

Swale Borough Council

Swale Important Local Countryside Gaps Review

Final report

Prepared by LUC

February 2025



Swale Borough Council

Swale Important Local Countryside Gaps Review

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Project aims

1.1 The aim of this Important Local Countryside Gaps Review is to undertake an independent review of the Important Local Countryside Gaps around Sittingbourne, Upchurch and Sheerness. It will provide a clear evidence base on the role these areas play in providing a sense of separation between settlements; safeguarding the open and undeveloped character of the land; and guarding against coalescence.

1.2 The gaps were last reviewed in 2014 and were found to be sound at the previous Local Plan Examination of the current Local Plan: Bearing Fruits (adopted 2017). This review will be used as part of the evidence base for the new Local Plan.

1.3 This review follows the same methodology developed by LUC in 2021 to define new Important Local Countryside Gaps between Teynham and Bapchild, Teynham and Lynsted, Faversham and Oare, Faversham and Ospringe and Faversham and Goodnestone.

1.4 This study updates the existing Important Local Countryside Gaps in the west of the borough. This ensures all the gaps follow the same methodology and are defined using a consistent method and evidence base.

Important Local Countryside Gaps

1.5 The sense of separation provided between settlements relates to the character of the gap as well as its size. Small gaps can be effective in maintaining settlement separation if they have a rural character and provide separation. This could be due to a distinct topography, the presence of vegetation which limits inter-visibility between the settlements, or the gap containing a distinct landscape feature. On the other hand, large gaps may not be effective if they have a suburban character, lack vegetation or have clear inter-visibility between the settlements, and lack any other features that might provide a sense of separation such as a distinct topographical or landscape feature.

Background and policy context

1.6 Protection of existing settlement pattern and gaps is not specifically mentioned in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF 2024), nor the associated PPG. However,

the concept of settlement gaps is broadly consistent with the NPPF in that: *“Strategic policies...should make sufficient provision for ...conservation and enhancement of the natural built and historic environment, including landscapes and green infrastructure”* (NPPF paragraph 20) and *“Planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by...protecting and enhancing valued landscape”* (NPPF paragraph 187).

1.7 In Swale, Important Local Countryside Gaps were defined and set out in the 2008 Local Plan. The boundaries were reviewed and updated in Technical Paper 6 in 2014, and confirmed in Bearing Fruits, the 2017 adopted Local Plan.

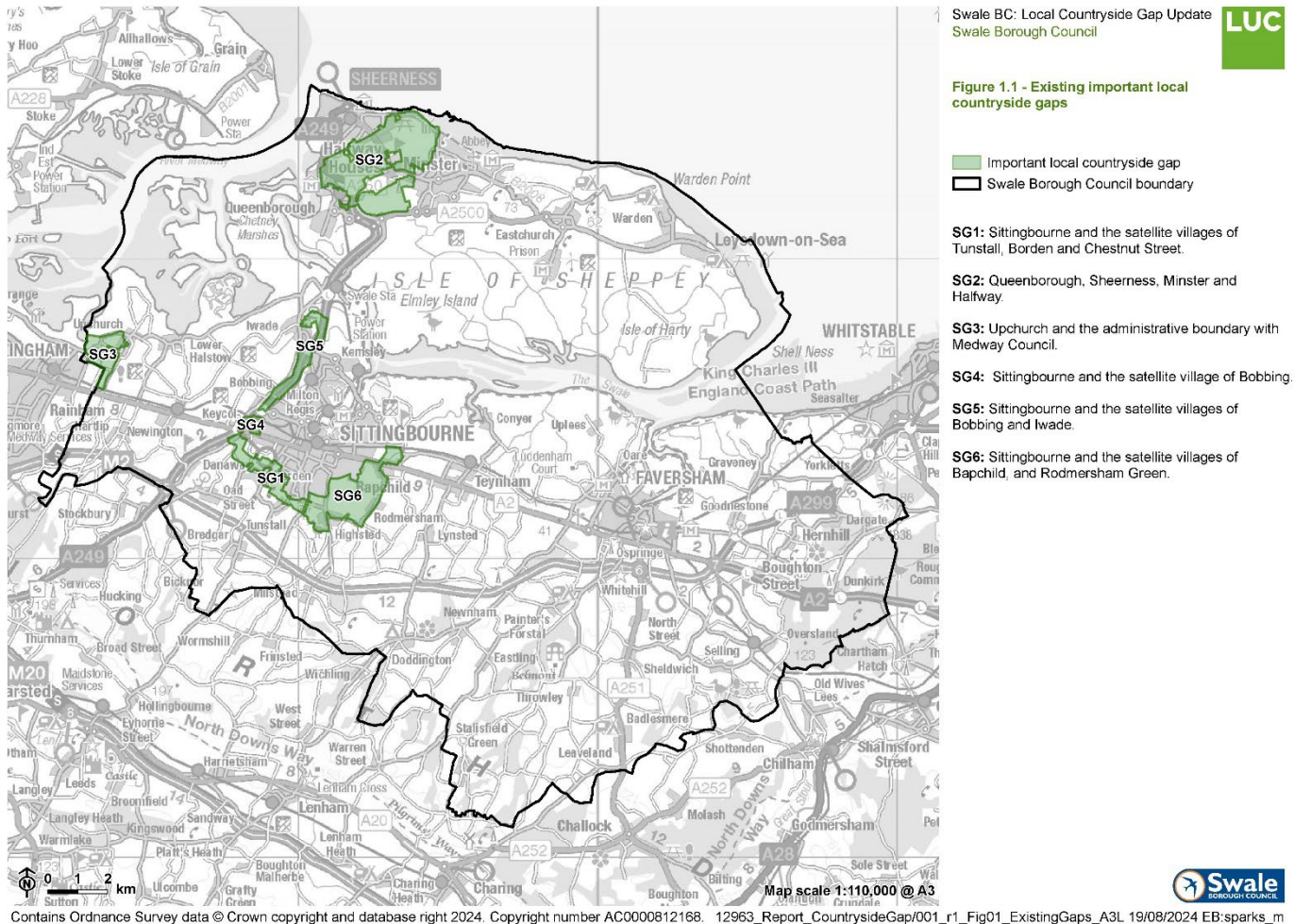
1.8 The purpose of the Important Local Countryside Gaps, as defined in Policy DM 25 of the Swale Local Plan (2017) are to:

- maintain the separate identities and character of settlements by preventing their merging;
- safeguard the open and undeveloped character of the areas;
- prevent encroachment and piecemeal erosion by built development or changes to the rural open character; and
- influence decisions on the longer-term development of settlements through the preparation and review of Local Plans.

1.9 The current defined settlement gaps which this study reviews are listed below, and illustrated on Figure 1.1:

- Sittingbourne and the satellite villages of Bapchild, Rodmersham Green, Tunstall, Borden, Chestnut Street, Bobbing and Iwade;
- Upchurch and the administrative boundary with Medway Council; and
- Queenborough, Sheerness, Minster and Halfway.

Figure 1.1 Existing Important Local Countryside Gaps



Chapter 2

Methodology

2.1 An essential element in reviewing areas for local designation is the adoption of a consistent, systematic, and transparent process.

2.2 There is currently no prescribed method for assessing 'gap' designations. Strategic gap policies have generally been found sound at Examination when they are supported by robust and up-to-date evidence to justify the extent or purpose of the gaps identified and are focused on protecting specific areas between settlements (rather than all rural areas outside settlements).

2.3 The criteria-based approach used in this study draws from LUC's experience in undertaking similar reviews elsewhere in the UK, lessons learned from our involvement in Local Plan examination, the specific requirements of the Council, and from the previous 2021 Important Local Countryside Gaps study. The criteria were drawn up in discussion with SBC Planning Officers.

Key stages and tasks

2.4 All of the existing Important Local Countryside Gaps have been assessed for their continual inclusion within the Important Local Countryside Gaps policy:

- SG1: Sittingbourne and the satellite villages of Tunstall, Borden and Chestnut Street;
- SG2: Queenborough, Sheerness, Minster and Halfway;
- SG3: Upchurch and the administrative boundary with Medway Council;
- SG4: Sittingbourne and the satellite village of Bobbing;
- SG5: Sittingbourne and the satellite villages of Bobbing and Iwade; and
- SG6: Sittingbourne and the satellite villages of Bapchild, and Rodmersham Green.

2.5 The Important Local Countryside Gaps recommended in the 2021 study have not yet been adopted and are not included within this review.

Evaluation criteria

2.6 The evaluation criteria were developed by LUC drawing on previous strategic gap studies, which have been assessed as robust through the Local Plan examination process. They

have been refined to reflect the particular landscape and settlement pattern of Swale.

2.7 Each of the Important Local Countryside Gap assessments were undertaken using the criteria set out in Table 2.2.

Desk review

2.8 The desk review involved a two-step evaluation. The gaps were assessed against the criteria set out in Table 2.2, to understand how the identity of the adjacent settlements and the landscape and visual characteristics of the gap contribute to its character as open and undeveloped land. Each criterion was given a rating as set out in Table 2.1: with commentary on whether the area meets, does not meet or partially meets criteria for designation.

Table 2.1 Ratings

Key	
Fully meets	
Partially meets	
Does not meet	

2.9 Sources of information used for the desk study include:

- 1:25,000 OS mapping
- Conservation Area Appraisals

- Google Earth
- Swale Landscape Character and Biodiversity Appraisal
- Swale Landscape Sensitivity Assessment

2.10 The gaps were also evaluated against practical considerations, as set out in Table 2.3, including their extent, boundaries and potential for enhancement.

2.11 The issues were summarised, concluding whether the area meets the criteria for continual designation as an Important Local Countryside Gap.

Field verification

2.12 Field checking was undertaken in July and August 2024 to review information on the ground and test and refine the draft Important Local Countryside Gap assessment and boundaries. The field survey was undertaken from roads and public rights of way.

Final report and boundaries

2.13 The outputs of this review are presented in Chapter 3.

2.14 Maps of the existing and proposed refinements to the gaps and their boundaries were mapped at 1:25,000. These were also provided as shapefiles to form part of the Proposals Map for the Local Plan. The boundaries generally follow recognisable physical features, the defined built-up area boundaries or the boundaries of committed development or allocations.

Table 2.2 Important Local Countryside Gap assessment criteria

Criterion	Explanation	Indicators of a weak gap	Indicators of a strong gap
Existing settlement identity and pattern	Assess the extent to which the settlements or neighbourhoods that lie adjacent to the gap have an individual townscape character and identity that contributes to existing settlement pattern.	The individual townscape character, form and pattern of the settlements or neighbourhoods that lie adjacent to the gap are not distinct. Loss or partial loss of the gap would not adversely affect the existing settlement pattern.	The individual townscape character, form and pattern of the settlement or neighbourhoods that lie adjacent to the gap are distinct. The presence of Conservation Areas, Listed Buildings are indicators of individual settlement character. The gap plays a role in settlement separation and pattern.
Landscape character	Assess the landscape character of the area between the settlements or neighbourhoods and any land use and landscape features within the gap that	There are significant manmade features or urban land uses that contribute to the developed character of the landscape.	Existing rural land uses contribute to the open and undeveloped 'countryside' character of the landscape, e.g. agriculture, horticulture, forestry.

Criterion	Explanation	Indicators of a weak gap	Indicators of a strong gap
	contribute to its character as open and undeveloped land.	The area lacks typical elements of rural vegetation e.g. farmland, hedges, trees etc, which contribute to an undeveloped character. The area has a suburban character and residential areas outside defined settlement boundaries weaken the perception of the gap as 'countryside'.	The landscape has significant landscape features that contribute to its undeveloped character. There is a low density or absence of development.
Visual character	Assess the visual character of the area between settlements and any views to settlements or from settlements into the open countryside that contribute to that character and provide visual separation between settlements or neighbourhoods.	Views to and from the settlement do not contribute positively to the visual character of the area. There is a clear inter-visibility between the settlements due to a lack of vegetation. Intervisibility alone does not indicate a weak gap and this criteria interplays with settlement identity and pattern e.g. intervisibility of contrasting settlement types may contribute to a stronger gap function.	Views to and from the settlement contribute positively to the visual character of the area (e.g. views mentioned in the Landscape Character Assessment/ Conservation Area appraisal). There are limited/no views between settlements. Landscape elements, such as hills, ridges, and/or tall vegetation within the gap contribute to the sense of visual separation between the settlements. Alternatively, where there is intervisibility or a narrow gap, the view shows clearly differing settlement character and identity e.g. between an expanding urban edge and distinct rural village. Open vistas and long views may also indicate a strong gap where they are an important part of the character of the landscape.

Table 2.3 Practical considerations

Criterion	Explanation	Indicators
Gap extent	Assess the role of the extent of the gap in maintaining physical separation between settlements or neighbourhoods. What is the physical extent of the area between settlements? What are the key routes between settlements? Appropriateness of distances will vary from area to area and are intrinsically linked to characteristics and features of the landscape which sits between	The gap is less than 2km away from a neighbouring settlement. The gap should be of sufficient size to make it practical to develop policies for its protection, management and planning. A distance further than 2km could be considered too great to prevent the coalescence of two settlements.

Criterion	Explanation	Indicators
	settlements i.e. gaps should have the sense of leaving one settlement, moving through the gap before entering a different settlement.	
Boundary defensibility	Boundaries of the existing Important Local Countryside Gaps should follow physical features on the ground, considering potential new boundary features that may alter the risk of settlement coalescence. Review the pressures on the land between the settlements from draft allocations and promoted sites.	The gap is not subject to draft allocation, or future infrastructure projects.
Potential for enhancement	Review existing environmental designations (both national and local level ecological and cultural heritage designations), priority habitats and recreational features (including PRoW, cycle paths, open access land/registered common land, allotments, amenity green spaces) to provide an indication of the value of the landscape. Other sources of information include Swale Blue/Green Infrastructure. Use this to consider the potential enhancements to existing open space, wildlife areas, cultural heritage and access to the countryside (via PRoW etc).	Presence of green space and recreational values – highly accessible green space, presence of PRoW, recreational facilities e.g. sports pitches, play areas and parks. Ecological values – environmental designations indicating higher Green Infrastructure value, indicated through the presence of SSSI, SINCs, National and Local Nature Reserves, ancient woodland etc.

2.15 These indicators work in combination, and an Important Local Countryside Gap will not need to fulfil all the criteria equally. The assessments are based on professional judgement, taking account of the complex interplay between the criteria, as well as instances where some criteria might be more important to a particular Important Local Countryside Gap.

Limitations

2.16 This is a strategic level study, undertaken at a scale of 1:25,000.

2.17 The gap boundaries are chosen to be functional, defensible and pragmatic. Where possible they follow defined features on the ground including roads, tracks, field boundaries or occasionally rights of way. This means that the gaps may include some areas that are not critical to a gap function but are included for practical reasons.

2.18 Similarly, the boundaries of the gaps are taken up to the existing settlement edge represented by built

development/settlement boundary or the extent of proposed allocations. The definition of a critical area of gap away from the existing settlement edges would not be practical or defensible.

2.19 Finally, it should be noted that an Important Local Countryside Gap is not a landscape quality designation. Gaps may include degraded elements or features including for example abandoned land, areas of polytunnel/glasshouses, quarries or limited development. The key requirement is that overall, they have a rural/countryside character and are not developed.

Chapter 3

Important Local Countryside Gap Assessments

3.1 This chapter presents the results of the review of the six existing Important Local Countryside Gaps against the agreed assessment criteria set out in Chapter 2.

