

OTHAM PARISH NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN 2020-2035

Our vision is that Otham be recognised as an important, ancient historic village nestled in a unique rural setting, with a vibrant community at its heart, providing a green oasis for the visiting population of Maidstone and part of a 'Green Corridor' that stretches from the edges of Maidstone, through the parish eastwards towards Leeds village. It should continue to thrive, meeting the evolving needs of the community while preserving the ancient core of Otham Village, its Conservation Area, its numerous listed buildings and its rural character.



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Bishops, Avery Lane

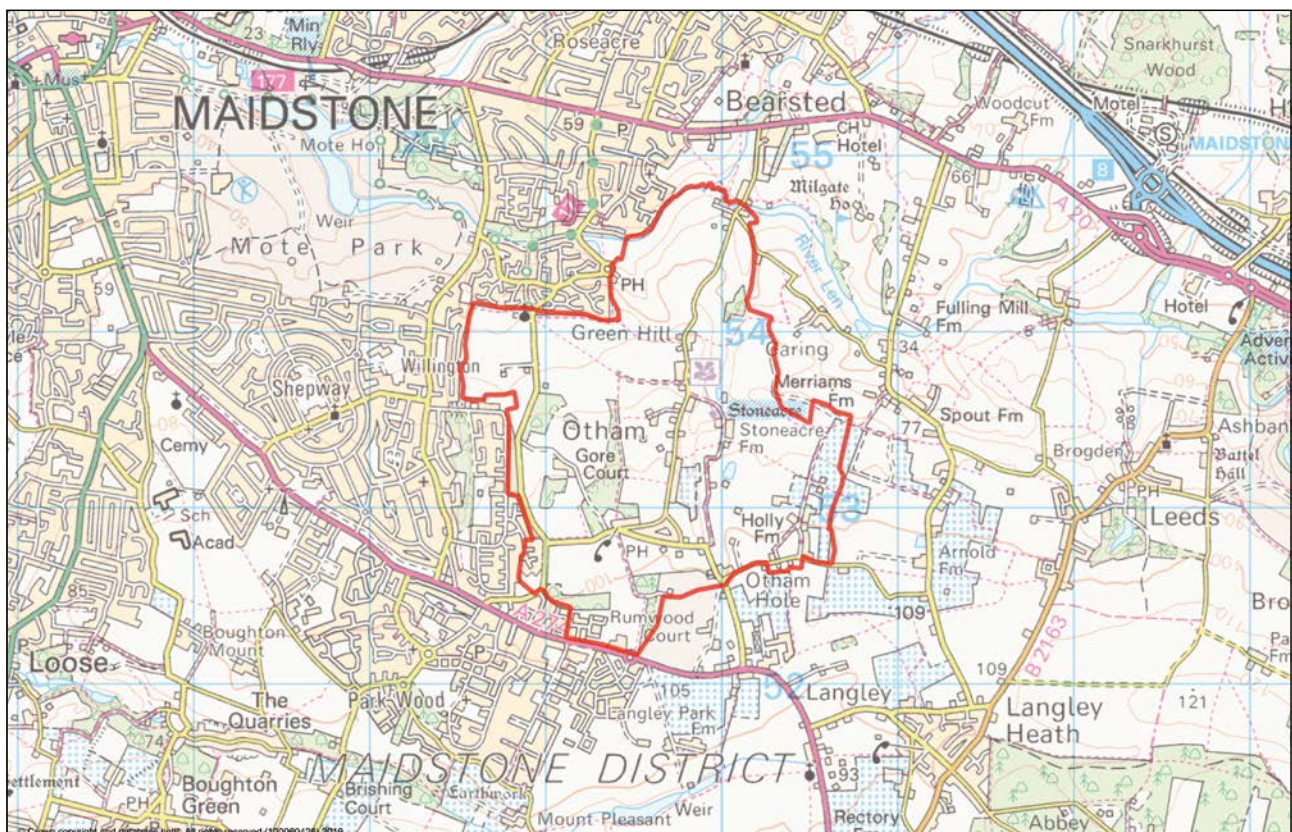
1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1** The Otham Parish Neighbourhood Plan is a planning document. It is part of the Government's approach to planning, which aims to give local people more say about what goes on in their area.
- 1.2** The Neighbourhood Plan provides a vision for the future of the community, and sets out clear planning policies to realise this vision. It covers the period from (2020 to 2035).
- 1.3** The Otham Parish Neighbourhood Plan has been shaped by the community through extensive and direct consultation with the people of Otham and others with an interest in the Parish.
- 1.4 How the Neighbourhood Plan fits into the Planning System**
Maidstone Borough Council approved the designation of Otham as a Neighbourhood Area on 1st August 2017. The Neighbourhood Area follows the Otham Parish boundary (see map below).
- 1.5** Neighbourhood Plans must be in line with European Regulations on Strategic Environmental Assessment and Habitat regulations. They must also have regard for national planning policy; contribute to sustainable development principles and

conform generally to the strategic policies of the Maidstone Borough Council Local Plan. The Parish Council has considered all of the strategic policies of the local plan and this Neighbourhood Plan focuses on those of local importance.

- 1.6** The relationship with the Local Plan is important because evolving Government policy and the continuing pressure for housing in the wider area means that the Maidstone Borough Local Plan is currently being reviewed to cover the period 2022-2037. It is presently envisaged that the Local Plan Review will be adopted in late-2022, and the implications for the Neighbourhood Plan will then need to be considered. If necessary, the Neighbourhood Plan will be reviewed to ensure that it remains an important part of the statutory development plan for the Parish.
- 1.7** The Otham Parish Neighbourhood Plan gives local people the opportunity to have a say in how the parish should evolve. Following a successful referendum, this plan will become part of the Maidstone Development Plan and will influence planning decisions made by the local authority.

Otham Neighbourhood Area



2. ABOUT OTHAM PARISH

2.1 Otham has significant heritage value and this is described in Chapter 4 'Heritage, Conservation and Landscape Protection'.

2.2 Social and Communal Value. The parish is characterised by open farmland lying alongside and between mature wooded hills with some excellent views of neighbouring parishes including, Bearsted, Leeds and Langley. At the centre lies the Conservation Area



View to Langley

2.3 The church serves the people of Otham, Langley, Downswood, Willington and Madginford. The nursery school which is held in the village hall, has drawn children from a similar area for many years. An annual village fete on The Green brings back past villagers who now live in the surrounding area and revives the collective memory of the village.

2.4 Numerous footpaths and bridleways allow visitors, whether on cycle, horse or foot, easy access to the village from the surrounding parishes particularly Maidstone town.

2.5 Bearsted Football Club and Rumwood Cricket Club have their playing fields here.

2.6 The White Horse Public House at the junction of White Horse Lane and Honey Lane was built in 1909.

2.7 Ancient Bicknor Wood is owned and managed by Bicknor Woods Residents Community Group as an amenity for local people.

2.8 The position of Otham parish lying to the east of Maidstone allows it to act as an important part of a wider 'Green Corridor' of beautiful open countryside to the east, with the Downs including the Pilgrims Way lying to the North. This 'Green

corridor' of which Otham parish is an integral part performs an important function which the Otham Neighbourhood Plan seeks to protect and enhance.

2.9 Evidential Value. As well as the church parish records preserved in the Kent History and Library Centre (KHLC), there is other extensive material relating to the manors of Otham and Stoneacre which, historically, made up the village. The Otham Conservation Area Appraisal, which was approved by Maidstone Borough Council in February 2009, highlights the history of the area and describes both key listed buildings and others of positive value as well as giving further references to documentary evidence concerning the village.

2.10 Archaeological Interest centres on the extraction of ragstone in the village and the survival of part of the medieval quarry. In addition, the medieval hall houses form an important group of survivals and historical resource while Kent County Council Heritage Environment Record holds details of individual archaeological findings.

2.11 A Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) is sited on the northwest boundary of the village at its boundary with Downswood. See Appendix 5 for a description of the site.

2.12 Designated Landscapes. 'Stoneacre' is a National Trust house and garden within the Conservation Area, but an early 19th century park and garden was created around 'Gore Court' on the western side of the village.



Stoneacre

- 2.13 Aesthetic Value.** The village of Otham connects the important green space of Mote Park in the centre of Maidstone to the rural countryside which extends eastwards to Leeds Castle. Because the land is actively farmed, Otham is itself an attractive green area, providing outstanding views of the surrounding countryside. Many of the houses are timber framed or use a mix of brick and ragstone in their construction.
- 2.14 Landmark Status.** The village green lying within the Conservation Area, was gifted as a memorial to those who fell in the First World War. The Church of St. Nicholas and Church House (built on the site of the Court House) form a significant group on the western side of the village.
- 2.15 Group Value.** The development of the Len Valley is similar to the Loose Valley both geographically and in sharing a history of ragstone quarrying and paper making. These two valleys form green spokes radiating from Maidstone emphasising its reputation as the centre of the Garden of England.
- 2.16** Due to the presence of a 'Limestone Hythe Formation - (Kentish ragstone)', most of the parish is designated as a Kent County Council Minerals Safeguarding area. Because of the geological nature of ragstone formation, 'swallow' (sink) holes may appear in the parish; hence the name Otham Hole to the area in the southernmost part of the parish.
- 2.17 Farming in Otham.** Otham has a long history of farming first recorded in the Domesday Book.
- In the 14th and 15th Centuries extensive ragstone quarrying took place. This was to shape the land and the results of quarrying can be seen today in the valley that borders the Village Green and extends southwards to Honey Lane.
- Hop and fruit growing is recorded in the 18th century. At that time fruit trees were larger than seen today and this allowed the grazing of sheep in the same field as those used for fruit production. Alternatively nuts or currants were grown under the trees.
- Hop production that had developed in Otham declined in the 1950s and 1960s,

as did the farming of pigs, chickens and cattle. The resulting land mainly went into arable crops and sheep farming.

In Otham today there is a variety of farming undertaken by long established local farmers.

At the northern end of Otham lies Greenhill Farm. Here free range Christmas turkeys; chickens for the table and lambs are farmed. In addition, there is stabling for horses.

Stoneacre Farm has grazing for sheep and horses and land is also used for fruit farming. Horses are also stabled at Stoneacre Farm to cater for the extensive horse riding which takes place in and around Otham.

Arable farming occurs in the fields to the west of Otham Street.



In addition there is extensive fruit farming. W.B. Chambers & Son of Oakdene Farm employ a large number of people including up to eighty people who work in Otham. Ninety acres of farmland produce 400 tonnes of raspberries, blueberries, blackberries and currants. The fruit is sold to supermarkets and local stores.

Otham's agricultural acreage is being reduced by extensive use of grade 2 farmland for housing development. At least one of the long-established farming families in the parish believes that this shrinkage of the available farmland together with increased traffic and footfall is threatening the continuation of farming in Otham.



Greenhill House

2.18 In the 1911 census there were just under 100 dwellings in Otham with the majority in the historic centre and the remainder dispersed across the parish. 100 years later this number had increased to 193 mainly through developments in two areas – in and around the triangle formed by White Horse Lane, Honey Lane and Simmonds Lane and on the western edge of the parish as part of the large Senacre Wood development. These newer homes are built in styles reflecting the era in which they were built.

Relative to the number of dwellings existing in Otham prior to 2011, considerable building has already taken place or is planned both within the area covered by this plan and on its boundaries. Within Maidstone Borough Local Plan, Adopted October 2017 the following policies are relevant:

Policy H1(6) – North of Sutton Road (286 dwellings of which 100 collectively known as The Coppice are within Otham Parish)

Policy H1(7) North of Bicknor Wood (190 dwellings exclusively within Otham Parish in the original plan but now approved for 250)

Policy H1(8) West of Church Road (440 dwellings exclusively within Otham Parish)

Policy H1(9) Bicknor Farm (335 dwellings of which approximately 225 will be within the parish boundary).

All of the above together with consultation with local residents provided input to the Parish Council's development of its vision for Otham Parish:

That Otham be recognised as an important, ancient historic village nestled in a unique rural setting, with a vibrant community at its heart, providing a green oasis for the visiting population of Maidstone and part of a 'Green Corridor' that stretches from the edges of Maidstone, through the parish eastwards towards Leeds village. It should continue to thrive, meeting the evolving needs of the community while preserving the ancient core of Otham Village, its Conservation Area, its numerous listed buildings and its rural character.



4. HERITAGE, CONSERVATION AND LANDSCAPE PROTECTION

4.1 Context

Age, Rarity and Survival. Otham lies in the Len Valley and is described in Domesday. The parish has at its heart a beautiful historic village which contains the majority of the dwellings that existed prior to 2011, the core of which lies within the parish's Conservation Area. Otham lies high up above a steep wooded valley commanding fine views and within sight of many fine houses.

The Grade 1 listed church of St. Nicholas, stands a kilometre or so away from the heart of the village. The nave is Norman with an early font and memorials to Hendley, Fludd and Bufkin families, including a fine example by Maximilian Colt. The 13th century tower contains one of the oldest bells in Kent. Later additions enlarged the building over the next two centuries which, luckily, suffered little change during the 19th century restoration. Below the church, on the banks of the River Len and opposite the eastern entrance to Mote Park, lies the site of the mill recorded in Domesday, later becoming one of the important paper mills serving the economy of Maidstone in the 18th and 19th centuries. Only the foundations remain.

Historic Associations. Of the many fine houses in the parish Wardes is architecturally the most important dating from the late 1300s. Gore Court, which is Grade II* listed, surrounded by a 19th century park, which is of historic importance and details of which are set out in Appendix 4, is the oldest house and is made up of two 15th century hall houses on the foundations of a much earlier house. Two other hall houses 'Synyards' and 'Belks', in Otham Street, lie on the edge of the medieval quarry as does a third, 'Stoneacre', which is currently owned and run by the National Trust. Stoneacre houses a precious collection of Blue Dragon china, kingposts in the hall, and a stained glass Madonna of 15th century. The crown posts and marvellous wooden window sills with the original shutters, were

revealed during restoration work early in the 20th century.

