, it makes no specific comments on the retail strengths of Maidstone town centre, or on potential development sites.

Table 5.1: Forecasts of Retail Need by Goods Type

Sq m gross	Comparison Goods	Convenience Goods
2011	-350	-2,850
2016	14,700	-600
2021	33,900	1,900
2026	55,250	4,650

Source: Kent County Council
NB: Cumulative gross figures

5.17 As at September 2007, there was circa 107,000 square feet of retail floorspace either under construction or with planning permission. The largest commitments include the extension to the Mall Shopping Centre, with circa 34,500 square feet of comparison goods floorspace (now complete), and 22-27 High Street/1-9 Pudding Lane, which has planning permission for circa 31,000 square feet of comparison goods floorspace.

5.18 The headline findings for the retail capacity work is that there is identified capacity for 55,250 sq m (gross) of comparison goods floorspace and 4,650 sq m (gross) of convenience floor space for the Borough of Maidstone up to 2026. By way of comparison, this total floor space would equate to a development significantly larger than the Fremlin Walk development in the town centre.

ii) 'Maidstone Borough Council Employment Land Review, 2009 update'

5.19 This document, produced by GVA Grimley, sets out analysis on the potential future requirement for offices in Maidstone, based on historic floorspace trends, macroeconomic employment projections, property market findings, and the population growth arising from Maidstone's Growth Point Status with a housing target of 11,080 homes to be delivered up to 2026.

5.20 In compiling a synthesis forecast, GVA Grimley took the historic completion rates for offi ce, industrial and warehousing uses and make the following adjustments:

- Local supply constraints;
- Historic and forecasted employment trends, including housing from the Growth Point Status;
- Market characteristics and regeneration aspirations, including competition from neighbouring

authorities, labour cost, access to skilled labour, infrastructure investment and development pipeline.

5.21 When existing planning commitments are taken into account, this reduces the amount of office land required over the period 2006-2026.

5.22 Some of these sites already have office buildings, but are considered to be of inferior quality requiring redevelopment.

5.23 The Review goes on to project a town centre office requirement, taking into account the quantity of existing vacant floor space in the town centre, the lower quality of some of this floor space and consequent need for an element of 'substitution' provision to be made and the critical mass of recent office quarter proposal elsewhere. On this basis, the Review concludes that a 15,000 to 17,500 office replacement component would be a reasonable quantum for further testing.

iii) 'The Maidstone Economic Development Strategy: Creating a 21st Century County Town, November 2008'

5.24 This report was produced by Shared Intelligence, and sets out the vision and objectives for creating a prosperous economy in Maidstone over the next twenty years. The study is not a Development Plan Document (DPD). The vision is to create:

> "a model 21st century county town, a distinctive place, known for its blend of sustainable rural and urban living, excellence in public services, dynamic service sector-based economy, and above all, quality of life".

5.25 The study provides a SWOT analysis for the town as follows:

Strengths

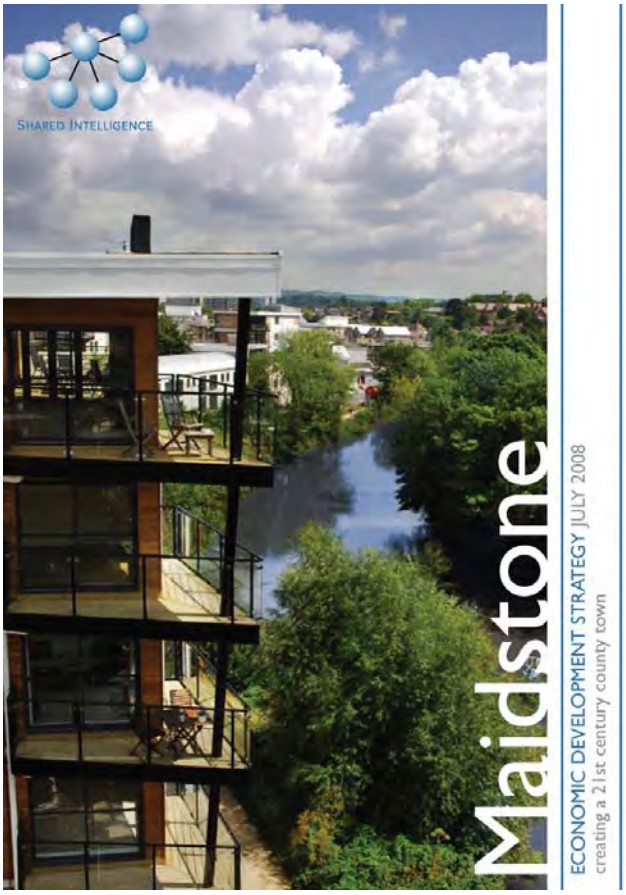
- Thriving town centre and lively night time economy
- Good strategic transport links
- Strong on quality of life factors including picturesque rural landscape, good schools, relatively affordable housing and low crime rates
- Tight labour market with high rates of employment, low levels of inactivity and low unemployment rates
- Some sector strengths in business and professional services and construction
- 'Excellent' borough council and strong public sector
- Evidence of an entrepreneurial spirit and a high business density
- Relatively high resident wages and improving workplace wages
- Large proportion of residents educated to degree level
- Improving schools performance at A* - C GCSE level
- Key tourism assets: e.g. Leeds Castle

Weaknesses

- Relatively low productivity driven by low levels of innovation and a lack of Higher Education provision
- No sector specialism
- Persistent, but improving resident-workplace wage gap
- Despite high levels of entrepreneurship, limited support for start-ups
- Shortage of high quality office space
- Secondary unattractive office space in the town centre
- Pockets of Deprivation – and a high proportions of NEETs – in Park Wood and High Street wards
- Traffic congestion and limited accessibility in the town centre
- Traffic congestion on the M20 west of Maidstone
- Operation Stack disrupting businesses and residents in the borough
- Rail connectivity to London slow and infrequent when compared to elsewhere
- Evening economy offer limited for families

5.26 The Economic Development Strategy highlights the 'County Town' status of Maidstone, with a third of employment in public sector services, but highlights a lack of sector specialism and innovation which would help the town to distinguish itself from others. To address this issue, the Economic Development Strategy seeks to prioritise seven sectors in order to improve the competitiveness of the borough of Maidstone. The sectors are:

- Business and professional services;
- Retail and leisure;
- Creative and media;
- Sustainable construction;



Maidstone Economic Development Strategy

- Rural industries;
- Public sector; and
- Tourism.

5.27 The Economic Development Strategy highlights the need to rejuvenate the office market within the town centre, through bringing forward sites for the development of high quality offices in order to attract more knowledge-intensive service sector-based companies, within the business and professional services, and the creative and media sector. However, it recognises the viability issues of developing town centre offices (again, see below), as well as the need to improve the overall attractiveness of the town centre to office occupiers, including the state of the public realm, parking arrangements and road and rail connectivity. The perceived traffic congestion around the town centre, 'Operation Stack' and poor connectivity by train are highlighted as key barriers to attracting national and international companies from investing in Maidstone town centre. The Economic Development Strategy also supports the development of complementary edge-of-town office developments, particularly around motorway junctions, such as Eclipse Business Park; 20/20 Business Park, and Lordswood.

5.28 To facilitate the development of emerging sectors of the economy, the Economic Development Strategy also recommends the potential establishment of a Maidstone Enterprise Centre, which would be linked to the University for the Creative Arts (UCA) providing incubation space for small media firms and exhibition space for the University. The incubator could form part of the new UCA campus, and the Economic Development Strategy recommends that a feasibility study for an Enterprise Centre is undertaken.

GL Hearn Office Viability Study, January 2009

5.29 GL Hearn was instructed by Maidstone Borough Council to assess the viability of potential office refurbishment / redevelopment in Maidstone town centre, having regard to the relatively large quantities of outdated / poor quality stock within the town centre at present. The existence of such outdated stock, and the issues associated with its redevelopment, are alluded to in some of the other background documents to which we refer, above.

5.30 GL Hearn undertook development appraisals for representative "hypothetical" buildings reflecting three of the most typical office typologies found in Maidstone, of varying age / quality. The potential refurbishment / redevelopment of each building was appraised having regard to a range of scenarios, including: refurbishment to provide the same quantity of floorspace as existing, to modern standards; redevelopment of the building, if vacant; redevelopment to include a greater quantum of office floorspace or additional residential development to facilitate viability.

5.31 GL Hearn concluded that none of the scenarios involving 100% office re-provision to heights similar to existing heights would be likely to prove sufficiently viable for a developer. While there would be some scope to improve viability if storey heights could be increased significantly, or if residential uses could be included (both subject to planning), viability would still be marginal.

5.32 GL Hearn's analysis was based on "sustainable" market values (i.e. what they consider the current value to be, but in a "normal" rather than recessionary economic climate). The above conclusions notwithstanding, the report highlights the fact that a significant proportion of Maidstone's office stock is in excess of 20 – 30 years old, and will therefore continue to deteriorate, to the extent that over time, there may be greater financial impetus upon owners

to refurbish / redevelop. In addition, as and when leases to the original tenants of the buildings expire, leaving the potentially weaker covenant strength of sub-tenants, this may have implications for the capital values of the property, and again provide greater stimulus to redevelopment.

5.33 Given an understanding of the Maidstone office market, GL Hearn's conclusions are not surprising. Indeed, it is often challenging to secure the redevelopment of existing employment land / buildings for purely employment related uses, as the potential value uplift often fails to cover the costs involved. As such, this is not an issue which is unique to Maidstone. Amongst their wider comments, GL Hearn suggested the potential creation of an office quarter, e.g. at Springfield Park / Maidstone East, in order to help stimulate the town's office market.

5.34 The Retail and Leisure Market sub-section below provides an overview of the retail and leisure market in Maidstone. Subsequent sections focus on the office and residential markets.

Retail and leisure markets

National overview

5.35 As a result of the present economic downturn, the overall picture for high street retail in the UK as a whole has been bleak. With regard to the occupational market, there has not yet been a collapse in the number of leasing transactions as was feared earlier in the year, despite the negative press associated with the performance of individual high street retailers during the recession and some high profile business failures. However, there are notable differences between particular locations, with vacancy levels in secondary retail centres increasing sharply while other, more established, centres continue to be relatively resilient to the downturn.

5.36 On the investment side, a key development in Q1 2009 for UK high street retail has been the stabilisation of prime high street yields, at circa 6%. There is increasing demand for prime retail assets of small lot sizes offering secure income, and this is particularly evident for premises occupied by banks. However, investment activity remains subdued as buying opportunities for this type of product are limited, as with prime product in other sectors.

Maidstone Town Centre

Catchment

5.37 Though Maidstone is judged as having a large shopping catchment (200,000 persons, source: PROMIS) and a high level of retail floorspace, the town's catchment is constrained by the presence of alternative centres such as Bromley, Chatham and the other Medway towns, Ashford, Canterbury, Sevenoaks and Hempstead Valley Shopping Centre. In addition, Bluewater, at less than half an hour's drive from Maidstone also impinges upon the town's retail catchment. It has a wide selection of prime retailers

unavailable in Maidstone (including John Lewis) and is likely to attract high spending trips from Maidstone's catchment area and beyond. In terms of floorspace, Maidstone is ranked by PROMIS as 28th of 200, similar to other centres in the UK such as Plymouth, Wolverhampton and York. To put this into perspective, other local town centres are ranked as follows: Canterbury (36), Tunbridge Wells (63), Chatham (83), and Ashford (156).

Prime pitch

5.38 Maidstone's prime pitch is historically situated at the southern end of Week Street, from the junction with Earl Street to the junction with High Street/King Street. Key retailers located here include Marks and Spencer (2 stores), WH Smith, Mothercare, Monsoon, River Island and Burton/Dorothy Perkins. This prime pitch has now been extended to the west by the opening of the Fremlin Walk Shopping Centre.

Shopping centres

5.39 Maidstone has three shopping centres accounting for 46% of total managed floor space in the town, the Royal Star Arcade, the Mall and Fremlin Walk Shopping Centre. Fremlin Walk Shopping Centre is the town's most recent development and was opened in 2005. The single level centre comprises 32,500m² of retail accommodation, anchored by a 9,300m² House of Fraser, and benefits from 800 car parking spaces. Fremlin Walk has also attracted a number of new retailers to Maidstone including Oasis, Republic, Zara, and Hotel Chocolat, boosting the town's reputation as a major retailing destination. The centre also accommodates retailers such as Boots, Waterstones, Early Learning Centre and Orange.

5.40 The Mall Maidstone (formerly known as the Chequers Centre) is located on the southern side of King Street. This is set over three storeys with key tenants including Bhs, Boots and TJ Hughes. There are several fashion multiples including Next, New Look, Miss Selfridge and Ann Harvey with retailers at the 'value' end of the market. A 2,800m² extension to the centre was completed in mid 2008; this extension also included 3,250m² of offices.

5.41 Maidstone's third shopping centre is the Royal Star Arcade which is located on the north side of the High Street. The arcade is home to a number of specialist and independent retailers occupying smaller units including Karen Millen, Raffles, The Oyster Box and Monsoon Children. The Royal Star Arcade is generally perceived to be not entirely successful with a number of vacancies and low pedestrian flows.

Convenience shopping

5.42 Maidstone has a reasonable level of convenience shopping provision in the town centre, with a Sainsbury's store at Romney Place, Iceland within the Chequers Mall and a Somerfield at the eastern end of King Street. There is also a Lidl next to Matalan at the Broadway Centre on the western side of the River Medway.

Independent specialist shopping

5.43 Maidstone has a number of independent and specialist shops. These provide an additional dimension to Maidstone's retail offer and prevent a "clone town" feel from dominating. More independent, secondary or specialist retailing is located in areas such as the western end of the High Street / Bank Street, Mill Street, Union Street and Pudding Lane. Included within this offer are a number of retailers specialising in children's wear, a number of shoe shops (including the local landmark The Golden Boot on Gabriel's Hill), a number of bridal shops and shops selling musical instruments.

Eating and drinking

5.44 Maidstone has a number of cafes, bars and restaurants, including representation from many of the national chains such as Pizza Express, Zizzis, Café Nero and Costa Coffee. While such uses are spread across the town, there are particular concentrations, for example on Earl Street. The present offer can be characterised as mass / middle-market.

Leisure

5.45 Lockmeadow Entertainment Centre is the only leisure park in Maidstone, falling within the south-western corner of the study area. Anchored by an Odeon cinema, the park also includes various nightclubs, restaurants and a David Lloyd Leisure Centre. Tenant change has been limited, Liquid Envy nightclub is the only new arrival. Falling outside of the study area are The Astor Sports & Leisure Complex at Oakwood and Maidstone Leisure Centre at Mote Park. In the north of the study area at Whatman Park is an LA Fitness Gym and at Lower Stone Street is Gala Bingo. The Hazlitt Theatre is located on the south side of Earl Street, benefitting from the proximity to A3 uses.

Bulky goods

5.46 Maidstone ranks 72nd of the Property Market Analysis (PMA) centres for Retail Warehousing supply, with an estimated provision of 839,00 sq ft. With four PMA classified parks in the Maidstone area, over 57% of total retail warehousing floorspace is on retail parks. The study area includes a number of retail warehouses / retail parks, including St Peter's Wharf Retail Park where the tenants are Homebase, TK Maxx and Hobbycraft (with an Asda Living and Travelodge currently under construction immediately to the south), and B & Q opposite Lockmeadow. Matalan and Lidl are present at the Broadway Centre. There are also a number of retail warehouse occupiers / trade counter users, such as Dreams and Topps Tiles at Hart Street Commercial Centre. There are two retail parks just to the west of the study area beyond Maidstone Barracks rail station, the most prominent being the London Road Retail Park, which houses Dunelm Mill and Paul Simon.

Retailer demand

5.47 Maidstone has relatively weak retail demand at present; demand that does exist is generally for smaller retail units, the main concentration being from clothing shops, restaurants, cafes and bars. Historically over the period from 2000 to 2009 figures from PROMIS show that town centre vacancy rates have risen from circa 7% to 10.5%. Present requirements include Moda in Pelle, Coffee Republic, Gourmet Burger Kitchen and Strada. It is understood that Waitrose, Tesco and Asda are all potentially seeking representation in Maidstone.

5.48 Reported demand from retail warehouse operators for Maidstone was close to the Retail PROMIS average in terms of total floorspace. Operators with current requirements include Argos, Halfords, Go Outdoors and Texstyle World.

Available supply

5.49 There are a number of available retail units in Maidstone, although the vacancy level recorded by PROMIS in January 2009 stood at 8.2% which is well below the average of PROMIS centres. These vacancies were spread across the centre of Maidstone and much of the take-up can be attributed to the movement of independent retailers. In January 2009 there were a total of two vacant units on the prime pitch of Week Street and in Fremlin Walk there were two further available units. Within the Mall Maidstone there were a total of seven vacancies including a new 30,000 sq ft unit developed as an extension to the centre in 2008.

5.50 At the Royal Star Arcade, movers from the centre include Viyella, Vines & Vinyl and a number of independent retailers. At January 2009 there were a total of 7 vacant units within the scheme.

Pipeline development schemes

5.51 Reported development schemes in the pipeline include:

- Full planning permission has been granted to redevelop the former Army and Navy (House of Fraser) store on Week Street for a mixed use development with four retail units and residential uses on the upper floors.
- Kier has been selected as the preferred bidder to work in partnership with Network Rail on the redevelopment of Maidstone East railway station and other mainline rail stations. Proposals for the site could include mixed retail, leisure, offices, residential units and station improvements. It is reported that Asda was in negotiation with the developer of the site.
- Full planning permission has been granted for a 19,000 sq ft food store on Well Road, outside the study area, to the north.

Rents

5.61 Historically prime rental growth in Maidstone town centre has underperformed national sub regional centres as recorded by PROMIS. Between 1987 and 2009 Zone A rents increased by only 1%. Rents fell during the early 1990s and only regained their previous peak in 2000. Rents are now at a similar level to 2006. The town has reportedly experienced slow rental growth, ranking low amongst PROMIS centres on this indicator. Lack of demand has accounted for this slow rental growth, and with few recent transactions, rental analysis is limited. According to local agents prime headline rents in the centre of Maidstone range from between £140 psf Zone A to £165 psf Zone A (paid by Ann Summers on Week Street) and circa £180 Zone A on Fremlin Walk. On Week Street Zone As rents have shown little growth over recent years with Jones Shoes taking a new lease in Summer 2007 at £140 psf Zone A, Phones 4 U taking a new lease in

Autumn 2008 at a rent of £150 psf Zone A and rents now reportedly falling back to £130 psf Zone A. At the north of Week Street the quality of the retail provision falls away. Rents achievable at this end of the street are £70 psf Zone A.

5.52 The Mall Maidstone, located south of Fremlin Walk, has rents of circa £110 psf Zone A on the upper level and £70-£75 psf Zone A for the lower Mall. Maidstone's third arcade is the Royal Star Arcade where rents are lower at circa £55 psf Zone A. Elsewhere in the town agents note that Zone A rents for King Street are in the region of £70 psf Zone A and around £60 psf Zone A for units on the High Street.

Fremlin Walk shopping centre

5.53 Within the Maidstone study area rents for retail warehouse / bulky goods units vary. The majority of retail warehouse / bulky goods units are located on the west side of the River Medway. Beyond the study area, top rents at London Road Retail Park are at £25 per sq ft following the letting to Argos Extra in August 2006. At Lockmeadow Entertainment Centre passing rents range from £19 psf to £30 per sq ft.

Investment Yields

5.54 The investment market in Maidstone has been similarly affected by market depression over the past year. As a result, agents have seen a marked outward shift in yields and resulting fall in capital values. Agent sources placed prime retail yields in Spring 2009 at 7.25% moving outward in line with the great pattern of the PROMIS Centres. The most recent comparable was the very recent purchase of Fremlin Walk shopping centre from Land Securities by Europa Capital at a yield of circa 8.75% and at a 30% discount from its original asking price. Prior to this, in April 2009, 12-14 Week Street comprising 10,000 sq ft of retail was sold at 6.75% NIY. As mentioned, investment activity remains subdued with interest primarily for well let, income secure retail units.

Key conclusions

5.55 From the above analysis, the key conclusions are as follows:

- Maidstone has a strong retail centre providing a primarily mid / mass market offer. It is categorised within the PROMIS top 30 retail centres;
- The town has a good choice of independent / specialist shopping;
- The development of Fremlin Walk has been a broadly successful addition, having a positive impact on the town. However, further retail growth and demand has stalled albeit partly due to the current recessionary climate;

- Although Maidstone has significant forecast capacity, its catchment is constrained by a number of competing centres in relatively close proximity, a number of which have a strong "quality";
- In the longer term it is acknowledged that the future opportunity created by plans for the construction of 11,080 new homes in Maidstone will bring associated employment growth;
- There is reportedly weak retailer demand due to the lack of quality space although operator interest exists for a new supermarket, which could improve the quantity and quality/choice of provision in the town centre;
- There is a strong leisure offer aimed at a mid / mass market which is spread around the town; and
- There is a lack of family orientated leisure uses with exception of the cinema.

5.56 Given the current economic climate, we consider that there may be limited scope for new development within the town centre, in the short term. However, there may be a number of opportunities to grow Maidstone's offer in the medium to long term, particularly given the forecast retail capacity. The town's offer is likely to remain primarily at the value/mid-market end of the retail market. While Maidstone has a reasonably affluent catchment population (particularly outside the town centre), competing locations such as Bluewater (in particular), Tunbridge Wells and – to some extent – Sevenoaks have a strong quality retail offer, combined with a town centre environment which is perceived to be of high quality, and a strong range of A3 uses (again, with a particular emphasis on "quality", which will prove more attractive to affluent shoppers).

5.57 While the most likely proposition may be to grow Maidstone's retail offer along its current lines, there may be some scope to create more boutique/ upmarket development in the town, in the longer term (we are aware that some higher quality operators have considered taking space within the town). To be successful, such a development need not be particularly large (a scheme of, say, 6,500m² – 9,000m² could provide sufficient critical mass, and could potentially also work well in conjunction with a more upmarket convenience retailer such as Waitrose).

5.58 There are a number of locations which could potentially accommodate significant new development, albeit there is a lack of obvious development opportunities which could be implemented relatively quickly. The possible exception to this is Maidstone East (and potentially the adjoining Parcelforce site), given the fact that the station site is in single ownership. This site is, however, some way off pitch and therefore in retailing terms, would be most likely to be suitable for a large convenience retailer. However, wider proposals to the north of the town centre would help to increase footfall around the station and therefore could bring the site into consideration for some comparison retail element.

5.59 Another factor which will be important, in helping to attract more retailers (particularly upmarket retailers) to the town, will be the scope to which the quality of the existing town centre environment can be improved and enhanced.

5.60 Although perhaps more directly beneficial to the office market, it is considered that improved public transport links (particularly rail) would also help to improve the town's retail offer. A reduced journey time to Central London would make Maidstone more attractive to more affluent commuters, who could then potentially be encouraged, (for example through a mixture of new development and environmental improvements) to spend a greater proportion of their disposable income within the town centre. Given the relative ease of road access to centres such as Bluewater, traffic improvements in the town centre will also help to retain shoppers, and make the centre attractive to retailers.

Office market summary and outlook

National Overview

5.61 The overall picture for the office market in the UK has been poor in recent months with covenant strength weakening and rents adjusting rapidly to reflect the overall economic downturn. Office rents across the UK have fallen over the last year but the rate of rental growth decline has eased since the Spring. On a monthly basis, office rental growth fell by -1.3% in May, an improvement on the severe fall of -2.6% recorded in March. Over the 12 months to May rental growth stands at -12.3%. With occupiers increasingly looking to consolidate their accommodation amid the downturn, it is anticipated that downward pressure on rents will remain throughout 2009 albeit at more muted levels to that seen in recent months.

5.62 Capital growth recorded a fall of 31.8% over the 12 months to May and, since the peak of the market in mid-2007, office capital values have declined by nearly 44%. By way of comparison, office values fell by -38% over the entire downturn in the early 1990's, a period which lasted 31 months from peak to trough.

5.63 Transactional volumes fell suddenly and substantially from late summer 2007 and have not recovered since. However, market sentiment has become much more positive in recent months, albeit that investor interest is highly focused on prime, secure-income assets. Indeed, part of the reason buying activity remains so subdued, in addition to the obvious lack of finance available, is the shortage of buying opportunities available for this type of asset among willing investors.

5.64 The continued shortage of credit and a lack of desirable investment stock has kept transactional volumes at subdued levels. In the South East, investment turnover in Q1 totalled £68.6m, 87% below the quarterly average for the last six years. Where finance is currently available to investors, margins are high while loan to value ratios have been reined in to circa 60% to 70%.

5.65 The increasing threat of tenant defaults caused by the recession and the associated effect on asset performance is nevertheless leading to heavy discounting on assets with high risk tenants. Consequently, a pricing distinction has emerged between prime assets. The keenest pricing relates to prime buildings in prime locations which offer secure income, while prime buildings with a greater degree of occupational risk, such as multiple tenanted offices, are being discounted accordingly. In the South East, for example, this pricing differential is currently 75 to 100 basis points, i.e. 0.75% to 1%.

5.66 Across the UK's regional office markets, 2008 began as a story of divergence between investment and occupational sentiment. However, in 2009 there are now clear signs that a slowdown in the occupier market is starting to appear, providing an added threat to investor sentiment. Many regional cities saw lower office take-up and rising vacancy rates by the end of 2008, but prime headline rents have held firm across the board.

Maidstone Town Centre

Overview

5.67 As the County Town of Kent, Maidstone performs an important administrative role and the town has benefited from decentralisation from Central London in the 1970's and early 1980's. Although the town centre office market is relatively small, it is the predominant office centre within Kent.

5.68 In common with many "county" towns (i.e. outside the M25) demand for office space in Maidstone is limited. Office occupiers locating beyond the M25 (particularly "high quality" national or international occupiers) tend towards areas with good access to London and the west, such as Surrey and Berkshire. These areas are preferred to centres on the east side of the M25 such as Maidstone. This regional preference accounts for the flat demand which reportedly characterises much of the Maidstone office market. Additional factors compounding this issue include Maidstone's relative inaccessibility by rail (with the rail journey approximately twice the length of that from London to locations such as Reading, Woking and Guildford) and car from London, and Maidstone's relatively poor access to the M25 via the M20.

5.69 Given the relatively limited demand, and hence lack of recent development, it is clear that the majority of offices in Maidstone's town centre are dated and restricted in terms of facilities, condition, parking and access when compared to alternative locations. Alternative office locations on the edge of or close to Maidstone include Eclipse Park, Kings Hill and (in the future) Ebbsfleet, where the specification of offices is better with good parking facilities, an essential consideration for many office occupiers. Maidstone suffers from a perception of traffic congestion in the town centre. In addition Maidstone is not viewed as having a commercial "specialism" which means that demand from specific market sectors is diluted. By way of comparison, a centre such as Reading is perceived to have a cluster of hi-tech and financial services occupiers.

5.70 As the administrative centre for Kent, key occupiers in Maidstone town centre include a number of major public sector users such as Kent County Council, Maidstone Borough Council and the Inland Revenue, Customs & Excise. These are the largest employers in the town accounting for 33% of office take up over the last 5 years to Q4 2008. Private sector office occupiers include Kent Messenger Group Newspapers, Brachers, Hidden Hearing, Royal Bank of Scotland, Ace Insurance, Day Smith & Hunter and Mouchel Consultancy.

5.71 These private sector office occupiers are mostly medium sized employers, employing circa 500 or fewer employees. Larger office occupiers tend towards out of town locations such as Kings Hill Business Park. Major occupiers out of town include Cabot Financial, Charities Aid Foundation, Kimberley Clark, Man Group, Barclays Independent Financial Planning and Brachers. There have been very few large employers recently moving to Maidstone; and those that do move including Cabot in 2007 and more recently Rolex, prefer out of town locations. In fact 73% of demand is for space out of town compared to the 64% average for PROMIS centres.

Office supply

5.72 At the end of 2008 the Maidstone area as a whole was estimated to have a total office stock of circa 200,000m². To put this into perspective, Maidstone is ranked as 64th out of 200 centres by PROMIS in terms of total floorspace. Similar sized centres include Chelmsford and Colchester.

5.73 Figures from PROMIS show that available office stock mostly comprises smaller units under 1,000m². Offices in Maidstone are mostly situated to the south

of the main retail area on King Street, Romney Place, Upper Stone Street and Knightrider Street. These offices are mostly of poor quality, from the 1960's / 70's and second hand. The GL Hearn report, referred to in Section 2 above, highlights the difficulties associated with the refurbishment / redevelopment of such premises given current rental levels. As a result new town centre office developments are rare and office occupiers looking for space tend to seek out of town locations. The most recent office development in the town centre is the refurbishment of Stoneborough House on King Street, comprising 83,000 sq ft and let to the Council. The development of County Gate (40,000 sqft of offices to the north of Maidstone East) has been the only speculative development in a decade.

Town centre offices

Further developments (not necessarily recent) include Medway Bridge House, Coleman House and Brenchley House near Maidstone East Station. There is also a small cluster of office uses in the vicinity of Maidstone West station / London Road / Tonbridge Road, in part reflecting the proximity of the Law Courts. Within the study area, Mountgrange have permission for circa 200,000 sqft of offices at Springfield Park. The future of this proposal is uncertain as the development is currently in the hands of receivers.

5.74 Office development often depends upon pre-let arrangements with tenants in order to minimise development risk. Without such arrangements it is often difficult for office development to take place. Office development in Maidstone has been hampered by a lack of firm demand, and additional risks include the added expense of town centre development, poor tenant demand, limited car parking provision for major office developments and the lack of available development finance.

5.75 Recent office developments out of Maidstone include Kings Hill which is a mixed use development located 7 miles to the West of Maidstone. Also, Turkey Mill (to the east of the town centre), South Park Business Village (to the south of the town), Eclipse Business Park (just off Junction 7 of the M20) and 20/20 Business Park (just to the north of the town). Gallagher Properties have permission to expand Eclipse Business Park with a further 9,000m². At Kings Hill approximately 50% of the development was funded by pre-let arrangements with tenants. These prior arrangements are typical in a market where demand is deemed to be limited.

Rents

5.76 Historically, there have been few deals in the town centre due to the lack of available space and the inferior quality of the space which is available. This is reflected by the relatively low rents per square metre achieved (see Table 5.3). The top reported rent

in the town centre at the end of 2008 was £233 per square metre, but the majority of demand has been for second-hand accommodation at rents around £80-120 per square metre. The larger, better quality, out of town schemes have generally satisfied the needs of the national and international companies and have therefore achieved higher rents. Top rents locally, out of town, were reported to be £250 per square metre at the end of 2008 at Kings Hill Business Park.

Investment yields

5.77 Historically yields in Maidstone have, according to PROMIS, tended to reflect the market as a whole. In 2003 yields stood at 7.75% for the centre of Maidstone strengthening to 5% in 2006. At the end of 2008 prime office yields in the Maidstone area stood at 8.25%. There have been few recent reported office sales in Maidstone town centre. It is expected that yields in the town centre would now be higher and dependent on covenant strength to a significant extent.

Key conclusions

5.78 Having regard to the above analysis, the key conclusions are as follows:

- Maidstone is the largest office centre in Kent with major occupiers including a number of major public sector occupiers (for example, Kent County Council, the largest employers in the region);
- There is presently relatively poor demand for office space in the town centre due to the condition of much of the existing office stock, together with issues of perception (for example, poor public transport, traffic congestion in the town centre, relatively poor quality town centre environment);
- Therefore, new office development in the town centre is rare and some office users favour out of town space which provides more modern, higher specification offices with better facilities and access;
- Due to the inferior quality of town centre space rents have been kept down and the larger, better quality, out of town schemes have achieved higher rents; and
- As noted in the GL Hearn study, we consider that in the short term the redevelopment of office stock is likely to be unviable.

5.79 While the above points do not present a wholly encouraging picture for the town centre, it is important to recognise that these problems are not unique to Maidstone. If Maidstone is to address these issues, then there are a number of measures that could potentially be undertaken. Like many similar centres, Maidstone suffers from issues of poor perception. This could potentially be addressed through improvements to the quality of the town centre environment (perhaps particularly in the area around Maidstone East station and the north end of Week Street), and also measures to ease congestion within the town centre. While clearly harder to address, at least in the short term, measures which improve the journey time by rail to Central London would also be beneficial.

5.80 Given the current economic climate and, in particular, the lack of speculative development finance, we consider that new office development of any significant scale, within or close to the town centre, is unlikely in the short term. In addition, development may currently be marginal in terms of its financial viability, having regard to current rental levels within the town.

5.81 The GL Hearn study highlights the viability problems associated with the redevelopment of much of the town's existing office stock. This may change over time, for a variety of reasons (improving rental values as the economy recovers, the implications of future lease expiries and also the lapse of "privity of contract" on buildings which have been sublet, but where the original tenant remains potentially liable for the rental payments etc).