SG1: Sittingbourne and the satellite villages of Tunstall, Borden and Chestnut Street

Figure 3.1 Natural heritage and landscape designations

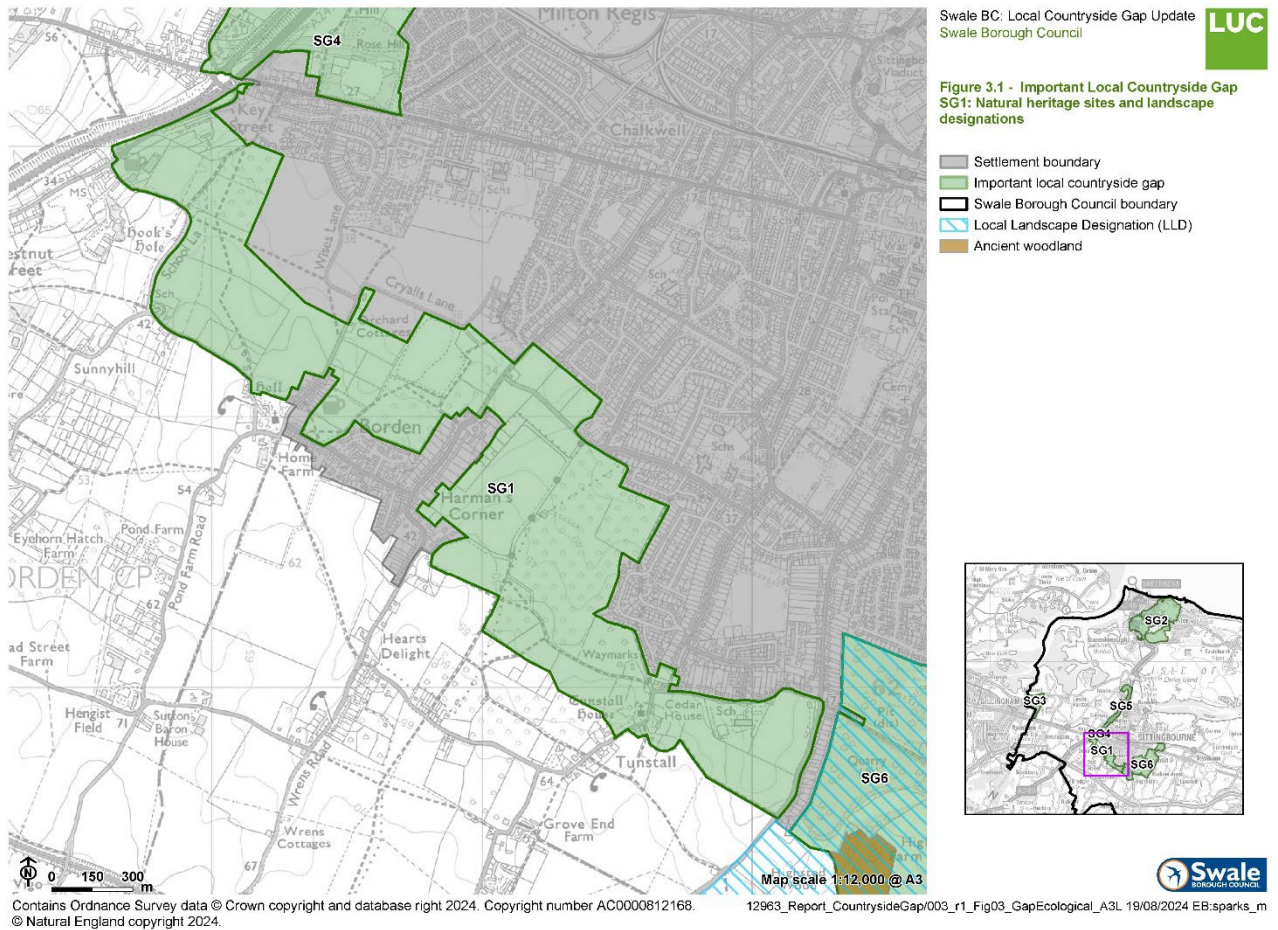


Figure 3.2 Cultural heritage and recreation

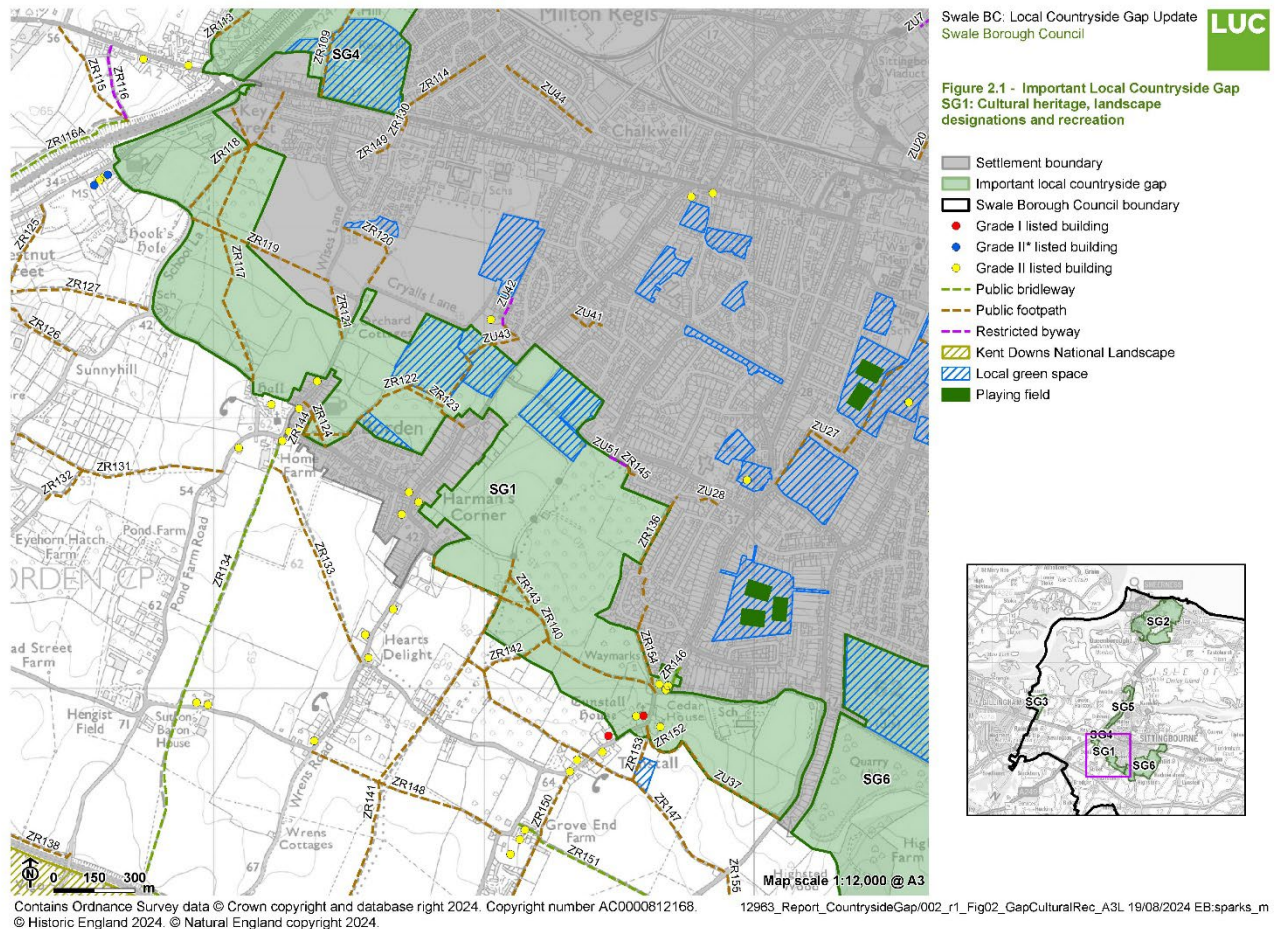


Figure 3.3 Representative photos



View north from ZR117 towards construction of new settlement edge of Sittingbourne



View north from the edge of Tunstall on ZU37 looking towards Sittingbourne

Location and extent of area

Table 3.1 Summary of existing gap

SG1: Sittingbourne and the satellite villages of Tunstall, Borden and Chestnut Street	
Location and extent of area	The gap lies to the south and south-west of Sittingbourne. The boundary follows the A249, School Lane, settlement edge of Borden and field boundaries before ending in the east at Ruins Barn Road. Important Local Countryside Gap SG6 lies to the east of Ruin Barn Lane.
Landscape character context	LCA 19: Borden Mixed Farmlands LCA 42: Tunstall Farmlands.

Table 3.2 Assessment criteria

Assessment criteria	Rating	Commentary
Existing settlement identity and pattern	Fully meets	Sittingbourne Sittingbourne was a small market town along the Roman road of Watling Street, which expanded in the medieval era as a route for pilgrims travelling to Canterbury. This continued into the 18th century as Sittingbourne was an important stopping point on the journey between London and Canterbury. In the 20th century Sittingbourne expanded considerably in all directions, including to incorporate the originally separate settlements of Key Street in the west and farmland of Gore Court Park. The western edge of Sittingbourne is contained by the A249 Maidstone Road. The south-western edge is less well defined. Chestnut Street and Borden Borden parish lies to the immediate south-west of Sittingbourne and contains a number of small settlements including the roadside settlement of Chestnut Street. A number of Roman trackways ran south through the parish from Watling Street, with evidence of villas and burials. The parish was part of a late Anglo-Saxon estate centred at Milton, and the dispersed pattern of hamlets and farms can still be read in the landscape at Chestnut Street and Harman's Corner. A number of housing developments from the 1970s has enlarged the size of Borden village. They have also caused Borden and Harman's Corner to coalesce. Land at South West Sittingbourne, along Wises Lane, has permission for up to 675 dwellings, primary school,

Assessment criteria	Rating	Commentary
		local retail and commercial facilities, sports facilities and a link road between Borden Lane, Chestnut Street and the A249. This development largely lies within the settlement boundary of Sittingbourne. However, the link road to Chestnut Street and the A249 will run south of the electricity substation within the gap between Chestnut Street and Sittingbourne. There is clear separation between the edge of Sittingbourne / Key Street and Chestnut Street and Borden. The Borden – The Street Conservation Area Appraisal states <i>'The continued separation between Borden and Sittingbourne is a crucial component of the setting allowing the historic plan of the settlement to be preserved and its agricultural context which was so important to its development'</i>. Development currently under construction west of Wises Lane and south of Key Street / Sittingbourne brings the edge of Sittingbourne closer to the east of Chestnut Street Tunstall Tunstall was recorded in the Domesday survey and remains a linear settlement along Tunstall Road. Post war housing development on the southern edge of Sittingbourne has significantly reduced the gap between the two settlements. However, Tunstall Conservation Area Appraisal states that <i>'Despite the southwards expansion of Sittingbourne up to its very northern edge, Tunstall's identity continues to remain remarkably rural in character and distinct from Sittingbourne's suburbs'</i>. A planning application was recently allowed at appeal for up to 290 dwellings, footpaths and cycle routes, landscaping and other infrastructure works on the edge of Sittingbourne, between Harman's Corner and Tunstall.
Landscape character	Fully meets	Chestnut Street and Borden Most of the land between Sittingbourne / Key Street and Chestnut Street and between Sittingbourne and Borden is in agricultural use, with arable cropping dominant. An electricity substation, electricity pylons, and large farm buildings along School Lane in the west

Assessment criteria	Rating	Commentary
		are modern elements in the landscape. A former chalk quarry and landfill on the northern edge of Borden is regenerating with grassland and scrub. It is now a nature reserve and designated as a Local Green Space. Land to the north-east of Borden is in use as allotments and also designated as a Local Green Space. Small areas of land are recorded as priority habitat traditional orchard, although these do not appear to be in use as orchards now. Tunstall Land immediately east and west of Tunstall is in agricultural use for arable cropping. To the north the land is in use for commercial orchards. The gap includes parts of the historic core of Tunstall including the Grade I listed Church of St John the Baptist. Educational facilities associated with Tunstall C of E primary school and a training ground lie south of Tunstall Road and west of Ruins Barn Road. There is limited additional development within the gap. Small areas of land are recorded as priority habitat traditional orchard, although these do not appear to be in use as orchards now.
Visual character	Fully meets	Chestnut Street and Borden Chestnut Street Conservation Area Appraisal states that the surviving open countryside to the east of the hamlet forms part of the important open spaces preserving the sense of the rural location of the hamlet. Mature hedgerows and result in no views between Chestnut Street and Key Street / Sittingbourne. Borden - The Street Conservation Area Appraisal states that land to the north contributes to the rural countryside setting of the village. There are long distance views across Sittingbourne towards the Swale and Sheppey. Hedgerows and mature trees within Borden Nature Reserve restrict views between the existing settlement edge of Sittingbourne and Borden. Tunstall There is a strong relationship between the Tunstall Conservation Area and surrounding landscape, experienced through views and vistas and on the

Assessment criteria	Rating	Commentary
		public footpath network. Despite the close proximity of Sittingbourne, houses along Tunstall Road result in no views between the two settlements. The undulating topography and hedgerow boundaries result in no views between Chestnut Street, Borden and Tunstall.

Table 3.3 Practical considerations

Consideration	Commentary
Gap extent	Chestnut Street The gap between Key Street / Sittingbourne and Chestnut Street the south of Bapchild is around 310m. The main route between the settlements is Chestnut Street in the north. Public right of way ZR118 leads between Key Street / Sittingbourne and School Lane, although not directly into Chestnut Street. The electricity substation is a modern element along Chestnut Street between the two settlements. Development currently under construction west of Wises Lane and south of Key Street / Sittingbourne brings the edge of Sittingbourne closer to the east of Chestnut Street but does not bridge the gap. The gap between the new settlement edge and School Lane is therefore important if the separate settlements are to be retained. Part of the new development on Wises Lane is to provide a new road junction with the A429. This will cross the gap between Chestnut Street and the electricity substation. While the road itself will not reduce the gap extent, it will create another modern element within the gap. Borden The gap between Borden and Sittingbourne is around 230m. The main routes between the settlements are Wises Lane in the west and Borden Lane in the east. Despite the short distance between the settlements there is a sense of leaving one settlement and travelling to another while travelling along both roads. Development at the junction between Wises Lane and Cryalls Lane reduces the perception of the gap. Public right of way ZU43 / ZR122 links the settlement edge of Sittingbourne and Borden. This runs through the Borden Nature Reserve, and there is a strong sense of leaving one settlement and walking to another. Tunstall The gap between Sittingbourne and Tunstall is around 160m. However, the perception of the gap is much smaller due to development along Tunstall Road. The main vehicle route between Sittingbourne and Tunstall is along Tunstall Road. The layout of the road and development along it is such that there is a perception of leaving Sittingbourne and travelling to a new settlement, albeit at a very close proximity. Public rights of way ZR146 and ZR154 link the settlements. ZR154 runs along the settlement edge of Sittingbourne, with

Consideration	Commentary
	views across open countryside providing the experience of leaving one settlement and arriving at another. Bridleway ZR146 is shorter and has fewer open views as it is contained by development. However, on exiting at Tunstall Road there are glimpsed views through the hedgerow to open fields, and the positioning of Tunstall at a right angle also provides the experience of travelling between two separate settlements. New development between Sittingbourne and Tunstall will reduce the perception of the gap between the settlements as the boundary of Sittingbourne will expand westwards.
Boundary defensibility	The boundaries of the existing Important Local Countryside Gap are defined by on the ground features. From the west, it follows Chestnut Street and the A249, before following School Lane. The gap follows a field boundary around Borden Hall, and then the settlement boundary of Borden before following footpath ZR140, ZR141 and field boundaries to reach Tunstall. The gap boundary follows Tunstall Road, ZR152 and ZU37 to reach Ruins Barn Road in the east, which forms the Sittingbourne settlement boundary. Sports pitches for the new development along Wises Lane will extend south of the existing settlement edge, south of Cryalls Lane. The sports pitches will decrease the perceived gap between Sittingbourne and Borden. However, planned planting of trees and native hedgerows will provide further screening between residential development in both settlements. The illustrative masterplan for new development planned between Harman's Corner and Tunstall indicates a large area of open space on the southern and western edges of the application site. This development will therefore considerably decrease the gap between the edge of Sittingbourne and Tunstall, and between Sittingbourne and Harman's Corner / Borden, but not close it.
Potential for enhancement	There are no national or local level ecological designations within the gap between Chestnut Street, Borden, Tunstall and Sittingbourne. There are small areas of priority habitat traditional orchard recorded, although these are no longer intact. Conservation, sensitive management and potential expansion of traditionally managed orchards should be explored. Other relevant enhancements noted in the LCAs include conserving hedgerows, shelterbelts and mature and remnant orchards. The gap contains a number of Conservation Areas at Borden Chestnut Street, Borden the Street, Borden Harman's Corner and Tunstall. All the Conservation Areas contain clusters of listed buildings. The setting of all these heritage assets should be enhanced. Parts of Wises Lane and Wrens Road are designated as Rural Lanes, which contribute to the rural amenity, nature conservation and character of the landscape. There are opportunities to enhance the rural characteristics of these roads. There are a number of public rights of way in the gap, which can be enhanced to increase access to and enjoyment of the countryside.