The remains of a medieval ragstone quarry lie in the centre of the Conservation Area. Six Wealden Hall houses still survive which were built around the edges of the quarry in the 15th century together with a further three on the western side of the village close to the church. All the Hall houses are 14th or 15th century and 'Madam Taylor's', with its fine Grade II listed brick garden wall, is a 16th century manor house and other smaller listed buildings form an important part of the historic heritage of Otham parish as do unlisted buildings such as The Old School and The Village Hall. A full description of these appears in the



Greenhill Cottage

Otham Conservation Appraisal (2009). The detailed analysis contained in the document states that all the buildings fall within the grades Essential, Positive or Neutral; none is graded negative. Various notable people have lived in the village, for example, following the rebellion of 1554 and the execution of Sir Thomas Wyatt, his widow, Jane, came here. Their grandson Francis, became the first governor of Virginia.

The earliest recorded footpaths are shown on the Ordnance Survey Drawings of 1797 as a network which is very similar to those of the present day. These supplement the local roads and allow short cuts between the groups of houses scattered over the parish as well as a more direct route into Maidstone than that afforded by the roads.

Later maps, the tithe (1838) and the historical series of 25 inch Ordnance Survey maps (1865 to present), confirm these paths, as well as showing others. The maps emphasise how important the paths were, not only to allow adults to reach their place of work and children to attend school but also to allow access to the shops and markets of Maidstone. As well as providing freedom of movement, these paths linked the green spaces through which they travelled and this they continue to do to the present day.

The Protection of Views

The Settings of Heritage Assets GPA3 first published by English Heritage in 2015 and updated December 2017, provides advice in accordance with the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and the related Planning Practice Guide (PPG). It emphasises the importance of preserving listed buildings and their settings which allow their significance to be appreciated. As well as pointing out that this will 'almost always include the consideration of views', the document goes on to say that 'a conservation area is likely to include the settings of listed buildings and have its own setting'.

The paper also advises that 'contextual relationships between heritage assets apply irrespective of distance'; an example of this would be the view between the Green and the Church.

GPA3 also states that 'views, however, can of course be valued for reasons other than their contribution to heritage significance. They may, for example, be related to the appreciation of the wider landscape where there may be little or no association with heritage assets.'

The Otham Conservation Area Appraisal (Maidstone Borough Council, 2009) confirms that 'an important feature of Otham's character is its internal and external landscape setting'. Examples of the different types of views are shown in the following views.

No. 19 shows a view eastwards towards the Conservation Area and Madam Taylor's, the 16C manor house (Grade II listed), across the demesne lands purchased by Thomas Hendly in 1543. Equally important are the reverse views containing the footpaths used to reach the Church from Greenhill and the Green for several hundred years, nos. 9 and 10.

The Otham Appraisal comments that the wide views towards the North Downs from the vicinity of Green Hill and the War Memorial are particularly important to the character of the Conservation Area and its setting, nos.7, 12, 13, 14, 15 and 16.

It further comments that these views and those over the wider landscape of fields and woodland make an important contribution to Otham's special rural character, nos. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 11 and 20.



While not in the conservation area, GPA3 advises that many historic assets have settings that have been designed to enhance their presence, for example the early 18C park surrounding Gore Court (Grade II listed), nos. 17 and 18.

The Otham Appraisal concludes by stating that 'as the setting for the Conservation Area, these views are to be protected'.

It is vital that the heritage value described above is maintained and this is entirely consistent with The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) Paragraph 185 which states:

Plans should set out a positive strategy for the conservation and enjoyment of the historic environment, including heritage assets most at risk through neglect, decay or other threats. This strategy should take into account:

- a) the desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets, and putting them to viable uses consistent with their conservation;*
- b) the wider social, cultural, economic and environmental benefits that conservation of the historic environment can bring;*
- c) the desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness; and*
- d) opportunities to draw on the contribution made by the historic environment to the character of a place.*



It is also entirely consistent with The Maidstone Borough Local Plan Policy SP18 covering *The Historic Environment*:

To ensure their continued contribution to the quality of life in Maidstone Borough, the characteristics, distinctiveness, diversity and quality of heritage assets will be protected and, where possible, enhanced. This will be achieved by the council encouraging and supporting measures that secure the sensitive restoration, reuse, enjoyment, conservation and/or enhancement of heritage assets, in particular designated assets identified as being at risk, to include:

- i. Collaboration with developers, landowners, parish councils, groups preparing neighbourhood plans and heritage bodies on specific heritage initiatives including bids for funding;*
- ii. Through the development management process, securing the sensitive management and design of development which impacts on heritage assets and their settings;*
- iii. Through the incorporation of positive heritage policies in neighbourhood plans which are based on analysis of locally important and distinctive heritage; and*
- iv. Ensuring relevant heritage considerations are a key aspect of site master plans prepared in support of development allocations and broad locations identified in the local plan.*

4.2 Local Evidence

94% of residents believe existing views should be retained. (2018)

67% of residents believe that farming in Otham is important as it defines the rural character. (2015)

82% of residents support the Heritage Trails. (2018)

4.3 Aims

Our aim is to provide ‘quality of place’ through:

- providing walking routes that encourage residents and visitors to appreciate the historic sites within the parish thereby improving physical and mental health and knowledge and understanding. (See Appendix 3.)
- preserving the historical views between listed buildings in sympathy with their environment.
- preserving the extensive views of the North Downs as well as allowing appreciation of the countryside and wildlife in its historical environment thus providing both interest and relaxation.

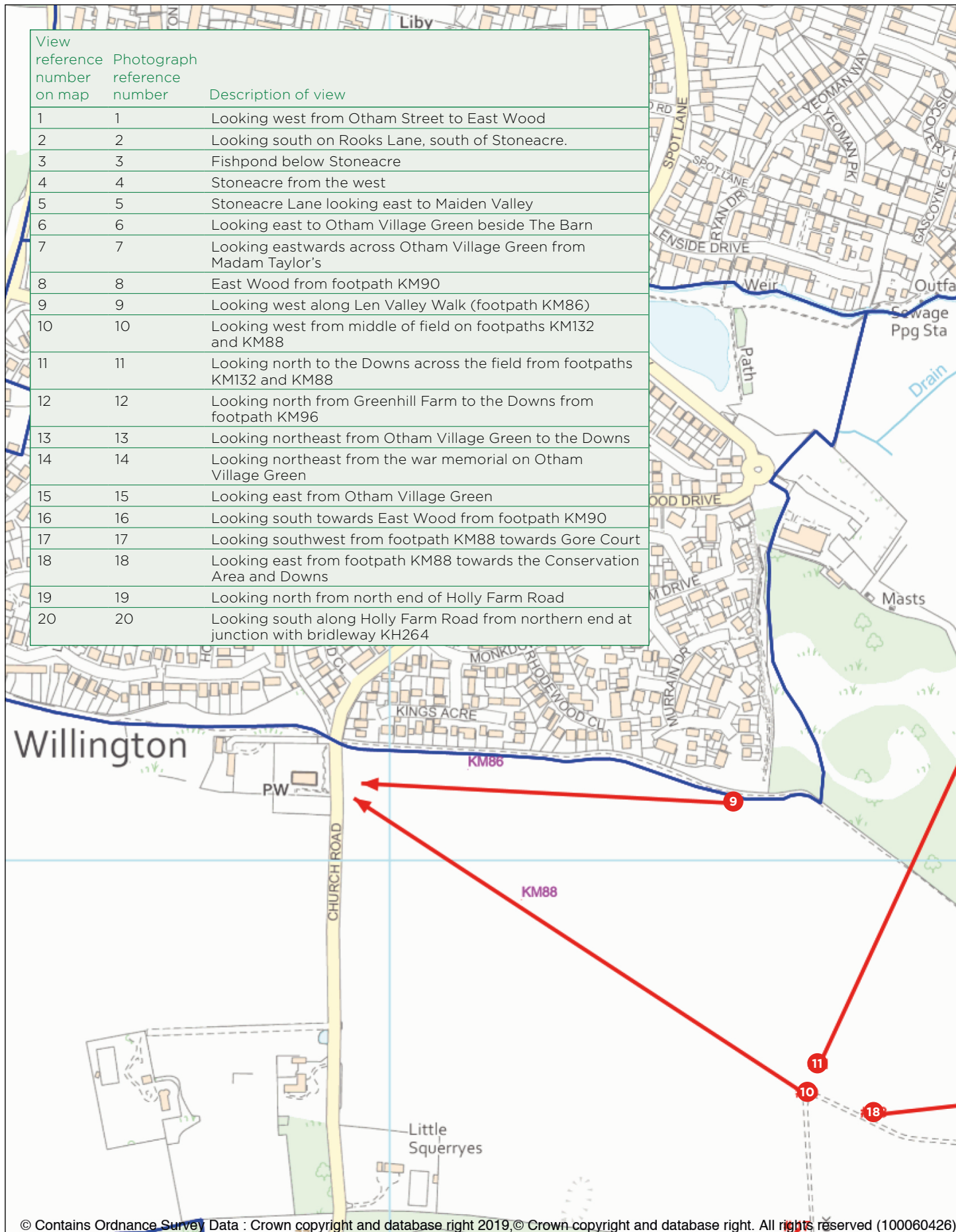
4.4 Policies

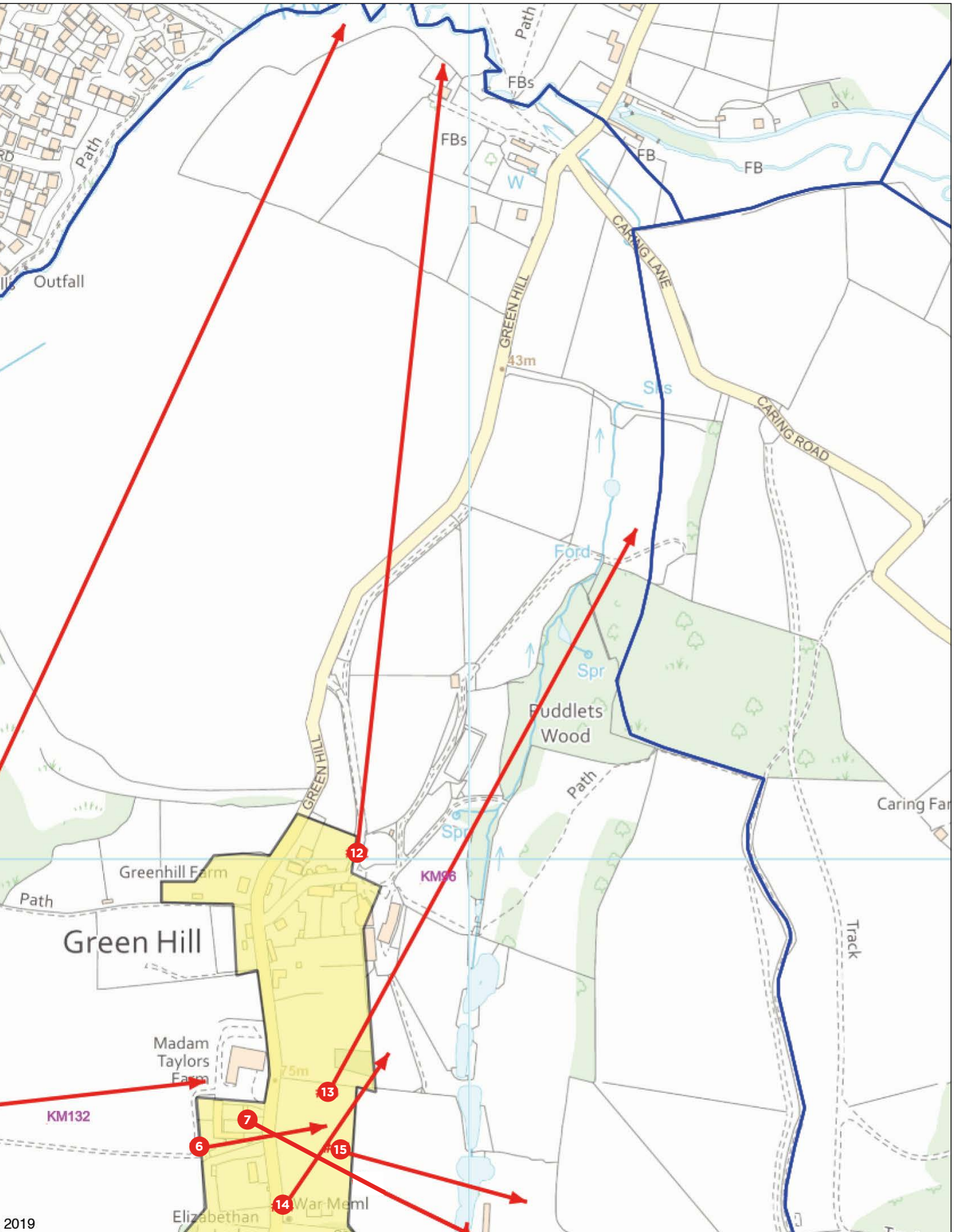
HC1: Development will be supported provided it does not detract from the recreational and educational value of the designated Otham Heritage Trails 1 and 2 as set out in Appendix 3.

