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Sevenoaks District has a high quality and beautiful natural environment with a predominantly rural character. The sweeping landscape incorporates the chalk hills of the North Downs, stretches of enchanting woodland, historic parkland and areas rich in biodiversity.

The Natural Environment

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The Natural Environment

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Strategic Objectives:

OB15: Ensure the District retains a high quality natural environment over the period of the Local Plan including delivering a 20% bio- diversity net gain on new development.



Sevenoaks District is an attractive place to live, work and visit. The natural environment is a key character component of the District and should be conserved and enhanced for current and future generations.

8.1 More than 60% of the District lies within the Kent Downs or High Weald Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and 11% of the District is covered in irreplaceable Ancient Woodland (compared with the UK average of 2%).

8.2 The District is rich in biodiversity and has a range of habitats varying from chalk grasslands, acid grassland, woodlands, rivers and open water and heathland.



The natural environment is a key component of the character of the District



- Sevenoaks District Boundary
- Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty
- Biodiversity Areas
- Parks, Open Spaces and Woodland
- Rivers and Areas of Open Water
- Urban Area

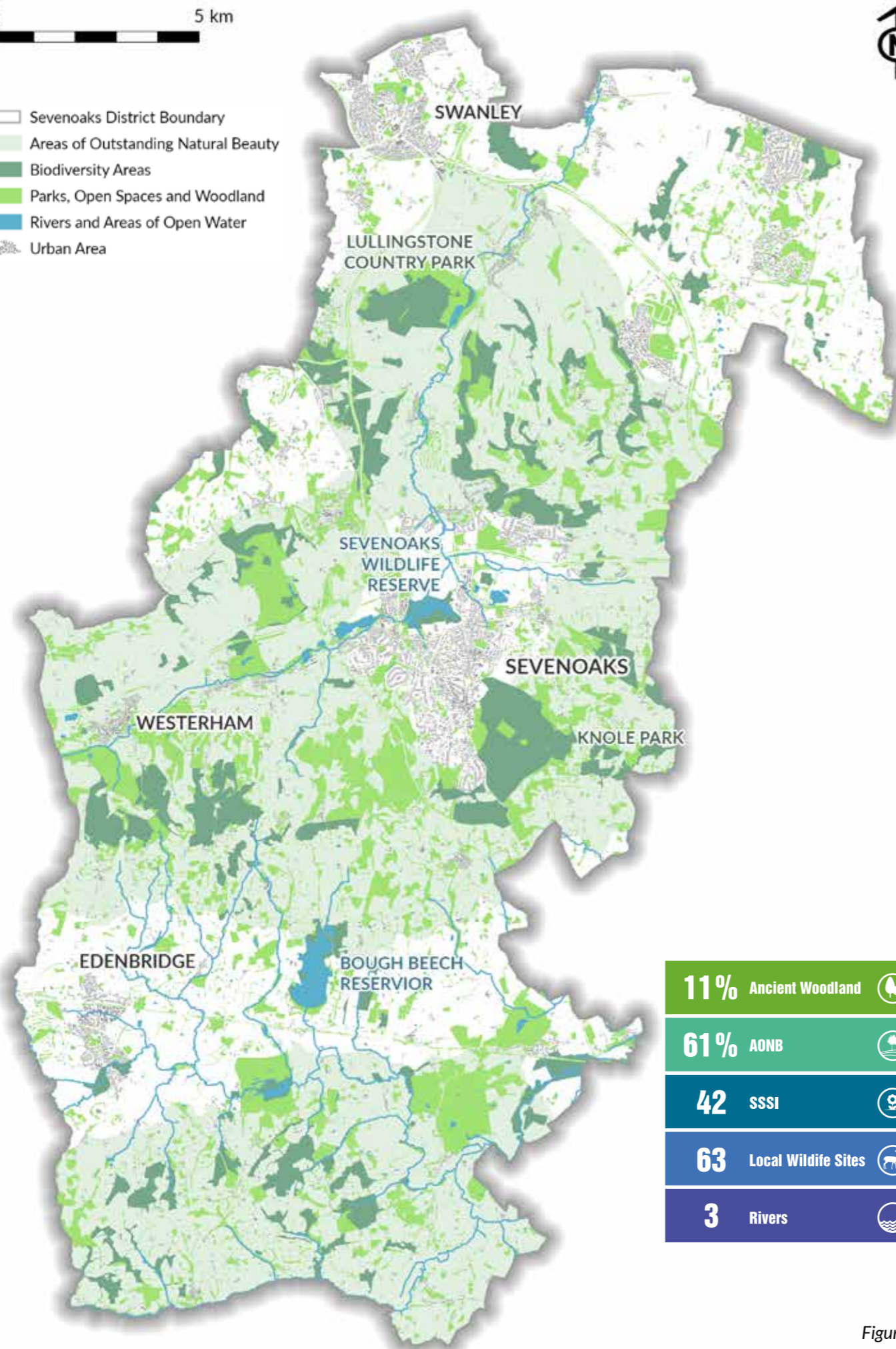


Figure 8.1 Key Natural Environment Features of Sevenoaks District



Landscape and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty

- 8.3 The Landscape Character Assessment 2016 provides a detailed review of the entire District including the AONBs. National policy and legislation already set out how the different designated areas should be managed and protected.
- 8.4 Developments in AONBs are expected to be modest and in line with the NPPF. They should conserve and enhance the distinct character of the AONB. Proposals should take account of the relevant Management Plan and associated guidance to produce sensitive and carefully designed schemes.

8.5 New developments should conserve and enhance the character of the AONB and the Management Plans can help to guide how a scheme may achieve this. Enhancements may include:

- Improvement of scenic beauty such as, the removal or improvement of currently detrimental buildings or features; or by obscuring or distracting from negative features such as pylons, substations and major roads;
- Supporting climate mitigation and resilience;
- Restoring historic features and replacing existing materials with more appropriate and local materials;
- Supporting the local economy by using local materials, including features reliant on local materials such as wood for biomass boilers, supporting new rural business etc.;
- Restoring historic settlement patterns, historic field patterns or historic routeways;
