Topic Paper:
Natural Environment

Regulation 18 Consultation on the Draft Local Plan
December **2020**

Dover District **Local Plan**

Supporting document

DOVER DISTRICT COUNCIL

1. Introduction

1.1 In 2018 Dover District Council started work on a Local Plan Review. The new Local Plan 2040 aims to be aspirational and deliverable, with clear, unambiguous policies. It will provide a positive vision for the future and will address the housing needs and economic, social and environmental priorities of the district covering the period to 2040.

1.2 Preparation work has been undertaken in accordance with the requirements of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, the Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive (European Directive 2001/42/EC as transposed into English law by the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004, Directive 92/43/EEC on the Conservation of Natural Habitats and of Wild Fauna and Flora (Habitats Directive), the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 2019, National Planning Practice Guidance and the local context and evidence base. The Planning Advisory Service (PAS) Local Plan Route Mapper Toolkit 2019 has provided useful guidance throughout.

1.3 In order to inform the Local Plan Review process, which includes a review of existing local plan policies, an extensive programme of stakeholder engagement has been undertaken. At the start of the review process a series of workshops was organised to gather initial thoughts on a vision, objectives and policies for the District and to re-examine the Council's land allocation process. The focus of these workshops was on a fully participative process with a wide-ranging group of invited stakeholders. One of the key overarching aspirations that came out of such early consultation exercises was a desire for a more streamlined Local Plan, with, for example, supporting text in the document kept to a minimum. As a result it was decided that much of the background evidence and other contextual information which support the policies within the Plan will be set out in a series of Topic Papers. This evidence will then be summarised succinctly in the text of the Plan itself. In this way the Local Plan 2040 will be easy to use and accessible to all users of the planning system in the district.

1.4 This Topic Paper is one in a series that set out the policy context and evidence base that has informed the preparation of each of the chapters of the Dover District Local Plan 2040, Regulation 18 Draft. Each Topic Paper presents the relevant national and local planning legislation, policy and guidance as well as other background information, including stakeholder engagement outcomes, monitoring of usage of existing policies, that forms the evidence base for the relevant section of the new Plan. For further information on individual pieces of evidence, links are provided to the full documents as appropriate. The full evidence base for the Local Plan can be found at: www.doverdistrictlocalplan.co.uk

1.5 The information in the Topic Papers will be updated as and when necessary and will form a key part of the Local Plan Evidence Base that will be relied on at the Local Plan Examination.

1.6 The issues covered by this Natural Environment Topic Paper are as follows:

Background

- The District's Green Infrastructure Network
- Water Supply and Water Quality
- Air Quality

Evidence Base

- Policy Context – National, Regional and Local
- Usage of existing Dover development plan policies
- Stakeholder Engagement and Feedback
- Sustainability Issues

Conclusions

- Local Plan 2040 preferred policy approach

Background

2. The District's Green Infrastructure Network

2.1 The landform of Dover District relates closely to its underlying geology and comprises coastal cliffs and marshes, arable lands and rolling chalk downs with numerous ancient woodlands and valleys. This is a spectacular landscape and coastline and the district enjoys has a wealth of natural assets; assets that are valued and protected at local, regional, national and international level. These landscape assets provide significant environmental, social, and economic benefits for the district and its residents. They range from the Heritage Coasts of the White Cliffs, to the expansive areas, rich in biodiversity, of the chalk grasslands of the Kent Downs AONB and coastal habitats including salt marsh and mud flats.

2.2 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 2019 (paragraph 174) requires Local Plans to identify, map and safeguard components of local wildlife-rich habitats and wider ecological networks, including the hierarchy of international, national and locally designated sites of importance for biodiversity within their areas. In addition, the wildlife corridors and stepping stones that connect them, as well as areas identified by national and local partnerships for habitat management, enhancement, restoration or creation, should be identified. Such landscape features and assets are often referred to as forming a district's "Green Infrastructure".

International Assets

2.3 Council Directive 92/43/EEC on *the Conservation of Natural Habitats and of Wild Fauna and Flora* (commonly referred to as the Habitats Directive) provides the context for EU Member States to set in place regulations to protect habitats and species of European importance, through the establishment and conservation of an EU-wide network of European Sites, known as the Natura 2000 network[1]. This network comprises Special Areas of Conservation (SACs), Special Protection Areas (SPAs) (the latter classified under Council Directive 79/409/EEC on the Conservation of Wild Birds), Ramsar sites (internationally protected wetlands under the *International Convention on Wetlands (Ramsar)* (1976) and Offshore Marine Sites.

[1] At the time of writing it is not clear what the future of the UK's relationship with the European Union, and specifically European legislation, will be after December 2020. However, with regard to the environmental directives which underpin the Regulations on Habitats and Species, the current position is that the whole body of existing EU environmental laws will be carried over into UK law (*European Union Withdrawal Act* (2018) section 3).

2.4 Such Sites are designated because they are of exceptional importance in respect of supporting natural habitats and species that are rare, endangered or vulnerable within a European context. The *Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010* (as amended) and *The Conservation of Offshore Marine (Natural Habitats and species) Regulations 2007* (as amended) enshrine such international statutes and regulations into UK law.

2.5 Five internationally designated sites fall, in full or in part, within the boundaries of Dover District. By virtue of their high level designation these sites are protected from development, adverse impact and loss.

- Dover to Kingsdown Cliffs SAC. The majority of the Dover to Kingsdown Cliffs SAC is owned by the National Trust, part of which comprises 'The White Cliffs of Dover'. The area attracts more than 250,000 visitors per year and is important for its sea cliffs and cliff top grasslands;
- Lydden and Temple Ewell SAC. This large site includes some of the richest chalk grassland in Kent with outstanding assemblages of plants and invertebrates;
- Thanet Coast and Sandwich Bay SPA. Thanet Coast and Sandwich Bay SPA is a coastal site consisting of a long stretch of rocky shore, adjoining areas of estuary, sand dune, maritime grassland, saltmarsh and grazing marsh. The site holds important numbers of Turnstone and is also used by large numbers of migratory birds as they make landfall in Britain in spring or depart for continental Europe in autumn. It is particularly susceptible to recreational pressure;
- Thanet Coast and Sandwich Bay Ramsar Site. At the coast, the site is contiguous with the SPA, but it extends further inland. The designation is similar to that of the SPA but also includes important wetland invertebrates;
- Sandwich Bay SAC. This site incorporates the golf links north of Deal and is designated for its sand dunes and their rich flora.

2.6 The District Council has a legal duty to consider potential significant impacts on these European (Natura 2000) sites. This duty is carried out through a Habitat Regulations Assessment (HRA) which will accompany the Local Plan and which is being prepared as part of the Dover Local Plan Review.