HC2: Protection of views:

- **Development proposals must give consideration to the identified shortrange and long-range views across the countryside and the village. These views are shown on the accompanying maps (HC2 Maps 1 and 2), and views from the Otham Heritage Trails are described in Appendix 3.**
 - **Where appropriate, development proposals should seek to safeguard the identified views. Proposals which could affect views that are a part of the setting of heritage assets should be accompanied by an assessment of the contribution the views make to the significance of such assets, and the measures that have been taken to avoid or minimise any harm.**
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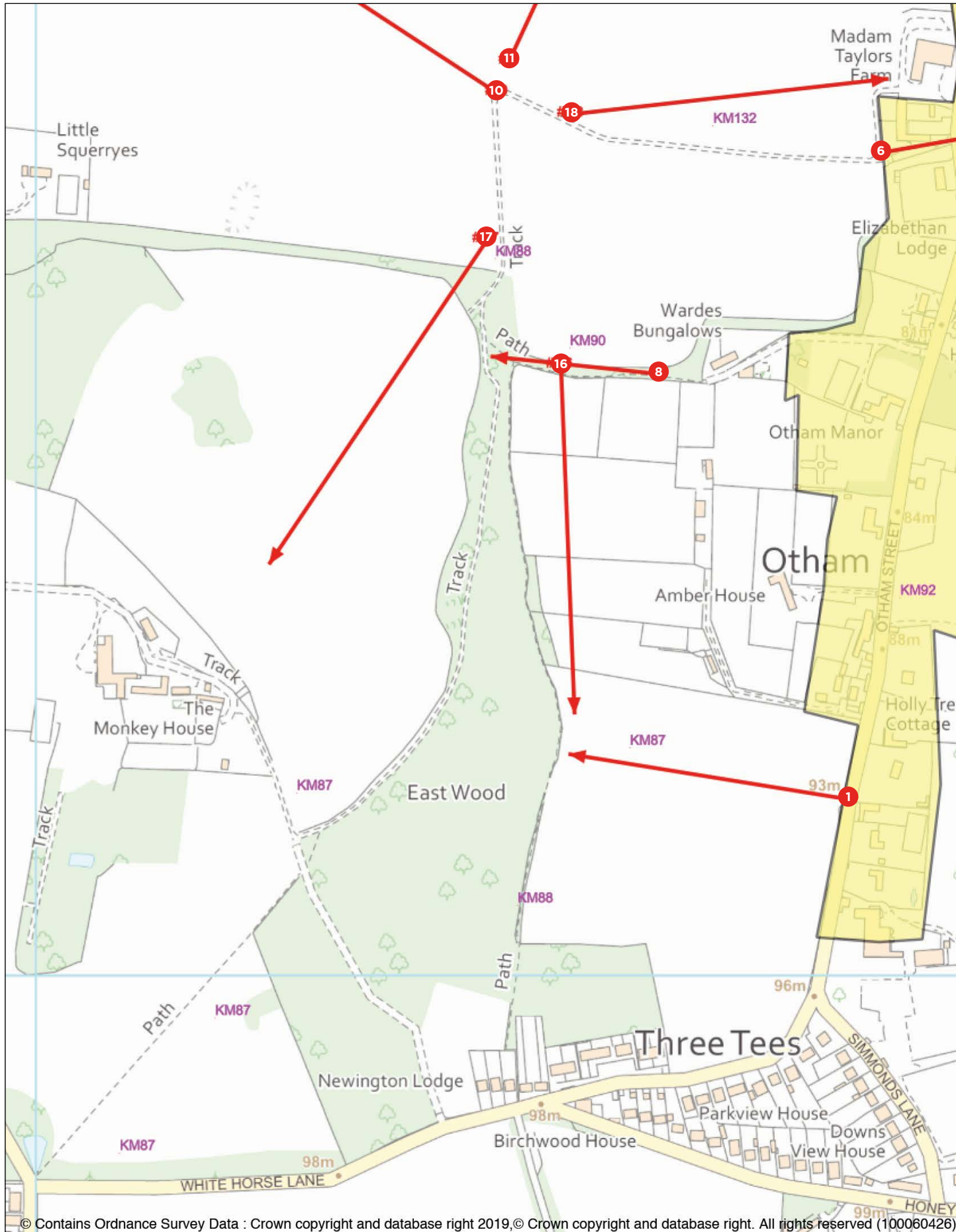
HC2: Protection of views: Map 1

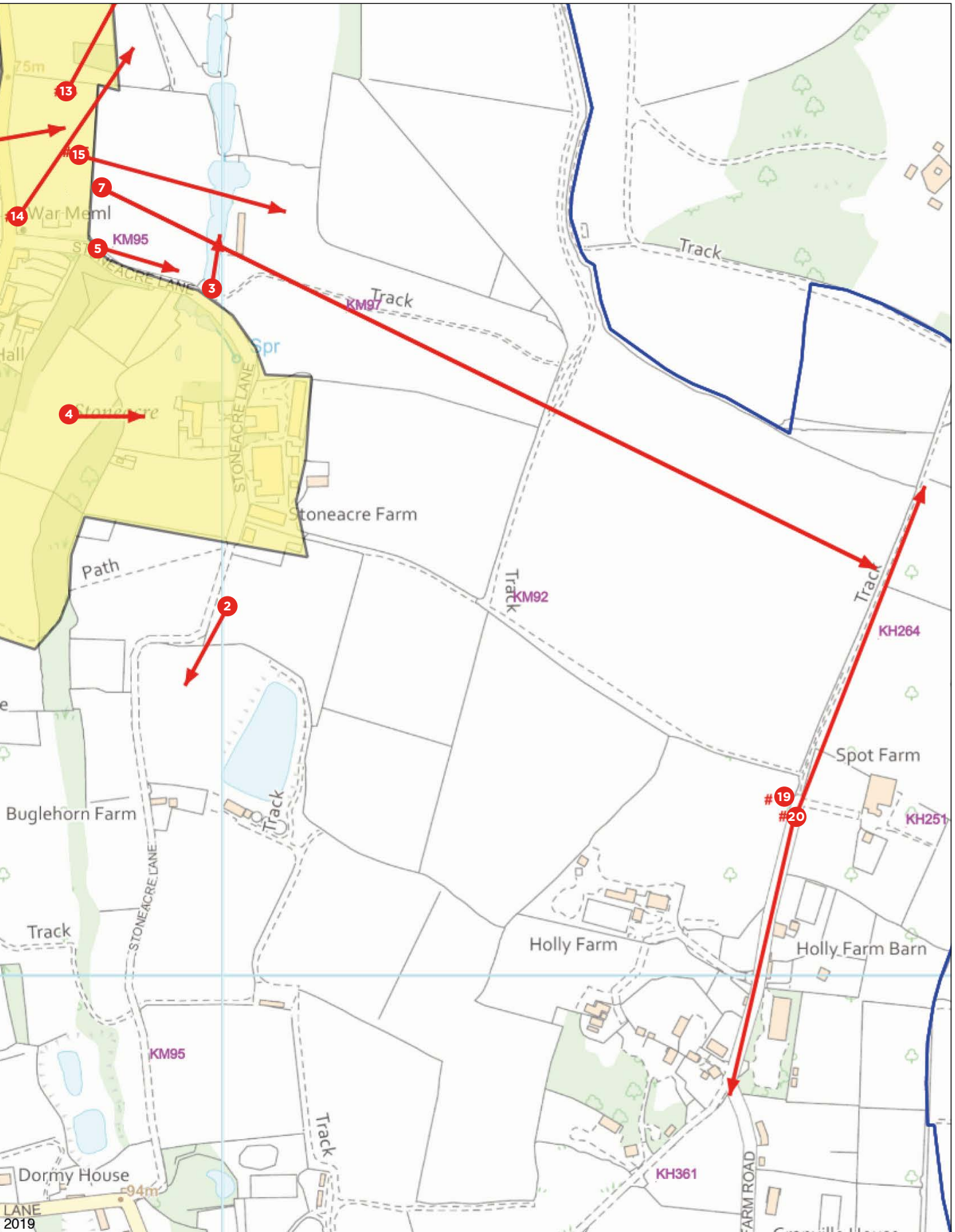




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HC2: Protection of views: Map 2





HERITAGE, CONSERVATION AND LANDSCAPE PROTECTION



1. Looking west from Otham Street to East Wood (ancient woodland)



2. Looking south on Rooks Lane, south of Stoneacre



3. Fish pond below Stoneacre



4. Stoneacre from the West



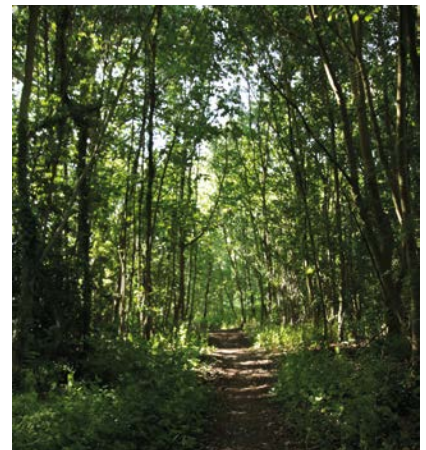
5. Stoneacre Lane looking east to Maiden Valley



6. Looking east to Otham Village Green beside The Barn



7. Looking eastwards across Otham Village Green from Madam Taylor's



8. East Wood from footpath KM90



9. Looking west along Len Valley Walk (footpath KM86)



10. Looking west from middle of field on footpaths KM132 and KM88



11. Looking north to the Downs across the field from footpaths KM132 and KM88



12. Looking north from Greenhill Farm to the Downs from footpath KM96



13. Looking northeast from Otham Village Green to the Downs



15. Looking east from Otham Village Green



14. Looking northeast from the war memorial on Otham Village Green



16. Looking south towards East Wood from footpath KM90



17. Looking southwest from footpath KM88 towards Gore Court



18. Looking east from footpath KM88 towards the Conservation Area and Downs



20. Looking south along Holly Farm Road from northern end at junction with bridle way KH264



19. Looking north from north end of Holly Farm Road

5. ENHANCING GREEN SPACE AND BIODIVERSITY VALUE

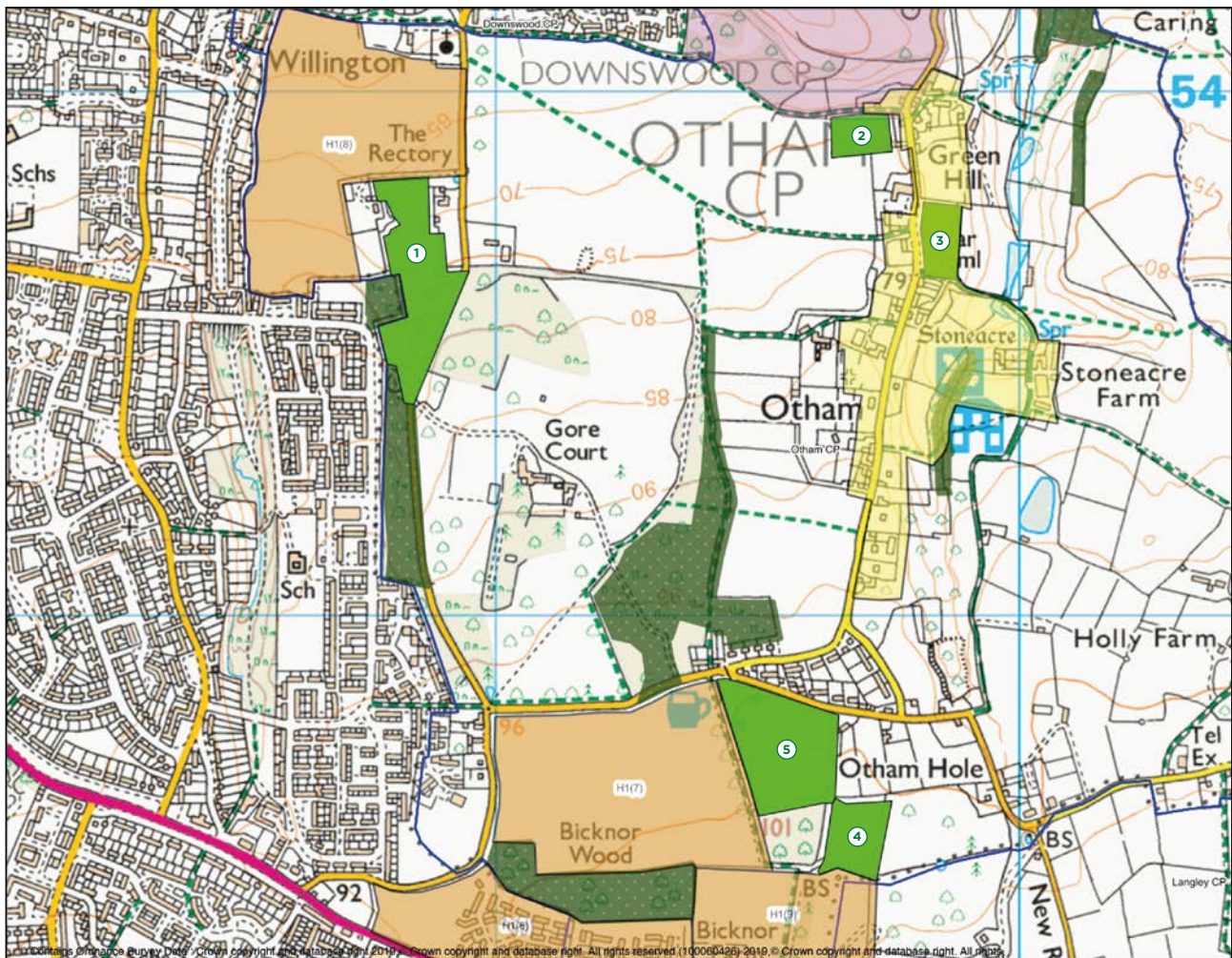
5.1 Context

Maidstone Borough Council's Analysis of Publicly Accessible Green Space in its Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy (2016) reveals that the 5,860 residents of neighbouring Shepway South ward (2014) only have access to 7.7ha of natural space, which falls 30ha below the draft standard. Their analysis also highlights a deficiency in the amount of accessible play areas and allotments available to residents in the ward. Also identified is an 11ha deficiency in the amount of natural open space accessible to the 2,800 residents (2014) of the Downswood and Otham Ward and a 43ha deficiency in the neighbouring ward of Bearsted which has 8250 residents (2014). Residents of these

urban communities rely on Otham for access to natural green space and publicly accessible footpaths.

