

# **KENT DOWNS AONB LANDSCAPE & VISUAL REVIEW**

**PEDHAM PLACE  
SEVENOAKS**

**PREPARED BY TPM LANDSCAPE LTD**

**FOR**

**Gladman**

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## 1.0 Introduction

This report has been commissioned by Gladman to support representations for proposed development on land at Pedham Place in the district of Sevenoaks in Kent. The report will seek to consider in detail the Kent Downs AONB in relation to this proposed development site and to examine how the AONB is managed; its designation and purpose; the planning framework within which it sits; and the changes it has undergone over time. Ultimately the report seeks to identify what constraints the AONB may place on development within its boundaries.

Consideration will be given to:

- The landscape and visual baseline and character of the AONB and what special characteristics and value the Kent Downs AONB contains to merit its designation;
- The planning protection afforded by National and Local Planning Policy;
- Land cover and use across the AONB;
- The extent of settlement and human activity throughout the AONB area; and
- The potential for change whilst maintaining the integrity and purpose of the AONB.

### 1.1 Location and Study Area

1.1.1 The proposed development site is located to the south east of the town of Swanley, to the immediate south of London Road (A20) and to the east of the M25. On the southern and eastern boundaries the site faces agricultural fields and looks out from an elevated location over Eynsford, Swanley and Crockenhill and across the Kent Downs AONB. To the north the site is bordered by the A20 and M20, both of which drop away in elevation travelling eastward towards the village of Farningham.

1.1.2 Farningham lies to the east of the site and is separated from the boundaries by steep wooded slopes and agricultural land. It is an ancient village on the river Darent which sits below the site, following the river valley north to south. Eynsford lies in the same deep valley to the south east.

1.1.3 At present the proposed development site consists of: a golf course business with an 18 hole championship course and 9 hole par 3 course; floodlit driving range; clubhouse and service and commercial buildings; three dwellings; and the scheduled monument of Fort Farningham located towards the centre of the site. To the west of the site, next to the M25, is land outside of the golf course, west of the pylon line, that is currently used only occasionally during the summer months for a Sunday Market.

1.1.4 Previous uses of the site have included extensive landfill tipping (1.3 million tonnes from 1993 approximately 2m in height) over the land which forms the basis for the raised ground of the golf course land and its man made appearance and topography.

1.1.5 The proposed development site sits within the Kent Downs AONB at its north western extent (figure 1). The whole Kent Downs AONB area extends from Swanley and Biggin Hill in the west down to Folkestone on the south east coast. It surrounds

the town of Sevenoaks in the west dropping down just north of Edenbridge and Tonbridge. From this ring shape area surrounding Sevenoaks the AONB runs in a narrow, linear fashion eastward towards West Malling before turning northwards towards Strood and Rochester terminating at the banks of the River Medway.

- 1.1.6 Crossing the river the Kent Downs AONB continues in a south easterly direction beginning from a narrow corridor of land sandwiched between Walderslade to the north and Maidstone to the south before fanning out into a large band of landscape running between Canterbury and Ashford before dropping southwards towards Folkestone and the coast.
- 1.1.7 A substantial section of coastline is included within the Kent Downs AONB from the southern edge of Dover to landscapes around west Hythe to the west of Folkestone.
- 1.1.8 In Total the Kent Downs AONB runs over approximately 85km varying in size and shape and washing over landscapes of varying types and character, altering its shape to run outside of major conurbations, or as in the case with Sevenoaks, surrounding them.
- 1.1.9 At its widest point the AONB is approximately 25km across following the coast from Dover to Hythe. The area surrounding Sevenoaks is approximately 18.5km north to south and 18.8km at its widest point east west in a broadly ring shaped area surrounding the town.
- 1.1.10 The development of the study area (figure 2) has been drawn from both desk top and site based assessment and has sought to consider the AONB areas assessed as being potentially able to experience significant effects as a result of development over the proposal site. To assist in this a landscape assessment has been developed in parallel to this report which includes the production of a Zone of Theoretical Visual Influence (ZTVI) which indicates from a bare earth computer model the potential visibility of development over the proposal site. (figures 7 & 8)
- 1.1.11 From this work an initial area of study has been determined which is illustrated in Figure 2.
- 1.1.12 This focuses on the section of the Kent Downs AONB that surrounds Sevenoaks with the proposed development site sitting at the northern most edge of this area, south of Swanley. The area of study has been restricted to this part of the Kent Downs AONB from the following initial observations and assessment work:
  - The proposed development is primarily for residential development with some commercial mixed use, provision for educational and community facilities. The potential area for development is 85.1 Ha within a total site area of 141 Ha. This is a potentially large scale housing development of up to 2500 homes but would be of a scale commensurate with other settlements within the broader landscape and utilise architectural and building vernaculars, densities and heights appropriate to the area.

This type of development would typically not be expected to generate landscape and/or visual effects of significance beyond 5km distance from the site;

- The ZTV mapping has indicated a potential visual envelope that extends up to 16km distance but where woodland is common place, substantially reducing the potential for views within the landscape;
- The AONB area surrounding Sevenoaks and containing the proposed development site falls within three Natural England National Character Areas (NCA). Each NCA is defined by a unique combination of landscape, biodiversity, geodiversity, history, and cultural and economic activity. Their boundaries follow natural lines in the landscape rather than administrative boundaries. The proposed development site falls within NCA 119 North Downs to the north and as such the focus of the study area is on this half of the AONB area as this represents a recognised and cohesive landscape type of significant scale;
- The AONB around Sevenoaks clearly has its own coherent landscape suggesting that the larger area surrounding Sevenoaks should also form part of the consideration in the study area to prevent the wider identity of the Kent Downs AONB being lost through survey division into areas of landscape, geological or biological identity.

## 1.2 The Proposals

1.2.1 The proposals are for a new urban development at Pedham Place in Kent. The development has been identified as a broad location for growth by Sevenoaks District Council in its draft local plan under site – MX48. The development description is for a residential led mixed use village development, incorporating: new homes including affordable homes; a new leisure centre; a hotel; office and commercial work space facilities; a local centre with healthcare provision and other civic buildings and retail space; and landscape and public open space.

1.2.2 Additionally the proposals will look to deliver two primary schools and a secondary school and park and ride facilities.

*Information on development description taken from Sevenoaks DC - Site Appraisals 4 Combined Appraisals*

## 1.3 The Kent Downs Area of Outstanding National Beauty (AONB)

1.3.1 An area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) is an area of countryside in England, Wales or Northern Island which has been designated for conservation due to its significant landscape value. Areas are designated in recognition of their national importance, by the relevant public body, in this case Natural England. Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty enjoy levels of protection from development similar to those of UK National Parks, but unlike with National Parks the responsible bodies do not have their own planning powers. They also differ from National Parks in their more limited opportunities for extensive outdoor recreation.

1.3.2 The Kent Downs AONB is one of a family of 46 AONBs across England, Wales and Northern Ireland which cover one fifth of the UK. It is the eighth largest AONB and, along with the High Weald AONB, covers 33% of Kent's land area providing a wealth of opportunities for people to explore, enjoy and benefit from this landscape.

## 1.4 AONB History

1.4.1 The idea for what would eventually become the AONB designation was first put forward by John Dower in his 1945 *Report to the Government on National Parks in England and Wales*. Dower suggested there was need for protection of certain naturally beautiful landscapes which were unsuitable as national parks owing to their small size and lack of wildness. Dower's recommendation for the designation of these "other amenity areas" was eventually embodied in the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 as the AONB designation

1.4.2 The Countryside Commission defined the purpose of AONB designation in a statement of 1991:

Purpose of AONB designation... '...is primarily to conserve and enhance natural beauty'. 'In pursuing the primary purpose of designation, account should be taken of the needs of agriculture, forestry, and other rural industries and of the economic and social needs of local communities. Particular regard should be paid to promoting sustainable forms of social and economic development that in themselves conserve and enhance the environment'. 'Recreation is not an objective of designation but the demand for recreation should be met so far as this is consistent with the conservation of natural beauty and the needs of agriculture, forestry and other uses.'

*Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty: A policy statement (Countryside Commission, CCP 356, 1991, p.5).*

1.4.3 Four common aims unite the 33 AONB's around the country which are expressed within the AONB management plan, these are:

- Conserve and enhance the natural and cultural heritage of the UK's AONBs ensuring they meet the challenges of the future.
- Support the economic and social well-being of local communities in ways which contribute to the conservation and enhancement of natural beauty.
- Promote public understanding and enjoyment of AONB landscapes and encourage people to conserve and enhance them.
- Value, sustain and promote the benefits that AONBs provide for society including clean air and water, food and carbon storage.



1.4.4 Designated in July 1968 the Kent Downs AONB has just celebrated its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

*Kent Downs AONB management plan 2014*

## 1.5 Planning overview

1.5.1 Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty have the same level of protection in planning terms as National Parks.

1.5.2 The Kent Downs AONB Unit acts in an advisory role to the local planning authorities on decisions that may impact on the AONB. Priority is given to providing advice on planning policy formulation but the Unit also advises local planning authorities on planning applications, where these fall within the remit of an agreed Planning Protocol. In accordance with the Protocol, the Unit generally only comments on planning applications which would have a significant effect on the AONB or when advice is requested by a local planning authority.

1.5.3 Local authorities, along with other public bodies and statutory undertakers, have a legal duty under Section 85 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 to have regard to the purposes of the AONB in carrying out their planning and other functions.

## 1.6 Definitions

1.6.1 The term ‘natural beauty’ remains at the heart of the purpose of AONB designation. Part IV of the 2000 Act provides the following definition of natural beauty:

*“Any reference in this Part to the conservation of the natural beauty of an area includes a reference to the conservation of its flora, fauna, geological and physiographical features”.*

*Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, section 92.*

1.6.2 The term ‘natural beauty’ was always intended to embrace more than just the visual or scenic elements of the landscape and the definition has been updated and broadened to include historic and cultural heritage. Government agency guidance specifically on AONBs provides a useful non-technical definition:

*“Natural beauty is not just the look of the landscape, but includes landform and geology, plants and animals, landscape features and the rich history of human settlement over the centuries.”*

*(Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty: A guide for AONB Partnership members – Countryside Agency, CA24, November 2001)*

1.6.3 At the core of the secondary purpose of AONB designation is the understanding that the landscape is not just scenery, but it is the result of the historic and on-going interaction between people and place. Social and economic activity that contributes

to the landscape and natural beauty is fundamental to shaping the future of the AONB.

- 1.6.4 The important link between people and place is emphasised in the European Landscape Convention (Council of Europe) where landscape is defined as “an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors”.
- 1.6.5 The convention, ratified by the UK in 2006, also recognises that “the landscape is an important part of the quality of life for people everywhere; in urban areas and in the countryside, in degraded areas as well as in areas of high quality, in areas recognised as being of outstanding beauty as well as everyday areas”.

## 1.7 National Planning Framework (NPPF)

- 1.7.1 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) sets out the Government’s planning policies and local authorities must have regard to this in reaching planning decisions. The NPPF confirms that AONBs are equivalent to National Parks in terms of their landscape quality, scenic beauty and planning status.
- 1.7.2 The NPPF sets out the following guidance on AONB’s and how they are to be considered within Local Authority plan making and the planning balance more broadly:
  - 1.7.3 Great weight should be given to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty in National Parks, the Broads and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, which have the highest status of protection in relation to these issues. The conservation and enhancement of wildlife and cultural heritage are also important considerations in these areas, and should be given great weight. The scale and extent of development within these designated areas should be limited. Planning permission should be refused for major development other than in exceptional circumstances, and where it can be demonstrated that the development is in the public interest. Consideration of such applications should include an assessment of:
    - A the need for the development, including in terms of any national considerations, and the impact of permitting it, or refusing it, upon the local economy;
    - B the cost of, and scope for, developing outside the designated area, or meeting the need for it in some other way; and
    - C any detrimental effect on the environment, the landscape and recreational opportunities, and the extent to which that could be moderated.
- 1.7.4 The Kent Downs AONB Management Plan is also a material consideration in planning decisions. The Management Plan sets out the special characteristics and qualities of

the Kent Downs AONB and provides policies on the management of the AONB. It is adopted by all the local authorities in the Kent Downs AONB.

## 1.8 Planning and the AONB Management Plan

1.8.1 Section 89 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act (CRoW) places a duty on local authorities within an AONB to act jointly to prepare and publish a Management Plan. The Kent Downs AONB Partnership produces the Management Plan on behalf of the 12 local authorities within the Kent Downs.

1.8.2 The Management Plan sets out the special characteristics and qualities of the Kent Downs AONB and formulates the local authorities' policies for its management and for carrying out their functions in relation to it. These functions include those on plan-making and decision taking for development management.

1.8.3 The Management Plan is a material consideration that should be taken into account when determining planning applications. It does not form part of the statutory development plan for a local authority.

### Management plan policies for planning (MMP)

1.8.4 While the whole of the Management Plan should be considered in respect of planning decisions, the following policies are considered to be most relevant to the planning process:

- MMP2 Individual local authorities will give high priority to the AONB management Plan vision, policies, and actions in Local Plans, development management decisions, planning enforcement cases and in carrying out other relevant functions.

### Sustainable development (SD)

- SD1 The need to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the Kent Downs AONB is recognised as the primary purpose of the designation and given the highest level of protection within the statutory and other appropriate planning and development strategies and development control decisions.
- SD2 The local character, qualities and distinctiveness of the Kent Downs AONB will be conserved and enhanced in the design, scale, setting and materials of new development, redevelopment and infrastructure and will be pursued through the application of appropriate design guidance and position statements which are adopted as components of the AONB Management Plan.
- SD3 New development or changes to land use will be opposed where they disregard or run counter to the primary purpose of the Kent Downs AONB.
- SD5 Local renewable and sustainable energy initiatives will be pursued where they help to conserve and enhance the natural beauty and landscape character of the AONB and bring environmental, social and economic benefits to local people. Proposals will be opposed where they do not conform with the Kent Downs AONB Renewable Energy Position Statement.

- SD7 To retain and improve tranquillity, including the experience of dark skies at night, careful design and the use of new technologies should be used. New developments and highways infrastructure which negatively impact on the local tranquillity of the Kent Downs AONB will be opposed unless they can be satisfactorily mitigated.
- SD8 Proposals which negatively impact on the distinctive landform, landscape character, special characteristics and qualities, the setting and views to and from the AONB will be opposed unless they can be satisfactorily mitigated.”
- SD9 The particular historic and locally distinctive character of rural settlement and buildings of the Kent Downs AONB will be maintained and strengthened. The use of locally-derived materials for restoration and conservation work will be encouraged. New developments will be expected to apply appropriate design guidance and to be complementary to local character in form, setting, scale, contribution to settlement pattern and choice of materials. This will apply to all development, including road design (pursued through the adoption and implementation of the AONB Rural Streets and Lanes Design handbook), affordable housing, development on farm holdings (pursued through the farmstead design guidance), and rights of way signage.
- SD10 Positive measures to mitigate the negative impact of infrastructure and growth on the natural beauty and amenity of the AONB will be supported.
- SD11 Where it is decided that development will take place that will have a negative impact on landscape character, characteristics and qualities of the Kent Downs AONB or its setting, mitigation measures appropriate to the national importance of the Kent Downs landscape will be identified, pursued, implemented and maintained. The removal or mitigation of identified landscape detractors will be pursued.
- SD12 Transport and infrastructure schemes are expected to avoid the Kent Downs AONB as far as practicable. Essential developments will be expected to fit unobtrusively into the landscape, respect landscape character, be mitigated by sympathetic landscape and design measures and provide environmental compensation by benefits to natural beauty elsewhere in the AONB.