Summary

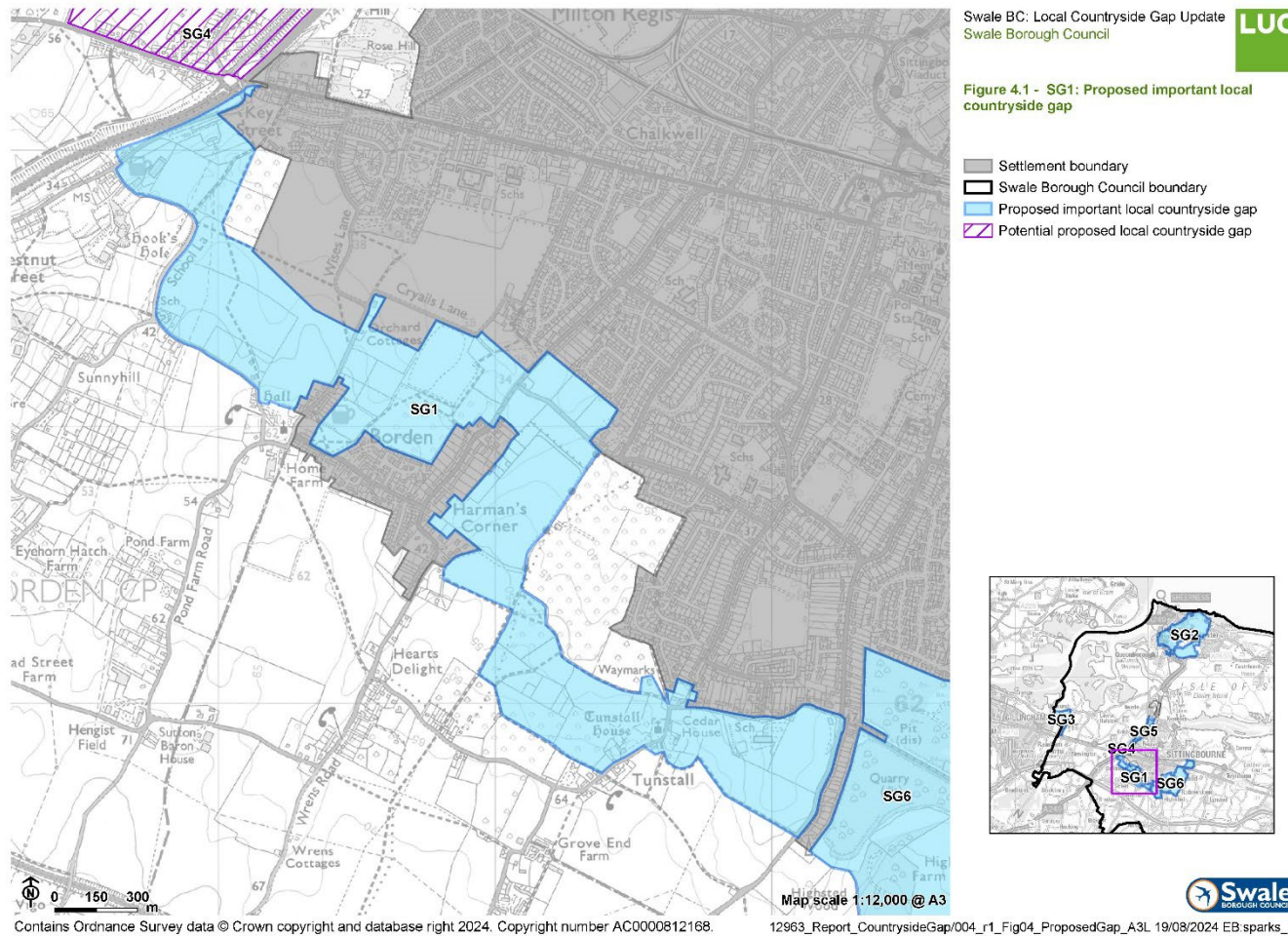
- 3.2** The analysis above indicates the gap between Chestnut Street, Borden, Tunstall and Sittingbourne is a gap between distinct settlements. The continued expansion of Sittingbourne southwards, as shown by the approved developments at Wises Lane and south-west of Sittingbourne means that an Important Local Countryside Gap is still relevant and important in this location.
- 3.3** Chestnut Street, Borden, Tunstall and Sittingbourne all have distinct characters and identities, and people travelling between the settlements, whether on foot or by vehicle, have an experience of leaving one distinct settlement and travelling to another.
- 3.4** There are currently no views between any of the settlements, which contributes to their character as separate settlements.

Recommendation

It is recommended that the gap is largely retained at its current extent to avoid the coalescence of Sittingbourne, Chestnut Street, Borden and Tunstall.

The settlement boundary of Sittingbourne, and therefore the gap, should consider the recent planning permission for housing development south-west of Sittingbourne. The gap should then be extended south to follow ZR147, ZR142 and ZR141 to retain a robust gap between Sittingbourne, Tunstall and Borden.

Figure 3.4 Proposed important countryside gap between Sittingbourne and Tunstall, Borden and Chestnut Street



SG2: Queenborough, Sheerness, Minster and Halfway

Figure 3.5 Natural heritage and landscape designations

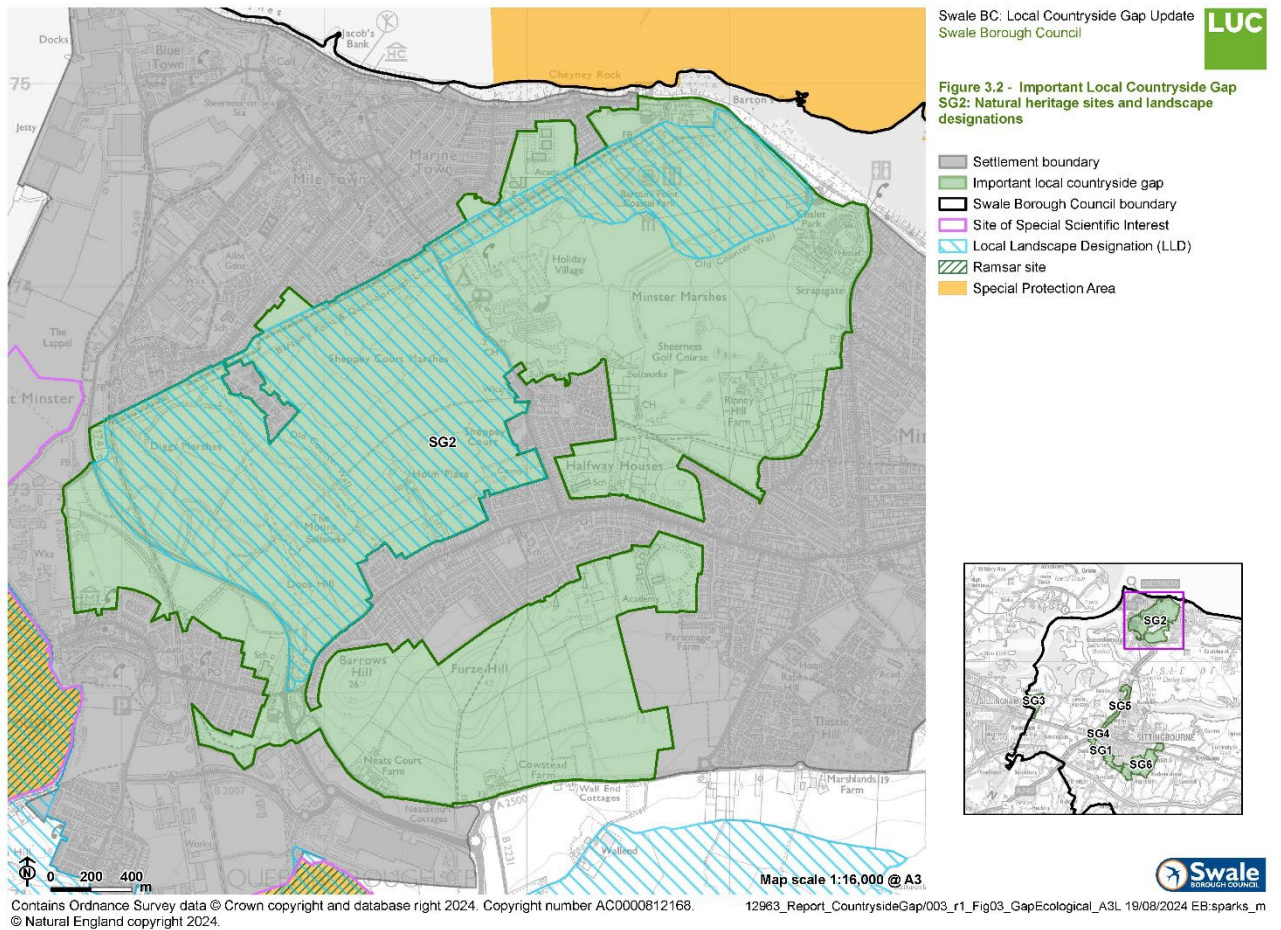


Figure 3.6 Cultural heritage and recreation

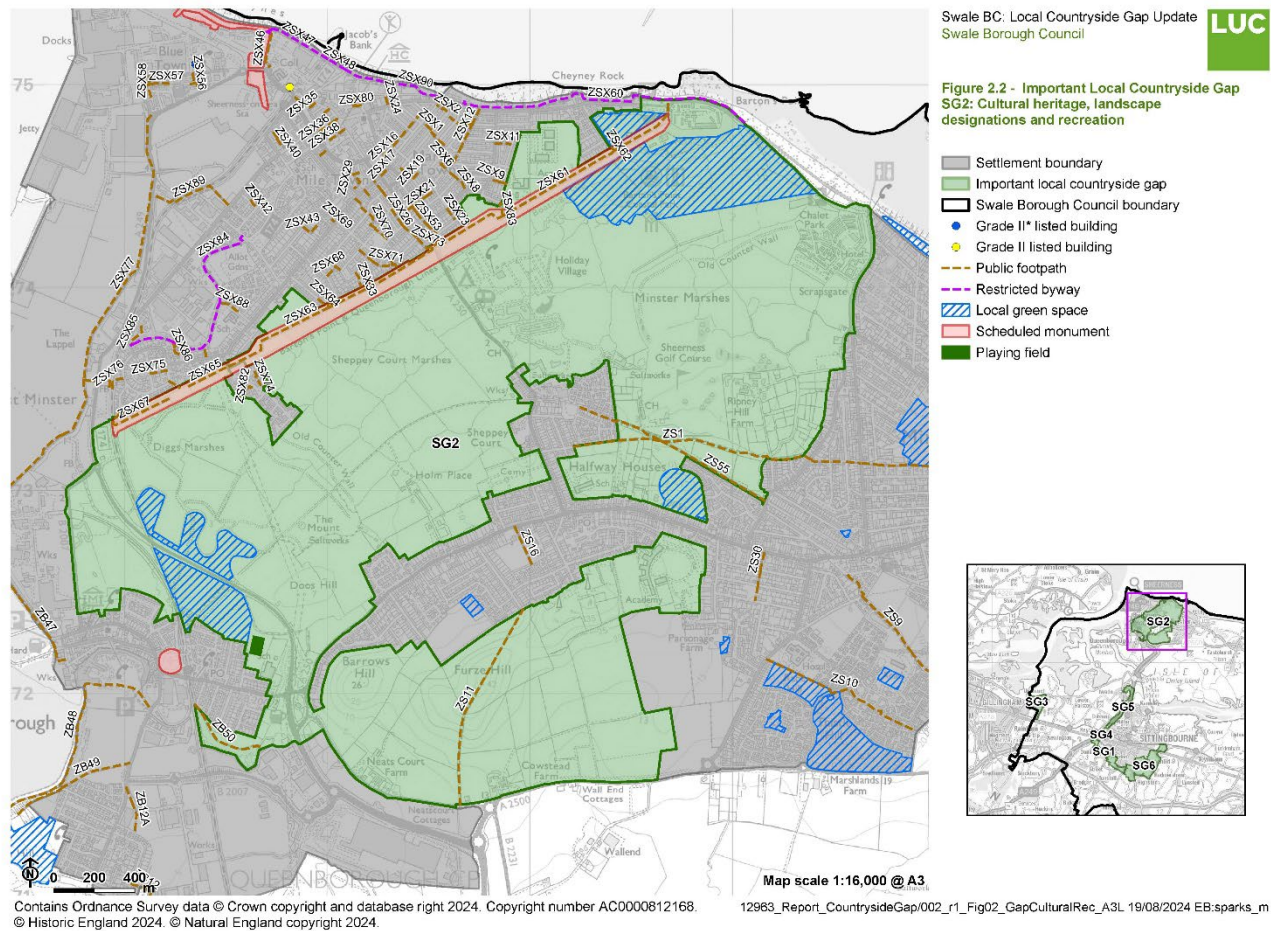


Figure 3.7 Representative photos



View looking south across Sheerness Golf Course



View looking east across Diggs Marshes towards Minster

Location and extent of area

Table 3.4 Summary of existing gap

SG2: Queenborough, Sheerness, Minster and Halfway	
Location and extent of area	The gap lies to the southeast of Sheerness, west of Minster and east of Queenborough. Halfway sits in the middle of the gap with the A2500 forming the boundary of the more open southern edge.
Landscape character context	LCA 09: Minster Marshes LCA 10: Sheppey Court and Diggs Marshes LCA 13: Central Sheppey Farmlands

Table 3.5 Assessment criteria

Assessment criteria	Rating	Commentary
Existing settlement identity and pattern	Fully meets	Sheerness Sheerness is in the north-west of the Isle of Sheppey. It was the site of a fort built in the 16th century to protect the river Medway from naval invasion and to protect the naval dockyard at Chatham. During the 17th century it was developed into a Royal Dockyard. There was no existing settlement at Sheerness at this time and it wasn't until the mid-18th century that workers built the first houses with materials from the dockyard. Blue Town is named from the grey-blue naval paint used on the exteriors. Modern day Sheerness is the coalescence of three formerly distinct settlements of Blue Town, Mile Town and Marine Town. Mile Town was developed in the early 18th century to provide new facilities to the cramped conditions of the docks at Blue Town. The Mile Town Conservation Area focuses on the High Street north of The Broadway. The Mile Town and Marine Town Conservation Areas have a mostly Victorian character. Infill development constructed in the mid-20th century housed the workforce for the expanding dockyards to the west. This residential development of mostly two story semi-detached and terraced housing now forms the northern edge of the Important Local Countryside Gap. Sheerness is now the largest port in the UK for motor imports. The southern edge of development at Sheerness is restricted by marshlands. Minster

Assessment criteria	Rating	Commentary
		Minster is the largest town on the Isle of Sheppey and sits on the highest point of the underlying London Clay. Minster gets its name from the Saxon Abbey on the hilltop. Minster spread north to the coastal edge and west towards Sheerness and Halfway during the 20th century with suburban estates and grew considerably in population. This more recent area of development consists largely of two-storey terraced and semi-detached houses and bungalows. Minster and Sheerness are separated by the low-lying alluvial marshlands of Minster Marshes. Development in Minster has also spread east along Minster Road to coalesce with Halfway. Halfway has in turn has spread along Queenborough road to erode the sense of separation between Halfway and Queenborough. The area between Minster and Halfway has since experienced more infill housing which now forms part of the southern boundary of the Important Countryside Gap. Queenborough Queenborough is a small maritime town of medieval origin on the west coast of the Isle of Sheppey just south of Sheerness. The town formed Queenborough Castle (now a Scheduled Monument) which is sited on a small hill of the underlying London Clay. The northern edge of the town is defined by Diggs Marshes with the southern boundary dictated by the creek and mudflats. Queenborough today still reflects its 18th century seafaring history from which period most of its most prominent buildings survive. The Queenborough Conservation Area Appraisal states <i>“Water has shaped the history of the town, through fishing, maritime trade, yachting and the ongoing control of flooding and drainage of the surrounding marshes. It is a key characteristic of the conservation area and defines its setting”</i>.
Landscape character	Fully meets	The northern area of the gap between Sheerness and Minster to Halfway Road has a level former marshland landform that is now largely used for recreational purposes. Development at Sheerness Golf Club is the dominant feature to the south, Sheerness Holiday

Assessment criteria	Rating	Commentary
		Park to the west, and Bartons Point Coastal Park to the north. These three areas are separated by Minster Marshes running from east to west through the centre of the gap. Much of this area, excluding the golf course, forms the Minster Marshes LWS. Whilst the marsh retains much of its original character through ditches and counter walls it is substantially affected by the industrial and residential development which surround it. Abbey Rise in the south is an important local feature. It forms one of the few areas of higher ground between Minster and Halfway. The eastern part of the gap comprises a landscape of grazing marsh encapsulated by Sheerness, Halfway, and Queenborough. It forms the whole of LCA 10 Sheppey Court and Diggs Marsh. The marsh retains many elements of its original character but is affected by the roads, railways, and pylons which cross the west. Much of the area is locally designated as the Diggs and Sheppey Court Marshes, Queenborough LWS. The southern part of the gap between Queenborough and Minster is of a largely agricultural character. This area also has a much more complex landform with an undulating topography compared to the low-lying Swale Level in the north. This landscape here forms part of the clay ridge that runs across the northern half of the Isle of Sheppey. This clay ridge forms a series of hills from Queenborough to Minister. Barrows Hill and Furze Hill both sit in the Important Local Countryside Gap and form a green backdrop to the lower lying settlement of Halfway/Minster and an important contrast to the nearby marshes. Most of the land around Queenborough is mudflats and marshland. The historic core of Queenborough sits on a small, elevated hill, around the Queenborough Creek.
Visual character	Partially Meets	There is clear intervisibility between Sheerness, Queenborough and Minster due to the low-lying, open topography across the marshes and golf course. coupled with the historic core of Minster situated on the hilltop.