Otham has a network of footpaths and bridleways which have been used extensively since the eighteenth century to supplement the local roads and allow short cuts between the groups of houses and public buildings scattered over the parish. These also link the natural green spaces through which they travel which are used daily by residents of Otham, Downswood, Senacre, Langley, Parkwood and Bearsted for walking, running, dog walking and horse riding and are connected by footpaths to the conservation area. These natural green spaces and the ancient paths and hedgerows that link them provide a haven for wildlife alongside the seven ancient woodlands that lie within the parish.

GS2: Proposed Local Green Spaces



■ Ancient Woodland
 Otham Conservation Area
 Local Plan Housing Allocations
 Len Valley Landscape of Local Value
 Proposed Local Green Spaces
 ① Grassland between Woolley Road and Church Road and adjoining Glebe
 ② Allotments
 ③ Village Green
 ④ Rumwood Cricket Club
 ⑤ Bearsted Football Club

A major theme of Maidstone Borough Council's 2016 Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy is the importance of maintaining and improving valued open spaces, heritage and tree cover and creating well linked green spaces to serve new developments. Paragraph 4.81 states, *'access to nature on an everyday basis helps to secure quality of life for all. Provision of places to access nature is important for giving everyone the opportunity to take advantage of the benefits that nature provides. There is substantial evidence that demonstrates the value of green spaces and contact with nature for improving mental well-being and physical health. Natural England's recommended Accessible Natural Green Space Standard (ANGSt) which has been adopted by the Borough Council, recommends that people live within 300m of a 2ha natural green space. Although the natural environment of the countryside provides a resource for able-bodied people in rural areas, local, accessible natural green space should be available close to where people live for those less able.'*

The existing, well used, natural green spaces in Otham, connected by footpaths, that sit adjacent to Senacre and to Downswood, are used as the accessible natural green spaces recommended by Natural England, but do not currently have a formal designation.

Otham also has some formal amenity green spaces and sports facilities which include: the village green with children's play area, Bearsted football club's ground at Honey Lane, Rumwood cricket ground and the allotments.

Paragraph 100 of the NPPF states that, 'The designation of land as Local Green Space through local and neighbourhood plans allows communities to identify and protect green areas of particular importance to them.' These designated Local Green Spaces are given the same protection as Green Belts. Through consultation with local residents, six sites in the village were identified as being of great local importance and of these, five have been deemed appropriate for

designation as Local Green Spaces. As required in the NPPF, all are in close proximity to residents of Otham, Downswood or Senacre, are proved through consultation to be of special significance to local people and are local in character and not extensive tracts of land. Table 1 opposite sets out how each protected Local green Space meets the criteria of the NPPF.

Otham is home to Gore Court, an historic parkland and also seven areas of ancient woodland and veteran trees as identified in the Maidstone Local Plan. The areas of ancient woodland within or adjacent to the boundary of Otham are; Bicknor Wood, East Wood, Pigeon Bank, Puddlets Wood, West of Church Road and East of Woolley Road.

Bicknor Wood has come under pressure from the developments H1(6), H1(7) and H1(9) which surround it and the woodland East of Woolley Road is threatened by the H1(8) development.

Paragraph 175c of the NPPF states that, 'Development resulting in the loss or deterioration of irreplaceable habitats (such as ancient woodland and ancient or veteran trees) should be refused, unless there are wholly exceptional reasons and a suitable compensation strategy exists.

5.2 Local Evidence

100% of residents believe it is important to maintain and protect our existing green spaces. (2018)

96% of residents believe the village green is vital, important or nice to have. (2015)

72% of residents believe the allotments are vital, important or nice to have. (2015)

37% of residents believe the football club is vital, important or nice to have. (2015)

5.3 Aims

- To secure high quality green infrastructure in Otham through the designation of 'Local Green Spaces' that are special to the community, to protect them for current and future generations, not only those resident in Otham, but also for Downswood, Bearsted, Madginford, Senacre, Parkwood and Langley.
- Local Green Spaces will form part of a network of paths and open spaces

Table 1 – Local Green Space Assessment

Local Green Space	Reasonably close proximity to the community	Demonstrably special	Local in character
The grassland between Woolley Road and Church Road and the adjoining Glebe field	Adjoins existing housing in Woolley Road, in the Senacre area of urban Maidstone and H1(8), a proposed development of 440 dwellings	Includes local, informal footpaths used extensively for recreation by both pedestrians and horse riders. Includes a veteran oak tree covered by a TPO and a veteran beech tree. The southern field has been used in the past for football training as an unofficial playing field. It supports a large slow-worm population. Daily walkers on the site explained in a 2018 survey that, 'without it we should be lost' and that, 'dog walking here is my therapy'	The Glebe field, which forms the setting for the Grade II 15th century Rectory, has been a meadow for at least 200 years, described as 'barnyard and house meadow' in the 1838 Otham Tithing Map. With the adjoining southern field, they provide a place where people meet while walking their dogs. Their informal footpaths connect the settlements of Downswood and Senacre as well as different parts of Otham. They provide open countryside at the edge of urban Maidstone
The allotments	In Green Hill, the settlement at the northern end of the village centre	The field was set up in 1590 as a charitable trust, The Hendley Charity, and the income raised from the allotment rents is still donated today to a charity supporting homeless people in Maidstone. The 25 plots are used by both Otham residents and those from the surrounding area	Very close to the centre of the village, at the edge of the conservation area, with views over the Len Valley
The village green	At the heart of the village, within the conservation area	Owned by the Parish Council having been gifted to the village in 1919 as a memorial to those killed in WW1. It is the site of the village war memorial and the Otham village sign. It includes public seating, a children's playground and football goal. Used by the local preschool children. It is the location of the annual village fete	Focal point for the village in the heart of the conservation area. Provides the setting for a number of listed buildings and has important views over the Len valley and the North Downs
Rumwood Cricket Club	Adjoins H1(9), the approved Monchelsea Park development of 335 dwellings	Founded over 120 years ago by local landowners for their workers, the club is now held in trust as a community club, used by residents of Otham, surrounding villages and Maidstone. Also used as Loose Cricket Club's ground. Outfields are used by Bearsted Football Club when not in use for cricket, so the land is in use all year	Popular and well used village amenity. Provides a vital green space to prevent the coalescence of Otham with urban Maidstone following the completion of the Sutton Road developments designated in the Maidstone Local Plan. Adjacent to Bearsted Football Club
The land used by Bearsted Football Club	Adjoins Honey Lane and the Three Tees housing	Land has been leased to Bearsted Football Club since 1998, a club with 20 teams drawn from the local community. Site has 2 stands with seating, flood lights and changing rooms. Approximately 60 supporters attend each match	Popular and well used village amenity. Provides a vital green space to prevent the coalescence of Otham with urban Maidstone following the completion of H1(7) Bicknor Wood development and the other Sutton Road developments designated in the Maidstone Local Plan. Adjacent to Rumwood Cricket Club

enabling safe pedestrian movement within Otham, between the new housing developments designated in Maidstone's Local Plan and into Otham from surrounding urban areas.

- To ensure that Otham remains a green oasis in urban Maidstone, providing opportunities for walking and physical activity and generally adding to the quality of life of people throughout the borough.
- To ensure that the seven areas of ancient woodland are protected from development.
- To ensure that despite the massive increase in Otham's population through

the construction of an additional 1,000 dwellings in the parish (as designated in Maidstone's Local Plan), Otham remains an attractive place to live and spend leisure time by maintaining green spaces of value to the community.

- To retain trees of significant amenity value.
- To preserve ancient woodland, veteran trees, ancient wood-pasture and historic parkland from any further pressures of erosion and damage to natural habitat from development and any other activities.
- To seek to secure appropriate management for these natural assets.

5.4 Policies

GS1: Development should be sympathetic and maintain a sense of openness with protection of views. Any possible development around or within these Green Spaces should respect the aims of our NP.

GS2: The following sites will be designated as Local Green Spaces:

- 1. Grassland situated between Woolley Road, Senacre and Church Road, Otham and The Glebe field situated to its north.**
- 2. Allotments, Greenhill, Otham.**
- 3. Village Green, Otham Street, Otham.**
- 4. Cricket Ground (Rumwood Cricket Club), Otham Hole.**
- 5. Football Pitches (Bearsted Football Club), south of Honey Lane, Otham Hole.**

The Local Green Spaces are shown on Map GS2 on page 19, and on detailed maps at Appendix 1 to this Plan.

GS3: The trees that lie within the site of Bearsted Football Club, which is a designated Local Green Space, will be maintained and preserved as a wildlife habitat and to protect the amenity of neighbouring residents.

GS4: Ancient woodlands, veteran trees and trees of significant amenity value will be protected from development. A zone of 15m surrounding each area of ancient woodland will be retained as open space and must remain undeveloped. No damaging activity will be undertaken in this zone other than farming. The historic parkland of



The protected veteran oak tree in the centre of The Glebe field.

Gore Court should receive the same consideration as other forms of ancient woodland.

GS5: Proposals from land owners to set aside land for new, native woodland to assist with carbon reduction will be supported.

The description of, and justification for the Green Spaces is given in Appendix 1.



Bearsted Football Club

6. PROTECTING THE COUNTRYSIDE

6.1 Context

As noted in chapter 4: Heritage, conservation and landscape protection, Otham is an important historical and rural asset on the edge of Maidstone, representing the transition from an urban to a rural environment. However, the housing developments allocated within the Maidstone Borough Local Plan 2017 have occupied or will occupy much of the green space around and within Otham, threatening those characteristics. The Maidstone Borough Local Plan recognises the risk from development of important assets of this nature and addresses it within Policy SS1 Maidstone Borough Spatial Strategy:

'In other locations, protection will be given to the rural character of the borough avoiding coalescence between settlements, including Maidstone and surrounding villages, and Maidstone and the Medway Gap/Medway Towns conurbation.'

Furthermore, the Maidstone Borough Council Otham Conservation Area Assessment of 27 February 2009 places great weight on the importance of the surrounding green and agricultural spaces to the character and integrity of the Conservation Area. This in the context of both maintaining and enhancing its rural character and also preserving the views from and within it:

'Increasing density significantly within the Conservation Area or in areas which provide its characteristic views is to be strongly discouraged whenever possible. This is supported by the Maidstone Borough-Wide Local Plan regarding development in the countryside, in which Otham is not identified as a settlement in which development would be encouraged.'

However, the developments to the south and west of the village have significantly reduced the green space around it and have already impacted that rural character so prized within the Conservation Area Assessment. This is also at the root of many of the comments made by local

residents and by those surveyed whilst using some of the allocated Local Green Spaces about the need to control any further development very carefully.

6.2 Local Evidence

100% of residents believe it is important to maintain and protect our existing green spaces. (2018)

67% of residents believe that farming in Otham is important as it defines the rural character. (2015)

68% of residents believe no further housing is needed in Otham. (2015)

6.3 Aims

To ensure that further developments not already identified in the Maidstone Local Plan do not result in the coalescence of the village of Otham with the Maidstone urban areas of Downswood, Bearsted, Senacre and Parkwood or the villages of Langley and Leeds.

6.4 Policies

Policy PC1

Development proposals within the countryside in the Plan area which would lead to significant adverse impacts upon the rural character and amenity of the area will not be supported. Proposals will be assessed to ensure that the character and integrity of the Otham Conservation Area, including views both from and within it, are safeguarded. Proposals will also be assessed to ensure that land and sites, including heritage and environmental assets, which are protected by other policy designations in this Plan and in the adopted Maidstone Borough Local Plan are appropriately safeguarded from the potential impacts arising from new development.