#### Landform and landscape character (LLC)

- LLC1 The protection, conservation and enhancement of special characteristics and qualities, natural beauty and landscape character of the Kent Downs AONB will be supported and pursued.
- HCH5 The application of high standards of design sympathetic to cultural heritage within the AONB, identified in guidance including the AONB Landscape Design Handbook, Kent Downs Farmstead Guidance and any relevant Village Design Statements and Neighbourhood plans, will be pursued.

#### Biodiversity (BD)

- BD 5 The protection, conservation and extension of Kent Downs priority and distinctive habitats and species will be supported through the Local Plan process, development management decisions and the promotion of the Biodiversity Duty of Regard (NERC Act 2006).

### Farmed landscape (FL)

- FL7 Conversion from agricultural to leisure use and the creation of non-agricultural structures will only be supported where there is not a cumulative loss to the principally farmed landscape of the AONB.

### Vibrant communities (VC)

- VC8 Local communities will be encouraged to prepare and promote Village Design Statements, Parish Plans and Neighbourhood Plans as appropriate to assist in the conservation and enhancement of local distinctiveness as settlements evolve. These documents should address development requiring planning permission, automatically permitted development and change outside the scope of the planning system.

## 1.9 SUMMARY SECTION 1.0

The proposed development will need to take account of the National Planning Background and history to the AONB which sees the designation primarily seek to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the Kent Downs. The needs of local communities, economic development and recreation are not seen as contrary objectives so long as they also work towards the conservation and enhancement of the environment.

The NPPF and its accompanying guidance identifies natural beauty as not just about the look of the landscape but also a deeper understanding of the features, elements and characteristics that combine to create the unique landscape characters of the Kent Downs. Proposals will have to fully embrace this approach to the interpretation of the landscape and the NPPF's requirement that great weight is to be placed on conserving and enhancing the scenic beauty of AONB's.

The proposed development will need to demonstrate that the proposals are needed within the national and local assessments of housing and other development provision;

The proposals will also need to demonstrate that any detrimental effect that development may bring to the environment are fully explored and mitigated where possible.

### CONCLUSION

Although primarily considering the AONB designation and how this physically manifest itself within the landscape, this report will ultimately seek to promote development on the proposal site which answers all of the above criteria. The need for housing and the national and local planning resource for housing allocations is acknowledged by the Council in the draft submission Local Plan (paragraph 1.5-1.6) where the constraints of AONB and Greenbelt play a part in housing requirements not being met to date. This report will set out the detail of how the natural beauty of the Kent Downs AONB is understood and what impacts and effects might come to bear upon this should development be brought forward on the proposal site. Finally it will suggest mitigation proposals within an integrated masterplan approach which can be seen to moderate or remove the adverse effects of development and deliver real enhancement to the AONB designation as a whole.

## 2.0 The Kent Downs AONB Management Plan 2014-2019

The foreword to the plan states that:

*The ultimate goal of the Management Plan remains to ensure that the natural beauty of the landscape and vitality of the communities of the Kent Downs AONB are recognised, valued and strengthened well into the future. We seek to do this in a way which enhances health and well-being and supports much needed sustainable growth and development.*

### 2.1 Special Characteristics and Qualities

2.1.1 The landscape of the Kent Downs AONB is described as being made up of diverse special characteristics and qualities which together distinguish it as a landscape of National and International importance consistently identified and valued by the public, individuals and institutions. The special characteristics and qualities of the Kent Downs natural beauty are identified as:

- **Dramatic landform and views**

The Kent Downs dramatic and diverse topography is based on the underlying geology. These features comprise: impressive south-facing steep slopes (scarps) of chalk and greensand; scalloped and hidden dry valleys - these features are especially valued where they have a downland character; expansive open plateaux; broad, steep-sided river valleys, and the dramatic, iconic white cliffs and foreshore. Breathtaking, long-distance panoramas are offered across open countryside, estuaries, towns and the sea from the scarp, cliffs and plateaux; the dip slope dry valleys and river valleys provide more intimate and enclosed vistas. Overlying this landform are diverse natural and man-made features creating distinctiveness at a local level.

- **Biodiversity-rich habitats**

Rich mosaics of habitats, plant and animal communities of national and local importance are sustained, although they may be isolated or fragmented in a modern agricultural landscape. These include: semi-natural chalk grassland and chalk scrub; ancient semi-natural woodland; traditional orchards, including cobnut plots; chalk cliffs, foreshore and sea platform; chalk rivers and wet pasture; ponds and spring lines; heath and acid grassland; woodland pasture and ancient trees and networks of linear features of species-rich hedgerows, flower-rich field margins and road verges. Sensitive management and conservation of all these features as well as the creation of functional ecological networks is essential to the survival of the AONB's important biodiversity heritage and landscape quality.

- **Farmed landscape**

A long-established tradition of mixed farming has helped create the natural beauty of the Kent Downs. The pastoral scenery is a particularly valued part of the landscape. Farming covers around 64% of the AONB. Expansive arable fields are generally on the lower slopes, valley bottoms and plateaux tops. Disconnected 'ribbons' of permanent grassland (shaves) are found along the steep scarp, valley

sides, and on less-productive land, grazed by sheep, cattle and increasingly by horses. Locally concentrated areas of orchards, cobnut plots (nut orchards), hop gardens and other horticultural production are also present, their regular striate form can enhance the rise and fall of the land. Provision for leisure including equine activities, shooting and increasingly renewable energies are replacing and augmenting traditional farming practices.

- **Woodland and trees**

Broadleaf and mixed woodland cover 23% of the Kent Downs and frame the upper slopes of the scarp and dry valleys and plateau tops. Some large woodland blocks are present but many woodlands are small, fragmented and in disparate land ownership and management. Over half of the woodland sites are ancient (continuously wooded since 1600), supporting nationally important woodland plant and animal species. Large areas of sweet chestnut coppice are present throughout. Woodland management is critical to secure this resource and efforts to secure new markets for woodland products are beginning to effect resurgence in management. Tree disease and deer are now probably the greatest threats to this vital resource

- **historic and cultural heritage**

Millennia of human activity have created an outstanding cultural inheritance and strong 'time depth' to the Kent Downs. In the original designation the villages, churches and castles are particularly noted. There are the remains of Neolithic megalithic monuments, Bronze Age barrows, Iron Age hill-forts, Roman villas and towns, medieval villages focused on their churches, post-medieval stately homes with their parks and gardens and historic defence structures from Norman times to the twentieth century.

Fields of varying shapes and sizes and ancient wood-banks and hedges, set within networks of droveways and sunken lanes have produced a rich historic mosaic, which is the rural landscape of today. Architectural distinctiveness is ever present in the scattered villages and farmsteads and oasthouses, barns and other agricultural buildings, churches and country houses. The diverse range of local materials used, which includes flint, chalk, Ragstone, timber and tile, contributes to the character and texture of the countryside. The AONB landscape has been an inspiration to artists, scientists and leaders, from Shakespeare to Samuel Palmer and Darwin to Churchill.

- **Geology and natural resources**

The imposing landform and special characteristics of the Kent Downs is underpinned by its geology. This is also the basis for the considerable natural capital and natural resources which benefit society. These include the soils which support an important farming sector and the water resources which support rivers teeming with wildlife and offering enchanting landscapes. Hidden below the chalk is a significant aquifer providing 75% of Kent's drinking water. Much of the AONB provides surprisingly tranquil and remote countryside – offering dark night skies and peace. These are much valued perceptual qualities of the AONB.



## 2.2 Sustainability, Design, Opportunities and Threats

- 2.2.1 The AONB Management sets out details with regard to the importance of tranquillity across the AONB and the definition and interaction with the setting of the AONB (An area outside of the boundaries of, and adjacent to the AONB that, if changed, may influence the neighbouring AONB itself)
- 2.2.2 The management plan considers the current and future threats to the AONB and acknowledges that the location in the south east of England, close to major conurbations means that there will remain constant pressure for development and change.

*The management plan policy framework needs to support the principles of sustainable development and reflect these challenges so that decisions (both within and outside the Kent Downs) have regard to the AONB and the benefits it offers. Significant urban areas adjoin the AONB boundary, or lie within close proximity, and most of these areas will expand in the coming twenty years.*

### AONB Management Plan 3.3

- 2.2.3 The main issues connected to the opportunities and threats from development include the following:

- To conserve and enhance the natural and scenic beauty of the Kent Downs, the design of new development, redevelopment and restoration is critical;
- Cumulative loss of landscape features, tranquillity and character due to incremental development, climate change (and adaptation and mitigation responses), intensive agricultural and forestry practices, pressure from traffic and significant levels of urban growth and development;
- The potential for climate change mitigation and adaptation responses to detract from landscape character and the opportunity to adopt those which support it;
- Despite a significant loss and continuing pressure, the Kent Downs still provides important relatively tranquil areas; the National Planning Policy Framework places a requirement on Local Planning Authorities to identify and protect tranquil areas;
- Fewer places have dark night skies;
- The setting of the Kent Downs is recognised as important in the original designation of the Kent Downs and in the enjoyment of the landscape today;
- The choice of design and materials in restoration, new development and landscape management are recognised as critical when seeking to conserve and enhance the landscape of the Kent Downs AONB;
- General development pressures, including major transport and infrastructure proposals; knock-on pressure from the Greater London area and growth areas, and the opportunity to provide positive outcomes from growth as well as effective mitigation strategies;

- Estimated day visitor numbers are high and probably increasing. Pressure on the characteristics and qualities of the AONB as well as particular countryside routes, sites and areas can be very high but unevenly distributed; and
- Urban and growth areas in close proximity to the AONB will generate new opportunities for enjoyment, health and well-being but also pressure for travel and access.

2.2.4 A series of landscape aims are set out following this :

1. AONB conservation and enhancement and sustainable development principles are the starting point of development and infrastructure plans, local policies and proposals;
2. The character and distinctiveness of villages, farmsteads and individual buildings are conserved and enhanced by combining the best traditions of the past with the best technologies of the present to create environmentally sustainable and locally enhancing development;
3. A positive, proactive and urgent approach is taken to the implications of climate change and intelligent and effective mitigation and adaptation responses are chosen which support landscape character and ecosystem services;
4. All development achieves landscape enhancement; conservation and mitigation is delivered in every case;
5. A comparatively tranquil environment is protected, conserved and enhanced;
6. The setting and views in and out of the AONB are conserved and enhanced;
7. New developments respect and reinforce the traditions of the past, whilst integrating sustainable technologies and sensitive new design; and
8. The impact of infrastructure on the qualities of the AONB is significantly reduced.

2.2.5 This is supported by a number of additional guides which include:

- The Kent Downs AONB Landscape Design Handbook;
- The Kent Downs AONB Rural Streets and Lanes: A Design Handbook

## 2.3 SUMMARY SECTION 2.0

The special characteristics of the AONB are set out in summary as part of the management plan and this sets the basis for what creates the characteristics and qualities that distinguish the Kent Downs as a landscape of National importance.

### Landform and Views

The proposals are for development on a site set atop a plateau above the Darent valley at the northern most edge of the AONB and bordered on its northern and western edges by the A20 and the M25 respectively. The site currently has a links golf course across the majority of the land with a section of land to the west which is rough grassland and used for occasional Sunday Market. The golf course includes existing building and a floodlit driving range as well as car parking and other infrastructure. The proposal site plays a role in providing both an expansive plateau and offers the opportunity for long distance panoramic views. This is in the context of the site being largely under a land use that is not fully aligned with the purposes of the AONB and in many respects contrary to its special characteristics.

### Biodiversity –Rich Habitats

The proposed development offers the opportunity to enhance and improve the key habitats that define the Kent Downs AONB, habitats that are not present currently across the site. The creation of new woodland; chalk grassland; orchards; species rich hedgerows; and flower rich meadows can form a strong positive enhancement to the AONB as a whole.

### Woodland and Trees

Although woodland and trees are well represented across the Kent Downs and play an important role in defining the character of the AONB they are not substantially present over the proposal site. Outside of the boundaries of the proposed development site there are a number of substantial woodland blocks, including ancient woodland, which form the basis of a potential network of woodland habitat that the proposed development can connect to. Opportunities to deliver new woodland that include coppice stands and other opportunities for woodland craft and commerce run alongside the potential to increase the net coverage of woodland habitat within the AONB.

### Historic and Cultural Heritage

The proposal site includes a scheduled monument within its boundaries (Fort Farningham) and the area surrounding the site both within and outwith the boundaries of the AONB includes a wide variety of other notable historic features aligning the area with the overall description of the Kent Downs as having a *strong time depth*.

The existing land use as a golf course and presence of substantial infrastructure such as the road network and power pylons has removed much of the historic land pattern. The existing Fort Farningham scheduled monument has always been hidden from view with no access or interpretation. The proposed development offers the opportunity to improve access and interpretation for the existing monument and to connect the landscape elements of any such proposal back to the wider historic and cultural backdrop of the AONB.

## 2.3 SUMMARY SECTION 2.0 cont.

### Landscape Aims for the Kent Downs AONB

The new development proposals will seek to create a characterful and distinctive approach to the urban design through reference to the existing character of villages within the AONB.

The proposed development will be an exemplar of sustainable design and create direct, positive responses that will support climate change initiatives such as: the creation of new woodland; the creation of new species rich grassland; the promotion and support of landscape based industries within the AONB such as woodland coppice management, woodland industries, orchards and other forms of craft and commerce; the promotion of sustainable transport systems within the site and for the wider area and community through park and ride facilities, bus services and new public rights of way; and building and construction that follows the most sustainable practice.

The proposed development, although bringing a large new urban area into the AONB will also achieve significant landscape enhancements that will have a benefit to the Kent Downs AONB as a whole, these will include: new woodland planting; the creation of new chalk grassland and species rich grassland; new orchards and other landscapes capable of supporting local industry or craft aligned with the distinctive character of the AONB; and the creation of a substantial new public rights of way network that will connect to existing routes and offer significant new access to the public into the AONB.

The tranquillity of the AONB is substantially compromised in the area within and surrounding the proposal site due to: the presence of the M25 and A20; the nearby conurbations of Farningham and Swanley; the presence of overhead pylons and other power and transport infrastructure; and the visible presence of the city of London to the north west. The proposals will look to create landscape and transition spaces within the masterplan to protect the tranquillity .

The proposed development site is located on an elevated plateau at the north western edge of the AONB and enjoys panoramic views into the AONB to the south and towards the city of London to the north west. There is currently very limited access across the site, principally along a single footpath route. This allows some views over the AONB and towards the city of London but these are often currently cut short by intervening golf topography.

Although potentially visible from both within the AONB and its setting, the location and aspect of the proposed development also offers important opportunities to: enable access to the south and west facing slopes giving panoramic views towards London and into the AONB at a gateway location; have limited intervisibility with the AONB to the south due to the elevated nature of the site; reduce visibility of proposed development through substantial new woodland planting around the boundaries of the development; and create open areas of grassland and connecting visual routes and vistas currently unavailable over a golf landscape.

## 3.0 Landscape Character Areas

The Kent Downs AONB was assessed by the Countryside Commission in 1995 and identified 13 Landscape Local Character Areas within the AONB. A more recent study, the 2004 Landscape Assessment of Kent builds on these descriptions identifying character areas, their condition and sensitivity.

Sitting above this level of assessment sits the National Character Assessments carried out by Natural England which divides England into 159 distinct National Character Areas (NCA).

The AONB management plan supports the use of landscape character assessment in informing the landscape management decisions for the Kent Downs AONB.

### 3.1 National Character Areas (figure 3)

3.1.1 The AONB is divided into just three NCAs with these character areas following the linear shape of the AONB around the edges of London and south eastwards to the coast, these are: NVA 119 North Downs; NCA 120 Wealden Greensand; NCA 121 Low Weald.

