

Gillingham Landscapes and Open Spaces Assessment Report

for
North Dorset District Council

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Project Team

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Structure of the Report

This volume provides the text. Plans and illustrations are in a separate, A3 size, volume. In order to focus on the key topics much of the research and survey work relating to the context, individual topics, and subject overviews are presented as appendices. Readers who wish to comprehend fully the scope of the study and the consideration of the features, factors, and influences should, therefore, regard the appendices as integral parts of the report and not simply as the repositories of data.

Brief / Terms of Reference

1 The Deposit version of the Draft Local Plan identified Buffer Zones at Milton on Stour, Bay, and Ham. Following the recommendation of the Local Plan Inspector, Buffer Zones were not included within the Adopted Local Plan (January 2003). The Council nevertheless decided in the summer of 2002 that it wished to obtain independent professional advice on the landscape qualities of the three areas in order to inform future land use policy. **The landscape character of these areas is the central topic of the brief. The landscape character of other urban fringe areas and urban green spaces are included in the brief for comparison with the Buffer Zones.** All areas are included in the consideration of the formal and informal provision of recreational space and opportunities in and around the town and its extensive new development areas. **The full brief is set out in Appendix A.**

2 As Buffer Zones are not included in the Adopted Local Plan the term Buffer Zone does not have any status, and it is only used in this report to

- **identify the locations referred to in the Deposit Draft Local Plan, and to**
- **provide consistency with the Council's brief for this project.**

3 The survey objectives are to assess and report:

- a) the landscape qualities of the Buffer Zone areas in their own right, bearing in mind their location within or adjacent to the town, and constraints imposed by other land use policies in the vicinity; and**
- b) the potential for these areas to contribute towards the requirements for public amenity space and formal recreation needs within the town in line with the Local Plan and national guidance on provision.**

4 Important Open or Wooded Areas (IOWAs) are also identified in the Local Plan, "... where it is considered that an open or wooded area contributes significantly to the amenity and character of a settlement..." "Both public and privately owned areas of land have been included." As these IOWAs might be visual features, have heritage or wildlife value, or be potentially usable open spaces, they were included in the survey.

5 Attention was drawn to community involvement in considering and presenting proposals for conserving or enhancing the local environment, particularly the "Three Rivers"

project. This led to secondary objectives being identified during the survey:

To identify and define the suitability of open spaces particularly alongside the rivers both within and adjoining the town to form "linear green corridors" that could be utilised as public amenity space.

- 6 Whilst focussing on the Buffer Zones, the effect of the requirements of the Brief
 - a) to consider the landscape character of other urban fringe areas and to compare them with the Buffer Zones and
 - b) also to consider the open space opportunities of areas and locations within and around the town

has meant that most parts have been investigated and surveyed to a lesser or greater extent.

7 The boundaries of the different areas within the brief are shown on the Gillingham Environmental Study Plan (**Plan 1**).

Approach

8 Gillingham's situation in the wider landscapes of northern Dorset is considered early in this report in order to provide the context for the environment and landscapes of the town. This is then followed by a more detailed examination of the features and characteristics of the landscapes of the various parts of the town and its fringes.

9 The **methodology** has been based upon Landscape Character Assessment (2002) and Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (2002), both of which have been critically reviewed since their initial publication in 1993 and 1995 respectively. Topographic and geological maps, along with vertical aerial photographs and Planning Authority documents, were consulted as part of the desk study prior to a detailed investigation of the areas and locations identified in the brief. The fact that the brief required a comparison of the Buffer Zones with the other urban fringe areas, and the study plan identified many Open Spaces to be assessed, has meant that both the relevant landscapes around the town and the accessible spaces within the town have been investigated.

10 The majority of the **fieldwork** was carried out during August and the first half of September 2002 with a draft report submitted in October. Since then planning permissions that were already being progressed have begun to be implemented with the effect that some

open spaces and landscape features identified as appropriate for retention have been developed or removed by the time this report is being finalised in 2003. The intervening period has also given planning and countryside staff the opportunity to research the extent, ownership, and management arrangements of the existing open spaces of Gillingham. The 2001 census data has also become available and so provides a more precise basis for considering potential demands for usable open space.

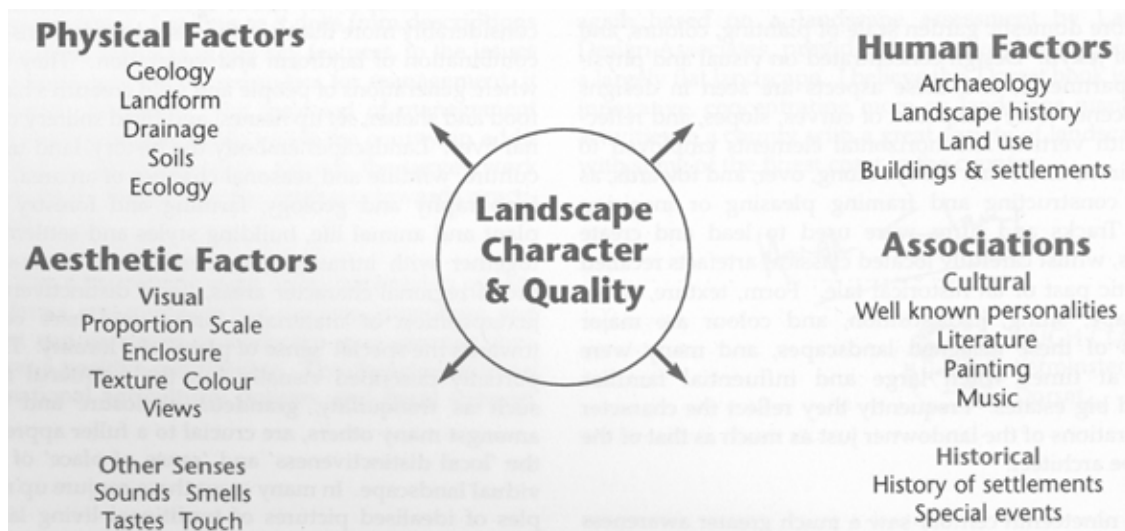
11 In addition to landscape character descriptions, identifying undeveloped and potentially accessible open spaces, and considering the ramifications of development on the landscapes of the Buffer Zones, the field survey involved taking in excess of 500 photographs. These are available to support the study.

12 "Landscape" is a term used by many but often in different ways. It is, therefore, appropriate to consider what it involves so that the scope of it, and what I and fellow landscape architects mean when we refer to landscapes, can be appreciated early in the study.

Landscapes and Landscape Assessment

Landscapes

1 Landscapes are all around us. They are more than just the visual appearance or personal aesthetic appreciation of views; they involve the nature of spaces, their character, location and distribution. They are comprised of features and elements, and the interrelationships and interactions between them. Landscapes are more than the individual elements of the landform, geology, vegetation cover, and land use. They incorporate all these along with wildlife, history, and the built environment. Landscapes are considerably more than two-dimensional pictures; they are four-dimensional and change with time, be it daily, seasonal or over decades. They are living and dynamic, and are places where nature, the elements, and human life interact.



Landscape character diagram from Burden and Le Pard 1996

2 The aesthetics of landscape involve the disposition and relationships of features and elements within the scene. These scenes can evoke emotional responses. When such responses are negative, or contrasting, ugly, or displeasing features intrude into the scene, reference is often made to eyesores or degraded landscapes. Those landscapes that are aesthetically pleasing tend to be viewed positively and features within them can be said to contribute to the visual amenity. The different proportions, scale, materials, design, and disposition of buildings within city and market town environments contribute to their individual distinctiveness and “sense of place”. Often building materials reflect the local

geology, and the grandeur or utilitarian nature of designs relate to function and the state of the local economy at the time of construction.

3 Squares and market places derive from historical activities, characterised by both their openness and the enclosure of the space within the urban environment. Parks, gardens, and playing fields can, depending on the particular town, be green lungs providing relief from industrialisation, sanctuaries of calm, havens for nature, and places for recreation, refreshment, and sport. Landscapes, whether urban or rural, can contribute to the amenity, or pleasantness, of a locality.

4 Trees are strong elements in most landscapes, reaching skywards as single elements, or as groups or woodlands channelling views and hiding other scenes. The form and character of trees and woodlands are recognised as contributing to visual amenity, and there are specific mechanisms to protect such features (Tree Preservation Orders). Trees that have intrinsic interest or their own visual amenity are employed to enhance locations, or to screen, blur or disguise eyesores. Sometimes this happens incidentally, more often it is by conscious design.

Landscape Assessment

5 There is much misunderstanding about what is landscape, and the differences between landscape descriptions, assessments or evaluation. Landscape descriptions and character assessments identify and describe the form, distribution, and features of the environment, on the basis that all landscapes have character. This leads to an understanding of local distinctiveness and the particular sense of place of a locality. This is especially important when development is being considered. Integration, echoing the existing character is one option. Potentially more controversial are designs that provide contrast or are overtly modern or even futuristic. Those developments that neither echo the existing nor have their own flamboyance but are mundane, with no acknowledgement of local character and give no clue to the geographical location, are the "anywhere" designs that contribute to a sameness in towns and villages up and down the country. The retention of existing features or characteristics can help integration or sustain the local distinctiveness. The process of landscape assessment seeks to identify key landscape characteristics to assist the conservation of the particular sense of place.

6 It is recognised that the character and features of some landscapes are more obvious, and more easily read, than others. That does not automatically mean some are good whilst others are bad. It is important to bear in mind that these survey methods do not assign ratings or values to the landscapes and are, in the current jargon, value neutral. Evaluation is an additional process, flowing from descriptions and assessments. This may be comparative or relative, drawing on the experience of the assessor and involving both judgement and personal responses to the landscapes. However, different people from different situations or backgrounds may subjectively assign different values to individual landscapes. A structured and objective landscape character assessment is a necessary precursor to evaluation.

7 In the context of this study of the landscapes of Gillingham it may be appropriate to recall that the Green Belts around major cities were designated for their function as open and undeveloped green space rather than for any recognised or special landscape characteristics or qualities.

The Landscapes of Gillingham

Background

Location

1 Situated in the northernmost part of Dorset, Gillingham lies north-west of Shaftesbury and south of Mere. It is the focal settlement of a broad asymmetrical clay vale, enclosed by the chalk of the West Wiltshire Downs to the north, the greensand heights of Duncliffe, Shaftesbury, and Kingsettle to the south and east, and the lower limestone ridge on its west that runs southward from Silton. It is some four miles south of the arterial A303, and has been connected to Exeter and London by mainline railway since 1859. The routes of the main transport links are shown on the Location and Context Plan (**Plan 2**).

Growth

2 The 1962 1: 10,560 Ordnance Survey Map (**Plan 6**) shows the small central core of the town with hamlets along the roads. The town has grown very dramatically since then, with new housing and employment opportunities leading to a projected population of around 12,000 in 2011. This expansion from 6,934 in the 1991 census to 9,324 in 2001 means Gillingham has grown by over 34% compared to growth in Dorset of 8.3% and in England and Wales of 4.3%. **Plan 7** demonstrates the current balance and distribution of urban and largely rural green space, and **Tables 2 & 3** (page 33) show the populations of the age groups for the different parts of Gillingham at both censuses.

Topography, Geology, and Rivers

3 The topography (**Plan 3**) is relatively gentle, reflecting the underlying clays, and ranges from 70 metres within the town to 97 m at Wyke where there is evidence of stonier ground. Bowridge Hill, to the east, rises to 107 m, whilst the majority of Milton on Stour is at 80 m, and the Ham ridge on the eastern side of the Shaftesbury road rises to 82 m at Park Farm.

4 The underlying geology is Kimmeridge Clay although the limestone, Coral Rag, influences the western outskirts of the town (see Geology, Rivers and Sections, **Plan 4**).

5 Three rivers drain an extended catchment area (**Plans 2 & 4**), and the relatively impervious nature of the underlying clay means that in times of storm or high rainfall they

are prone to dramatic and rapid changes in water level. The River Stour and Shreen Water flow southwards, either side of the Peacemarsh ridge, towards the town centre (**Plans 4 & 5**). The older parts of the town are on the raised ground around the confluence of these rivers where the roads from Mere, Wincanton and Shaftesbury meet. The River Lodden skirts the east of the town, separated from Shreen Water by the extended ridge of Bowridge Hill, pierces the railway embankment, and meanders south-westwards to join the River Stour (**Plans 3 & 4**).

Landscape Setting

6 At a county scale, the landscapes of Gillingham are of the Blackmore Vale character type. A relevant extract from 'A New View of Dorset' is included in **Appendix B**.

7 Largely pastoral, with fields enclosed by hedges, and the rivers marked by twisting lines of bankside trees, the Gillingham landscapes are predominantly green and lush (**Figures 1,2,4,12,13, & 20**). The valleys are generally wide and gentle, although the actual river channels are quite narrow, frequently steep sided, and half filled with sedges and reeds. There are many narrow drains and hedgerow ditches that feed these rivers, collecting water across a wide area, and in doing so over a relatively impermeable geological formation facilitate rapid water level rises and bursting of banks when there are storms or periods of continuous rain.

8 Closer inspection of the Gillingham landscapes reveals many variations and subtleties, often linked to topographic changes, field dimensions and the size of hedgerows. The impervious nature of the land in the northern, eastern, and southern sectors, linked to long periods of grazing based farming, is demonstrated by the presence of a large number of ponds (shown blue on **Plan 8**). On the western, limestone, side of the vale ponds are a rarity.

9 The clay was the basis of an important industry, brick making, providing the typical bold salmon red bricks found in many buildings. Today, the Lodden Lakes are the water filled remnant of that past industry and the slightly grey tinge to the water in the rivers is a reminder of the extent of the clay.

10 Changes of angle of the communications routes contrive to increase the complexity of the scene (**Plan 4**). For example, the B3095 runs almost due southward into Gillingham,

where it joins the B3081 road from Wincanton which loops in from slightly north of west, but bends away to the south-east as it progresses towards Shaftesbury. The route eastwards swings back north of east as it progresses to East Knoyle, and the B3092 to East Stour gradually deviates westward from its apparently southerly route out of Gillingham. The verges beside these roads are very narrow or non-existent. Many of the roads are lined by hedges, and the lack of verges emphasises the enclosed, even contrived, feel to these routes.

11 The railway slices across what was the southern side, but is now becoming the middle, of the town serving to emphasise the topography, arriving from the east on an embankment, going into a cutting, and leaving westward on an embankment. The embankment separates the historic King's Court from its original countryside setting on the northern side. The embankment does, however, provide a raised platform for trees to grow upon and gives the appearance of the presence of woodland. The single road bridge over the railway has been the centre of the radial traffic movement since its construction in the late 1850's. The construction of Le Neubourg Way in 1991 bypasses the historic centre of the towns, north of the railway, discharging and collecting traffic from the single bridge.

Local and National Environmental Designations

12 Partly owing to the rapid expansion of Gillingham there is concern that the historic and natural heritage of the town may be jeopardised. Whilst these matters are just two of the aspects that contribute to the landscape character and identity of the town and its environs they are, nevertheless, significant. Unfortunately there is a tendency only to regard features or areas that have been designated through the statutory or planning systems as being of interest or value.

13 Although the character of the human environment is recognised in the two Conservation Areas of Gillingham and Milton on Stour, and the identified Listed Buildings in and around the town, most of the natural environment has not been designated (**Plan 8**). IOWAs (**Plan 10**) have been identified in successive Local Plans, and Tree Preservation Orders have been made when there have been both perceived threats to trees and resources available to create them. The Local Plan has also identified the historic landscape of Gillingham Forest on the eastern side of the town, and has established the Royal Forest project to encourage tree planting and countryside management within the designated area.

14 Nationally important wildlife habitats (SSSI) have not been identified although some habitats are verging on county importance (Sites of Nature Conservation Interest - SNCI - which would then be noted, and receive some protection, in the Local Plan). In particular, the river valleys and flood plains (**Plan 4**) harbour species that are scarce or nationally important, such as dragonflies and water voles, and otters are known to pass through the area. Because it rises from the chalk east of Mere the Shreen Water is classified as a chalk stream and has added status as a priority in the UK Biodiversity Action Plan, as have otter and water vole.

Development Plan Policies

15 Bournemouth, Dorset and Poole Structure Plan Environment Policy F states:

The quality and diversity of the Dorset landscape should be maintained and enhanced through:

- (1) The conservation and enhancement of natural and manmade features in the landscape that contribute to the character of Dorset;
- (2) Respect for the particular characteristics of the local landscape in the determination of development proposals; and
- (3) The encouragement of design in the built environment which will result in a benefit in environmental and landscape terms.

Current Local Plan Policies relating to Landscape and Open Space matters

16 The Adopted Local Plan 2003 includes the following policies relevant to this study.

17 Generally applicable:

Policy 1.1 Sustainable Development

Policy 1.8 Standard Assessment Criteria

Policy 1.24 Character of Conservation Areas

Policy 1.28 Archaeological Remains of National Importance

Policy 1.29 Archaeological Remains of Local Importance

Policy 1.39 Tree Preservation Orders

Policy 1.40 Landscaping of New Development

Policy 1.41 Amenity Tree Planting

18 Particularly relevant:

Landscape Character Areas

Policy 1.33

Within each of the Landscape Character Areas - Gillingham lies wholly within the Blackmore Vale Landscape Character Area - development should be situated and designed so as to integrate with the distinctive landscape character of the area.

Important Open or Wooded Areas

Policy 1.9

Designated Important Open or Wooded Areas will be protected from development.

Recreation and Sports

Policy GH 15

Additional sports pitches are proposed on land adjacent to the Town Football Club.

Policy GH 16

The area to the south of Chantry Fields is proposed as an informal recreation area with tree planting and landscaping to improve the visual aspects of the land.

Policy GH 17

Land adjacent to the Youth Centre is proposed for ancillary recreational purposes

Riverside Amenity Areas; footpath/cycleway links

Policy GH 18

Land alongside the River Stour is proposed as amenity/recreational areas together with provision of additional footpath/cycleway links, to form part of the proposed long-distance Stour Valley Way.

Policy GH 19

A riverside footpath/cycleway link is proposed to connect the Shaftesbury Road at Lodden Bridge, with Kings Court Palace, via a new bridge over the River Lodden.

Policy GH 20

A river bridge is proposed over the River Lodden to allow for a footpath/cycleway link between Lodden View and the proposed Ham Primary School.

Community Hall/Leisure Facilities

Policy GH 21

Three alternative option sites for a Central Community Hall for Gillingham will be

safeguarded:

- i. Land at Chantry Field,
- ii. Land adj. Gillingham Leisure Centre or
- iii. At redevelopment site GH 13, "Oakwoods" Station Road South.

Surface water attenuation facilities will be requires on any site in the town.

Gillingham Royal Forest

Policy GRF 1

Within the Gillingham Royal Forest Project Area it is proposed to;

- i. Enhance the landscape and aid diversification of agriculture through the provision of additional woodland planting
- ii. Provide and co-ordinate additional countryside recreational facilities
- iii. Provide interpretive/tourism/educational material and facilities

Development will be approved in the area if the above objectives are met and the proposal is in keeping with the character of the area.

Landscape Character

19 The landscapes of Gillingham are first perceived by visitors as they arrive along the roads or by railway. First impressions are:

- Green and largely pastoral surroundings
- Terraces and gentle ridges dropping towards the town centre
- Hedge lined roads with narrow or no verges
- New development
- Small core of older buildings, dominated by St Mary's church tower

Greater details of the topics discussed in this section are set out in **Appendices C to G**

Ridges and River Valleys

20 Closer investigation reveals the sequence of low ridges and river valleys, flowing from the north and east, and departing to the south-west. To a lesser or greater extent the river banks support serpentine lines of trees - alder, willow, oak, and ash - creating patchy green curtains partially separating town from countryside, and sections of the town from one

another (**Plan 9**).

Trees, Hedges, and Boundaries

21 Only within the town are boundary walls at all common, providing a contrast with the surrounding areas. Hedges and hedgerow trees are frequent in the countryside abutting the town (**Plan 9**). Relatively few seem to be sustained within the urban fabric. Although not a native tree, there are a number of Lombardy Poplars around the town area that act as visual markers. Their distinctive shape, tall and thin, makes them noticeable from quite a distance. Dutch Elm Disease struck in the 1970s and has caused older elms to die, opening up views that might have been obscured by stately mature trees thirty years ago. Sapling elms re-grow in the hedges but then succumb to the disease, leaving dead tree skeletons which, when left, give the impression that the landscape is not being cared for or cherished. Large oaks are the most visually noticeable hedgerow tree, with occasional ash and, west of Chantry Fields, pine.

22 Trees and hedges are often at the interface between new development and the countryside. Some of the older developments, at Wyke for example, used existing hedges as their boundaries, and that has aided the integration of these houses in the landscape. Some of the newer ones, for example Cherryfields, Saxon Gate and Kings Chase, are not contained within existing boundaries and are clearly seen. At these locations it will take time and effort to achieve some integration with the landscape.

Cultural Heritage

23 This encompasses the local history, older buildings, and more ancient archaeological features (**Plan 8**). The Local Plan recognises nine Areas of Local Character and two Conservation Areas have been designated. These tend to reflect the structure, disposition, and historic building styles of these localities, along with the character of the Listed Buildings. Whilst some of the buildings are considerably older, particularly the town centre church of St Mary's with its tower that can be seen from many quarters, it is often the Victorian buildings, whether substantial houses or terraces, that characterise these localities.

24 Being largely buried and out of sight the archaeology has tended to be underestimated, even though there is evidence of Romano-British settlement. The local museum is, however, a mine of information. Royal patronage is reflected in King John's

Kings Court, and also the medieval Royal Forest for deer hunting. The remnants of the Park Pale, and King's Court, are Scheduled Ancient Monuments. The silk spinning industry, established in the latter part of the eighteenth century, the more recent brickworks, and the welcome given to the railway in 1858 demonstrate that Gillingham has always been rather more than a rural market place.

Natural Environment

25 The Dorset Environmental Records Centre holds relatively little wildlife data for Gillingham. This probably reflects a lack of threats in the past and hence little imperative to record the wildlife. The agricultural land around the town is largely pastoral on the clay with arable appearing to the west on the rising limestone ground.

26 From the north-east round to the south many of the pasture fields contain central ponds, often surrounded by trees. Most of these habitats are likely to support populations of amphibians and waterbirds, however, they are some distance from the edge of the town.