7. PROMOTING ACTIVE AND SUSTAINABLE TRAVEL

7.1 Context

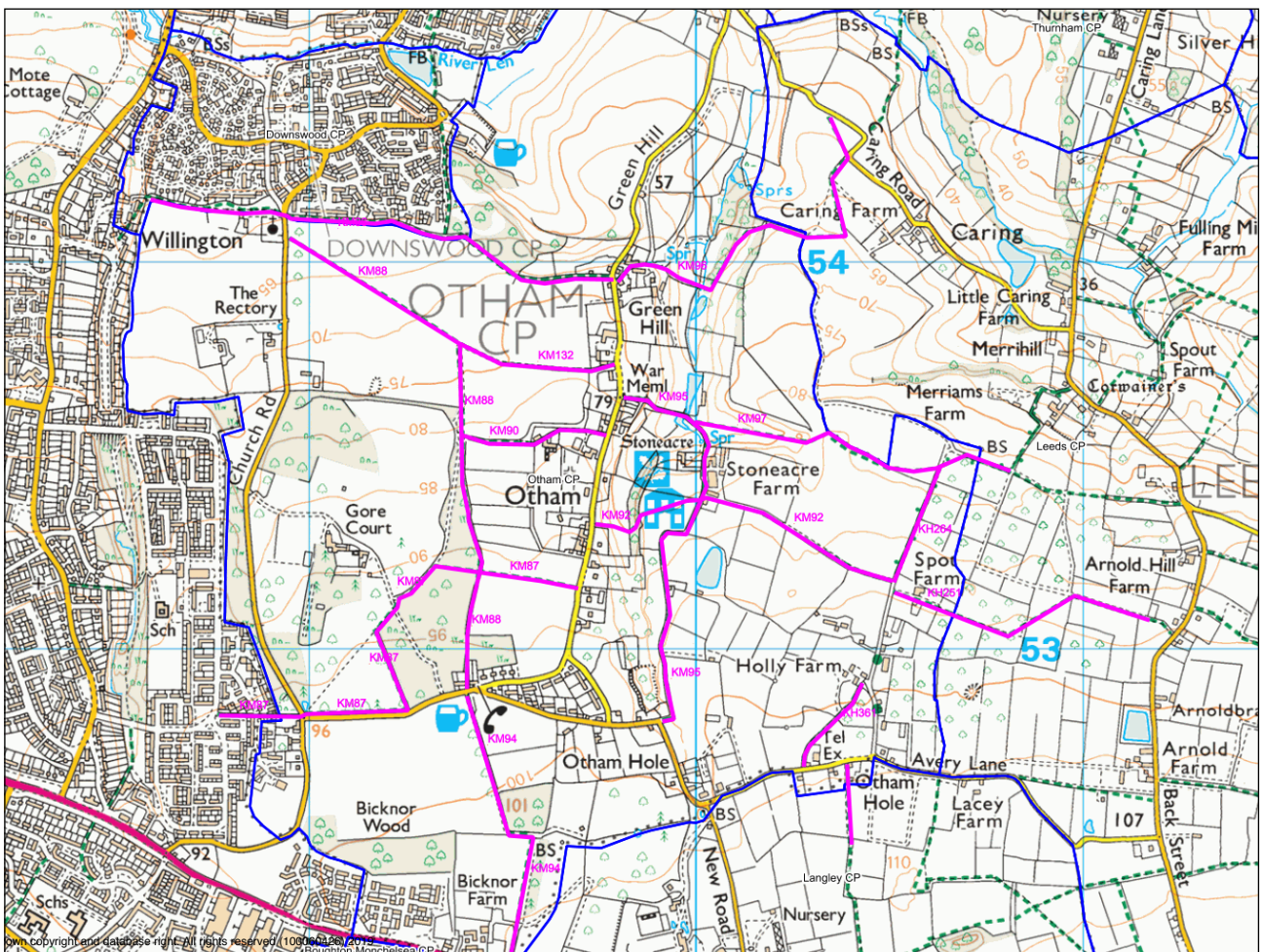
Otham Parish benefits from a network of Public Rights of Way (PROW) in the form of public footpaths and bridleways that serve multiple purposes. PROW that run through the parish include KM 86, 87, 88, 92, 94, 95 (Bridle way), 96, 97, 132. In addition, one end of KM80 and KB37 are at the parish boundary. Heritage Walks have been written that provide the opportunity to understand and protect the historical and geographical context of Otham and the importance of the parish, whilst using the network of PROW. The definitive map and statement are held at Invicta House, County Hall, Maidstone.

The footpaths and bridleways provide the opportunity for local residents and visitors to enjoy the countryside and wildlife and exercise themselves, their dogs and their horses. They also provide links between different communities, to

transport networks, to retail outlets and community facilities such that access to these can be obtained without generating road traffic. KM94 that runs outside the western boundary of the football grounds (Green Space GS4) represents an increasingly important link between the housing developments within the village and the retail operations and school across the Sutton Road

All of the above is entirely consistent with The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) Paragraph 91 which states: *'planning policies and decisions should aim to achieve healthy, inclusive and safe places which enable and support healthy lifestyles, especially where this would address identified local health and well-being needs - for example through the provision of safe and accessible green infrastructure, sports facilities, local shops, access to healthier food, allotments and layouts that encourage walking and cycling.'*

ST1: Public rights of way



It is also entirely consistent with Kent County Council's Rights of Way Improvement Plan adopted on 15 December 2018 and the vision of which is:

'To provide a high quality, well-maintained Public Rights of Way network, that is well used and enjoyed. The use of the network will support the Kent economy, encourage active lifestyles and sustainable travel choices that support health and wellbeing, and contribute to making Kent a great place to live, work and visit.'

In the survey of residents of Otham in 2015 48% of residents indicated they used the paths and bridleways 11 or more times per month with 21% using them more than 20 times.

A number of the roads around Otham have become increasingly busy associated with the increased number of houses in South Maidstone and their use by commuters avoiding the congested links between the Sutton Road and the M20. Since these roads are narrow and do not have pavements, the footpaths provide a much safer option for pedestrians.

In The Maidstone Borough Local Plan, the Borough Council have expressed a desire to bring about a modal shift in transport. This is defined as replacing a saturated means of transport with another to make the first less congested. In that context private car use is regarded as the saturated means and the replacement would be to bus, cycle or foot.

It is possible to get into Maidstone town centre using cycle ways from the northern edge of Otham parish but there are no recognised safe cycle routes that can connect the main residential areas to these cycle ways.

As at the beginning of 2019 none of the new developments wholly or partially within Otham Parish that have been completed have included areas specifically for bus routes and bus stops hence most of the new residents who wish to use buses need to walk significant distances to find a bus stop.

7.2 Local Evidence

80% of residents walk through the village. (2015)

21% of residents walk through the village with children. (2015)

30% of residents cycle through the village. (2015)

87% of residents use public footpaths and bridleways at least once a month. (2015)

48% of residents use public footpaths more than 10 times per month. (2015)

48% of residents have used the Len Valley walk. (2015)

78% of residents support the construction of wheelchair-friendly footpaths. (2018)

7.3 Aims

- To ensure the availability of a high quality, appropriately maintained network of paths, bridleways and cycle ways that is well used, provides opportunities for exercise, leisure and open-air recreation and serves to reduce the amount of road traffic via links:
 - between housing developments and the public transport network, to encourage the wider use of sustainable transport in support of sustainable development.
 - between housing developments.
 - between housing developments and local retail operations that allow residents to walk or cycle to these rather than drive to them.
 - between developments and local amenities.



View across the village green

- To ensure new developments provide easy and convenient access to bus services.
- To develop and maintain connections with Public Rights of Way (PROW) external to the parish to encourage residents of other parts of Maidstone Borough to enjoy the health benefits of being in the countryside, to support Otham's vision to be a green oasis for Maidstone and to provide links between green spaces both within and outside Otham Parish.
- To develop and maintain cycle routes across the parish that connect with those into Maidstone town Centre.

7.4 Policies

ST1: Improvements to the quality, maintenance and accessibility for all users, including those with wheelchairs and pushchairs, of the existing Public Rights of Way in the Parish will be sought where they provide commuting routes or access to local schools, retail and medical facilities or to bus stops. In association with the Borough and County Councils, the Parish Council will look to develop a Parish-wide cycle and footway strategy and to provide new, safer routes between residential areas and improved connectivity to local facilities.

ST2: All developments should include proposals which enhance the attractiveness of walking and cycling, carefully considering potential desire lines of new residents for leisure purposes as well as to access local services and bus routes.

ST3: Subject to other considerations within the plan, development adjacent to public footpaths, which are shown on Map ST1, should not adversely affect their amenity as a leisure facility, cause undue harm to the views of the North Downs or have an adverse impact on the Heritage Trails identified on Maps 1 and 2 in Appendix 3.

8. MANAGING THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

8.1 Context

As noted in Chapter 2 'About Otham Parish' implementation of the Maidstone Borough Local Plan adopted in October 2017 will add approximately 1000 new dwellings to a parish which previously contained under 200. This represents a massive 500% increase over approximately 10 years which threatens its significant heritage and rural nature.



Church Road

This weight of new development continues to prompt local residents to express concerns about the ability of the local road network to cope with the anticipated additional traffic associated with these developments and the resulting pressures on other local services.

The Parish Council conducted a public consultation in February and March 2018 to secure views from local residents regarding the principal objectives of the Otham Neighbourhood Plan. 81% of respondents indicated they wanted no further major housing development beyond that already identified.

Paragraph 4.1 of the 2016 MBC Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy states that *'Maidstone's towns and villages are shaped and made distinctive by the local landscape. The overall settlement pattern across the borough's countryside is characterised by a large number of small villages surrounding a handful of larger, more substantial settlements. It is*

important these settlements retain their individual identities, as there can be a delicate balance between settlement proximity and separation.' The people of Otham overwhelmingly wish for Otham to remain a small village, retaining its identity as a rural village separate from the larger settlements of urban Maidstone, Bearsted, Downswood and the villages of Langley and Leeds.

Otham is a dark village, with only 4 street lights in White Horse Lane. In the 2015 village survey, 81% of residents were satisfied with dark lanes and stated that further lighting is not required, commenting that, "Part of the pleasure of living in a rural community is the lack of light pollution" and, "lighting is not needed as it's intrusive to wildlife and destroys the rural atmosphere."

Paragraph 4.85 of Maidstone Borough Council's 2016 Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy states that, *'Careful consideration is required through the planning process to ensure that increased light pollution from urban expansion does not impact on the biodiversity of local green and blue infrastructure. Adverse effects can potentially include causing migratory birds to collide with lit buildings, false dawns which disrupt bird behaviour, moth deaths, and the disruption of tree and plant biological mechanisms that are controlled by day length.'*

Paragraph 125 of the NPPF states that *'Design policies should be developed with local communities so they reflect local aspirations, and are grounded in an understanding and evaluation of each area's defining characteristics.'* The people of Otham value their dark lanes and lack of light pollution. The large housing developments H1(6), H1(7), H1(8) and H1(9) will all include lighting schemes in line with Maidstone Local Plan Policy DM8, but against the proven wishes of local people.

8.2 Local Evidence

81% of residents believe no further housing is needed in Otham. (2018)

93% of residents feel that it is important that building style be included in the ONP. (2018)

59% of residents feel that the current level of street lighting i.e. dark lanes is adequate. (2015)

8.3 Aims

In order both to protect and preserve the ancient core of Otham village and the wider parish and to meet the parish's aspiration of remaining a rural village forming part of a 'Green Corridor' that stretches eastwards from urban Maidstone, the Otham Neighbourhood Plan encourages and defines a sensitive and selective approach to any future development. In practice this will mean small-scale infill development on what may be described as 'Windfall Sites', or they might for example comprise previously developed sites that have become available.

In keeping with the vision and aims of this plan which take account of the overwhelming view expressed by parish residents in the planning survey, March 2018, any proposal for further large scale developments in Otham parish will be resisted in order to retain its rural and historic character and to prevent coalescence of settlements.



The Coppice

In line with the central theme of the NPPF, any new development will be sustainable by retaining and supporting our agricultural industry, supporting health and wellbeing and protecting and enhancing the natural environment by supporting biodiversity, minimising pollution and mitigating and adapting to climate change.

8.4 Policies

BE1: Development Proposals

Development will be supported subject to the following criteria:

- **It does not displace an active use such as agricultural industry, the storage of agricultural machinery, employment, including agricultural employment, leisure or community facilities.**
- **Development is located on sites that encourage easy access to facilities through walking, cycling and public transport to promote health and wellbeing. Within larger developments, the design promotes walking within the site to discourage reliance on vehicle use for short journeys.**
- **It does not result in significant harm to the surrounding landscape or the setting of heritage assets most especially any listed building or the Conservation Area and its setting unless public benefit outweighs harm to the significance of heritage assets.**
- **Any existing hedgerows are retained and strengthened. Damaged or removed hedgerows are replaced with plants of such a size and species and in such positions to mitigate the loss or damage. Existing roadside hedges are reinforced with appropriate species. Openings and boundary treatments reflect local landscape character.**
- **Where required, the development takes account of the requirements contained in the flood risk and water management strategies published by the Environment Agency.**



Bicknor Wood Development

BE2: Building Design

Design proposals should:

- Where practical, include the use of locally sourced materials to reflect the area's character.
- Provide good quality internal and external environments for their users, promoting health and wellbeing. This includes the building itself through high construction standards, ventilation and appropriate measures to prevent overheating.
- Demonstrate careful planning of aspect and orientation to allow for solar gain for heating, natural lighting and shading.
- Ensure that buildings relate positively to the private, shared and public spaces around them, contributing to social interaction and inclusion.
- Embrace new technologies so that new buildings have a long lifespan. This could include low carbon heating and energy efficiency measures, high construction standards, smart technologies and modern methods of construction.

BE3: Encouraging Sustainable Development

Development proposals should:

- Demonstrate, where practical, that buildings are designed to minimise the amount of energy they need and the amount of waste they produce, including the management of grey water and measures to reuse heat and water.
- Where practical and viable, incorporate the following sustainable measures in new buildings:
 - Easy recycling facilities within the home and on the development
 - Smart control systems that can be controlled remotely and promote energy efficiency
 - Water efficient devices built in as standard
 - Water storage in gardens
 - Grey water recycling
 - Space for composting and allotments in communities
 - EV charging points
 - Solar PV
 - Low carbon heating systems



White Horse Lane

- **Provide ecosystem services. This includes:**
 - **SUDS**
 - **Air quality**
 - **Carbon sequestration**
 - **Biodiversity improvement networks and corridors.**
 - **Green planting**

BE4: Lighting

Lighting associated with new housing developments, recreation and leisure or road safety and traffic calming, if demonstrated to be essential, should:

- **Minimise light pollution**
- **Minimise energy usage**
- **Limit harm to local residents**
- **Protect biodiversity**
- **Minimise the visual impact on the rural character of the area**
- **Minimise the visual impact on historic buildings**

Non-essential street lighting will not be supported.