3.1.2 The proposed development area falls within NCA 119 North Downs with a further NCA 113 North Kent Plan lying to the immediate north.

3.1.3 Although a theoretical area of visibility map suggests potential intervisibility with NCA 120 (Wealden Greensand) this is over 11km distance from the proposal site and so is not considered further in this report considering the character of the landscape within the AONB in relation to the proposed development site.

3.1.4 Similarly NCA 121 (Low Weald) has no theoretical visibility with the proposed development site and is some 16km distant. As a consequence this NCA area is also scoped out of consideration from this report.

#### NCA 119 North Kent Downs

3.1.5 The North Downs National Character Area (NCA) forms a chain of chalk hills extending from the Hog's Back in Surrey and ending dramatically at the internationally renowned White Cliffs of Dover. The settlement pattern is characterised by traditional small, nucleated villages, scattered farms and large houses with timber framing, flint walls and Wealden brick detailing. Twisting sunken lanes, often aligned along ancient drove roads, cut across the scarp and are a feature of much of the dip slope. The Kent Downs and Surrey Hills Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty designations are testament to the scenic qualities and natural beauty of the area. Agriculture is an important component of the landscape, with variations in soils supporting mixed farming practices where arable, livestock and horticulture have co-existed for centuries. The woodlands, many of which are ancient, are a prominent feature of the landscape, yet their ecological value has suffered in recent years due to a reduction in active management, particularly of mixed coppice, since the 1990s. Two Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) are designated for their rare

woodland compositions. Chalk grassland is particularly notable, with seven SAC designated for chalk grassland interest including outstanding assemblages of rare orchids. The chalk downland habitats support rare species, including the late spider orchid – wholly restricted to Kent – and the black-veined moth and straw belle moth which are currently found only within the North Downs. The North Downs are cut by the valleys of the Stour, Medway, Darent, Wey and Mole with their associated wetland habitats. The chalk aquifer of the North Downs is important for supplying water within Kent and to London.

- 3.1.6 Development pressures and agricultural practices continue to be forces for change throughout the NCA; high-quality and well managed green infrastructure both within and surrounding the NCA could help to service the demands of a growing population, a changing climate and increased pressures on natural resources. Opportunities to create more robust and resilient ecological networks across the agricultural landscape should be maximised, working in partnership to secure positive environmental outcomes. The natural and cultural assets of the NCA support food production, regulation of water and soils, biodiversity, recreation, tranquillity, sense of place and sense of history
- 3.1.7 The NCA has a number of statement of Environmental Opportunity which set out a summary of how management and planning of the NCA as a whole can bring about positive change in line with the existing character and qualities of the NCA. Those of particular relevance to the proposed development and site at Pedham Place are:
- SEO 1: Manage, conserve and enhance the distinctive rural character and historic environment of the North Downs, including the long-established settlement pattern, ancient routeways and traditional buildings. Protect the tranquillity of the landscape and sensitively manage, promote and celebrate the area's rich cultural and natural heritage, famous landmarks and views for future generations;
  - SEO 2: Protect, enhance and restore active management to the diverse range of woodlands and trees of the North Downs. Seek opportunities to establish local markets for timber and biomass to support the active management of local woods, while recognising their contribution to sense of place, sense of history and tranquillity;
  - SEO 3: Manage and enhance the mosaic of semi-natural habitats including the internationally important chalk grassland;
  - SEO 4: Plan to deliver integrated, well-managed multi-functional green space in existing and developing urban areas, providing social, economic and environmental benefits and reinforcing landscape character and local distinctiveness, particularly on or alongside the boundaries of the designated landscapes within the North Downs.

## 3.2 SUMMARY SECTION 3.1

The NCA description closely follows that of the AONB management plan landscape description with the areas of coverage for the Kent Downs AONB and NCA 119 correlating to the northern band of the designation.

The Statements of Opportunity also follow a similar theme to those expressed in the AONB landscape aims promoting: the conservation and enhancement of the distinctive rural character and historic environment of the North Downs; the protection of woodlands and the promotion of local markets for wood, timber and biomass; the management of chalk grasslands that are a distinctive and important habitat in the North Downs; and delivering integrated, multi functional green spaces in developing urban areas together with social, economic and environmental benefits.

The proposed development will deliver against the Statements of Opportunity promoting and enhancing the existing historic features within the site; creating new woodland and grassland areas and integrating these into a new urban area.

Notably the proposed development will bring forward social and economic benefits as well as those environmental benefits already highlighted in section 2. The Masterplan sets out the delivery of 2,500 new homes alongside commercial and retail development bringing employment opportunities beyond those created through the construction phases. The Masterplan will also deliver primary and secondary education facilities; leisure and sports facilities; park and ride; a local health centre; and a civic centre where other local services and facilities will be encouraged and promoted.

All of this infrastructure will be held within a comprehensive landscape framework which will seek to bring direct benefits to the landscape of the AONB as a whole and mitigate the effects of introducing new urban development into the Kent Downs Landscape.

## 3.3 Regional/Local Landscape Character Areas

3.3.1 The Kent Downs AONB landscape character assessment divides the AONB in 13 main character areas of which 5 fall within the area of study:

1. Darent Valley;
2. Sevenoaks Ridge;
3. The Low Weald;
4. West Kent Downs; and
5. Kemsing Vale.

3.3.2 The proposed development site falls within the Darent Valley Area with The West Kent Downs also an area within relatively close proximity of the proposed development site.

3.3.3 Darent Valley

### Key Characteristics

- Steep, often wooded scarp top and greensand ridge.
- Strong hedgerow patterns on valley sides.
- River within tree-lined corridor.
- Riverside trees and pasture.
- Flint and brick and weather boarded buildings.
- Much of the floodplain is arable farmland.
- Motorway.

### Overall Landscape Character Objectives

- To maintain and improve where necessary the existing hedge network, in particular on the scarp foot and on the northern downland “prairies”.
- To enhance the river corridor by conserving and extending the variety of tree and grassland habitats.

### 3.3.4 West Kent Downs

#### Key Characteristics

- Extensive deciduous woodlands surround large arable fields;
- Thick deciduous shaws and hedgerows;
- Remote, enclosed dry valleys with small pastures;
- Village settlements in the woodlands;
- Small network of country lanes; and
- Large arable fields on plateaux

#### Overall Landscape Character Objectives

- To retain the agricultural character of the landscape, maintaining in particular the extensive deciduous woodlands and ameliorating urban edge pressures;
- Curb urbanisation and loss of distinctiveness;
- To curb the general suburbanisation of the countryside due to inappropriate development, introduction of non-native species and use of unsympathetic materials and design;
- To protect and enhance unimproved chalk grassland;
- Conserve the historic landscape and special character of villages and settlements; and
- To reduce the impact of major roads in the landscape.

## 3.4 The Kent Landscape Character Assessment (figure 4)

- 3.4.1 The Kent Landscape Character Assessment (Babtie 2004) brings together existing landscape character assessments under numerous landscape character areas.



3.4.2 Those character areas within the AONB and the study area, and within areas of potential intervisibility with the proposed development site are:

- North Darent: Darent Valley;
- Knockholt Downs;
- Knockholt: Darent Valley;
- Kingsdown: West Kent Downs.

### **North Darent: Darent Valley**

3.4.3 At Sevenoaks, as the Darent turns north, the character derives from the cohesion between the steep wood-topped scarps, the lower, intensively farmed scarp foot with its strong pattern of hedges and shaws (thick strips of mature broadleaf trees and small blocks of once coppiced woodland), and the thick belts of trees along the river, road and railway in the valley bottom.

3.4.4 Although the river is largely hidden from view, several stretches of thin Lombardy poplars along the banks send strong visual signals of its presence, making a focal point in the valley. In the north, the ordered pattern of hedgerows gives way to the ancient, unenclosed wood pastures of Lullingstone Park and the open arable fields around Eynsford. These vast chalky expanses are broken up only by occasional thick, overgrown hedges or small shaws, which cast striking lines across the landscape.

3.4.5 Despite its apparent rural seclusion, the North Darent Valley is under considerable pressure. The M25 motorway cuts through its western edge, creating a constant hum of traffic and isolating small sections of the AONB. The fragmentation of farm holdings is allowing the gradual introduction of urban-edge land uses, such as horse pasture and golf courses, into the agricultural landscape.

### **Characteristic Features**

3.4.6 Rural and secluded. Intensively farmed scarp foot with hedges and shaws. Thick belts of trees along valley bottom along river, rail and road. Unenclosed pasture and chalky arable fields in the north - occasional woods and overgrown hedges. Urban influences - horseculture and golf courses.

3.4.7 The condition of the LCA is considered Moderate being a rural, intensively farmed chalk scarp that, although coherent and with few detractors also includes transport corridors, mixed land use and amenity uses such as golf courses.

3.4.8 The sensitivity is assessed as Very High with high visibility, historic elements and villages and other distinctive features. The LVIA assessment considers the section of LCA within the study area and concludes that locally this sensitivity is less at Medium-High.

3.4.9 The Landscape Actions for the LCA are CONSERVE AND RESTORE specifically:

- Conserve the landscape pattern;
- Conserve and restore hedgerows;

- Restore riparian vegetation and copses;
- Restore sympathetic land use within the field system

### **Knockholt Downs**

3.4.10 This is an intimate, enclosed landscape of ridges and dry valleys extending north-west from the scarp within the West Darent character area of the Kent Downs AONB.

#### **Characteristic Features**

3.4.11 Undulating topography of ridges and dry valleys. A network of fragmented broadleaf woodland and shaws on the ridge tops enclosing pastures in the valleys. More open arable landscapes on the plateau areas. Characteristic flint and brick buildings forming the cores to the suburbanised villages.

3.4.12 The condition of the LCA is described as Moderate with a mixture of broadleaf woodland interspersed with residential development.

3.4.13 The sensitivity of the LCA is assessed as Moderate with views relatively restricted and a historic and rural character.

3.4.14 The Landscape Actions for the LCA are CONSERVE AND CREATE specifically:

- Conserve the dominance of the woodland cover;
- Conserve existing and create new woodland;
- Conserve the occurrence of dominant woodland species such as oak and beech;
- Conserve narrow roads and their enclosure/wood banks;
- Create distinctive design elements for housing and new boundaries within woodland;
- Create formal parkland features within residential areas;
- Create appropriate and manageable woodland boundaries to the common boundary between existing woodland and housing

### **Knockholt: Darent Valley**

3.4.15 The dense woodlands along the top of the western escarpment conceal a small-scale landscape of mixed farming and deciduous coppice woodlands, which stretches north towards Bromley. Several dry valleys, extending out of the AONB, give the countryside a gently rolling character. It is a densely settled area, where overgrown hedges and hedgerow trees are interspersed by ornamental conifers, concealing an increasing amount of pony paddock fencing and suburbanisation.

#### **Characteristic Features**

3.4.16 Small scale-gently rolling with dry valleys. Mixed farming and deciduous coppice woodland. Settlement associated with railway. Suburban planting and paddocks. M25 physically dominant and noisy.

3.4.17 The condition of the LCA is described as Very Good with a unified pattern of elements and some detractors (motorway). Varied woodland and rough pasture provide a strong ecological resource.

3.4.18 The sensitivity of the LCA is assessed as High with enclosed views and much of the woodland recognised as ancient including managed coppice. The LVIA assessment considers the section of LCA within the study area and concludes that locally this sensitivity is less at Medium-High.

3.4.19 Landscape Actions for the LCA are CONSERVE specifically:

- Conserve the dense woodland cover;
- Conserve narrow roads and details;
- Conserve isolation of farming settlements

#### **Kingsdown: West Kent Downs**

3.4.20 The southern part of this area contains a considerable amount of formerly coppiced, mixed woodland and Scots pine, interspersed by small, irregular pastures and thick hedges. This results in an enclosed, intimate landscape, which succeeds in absorbing much of the bungalow development that has spread through the area.

#### **Characteristic Features**

3.4.21 Rolling downland. Intensive arable cultivation in north with open fields of chalky-white soils. Enclosed, irregular pastures in south, thick coppice and mixed woodland. Suburbanisation, horseculture and smallholdings.

3.4.22 The landscape condition of the LCA is described as Very Good despite detracting land uses and residential development. The landscape pattern is strong and includes woodland and hedgerow with ecological value.

3.4.23 The landscape sensitivity is assessed as High with a rolling landform and restricted visibility. 20<sup>th</sup> century additions such as new housing and golf courses do not contribute to the local distinctiveness.

3.4.24 Landscape actions for the LCA are CONSERVE specifically:

- Conserve woodland;
- Conserve and manage tall hedges on roadside;
- Conserve the range of species in woodland and hedgerow;
- Conserve pastures and irregular field patterns;
- Conserve historic, isolated settlement.

### 3.5 SUMMARY SECTION 3.3 and 3.4

The proposal site falls within the Darent Valley and as such this is the only character area within the AONB that would be directly affected by the proposals at Pedham Place and see physical change as a result of the proposals.

The ZTV mapping (figures 7 & 8) shows theoretical visibility for proposed masterplan over four character areas. The furthest of these is the Sevenoaks Ridge some 16km distant and has been scoped out as not likely to experience significant impacts. Of the remaining three areas only Darent Valley will experience direct landscape impacts with potential landscape change over The West Kent Downs and Kemsing Vale being restricted to that brought about through visual change only.

The Darent Valley is assessed as having Very High sensitivity to change but the LVIA assessment considered the area of LCA within the study area is Medium-High sensitivity. Mitigation measures will need address the potential adverse effects of new urban development within the AONB with beneficial change and the removal of features considered detrimental or harmful to the character of the AONB such as the existing golf course and transport infrastructure.

The Darent Valley has characteristics that include: parkland; broadleaved woodland and blocks of once coppiced woodland. Although rural and secluded in places the area is described as under pressure from transport infrastructure and new development including golf courses. The proposal site, bordered by the A20, M20 and M25 and crossed by a major pylon line and railway tunnel as well as being covered largely by a links golf course clearly represents a section of the character that includes all of the detracting influences cited.

The golf course is considered as a detracting land use and this, combined with the other detractors present reduces the sensitivity ascribed for the whole character area to medium high. The potential for significant landscape effects remains, but the loss of a golf course landscape within this character area is a beneficial change bringing with it the potential for a masterplan that will bring beneficial change weighed positively against the obvious adverse effects of introducing large new urban form into a largely undeveloped landscape.

The landscape actions of Conserve and Restore are not directly applicable to the proposed development site as the retention of the golf course is not a desired outcome.

The removal of the golf course landscape and its replacement with a mixed development that delivers substantial economic and community benefits as well as substantial ecological and recreational opportunities within a large area of landscape kept open from development and made accessible to the public will bring both beneficial and adverse impacts to the character area.