2.7 Visitor pressures arising from dog-walking for example, have been previously identified at a number of these designated wildlife sites, in particular at the Thanet Coast and Sandwich Bay SPA. The Council has therefore been proactive in studying the potential for significant impact and in 2012 adopted a mitigation strategy to monitor potential impacts to the qualifying bird species of the Thanet Coast and Sandwich Bay Special Protection Area (SPA) arising from development in the district. The strategy sets out to monitor recreational impacts from visitors to Sandwich and Pegwell Bay which may increase due to the higher number of people living in the district because of new housing. The mitigation strategy is supported for 10 years; i.e. to 2022. As part of the developing Local Plan, a new Habitats Regulations Assessment and mitigation strategy are being prepared.

National Assets

2.8 The highest national environmental designations in the UK, alongside National Parks, are Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), Sites of Significant Scientific Interest (SSSI), National Nature Reserves, and Heritage Coasts. Aside from National Parks, the rich landscape of Dover District is home to all such environmental designations.

Kent Downs AONB

2.9 Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty are areas of high scenic quality that have statutory protection (National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act, 1949 and Countryside and Rights of Way Act, 2000) in order to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of their landscapes. AONB landscapes range from rugged coastline and water meadows to gentle lowland and upland moors. The Kent Downs AONB comprises the striking North Downs landscape feature that covers nearly a quarter of Kent running from the White Cliffs at Dover up to the Surrey and London borders. Approximately 22% of Dover District is designated as AONB, with two separate sections of the Kent Downs AONB either side of Dover town:

- The East Kent Downs: typically this area is dominated by long ridges and isolated valleys with scattered woodlands (often SSSI) on steep valley sides with hedges transecting the valleys. To the coast are exposed chalk cliffs and the tumbled, scrub covered rock-falls of the Folkestone Warren SSSI. Also present is scrub from post-war agricultural abandonment.
- The South Foreland Valley: characterised by the White Cliffs of Dover (SAC), there is unimproved chalk grassland along cliff tops (SAC), with a hinterland predominantly of large rolling arable fields with some remnant hedgerows or scrub, dotted by farms and small settlements fringed by trees and scrub, creating an open landscape vulnerable to any form of development.

Sites of Special Scientific Interest

2.10 Sites of Significant Scientific Interest are protected areas identified by Natural England under Section 28 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 as being of national wildlife importance, for their flora, fauna, geological or physiographical features. The Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 amends the Wildlife and Countryside Act and imposes a duty on public bodies exercising statutory functions which may affect SSSIs, to take reasonable steps consistent with the proper exercise of these functions, to further enhance the features for which the site is notified as SSSI. There are five SSSIs in this district:

- Dover to Kingsdown Cliffs SSSI: The coastline from Dover Harbour to Kingsdown is of extreme importance geologically and for its varied floral and faunal communities which include many rare species (61.3% favourable condition);
- Folkestone Warren SSSI: This coastal site, comprising steep chalk cliffs and foreshore exposures is located just to the east of Folkestone. The series of cliff

sections at the western end of the site represent the most important single locality for studying Cretaceous age rocks in England. Of particular note is Samphire Hoe created by using 4.9 million cubic metres of chalk from the Channel Tunnel excavations and is found at the bottom of a section of the White Cliffs of Dover (60.1% favourable condition).

- Alkham, Lydden and Swingfield Wood SSSI: This site is composed of several steeply sloping woods on chalk soil, together with an area of chalk grassland. The ground flora is diverse, including some unusual plants such as lady orchid in the woods and burnt orchid in the meadow (76.6% favourable condition)
- Lydden and Temple Ewell Downs SSSI: This site lies just outside the North Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The site which is also an SAC is owned and managed as a National Nature Reserve by the Kent Wildlife Trust. It includes some of the richest chalk grassland in Kent, with outstanding assemblages of plants and invertebrates (86.1% favourable condition);
- Sandwich Bay to Hacklinge Marshes SSSI: This site contains the most important sand dune system and sandy coastal grassland in South East England and also includes a wide range of other habitats such as mudflats, saltmarsh, chalk cliffs, freshwater grazing marsh, scrub and woodland (50.4% favourable condition).

National Nature Reserves

2.11 National Nature Reserves (NNR) are established to protect the most important areas of wildlife habitat and geological formations in Britain, as well as places for scientific research. As such, they are subject to management plans agreed with Natural England and can attract specific funding to help maintain these national assets. There are 2 NNRs in Dover District:

- Sandwich and Pegwell Bay NNR: Incorporating Pegwell Bay Coastal Park (Kent County Council), the site is recognised for its important number of wading birds, together with its sand dune system and the rare species that it supports. This site is managed by Kent Wildlife Trust on behalf of a partnership including Dover District Council;
- Lydden and Temple Ewell Downs NNR: This escarpment is best known for its fine chalk grassland and associated rare orchids and invertebrates. The site is owned by the Kent Wildlife Trust.

Heritage Coasts

2.12 A number of areas of UK coastline are designated by Natural England as Heritage Coasts, having notable natural beauty or scientific significance. The NPPF (paragraph 173) requires that in areas defined as Heritage Coast planning policies and decisions should be consistent with the special character of the area and the importance of its conservation. Heritage Coasts are one of the few places in south east England which offer a feeling of wilderness. The ever-changing chalk cliffs, foreshore and seabed platform are home to distinctive wildlife influenced by the sea and exposure. Globally coastal chalk is a scarce resource, the UK holds 57% of Europe's resource, Kent holds 35% of the UK resource. The geology and

landform of the coast is internationally important with the cliffs being home to many rare birds, plants and invertebrates.

2.13 The only two areas of Heritage Coast within the county of Kent are found in Dover District and are the cliffs either side of Dover:

- Dover to Folkestone, Heritage Coast: The heritage coast is dominated by the Folkestone Warren SSSI. Its cliff tops are marked by wartime defence structures, while Samphire Hoe (the country's youngest land area, named after a scene in Shakespeare's King Lear and created from the spoil from the construction of the Channel Tunnel) lies at its base near Dover town. Its cliffs are greener than those east of Dover since with the railway and its sea defences between them and the shore, they are not subject to the erosive forces of the sea. It includes Shakespeare Cliff.
- South Foreland, Heritage Coast: Almost entirely owned by the National Trust following a major purchase in 2012, these are the familiar White Cliffs of Dover as seen from France. The majority of the cliff faces arise directly from the sea and are exposed to its erosive forces which contribute to their whiteness. The cliff top is marked by the South Foreland Lighthouse and the Dover Patrol Memorial.