5.82 However, if Maidstone is to attract significant new high quality office development, then it is suggested that it may well be more appropriate to focus on creating a new office quarter on land which is currently vacant or underused. It is considered that land at the northern end of the study area, in the Springfield area and in the vicinity of Maidstone East station, would have the potential to create such a quarter in the longer term, with either a relatively high density urban feel or, alternatively, in a more business park style campus setting, taking advantage of the existing green nature of much of this area and its proximity to the River Medway. This location also provides the benefit of close proximity to Maidstone East station, and relatively easy road access to the M20, free from the worst of the congestion of the town centre "core". In order to create a truly high quality new office development, it will be necessary to achieve rental values in excess of £200 per square metre; somewhat above current values within the town.

5.83 The existing office development, primarily on the southern side of the town centre, may well continue to perform a role, providing a suitable location for smaller or more local businesses. This would have little impact on the demand for higher quality space or the proposed office quarter which would fulfil the requirements of larger, more high profile occupiers. In addition, sites such as the Powerhub site, have the ability to provide start-up space for smaller occupiers. This latter market may potentially be further stimulated, should the University for the Creative Arts (UCA) choose to develop its main campus in Maidstone. In summary, the Springfield area provides something of a "blank canvas" upon which one could

Table 5.2 - Recent Office Transactions in Maidstone

Address	Date	Size (m^2)	Rent achieved (£ per m^2)	Quality of accommodation	Lease term
Cornwallis House, Pudding Lane	15/03/2009	220	86.33	B	1yr
Carriage House, Mill Street	16/10/2008	545	183.33	B	n/a
Meadow House, Medway Street	23/09/2008	608	121.67	B	n/a
Medvale House, Mote Road	12/09/2008	523	111.11	B	n/a
Mill House, Mill Street	01/07/2008	545	82.56	B	10yrs
Brenchley House, 125/135 Week Street	26/06/2008	1,155	93.33	B	Lease Expiry Date: 24/03/2012
County Gate 2, Staceys Street	11/02/2008	977	233.33	A	n/a

** Quality A classifies new modern office space as having air conditioning, raised access floors, suspended ceilings and parking. Quality B refers to second hand office space of poorer quality.*

potentially create high quality new offices (and is indeed the best location for this). The offices in the existing Urban Enterprise Quarter are in a somewhat less attractive location, and the GL Hearn study has highlighted the viability issues associated with the refurbishment/redevelopment of these.

Residential market

National overview and outlook

5.84 Nationally, the residential property market has experienced a sharp, much publicised decline over the past 12 months, with rapid price falls, reduced buyer demand, significant restrictions on mortgage lending and significantly reduced sales volumes. However, clear evidence is beginning to emerge that the first stage of the downturn - continual and rapid price falls - is being replaced by a period of more modest price falls and in some areas even stable prices. According to Nationwide, in July 2009 UK average prices are 19% below their October 2007 peak - at £150,946. The decline in prices has been led by southern England (down 20%-22%).

5.85 In the first quarter of 2009, both Halifax and Nationwide reported individual monthly rises, although both admit that little should be read into a single month of growth. Further declines are expected in Q2, but the rate will be slower (0.5% to 1% per month rather than last year's 1% to 2%). A period of flat prices or marginal price rises should encourage some of those who stayed out of the market to re-enter.

5.86 In terms of sales volumes, the restriction of finance has been a major contributory factor, along with very low consumer confidence. Sales volumes have remained more than 50% below their long term trend into 2009. However, in January and February, the RICS reported the first upturn in sales volumes since mid 2007. Knight Frank's own data for the prime markets clearly points to an improvement in demand since February.

5.87 As demand improves, supply is getting tighter. New properties entering the market in March were 30% lower on a year-on-year basis. An ongoing area of concern in the market is the tendency for financing issues to undermine potential sales, either in terms of the cost or structure of the financing offered.

5.88 Recent evidence would suggest that the market has beginning to turn. There is improved confidence and a feeling that deals can be done. We can also be relatively sure that sales volumes will begin to move upwards. However, the risks are still significant and we would suggest that further price falls, of between 5% and 10% in most areas, are inevitable. The growth of unemployment (and the fear of unemployment) is now the largest factor restricting the housing market. The availability of finance is the other factor which will also limit the speed of the recovery.

Maidstone Town Centre

Supply

5.89 Recent residential developments in Maidstone are mainly located outside the study area. Those that are within the study area are mainly located towards the south west of the river. Recent developments in Maidstone include a development by Bellwinch Homes at the Blue Quarter on Hart Street. This development borders the south of the study area and overlooks the Medway river. It includes five apartments, with one bedroom apartments available at £150,000 and the two bedrooms for £170,000.

5.90 Riverside Plaza, built by Places for People, overlooks the river and is on Hart Street. It is a new development of 39 one and two bed room apartments on the south-western tip of the study area. Working on a Part Buy/Part Rent basis, apartments are

purchased at Riverside Plaza at an initial share of 25% with a modest rent on the remaining share. Starting prices for one bedroom flats are £25,000, given this purchasing structure.

5.91 The Old Hospital on King Street has been developed by Higgins Homes and has recently come onto the market. This development comprises one and two bedroom apartments ranging in price from £129,500 for a 1 bedroom apartment to £169,500 for a two bedroom apartment.

5.92 Iconica, developed by Bermac Properties Ltd, is on Knightrider Street and comprises 26 1 and 2 bedroom luxury apartments. This development is located towards the south of the study area. These apartments are presently being let and are not for sale. Further developments, but not so recent, include Kingfisher Meadow at Lockmeadow and Mckenzie Court, Brenchley Gardens on the east bank of the River Medway.

Demand

5.93 According to local agents, demand for apartments in the town centre is improving. Prices have fallen and there has been much demand for two bedroom apartments. There is encouraging demand for new developments such as The Old Hospital from local residents working in Maidstone and the Kent area but also residents who commute to London. Demand for three bedroom apartments / houses tends to be focussed beyond the town centre where there are a greater number of family sized houses.

Values

5.94 Prices for apartments in the area vary, according to the quality and size of the unit and its location. It is evident that there are a range of prices for standard modern or new units within purpose built apartment blocks in the Maidstone area and that apartments with river views or in the town centre are sold at a premium. According to the website findaproperty.com, average prices for apartments in Maidstone are: 1 bed £95,000; 2 bed £137,000; 3 bed £267,000. (NB: These average prices reflect a much wider area than the study area and includes a variety of different quality apartments. Two bedroom flats in the town centre range in value from £150,000 to circa £200,000 equating to £380 psf. three bedroom flats cost approximately £225,000 depending on quality and location).

Key conclusions

5.95 Key conclusions on the residential market are as follows:

- Both nationally and within Maidstone the residential market has been poor but demand is reportedly improving;
- There are relatively few new schemes in the town centre;
- There is a premium for apartments in the town centre with river frontage;
- Town centre flats are mainly one and two bedroom;
- There are relatively few sites within the town centre with unimplemented consents and therefore Maidstone is without the "overhang" of supply present in some regional markets;

5.96 Nationally, it is clear that the residential market is likely to take some time to recover in confidence, and to see a significant, wide spread improvement in sales values. The rapid growth in the residential market in recent years was fuelled by a number of factors, including the "buy-to-let" boom, expectations of rapidly rising capital values, and the ready availability of mortgage finance. These figures are likely to be significantly absent from the market in the short term. The recent housing market crash has led to significant restructuring in the residential development market,

and we consider that, particularly in the short term, most developers are likely to focus primarily on greenfield developments and urban extensions, rather than more complex, brownfield/urban regeneration mixed use projects. In addition, it should to be remembered that for the majority of homeowners, the ultimate aspiration is to own a traditional family house, rather than an apartment. However, there is continuing demand for flats in the town centre in the longer term which is likely to arise when the buy to let market has recovered and demand for central living within an enhanced County town centre from specific markets such as the elderly, first time buyers or students increases.

5.97 For these reasons, it is considered that it would be appropriate to be cautious, about the promotion of a significant number of new residential units within the town centre, particularly in apartment form, although we note that – anecdotally – demand for such units within the town is increasing. Where residential uses are to be promoted in the town centre, it may well be preferable to focus on sites where traditional family housing (for example in townhouse form) can be provided, and/or developments without a significant "vertical" mixing of uses. Where possible, developments should seek to capitalise upon Maidstone's key environmental assets for example areas of high quality green space, the historic environment and, in particular, the presence of the River Medway.

Summary

5.98 Within the commercial property sectors, it is clear that Maidstone is constrained by high quality competition, whether in the form of nearby competing retail centres, or out of town business park developments. Several of these locations do, in particular, have an advantage in securing interest from higher quality occupiers.

5.99 Maidstone is perceived to have a number of disadvantages. While these are not necessarily unique to the town, they include the following:

- Relatively poor public transport access, particularly by rail to/from Central London;
- A relatively poor quantity of town centre environment;
- While Maidstone has a relatively affluent catchment, some of the Borough's more affluent residents live outside the town centre, and do not necessarily work or shop in the town;
- There are perceptions of significant traffic congestion within the town centre;
- Maidstone fails to make sufficient use of its assets, some of which (high quality green spaces in close proximity to the town centre, fine historic buildings and – in particular – the presence of the River Medway) are significant; and
- Compared to certain competing locations such as Tunbridge Wells or Canterbury, for example, Maidstone does not have a clearly articulated "brand" or "identity".

5.100 While Maidstone is perceived to have a number of disadvantages, the town also has a number of significant strengths, as follows:

- A strong mass/mid market retail offer (in terms of size of retail provision, the town is in the top 30

retail centres nationally)

- The largest office market in Kent and a centre for public administration functions
- As referred to above, the benefit of a number of significant environmental/townscape assets, which could potentially be enhanced
- Proximity to attractive countryside, and a major regional tourism asset in the form of Leeds Castle

5.101 While a strategy for the town centre needs to deal with the many site specific issues, it ideally needs to help address some of these overarching issues/cross cutting themes. These are not necessarily all matters which can be left to the private sector, and to private sector property development, particularly in the short term as the economy slowly begins to recover from the current recession.

5.102 Some of the development opportunities which may exist are likely to be longer term opportunities (due to various factors such as the need for site assembly, need to build greater confidence in the market, need to see clear evidence of rising values and/or demand etc), but the appropriate initial steps need to be put in place where possible.

New housing on Fairmeadow

6. Identification of key issues

Introduction

6.1 The baseline analysis included detailed consideration of the key issues in relation to the future of the town centre. The following section includes a summary of the key issues which are considered relevant to the Town Centre Study, and identifies a number of town centre opportunity sites.

Summary of key issues

6.2 The baseline analysis has highlighted the following key issues relevant to the town centre which the study will consider:

- At the present time the town centre lacks a coherent 'identity' or 'brand'. The study should seek to resolve the future direction and strategy for the town centre, including a strategy for future development and regeneration, taking into account the town's current status as:
  - a retail centre;
  - the county town of Kent;
  - a centre for growth (Growth Point status); and
  - a cultural and visitor centre.
- Maidstone suffers from relatively poor public transport links, and primary road access routes run around the centre, which dissects the town centre from its surroundings and the riverside;
- The quality of the town centre environment suffers from poor air quality, traffic congestion, poor quality public realm and a lack of green space;
- Maidstone town centre includes a number of strong assets, including the riverside, the presence of a number of historic and landmark buildings and several conservation areas. However, at present these are considered to be under-utilised, and the opportunity exists to increase the importance and scope of their role within the town;
- The town centre experiences strong competition across the market sectors;
- The core of the town centre provides a successful and active environment, however beyond this core routes educe in quality and footfall drops away substantially; and
- Maidstone town centre includes a number of key opportunity sites (see further details below).

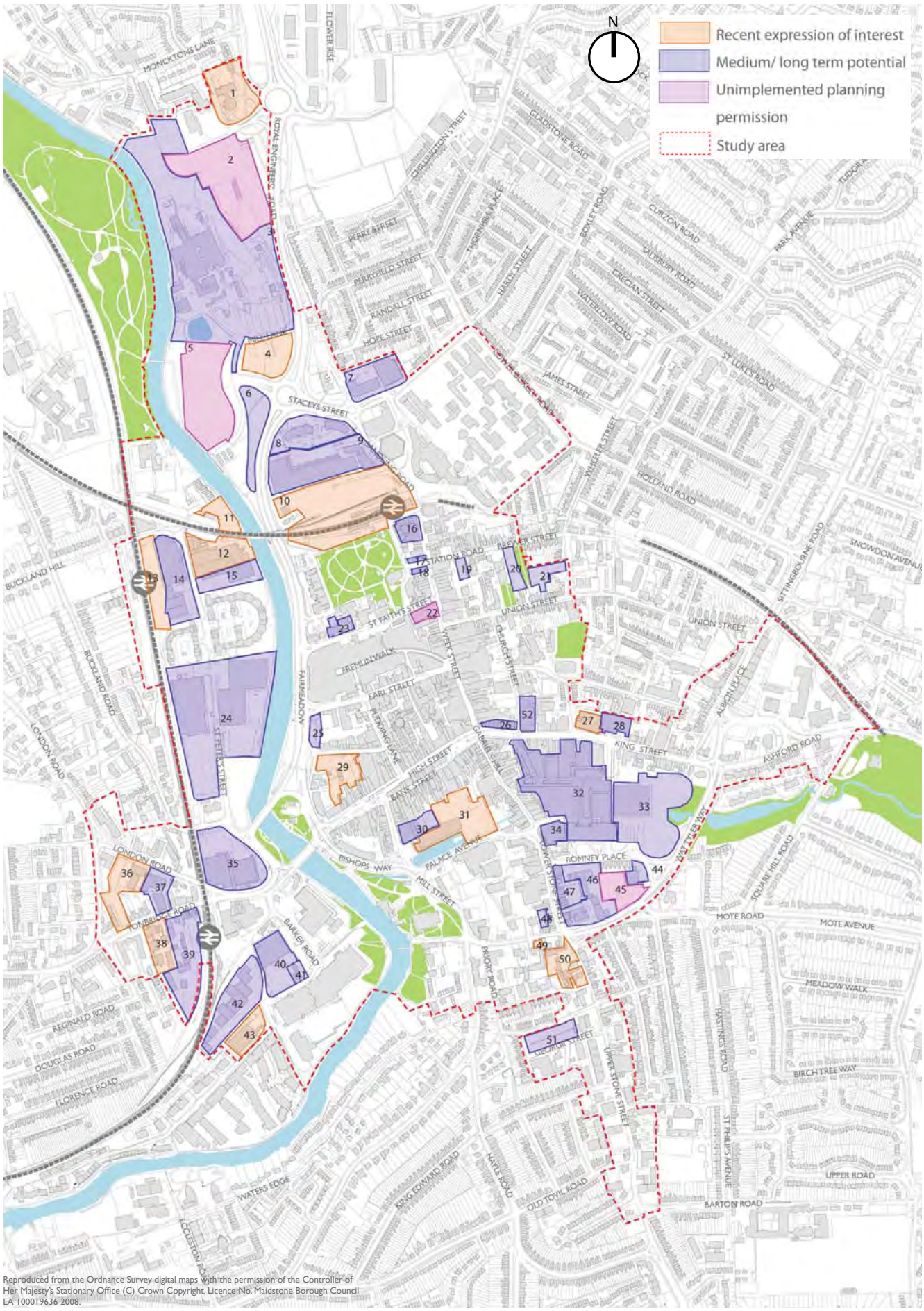


Figure 6.2 - Town centre opportunity sites

Opportunity sites

6.3 A number of opportunity sites have been identified as a result of the baseline analysis (see Figure 6.2). The sites fall into three categories.

Unimplemented planning permission

6.4 A small number of sites are subject to approved permissions which have not been developed. For example, Springfield Mill (site 2) at the northern end of the town centre, has approval for the construction of employment floorspace and 192 residential units alongside community uses which has not been taken forward. Other sites include land at James Whatman Way (site 5), 66-77 Week Street (Army & Navy Store - site 22) and 27 Mote Road (site 45).

Recent expressions of interest

6.5 A number of sites have been identified where some level of discussion with landowners has taken place. These range from sites where development proposals have been well considered such as land at Maidstone East station (site 10) through to Hart Street Commercial Centre (site 43) where the land use opportunities are being discussed.

Longer term opportunities

6.6 The remainder of the sites have been identified as a product of the analysis as speculative opportunities in the medium to longer term. These sites have been identified where greater potential exists in a particular location, or where refurbishment or redevelopment could enhance the local environment.

PART 2: STRATEGY AND PLANNING BRIEFS

7. Vision and future role of Maidstone

Vision

7.1 The vision for Maidstone Town Centre is to realise the town centre's role as the county town of Kent and a sub-regional centre for employment, shopping, leisure and education.

7.2 Maidstone town centre will be revitalised through a strong mix of supporting uses and activities, set within an environment of exceptional quality.

7.3 Key streets will be enhanced, the riverside given a new lease of life and new green spaces established to support an attractive and inviting town centre for residents, visitors and businesses to thrive.

7.4 The existing town centre core - set around the axis of the High Street and Week Street - will be supported and extended through new anchors to establish a sustainable pattern of activity. The full potential of existing retail streets will be realised by strategic placing of new development.

7.5 The unique features of the town centre will provide the levers to attract investment. Additional investor requirements will be met to help ensure new businesses can be attracted into the centre.

7.6 The following vision statement has been developed to guide future change in Maidstone town centre:

By 2026, a regenerated and sustainable Maidstone Town Centre will be a first class traditional town centre at the heart of the 21st century County town which has maintained its place as one of the premier town centres in the region by creating a distinctive, safe and high quality place which has:

- *Retained its best environmental features, including the riverside, and the enhanced public realm;*
- *Provided a variety of well integrated attractions for all ages including new shopping, service sector-based businesses, leisure, education and cultural facilities; and*
- *Improved access for all.*

Key components in realising this vision are:

- *Creating a highly sustainable location which is resilient to future climate change;*
- *Establishing the town centre as an attractive hub for businesses – building on the town centre's assets and environment as an alternative to isolated business parks;*
- *Growing the diversity of the retail offer, supporting a continued balance between independent and multiple retailers; and*
- *Creating a stronger mix and balance of uses within the centre to support long term vitality.*

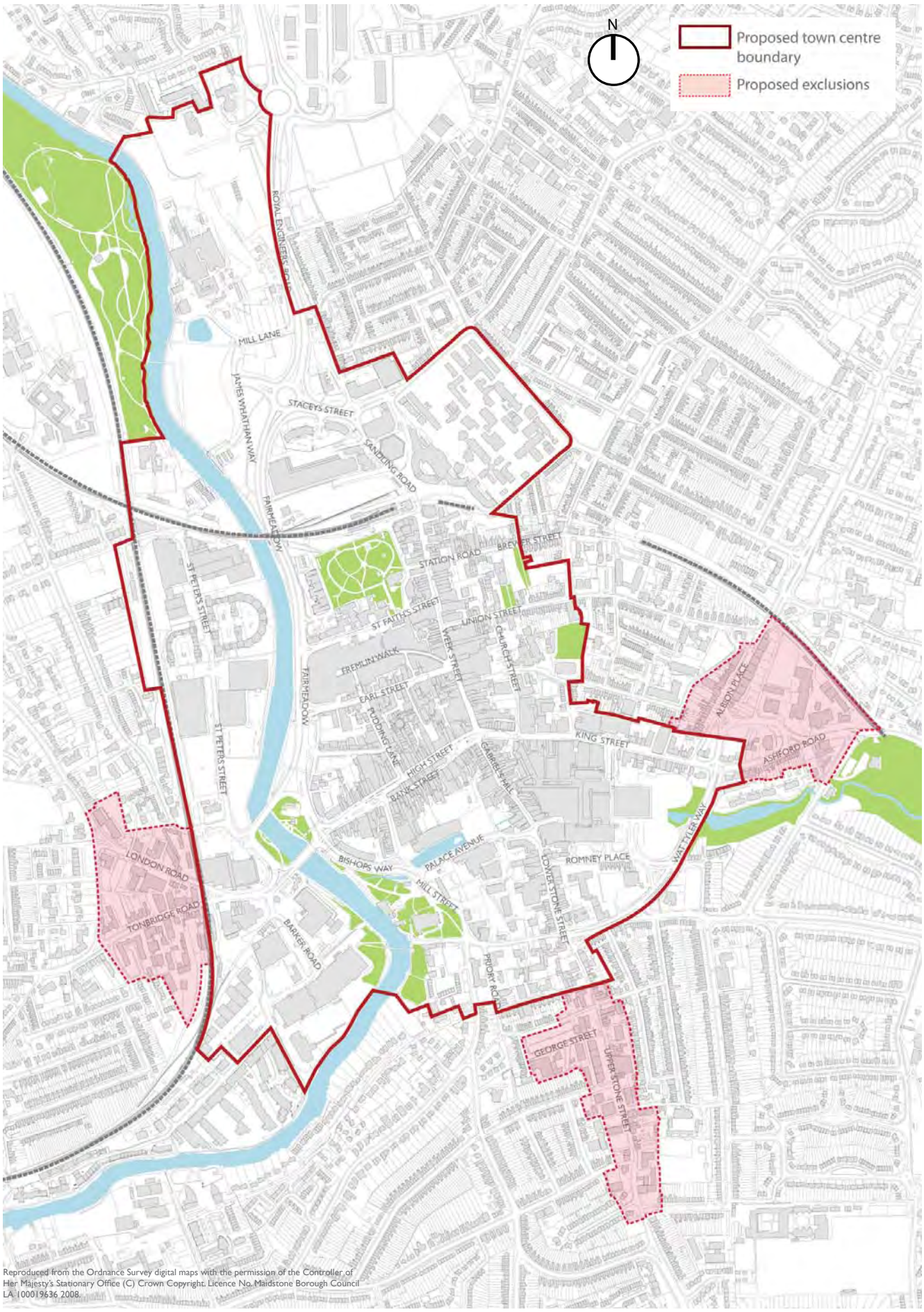


Figure 7.1 - Maidstone town centre proposed boundary

Town centre boundary

7.7 The town centre boundary has been drawn to encompass all of the key town centre uses set out in draft PPS4, and to include a small number of key areas of opportunity to develop new uses to strengthen the centre's offer and identity. The town centre includes the three stations of Maidstone East, Maidstone West and Maidstone Barracks. The boundary also takes in all the existing retail uses in and around the town centre, excluding those activities at the fringe of the centre which serve a more local market.

7.8 The River Medway and River Len are fully embraced and therefore, rather than representing barriers to the extent of activity they will be the foci for new uses and activities – particularly retail and leisure.

7.9 The town centre boundary has been drawn so as to recognise the town centre's current and future role. Those areas which are directly connected to the key spinal routes of River Medway, High Street, Week Street/Lower Stone Street and Fairmeadow, have been included within the boundary. Figure 7.1 illustrates the town centre boundary. Some areas which have been appraised through the baseline analysis have been excluded as they were not considered either to include core town centre uses or present major opportunities to improve the town centre offer. The resulting space defines the new town centre boundary.

7.10 The vision statement promotes a future mixed use role for the town centre including by providing an attractive hub for businesses and diversity in retail offer. National guidance in PPS4 promotes a 'town centre first' sequential approach when planning for town centre uses - retail, office and leisure as well as residential. Furthermore the Economic Development Strategy objective is to strengthen the town centre, with the rejuvenation of the office market and the expansion of the successful, established retail and leisure activity. On this basis the Study has assessed the capacity of the town centre to accommodate future needs on suitable and viable sites.

7.11 The area to the west of Maidstone West station has been appraised and has not been included within the town centre. The area's topography and lack of visual relationship with the more central areas of the town centre mean it conveys a perception of distance from the central area. Whilst the actual distance to the heart of the centre is not significant it is considered that this area has an important future role as a local neighbourhood centre, supporting the large and growing residential catchment in this part of the town. Enhancements in this area should focus on public realm improvements to support the area's future role. New retail and community uses should be encouraged as part of a supporting this node as a mixed use neighbourhood centre.

7.12 The area along Upper Stone Street is equally considered to have an important future role as a local neighbourhood centre providing a supporting role in the town, but not a core town centre area. The topography and lack of visual relationship to the town centre make this area perceptually less a part of the core town centre. In addition, its role as an important one-way route out of the town centre make it an unattractive location for extended the town centre activities. Enhancements in this area should focus on providing a high quality neighbourhood centre for the surrounding residential areas. A mixed use approach should be supported to encourage small scale retail alongside residential and employment activities. The junction of Wat Tyler Way and Upper Stone Street should be enhanced as a gateway into the town centre which supports stronger pedestrian and cycle connections between the neighbourhood centre and the town centre.

7.13 To the east of the town centre, the area around Ashford Road and Albion Place has not been included as this is perceived to be a more peripheral location. The Ashford Road area is occupied by non core town centre uses such as car showrooms and the character of the area is a much looser urban form. The area works well in terms of location and activity currently, and any improvements should focus on supporting stronger pedestrian and cycle links along Ashford Road into the town centre. Albion Way performs a fringe role in terms of land use activities. It is currently home to some office and employment space, as well as significant residential accommodation. In the longer term this area could become a stronger part of the town centre, however, for the period up to 2026 it is considered appropriate to focus town centre activities and improvements on King Street first. The Land around the junction with Wat Tyler Way is included as this presents a natural gateway to the town centre with considerable potential to be enhanced.

7.12 The boundary includes key opportunity sites of Springfield and the western riverside. These locations will develop to support Maidstone town centre's future role and embrace the economic activities required to ensure the town centre's sustainability. The town centre boundary has been drawn so as to recognise the physical extent of town centre character and economic activity identified in the baseline analysis with a recognition of currently underdeveloped sites which could form significant roles in the future to accommodate growth in town centre uses - particularly retail and employment activities.

Town centre capacity

7.14 The supporting evidence base documents suggest the town centre has capacity to support the following levels of land uses up to 2026:

- Retail: 55,250 sq m comparison floorspace adn 4,650 sq m convenience floorspace
- Office: some 15,000 sq m new development space
- Residential: the South East Plan requirement for the Borough is 11,080 dwellings. The SHLAA identified capacity for 337 new homes in the town centre.

Retail capacity

7.15 The Retail Needs Study explores three scenarios for growth which indicate the following demand for floorspace:

Scenario	Comparison goods demand	Convenience goods demand
Baseline	55,250m²	4,650m²
Scenario 1	118,500m²	3,300m²
Scenario 2	32,450m²	-400m²

7.16 In order to absorb the appropriate level of available expenditure from Maidstone town centre's catchment and avoid leakage of expenditure to competing centres, Maidstone needs to deliver a significant amount of retail floorspace in the period to 2026. In order to achieve this sizeable growth, some significant redevelopment is required in those parts of the town centre which currently under-perform both in terms of economic role and environmental quality.

Employment capacity

7.13 Maidstone is currently under-performing in terms of employment floorspace and job generation. In order to fulfil its sub-regional employment role a significant shift in both quality and quantity of employment floorspace is required.

Overarching strategy

7.17 Based on the analysis undertaken to date as part of the Baseline Review in Part One, the following strategy has been developed for Maidstone. The strategy seeks to build upon Maidstone's assets whilst addressing the key issues identified to help secure and promote ambitious sustainable development and regeneration of Maidstone and help reconnect it with its under-utilised waterfront:

Current assets

7.18 There is a need to promote Maidstone's existing assets, including the high quality historic core of the town centre around Week Street and High Street, the riverside setting of the town and historic gems including the Archbishop's Palace, All Saints Church, the high quality buildings within the Conservation Areas and the extensive retail offer, including a number of high quality independent retailers. New development should be well integrated with, and complementary to, Maidstone's existing assets.

7.19 Opportunities to enhance historic buildings and streetscapes should be explored where possible.

New destinations

7.20 There are a number of opportunities to develop new destinations in Maidstone town centre for shopping, employment and leisure. These destinations will complement Maidstone's existing assets and increase its competitiveness.

Public realm and green infrastructure

7.21 Public realm and green infrastructure must provide the foundation for all new development in Maidstone. An enhanced and more coherent network of green spaces and public realm will increase resilience to climate change, improve the overall town centre

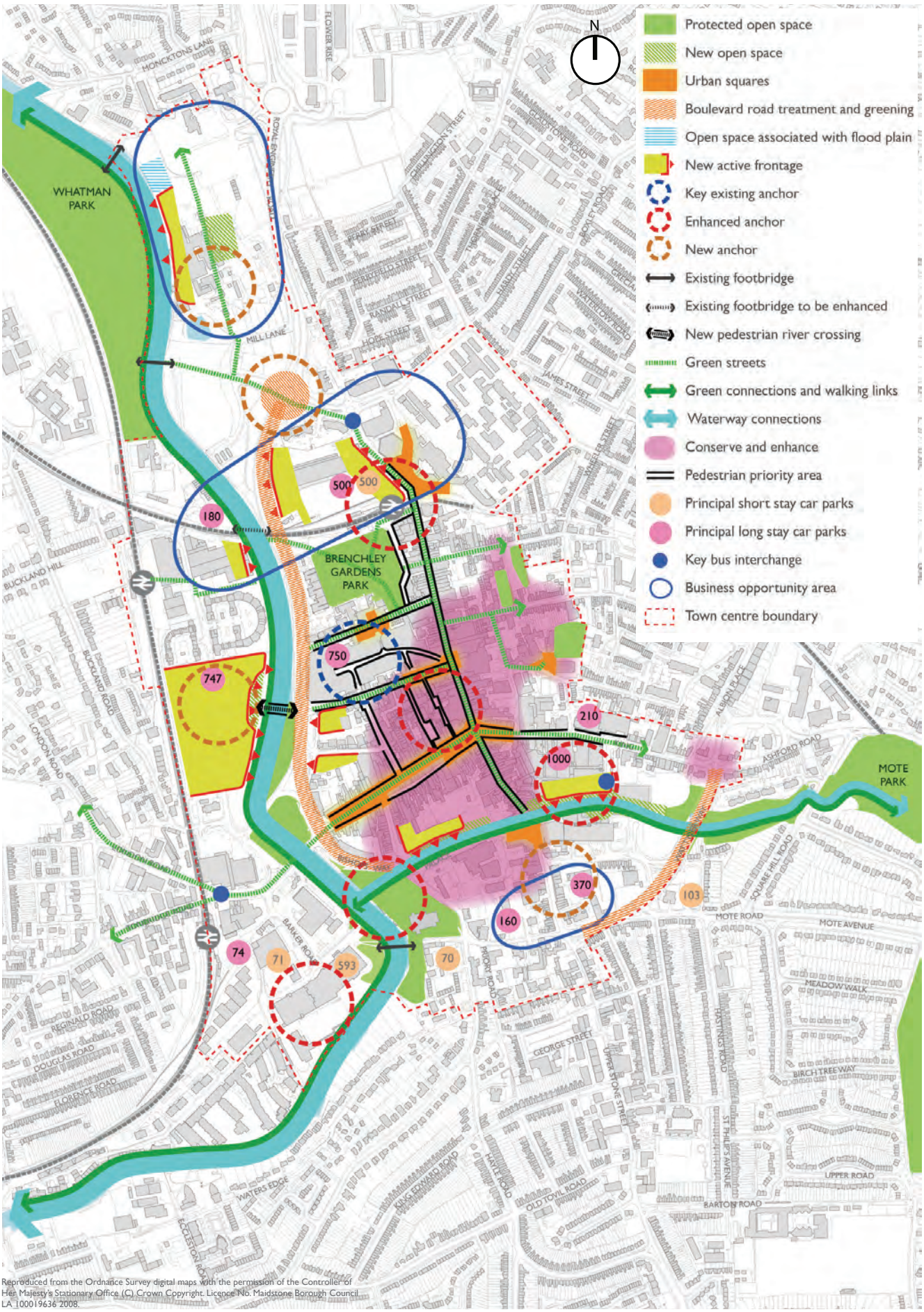


Figure 7.2 - Overarching strategy

environment, and help create a more connected, legible and sustainable place. Whatman Park and Mote Park, the two largest open spaces within walking distance of the town centre, could be connected through a green infrastructure network within the town centre and along the River Medway and River Len.

7.22 The opportunity exists for development to strengthen the relationship with natural assets, particularly the rivers and other existing areas of open space. The rivers are a greatly under-used resource with the potential to attract more people and activities and act as an alternative movement network through the town centre with the redevelopment of a number of adjacent sites. There is also the possibility of de-culverting and naturalising part of the River Len which which would have major sustainability benefits in the longer term.

Connections

7.23 There is a need to improve connections throughout Maidstone town centre, particularly for pedestrians and cyclists. The River Medway is a key route for walking and cycling and continuous access along its banks is currently not possible in the town centre. The adjustment of Fairmeadow is crucial to help improve the pedestrian environment and create a more pleasant and attractive riverside environment, whilst a potential new footbridge over the river could help to reinstate the river at the heart of Maidstone. Both Fairmeadow and Wat Tyler Way represent streets currently dominated by vehicular movements. A boulevard style treatment to both of these routes would support higher quality pedestrian environments through widened pavement space and greater planting. Enhanced existing and new connections across the River Medway are required to support a cohesive town centre, and a number of opportunity sites require improved connections with the current assets to help provide a joined up and connected town centre.

7.24 A continuous network of both pedestrian and cycle routes are required and these are explored in more detail in Chapter 9.

Town centre quarters

7.24 The identification of town centre quarters will help to promote appropriate development on opportunity sites and ensure that new development respects the town centre's existing character and grain. The town centre quarters have been derived from local character and land uses which help to determine the nature of appropriate opportunities for development.