## 3.6 Visual Sensitivity and Impacts

- 3.6.1 The proposed development site sits on an elevated plateau at the northern edge of the AONB north of Sevenoaks. The potential visibility of the proposals have been assessed within a landscape and visual assessment which itself has helped shape the development of the masterplan to understand and minimise any adverse visual effects.
- 3.6.2 To assist in this process a zone of theoretical visibility (ZTV see figures 7 & 8) has been produced using computer modelling techniques to map areas of potential visibility over a bare earth model of the surrounding landscape. Two different building height solutions have been modelled to give a broad indication of the extent of potential visibility for different elements of the masterplan. Firstly the model considers buildings up to 8m in height which has been used as a typical building height for residential properties. Secondly a building height of up to 15m has been considered to represent buildings of 3 storeys or commercial buildings in the B1-B8 categories.
- 3.6.3 The modelling does not take into consideration any existing vegetation or urban form and represents only those areas that may have views towards the site where vegetation or built form does not obstruct the view. It forms a starting point for more detail assessment work where areas can be scoped out having no possibility of visual intervisibility with the proposal site due to intervening topography.
- 3.6.4 Figure 8 shows the ZTV mapping for buildings up to 8m in height, these are building heights expected to be typical across the whole of the masterplan developed areas. The extent of potential visibility within the boundaries of the AONB is restricted to 3 areas to the south of the proposal site all of which are separated by land at lower levels where views are not possible.
- 3.6.5 The first of these is to the immediate west of Sevenoaks and is approximately 4km square sitting either side of the M25/A21. This area of possible visibility is between 12km and 15km distant from the site. Visual impacts at this distance for buildings of residential scale within a landscape where built form and transport infrastructure are common place is not expected to generate significant impacts and are not considered further.
- 3.6.6 The second and third areas of potential visibility lie north of the M25/M26 and run in two linear bands north to south along ridgelines from Shoreham to Lullingstone Park and north of Kemsing and to the east and west of West Kingsdown.
- 3.6.7 The landscape is heavily wooded and so further investigation, selecting individual view points has been undertaken to further understand what if any visibility of the proposed development site there is from the AONB. This has involved viewpoints from receptors including: public footpaths; public highways; residential properties and settlement and any notable points where people may value the view such as from viewing points or historic parkland or gardens.

- 3.6.8 Figure 7 shows the ZTV mapping for buildings up to 15m in height, these represent potentially taller residential buildings and commercial buildings. Within the indicative masterplan such buildings are restricted to locations centrally within the site around the district centre and in the north western corner close to the M25 junction.
- 3.6.9 The areas of potential visibility are similar to those for the 8m buildings but extend over larger areas, effectively merging into one area but retaining the zones where no visibility is experienced within the low valley of the river Darent and between the ridges running south of Eynsford.
- 3.6.10 Twenty view locations were considered within the LVIA study and these consider receptors and location from immediately within the site to up to 4km from the proposed development site.
- 3.6.11 Potential visual effects vary greatly across this area with the site well screened through a combination of topography and vegetation leading to some view locations to the north, west and east having little or no visibility of potential built form.
- 3.6.12 The most exposed section of the site visually is to the south, but even this is restricted to views from higher ground in the immediate landscape of the proposal site. Close quarter views are prevented by topography and boundary hedges while more distant views begin to be severely restricted at around 2-3km distant by intervening rolling hills, hedges, woodland and trees.
- 3.6.13 Given the potentially large scale of the proposed development the potential visual impacts of note are restricted to those immediately within the site on public footpath routes and those with an elevated view over the site within approximately 1-2km of the site. Beyond this visibility is possible up to 5km but becomes increasingly difficult as the well wooded and undulating landscape intervenes. The theoretical visibility up to 16km is not supported by the field work.

### 3.6 SUMMARY SECTION 3.5

The site is well contained by existing topography and vegetation and its elevated position means many close local views do not look over the proposed development site. Views are possible of the site from the south up to around 4-5km distant but notable effects are likely to occur only within 1-2km distance from the site.

The site currently contains a number of detracting visual influences such as electricity pylons, flood lighting and the golf course complex. The last two of these items would be removed as a result of the proposals.

### 3.6 SUMMARY SECTION 3.5 cont

The visual change where it occurs will happen within a section of the AONB which is already characterised by visually detracting elements such as the motorway and rail network, electricity pylons, the golf course and industrial units to the south of Swanley. Residential development is typical throughout the area with both Eynford and Farningham prominent from vantage points as settlements within the Darent Valley.

Mitigation measures would seek to reduce those potential visual impacts identified while ensuring that the value in elevated views from the site, and within the AONB, are retained.

This can be achieved through the following measures:

- A layout that sits back from the slopes and on the plateau ensuring that few receptors look over the proposed development areas and many have potential views removed due to the angle of view;
- Woodland and tree planting around boundaries creating a wide visual screen where required;
- The creation of areas of open, publically accessible land, focusing on the southern slopes, to retain views south over the AONB and create new access to this;
- To consider mounding and land grading to further reduce views into or over the development;
- A layout that enables views into and out of the development areas and seeks to make new connections with the urban areas and the AONB in the same manner that existing villages and settlement have a visual relationship and connection with the AONB.

## 4.0 AONB Landscape Opportunities and Aims

The Kent Downs AONB Management Plan in considering the existing, detailed landscape character assessment work summarises this into statements regarding the opportunities and threats facing the AONB landscape and the aims in managing these landscapes within the AONB.

### 4.1 Landscape Character Opportunities and Threats

- a. Loss of and damage to the quality of views in and out of the AONB through development and occasionally obstructing tree growth and vegetation;
- b. Degradation of the setting and urban fringe impacts in certain Kent Downs landscape character areas through development, infrastructure, urbanisation and recreational pressure;
- c. The erosion of natural beauty and special character through illegal activities particularly fly-tipping, abandoned cars and illegal off-road vehicles;
- d. The importance of the setting of the Kent Downs;
- e. The opportunity to promote landscape character conservation and enhancement specifically focusing on addressing and seeking to remove or mitigate identified detractors from it;
- f. General lack of awareness of the importance and value of the Kent Downs landscape, its characteristic features and the social and economic benefits it brings;
- g. Landscape character approach not used sufficiently or appropriately in land use, land management and development management decisions and landscape character assessments are not always consistent or up to date.

#### Landscape Character Aims

1. The diversity of landscape character across the Kent Downs is properly described and understood, maintained and enhanced, and the strong sense of place of individual localities is recognised, reinforced and celebrated;
2. A landscape character approach is used to inform AONB management decisions and areas of opportunity and threat are identified and become the focus for action;
3. The highest standards of landscape conservation, restoration and enhancement are encouraged and integrated into all land uses in the Kent Downs and its setting;
4. There is better understanding of which landscape features local people and visitors value and all people are encouraged to play a part in retaining and enhancing these features.



These are followed by a set of landscape policies.

## 4.2 SUMMARY SECTION 4.1

The opportunities and threats identified in the management plan offer a rounded view of the detailed landscape character assessments. While this identifies pressures such as development and urbanisation it also stresses the opportunity for landscape character conservation and enhancement, specifically seeking to remove or mitigate identified detractors such as the golf course and road network.

The masterplan looks to replace the golf course links and infrastructure with a mixture of housing and commercial development combined with a suite of economic and social benefits including educational, health and leisure facilities. This is set within a landscape framework that looks to directly address the identified aims of enhancing the landscape character through a targeted approach of mitigation that will see the introduction of:

- New woodland planting;
- New chalk grassland and species rich grassland;
- New public rights of way and access over and into the AONB;
- The management of existing woodland and hedgerows in line with AONB objectives;
- The introduction of features and elements specific to the character areas such as orchards, and coppice woodland management;
- The reduction of views of development, including existing detracting urban influences, through woodland planting; and
- Maintaining opportunities to enjoy the expansive, elevated views from the proposal site both into the AONB and out towards the city of London.

## 4.3 Biodiversity

4.3.1 The Kent Downs AONB Masterplan also considers the bio-diversity of the AONB and the features and elements that contribute to the rich and diverse ecology that plays a role in defining the special sense of place.

4.3.2 The Kent Downs AONB Management Plan, together with other national strategy documents such as the Natural Environment White Paper and DEFRA Biodiversity 2020 action plan set out targets for biodiversity for the next decade. These includes targets for the North Kent Downs NCA (within which the proposed development area sits):

*Work carried out by Natural England in support of Outcome 1 identifies potential targets for new habitat creation in the North Downs National Character Area (broadly similar geography to the Kent Downs) which proposes; 110ha of new traditional orchard, 25km of new hedgerow; 25 new ponds; 1180ha field margin; 30ha new heathland; 400ha new chalk grassland.*

## *Kent Downs AONB Management Plan*

4.3.3 The wildlife of the Kent Downs is particularly rich and distinctive. It is also varied, reflecting changes in the local climate, geology, soils and topography and its proximity to the continent. In Britain, there are several species largely or wholly confined to the Kent Downs.

4.3.4 The Management Plan notes a number of key habitats which are represented within the AONB and form a key part of defining the character, distinctiveness and beauty of the area, these include:

### Unimproved Chalk Grasslands

4.3.5 Chalk grassland is an internationally important habitat, with over half the world's resource found in England. Although this habitat is one of the most valued features of the Kent Downs (the most important feature for 71% of respondents to an AONB questionnaire), the remaining extent of unimproved chalk grassland is less than 2% of the AONB land area.

### Ancient Woodland, Wooded Pasture and Parkland

4.3.6 The AONB includes significant areas of these types of habitat which especially significant in terms of defining the landscape character of the AONB.

### Species Rich Hedgerow

4.3.7 Species rich hedgerow are a special feature of the downs landscape lining road verges and sunken lanes and providing connecting ecological corridors.

### Farmland Habitat

4.3.8 Farmland habitats and species adapted to traditional mixed farming practices; in particular the Kent Downs supports a nationally important site for arable weed communities,

### Traditional Orchards

4.3.9 The Kent Downs landscape is strongly associated with fruit growing, with orchards making a significant contribution to local distinctiveness.

### Nature Conservation Sites

4.3.10 There are 38 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) in the Kent Downs AONB covering some 4404ha.

4.3.11 There are three SSSI nature reserves which fall within 7km and to the south of the proposed development site which fall within the AONB, these are:

- Lullingstone Park;
- Otford to Shoreham Downs; and
- Magpie Bottom.
-

## Opportunities and Threats

4.3.12 As with the landscape character of the AONB the Management plan identifies the key opportunities and threats facing the biodiversity of the designation area as follows:

- a. Habitat fragmentation, damage and loss, the opportunity to manage, extend and connect existing priority protected sites and habitats as well as create new habitat as a critical step to conserve and enhance biodiversity and generating high quality Green Infrastructure in which the Kent Downs could play a focal role;
- b. Lack of grazing livestock or poor returns from managing remaining areas of semi-natural grassland, and other habitats important in the Kent Downs particularly small, inaccessible or unprotected sites;
- c. General lack of awareness and understanding of the biodiversity resource and value of the Kent Downs and how it contributes to landscape condition, the quality of life, health and well-being as well as the county economy with an associated lack of funding and support for management;
- d. Need to provide accessible and well-managed nature conservation sites in close proximity to urban areas to provide contact with nature particularly through the designation of Local Nature Reserves;
- e. Need to respond to the failure to meet Biodiversity 2010 targets and the opportunity for the Kent Downs AONB to make a significant local contribution to meet Biodiversity 2020 targets;
- f. Need to find sustainable economic futures for key habitat products in the AONB to ensure their continued management;

The aims of the management plan are to create and manage a landscape that:

1. The rich diversity of natural features, wild animals, plants and habitats are recognised, conserved and positively managed so that the extent and condition of key habitats is enhanced in a way that allows characteristic species to flourish;
2. A network of well-managed, connected sites of biodiversity importance covers the Kent Downs, providing habitats for locally typical and rare species and communities and the essential building block to achieve functional ecological networks to assist with climate change adaptation;
3. More common and widespread wildlife species and populations of the wider farmed and wooded landscape flourish due to careful and sensitive management;
4. Comprehensive and easily accessible data informs and influences land management and development decisions and monitors changes to biodiversity
5. The natural heritage and wildlife is recognised for its inherent value for contributing to quality of life and the economic value of the Kent Downs.
6. Collaborative management at a landscape scale secures significant enhancement to the characteristic habitats and species of the Kent Downs as a local response to the national and international challenges to biodiversity.

These are followed by a set of bio-diversity policies.

#### 4.4 SUMMARY SECTION 4.3

The proposed development site is currently a links style golf course and rough grassland and has a limited ecological value. There is little woodland or tree cover and no ecological protection.

The proposal development is set within a substantial landscape framework that is based around delivering significant positive biodiversity enhancement to the AONB. Importantly these would not be carried out in isolation and would sit alongside existing areas of protected habitat within the surrounding landscape which the proposed the masterplan can connect to.

The proposals would work with the AONB management and local wildlife groups to develop habitats across the site that will be characteristic to the Kent Downs and provide a local response to International issues such as species decline, habitat loss and climate change.

The masterplan will provide 45.4Ha of the overall 141 Ha available to deliver varied landscapes which will create a regionally important level of new habitats and deliver real biodiversity benefit.

#### 4.5 Woodland and Trees (figure 6)

- 4.5.1 The Kent Downs AONB management plan also considers areas of woodland and trees within the designation with a vision to extend the coverage of woodland across the AONB and maintain the existing woodland coverage and quality.
- 4.5.2 Currently the AONB is one of the most wooded of the nation's AONB areas with 23% coverage. Almost 70% (12,129 ha) of the Kent Downs woodland resource is ancient woodland (continuously present since at least 1600). The Kent Downs' ancient woodland is nationally important representing (3.3%) of the total resource of England and Wales (Natural England, Ancient Woodland (England) Inventory 07/03/2013).
- 4.5.3 Woodland and trees are seen as an integral part of the AONB and another key factor contributing to the overall character, quality and natural beauty of the Kent Downs.
- 4.5.4 As before the management plan sets out a series of opportunities and threats together with aims for the future. The following are an extracted list of these that are of particular relevance to the area of study and the proposed development site and its potential impact:

## Threats and Opportunities

- c. Restocking on woodland sites, woodland creation and tree planting – need to use a diverse range of appropriate species of local provenance if available. In many situations, natural regeneration should be encouraged and current best practice should be adhered to;
- f. The emphasis on multi-purpose woodland use brings challenges for owners and managers where recreation, biodiversity and landscape management are unlikely to bring commercial returns;
- g. Intensive agriculture, infrastructure and building developments have led to the loss of woodland and transitional habitats around woods;
- i. Need to take a strategic approach and propose long term management solutions to minimise biodiversity loss, to promote woodland regeneration and to limit the long term impact of disease and deer population growth in Kent Downs woodlands;
- l. Need for the restoration and management of open space in woodlands, particularly woodland rides and glades;
- n. The need to harness the popular value of woodlands to improve understanding, engage new management arrangements and wider community and individual involvement;
- o. The opportunity to act strategically and collaboratively to master plan woodland management and where appropriate creation in the Kent Downs to meet the multiple objectives of the AONB Management Plan.

## Aims

- 1 The irreplaceable fine tree and ancient woodland characteristics and qualities, cultural heritage and landscape character is conserved, restored and managed;
- 2 The sustainable management of woodlands provides recreation and education, timber, a source of renewable energy, a wildlife habitat and mitigates the impacts of climate change;
3. Woodlands form functional ecological networks alongside other key habitats of the AONB in order to encourage resilience to the impacts of climate change;
4. Woodland ecology and archaeology is well understood, conserved, enhanced and recognised for its value.
5. There is promotion of public understanding, engagement and the sensitive use of woodlands for recreation and leisure.
7. A collaborative management approach to the woodlands

## 4.6 SUMMARY SECTION 4.5

The proposed landscape framework includes for up to 23Ha of new woodland planting as part of the overall mitigation approach to both visually enclose parts of the development within woodland and to provide a significant volume of new woodland planting within the AONB.

This approach can address both the threats to woodland within the AONB and the opportunities identified. The new woodlands will be sustainably managed and could provide opportunities for recreation, education, renewable energy and woodland based commerce and the creation of new wildlife habitat.