Assessment criteria	Rating	Commentary
		Views from the gap towards the surrounding settlements do not contribute to the rural / countryside character of the gap. The visible development at Sheerness, Minster and Halfway is mid-20th century two-storey housing that does not relate to the distinct characters of each settlement. The area has a generally open and exposed character with some extensive views crossed by the local transport corridors and the pylons across Diggs Marsh. There are long and distinctive views across the marshes from Minster.

Table 3.6 Practical considerations

Consideration	Commentary
Gap extent	Minster The gap between Minster and Sheerness is 750m at its narrowest point along the Halfway Road (A250) and 1750m at its widest point. Along with the A250 Halfway Road the other main road connections between the two settlements are Brielle Way to the west and Marina Parade to the east. Although the gap is quite narrow along these transport routes there is still a clear sense of departure/arrival between these two distinct settlements due to the undeveloped nature of the marshes. The northern part of SG2 has Public Footpaths ZS1 and ZS55 in its southern section and ZXS61 and ZXS63 running across its northern boundary from Bartons Point to Diggs Marshes. Queenborough The gap between Queenborough and Sheerness is around 1000m of Diggs Marshes. The main route between the two settlements is Brielle Way (A249). There is a clear sense of departure and arrival between these two settlements due to the undeveloped and open nature of Diggs Marshes. The main route to Halfway/Minster from Queenborough is the B2007/A250 which has been developed along its route and reduced the gap between the two to 150m. The narrow nature of the gap in this area and the intervisibility between the two settlements means that there is no sense of leaving one area and entering another either by car or by foot. The gap to the south of Halfway and east of Queenborough with its elevated topography of Furze Hill and Barrows Hills creates a visual screen between Queenborough and Halfway/Minster and as such does create a sense of departure/arrival when travelling along Queenborough Road /A2500 toward the southern edge of Minster. This area is crossed by the Public Footpath ZS11 linking Queenborough Road to Minster which traverses Furze Hill and leads to residential development at Halfway.

Consideration	Commentary
Boundary defensibility	The existing northern boundary of the gap largely follows the developed settlement edge of Sheerness to the north, Minster to the south, and Queenborough in the southwest. There is an already developed area at Mister Park off The Broadway in the east which could be excluded without any major effect on the separation between Minster and Sheerness. Marine Parade forms the north-east boundary to this part of the gap. The western boundary is defined by the B2007 and then wraps around Queenborough until it meets the railway line. It then follows the settlement boundary to run along the A2500. The eastern edge cuts north across field boundaries then follows the irregular boundaries of residential garden boundaries. This area includes the grounds of the Oasis academy which with its open sports fields contributes to the open feel of the gap
Potential for enhancement	There are already some public rights of way across the southern part of the gap and along the top of the northern part of the gap. These could be enhanced and extended to increase access and enjoyment of the countryside. The existing recreational land uses such as holiday parks should be integrated into the landscape, using appropriate vegetation. Similarly, the stark edge of Halfway should be softened to ensure the interface with the marshland is more sympathetic. The areas of priority habitat coastal and floodplain grazing marsh could be expanded southwards towards the Sheerness Golf Course and Sheppey Court. Appropriate grazing regimes should be encouraged. There are opportunities to link lines of trees and areas of scrub woodland with native planting to provide visual continuity and reduce the unnatural effect of isolated planting. There are opportunities around Barrows and Furze Hills to restore a stronger landscape structure through tree and shelterbelt planting along with the creation or enhancement of hedgerows along roads and in denuded areas. Enhance the heritage value of the Queenborough Lines Scheduled Monument which runs along the north of the gap through further interpretation.

Summary

3.5 The analysis above indicates that the gap between Sheerness, Queenborough, and Minster is a large gap with an open character between three distinct settlements. The main area most at risk of coalescence is the small gap between Queenborough and Minster defined by Brielle Way. The sense of travelling between two distinct settlements is most at risk in this area.

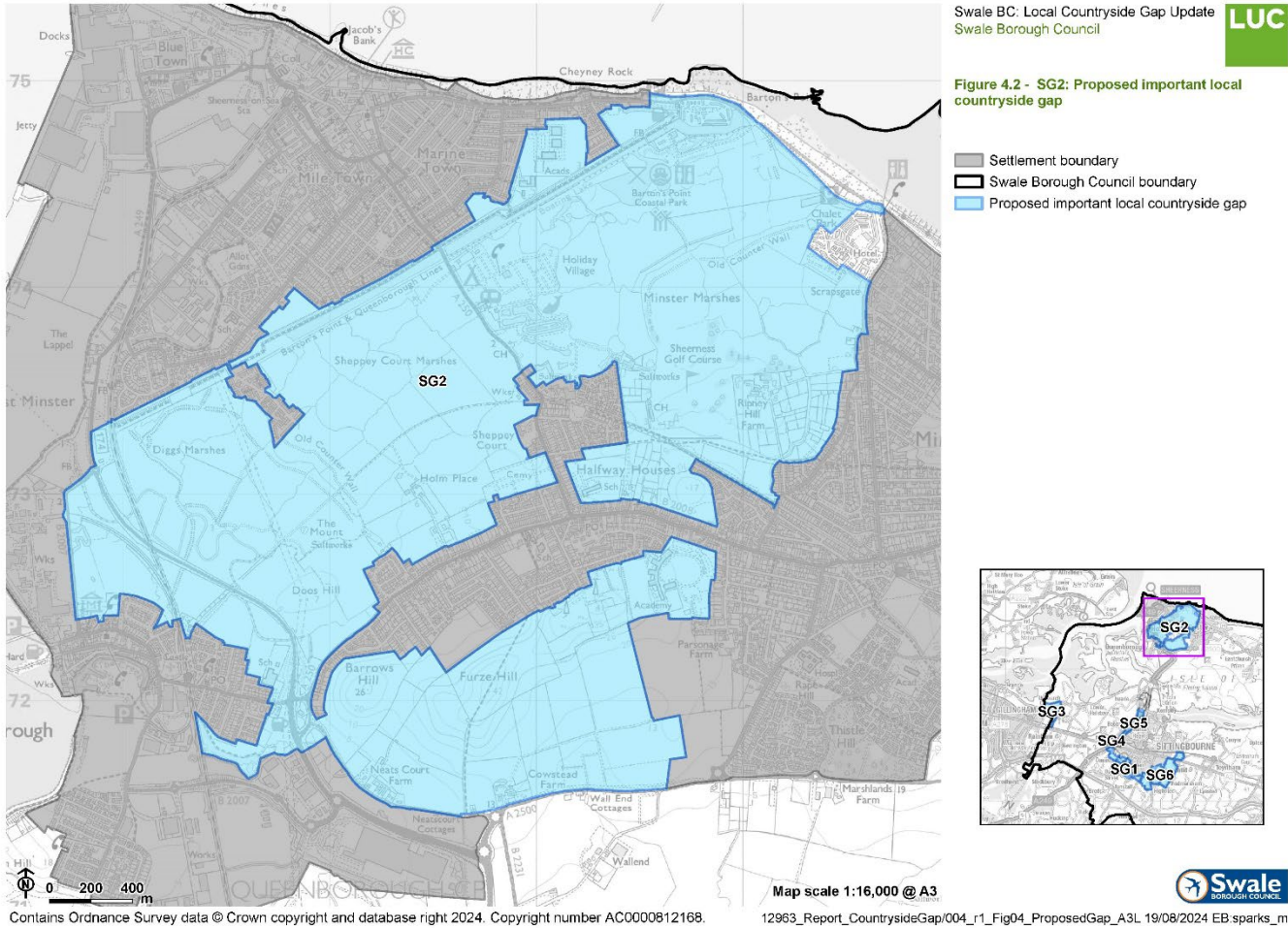
3.6 The analysis above indicates the gap between Sheerness, Queenborough, and Minster continues to meet the criteria for designation for an Important Countryside Gap. The area has a rural character which separates the three settlements and people travelling between them, whether on foot or by vehicle, have an experience of leaving one distinct settlement and arriving at another.

Recommendation

It is recommended that the gap is retained between Sheerness, Queenborough, and Minster to avoid the coalescence of these settlements. The main threat to coalescence is between Queenborough and Minster along the B2007 with the A249 forming the only real boundary between the two.

One change to the boundary is required to exclude the Minster Park area off Ash Lane in the north-east of the gap. This is an established residential area that does not add to the rural countryside character of the gap.

Figure 3.8 Proposed Important countryside gap between Queenborough, Sheerness, Minster and Halfway



SG3: Upchurch and the administrative boundary with Medway Council

Figure 3.9 Natural heritage and landscape designations

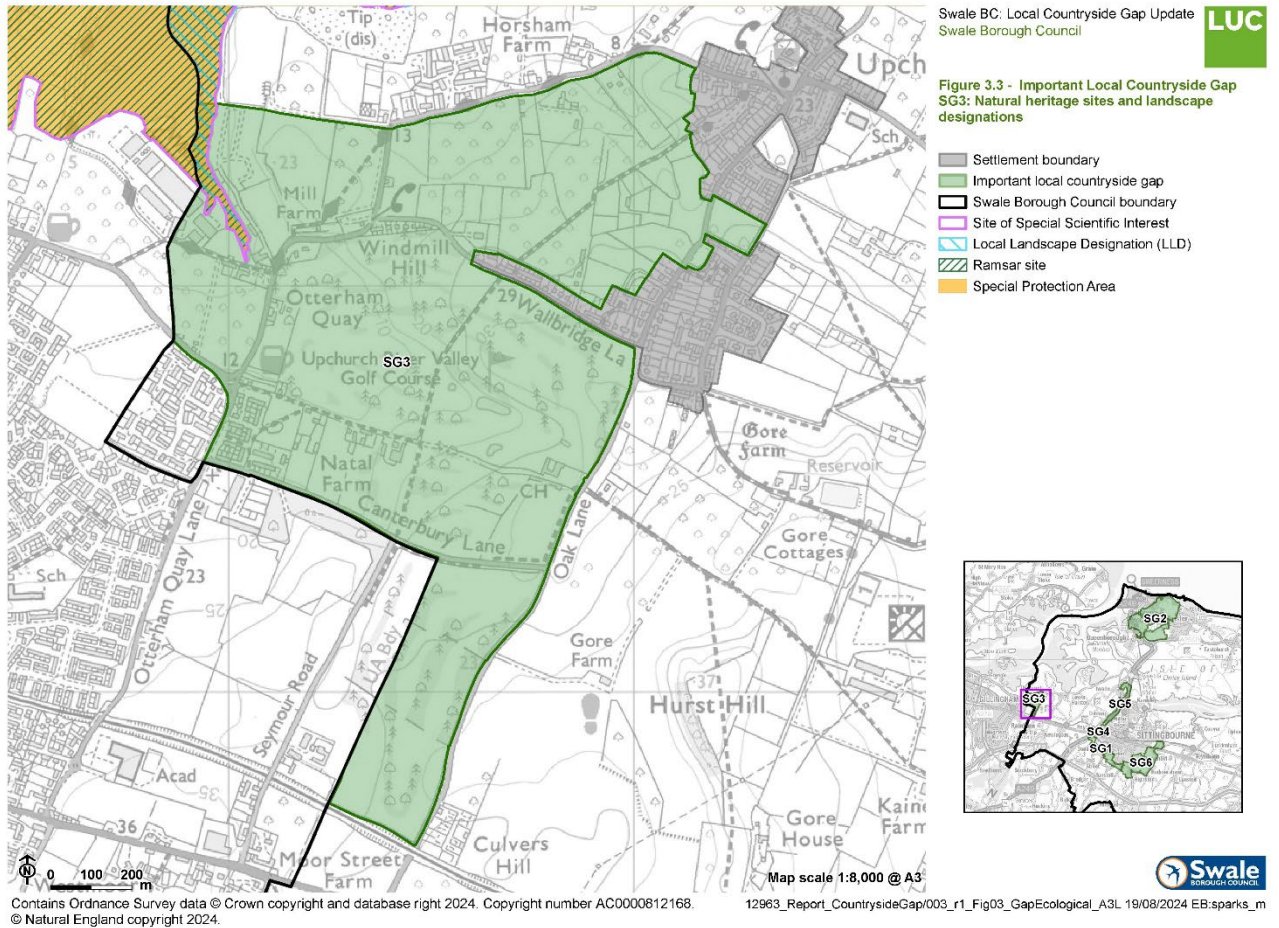


Figure 3.10 Cultural heritage and recreation

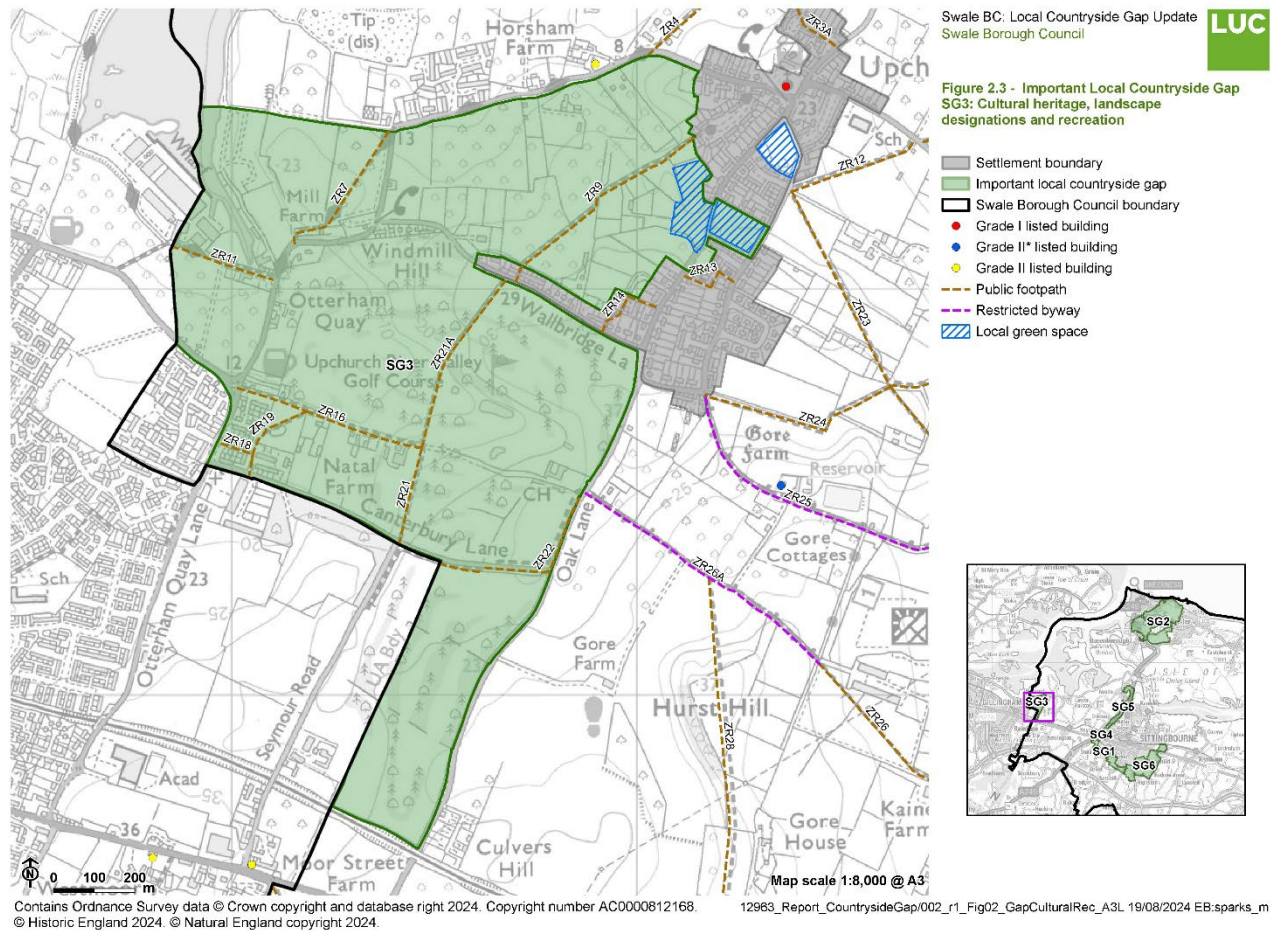


Figure 3.11 Representative photos



View from footpath ZR9 looking north towards Upchurch



View from footpath ZR21A looking south towards Rainham

Location and extent of area

Table 3.7 Summary of existing gap

SG3: Upchurch and the administrative boundary with Medway Council	
Location and extent of area	The gap lies to the west of Upchurch with Oak Lane forming most of its eastern boundary, Horsham Lane the north boundary and the administrative boundary with Medway council forming the western boundary.
Landscape character context	LCA 32. Upchurch and Lower Halstow Fruit Belt