Key elements

7.25 The development strategy section (chapter 9) explores the key opportunities for change within the overarching strategy. Figure 7.3 provides a summary of these key opportunities:

- Springfield campus – a focus for state of the art, sustainable, business and education facilities set within landscaped parkland along riverside.
- Station gateway – high quality buildings and civic square focused around an enhanced station and interchange with mixed use activities including retail, employment and residential.
- Western riverside – new pedestrian and cycle link from Maidstone's heart across the river to a new riverside retail and leisure area, set in a vibrant public space.
- Cultural link – an enhanced cultural offer with a new link to the retail core.
- Eastern anchor – a longer term opportunity to revitalise a key anchor in town centre through de-culverting the River Len and redeveloping the Mall into a street-based, riverside retail destination.

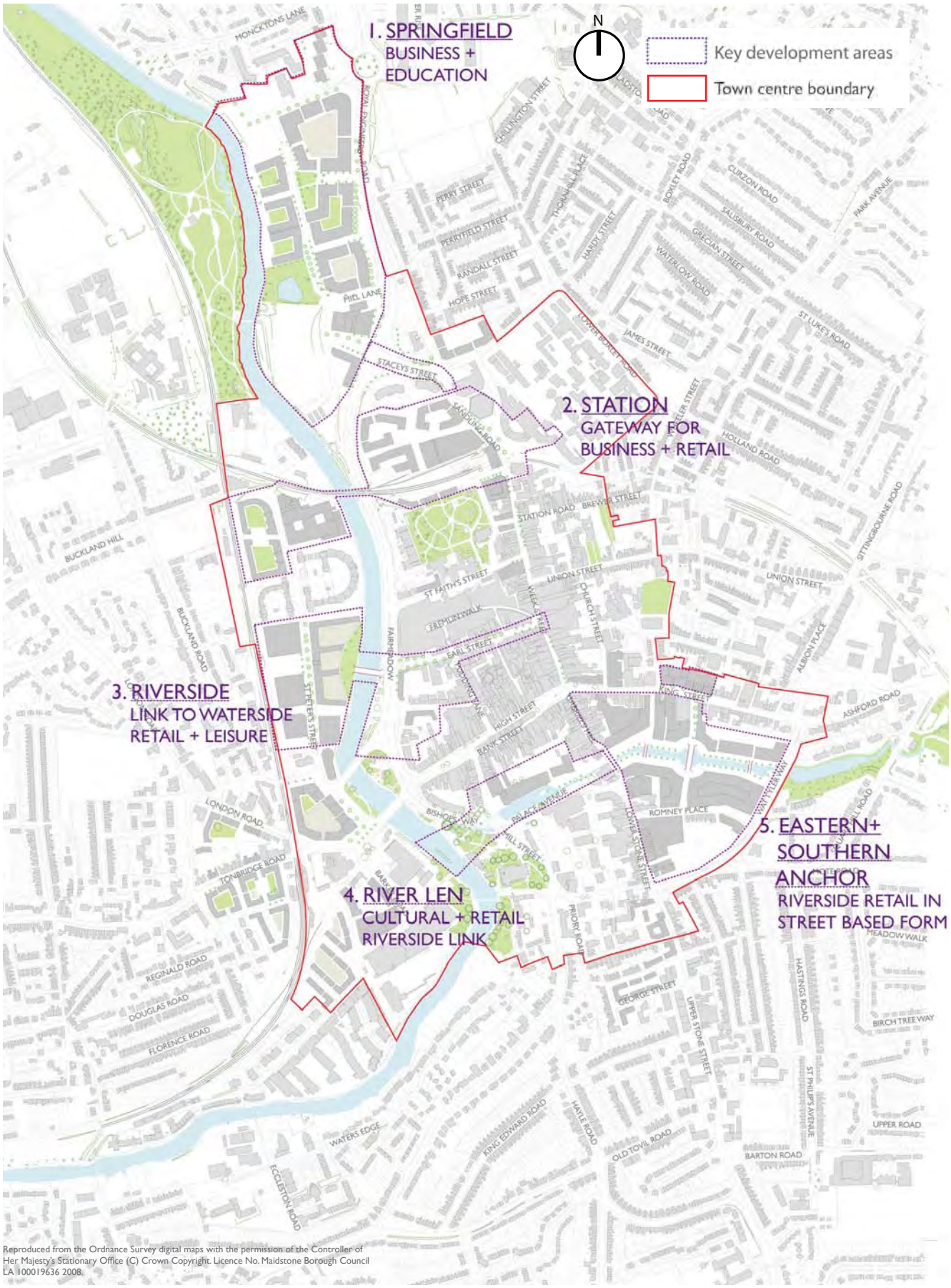


Figure 7.3 - Development strategy - key elements

Figure 8.1 - Green infrastructure strategy

8. Green infrastructure strategy

Rationale

8.1 Maidstone has a number of natural assets which provide the key to unlocking its potential. Green infrastructure will make Maidstone a better place to live, work and visit by making the centre more attractive, enabling greater levels of sustainable transport, improving air quality and increasing resilience to climate change. The River Medway, Whatman Park and Mote Park each form an important element within a wider network of green spaces, streets and routes. At present the provision of high quality green space and wider green infrastructure (including street trees, green roofs, rivers and public realm) is relatively minimal within the town centre. There is therefore an important opportunity to provide new green infrastructure as part of a green network and movement strategy.

8.2 The addition of new spaces, enhanced streets and pedestrian routes would have a significant impact on people's experience of the town centre – placing Maidstone in a far more attractive and sustaianble position as a place to live, work and visit. The quality of a centre's public realm and green space has been shown to have a direct impact on quality of life, attraction and land values – as well as increasing sustainable transport options - benefits for Maidstone which could be significant.

8.3 The prospect of a changing climate over the next decades raises the importance of a functional network of green infrastructure in the town. As temperatures rise and extreme rainfall events become more frequent the resilience of town centres will be based on the ability of their green infrastructure to shade and protect pedestrians and buildings from this extreme weather. The flood storage capacity of green spaces and the rate with which surface runoff moves across surfaces to rivers will be crucial to maintaining core functions throughout the town centre.

Green network

8.4 A network of green infrastructure is therefore proposed to ensure Maidstone is well placed to attract investment and maintain this in the longer term in the face of environmental threats. This network seeks to join the existing assets through the centre – linking up key retail and pedestrian routes to river frontage and areas of public realm. This network integrates with the pedestrian and cycle routes proposed in the movement strategy.

8.5 Figure 8.1 illustrates the green infrastructure strategy, the key elements of which are:

- The existing waterways of the River Medway and River Len provide the spines to the overall network;
- The major green spaces beyond the centre provide important destinations to connect up to the wider network via routes along the waterways;
- The provision of riverside spaces and routes will be central to realising Maidstone's potential as a riverside centre;
- The strengthening of green links along central streets through tree planting, vegetation and planting;
- The enhancement of incidental spaces to provide respite throughout the centre; and
- The establishment of new green space through redevelopment – both in terms of private outdoor space or courtyards, and also green roofs and walls - to ensure new buildings contribute positively to a strategy for climate change adaptation and mitigation.

8.6 The green infrastructure strategy incorporates planned improvements to the High Street and linkages between squares and spaces throughout the town centre.

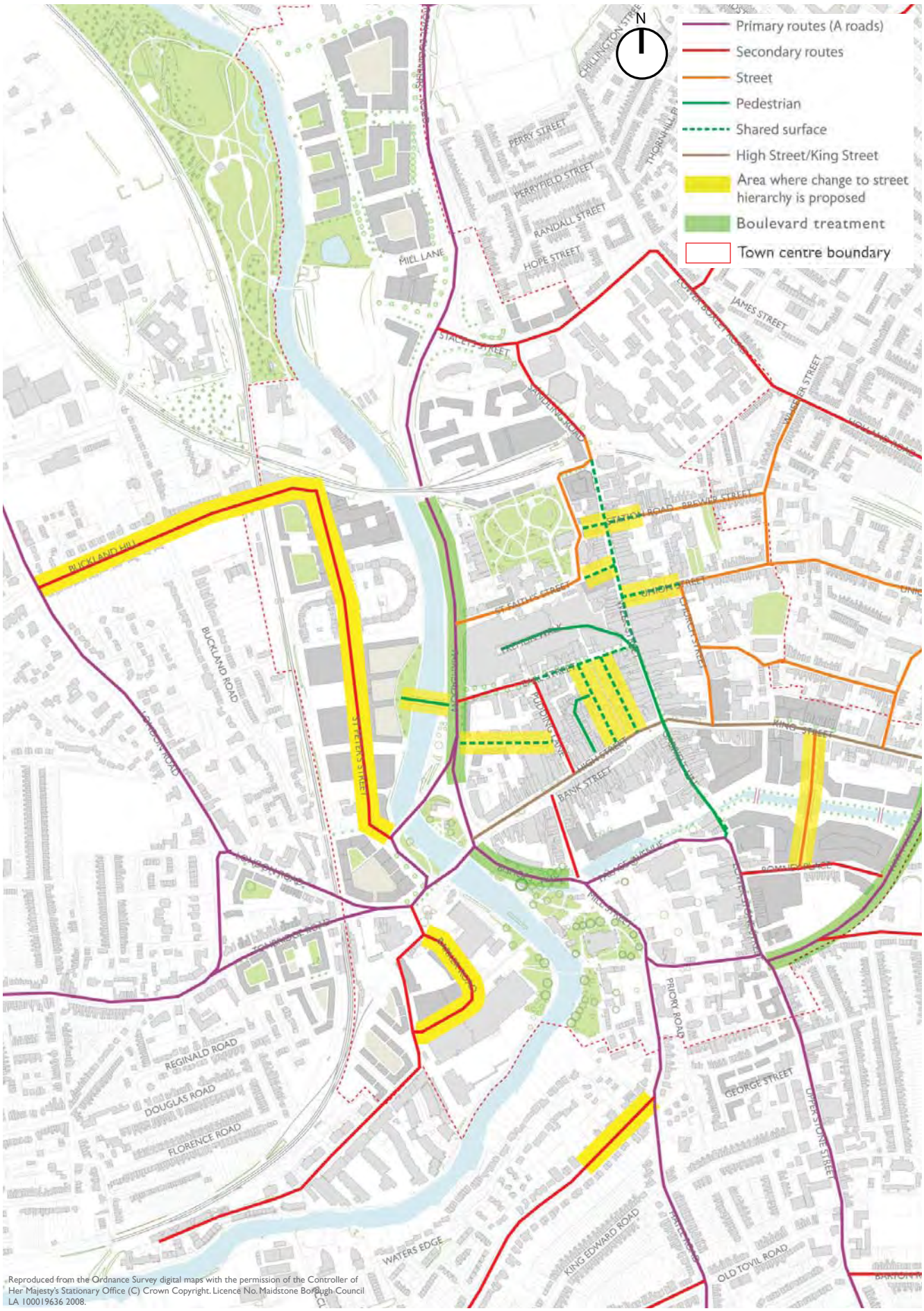


Figure 9.1 - Proposed street hierarchy with changes highlighted

9. Movement strategy

Introduction

9.1 The way in which people move in to, out of and around Maidstone is critical to the commercial success and competitiveness of the centre, its attractiveness and its environmental quality. This section sets out a strategy for establishing better, easier and more sustainable movement in Maidstone.

Hierarchy plan

9.2 Establishing a clear movement and street hierarchy throughout the town centre represents the first step in the wider movement strategy.

9.3 Figure 9.1 illustrates the proposed nature and function of the street network in Maidstone town centre. This hierarchy of routes are described as follows:

- Primary Routes: primary access for all vehicles into the town centre
- Secondary Routes: secondary access routes that function as principal bus corridors, and alternative cross town routes for all vehicles
- High Street/King Street: a secondary route due to its function as a principal public transport corridor, but also prioritises pedestrian and cycle movement
- Streets: routes that can be accessed by buses and service vehicles, but allow for improved pedestrian space.
- Green / Pedestrian Streets: routes that are principally pedestrian/cycle dominated routes but where absolutely essential, allow service vehicles to access adjacent retail development under some form of access control.

Overall strategy

9.4 This sub-section identifies the following key principles for the movement strategy in Maidstone:

- To maintain existing primary routes, but look at interventions to re-prioritise space for public transport, pedestrians and cyclists and introduce further tree planting and green landscaping.
- To maintain existing secondary routes. Well Road and Holland Road retained to provide alternative link across the northern edge of the town centre.
- To revitalise High Street and King Street to provide an improved public realm while allowing it to maintain its function as the principal public transport corridor for the town centre.
- To maintain existing streets and pedestrian streets, but explore opportunities to re-prioritise space for pedestrians.
- To enhance existing pedestrian and cycle routes and create new routes to complete the gaps in the network, providing improved facilities for cyclists and shared surfaces for areas of key pedestrian activity, whilst maintaining service access to adjacent development.
- To enhance existing public transport by improving existing bus operations and creating better public transport interchanges at the railway stations.
- To increase the capacity of existing park and ride services and to explore the development of additional services to serve areas to the south west and south.
- To support and promote the Kent Rail Utilisation Strategy, particularly the development proposed for Maidstone East station, access improvements to Maidstone Barracks Station and improved access to Maidstone West station to allow for any extensions to Ebbsfleet shuttle and increased passenger demand.
- To integrate the green network of spaces and streets through pedestrian and cycle routes.

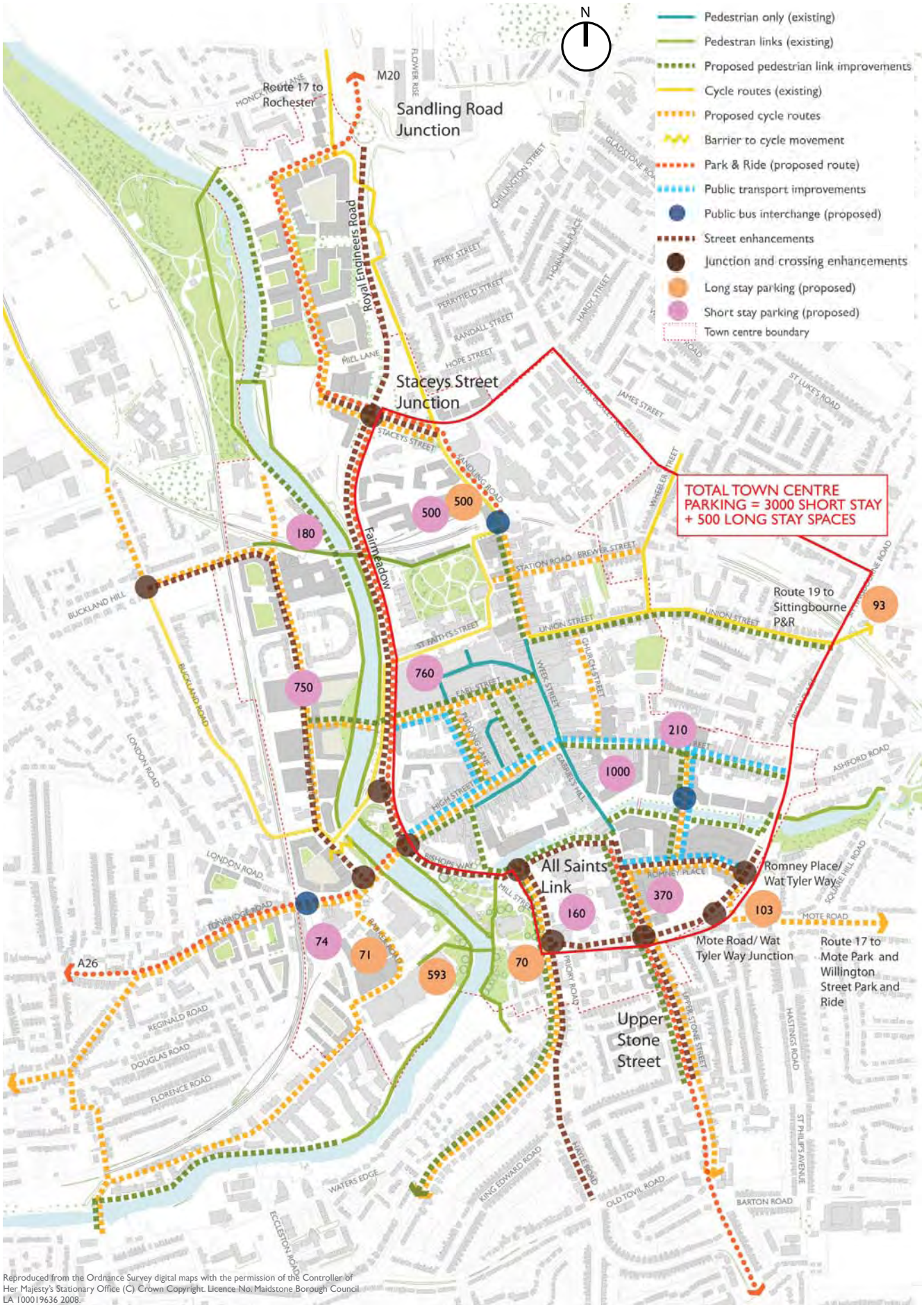


Figure 9.2 - Key movement interventions and parking strategy

Street network

9.5 Figure 9.2 identifies the key interventions which should be considered for the primary routes. In summary these are:

- to provide environmental improvements to Royal Engineers Road between Sandling Road and Staceys Street junctions to enhance the environment for pedestrian and cyclists and support public transport links;
- to change the roundabout at Staceys Street to a signalised junction to provide a new gateway and a more pedestrian friendly environment;
- to provide environmental improvements to Palace Avenue, Lower Stone Street, Knightrider Street and Mill Street to improve the pedestrian environment;
- to improve the junction of Wat Tyler Way and Stone Street to enhance connections between the town centre and residential hinterland, whilst emphasising the role of this junction as a gateway into the town centre;
- to provide a new staggered junction at Mote Road, Wat Tyler Way and Romney Place to support stronger connections between the town centre and surrounding residential neighbourhoods particularly for residents on foot;
- to allow two way working between Bishops Way and Fairmeadow in order to remove the need to cross the river to travel north;
- to improve the environment around the All Saints area either through the proposed All Saints Link or other alternative proposals for Mill Street, and enhanced pedestrian crossings;
- application of boulevard treatment to Fairmeadow, Bishop's Way and Wat Tyler Way, reducing carriageway widths wherever possible to provide additional pedestrian space, further tree planting and enhanced at grade pedestrian crossings; and
- to widen Upper Stone Street to provide two northbound lanes and thereby reduce traffic flows in College Road.

9.6 The following changes are suggested to reflect the status of the following routes as secondary, rather than primary, routes and their function as principal bus corridors and service access i.e. streets - these represent routes which would be downgraded for vehicles to support enhanced pedestrian and cycle movement:

- Station Road and St Faith's Street;
- Earl Street (from the Pudding Lane/Earl Street junction, westbound to the Earl Street / Fairmeadow junction; and
- Pudding Lane.

9.7 The section of Earl Street from Earl Street/ Pudding Lane junction to Week Street could be converted from a primary service route to a pedestrian street. This new shared surface could enhance the public realm within the town centre while providing improved pedestrian access to Pudding Lane for bus transfer.

9.8 Medway Street could be downgraded from a primary service route to become a pedestrian street. This shared surface could enhance the visual appearance of the corridor from Fairmeadow into the town centre as well as supply sites 29 and 25 with improved pedestrian linkages to Pudding Lane.

9.9 The central pedestrian spine consisting of Week Street, Gabriel's Hill, Bank Street should be retained as pedestrian street. However the upper section of Week Street should be considered for cycle and service vehicle access, and Station Road altered to make it service access only and to remove through traffic except buses.

9.10 To the south west, Barker Street, leading into Hart Street could become a more important primary service route. The Hart Street loop, to the west of Barker Street could be downgraded to a secondary service route, as this route could primarily be used for access only into sites 40, 42 and 43.

Walking and cycling

9.11 The movement of cyclists and pedestrians through the town centre could be improved through encouraging shared surfaces rather than maintaining pedestrian only routes. Improved cycle stands on street and at the rail stations and park and rides could further encourage the use of bicycles. Cycling could further be promoted by introducing street calming along the busier roads within the town centre, such as on High Street, Earl Street and Pudding Lane.

Connections to existing routes

9.12 There is significant potential to improve linkages and connections between the town centre and the existing pedestrian routes, which are predominantly located along the stretch of the River Medway. Figure 4.5 displays the proposed walking and cycle linkages.

9.13 A new link across the River Medway from Earl Street to Site 24, could connect the town centre with the west side of Maidstone. In order to extend this to the town centre, there could be additional pedestrian and cycle improvements along Earl Street which connect with Week Street in the east and the proposed bridge in the west. This option could enhance the public realm and encourage development on the west side of Maidstone.

9.14 Furthermore, cycle access to the proposed developments on the west side of the river (sites 11 to 15 and site 24), could be improved by extending the route south along Buckland Road, Buckland Hill and St. Peter's Street, and linking up with either the new crossing or the existing crossings. This would encourage cycle use between the town centre and the west of Maidstone. Extra cycle stands could be provided at London Road park and ride to encourage cycle use.

9.15 Further pedestrian and cycle link improvements could be made within the town centre, which could connect with the proposed central pedestrian routes along Earl Street:

- There is potential to improve the pedestrian links in the Market Buildings area to the south of Earl Street, east of Pudding Lane. Ideally, these routes would stretch between Earl Street and High Street and encourage pedestrian movement through this site to integrate with the public transport hub around King Street / High Street.
- Cycle and pedestrian improvements could be made to Pudding Lane, as this is an important route for accessing sites 25 & 29 from the town centre, public bus access and the south west of the town.
- To the east of Week Street, there is potential to integrate the existing cycle routes along Union Street and King Street, with improved pedestrian facilities, which could link the east side of Maidstone with the town centre. Furthermore, improving the pedestrian links along King Street would benefit the interchange between pedestrians and public bus services.
- Cycle access to new development west of Royal EngineersRoad could be improved by providing a link to connect with cycle route 17. This cycle link could run between Stacey's Roundabout and Springfield Roundabout.
- There is potential to provide a cycle link, which connects Maidstone East Station with the southern areas of Maidstone. This could be achieved by providing a cycle route from the station along the Week Street shared surface, up to the junction with

Union Street. From here, the route could connect with cycle route 19, which operates along Union Street to Sittingbourne Road park and ride, where extra cycle stands could be located. The new route could continue south along Church Street and Wyke Manor Road to connect with King Street. Cycle access to sites 19, 20 and 21 could further be improved by providing a cycle connection between Brewer Street and Week Street.

9.16 There are currently very poor cycle connections between the A26, to the south west and the town centre. Therefore, cycle linkages could be improved by extending the existing route 12 from St Peter's bridge to south west along Tonbridge Road. There is also potential to provide a cycle link along Barker Road.

9.17 Connections could be improved between the High Street and the Millennium Footbridge to the south. This could be achieved by enhancing the pedestrian routes along Mill Street to connect with the route through the historic area to the south west of Mill Street.

9.18 Pedestrian enhancements along Palace Avenue could encourage improved pedestrian activity. Upper Stone Street and College Road could also benefit from pedestrian and cycle enhancements to improve access.

9.19 Links to Mote Road and Mote Park could be improved by providing a cycle and pedestrian route connecting King Street with Romney's Place via St Pad's Hill. This link would potentially be viable in the longer term, as St Pad's Hill is currently being used for bus transfer. The cycle route could then connect with the existing cycle route 17 to Mote Park and Willington Street park and ride. Extra cycle stands could be provided at Willington Street park and ride to encourage cycle use. It may also be possible to make Romney Place bus and cycle only in the easterly direction which would assist buses' access to the Mall.

9.20 There is also potential in the longer term to improve the pedestrian link between the Lower Stone Street / Upper Stone Street junction with the central east side of Maidstone. However, this route would cut through the existing Mall and Sainsbury's and is therefore aspirational in the long term.

9.21 The riverside walks could further be improved by providing a continuous footpath along both sides of the River Medway. This enhancement could provide a continuous pedestrian link between the town centre and associated green areas to the north west of Maidstone, via the proposed Earl Street bridge or improved Mill Street route. From here, pedestrians can either access the town centre, or continue eastwards to connect with the green areas to the east of Maidstone.

9.22 In the longer term the aspiration should be to establish pedestrian and cycle routes along the River Len between the River Medway and Mote Park.

Bus operations

9.23 In the short to medium term, the quality and operation of the existing public bus facilities could be improved, which would create a better public realm within the town centre. This option would require the continued use of St Pad's Hill as the main bus interchange. Increased service frequency and quality of bus services could promote the use of public transport and provide a more sustainable alternative for people in Maidstone.

9.24 Other options for bus operations include:

- Whilst clearly maintaining its function as the principal public transport corridor for the town centre, there is the opportunity to mitigate the over utilisation of buses travelling along the High Street and King Stree through the additional option of creating bus stands on Palace Avenue

for southbound bus routes. There are a total of 10 bus routes travelling south from the town centre. These services utilise Lower Stone Street/ Upper Stone Street (for outbound journeys) and Hayle Road/ Mill Street (for incoming journeys). Bus stands on Palace Avenue would provide a key interchange between these 10 bus services as well as providing an improved interchange between bus users and the retail core via Gabriel's Hill. Bus services 501, 503, 506, 101, 71, 5, 12, 82, 85, 89 could benefit from this arrangement, as they currently utilise Palace Avenue.

- Associated with redevelopment proposals, there is the potential to provide a new satellite bus station at Maidstone East station.
- In the longer term, there is potential to redevelop a new bus interchange on the existing Mall and Sainsbury's site when the re-development of this site is viable. The aspiration is for a new open bus interchange located along the new alignment of St Pad's Hill and Romney Place. This would be integrated into the new public realm, while the provision of additional bus stands to cater for the increased services could be accommodated behind the principal frontages.

Park and ride

9.25 A total of 950 to 1,500 additional office jobs are predicted in Maidstone by 2026. As demonstrated in the baseline analysis, the existing park and ride facilities are well utilised, operating between 78% and 90% of capacity. Recently, the Sittingbourne site has been expanded to over 500 parking spaces. The potential to increase the capacity of the existing services needs to be investigated further. Similarly, further studies are required to investigate the potential for the introduction of more park and ride sites in order to support the reduction in long stay parking within the town centre and cater for the planned growth by 2026.

9.26 Currently, there is limited potential to expand public bus corridors, due to the restricted road widths throughout Maidstone. Sittingbourne Road and Fairmeadow are the only radial roads which could be converted to incorporate bus lanes.

Park and ride aspirations

9.27 There is potential to provide a new park and ride site to the south of Maidstone. Ideally, this site could be located off the A274 Sutton Road or A229 Loose Road to intercept northbound traffic entering the town centre.

9.28 The A229 (Fairmeadow) extends northwards to connect with junction 6 of the M20. There is potential to provide park and ride at this site to intercept traffic accessing Maidstone from the M20. Malta Hotel is situated on the banks of the River Medway, adjacent to junction 6. There is potential for the hotel car park to be shared use with the park and ride. This is dependent on the current daytime usage of the hotel car park and ownership agreements. Furthermore, there could be potential to develop a boat link to the town centre from the hotel car park.

9.29 Potential also exists to provide a park and ride service to the south west of Maidstone, alongside the A26 to intercept traffic entering the town in a north easterly direction. However, the A26 has limited road widths at around 6.5m, so it would not be possible to provide complementary bus priority measures.

Parking strategy

9.30 Currently there are a total of 4,850 parking bays within the town centre boundary, of which 1,000 are public car parking. Taking into account the future population and employment increases, the overall objective is to reduce the combined number of public and private retail parking spaces to approximately 3,500 parking bays in the town centre, and to ensure

they are provided in strategic locations to intercept traffic arriving at the town centre and to reduce traffic circulation through the town centre. This will be supplemented by 200 parking bays available in the Invicta parking at County Hall over the weekends. The parking strategy outlined in this section must be supported by improved public transport and Park and Ride services, without Park and Ride, the parking demand in the town centre will increase.

9.31 The rationalisation of car parks could be assisted by positive management of spaces through the UTMC system .This reduction in overall car parking must be supported by increasing the capacity of existing park and ride sites, and exploring the development of two new park and ride services along A26 Tonbridge Road and A229 Loose Road/A274 Sutton Road.

9.32 Figure 9.3 details the key elements of the parking strategy.

9.33 The suggested parking sites/allocations within the new town centre boundary are as follows:

- Maintain 760 parking bays at Fremlin Walk.
- Maintain 160 parking bays in the Mill Street/Palace Avenue area.
- Provide 370 parking bays for the relocated Sainsbury's on Lower Stone Street.
- Construct 210 new parking bays available for public parking on King Street site (replacing the existing 213 spaces).
- Increase parking at Maidstone East Station from 493 to 1,000 bays (500 for short-stay public use and 500 bays reserved for long stay station parking).
- 1,000 bays associated with the existing Mall shopping centre to be reprovided in the long term within any redevelopment proposals.

9.34 Longer stay parking could be accommodated in the following sites:

- Western riverside development (750 spaces)
- Leisure Centre (180 spaces)
- Mote Road (103 spaces)
- Sittingbourne Road (93 spaces and coach parking)
- College Road (70 spaces - but improve historic environment by reducing the total number of bays)
- Lockmeadow (593 spaces)
- Barker Road (71 spaces).

9.36 The following existing public car parks have surplus capacity which could be rationalised or removed as part of the proposed parking strategy:

- Medway Street (55)
- Union Street West & East (82)
- Brunswick (71)
- Wheeler Street (58))
- Brewer Street East & West (102)
- Lucerne Street (18)
- Well Road (22)
- Brooks Place (13)

9.37 It is important to recognise that this strategy would be phased over a number of years. Therefore, with ongoing monitoring, it would be possible to assess the initial effects and adapt the strategy as needed. The two main car parks of Fremlin Walk and The Mall are privately operated and adjustments to them would require agreement with landowners.

Figure 10.1 - Maidstone town centre indicative new development opportunities

10. Quarters and development strategy

Development strategy

10.1 The development strategy for Maidstone town centre is designed to bring forward key opportunity sites which will help the town centre to realise its potential, and smaller opportunities which taken together will result in a step change in quality. All of the development sites sit within the wider strategy including the green infrastructure plan, movement strategy and the 'quarters' approach to planning.

10.2 The key themes of the development strategy are to:

- provide appropriate new employment provision and address issues of quality and over-supply;
- enhance and expand the retail core;
- identify select residential opportunities;
- re-instate the waterways as the spines in the town centre structure; and
- establish a network of high quality streets and public spaces.

10.3 Figure 9.1 shows the indicative proposals for the town centre. This shows where new development and enhancement will be focused. It provides an indication of possible block layouts on key opportunity sites which provides an indication of capacity. The layouts are flexible, but they adhere to important design principles which should be observed.

10.4 These principles include:

- ensuring high quality active frontage on to streets;
- observing the existing character preference for perimeter blocks;
- respecting existing building heights and a general preference for 4 storey heights and below; and
- clearly delineating the boundaries between public and private open space.

10.5 A significant growth in both retail and employment activities is required in the town centre to meet the demands of associated residential growth throughout the town.

Quarters vision

10.6 In seeking to ensure the town centre develops in line with existing character but supports the mix of uses required, the centre has been characterised into a series of quarters. The quarters were identified based on an analysis of character and function. These quarters provide the basis for determining appropriate forms of new development and other interventions.