- Allowing new appropriate public access;
- Restoring native planting and natural features including trees, hedgerows, meadows and grassland;
- Improving tranquillity and reducing the existing impact of noise and lighting.

Policy NE1

Landscape and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty

This policy will set out local requirements to:

- Conserve and enhance the distinctive features that contribute to the special character of the District in line with the Landscape Character Assessment, AONB Management Plans and associated documents;
- Guide development in the AONB in line with the NPPF including managing major development;
- Ensure developments within the AONB reflect the distinctive high quality area by identifying specific design criteria;
- Require Landscape and Visual Impact Assessments for larger development proposals.

STRATEGIC POLICY

Consultation Questions:

1. What could be included in Policy NE1 and design criteria for developments in the AONB?
2. Do you agree that an Assessment of Landscape and Visual Impacts (LVIA) should be required for all new major developments?



Partnership Working in the Natural Environment

- 8.6 Projects which provide improvements to the natural environment, increase public enjoyment, promote climate resilience and provide health benefits both at the landscape scale, such as the Darent Valley Landscape Partnership Scheme and the Sevenoaks Greensands Commons Project, and at the local scale, such as woodland management projects, will be supported by the Council.
- 8.7 There are emerging proposals around the Bough Beech reservoir and Bore Place sites (see figure 8.2), for potentially opening up Bough Beech reservoir to be more of a community resource. We will continue to work closely with both Bore Place and Sutton and East Surrey Water Services, to enhance the linked sites for people and nature.

- 8.8 This exciting project will play a part in delivering health and wellbeing (both physical and mental) over the plan period which is a central theme in this Plan. Nature and biodiversity and resilient employment are also local priorities, and this is likely to align well with many of the economic and environmental policies of the Council. Further information on this important site, which represents a significant opportunity for the District, will be included in subsequent versions of plan as it progresses towards adoption.



Figure 8.2: Bough Beech Reservoir and Bore Place



Biodiversity and Ecosystems

8.9 Sevenoaks District has a wide range of habitats and protected areas, including 42 Sites of Special Scientific Interest, 63 Local Wildlife Sites and 19 nature reserves.

8.10 The District is home to a number of nationally designated sites which will be highlighted on the policies map. There are also a number of locally designated sites including Local Wildlife Sites, Local Nature Reserves, Roadside Nature Reserves, Kent Wildlife Trust Reserves. These are protected for their biodiversity and ecological value.