Table 3.8 Assessment criteria

Assessment criteria	Rating	Commentary
Existing settlement identity and pattern	Fully meets	Upchurch Until the 20th century Upchurch consisted of a church, a few groups of modest cottages, a village school, shops and public houses. 20th century housing developments changed the character to one of modern residential estates albeit it retains a rural village character at the core. There is a clear sense of separation between Upchurch and Rainham, which lies on the other side of the Medway Boundary. This sense of separation is also aided by the Otterham Creek to the north-west. Rainham Rainham was originally a linear settlement which developed along the now A2. When the railway arrived in 1858 it brought growth to the area with the village spreading north in the direction of Upchurch. The population of Rainham expanded again when the line was electrified in 1959 especially to the south of the A2 with a large housing estate called Park Wood. To the west of Rainham there is almost continuous development along the A2 which leads to a merging with the eastern edge of Gillingham. Land along Otterham Quay Road has attained planning permission on appeal for a development of 74 dwellings with public open space. This will extend the existing edge of Rainham further into the gap.
Landscape character	Fully meets	Upchurch A large part of the undeveloped area between Upchurch and the Medway Borough Council administrative boundary is taken up by the Upchurch

Assessment criteria	Rating	Commentary
		River Valley Golf Course. The course has mature Poplar boundaries as well as screening between individual holes. The landform in this area falls steeply to the south giving good views across Rainham and the neighbouring landscape. The gap to the north of Wallbridge Lane has a different character being a mix of orchards, horse paddocks, some small residential development, allotments and the recreation ground. A park home estate is situated on north-west edge. This area also contains an overgrown orchard formerly part of Horsham Farm. The landform in this area is a gentle slope down to Otterham Creek. The dense orchard planting and high hedges in this area allow for far shorter views and a stronger feel of visual enclosure.
Visual character	Fully meets	There is no visual relationship between Upchurch and Rainham due to the mature screening provided by the trees that surround much of the golf course. High roadside hedgerows, containing trees, also help with the sense of visual enclosure with any gaps in boundaries quickly blocked by the densely planted mature orchards beyond.

Table 3.9 Practical considerations

Consideration	Commentary
Gap extent	The gap between the southern edge of Upchurch and the north-eastern edge of Rainham is 1km. The main road connections between the two settlements are Horsham Lane and Wallbridge Lane which are both locally designated Rural Lanes. The two settlements are also linked by public footpaths. ZR21A, ZR16, and ZR19 link up to cross the golf course. Footpaths ZR9 and ZR7 cross the orchards and paddocks in the north to reach Upchurch. There is a clear sense of travelling between two settlements by car and on foot. The high hedges, mature trees and the rising landform making views between the two settlements almost impossible.
Boundary defensibility	Oak Lane defines much of the eastern boundary of the gap running from the railway line and the A2 to the south all the way north to Upchurch. A residential development completed in 2018 in the south-west has only eroded the gap by a small area. This is

Consideration	Commentary
	perceived as part of Rainham and should be excluded from the Important Local Countryside Gap. There is a permitted development along Otterham Quay Road for 74 dwellings. This development will extend the edge of Rainham further into the existing gap closer towards the south-east edge of Upchurch. This area should be excluded from the Important Local Countryside Gap. The gap to the south of Wallbridge Lane is defined by the golf course and the Medway Borough Council boundary.
Potential for enhancement	Horsham Lane and Wallbridge Lane are designated as Rural Lanes, which contribute to the rural amenity, nature conservation and character of the landscape. Enhancements could be made to these as well as the rights of way that cross the gap. Additional planting should be used to maintain and enhance the well-integrated edges of Upchurch and to integrate the new development edges of Rainham. This could include hedgerows, shelterbelts and community orchard planting. A small part of the Medway Estuary and Marshes Ramsar, SPA and SSSI extends into the gap west of Otterham Quay Road. Opportunities to conserve, enhance and expand the estuarine and marshland habitats should be encouraged. There are small areas of priority habitat traditional orchard on the edges of Upchurch and at Natal Farm. These should be conserved and sensitively managed. Opportunities for new non-intensively managed orchards should be pursued on land of lower biodiversity value.

Summary

3.7 The analysis above indicates that the gap between Upchurch and Rainham is an important gap that is at most risk of coalescence along Otterham Quay Lane/ Wallbridge Lane.

3.8 The analysis above indicates the existing gap between Upchurch and the administrative boundary with Medway Council/Rainham continues to meet the criteria for an important countryside gap. The area has a rural character that separates the settlements of Upchurch and Rainham. People travelling between the settlements, whether on foot along the footpaths or other modes of transport along the roads have an experience of leaving a distinct settlement and travelling to another.

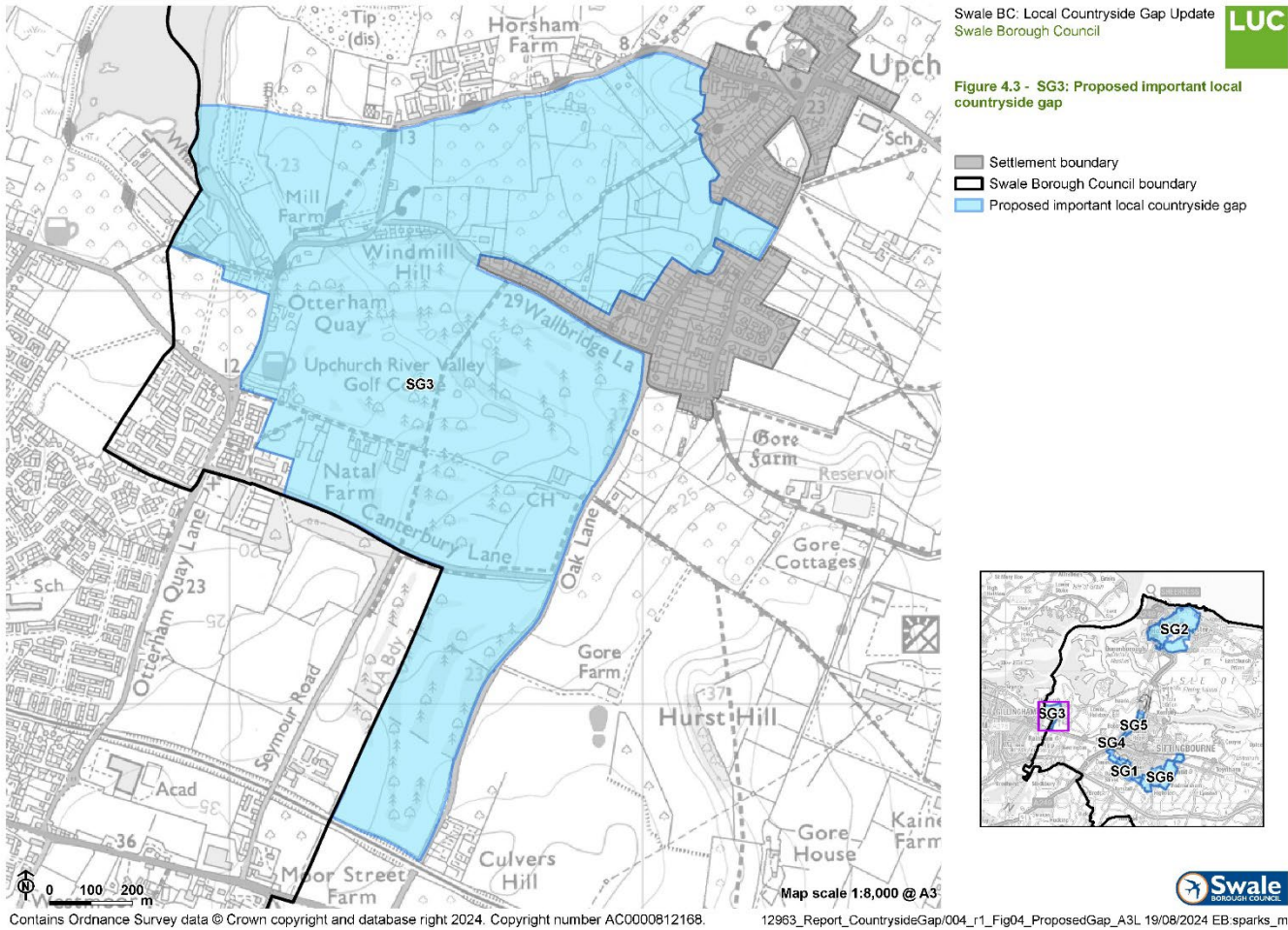
3.9 There are no views between Upchurch and Rainham due to the mature vegetation around the golf course and through the fruit farms that make up the gap. This contributes to their character as separate settlements.

Recommendation

It is recommended that the Important Local Countryside Gap is retained at its current extent to avoid coalescence of Upchurch and Rainham. A change to the boundary is required in the south-west due to a recent development on the edge of Rainham along Otterham Quay Lane.

A small amendment to the boundary should be made to allow for the permitted development on Otterham Quay Lane. The current proposal shows development restricted to the south of the site which allows the north to remain part of the gap.

Figure 3.12 Proposed Important Local Countryside Gap between Upchurch and the administrative boundary with Medway Council