27 The rivers Stour, Lodden, and Shreen Water are significant influences on the wildlife, bringing aquatic environments into the centre of the town. The Environment Agency initiated a River Corridor Survey in 1997 and, with the Dorset Wildlife Trust, is particularly concerned that water vole populations are sustained and not jeopardised, for instance by river bank development, river engineering, or inappropriate management. This is because Gillingham is a core area for water voles where populations have managed to remain stable whilst declining nationally, despite national protection for their habitat.

28 The tree-lined nature of the rivers provides seclusion for both wildlife and humans, and the local community have investigated the character and potential of the rivers in the Three Rivers Project. The river corridors contain a mix of scrub, wetland, and grassland habitats, and, together with the associated flora and fauna, these are attributes of the three rivers that contribute to making them defining features of Gillingham.

29 Field and roadside hedges, and a few hedgerow trees, also reach into the town. Not only are these useful habitats but they also act as corridors for wildlife, linking town to countryside and riverbanks to farmland. This network of riverside and hedge habitats (**Plan**

9) is the main source of wildlife interest, ranging from common shrubs and hedgerow birds to rushes and reeds and scarce water voles, dragonflies, and kingfishers.

30 Apart from the river banks, the main areas of woodland close to the town are associated with the railway embankment.

31 Lodden Lakes are the main still waters on the edge of the town, and derive from the flooding of the clay pits for the brickworks. They are managed for fishing and, despite being close to a road and major area of employment, they are now a haven of tranquillity and wildlife.

32 As a chalk stream, the Shreen Water is noted in the UK Biodiversity Action Plan. However, despite the broad interest and the presence of some restricted species none of the other aspects of the wildlife has been rated of sufficient importance to gain national designation (SSSI) nor county status (SNCI). There is one SNCI approximately 1 km south-west of the main settlement. Although there is a lack of detailed or extensive wildlife data some understanding of the wealth of interest can be drawn from knowledge of species associated with the willows, alders, ash and oak of the grassy river banks and the hawthorn, blackthorn, bramble, elm and oak of the hedges. This is elaborated in **Appendix F**. The interlinking and continuity of these habitats contribute greatly to the character of the town and its environs.

Amenity Aspects

33 IOWAs (**Plan 10, Appendix G**) are, with the exception of the river valleys and Milton on Stour, more open than wooded. Nevertheless these undeveloped green spaces, sometimes associated with heritage features or recreational facilities, are part of the fabric of the town, contributing openness, diversity, and character.

34 Amenity trees within urban areas may, possibly because of their age, also have wildlife value. Gillingham does not have many mature trees away from the river valleys, and those that are found, either as integral parts of the older parts of the town or as isolated specimens within new developments, do provide a focus related to their individual form, texture, and height. Some are protected by TPOs, but the newer developments do seem to

have lost their hedges and trees in their construction.

Detractors

35 Not all attributes of a locality are perceived to contribute to the quality of the landscape. Overhead wires and cables are often regarded as negative elements, disrupting the view and detracting from the pleasantness or historic character of a group of Listed Buildings or a Conservation Area. There is an element of subjectivity as different observers may regard features as neutral or even positive that others categorise as detracting. In some cases it may simply be that the nature, scale, or form of a feature is very different from others in the neighbourhood, or the arrangement of buildings creates narrow spaces with high skylines and limited horizons. Detractors tend to militate against integration within existing landscapes without creating characteristic alternative landscapes. This can be a sensitive matter as designs based on usefulness and safety, such as the curving town centre by-pass, may create a feature that is unique in the area. Similarly, the railway embankment, nearly 150 years old, blocks out views across town and down the Stour valley although it does provide a location for trees to grow. Some aspects may be temporary, overcome by rubbish clearance, renovation, and amenity planting.

36 In considering the landscapes of Gillingham, potential detractors could include:

- overhead wires and cables
- non-local building materials and designs
- "exposed" industrial sites
- tight new housing developments with narrow streets and tall buildings more readily associated with a city environment than a rural town
- "exposed" parking areas
- white or shiny roofs on large buildings that emphasis both their presence and extent
- elevated or skyline buildings
- dead hedgerow trees (eg. sapling elms)
- evidence of lack of care or attention
- the incongruous or out of place

In addition there may be specific issues, such as the blocking of views of the church tower, light pollution, and hardening or engineering the banks of the rivers, which impact on particular interests or sensitivities.

Summary of Landscape Characteristics

37 Gillingham has attributes of a working rural town, demonstrating changing economic fortunes. The recent and rapid housing and employment development is obvious to see, often in styles and materials that do not reflect the traditions of the locality. The construction of Le Neubourg Way has contributed to transferring the focus of the town from St Mary's church and its tower to the supermarket / library complex. The town does not have groups of top quality historic buildings nor does it possess large public parks or significant formal, designed, landscapes. It does have historical features that are not immediately obvious, and broad wildlife interest without the outstanding characteristics that would justify county or national designations. The town and surrounding countryside have few dramatic or stunning amenity features, and for decades it was a pleasant enough rural town in delightful but generally unexceptional agricultural landscape. Development pressures and changes in farming now mean that pleasantness and delightfulness, previously taken for granted, are at risk. Gillingham does have the three rivers, however their flooding has tended to cast them as problems rather than the assets that they could be.

38 The principal landscape characteristics of Gillingham are:

- ◆ Low relief with subtle changes of level.
- ◆ Central ridge northwards with rising ground to the west and east across the river valleys provides openness within a contained wider landscape.
- ◆ Surrounding, wider, landscape intensely rural as far as the eye can see.
- ◆ Countryside, largely pastoral with many hedgerows and some associated trees, comes right up to the town, with Chantry Fields the only transition area.
- ◆ Dense new developments north and south of the town centre with a mix of designs not always reflecting local materials or traditions.
- ◆ New developments extend tight to the river floodplains.
- ◆ Older, historic development on the ridges around the town centre confluence of the River Stour and Shreen Water.
- ◆ Meandering rivers thread through and around the town.
- ◆ Rivers generally not accessible within the town, with human activities turned away from them.
- ◆ Rivers, often half filled with sedges and reeds, the river banks, and the field hedgerows

are the main sources of wildlife and amenity interest within and adjacent to the town.

- ◆ Riverside trees, tight to the watercourse, include alder, willow, oak and ash.
- ◆ Relatively small number of mature amenity trees within the town, other than around Wyke Road and Town Mills.
- ◆ Several Lombardy Poplars, which act as visual markers, found at; Bay Bridge (north), the leisure centre, King's Court, Lockwood Terrace and Lockwood Farm.
- ◆ Absence of woodlands, in or adjacent to the town.
- ◆ St Mary's Church tower visible from many areas, otherwise historic heritage not obvious.
- ◆ Railway embankment, with single road crossing point, both separates the southern parts from the remainder the town and creates an ever busy vehicle and pedestrian focus.
- ◆ Town centre by-pass is a significant feature, being both a physical separator of areas and a porous pedestrian barrier, as well as the main vehicular artery.
- ◆ Schools, leisure centre, and sports fields on the rising ground east of the town centre and north of the railway form, despite some large skyline buildings, a substantial, and largely green, entity.

39 This brief consideration of the aspects that contribute to the character and quality of the landscapes of Gillingham as a whole also provides the context for the more detailed assessments of the landscapes of the Buffer Zones and the urban fringe areas, and the open space assessment.

Open Space – Current Provision and Future Requirements

1 Open spaces, their size, character, and distribution influence the quality of environment of a town. This part of the project considers the amount of open space in and around Gillingham, how that is distributed, and whether the type and range available will be appropriate for the future population of the town.

Scope of the Study

2 The brief identified overall outdoor recreational open space and children's play provision in relation to the projected town population in 2011. Whether there would be a need to allocate more land for open space and recreation would be considered along with other public amenity space in relation to children, the elderly, and the infirm. The community consultation held in the autumn of 2002 identified a large number, and forceful, requests for more open space, a halt on development, the provision of parks, gardens, and riverside walks, and green spaces [paragraphs 39-43, 48,51,52,66, 72, and 74 of the report November 2002]. It is clear that

"any 'greening' of the town should be a priority. Whether the provision of play parks, formal gardens, kick around area, or the development of riverside walks etc. it appears that all or any such plans would be very much welcomed."

Definition of Open Space

3 Open space is used to describe land that has not been built upon. It is not necessarily Public Open Space with legal or permissive rights for the public to enter and enjoy. Open space may, however, contribute significantly to the character and atmosphere of a locality. For instance, a series of long gardens can constitute a big unbuilt upon area such as the area north of Town Mills or between the old peoples' home and the River Stour. The vast majority of the countryside is open space but general public access to experience it is limited to roads, bridleways, and footpaths. This non-public open space is part of the visual amenity and landscape character although the public have little influence on its management.

Types and Locations of Space in Urban Areas

4 The provision of space for rest, refreshment, sport and recuperation can take many forms. PPG 17 (2002) sets out the variety, and identifies the quantitative, qualitative, and

accessibility issues. Sports stadia, pitches and hard surfaced cycle and walkways form one end of the spectrum. Formal parks and gardens with constructed play areas are roughly in the middle, and country parks, nature areas, and rural Rights of Way are towards the other end. Historic features, such as footpaths and bridleways, or a Victorian Jubilee Garden, are already located where they are. New development brings with it the opportunity, and in many cases an obligation, to provide for informal, formal, active and contemplative open space. There is a tendency, when a town grows quickly, for the external space around the town to be the 'edge of town open space'. It is, however, within developments where open space, both private and public, are needed to contribute to sustaining character and providing opportunities for play and relaxation for young and old near to their homes.

Analysis of Current Situation in Gillingham

Locations and Types of Facilities

5 Important open or wooded areas, constructed play facilities, a green space analysis, and NDDC's own an open space survey are shown on **Plans 10, 11, and 17**, and **the table on the next page**. Although there are five locations with constructed children's play equipment in Gillingham, the location of which is shown in the IOWAs and Constructed Play Areas Plan (**Plan 10**), some of them are very basic or simple.

6 There is virtually no provision for early teenage adventure play nor junior or more adult kick about areas.

7 Except for the Rugby Club, which is about 1 km from the edge of town, all formal sports facilities are concentrated around the Leisure Centre and the schools. Although there appears to be a substantial level of provision at Hardings Lane, concerns about security have limited community use of school facilities. A developing town might be expected to have public sports facilities at more than one location and more than one cricket pitch.

8 The small open greens at Maple Way or Fairy Crescent do not appear to be used as play areas for youngsters nor as sitting and relaxation areas for senior citizens.

9 Somewhat surprisingly there are no Borough Gardens or Town Park in Gillingham.

Table 1 Schedule of open spaces in Gillingham							see Plan 17 for site locations
SITE REF	LOCATION	AREA (Ha)	TYPE OF SPACE	OWNER	MANAGEMENT	USE	COMMENTS
1	Land East of Gyllas way	3.44	open grassland with fp	NDDC*	NDDC Rangers?	Public	Parts mown, fp + play area part IOWA
2	North and west of Neil's Yard	2.81	Proposed woodland with fp/cycleway	Private	To be agreed		Allocated as woodland. Ownership may transfer to public body.
3	Land west of Marlott Road	2.94	open grassland with fp and kids play area	NDDC*	NDDC Rangers?	Public	IOWA. Mown grass with fp/cycl access
4	Land west of Fire Station	0.37	open grassland	NDDC*	NDDC Rangers?	Public	Site under construction
5	Land East of Foxglove Close	1.79	open grassland with fp	NDDC	NDDC Rangers	Public	IOWA. Mown grass with fp/cyclway access
6	Land north of Rolls Bridge Way	0.82	open grassland with fp	NDDC	NDDC Rangers	Public	IOWA. Mown grass with fp access
7	Land north of Hawthorn Avenue	1.53	open grassland with fp	Private/ NDDC*		Public	IOWA Mown grass with fp access
8	Land north of Ellington Mead	0.54	open grassland with fp	NDDC*		Public	Mown grass with fp access
9	Land East of Shreen Way	1.35	overgrown grass with fp	Private		Public	Unmanaged. Some gardens extended
10	Land north of Waitrose	0.68	open grassland with fp	NDDC	NDDC Rangers	Public	Mown grass with fp access
11	Land south of King John Road	2.01	open grassland with fp	Private	Private	Residents	Mown grass with fp/cyclway access
12	Land East of King's Chase	1.19	open grass with play area	GTC*	GTC?	Public	mown grass and trees
13	Land east of Addison Close	1.88	overgrown grass with fp	NDDC / private		Public	Unmanaged.
14	Land west of Ham farm	2.46	Proposed open grassland with fp/cycleway	GTC / NDDC*	To be agreed	Public	Site being developed. Ownership to transfer to the Town Council or NDDC
15	Land south of Gylla's way	0.78	open grass + hedgerow	NDDCpt		Public	IOWA
16	Land south of Lodbourne	1.48	open grassland	Private	private	Private	IOWA but no public access.
17	Land west of Wyke School	0.2	grass with play area	NDDC?	?	Public	IOWA
18	Land North of Common Mead Lane	0.31	Agricultural	Private	private	Private	IOWA but no public access.
19	St Mary's Churchyard	0.29	Churchyard	Private	private	Public	IOWA

SITE REF	LOCATION	AREA (Ha)	TYPE OF SPACE	OWNER	MANAGEMENT	USE	COMMENTS
20	Chantry Fields	6.64	Agricultural/grazing	Private	private	Private	Public access via f paths. Proposed as informal recreation area. Not IOWA.
21	Cemetery, Nth Cemetery Rd	1.62	cemetery	GTC	GTC	Public	
22	Cemetery, Sth Cemetery Rd	0.43	cemetery	GTC	GTC	Public	
23	Allotments, Sth Cemetery Rd	0.91	Allotments	GTC	GTC	Lessees	Allotments well used
24	Wyke School	0.54	playing field	DCC	DCC	School	
25	Gillingham Primary School	0.18	playing field	DCC	DCC	School	
26	Gillingham School	2.36	playing field	DCC	DCC	School	
27	Gillingham School	3.02	playing field/all weather pitch	DCC	DCC	School	
28	Gillingham School	4.04	playing field	DCC	DCC	School	Recently acquired
29	Gillingham School	1.57	Tennis courts/playing field	DCC	DCC	School	
30	Recreation Ground, Hardings Lane	2.53	Town recreation ground	GTC	GTC	Public	
31	Gillingham Football Club	0.74	Football Ground	Private	Gill Town FC	Private	Lease has expired
31a	Land adj Football Club	4.39	grassland	Private	private	Private	Land allocated for additional pitches
32	Gillingham Bowling Club	0.17	Bowling Green	Private	Bowling Club	Private	
33	Ham Primary School	0.87	Playing Field	DCC	DCC	School	Under construction
34a & b	North Dorset Rugby Club	6.92	Playing Field	Private	Rugby Club	Private	
35	Milton on Stour Primary School	1.48	playing field	DCC	DCC	School	
36	Land north of junction Wyke Street/Le Neubourg Way	0.54	Youth Centre	DCC	DCC	Public	Land allocated for use by Youth Centre

Key: NDDC = North Dorset District Council; NDDC* = land to be transferred to NDDC; DCC = Dorset County Council; GTC = Gillingham Town Council.

10 Admirable though they are for dog walkers, the walks north and south of Rolls Bridge could make greater provision for adventure play, such as the small area where a tree has fallen across a stream.

11 The plans and table show quite significant open areas. However, only half are unequivocally accessible to the public, and the apparently substantial areas of playing fields (sites 24 – 29, 33, 35) are largely schools or private clubs (sites 31, 34). Much of the other open space, with the exception of the Stour riverside from Wavering Lane to Wyke Bridge, is on the countryside edge of developments. Significantly, NDDC's recent survey does not, quite properly in my opinion, regard undesignated open countryside as open space for the town.

12 There is little provision of open space within new residential developments. This is a particularly important issue as emphasis on more effective use of building land has led to higher densities of buildings and large populations on sites. The effect has been to have buildings closer to the frontage of individual plots, more terraced or linked buildings, and consequently less public and private space along roads and between buildings.

13 Perhaps because Gillingham was originally a small town, there appears to have been a tendency to regard the adjacent countryside as a substitute or alternative for urban open space when new residential estates have been built. As the river flood plains are a constraint on the location of development there has also been a tendency to treat those areas as open space, even though they may not be safe or reasonably accessible for periods of the year. The result, combined with government encouragement for using infill development before greenfield sites, is that there is little by way of public open space within the development boundary.

Use and Accessibility

14 Provision for the less able, be they the very young, mothers with pushchairs, or the more infirm elderly, is similar in many respects. They need places to stop and sit, reasonably smooth and wide paths and bridges, the avoidance of steps, and suitable road crossings to reach facilities. In addition, the provision of gates rather than stiles would make access easier at several footpaths, however these need to open wide enough and some kissing

gates are too tight.

Local Plan Policies

15 These pre-date the government guidance (PPG 17, 2002). However sports and other outdoor recreational open space are covered by Local Plan policy 4.6 which refers to the national standard (NPFA) of 1.6 - 1.8 ha per 1000 population, and identifies land adjacent to the Football Club, Hardings Lane, being reserved for sports pitches and other recreational use.

16 In relation to play areas and amenity open space for residential estates, policy 4.8 refers to the provision of casual children's play space at 0.4 - 0.5 ha per 1000 population and equipped play areas at 0.2 ha - 0.3 ha per 1000 population in addition to amenity areas related to the scale of development and the site. Provision of commuted sums for maintenance and contributions to off site facilities are set out. Play areas are to be within safe pedestrian distance, which is set out as 200 metres for pre-school children and 400 metres for older children. Off site facilities can be provided where there are physical restraints on a site. No comment is made about ease of accessibility or whether facilities ought, in the normal course of events, to be provided within developments.

Local Levels of Provision

17 Recent government guidance (Addressing Needs and Opportunities: A Companion Guide to PPG 17, 2002) suggests local assessment and consultation should lead to local criteria for levels of provision rather than rigid adherence to national standards. The implication is that greater variety of provision, appropriate to the locality, is being encouraged and not a reduction in standards. Implicit is the understanding that facilities will be located appropriate to the age profile and size of the population. The Community Consultation in autumn 2002 identified great concern about the lack of green space, open space, and play and recreation facilities. It did not, however, seek to obtain views on levels of provision. Nevertheless, the number and intensity of the responses suggest there is a strong perception that open space and recreation provision falls short of expectations. The effect of the government guidance for Gillingham should be, therefore, to make up the perceived shortfall and anticipate the necessary provision for the expanding population.

Hierarchy of Provision: Applying National Advice to Gillingham

18 The provision of open space can be considered in terms of a typology or hierarchy. The Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions (now the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister) has issued a 'Typology of Urban Greenspace', in their report 'Improving Parks, Play Areas and Green Spaces' (2002). This divides green spaces into main types and sub-divisions. This methodology has been used in the Green Space and Land Use Plan (**Plan 11**), which highlights the different types of use around Gillingham. Superficially there is quite a lot of green space, but closer examination of **Plans 11 and 17** show that most of it is around the edges of the town. Ideally open space should be within the town, and the Stour valley from Cold Harbour to Wavering Lane Bridge is the major open area within the town. The open space at Lodbourne is being reduced by the Barnaby Mead development and part of the open space at Downs View Drive has already been taken by new housing. There appears to be quite a lot of green space at Peacemarsh but much of this is peripheral and the areas between existing development have been identified for additional housing. Apart from the banks of the River Lodden there is virtually no open space within the developments south of the railway line. The need for open space within employment/industrial areas is often overlooked, and there is little useable green space within the Brickfields Industrial Estate and Business Park.

Distribution of population age groups within the town.

19 Knowing how many people of what age groups are living in which parts of the town is an important factor in planning the provision of open space. The 2001 Census information at Ward level only became available after the field survey work for this project had been undertaken. It has been used to give a breakdown of population age groups within the town (**Plan 16**). **Tables 2 and 3** show that while the population of the town as a whole has increased by around 35% since 1991, the growth in particular age groups varies from just 11% in the "pensionable age" group through 39% in the "under 16s" to 85% in the "16 to pensionable age" (ie the working age population).

20 This shows the substantial growth in working age population in the town, compared to those of pensionable age. The latter age group has now dropped from a high 31% in 1991 to a figure more in line with the County average of 25%. However, this is still high in

comparison with the national average of around 18%, and in absolute terms the numbers have increased by more than 230.

21 Looking at the changes within Wards, **Ham** has shown a small decline in total between the census counts, but is an area where much of the new development planned to 2011 is now occurring. This is likely to boost both the actual numbers and the proportion of under 16's and working age population in the future.

22 **Gillingham Town Ward** has shown relatively low growth in absolute terms, with a small swing towards those of working age and away from the retirement age group. However proposed new high density developments within the town centre (eg Oakewoods off Station Road) will boost the population of this area.

23 **Lodbourne** has grown by about 26%, but with relatively even growth between the age groups.

24 **Milton** has grown in line with the town's average rate of 35%, but has seen a significant decline in retirement age population (from 445 to 295) and growth in the working age and children's age groups. Under 16s form 21% of the ward, the highest of all parts of the town. There is considerable new development now underway in this ward (around 250-300 new dwellings) which will not yet have been accounted for in these figures.

25 **Wyke** shows the greatest growth of all the wards from 1991 of around 70%. This includes rapid growth of both “under 16s” and working age populations which have almost doubled in absolute terms.

26 The “16 to pensionable age” is a very broad category which could be made up of a high proportion of young people. However, without further, more detailed, census data, the increases in that category could be due to an influx of the early retired. If that is the case the numbers transferring to the “pensionable age” category over the next few years could be significant.