## 5.0 Other Matters Within the Management Plan

- 5.0.1 The Kent Downs AONB Management Plan also considers other matters as important in defining and describing the AONB character and its unique and special qualities, these include: Farming landscapes; Historic and cultural heritage; Geology; and Communities.
- 5.0.2 Both arable and grazing pasture form an important part of the AONB landscape with horticulture also forming a notable constituent part. Orchards and Horticultural growing have formed an important part of the AONB character but are on the decline as pressures on farming practice shape the management of farmed land. The area of orchards and hop gardens in the AONB has decreased by nearly 50% since 1961 (70% nationally). There has however been a recent upturn in orchard planting including walnuts and fruits such as apricots, as well as vineyards,
- 5.0.3 The study area of the AONB considered within this report and south of the proposed area of development is rich with a variety of historic and cultural assets. All of the main forms of designation and protection are present across this area with scheduled monuments; historic parks and gardens; Conservation Areas; and listed buildings all featuring prominently in the landscape and at the heart of the character and special quality of the AONB.
- 5.0.4 The management plan stresses the need to include local communities within the planning and conservation of the AONB and that these communities will continue to shape and influence the character and quality of the landscape. It sets out a number of perceived threats and opportunities which include:
- retaining and improving access to local services such as post office, village shops, public houses and garages;
  - available and accessible community facilities such as schools, libraries, social care and doctors surgeries;
  - Affordable housing within the AONB;
  - An important opportunity to increase the number of visitors to the AONB;

- 5.0.5 A series of aims for the landscape that would lead to vibrant communities within the AONB are then highlighted, these include:
- Vibrant and thriving communities that play an active role in its conservation and enhancement;
  - Strong and sustainable rural economy;
  - Well designed and sustainable affordable housing;
  - Accessible, affordable local services and facilities;
  - The area is recognised as a sustainable tourism destination.
- 5.0.6 Finally Access within the AONB is considered with opportunities for people to enjoy and understand the AONB countryside prominent in the aims of the plan. This is described as being achieved through maintaining the public rights of way network and creating new routes and connections between these. Provision is encouraged for walkers, cyclists and horse riding with special places and events and opportunities for involvement in the AONB and its management encouraged.

## 5.1 SUMMARY SECTION 5.0

The proposals will deliver:

- new education and health care facilities;
- community facilities as part of a local district centre;
- new retail and services as part of a mixed retail and commercial development proposal;
- provide park and ride facilities and bus services; provide affordable housing within the mix of housing provided;
- provide jobs and employment opportunities; and
- promote the location as a gateway to the AONB enabling new access into the AONB via footpaths, bridleways and cycle routes.

## 6.0 Landscape Design Handbook – Kent Downs AONB

- 6.0.1 The management plan is accompanied by a suite of design guides and supplementary information to assist in the management of the AONB. The purpose of the design handbook is to provide design guidance to aid the conservation and enhancement of the AONB as a whole.
- 6.0.2 The Handbook considers New Built Development in section 2.0 and begins by considering Urban Edge Housing and Commercial Development, both of which are of particular relevance to the proposed development at Pedham Place.

- 6.0.3 There is a presumption against development that would impact upon important views and to avoid intrusion onto sensitive ridgelines or damage to distinctive landscape settings.
- 6.0.4 Development sites should seek to keep key landscape features such as woodland, hedgerow and mature trees and integrate new development into the landscape character using open space and planting to provide visual links to the countryside. Woodland can be utilised to screen new development.
- 6.0.5 New development should consider massing, form, height, colour of buildings to take account of local distinctiveness and characteristics. Use local materials and look to minimise the impact of lighting on the landscape from new development.
- 6.0.6 Other guidance is offered for infrastructure and minor road improvements and for farm diversification.
- 6.0.7 Golf courses have a small section of their own and are considered as potentially offering an adverse visual impact on the AONB. The handbook offers a presumption against golf course development within the AONB making the existing golf course site at the proposed development site an anomaly within the designation.
- 6.0.8 Woodland is considered from section 2.7 and is broadly welcomed by the handbook stating that *woodlands are a vital component of the natural beauty and character of the Kent Downs*. A wide diversity of woodland types occur with sweet chestnut coppice a particularly significant feature. Shaws or narrow belts of woodland are also characteristic in parts of the Kent Downs.
- 6.0.9 Design principles for woodland include: the re-instatement of coppice management and traditional woodland industries; the encouragement of public access and recreation areas; the creation of new woodlands and prioritise the extension of existing woodland.
- 6.0.10 Hedgerows are also noted as an important element contributing to the scale and character of the landscape. The handbook identifies a need to restore hedgerows and encourage more sensitive management. It recommends managing hedgerows by using traditional methods to encourage wildlife, maintain standard trees in hedgerows and establish new hedgerows with native species with banks and ditches appropriate to local character.
- 6.0.11 Unimproved chalk grassland with a flower rich sward and rich insect life remains a major landscape characteristic of the Kent Downs AONB. Acid grassland over the greensand and clay plateau are also important. The handbook identifies that the creation of new areas of grassland is vital to the landscape character of the Kent Downs as well as is biodiversity.
- 6.0.12 The handbook also highlights elements of the historic landscape with the Kent Downs being particularly rich in historic features. It notes that no part of the AONB



landscape has been unaffected by past human activity and recommends a number of design principles in order to properly conserve and manage these landscapes.

6.0.13 Amongst the principles some are of particular relevance to the area of study and the proposed development site, these include: the protection, conservation and enhancement of archaeological monuments and the promotion of traditional orchards, cobnut plats and hop gardens.

6.0.14 The guidance also offers details of suitable hard building materials and plant species before considering the detailed landscape character guidance which is a reproduction of information from the Kent Downs landscape character assessment 2004.

6.0.15 Design guidance is offered for each of the landscape character areas with the North Darent area (within which lies the proposed development site) including the following:

- Conserve and restore hedgerows on lower slopes, thick belts of trees along the river valley bottom, and unique mature beech avenues along roads leading up valley sides.
- Ensure any new land uses such as horse pasture, golf courses and smallholdings conserve and enhance the strong pattern of hedgerows and shaws.
- Conserve the wood pastures of Lullingstone Park including its ancient oak trees.
- Seek the sympathetic use of local materials – brick, tile and flint.
- Avoid inappropriate use of non-native species.
- Avoid suburban boundary treatments.
- Conserve, enhance and seek to connect chalk grassland areas.

## 7.0 Rural Street and Lanes – A Design Handbook

7.0.1 The supporting information to the AONB Management Plan also includes a further design handbook on rural streets and lanes. This considers in detail design guidance pertaining to highway and public rights of way management, maintenance and design. It begins by considering the special characteristics of routeways and rights of way through the different character areas within the AONB. Darent valley, which contains the proposed development site and much of the study area for this report is described as follows:

- The Valley includes the ancient trackway of the Pilgrims' Way, at the base of the North Downs scarp, marked by minor roads and footpaths, and abutted by the historic park of Chevening;
- Open sweeping views are apparent from the Pilgrims' Way across and along the valley;
- The North Downs Way also runs along the ridge, and also is in part an ancient trackway following a more wooded route;
- Noise and visual intrusion is sometimes apparent from the M25;

- The relatively rural and secluded North Darent Valley has historic routes just above the floodplain and distinctive beech avenues along roads and tracks leading up the valley sides;
- The streets and villages of Shoreham, Eynsford and Otford are becoming busy and congested with modern day traffic;
- Distinctive, narrow stone and brick bridges and a ford are found at Eynsford;
- Narrow, historic and wooded lanes on top of the North Downs around Knockholt are subject to “suburbanising” influences.

7.0.2 The handbook then considers in detail the design of streets, cycle routes and other public routeways focusing on how these can be decluttered of highway and other signage and arranged and design in such a way as to be complementary and supporting of the existing distinctive character of lanes, roads and villages within the AONB.

## 8.0 Settlement within the AONB

8.0.1 The Kent Downs AONB is a landscape which has been influenced by human activity for thousands of years and continues to contain both settlement and farmed land as well as significant transport and power networks reflecting its location close to the capital.

8.0.2 Figure 5 Shows the study area of the AONB and the settlements that fall within or border its boundaries. Closest to the proposed development site is Farningham and Eynsford, two village settlements which almost coalesce within the deep cut Darent valley. Eynsford population is cited as being 1,814 (2011 census) while Farningham has 1,314 (2011 census). Both villages are closely associated with various historic buildings, including Eynsford castle and the area has evidence of occupation during Neolithic times.

8.0.3 Further south at the eastern and western boundaries to the AONB and close to motorway corridors (M25 and M20) lie the hamlets of Well Hill, Badgers Mount and the larger village West Kingsdown with a population of 6000 and history that dates back to an Anglo Saxon origin.

8.0.4 South of the proposal site and adjacent to the A225 lies the small village of Shoreham with a population of 2,041 (2011 census) it too has an ancient provenance with the surrounding valley being recognised as a centre for Stone Age activity.

8.0.5 Within the remaining area of AONB study area the villages of Knockolt and Knockolt Pound; Offord; Kemsing; and Wrotham can all be found to the north of the M25/M26 corridor. South of this numerous other villages are also found circling the larger centre of Sevenoaks which sits removed from inclusion within the AONB but surrounded by it.

- 8.0.6 In between these settlements is a landscape peppered within individual farmsteads; mill building; windmills; cottages; pubs and inns and criss-crossed with a road network that both connects these centres locally within one another but also a national network of motorways and A roads which both surround and cut across the AONB study area.
- 8.0.7 As well as the road network the railway network also runs through the AONB with the Sevenoaks line crossing through the proposed development site within a tunnel in its south western corner before travelling due south towards Sevenoaks. Further branches of the line travel north west towards the capital, east and south.
- 8.0.8 Other infrastructure that supports this settled and connected landscape is also prominent in the form of major power pylon lines which dominate the western section of the proposed development site and notable across the remainder of the AONB study area.

#### SUMMARY SECTION 8.0

The existing landscape within the AONB boundaries and study area demonstrate a long history of human activity where people have shaped the landscape into the form it appears in today. The AONB is not a wilderness landscape and people have lived along the Darent Valley and surrounding hills for thousands of years. Settlement is an integral part of the character of the AONB and much of its historic and cultural significance is found within the buildings, villages, towns and communities of the Kent Downs.

This settlement, although often historic, is not representative of one particular time but rather an expression of continued habitation over many generations up to the present day. This continues with the landscape now accommodating major transport infrastructure routes and expanding settlements in Swanley, Knockholt and Sevenoaks.

The proposed development will create new housing at a scale of a small village but this will not be an incongruous addition within an AONB which already relies on numerous other small settlements to form a key part of its character,

The new proposed development will need to create a new urban centre which advances the existing unique characteristics of the built environment within the AONB by using local building materials, styles and traditional construction forms where appropriate. The proposals offer the opportunity to celebrate the urban part of the AONB designation and combine this with significant additions to the landscape and ecology of the AONB in a design led response for a 21<sup>st</sup> century housing solution.

## 9.0 Change and Development within the AONB

- 9.0.1 As previously discussed in section 8, the landscape surrounding the proposed development site and the AONB surrounding Sevenoaks more generally is one where human activity and settlement have formed a key characteristic over thousands of years and have shaped the form of the landscape that is now protected within the AONB through farming practices and the building of settlements, dwellings, commercial and community buildings and the transport networks that connect them.
- 9.0.2 Prior to the designation of the AONB as an area of outstanding natural beauty this settled landscape was well established with all of these features helping to create the character that would be recognised by the designation.
- 9.0.3 Maps from the nineteenth century (see figures 10 & 11) show Farningham and Eynsford forming a familiar urban form along the Darent valley to the east of proposed development site. This appears as open fields with a single dwelling to the north carrying the name Pedham Place and with little in the way of field boundaries.
- 9.0.4 Blocks of vegetation appear similar to that found in today's landscape with Farningham Wood present to the north and other smaller blocks of woodland dotting the landscape throughout.
- 9.0.5 The rail line that crosses the proposed development site in tunnel is also present and forms part of the London, Chatham and Dover railway.
- 9.0.6 What appear to be numerous orchard plantations appear on the 1867 plan, associated with Pedham Place, and farms around Crockenhill and to the east of Swanley. The loss of these orchards are one of the more notable changes of the landscape through the 20<sup>th</sup> century and into the 21<sup>st</sup>.

### 1968-1980's

- 9.0.7 Mapping from the point of designation in 1968 shows a landscape that continues to be one that is responding to the settlement and human activity within and surrounding its borders.
- 9.0.8 The maps from 1969-71 through to 1980-93 show limited development growth but substantial infrastructure development that runs throughout the AONB study area.
- 9.0.9 During this period the M25, M26 and M20 motorways are constructed. The M25/M26 cuts directly across the AONB study area east to west with the M25 corridor turning northwards before reaching Sevenoaks and continuing within the AONB, skirting its western edge and finally exiting the AONB at the proposal site before continuing north. The M20 encloses the northern part of the AONB to the east and runs south eastwards at the edge of the AONB designation from the

proposal site and Farningham before turning due site and entering the AONB at West Kingsdown.

- 9.0.10 To the south of the M25/M26 the A21 appears as a major A road travelling southwards through the AONB to the west of Sevenoaks before exiting the designation close to Underriver.
- 9.0.11 At Badger Mount a short section of the A21, another major new A road route appears travelling from within the AONB and the M25 west.
- 9.0.12 Major built development associated with settlements is more limited and shows major urban extension to the south east of Swanley which runs up to the boundaries of the AONB and development within Sevenoaks and at the south eastern corner of the AONB study area.

#### 1980-93 and contemporary landscape

- 9.0.13 The period between the 1980's and the present day has continued to see some development change within the AONB boundaries with the largest of this being the QuinetQ works and compound at Knockholt.

## 9.1 SUMMARY SECTION 9.0

The AONB landscape, since its inception and designation in 1968 has undergone major change and seen large scale development and expansion of activity within its boundaries through the introduction of the M25, M26 and M20 motorways and the major A road routes of the A20 and A21.

In addition urban development has also continued within and at the edges of the AONB with large scale development occurring to the south east of Swanley and at the QinetQ works at Knockholt.

Both major road infrastructure and large scale development can be accommodated within and close to the boundaries of the AONB without altering the key characteristics and natural beauty of the Kent Downs. Both of these introductions into the AONB differ from the proposals at Pedham Place in they are entirely incongruous to the character of the existing AONB at the time they were built

The proposals for development at Pedham Place would see the introduction of predominantly residential led mixed use development including community and recreational uses which can be shaped to contribute to the existing urban characteristics of the AONB through strong and sensitive design. The commercial elements of the proposals could be located towards the edge of the AONB and the M20 and M25 corridors where the character of the AONB is already compromised.

The proposed development will also include significant aspects of directly beneficial change, removing a noted adverse landuse in the golf course (with its building structure sand floodlighting) and providing extensive new landscape and ecological habitats alongside public access.

An analysis of how the AONB has changed during its lifetime suggests that development, particularly in response to a national infrastructure need can be accommodated without causing undue harm to the key characteristics of the AONB.

## 10.0 CONCLUSIONS

### 10.1 Existing Proposal Site and Location

The existing proposal site is located within the Kent Downs and is currently an 18 hole championship golf course with 9 hole course and driving range. The site also includes an additional section of land which is rough grassland used occasionally for a Sunday Market. The existing landscape across the site is clearly man made and ecologically poor with little tree cover and managed grassland. The site also contains built infrastructure including the club house and associated commercial and service buildings and three residential dwellings.

Historically the golf course was formed on landfill where levels over the site in the early nineties were elevated by approximately 2m across the site.

The proposed development site is also flanked on three sides by major roads and motorway corridors (to the east, north and west) and crossed by a rail line (in tunnel). Other very visible infrastructure includes large electrical pylon lines which cross the site to the west of the golf course and smaller electrical and gas service routes.

Although within the AONB the proposed development site is not typical of the AONB landscape more broadly and includes features which are noted as detrimental to the character of the AONB, these include: golf course development; motorway and road infrastructure; power line and pylons.