8.11 The various ecological and habitat components across the District, alongside other areas of open space, are collectively known as the blue green infrastructure network. The network consists of the following sites and is shown as an interactive map:

- Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs);
- Registered Historic Parks and Gardens;
- Land designated under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (CROW) including Common Land and Public Rights of Way;

- Local Wildlife Sites;
- Nature Reserves;
- Woodland and Ancient Woodland;
- Country parks;
- Trees subject to Tree Preservation Orders;
- River corridors and open bodies of water;
- Cycle routes;
- Sites identified in the Kent Compendium of Historic Parks and Gardens;
- Sites designated as Open Space including:
 - Amenity Greenspace;
 - Natural and Semi-natural Greenspace;
 - Provision for Children and Young People;
 - Outdoor Sports facilities, playing pitches and playing fields;
 - Allotments and community gardens
 - Green corridors;
 - Cemeteries and Churchyards.

Policy BW1

Safeguarding Places for Wildlife and Nature

This policy will seek to:

- Protect the blue green infrastructure network;
- Designate biodiversity areas that are not already protected through legislation such as Local Wildlife Sites;
- Support schemes and projects to enhance the blue green infrastructure network.

Consultation Questions:

3. *Is there anything else that should be identified as part of the District's natural landscape (blue green infrastructure network)?*
4. *Do you agree that locally designated sites should generally be protected from development?*



Ashdown Forest

- 8.12** There are four internationally important sites within 10km of the boundary of the District, the most significant of which is Ashdown Forest which lies approximately 6km south of the District boundary. It is internationally important for nature conservation, reflected in its designation as a Special Protection Area (SPA), due to the presence of breeding Nightjars and Dartford Warblers and as a Special Area of Conservation (SAC), primarily due to heathland habitats. The European designations cover around 3,000ha.
- 8.13** The District's nearest settlement to Ashdown Forest is Edenbridge, which is approximately 12km from the site and a 2021 visitor's survey found that less than 2% of visitors to the Forest are from within Sevenoaks District.
- 8.14** We are members of the Ashdown Forest Officer Working Group and have signed a Statement of Common Ground to demonstrate our ongoing commitment to joint-working on this important issue. Once adopted the Local Plan will be accompanied by a 'Habitats Regulations Assessment' (HRA) to assess whether there are any adverse effects on the integrity of the European sites, as a result of development provided by the Plan, even in combination with other plans and projects. We will continue to work proactively with Natural England, neighbouring authorities and any other relevant bodies to understand the impact of the Local Plan on the Ashdown Forest.

- 8.15** To date, neighbouring authorities have sought modest developer contributions towards mitigating the impact of recreational pressure from new development, within a 7km zone of the forest. This zone just reaches into the District (a very small area around Fordcombe and Cowden as shown in figure 8.3), but there currently is no development proposed in these areas as it is entirely washed over by the Green Belt. However, due to the possibility of windfall development, Natural England has recommended that Strategic Access Management and Monitoring (SAMMs) contributions are sought, to allow any windfall development within the 7km zone to proceed, whilst addressing their impact on the forest.
- 8.16** As there currently are no proposed site allocations within the 7km zone in the District, a strategic Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG) is unlikely to be feasible but we will explore options for alternative provision. Tariff guidance is set out in the following document and is currently set at £1,170 per new residential unit: www.sevenoaks.gov.uk/downloads/file/1140/ashdown_forest_special_protection_spa_strategy_tariff_guidance