Ward	Total Pop. From 1991 Census	Under 16		16-Pension Age*		Pension Age* +	
Gillingham Town	1667	325	19%	962	57%	380	23%
Lodbourne	1404	222	16%	711	51%	471	33%
Milton	1226	189	15%	592	49%	445	36%
Ham	592	129	22%	312	53%	151	25%
Wyke	2045	350	17%	1010	49%	685	34%
GILLINGHAM PARISH	6934	1215	17%	3587	52%	2132	31%

Ward	Total Pop. From 2001 Census	Under 16		16-Pension Age*		Pension Age* +	
Gillingham Town	1855	350	19%	1148	62%	357	19%
Lodbourne	1768	271	15%	904	51%	593	34%
Milton	1659	349	21%	1015	61%	295	18%
Ham	561	91	16%	332	59%	138	25%
Wyke	3481	626	18%	1872	54%	983	28%
GILLINGHAM PARISH	9324	1687	18%	5271	57%	2366	25%

*65 years taken as Pension Age for Male/Female as no Age/Gender split given in Census information

Potential Location of Demand

27 The proportions of the populations of each part of Gillingham in the three age categories can guide consideration of the types of open space and recreation provision. There is a presumption that the needs of under 16s are different from the over 64s. However, the access and accessibility issues associated with young families, the less able, and old have considerable similarity. Grandparents seem to be increasingly taking the role of looking after younger children whilst their parents work. The young tend to be more interested in play opportunities at a specific location and the old are associated with sedentary and contemplative activities. Social and cultural activities are often seen as the realm of the post 16 age groups whilst sports activities (apart, perhaps, from bowls) are perceived as post 16 and pre-retirement activities. Such a simplistic analysis does not take account of distinctions between formal, organised, group activities and more informal and personal ones. Nevertheless, open space near to homes can perform a variety of functions, and should, therefore, be provided.

28 It would also be an oversimplification to assume that under 16s will be unable to access specialised facilities based at a single location purely because of the distance to the

facility. Parents, family, and friends often join together to travel, and teenagers seem keen to bicycle to places. The car maybe the main means of travel for the aged and less able. A recognition of this use of private cars is not necessarily a good reason to concentrate built and specialised facilities in one part of the town. **A strategy of dispersal of facilities could lead to a reduction in the need to travel.** That could solve associated traffic and parking problems, as well as placing facilities within walking or bicycling distance of a greater proportion of the population.

29 An analysis of the distribution across areas of the town of the percentage of each age group could provide some guidance on the potential demand for facilities, and hence scale of provision. This could relate particularly to youngsters or those less mobile. **Table 4** puts the five areas of the town into rank order by the percentage in each age group of the total living in that part. It shows Milton, Gillingham Town, and Wyke as the areas with the highest proportion of under 16s, and Lodbourne, Wyke, and Ham as those with the highest proportion of pensioners. Whilst this might suggest a need for a relatively high level of open space within these localities the current and proposed developments in Ham are likely to change the situation fairly soon, with the potential demand for play facilities likely to be much higher. Again, whilst percentages inform the balance of the type of open space provision, the actual populations are more relevant for the level of provision.

Rank Order	Under 16	16 - Pension Age	Pension Age+
1	Milton	Gillingham Town	Lodbourne
2	Gillingham Town	Milton	Wyke
3	Wyke	Ham	Ham
4	Ham	Wyke	Gillingham Town
5	Lodbourne	Lodbourne	Milton

Table 4: Rank order of Wards by percentage of the 2001 Ward population in each age group

30 The 2001 census took place before the start of building of around 400 new dwellings in the Ham ward. The position of Ham in any analysis, such as **Tables 4 & 5**, should be viewed with caution. Both the actual population of Ham and the proportions of the totals for

the age groups of the town will change significantly as the town population moves towards the predicted figure of 12,000.

Table 5

Proportion of total population analysed by ward and age group						Census 2001	
Ward	Total Pop. From 2001 Census	Under 16		16-Pension Age*		Pension Age* +	
Gillingham Town	1855	350	3.75%	1148	12.31%	357	3.83%
Lodbourne	1768	271	2.9%	904	9.7%	593	6.36%
Milton	1659	349	3.74%	1015	10.89%	295	3.16%
Ham	561	91	0.97%	332	3.56%	138	1.48%
Wyke	3481	626	6.7%	1872	20.08%	983	10.54%
GILLINGHAM PARISH	9324	1687	18.06%	5271	56.54%	2366	25.37%
*65 years taken as Pension Age for Male/Female as no Age/Gender split given in Census information							

Analysis and Conclusions

31 Overall, at the moment there is an obvious shortage of open space within developments. Furthermore, the prevalence of "edge of development" open space means currently available land is not ideally placed. Safeguarding existing spaces can lead, in the longer term, to achieving realistic green corridors with associated play and recreational opportunities. The ability to gain additional access to open spaces, or to link up previously isolated green spaces, should be considered when assessing individual planning applications. Recognising that informal play facilities for youngsters should be within 200 - 400m of home the implications for Gillingham are that four or five substantial facilities are needed.

32 A ward by ward comparison with the general distribution of open space and recreation facilities in the town (**Plans 10, 11, and 17**) indicates a relative shortage of facilities in the **Wyke Ward**, particularly south of Wyke Road. This area is also furthest away from the existing and proposed recreation facilities at Hardings Lane. This indicates that improved facilities, particularly for young people, within or accessible to this area are needed.

33 Whilst most formal recreation facilities are located in **Town Ward**, publicly owned informal open space for sitting out/walking/quiet enjoyment is far less readily available here. Housing density in the central part of the town is also higher than the suburban areas, increasing the need for easily accessible public amenity areas.

34 In **Ham Ward**, where major new development is currently underway, most open space that is available or planned is on the outskirts of the area. There appears to be a shortage of well planned, easily accessible open space within the new developments. This indicates a need to open up these developments. In addition, there should be provision for links to the riverside area and into the Royal Forest Project Area.

35 Despite the proximity of sports and recreation facilities at Hardings Lane to residents of the Ham Ward accessibility by foot or cycle from areas south of the railway line is extremely poor (see **Plan 12**). This indicates a need to improve pedestrian/ cyclist accessibility or provide alternative facilities in the south of the town.

36 In **Milton Ward** developments either side of the B3081 have again mostly turned their backs on the available internal open space. The public space to the north of Horsefields and Cherryfields could satisfy the needs of many age groups if planned and managed effectively, as could the area alongside the River Stour, west of Peacemarsh. The open space at Downsview Drive is a remnant but nevertheless welcome green area in the heart of this Ward that offers opportunities to satisfy the needs of young children and older people, possibly in the style of a Doorstep Green.

37 Accessibility of facilities is a major issue. A simple analysis of the road pattern and location of employment/industry shows that the **four main roads will be more heavily trafficked as the population grows**, and that there will be **a major concentration of vehicle movements at the bridge over the railway**. Crossing these roads or using them to get to facilities may be a hazard many will not wish to take. An alternative will be to use a car to get to facilities but that will increase traffic and parking problems.

38 The Wyke area is sandwiched between the road to Wincanton and Le Neubourg Way, and the developments either side of the road to Mere around Peacemarsh are divided by that road. There are existing and potential pedestrian and cycle routes from the eastern developments to the school and sports centre that avoid main roads. Gaining access from the housing areas south of the railway line involves crossing or joining the major roads and negotiating the bottleneck of the railway bridge.

39 Whilst a strategy of concentrating formal sports facilities in one part of town has attractions, **provision should be made to get to sports and recreation facilities without using a car and avoiding heavily trafficked areas.** Combined cycle and walkways are the obvious options, along with some form of public transport. The pedestrian permeability of the settlements has been considered in conjunction with the rights of way outside the settlement in **Plan 12**. Potential routes have been considered, in order to minimise the reliance on footpaths beside heavily trafficked roads.

The Landscape Character Assessments and Proposals for the former Buffer Zones

1 As has been noted on page 6, the term “Buffer Zone” refers to areas formerly designated in the Deposit Draft of the Local Plan. However, following the recommendation of the Local Plan Inspector the designations were not included in the Adopted Local Plan. The term “Urban Fringe” refers to other areas of countryside abutting the town that have been identified solely in connection with this study for comparison with the former Buffer Zones. The term does not have any significance in respect of the Adopted Local Plan.

2 The Plans and Illustrations volume should be referred to whilst considering these detailed assessments.

Milton and Colesbrook

Description

1 This zone is a series of interlinked areas forming a crescent around the northern sectors of the town. The valley of the River Stour runs southward through the western sector and Shreen Water twists and turns its way along the eastern side (**Plan 13**). Although there are many firm boundaries it is not obvious, or easy to determine on the ground, which ones relate to the Buffer Zone, IOWA, urban fringe, and open countryside. Photographs of the area can be seen (**Figures 2 to 5**) in the Plans and Illustrations Volume. In order to provide the context for the Buffer Zone, IOWAs, and urban fringe (**Plan 1**) the adjacent parts of the open countryside to the north and the developments at Peacemarsh are also included in this description.

2 Bowridge Hill is one firm and definitive presence on the east, and it provides a vantage point to observe Colesbrook, Purns Mill, and the tidy pastures towards the gleaming spire of Milton church (**Figure 4**). It is also a point from which to consider the scale, form, colours and extent of recent developments south of Colesbrook. Bushy hedges, still showing the bare skeletons of young elms that have succumbed to disease, cross the cattle grazed pastures on the concave slopes of Bowridge Hill. The trees (alder, ash, oak and willow) that grow close to the bank of Shreen Water are quite tall and continuous between Fairey Bridge and Colesbrook. In addition to being a feature in their own right, having aesthetic and

wildlife interest, they form a variable visual curtain providing enclosure and a green skyline from within the new housing. Externally they are a vital screen, softening the interface between new, intensive, urban development and long established countryside. The Shreen Water and the bankside vegetation are, therefore, significant features of the town side of this urban fringe area.

3 From Purns Mill northwards, the topography is flatter and wider, with the distant Mere downs forming the northern skyline. Riverside trees are more patchy, with spreading willows and columnar Lombardy poplars near Purns Mill, and sporadic groups of bushy willow further north. Tidy, trimmed hedges enclose the flat pasture fields towards Milton church, with occasional hedgerow oaks providing visual markers. The church spire is a focal feature in the scene, with mature amenity trees, probably a legacy of Victorian times, providing a stately foil. The appellation, open countryside, is particularly apt.

4 Colesbrook hamlet is reached by a narrow lane from the B3092 and includes the Mill House, a Listed Building, and the field enclosed by the two lanes and the river. This field and the one adjacent to the B3090 are identified as Buffer Zone, and the rest of the hamlet north of Colesbrook Lane is open countryside. The hedge along the B3092 hides the hamlet from view. The lane to Purns Mill is surprisingly narrow for one used by lorries based there. The mill has large grey buildings, partially disguised by the trees around, and some of the styles and materials are rather industrial. Colesbrook itself retains a rural charm of times gone by, probably due to the form, scale and disposition of the houses and their gardens. Recent renovations, alterations and additions have sought to respect this heritage. Hedges continue to be a constant feature, particularly the tall and substantial one on the south side of Colesbrook Lane (**Figure 5**). This provides a strong visual and physical separation from the open area on the northern side of the new Horsefields development.

5 The Horsefields area of rough grass (**Figure 5**) has a number of access points from the new houses, but has no obvious function other than being an open area, and would benefit from a clearer purpose and more regular management. There has also been some tree planting to reinforce the hedge and to create new clumps. To the west, behind another bushy hedge typical of the area, are the open grassland and tennis courts of the private sports club. To the east the new amenity planting and remnant hedges provide elements of enclosure and

screening. They are, however, rather difficult to understand or find any easy route through, even though there is one secluded triangle of regularly maintained grass (**Plans 9, 10 & 12**). There is also a storm water retention area with steep sides and generally bare of vegetation. Closer inspection revealed numbers of small willow plants. Part of this area is identified as Buffer Zone and part as IOWA.

6 Where the IOWA becomes urban fringe (**Plans 1 & 10**) is also difficult to determine on the ground, and, apart from the riverside trees, the area between the housing and the western bank of Shreen Water is largely disturbed grassland with ruderal weeds. Nevertheless the presence of the river is still felt, directly or indirectly by the meandering line of trees. Colesbrook ford is an attractive feature, with a narrow road bridge on the northern side. The trees around the ford provide shade and channel the view along the road. The road however turns gently either side of the ford, providing it with seclusion and encouraging exploration along the road. Substantial grey poplars line the lane towards Bowridge Hill, giving some separation and enclosure to the urban fringe fields on the southern side.

7 As has been noted, the B3092 to Mere is enclosed between hedges north of the sports club to Milton Church (**Plan 13**). On the eastern side there is a disturbed area that was the entrance to a plant nursery. To the south of this there is some formal planting around the Kendalls and Kendalls Lodge whilst to the north there are substantial mature beech and horse chestnuts, recognised as IOWAs, around the turning to Silton and Milton village.

8 Milton village is a mixture of narrow lanes, straggling hedges, working farms, stately mature trees, and well maintained and substantial properties. The River Stour and Whistley Brook both flow under Milton Lane and join east of Woolfields Farm, forming part of the northern boundary of the Buffer Zone. East of the River Stour the landform south from Milton is predominantly a very slightly domed plateau which then drops back quite quickly some 6 or 7m to the river (**Plan 4, section A**). In places there is a flood terrace with the river in a deeper channel. The identified Buffer Zone includes the park-like area south of Kendalls Lodge and these riverside terraces to Peacemarsh. On the western side there is a more gradual and steady slope which continues westwards, seemingly to the skyline. Shallow drain lines towards the river create ripples across the slope. Further west, high

hedges enclose both sides of Milton Lane, which forms the boundary of the Buffer Zone which becomes urban fringe some 200m north of Slaughtergate Farm (**Plan 1**).

9 The River Stour flows fairly directly to Peacemarsh where it starts to twist and turn whilst maintaining its southerly direction to Wavering Lane Bridge. The western slopes are a mixture of pasture and arable fields, the arable increasing to the west (**Figure 1**). Hedges are obvious features, creating box like fields. However in some places they have been replaced by wire fences, visually porous, making the fields appear bigger than they are. The pasture fields are also characterised by individual hedgerow trees, oak and ash, and some remain beside the arable fields (**Figure 2**). Breaks or gaps in the hedges allow limited views up the valley to Milton.

10 North of Peacemarsh the River Stour has trees, oak, alder, willow and ash, growing by the waters edge on both banks. This snaking ribbon of bushy trees effectively divides the valley into two visually separate sides. Beside the latest development at Peacemarsh these trees are in clumps, allowing light to the river and intermittent views across the valley (**Figure 3**). From the older Wessex Way development to Wavering Lane Bridge the river is very open with only a few willow bushes at the southern end.

11 The eastern side of the Stour at Milton comprises the large open park-like field south of Kendalls Lodge, divided into three by fences, with a few isolated mature trees, and substantial hedges to the east and south, and the trees of the river-side to the west. The field to the south (identified for employment purposes in the Local Plan) has a similar physical structure sloping very gradually westwards before falling away to the river, and is enclosed by three substantial hedges (with some notable trees) and the riverside trees. South from this is the current Prowtings development. The northern hedgerow is strong and bushy, with a significant oak in the part identified as IOWA (**Plan 10**). To the west the ground has been cultivated and on a lower terrace a serpentine pond created (**Figure 3**). A tarmac track has been installed as a cycleway which crosses the river and continues, within a wire fence, tight to the river to Wavering Lane. The ground levels in the development appear to be being changed, with the top of the remains of a substantial hedge now being in a narrow valley and level with the adjacent ground surface. A single mature oak remains, whilst much of the new amenity tree planting has died. There are some substantial willows beside the river and

at least 3 significant mature ash trees in the southern boundary hedge.

12 A bushy hedge on the north and rather thin and gappy ones to the south enclose the two fields between the river and the Fire Station. The hedge between the two rough grass fields is low with gaps as is the one to the road. These areas are now [2003] being developed for housing. A substantial group of mature willows grows beside the river. South of here, the gardens of the two new bungalows are the main riverside features until the willows nearer Wavering Lane are reached.

Landscape Characteristics

- ◆ The zone constitutes a substantial crescent of largely undeveloped land stretching from the River Stour to Shreen Water around the area to the north of Peacemarsh.
- ◆ Topographically, the developed areas are on a central plateau that slides gently east and west towards the rivers, followed by a break in slope where the ground drops more quickly to the individual rivers themselves.
- ◆ From the rivers outwards, to the west there is a long steady slope, while to the east the ground is flattish which then rises more rapidly in a concave slope to Bowridge Hill.
- ◆ There are links to the countryside in all directions, except south.
- ◆ The main road runs north south, cutting through the centre of the area. This acts as an entry point to Gillingham, with a sudden arrival into the developed town area. The road is generally well screened by hedges, adding to the rural character north of Peacemarsh.
- ◆ The hedges vary in character within the area. Trimmed hedges occur in the open countryside area between Milton Primary School and Purns Mill, where there is a more open landscape and a few obvious hedgerow trees. The hedges are bushier in Milton, along the road from Colesbrook to the east, and in the fields beside the Stour. There are some hedgerow trees to the west of the Stour, however the hedges are variable with some post and wire replacement fences.
- ◆ Hedges play an important role in enclosing the landscape, channelling views, screening,

and contributing to biodiversity.

- ◆ There is a rural/rustic feel to Colesbrook, partly due to the older buildings, their form, the proportions of the gardens, and the ford and its approaches.
- ◆ There is an air of formality around the Milton on Stour area on the northern side of the Buffer Zone. Elements include the Victorian church with its feature spire, the associated exotic tree planting, the tree planting and pasture land at the Kendalls, and the amenity trees around the hotel area.
- ◆ The River Stour, within the Buffer Zone, has lines of trees beside its banks more or less continuously along its length. On Shreen Water, within the urban fringe, there are bankside trees south of Colesbrook ford, though to the north in the open countryside area these are rather more sporadic, and with higher willow content.
- ◆ There are biggish, long fields around the route of the Stour, south of Milton. Opposite Peacemarsh, the fields are squarer
- ◆ The interface with the new development shows disturbed areas. In some cases the uses are unclear and the areas need care and attention.
- ◆ The visual envelope is very variable, ranging from close and channelled at Colesbrook Ford and Horsefields to extensive but enclosed at the Kendalls, and expansive to the skyline west of the Stour near Peacemarsh.

Assessment and Comment

14 The Local Plan formulation process considered the characteristics and a range of options for this relatively large area. These landscapes are part of the wider asymmetrical valley, which contains the rather plateau-like central ridge separating the individual courses of the River Stour and Shreen Water. They form a broad, patterned, green scarf wrapping around the northern parts of Gillingham (**Plan 13**). To date, development has been confined to the plateau south of Colesbrook Lane.

15 In landscape terms the Royal Forest project area is east of the top of Bowridge Hill

and so, in both visual and functional terms, the designation does not immediately impact upon the area of this particular assessment. Nevertheless, there are distinct similarities between the landscapes of the east and west sides of the hill.

16 The landscape compartments rely heavily on the existence of mature trees and hedgerows for their character and containment. The effects of closely trimming hedges, or replacing them with wire fences, can be seen between Milton Church and Purns Mill, and west of the Prowtings development. If a disease similar to Dutch Elm Disease were to attack the thorn hedges or the riverside willows the existing enclosed areas and vistas would change dramatically. The relatively small changes in topography also indicate that buildings or features on higher ground rely disproportionately on hedges and trees to screen, protect, and blend them into the scene.

17 The differences between the upper parts of the Stour and Shreen relate to

- the form of the river channel (a more obvious flood terrace on the Stour),
- the condition of the fields (flatter, more expansive, well maintained hedges with distinctive individual trees on the Shreen) and
- the type and density of river bank trees (oak, alder, ash, and willow on the Stour but mainly willow on the Shreen).

These differences decrease where the rivers run southward beside the new developments, and the fields on the far banks rise gradually, bounded by hedges with occasional individual trees.

18 Colesbrook is a rural hamlet within a sweep of countryside. **In my opinion it should remain a separate and distinct hamlet and not be incorporated in the development to the south. Further development there would weaken the argument for retaining it as a separate hamlet and prejudice the tranquil rural character of Colesbrook Lane and the ancient ford. Intensive and extensive development of Purns Mill could have similar effects.**

19 The road from Milton church to the Peacemarsh roundabout is a major entry to Gillingham. It is likely to be more heavily trafficked in future for domestic and business access to the A303. It is important, therefore, to maintain the landscape character of the route whilst minimising the road hazards. **The hedges are crucial as removing them**

would expose the traffic to view and open up views to Colesbrook on the east or expose the Kendalls. Pedestrian and cycle routes could, however, be achieved on the field sides of the hedges, thereby retaining the hedges as practical protective barriers from the traffic and as the visual screens and wildlife corridors they currently are.

20 The sports club tennis courts and field, the open grass areas around the Horsefields and Cherryfields, and the river banks round to Fairey Bridge are closely interrelated despite their separate identities of former Buffer Zone, IOWA, and urban fringe countryside. Whilst they may ultimately have different detailed management regimes they form a crescent shaped continuum. The development is along the inside of the crescent and countryside is on the outside. The trees and hedges are constant factors even if the balance of species changes. **In my opinion, they form a single sub unit. Current landscape differences relate more to the existing site management, or lack of it, rather than more fundamental matters. These areas should enjoy equal protection from future development and appropriate pro-active management.**

21 The landscape around the Kendalls has clearly been influenced by design rather than just as a by-product of agricultural use. The other parkland style area at Gillingham with isolated trees within grazed grassland is at Wyke Hall, which forms a distinctive area within the urban fringe between the fields and hedges of the Stour valley and the slopes south west of Wyke. **At The Kendalls the eastern and southern hedges are crucial for maintaining the enclosure of that part of the Buffer Zone. Additional parkland tree planting could strengthen the existing character whilst removal of the trees would link it more closely to the domestic pastures of Colesbrook Farm.**

22 The fully enclosed field to the south is identified for employment uses with a proposal to provide a substantial tree belt around the north and west sides. **Retaining the southern and eastern hedges (with their associated noticeable trees) will also be critical in sustaining screening for business buildings and creating a pleasant working environment. Care will be needed to ensure the belt of trees itself echoes the planting in the neighbourhood, being predominantly deciduous. I also recommend additional tree planting on the eastern side and along the southern hedge. This southern boundary is a vital separator between housing and employment areas, and the**

adjoining IOWA needs an additional, parallel, hedge to maintain the physical and visual separation whilst the original hedge is trimmed in the interests of good management.

23 The proposed tree belt should link with the IOWA and then continue southwards to provide shelter, habitat and screening and an echo of the hedge that was previously there. It should be put in place before further development occurs. Additional tree planting set back from the river bank will also provide continuity of trees and allow, within time, some clear space between trees and the river bank. The substantial trees around the currently undeveloped fields should be safeguarded and additional trees planted.