### 10.2 The Kent Downs AONB

The Kent Downs AONB is a large area of designation which has common features and characteristics that combine to create its special qualities and natural beauty. The proposed development site sits on an elevated plateau at the north western extent of the area with panoramic views southwards, along the Darent valley and over the gently rolling hills of the downs. To the north west views are possible towards the city of London with the more rural landscape of the AONB and the urban metropolis of Greater London both part of the visual amenity of the site.

Views and visual amenity are a key aspect of the Kent Downs and the proposed development will take care to reduce the potential visibility of development across the wider AONB whilst still maintaining opportunities for views outward. Settlement and built form are an ever present and characteristic part of the existing AONB and so the masterplan will also consider how views of the development can interact with the Kent Downs landscape in a sensitive and considered way.

The biodiversity of the Kent Downs is a rich and varied part of the AONB with woodland and grasslands providing a home for rare and in some cases unique species. Woodland areas vary from ancient wood to remnant coppice woodland to managed orchards with the Kent Downs being one of the most heavily wooded AONB's in England.

The masterplan will seek to balance the developable area proposed with a significant increase in both woodland and species rich grassland cover.

The proposed development site contains a scheduled ancient monument in Fort Farningham which currently exists entirely underground and without public access. The wider AONB holds a rich tapestry of historic features and landscapes and the proposals offer the opportunity to enable access and interpretation to the monument.

### 10.3 Landscape Character

The National landscape character description follows closely the boundaries of the AONB with similar key characteristics and environmental objectives.

The proposed development will deliver against the Statements of Opportunity promoting and enhancing the historic features within the site, creating new woodland and grassland areas and integrating these into a new urban area. The masterplan will also deliver social and economic benefits with the delivery of up to 2,500 new homes alongside commercial and retail development.

The masterplan will be delivered alongside a comprehensive suite of landscape and ecological enhancement and mitigation which will seek to protect the tranquillity of the AONB and NCA. Importantly the existing site does not play a strong role in the tranquillity of the Kent Downs with an opportunity to lessen the impacts of the motorway and electricity network infrastructure over the landscape through the design of the masterplan.

At a local level the proposed development site is equally out of kilter with the general description for the Darent Valley with its landscape action of Conserve and Restore not applicable to the degraded landscape of the golf course and rough grazing land. The potential for significant landscape effects remain, but the loss of a golf course landscape within the local character area is a beneficial change which can, alongside other positive additions in mitigation and landscape design, weigh against the adverse effects of introducing built form into the AONB.

### 10.4 Landscape Aims of the AONB

The opportunities and threats identified in the management plan offer a rounded view of the detailed landscape character assessments. While this identifies pressures such as development and urbanisation it also stresses the opportunity for landscape character conservation and enhancement, specifically seeking to remove or mitigate identified detractors such as the golf course and road network.



The proposed masterplan looks to replace the golf course links and infrastructure with a mixture of housing and commercial development combined with a suite of economic and social benefits including educational, health and leisure facilities. This is set within a landscape framework that looks to directly address the identified aims of enhancing the landscape character through a targeted approach of mitigation that will see the introduction of:

- New woodland planting;
- New chalk grassland and species rich grassland;
- New public rights of way and access over and into the AONB;
- The introduction of features and elements specific to the character areas such as orchards, and coppice woodland management;
- The reduction of views of development, including existing detracting urban influences, through woodland planting; and
- Maintaining opportunities to enjoy the expansive, elevated views from the proposal site both into the AONB and out towards the city of London.

The proposed development will deliver significant, positive biodiversity enhancement to the AONB. Importantly these would not be carried out in isolation but will look to connect to existing areas of protected habitat within the surrounding landscape.

New woodland cover will be created within the landscape framework of the masterplan providing opportunities for visual screening, woodland commerce, the creation of new woodland coppice and new orchard planting.

## 10.5 Settlement

Settlement is an integral part of the character of the AONB and much of its historic and cultural significance is found within the buildings, villages, towns and communities of the Kent Downs.

This settlement, although often historic, is not representative of one particular time but rather an expression of continued habitation over many generations up to the present day. This continues with the landscape now accommodating major transport infrastructure routes and settlements.

The proposed development will create new housing at a scale of a small village but this will not be an incongruous addition within an AONB which already relies on numerous other small settlements to form a key part of its character,

The new proposed development will create a new urban centre which advances the existing unique characteristics of the built environment within the AONB by using local building materials, styles and traditional construction forms where appropriate.

An analysis of how the AONB has changed during its lifetime suggests that development, particularly in response to a national infrastructure need can be accommodated without causing undue harm to the key characteristics of the AONB.

## 10.6 In Conclusion

The proposed masterplan looks to balance the need for housing and economic growth with the need to manage the Kent Down AONB and ensure it continues to maintain its natural beauty.

The proposals must continue to uphold the common aims of the AONB through a careful balance of development and landscape and ecological enhancement and an informed and sensitive approach to design. The four common aims of the AONB are:

- Conserve and enhance the natural and cultural heritage of the UK's AONBs ensuring they meet the challenges of the future.
- Support the economic and social well-being of local communities in ways which contribute to the conservation and enhancement of natural beauty.
- Promote public understanding and enjoyment of AONB landscapes and encourage people to conserve and enhance them.
- Value, sustain and promote the benefits that AONBs provide for society including clean air and water, food and carbon storage.

To deliver on these requirements the development and landscape framework are combined in a masterplan that will deliver the following:

- New education and health care facilities;
- Community facilities as part of a local district centre;
- New retail services as part of a mixed commercial development proposal;
- Park and ride facilities and bus services;
- Affordable housing within a total development of up to 2,500 new homes;
- Jobs and employment opportunities; and
- The promotion of access into the AONB through the site with new footpaths, bridleways and cycle routes helping to facilitate this.

The landscape and mitigation framework will include:

- Woodland screening of the proposals from the wider AONB to the south;
- The creation of managed views out across the AONB from the plateau and towards the city of London from new public open space areas;
- New footpath, bridleway and cycle routes that will connect with the existing PROW network and provide access into the AONB;
- Create an appropriate setting for, and interpretation of the existing scheduled monument at Fort Farningham;
- Provide approximately 23 ha of new woodland planting which will include areas of coppice and woodland industries;
- Provide approximately 22 ha of new chalk grassland and species rich grassland habitat;
- Provide new orchard planting as part of the tree and woodland strategy;
- Create new public realm and open space

Legend

● Site Location



**FIGURE 1**

**Project Name:** Pedham Place Sevenoaks

**Title:** Full Extents of Kent Downs AONB

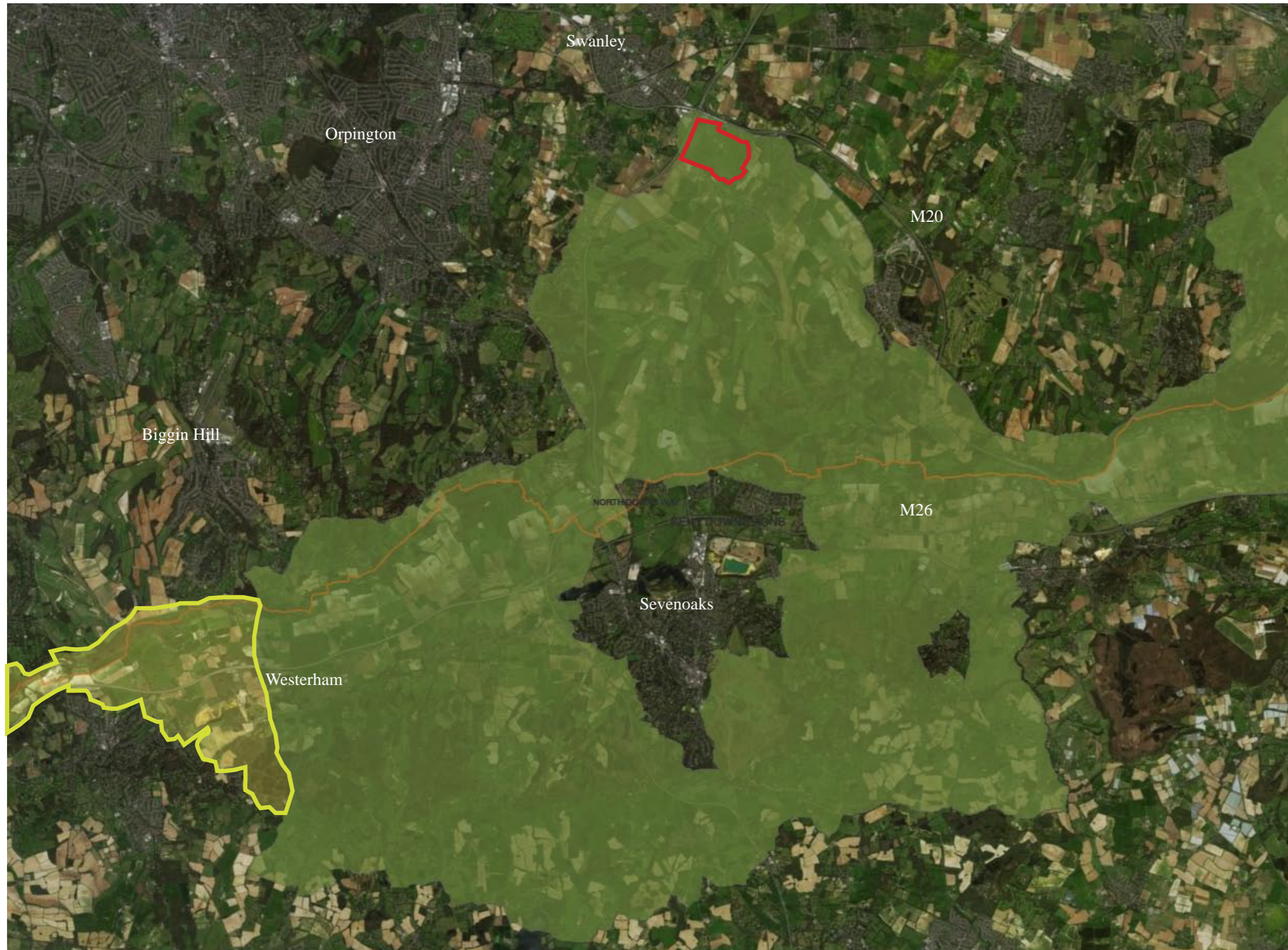
**Date:** 4/1/2019

**Scale:** Not to scale



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Legend

- Site Boundary
- Kent Downs AONB
- Surrey Hills AONB

**FIGURE 2**

<b>Project Name</b>	Pedham Place Sevenoaks
<b>Title:</b>	Extents Study Area within AONB
<b>Date:</b>	4/1/2019
<b>Scale:</b>	Not to scale





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Legend

- Site Boundary
  
- Published National Landscape Character Areas (NCAs)  
NCAs from Natural England
  
- NCA 113: North Kent Plane
- NCA 119: North Downs
- NCA 120: Wealden Greensand
- NCA 121- Low Weald
  
- Bromley Borough Council Landscape Character Assessment Area

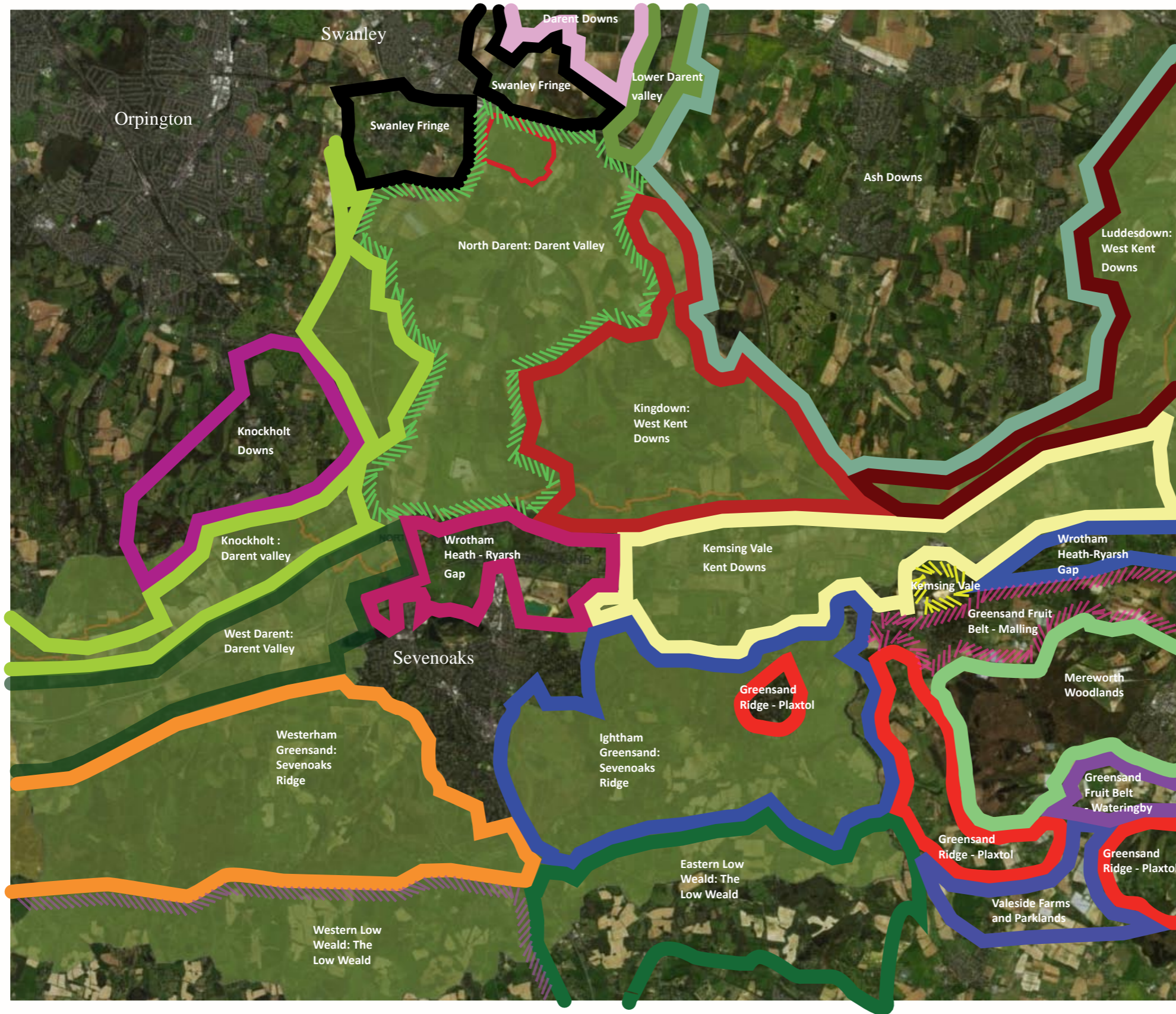
**FIGURE 3**

<b>Project Name</b>	Pedham Place Sevenoaks
<b>Title:</b>	National Landscape Character Areas
<b>Date:</b>	4/1/2019
<b>Scale:</b>	Not to scale



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Legend

-  Site Boundary
-  Ash Downs
-  Darent Downs
-  Greensand Fruit Belt- Wateringbury
-  Greensand Fruit Belt- Malling
-  Greensand Ridge Plaxtol
-  Ightham Greensand: Sevenoaks Ridge
-  Kemsing Vale
-  Kemsing Vale Kent Downs
-  Kingdown: West Kent Downs
-  Knockholt Downs
-  Knockholt: Darent Valley
-  Lower Darent Valley
-  Luddesdown: West Kent Downs
-  Mereworth Woodlands
-  North Darent: Darent Valley
-  Swanley Fringe
-  Wrotham Heath Ryarsh Gap
-  West Darent: Darent Valley
-  Westerham Greensand: Sevenoaks Ridge
-  Western Low Weald: The Low Weald
-  Kent Downs AONB