Marine Conservation Zones (MCZ)

2.14 Marine Conservation Zones (MCZs) are a form of Marine Protected Area, designated under the Marine and Coastal Access Act, 2009. They aim to conserve the diversity of nationally rare or threatened habitats and species that are representative of the biodiversity in our seas. There are two Marine Conservation Zones (MCZs) in Dover District:

- Dover to Folkestone MCZ: Designated in January 2016. This MCZ is a highly diverse area with several habitats and features of interest. The chalk communities on the seashore are one of the best examples in the region, supporting a range of seaweeds and the animals that associate with them. Rocky outcrops, ledges and boulders support intertidal under boulder communities, an important habitat, of which this example is one of the best examples in the region. Boulders create shaded areas that provide a refuge to sea squirts, sea mats, and sponges. The undersides of the boulder provide a habitat for animals like sea slugs, long-clawed porcelain crabs and brittlestars. Crabs, fish and young lobsters also scavenge for food and seek shelter amongst the boulders. On the seabed, mixed sediment is rich in mobile animals including brittlestars, squat lobsters, crabs, fish and molluscs and wild native oysters.

- Dover to Deal MCZ : Also designated in January 2016. The site helps to protect intertidal under boulder communities, where large boulders provide shaded, cave-like conditions for unusual algae to thrive, and mobile animals such as long-clawed porcelain crabs, sea slugs and brittlestars shelter among sponges. Crabs, fish and young lobsters also scavenge for food and seek shelter amongst the boulders. This site includes excellent examples of littoral chalk communities which are unique communities of seaweeds and animals. Areas of littoral chalk

are small in range and are limited within Britain. The area also includes the best example in the region of wave-cut platforms, flat areas at the base of a cliff formed by wave erosion. The chalk foreshore at St Margaret's Bay has one of the richest communities of algae in the south east. As well as Ross worm reefs subtidal off Kingsdown, there is a well-developed Ross worm reef between Dover and South Foreland. The presence of Ross worm reefs on chalk reefs is extremely rare, and this reef is also thought to seed more vulnerable reefs offshore.

Regional Assets

Biodiversity Opportunity Areas

2.15 Recent years have witnessed a recognition that the planning system should move towards a more integrated landscape-scale approach to improving biodiversity alongside the conservation of individual sites and species. BOAs are the Kent priority areas of opportunity for restoration and creation of priority habitats. In this regard The Dover Local Plan 2040 will support the aims and objectives of the Kent Biodiversity Strategy (2020 – 2045) as they relate specifically to the Biodiversity Opportunity Areas (BOAs) of this District.

2.16 Dover District includes three BOAs. The Lower Stour Wetlands opportunity area contains some of Kent's most extensive water and wetland habitats. The area includes a very high number of designated sites such as Stodmarsh, Westbere Marshes, the Lydden Valley and Hacklinge Marshes. Along the coast, the mudflats and sand dunes which lie between the marshes and the sea form part of the Sandwich & Pegwell Bay SSSI, a site of international importance for bird life. Kent Nature Partnership targets for this BOA include no net loss of intertidal mudflats, saltmarsh, and sand dunes, the maintenance of existing natural coastal processes the pursuance of opportunities to restore and/or recreate intertidal habitats, grazing marsh, fen and reedbed (including for bittern) as part of a matrix of natural wetland and coastal habitats and the restoration and enhancement of at least 200ha of grazing marsh around Sandwich and in the Lower Stour Valley, adjoining the Sandwich Bay to Hacklinge Marshes SSSI and/or within the Ash Level and South Richborough Pasture Local Wildlife Site.

2.17 The area to the west of Dover Town lies in the Dover and Folkestone Cliffs and Downs BOA. This area encompasses a series of valleys around Dover, cliffs and cliff-top grassland, intertidal and subtidal chalk and the steep scarp slope of the North Downs at Dover. Much of the grassland is nationally or internationally important, and there are areas of locally or nationally important woodland. Targets for the Dover and Folkestone Cliffs and Downs BOA include extending, reconnecting, restoring and enhancing areas of chalk grassland, to include restoration of at least least 90ha, creation of an additional 75ha and enhancement at least 60 ha of chalk grassland to bring it to UK BAP priority habitat quality, by 2020.

2.18 Finally, a small section of the East Kent Woodlands and Downs BOA falls within the district, in the vicinity of the village of Wootton. This BOA comprises a complex of woodland and grassland habitats, including several nationally and locally important sites, including some large blocks of woodland of importance for threatened butterflies such as the Duke of burgundy and the black-veined moth. Acid grassland and heath habitats occur on the areas of gravel exposures.

Regionally Important Geological Sites (RIGS)

2.19 These are geological sites of particular importance in Kent that are identified by Geo Conservation Kent Group, a member of United Kingdom RIGS Groups (UKRIGS). Three Regionally Important Geological Sites are located in the District:

- Betteshanger Colliery Tip: This RIGS is at the former Betteshanger Colliery, which was one of the largest collieries in Kent. The colliery opened in 1924-30 and closed in 1989. The tip, located to the north east of the former pit, was composed of carboniferous sedimentary rock. The fossil plant assemblages found indicate areas of forest, river levees and overbank (crevasse) deposition. A rare, large millipede-like anthropod fossil was also found. The tip has now been landscaped to create Fowlmead Country Park.
- Tilmanstone Colliery Tip: The spoil tip of a colliery that opened in 1906-1913. The tip is composed of carboniferous sedimentary rock. The recording of the rocks and fossils in the spoil heap, now an endangered system in Kent, is important in our understanding of changes in climate and habitat. Fossil plants found at the colliery include clubmosses, horsetails, ferns and gymnosperms.
- Snowdown Colliery Tip: The spoil tip of a colliery that opened in 1909 and closed in 1987. The tip is composed of carboniferous sedimentary rock. A central depression was caused by extraction for construction of the Channel Tunnel. Fossil plants found at the site include arboreal clubmosses, horsetails, ferns, rare cordaites and charcoal. Fossil animals found include arthropods both terrestrial and freshwater.

Local Assets

Landscape Character Areas

2.18 Dover District falls within the North Kent Plain and the North Downs National Character Areas as defined by Natural England. The Dover Landscape Character Assessment 2020 provides detailed assessments at a district level. It defines eight generic landscape character types (LCTs) in the district, each representing a distinct identity and common geology, topography, land use and cultural pattern. The LCTs are subdivided into local landscape character areas (LCAs), which are discrete geographic areas that possess the characteristics described for the landscape type but have a recognisable local identity. The classification identifies 17 LCAs and defines issues of landscape management and development management which should be delivered over the plan period.

LCT A: River Valleys and Marshes

A1 Little Stour Marshes
A2 Ash Levels
A3 Little Stour and Wingham River
LCT B: Developed River Valley
B1 Great Stour – Sandwich Corridor
LCT C: Coastal Marshes and Dunes
C1 Sandwich Bay
C2 Lydden Valley
LCT D: Horticultural Belt
D1 Preston
D2 Ash
D3 Staple Farmlands
LCT E: Open Arable Chalk Farmland with Parkland
E1 Shepherdswell Aylesham Parklands
E2 Whitfield Parkland
LCT F: Open Arable Chalk Farmland with Woodland
F1 Chillenden
F2 Northbourne
F3 Ripple
LCT G: Chalk Hills
G1 Lydden Hills
G2 Guston Hills
LCT H: Defensive Hills
H1 Richborough Bluff

Local Wildlife Sites

2.19 Kent Wildlife Trust has identified, on behalf of the Kent Biodiversity Partnership, 41 Local Wildlife Sites (LWS) within Dover. These are sites of county importance for their wildlife interest and complement designated SSSI. They are on both public and private land and form an important element of the District's network of green infrastructure, particularly the chalk grasslands which wrap around Dover town.