SG4: Sittingbourne and the satellite village of Bobbing

Figure 3.13 Natural heritage and landscape designations

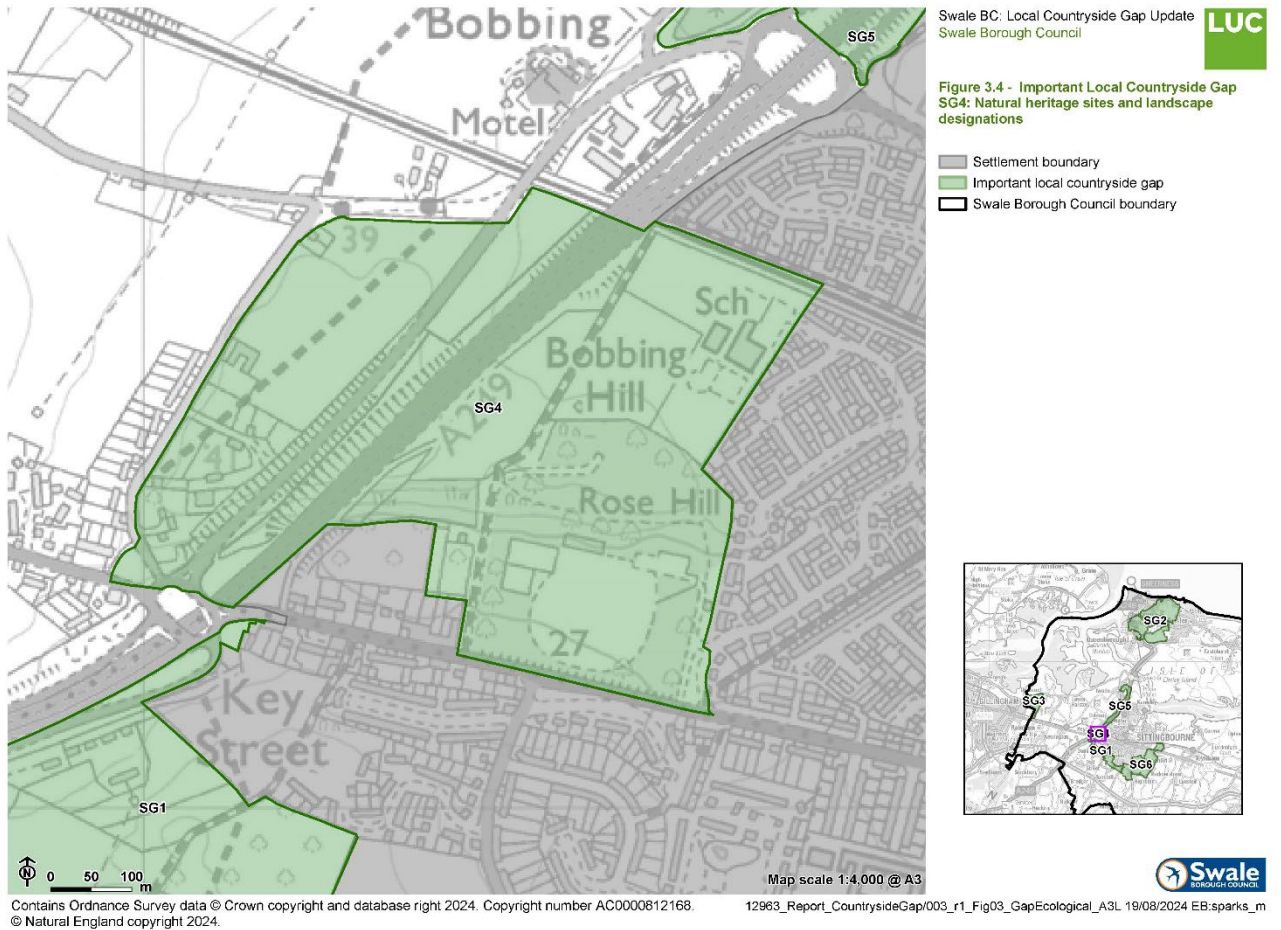


Figure 3.14 Cultural heritage and recreation

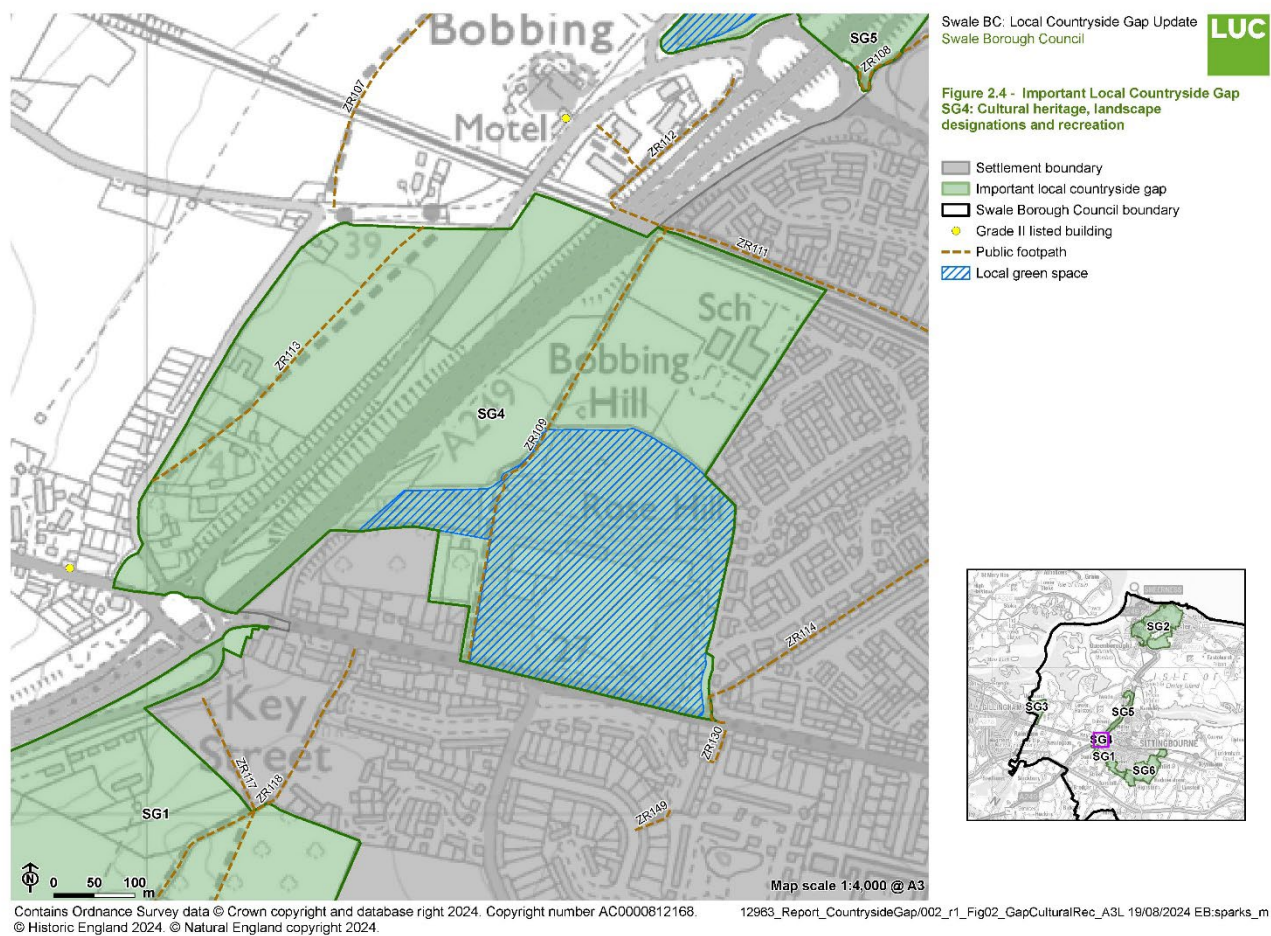


Figure 3.15 Representative photos



Rose Hill Woods



Gore Park

Location and extent of area

Table 3.10 Summary of existing gap

SG6: Sittingbourne and the satellite village of Bobbing	
Location and extent of area	The gap lies to the west of Sittingbourne and encompasses Rose Hill. The gap crosses the A249, and the western boundary is formed by Bobbing Hill. The northern boundary is formed by the railway line.
Landscape character context	LCA 24: Iwade Arable Farmlands.

Table 3.11 Assessment criteria

Assessment criteria	Rating	Commentary
Existing settlement identity and pattern	Partially meets	Sittingbourne Sittingbourne was a small market town beside the Roman road of Watling Street, which expanded in the medieval era as a route for pilgrims travelling to Canterbury. This continued into the 18th century as Sittingbourne was an important stopping point on the journey between London and Canterbury. In the 20th century Sittingbourne expanded considerably in all directions. The western edge of Sittingbourne largely follows the historic edge of Rose Hill house and grounds north of the A2. South of the A2, the settlement edge of Sittingbourne has coalesced with Key Street and extends to the A249. Bobbing Bobbing is a very small linear settlement based along Sheppey Way (formerly Ferry Road). It contains a few listed buildings including the Grade I listed Church of St Bartholomew and the 18th century Grade II listed Bobbing Court. There is no Conservation Area. The village lies north of the railway line. In the late 1990s the dual carriageway A249 was constructed to the east of the existing road, providing a barrier between Bobbing and the expanded edge of Sittingbourne. West of the A249 and south of the railway line early 20th century linear development lies along Bobbing Hill. Bobbing does not have a very strong individual settlement identity. The loss of the gap to the east of the A249 and south of the railway line, would not adversely affect the existing settlement pattern. The transport routes, including the roundabout junction between the A2 and A249, provide a clear barrier between Bobbing and Sittingbourne.

Assessment criteria	Rating	Commentary
Landscape character	Partially meets	East of the A249, land is in use in the north as educational facilities including playing fields. There are mature trees along the railway line and the A249. The south of the area comprises Rose Hill woods, recorded as priority habitat deciduous woodland, and Grove Park. Grove Park was gifted to the local authority as a public park in 1931 and is now used by Sittingbourne Rugby Club and Gore Court Hockey Club. Rose Hill woods and Grove Park are designated as a Local Green Space. Land west of Grove Park is in arable use, with strong hedgerow boundaries. West of the A249 land is under arable cropping and contains small residential properties and a small-scale business centre. Mature trees line the A249, and field boundaries are bound by hedgerows. Although there is development within the gap, it is limited and does not detract from the undeveloped character. However, the educational facility and recreational land uses weaken the perception of the gap as 'countryside'. The gap is dominated by the dual carriageway A249, which is lined by mature vegetation. The road creates a physical infrastructure barrier between the settlements.
Visual character	Fully meets	Mature treelines along the railway line and A249, as well as the woodlands of Rose Hill ensure that there are no views between Sittingbourne and Bobbing.

Table 3.12 Practical considerations

Consideration	Commentary
Gap extent	The gap between Sittingbourne and Bobbing in the north is 170m, and along the A2 in the south is 230m. The railway line passes through both settlements in the north, and the A2 connects the settlements in the south. The large transport infrastructure of the A249, large roundabout between the A2 and the A249, and the A249 being in cutting, creates the sense of leaving one settlement and travelling to another. Footpath ZR111 runs along the north of the railway line and crosses under the A249 to join to Bobbing. Passing under the A249 gives the perception of leaving one settlement and entering another.
Boundary defensibility	The boundaries of the existing Important Local Countryside Gap follow Bobbing Hill in the west and the access road before running along the railway line to the settlement edge

Consideration	Commentary
	of Sittingbourne. In the south the gap boundary follows the A2, the settlement boundary of Sittingbourne and the A2 again south of Grove Park. Although there is educational and recreational development within the gap to the east of the A249, this does not erode the gap or cause perceived coalescence. West of the A249 the gap includes some individual houses to the east of Bobbing Hill.
Potential for enhancement	Rose Hill woods contain priority habitat deciduous woodland, which should be appropriately managed. There is considerable woodland along the A249 and railway line which soften these transport route. These linear vegetation belts should be maintained. Public rights of way cross the gap and can be enhanced to increase access to and enjoyment of the landscape. The recreational value of Grove Park and Rose Hill, a Local Green Space, should be preserved and enhanced where possible. Relevant enhancements noted in the LCA include restoring the landscape structure of woodland, hedgerow, orchard, ditches and shelterbelts. and improving the structure of hedgerows and shelterbelts, including along the rural roads.

Summary

3.10 The analysis above indicates the gap between Sittingbourne and Bobbing is a small gap between two settlements. The dual carriageway A249, which is well-wooded forms the main separation between the settlements, as well as the railway line in the north. The vegetation and transport corridors also contribute to the lack of views between Sittingbourne and Bobbing, which reinforces their character as separate settlements.

3.11 The undeveloped character of the east of the A249 is partly due to the educational facilities in the north and Grove Park and Rose Hill woods in the south, designated as a Local Green Space. These features are unlikely to change or be developed.

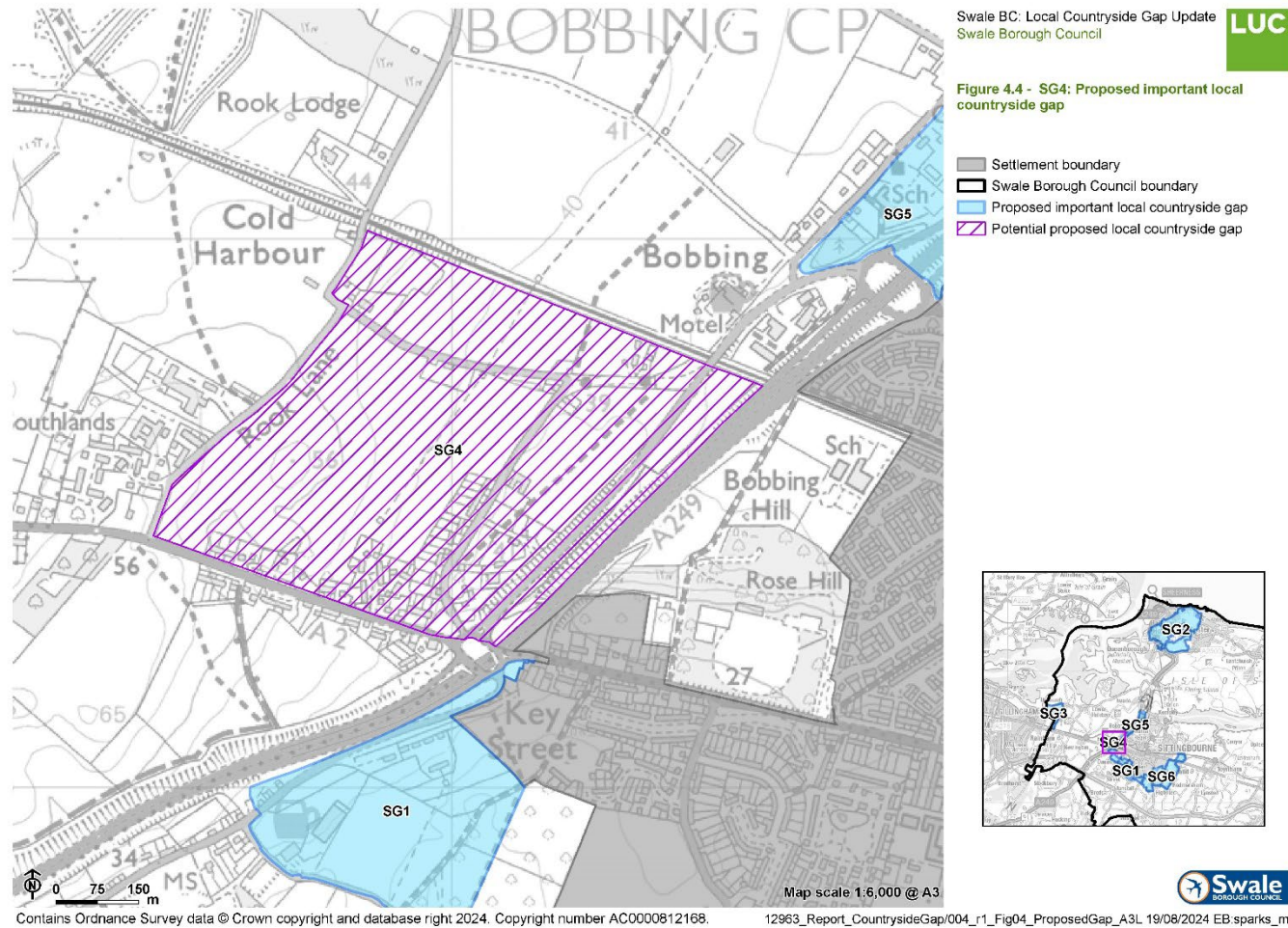
3.12 There is no known pressure for development within this gap.

Recommendation

It is recommended that this Important Local Countryside Gap is removed. Existing recreational and educational land uses to the east of the A249, and the strong boundary feature of the road itself reinforced by mature vegetation, provide clear separation between the edge of Sittingbourne and Bobbing, which lies north of the railway line. The gap is dominated by the A249 which does not provide a 'countryside' character.

An Important Local Countryside Gap is not required to maintain the separate identities of the settlements, safeguard the open and undeveloped character or prevent encroachment of the rural open character.