10.7 The quarters are:

- The heart
- Riverside quarter
- Gateway quarter
- Campus quarter
- Urban Enterprise quarter
- A new neighbourhood

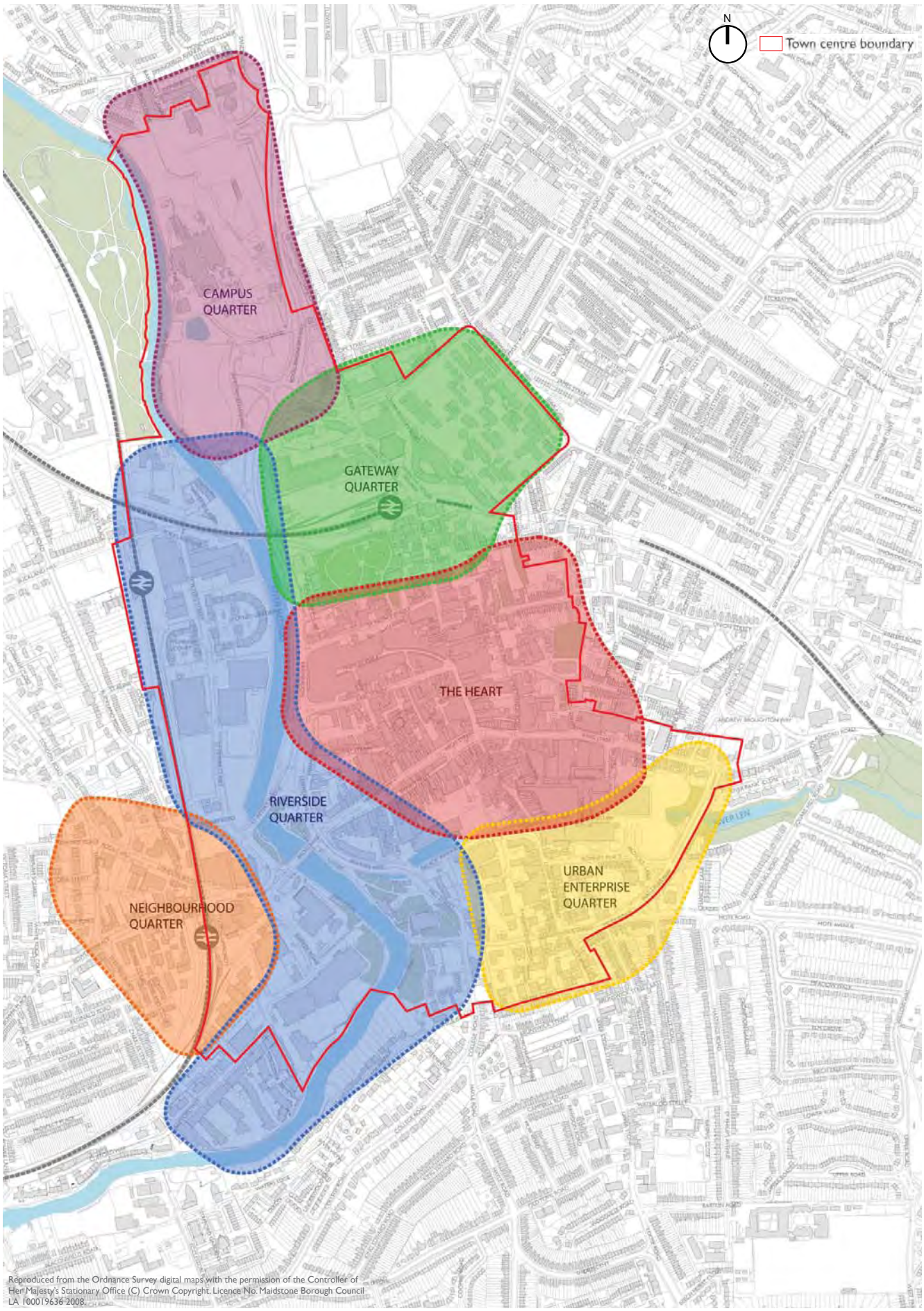


Figure 10.2 - Town centre quarters

Town centre quarters

10.8 The following town centre quarters have been identified following the baseline analysis (see Figure 10.2).

The Heart

10.9 This quarter includes a significant retail offer and forms the economic hub of Maidstone, as recognised in the South East Plan. The quarter is historically established, consisting of a largely traditional street pattern, and street enclosure. Much of the historic area is protected by Conservation Areas, and the quarter includes several landmark buildings. The axis of Week Street and High Street forms an important structure around which the retail activity is focused. At present activity reduces dramatically along King Street and to the north and east of Week Street. Opportunities to ensure future retail and employment activities in this quarter support the existing structure and circuits whilst strengthening those areas currently underperforming should be supported.

Campus Quarter

10.10 The Campus Quarter is currently separated from the centre of Maidstone, severed by the A229 (Fairmeadow). The quarter suffers from a lack of enclosure or high quality streets and open spaces. The site is currently occupied by a papermill. However, the opportunity exists for campus development either focussed around the University of the Creative Arts or the provision of high quality, sustainable office and business accommodation – or a mix of the two. Through redevelopment in this area, the opportunity exists to bring large areas of riverside land which are currently inaccessible into the public realm.

Gateway Quarter

10.11 Along with the Campus Quarter, the Gateway Quarter has significant potential to accommodate a major expansion of central uses outside of the core town centre area. The Gateway Quarter is highly accessible and offers the potential to extend the urban block structure, grain and uses of the town centre to the north, potentially accommodating a convenience food store, employment and residential uses.

Riverside Quarter

10.12 Historically, the river Medway was a source and route for much of Maidstone's trade, and is key to the town's development. There is an exciting opportunity to reconnect Maidstone with the river, providing a riverside walkway along the western bank, adjusting Fairmeadow to create a riverside boulevard which is pleasant for pedestrians as well as traffic, and providing a new pedestrian crossing to enable an expansion of the retail heart. This quarter includes a key historic area of Maidstone, and the All Saints Conservation Area. Several cultural destinations exist within this quarter, and the potential exists to strengthen these to provide an even more attractive offer to visitors in the future. Opportunities also exist to enhance the riverside and to improve the street environment for pedestrians.

Urban Enterprise Quarter

10.13 At present, this area is the focus for much of Maidstone's low quality office development. An opportunity exists to create a much enhanced urban environment which will provide the setting for some of the office buildings to continue to provide incubator units for new businesses, whilst strengthening the contribution this area makes to the town centre as a whole with a mix of activities including residential.

A New Neighbourhood

10.14 This quarter, which surrounds Maidstone West Station, currently functions as a series of disparate piece meal developments, but could accommodate a new residential area and a focus for living within the centre. A substantial growth in population will help to support more local shops and community facilities, support new public transport services and new connections. The opportunity also exists to provide space for small businesses, particularly within the legal sector.

10.15 In addition to the quarters identified, there are opportunities to enhance some key edge of centre locations to support secondary activities and the transition to the residential hinterland. Some key opportunities include:

- Upper Stone Street – opportunity to enhance streetscape and support this area's dual role as a key point of access to the town centre and a local neighbourhood centre.
- Haynes Garage area – site currently in appropriate use, but given this area's role as part of an eastern gateway, opportunities to enhance the streetscape should be explored. The role of street trees in better defining the streets should be considered.
- Ashford Road – enhancements in keeping with this Conservation Area's character should be explored given this area's important role as a first impression of Maidstone for visitors from the east.

Opportunity sites

10.16 The opportunity sites identified in Part One have been used as the basis for identifying appropriate redevelopment within each of the quarters. Those opportunity sites which represent important elements in the overall strategy and visions for each of the quarters have been the focus of more detailed consideration.

10.17 Section 11 outlines a series of planning briefs within each of the quarters. The sites have been grouped to support area-based improvements, although where possible land ownership boundaries have been observed to support phased delivery.

10.18 In some cases the briefs include core sites for redevelopment as well as additional sites which could deliver a more significant step change in development, and thereby fulfil the quarter's vision more fully. This is particularly true for the Gateway and Heart quarters.

11. Planning briefs

Introduction

11.1 This section includes a series of planning briefs for key sites in Maidstone town centre. The purpose of the planning briefs is to provide an indication of development capacity, appropriate uses and design principles for sites within each of the town centre quarters. The proposals for each quarter have also been reviewed in property market terms to provide a broad brush, high level indication of deliverability. The planning briefs provide an indication of the way in which the wider vision and strategy for Maidstone can be realised. The briefs have been grouped as follows:

Campus Quarter
- Springfield brief (sites 1-6)

Gateway Quarter
- Station area brief (sites 8-10)

Riverside Quarter
- Buckland Hill brief (sites 11-15)
- St Peter's brief (sites 24 and 35)
- Len House brief (sites 30 and 31)

The Heart Quarter
- King Street brief (sites 26-28, 34 and 52)
- Water Lane brief (sites 26-28, 32-34 and 52)

Urban Enterprise Quarter
- Lower Stone Street brief (sites 44-47)
- Knightrider Street brief (sites 49-51)

11.2 In addition, briefs have been prepared for the area around Maidstone West station which is located on the edge of the town centre and contains a number of opportunity sites:

Neighbourhood Quarter
- Hart Street brief (sites 40-43) (within town centre)
- Tonbridge Road brief (sites 36-39)

11.3 Each planning brief includes a development framework plan illustrating potential block layouts, proposed routes and green spaces. In addition the role of the site(s) within the wider study proposals is identified, together with a land use strategy, design principles and buildings heights guidance, land use capacities, movement and parking guidance, and details of the likely delivery and phasing arrangements. Constraints such as flood risk are identified and taken into account in informing appropriate land uses where appropriate. It should be noted that the Level 2 Borough Strategic Flood Risk Assessment will further inform land uses through the sequential testing of sites.

11.4 Guidance is identified at both a quarter and site level. Both these elements should inform the development of the sites identified.

11.5 Development capacities have been estimated based on the indicative schemes. Total capacities by site and quarter are highlighted. The development capacities indicated represent the maximum scale of development that could be accommodated, however this should not be treated as a target, but rather an upper limit.

11.6 In some cases, development space has been identified for parking. These figures relate to covered and multi-storey parking where this is within the development blocks outlined. Areas of public space have also been identified for those areas where the delivery of new public space is integral to the development of a site. Where an open space figure is not provided, the development will be expected to provide appropriate levels of public and private open space in line with local need.

Campus Quarter

Introduction

11.7 The opportunity sites within this quarter should be utilised in the future to form a campus for the University for the Creative Arts, or alternatively for the provision of high quality, sustainable office and business accommodation. There may also be some scope to combine both uses. The total area of opportunity within the quarter is 11.69ha, representing a sizeable opportunity for development capacity and public space.

11.8 The principal future land uses would be educational (D1), office and business (B1), and residential (C2/C3) buildings.

11.9 A high quality environment of streets and squares would be achieved, which takes advantage of the 'green' riverside nature of the area, and maximises frontages to the River Medway and Royal Engineers Way. High quality pedestrian linkages and routes would be included, and access to cycle and bus routes improved.

Land use and development capacity assessment

11.10 An assessment of the Campus Quarter has been prepared and has identified capacity for up to the following broad maximum quantum of development:

Land Use	Capacity (m^2)
Retail (likely to be primarily convenience goods)	5,780
Employment / education	57,030
Leisure, tourism and community	5,310
Residential (c. 555 units – either student accommodation or mix of riverside housing and apartment format)	39,260

Table 11.1: Land use capacities - Campus Quarter (N.B. capacity figures represent net floorspace and therefore exclude circulation space which has been assumed as 25% of floor area. An average size of flat and house has been assumed of 70sqm and 120sqm respectively)

Artist's impression of enhanced Royal Engineer's Way (looking south)

11.11 To a significant extent the proposed site of the Campus Quarter is not currently built upon. While the land is within a number of different ownerships (and has extant planning consents), the relative absence of existing uses may help to facilitate site assembly and/or the implementation of development within a defined timescale.

11.12 The Campus Quarter benefits from a number of locational factors, including relative proximity to Maidstone East railway station, a relatively high quality of green open space both within the quarter, and on the west bank of the river, together with its proximity to the River Medway itself. Lying outside the town centre core, the Campus Quarter has relatively good access to the M20, and does not suffer from the same degree of traffic congestion as the town centre core.

11.13 The Campus Quarter has the potential to accommodate a range of uses. We consider that there would be scope to deliver high quality residential development in this location, for example in the form of traditional family housing/town house style development, and possibly some limited apartment development. In addition, it is considered that this represents the most appropriate location for the delivery of a significant new high quality office quarter for the town, particularly in the longer term. This could potentially take the form of either a "greener" campus style development, in the form of a sustainable business park environment or, alternatively, a new university campus for University of Creative Arts. There may be potential to combine both activities, particularly as the floorspace required by UCCA is only approximately 25,000 m². Ideally pedestrian linkages to the town centre to the south need to be improved/maximised.

Artist's impression of redeveloped Springfield sites (looking north east)

Movement and transport

Public transport

11.14 There is potential to provide a new park and ride site at Junction 6 of the M20 to cater for external Campus Quarter students / visitors / staff and Maidstone town centre, as well as providing an alternative commuting and shopping access to Maidstone. This could link with an improved interchange with Maidstone East Station.

11.15 However, if a park and ride site close to junction 6 is not developed, an interceptor car park for vehicles accessing Maidstone from the north could be required to reduce town centre congestion. Patrons of this car park could either access the town centre via foot, or utilise public transport.

11.16 At present, bus services 101 (four buses an hour) and park and ride Services 506 and 501 (five buses an hour each) operate within walking distance of this quarter. If the site is to be jointly used for public parking and a campus facility, then the level of development across this quarter could support the addition of new bus services and/or increased frequencies. The alternative could be to re-direct existing bus routes to improve access between the quarter and the town centre.

Parking requirements

Business B1	Car parking	Cycle parking
Offices up to 500m²	1 space per 20m²	1 space per 1000m² for collection/ delivery/ shopping, or 1 space per 200m² for workplace/ meeting
Offices up to 2,500m²	1 space per 25m²	
Offices over 2,500m²	1 space per 30m²	
High Tech / Research	1 space per 35m²	

Table 11.2: Kent parking standards for office use

11.17 In order to compete with out of town locations, a balance needs to be struck between encouraging more sustainable modes of transport and the marketability of a new employment locations. Due to the concentration of employment uses, a maximum parking allocation of one space per 30m² is suggested, despite the relative proximity to Maidstone East station.

Residential C3	Car parking	Cycle parking
1 bedroom	1 space per dwelling	1 per bedroom
2 and 3 bedrooms	2 spaces per dwelling	1 per bedroom
Mixed Dev of 1, 2 & 3 Bedrooms	Ave of 1.5 spaces across the development.	1 per bedroom
4 or more bedrooms	3 spaces per dwelling	1 per bedroom
Flats	As above	1 per unit

Table 11.3: Kent parking standards for residential development

11.18 If private, riverside residential apartments were to be developed on this site, then car parking spaces set out above will be applied as maximum standards. However, due to the site's proximity to retail, employment and public transport, more rigorous standards could be applied.

11.19 If the accommodation is being used for student residential accommodation, then there could be a reduced parking allocation as set out below.

College D1	Car parking (Staff)	Car parking (Pupils and visitors)	Cycle parking
	1 space per 2 staff	1 space per 15 students	1 space per 5 students

Table 11.4: Kent parking standards for college development

11.20 Although the Kent County Council parking standards suggest one car parking space per 15 students and one space per two staff, there is potential to reduce this further, as the site is located close to the town centre, existing bus routes and Maidstone East rail station. Ideally, an exemplar educational scheme would only provide parking for operational use and staff access. A definitive Travel Plan should be targeted towards staff and students to make best use of the public transport accessibility of the site.

Transport improvements

11.21 An existing pedestrian and cycle footbridge extends from the western arm of the Sandling Road Roundabout, over Fairmeadow, to connect with Sandling Road/Albert Street to the east. Zebra crossing facilities are available here to connect with Station Road and the town centre. This link provides a good quality pedestrian and cycle connection to the town centre from the north side of the quarter. However, improved at grade pedestrian and cycle crossing facilities could negate the need to maintain the footbridge.

11.22 The roundabouts themselves could be improved by staggering access to the quarter. However, the potential for environmental improvements to both Sandling Road and Staceys roundabouts on Royal Engineers Road could be counteracted by the additional traffic generated by the developments within the quarter. An ambition should be to simplify the roundabout at the southern entrance to the Quarter to facilitate a much stronger connection with the town centre.

11.23 A new link road through the quarter, running parallel with Royal Engineers Road from Sandling Road roundabout to Staceys Street roundabout would provide the principal movement spine for the development. This is identified on the road hierachy plan (Figure 4.1), and would provide public transport and service access while still maintaining a pedestrian and cycle friendly environment.

Springfield brief (sites 1-6)

Role of site in wider town centre proposals

11.24 The Springfield group of sites represent a large area of opportunity at the northern fringe of the town centre. A key move in the town centre wide study is to strengthen activities to north of the main retail streets to secure stronger levels of footfall at the northern end of Week Street. The development of the Springfield area will help to support this aim by providing a key destination to the north of the station. The area also appears to provide the most appropriate location for the provision (subject to demand) of a significant quantum of new high quality employment floorspace.

Land use strategy

11.25 The Springfield area should be a focus for employment uses. These uses could be in the form of high quality office accommodation or university education facilities set within an attractive parkland landscape.

11.26 The intention is that this area provides an attractive town centre alternative to the out of town business park or campus. The location would support ample car parking alongside easy access to the rail and bus network. The riverside location and scope for comprehensive redevelopment would support highly sustainable urban design, creating an area of new, state of the art character to attract employers.

11.27 The land use mix would encompass a mix of uses including educational, office, residential, retail and community uses. A hotel use could also be considered alongside the office uses.

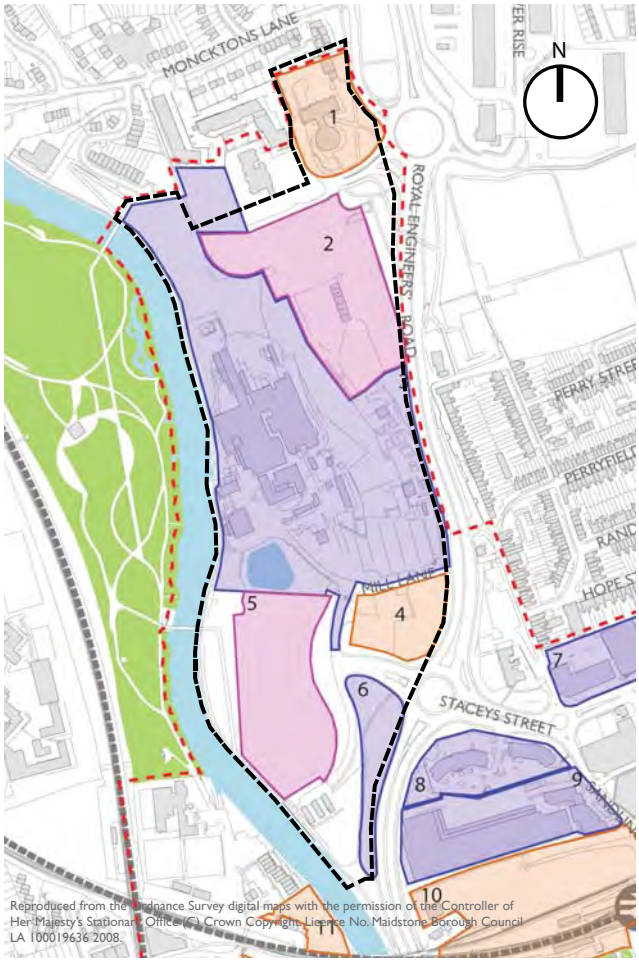


Figure 11.1 - Springfield opportunity sites

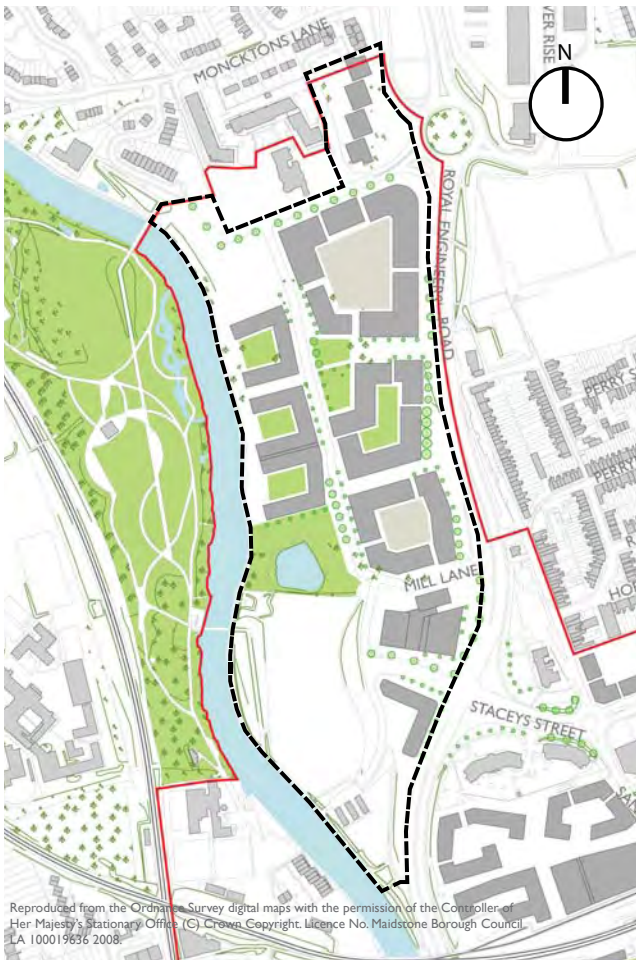


Figure 11.2 - Indicative development framework for the Springfield area

Design principles

11.28 It is not considered that this site is suitable for tall buildings. A general maximum storey height across the area should be four storeys. The topographical changes across the sites should inform each block's building height so as to support the area's character and views to and from the riverside.

11.29 The approach to the layout of development should be informed by a green infrastructure strategy. Key environmental assets on the site should be maintained and enhanced where possible and building blocks arranged to support these. Parts of the area are located within flood risk zones and therefore development should be steered away from these locations. The overall approach, however should be to secure a sustainable drainage and flood water storage strategy across the site to minimise flood risk.

11.30 The creation of perimeter blocks wherever possible should steer the layout design. Strong frontages around the exterior of the site onto main streets should be established. In addition, a strong relationship with Whatman Park and the river should be supported through building frontage and set back.

11.31 Overall the intention should be to establish an attractive campus style environment with a strong green setting and character.

Movement and parking

11.32 The structure of development should be strongly informed by the need for a central spine route to provide access to new developments. This route should operate as a public transport, walking and cycling spine as well as car access route. Public transport access needs should be integral to the scheme, and enhanced pedestrian and cycle routes and facilities are required.

11.33 A balance should be struck between the competing aspects of proximity to Maidstone East station and the car parking requirements of potential office development, which will need to be attractive to occupiers. Parking levels will be necessarily higher should be the site be developed predominantly as office space rather than university facilities. All opportunities to maximise the use of sustainable transport modes should be taken.

11.34 It is recommended that parking areas are located to the north west of the area within areas of greater flood risk. Please note this would be in place of the blocks identified in Figure 11.2.

11.35 Environmental improvements to Royal Engineers Road should be achieved through redevelopment. In particular, opportunities to improve the junctions on this key route should be considered. Where land-hungry roundabouts could be simplified crossroad junctions this would be supported. It is not anticipated that any additional junctions or access points would be required off Royal Engineer's Road – access and exit should be at the southern and northern ends of the site group.

Delivery and phasing

Site information

11.36 Site 3 is currently owned by GE Healthcare and is operated as a paper mill by Whatmans. The owners currently plan to sell off approximately half of the land for redevelopment in the next five years – most likely the land to the east of the site, adjoining Royal Engineers Way. This land is mostly green space, and unused, although redevelopment would require relocation of several services and utilities to support Whatman's ongoing operations including water, steam and gas. There is no clear strategy currently for the remainder of the site, although this could be considered a longer term opportunity for redevelopment.

11.37 Site 2 had consent for B1 use and 192 flats. This consent has now lapsed.

11.38 The University for the Creative Arts are looking to establish a new university campus within Kent. They are currently looking at their requirements in more detail and will prepare a preliminary development brief setting out their specific requirements and vision. The Springfield site is being considered alongside a selection of other sites in the county, all of which will be assessed with respect to this brief.

11.39 The University would require approximately 25,000m² floorspace and approximately 500 residential units in total.

11.40 Sites 1 and 4 are currently the subject of linked planning applications which are recommended for approval. The redevelopment of these sites to provide residential units, a library and a care home would be expected to be delivered in the short term should the applications be approved.

11.41 Site 5 is the subject of an unimplemented application for a football stadium. A recreational or sports use is considered to be appropriate for this site given its location within the floodplain. Part of the site is currently in the hand of the receivers, and is on the market.

Phasing

11.42 It is intended that those areas already subject to planning applications or approvals would be first to come forward in the short term. Development of the main central areas would be more medium to long term. Development on the eastern side of the sites adjacent to Royal Engineer's Way would be likely to come forward before the riverside area under the current land owner's plans.

Delivery partners

11.43 The development of this area is most likely to come about as a series of phases led by respective landowners.

11.44 Kent County Council has a central role in delivering the early phases of development currently the subject of planning applications on sites 1 and 4. Maidstone United Football Club would most likely bring forward site 5. Private land owners and future development partners will then be responsible for the remaining sites' development.

Capacity

11.45 An indicative layout of the site has been used to calculate broad capacities for each of the sites. The capacity of the sites for development are therefore estimated to be:

Site	Employment / education (m²)	Residential (m²)	Supporting uses incl. retail and community (m²)	Public space (m²)
1		8,550		
2 and 3	57,030 (25,000 education, 32,030 office)	13,930	4,610	6,100
4		13,270	5,310	
5				All – 7,070
6		3,510	1,170	

Table 11.5: Land use capacities - Springfield
(N.B. capacity figures represent net internal floorspace and therefore exclude circulation space which has been assumed as 25% of floor area)

Gateway Quarter

Introduction

11.46 The Gateway Quarter offers the potential to expand central uses outside of the core town centre area by providing new development which would stimulate increased footfall and provide a link between the town centre and the Campus Quarter. A total of 5.71ha are potentially available for redevelopment.

11.47 The area would be the subject of mixed use development with the principal future land uses encompassing retail, employment, residential and station-associated facilities including parking.

11.48 A sensitive approach to building density and height is required, as well as efficient use of land given topography and access constraints.

Artist impression of enhanced public space at new entrance to rail station

Land use and development capacity assessment

11.49 An assessment of the Gateway Quarter has been prepared and has identified the following broad maximum land use capacities:

Land Use	Capacity (m^2)
Retail (comparison goods)	5,725
Retail (convenience goods)	3,295
Employment	18,110
Residential (c. 140 apartments)	9,960*

Table 11.6: Land use capacities - Gateway Quarter (N.B. capacity figures represent net internal floorspace and therefore exclude circulation space which has been assumed as 25% of floor area. An average size of flat and house has been assumed of 70sqm and 120sqm respectively)

11.50 As per the Campus Quarter, the Gateway Quarter benefits from proximity to Maidstone East railway station, and also to key office uses, notably Kent County Council's offices at Invicta House and Sessions House. In addition, this site sits adjacent to the town centre retail core and hence the various amenities this affords.

11.51 Maidstone East, and potentially also the adjacent Royal Mail site, represent key development opportunities, given that they are large sites of significant scale, individually in single ownership.

11.52 Potential uses for this location would include offices and – potentially, subject to capacity/ qualitative considerations – a major new convenience store, as well as some comparison retailing. However, it is considered that this quarter is too "off pitch" for the inclusion of high-street style comparison shop units within the timeframe being considered in the study.

11.53 Like the Campus Quarter the Gateway does not suffer from the same levels of traffic congestion as the Heart, to the south.

11.54 With the exception of Sessions House, this Quarter currently presents a relatively unprepossessing entrance to the town centre when arriving from the north of the town, or at the railway station. Particularly weak is the area around the railway station itself (including the vacant public house), and the northern end of Week Street. Securing high quality development in this area would significantly improve first impressions of the town centre, to the benefit of the town as a whole. The potential to create a high quality civic square in front of Sessions House would significantly benefit this quarter, and enhanced links to Brenchley Gardens would further support the open space amenity. Such improvements would also benefit development on the site itself.

11.55 Given current rental values within the town for commercial (for example office) uses, and the attendant viability issues, it is considered that tall buildings should not form a component of development in this location.

* The total residential capacity for the quarter is also supported by proposed development on opportunity site 7 where potential for 65 homes has been identified by the town centre study. A planning brief has not been prepared for this site.

Station area brief (sites 8-10)

Role of site in wider town centre proposals

11.56 The station site and adjacent land areas represent a prime opportunity to create an enhanced northern anchor to the town centre. At present the footfall at the northern end of Week Street is low and the quality of the environment correspondingly poor. Enhancing the northern gateway to the heart of the town centre through the provision of a significant footfall generator next to the station would support the overall strategy.

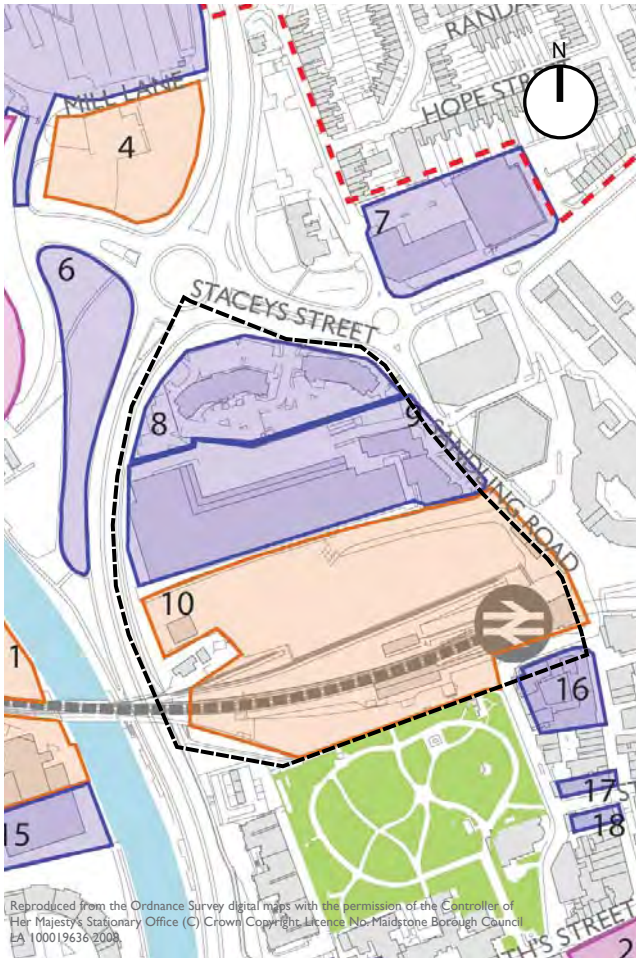


Figure 11.3 - Station area opportunity sites

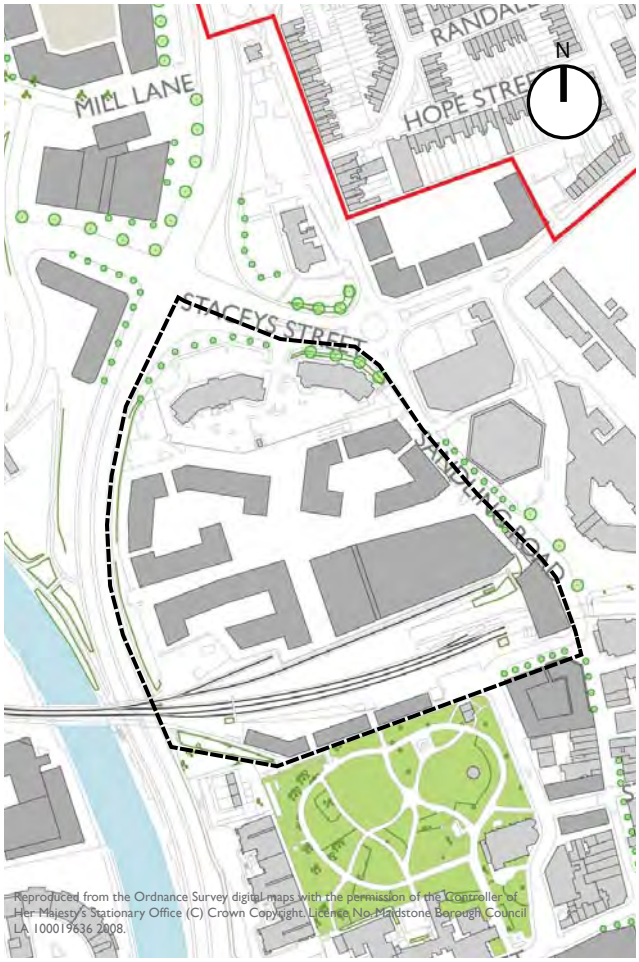


Figure 11.4 - Indicative development framework for the station area

Land use strategy

11.57 The key opportunity for development is site 10 encompassing Maidstone East station and car park. This site would be the focus for station improvements including a new station entrance at the northern end of Week Street. Residential development is considered most appropriate along the southern side of the rail line fronting on to Brenchley Gardens. The station car park area would then be the focus of retail, parking, employment and potentially some enabling residential uses should these be feasible.

11.58 The retail component should sit immediately to the north of the new station entrance, with frontage and a main access into the store from Sandling Road. It is considered most appropriate for this to be primarily a convenience retail store, though with the scope to accommodate some comparison retailing, and potentially A3 uses.

11.59 Site 9 has also been considered as a potential option for development. Should the Royal Mail operations move from this site, the opportunity for comprehensive redevelopment with the station site should be considered. An extension of the employment, residential and retail activities could be explored on this site. A boutique hotel could also be considered alongside such uses.

Design principles

11.60 This area is not considered appropriate for tall buildings. An appropriate building height across the site would not exceed five storeys.

11.61 The design approach should be to establish a strong frontage around the exterior of the site onto Fairmeadow and Sandling Road.

11.62 The role of this site, and particularly the key node at the northern tip of Week Street in establishing an attractive gateway into the heart of Maidstone, should be realised through the detailed design of the development proposals. A strong "anchor" should be realised here with an enhanced civic square (through enhanced pedestrian priority) between the new station entrance and Sessions House.

11.63 The quality of access and interchange at the station should be much enhanced. The layout and design of development should support the legibility of this interchange node and its relationship to the core of the town centre.

11.64 Development should be sensitive to its visual impact on views from the western side of the town centre and river.

11.65 All developments will be expected to meet the highest practicable sustainability standards and to maximise their contribution to the overall green infrastructure network in the town centre. The provision of attractive and functional public and private green space should be supported by appropriate climate change adaptation actions including street tree planting and green roofs. Given the western section of the area lies in a flood risk zone, opportunities to address this challenge positively and ensure sustainable drainage throughout the site must be considered.