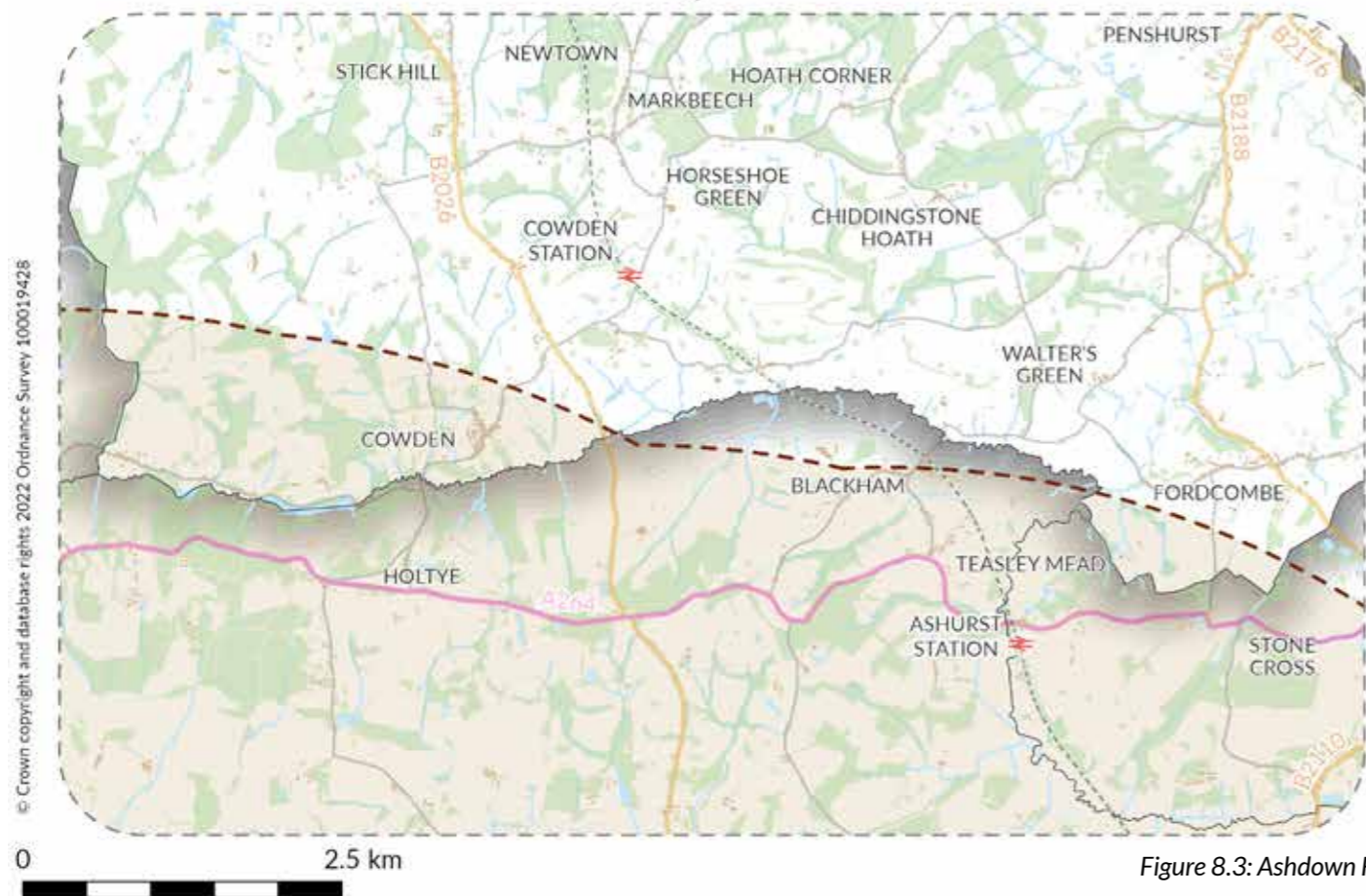
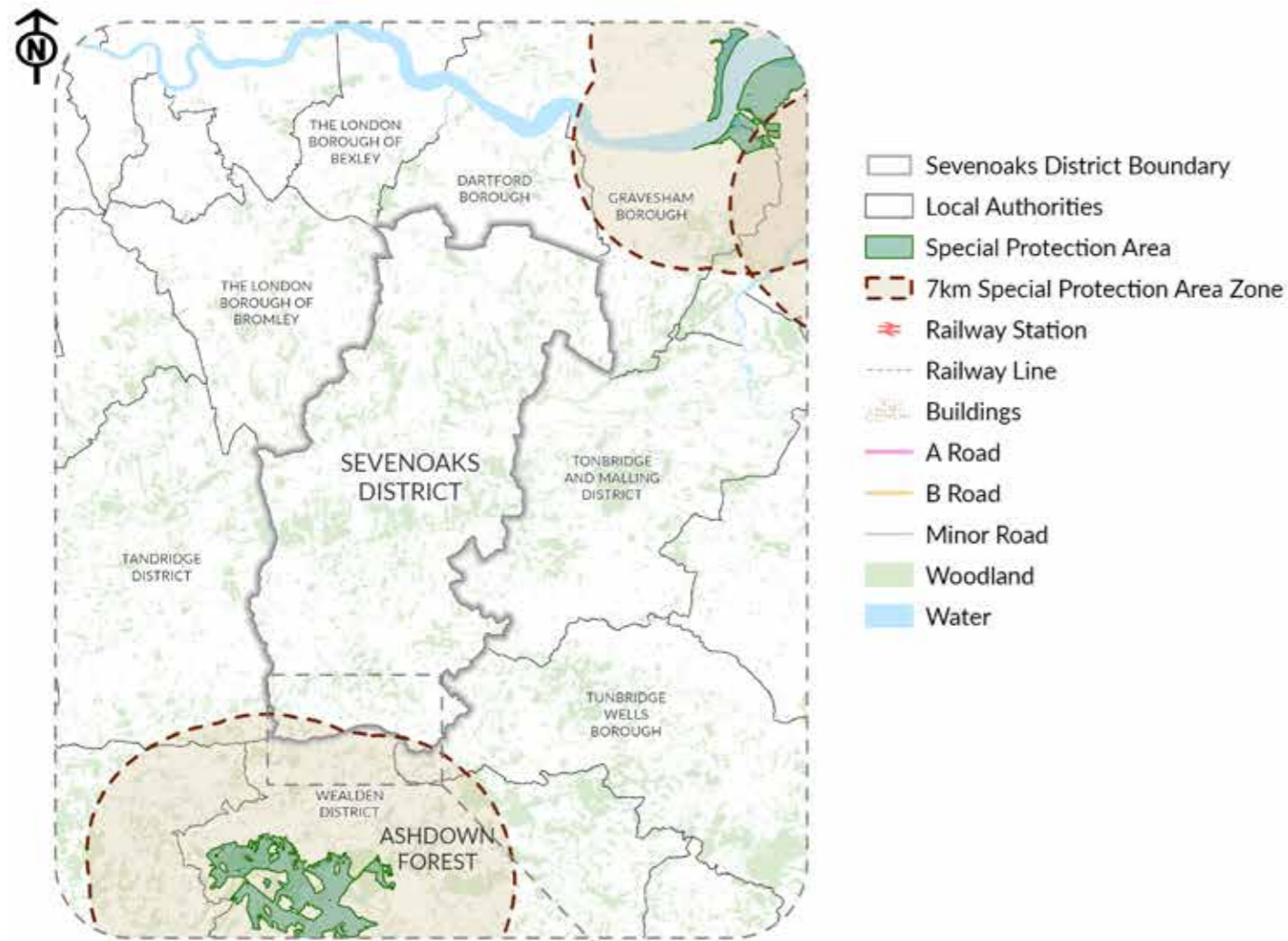