24 Virtually all open space associated with the new housing developments is on the outside between the houses and the countryside. This is liable to facilitate trespass and to precipitate conflicts with farmers and other urban fringe land managers. Strategically, open space that is within a development is closer to a greater population and encourages activities within the community. With this concept in mind, I recommended (October 2002) that the field next to the Fire Station be retained as public accessible open space, with pedestrian and cyclist links to adjacent development. However, this site was allocated in the Local Plan so this opportunity has been overtaken by events with the fields being developed for housing. Nevertheless, **I strongly recommend that in any future developments open spaces should form integral parts of the development, linking to other open spaces and countryside areas.**

25 The western slopes of the River Stour valley look towards the recently developed areas and, in turn, are part of the countryside scene that is seen from these houses. Although the balance of orientation of the southern fields differs from the long, up the slope structure of the northern ones, hedges and hedgerow trees enclosing medium to small fields are continuing features from Milton to Wavering Lane. In effect the whole area is countryside facing towards development. **My view is that development in these areas would erode the countryside character.** Nevertheless, retaining and maintaining the hedges and hedgerow trees around the field north of Wavering Lane and west of the house Peacemere could allow that field to be used as a playing field to meet the needs of the growing population of Milton Ward.

26 Hedge management and replanting should be encouraged, along with additional specimen hedgerow trees. **The sweep of countryside, including the existing hedges and riversides, will be crucial in maintaining a clear countryside gap between the south-eastern side of Milton and the employment and housing development on the north side of Peacemarsh.**

Conclusions

27 To conclude on this large area of countryside, I am of the opinion that the landscape character of the arc of countryside from Slaughtergate Farm round to the slopes of Bowridge Hill:

- ◆ contributes to the setting of Gillingham and Milton on Stour,
- ◆ is clearly countryside that should be retained as countryside,
- ◆ that intrusions by housing or employment areas would be detrimental,
- ◆ that Colesbrook should remain a hamlet in its current form and scale, and
- ◆ that the areas adjacent to Horsefields and Cherryfields be managed as open space for access and amenity.

28 In particular:

- The crescent of the asymmetrical valleys the River Stour and Shreen Water and the northern parts of the rather plateau-like central ridge between them form a broad, patterned, green scarf wrapping around the northern parts of Gillingham.
- The landscape compartments rely heavily on the existence and management of mature trees and hedgerows for their character and containment.
- Hedge and tree management and protection, along with additional planting, are important elements in sustaining the landscapes south from The Kendalls to Peacemarsh. Such activities should link to existing riverside trees and designated IOWAs and planting areas.
- Colesbrook should remain as a separate rural hamlet and rural character of Colesbrook Lane and the ancient ford should be protected.

- Practically all the open spaces are between the newly developed areas and the open countryside. However, the developments would be better served by open spaces within them. Every effort should be made to conserve, enhance, and provide open spaces within existing and planned developments.
- The outer sides of the river valleys provide the countryside setting for the housing either side of the central plateau, and open countryside character should be protected.
- Maintaining the sweep of countryside from the south-west to the north-east, including the existing hedges and riversides, will be crucial to sustain the rural character and clear countryside gaps. In particular, those between the south-eastern side of Milton and the employment and housing development on the north side of Peacemarsh, and Horsefields / Cherryfields, Colesbrook, and Milton should be formally recognised and protected.
- Landscape management is likely to become an increasingly pressing issue, particularly for the river valleys and access areas.

29 The various sub units of this crescent of land combine to form a significant and important landscape gap between the town, Milton on Stour, and Colesbrook. I recommend that it be protected and managed to sustain the landscape features, maintain the landscape character, and retain the separate identities of the settlements. Careful consideration should, therefore, be given to policies and procedures to achieve these aims, including Conservation Area status for Colesbrook and Purns Mill House.

Bay and Lodbourne

Description

1 The area is focused around the course of the Shreen Water (**Plan 14**), the road crossing from Queen Street and climbing north-eastwards towards Bowridge Hill, and the fields stretching eastwards, north of the schools. Photographs of the area can be seen (**Figures 6 to 8**) in the Plans and Illustrations Volume. The hamlet of Bay itself is strung along the road, east of the bridge over the river, along with the group of houses that have evolved around Bay Farm and the path southwards. The area from here to the east of Windyridge Farm is identified as urban fringe. Sections C and D (**Plan 5**) illustrate the topography.

2 North of Bay Bridge the landscape is almost immediately countryside, with a narrow link southwards to the Buffer Zone. The area is identified as urban fringe (**Plan 1**). Trees blur the view of houses to the west. The eastern side of the river has a terraced flood channel, and the pasture fields and their enclosing hedges sweep up to Bowridge Hill.

3 West of the bridge, the Lodbourne houses have their backs to the flood plain of Shreen Water, which is roughly an extended oval of level pasture. The sector on the northern side of the river is designated as an IOWA (17), however both sides of Shreen Water have similar characteristics and form a coherent, balanced, unit. At the western end of this, the river turns south to the town centre, flowing through the gardens of larger houses, and around the site of the Town Mills. This southern section includes a number of large trees which screen the view towards the town. There are a few small willows along the course of the meandering river through the grassland. In the loops of the meanders south of Bay Bridge is a group of large willows which is a major feature in the scene. This group also serves to enclose the oval visually from the north-east.

4 On the southern side, the ground rises towards the knoll on which the schools have become established. Between the western side of the school campus and the southerly route of Shreen Water is an established development, largely of bungalows, Barnaby Mead. North of this, on the slope down to the river, an additional development of taller, two storey, houses has recently started. A footpath runs eastwards from the bungalows around the

school playing fields, separated from one by a thick hedge and by a chainlink fence from the other. Between these a small field of rough grass slopes from the school down towards Bay Farm, whence another path joins. A further path strikes north-eastwards, behind a windbreak of coniferous trees, across the pasture field to Windyridge Farm. To the east of Bay Farm the countryside is grazed pasture surrounded by trimmed hedges. The ground rises towards Windyridge Farm and falls gently south-eastwards to the River Lodden.

5 The northern school playing field, below the higher ground accommodating the senior school building, is part of the Buffer Zone along with the field to its west. The large IOWA (13) incorporating the all weather pitch and the football ground bridges the space between the eastern edge of the Buffer Zone and the Royal Forest project area to the east. The junior school playing field (IOWA 15) adjoins the south-west part of the Buffer Zone. Together with IOWA 14, the Buffer Zone, the other two IOWAs (13 & 15), and the countryside beyond the settlement boundary constitute a significant green wedge reaching from the countryside to the western side of Shreen Water at Lodbourne.

6 *Landscape Characteristics*

- ◆ The ground form is a shallow bowl that is hidden and secluded, with small changes in topography where the ground rises approximately 7m to the south and east.
- ◆ A flat, enclosed, area of floodplain grassland beside Shreen Water, backing northward onto long narrow gardens slopes upward and south-easterly between new housing and the older buildings of Bay hamlet to link to an area of rough grassland and eastwards to playing field. These in turn link south and east to the school campus and open countryside pasture stretching to the River Lodden.
- ◆ The oval of grassland straddling Shreen Water and the grassy slopes next to Bay Farm also link northward through the area of Bay Bridge to join with the urban fringe countryside of Bowridge Hill.
- ◆ The river threads southwards, out of the area, to the town centre.
- ◆ There is a group of large willows in a bend in the river south of Bay Bridge, and private

trees towards Town Mills. Apart from these there are few other trees, with the exception of the playing field windbreak and in gardens north of Bay Bridge.

- ◆ Bay Road and Bay Bridge form a narrow point, with close contact with vehicles, and there is no footpath beside the road.
- ◆ The Lodbourne and Bay parts of this green area (including the IOWA) abut older styles of development, which are designated Areas of Local Character.
- ◆ Footpaths on the higher ground give access from the east to Bay Lane and Barnaby Mead. There are views of St Mary's tower, and northward over the area. The riverside core is not publicly accessible.
- ◆ The hedges to the south bordering the school field and the east of Bay Lane play an important role softening, fuzzing and blurring views of development.
- ◆ The new development at Barnaby Mead is occurring on the slightly higher ground. The existing single storey buildings nestle within the slope, whilst older two storey properties are across the river on lower ground to the north and north-west. The new development of two storey buildings is raising the skyline and encroaching on the river and grassland, reducing the open area (**Figure 6**).
- ◆ The visual envelope varies within the area. From the footpath near Barnaby Mead it extends eastwards along the route of the hedge. Within the Buffer Zone itself the view up the valley is obstructed by the willows along the river. Looking to the west the visual envelope widens out considerably, with extensive views enclosed by the skyline. If the area by the river were accessible, the new development would figure highly and probably enclose the area.

Assessment and Comment

7 This Lodbourne / Bay area has two closely interlinked parts. There is the oval saucer of grassland through which the river flows, enclosed on the north and west by the backs of gardens and on the south and east by rising ground. The seclusion of this area is enhanced

by the groups of trees at the north-eastern and south-western ends. **The rural character and seclusion are being severely encroached upon by the new extension of the Barnaby Mead development** which runs down the southern slope, much reducing the open area and overlooking the remaining Important Open or Wooded Area on the north side of the river. **In my view the Lodbourne IOWA should have included the grassland on both sides of Shreen Water, as they are essentially the same landscape.**

8 The group of large willows near Bay Bridge provide a substantial visual feature, and a screen restricting views in or out. Nevertheless, **the area links functionally and organically with the countryside north of the bridge.**

9 The second part flows from the south-eastern slope of the saucer, rising further towards the senior school buildings and including the northern playing field. There is organisation, tidiness, and a degree of formality to the playing field. Although access to this field is controlled by wire fences **it is physically and visually part of the open and green continuum from the river eastwards to the open countryside and the Royal Forest project.** There is a windbreak of conifers along its northern side, screening it from the pasture field, Bay hamlet, and winds from the north.

10 From the northern extension of the football ground IOWA (13) and the open countryside there is a clear linkage with the Buffer Zone and the junior school IOWA (15) as well IOWA 17. Combined with the riverside area it is rather like a V lying on its side, with the upper arm reaching out along the Shreen Water into the countryside slopes of Bowridge Hill. The oval forms the join of the arms, and the lower, wider arm, takes in the playing fields and the hedged pasture fields in an almost seamless way. **In my opinion, these green arms, or joined green wedges, should be protected and managed as features of the town.**

11 It is possible to gain physical access to the Lodbourne IOWA (17) from a track on Bay Road. However, this is currently only for private use. **The ability to gain additional access to open spaces, or to link up previously isolated green spaces, should be actively pursued when assessing individual planning applications.**

12 **In my opinion, the Barnaby Mead new development is most unfortunate. It creates a densely packed, largely two storey, development extending from the high ground** where more extensive single storey buildings were maturing to become part of the scene. **The higher buildings will create a new, urban skyline,** where previously the existing hedge and low profile of the bungalows had enabled a significant degree of integration. **The density of the new buildings is out of character with the existing buildings around, and they will be a strong presence, destroying much of the rural character of the grassy oval of the river flood plain.** The sharp straight edge of the eastern side of the development running down the slope is likely to emphasise the contrast, and be a strong element in the view from the footpath. There appears to be little by way of landscape treatment planned to ameliorate the situation.

13 As well as encroaching upon the river valley scene, the introduction of a large new development has also had a significant effect on the balance of old and new buildings. **Additional development would risk further reducing and isolating the riverside grassland. It is also likely to prejudice the separateness, rural character, and scale of Bay Hamlet. The current development erodes the calm and tranquillity of the area,** and is likely to be a looming presence rising on the southern ground, altering the skyline and views from the long established houses at Lodbourne.

14 Although the Rights of Way are currently only footpath status it is clear that there is the potential for them to be more widely used, possibly as cycle routes, between Bay, the town, the schools, the leisure centre, and the countryside to the east. St Mary's tower is visible from the southern footpath and the higher ground, retaining a visual link to the ancient cultural focus of the town.

15 The analysis of the population distribution, age structure, and available open space has indicated a need for more accessible, informal public open space in this area.

Conclusions

16 I am of the opinion that the landscape character of the Bay / Lodbourne Buffer Zone and associated IOWAs

- ◆ contributes to the local distinctiveness of the locality,

- ◆ provides landscape gaps between Bay hamlet and other parts of the town,
- ◆ has clear and realistic links to open countryside,
- ◆ would be severely prejudiced by further extension of the Barnaby Mead development, and
- ◆ has potential for contributing to the accessible open space of the town.

17 In particular

- The Buffer Zone and IOWA 17 form the core of a green wedge reaching westwards into the floodplain of Shreen Water from the open countryside of the Royal Forest project area, and the area links functionally and organically with the countryside north of Bay bridge.
- Additional development would further erode the calm and tranquillity of the area, and is also likely to prejudice the separateness, rural character, and scale of Bay hamlet.
- There are opportunities to enhance access from Bay Road, seek pedestrian access along the river corridor to the town centre, and make more effective use of the Rights of Way and their linkages to local facilities.
- There is scope for public use of IOWA 17 and much of the Buffer Zone as informal recreation space or a park.

18 I recommend that the former Buffer Zone and the important landscape gaps that link this area to the open countryside be protected and managed to sustain their landscape features and landscape character. Careful consideration should, therefore, be given to policies and procedures to achieve these aims, including enlarging IOWA 17 to extend over the area of the former Buffer Zone. I also recommend allocating the area as a publicly accessible park (see the proposal on page 70).

Ham

Description

1 The district of Ham extends from the south side of the River Lodden to the town boundary. Substantial areas of new housing are being constructed both sides of the main road north of the former Buffer Zone, and a new roundabout and access point to one of them and an employment site has been constructed south of the Buffer Zone. The former Buffer Zone does, therefore, need to be considered in the context of the rapidly changing landscapes of the whole of the Ham area and its links to existing features. Outside the new housing areas the land to the east, south, and west is identified in this project brief as urban fringe countryside. To the east it is also Royal Forest project area. **Plans 3 – 6, 8, 9, 11, 15** are particularly relevant to this section, as are **Figures 9 – 13**.

2 The Ham Buffer Zone is a relatively small area straddling the B3081 Shaftesbury road between Ham Farm and Park Farm (**Plans 1 & 15**). It stretches across the eastern ridge from the south eastern side of the new housing (**Figure 9**), where it is open ground about 120 m wide (although there are a further 40 m to the bund screening the Park Farm buildings). It crosses both the entry road to the Kings Chase / Saxon Gate development and the main road, and slopes towards Lockwood Farm where it is a tree lined paddock some 60 m wide. The central section is a sloping garden, largely grass with some smallish fruit trees.

3 The road to Shaftesbury appears to be the spine of the Ham area. This is because the road is the part that most people frequent. In reality the ridge running about 150 m to the east of the road is the physical spine. Park Farm is on that ridge, with the wide flat valley of Fern Brook further to the east (**Figure 12**). The grain of the land runs with the gradient towards the north-west, however where Fern Brook funnels down to join the River Lodden near Kings Court that grain turns westward and then heads south-west. The main ridge and the pastures around Fern Brook are noticeably higher than the Lodden. After the direction changes the plain of the meandering River Lodden widens some 200 metres south-west of Lodden Bridge and begins to separate from the sloping pastures that run towards it west and north-west of Ham Farm (**Figure 13**).

4 West of the Shaftesbury road is a shallow hollow, initially running parallel to the

road from the edge of the town but swinging westward towards the River Lodden after it has passed northward through Ham Farm. This hollow can be readily perceived at the builders depot, west of the roundabout, which is lower than the road. There is a further ridge to the west, and a footpath runs along it before dropping to southwards to Cole Street Lane and the River Lodden to the north-west. The land to the west of the Shaftesbury Road is, therefore, higher and more open to view, particularly from the access and housing areas on the west bank of the Lodden, than is immediately obvious.

5 The existing character of the landscape between the River Lodden and Shaftesbury Road changes subtly from north to south and west to east. From Lodden Bridge riverbank strips of goat willow behave as hedges in screening and blocking the view across the river between Addison Close and Bridge Close. The flood channel of the river provides a stepped bank or a separate, more direct, line down the valley deflecting the eye from the meandering river course. A large riverside ash tree is a focal point, visible from all around and being a point of reference. There are only two or three other readily noticeable trees in the hedgerows that run down the slopes to the river (**Figure 13**). Between Lodden Lakes and Ham Farm the riverside has a remote and even bleak atmosphere, derived from the long views down the wide flat valley and the sparse vegetation.

6 East of the river the ground rises unevenly across pasture to the ridge that is marked by the western gable of the Ham Farm buildings. The fact that the field next to Hine Close appears unmanaged, with many thistles, does not make it fundamentally different from the other fields, although this may reflect the fact that the field is earmarked for development. On the northern side of the farm buildings the hollow between the road is seen, and the falling ground is also seen from Hine Close, but on the footpath nearer Ham Farm the hedges provide enclosure and close off the hollow from view. The pasture fields to the west and south wrap round the ridge. The fields tend to run down the slope so the hedges limit views along the valley side.

7 There is a line of young elms trees, unfortunately showing signs of Dutch Elm Disease, beside the path to the west of Ham Farmhouse. In a rough triangle widening from these trees to the road is the part of the hollow with the most trees, including the part of the Buffer Zone between Lockwood Farm and the road. The area with trees extends south of

Ham Farmhouse. Most of the trees are associated with the hedges and boundaries around smaller paddocks and gardens. Many are ash, and there are some cypress between Lockwood Farm and the builders depot. The Buffer Zone continues across the road, incorporating a paddock adjacent to 2 Park Villas and the open grass area between the tall new terraces of the Saxon Gate development and Park Farm.

8 On the opposite, south-eastern, side of the roundabout there is a group of mature oak trees between Park Farm and the road. The new roundabout and associated works have opened to view some of the Park Farm buildings, the entrance to the new housing developments, Ham Farmhouse and the builders depot. To the south-east, beyond the lay-by, hedges line both sides of the Shaftesbury Road. As one approaches from Shaftesbury there are roadside hedges up to the new roundabout. This is followed by an open area around Park Farm, with roadside hedges again around the Buffer Zone and leading into the town. Stretching along the eastern side of the Shaftesbury Road from south of Park Farm, through the roundabout area, and on towards the new housing are the historic remains of the Park Pale – the bank on which the fence for the royal deer park was erected in medieval times – which is a site of archaeological importance.

9 The very substantial hedges, and other boundaries, of Park Farm tend to run at right angles to the ridge, rising over it and gently sweeping away north-eastwards to Fern Brook. Other than south-east of the farm buildings, there are noticeably few hedgerow trees around these pasture fields, the mature trees being willows growing in the banks of the brook. A substantial amenity tree planting project linked to the Gillingham Forest takes up much of one field and parts of two others. After some five or six years the planting is beginning to have an impact although the physical and visual strength of the hedges means they are still a bigger feature in the landscape. To the north, across the surprisingly straight Fern Brook, the land rises towards Kings Court Wood, a significant backdrop to the eastern landscapes of Ham.

10 The straight, exposed, and open to view eastern edge of the new Saxon Gate and Kings Court housing developments is emphasised by the inclusion of three storey buildings which stand on the highest ground. There is minimal integration with the landscape and the use of light colour washes on the walls enables the site to be easily identified from

Shaftesbury!

11 *Landscape Characteristics*

- ◆ The topography of the wider Ham area is deceptive, with the main road on the side slope of a ridge. There is a small knoll west of Higher Ham Farm, dropping to the north-west. The Park Farm ridge also tapers to the north-west, falling away north-eastwards to the junction of Fern Brook and the River Lodden. The area is superficially linear, but expands to the east and west.
- ◆ The presence of Kings Court Wood to the north-east represents the only significant area of woodland cover in the area and appears on the skyline when viewed from Ham. It is therefore a strong and obvious landscape feature.
- ◆ The River Lodden and its valley to the west is a strong influence on the north west sector.
- ◆ To the east there is a feeling of remoteness, even before the linear route of Fern Brook is reached. It provides an angular feature in the landscape, which is partly softened by the field boundaries around it. The ground is fairly level, forming an extensive saucer shape which drains towards Kings Court Palace. The fields are large and organised. The hedges are tall and wide with A-shaped trimming. Evidence of Dutch Elm Disease is widespread. There is amenity tree planting within Park Farm, as part of the Gillingham Royal Forest Project.
- ◆ The new developments of Saxon Gate / Kings Chase and in the Hine Close area have straight, bare boundaries. The new buildings do not integrate and blend with the surroundings in either colour or form and often they are too tall for the land levels. There are no hedges or trees to soften, blur, or fuzz the edges of the developments effectively.
- ◆ Some landscape treatment has recently been undertaken on the open space south-east of the Saxon Gate / Kings Chase development to help soften the impact of the three storey buildings. This will need careful management for many years if it is to succeed.

- ◆ The new roundabout on Shaftesbury Road creates a significant feature within the area, with an industrial atmosphere fuelled by high wire fences, advertisements, the builders depot, and Park Farm parking area adjacent to the road on the southern approach.
- ◆ The former Buffer Zone is a mixture of grassland, hedges, and pasture straddling the hedge-lined Shaftesbury Road in a rapidly changing area towards the edge of the town.
- ◆ The land immediately to the north-west of the roundabout forms a significant open space that provides a link between the landscaped space south-east of Saxon Gate / Kings Chase and the mature trees on the opposite side of the roundabout at Park Farm. It is currently allocated in the Local Plan for employment.
- ◆ The high buildings on the edge of Saxon Gate dominate the eastern, open grassed part of the Buffer Zone.
- ◆ The small parcel of Buffer Zone at Lockwood Farm adjoins urban fringe countryside which continues, and expands, westwards.
- ◆ There are three visual envelopes to the wider landscape; the hollow between the ridges, and the expansive views east and west from the relevant ridge and slopes.

Assessment and Comment

12 There is an Area of Local Character in the older part of Ham, east of Lodden Bridge (**Plan 8**), and the remains of the park pale on the eastern side of Shaftesbury road. Otherwise the built environment and heritage is relatively undistinguished. Access to the countryside is limited to the footpaths through Ham Farm, there being no Rights of Way between Shaftesbury Road and Fern Brook (**Plan 12**).