11.66 Any residential component of redevelopment should reflect existing housing provision and need, with a view to supporting family housing, where possible and appropriate, and appropriately sized dwellings with adequate private outdoor space.

Movement and parking

11.67 The existing access and egress from Sandling Road should be maintained through redevelopment.

Any development of the site must consider the requirement by Network Rail for maintenance access to the western end of the tracks.

11.68 The redevelopment should re-provide the existing 500 station parking spaces and incorporate extra parking for the new uses. The opportunity to utilise level differences across the site to support the efficient provision of parking should be maximised.

11.69 The station itself should be refurbished to provide a high quality interchange. The provision of cycle facilities and links alongside pedestrian access will be particularly important elements. Interchange between buses and trains should continue to be supported, and enhanced where possible.

Business B1	Car parking	Cycle parking
Offices up to 500m²	1 space per 20m²	1 space per 1000m² for collection/ delivery/ shopping, or 1 space per 200m² for workplace/ meeting
Offices up to 2,500m²	1 space per 25m²	
Offices over 2,500m²	1 space per 30m²	
High Tech / Research	1 space per 35m²	

Table 11.7: Kent parking standards for office use

Retail A1	Car parking	Cycle parking
Food Retail up to 1000m²	1 space per 18m²	1 space per 200m²
Food Retail over 1000m²	1 space per 14m²	1 space per 400m² *
Non Food Retail	1 space per 25m²	As food retail.

* If over 5000m² a minimum of 12 spaces, with additional spaces possible through negotiations.

Table 11.8: Kent parking standards for residential development

11.70 Retail developments comprising up to 8,000m² would equate to a maximum parking standard of 320 to 445 car parking spaces, depending on the proportion of food and non-food retail. Office developments comprising up to 8,000m² would equate to a maximum parking standard of approximately 270 car parking spaces.

11.71 Due to this site being located adjacent to Maidstone East rail station, it's close proximity to bus stops on Sandling Road (which is served by park and ride routes 501 and 506 as well as the frequent 101 service) and within walking distance of other parking sites, there would be a case for the retail and office use parking to be reduced. Furthermore, parking for the residential element of this quarter has the potential to be nearly car free.

11.72 The Kent Rail Utilisation Strategy indicates that any development on site 10 should allow for future increases for rail commuter use, particularly for additional park and ride.

11.73 Ideally, the wider strategy has identified that 500 short stay and 500 long stay car parking spaces (replicating current provision) should be provided on this site to cater for Maidstone East station rail commuters and the proposed developments on site.

Delivery and phasing

11.74 Solon Regeneration are exploring opportunities to bring forward the station site (site 10) for redevelopment through a joint venture between Network Rail and Kier. It is envisaged that this development could be brought forward in the short to medium term.

11.75 Site 9 is currently the Royal Mail Sorting Office and it is understood that Royal Mail currently has no firm plans for relocation. However, Royal Mail does have a wider aspiration to redevelop this site alongside the station site. Any redevelopment of this site will be dependent upon finding an alternative site for operations.

Capacity

11.76 An indicative layout of the site has been used to calculate broad capacities for each of the sites. The capacity of the sites for development are therefore estimated to be as set out in Table 11.9.

Site	Employment (m²)	Retail (m²)	Residential (m²)	Parking (m²)
10	5,560	6,590	2,980	9,760
9	2,000	1,000	2,400	

Table 11.9: Land use capacities - Station area
(N.B. capacity figures represent net internal floorspace and therefore exclude circulation space which has been assumed as 25% of floor area)

Riverside Quarter

Introduction

11.77 The Riverside Quarter provides an opportunity to reinstate the river at the heart of Maidstone. Expanding the retail core across the river through the creation of an attractive riverside environment and introducing a mix of uses including some residential will significantly enhance Maidstone town centre's attraction to investors, residents and visitors. Opportunity sites in this area provide the opportunity to redevelop up to 7.80 ha of the riverside space.

11.78 A mix of uses will complement those already found along the riverside. Principal future land uses will comprise both retail (A1) and A3, cultural, employment and residential.

11.79 Development should seek to provide high quality frontages and open space along the River Medway – making the river the key asset for the setting of new development.

Artist impression of Fairmeadow with pedestrian bridge linking across River Medway (looking north)

Land use and development capacity assessment

11.80 An assessment of the Riverside Quarter has been prepared and has identified the following broad maximum land use capacities:

Land Use	Capacity (m^2)
Retail (comparison goods)	35,860
Retail (convenience goods)	2,630
Employment	2,250
Leisure, tourism and community	1,740
Residential (c. 385 homes mix of apartments and houses)	34,420

Table 11.10: Land use capacities - Riverside Quarter (N.B. capacity figures represent net internal floorspace and therefore exclude circulation space which has been assumed as 25% of floor area. An average size of flat and house has been assumed of 70sqm and 120sqm respectively)

11.81 The unifying theme for this Quarter is the presence of the River Medway itself. Much of the commercial uses in this location are relatively "big box" in nature, for example, the Lockmeadow Leisure Centre and St Peter's Retail Park, together with the Law Courts.

11.82 At present, much of the development in this location fails to capitalise upon, or acknowledge its proximity to the river. This is also true of some of the residential development which has taken place.

11.83 Key longer term aspirations for this Quarter would include the realisation of an unbroken high quality Riverside Walk, and the creation of a development which maximises the environmental/ quality benefits to be derived from the waterside location.

11.84 There may be scope to secure a greater intensification of the uses on key sites, for example, St Peter's Wharf, when the existing buildings reach the end of their economic life. The creation of a riverside retail area including A3 uses would be beneficial, although this is not likely to be a location for "true" town centre-style comparison retailing in the short term given its current physical and functional separation from the Heart.

11.85 This Quarter also has a significant business function, for example, the Powerhub site at its northern end, which represents a key landmark building at the northern end of the town centre, and with a high degree of prominence from the railway line approaching Maidstone East station. The Riverside Quarter is also significant in terms of its proximity and linkages to the Gateway Quarter/Campus Quarter and the Riverside Quarter. Ideally, efforts should be made to improve linkages to the Heart, for example, via a new pedestrian footbridge over the Medway, which although expensive, could unblock the potential of the western river bank.

11.86 Enhancing the existing historic assets will support the town's overall attraction to investors and residents.

Movement and transport

11.87 St Peter's Street forms the principal movement spine for the Riverside Quarter and is classified a street in the Maidstone hierarchy. The width varies from 6.5m at its narrowest to 8.5m at its widest, with approximate footpath widths ranging from 3m to 4m. Therefore, there is an opportunity to reprioritise space in favour of pedestrians and cyclists and allow more activity along the frontages while still allowing a bus services and service access.

11.88 There are a limited number of bus routes currently operating along St Peter's Street. Currently, bus services 5, 12, 82, 85, 89, 503 (London Road P&R) and 71 operate along London Road and the western side of the gyratory (on the southern part of St Peter's St). Therefore, there is potential to divert some routes through St Peter's St and/or increase the frequency and number of bus services along this route to access this quarter.

11.89 There is potential to improve linkages with the town centre by providing a new footbridge, accessible to cyclists and pedestrians, from site 24 to the west, over the River Medway to connect with Earl Street in the east.

11.90 A signed cycle route could be established along St Peter's Street and Buckland Hill which could connect the north-western Cycle Route 12 (to the north of Buckland Hill) with the southern Cycle Route 12 (currently terminating at St Peter's Bridge). This link would then provide a continuous cycle route from the north west of Maidstone, through the town centre and on towards Rochester.

11.91 There is potential to improve pedestrian and cycle linkages to Maidstone East, Maidstone Barracks and Maidstone West train stations by improving the pedestrian environment and access to the existing river crossings.

11.92 The retail, residential and employment land uses within this quarter could be focused towards being more sustainable developments, with reduced parking due to their close proximity to all three rail stations, bus routes and the town centre. Travel Plans should target employees and residents of these establishments and focus on encouraging patrons to make best use of alternative sustainable transport options and facilities.

11.93 The junction of Buckland Road / St Peter's Street may also have to be enhanced due to the increased demand along this route.

11.94 The latest Kent County Council Parking Standards (2003) request the following number of car parking spaces for each land use:

Retail A1	Car parking	Cycle parking
Food Retail up to 1,000m²	1 space per 18m²	1 space per 200m²
Food Retail over 1,000m²	1 space per 14m²	1 space per 400m² *
Non Food Retail	1 space per 25m²	As food retail.

* If over 5,000m² a minimum of 12 spaces, with additional spaces possible through negotiations.

Table 11.11: Kent parking standards for retail use

Business B1	Car parking	Cycle parking
Offices up to 500m²	1 space per 20m²	1 space per 1000m² for collection/ delivery/ shopping, or 1 space per 200m² for workplace/ meeting
Offices up to 2,500m²	1 space per 25m²	
Offices over 2,500m²	1 space per 30m²	
High Tech / Research	1 space per 35m²	

Table 11.12: Kent parking standards for office use

Residential C3	Car parking	Cycle parking
1 bedroom	1 space per dwelling	1 per bedroom
2 and 3 bedrooms	2 spaces per dwelling	1 per bedroom
Mixed Dev of 1, 2 & 3 Bedrooms	Ave of 1.5 spaces across the development.	1 per bedroom
4 or more bedrooms	3 spaces per dwelling	1 per bedroom
Flats	As above	1 per unit

Table 11.13: Kent parking standards for residential use

11.95 In order to improve the connections to the Neighbourhood Quarter and Maidstone West station, there is an aspiration to convert the existing one way clockwise section of St Peter's Street (on the west side of the Fairmeadow/Bishops Way/St Peter's Bridge /Broadway gyratory) into two way working. However, this must be done in conjunction with 2 way working of the Fairmeadow section on the eastern side of the river.

Buckland Hill brief (sites 11-15)

Role of site in wider town centre proposals

11.96 The sites situated around Maidstone Barracks station and Buckland Hill represent an important opportunity to revitalise a highly accessible part of the western riverside. The regeneration of the Powerhub building has provided an important employment opportunity and these activities should be supported as part of the wider economic strategy. The pedestrian link from this site across the rail bridge needs to be improved in order to ensure a stronger link to Maidstone East station and the town centre heart.

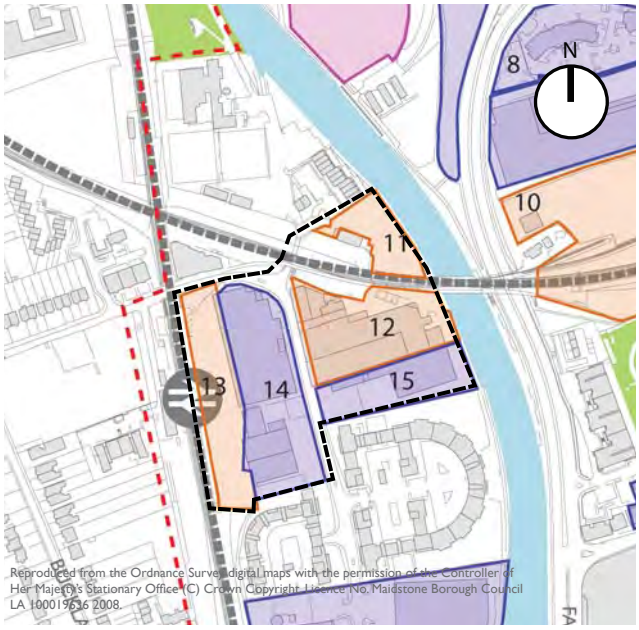


Figure 11.5 - Buckland Hill opportunity sites

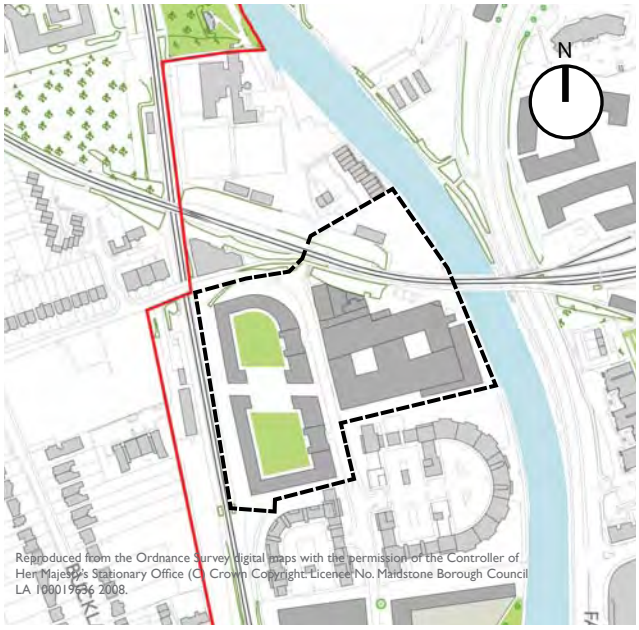


Figure 11.6 - Indicative development framework for the Buckland Hill area

Land use strategy

11.97 Employment activities associated with the Powerhub complex should be supported and any opportunities to intensify or extend activities in the longer term should be considered favourably within the context of the wider employment land strategy.

11.98 Any opportunities to support greater public access and activity along the riverside will be encouraged. It is therefore proposed that as part of an extension to the Powerhub a café could be provided with frontage along the riverside.

11.99 Sites 13 and 14 present an opportunity to manage the transition between different uses sensitively in this area. The introduction of residential development on these two sites would support the local character of this area and support the use of Maidstone Barracks station.

11.100 The existing activities on sites 11 and 12 are deemed to be appropriate in the medium term, and therefore no proposals are shown for these sites. Site 15 represents an extension to the Powerhub building to provide for a riverside cafe space.

Design principles

11.101 This area is not considered appropriate for tall buildings. The existing context should be used to steer building heights – with a general building height of four storeys. This area enjoys a high level visibility and therefore the quality of design and density of development should be considered carefully to ensure change is sensitive and appropriate.

11.102 The design approach should be to establish strong frontages around the exterior of the sites onto main streets and riverside.

11.103 An extension to the Power Hub could be attractively accommodated as a contemporary addition, but with a strong contextual style.

11.104 Development in this area should support a stronger relationship and access to the riverside.

11.105 Opportunities to provide larger housing units and private outdoor space should be explored in this area.

11.106 This area is located within the floodplain and therefore care should be taken when developing the site to reduce flood risk through appropriate design and location of development, as well as the introduction of green infrastructure.

Movement and parking

11.107 The strategy for enhanced movement in this area should be focused on supporting better access to Maidstone Barracks station and a link between this and Maidstone East station.

11.108 Development should therefore enhance access to the station via sustainable modes.

11.109 Access and environmental improvements to the pedestrian bridge across the river should also be secured. In addition, development should support the provision of a riverside walk and cycleway.

11.110 Kent County Council retail parking standards suggest a range from 90 to 125 car parking spaces for sites 11 to 15. Given the area's high level of accessibility, there is a possibility to reduce the parking requirements.

11.111 Access to the north is an issue as well as to site 11, through Waterside gate bridge. There is a potential issue with regards to construction traffic access for site 11 as well as delivery vehicle access. Smaller HGV or LGV access would be recommended. Sites 12 and 15 can be accessed off St Peter's St, as they currently are.

Delivery and phasing

11.112 The Powerhub site is a successful venture and is currently being supported by its owner into the future. The delivery of an extension would be driven by demands for space within the building itself and the market case for a café use or similar. Site 15 would therefore be most likely to be delivered by the landowner in the medium to long term.

11.113 Sites 13 and 14 adjacent to the railway and station are currently in operation as employment / trade counter type uses. Any redevelopment of these sites would be long term and would only occur should the current uses vacate.

Capacity

11.114 An indicative layout of the site has been used to calculate broad capacities for each of the sites. The capacity of the sites for development are therefore estimated to be approximately:

Site	Employment (m²)	Retail (m²)	Residential (m²)	Public space (m²)
11				
12				
13 and 14			13,050	1,510
15	2,250	2,250		

Table 11.14: Land use capacities - Buckland Hill
(N.B. capacity figures represent net internal floorspace and therefore exclude circulation space which has been assumed as 25% of floor area)

St Peter's brief (sites 24 and 35)

Role of site in wider town centre proposals

11.115 These are two key riverside sites in an area which is already experiencing change through regeneration. This area forms a key piece in the overarching strategy for the town centre. There is a significant opportunity to develop a new, more 'urban' retail quarter, set in a high quality riverside open space, which could strengthen the retail offer and reinstate the river at the heart of the centre.

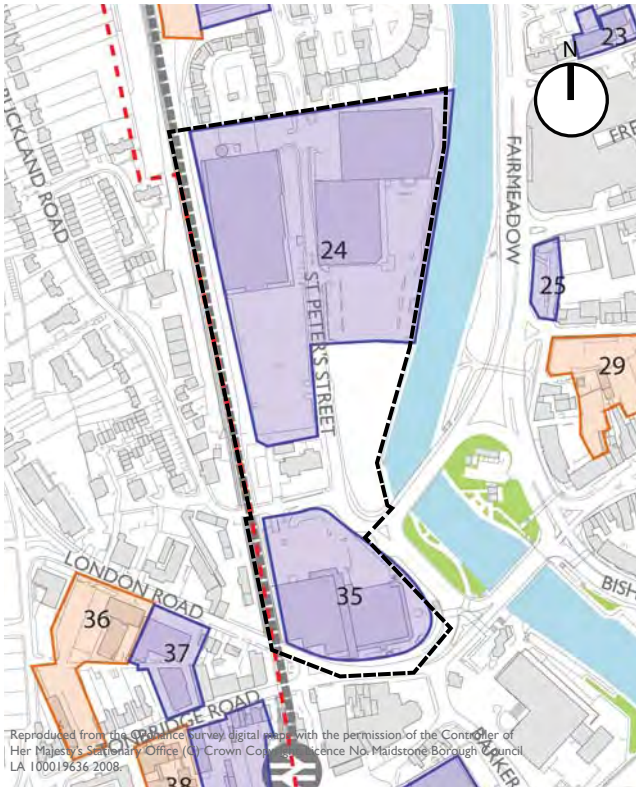


Figure 11.7 - St Peter's opportunity sites

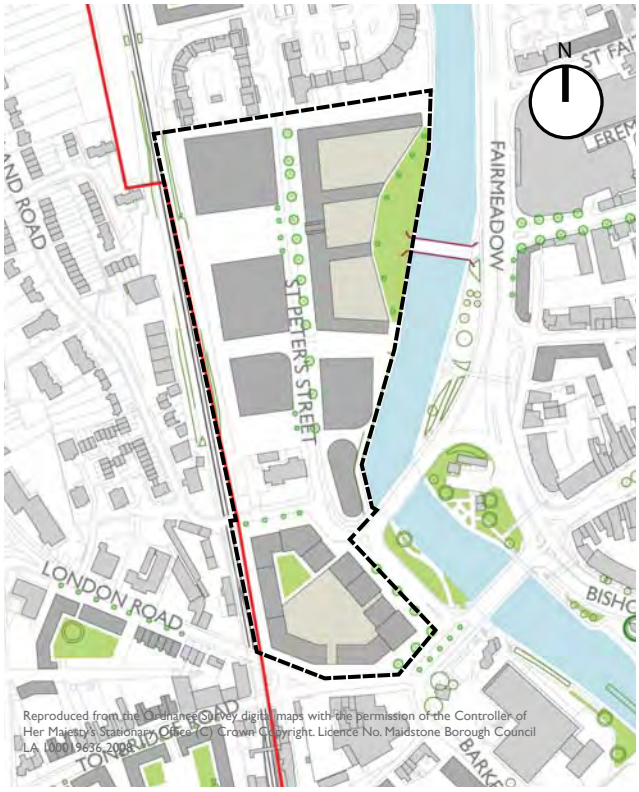


Figure 11.8 - Indicative development framework for the St Peter's area

Land use strategy

11.116 The western riverside area represents a sizeable area of land already in low intensity retail use. The ambition is to see this area redeveloped to intensify its retail potential as an extension to the primary retail core, facilitated by a new pedestrian bridge

11.117 Development will be predominantly retail at ground level (though first floor / mezzanine trading may also be appropriate), with inclusion of decked / multi-storey parking as appropriate. The potential inclusion of residential development above, or adjacent to, the retail along the riverside would complete the vision for the immediate riverside setting and support this area becoming a fully integrated piece of the town centre.

11.118 The mix of uses across the sites will include retail, restaurants / cafes, residential, parking and open space. The inclusion of family leisure uses could also support the land use mix here.

11.119 Site 35 offers an opportunity to manage the transition between an active riverside area and a more local centre of the neighbourhood quarter. The retail uses and layout should be reprovided and enhanced with the inclusion of residential development above.

Design principles

11.120 This area is not considered appropriate for tall buildings. A general maximum building height of four storeys is to be observed. The sites in this area are all highly visible within the town. The quality and character of development is therefore important. The density of development should be steered by the need to enhance views and access to the riverside and keep building heights to an appropriate scale. The redevelopment of Site 35 offers an opportunity to establish a more sensitively designed building for this prominent site.

11.121 The design approach should be to create high quality riverside open space leading to a new pedestrian and cycle bridge across to Earl Street. This space should provide a new public space to provide a focus for events and for the enjoyment of the river. Around this space should be retail frontage, potentially including cafes and restaurants to add vitality to this area.

11.122 Overall the sites should support strong riverside and street frontage. The creation of perimeter blocks, wherever possible, should provide the framework for development.

11.123 Some larger 'big box' retail could be retained or redeveloped to the west of St Peter's Street, or on Site 35.

11.124 This area is located within the floodplain and therefore the design and layout of development should be considered carefully. Green infrastructure opportunities including green roofs, planting, and natural drainage opportunities should be maximised to support better management of existing and future flood risk.

Movement and parking

11.125 Site 24 would require pedestrian link improvements to Maidstone East station and the town centre. The link to the station could be provided by the re-development of Site 35, and improving the crossing facilities at the Station Approach / Tonbridge Road / London Road link.

11.126 Significant improvements to the pedestrian links to the town centre will be essential and this can best be achieved through the provision of a new footbridge over the river to link up with Earl Street. The existing vehicle access to these sites off St Peter's Street / Buckland Road would be retained.

11.127 Retail parking standards represent a range from 1,239 to 1,720 additional car parking spaces for the retail element of sites 24 and 35. However, there is a possible reduction in the number of spaces due to the proximity and accessibility of the site in relation to the town centre and public transport facilities. It is proposed that the parking provision could be provided in covered ground or multi-storey format within the new mixed use block to the east of St Peter's Street.

Delivery and phasing

11.128 The retail warehouses currently on the site are operational and trading well, therefore any redevelopment will be subject to the buildings coming to the end of their life and requiring significant refurbishment. This is estimated to be 10-15 years time.

11.129 The landowner does not currently have any plans for redevelopment.

11.130 A phased approach to redevelopment could be envisaged where the riverside sites to the east of St Peter's Street come forward first, followed by the later

redevelopment or refurbishment on the western side of St. Peter's Street.

Capacity

11.131 An indicative layout has been used to calculate broad capacities for each of the sites. The capacity of the sites for development are therefore estimated to be approximately:

Site	Parking (m²)	Retail (m²)	Residential (m²)	Public space (m²)
24	9,000	26,250	10,120	5,180 (at ground and upper courtyard level)
35		4,720	11,250	

Table 11.15: Land use capacities - St Peter's (N.B. capacity figures represent net internal floorspace and therefore exclude circulation space which has been assumed as 25% of floor area)

Artist's impression of redeveloped riverside area (looking north west)

Len House brief (sites 30 and 31)

Role of site in wider town centre proposals

11.132 Len House and adjacent sites have an important location in the town centre. They mark the threshold between the retail heart and the historic and cultural cluster around All Saints. Given their location on the River Len they also have an important future role in facilitating a pedestrian link alongside this river between Gabriel's Hill and the River Medway.

Land use strategy

11.133 The site has the potential to deliver a number of land uses and therefore a series of options are considered. In every case the retention and refurbishment of Len House is envisaged.

11.134 Different delivery options depending on the primary use of Len House are therefore proposed. The uses could be:

- Retail – refurbishment of the space to provide convenience retail with parking behind, and potentially some comparison goods or other retail / A3 space at the upper level.
- Cultural – the building would provide an ideal space for an art gallery or other cultural facility with scope for a ground level café next to the mill pond.
- Hotel – there may be scope to refurbish the building and accommodate a boutique hotel within the main building.

11.135 Subject to the provision of adequate on site parking, appropriate to the proposed primary use, the remainder of the site could be redeveloped for retail units with frontage on to the river space and accessed via the existing bridge.

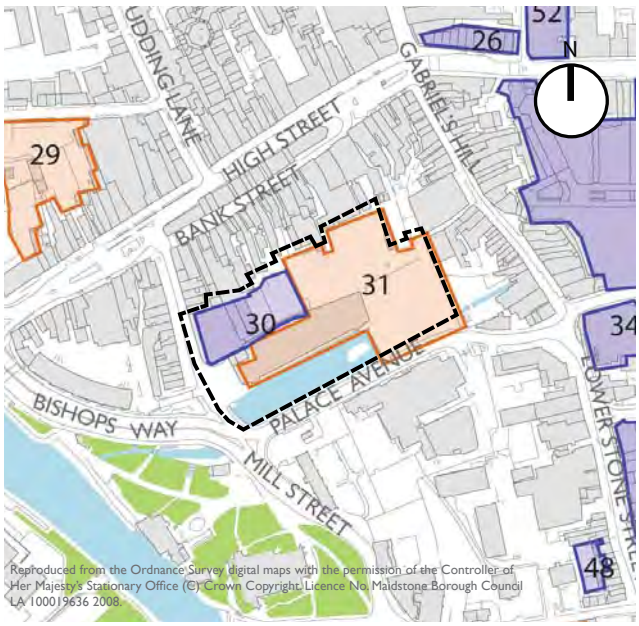


Figure 11.9 - Len House opportunity sites

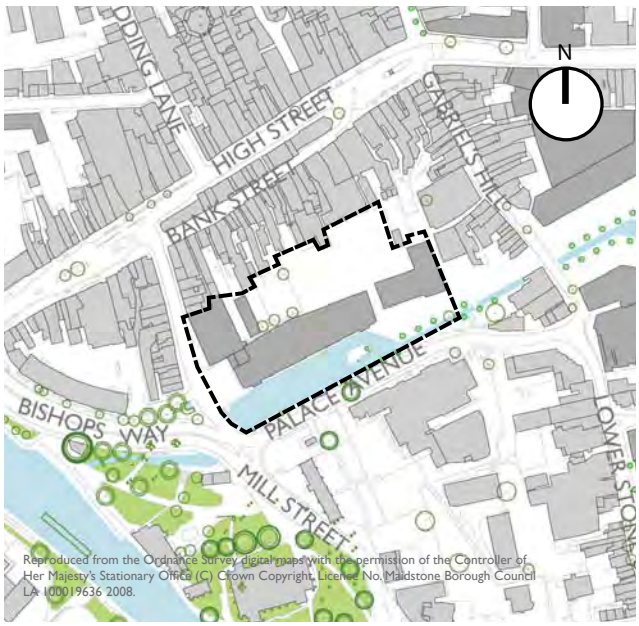


Figure 11.10 - Indicative development framework for the Len House site

Design principles

11.136 The main principle to be observed on this site is to sensitively refurbish Len House through the accommodation of a new use which will revitalise the building. The use and internal layout should maximise the waterside setting – looking to maintain the large window views into and out of the building. Len House is considered to be a landmark building in the town centre and is a Grade II listed building, and new development should seek to enhance the setting of Len House.

11.137 Any new development next to the existing building should be sensitively designed to complement the existing Len House. Building heights should observe the existing context and should not exceed four storeys.

11.138 The River Len and mill pond should be enhanced as a key asset.

11.139 Much of the site is located within the floodplain and therefore refurbishment and enhancement must ensure no greater flood risk results.

Movement and parking

11.140 The parking provision on the site should be considered in light of the town centre location and its close proximity to all three rail stations and bus routes.

11.141 The existing tarmac area to the rear of Len House could be used to provide parking for both Len House and any new build. The level of parking on the site will be dependent on the land uses included.

11.142 The access points for the site will need to be informed by the land uses and the frequency of access required. It is anticipated that the main access would be retained to the north east, to avoid significant traffic on Palace Avenue.

Delivery and phasing

11.143 The delivery and phasing of this site will be highly dependent on the use chosen.

11.145 It is envisaged the site will come forward for refurbishment and redevelopment in the short to medium term. Delivery will be reliant on the land owner, although Maidstone Borough Council could support the delivery of the site should an appropriate cultural use be identified.

Capacity

11.146 An indicative layout of the site has been used to calculate broad capacities for each of the sites. The capacity of the sites for development are therefore estimated to be approximately:

Site	Retail (m²)	Refurbishment of Len House as cultural / retail / hotel (m²)	Residential (m²)	Public space (m²)
30 and 31	5,260	1,740		530

Table 11.16: Land use capacities - Len House
(N.B. capacity figures represent net internal floorspace and therefore exclude circulation space which has been assumed as 25% of floor area)

Artist's impression of refurbished Len House

The Heart Quarter

Introduction

11.147 Opportunity sites within The Heart present the opportunity to provide an expansion and improvement of retail facilities in the town centre and potentially an enhanced and more distinctive urban environment for Maidstone.

11.148 Key opportunity sites on King Street and Week Street offer the opportunity incrementally to increase and improve the retail offer whilst intensifying the use of upper floors. Together these key sites provide a land area of approximately 5ha.

11.149 A longer term opportunity to deliver a significant step change in the quality of the environment and retail floorspace provision is identified in the eastern section of the Heart Quarter as an adjunct to this section.

11.150 During the course of preparing this study, the team has developed and discussed with the client team ideas for redeveloping the area of the town centre to the south of King Street and encompassing the Mall. The River Len, which is a tributary of the Medway, is culverted in this area of the town. It is likely that the Mall will require major refurbishment or redevelopment during the lifetime of this study in order to remain competitive as the retail offer in the town centre evolves. In addition, the area which includes Sainsburys and the bus station is characterised by poor urban form and weak public realm and detracts from the overall environment in the town centre. There is an opportunity to redevelop a substantial part of this area of the town centre to deculvert and naturalise the river Len, and to provide a modern, attractive and street based retail environment. The movement strategy sets out indicative proposals for the reprovision of the bus station, and there is an opportunity for a significant convenience foodstore to be provided in the urban enterprise quarter. This strategy would be complex to deliver, and should be the subject of further detailed feasibility work and discussion with landowners before it is progressed. For this reason, it is not considered appropriate for a planning brief to be included for this site at present. However, it is considered that the pursuit of this idea may carry the potential to deliver significant benefits in the environmental quality, retail offer, distinctiveness and character and environmental sustainability of the town centre. An outline of the proposals is included in this section under the heading 'Water Lane - major opportunity'.

Land use and development capacity assessment

11.151 An assessment of the Heart Quarter has been prepared and has identified the following broad maximum land use capacities:

Land Use	Capacity (m²)
Retail (comparison goods)	50,120*
Employment	9,300

Table 11.17: Land use capacities - The Heart (N.B. capacity figures represent net internal floorspace and therefore exclude circulation space which has been assumed as 25% of floor area).

11.152 This Quarter encompasses Maidstone's retail "core", including Fremlin Walk, the southern end of Week Street and its junction with High Street/ King Street, as well as the Chequers Mall. This is the location where retail rents (in terms of Zone A) are at their highest, and where there is the greatest concentration of national multiple retailers.

11.153 The core also includes a significant number of A3 uses, of particular note being the concentration of such uses on Earl Street, in proximity to Week Street and the Hazlitt Theatre. The core also includes some

more specialist boutique retailing, e.g. within Royal Star Arcade, and on the northern end of Gabriel's Hill.

11.154 The core has the potential to capitalise on glimpses of the River Medway, utilising east-west links, but at present much of the development within the area, such as Fremlin's Walk, effectively turns its back on the river.

11.155 While listed buildings and conservation areas can potentially impose some constraints upon development, they can also provide an appropriate location for services and commercial uses, and help to create a high quality environment, such as that enjoyed by a number of Maidstone's competitors. A number of Maidstone's landmark historic buildings fall within the Heart.

11.156 The fine grain of the Heart means the scope for significant alteration through much of the historic area is limited. However, the opportunities to bring the rear of properties and upper floors of existing retail units could be explored in the longer term as retail trends shift.

11.157 The Heart is not considered appropriate as a significant residential location.

* The total retail capacity for the quarter is supported by the potential intensification of Royal Star Arcade, for which a planning brief has not been prepared.

Artist's impression of enhanced Earl Street (looking west towards new pedestrian bridge over River Medway)

King Street brief (sites 26-28, 34 and 52)

Role of site in wider town centre proposals

11.158 These sites represent important redevelopment opportunities to support the anchors and overall structure of the town centre. Intensifying retail activity and the quality of employment and parking space will help to enhance both the overall activity in the town centre and the quality of the streetscape.

Land use strategy

11.159 The land use strategy is to see mixed use development throughout the area. Opportunity sites should seek to secure active retail ground floor uses. Uses on the upper floors will vary from site to site but should focus on providing further retail, employment and parking uses as appropriate.