Local Nature Reserves

2.20 Local Nature Reserves are specifically designated by the Council for public access to nature, under Section 21 of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 and amended by Schedule 11 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006, with the purpose of increasing the public enjoyment and understanding of nature, as well as promoting nature conservation. They provide a significant and long-term contribution to nature conservation and are an important resource for the community, making a positive contribution to health and wellbeing. Dover District supports 4 Local Nature Reserves:

- High Meadow (LWS), managed by the White Cliffs Countryside Partnership (WCCP) on behalf of Dover Town Council
- Princes Beachland (SSSI), managed by KWT on behalf of DDC

- Western Heights (LWS), managed by WCCP, on behalf of DDC and English Heritage
- Whinless Down (LWS), managed by the WCCP on behalf of DDC; Local Assets: Other Nature Reserves (excepting SSSI)

2.23 The District contains two other Nature Reserves:

- Gazen Salts Nature Reserve, managed by Sandwich Town Council on behalf of DDC
- Monks Wall Nature Reserve (LWS), owned and managed by Sandwich Town Council

Beaches and Foreshores

2.24 Foreshores are considered to be those coastal areas that, by and large, are found between the mean high water and the mean low water. Beaches may be part foreshore but also extend inland above mean high water. Inland, they tend to be bound by sea defences or, less often, by other physical structures, such as roads. Given the extensive coast and associated coastal landscapes in Dover district the contribution of beaches and foreshores to the character of the natural environment and green infrastructure network here is significant, ranging from ecosystem services such as flood prevention and seafood provision, to a range of recreational activities.

River Catchment Areas

2.25 Two main rivers flow through Dover District - the River Stour and the River Dour. The Stour, in the north, drains much of East Kent. It provides distinct habitats and settings compared to the more accessible open spaces in the south of the district, as the downland gives way to the flat open landscape of the Ash Levels, the Lower Stour Valley and Hacklinge Marshes. The landscape of this part of the North Kent Plain consists of marshland and wetlands, with an intricate pattern of drainage. The River Stour historically and currently is of poorer quality compared to the Dour, due to high nutrient concentrations, particularly nitrates and phosphates, which reduce biodiversity value. However, despite this, the catchment area has great nature conservation interest, which includes the last valley fen in South East England, together with some 280 km of dykes and drainage ditches, draining approximately 10% of the district.

2.26 The River Dour, located in the south of the District, has a local catchment. It rises at Watersend and drains the dry chalk valleys in the vicinity of Dover town. The town grew up around the river Dour, which has been a source of power or water for other industries, including iron foundries, saw mills and a tannery. The first record of a mill in Britain, in AD 672, is that of a corn mill on the Dour. The river has supplied the energy for thirteen watermills, including eight corn mills, the others producing paper. The river discharges into the sea at Wellington Dock. The River Dour catchment has good water quality and is important ecologically as, being an isolated catchment, it provides a safe haven for native species. Being an urban river, fed predominantly through groundwater, makes the river susceptible to a mix of fluvial and pluvial flooding in periods of high rainfall.

3. Water Supply and Water Quality

Water Supply

3.1 Dover District is underlain by chalk, which provides groundwater for the public water supply. As a result of such permeable geology, there are few main rivers in the District aside from the River Stour and the River Dour.

3.2 Groundwater provides a third of drinking water in England and Wales, and it also maintains the flow in many rivers. It is therefore crucial that groundwater sources are properly looked after.

3.3 The Kent Environment Strategy[2] identifies Kent as one of the driest regions in England and Wales. At the same time, Kent's household water use is above the national average (154 litres per person per day compared with 141 litres nationally). Kent's water resources are therefore under particular and continued pressure, requiring careful management and planning. Dover falls partly within the Dour Water Resource Zone (Affinity Water) and the Thanet Water Resource Zone (Southern Water), both of which will experience a shortfall in demand up to 2031[3].

3.4 Drinking water is supplied wholly by groundwater sources from the underlying chalk. Dover is located in the Environment Agency's Stour Catchment Abstraction Management Strategy, which identifies all the groundwater sources as over-abstracted.

3.5 The Environment Agency has defined Source Protection Zones (SPZs) for groundwater sources such as wells, boreholes and springs used for public drinking water supply. These zones show the risk of contamination from any activities that might cause pollution in the area. The closer the activity, the greater the risk. A number of Source Protection Zones 2 and 3 are located within Dover district, protecting the district's rivers and aquifers from pollution. The majority of the zones are concentrated in the southern third of the District, with a significant concentration to the north-west of Dover. In order to ensure that as much rainfall as possible returns to the ground to re-charge groundwater sources, to control rainwater runoff at source and alleviate pressures on sewer systems and treatment plants, the Local Plan will be promoting sustainable urban drainage systems (SUDS) which aim to mimic natural drainage as far as possible. These are, however, only acceptable in Source Protection Zones when it can be demonstrated that there will be no environmental risks to water quality.

Water Quality

[2] *Kent Environment Strategy*, Kent County Council (2016)
[3] *Kent Water for Sustainable Growth Study,* Aecom (2017)

3.6 The Dover District Water Cycle Study[4] found that while the River Dour catchment has good water quality, the lower reaches of the River Stour have poor water quality, both in recent years and historically.

3.7 According to the Water Cycle Study, small increases in wastewater flows are expected across Dover, following development. This is largely due to the expected reduction in both occupancy rates and per capita consumption. However, the capacity of the sewerage network potentially poses a constraint as upgrading and extensions of sewers will be required to meet certain development needs, particularly for development at Whitfield. Individual treatment works have varying capacities and those serving the main towns where significant growth is planned will see a marginal increase. According to Kent's Water for Sustainable Growth Study[5], one wastewater treatment facility in this district at Eastry is close to or at risk of exceeding flow headroom with additional growth in excess of planned levels.