9. COMMUNITY AND LEISURE

9.1 Context

Otham’s Village Hall, originally known as Institute Hall, was built in 1895 as the Men’s Institute, later becoming the Women’s Institute, serving a community of 335 residents (1901 census). Its current use by the local community of 523 residents (2011 census) is limited, due to its small interior dimensions, its location on a narrow country lane with no off road parking and the absence of any outside space. However, a small pre-school operates in the hall, Parish Council meetings are held there and the hall is used as a polling station and by the community during the summer fete and on Remembrance Sunday, so it currently serves the needs of the residents of the 204 homes in Otham.

However, housing allocations in the adopted Maidstone Local Plan will see the construction of over 1000 new homes in Otham over the next few years. This 500% increase in the population of the village means that the social and leisure needs of the community cannot be met by the existing Village Hall.



Village Hall

In a large scale village questionnaire undertaken in 2015, 47% of responders said that the existing village hall is vital or important and an equal number felt it was nice to have. However, many responses mentioned a new community centre with parking, incorporating a farm shop, a tea room or bar as being a desirable additional amenity and expressed a desire for somewhere in the village for meetings, gatherings and fitness clubs. In a further community Neighbourhood Questionnaire in 2018, 56% of responses favoured the construction of a new community centre.



Otham Village Fete



Otham annual litter pick

9.2 Local Evidence

94% of residents believe a village hall is vital, important or nice to have. (2015)

73% of residents believe that village-based clubs and societies are vital, important or nice to have. (2015)

56% of residents support the construction of a new village hall. (2018)

9.3 Aims

To create a new, larger, multi-use village hall for the local community that will cater for current and new social groups and activities. It will be flexible enough to support existing social activities and space for new ones. This may include a larger multi-use hall, kitchen, WCs, bar and associated parking. It will cater for new indoor sports activities, private hire, community events, social clubs and village meetings, creating a new social hub of the enlarged village which the present village hall, with its lack of size, outside facilities and parking constraints,

does not allow. The design and size will respect its surroundings and be future proofed with close regard for the increasing population of the village.

A survey of community need for a new village hall is underway to determine the necessity of a new hall and to find a suitable location in the parish. Some financial contributions have already been allocated via Section 106 agreements. The project is supported by both the Parish Council and the Village Hall Committee.

9.4 Policies

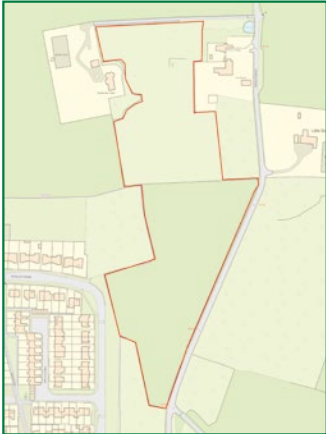
CL1: The development of a new village hall in the Plan area will be supported, where proposals meet all of the following criteria:

- 1. The site provides good accessibility to the whole of the village of Otham, particularly by means of convenient walking and cycling routes, with the agreement and support of the Local Highway Authority.**
 - 2. The impact of the proposed development upon surrounding amenities can be satisfactorily mitigated through the siting and design of the building, access arrangements, car parking and landscaping.**
 - 3. The design of the building and materials should reflect the local vernacular and seek to enhance the village character, particularly in respect of views to/from the countryside and the Conservation Area.**
-

APPENDIX 1 DESCRIPTION OF AND JUSTIFICATION FOR LOCAL GREEN SPACES

1 The grassland between Woolley Road and Church Road and the adjoining Glebe field (3.9 Ha)

OS Grid Ref. TQ78846 53552 and TQ78852 53751



The green space that sits between Woolley Road in Senacre, Shepway and Church Road in Otham covers an area of 3.9 hectares and is made up of two adjacent fields; The Glebe, at the northern end, owned by The Canterbury

Diocesan Board of Finance Ltd, which covers 1.7 hectares, and a field owned by Gore Court (2008) Ltd, which covers 2.2 hectares at the southern end of the site. There is no physical boundary between the two sites. The site is directly adjacent to existing and proposed large urban communities, namely Senacre to the west and the proposed 440 homes to be built at site H1(8) to the north and west.



Southern Field

It is in close proximity to the existing community of Downswood, 300m to the north and the new developments H1(5), H1(6), H1(7) and H1(9) which are between 600m and 1300m to the south.

The southern field is bordered to the south and west by two parcels of ancient woodland, and can be directly accessed from Woolley Road and the residents of Senacre, part of the Shepway South Ward of urban Maidstone. Church Road, opposite Gore Court, a 15th century Grade II* listed manor house, forms the eastern boundary. A farm gate provides access onto Church Road. This field is an occasionally mowed, informal, grassed meadow which contains a large, veteran beech tree. It is covered by well worn, grassy paths which follow a circular route around the field



Sapling Oaks in the Glebe

GF1: Existing access points into The Glebe and existing paths



APPENDIX 1

and also cross into the lower lying, northern part of the site, known as The Glebe.

The Glebe field, adjacent to Otham's 15th century, Grade II listed Rectory, is dominated by a large, veteran oak tree at its centre, which is at least 600 years old and is covered by a Tree Preservation Order. Saplings scatter the site and a copse of trees grow on the foundations of stables that once stood here. This untended, wildflower meadowland also has worn, grassy paths which stretch from the northern boundary to the southern field mentioned above.

Site surveys revealed that the whole site has been used on a daily basis by residents of Senacre, Otham, Downswood and Maidstone for over 45 years for dog walking, walking to work, riding horses and for leisure. Their statements (Appendix 2) reveal that they highly value the fields as a safe, natural, open space to walk their dogs which is close to their homes yet feels part of the countryside due to the density of trees, the sense of space, its tranquillity and the abundance of rich wildlife and wild flowers and view it as an essential community asset.

The site's biodiversity value is highlighted in Maidstone's 2013 Landscape Character Assessment of Gore Court, which forms the eastern border of the site, which noted that 'the grassland areas and field boundaries may have the potential to support reptile species including slow worm and viviparous lizard. Broad-leaved and ancient woodland blocks may provide suitable habitat for protected mammals such as, badgers, dormice, bats and nesting birds. Woodland edge habitats may also support notable invertebrates as well as reptiles.'

2 The Allotments (0.8 Ha) OS Grid Ref. TQ79708 53919



The allotments are situated at Greenhill in Otham. They are approached from Otham Street at Greenhill by a single track, which is about 100 feet in length. Hedgerows and fencing border the allotments.

Thomas Hendley originally gave the

allotment field in Otham within a charitable trust – The Hendley Charity – in 1590.

The field was to be rented out and the income raised was to be used for the relief of poverty in Otham village.

The monies raised were mainly used to buy coal for poor people in the winter.

Some years back the trustees applied to extend the area covered to Maidstone and surrounding districts, as there was not the same need to give to the poor of Otham.

Since then the funds have been donated mainly to a charity called Homeless Care.

The field has always been rented as allotments or 'kitchen Gardens' as far as records go back. There is a record of a Trustee meeting held in 1876 when two tenants were asked to leave. Trustee meetings continue to be held on an



Allotments

annual basis. A representative from the Parish Council attends the annual meetings.

Currently about twenty-five people grow produce on the allotments. Thus the allotments are well used and maintained.

There is no water supply to the allotments, which rely on gathered rainwater.

Bonfires are strictly controlled and only allowed in November.

Residents from Otham and the surrounding area use the allotments. Currently there are:

3 residents from Otham

14 residents from Senacre

1 resident from Parkwood

4 residents from Madginford

1 resident from Downswood

2 residents from Maidstone

Maidstone Borough Council's analysis of publicly accessible green space against open space standards by ward 2014 confirms that Parkwood Ward (population 7040) and Shepway South Ward (population 5860) have no allotments. Shepway North Ward (population 9030) has insufficient allotment space (deficiency/ha-1.48).

The Otham Parish Council Neighbourhood Plan Questionnaire Summary revealed that 36% of residents said allotments were 'nice to have', 23% said 'important' and 13% 'vital'. (See Consultation Statement.)

The allotments are an important and much appreciated amenity in Otham, used by residents from surrounding areas. Furthermore the charitable contribution made by the allotments to the homeless in Maidstone contributes to the importance of the allotments and the need to preserve the allotments as a Local Open Green Space.

3 The Village Green OS Grid Ref. TQ 79845 53721



The Green is situated in Otham Street at the junction with Stoneacre Lane, 1.5km south of the Ashford Road (A20). In size it is c.80m east to west and 160m north to south, an area of 1.28 hectares. It is registered and

protected under the Commons Registration Act of 1965 and lies within the Otham conservation area. The land was given to the village in 1919 by Alfred Johnson of Gore Court and James Rayner Betts of Greenhill as a war memorial to be retained in perpetuity.

The Green is bounded to the west by Otham Street and to the south by Stoneacre Lane. The northern boundary is a wire fence and line of small trees, mainly blackthorn, while to the east a similar fence allows the important views to the east to be seen. Access to the Green is from anywhere on the western and southern boundaries.

The Green consists of a flat grassy area which is regularly maintained. There are clumps of deciduous trees in the southeast and northwest corners which were planted in 1973



The Village Green

and 1974 in order to enhance the appearance and to frame the views from the Green to the North Downs. In the southwest corner is the most important feature, the War Memorial commemorating those who gave their lives in the First and Second World Wars; adjoining this is a small children's playground.

The Green is used regularly as a recreation area, a place to walk, to exercise dogs or just to kick a ball for which purpose there is a single goal post. It is important to the playschool who lease the Village Institute Hall 100m south of the Green. However, the most important event which takes place is the annual village fete which draws in not only the present villagers but also those who have moved to the surrounding areas on the edge of Maidstone, allowing a grand reunion. Not least, it is a place to sit, to admire the views and to relax.

In the the Otham Conservation Area Appraisal approved by the Maidstone Borough Council in 2009, the Green is referred to as an 'important civic area'. The Open Spaces Quality Audit commissioned by MBC, produced by Val Hyland, Irene Seijo and Sharon Bayne in April 2015, awarded the Green 71% (good) for accessibility and 80% (good) for quality. A survey by Otham Parish Council in 2015 found that 97% of responders thought that the Green and play area were considered to be an important part of village life, while a further survey in 2018, concluded that 95% of those replying thought that it was important to protect existing green spaces and 86% thought it was important to maintain existing views.



Cricket pitch

4 Rumwood Cricket Club (1.5 Ha)
OS Grid Ref. TQ79688 52582



The Rumwood Cricket Club (RCC) is situated along the southerly border of the Parish with Rumwood Court and Bicknor Farm and a short distance from the A274 'Sutton Road'. The ground which measures approximately 130

metres by 120 metres is framed by Belts Wood and Bearsted Football club to its western side and fields to the east and north.

The club has been in continuous existence for approximately 120 years providing the local community with an important sporting and social amenity. The original RCC was founded and run by the owners of Rumwood Court for the benefit of its staff. Local villagers were subsequently invited to play alongside and against Rumwood staff.

Today the club is held in Trust as a 'Community and Sports Club' with four Trustees overseeing the running and management of the club. The Groundsman annually prepares and keeps two wickets which are in active use from the third week in April to the middle of September. From the middle of September to middle of April annually the outfield areas are made available to two football teams of 8-9 year olds from the neighbouring Bearsted FC.

RCC represents an important 'all year round' social asset not only to residents of Otham but to the wider communities of Maidstone, Loose and Bearsted. Loose Cricket Club has been using the ground for all 11 of its home games since it lost use of its 'King Edward VII' ground. In addition, RCC plays its 8 home games at the ground.

Two teams involving some some 45-50 boys and girls aged between 8 and 9 from Bearsted FC make use of the outfield areas for training and local games for some 7 months of the year with approximately 40 adults in attendance.

The ground is clearly in high social demand representing a most significant amenity of value to local residents as well as visitors from Maidstone, Loose and Bearsted. It is also a most important 'Local Open Space' with wonderful views towards the Downs to the North.

Protecting this area for recreational purposes is consistent with NPPF paragraph 100 and also with Policy DM19 'Publicly accessible open space and recreation' within the Maidstone Borough Local Plan.

5 The Football Grounds (4 Ha) OS Grid Ref. TQ79564 52733



The Bearsted Football Club currently occupies this area which is accessed from White Horse Lane but sits to the south of Honey Lane, covering 4 hectares. A north-south track runs along its western boundary allowing for the

parking of 150 vehicles on site and pedestrians are able to follow this track to reach Sutton Road. Belts Wood sits at the southern end of the site. The two fields that directly border the west and south of the site have been allocated for housing in the Maidstone Local Plan, sites H1(7) and H1(9), totalling 585 new dwellings. The site borders Rumwood Cricket ground to the south east.

The land is leased to Bearsted Football Club who are a non-professional football club established in 1895. They have played in Otham since 1998 and have recently secured a new 20-year lease. The site has 2 stands with seating, flood lights, hard standing and changing rooms.

The club has 20 teams and the players are drawn from the local community and range from under 5's to adults who play in the Kent League. The average attendance at league matches is 60 supporters.

Having Local Green Space status will allow Bearsted Football Club to remain a part of Otham, supporting physical activity for the community of Otham and surrounding areas and also providing an important habitat for wildlife, consistent with NPPF paragraph 100 and Local Plan Policy DM19.