Figure 3.16 Proposed Important Local Countryside Gap between Keycol and Bobbing



SG5: Sittingbourne and the satellite villages of Bobbing and Iwade

Figure 3.17 Natural heritage and landscape designations

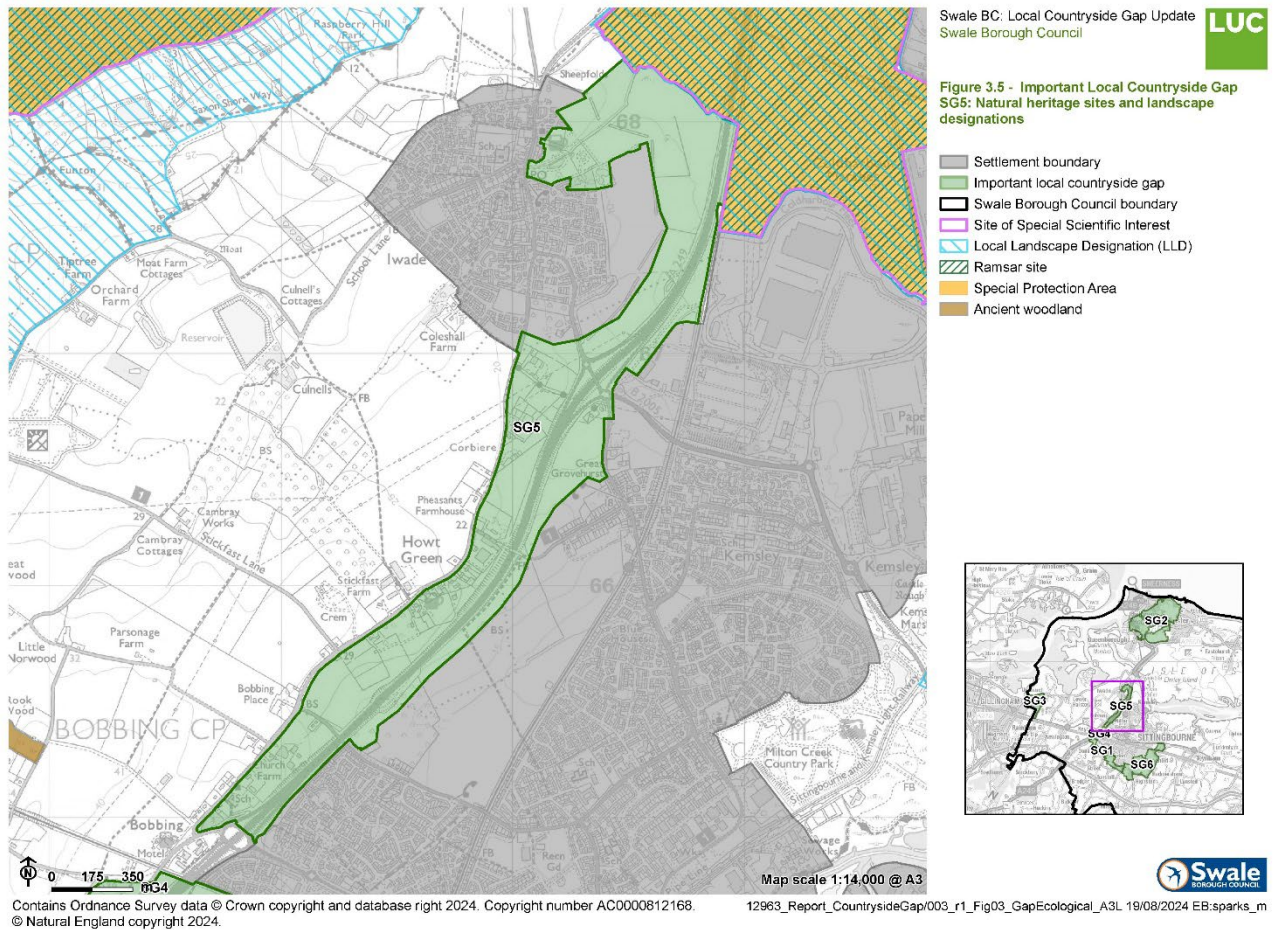


Figure 3.18 Cultural heritage and recreation

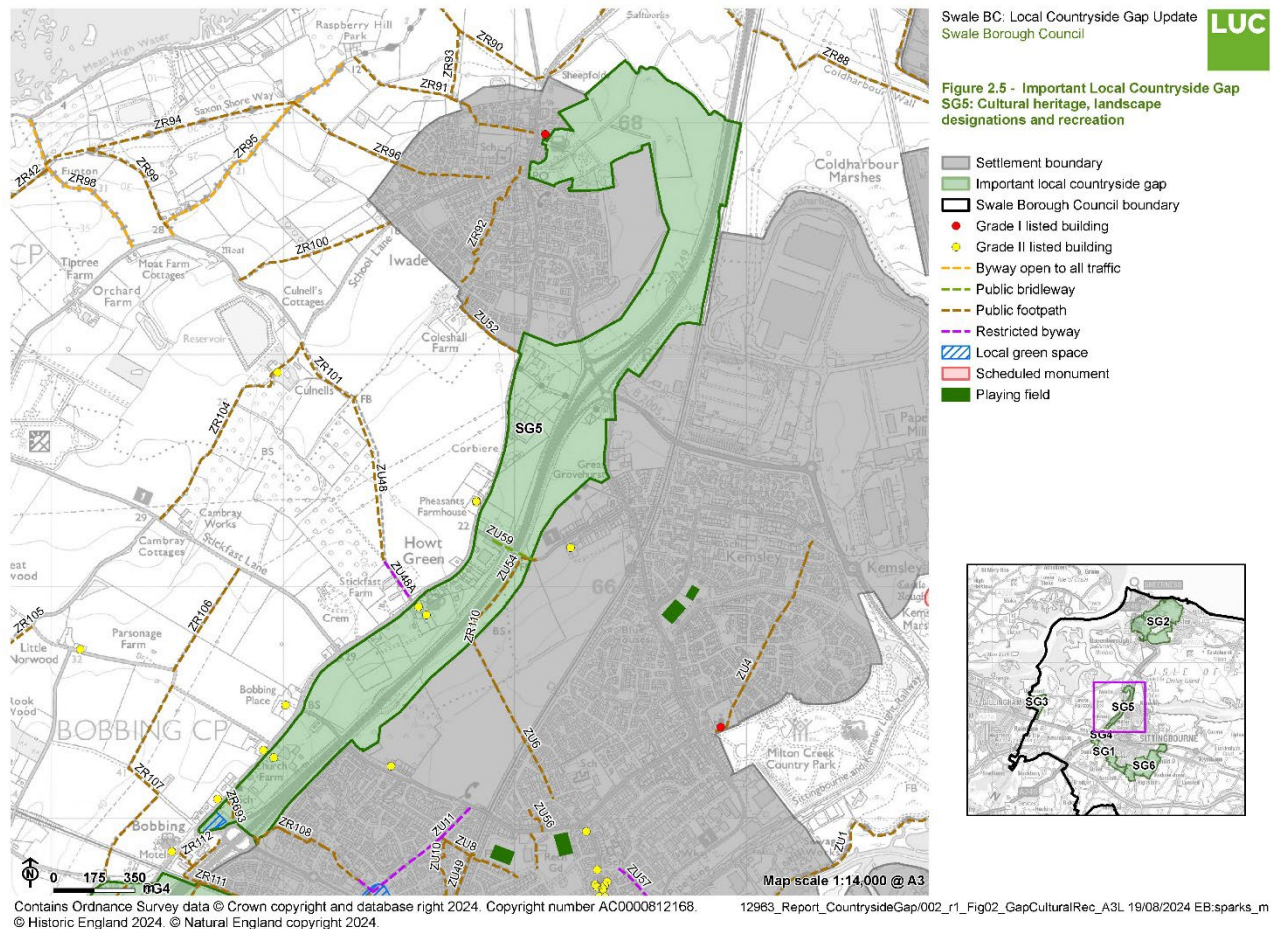


Figure 3.19 Representative photos



View from settlement edge of Iwade with pylons and commercial edge of Sittingbourne glimpsed through trees



Settlement edge of Sittingbourne, with woodland screening the A249 to the west

Location and extent of area

Table 3.13 Summary of existing gap

SG6: Sittingbourne and the satellite villages of Bobbing and Iwade	
Location and extent of area	The gap lies to the west of Sittingbourne, largely following the A249 with Sheppey Way and Iwade settlement boundary forming the western boundary. The northern boundary follows field boundaries.
Landscape character context	LCA 24: Iwade Arable Farmlands

Table 3.14 Assessment criteria

Assessment criteria	Rating	Commentary
Existing settlement identity and pattern	Fully meets	Sittingbourne Sittingbourne was a small market town beside the Roman road of Watling Street, which expanded in the medieval era as a route for pilgrims travelling to Canterbury. This continued into the 18th century as Sittingbourne was an important stopping point on the journey between London and Canterbury. In the 20th century Sittingbourne expanded considerably in all directions. The north-west of Sittingbourne has coalesced with Milton and Kemsley, itself built as accommodation for employees at the Kemsley Paper Mill. The north-west settlement boundary of Sittingbourne lies to the east of the A249. The commercial edge of Sittingbourne lies east of the A249 and railway line. Iwade Iwade was established in the Medieval era linking Watling Street to the coast. It was a small linear settlement, set along Ferry Road. The village has expanded considerably in the late 20th century, with further expansion east planned. As a result of this, Iwade does not have a particularly strong identity. The A249 constructed in the late 1990s provides a barrier between Iwade and Sittingbourne. New residential development is under construction along Featherbed Lane, extending the village further south. New residential development of up to 466 dwellings has been approved east of Iwade. Bobbing

Assessment criteria	Rating	Commentary
		Bobbing is a very small linear settlement based along Sheppey Way (formerly Ferry Road). It contains a few listed buildings including the Grade I listed Church of St Bartholomew and the 18th century Grade II listed Bobbing Court. There is no Conservation Area. The village lies north of the railway line. In the late 1990s the dual carriageway A249 was constructed to the east of the existing road, providing a barrier between Bobbing and the expanded edge of Sittingbourne. West of the A249 and south of the railway line early 20th century linear development lies along Bobbing Hill. Bobbing does not have a very strong individual settlement identity. The loss of the gap to the east of the A249 and south of the railway line, would not adversely affect the existing settlement pattern. The transport routes, including the roundabout junction between the A2 and A249, provide a clear barrier between Bobbing and Sittingbourne. The small linear hamlet of Howt Green lies between Bobbing and Iwade along Sheppey Way. There is considerable ribbon development along Sheppey Way, both residential and commercial. The gap between Bobbing and Iwade is weakened by this development.
Landscape character	Partially meets	The gap is linear and is dominated by the A249, a dual carriageway. The road is lined by mature vegetation; however, it is not a rural land use. Small areas of priority habitat traditional orchard are recorded at Howt Green, as well as a small area of priority habitat deciduous woodland. Residential and employment development between Sheppey Way and the A249 at Howt Green contribute to the developed character of the landscape. However, this is often set back from the road and views between development to arable fields retains a rural character. A small Local Green Space is designated south of St Bartholomew's Church Bobbing. There is a more rural character in the gap east of Iwade, with traditional orchard and ponds and arable fields bound by hedgerows.

Assessment criteria	Rating	Commentary
		East of the A249 the gap covers a small strip of arable fields and the roadside vegetation. Recent development at Applegarth Road, off Quinton Road, now extends into the gap. In the north-east, a small part of the Sittingbourne Logistics Park extends into the gap. The hardstanding does not contribute to a rural land use.
Visual character	Fully meets	Vegetation along the A249 restricts views between Iwade and Sittingbourne. There are occasional glimpses of electricity pylons and the roofs of commercial buildings on the edge of Sittingbourne from Iwade. Distance and intervening vegetation results in no views between Iwade and Bobbing. The open fields to the east of Iwade form part of the rural setting to the village, although there are limited views out from the settlement. It contributes to the sense of separation between the A249 and settlement.

Table 3.15 Practical considerations

Consideration	Commentary
Gap extent	The gap between the north of Sittingbourne and Iwade is 230m. The main route between the settlements is Grovehurst Road / Swale Way. Crossing the A249 via roundabouts creates a clear sense of travelling between two separate settlements. No public rights of way link Sittingbourne and Iwade. The gap between Bobbing and Iwade is 2.3km. The main route between the settlements is Sheppey Way. The gap between Bobbing and Sittingbourne is 240m. They are linked by Quinton Road, which crosses over the well-vegetated A249. This creates the experience of leaving one settlement and entering a different settlement. Public rights of way ZR693/ZR108 provide pedestrian access between the settlements. The footpaths follow the junction of the A249, B2006 and Sheppey Way and therefore there is a clear sense of travelling between settlements.
Boundary defensibility	New residential development is under construction to the north of Featherbed Lane, east of Sheppey Way and west of Grovehurst Road. This development is an extension of Iwade, and therefore the land should be excluded from the gap. As part of approved residential development of up to 466 dwellings east of Iwade, land between Iwade and the A249, which is partly within the gap, will become a country park. Playing fields/sports pitch are proposed in the south close to the A249/Grovehurst Road junction. Woodland planting both

Consideration	Commentary
	along the edge of the new development and along the A249 is proposed. The existing gap at Iwade follows the settlement boundary and field boundaries, then to the east follows the A249 before following the Sittingbourne settlement boundary. The Sittingbourne settlement boundary however does not always follow physical features on the ground. The gap crosses the A249 at its junction with the B2006. To the west it follows the eastern edge of Swale Way. There has been an increase in development within the existing gap at Layfield Farm, Howt Green, and along Bramblefield Way. These reduce the rural character of the gap.
Potential for enhancement	Priority habitat traditional orchard is recorded east of Iwade and at Howt Green. A small area of priority habitat deciduous woodland is also recorded at Howt Green. These priority habitats should be appropriately managed and enhanced. There is considerable woodland along the A249 which softens the road. These linear vegetation belts should be maintained. A few public rights of way cross the gap and can be enhanced to shelter them further from the busy dual carriageway and provide access to the wider countryside. A Local Green Space is recorded at the junction of the A2, A249 and Sheppey Way. The ecological and recreational value of this area should be preserved and enhanced where possible. Relevant enhancements noted in the LCA include restoring the landscape structure of woodland, hedgerow, orchard, ditches and shelterbelts. and improving the structure of hedgerows and shelterbelts, including along the rural roads.

Summary

3.13 The analysis above indicates the gap between Sittingbourne and Iwade is linear, mainly focused along the A249. There are a number of development pressures at Iwade, which are within the existing gap. The separation of Iwade and the industrial edge of Sittingbourne is provided by the vegetated A249 dual carriageway. There are also limited views between the two settlements, which contributes to their character as separate settlements. The illustrative masterplan for the approved development east of Iwade shows that land between the new residential edge and the A249 will be in use as a country park, with planting along the settlement edge and the A249. This will form a strong settlement edge to Iwade.

3.14 The land east of the A249 and west of the railway line, within the Sittingbourne settlement boundary, is currently in arable use and there are no current development pressures. As this land is within the settlement boundary of Sittingbourne there is no guarantee that this land will remain undeveloped. However, the A249 forms a strong boundary to the settlement edge of Sittingbourne.

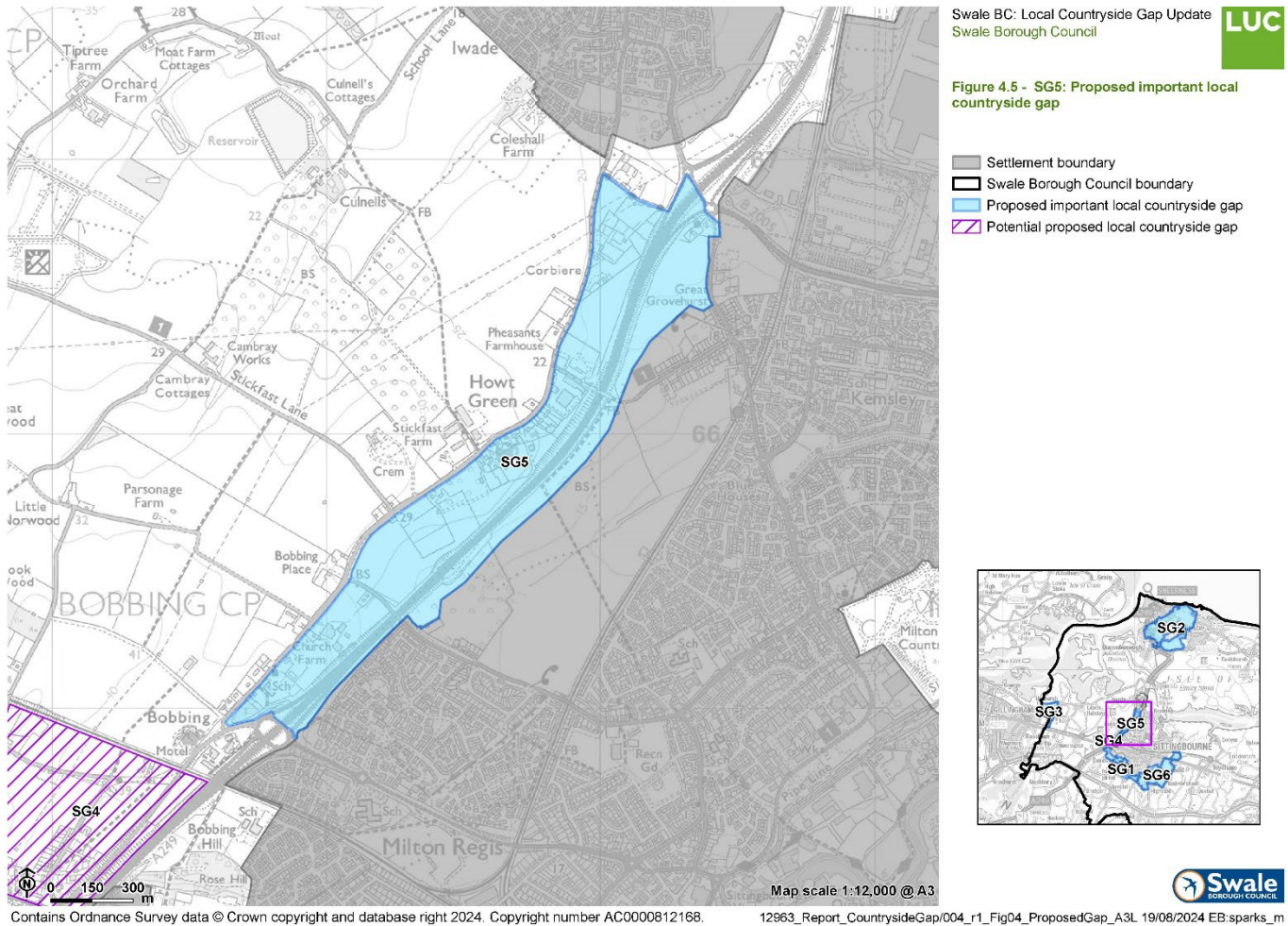
3.15 The gap between Sittingbourne and Bobbing is largely formed by the A249. The vegetation lining the A249 provides separation between the two settlements. Travelling over or under the A249 on car or foot also provides an experience of leaving one distinct settlement and travelling to another. Residential and commercial development at Howt Green, along Sheppey Way, reduces the perception of a gap. However, the open spaces between the developments reinforces the impression that Howt Green is not a continuation of Bobbing or Iwade.

Recommendation

It is recommended that the Important Local Countryside Gap is retained between Sittingbourne and Bobbing to avoid the coalescence of these settlements. There are rural land uses between Sheppey Way and the A249 which should be retained, although the A249 itself forms a strong physical feature to the settlement edge of Sittingbourne.

It is recommended that the gap covers land up to the new southern boundary of Iwade and that the gap is removed from the east of Iwade. New residential development east of Iwade will provide a country park between the settlement edge and the A249. The A249 is also a strong physical feature retaining separation between Iwade and the commercial edge of Sittingbourne.