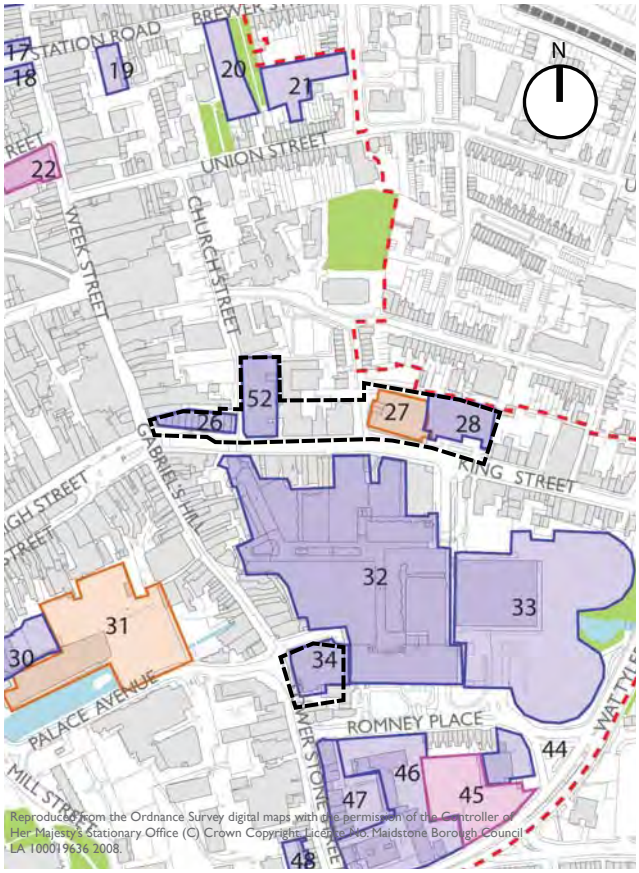


Figure 11.11 - King Street opportunity sites

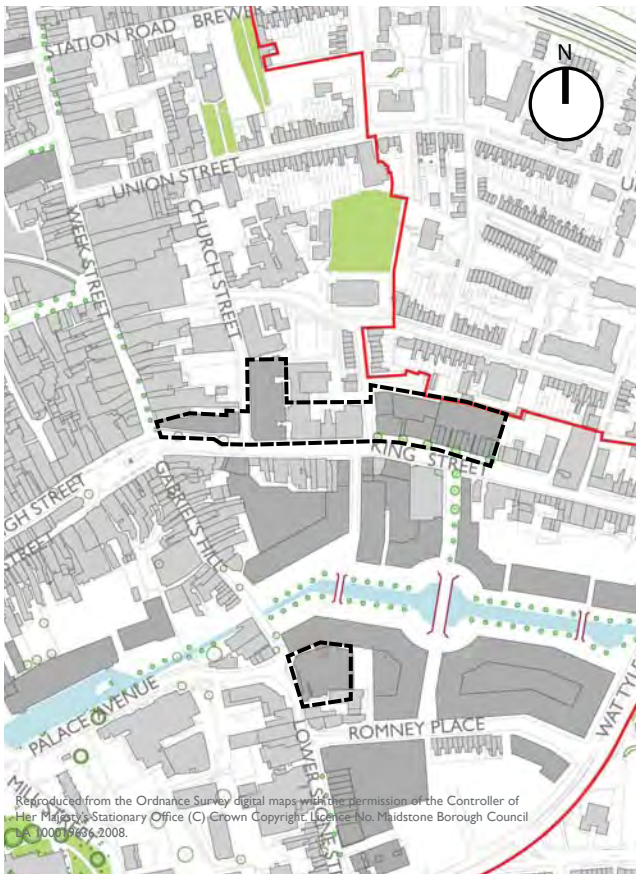


Figure 11.12 - Indicative development framework for the King Street area

Design principles

11.160 This area already has a number of higher buildings, including a 9 storey building on site 26. It is considered appropriate to see this taller building refurbished as an appropriately located landmark. Other sites should observe their immediate context and should not exceed 4 or 5 storeys. The prominent locations of these sites should steer their design and density.

11.161 The redevelopment of sites 27 and 28 should provide much improved frontage to King Street, looking to complete the building line by bringing development forward to the pavement edge.

11.162 Refurbishment of the landmark Gala Bingo building should be explored, although redevelopment may provide greater potential.

Movement and parking

11.163 The overall parking strategy has suggested that 210 parking bays for public access are provided as part of future King Street redevelopment. It is suggested that the parking requirement for retail uses is accommodated by this allocation.

Business B1	Car parking	Cycle parking
Offices up to 500m²	1 space per 20m²	1 space per 1000m² for collection/ delivery/ shopping, or 1 space per 200m² for workplace/ meeting
Offices up to 2,500m²	1 space per 25m²	
Offices over 2,500m²	1 space per 30m²	
High Tech / Research	1 space per 35m²	

Table 11.18: Kent parking standards for office use

11.164 This implies that an additional car parking of 310 parking bays is required for employment element of this site. However, these sites are very well served by buses, as they are located adjacent to the main bus hub of St Pad's Hill. Bus services 5, 12, 82, 85, 89, 71, 101 and all park and ride services pass this site. Therefore it is suggested that parking for employment is not accommodated on site and that the development should look at promoting the use of the park and ride services for its staff.

Delivery and phasing

11.165 Sites 27 and 28 offer an opportunity for comprehensive redevelopment. The car park building currently occupying site 27 is coming to the end of its life and is in need of redevelopment, while the AMF facility represents an opportunity for achieving a more intensive use of the land through redevelopment. The opportunity for the two landowners – Maidstone Borough Council and X Leisure - to work in partnership should be explored in order to gain the best outcome for this section of King Street. However, site 27 has potential for redevelopment in the short term and may therefore come forward before site 28.

11.166 The refurbishment or redevelopment of sites 26 and 34 would be landowner led and would therefore only come about as a market led opportunity.

11.167 The former post office (site 52) is a much longer term opportunity and would be subject to a suitable operator taking on the refurbishment of the building in order to provide retail activities.

Capacity

11.168 An indicative layout of the site has been used to calculate broad capacities for each of the sites. The the following broad maximum land use capacities have been identified:

Site	Retail (m²)	Employment (m²)	Leisure (m²)	Parking (m²)
26	1,260	2,620		
27	1,240			6,640
28	1,670	6,680		
34	2,850			
52	2,740			

Table 11.19: Land use capacities - King Street
(N.B. capacity figures represent net internal floorspace and therefore exclude circulation space which has been assumed as 25% of floor area)

Artist's impression of refurbished site 26

Water Lane - major opportunity (sites 26-28, 32-34 and 52)

Role of site in wider town centre proposals

11.169 Delivering the full stimulated retail capacity represents a significant challenge in Maidstone town centre. The overarching strategy looks to strengthen the core retail area and support this through the intensification of key anchors at each end of the main retail centre – to the north (station site) to the west (western riverside) and to the south east.

11.170 This latter anchor is currently provided by the Mall, which provides a significant retail offer in a very central location. This provision, however, will increasingly suffer both from an ageing building and competition from newer retail layouts such as Fremlin Walk.

11.171 This section therefore explores the potential to review the existing Mall and surrounding area with a view to redeveloping this as a more intensive and higher quality retail location – thereby providing the strength of anchor required at this end of the town centre.

11.172 It is recognised that this represents a complex, longer term development opportunity which would be subject to a number of challenges in terms of design, engineering/infrastructure, land assembly and phasing, and will require significant further viability/feasibility testing. However, given the potential benefits, it is considered that the proposition merits further consideration.

11.173 If this proposition is not viable or deliverable alternative, arguably less radical, proposals should be considered.

11.174 The strategy for this area would involve staged, but comprehensive redevelopment of the

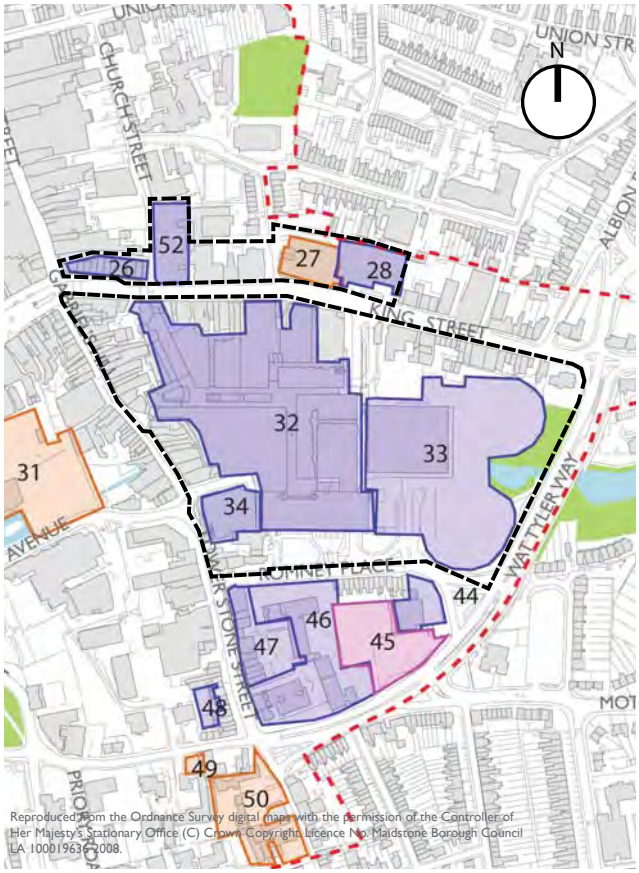


Figure 11.13 - Water Lane opportunity sites

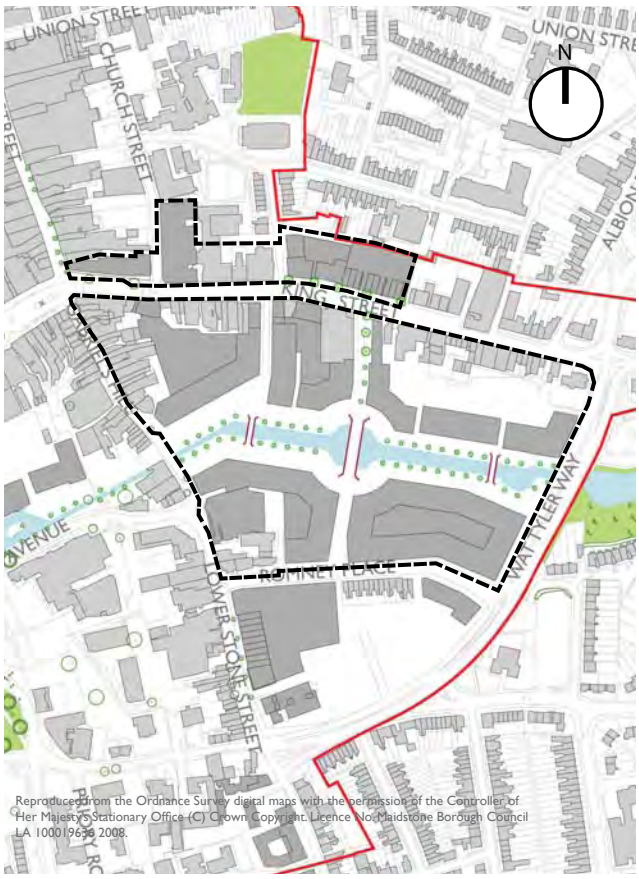


Figure 11.14 - Indicative development framework for the Water Lane area

Mall scheme and some key adjacent sites. A key part of the design approach is to uncover the River Len and deculvert the waterway to provide an attractive waterside environment. Around this new environment a series of high quality and high density retail blocks would be laid out. Connections to Gabriel's Hill, King Street and Romney Place would be facilitated as well as a finer grain set of connections across the waterway to support a strong retail circuit.

Land use strategy

11.175 The land use strategy would be to achieve mixed use development comprising primarily retail and A3 uses. An anchor department store would be secured in the south eastern quarter alongside which significant car parking would be re-provided. Leisure and employment uses could also be part of the overall mix, with some residential introduced to provide a balanced and sustainable offer.

Design principles

11.176 The topography of the area suggests taller buildings would not be appropriate within the main area envisaged for redevelopment. A general building height of 4 storeys should be observed.

11.177 Any long-term reconfiguration of the Chequers Mall potentially provides the opportunity to de-culvert sections of the River Len to provide additional amenity space, and to create a new riverside setting for a mixture of uses. This would be a strategic waterside route linking the River Medway to Mote Park.

11.178 The general design approach would be to complete the existing block structure to provide a finer grain urban area. The layout and design should support the development of a new character taking

cues from the existing structure, grain and styles.

11.179 An important factor in the design will be to secure a sustainable drainage strategy through the layout of green infrastructure, with a view to supporting greater flood storage and water absorption capacity and a significantly more attractive environment.

Movement and parking

11.180 The comprehensive site will be accessed principally from St Pad's Hill and Romney Place. The existing bus routings can be maintained, and provide service access to the individual elements. However, parking will be primarily accessed from Wat Tyler Way via Romney Place in order to remove car movements from King Street.

11.181 The parking strategy is to maintain the existing level of retail parking, namely 1,000 parking bays. The required parking for Sainsbury's will be located on its new site. This implies that approximately 25,000m² GFA is required for parking.

11.182 In the longer term, there is potential to redevelop a new bus interchange on the existing Chequers and Sainsbury's site when the re-development of this site is viable. The aspiration is for a new open bus interchange located along the new alignment of St Pad's Hill and Romney Place. This would be integrated into the new public realm, while the provision of additional bus stands to cater for the increased services could be accommodated behind the principal frontages.

Delivery and phasing

11.183 In order to achieve this vision for the eastern section of the Heart Quarter, some degree of land assembly would be required. An important pre-requisite would be the relocation and reprovision of the Sainsbury's supermarket, potentially on to site 46 and 47 to the south of Romney Place. This would provide a strong anchor on Lower Stone Street, thereby supporting footfall on Gabriel's Hill. This relocation would facilitate the release of site 33 for redevelopment alongside site 32 (The Mall).

11.184 It is envisaged that some degree of staged delivery could be achieved by beginning construction on site 33 first followed by site 32. In any event, relocation of many of the stores within the Mall would be required during much of the construction. A further approach to phasing could explore the opportunity to consider a stand-alone redevelopment of the Mall buildings.

11.185 Bringing this proposal forward would be led by The Mall Corporation with support from Maidstone Borough Council and other landowners. It is anticipated that the current buildings would start to be considered for significant refurbishment in the next 10-15 years and this would be the catalyst for considering redevelopment and intensification.

Capacity

11.186 An indicative layout of the site has been used to calculate broad capacities for each of the sites. Table11.24 indicates the capacity for development within sites 32 and 33. Sites to the south of Romney Place represent additional capacity as the supermarket currently occupying site 33 would be re-provided here.

Site	Retail (m^2)	Employment (m^2)	Leisure (m^2)	Parking (m^2)
32 and 33	37,670			8,850

Table 11.20: Land use capacities - Water Lane
(N.B. capacity figures represent net internal floorspace and therefore exclude circulation space which has been assumed as 25%)

The Urban Enterprise Quarter

Introduction

11.187 The Urban Enterprise Quarter presents an opportunity for selective redevelopment of buildings which will reach the end of their economic life. Future redevelopment within this quarter is likely to be closely linked with future changes within The Heart.

11.188 Redevelopment is likely to be for a mixture of uses, including retaining the existing employment function of the quarter, but also incorporating new residential and retail uses. There is a significant opportunity to improve the public space and overall environmental quality of this area.

11.189 Together the sites in the quarter represent a land area opportunity of approximately 4.4ha.

Existing mixed use development in the urban enterprise quarter

Land use and development capacity assessment

11.190 A market assessment of the Urban Enterprise Quarter has been prepared and has identified the following broad maximum land use capacities:

Land Use	Capacity (m^2)
Retail (comparison goods)	5,090
Retail (convenience goods)	4,235
Employment	1,860
Residential (c. 96 flats)	6,750

Table 11.21: Land use capacities - Urban Enterprise quarter
(N.B. capacity figures represent net internal floorspace and therefore exclude circulation space which has been assumed as 25% of floor area. An average size of flat and house has been assumed of 70sqm and 120sqm respectively)

11.191 This Quarter contains much of Maidstone's older, poorer quality office development, a significant proportion of which is vacant or in multiple occupancy.

11.192 As the GL Hearn study identifies, in the short term, redevelopment/refurbishment of these older buildings is unlikely to prove financially viable, at least in the short to medium term. While this is likely to remain a significant office location in the short to medium term, there may be scope for redevelopment of some office sites for employment or mixed uses in the longer term.

11.193 In general terms the environmental quality of this area is poor, and while it includes some older buildings, it fails to capitalise upon its linkages to the Heritage and Cultural Quarter to the west and, indeed, the Heart, to the north. Indeed, many of the retail/A3 uses in this location are secondary or tertiary in nature. A key constraint is the environmental impact of the road network in this location, which creates a hostile and unattractive environment. This is compounded by typically poor quality public realm and (for example on Upper Stone Street) narrow pavement widths.

Lower Stone Street brief (sites 44 to 47)

Role of site in wider town centre proposals

11.194 The sites within this area will play a central role in delivering the vision for the Urban Enterprise quarter. The selective demolition and refurbishment of tower buildings will help support the wider town centre economic strategy with respect to office space. In addition, to support the wider town centre strategy objectives, sites 44-47 could potentially accommodate a food store. This would secure a clear anchor and 'end' to the retail core on Lower Stone Street.

Land use strategy

11.195 The overall approach should be to achieve mixed use development comprising employment, retail and residential uses across the sites.

11.196 The reprovision of a foodstore as part of sites 46 and 47 could be considered alongside wider, more strategic moves. In any event, active ground floor uses should be secured along Lower Stone Street.

11.197 The existing tower blocks should be reviewed and two out of the three on sites 46 and 45 considered for redevelopment, whilst one should be left for refurbishment. It is considered most appropriate to retain the tower block on the corner of Lower Stone Street and Wat Tyler Way as this provides an existing landmark and could be enhanced to support this junction's role as a gateway to the town centre. The other two tower blocks are considered to be less positive in terms of townscape and potential refurbishment options.

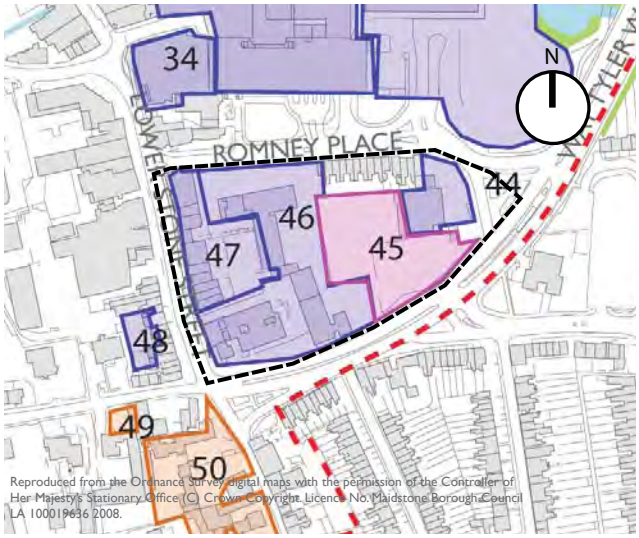


Figure 11.15 - Lower Stone Street opportunity sites

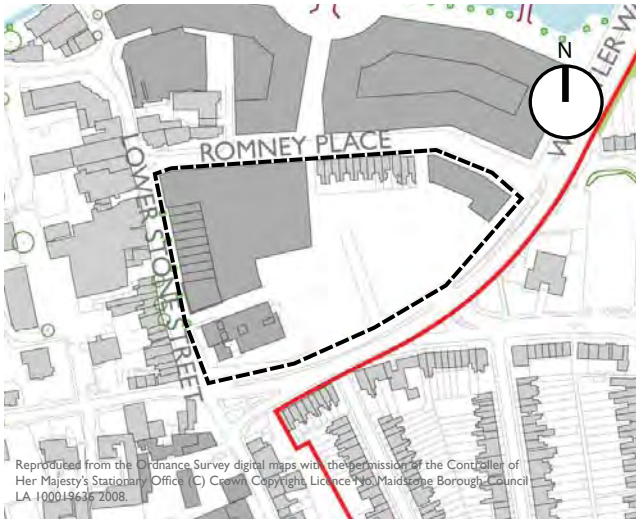


Figure 11.16 - Indicative development framework for Lower Stone Street area

Design principles

11.198 This area is not considered appropriate for tall buildings in terms of the overall town centre design and therefore opportunities to reduce the number of tower blocks should be pursued. A tower at the end of Lower Stone Street, however, would support legibility and therefore one tower should be retained. For new development a maximum height of 4 or 5 storeys should be observed.

11.199 The design approach to new development should be led by a preference for perimeter blocks wherever possible. A focus on enhancing the street frontage and providing attractive public spaces should be at the centre of any design strategy.

11.200 This area offers the central opportunity to enhance the quality of the built environment within the Urban Enterprise Quarter. The area is highly visible and forms part of the southern gateway to the town centre. The refurbishment of the existing tower on the corner of Lower Stone Street should seek to transform this building into an attractive landmark.

Movement and parking

11.201 The parking provided in this location need to balance the competing pressures of a town centre location and the need to attract employment occupiers.

Retail A1	Car parking	Cycle parking
Food Retail up to 1000m²	1 space per 18m²	1 space per 200m²
Food Retail over 1000m²	1 space per 14m²	1 space per 400m² *
Non Food Retail	1 space per 25m²	As food retail.

* If over 5,000m² a minimum of 12 spaces, with additional spaces possible through negotiations.

Table 11.22: Kent parking standards for retail use

11.202 For 8,470m² of development, a range from 339 to 605 car parking spaces would need to be provided, depending on the percentage food / non food retail split.

11.203 In the longer term, it is possible much of the site would be required to accommodate a relocated foodstore and its associated parking. Site 45 currently has limited access, as there is a left in, left out only arrangement via Mote Road. This encourages trips to circulate round the Romney Place / Lower Stone Street loop in order access the site. The primary access for the above would be Romney Place. Any additional access to the south would require a comprehensive approach to environmental improvements to Knightrider Street, Mote Road, Upper and Lower Stone Streets and Watt Tyler Way.

Business B1	Car parking	Cycle parking
Offices up to 500m²	1 space per 20m²	1 space per 1000m² for collection/ delivery/ shopping, or 1 space per 200m² for workplace/ meeting
Offices up to 2,500m²	1 space per 25m²	
Offices over 2,500m²	1 space per 30m²	
High Tech / Research	1 space per 35m²	

Table 11.23: Kent parking standards for office use

11.204 The wider site area will need to be carefully planned to ensure that opportunities are maximised to front the deculverted River Len. Alternatively, the sites could present an opportunity to provide an improved setting for mixed use and office buildings, and provide incubator units for new businesses.

11.205 The primary access to sites 44 to 47 sites could be off Romney Place, with Upper Stone Street, to the west, offering a secondary site access. Ideally, no site accesses would be provided along Wat Tyler Way.

11.206 Site 48 can only be accessed by traffic travelling westbound along Knightrider Street if the current access arrangement is maintained.

11.207 Bus routes 5, 12, 82, 85 and 89 currently operate along Upper Stone Street and Romney Place to the west of the site. The closest bus stops are located on Upper Stone Street, with the existing central bus hub (St Pad's Hill) located adjacent to the site, to the north.

Delivery and phasing

11.208 The opportunities in this area are considered to be medium-long term. Individual land owners will lead any change, but collaboration and co-operation between landowners would be appreciated in order to maximise the area's potential.

Capacity

11.209 An indicative layout of the site has been used to calculate broad capacities for each of the sites. The broad capacity of the sites for development are estimated in Table 11.28. Part of the site has been assumed to be required for parking or open space, however capacities could be increased should these land uses be integrated within development.

Site	Retail (m^2)	Employment (m^2)	Leisure (m^2)	Parking (m^2)
44		1,860		
46 and 47	8,475			

Table 11.24: Land use capacities - Lower Stone Street
(N.B. capacity figures represent net internal floorspace and therefore exclude circulation space which has been assumed as 25% of floor area)

Artist's impression of site redevelopment (looking north east up Lower Stone Street)

Knightrider Street brief (sites 49 to 51) - partly outside town centre boundary

Role of site in wider town centre proposals

11.210 The sites have a less strategic role than those on Lower Stone Street, but will help support the establishment of the urban enterprise quarter and therefore the overall provision of employment floorspace. Sites 49 and 50 are located within the town centre boundary and therefore have a role in supporting town centre uses. Site 51 is more peripheral and is included only as an example of development opportunities outside the town centre.

Land use strategy

11.211 The land use strategy is to encourage mixed use development comprising residential and some small scale commerical / employment / retail uses.

11.212 Sites 49 and 50 present an opportunity to provide an improved setting for the existing buildings, and to provide new residential accommodation. Site 49 could potentially accommodate residential or small scale office use, and site 50 could provide residential units with some small scale retail on the ground floor of units fronting Upper Stone Street. Site 51 presents an opportunity to provide in-fill residential development.

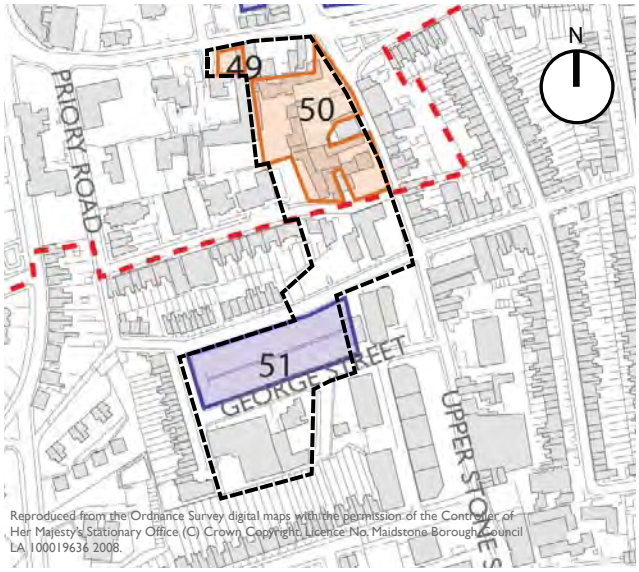


Figure 11.17 - Knightrider Street opportunity sites

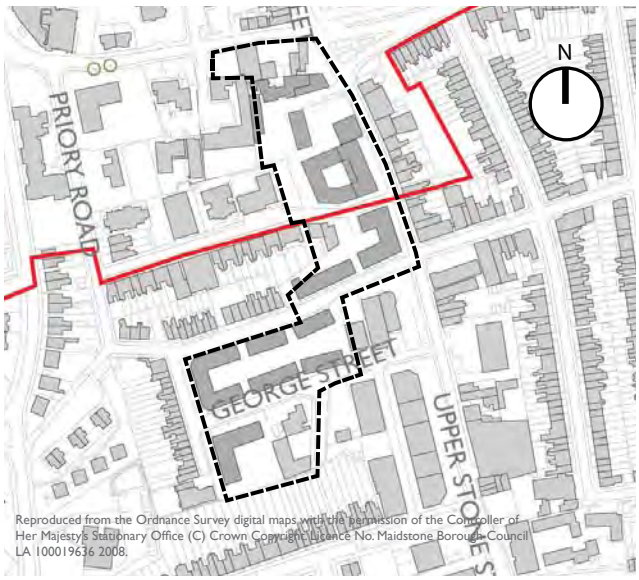


Figure 11.18 - Indicative development framework for Lower Knightrider Street area

Design principles

11.213 This area is not considered appropriate for any new tall buildings. A maximum building height of 4 or 5 storeys is to be observed.

11.214 The overall approach should reflect a preference for perimeter blocks as far as possible.

11.215 The transition between the town centre core to the north and a more local centre on Upper Stone Street to the south should be reflected in the scale and design of buildings.

11.216 Development should be set back slightly from Upper Stone Street to accommodate streetscape improvements.

Movement and parking

Residential C3	Car parking	Cycle parking
1 bedroom	1 space per dwelling	1 per bedroom
2 and 3 bedrooms	2 spaces per dwelling	1 per bedroom
Mixed Dev of 1, 2 & 3 Bedrooms	Ave of 1.5 spaces across the development.	1 per bedroom
4 or more bedrooms	3 spaces per dwelling	1 per bedroom
Flats	As above	1 per unit

Table 11.25: Kent parking standards for residential use

11.217 Site 50 is located adjacent to the busy Upper Stone Street currently operating one way southbound. There is potential to improve the movement of traffic through Upper Stone Street, by offering development land to allow transport improvements along this section of road, which would improve access to the site from both directions. There is alternative access from Foster's Street. However, Foster's Street is only accessible from Upper Stone Street and Knightrider Street via Priory Road so its benefit is limited.

11.218 By offering extra land for transport improvements, there is potential to provide new bus stops along Upper Stone Street, which would improve accessibility and sustainability to the site. Bus routes 5, 12, 82, 85 and 89 currently operate southbound along Upper Stone Street.

11.219 Site 51 has a constrained access from Upper Stone Street and Knightrider Street via Priory Road. However, improvements to Upper Stone Street will improve its accessibility. Existing public transport assess is limited, as there are no bus stops located adjacent to this site on Upper Stone Street. Therefore the parking standards will apply without any reductions.

Delivery and phasing

11.220 Sites 50 and 51 are considered to be short to medium term opportunities. Their public sector ownership suggests the delivery of the sites could be brought forward within the plan period. The most likely delivery route would be Maidstone Borough Council and Kent County Council as landowners working with a developer to bring development forward.

Capacity

11.221 An indicative layout has been used to calculate broad capacities for each of the sites. The the following broad maximum land use capacities have been identified:

Site	Retail (m^2)	Employment (m^2)	Residential (m^2)	Parking (m^2)
50	850		6,750	
51 (outside town centre)			4,310	

Table 11.26: Land use capacities - Knightrider Street
(N.B. capacity figures represent net internal floorspace and therefore exclude circulation space which has been assumed as 25% of floor area)

Neighbourhood Quarter

Introduction

11.222 The potential exists to create a sustainable neighbourhood surrounding Maidstone West Station. This area is partly within the town centre and partly outside of the boundary. It is some distance from the core town centre and is currently dominated by business and residential uses, with the latter becoming more prevalent over recent years. The opportunity exists to support this area as a neighbourhood in its own right through focusing residential development on key sites and ensuring a mix of local retail / A3, community uses and small businesses on key streets.

11.223 The ambition would be to promote, where possible, the provision of more family housing given its edge of centre location, and to balance the flatted development which has occurred here in the last decade.

11.224 The opportunity sites within this quarter provide around 4.5ha of land to consider for redevelopment to support this vision.

Looking into the town centre from the neighbourhood quarter

Land use and development capacity assessment

11.225 A market assessment of the New Neighbourhood Quarter has been prepared and has identified the following approximate land use capacities:

Land Use	Capacity (m^2)
Retail (comparison goods, outside the town centre boundary)	1,520
Employment	220
Leisure, tourism and community	5,200
Residential (c. 175 houses)	21,360

Table 11.27: Land use capacities - Neighbourhood Quarter (N.B. capacity figures represent net internal floorspace and therefore exclude circulation space which has been assumed as 25% of floor area. An average size of flat and house has been assumed of 70sqm and 120sqm respectively)

11.226 This Quarter currently functions as a series of disparate elements and uses including the Hart Street Commercial Centre, the Broadway Centre, the small concentration of office uses at the lower end of London Road and Tonbridge Road and the Renault garage. For the purposes of this section the retail development proposed on the Broadway Centre site has been excluded from the calculations as this has already been addressed within the Riverside Quarter section.

11.227 While a small element of existing commercial uses may benefit from proximity to the Law Courts, in practice this Quarter is lacking in a clearly defined commercial identity or specialisation. Some of the uses present do not necessarily need to be in a town centre location.

11.228 The Quarter benefits from its proximity to Maidstone West station, and short walking distances to the town centre core, albeit the road network is a significant constraint, and detracts from the quality of the environment and some of the pedestrian linkages (for example, alongside the railway line) are of poor quality.

11.229 This Quarter may have the potential to become an area with a greater residential focus, while retaining some facilities for smaller/local businesses and local retailing.

11.230 In the short to medium term, land ownership is likely to be a significant constraint, given that there are a number of relatively small sites, which are in different ownership and with a significant number of occupational uses.

11.231 There is some pressure for change within the area already, for example the proposed conversion of 22-26 Tonbridge Road to hotel use. Such a land use could be appropriate in the area and this would be seen as delivering part of the floorspace capacities described above as residential and employment.

Hart Street brief (sites 40 - 43)

Role of site in wider town centre proposals

11.232 These sites will play an important role in supporting this quarter's sustainable neighbourhood character. They all lie within the town centre boundary and therefore will support town centre activities. Through their redevelopment they will also support wider movement strategy objectives through greater use of Maidstone West station and establishing good quality pedestrian and cycle links into the town centre core and to the riverside routes. Supporting Lockmeadow as a hub for leisure activities will also be important.

Land use strategy

11.233 The approach to this site should be to achieve mixed use development across the area comprising primarily residential uses with some leisure/A3 uses on sites 40 and 41 to support a critical mass alongside the existing leisure offer.

11.234 Sites 42 and 43 may be appropriate for family terraced housing to support the land use mix across the neighbourhood quarter.