Bearsted Football Club

APPENDIX 2

WALKER SURVEY

Survey of Church Road/Woolley Road/Glebe

Date	How often do you use this space?	For how long have you used this space?	Why do you use this space and what is its value to you? What makes it special?	Which other spaces do you use in Otham? Why?	Postcode
1100hrs 05/05/18	2 times per day, 7 days per week	7 years	45 minute dog walking route - without it we should be lost. It's safe	None - live in Senacre so this is the nearest	ME15 8SS
0715hrs 02/06/18	(2 people) Daily	30+ years	Convenient, adders, slow worms, kestrels, meeting place	Route: Alley, Whitehorse Lane, field by horses, concrete paths, Lens Cottage and Madam Taylor's, Green, big field plus Glebe in the past	ME15 8XD
0730hrs 02/06/18	Daily	6 years	Wildlife, great open space	n/a	ME15 8QD
0730hrs 02/06/18	Daily	45 years	Open space, wildlife, pheasants, kestrels, flora and fauna	Otham Route	ME15 8QD
0755hrs 02/06/18	Daily	45 years (6 with dog)	Nice for dog walk, lovely open space	n/a	ME15 8QA
0830hrs 02/06/18	Every two weeks	8 years	Safe pedestrian route from Gore Court Road to Downswood/Bearsted	Otham footpaths and green spaces	ME15 8RE
1715hrs 02/06/18	Daily	8 years	Dog off lead, great walks even in winter, wildlife	The Glebe in winter - less overgrown	ME15 8HL
1720hrs 02/06/18	Twice daily (am and pm)	18 months	Best short cut ever, peaceful, safe, off-road walk to work and back. (Downswood to Parkwood)	Field opposite church	ME15 8XN
1730hrs 02/06/18	Twice daily (am and pm)	2 years	Dog walking here is my therapy - as a carer for ill father, couldn't cope without it	The Glebe + opposite the church	ME15 8SS
16 June 2018	Often	9 years	Walks	-	ME15 8UP
	Often	-	Dog walks	-	ME15 8LL
	Often	22+ years	Walks	-	ME15 8RL
	Often	24+ years	Walks	-	TN29 9HL
	Often	48 years	Walks	-	ME15 8UN
	Often	38 years	Walks	Many	ME15 8RX
	3 days/week	25 years	Dog walking	All	ME15 8RQ
	Often	25+ years	Dog walking	All	ME15 8RQ
	Frequently	20+ years	Walking	All of them	ME15 8RX
	Frequently	22 years	Walking	All of them	ME17 3NE
	Lots	30+ years	Exercise, relaxation, walking	All	ME15 8RR
	Regular	43 years	Dog walking	All	ME15 8HD
	Every week day	3 years	Take my son to school at Langley Park	All	ME15 8RG
	Regular	3 years	Dog walking	All	ME15 8RR
	Regular	2 years	Dog walking	All	ME15 8RR
	Regularly	6 months	walking	Walking along the River Len/using footpaths to reach Leeds Village	ME15 8TN

APPENDIX 3 HERITAGE TRAILS

HERITAGE TRAIL 1

This is a circular walk from the Church east to the Green and then leading south past Stoneacre to Honey Lane and returning via Otham Street and East Wood to the Church.

Heritage links

The walk links St Nicholas Church to Madam Taylor’s (the manor house) which lies on the western edge of the Green. This land was donated by the Mr Alfred Johnson of Gore Court and Mr James Rayner Betts of Greenhill to commemorate those who died in the service of their country during the First World War. From the Green with its group of listed buildings, the village hall and the former school, the trail continues past Stoneacre, a National Trust property, south along Rooks Lane which forms the eastern side of the medieval ragstone quarry, to Honey Lane where a further cluster of listed buildings is to be found. These are all situated near the area known as Otham Hole, an early sink hole, and include Buglehorn Cottages, Thatched Cottage and Whitehorse Cottage, formerly an inn. The trail continues west to Three Tees a

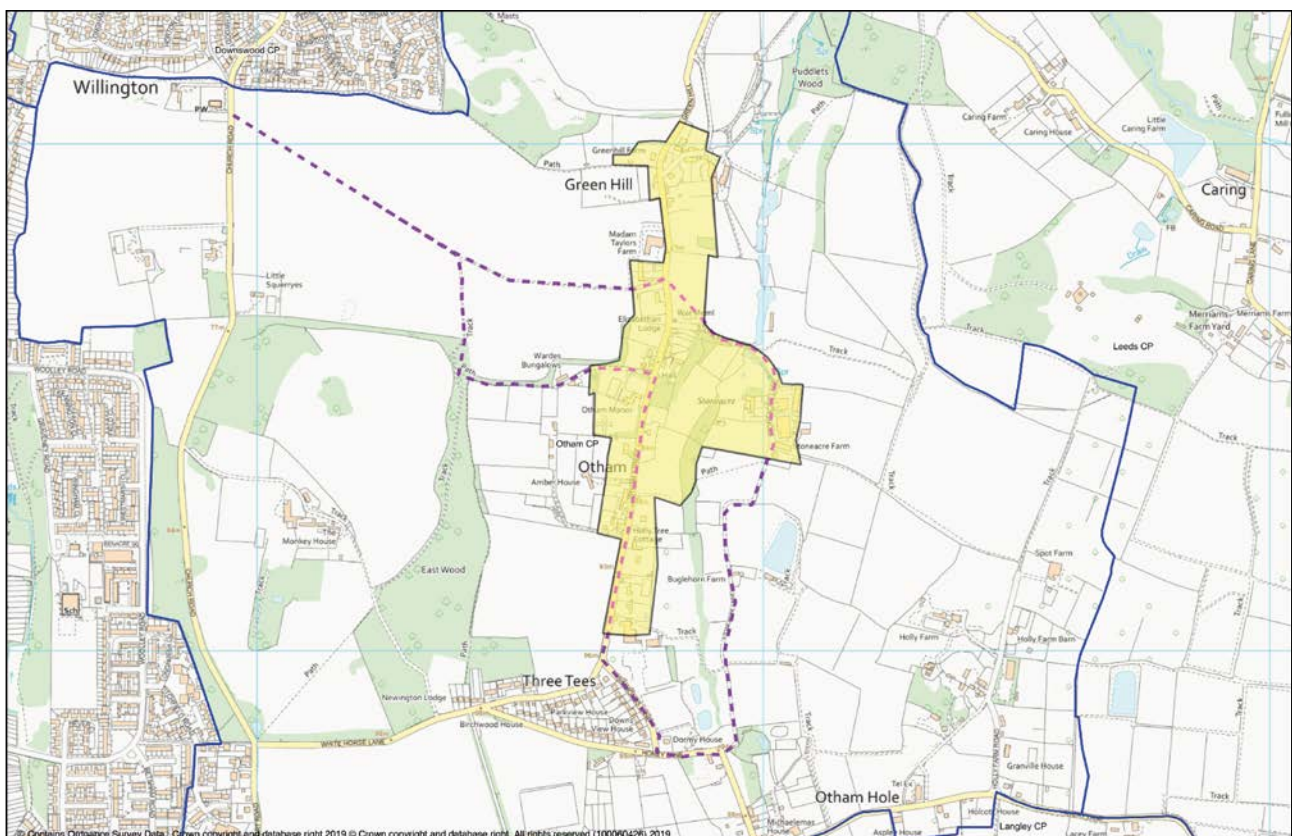
triangle of mid-twentieth homes, mainly bungalow, and from there to Otham Street. This forms the main north to south road through the village, linking Three Tees to the Green. This part of the trail passes Forge Cottage, Synyards (a wealden hall house) and Swallows (another forge in earlier times). Leading west to East Wood, the walk enters ancient woodland with some fine sweet chestnuts and picks up a roadway leading north to rejoin the walk back to the Church. The roadway was constructed during the Second World War by the army to serve a camp whose building foundations are still apparent.

Views from the trail

There are extensive views of the North Downs during the first part of the walk as well as from the Green where there are views east towards Leeds. Glimpses of the valley which was created by the medieval ragstone quarry are seen during the middle section of the walk with further views of the North Downs towards the final section.

Heritage Trail No. 1 may be extended by turning eastwards at Stoneacre and following the footpath towards Leeds as far as the bridle way leading south to become Holly Farm Road

Heritage Trail 1



and eventually joining Avery Lane. Continuing westwards the walk joins Honey Lane at Otham Hole and the main part of the trail.

The walk from Holly Farm Road to Otham Hole passes several fine listed timber framed houses which include Bishops, another Wealden hall house.

The North Downs are clearly visible between Stoneacre and Holly Farm road.

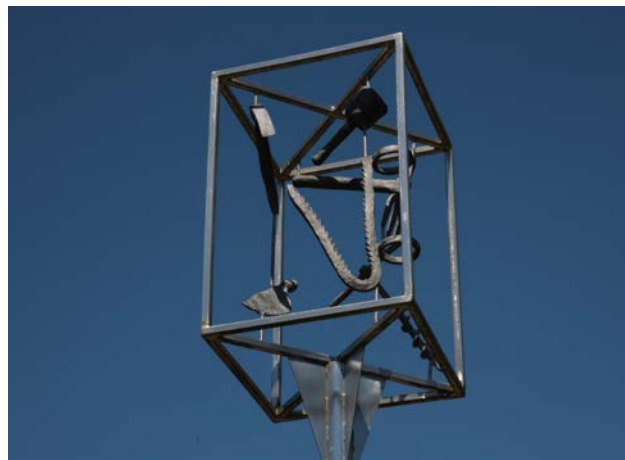
A Circular Walk from St Nicholas Church, Otham – 2.7 miles

1. From Otham Church, take the footpath (KM 88) directly opposite the lychgate.
2. Follow the path across the large field. Note the lovely views of the North Downs to your left and look back over your shoulder at views of the Church. In this field you may see buzzards or hear skylarks in season.



3. Ignore the footpath going off to the right and continue up a slight incline to the gate. Go through and walk the short distance to the road past pretty houses on the left, formerly farm buildings.
4. Cross the road on to the Green. Walk diagonally south east (right) across the Green. If you have time, walk up to the war memorial and the unusual village sign and look again at the view across the Green to the North Downs.

5. The village sign was erected for the centenary of the parish council. The plaque reads 'Otham Parish Council 1894-1994 the tools that shaped our village'. The tools include a mallet, a mattock, a hop-dog, an auger, an adze and a thatcher's knife.



6. Join the metalled road signposted to Stoneacre and walk down the short steep hill, looking across the valley and sheep field.
7. At the bottom, pause to look at the old fishponds on the left and right, home to much wildlife. You can take the small bridge if the stream is flowing over the road.





- 8.** Walk up the short steep hill and look at Stoneacre on the right, a 15th Century Yeoman's Hall House. This small but beautiful National Trust property is open to the public from March to September on Saturdays and Bank Holidays from 11-5.30pm. Recently, a fabulous new tearoom has been opened which is also open on other days. Check availability at eventsatstoneacre@gmail.com

- 9.** Continue up the hill past farm buildings, a path and a house on the left. Continue as the metalled road gives way to a bridleway. There are usually ponies in the fields on the right.
- 10.** Continue on the bridleway, which bends right and left. Continue straight on and note the soft fruit growing in the fields either side, one of the main industries for Otham and surrounding parishes.
- 11.** Just after a sharp right bend the bridleway joins the road, Honey Lane. Straight ahead is Thatch Hall, which contains elements of its origins as a Hall House. Keep right, passing White Horse Cottage, one of the original inns of the village.
- 12.** Turn right along Simmonds Lane and walk to the T junction with White Horse Lane/Otham Street.
- 13.** Turn right, signposted Otham and Bearsted. Pass Synyards, on the right one of Otham's historical hall houses, built in the 15th Century. A little further on, on the left and easier to see is Belks, built as a farmhouse in late 14th Century or early 15th Century. Continuing down Otham Street, you can glimpse Stoneacre once more across the valley to the right.



14. Just before you reach the Village Hall on the right, there is a turning to the left, which, although currently unmarked, is a footpath (KM90). From the beginning of this path you have a clear view of Otham Hall (formerly Wardes), which is a Grade 1 listed late 14th Century Hall House with 16th Century alterations. It was renovated in 1912 by Sir Louis Mallet, ambassador to Constantinople at the outbreak of the 1st World War.
15. Follow the path through trees along the edge of a field. Another path joins from the left (KM85), keep straight on. You are walking through ancient woodlands with many oaks, chestnuts and other trees.
16. The path joins a wide path coming from the left (not a footpath, but a private track belonging to Gore Court) and your path bears right and widens out. A bend in the path reveals the magnificent, panoramic view of the North Downs and Otham Church to the left. Continue straight down to the junction with the path you walked along at the beginning.
17. Turn left and retrace your steps back to the Church.



18. If you have time, walk around the beautiful Churchyard and look at some the historical gravestones. St Nicholas is 12th-century, Grade I listed building.

What is a Hall House?

A Hall House is a house built from traditional materials reflecting the needs of the area and using local construction materials. The house centres on an open hall and is usually timber framed, with some examples built in stone. The Wealden Hall House is traditional in the south east of England. Typically built for a yeoman, it is most common in Kent, which has one of the highest concentrations of these surviving medieval timber framed buildings in Europe. The large public area had a fireplace in the centre. One end bay at the 'screens end' or 'lower end' of the hall would contain two unheated rooms commonly called the pantry, used for storing food, and the buttery used for storing drink. The rooms in the 'upper end' bay formed the private space. The rooms on the ground floor of the private space, were known as the parlour while the upper floor room was called the solar.

HERITAGE TRAIL 2
A Circular Walk from
Otham Village Green - 3½ miles

This walk focuses on the countryside within Otham and adjacent parishes. It takes in a Site of Special Scientific Interest, demonstrates both traditional and contemporary farming methods and provides outstanding views of the North Downs. It also allows glimpses of Caring Wood, RIBA House of the Year, 2017. The route can be muddy and there are uphill sections.

1. Starting at the war memorial and village sign, walk on the green away from the housing (North View), along the line of the road.