Figure 3.20 Proposed important countryside gap between Sittingbourne and the satellite villages of Bobbing and Iwade



SG6: Sittingbourne and the satellite villages of Bapchild, and Rodmersham Green

Figure 3.21 Natural heritage and landscape designations

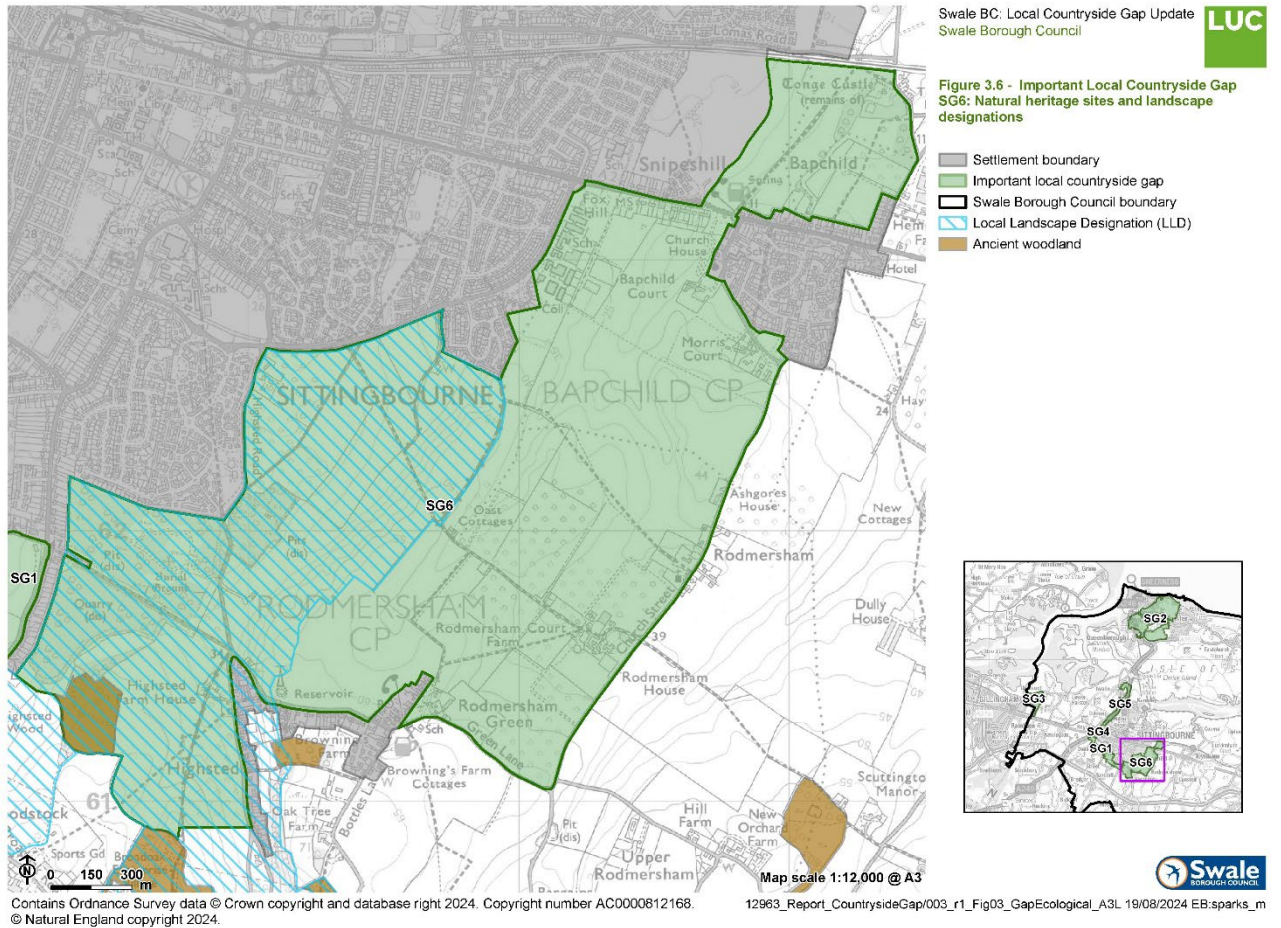


Figure 3.22 Cultural heritage and recreation

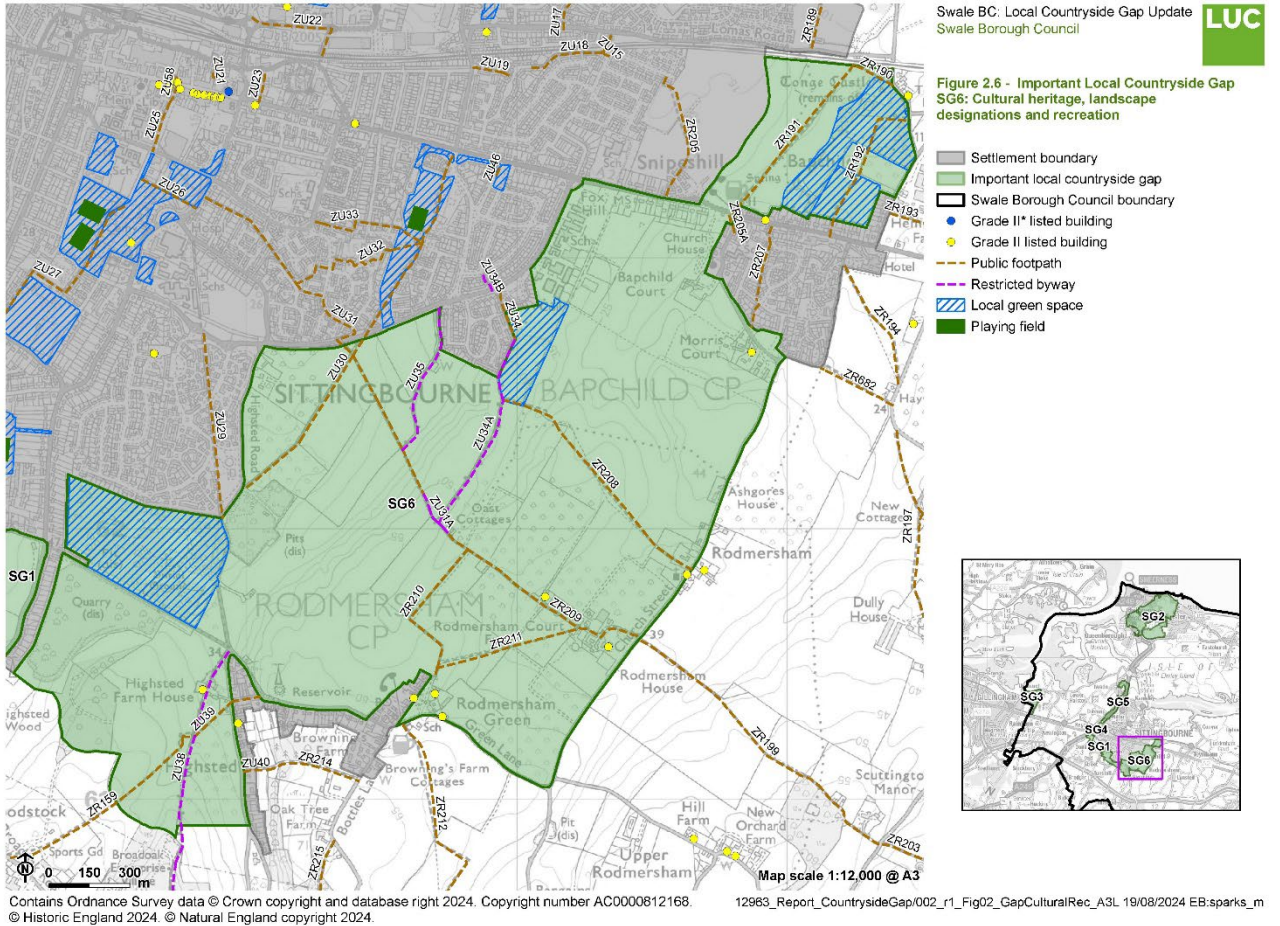


Figure 3.23 Representative photos



Fields north of A2 forming gap between Bapchild and Sittingbourne



Settlement edge of Sittingbourne, development along the A2 and settlement edge of Bapchild seen from ZR208, with Sheppey in the distance

Location and extent of area

Table 3.16 Summary of existing gap

SG6: Sittingbourne and the satellite villages of Bapchild, and Rodmersham Green	
Location and extent of area	The gap lies to the east of Sittingbourne, with Church Street forming the eastern boundary and Green Lane and field boundaries forming the southern boundary.
Landscape character context	LCA 31: Teynham Fruit Belt LCA 29: Rodmersham Mixed Farmlands LCA 40: Rodmersham and Milstead Dry Valley LCA 42: Tunstall Farmlands.

Table 3.17 Assessment criteria

Assessment criteria	Rating	Commentary
Existing settlement identity and pattern	Fully meets	Sittingbourne Sittingbourne was a small market town beside the Roman road of Watling Street, which expanded in the medieval era as a route for pilgrims travelling to Canterbury. This continued into the 18th century as Sittingbourne was an important stopping point on the journey between London and Canterbury. In the 20th century Sittingbourne expanded considerably in all directions. The south-eastern edge of Sittingbourne is largely contained by Swanstree Avenue and Highsted Road, although development has now breached this boundary. Land south of Swanstree Avenue close to Highsted Road has planning permission for up to 135 dwellings. Bapchild Bapchild was a linear settlement along the A2, which has grown south of the A2 during the 20th century. Bapchild is largely contained by the A2 to the north, although housing extends onto Hempstead Lane north of the A2. Panteny Lane provides the eastern extent and Church Street the western settlement boundary. There are three Listed Buildings on the A2 in the west, and the Grade I listed church of St Lawrence in the southwest. The western settlement edge is contained by Church Street, with the church, Bapchild Court and Morris Court lying west of the road. There is linear development along the A2 west of Bapchild, and a large new

Assessment criteria	Rating	Commentary
		extension to Sittingbourne, currently under construction called Spring Acres. Although this reduces the undeveloped nature of the gap, the land immediately to the east of Spring Acres will be a 'countryside gap', which the approved plans state will act as a permanent buffer between Sittingbourne and Bapchild. Bapchild and Sittingbourne are still perceived as distinct separate settlements along the A2 London Road, despite intervening development. Rodmersham Green Rodmersham Green is a small linear settlement, originally centred on the green, before expanding west along Stockers Hill and Highsted Valley. There are six Listed Buildings within the historic core, which is covered by a Conservation Area. The Grade I listed St Nicholas church lies 1km from the village and is covered by a separate Conservation Area. Rodmersham Green has expanded in the 20th century, to coalesce with Highsted, another linear settlement based along Highsted Road. The village largely retains its linear settlement pattern. There is a clear sense of separation between Sittingbourne and Rodmersham Green, despite recent developments east of Swanstree Avenue. The Conservation Area Appraisal states that '<i>Despite [Rodmersham Green's] close proximity to suburban Sittingbourne, it retains a strong and independent sense of identity and place</i>'.
Landscape character	Fully meets	Bapchild Most of the undeveloped area between Sittingbourne and Bapchild is in agricultural use, generally for arable cropping. Educational facilities lie east of Swanstree Avenue and south of the A2, including playing fields and sports facilities. Housing along the A2 between Sittingbourne and Bapchild slightly reduces the rural character, although there are glimpses of the agricultural land to the south. North of the A2 the grassland, local spring and remnant areas of priority habitat deciduous woodland and traditional orchard form part of the

Assessment criteria	Rating	Commentary
		Tonge Country Park, which contains two dedicated Local Green Spaces. There is very limited development within this area. Rodmersham Green The land between Sittingbourne and Rodmersham is in arable use, bounded by hedgerows. Small areas of orchard are found around Rodmersham Church. Small farms lie west of Church Street, but do not detract from the rural character. Highsted Quarries east of Highsted Road are former quarries which now contain priority habitat deciduous woodland and are designated as a Local Wildlife Site and Local Green Space.
Visual character	Fully meets	Bapchild There is no visual relationship between the south of Bapchild and the eastern edge of Sittingbourne due to hedgerow boundaries and undulating topography. High roadside hedgerows along Church Street and undulating topography also result in no visual relationship between Bapchild and Rodmersham Green. The settlement edges of Sittingbourne and Bapchild can be seen in views from higher ground to the south, along footpath ZR208. Rodmersham Green The Rodmersham Green Conservation Area Appraisal notes the strong relationship between the village and its surrounding landscape, with significant views noted north-east and north-west along footpath ZR210, and north-east and north-west from Stockers Hill to the west of the Conservation Area. There is no visual relationship between Rodmersham Green and the south or east of Sittingbourne, due to hedgerow boundaries, areas of traditional orchard and the undulating topography.

Table 3.18 Practical considerations

Consideration	Commentary
Gap extent	Bapchild The gap between Sittingbourne and the south of Bapchild is around 420m. The main route between the settlements is the A2 in the north. Development along the A2 including the under-construction development of Spring Acres north of the

Consideration	Commentary
	A2, and linear development to the southside of the A2 reduces the gap between the settlements to under 100m. The gap along the A2 between Sittingbourne and Bapchild is therefore very important if the separate settlements are to be retained. Rodmersham Green The gap between Sittingbourne and Rodmersham Green is around 920m. At its closest, the gap between the southern edge of Sittingbourne and the northern edge of Rodmersham at Highsted Hill is 500m. The main route between the settlements is Highsted Road. There is a clear sense of travelling between two settlements along this rural road, partly due to the experience of travelling through the woodland of Highsted Quarries on the edge of Sittingbourne. Public rights of way ZU31 and ZR210 run between Sittingbourne and Rodmersham Green.
Boundary defensibility	Land south of Swanstree Avenue has planning permission for up to 135 dwellings. Although this area is important to the gap between Sittingbourne and Rodmersham Green, development will not so erode the gap as to cause perceived coalescence. The only change to the existing gap is therefore to exclude this land from the gap. The gap to the north of the A2 is defined along the western boundary by the extent of Spring Acres, by the railway line to the north and by Church Road and Hempstead Lane to the east. It is recognised this Important Local Countryside Gap does include areas of residential development and educational facilities south of the A2. However, to exclude these areas would weaken the gap in the areas adjacent to the settlements which offer greatest potential for enhancement. South of Bapchild the gap follows Church Street and Green Lane. The relationship between Rodmersham Church and the village is important to its character, as set out in the Conservation Area Appraisal. The gap follows Highsted Valley and cuts west across the field boundary of orchards, which are important to the rural character of the gap. It then uses field boundaries and the edges of Highsted Wood and Highsted Quarries to meet the settlement edge of Sittingbourne along Ruins Barn Road.
Potential for enhancement	Highsted Quarries LWS lie to the south of Sittingbourne, close to Highsted, designated for its priority habitat deciduous woodland. The former quarries are bound along Highsted Road by barbed wire and concrete posts, which could be removed and replaced with more appropriate boundary treatments such as hedgerows. There is potential for recreational access to the Highsted Quarries, providing this can be balanced with the management of the woodland. Highsted Wood ancient woodland lies in the west of the gap and should be appropriately managed. Small areas of priority habitat traditional orchard lie west of Church Street at Rodmersham, and at Morris Court south of Bapchild. Conservation and sensitive management of these should be encouraged, and the possibility of extending the

Consideration	Commentary
	traditionally managed orchards should be explored. Other relevant enhancements noted in the LCAs include restoring and improving the structure of hedgerows and shelterbelts, including along the rural roads. The gap contains a number of Conservation Areas at: Tonge, north of Bapchild, Rodmersham Church Street and Rodmersham Green. All the Conservation Areas contain clusters of listed buildings. The setting of all these heritage assets should be enhanced. Church Street and Highsted Road are designated as Rural Lanes, which contribute to the rural amenity, nature conservation and character of the landscape. There are opportunities to enhance the rural characteristics of these roads. There are a number of public rights of way in the gap north of Bapchild, between Sittingbourne and Rodmersham and Rodmersham Green, which can be enhanced to increase access to and enjoyment of the countryside.

Summary

3.16 The analysis above indicates the gap between Sittingbourne and Bapchild is a small gap between two distinct settlements, threatened by linear development and coalescence along the A2. The continued expansion of Sittingbourne eastwards means that an Important Local Countryside Gap is still relevant in this location.

3.17 The analysis above indicates the gap between Sittingbourne and Rodmersham Green continues to meet the criteria for designation as an Important Countryside Gap. The area has a rural character which separates the two settlements. Rodmersham Green and Sittingbourne have distinct characters and identities, and people travelling between the settlements, whether on foot or by vehicle, have an experience of leaving one distinct settlement and travelling to another.

3.18 There are no views between Sittingbourne and Bapchild, Bapchild and Rodmersham Green, and Rodmersham Green and Sittingbourne. This contributes to their character as separate settlements.

Recommendation

It is recommended that the gap is retained at its current extent to avoid the coalescence of Sittingbourne and Bapchild. Although the main threat to coalescence is along the A2 corridor, the proposed gap extends north and south of the A2, to ensure that the settlements remain separate.

It is recommended that the gap is retained at its current extent to avoid the coalescence of Sittingbourne and Rodmersham Green. One small change in boundary is required to take into account the recent planning permission for housing development off Swanstree Avenue.

Figure 3.24 Proposed important countryside gap between Sittingbourne, Bapchild, and Rodmersham Green