3.8 In July 2020 Natural England issued advice to local authorities for development proposals with the potential to increase nutrient impacts to nationally and internationally important wildlife sites within the Stour Valley catchment. These sites comprise:

- Stodmarsh Special Area of Conservation (SAC)
- Stodmarsh Special Protection Area (SPA)
- Stodmarsh Ramsar site
- Stodmarsh Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)
- Stodmarsh National Nature Reserve (NNR)

The Stodmarsh wetland sites rely on a high quality of water and stable water levels, in particular the lake habitats. Some of the lakes are currently impacted by an excess of both Nitrogen and Phosphorus and are not achieving the required standard to support their favourable condition. This is because both Nitrogen and Phosphorous can have a range of negative impacts, including promoting algae growth, which can lead to reduced light and oxygen available for aquatic plants and animals and affect those birds that feed on them. Increased nutrients can also promote changes in structure which make it unsuitable for wetland species, including the main SAC feature. Natural England's advice is that a likely significant effect on the Stodmarsh designated sites from development that increases these nutrients cannot be ruled out, on objective evidence, at this stage. In the absence of evidence to the contrary, all new housing development proposals, will therefore need to consider, via an appropriate assessment, the impact of adding to the existing water quality target failures in the Stodmarsh European sites.

[4] *Dover District Water Cycle Study,* Entec (2009)
[5] *Kent Water for Sustainable Growth Study*, Aecom (2017)

4. Air Quality

4.1 The Kent Environment Strategy[6] highlights Kent's unique challenge presented by the county's position between London and the continent. Easterly winds can bring pollution from cross channel freight and the continent and westerly winds bring pollution from London. There are currently 40 air quality management areas in the county where air pollutants have been known to exceed objectives set by government.

4.2 There are currently two Air Quality Management Areas (AQMAs) declared in Dover District, due to exceedances of the annual mean Air Quality Strategy (AQS) objective for NO2, caused primarily by road traffic emissions. Both are located in Dover town centre:

1. A20 AQMA (declared in 2004, amended in 2007 and 2009)
2. High Street/Landwell AQMA (declared in 2007)

4.3 A new Air Quality Action Plan (AQAP) is currently under development for Dover District and will be finalised in 2021 when uncertainty over whether the UK will be leaving the European Union with a deal or without (with Dover likely to be significantly impacted by such decisions), together with the nature of the deal, and its associated border administration, will be clarified. A dispersion modelling assessment along the main roads in Dover, including both AQMAs will be undertaken as part of this Action Plan, utilising the latest monitoring data, alongside an updated source apportionment study to identify the extent to which different key sources are contributing to air quality exceedances in the area. The outcomes of this assessment will help ascertain whether AQMA adjustments will be required.

4.4 As part of the evidence base for both the Local Plan and the revised Dover AQAP, an Air Quality Assessment has been undertaken. The Assessment examined the exposure of existing residential and ecological receptors, alongside new local plan originated development receptors, to concentrations of Nitrogen Dioxide (NO2), Particulate Matter (PM10), CO2 and Nitrogen (as NOx). This work concluded that the implementation of the Local Plan is not predicted to significantly impact air quality or increase the number of sensitive receptors which are exposed to poor air quality, provided recommended mitigation measures are followed.

[6] *Kent Environment Strategy*, Kent County Council (2016)

Evidence Base

5. Policy Context

International

EVIDENCE BASE

- The Council Directive 92/43/EEC on the *Conservation of Natural Habitats and of Wild Fauna and Flora* (the Habitats Directive)
- International Convention on Wetlands (Ramsar Convention) (1976)
- European Nitrates Directive (1991)
- European Urban Waste Water Directive (1991)
- European Air Quality Framework Directive (1996)
- Air Quality Directive (2008)
- European Drinking Water Directive (1998)
- European Water Framework Directive (2000)

5.1 As set out in paragraphs 2.3 – 2.6 above, the district is home to 5 internationally protected environmental sites. These sites – The Dover to Kingsdown Cliffs SAC, the Lydden and Temple Ewell SAC, the Thanet Coast and Sandwich Bay SPA and Ramsar sites and the Sandwich Bay SAC are designated for protection under the Council Directive 92/43/EEC on the *Conservation of Natural Habitats and of Wild Fauna and Flora* (the Habitats Directive) and the International Convention on Wetlands (Ramsar Convention) (1976) for their internationally significant biodiversity.

5.2 Other international statutes and regulations that the natural environment aspects of the Dover Local Plan 2040 will have be accord with include the European Nitrates Directive (1991) which identifies nitrate vulnerability zones and puts in place measures to reduce water pollution caused by the introduction of nitrates, and the European Urban Waste Water Directive (1991) which seeks to protect the environment from the adverse effects of urban waste water collection, treatment and discharge, and discharge from certain industrial sectors.

5.3 European Air Quality Framework Directive (1996) and Air Quality Directive (2008) put in place measures for the avoidance, prevention, and reduction in harmful effects to human health and the environment associated with ambient air pollution and establish legally binding limits for the most common and harmful sources of air pollution. With regard to drinking water the European Drinking Water Directive (1998): Protects human health from the adverse effects of any contamination of water intended for human consumption by ensuring that it is wholesome and clean. The European Water Framework Directive (2000) protects inland surface waters, transitional waters, coastal waters and groundwater.

National

EVIDENCE BASE

- *The Countryside and Rights of Way* Act (2000)
- *The Natural Environment and Rural Communities* Act (2006)
- *Marine and Coastal Access Act* (2009)
- *The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations* 2010 (as amended)
- *The Offshore Marine Conservation Regulations* (2007)
- *Biodiversity 2020: A Strategy for England's Wildlife and ecosystems services* (DEFRA) (2011)
- *The Environment Bill* (2020)
- National Planning Policy Framework 2019, paragraphs 166-181
- State of Nature Report (2019)
- UK Marine Policy Statement (2011 as amended September 2020)
- *A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment*, HM Government (2018)
- UK Plan for Tackling Roadside Nitrogen Dioxide Concentrations (2017)

The National Planning Policy Framework

5.4 The National Planning Policy Framework (2019) sets out the Government's planning policies for England and how these should be applied. It sets out the Government's requirements for the planning system only to the extent that it is relevant, proportionate and necessary to do so and as such provides important basis for the drafting of policies. Paragraphs 166 – 169 and set out the required approach to development in Coastal Change Management Areas (the entirety of the District's coastline being so designated) and require planning authorities to take account of national Marine Policy Statements and marine plans, to reduce risk from coastal change by avoiding inappropriate development in vulnerable areas and not exacerbating the impacts of physical changes to the coast.

5.5 Paragraphs 170 – 173 require planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment to conserving and enhancing the natural environment by protecting and enhancing landscapes, sites of biodiversity or geological value, maintaining the character of the undeveloped coast, and minimising impacts on and providing net gains for biodiversity. In this work plans should distinguish between the hierarchy of international, national and locally designated sites, allocate land with the least environmental or amenity value, take a strategic approach to maintaining and enhancing networks of habitats and green infrastructure and plan for the enhancement of natural capital at a catchment or landscape scale across local authority boundaries.

5.6 Paragraph 173 reflects the legal position as set out in the *Countryside and Rights of Way* Act (2000) that great weight should be given to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty in Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Similarly, within areas defined as Heritage Coasts planning policies should be consistent with the special character of the area and the importance of its conservation.