**FIGURE 4**

**Project Name:** Pedham Place Sevenoaks  
**Title:** Landscape Character Areas

**Date:** 4/1/2019







**Scale:** Not to scale



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Legend

-  Site Boundary
-  Motorway
-  A-Road
-  Railway
-  Town/ Village
-  Kent Downs AONB

**FIGURE 5**

**Project Name:** Pedham Place Sevenoaks

**Title:** Settlements in and around Kent Downs AONB

**Date:** 4/1/2019




**Scale:** Not to scale



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Legend

-  Site Boundary
-  Kent Downs AONB
-  Vegetation

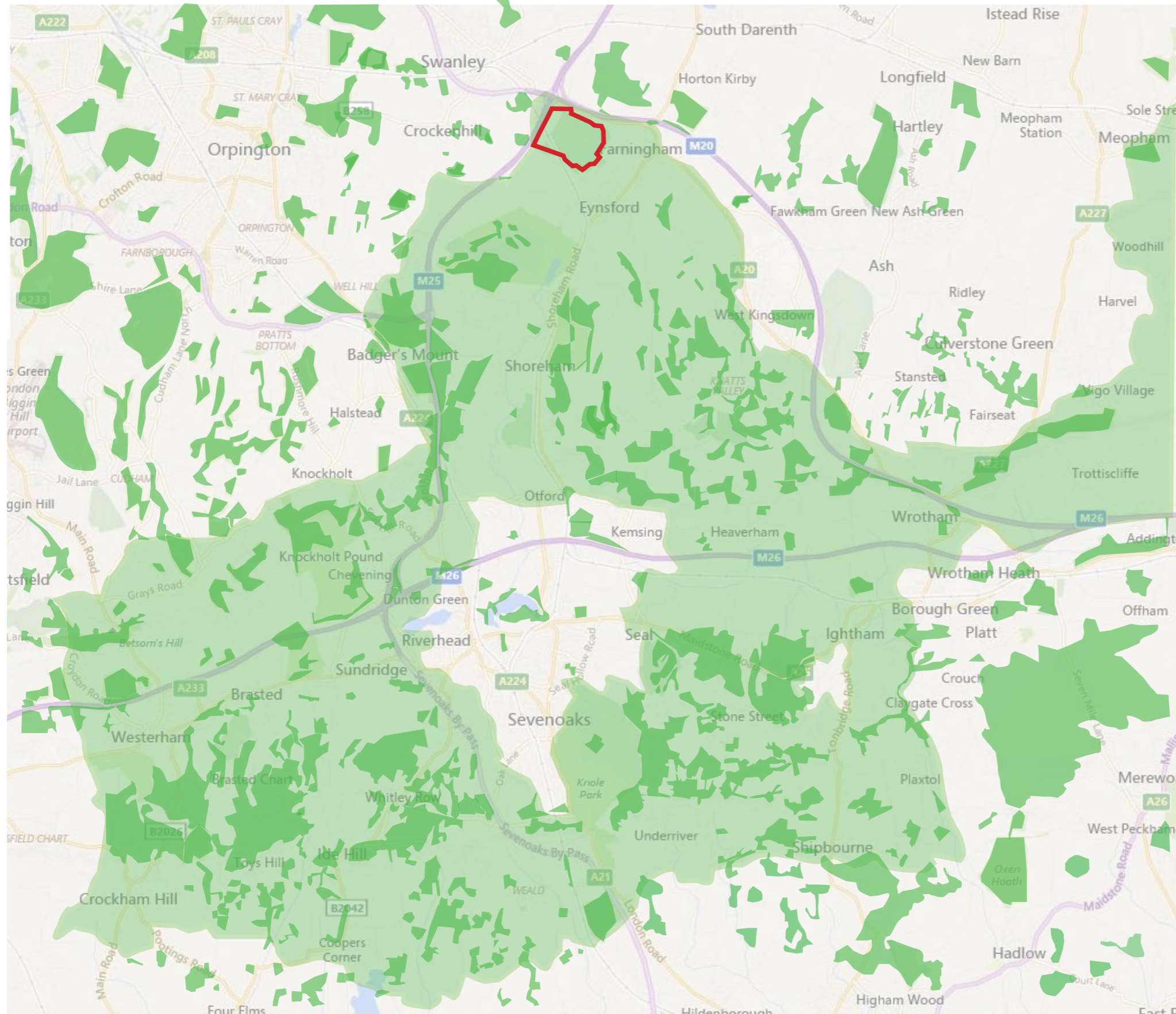
**FIGURE 6**

**Project Name:** Pedham Place Sevenoaks

**Title:** Vegetation

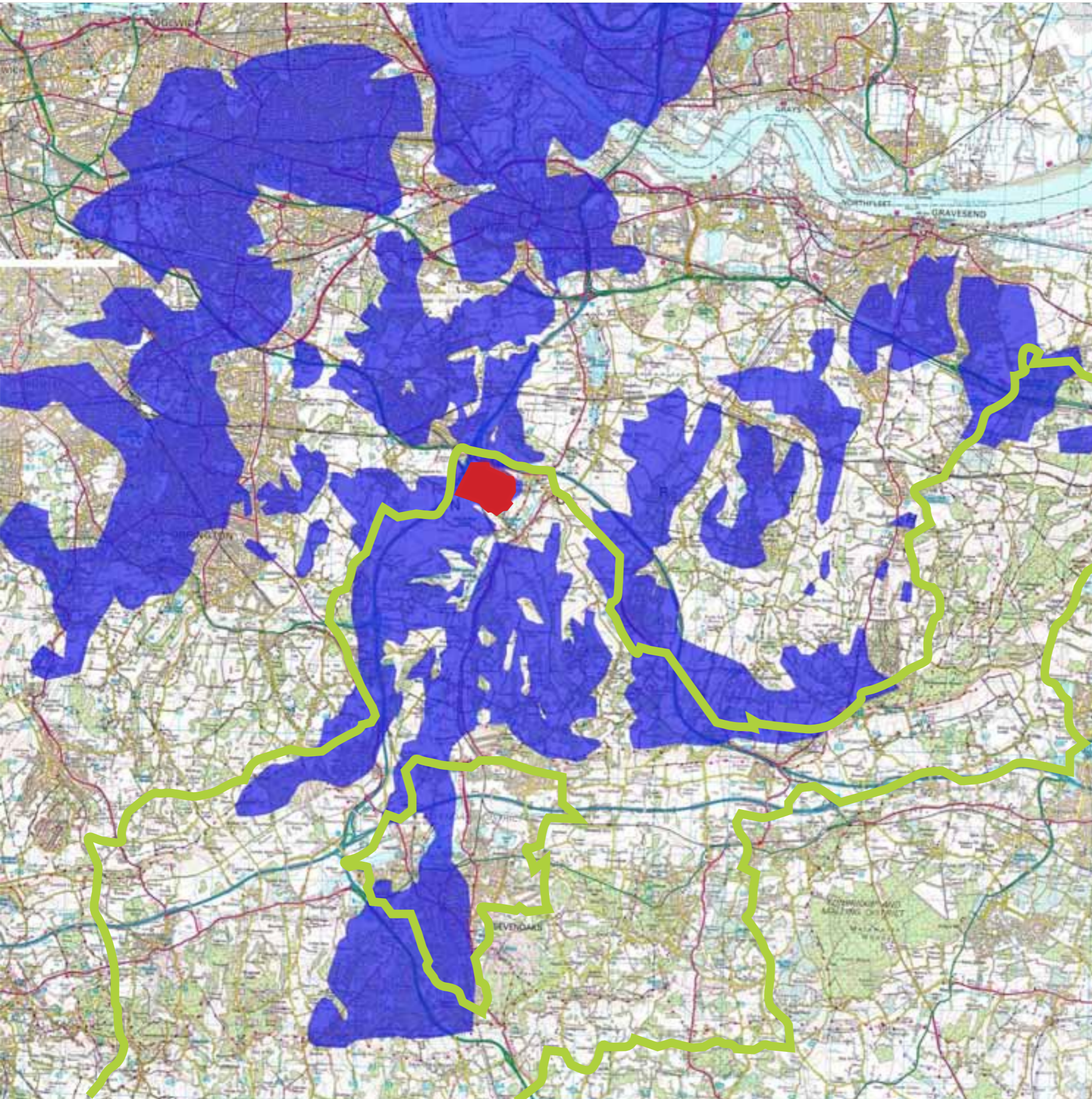
**Date:** 4/1/2019

**Scale:** Not to scale



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Legend

- Site Boundary
- Areas from where Site is Visible
- Kent Downs AONB

**FIGURE 7**

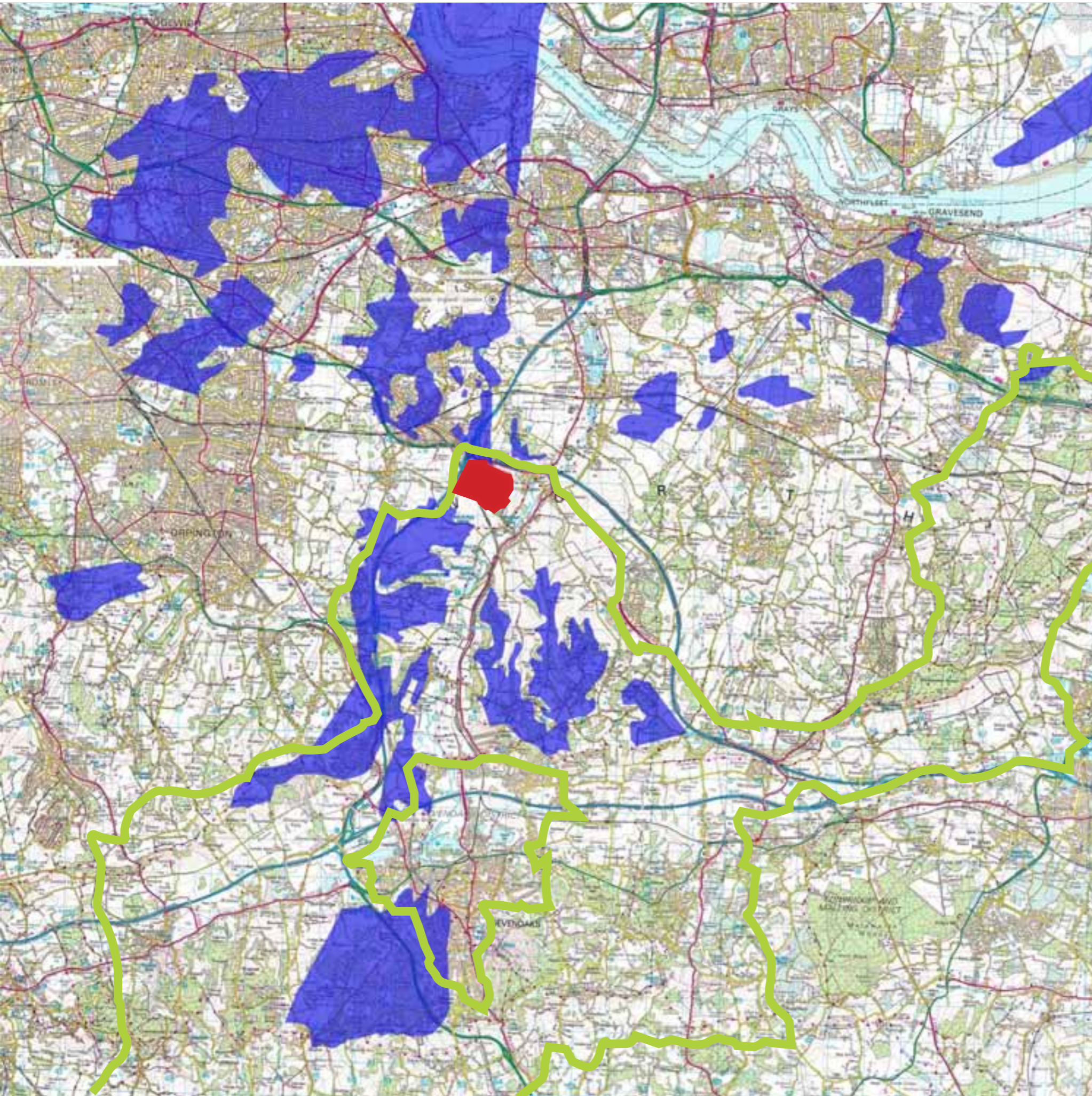
<b>Project Name</b>	Pedham Place Sevenoaks
<b>Title:</b>	Potential areas of visibility (15m Buildings)
<b>Date:</b>	4/1/2019
<b>Scale:</b>	Not to scale





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Legend

- Site Boundary
- Areas from where Site is Visible
- Kent Downs AONB

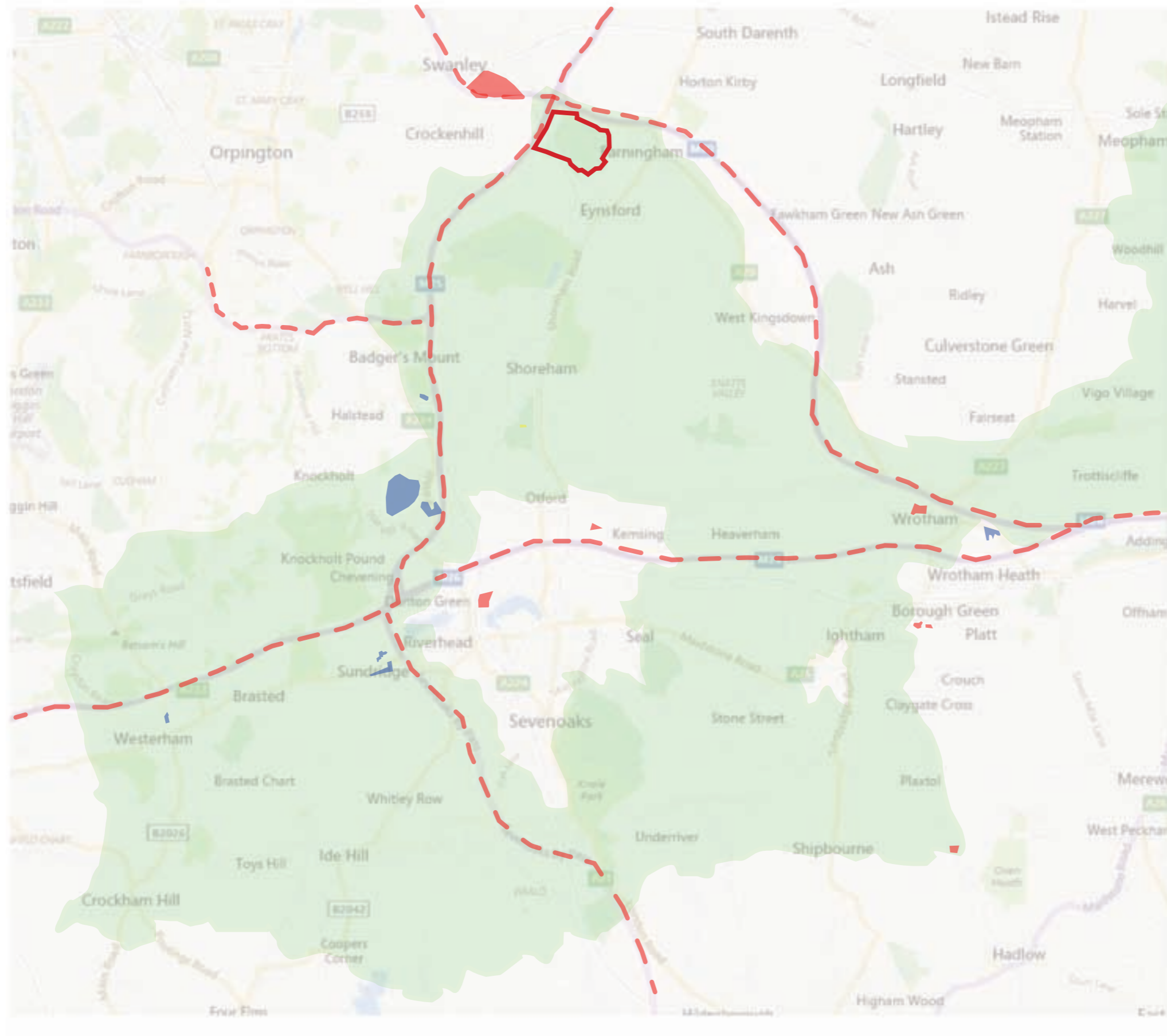
**FIGURE 8**

<b>Project Name</b>	Pedham Place Sevenoaks
<b>Title:</b>	Potential areas of visibility (8m Buildings)
<b>Date:</b>	4/1/2019
<b>Scale:</b>	Not to scale