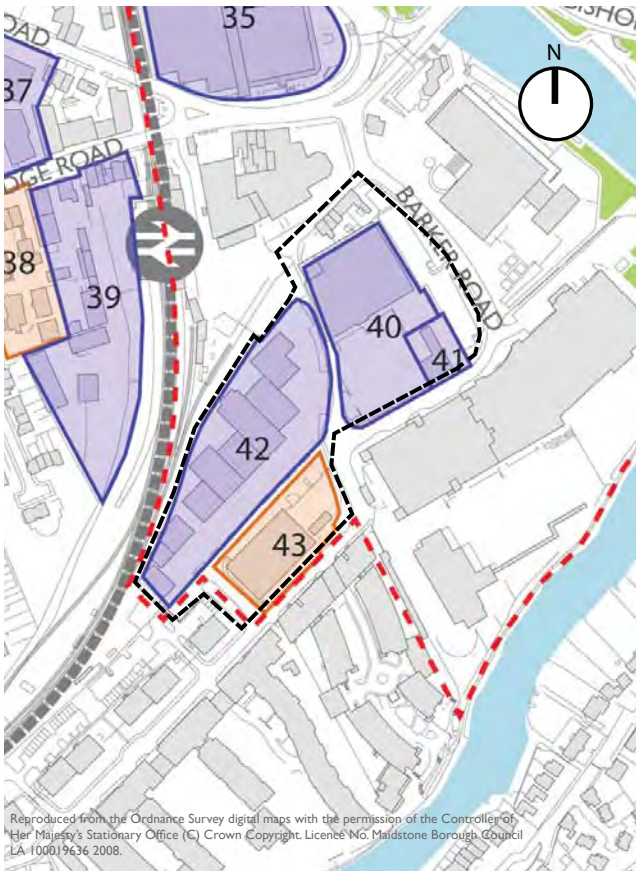


Figure 11.19 - Hart Street opportunity sites

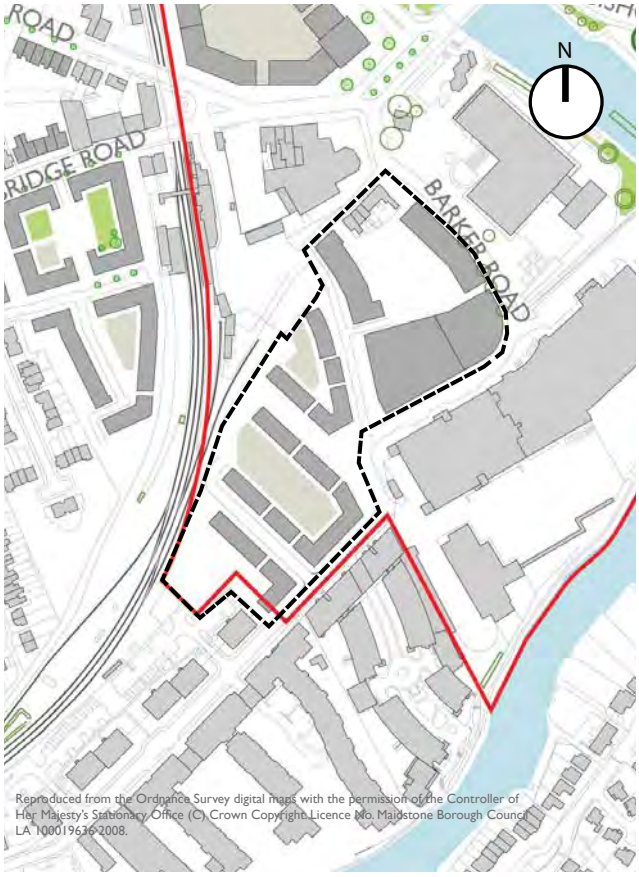


Figure 11.20 - Indicative development framework for the Hart Street area

Design principles

11.235 This area is not considered to be suitable for tall buildings. A maximum building height of 4 storeys should be observed. The sites are in a highly visible location and their design and density should be sensitive to this.

11.236 The design approach should be to achieve the completion of the existing block structure through development. Street-based perimeter blocks shielding the rail line to the rear should be the prime form of development.

11.237 A comprehensive approach to sites 40 and 41 is preferred in order to achieve the full potential of this site and a suitable streetscape impact.

11.238 A comprehensive approach to sites 42 and 43 is also preferred. Individual site development here would be less desirable.

11.239 Parts of the area lie within the floodplain. The design and layout of development should therefore be considered carefully to reduce and manage future flood risk.

Movement and parking

11.240 Barker Street and Hart Street provide the principal access to this quarter. The northern end of Hart Street should be improved to allow two-way working and improved access to Maidstone West Station and sites 40 and 41. Road space should be re-allocated to provide a better pedestrian and cycling environment while maintaining a carriageway width sufficient to accommodate bus and service vehicle access.

11.241 The Lockmeadow parking site remains as long stay parking. A combination of improved signage and appropriate pricing could encourage its use as an interceptor car park for vehicles entering Maidstone from the west, via London Road (A20) and Tonbridge Road (A26).

11.242 Kent County Council parking standards for mixed use residential developments indicate 1.5 spaces per dwelling. This would be taken as a maximum car parking provision, as the site is accessible to bus stops on London Road.

11.243 The parking standard for most leisure facilities is 1 car parking space per 22m². However this will vary depending on the use of leisure facility proposed. As the sites are located close to Lockmeadow car park, there could be an option of sharing the existing parking space at Lockmeadow with the proposed leisure developments of sites 40 to 43.

11.244 There is the potential to improve and extend existing bus services to service the proposed development, the existing residential developments and developments under construction to the south of site 43.

Delivery and phasing

11.245 All the sites are in private ownership and are primarily in occupational/employment use. Some sites are being considered for future development by land owners and these could potentially come forward in advance, however this would need to be a co-ordinated approach in order to achieve the overall aspirations.

Capacity

11.246 An indicative layout has been used to calculate broad capacities for each of the sites. The approximate capacity of the sites for development is therefore estimated to be:

Site	Retail (m²)	Leisure (m²)	Residential (m²)	Public space (m²)
40 and 41		5,200	3,490	
42 and 43			6,700	Private gardens

Table 11.28: Land use capacities - Hart Street
(N.B. capacity figures represent net internal floorspace and therefore exclude circulation space which has been assumed as 25% of floor area)

Tonbridge Road brief (sites 36 - 39) - outside town centre boundary

Role of site in wider town centre proposals

11.247 These sites will play an important role in supporting this quarter's sustainable neighbourhood character. Each of these sites falls outside the town centre boundary. Through their redevelopment they will support wider movement strategy objectives through greater use of Maidstone West station and establishing good quality pedestrian and cycle links into the town centre and to the riverside routes.

Land use strategy

11.248 Principal future land uses for this area would be predominantly residential (C3) uses, but including mixed retail (A1 / A3) and office (B1) uses where appropriate. Leisure and community uses would also be appropriate.

11.249 The opportunity may exist to provide space for small businesses, particularly within the legal sector, alongside new residential and community uses.

11.250 Mixed use development should occur along the key routes, with active uses at ground floor level. Residential development should be steered towards houses and family accommodation with private outdoor space.

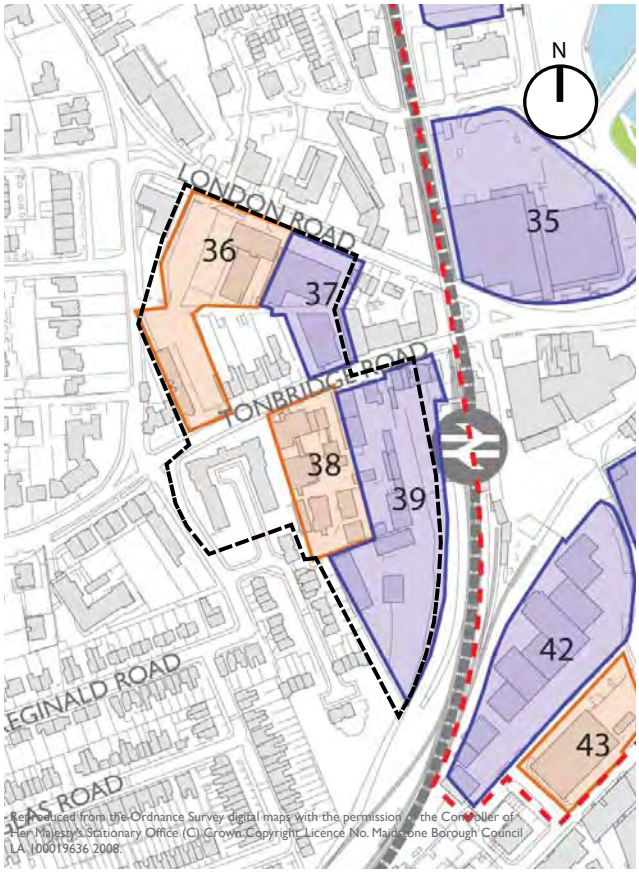


Figure 11.21 - Tonbridge Road opportunity sites

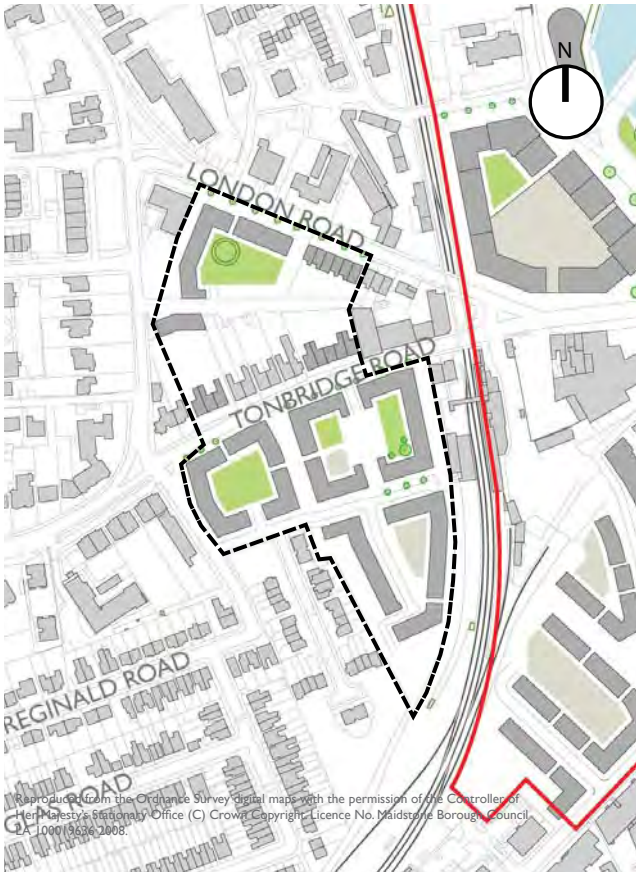


Figure 11.22 - Indicative development framework for the Tonbridge Road area

Design principles

11.251 This area is not considered appropriate for tall buildings. A maximum building height of 4 storeys should be observed.

11.252 The design approach should be to establish strong frontage around the exterior of sites onto the main streets. The creation of street-based perimeter blocks should steer the layout of development.

11.253 New housing should be developed around high quality street based blocks. Smaller scale retail, A3 or office units may be accommodated on ground floors fronting London Road and Tonbridge Road.

11.254 This area lies outside the floodplain. Green infrastructure and sustainable drainage systems should be used to ensure water is managed as far as possible on side. The role of green outdoor space and green roofs are likely to be central to this.

Movement and parking

11.255 The Kent County Council Parking Standards recommend an average of 1.5 car parking spaces for mixed residential developments. However, due to the sites's proximity to the town centre, and public transport, we would suggest this standard is treated as a maximum and reduced parking allocation could be feasible.

Residential C3	Car parking	Cycle parking
1 bedroom	1 space per dwelling	1 per bedroom
2 and 3 bedrooms	2 spaces per dwelling	1 per bedroom
Mixed Dev of 1, 2 & 3 Bedrooms	Ave of 1.5 spaces across the development.	1 per bedroom
4 or more bedrooms	3 spaces per dwelling	1 per bedroom
Flats	As above	1 per unit

Table 11.29: Kent parking standards for residential use

11.256 The existing access to sites 36, 37 and 38, 39 will be maintained. Since these accesses open up onto primary routes, they are likely to require additional space to meet the necessary safety standards.

11.257 Bus routes 5, 12, 71, 82, 85, 89 and Park and Ride route 503 operate along Tonbridge Road and London Road and therefore there is potential for improving the pedestrian/bus interchange along this road to cater for the quarter's demands.

11.258 Pedestrian access to Maidstone West Station and to the town centre should be improved as the quarter is bordered by the busy Broadway / St Peter's Street Junction. Improved pedestrian and cycle facilities linking sites to town centre to be supported

Delivery and phasing

11.259 The delivery of development in this area will be dependent upon land owners bringing sites forward at a time they feel appropriate with respect to the market and having regard to existing occupational interests, where appropriate. It is anticipated that the sites in private ownership would be primarily long term opportunities and therefore may not come forward within the timeframe of the Core Strategy.

11.260 Those sites currently owned by Maidstone Borough Council could be brought forward in advance of others to help support the ambitions for the wider quarter.

11.261 Those sites in private ownership are primarily in operational employment use. These sites would only come forward if landowner interest in redevelopment was sufficiently strong to provide an impetus to delivery.

Capacity

11.262 An indicative layout of the site has been used to calculate broad capacities for each of the sites. The approximate capacity of the sites for development are therefore estimated to be:

Site	Retail (m²)	Employment (m²)	Residential (m²)	Semi-private space (m²)
36 (outside town centre)	330	225	3,210	1,130
37 (outside town centre)			1,680	
38 (outside town centre)			1,710	890
39 (outside town centre)	340		4,560	700

Table 11.30: Land use capacities - Tonbridge Road
(N.B. capacity figures represent net internal floorspace and therefore exclude circulation space which has been assumed as 25% of floor area)

Town centre capacity

11.263 The planning briefs outlined in this section together provide significant development and growth opportunities within the town centre, with a clear steer on how this growth should be realised.

11.264 The adjacent table below summarises the total proposed new build development which has been identified within the town centre boundary. The figures include all the development proposed within the town centre boundary and excludes those which have been identified outside this boundary where further capacity has been identified in the quarter assessments and Tonbridge Road and Knightrider Street briefs (sites 36-39 and site 51).

Land use	Proposed new build (figures with * are net increases)	Evidence base requirements
Retail (convenience goods)	up to 15,945 m² (up to 10,945 m² * net increase)	4,650 m²
Retail (comparison goods)	c. 96,795 m² (c. 46,795 m² * net increase)	55,250 m²
Employment	63,550 m² (including new and refurbished space)	up to 15,000m² new development, with a further 25,000m² of existing office space refurbished
Residential	1,077 homes (86,040 m² * net increase) 8 m²	11,080 homes (borough wide target)
Community / leisure	12,250 m² *	
University space at Springfield	c. 25,000 m²	

Table 11.31: Overall town centre development capacities

11.265 The study illustrates there is scope for 112,740 m² of new retail development within the town centre boundary. Much of this development is focused on the intensifying and extending the retail core to the western riverside site. The cumulative net increase in retail provided by all of the proposals within the town centre boundary is 57,740 m². This includes a longer term opportunity to redevelop the Mall Shopping Centre which would provide a qualitative improvement to the retail infrastructure of the town and provide a net replacement of the existing Mall Shopping Centre floorspace. The total net increase identified by the study aligns well with the forecast demand for floorspace identified in the Retail Study Evidence Base report.

11.266 The study has identified significant scope for employment development. The Campus Quarter at Springfield provides the scope for a large amount of modern, fit for purpose employment space should this be required. At present the Employment Land Evidence Base document suggests a lower level of demand for employment floorspace. However, the wider strategy for investment and enhancement of the town centre creates a context for promoting and encouraging new employment development to take place within the town centre as opposed to out of town.

11.267 The proposed employment sites are also flexible to accommodate other uses should these prove be more viable or sustainable and be consistent with the wider strategic aims for the town centre.

11.268 The sites identified in the town centre have the scope to deliver a range and mix of uses to support the overall vision. Residential development will form part of this mix and capacity for up to 1,077 homes has been identified across all of the sites lying within the town centre boundary. This is higher than the level previously identified in the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA). The capacity identified through the SHLAA outlines deliverable development up to 2026. Some of the sites identified through the town centre study may require a longer timescale to come forward. Broad timescales have been identified in each of the planning briefs. The capacity aligns well with the borough wide target of 11,080 homes - potentially allowing 10% of the borough's needs to be addressed within the town centre boundary.

12. Indicative viability appraisals

Introduction

12.1 Knight Frank has provided property market and viability advice to the Urban Practitioners led team in relation to the Maidstone Town Centre Study. As part of this work a cross section of eight key sites have been subjected to initial "high level" viability testing.

12.2 This viability assessment is based on the emerging block layouts and floor space schedules illustrated in Chapter 11. These do not represent fully realised, detailed schemes and that a number of assumptions have therefore been made at this stage. Further more detailed work will undoubtedly need to be undertaken in order to understand in greater detail the viability/deliverability of the various proposals. The development and construction costs which have been used are based on standard building cost indices and actual costs may vary. These factors mean that the results outlined below need to be treated with a degree of caution.

12.3 In respect of the rental and sales values adopted, it should be recognised that the viability testing was undertaken at a "low point" in the property market cycle with the UK economy in the midst of the worst recession in living memory. While it is standard practice to rely on current day values and costs, we have, where appropriate, sought to make an allowance for adjustment to "normal market conditions" (for example, via the availability of debt finance). This needs, however, to be set against the 10 to 15 year period over which the delivery of the proposals in this study is envisaged.

12.4 The viability assessment has been undertaken using the market accepted Argus software package. It should be noted that the development appraisals do not constitute formal valuations as defined by the RICS Valuation Standards ('Red Book'), and therefore the inputs and results of the appraisal exercise provide only an indication of viability. They are likely to be subject to change due to a number of factors, including changing market conditions, refinement of the proposals, detailed infrastructure and cost information, as well as phasing and the approach to implementation.

12.5 In terms of the appraisals, in each case an initial baseline appraisal has been undertaken. The assumptions for the baseline appraisal are set out in in the Development Appraisal Assumptions section below. This is followed by a site by site summary of the baseline analysis and a summary of the overall results.

12.6 Subsequently, having regard to a number of factors, including current market conditions, the broad assumptions which have been made at this stage, and also the wider positive impacts which are likely to arise from implementation of the proposals in the Town Centre Study, additional sensitivity testing has been undertaken.

12.7 For ease of reference the table overleaf sets out the sites considered including the mix of uses proposed, the indicative height of development and the total (gross) floor areas.

Site Ref	Site Name	Proposed Uses	Proposed Height	Indicative Floor Area
3	Springfield	University Campus, Employment, Retail, Residential Apartments, multi-storey and surface Car Parking	4 Floors	86,988 sq m GIA
9	Station site (Royal Mail)	Employment, Retail, Residential Apartments, Car Parking (surface), Ticket Office	2 to 4 Floors	6,197 sq m GIA
10	Station Site (car park)	Employment, Retail, Residential Apartments, Car Parking (undercroft), new station Ticket Office	1 to 3 Floors	20,172 sq m GIA
9 & 10	Station Site (Royal Mail and car park) combined	Employment, Retail, Residential Apartments, Car Parking (surface and undercroft), Ticket Office	1 to 4 floors	50,622 sq m GIA
24	Riverside Site	Retail, Residential Apartments, Surface Car Parking	2 to 3 Floors	48,500 sq m GIA
27 & 28	King Street MSCP and AMF Site	Employment, Retail, and Multi-Storey Car Park.	1 to 7 Floors	12,802 sq m GIA
35	Broadway Site	Retail, Residential Apartments, Car Parking (undercroft)		21,300sq m GIA
36	London House Site	Residential Apartments, Retail and car parking (surface and undercroft)	1 to 3 Floors	3,600 sq m GIA
50	All Saints Site	Residential Apartments, Retail, Surface Car Parking	1 to 3 Floors	7,600 sq m GIA

Development Appraisal Assumptions

12.8 Given the high level nature of the study, a number of assumptions have been adopted in order to arrive at a view on viability for each of the sites. Set out below are the main assumptions which have been adopted, however, it is important that the following assumptions are read in conjunction with the block layouts and the summary planning briefs, which provide greater context and rationale for the indicative scheme proposals.

Pre-Development Costs

12.9 Notional pre-development costs as outlined in the table below have been assumed. The costs include an allowance for further site feasibility studies, obtaining planning permission and initial site preparations.

Site Ref	Site Name	Indicative Costs
3	Springfield	£150,000
9	Station Site (Royal Mail)	£100,000
10	Station Site (car park)	£100,000
9 & 10 Combined	Station Site (Royal Mail and car park)	£200,000
24	Riverside Site	£100,000
27 & 28	King Street MSCP and AMF Site	£50,000
35	Broadway Site	£50,000
36	London House Site	£50,000
50	All Saints Site	£30,000

Demolition and Infrastructure Costs

12.10 The demolition and infrastructure costs which have been adopted are indicative at this stage. The costs set out in the table on the following page, are based on an external inspection of the sites / buildings having regard to their scale, massing and construction type as well as likely existing infrastructure provision.

Site Ref	Site Name	Assumption Commentary	Indicative Cost
3	Springfield	It is assumed that Springfield is a cleared site therefore no demolition costs would be applicable. Given the nature of the development proposed and the likelihood that no major infrastructure provision exists, we have made an allowance of £1m to adequately service the site.	Demolition - N/A Infrastructure - £1m
9	Station site (Royal Mail)	The site comprises the Royal Mail sorting office.	Demolition - £500,000 Infrastructure - £150,000
10	Maidstone East Station Site (car park)	The station car park is a cleared site therefore no demolition costs would be applicable.1	Demolition - N/A Infrastructure - £200,000
9 & 10 Combined	Station Site (Royal Mail and car park)	See Sites 9 and 10	Demolition - £500,000 Infrastructure - £350,000
24	Riverside site	The riverside site comprises a range of retail warehousing. Demolition of these structures are assumed not to be onerous. This is reflected in the demolition cost adopted.	Demolition - £100,000 Infrastructure - £200,000
27 & 28	King Street MSCP and AMF Site	The existing uses on the site comprise a MSCP and bowling alley.	Demolition - £350,000 Infrastructure – 250,000
35	Broadway Site	The Broadway Site comprises the Broadway Shopping Centre and Car Park. Given the scale of the existing structure an indicative allowance of £500,000 has been assumed.	Demolition - £500,000 Infrastructure – N/A
36	London House Site	The existing uses on the site comprise 2,575 sq m of Offices and Car Park with 131 spaces.	Demolition - £150,000 Infrastructure – £N/A
50	All Saints Site	It is assumed that the All Saints Site is a cleared site. We are unaware of the detailed issues relating to the existing listed buildings and have made no allowance in this respect.	Demolition - £N/A Infrastructure – £250,000

Vacant Possession Costs

12.11 Given the study timescales and the nature of the sites considered it is assumed that many of the site will be brought forward by the landowner with the benefit of vacant possession.

12.12 However, in some instances, an initial high level estimate of the potential cost of obtaining vacant possession has been made, in order to consider this in the context of overall scheme viability. Where this is the case (identified in the table below) and in the absence of more detailed rental information, we have utilised the rating list, using rateable values (RVs) to come to a view of rental value. An indicative capitalisation rate has then been applied in addition to making an allowance for disturbance. Although this is a relatively rudimentary method, it is accepted by the property industry as an initial "stage one" or "high level" approach to assessing the likely acquisition costs (the figures, do however, need to be treated with a high degree of caution).

12.13 Set out in the table below are the assumptions adopted for each of the sites and where appropriate an indication of the cost of obtaining vacant possession.

Site Ref	Site Name	Assumption Commentary	Indicative Cost
3	Springfield	Assumed vacant possession	N/A
9	Station site (Royal Mail)	Our understanding is that the Royal Mail are considering a relocation from the site, to a new facility elsewhere, as part of a consolidation of a number of their existing facilities within Kent. In the absence of any further information, we have made not allowance for land assembly costs.	N/A
10	Station Site (car park)	Assumed Vacant possession with the site being developed by Network Rail or a development partner.	N/A

Site Ref	Site Name	Assumption Commentary	Indicative Cost
9 & 10 Combined	Station Site (Royal Mail and car park)	See Sites 9 and 10.	N/A
24	Riverside site	We have assumed that in order to gain vacant possession the current tenant interests would need to be purchased by a developer. We have therefore taken the rateable values of each interest, capitalised this value at 7.5% and added 10% for disturbance costs. The following rateable values have been used: Hobbycraft - £187,000 TK Maxx - £317,500 Wilkes - £770,000 Homebase - £545,000	£26,686,000
27 & 28	King Street MSCP and AMF Site	Our understanding is that as freeholder of the King Street MSCP, Maidstone Borough Council (MBC) can readily obtain vacant possession of the Somerfield store. In terms of the AMF site, we have taken the RV of the property, capitalised this value at 8% and added 10% for disturbance costs. The following RV has been used: AMF Bowling Centre - £120,000,	£1,650,000
35	Broadway Site	We have assumed that in order to gain vacant possession the current tenant interests would need to be purchased by a developer. We have therefore taken the rateable values of each heriditament, capitalised this value at 8% and added 10% for disturbance costs. The following rateable values have been used: Lidl-£196,000 1-2 Broadway (gym) - £24,000 3 Broadway-£7,700 4 Broadway-£8,300 5 Broadway-£8,200 6 Broadway-£8,700 7 Broadway-£9,100 8 Broadway-£15,000 CarPark-£47,750 Matalan-£218,000 Security Office-£1,625 Lidl-£8,300 (NB: 2 listings for Lidl)	£7,600,000
36	London House Site	The site is currently vacant and is being marketed for freehold sale. We understand the asking price is £2.0m	£2,000,000
50	All Saints Site	Assumed vacant possession	N/A

Construction Costs

12.14 The construction costs have been assessed using BCIS (industry standard building Indices) and SPONS Architect's and Builder' Price Book 2009 and reflecting the location, quality and massing of the proposals. It should be highlighted that the following should be reviewed further as the scheme proposals evolve and more detailed information becomes available.

Site Ref	Site Name	Proposed Use	Indicative Cost per sq ft
3	Springfield	Residential Retail Office Car parking (multi-storey)	£100 £75 £140 £30
9	Station Site (Royal Mail)	Residential Retail Office Car parking (surface)	£100 £75 £120 £6
10	Station site (car park)	Residential Retail Office Car parking (undercroft)	£100 £75 £120 £37
9 & 10	Station Site (Royal Mail and car park) combined	Residential Retail and supermarket Office Car parking (surface) Car parking (undercroft) Ticket office	£100 £75 £120 £6 £37.17 £60
24	Riverside site	Residential Retail Car parking (multi-storey) Car parking (surface)	£100 £80 £25 £6
27 & 28	King Street MSCP and AMF Site	Retail Office Car parking	£85 £120 £27
35	Broadway Site	Residential Retail Car parking (undercroft)	£100 £80 £37
36	London House Site	Residential Retail Car parking (surface and undercroft)	£100 £75 n/a - existing
50	All Saints Site	Residential Retail Car parking (surface)	£100 £75 £6

Floorspace Assumptions/Unit Mix

12.15 As referred to above the viability analysis is based on the block plans outlined in Chapter 11. A calculation of the overall saleable or lettable area using the gross to net assumptions has been undertaken and is set out in the table below. At this stage a detailed assessment of the residential unit mix has not been made. Instead an average unit size has been adopted of 745 sq ft for the flatted accommodation to provide an indication of residential unit numbers. Clearly this will require further consideration as more detailed proposals emerge.

Value Assumptions

12.16 As referred to above, 'normal market conditions' have been reflected within the appraisals, and this approach has informed the value assumptions which have been used. As the three main key town centre land uses (residential, retail and offices) have different characteristics, for example in terms of value fluctuations to reflect the property market cycle, and the recent economic downturn, it has been necessary to adopt different approaches in each case, to the formulation of these assumptions. Further details are provided below.

Use	Ratio
Residential Apartments	85%
Residential Houses	100%
Retail / A3	80%
Retail Supermarket and Larger Stores	100%
Office	85%
Food Retail	100%

Private Residential Values

12.17 Current evidence indicates that average private residential sales values in Maidstone are circa £230 per sq ft. However, as this report has been prepared as we are emerging from a low point in the property market cycle, we have adopted a slightly higher figure circa 10%) in order to reflect "normal market conditions". (NB: this should not be interpreted as a formal forecast of potential future price rises). For the purpose of the viability assessment, a range in sales values has been adopted from £250 per sq ft for what we consider to be the higher value more attractive sites to £220 per sq ft for other locations (in general terms these figures are in the order of 10% lower than those sales values achieved at the peak of the market in 2007). The variation in sales value are based on agents view of the likely product on each site and its attractiveness to the market. In broad terms the sites which have river views have the highest sales values and the sites which are constrained or in less desirable locations have a lower sales value. Local agents report that despite current market condition there remains a premium attached to properties with river views in Maidstone. For ease of reference the private residential values adopted for each of the sites are set out in the table on the following page.

Affordable Housing Mix and Values

12.18 Within the appraisals assumptions have been made in accordance with the Affordable Housing Development Plan Document (December 2008) which forms part of emerging planning guidance. A 40% affordable housing requirement has been applied, with a 60% / 40% split between social rented and intermediate tenures. Further detailed discussion in respect of the affordable housing requirements will be required as the schemes evolve.

Site Ref	Site Name	Private Residential Values
3	Springfield	£250
9	Station Site (Royal Mail)	£240
10	Station site (car park)	£240
9 & 10	Station Site (Royal Mail and car park)	£240
24	Riverside site	£230
27 & 28	King Street MSCP and AMF Site	n/a
35	Broadway Site	£230
36	London House Site	£240
50	All Saints Site	£220

12.19 It has been assumed that an element of grant funding will be available and have therefore adopted social rented and intermediate sales values at 40% and 70% of private sales values respectively. As more information becomes available a full assessment of affordable housing values will be required using one of the standard affordable housing packages such as the "Three Dragons" model.

Residential Ground Rents

12.20 In addition to the sales values for the residential element it has been assumed that the landowner would benefit from a ground rent (for the apartments only). An indicative allowance of £150 per annum per unit for the private and shared ownership accommodation has been applied with a capitalisation rate of 6%.

Retail Values and Yields

12.21 In terms of the retail accommodation, as fully detailed schemes are not available it has not been possible to zone the accommodation which would be the normal approach for assessing the value of the majority of retail units in town centres. In addition, available time series data relates to prime retail rents in Maidstone for 'standard' unit shops, whereas the sites which have been appraised are, in retail terms, 'off pitch' and in addition, may be attractive to larger format retail uses, which may more typically pay rent on an 'overall' (i.e. £ per sq.ft) basis. Particularly in terms of the Riverside site (Site 24), but potentially other sites, the aspiration is to achieve larger format retail units, in the form of economical space for town centre retailers, who may be seeking larger unit sizes than those which currently exist within the town centre, in a quality development. While such schemes have been successfully developed elsewhere, this would be a new format to Maidstone, and as such there is little or no recent evidence for such uses within the town. As such, the views of retail agency colleagues (in the context of the 'normal market conditions' assumption) have been sought, while also having regard to the rents which have been achieved for schemes of this nature elsewhere.

12.22 An overall rental value ranging from £18 - £265 per sq ft has been applied depending on the location and nature of the likely development. The rental values have been capitalised using a range of yields from 6% to 9.5% to reflect the quality of the covenant anticipated and the likely risk. A 12 months 'rent free period' for tenants' incentives has also been included.

Site Ref	Site Name	Retail Rental Values (per sq ft)	Retail Yields	Incentives
3	Springfield	£18	9.0%	12 months rent free
9	Station Site (Royal Mail)	£22	9.5%	12 months rent free
10	Station site (car park)	£20 (supermarket)	6.0%	12 months rent free
9 & 10 Combined	Station Site (Royal Mail and car park)	£22 (retail) £20 (supermarket)	9.5% 6.0%	12 months rent free
24	Riverside site	£26	7.25%	12 months rent free
27 & 28	King Street MSCP and AMF Site	£25	7.25%	12 months rent free
35	Broadway Site	£20	7.5%	12 months rent free
36	London House Site	£15	9.0%	12 months rent free
50	All Saints Site	£15	8.5%	12 months rent free

Office Values and Yields

12.23 An indicative rental tone for the office accommodation has been adopted based upon the property market review in Part One of this report. This indicates that prime office rents within Maidstone have remained relatively stable over the past few years, with relatively little fluctuation despite the recent property market boom, and subsequent recession.

This is perhaps indicative of the fact that there has been very little new office development in Maidstone in recent years, and no significant speculative development within the town centre, since the implementation of the County Gate proposals.

Site Ref	Site Name	Office Rental Values (per sq ft)	Office Yields	Incentives
3	Springfield	£23.50	7.75%	18 months
9	Station Site (Royal Mail)	£22	8.5%	18 months
10	Station site (Car park)	£20	8.5%	18 months
9 & 10 Combined	Station Site (Royal Mail and car park)	£22	8.5%	18 months
24	Riverside site	n/a	n/a	n/a
27 & 28	King Street MSCP and AMF Site	£20	8.5%	18 months
35	Broadway Site	n/a	n/a	n/a
36	London House Site	n/a	n/a	n/a
50	All Saints Site	n/a	n/a	n/a

12.24 Reflecting the fact that the development proposals for a number of the sites envisage new office development (including sites with locational advantages, for example the Maidstone East Station site), rental values which reflect these prime office rents have been utilised, with some differentiation between individual sites to reflect their specific characteristics.