5.7 Paragraphs 174 – 177 are concerned with the protection and enhancement of habitats, biodiversity and geodiversity. Local Plans should map and safeguard components of local wildlife-rich habitats and wider ecological networks including the hierarchy of international, national and locally designated sites of importance for biodiversity, wildlife corridors and stepping-stones that connect them. In addition, the restoration and enhancement of priority habitats, species and ecological networks should be promoted with opportunities for securing measurable net gains in biodiversity identified.

5.8 Planning policies should also identify and protect tranquil areas which have remained relatively undisturbed by noise and are valued for their recreational and amenity value for this reason and limit the impact of light pollution from artificial light on local amenity, intrinsically dark landscapes and nature conservation. Paragraph 181 requires policies to sustain and contribute to relevant limit values or national objectives for pollutants taking account of AQMAs and identify opportunities to improve air quality including the mitigation of impacts through traffic and travel management.

The Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act (2006)

5.9 The NERC Act places a lead role on local planning authorities in addressing biodiversity losses. As a result, English local planning authorities have a statutory duty to show regard for conserving biodiversity in the exercise of all public functions.

Biodiversity 2020: A Strategy for England's Wildlife and ecosystems services (DEFRA) (2011)

5.10 Biodiversity 2020 sets out the government's plans to address threats to protected and priority species and to 'priority habitats'. The strategy is due to be updated with new local requirements after the strategy and targets have been reviewed.

A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment (2018)

5.11 This Government Strategy sets out national goals for improving the environment within the next 25 years. It details how the Government will work with communities and businesses to leave the environment in a better state than it is at present. This national strategy identifies six key areas around which action will be focused:

- Recovering nature and enhancing the beauty of landscapes:
    - Develop a Nature Recovery Network to protect and restore wildlife, and provide opportunities to re-introduce species that have been lost from the countryside
    - Respect nature by using water more sustainably.

- Securing clean, productive and biologically diverse seas and oceans:
    - Achieve a good environmental status of the UK's seas while allowing marine industries to thrive and complete our economically coherent network of well-managed marine protected areas.
- Protecting and improving our global environment:
    - Provide international leadership and lead by example in tackling climate
    - Change and protecting and improving international biodiversity
    - o Support and protect international forests and sustainable agriculture.
- Using and managing land sustainably:
    - Embed a 'net environmental gain' principle for development, including natural capital benefits to improved and water quality
    - Protect best agricultural land
    - Improve soil health and restore and protect peatlands
- Connecting people with the environment to improve health and wellbeing:
    - Help people improve their health and wellbeing by using green spaces including through mental health services
    - Encourage children to be close to nature, in and out of school, with particular focus on disadvantaged areas.
    - 'Green' our towns and cities by creating green infrastructure and planting one million urban trees
    - Make 2019 a year of action for the environment, working with Step Up To Serve and other partners to help children and young people from all backgrounds to engage with nature and improve the environment.
- Increasing resource efficiency, and reducing pollution and waste:
    - Reduce pollution by tackling air pollution in our Clean Air Strategy and reduce the impact of chemicals.

The Air Quality Strategy for England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland

5.12 The National Air Quality Strategy sets out a way forward for work and planning on air quality issues by setting out the air quality standards and objectives to be achieved. It introduces a new policy framework for tackling fine particles, and identifies potential new national policy measures which modelling indicates could give further health benefits in this regard. The objectives of the Strategy are to further improve air quality in the UK from today and long term and to provide benefits to health quality of life and the environment.

UK Plan for Tackling Roadside Nitrogen Dioxide Concentrations

5.13 This Plan establishes the Government's ambition and actions for delivering a better environment and cleaner air, including £1 billion investment in ultra low emission vehicles (ULESvs), a £290 million National Productivity Investment Fund, a £11 million Air Quality Grant Fund and £255 million Implementation Fund to help local authorities to prepare Air Quality Action Plans and improve air quality, an £89 million Green Bus Fund, £1.2 billion Cycling and Walking Investment Strategy and £100 million to help improve air quality on the National road network.

Future Water: The Government's water strategy for England

5.14 Future Water out how the Government wants the water sector to look by 2030, providing an outline of steps which need to be taken to get there. These steps include improving the supply of water; agreeing on important new infrastructure such as reservoirs, proposals to time limit abstraction licences, and reducing leakage. The document also states that pollution to rivers will be tackled, whilst discharge from sewers will be reduced.

The Environment Bill (2020)

5.15 The Environment Bill introduces a mandatory approach to biodiversity net gain (BNG), whereby development will be required to leave biodiversity in a better state than before. Under this Bill (at the time of writing going through its readings in the House of Commons) all developments are required to commit to providing net gains for biodiversity in perpetuity; at a minimum, net gain should be provided for 30 years or for the lifetime of the development, whichever is longer. Such net gains should be 10% as a minimum and aim to achieve more wherever possible.

Regional

EVIDENCE BASE

- Kent Biodiversity Strategy 2020 – 2045, Kent Nature Partnership (2020)
- Kent Downs AONB Management Plan 2014-2019
- Kent Downs AONB Management Plan 2020-2025 Consultation Draft
- Kent Biodiversity Action Plan (1997)
- Kent Environment Strategy (2016)
- Kent Minerals and Waste Local Plan 2013-2031
- Kent Landscape Assessment (2004)
- Kent Water for Sustainable Growth Study 2017

The Kent Biodiversity Strategy 2020 - 2045

5.16 The Kent Biodiversity Strategy aims to deliver, over a 25 year period, the maintenance, restoration and creation of habitats that are thriving with wildlife and plants, ensuring the county's terrestrial, freshwater, intertidal and marine environments regain and retain good health. The Strategy looks to protect and recover threatened species and enhance the wildlife habitats that Kent is particularly important for. It also aims to provide a natural environment that inspires citizen engagement and is well used and appreciated, so that the mental and physical health benefits of such a connection can be realised by the people of Kent.

5.17 The Kent Biodiversity Strategy is developed by the Kent Nature Partnership with the intention that the targets will over time be adopted and incorporated into relevant local policy and plans. The Kent Nature Partnership has a vision for the county based

on "a healthy natural environment that is rich in wildlife, is enjoyed and valued by all and underpins our long-term economic, social and personal wellbeing" and is clear that thriving biodiversity is key to achieving this vision. Strategic priorities in the Strategy derive from the need to improve the quality, extent and connectivity of high value habitats and aims to deliver a network of good quality and high value natural and semi-natural habitats across the county, made up of locally and nationally recognised sites, that is well managed and connected.

5.18 The Biodiversity Strategy provides the detail and focus needed to achieve the natural environment aspirations of the Kent Environment Strategy, in particular to conserve and enhance the quality and supply of the county of Kent's natural and historical resources and assets. The Kent Biodiversity Strategy should provide a guiding framework for the delivery of Biodiversity Net Gain, the Local Nature Recovery Strategy and Nature Recovery Networks within the county.