Figure 8.3: Ashdown Forest

Policy AF1 Ashdown Forest

This policy will require:

- Any residential development in the 7km zone to provide a strategic access management and monitoring (SAMMs) contribution to address visitor impact on Ashdown Forest, in line with the SAMM strategy;
- Major development within or adjacent to the 7km boundary to be assessed on a case by case basis to determine any additional mitigation measures.

Consultation Question:

5. Do you agree with the approach to protecting the Ashdown Forest?





Biodiversity in Development

8.17 Biodiversity is found throughout the rural and urban areas of the District. All development can have a positive impact on biodiversity and should provide a measurable net gain.

8.18 Access to the natural environment and areas of high biodiversity value supports our spatial vision. It can also have a positive impact on health and wellbeing and can help reduce social and health inequalities. We are supportive of countryside projects such as community led habitat management, health walks and wildlife/nature experiences especially those which encourage children and young people to engage with the natural environment.

8.19 Blue green infrastructure is essential to mitigating and adapting to climate change, ensuring that future generations can enjoy a healthy and thriving environment for years to come. The Council has committed to helping the District reduce carbon emissions and become more resilient to a changing climate through its Net Zero 2030 commitment.

8.20 The Council will continue to work with partners to develop projects to strengthen the blue green infrastructure network and improve access to and the understanding of the natural environment. Partners include:

- The North West Kent Countryside Partnership;
- Kent Wildlife Trust;
- Kent Downs and High Weald AONB units;
- Town and Parish Councils.

8.21 Working with local authorities across Kent and Kent County Council, the Kent Nature Partnership, has concluded that a 20% target for biodiversity net gain for new development should be included in Local Plans. This is supported by a Kent wide viability study. A 20% target for Sevenoaks District is under consideration, and will be tested in the forthcoming viability assessment.

8.22 A Supplementary Planning Document covering biodiversity net gain will be prepared to set out the detailed requirements for biodiversity net gain and will include both on-site and off-site net gain provision.

Policy BW2

Biodiversity in New Development

This policy will seek to:

- Achieve 20% biodiversity net gain from new development;
- Ensure proposals incorporate natural environment measures that help to support biodiversity, mitigate climate change and integrate climate resilience.

Consultation Question:

6. *Is the 20% biodiversity net gain target appropriate for Sevenoaks District?*