13 In addition to the established urban area to the north of Ham, there are three sub divisions of the wider Ham landscapes:

- i. the ridge and the fields sloping eastwards to Fern Brook,
- ii. the pasture fields that wrap around the second, western, ridge and link to the

Lodden and its spreading valley, and

iii. the hollow between the two ridge lines.

i. The straight line boundary and the exposed buildings of the Kings Chase and Saxon Gate housing developments, not softened by hedges or integrated into the verdant landscape, overlook the plain of Fern Brook. They form a harsh and insensitive edge, with the developments imposing themselves on the countryside. **In my opinion, substantial landscape works need to be undertaken immediately to create a more appropriate and sensitive interface with the Royal Forest countryside and project area.** Such landscape treatment could link to the eastern end of the Buffer Zone.

ii. The views of the western side of Ham, from beside the River Lodden and the houses between Lodden Lakes and Lodden Bridge, are currently substantially gently undulating pasture fields. However, much of this rural scene is planned for further housing development. **Retaining the hedgerows and providing structural and additional tree planting throughout the site would add amenity value to the development and ameliorate the visual impact of the mass of new buildings.** The visibility of Hine Close (**Figure 13**), which is set back towards the Shaftesbury Road and not on the highest ground, gives an indication of how exposed to view the new development at Ham Farm is likely to be from the north and west. The new development appears to have little open space within it, so the opportunity of retaining the open character of the former Buffer Zone gains importance. Furthermore, **the river valley and slopes between Lodden Lakes and the former Ham Buffer Zone are of sufficient landscape character to warrant recognition and protection. Careful consideration should, therefore, be given to policies and procedures to achieve these aims.**

iii. The former Buffer Zone is within the third area. It takes the form of a central square of grass and paddock contiguous with a larger green square to the east (recently landscaped to provide a play area, some bunds, and tree and shrub planting), and a smaller oblong of hedged pasture across the Shaftesbury Road to the west. Despite the space created by the roundabout, which is a focus of movement and activity, **the former Buffer Zone is the only undeveloped belt of open space south of Lodden Bridge to reach across both sides of the road and create a link to the open countryside on either side. Restrictions on**

intensification of development on adjacent land, and rigorous protection of the trees, could help sustain the existing open character of this undeveloped area.

14 Although the land immediately to the north-west of the roundabout is currently allocated in the Local Plan for employment it currently makes a significant contribution to the open space near the roundabout. It provides a link between the former Buffer Zone and the mature trees on the opposite side of the roundabout at Park Farm. **I recommend that the area be maintained as an open space, and that its current allocation be changed.**

15 There are hedges on both sides of the road through this zone. Removing either hedge would physically and visually open up the area, and the space associated with the roundabout is already noticeably open. Currently the road in both directions has no useable verges, and so is enclosed by either hedges or the boundaries of houses. **The potential difficulty of providing an appropriate footpath could be overcome by providing one on the inside of the existing hedge.** This would not only retain the visual screen but also separate and protect pedestrians from traffic on what will become an increasingly busy road.

16 There are some recently created open areas, for example, at Ham Farmhouse and the roundabout itself and the existing deciduous trees associated with the mixture of short boundaries and hedges in this area have a strong influence on the landscape character. They provide vertical green cover and texture, and in association with the hedges provide wildlife corridors and habitat.

17 The mature oaks at Park Farm, and the ash trees across the road, provide something of a gateway or entry point to Gillingham. Arriving from Shaftesbury, the road gradually becomes more urban, but there is no clear statement of arriving at the town. **A definitive entry point could be made by creating a much more wooded area all around the roundabout and adjacent to it. That would provide screening tree growth in advance of development for employment at Park Farm, enhance the entry to the new housing, and be a feature to associate with the Royal Forest project.** Such a scheme could include the former Buffer Zone, and also establish a link to the existing Gillingham Forest planting scheme undertaken by Park Farm.

18 The Buffer Zone is very much across the end of the linear development area so it would not be particularly accessible for a significant proportion of the population for active recreation. It is, however, **the only green “bridge” and open space linking the eastern countryside of the Fern Brook and that of the western River Lodden.** It could accommodate east – west links for walkers and riders, and possibly include both woodland and a pocket park for lunch-time use by people working nearby. The open area south of the new housing has recently been reshaped, planted, and provided with a children’s play area along with an informal space for sport or sitting out. The paddock at Lockwood Farm might become a more formal public garden or allotments. **My view is that wooded green space with walkways and clearings would be an appropriate use, and it is important to maintain the open spaces to the east and the west whilst establishing access to the wider countryside.**

19 *Conclusions*

- The former Ham Buffer Zone is a relatively small open area in a part of Gillingham that is undergoing substantial and rapid change, largely due to major house building schemes to the east and west of the main road.
- Soon it will be the only sizeable open space within the developed areas south of Lodden Bridge.
- It is the only green “bridge” across the Shaftesbury Road, and has the potential to link, and make accessible, the open countryside of the Lodden valley to the historic Royal Forest countryside.

20 **The former Ham Buffer Zone and land between this and the roundabout currently provides an undeveloped open space and landscape gap that offers the opportunity to create a “gateway” feature at the entrance to Gillingham. This should be enhanced with additional tree planting (both to emphasise the gateway effect and soften the impact of new development close by) and the area given protection as an IOWA.**

21 **The area also has the potential to be a bridge linking the countryside of the Royal Forest in the east to the valley of the River Lodden in the west. Opportunities to open up public access to the countryside both to the east and west of the Shaftesbury**

Road should be explored with a view to links being made via the former Buffer Zone.

22 Where the boundaries of the new housing developments do not coincide with existing hedges the new buildings fail to integrate with the adjoining open countryside. Urgent action is needed to ameliorate the situation, especially the interface with the Royal Forest project area. Careful consideration should also be given to policies and procedures to enable future developments to be more readily integrated, including attention to scale, sympathetic designs, landscape treatment, and appropriate materials.

The Landscape Character and Proposals for Riverside areas and associated Green Corridors within and adjoining the Town

Description

1 The river valleys provide the main tentacles of green or undeveloped land which thread through or around the urban areas (**Plans 4, 7 & 11, Figure 1**). Although some are linked to pedestrian Rights of Way not all the sections are publicly accessible, for example, the Stour valley north west of Wyke Bridge, Shreen Water from Bay Bridge to Town Mills, and the River Lodden from Kings Court to Lodden Bridge. Rights of Way frequently provide green routes, and other green corridors or broader green wedges include the former buffer zones, playing fields, the cemeteries, and Chantry Fields.

Stour

2 The Stour valley runs outside the development area as it heads southwards past Peacemarsh. The northern part has very limited access but from the Prowtings development there is access via the new cycleway. Access further south is largely by permissive paths. At Wavering Lane Bridge it becomes a broad corridor with river bank trees between housing developments, and incorporates a storm water attenuation area near Rolls Bridge. Thence the corridor twists through largely private grassy flood plain with the river itself marked by trees to Wyke Bridge. The section from Rolls Bridge to Hawthorn Close is accessible, but the final bridge is narrow with steps both sides. From Wyke Bridge the into the centre of town the line is little wider than the steep sided river channel, marked by large trees, with limited access between private land via narrow paths and a footbridge. There is a sizeable green and open area between the river and the Red Lion linked by a footbridge (**Figure 17**). The grassy riverside is terraced to create a flood channel around the supermarket and library site after the confluence with Shreen Water (**Figure 19**), but the properties on the eastern bank crowd towards the river whilst facing away from it. A narrow path allows access under the Le Neubourg Way Bridge. The river and its constructed flood channel then skirt round Chantry Fields providing a significant ribbon between the open fields and the old industrial sites until the river heads under the double arched railway bridge and continues past the edge of the industrial estate.

Shreen Water

3 From Purns Mill until Bay Bridge the meandering Shreen Water wraps around the housing development on the higher ground beyond its western bank. Between the housing and the river is potentially accessible space, largely disturbed by development and incorporating two storm water attenuation areas north of the narrow Fairey Bridge. Southward the bankside is more mature and there are access points at either end. Trees line the river banks, and Shreen Water is effectively a green belt between the housing and the open countryside running up to Bowridge Hill. There is a footpath that strikes northwards some distance east of Bay Bridge and official access to the fields is limited to the Rights of Way. Southward from Bay Bridge the grassy flood plain bends through Lodbourne and continues into the town centre between private properties marked by some substantial trees. The western bank is accessible from the War Memorial in the car park to the High Street. There is de facto access to the river beside the Red Lion, although it appears to be private land, until it joins the Stour.

River Lodden

4 North-east of Kings Court the River Lodden twists and turns its way through the railway embankment becoming a field boundary before running across the backs of the gardens on its southern side. The green wedge reaching towards Lodden Bridge has been reduced by the Lodden Gate housing development but a broad strip along the northern bank has been left open. The narrow point of this corridor is at the bridge itself, carrying the Shaftesbury Road. It widens southward, between the Addison Close and Bridge Close housing areas. There are shrubs along the eastern bank, occasional trees, and the western bank has been engineered into terraces to create a flood channel that runs more directly southwards than the actual river channel. Ultimately this opens onto the wider and open landscape of the lower valley as the river meanders to Madjeston Bridge. Most of the access is permissive rather than on Rights of Way, and there is not a formal link eastwards from the Lodden Gate housing area.

Rights of Way

5 The main footpaths [surprisingly there is only one bridleway in the area and that is actually outside the development boundary] create green routes, but not necessarily following the rivers (**Plan 12**). Linking these to topography and hedgerows they can be said

to constitute green amenity and wildlife corridors. Paths link the southern side of the Wyke housing areas across Common Mead and through Chantry Fields to the supermarket and library site. The combination of footpath, grassland and boundary hedge create another green amenity area around the western edge of Wyke, rolling down to the small stream.

Green Wedges

6 Broader green areas reaching in towards the centre of town constitute physical and visual green wedges. Chantry Fields and Common Mead are a substantial green wedge stretching in from the south-west. The football ground, recreation ground, school playing fields and the remainder of the Bay Buffer Zone constitute another reaching into Lodbourne from the rolling valley of the River Lodden. The south-western slopes of Bowridge Hill also serve as a green wedge between Bay and the Shreen Way development.

Assessment and Comment

7 It is only along the rivers that the IOWAs (**Plan 10**) link together to form physical, visual, and wildlife corridors. Parts of these corridors are on the edge of the built up area and act as intermediary zones or green ribbons facing the countryside. **The rivers do provide interlinking green corridors that reach right into the centre of the town.**

8 **Chantry Fields and the green space between Lodbourne, Bay, and the open countryside are wedges of undeveloped land** that perform similar physical and visual functions, and their potential green space roles are considered below.

9 Only limited parts of the green corridors are accessible as of right, although there are opportunities for improved accessibility. **The current reliance on permissive access should be formalised and enhanced to secure pedestrian access along all three rivers.**

10 The Wavering Lane Bridge to Rolls Bridge section is owned by the District Council and managed for access, wildlife, and amenity by the Countryside Rangers. Other areas beside the rivers are owned by the Town Council or privately and in some areas ownership is unclear. **Ownership and management responsibilities should be clearly identified** as some of these areas offer open space and recreation opportunities that could be realised.

11 More detailed observations and comments about individual IOWAs, their functions, and possible extensions, are in **Appendix G**.

12 Opportunities should be taken when considering development layouts to provide amenity and flexible use open space within, and hence within reach of the majority of residents, rather than on the edges.

13 Other opportunities for open space provision and activities could build upon the start made by "The Three Rivers Project". However, that particular project may need a wider focus than walking and wildlife, and the rivers. **Links between Rights of Way (Plan 12) should be considered**, possibly via Countryside Stewardship or Royal Forest schemes, **to enhance countryside access around the town and into the open countryside itself**. In order to minimise trespass and disruption to legitimate farming activities additional access along the River Stour and Shreen Water north of Peacemarsh and Bay should be on the town rather than the countryside banks.

14 The concepts arising from the study of the three rivers and the joint work of the Countryside Rangers and the Environment Agency have the opportunity to supplement and help realise a wider vision. Projects could involve linear parks, formal play facilities (for old, e.g. boules, as well as young) and path and cycleways to link to sports facilities, as well as site management and biodiversity enhancement.

15 Such cycleways could, obviously, double as routes to work and school. As the railway currently has a single road crossing point **it may be necessary to consider using the under bridges near Kings Court and the Sewage Works for pedestrian and cycle routes**. The road bridge under Le Neubourg Way may also become a more important feature in future.

Examples of Major Opportunities

16 As an indication of the sort of opportunities there are for the positive provision of open space, three areas and their potential are considered in greater detail below, and illustrated as indicative sketches on **Plans 18, 19, and 20**.

Town Park Concept

17 At present, Gillingham has no central park or green area. However, the Red Lion site offers the potential for fulfilling this role.

Description

18 The area encompassing the Red Lion redevelopment area and the open space to the south of the Stour represents the most **significant open green space within the town centre area**, both in size and use. A full site description for this area is included in Appendix 3. Photographs of the area are supplied in the Plans and Illustrations Volume, as **Figures 17 to 19**. Two of the town's main rivers run through the site, with the confluence of the Stour and Shreen Water to the east of the footbridge. The Stour runs from west to east, before heading through Chantry Fields, while Shreen Water runs north to south. A large part of the open area is to the south of Town Bridge. This is currently cut grass with a board fence through the centre of the sites serving to limit access. In this area trees and vegetation obscure the two rivers, with little access to the watercourse. However, south of the Stour there are occasional access points, created and maintained by active management.

Analysis

19 There are a number of positive aspects about the site that would benefit any future proposals. The area is in close proximity to shops, pubs, public toilets and the town library and museum. **It is a nodal area at the centre point of several routes.** There is also access across to the Chantry Fields site, by way of a footpath along the route of the Stour under Le Neubourg Way. Currently the town has largely turned its back on the rivers; this proposal is about turning to face the rivers. The bridge to Buckingham Road would also benefit from some enhancement to make it more inviting. In particular, it would be beneficial to create a more direct access route to the High Street, for example through the Somerfield car park.

Opportunities

20 The area would be ideal for a Town Park, which would act as a focal point for the community and for events. This should involve:

- ◆ Unifying the site by either removal of the boarding or creating access points through it.
- ◆ Clearance/thinning of sections of vegetation along the route of Shreen Water from

the Town Bridge to the Stour confluence, to allow public access and increase light levels.

- ◆ Create a path beside Shreen Water.
- ◆ Additional points of access to the Stour along its south banks, with seats.
- ◆ Improve the path under Le Neubourg Way.
- ◆ Tidy up and locate the car park to the western side.
- ◆ Create a central feature and associated facilities, such as a bandstand and seating areas, play areas, boulevards for the twin town visitors, planting beds, shrubberies, and picnic areas.
- ◆ Create more effective connections from the town centre to Buckingham Road footbridge.

Chantry Fields

21 A number of suggestions have been floated about the future of Chantry Fields. As it seems to offer a number of opportunities a proposal is put forward which could combine many activities whilst retaining the essential character of the area.

Description

22 The Chantry Fields site is comprised of a series of large grassland fields, currently well used, particularly by dog-walkers, and could be enhanced to attract a greater variety of uses. The possibility of providing community facilities here is noted in Local Plan policies GH 16 & 21. A full site description for this area is included in Appendix 3. Photographs of the area are supplied in the Plans and Illustrations Volume, as **Figures 14 to 16**. There are a number of public rights of way through the area though these are not strictly adhered to. Popular routes appear to be along the lines of the hedges and the River Stour. **The site has particular potential due to its location adjacent to Le Neubourg Way, the relatively flat topography, and the river, hedges and trees that create a countryside feel.** Although the Le Neubourg Way is a major vehicular route, in terms of pedestrians it may act to limit access from the town centre. There is pedestrian access along Le Neubourg Way, though it is difficult to cross.

Analysis

23 While there may be some concern that any development could have a negative effect

on the character of the site, this does not have to be the case. **A strategy of beneficial community use could involve organised sports and community facilities close to the existing built up area, with informal activities grading out to countryside and wildlife interests to the south and beside the river.** An additional sports facility would supplement the existing leisure centre on Hardings Lane, and help serve the southern and western parts of the town which are lacking such facilities. The site could have multiple use facilities, such as cricket in summer, football in winter and a community hall. If a community facility were to be developed, the logical entrance point would be from Church View, and parking would be contained near the access. The site may be able to accommodate community and sports facilities, while still retaining the majority of the open space currently available.

Opportunities

24 The following suggestions would help to enhance the visual amenity of the site and expand its use:

- ◆ It would be beneficial to install a stepped pedestrian access point leading down from Le Neubourg Way at the point at which it crosses the Stour.
- ◆ Additional screening of the industrial site, through tree planting, along the route of the river would enhance views within the area.
- ◆ Formal sports facilities could be installed in the northern end of the site. These could give way to informal and wildlife focused activities along the river and in the direction of Common Mead.
- ◆ Hedge management would be beneficial in order to maintain the strong features created by the existing hedgerows and hedgerow trees.
- ◆ The storm water retention area to the north of the site may provide a feature in its own right. An example would be to create a wetland habitat within the hollow and control the rate at which the water is released.
- ◆ The potential cemetery site could be moved down the slope to a location where, with appropriate landscape treatment, it would be less influenced by the views of the industrial area across the fields.
- ◆ Cycle / bridleway routes from Stour Meadows to Church View and the bridge under Le Neubourg Way, and Stour Meadows towards Brickfields (and thence eastwards) could be relatively simply created.

Lodbourne – Bay Park

25 There is very little open space within the northern part of the town. The Lodbourne IOWA and the open space between Bay and the schools complex has pedestrian access to parts, views, potential links to the town centre and open countryside, and Shreen Water flowing through.

Description

26 The area is described in the section on the landscape of the Bay Buffer Zone. It comprises the flat river flood plain between Bay Road and Barnaby Mead, and the grassy slopes from the river south-eastwards towards the schools.

Analysis

27 The higher ground links to the footpath Rights of Way, and there are views northward and south-westwards to St Mary's Church tower. There are at least two gaps between the properties on the south side of Bay Road that could provide access for walkers and riders. There is the potential to link through Lodbourne to a path along the west bank of Shreen Water via the existing access at Brookside. The trees south of Bay Bridge are a significant landscape feature, and there is also scope for wider access to the river. A bridge or bridges would be needed to enable walkers and riders to cross the river, and they could facilitate cycle access from Lodbourne and areas further north to the schools and the Leisure Centre. Creation of a park would make beneficial public use of the identified strategic landscape gap, and provide a public amenity space that is lacking in the Town Ward.

Opportunities

28 There is scope to provide additional access, areas for informal play and relaxation, links to other parts of the town and adjacent countryside, and management to enhance the biodiversity:

- ◆ Use gaps between properties to create accesses from Bay Road.
- ◆ Create bridges for walkers and riders over Shreen Water and riverside walks.
- ◆ Create links from Rights of Way through the park area, especially towards Lodbourne and the town centre.
- ◆ Accesses could also be made to the school sites to facilitate trips to school and the Leisure Centre that avoid or reduce the reliance on roads.

- ◆ Landscape management and planting to soften the impacts of new development and enhance the local character.

Appendix A

Project Brief

SPECIFICATION FOR THE LANDSCAPE ASSESSMENT OF GILLINGHAM BUFFER ZONES

1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 North Dorset District Council wishes to commission a landscape assessment of three specific areas in and around the town of Gillingham.
- 1.2 The three areas were identified in the Deposit Draft Local Plan as "Buffer Zones". The general intention behind the allocation was to protect the land from future development.
- 1.3 Following consideration of objections to the Buffer Zone policies of the Local Plan Inquiry, the Inspector recommended that they should be deleted from the Plan. The Council has accepted this recommendation, however, it now wishes to obtain independent professional advice on the landscape qualities of the three areas in order to inform future land use policy. The Council intends to publish Supplementary Planning Guidance to support the Local Plan in respect of these areas - based on the findings of the Landscape Assessment.

2.0 SURVEY OBJECTIVES

2.1 The objectives of the survey are:

To assess and report on:

- a) the landscape qualities of the Buffer Zone policy areas in their own right, bearing in mind their location within or adjacent to the town, and constraints imposed by other land use policies in the vicinity; and
- b) the potential for these areas to contribute towards the requirements for public amenity space and formal recreation needs within the town in line with the Local Plan and national guidance on provision.

3.0 DETAILED SURVEY REQUIREMENTS

General Requirements:

- 3.1 To assess the landscape character of each of the Buffer Zone Policy areas (as identified on Plan 1). This should include an analysis of the land use, topography, geology, archaeology, vegetation, natural habitats, watercourses, built form, public accessibility, the contribution the area makes to the conservation of the natural and built heritage and any other features of importance to the landscape character of the area.

- 3.2 To consider the landscape character of other urban fringe areas of Gillingham (as identified on Plan 1), including the Important Open or Wooded Area (IOWA) at Chantry Fields to the south of Le Neubourg Way
- 3.3 To consider the overall requirements for outdoor recreational open space (including playing fields) and children's play space in the town in accordance with Deposit Draft Local Plan policies 4.6 and 4.8, based on the town's projected population for 2011.
- 3.4 To consider the existing availability and proposals for future development of outdoor recreational open space (including playing fields) and children's play space in the town and whether there is a need to allocate more land to meet projected needs.
- 3.5 To consider the need for other public amenity space for the town, bearing in mind the particular recreational needs of the elderly and disabled.

Site specific requirements:

Milton on Stour Buffer Zone

- 3.6 To consider the landscape character of the area as set out in 3.1 above.
- 3.7 To compare the landscape character of this area with other urban fringe areas.
- 3.8 To consider the relationship between the town, the hamlet of Colesbrook and village of Milton-on-Stour and whether, on the basis of the landscape, there is a need to afford this area additional protection over and above existing countryside policy (Deposit Plan Policy 1.7).
- 3.9 To assess whether there is a need to protect any part of this area to meet any recreational, children's play or public amenity space requirements identified in 3.4 and 3.5 above.

Bay Buffer Zone

- 3.10 To consider the landscape character of the area as set out in 3.1 above.
- 3.11 To consider the relationship of the Bay area to the town centre and whether there is a need to protect the landscape gap between these areas.
- 3.12 To assess whether there is a need to protect any part of this area to meet any recreational, children's play or public amenity space requirements identified in 3.4 and 3.5 above.

Ham Buffer Zone

- 3.13 To consider the landscape character of the area as set out in 3.1 above.

- 3.14 To consider the need to protect this land as an open space for amenity purposes, bearing in mind the different land uses either side of the site.
- 3.15 To assess whether there is a need to protect any part of this area to meet any recreational, children's play or public amenity space requirements identified in 3.4 and 3.5 above.