The Kent Environment Strategy (2016)

5.19 The Kent Environment Strategy sets targets in relation to the quality of the environment and improving biodiversity across the county. These are

- decreasing the number of days of moderate or higher air pollution and the concentration of pollutants (in order to align with the Kent and Medway Air Quality Partnership and national monitoring standards)
- Work to reduce the noise exposure from road, rail and other transport
- Reduce water use from 160 to 140 litres per person per day
- A minimum of 65% of local wildlife sites will be in positive management and 95% of SSSIs will be in favourable recovery by 2020.
- 60% of local wildlife sites will be in positive management
- 95% of SSSIs will be in favourable or recovering status by 2020.
- Status of bird and butterfly specifies in Kent and Medway are quantified.

Kent Biodiversity Action Plan (1997)

5.14 This Plan establishes Habitat Action Plans across the county. Each Plan denotes the importance of conserving, enhancing and restoring the natural condition of a habitat by working together on projects.

Kent Minerals and Waste Local Plan 2013-2031

5.15 This represents the overarching strategy and planning policies for mineral extraction, importation and recycling, and the waste management of all waste streams that are generated or managed in Kent. It also establishes the spatial implications of economic, social and environmental change in relation to strategic minerals and waste planning. The most commonly safeguarded mineral in Dover is Brickearth, found across the District but particularly to the north-west of Deal.

Local

EVIDENCE BASE

- Dover District Council Corporate Plan 2020 -2024
- Dover District Local Landscape Character Assessment (2020)
- Thanet Coast SPA Mitigation Strategy (2012)
- Dover Green Infrastructure Strategy (2014)
- Air Quality Assessment Dover Area, Bureau Veritas (2020)
- Up on the Downs, the White Cliffs Landscape Partnership Scheme Landscape Conservation Action Plan, (2012)
- Draft Pegwell Bay, Kent: Bird Disturbance Study 2010 -2011 (Kent Wildlife Trust, 2012)
  Managing walkers with dogs at Sandwich Bay and Pegwell Bay National Nature Reserve, preliminary assessment (Natural England and The Kennel Club, 2012)
- Dover District Water Cycle Study (2009)

Dover District Council Corporate Plan 2020- 2024

5.16 The Dover District Corporate Plan 2020 – 2024 is the main strategic document of the Council, providing a framework for the delivery of its services and a clear statement of the Council's vision and priorities. It provides the context for all other Council strategies and plans. Of the four Corporate Objectives, the third is Climate Change, Environment & Assets a cleaner sustainable environment:

Support the wider climate change agenda to facilitate a better environment for everyone. Support the development and protection of our environment and open spaces, making the most of our enviable landscapes, heritage and assets and making our parks destinations of activity, recreation and community.

Green Infrastructure Strategy

5.17 The Dover District Green Infrastructure Strategy sets out a framework for protecting, managing, enhancing and increasing the District's Green Infrastructure and for ensuring that the quality of provision is maintained and Satisfaction levels with both the number and quality of Green Infrastructure spaces across the District are high. Deal beach and Kearsney Abbey are the most popular locations, followed by St Margaret's and the White Cliffs. The results indicate that residents primarily use the landscape assets close to their homes rather than travel across the District. The District is in the process of updating its Green Infrastructure Strategy to inform the New Local Plan.

5.18 This work is currently being updated.

Sandwich Bay SPA Mitigation Strategy

5.19 The current mitigation strategy applies a tariff across the whole of Dover district. The revision of the mitigation strategy is currently in progress. This work is evaluating whether this whole district approach remains appropriate, whether a 'zone of influence' approach is more applicable or whether another approach is required. A zone of influence approach has been adopted by neighbouring Thanet and Canterbury districts in respect of the Thanet Coast and Sandwich Bay SPA. It was also recommended as an approach to explore further in an earlier review of visitor surveys carried out for Dover District Council.

Air Quality Assessment Dover Area

5.20 It is currently proposed that the following measures are introduced to improve air quality both within the AQMAs and throughout the District as a whole.

- Improved traffic management through junction improvements
- Dualling of the A2 between Lydden and Dover
- Strategic Signage Improvements
- Improvements to Eastern Docks Layout
- New Dover Eastern Docks Exit Road to A20 Townwall Street
- Consideration of the effects of the development of a Port Buffer Zone
- Consideration of the effects of an expansion to the Western Docks
- Transfer of freight from road to rail.

5.19 In addition it is currently recommended that general measures to improve air quality across the whole District are considered:

- encourage Council Travel Plan opportunities and seek to facilitate uptake of sustainable modes of transport.
- continue to work together with Kent County Council (KCC) to encourage the uptake of Employer and School Travel Plans within the District.
- continue to work with KCC to improve the facilities for cycling and walking within Dover and encourage greater uptake
- ensure that air quality is taken into account in the planning process when located in or close to the AQMA or in areas marginally below air quality objectives.
- continue to work together with developers to improve sustainable transport links serving new developments.
- develop, through the Kent & Medway Air Quality Partnership, supplementary planning guidance to assist with air quality assessments of development proposals.
- continue to work together with KCC to improve public transport services and encourage the use of more sustainable transport modes.
- continue their commitment to local air quality monitoring within the District to ensure a high standard of data is achieved to assess against air quality objectives.

6. Usage of Existing Policies

6.1 The following are the current saved Local Plan and Core Strategy Natural Environment policies. These are to be used when natural environmental issues are a relevant factor in the determination of planning applications:

- CO5 Undeveloped or Heritage Coasts
- CO8 Development that which would adversely affect a hedgerow
- CP7 Green Infrastructure Network
- DM15 Protection of the countryside
- DM16 Landscape character
- DM17 Groundwater Source Protection
- DM18 River Dour

6.2 The Council's Annual Monitoring Report includes the monitoring of the effectiveness of Development Management Policies through an examination of how often each policy is used by the Council as a 'reason for refusal'. If a policy can confidently be used to refuse a proposal, knowing that it may be challenged at appeal, it indicates that it remains useful.

6.3 Of the saved Local Plan policies used most frequently in planning refusals, those that relate to the Natural Environment feature strongly. (See Table 1 below) The Kent Downs AONB Management Plan and the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010 (as amended) are also regularly used in planning decisions.