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Legend

— Site Boundary

Development Between 1969-71 Map and 1980-1993 Map

■ Building Development

— Major Road Development

Development Between 1980-1993 Map and Contemporary Map

■ Building Development

■ Kent Downs AONB

FIGURE 9

**Project Name** Pedham Place  
Sevenoaks

**Title:** Development in Kent Downs AONB Since its Initiation (1968)

**Date:** 4/1/2019

**Scale:** Not to scale



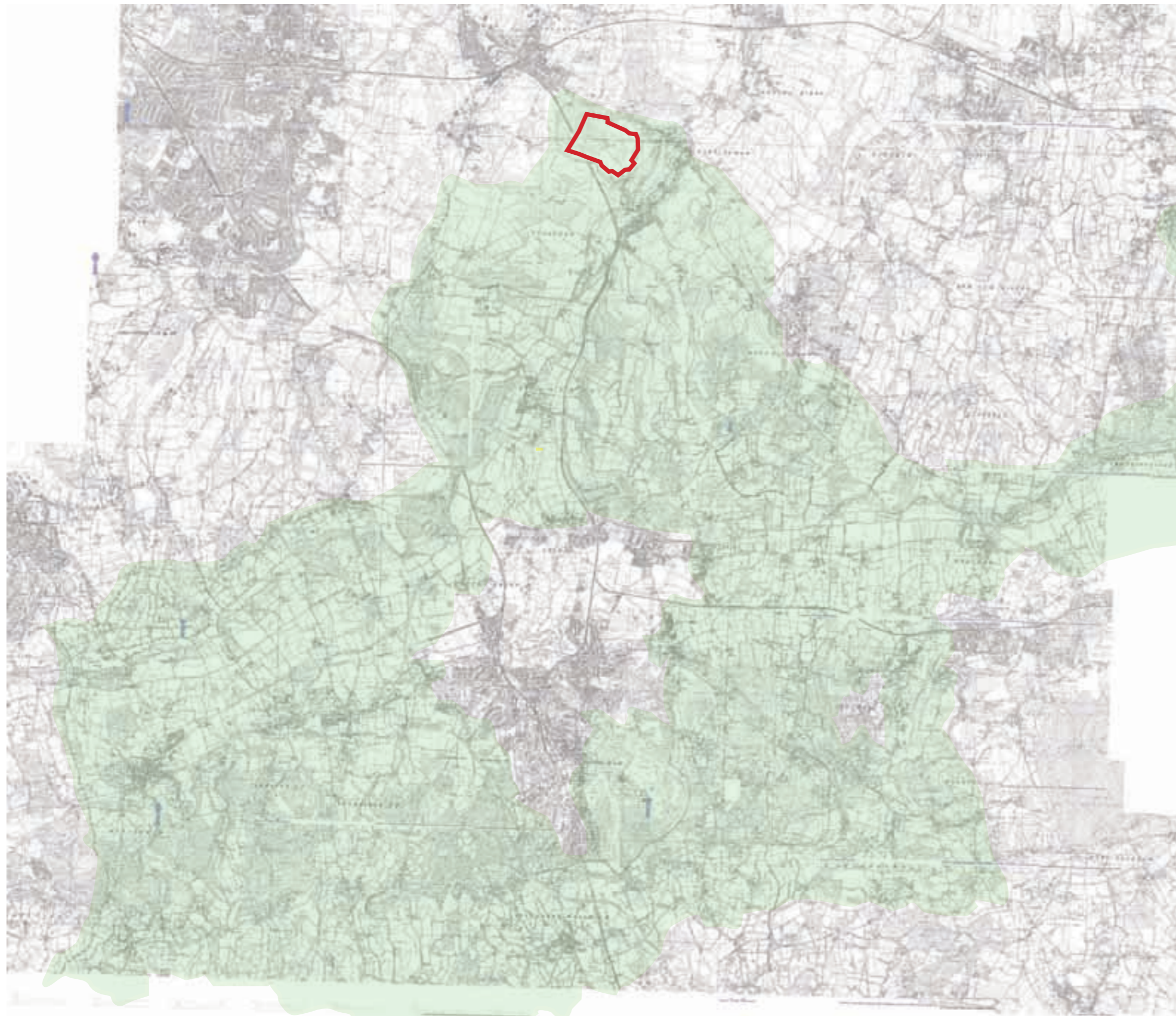
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Legend

— Site Boundary

■ Kent Downs AONB



**FIGURE 10**

**Project Name** Pedham Place Sevenoaks

**Title:** 1969-1971 Map

**Date:** 4/1/2019

**Scale:** Not to scale




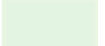


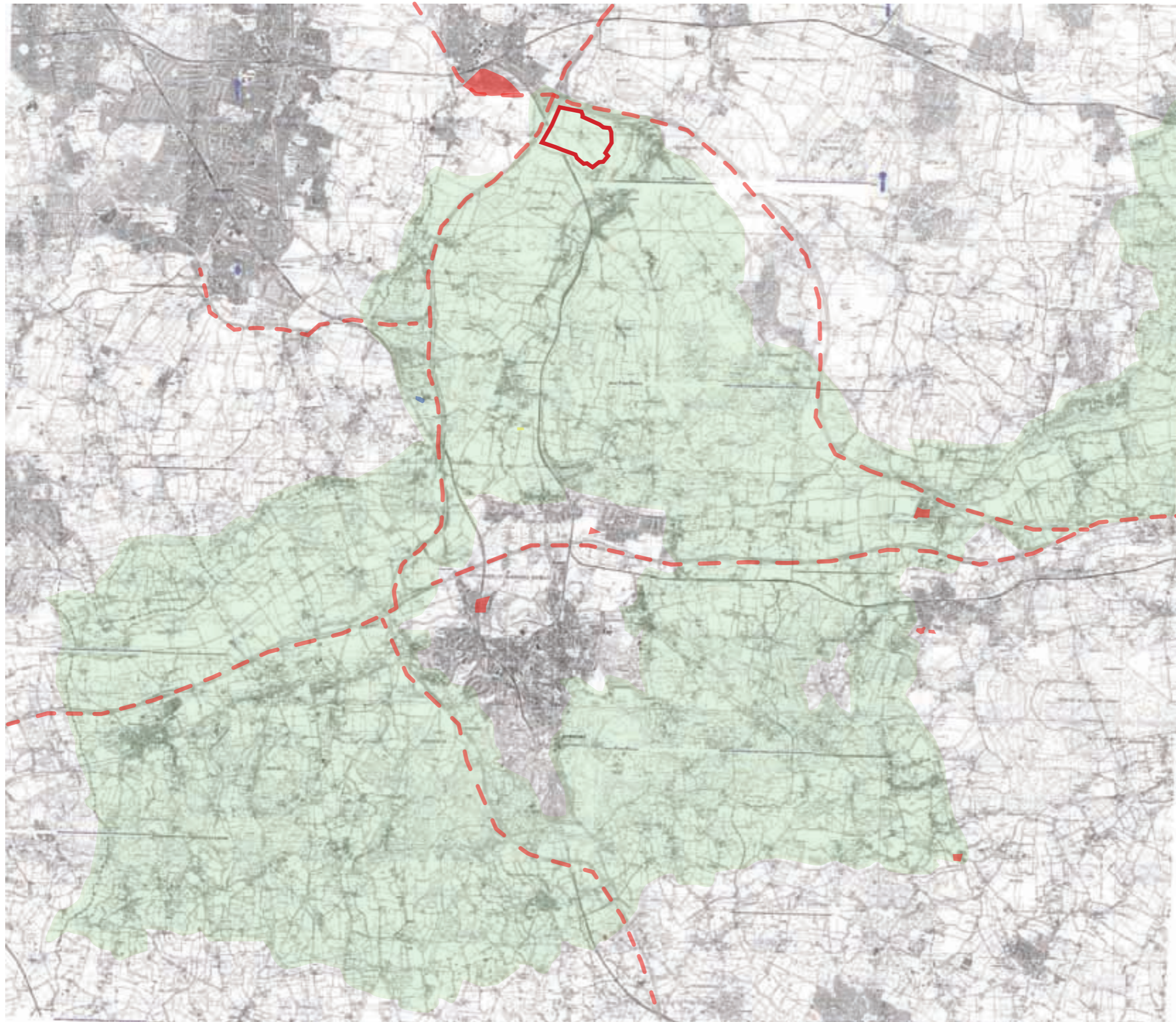


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Legend

-  Site Boundary
-  Building Development
-  Major Road Development
-  Kent Downs AONB



**FIGURE 11**

<b>Project Name</b>	Pedham Place Sevenoaks
<b>Title:</b>	1980-1993 Map showing Development Since 1969-71 Map
<b>Date:</b>	4/1/2019
<b>Scale:</b>	Not to scale























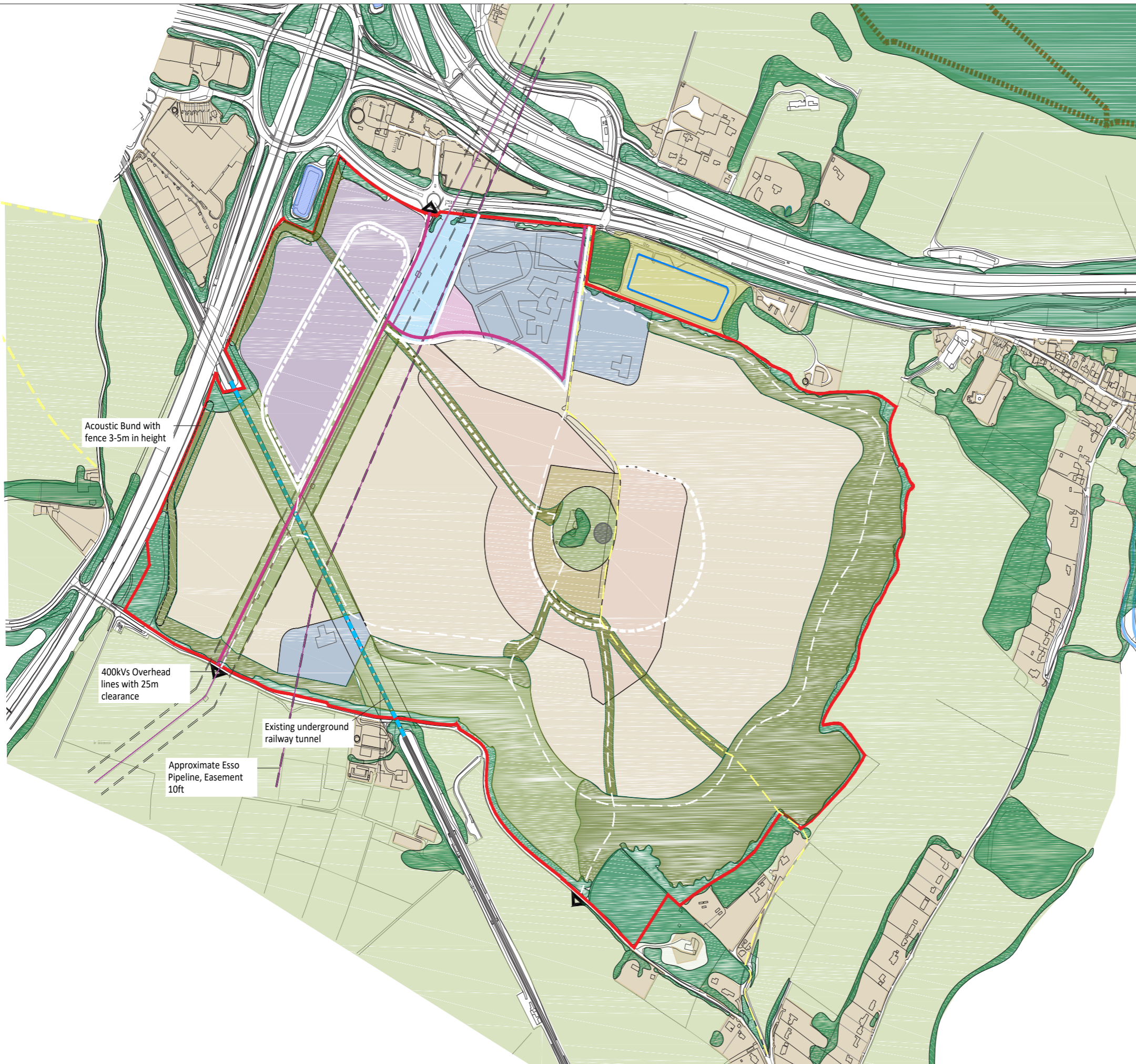


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Legend

-  Commercial
-  Educational Facilities to include 1nr 6FE Secondary and 2nr 2FE Primary
-  Leisure Centre & Hotel
-  Park & Ride and Transport Hub
-  District Centre to include, community buildings, retail and 60+ homes
-  Existing Vegetation Scheduled monument retained and enhanced
-  Proposed Woodland
-  Proposed Grassland
-  Existing PROW
-  Bridleway/ Cycleway
-  Secondary Bus Route
-  Main Bus Routes
-  Secondary Road
-  Built form
-  River Darent
-  Pond
-  Thames Water Underground Reservoir
-  Agricultural Land
-  Scheduled Monument Retained and Enhanced
-  Site Boundary



Acoustic Bund with fence 3-5m in height

400kVs Overhead lines with 25m clearance

Existing underground railway tunnel

Approximate Esso Pipeline, Easement 10ft

**FIGURE 12**

**Project Name** Pedham Place Sevenoaks

**Title:** Proposed Development Framework

**Date:** 4/1/2019

**Scale:** Not to scale

























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Legend

- LEGEND:
-  Existing Vegetation Retained
  -  Proposed Woodland Coppice
  -  Proposed Screening Vegetation
  -  Proposed Woodland to create British Native I
  -  Proposed Orchard including Rare Fruit Species
  -  Proposed Avenue Trees
  -  Proposed Allotment
  -  Proposed Parkland Trees
  -  Proposed Chalk Grassland
  -  Proposed Species Rich Grassland
  -  Existing pond
  -  Existing Public Right of Way
  -  Bridleway/ Cycleway
  -  Primary Bus Route
  -  Secondary Bus Route
  -  Secondary Road
  -  Underground Railway Tunnel
  -  Built Form
  -  Agricultural Land
  -  School site
  -  Development Area
  -  Site Boundary

**FIGURE 13**

<b>Project Name</b>	Pedham Place Sevenoaks
<b>Title:</b>	Proposed Development Framework
<b>Date:</b>	4/1/2019
<b>Scale:</b>	Not to scale





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