12.25 As indicated in the table below £23.50 per sq ft has been adopted for the Springfield development to reflect the Grade A office space proposed and the business park environment, and this reflects the rents being achieved in nearby business park locations, for example Kings Hill. The rental values have been capitalised using a range of yields from 7.75% to 8.5% to reflect the quality of the covenant anticipated in each location and the risk to the market. An 18 months "rent free period" for tenant incentives has also been included.

Car Parking

12.26 The proposals for the individual sites represent broad scheme concepts, and not detailed scheme designs or development proposals, the preparation of which is outside the scope of this instruction. At this stage, we have made the assumption, when considering the values associated with the various uses proposed for the individual sites, that the detailed process of scheme refinement will give further consideration to the overall level of car parking provision which can be accommodated on each site, in order to reach a commercially acceptable solution. However, in the absence of any alternative information, cost inputs on the basis of the development concepts as drawn have been prepared, and the resulting floorspace information, including the level and nature (surface, undercroft or multi storey) of the car parking, as shown. Again, further scheme refinement will be required in order to confirm whether the overall levels of car parking can be increased to a commercially acceptable level, on a number of the sites, in a cost effective manner.

Site Ref	Site Name	Assumption Commentary	Total Indicative Cost
3	Springfield	Car Parking (multi-storey and surface)	£2,260,000 (multi-storey) £300,000 (surface)
9	Station Site (Royal Mail)	Car Parking (surface)	£194,000
10	Station site (car park)	Car Parking (undercroft)	£3,900,000
9 & 10 Combined	Station Site (Royal Mail and car park)	Car Parking (surface) Car Parking (undercroft)	£194,000 £3,900,000
24	Riverside site	Car Parking (multi-storey) Car Parking (surface)	£2,400,000 £190,000
27 & 28	King Street MSCP and AMF Site	Multi-Storey Car Park (Paying)	£1,790,000
35	Broadway Site	Car Parking (undercroft)	£1,000,000
36	London House Site	Car Parking (existing surface and undercroft)	Utilising existing car Parking provision
50	All Saints Site	Car Parking (surface)	£64,500

Landscaping Costs

12.27 We have adopted varying landscaping assumptions based on areas provided to us by Urban Practitioners. Specific assumptions, as well as an indication of the costs, are set out in the table below.

Site Ref	Site Name	Assumption Commentary	Indicative Cost
3	Springfield	Given the characteristics of the site and in the context of the proposed uses, comprehensive landscaping proposals are envisaged. It has been estimated that circa 5,670 sq m (61,030 sq ft) will be landscaped at a cost of £5 per sq ft.	£305,150
9	Station site (Royal mail)	As the Royal Mail site is similar in terms of its size to the Site 10 (see below), an equivalent cost has been applied for landscaping and public realm improvements.	£210,000
10	Station Site (car park)	The landscaping proposals for the Station site include a new civic square (circa 2,000 sq m / 21,000 sq ft) located opposite Sessions House. To reflect the high quality nature of the public square proposed we have adopted an indicative cost of £10 per sq ft.	£210,000
9 & 10 combined	Station Site (Royal Mail and car park)	See above	£420,000
24	Riverside site	Circa 3,200 sq m (34,000 sq ft) has been allocated as riverside public space as well as 4,250 sq m (45,000 sq ft) for upper level courtyards to serve the residential accommodation. We have assumed an indicative cost of £5 per sq ft for both the riverside public areas and the residential courtyards.	£395,000
27 & 28	King Street MSCP and AMF Site	It is assumed that the site is densely developed given the town centre location and therefore there is limited scope for significant landscaping. It is envisaged that any streetscape works would predominantly relate to the frontage including the pavement area pavement of the new development. An indicative cost of £50,000 has been adopted.	£50,000
35	Broadway Site	No major ground level areas have been assumed with the exception of streetscape work along the frontage / pavement area. In addition circa 2,630 sq m (28,000 sq ft) of floor space has been allocated for the residential courtyards at upper levels. We have adopted an indicative cost of £75,000 for the improvements to the street frontage and £5 per sq ft for the residential courtyards.	£215,000
36	London House Site	Landscaping has been assumed for the area fronting London Road as well as to the rear of the proposed development.	£50,000
50	All Saints Site	Similar to sites 27 and 28, the landscaping works relate predominately to improvements to the frontage and pavement areas of the new development. An indicative cost of £50,000 has been adopted.	£30,000

S106 Costs

12.28 With the exception of affordable housing which is in line with emerging planning guidance as detailed earlier, no other section 106 / 278 costs have been included at his stage. As the schemes evolve a more detailed assessment of S106 / 278 costs will be required.

Residential Take up Rates

12.29 In respect of the residential take up we have assumed that the private accommodation will be developed and sold in parallel with the affordable housing accommodation. A private dwelling sales rate of 4 units for residential flatted development per month (48 units per annum) has been assumed.

Professional Fees and Contingency

12.30 For all proposals we have adopted all usual professional, agents and legal fees for a development of this nature and an overall project contingency of 10%.

End Payments and Marketing

12.31 For the residential accommodation the following has been applied:-

- An allowance of £2,500 per private unit has been assumed for marketing and show apartments.
- A sales and marketing agency fee of 2% has been included.
- A legal sales fee of 1.5% has been included.

12.32 For the commercial accommodation the following has been applied:-

- Letting Agents Fees at 12%
- Letting Legal Fees at 5%
- Investment Sales Fees 2%
- Investment Legal Fees at 0.5%

Inflation

12.33 We have assumed all values and costs to be current day i.e. no allowance for inflation has been made this stage. (NB: but please see also para 1.4, above).

Interest

12.34 Debt interest has been assumed at 4.5% to reflect the risk margin involved and to reflect current market conditions and specifically the difficulties associated with bank lending.

Construction Period

12.35 An estimated construction period (detailed in the table below) and phasing programme has been incorporated into the appraisal for each of the sites to reflect the nature of the proposed development. A more detailed programme will be required in relation to specific proposals, also facilitating detailed cash flow analysis, once detailed scheme designs have been prepared.

Site Ref	Site Name	Indicative Constructive Period
3	Springfield	60 months
9	Station Site (Royal Mail)	24 months
10	Station site (car park)	24 months
9 & 10 Combined	Station Site (Royal Mail and car park)	36 months
24	Riverside site	24 months
27 & 28	King Street MSCP and AMF Site	18 months
35	Broadway Site	24 months
36	London House Site	18 months
50	All Saints Site	15 months

Developers Profit

12.36 A developers profit on cost of 20% on all sites has been adopted to reflect the overall risks associated with development, the mixed use nature of the sites, and current market conditions.

Viability Analysis Summary

12.37 Below is an overview of the results of the indicative viability analysis for the eight sites selected for appraisal. For ease of reference the tables below set out the uses and quantum of floor space proposed as well as a summary of the viability analysis. The viability table sets out the gross development value, the total cost of the completed scheme and the positive or negative residual land value generated.

Ref - Site 3
Site Name – Springfield

Proposed Use	Gross Floor Area (sq m)	Gross Floor Area (sq Ft)	Units
Private Residential	10,644	114,581	131
Affordable Residential	7,096	76,380	87
Office Accommodation	32,663	351,587	
Retail Accommodation	3,921	42,205	
Car Parking	7,000	75,347	280

Development Income	114,110,918
Total Development Cost	97,267,854
Developer Profit	19,451,064
Gross Residual Land Value	-£2,608,000
Gross Profit On Cost	20%

Summary

12.38 The site consists of residential apartments, convenience retail, multi storey car park and offices. We have assumed a 12 month pre-development phase for site preparation and a three year three phased construction programme; the residential element being built from the first phase over a 3 year period. Each phase is assumed to be sold at the completion of each construction period. We have assumed a 6 month void from the completion of the development to the point of sale.

12.39 The development produces a Gross Development Value of £114,110,918 and Total Development Cost of £97,267,854 (less 20% profit on cost). This produces a negative Gross Residual Land Value of £2,608,000.

12.40 This indicates that, at the present time, the development is not viable. This is not necessarily a surprising result, given that there has been little or no "grade A" office development in Maidstone town centre, capable of competing with out of town business park development, in recent years. However, once sensitivity testing is applied to the appraisal, outlined later in this section, the viability of this site's development is shown to be positive.

12.41 This initial appraisal results indicate that, inter alia, rental values would need to improve, as would market perception of Maidstone as a major business location (thus allowing a keener yield to be applied), to support the development of this site.

Ref - Site 9
Site Name – Royal Mail Site - Maidstone East

Proposed Use	Gross Floor Area (sq m)	Gross Floor Area (sq Ft)	Units
Private Residential	1,438	15,481	18
Affordable Residential	959	10,320	12
Office Accommodation	11,403	122,740	
Retail Accommodation	1,598	17,200	
Car Parking	3,000	32,280	120

Development Income	28,938,565
Total Development Cost	25,669,661
Developer Profit	5,133,932
Gross Residual Land Value	-£1,865,028
Gross Profit On Cost	20%

Summary

12.42 The site consists of residential apartments, retail, offices and surface car parking. We have assumed that the development has a 12 month pre-development phase for the demolition of existing buildings and 24 month construction period. There is a 6 month void from the completion of the development to the point of site sale.

12.43 The development produces a Gross Development Value of £114,110,918 and a Total Development Cost of £97,267,854 (less 20% profit on cost). The site produces a negative Gross Residual Land Value of £2,608,000, i.e. a 20% profit on cost is not achievable, though if a lower profit figure were to prove acceptable, then a positive land value would result. Clearly, further work will be required in order to understand the extent to which development of the site may be required to contribute financially to Royal Mail's relocation/consolidation aspirations.

Ref - Site 10
Site Name – Maidstone East Station Car Park

Proposed Use	Gross Floor Area (sq m)	Gross Floor Area (sq Ft)	Units
Private Residential	2,383	25,653	29
Affordable Residential	1,589	17,102	20
Office Accommodation	7,410	79,760	
Retail Accommodation	7,110	76,531	
Ticket Office (GIA)	3,972	42,754	
Car Parking	9,762	105,077	390

Development Income	43,661,921
Total Development Cost	34,989,516
Developer Profit	7,276,986
Gross Residual Land Value	£1,395,419
Gross Profit On Cost	20%

Summary

12.44 The site consists of residential apartments, a major food superstore or similar retail use, multi storey car park, offices and a station ticket office. We have assumed that the development has a 12 month pre-development phase for site preparation and a 24 month construction period. There is a 6 month void from the completion of the development to the point of site sale.

12.45 The development produces a Gross Development Value of £43,661,921 and a Total Development Cost of £34,989,516 (less 20% profit on cost). The site produces a Gross Residual Land Value of £1,395,419.

12.46 The above indicates a viable scheme, albeit the residual land value is limited.

Ref - Site 9 and 10
Site Name – Maidstone East – Royal Mail Site and Station Car Park Combined

Proposed Use	Gross Floor Area (sq m)	Gross Floor Area (sq Ft)	Units
Private Residential	3,821	41,134	60
Affordable Residential	2,548	27,422	40
Office Accommodation	18,812	202,500	
Retail Accommodation	1,598	17,200	
Supermarket Accommodation	7,110	76,531	
Ticket Office (GIA)	3,972	42,754	
Undercroft Car Parking	9,762	105,077 390	
Surface Car Parking	2,999	32,280	120

Development Income	£76,433,914
Total Development Cost	£62,100,533
Developer Profit	£12,738,985
Gross Residual Land Value	£1,594,396
Gross Profit On Cost	20%

Summary

12.47 The combined sites consist of residential apartments, a major food superstore, retail units, a surface and multi storey car park, offices and a station ticket office. We have assumed that the development has a 18 month pre-development phase for site preparation and a 36 month construction period. There is a 6 month void from the completion of the development to the point of site sale.

12.48 The development produces a Gross Development Value of £76,433,914 and a Total Development Cost of £62,100,533 (less 20% profit on cost). The site produces a Gross Residual Land Value of £1,594,396.

12.49 The above indicates a viable scheme, albeit the residual land value is limited in the context of the overall scale of the development.

Ref - Site 24
Site Name – Riverside Site

Proposed Use	Gross Floor Area (sq m)	Gross Floor Area (sq Ft)	Units
Private Residential	8,100	87,188	99
Affordable Residential	5,340	58,125	67
Retail Accommodation	17,500	188,368	
Car Parking	12,000	129,167	480

Development Income	88,100,081
Total Development Cost	51,423,434
Developer Profit	14,683,351
Gross Residual Land Value	21,993,296
Gross Profit On Cost	20%

Summary

12.50 The site consists of residential apartments, retail, multi storey and surface car parking. We have assumed that the development has a 6 month pre-development phase for the demolition of existing buildings and a 36 month construction period. There is a 15 month void from the completion of the development to the point of site sale.

12.51 The development produces a Gross Development Value of £88,100,081 and Total Development Cost of £51,423,434 (less 20% profit on cost). The Gross Residual Land Value for the site is £21,993,296.

12.52 The above indicates a viable scheme assuming that the existing buildings have come to the end of their economic life. This is unlikely to be the case in the short to medium term, however, the site may represent a longer term opportunity towards the end of the period contemplated by the study.

12.53 To put the viability of the proposals into perspective, we have undertaken a high level assessment of the existing use value / land assembly costs. These have been estimated at approximately £26.7 million pounds. When the existing use value is considered alongside the residual land value this further indicates that development is unlikely to be brought forward in the short to medium term on this site. However, the indication of a strong positive land value is encouraging, at this stage.

Ref - Sites 27 and 28
Site Name – King Street

Proposed Use	Gross Floor Area (sq m)	Gross Floor Area (sq Ft)	Units
Office Accommodation	8,912	95,928	
Retail Accommodation	3,890	41,871	
Car Parking	6,648	71,554	266

Development Income	28,637,157
Total Development Cost	23,282,363
Developer Profit	4,772,859
Gross Residual Land Value	581,935
Gross Profit On Cost	20%

Summary

12.54 The site consists of retail, multi storey car park and offices. We have assumed a 12 month pre-development phase for the demolition of existing buildings and a 24 month construction period. There is a three month void from the completion of the development to the point of site sale.

12.55 The development produces a Gross Development Value of £28,637,157 and Total Development Cost of £23,282,363 (less 20% profit on cost). The Gross Residual Land Value for the site is £581,935.

12.56 This needs to be set against our estimated cost for acquiring the AMF interest of circa £1.65m, together with the income which we understand the Council receives from the site of circa £170k net per annum (2008 figures). In other words this suggests that the proposals are currently marginal in terms of their viability.

Ref - Site 35
Site Name – Broadway Site

Proposed Use	Gross Floor Area (sq m)	Gross Floor Area (sq Ft)	Units
Private Residential	6,745	72,656	83
Affordable Residential	4,500	48,438	55
Retail Accommodation	6,300	67,813	
Car Parking	3,000	32,291	120

Development Income	34,223,690
Total Development Cost	26,425,079
Developer Profit	5,703,951
Gross Residual Land Value	2,094,660
Gross Profit On Cost	20%

Summary

12.57 The site consists of residential apartments, retail, and undercroft car parking. We have assumed that the development has a 12 month pre-development phase for the demolition of existing buildings and 24 month construction period. There is a sic month void from the completion of the development to the point of site sale.

12.58 The development produces a Gross Development Value of £34,223,660 and a Total Development Cost of £26,425,079 (less 20% profit on cost). The Gross Residual Land Value for the site is £2,094,660.

12.59 As per the Riverside development opportunity (Site 24), on a cleared site basis our analysis indicates a viable scheme. However, when considered in the context of the site's estimated existing use value (£7.6 m) the scheme is marginal. In this context it is unlikely that the proposals will be brought forward in the short to medium term.

Ref - Site 36
Site Name – London House Site

Proposed Use	Gross Floor Area (sq m)	Gross Floor Area (sq Ft)	Units
Private Residential	1,890	20,343	23
Affordable Residential	1,260	13,562	15
Retail Accommodation	450	4,844	
Car Parking	existing	existing	existing

Development Income	6,475,361
Total Development Cost	5,396,135
Developer Profit	1,079,227
Gross Residual Land Value	244,131
Gross Profit On Cost	20%

Summary

12.60 The proposed development consists of residential apartments, surface car parking and retail. We have assumed that the development has a nine month pre-development phase for the demolition of the existing buildings and an 18 month construction period. There is a 1 month void from the completion of the development to the point of site sale.

12.61 The development produces a Gross Development Value of £6,475,361 and Total Development Cost of £5,396,135 (less 20% profit on cost). The site has a Gross Residual Land Value of £244,131.

12.62 The above analysis indicates that the proposed residential led mixed use development (subject to a 40% housing requirement) produces a modest land value of circa £250,000. In the context of an asking price of £2.0 m for the existing building / site, this indicates that redevelopment of the site for predominantly residential use, given current market conditions, may be marginal, although clearly viability would improve if a lower asking price could be negotiated.

Ref - Site 50
Site Name – All Saints Site

Proposed Use	Gross Floor Area (sq m)	Gross Floor Area (sq Ft)	Units
Private Residential	4,097	44,800	64
Affordable Residential	2,666	28,000	40
Retail Accommodation	850	9,150	
Car Parking	1,000	10,764	40

Development Income	12,574,757
Total Development Cost	10,477,675
Developer Profit	2,095,793
Gross Residual Land Value	1,289
Gross Profit On Cost	20%

Summary

12.63 The site consists of residential apartments, surface car parking and retail. We have assumed that the development has a six month pre-development phase for the demolition of existing buildings and an 18 month construction period. There is a 15 month void from the completion of the development to the point of site sale.

12.64 The development produces a Gross Development Value of £12,574,757 and Total Development Cost of £10,477,675 (less 20 % profit on cost). The site has a small positive Residual Land Value of £1,289.

12.65 This indicates that the development proposals are viable albeit developers would consider this a marginal scheme given the small residual land value.

Base Case Summary

12.66 Above, we have outlined the key assumptions which we have adopted in undertaking our viability analysis for the eight identified sites, and also the key "headline" conclusions. Overall, the results of this analysis can be summarised as follows:

Site Ref	Site Name	Viability
3	Springfield	Not viable (marginal)
9	Station Site (Royal Mail)	Not viable (marginal)
10	Station Site (car park)	Viable (marginal)
9 & 10	Station Site (Royal Mail and car park)	Viable (marginal)
24	Riverside	Viable
27 & 28	King Street	Viable (marginal)
35	Broadway	Viable (marginal)
36	London House	Viable (marginal)
50	All Saints	Viable (marginal)

12.67 While initial viability testing is necessary, in order to understand – at a high level – the potential viability of proposals within the Maidstone Town Centre study, it is important to acknowledge the very initial nature of the results which we have outlined above. As the introductory comments to the viability paper state, at the present time the study presents indicative or emerging concepts for a number of sites, rather than fully realised, detailed development proposals, with all the relevant issues, constraints and opportunities fully addressed and resolved.

12.68 It is reasonable to expect that abnormal or onerous costs may emerge in relation to some or all of the sites, once more detailed design work is undertaken but that, similarly, a process of scheme refinement and "value engineering" may well lead to improvements on the "value side" of the viability equation.

12.69 In our experience, it is not unusual for complex development proposals which appear to be unviable (perhaps significantly so) on the basis of a "first cut" appraisal, subsequently to reach a position of viability through a detailed process of scheme refinement, options testing etc. This is a process which can take months or, in many cases years, and is significantly outside the scope of this current instruction.

12.70 A particular issue to be borne in mind is that the timing at which development proposals are brought forward may have a significant impact upon their viability. While we have sought to adopt assumptions which reflect more normal market conditions than those which are currently being experienced, we have tried to avoid being over optimistic with our assumptions. Over the 10-15 year timescale contemplated by the study, there may well be scope for value increases as confidence returns to the market, restrictions on bank lending ease etc. In addition, "external" factors such as improvements that can be made to the town centre environment within Maidstone for example, to train services between Maidstone East and Central London, or in terms of significant new residential development within the town, will all help to improve perceptions of Maidstone, and increase market confidence.

12.71 It must also be remembered that a number of the sites are subject to existing leasehold interests. As we have indicated, above, a site such as Site 24 (Riverside) represents a significant investment value (in fact slightly greater than the indicative residual land value generated by our appraisal, hence the comments in the summary table, above, that the site has "marginal" viability). With this – and other – sites,

we are not aware of the detailed lease arrangements, and hence the ability which the freeholder may have to gain vacant possession of the site. However, retail warehousing such as exists on Site 24 has a finite lifespan in terms of the building structures, and redevelopment may represent a more attractive opportunity for the freeholder, as the existing buildings reach the end of their economic life and lease expiries – and therefore the prospect of rental voids and re-letting costs - become more imminent.

12.72 Another factor which has informed our summary table, above, is the extent of the profit/ residual land value and/or deficit indicated by our initial appraisal analysis, relative to the overall gross development value (GDV) of the development proposals. For example, while Site 3 (Springfield) shows a negative land value in excess of £2.5m, this needs to be set in the context of a scheme with a GDV of in excess of £110m i.e. the deficit is small relative to the overall value of the completed development.

12.73 The nature of a residual development appraisal is such that a relatively small change to certain key assumptions, or cumulative changes to a number of assumptions, can have a significant impact upon the overall viability of a development proposal. For example, a modest downwards revision of a developer's profit on cost requirement for the Springfield site to circa 17.5% would lead to a positive land value. We consider a profit on cost target of 20% to be appropriate, in the current market. However, if sites were to be brought forward on a competitive basis, with a number of development partners bidding to secure the opportunity, then we might expect developers to adopt a more "aggressive" approach to their profit requirements.

12.73 In addition to changes on the cost and value sides of the development appraisal, another factor which will be of relevance – particularly to the larger and more complex proposals – will be the phasing assumptions and take up rates. At the present time, in addition to the tenants incentives which we have outlined above, we have also assumed a lettings void for each of the sites. If, however, any of the developments were to be wholly pre-let, then this would have a (positive) impact on viability. Detailed consideration of the construction and phasing programmes for more complex development projects can often have a significant impact on their viability.

12.74 It should be noted that in preparing our appraisals, we have assumed that sufficient tenant demand exists, in order to let the proposed developments. Clearly, this is impossible to predict with certainty, over the 10-15 year lifetime of the study, but the study proposals respond to the capacity figures identified in existing Council Development Plan Documents.

A Note on Section 106 Costs

12.75 As set out in Section 2, above, indicative allowances have been made for a range of costs such as landscaping, and the provision of car parking. The approach has been to make an initial allowance for those works which we consider a developer would wish to undertake in order to create an attractive and marketable product. It is conceivable that some of these costs could be included within potential Section 106 Agreements, but the assumption is that these are works which a prudent developer would wish to undertake in any case – for example, the creation of a high quality business park campus style environment at Springfield will necessitate a degree of landscaping and public realm provision, which the likely occupiers of such a development would expect to see provided. Offsite Section 106 costs have been specifically excluded, such as the pro rata contributions from residential development which might be sought for education or healthcare provision, for example.

12.76 As will be seen from the results of the analysis, at the present time the proposals do not permit a significant level of developer contributions relative to the delivery of viable development in accordance with the Council's potential wider objectives for economic development and regeneration. However, this may change over time, as proposals are refined. Clearly a number of the development proposals which we have analysed would be more viable, if a lower level of affordable housing were to be considered acceptable; alternatively, there may be a need to trade off affordable housing against other contributions. The Council may, in the future, seek to secure funding for key elements of the study 'vision' through means such as a strategic infrastructure levy or similar mechanism.

12.77 Given the above comments, regarding the scope for values and viability to improve, sensitivity analysis on the baseline appraisals has been undertaken, the results of which are set out below.

Sensitivity Testing

12.78 The sensitivity analysis has been undertaken using two different approaches.

Approach 1

12.79 Firstly sensitivity testing which looks at the positive effect on viability, of specific adjustments to the "income side" of the development appraisals, has been undertaken via relatively modest adjustments to the rental levels and yields applied (for the commercial land uses), and the residential sales values, for those appraisals which include a residential component.

12.80 The individual changes can be summarised briefly as follows:

- Springfield – office rents adjusted from £23.50 to £25.00 per sq ft (circa 5% increase)
- Office rents for other locations adjusted by circa 10%
- Retail rents adjusted by circa 10%
- Commercial yields adjusted by 0.5% (reduction in yield to reflect a positive improvement in capital value)
- Residential sales values increased by 10%

12.81 Such rental / yield improvements could potentially arise from a number of different factors, acting either individually, or in combination. Such factors could include increasing confidence in Maidstone, as a result of the implementation of a number of the actions outlined in the study, as well as improved property market / economic conditions (i.e. beyond the 'normal market conditions' assumptions which we have used within our baseline analysis), and strong levels of tenant demand (or purchaser demand in the case of residential property), resulting in competition for those units which are marketed. A combination of these factors is perhaps the most likely scenario, for example with an improved economic climate, and investor confidence, leading to a downward pressure on yields, and also increased occupier demand, with an upward pressure on values. The 10% upward adjustment to values which has been utilised should not be regarded as a 'ceiling' to the value increases which could potentially be achieved, over the lifetime of the study.

12.82 The base case table (Table 12.1), on the following page, shows the results of the original appraisals, while Table 12.2 illustrates the results of the revised appraisals, reflecting the above sensitivity testing.

Table 12.1 - Base Case

Site Reference	Site Name	Gross Development Value	Total Development Costs	Land Assembly Costs (where applicable)	Residual Land Value
3	Springfield	£ 114,110,918	£116,718,910		-£2,607,992
9	Station Site (Royal Mail)	£28,938,565	£30,803,593		-£1,865,028
10	Station Site (Car Park)	£43,661,921	£42,266,502		£1,395,419
9 & 10	Station Site (Royal Mail and Car Park) combined	£76,433,914	£76,274,518		£1,594,396
24	Riverside Site	£88,100,081	£66,106,785	£26,686,000	£21,993,296
27 & 28	King Street MSCP and AMF Site	£28,637,157	£28,055,222	£1,650,000	£581,935
35	Broadway Site	£34,223,690	£32,129,030	£7,600,000	£2,094,660
36	London House Site	£6,475,361	£6,231,230	£2,000,000	£244,131
50	All Saints Site	£12,574,757	£12,573,468		£1,289

Table 12.2 - Sensitivity Testing, Approach 1

Site Reference	Site Name	Gross Development Value	Total Development Costs	Land Assembly Costs (where applicable)	Residual Land Value
3	Springfield	£129,546,266	£120,914,266		£8,632,000
9	Station Site (Royal Mail)	£33,659,531	£32,002,710		£1,656,821
10	Station Site (Car Park)	£48,781,537	£44,035,952		£4,745,585
9 & 10	Station Site (Royal Mail and Car Park) combined	£84,959,152	£78,020,269		£6,938,883
24	Riverside Site	£100,754,049	£70,600,823	£26,686,000	£30,153,226
27 & 28	King Street MSCP and AMF Site	£33,305,690	£29,633,112	£1,650,000	£3,672,578
35	Broadway Site	£38,818,054	£33,717,752	£7,600,000	£5,100,302
36	London House Site	£7,155,284	£6,442,533	£2,000,000	£712,751
50	All Saints Site	£14,005,217	£12,996,001		£1,009,216

12.83 On the basis of these sensitivities, the overall outcome of the appraisals can be summarised as follows:

Site Reference	Site Name	Results of Original Viability Analysis	Results of Sensitivity Analysis, Approach 1
3	Springfield	Not viable (marginal)	Viable
9	Station Site (Royal Mail)	Not viable (marginal)	Viable (marginal)
10	Station Site (car park)	Viable (marginal)	Viable
9 & 10	Station Site (Royal Mail and Car Park) combined	Viable (marginal)	Viable
24	Riverside	Viable	Viable
27 & 28	King Street	Viable (marginal)	Viable
35	Broadway	Viable (marginal)	Viable (marginal)
36	London House	Viable (marginal)	Viable (marginal)
50	All Saints	Not viable	Viable

Approach 2

12.84 As an alternative to the above sensitivities, a further sensitivity analysis has also been undertaken on the more generalised basis of a modest (10%) overall increase to the gross development values arising from each of the sites. While this may seem like a slightly arbitrary adjustment (as opposed to sensitivities which consider the results of changes to specific appraisal inputs, referred to above), this is an approach which has been recently adopted in respect of similar situations elsewhere.

12.85 This is a valid approach, as rather than explicitly assuming adjustments based upon changes to a limited number of key appraisal inputs, this alternative approach arguably reflects the fact that, in reality, value increases (i.e. improvements to overall viability) are likely to arise from a number of different actions, not just improvements to rents/yields or sales values, but also to other factors, which will necessarily be considered in greater detail as individual scheme proposals are refined, and worked up in greater detail, for example by landowners / developers, or which become apparent as economic/property market conditions improve.

12.86 Amongst the factors which are relevant in this respect, are potential improvements to the overall timescales for implementing development projects (and also phasing), potential reductions in tenants' incentives, as well as detailed "value engineering" of scheme proposals in order to derive more efficient layouts which yield higher unit numbers or greater lettable areas, and reductions in developers' profit requirements.

12.87 Table 12.3, below, sets out the results of this additional sensitivity analysis:

Table 12.3 - Sensitivity Testing, Approach 2

Site Reference	Site Name	Gross Development Value	Total Development Costs	Land Assembly Costs (where applicable)	Residual Land Value
3	Springfield	£125,522,010	£116,718,910		£8,803,100
9	Station Site (Royal Mail)	£31,832,422	£30,803,593		£1,028,829
10	Station Site (Car Park)	£48,028,113	£42,266,502		£5,761,611
9 & 10	Station Site (Royal Mail and Car Park) combined	£84,077,307	£74,839,518		£9,237,787
24	Riverside Site	£96,910,089	£66,106,785	£26,686,000	£30,803,304
27 & 28	King Street MSCP and AMF Site	£31,500,873	£28,055,222	£1,650,000	£3,445,651
35	Broadway Site	£37,646,059	£32,129,030	£7,600,000	£5,517,029
36	London House Site	£7,122,897	£6,231,230	£2,000,000	£891,667
50	All Saints Site	£13,832,233	£12,573,468		£1,258,765

12.88 This produces the following results, in comparison to the original viability analysis.

Site Reference	Site Name	Results of Original Viability Analysis	Results of Sensitivity Analysis, Approach 1
3	Springfield	Not viable (marginal)	Viable
9	Station Site (Royal Mail)	Not viable (marginal)	Viable
10	Station Site (car park)	Viable (marginal)	Viable
9 & 10	Station Site (Royal Mail and Car Park) combined	Viable (marginal)	Viable
24	Riverside	Viable	Viable
27 & 28	King Street	Viable (marginal)	Viable
35	Broadway	Viable (marginal)	Viable (marginal)
36	London House	Viable (marginal)	Viable (marginal)
50	All Saints	Not viable	Viable

Sensitivity Summary

12.89 The above analysis demonstrates the positive impact of possible future changes in economic / property market conditions. When the base case viability analysis is considered in conjunction with these sensitivities, there is reason to be optimistic about the prospects for implementation of the study proposals, over the lifetime of the study.

12.90 While the sensitivities arguably primarily reflect the positive effects of improvements in the wider economy and property market, more "local" considerations may also have an influence upon improving development viability, for example, leadership via the public sector, including promotion of Maidstone and its attractions, investment in the town centre environment and transport improvements, as envisaged in the study and so on. "Early wins" (for example possible development at Maidstone East or the potential securing of the University of the Creative Arts) will also help to create improved confidence in the town, and improve property market sentiment.

13. Conclusions

13.1 The Maidstone Town Centre Study sets out an exciting vision for Maidstone with proposals indicating how the vision could be realised. It is an approach which prioritises sustainability and environmental quality, as the key levers to attract the investment which will be needed to enable the town to realise its potential as a retail and employment centre and the county town of Kent.

13.2 The overarching strategy provides the focus for identifying key opportunities for development and enhancement over the next 10-20 years, and this is supported by more detailed public realm, movement and development strategies. The strategy also sets out a timescale for phasing development over the short and medium term in order to build confidence and momentum.

13.3 The Town Centre Study will form part of the evidence base for the Maidstone Core Strategy, and for the preparation of an Area Action Plan for Maidstone Town Centre. The Area Action Plan will provide a formal planning policy context for the delivery of the proposals. The preparation of the Area Action Plan will also involve extensive consultation and engagement, which will provide an opportunity for the proposals to be tested and refined.

13.4 The scale of change which is proposed in the Maidstone Town Centre Study will be delivered within a context of strong public sector leadership and partnership working. A number of the key opportunities in the town centre will need private landowners to work alongside the Council and its partners to plan strategically in order to realise the full potential of the town centre.

13.5 The next phase of Maidstone's development will be an exciting period of change – where the assets of the historic town centre are enhanced and the overall setting improved to realise a highly attractive, vibrant and sustainable town centre. New growth will play an important role in facilitating key changes and supporting the viability and vitality of Maidstone as it grows into its sub-regional role.