Policy	Topic	Percentage of refusals where Policy is used
DM15	Protection of the Countryside	38%
DM16	Landscape Character	22%
	AONB Management Plan	3%
CO5	Undeveloped or Heritage Coasts	3%
CP7	Green Infrastructure Network	1%
	Habitat Regulations	1%

Table 1: Use of Local Plan Natural Environment Policies in refusal decisions by DDC 2018/19

6.4 In addition to Local plan Policies, the Council's AMR monitors the use of the NPPF in planning refusals (see Table 2 below)

NPPF Paragraph	Topic	Percentage of refusals
170	Conserving and enhancing the natural environment	32%
172	Conserving and enhancing the natural environment	10%

Table 2: Use of NPPF Natural Environment paragraphs in refusal decisions by DDC 2018/19

6.5 Finally, planning appeal decisions are also monitored to see which Local Plan Policies and NPPF paragraphs have been cited most frequently in the decisions of cases in Dover District by Planning Inspectors (please see Table 3 below)

Policy	Topic	Percentage of appeal decisions
DM15	Protection of the Countryside	48%
DM16	Landscape Character	24%
170/172/ 177 NPPF	Conserving and enhancing the natural environment	21%

Table 3: Use of NPPF paragraphs and Local Plan policies in appeal decisions in Dover District 2018/19

7. Community Engagement

7.1 As part of the preparation of the Regulation 18 Draft Dover District Local Plan 2040 a number of stakeholder workshops and consultation events have been held. These have provided valuable feedback which was been fed into the preparation and drafting of policies.

7.2 In July 2018 two workshops were held to scope early thoughts on what the next iteration of the Local Plan should focus on. With regard to conserving and enhancing the natural environment, the following Key Findings emerged:

- Protect, enhance and improve accessibility of the District's natural features;
- Invest in our natural assets;
- Development needs to fit within the environment that it is located;
- Develop land of lower landscape value;
- Development on least environmentally constrained land.

7.3 A third workshop was held at The Ark, Dover in October 2018 involving stakeholders with a special interest in policies related to Development Management. (outcomes?)

8. Sustainability Issues

8.1 In 2017 Dover District Council commissioned LUC to carry out the Sustainability Appraisal incorporating Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) of the new Local Plan for Dover District (The Dover Local Plan 2040). This process is designed to consider and communicate the significant sustainability issues and effects of emerging Plans and Policies, including their alternatives. It informs the plan-making process by helping to refine the contents of such documents, so that they maximise the benefits of sustainable development and avoid or at least minimise the potential for adverse effects.

8.2 The 2018 Scoping Report[7] provides the context for, and determines the scope of, the Sustainability Appraisal/SEA of the review of the Local Plan and sets out the framework for undertaking the later stages of the SA/SEA. The Scoping Report starts by setting out the policy context of Dover Local Plan 2040, before describing the current and likely future environmental, social and economic conditions in the District. This contextual information is used to identify the key sustainability issues and opportunities that the New Local Plan can address. The key sustainability issues and opportunities are then used to develop a framework of SA Objectives used to appraise the likely significant effects of the constituent parts of the Local Plan, including strategic policies, site allocations and development management policies.

8.3 With regard to the natural environment, the key sustainability issues facing Dover District are identified in the SA Scoping Report as follows:

- Dover contains a number of designated biodiversity sites. All of these biodiversity assets, most notably the Thanet Coast & Sandwich Bay SPA and Ramsar Site, could be harmed by inappropriate development. The New Local Plan provides an opportunity to evaluate the condition of the District's habitats and employ measures to ensure that future growth in the District does not adversely affect their current condition but where possible contributes to their improvement and connection.

- Green networks for wildlife and natural green spaces need to be set out clearly in the New District Local Plan and any associated GI Strategy to provide a framework for the consideration of development proposals, and for avoiding harm and gaining enhancements where appropriate.

- The District contains a number of distinct rural landscapes which could be harmed by inappropriate development. The New Local Plan offers an opportunity to ensure that designated landscapes (such as the Kent Downs AONB and Special Landscape Area) are protected and enhanced as appropriate and that development outside these designations is sited and designed to take account of the variation in landscape character across the District.

[7] *Dover District Council New Local Plan, Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report*, LUC (February 2018)

- Dover contains some of the county's best and most versatile agricultural land, most notably around Sandwich, as well as many valuable mineral reserves. The New Local Plan provides an opportunity to ensure that these natural assets are not lost or compromised by future growth in the District by prioritising the development of brownfield land over greenfield land and poorer agricultural land over the best and most versatile.

- Dover's Groundwater Source Protection Zones are concentrated in the southern third of the District, with a significant concentration of Zones to the north-west of Dover. The New Local Plan provides an opportunity to minimise the amount of inappropriate development that takes place within these Source Protection Zones.

- Groundwater sources in Dover District are over-abstracted. Dover falls within the Dour WRZ and Thanet WRZ, both of which will experience a shortfall in demand up to 2031. A New Local Plan provides an opportunity to ensure that water efficiency measures are implemented over the plan period.

- There are two Air Quality Management Areas in Dover District, which have been designated because these areas exceed the annual mean Air Quality Strategy objective for nitrogen dioxide caused primarily by road traffic emissions. The New Local Plan provides an opportunity to set out measures to mitigate these exceedances without inhibiting the need for the District to grow.

- Water bodies in Dover are failing to meet the Water Framework Directive objective of 'Good Status'. A New Local Plan provides an opportunity to implement measures to improve water quality.

- Small increases in wastewater flows are expected across Dover District, following future development. However, the capacity of the sewerage network could pose a threat to meeting these future development needs, particularly in Whitfield. The New Local Plan provides an opportunity to ensure that the location of development takes into account the sensitivity of the water environment and that wastewater infrastructure (notably in the Whitfield area) is put in place.

8.4 The likely significant effects of the constituent parts of the Local Plan will therefore be assessed against the following SA Objectives:

SA 5: To promote sustainable forms of development that maintain and improve the quality of the District's natural resources, including minerals, soils and waters.

SA 6: To reduce air pollution and ensure air quality continues to improve.

SA 9: To conserve, connect and enhance the District's wildlife habitats and species.

SA 11: To conserve and enhance the special qualities, accessibility, local character and distinctiveness of the District's settlements, coastline and countryside.

Conclusions

9. Preferred Local Plan 2040 Policy Approach

9.1 The Natural Environment chapter will set out the Council's approach to the protection and enhancement of the District's natural and environment. Given the legislative framework outlined above, this chapter will comprise policies which, in the first instance, will be strategic and will identify and provide appropriate safeguarding for the hierarchy of international, national and locally designated sites of importance for biodiversity in the District.

9.2 In order to reflect the findings and recommendations of the Local and National evidence base, including the outcomes of the stakeholder workshops and the review of the use current made of existing policies for the protection and enhancement of the natural environment of the District, the chapter on Natural Environment in the Dover Local Plan 2040 will contain a number of existing policies which have been revised and a number of additional policies.

9.3 Monitoring of the use of policies and NPPF usage provides sound evidence for the usefulness of the existing policy base, specifically, which policies that it is appropriate to retain and which are no longer considered necessary. In the case of Natural Environment Policies, monitoring reveals that Policies DM15, DM16, CO5 and CP7 are frequently used and therefore it is proposed that these are retained, amended where necessary and carried forward into the new Local Plan. Policies CO8 and DM17 and DM18 are little used. Policy DM17 however is considered appropriate to be retained given the particular importance of protecting drinking water supply sources in this district.