4.0 PLANNING BACKGROUND TO THE BUFFER ZONE POLICY AND EXPANSION OF GILLINGHAM

- 4.1 Gillingham is a small but rapidly expanding town in the North of the District. Its population has grown from around 5,500 in 1981 to 9,500 in 2000. Further growth of about 1,250 dwellings is anticipated in the period up to 2011. This could give rise to a population of around 12,000 in 2011.
- 4.2 The Development Plan for the area comprises the Bournemouth, Dorset and Poole Structure Plan (2001) and the Deposit Draft District Wide Local Plan 1998 (as modified).
- 4.3 The Local Plan makes provision for housing and employment growth in the town and seeks to protect a number of areas for amenity value as well as designating additional land for recreational purposes. The town has grown up on the confluence of the River Stour and two tributaries (the River Lodden and the Shreen Water). These watercourses and their floodplains provide an important amenity for the town.
- 4.4 In view of the rapid growth that the town has undergone in recent years, the community is keen to protect remaining areas of open space. There has also been concern that if development is not controlled, the town could continue to expand northwards to overwhelm the hamlet of Colesbrook and village of Milton-on Stour. To help address these concerns the Buffer Zone policies were introduced into the Plan.
- 4.5 However the Inspector who considered objections to the Local Plan at the Inquiry in 1999 recommended for various reasons that the policies should be deleted. The Council has accepted these recommendations, but has instigated an urgent review and full landscape assessment of the Buffer Zone policy areas in order to provide evidence to support future policy in these areas.
- 4.6 A recent planning appeal decision is also of relevance to this review. A proposal to develop land within the Bay Buffer Zone for residential use was dismissed at appeal primarily because of the current over-supply of housing land in the town. The Inspector did not accept arguments that the land should be safeguarded for its public amenity or recreational value.
- 4.7 Relevant details from the Local Plan and planning history are appended to this specification.

Appendix B

Extract from 'New View of Dorset'

Burden and Le Pard, 1996

Blackmoor Vale



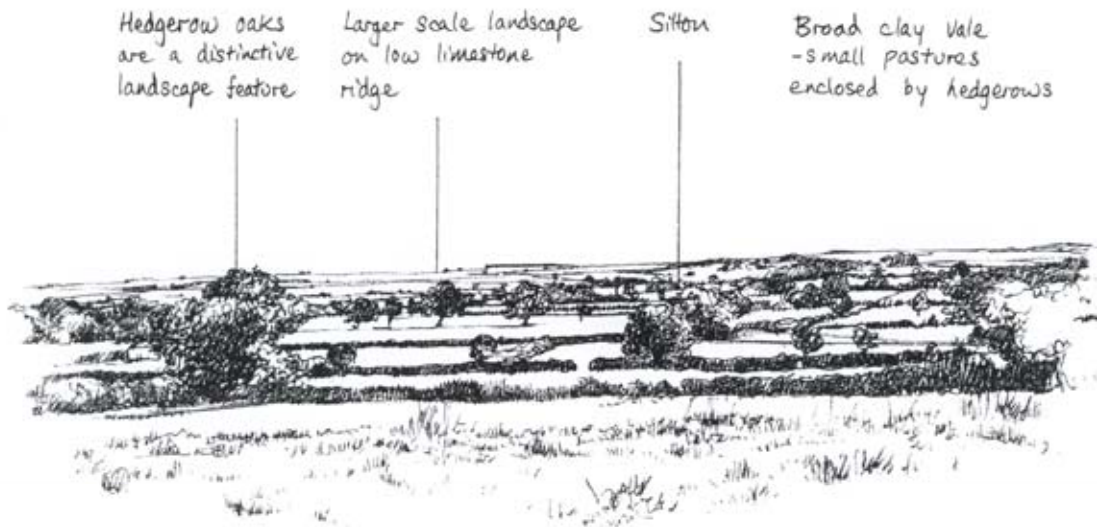
The Blackmoor Vale is a very broad clay vale drained by the River Stour. To the south, the Vale is separated from the Northern Chalk Escarpment by the North Scarp Hills. The Vale is divided in two by the most easterly of the North Dorset Limestone ridges. The western Vale is flanked by the limestone ridges of north-west Dorset and a lower limestone ridge to the east. To the south-west the Vale extends as far as Yetminster, where it is separated from the Halstock valley by another low limestone ridge. This broad western Vale is drained by the River Lydden and the Caundle Brook, which meet the River Stour at Kings Mill Bridge, just south of Marnhull. The eastern Vale, between the limestone ridge and the North Scarp Hills around Shaftesbury is drained by a network of small streams which meet the Stour near Sturminster Newton. These numerous streams probably affect the micro-climate of the Vale which frequently seems to differ markedly from that of the surrounding hills. It is cooler, damper and often mistier, 'a land of mists and mud' as it has sometimes been described. It is certainly lusher than the surrounding countryside, in a dry summer the Vale remains green whilst the surrounding grassland is parched and dry. This is certainly not due to local rainfall as the Vale generally has a lower rainfall than the hills to the south and east. This was most pronounced in 1995 when one rainfall station in the Vale recorded only 759 millimetres, whilst a similar station five kilometres away on the downs recorded 1326 millimetres! This green, lush aspect has been a feature of the Vale for many years, as Thomas Hardy noted in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*:

Here, in the valley, the world seems to be constructed upon a smaller and more delicate scale; the fields are mere paddocks ... Arable lands are few and limited; with but

slight exceptions the prospect is a broad rich mass of grass and trees, mantling minor hills and dales within the major. Such is the Vale of Blackmoor.

The Vale has a gently rolling landform which becomes progressively flatter towards the east and towards the broad River Stour corridor. The numerous small streams within the Vale tend to be very narrow and cause only very minor ripples in the landform. The chalk escarpment forms the horizon and backdrop for all views to the south from within the Blackmoor Vale. Melbury Hill, Fontmell Down and Nettlecombe Tout are examples of distinctive escarpment summits which are important landmarks for orientation, and are an echo of the hills surrounding the Marshwood Vale. The Blackmoor Vale has a finely-grained landscape which forms a highly-patterned, complex mosaic when viewed from the escarpment to the south.

There is mixed farming, but pasture predominates overall. The fields are enclosed by straight hedgerows but have irregular shapes, even though they are all of similar scale. Mature, individually spaced hedgerow oak trees are a regular, distinctive feature of the Blackmoor Vale landscape. They give the Vale a speckled appearance and an overall unity when viewed from the escarpment ridge. These hedgerow oak trees have dramatic, contorted spreading silhouettes and often frame views within the Vale. They are all of similar age and many are becoming stag-headed and broken. The hedgerows are overgrown, bushy and often in poor condition; they have a rich variety of species, including hazel, ash, field maple and blackthorn but there is little evidence of regenerating oak trees. The ash trees are likely



BLACKMOOR VALE: Looking south-west across the Blackmoor Vale near Silton. GR 788300.

to become progressively more dominant unless a new generation of hedgerow oaks is planted.

The landscape seems more open in the fields beside the River Stour and there are often long views across the Vale to the higher ridges beyond. The river itself is a visual focus as it meanders across the pastures and the historic bridges, such as those at Sturminster Newton and Kings Mill, are beautiful landmarks. There are often willow trees alongside the narrow tributary streams and their sporadic presence in hedgerows indicates the point at which a stream crosses the road.

The clays of the Blackmoor Vale provide the typical red bricks for the numerous small villages and hamlets which form small nuclei within the landscape patchwork of fields, hedges and small woodlands. The villages tend to be very

small and of a similar size - many are tiny hamlets or extended farmsteads. They are often surrounded by patches of woodland so the buildings are partially screened. These villages and farmsteads are connected by twisting, narrow lanes, forming a dense, contorted network across the Vale. The Blackmoor Vale landscape is characterised by subtle, small-scale variations of field shape and texture, a gently undulating landform, glimpsed views of hamlets and the spreading silhouettes of ancient oak trees.

There are occasional areas of surviving acid grassland, of which Lydlinch common is the most important example. This common is also a rare survival of a pre-enclosure landscape, open rough grazing and scattered scrub, with cottages scattered round the edge to take best advantage of their Common Rights.

These small villages, twisting lanes and broad scale of the Blackmoor Vale make it seem bigger than it actually is. The Vale has a relaxing, slow pace and feels slightly disorientating. There are no abrupt edges or sharp contrasts. The Blackmoor Vale has a comfortable, settled atmosphere which feels familiar, peaceful and undemanding. The subtle, undulating landform, the irregular shape of each field and the character of the settlements provide sufficient diversity to give the landscape interest and charm.

THE KEY CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES OF THE BLACKMOOR VALE ARE:-

- Very broad, gently rolling damp clay vale, drained by the River Stour and its dense network of tributaries.
- Fine-grained, irregular mosaic of lush green pastures, villages and small woodlands.
- Woodlands and fields form an irregular patchwork strongly defined by hedgerows
- Distinctive mature hedgerow oak trees.
- Domestic, farmland landscape linked by a network of narrow, twisting lanes.
- Long views are typical along and around the water courses where the Chalk Escarpment forms a prominent backdrop to the south and east.
- Small villages, hamlets and farmsteads are scattered evenly throughout the Vale.

MANAGEMENT GUIDANCE

i Management should focus on sustaining the diversity in the vegetation pattern of the Blackmoor Vale landscape, with its many combinations of field, woodland, copses and hedgerow trees.

ii The fine, rich, ancient hedgerows should be protected and carefully managed to ensure their important contribution to the Vale's character is maintained.

iii Opportunities should be sought to restore mixed species hedgerows where loss is apparent.

iv Hedgerow oaks make an important contribution to the character of this landscape. Most existing specimens are now mature and stag-headed and a new generation of oak trees could be regularly planted throughout the Blackmoor Vale. The trees should be spaced at intervals of 30-70 metres along the hedgerows so that each tree is able to develop a full, spreading crown.

v Opportunities should be sought to restore traditional grazing meadows and create flower-rich grasslands in association with stream corridors and adjacent to hedgerows.

vi The many attractive, small winding streams make an important contribution to the landscape character of the Vale. Water quality should be protected along with the character of the streams. Groups of willows, open pastures and dense copses are typical along the edges of the streams and these diverse features should be conserved, while seeking to establish broader wetland corridors, with a rich assemblage of stream-side habitats.

vii The remaining acidic grassland sites on the historic commons, such as Lydlinch, are ecologically important species-rich habitats and should be protected and managed to control the encroachment of scrub and woodland.

viii The few remaining small semi-natural ancient woodlands should be a priority for nature conservation and sensitive management.

ix Small copses are particularly appropriate in the vicinity of hamlets and farmsteads. Some new farm buildings would benefit from screen planting.

x The character of the network of the lanes should be sustained.

Appendix C

First Impressions

From Shaftesbury

The traveller arriving by road from Shaftesbury gains glimpses of the town until the undulating road gradually steps down the multiplicity of terraces until the hedges growing tight to the road conspire to squeeze out all views other than that of the road forward. The sudden appearance of the roundabout at Park Farm, and the builders depot on one side and developers' sales hoardings on the other, announce a town has been reached. Continuing on between close hedges it seems to have been a false alarm until more houses appear, the road sweeps over Lodden Bridge, and then onto the railway bridge and the town centre. Little has yet been seen of the landscapes of the town, however swinging down Le Neubourg Way through the warehouses and car sales the traveller could be in any town. Then a glimpse to the left of riverside willows and extensive flat fields. Over the river bridge and young trees beside the road turn attention to the right for a fleeting glimpse of a warm stone church tower. Through the traffic lights and along a road hemmed in by asphalt pavements and brick retaining walls to another roundabout. Although more open here, there is little greenery or obvious local identity. The road towards Mere eases up a very gentle slope, with post-war houses to one side and older cottages and new development on the other. A slight drop to arrive at another new roundabout, with roads either side into housing developments, and the straight exit road then becomes tightly enclosed by hedges as the town is left behind.

From Mere

The traveller from Mere finds the road rippling along between grass verges and trimmed hedges and has an opportunity to survey the fields. Over a cross-roads the road drops into a series of testing turns. Ahead an off white church spire stands in front of a mixture of mature trees and flattish fields and tidy hedges spread out to the left. Then into a slight dip, over a stream, up the other side and past the church and the avuncular trees. The verges disappear, and high hedges, tight to each side, channel the road straight to a modern roundabout with "anywhere" housing on either side. The road rises and there are some older houses, a pub, and new houses trying hard to weather and fit into the scene. Now on to a second roundabout where the lie of the land invites a half left turn between weathered brick buildings and a couple of grander but staid stone ones. The local shops are of that

uncompromising grey that did reconstructed stone no favours. Enticed by the sight of what could be a village street our traveller turns fully left, winds between houses, hedges, trees, and narrow brick bridge parapets and starts to climb passed cottages and gardens. All too soon the de-restriction sign announces the town is behind. A brief stop reveals a countryside of undulating pasture fields enclosed by hedges, or occasionally post and wire, stretching away southwards, with some substantial institutional buildings commanding the middle distance high ground.

From Sturminster Newton

A business traveller from Sturminster Newton would arrive at East Stour and cross the A30. Stone is still the typical building material as the road turns and continues to climb. A kilometre on and it drops down Hunger Hill and straight ahead, gleaming in the sunshine, are the bright roofs of Brickfields Business Park and the pink/red bricks and tiles of the new developments around the River Lodden. Having lost height quickly, our driver negotiates two sharp turns, crosses the flood plain of the Lodden, and after a gentle rise turns left into a smart new business area. Later, continuing passed brick terraces that reflect a previous industry, he joins the traffic crossing the railway. Heading into the town, the pace slows but pedestrian activities increase. Laughing students appear down the slope from the right and senior citizens walk across from the Bowls Club to the Post Office. Parking the car he notices the newer Methodist church spire challenging the ancient Anglican tower across the lower reaches of Shreen Water, largely hidden by riverside trees.

Appendix D

Trees and Hedges

One cannot help but be impressed by the extent of hedges around Gillingham. All too few seem to be sustained within the urban fabric. In addition to their wildlife interest and value (discussed in Appendix F and F 2) they often mark historic boundaries as well as being both green screens and features of visual interest. As in other clay areas of Dorset, the elm used to prosper here. Since the onset of Dutch Elm Disease in the 1970s all the stately mature trees have been lost, allowing longer views but reducing the vertical elements within the landscape. Younger elm still survive in plenty of the hedges, however saplings reaching 6-8 m height succumb to the disease. These dead skeletons are found in many hedges around Gillingham, providing a depressing reminder of the disease. The appearance of these dead remains gives an impression that the landscape is un-cared for.

Although not a native tree, there are a number of Lombardy Poplars around the town area that act as visual markers. Their distinctive shape, tall and thin, makes them noticeable from quite a distance. Within the hedgerows themselves, the most visually noticeable tree species are the large oaks seen in several areas.

Trees and hedges are often at the interface between new development and the countryside. Some of the older developments, at Wyke for example, used existing hedges as their boundaries, and that has aided the integration of these houses in the landscape. Some of the newer ones, for example Cherryfields, Saxon Gate and Kings Chase, are not contained within existing boundaries and are clearly seen. At these locations it will take time and effort to achieve some extent of integration with the landscape.

Appendix E

Cultural and Built Heritage Overview

Local history

Gillingham was first recorded by name in 1016, however the town's history dates back even further. The name Gillingham is thought to mean place of shelter on a road and is often found near Roman roads or occupation sites. The evidence of Romano-British settlement found around the modern town supports this.

The town of Gillingham was once the centre of the Royal Forest of Gillingham, and one of several deer parks in Dorset. The medieval park, from which deer were released to be hunted, formed the core of the wider forest area. Kings Court, the hunting lodge within the forest, was, after Corfe, the most frequented of King John's twenty Dorset hunting lodges. However, the centralisation of government in London led to the decline of the rural houses in Dorset, and eventually the forest itself. James I commissioned the enclosure of the Royal Forest in 1624, leading to riots between 1626-1630 as local people objected to the loss of common rights. Five thousand acres of the forest were cleared and divided into large fields and a series of isolated farms. Sir Walter Raleigh was, at one point, a ranger of the Royal Forest.

The local silk spinning industry grew up in Gillingham in the late eighteenth century, after a silk mill was established c.1769. One early nineteenth century building was designed with a ground and first floor for washing and drying spun silk, while the upper floor was a dormitory for young girl apprentices brought down from London workhouses (Taylor, 1970).

In addition to the Royal Forest and well-known textile industry, Gillingham has several other points of historical interest. Slaughter Gate is the place where Edmond Ironside overtook fleeing Danes, and there is a proud memory of a day in 1042 when a Witenagemot was held at Gillingham at which the Confessor was elected King.

Archaeology

Gillingham has evidence of at least 1200 years of settlement and the landscape as an entity has a long history. To regard the sites not yet recorded as 'up for grabs' in terms of land use changes is over simplistic. Often unrecorded sites have later been found to have archaeological remains (hence PPG 16). Several of the areas of particular interest around Gillingham are those associated with the Royal Forest. There are remnants of the Park Pale around the Park Farm area and King's Court Palace, which are Scheduled Ancient Monuments.

The remaining archaeological evidence within the town dates from a variety of periods. Medieval and Saxon archaeology has been discovered in the Chantry Fields/Waitrose area, while there are Roman remains at Cold Harbour. There is a green lane in a field to the east of the Milton-Wyke Road and several areas of cultivation remains around the south and west of the town, to the south of the Brickfields Industrial Estate, and the west of Stock Water. Around Milton on Stour there are settlement remains with associated pottery of the 12th and 13th century. In addition, several buildings throughout the town centre, including the church and Town Mills, are of archaeological interest. A full list of the archaeological sites around the town is included in Appendix E2.

Observations on the Areas of Local Character and Conservation Areas

Each of the Areas of Local Character and Conservation Areas, as designated in the North Dorset District Wide Local Plan 1st Revision, have been considered in turn, in order to assess their characteristics and importance. They are identified on Plan 8. The Listed Buildings associated with each area are listed in Appendix E2. All Listed Buildings are Grade II, unless otherwise stated.

Areas of Local Character

Bay

The buildings of this area are an eclectic mix of styles, with no single type of style or material common throughout. There are a few traditional limestone buildings and thatched cottages along the road, with some more modern buildings mixed in between the older properties. Some of the newer buildings attempt to blend in, while others are slightly out of place. The sizeable front gardens, seen in few of the newer developments of Gillingham,

create a feeling of space and separate the buildings from each other and set them back from the road. As the area is approached along the Bay Road towards Gillingham, there is a feeling of being in a village due to the single line of mature but generally low key houses along the road and the surrounding fields. Bay Lane and Bay Road are similar, though Bay Lane has a more intimate feel due to the closer proximity of the houses. There are no Listed Buildings in this area.

Lodbourne

There are similarities with Bay as this is the adjacent area. However, the development has spread away from the road northwards, creating a much more suburban feel. This is because the buildings here are modern bungalows in an estate style layout, with similar grey/cream rendering. On the Bay Road, there is terrace of four small cottages with protruding porches and two sets of Victorian redbrick terraces with pale brick surrounds on the windows and doors. These sets of houses add character to the area, though they are only found on the southern side of the road. There are no Listed Buildings in this area.

Wavering Lane

Again the character area is composed of an eclectic mix of styles. There are two rows of traditional stone cottages and several Victorian redbrick buildings, in addition to a mix of several other Victorian buildings. The cottages are small buildings in a terrace formation, while the Victorian buildings tend to be large and imposing detached properties. The mix of styles does not create a village feel in this area, probably accentuated by the infill of more modern development. However, the mixture creates a pleasant character area with a variety of building styles that is not seen in the newer developments. There are no Listed Buildings in this area.

Peacemarsh

The Peacemarsh Area of Local Character covers properties either side of the B3092. The stone cottages of the area are of various ages, though all have a similar character and typically sit face on to the road. Some of the buildings have redbrick around the windows and quoins, while others appear more like traditional farmhouses. The stone theme running throughout gives continuity to the area. However, as with other character areas this has been dissipated by the addition of unsympathetic recent development. There are no Listed

Buildings in this area.

Colesbrook

The buildings at Colesbrook are a traditional stone style, with either slate or tile roofs. There have been some modern additions in the area but these are generally sympathetic to the prevailing styles and blend in well. There is a definite village feel to the area, due to the similarities between the buildings and the relatively large spaces surrounding them. As with Bay, the village feel is probably emphasised by the single line of houses along the road and the open spaces around it. It should be noted that the designated character area covers the southern road and not Purns Mill Lane, and therefore does not include the mill. There are no Listed Buildings within the Colesbrook character area, however Purns Mill House [Grade II] is just outside. It would make sense for the character area to include this building and its immediate context.

Wyke

The area around Wyke Road has an interesting mix of buildings of varying styles. Many of the buildings are a stone style with redbrick around the windows and quoins, including two rows of terraces on either side of Wyke Road. There is a village feel to the area due both to the intensity of buildings of character, including both terraces and large Victorian detached houses, around the main road and the dominance of the historic old brewery building. There is a variety of Listed Buildings that fall outside of the designated area (identified in Appendix E2), therefore, it may be logical to extend the existing area or designate an additional one for these buildings.

Kings Court

The area is clearly suburban in nature, a factor emphasised by the close proximity of the arterial road. Some examples of the range of styles include a traditional stone thatched cottage, two sets of Victorian redbrick semi-detached, redbrick with pale brick around the windows and quoins, stone with redbrick around the windows and quoins, and traditional stone cottages. There is a range of housing types in the Kings Court character area, although these do not tend to create a village feel due to the disparate nature of the houses and the relatively high density of development. There are no Listed Buildings in this area.

Lodden Bridge and New Road

The buildings of the Lodden Bridge and New Road character area reflect the close proximity to the town brickworks, which were historically situated in the New Road area. The most striking features are the rows of Victorian redbrick terraces, which can be found in several groups particularly on the bend in New Road. This area of Gillingham has a distinct unity and feel due to the dominance of a single material, however this is of a suburban and not village nature. The buildings are also important as a standing symbol of the town's industrial past.