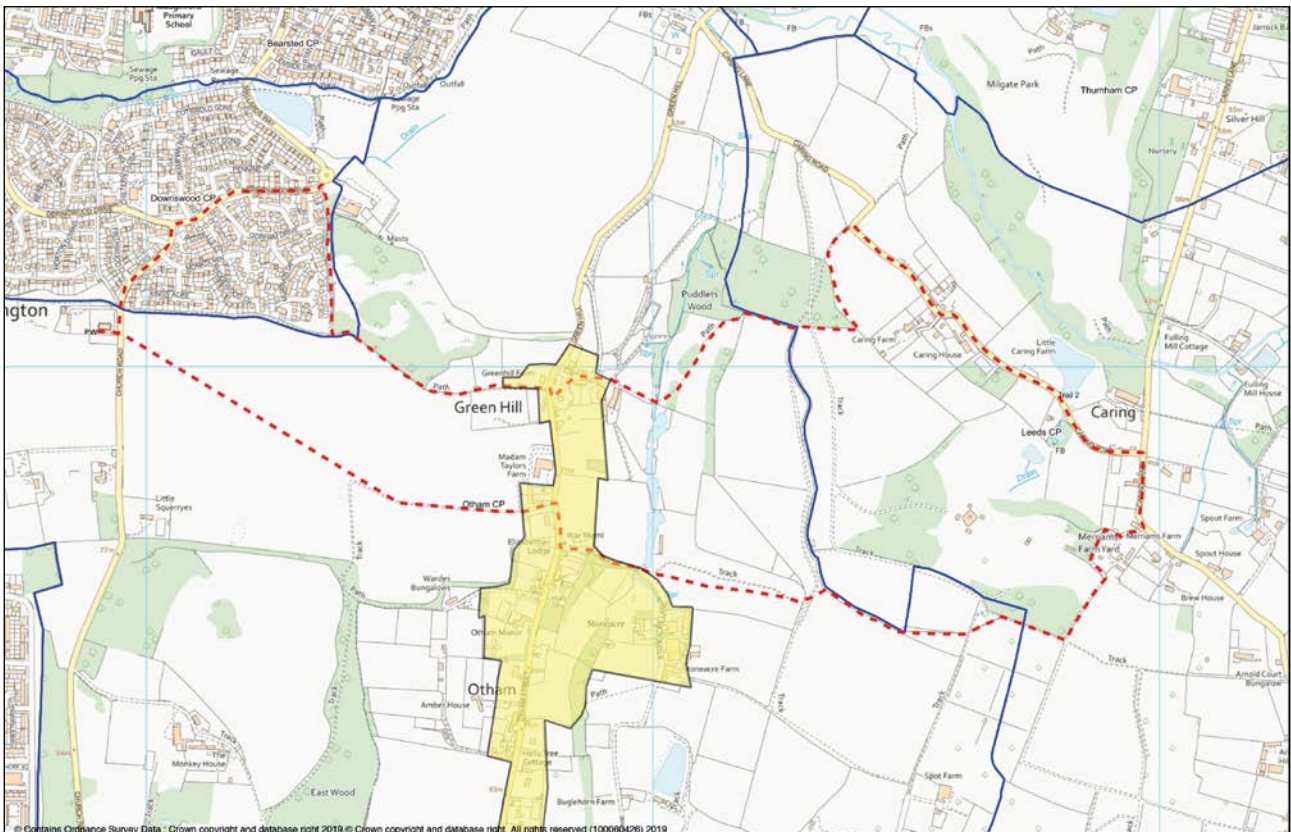


2. Pass 16th Century home, Madame Taylor's, on the left, one of the oldest houses in Otham, and walk as far as the Diamond Jubilee plinth. At this point, turn left to cross the road and take the path directly opposite (KM132), passing the Cart Lodge and Barn which are on your right.



3. Pass around the metal gate and follow the same path across the large field towards Otham Church in the distance. Ignore the path coming in from the left and admire the views of the North Downs to the right.
4. Come out onto Church Road, opposite Otham Church and, going through the lychgate, walk around the churchyard. St Nicholas Church is a 12th Century, Grade 1

Heritage Trail 2



listed building with many interesting memorials. Look through the old gate at the rear of the church to see Grade 2 listed Church House, originally built as cottages in the 16th Century.



5. Return to the road and walk left down the road towards Downswood, joining the footpath when possible. At the T junction at the end of Church Road, turn right onto Deringwood Drive and follow this down to just before the roundabout, where there is a footpath going up steps and through trees on the right. This footpath follows the line of Otham's Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) the face of which can be seen along the path between Downswood and Otham.

What is special about Otham's SSSI?

Downswood was built on the site of a Kentish Ragstone quarry; ragstone is a hard, grey, sandy limestone, used in the construction of many traditional and historical buildings in Kent. Ragstone occurs in a geological formation known as the Hythe Beds of the Lower Greensand, a layer of limestone running from Kent into Surrey, which was laid down in the Cretaceous period, an epoch ending some 65 million years ago. In the Maidstone area it occurs as an east west belt across the borough. The ground was formed of the sandy limestone of the Hythe Beds, but during the Ice Age the land at Otham slipped over the underlying Atherfield Clay. This former face forms a cross-section through a series of tilted, cambered (sloping) blocks, with large gulls or cracks, filled with loess. Loess is sediment formed by the accumulation of wind-blown silt. The site provides the best cross-section through a series of cambers and gulls currently visible in Britain. Also, the loess in the gulls is

noted as containing the fossils of land snails, probably of Wolstonian age, between 352,000 and 130,000 years ago. Loess elsewhere in Britain does not contain fossils and Spot Lane Quarry is one of very few sites available where loess fossils can be studied.

6. Continue up until the path rejoins the field and turn left, on Footpath KM86. Follow the path which keeps Downswood on the left and then passes between trees and field then garden boundary. There are good views of Bearsted at this point.
7. Come out on the road, Greenhill, cross over, following the sign for the Len Valley Walk. Take the track opposite which then curves right, between houses and through a gate marked Footpath and pass The Oast House and Greenhill Farm.



8. Continue straight ahead, ignoring the first track on the left. Turn into the second track on the left and look for a small gate a few yards ahead on the right marked, 'Please keep to the Footpath' and go through it.



9. Head downhill, following the line of the fence. Go over a stile at the bottom, over a small stream, then another stile to emerge in a large field with beautiful, ancient oak and ash trees.

- 10.** The footpath strikes diagonally left and uphill; it is not very obvious to start with. Aim for a metal gate in the top, left hand corner of the field, passing between large oak trees.



- 11.** Pass through the gate, into a field with soft fruit polytunnels, and follow the path, keeping the hedge on the left to the next gate on the left. Go through this gate and turn immediately right.
- 12.** Cross the gravel drive for Caring Wood and continue between tree plantations to another metal gate. Go through and follow the path left, which can be overgrown, as it meanders towards a line of poplar trees. Ignore Footpath FP258 on the left and come out on a road, Caring Road.



- 13.** Turn right, and walk along this very quiet road passing Caring Stud and Jacksons. After a bend, look out for magnificent Caring House on the right, which has the date 1547 above the door.
- 14.** Continue along the road, with glimpses of Caring Wood on the skyline on the right and pass a private fishing lake on the left in the dip.

Caring Wood

Caring Wood is a new, multigenerational family, country home set in 84 acres that won RIBA House of the Year in 2017. Inspired by the traditional oast houses of Kent, Caring Wood uses local building crafts and traditions, including locally sourced handmade peg clay tiles, locally quarried ragstone and coppiced chestnut cladding. The house comprises four towers, with interlinking roofs, echoing other oast houses in the distance. Its brief was to embody the spirit of the English country house and estate in a design which would embrace its context and landscape, while providing a carbon neutral response to climate change. The surrounding grounds have been extensively planted with locally occurring trees and shrubs and there is a hidden solar array near the Lodge.

- 15.** Coming out of the dip, the road joins Caring Lane where you turn right. Walk uphill as far as Rose Cottage, with good views of the North Downs on your left.



- 16.** Turn right up a Restricted Byway, KH264, towards Merriams Farm and Caring Wood Lodge. Follow the path right then around to the left, leaving the gate to Caring Wood Lodge behind. Before the next gate, turn right, taking a partially paved track uphill.
- 17.** At the top of this track, turn right along a bridleway, clearly identified by several stone markers. The bridleway bends left then left again at which point take the footpath on the right that passes through a line of poplar trees, KH359.

18. Follow the straight path to a gap in the hedge. Note the small recently planted cobnut trees on the left, a traditional Kentish crop.



19. Turn right at the gap in the hedge and follow footpath KM97 along the line of polytunnels growing soft fruit. It can be very muddy here due to farm vehicles.

20. At the end of the line of tunnels, turn left and, a few yards on, take the path on the right over the stile. Walk down the middle of this ancient valley, usually home to sheep, to the fishing pond at the bottom. Cross over the stile on the left and come out onto the road.

21. Enjoy overlooking the pond with its abundance of waterfowl and then take the little bridge over the ford to avoid wet feet. On the left is land belonging to Stoneacre, a small National Trust property back up the hill behind you.



22. Walk up the steep hill until you reach the village green on your right.



APPENDIX 4 GORE COURT, OTHAM

The extent of the landscape is shown in this map and the site contains historic features which are detailed below (Kent County Council Monument Full Report, 19.06.2019).

HER Number TQ 75 SE 31 – MKE2150

Site Name Gore Court Otham. House, formerly school, grade II*, C15 origins.

Summary from record TQ 75 SE 231:
Grade II* listed building. Main construction periods 1367 to 1932.

Description from record TQ 75 SE 231:
The following text is from the original listed building designation (1952):

CHURCH ROAD TQ 75 SE OTHAM (East Side)
3/216

Gore Court, grade II* House, formerly school, now house. Late C15 or early C16, with late C16, (possibly C17) and late C18 alterations and additions. Late C14 or early C15 cellar, probably associated with a preceding building.

Gore Court, Otham

HER Number TQ 75 SE 86 – MKE15230

Site Name Gore Court gardens.

Gardens at Gore Court, Otham. Remains of park laid out c1830 including Ha Ha running in front of west front of house and continuing as west edge of belt of trees (now edge of overgrown Victorian pleasure garden). Ha Ha constructed of ragstone and mostly only visible as an earthwork. Runs from TQ 79045332 to TQ 7897 5301 approx. Area to south of house planted as Victorian pleasure garden incorporating existing trees and featuring exotic flowering shrubs. Pond in the centre of this area (at TQ 7904 5310) was fed from reservoir in SW corner of park (at junction of Church Rd and White Horse Lane. Pond issued into channel running along S side of walled garden. Formerly featured rustic bridges. Two substantial walled gardens to S of house, with range of glasshouses (now mostly demolished) against S facing wall, of C19 date. Gardens altered in 1930s inc. construction of private golf course in W side of park (now



removed). Very little remains of the ornamental gardens that were previously so extensive. However, a 300 year old cedar and the largest tulip tree in southern England remain as specimens in front of the Victorian wilderness, to the south of the house. This was once extremely ornamental with flowering shrubs, especially azaleas, and was riddled with water channels, pools and rustic bridges. These features are today impossible to discern. There has been extensive 1987 storm with little repair at the time of the last survey. Extending formally to the south of the house is a double line of large dome-shaped ancient yews. Beyond these yews to the west, is the remains of a ha-ha separating the garden area from the park. To the front of the house is a croquet lawn and to the side is a small, attractive, but fairly plain courtyard garden. The house has had a chequered history, being used as a nursing home, an aeroplane factory and more recently, a school. This is the site of a medieval building. Its ancient parkland is now largely arable. A private golf course is around the periphery of the estate. Lanes marking the boundary are marked by a ditch lined on one side by old hedgerows and on the other by a line of beeches, oaks and elms. The northern

boundary, with a footpath along it, is marked by coppiced hornbeams. There is a large timber-framed house, much altered throughout the centuries. The extensive Victorian gardens were maintained by ten gardeners until the 1930s. There are two large walled kitchen gardens behind the house. Associated with these is a series of glasshouses along the south-facing wall. The original boilers remain below these. Between the house and the walled gardens are stables, laundry and cow sheds surrounding a yard.

HER Number TQ 75 SE 87 - MKE15231

Site Name Gore Court laundry, Otham.

Nineteenth century laundry building for Gore Court situated SE of the main house.

HER Number TQ 75 SE 88 - MKE15232

Site Name Stone quarry pits near Gore Court.

Disused quarry pits beside Church Road, Otham, both in the shaw to the W of the road and in field to E. Probably ragstone quarries related to construction work at nearby Gore Court. Probably post date the construction of the road c1830.

HER Number TQ 75 SE 91 - MKE9234

Site Name Medieval seal-die at Otham.

APPENDIX 5 THE SSSI AT SPOT LANE QUARRY

'The site is located to the east of Maidstone and is centred on the east face of an abandoned quarry. The floor of this quarry has been infilled and developed for housing. The site consists of a narrow 150 metre long strip which runs along a small 2 metre cliff immediately behind a series of gardens. The face shows a series of large blocks of rock which consists of alternate layers of hard limestone and soft sandstone (rag and hassock). These blocks are separated laterally

by deep fissures, known as gulls. These gulls were opened up during the 'Ice Age' by the slow down-slope movement of layers of hard rock (rags and hassock) over softer clay rich rocks. This process is known as cambering.

The gulls at Spot Lane have been infilled by yellow-brown silt, which was deposited by the wind during the 'Ice Age' and is known as loess. The loess at Spot Lane is very unusual in that it contains the remains of snails. In summary, this is one of the very few sites where a good section through cambered rocks still exists and is therefore of particular importance.'



The eastern edge of Downswood showing the site of special scientific interest (SSSI).
(This information and map have been supplied by kind permission of English Nature.)