Eccliffe

This hamlet is located at the point where the meandering River Stour, leaving Gillingham, is channelled into a small gorge. The largest building, the Mill, is at the base of the U shaped development where farm buildings and stone cottages are set back from the flood plain of the river. Most are on the northern side and appear as a line following the contour. The river, with flat areas of permanent pasture either side, has been divided into channels as it approaches the Mill where the millstream goes beneath it. The railway runs along the northern edge on the higher ground and an embankment from the south-west side of the town. Alders, poplars and ash grow along the sides of the road, which crosses the valley floor by the Mill, with willow scrub along the banks of the river. Despite a number of power cables and the railway the hamlet has a tranquil, rural, atmosphere. The tall, grey stone, Mill is a focal feature of an area dominated by the river where other key characteristics are the narrow flat valley bottom, the sharp ridge along the southern side, the linear arrangement of the houses on the northern slope, and the roadside trees.

Conservation Areas

Town Centre

The Gillingham Town Centre Conservation Area was designated in 1985, as a means of protecting the historic centre from the commercial development elsewhere in the town. The Conservation Area is focused around St Mary's Church, the Town Mills, Wyke Street and The Square, which is thought to retain its basic medieval street form. The historic buildings range in style and age from traditional seventeenth century thatched cottages to a variety of Victorian styles. The central portion of the Conservation Area does have a unique feel, due to its quiet nature and density of historic buildings. However, the eastern area heading down

the High Street does not share this feel, due to the addition of unsympathetic features, primarily the more modern shopping areas. The links between the different parts of the Conservation Area has been reduced somewhat by the new road, Le Neubourg Way, which severs Wyke Street from the town centre. In reality, the areas feel separate although both are of primarily 18th century character. Of particular interest is the section containing Chantry Cottage and Chantry Ford. The character of this area has changed significantly since the Conservation Area was designated, due to the large supermarket and car park adjacent to it. However, the footpath along the Stour and between the cottages retains a rural feel and provides an island of nineteenth century countryside in the centre of town.

Milton on Stour

Two designated Conservation Areas cover the majority of the village of Milton on Stour, to the north of Gillingham. The village has evolved over many years, resulting in a mix of styles. The buildings are characteristically large and detached, comprised of Victorian redbrick, traditional stone and more modern styles. The majority of the buildings are built of stone, most with either redbrick around the windows and quoins or large stone block quoins. In particular, a number of the stone houses are of a large size, some with large grounds. The area is notable as it contains a varied selection of large houses in a rural setting. The location, slightly to the west of the main B3092 road, means that most of the village is quiet with little through traffic.

Appendix E 2

Archaeology List

The following list of archaeological sites and features within Gillingham is from the Royal Commission on Historic Monuments: Historical Monuments in the County of Dorset (volume IV North) and from the Dorset County Council Sites and Monuments Record.

Ecclesiastical

1. The Parish Church of St Mary

The Chancel and North Chapel date from the 14th century, while the remainder of the Church dates from 1838.

2. Carved stones, two, built into the north wall of the vicarage Probably of the 9th century

and presumably from a cross shaft.

Secular

3. Bridge (1800)
4. Footbridge (1821)
5. Bridge (1807)
6. Lodden Bridge (late 18th or early 19th century)
7. Kingscourt Bridge (c.1800)
8. Madjeston Bridge (1801)
9. Lock-up (early 19th century)
10. Free School (now incorporated in a shop, identified on OS map 1884)
11. Town Mills (West range 18th century, East range 19th century)
12. House (Range from 16th century)
13. Lime Tree House (mid 18th century)
14. Harwood House (first half of 17th century)
15. Knapp House (second half of 18th century)
16. Cottage (17th century)
17. Madjeston Farm House (19th century)
18. The Phoenix Hotel (18th century)
19. House (18th century)
20. The Red Lion Inn (18th century)
21. Houses (18th century)
22. House (18th century)
23. Newbury House (18th century)
24. House (18th century)
25. The Royal Hotel (18th century)
26. House (18th century)
27. Cottage (18th century)
28. House (18th century)
29. House (18th century)
30. House (18th century)
31. House (18th century)
32. Cottage (18th century)

33. Cottage (18th century)
34. Cottage (18th century)
35. Cottage (18th century)
36. House (18th century)
37. House (18th century)
38. Cottage (18th century)
39. House (18th century)
40. House (18th century)
41. House (18th century)
42. Cottage (18th century)
43. Cottages (18th century)
44. Cottage (18th century)
45. Cottage (18th century)
46. Higher Ham Farmhouse (18th century)
47. Madjeston Farm Cottages (18th century)
48. Cottage (18th century)
49. Cottage (18th century)
50. Cottages (18th century)
51. Cottage (18th century)
52. Cottages (18th century)
53. Cottage (18th century)
54. Cottage (18th century)
55. Malthouse Farm (18th century)
56. Cottage (18th century)
57. Cottages (18th century)
58. Wyke Hall (17th century nucleus, greater part mid 19th century)
59. Higher Langham House (1770 with 19th century extension)
60. Bainly House (mid 18th century)
61. House (second half 18th century)
62. House (late 18th century)
63. Wyke Farm (1700 with 19th century extension)
64. Bleet Farm (second half 18th century)
65. Cottages (second half 18th century)

66. Cottage (second half 18th century)
67. Westbrook Farm (second half 18th century)
68. The Meads (second half 18th century)
69. Cottage (second half 18th century)
70. Cottages (second half 18th century)
71. Cottage (second half 18th century)
72. Cottage (second half 18th century)
73. Stock Farm (second half 18th century)
74. Barn (late 18th century)
75. Ivy Cottage (early 18th century)
76. The Old House (elements late 17th century building, rebuilt in 19th century)
77. Lower Bowridge Hill Farm (17th century)
78. Pierston Farm (late 18th century with 19th century additions)
79. Bowridge Hill Farm (early 18th century)
80. Ridge Hill Farm (late 18th century)
81. Cottages (late 18th century)
82. Cottages (late 18th century)
83. Cottage (late 18th century)
84. Cottage (late 18th century)
85. Cottage (late 18th century)
86. Cottages (late 18th century)
87. Cottages (late 18th century)
88. Peacemarsh Farm (late 18th century)
89. House (late 18th century)
90. Cottage (late 18th century)
91. Cottages (late 18th century)
92. Cottages (late 18th century)
93. House (late 18th century)
94. Cottages (late 18th century)
95. Cottages (late 18th century)
96. Settlement remains (first recorded 1156)
97. Settlement remains (associated pottery of 12th and 13th century)
98. Cultivation remains

- 99. Deer Park (existed 1228-1628)
- 100. Roman occupation debris including Roman coins (1st- 4th century AD)
- 101. Inhumation burials (probably sub-Roman)
- 102. Longbury or Slaughter Barrow
- 103. Neolithic Axe
- 104. Part of '100.', a skeleton with Roman-British pottery sherds
- 105. Small number of prehistoric sherds
- 106. Cultivation remains
- 107. Green Lane
- 108. Peacemarsh Farm, moated site now built over
- 110. Hedgeline or hollow way
- 111. Possible hollow way
- 112. Medieval iron working/ore roasting ovens
- 116. Vicarage schoolroom
- 119. Old Toll House
- 120. Barn (17th - 19th century)
- 121 Church (1868)
- 123. Wyke Brewery
- 124. Medieval iron working/ore roasting ovens
- 132. Medieval moated site
- 133. Medieval iron working/ore roasting ovens

Motcombe

- 20. Moat and Banks, known as King's Court Palace (1199-1369)

Listed Buildings

The Listed Buildings are shown with reference to the Conservation Area / Area of Local Character in which they are situated. Those that do not fall into one of the above categories have been considered separately.

Colesbrook

There are no Listed Buildings within the designated area, however Purns Mill House falls just outside.

141 Purns Mill House: house, mid C19, ashlar with slate roof.

Wyke

152 Wyke Brewery: brewery mid C19 coursed, squared rubble with tiled roofs.

153 Brewery House and front fence: house late C18 rendered with gable-ended tile roof and end brick stacks.

In addition to the Listed Buildings within the character area, there are a number of other Listed Buildings in the surrounding area:

154 Wyke Hall: house, now 10 dwellings, C17 (rebuilt 1853, extended 1913), rendered and ashlar walls with tiled roof.

155 Wyke Farmhouse: farmhouse, C17, whitewashed brick and rubble with tiled roofs.

156 Granary approximately 10m south of Wyke Farmhouse: granary, early C19, brick with slate roof.

129 Church of St George Langham: memorial chapel, 1922, coursed squared rubble with thatched roof.

Lodden Bridge and New Road

148 Lodden Bridge Farmhouse: farmhouse early to mid C19 colourwashed rendered walls, hipped slate roof

Town Centre

105 Chantry Cottage: cottage, probably C17, coursed rubble walls with thatched roof.

106 Chantry Ford: cottage, probably late C18, whitewashed rubble walls with thatched roof.

109 Mill House: house, late C18, coursed rubble with tiled roof.

113 Church Cottage: cottage, c1838, ashlar with slate roof.

114 Church Walk Nos 1 and 2: pair of cottages, c1838, ashlar with hipped roof.

115 The Cottage: house, C17, coursed rubble with tiled roof.

116 Town Bridge: road bridge dated 1800

117 Church of St Mary: chancel C14, main body 1838-9. N.B. **Grade I.**

118 Unidentified Table Tomb: late C17

119 Unidentified Table Tomb: c1792

- 120 Unidentified Table Tomb: late C18
- 121 Premises of Senior and Goodwin: house, now offices, mid C18, colourwashed stucco with tiled roof.
- 122 Rawson Court: vicarage, now old peoples home, 1883, coursed rubble with hipped tiled roofs.
- 123 The Phoenix Hotel: hotel, late C18, rendered with hipped slate roof.
- 124 The Cat Boutique: shop, early C19, rendered with tiled roof.
- 125 Premises of Natural Harvest and Rutter and Rutter: house, now shop and offices, C18, coursed rubble with tiled roof.
- 126 The Red Lion: inn, mid C18, rendered and rubble walls with tiled roof.
- 127 War Memorial: c1920
- 133 No 1 and 2 St Martins Square: early C19, coursed squared rubble with tiled roofs.
- 134 Broadhayes: early to mid C19, ashlar and coursed squared rubble with slate roof.
- 142 Vicarage Schoolroom: now hall, mid C19, coursed rubble with tiled roof.
- 143 The Barton: house, mid C18, coursed squared rubble with tiled roof.
- 144 Lime Tree House: house mid C18, coursed squared rubble with tiled roof.
- 145 Broadhayes Cottage: cottage C17, coursed rubble with slate roof.
- 146 Queens Head and Queens Head Cottage: public house and cottage, early C19, stucco with slate roof.
- 151 Lock-up: early C19, coursed squared rubble with tiled roof.
- 158 Bridge at Wyke St: dated 1807.
- 159 Folly's End: house, early C18, coursed rubble with tiled roof.
- 160 Little Chantry: house, early C18, coursed squared rubble with tiled roof.
- 161 Plank House and River Gate: house, now two houses, C17-C18, ashlar facade with rubble side walls and tile roof.
- 162 Knapp House: late C18, ashlar and rubble walls with slate roof.

Milton on Stour

- 135 Church of St Simon and St Jude: 1868, coursed squared rubble with tiled roof.
- 136 Pierston House: house, early C19, rendered walls with tiled roof.
- 138 House in the premises of Milton garden plants: house, late C18, coursed rubble walls with slate roof.
- 231 The Old House: house, C17, coursed squared stone with tile roof.

232 Barn immediately south-east of The Old House

It should be noted that Pierston Farmhouse falls just outside the main area of the village and hence the Conservation Area.

137 Pierston Farmhouse: farmhouse, mid C18, coursed rubble with tiled roof.

Additional Listed Buildings

Bowridge Hill

110 Lower Bowridge Hill Farmhouse: farmhouse, C17, coursed rubble with tiled roof.

Lodbourne Green

130 Lodbourne Farmhouse: farmhouse, late C18, ashlar facade with chequerwork walls in greensand and rubble, tiled roof.

Madjeston

131 Madjeston Farm House: farmhouse, early C19, coursed rubble and ashlar with slate roof.

Newbury

139 The Laurels: house, early C19, course squared rubble with tiled roof.

140 Blackmore Vale House: house, early C19, stuccoed walls with slate roof

Queen Street

147 Stour Motors: house C16 with C20 alterations, coursed rubble with tiled

Ham

149 Park Farmhouse: farmhouse, early C19, rubble walls with slated roof.

Appendix F

Natural History Overview

There is little recorded and little recognition of wildlife features within the area, with only one SNCI, which falls approximately 1km to the south west of the main settlement area. The Dorset Environmental Records Centre has some information about the area, though this is not extensive. Much of the land is deemed of ecological value, however this is not at a high enough degree to be recognised at either county (SNCI) or national (SSSI) level. PPG 17: Planning for Open Space, Sport and Recreation (2002) recommends that areas of open space of 'particular quality' that 'particularly benefit wildlife and biodiversity' should be recognised and given protection by local authorities in their plans.

The main habitats around the Gillingham area are associated with the agricultural environment that surrounds the town, including hedges, grassland and trees, and the three main rivers that run through the town.

During the field survey observations were made of a number of species. For example, around Shreen Water and the Stour several dragonfly species were noted, and hedgerow species were recorded.

Agricultural Land

The majority of undeveloped land around the town is in agriculture, with both pastoral and arable areas. The grassland areas are a combination of permanent or reseeded pasture, which are generally not intensively managed. Of particular interest to the north, east and south of the town are a number of ponds that are situated within the fields. These may be of significant wildlife value to moorhens, frogs and newts. It should be noted that the Dorset Wildlife Trust is researching the presence of Great Crested Newts in this area. A group of trees often surrounds the ponds, creating a notable feature in the open fields. However, neither these fields, nor the hedgerow systems around, them are of SNCI (Site of Nature Conservation Interest) standard.

Hedges and Hedgerow Trees

There are a large number of hedges throughout the Gillingham area, dealt with more fully in a later section, which may have significant wildlife value. However, there are not a significant number of hedgerow trees. This would appear to be a result of Dutch Elm Disease, as there are a number of dead elms throughout the area. Where there are any number of trees these tend to be found in lines, which are often linked to the rivers and railway embankments. The woodland area to the south of the railway line is managed as a nature reserve, known as Wither Wood. There are also a number of large, isolated trees found within the residential developments, reflecting the past agricultural use.

As there is little wildlife data available for Gillingham it is necessary to draw conclusions based on general principles. The importance of hedgerows as a wildlife habitat has been established by research by Pollard, Hooper and Moore (1974) and the Hedgerow Regulations 1997.

The wildlife interest of a hedgerow is affected by both its structure and management. The particular vegetative species present and the way in which they are managed will determine the bird, mammal and insect species that are able to use the hedge. For example, a hedge consisting of hawthorn bushes cannot support a hole nesting species. Hedges with good ground cover tend to be more favourable to birds than those without. This is supported by work undertaken on game birds by the Game Conservancy - pheasants and partridge need the taller grass to camouflage themselves and their nests. The best type of hedge is thought by Pollard, Hooper and Moore (1974) to be the thick overgrown one. However, old and untrimmed hedges can become too open to provide effective protection for the nests of song birds from the depredations of magpies. The main hedge types and the associated species are included in Appendix F2. The evidence suggests that some lack of management can be beneficial, providing that the shape and density of the hedge is appropriate.

A significant number of plant species have been recorded in hedgerows, however over most of England the dominant species is Hawthorn. In Gillingham there is a variety of hedgerow species present, though the highest percentage is blackthorn. Of the six hundred known plant species, only half are regarded as hedgerow plants as most are also found in other habitats. Hedgerow trees develop within the systems either when they are planted

specifically, or when part of the hedge is permitted to grow up.

A hedge network in some ways provides a substitute for woodland, which is the natural habitat for the majority of British birds. This is of particular relevance around Gillingham as there is virtually no substantial woodland, apart from Kings Court Wood. The species that get the most value from hedgerows are those which feed in fields and use the hedge primarily as a nesting site. The hedges themselves often provide too small a feeding area. Almost all British mammals have made use of hedges from time to time, however the most common are small mammals. Species include the mole, wood mouse, long tailed field mouse, bank vole and field vole. However, at present little data is available of the importance of hedges to mammal populations.

Nearly all the common British herpetological species have been found in hedges as they provide the food and shelter required. For some species the associated banks and ditches are of particular importance, not necessarily the hedge itself.

Hundreds of invertebrate species can be found in a few metres of hedge and the grassy vegetation at its base. The diversity is a result of the variety of habitats that the hedgerow provides. A number of communities, such as litter dwellers, those that feed on growing leaves, associated parasites and predators, and transient visitors feeding on nectar/pollen, can all exist within the same ecosystem.

The number of invertebrates associated with trees varies greatly depending on the species. Native British trees characteristically host a much higher number of associated species than introduced trees do. The implications are that these invertebrate species are food sources for other invertebrates and vertebrates, and hence support larger and more diverse wildlife communities. The classic work on this concept is assessed by Kennedy and Southwood 1984. As highlighted in **Table 7** below, the most valuable trees in terms of invertebrate variety and diversity are the two species of *Quercus* and the five species of *Salix*.

Latin Name	Common Name	Associated Invertebrate Species
<i>Salix</i> (5spp.)	Willow spp.	450
<i>Quercus</i> (2spp.)	Oak spp.	423
<i>Prunus spinosa</i>	Blackthorn	151
<i>Alnus glutinosa</i>	Alder	141
<i>Fraxinus excelsior</i>	Ash	68

Table 7: The number of insect species associated with native trees. Adapted from Kennedy and Southward (1984).

The oak is the dominant hedgerow tree around the northern and western sides of the town, while along the rivers and within the hedgerows there are large numbers of willow. The species associated with the oak tree are highlighted in Appendix F2.

In addition to the wildlife value of hedgerows, their impact on quality of life should also be considered. For example, the abundance of fruits such as sloes and blackberries provides a source of traditional rural foods available freely.

Rivers

The most recorded information relates to the three main rivers and adjacent land. The wildlife interest of these watercourses changes throughout the town, as a number of different habitats are found. In 1997 the Environment Agency initiated the River Corridor Survey, carried out by Chalkhill Environmental Consultants, which found that the aquatic vegetation of the Stour and Shreen Water was typically a clay-type, but with occasional gravel beds and water-crowfoot. The dominant vegetative species throughout the area was *Sparganium erectum*, a reed species. In areas this has taken over and is affecting the flow of water.

Shreen Water, which rises east of Mere, is recognised by the Environment Agency as a chalk stream, and is noted as such in the UK Biodiversity Action Plan. Sections of the river are tree lined on both sides, dominated by willow and alder, while other areas have tree cover on one side or scrubby vegetation. The presence of water voles has been reported in the wetland areas around the river.

The River Stour is tree lined along much of its course, particularly in the northern sections. To the south of Le Neubourg Way, the Stour is known to have resident water voles and is frequented by otter.

The Lodden runs towards the town from the east of Bowridge Hill, diving under the railway embankment, and cutting across the Shaftesbury Road. The section of the river around Lodden Bridge has been heavily engineered, so it is more likely that interesting habitats will be found both up- and downstream of this point.

The combination of large trees, hedgerows and grassland adjacent to the watercourses providing a variety of habitats for invertebrates may, in turn, be beneficial habitat for bat species.

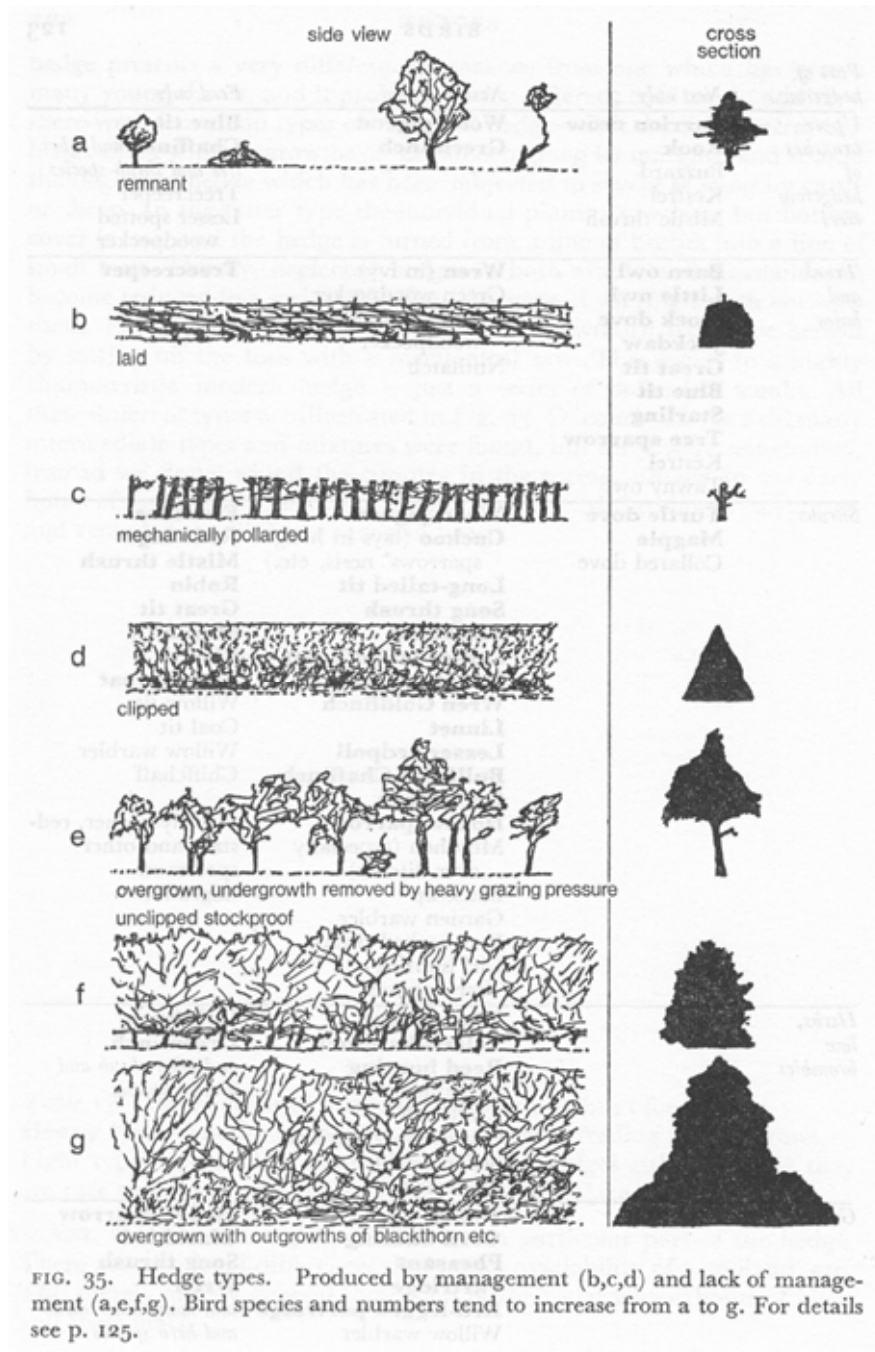
Paragraph 31 of PPG 17: Planning for Open Space, Sport and Recreation (2002) states that "The visual amenity, heritage and nature conservation value of water resources should also be protected." Therefore, the character and value of Gillingham's rivers must, at the very least, be maintained, with no scope for detrimental activities.

Lakes from Old Industrial Areas

The Lodden Lakes are two fishing lakes, which were created from the old town brickworks. The site now has a range of habitats, including tree belts and hedgerows, in addition to the freshwater lakes with small islands. The lakes have developed into interesting semi-natural habitat, forming the largest body of standing water within the Gillingham area. A number of bird species were observed at the site, including a heron.

Appendix F 2

Hedge management



From: Hedges by E Pollard, MD Hooper and NW Moore. 1974

Bird species associated with different hedge management techniques

Table 14. Birds in hawthorn and elm hedges under different management (from Moore *et al.*, 1967)

Field boundary type (illustrated in Fig. 35)	Length of hedges (yards)	Red-legged partridge																Average number of pairs per 1,000 yard	Number of species											
		Sparrow	Skylark	Corn bunting	Reed bunting	Whitethroat	Yellow-hammer	House sparrow	Song thrush	Blackbird	Linnet	Bullfinch	Hedge sparrow	Pheasant	Wood pigeon	Chaffinch	Blue tit			Carrion crow	Robin	Tree sparrow	Great tit	Goldfinch	Blackcap	Garden warbler	Lesser whitethroat	Turtle dove	Wren	Sedge Warbler
Unhedged boundary	4130		6	4	5	1	2																					4.4	5	
HAWTHORN a. Remnant	2320		2	4	2	2	2	1	1																			6.0	7	
b. Layed	2460		1	1	1	4	1	2	3	3																		6.5	8	
c. Mechanically pollarded	2455		2			2	1	1	2	1	2	1	1	1														5.7	10	
d. Clipped	2805		3			5	6		4	3	4				1													9.3	7	
e. Overgrown (no undergrowth)	2335								2					6	3	1	1	1	1									6.4	7	
f. Unclipped stockproof	2645					7	2		2	9	9	6		3				1		1								15.1	9	
g. With outgrowths	2099		1	1	5	6	6	2	6	11	6	2	5	6	3							1	1	1	1	3	2	3	33.9	19
ELM a. Remnant	2163			2		1	2				1									1								3.2	5	
b. Layed	258									1										1								7.8	2	
c. Mechanically pollarded	439					1																						2.3	1	
d. Clipped	1393						1	1	3			2								1								5.7	5	
e. Overgrown (no undergrowth)	1110					1	1	2												2								5.4	4	
f. Unclipped stockproof	2268							4	1	1	1	1	1	1	1													4.4	7	
g. With outgrowths	2154		1	1		3	2	4	2	7	1	1	3	1	1	1	1									1		14.4	15	
Hawthorn in elm (a, d, f, g)	257					3	1		1	3	1	1			1													42.6	7	

From: Hedges by E Pollard, MD Hooper and NW Moore. 1974

The Importance of Native Tree Species to Wildlife Communities

The Example of an Oak Tree



From: *The World of a Tree*, Arnold Darlington. 1972

Appendix G

Important Open or Wooded Areas

IOWAs have been designated by North Dorset District Council where it is considered that an open or wooded area contributes significantly to the amenity and character of a settlement. These areas may include School Playing Fields and Recreation Grounds, though designation does not signify that the area is Public Open Space. The location of the IOWAs, as defined in the North Dorset District Wide Local Plan 1st Revision, is shown on **Plan 10**. The areas have been considered in turn to determine their character. **Comments and recommendations are shown in bold type.** The numbers below relate to the particular IOWA on the plan.

Gillingham IOWAs

Important Open or Wooded Areas are shown on the Study Plan (1) and are numbered on **Plan 10**.

1. This IOWA is a fairly narrow strip of reseeded grassland located on the northern edge of the Peacemarth residential development. There are new houses to the south side and a hedge to the north side, which has one substantial hedgerow oak tree. The main species in hedgerow are elm, blackthorn, hawthorn, bramble, honeysuckle and dog rose. The hedgerow, which is c. 2.5m+ high, is a strong element that continues west to the River Stour and is a crucial element within the green space. Amenity planting has occurred within the IOWA, but only 13 out of 28 planted trees survive.

The green space may need an extra area on the north of the hedge to accommodate the existing Right of Way outside the proposed employment development to the north, as well as the proposed cycleway within the IOWA. Consideration should be given to additional planting, possibly a second hedge line which would allow the continued appearance of a substantial hedge when one is cut back for management.

Adjacent to the IOWA is a proposed woodland planting area (policy GH 2.1a). **An integrated scheme based on native species for the two areas would be beneficial. The planting should be implemented well before the employment area is developed.**

2. This IOWA is basically triangular in shape, with the point at the eastern edge and a substantial hedge running east to west from this point. There is a large oak tree at western end and a single oak to the north of the hedge at western end. On the southern side amenity tree planting has occurred, but a substantial proportion are dead. Generally the area is roughly mown grass, but there is a section to the east on the north of the hedge that appears more regularly mown. A footpath appears to follow the line of the hedge from Fairey Bridge to Dolphin Inn. The site is surrounded by residential development, with a road along the northern side and a tarmac path along the south-eastern side.

The hedge, trees and open space are a crucial green area within the large residential development. The IOWA has significant scope for recreational use. For example, it could have a 'village green' function within the development, possibly including a play area or teenage/adult fitness trail.

There is a need to maintain the footpath access, particularly to the west where there is a narrow path with 2m fence. This path is currently overgrown and hard to walk through in places. The stile should be removed to facilitate easier access for pushchairs and the less able. There is also scope to link it to Honeyfields via an access from a parking area.

3. IOWA 3 is located along the northern edge of the Horsefields and Cherryfields development. The boundary line against the properties has some logic in defining the open space, however the northern line is inconsistent. At both the eastern and western ends the boundary is an arbitrary line not following existing boundaries. However, there is a section in the centre that does follow a hedge line. To further complicate matters; the boundary cuts across the middle of a storm water retention area. The whole area is strongly influenced by hedges and trees, in many cases outside the currently defined boundary. There are remnants of a substantial hedge in the middle of the site, and around the south and west sides of the storm retention area. Amenity tree planting has been successful in parts, but not others. The western sector is roughly mown grass, with an enclosed triangle of more regularly maintained grass in the centre section. This centre section has an air of tranquillity due to hedges and planting. The eastern sectors of the IOWA are largely unkempt, but with

considerable potential.

My view is that the boundary of the IOWA should go from Fairey Bridge, along the river and up to the Colesbrook Road. The areas currently outside the IOWA include the heavily treed course of Shreen Water, a roughly triangular area of grass, and part of the Milton Buffer Zone (Colesbrook section). There are opportunities for informal recreation, however at present the varied edge of the development is beginning to blend with the countryside.

The IOWA is closely linked to the Buffer Zone, as the settlement boundary cuts through the centre of the open area creating the line where the IOWA meets the Buffer Zone. We believe that it would make sense to move the settlement boundary either in or out, so that the whole area is either within the development area or outside it.

4. This IOWA is the town cemetery. It is on relatively high ground and is a fairly substantial open area. There are a variety of amenity trees some of which are clearly regularly trimmed, but few substantial specimens. There is also a small chapel near the entrance and, understandably, a large number of gravestones, crosses and other memorials. On the northern sides housing and garages are very close to the boundary, and so overlook parts of the cemetery. At the entrance is a small verge area with three young trees that could be included in the IOWA. Boundary planting could enhance this area as a tranquil green space. A pathway through the cemetery links to Wavering Lane.

5. This is quite a large area from Rolls Bridge to Wavering Lane, including a storm water retention area. The River Stour flows through it, with numerous trees on the banks. In addition to a small number of mature trees away from the river, extra amenity planting is becoming established. There are walkways through the area and the varying levels of grassland management provide a variety of habitats, from close mown grass to rank grassland. **This is a significant part of the Stour Valley as it enters the urban area and is a crucial open space between the relatively recent Rolls Bridge Way development and the older area around Hyde Road. It may be practical to include the hedged area along the middle of the eastern side (where it meets Hyde Road) in the IOWA.**

6. This IOWA stretches from the south side of Rolls Bridge to Le Neubourg Way, immediately south of the Youth Centre, straddling the River Stour for much of its length. This is a very mixed area with different characteristics, including part of the Garden of Rest, the allotment gardens, some of the grassland between the old folks home and the river, and the large new house built adjacent to Le Neubourg Way. There are substantial trees along the banks of the river, and there has been new planting associated with the Hawthorn Avenue development and the path to Rolls Bridge. There are substantial and interesting trees in and around the Garden of Rest, including a substantial line of pines along the boundary with the allotment gardens. South of the allotment gardens, a belt of young trees has been planted across the valley line within the last couple of years. Currently the field west of the Youth Centre is very secluded and difficult to access. The area is focused around the spine of trees that run along the course of the river, although different sections have different features and characteristics.

This is a significant and sizeable green arm reaching towards the town centre. It might be appropriate to consider including the whole of the grassland around the old folks home and also the quite sizeable gardens of the houses immediately west of Rolls Bridge in the IOWA. The IOWA could also be extended south to include the open and treed gardens up to Wyke Bridge.

7. This is the school field (Gillingham Wyke Primary School) and hence mown grass. **The IOWA is a useful space, creating a gap between the quite tightly packed recent development.** The site is on a high point.

8. Located on the western side of Gillingham Wyke Primary School, this has the appearance of a very wide verge or a small village green. There is a fenced children's play area adjacent to the school boundary. Along the southern boundary is a hedge, which provides screening from the development to the south. **There is also a substantial oak tree to the south-west, but this falls outside the IOWA.**

9. An area of grassland that is between the southern end of the Freame Way development and the Mellows Nursing Home. It is in fact part of the wider field to the north-west. There is a hedge along the boundary with the Freame Way development and

views south-eastwards to Duncliffe Hill. There are a couple of trees south-west of the site and a new building has been built on the south side of the road outside the development area.

10. This is a large area of predominately flat, rough grassland, that goes from the south of the Church View development and Le Neubourg Way, across to the River Stour. It includes two substantial hedgerows with mature trees, running slightly west of south, and dividing the site into three main areas. There is a small south-westerly extension through the hedgerow that runs diagonally from the sewage works toward Common Mead Lane. About one third of the boundary adjoins development on the north-western sector and the site is screened from the north by the raised causeway of Le Neubourg Way and its associated tree planting. The south-eastern boundary follows the River Stour, where there is rough bank side vegetation on lower levels hiding the storm overflow course of the river. There are small to medium trees along the river, which partially screen the industrial areas to the west associated with Station Road. There is no natural boundary at the south-east side of the IOWA, as it cuts across the centre of a large field. The landscape, therefore, is the same in this part of the IOWA and the eastern section of the adjacent urban fringe. There is a significant storm water retention area at the northern end of the site. In addition to the existing Rights of Way, there are a number of other paths regularly used, particularly by dog walkers. This area is currently outside the settlement boundary and is being promoted as a common.

The area could be extended to include two small sections on the east of the Stour, which are currently not developed and fall outside the settlement boundary. Additional planting along the river bank, set back from the river, would improve the screening of the employment areas, where the buildings are of somewhat mixed and industrial character.

11. The area straddles the River Lodden southwards from Lodden Bridge. The river channel has been adjusted to create storm water channels and some amenity planting has been undertaken. It is predominately very rough grassland, with pathways mown through it and an area opposite Lodden View cutback. In addition to strong, hedge-like bank growth along the eastern bank, there are a few substantial trees. The south-western boundaries currently do not exist on the ground and the IOWA blends in seamlessly with what is

currently gently rolling open countryside and the fairly level meander plain of the river. There are a number of easy access points from the Addison Close / Lodden View developments. **The mature ash tree on the riverbank is a significant feature seen from many areas outside the IOWA.**

12. This is the area north-east of the Lodden Bridge, largely the riverbank flood area outside the new Trinity Vale development. The eastern end extends in a thin strip northward (it appears the development may have encroached upon this) to the wooded railway bank, and southwards across the river to include the gardens where there are some substantial trees. The eastern boundary hedge, although tall, is rather thin, and it appears to be following the boundary line of the ancient 'Royal Deer Park'. It is, therefore, probably of historic interest and value. Although much of the site is currently bare, the Local Plan originally envisaged play areas, riverside walks and access in the direction of Kings Court.

The IOWA could be extended slightly eastwards along the Shaftesbury Road to include the large garden, containing poplar trees.

13. This area includes the recreation ground, the adjacent grassland field (which includes the football ground), the pasture field to the north and the all weather sports pitch of the school (which is the highest point). There is a row of conifers along the eastern side of the all weather pitch. There are hedges on three sides of the area, with prominent Lombardy poplars at the southern end and amenity planting on the northern side. The railway is immediately outside the southern boundary, and is on a slight embankment on the eastern end moving into a cutting at the western end. The new development of Trinity Vale is clearly visible from most of this IOWA. The eastern boundary blends with the hedges to the north and east, and there are four or five trees identifiable within the scene. **The IOWA lies on a visual boundary between the suburban townscape and surrounding rural environment.**

14. This is the area at the entrance to Gillingham school, including the school rugby pitch, and the adjacent Bowling Club green. The section within the school grounds also contains a treed walkway, primarily ash with two hornbeam at the northern end. The ground slopes to the south-west. There is a hedge separating the bowling green from the school

grounds. **It may be possible, with the trees to the north-west and north-east of the bowling green, to link this IOWA to IOWA 15.**

15. This IOWA comprises the school playing fields sloping westwards. They are hedged around with trees along the south-western half of the southern boundary. In the southeast corner there has been a recent hard court sports development.

16. The area of the Church grounds. This is made up of a largely grassed churchyard with some amenity planting and a walkway around it. The area is strongly influenced by the scale and form of the historic buildings around it.

17. This is a 'sausage' shaped field on the northern side of Shreen Water. The area is generally flat with some small trees on the line of the river. The area is a green island within the built environment and is backed on by a number of historic buildings. The backs of gardens border the site, in many ways expanding the area and adding in a number of significant trees. **The IOWA does not include the substantial area of willows to the northeast, or the area to Bay Bridge. The new development at Barnaby Mead overlooks the site and will be visible through the partial tree cover along the river.**

Milton IOWAs

1. This is a private garden with old beech, lime and ash trees. There is also a variety of ornamental species.

2. This is a private grassed open space, fringed by horse chestnuts and ash, with a hedge at the base. The trees are growing inside the boundary and not in the hedge. There is a large spreading chestnut tree in the open area. The area faces across to the church.

3. This area is a continuation of IOWA 2. Again, there is an open area with significant horse chestnuts. The area is hedged around.

4. This area is comprises two domestic gardens. There are trees behind a hedgerow, including lime, ash and maple species. There are some dead elm. Large ash trees are situated at the west and north ends of the area.

5. The Stour runs to the west of this area of paddock with large trees. There are large horse chestnuts, a large beech and a large redwood species. Stourside House, which is not included as part of the IOWA, has several large trees including Scots pine and more ornamental species.

6. This area also runs adjacent to the eastern bank of the Stour. It is the garden of Kendalls Farm. There is a laurel hedge screening it from the road.

7. This area is part of the Old House garden, including substantial beech and horse chestnut planting. **Outside of the IOWA there are substantial areas of trees to the north of the northern drive and the south of the southern drive. It would seem logical to include these in the important wooded area.**

Tree Preservation Orders

We have received a map from North Dorset District Council showing the area, group and individual TPOs in place in Gillingham. We have not seen the individual schedules and, therefore, our observations are based on what we understand to be currently protected. **Significant comments and recommendations are shown in bold type.**

A quick assessment of the TPO situation is that **none of the hedgerow trees either side of the River Stour north of Wavering Lane and up to Milton on Stour is shown as protected** in any way. **Many of these trees are significant features in the landscape, readily visible from the rights of way and the new developments.**

There are also **no TPOs in the Bay or football ground areas** leading to the railway line sector, **although there are clearly trees of character. The trees to the north and south of Bay Bridge have also not been given protection.**

On the other hand, it appears that protection orders were made when the western slopes of Bowridge Hill were under consideration for potential development. However, it must be noted that if this survey was undertaken a long time ago it may relate to elm trees that have since died.

South of the railway line, one tree is shown in the original Brickfields Industrial Estate, immediately south of the station footbridge. A further two are shown just south of the junction at Kingscourt Road. **It appears that none of the trees in the existing development, or trees in areas that are proposed/committed for development, have been given protection. There are substantial and significant trees within these areas.**

There are three trees shown in Church View as protected, though the positions are perhaps 20m from their correct locations. It appears that additional planting has not been given TPO protection.

Outside the Conservation Area, there is **nothing protected along the south side of Common Mead Lane.** However, there is an area order and eight individual TPOs in the triangle between Knapp House and Broad Robin. In the rest of the area **between Common Mead Lane and Wyke Road, there are seven individual TPOs, but they do not include the substantial and obvious Monterey pines and oak trees.**

Although Wyke Road has quite a wooded character, none of the trees from Knapp House to the Old Brewery have TPO protection.

Wyke Hall is covered by an area order and seven specimen trees are identified in the new development on the southern boundary by the road (west of the Old Brewery).

The whole of the Rolls Bridge Road recent development, stretching down as far as Hawthorn Close and up to the bridge at Wavering Lane, is covered by an area order. In view of the significance of the remaining trees in this area, the individual and group trees should be identified and the appropriate TPOs made.

Outside the Conservation Area, and between the Mere Road and the Stour up to Peacemarsh, no TPOs have been made. An area order exists on the original Barnaby Mead development and includes the Town Mills and Rawson Court. North of the Bay Road, up to Gyllas Way, there is one individual TPO.

It should be noted that Area Orders are usually made in an emergency to cover all trees in the area. **Government guidance (2000) recommends that Area TPOs are redesignated as groups or individual trees as in the past it has been difficult to prove that trees damaged or destroyed were there at the time the Area Order was made.**

It is recommended that **trees included in landscape schemes implemented with recent and new housing developments should be considered for long term protection by TPOs.**

Appendix H

Red Lion / Waitrose area

Physical description

The redevelopment area between Town Bridge and the Stour footpath is predominantly mown grass and also includes the Red Lion car park. Along the river bank to the east trees grow closely together and there is thick ground vegetation growth, making access to the watercourse incredibly difficult. The land is relatively flat. There is a board fence across the centre of the site, which acts to stop pedestrians following the river bank or crossing the site other than by the path next to the Red Lion.

The area to the south of the footbridge is varied due to different levels of management that have occurred. Adjacent to the river there is a lower ground level, which may be a flood channel, while there is a raised bank with a hard surfaced path several metres to the south of this. To the east of the footbridge, an area of grass has been mown and the riverbank vegetation cleared. There is also a bench at this point. This managed section of the bank is the only point within the area with direct access to the watercourse or clear space to see the water. Further to the east of this area, the bank side vegetation is overgrown preventing views of the river. However, there is some shorter vegetation near to the road. This section of open land adjacent to the River Stour continues around to the footpath under Le Neubourg Way, where a large willow acts as a significant landmark.

To the west of the footbridge the river is overgrown and vegetation acts to prevent access to the watercourse and narrow the river channel. There are a number of large trees and shrubs to the west of the footbridge, which act to shade the river. The area of the Stour leading to Chantry Ford has thick vegetation along both sides of the river. The section of Shreen Water from the Town Bridge to the confluence with the River Stour has many trees, including willows and alders. Access to the watercourse here is very difficult and the area is shaded extensively by the thick vegetation.

The Town Bridge, which could be a focal point of the town centre, has limited views of the river and currently no access along the rivers edge. Around the north and east sides of the confluence itself, the river bank is thickly treed. The additional footbridge over to

Buckingham Road is not particularly inviting. The path does not lead directly to the High Street, but to the back of some of the shops and residential areas.

Planning situation

The area either side of the footbridge leading from the back of the Red Lion to Waitrose has not been designated on the project map. On the Local Plan Gillingham Town Centre Proposals Map (15a), the open area to the north of the footbridge has been highlighted as an area for redevelopment. It should also be noted that this section falls within the town centre Conservation Area. The area to the south of the footbridge currently has no planning designations, with the exception of being declared as a Site of Archaeological Importance.

Assessment

The area has scope to become more functionally and visually diverse in character. The overgrown vegetation within the river itself is unlikely to be optimum habitat and may be affecting the water flow. The route beside the river is underused due to the lack of access points. The one point that is obviously managed for recreation appears to be well used, suggesting that there could well be public support for further recreational areas and an increase in amenity use.

Chantry Fields

Description

Chantry Fields is a relatively flat, open area, dominated by rough grassland. The main elements of visual interest within the site derive from the boundaries that surround it. Along the line of the River Stour there are occasional trees and scrubby riverbank vegetation, leading to open views over to the industrial area. The trees along the line of the railway bank form a strong visual boundary to the south, and reduce the impact of the sewage works. There are several strong hedge lines throughout the area, creating linear features running north to south. There are areas of relatively recent development to the east of the area.

However the lines of hedges, which provide containment within the site, reduce the impact. There is also a group of trees, including Scots pine and oak, in the hedge running south from Church View. There is a flood water retention area that creates a significant feature within the site. Although the vegetation is the same grassland as the areas surrounding it, the

distinct change in topography, in the otherwise flat area, is noticeable. The bypass to the north of the site, Le Neubourg Way, is on a raised causeway with amenity planting on the sides.

Assessment

The Chantry Fields area is well used for recreational walking, particularly dog walkers. Although there are a number of footpaths within the site, these are not strictly adhered to and a number of informal routes have arisen. These tend to go along the lines of the hedges and the river, rather than the diagonal route of the official paths.

There is little obvious management within the Chantry Fields site. There are a large number of docks within the rough grass and the land is not productive. The grassland would benefit from additional management to prevent it becoming rank. There is also some evidence of Dutch Elm Disease.

Appendix I

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