

our  
stour

## Ashford's river character areas



## Foreword

Water is a defining part of Ashford's landscape: indeed the town owes its very existence to the rivers on which it is located. The 16th century writer Philpot believed that "Essetesford" – Ashford's former name - stood for "ash trees growing near a ford", while Lampard, a 16th century local historian, suggested that it meant "a ford over the river Eshe or Eshet", which was the old name for the tributary of the River Stour which rises at Lenham. Over the centuries the town has been shaped by its relationship with its rivers, and the rivers have been shaped by their relationship with the town. This relationship is as important now as it has always been; indeed it could be argued, that with the impact of climate change and the requirements to meet Water Framework Directive aspirations, this relationship is more important than ever.

Ashford has been growing steadily since the early 19th century with the arrival of the railway. As the town has expanded, land close to the rivers has generally escaped development, due to the risk of flooding and because the Borough Council has protected it as green space. The resulting undeveloped 'fingers' of land reach right into the heart of the town centre - together they form the Ashford Green Corridor - a valuable asset for people and wildlife. A further obvious benefit of riverside corridors is that they are generally flat, making walking and cycling along them relatively easy.



With the arrival of High Speed One (HS1) Ashford is set to grow further, increasing the pressure on the Green Corridor but also presenting an opportunity to use the rivers as a means of community cohesion, creating a sense of place and encouraging sustainable movement.

Ashford's environment, particularly its waterways and riverside greenspace, is one of its unique selling points. *Our Stour* can help to make the most of this superb asset, for the benefit of local communities, wildlife and Ashford's economy as a whole.

Traditionally local people were responsible for safeguarding their local neighbourhood environment. But in the more recent past there has been a cultural shift and it has become accepted that it is the role of public bodies to ensure our green-spaces and waterways are managed, sometimes ignoring the local community. 'Big Society' seeks to reverse this trend, helping people to come together to improve their own lives. It's about putting more power in people's hands – a transfer of control from remote public bodies to local communities - giving local councils and neighbourhoods more authority to take decisions and shape their area. It's also about encouraging and enabling people to play a more active part in society.

*Our Stour*<sup>1</sup> suggests how 'Big Society' ideals could bring communities together to improve the quality of every aspect of Ashford's riverside landscape – to create an environment that we are all proud of and can enjoy.

---

<sup>1</sup> The sobriquet *Our Stour* only really works when Stour is pronounced 'Stower' rather than the sometimes used 'Stoor'. Both forms of pronunciation are used in Kent.

## Acknowledgements

This report has been prepared on behalf of the Ashford Water Forum which comprises the following organisations:

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| ➡ Ashford Borough Council*                         | ➡ Kent Wildlife Trust                        |
| ➡ Ashford's Future* **                             | ➡ Kentish Stour Countryside Partnership      |
| ➡ Campaign to Protect Rural England (Protect Kent) | ➡ Natural England                            |
| ➡ Department for Communities and Local Government  | ➡ River Stour (Kent) Internal Drainage Board |
| ➡ Environment Agency*                              | ➡ South East Water*                          |
| ➡ Forestry Commission                              | ➡ Southern Water Services*                   |
| ➡ Homes and Communities Agency                     | ➡ Stour Fisheries Association                |
| ➡ Kent County Council*                             | ➡ Veolia Water South East                    |

\* Indicates member of Ashford Water Group

\*\* Ashford's Future was wound-up at the end of March 2011.

Many thanks to all those that have contributed to, and supported, **Our Stour**, in particular to the Kentish Stour Countryside Partnership and Gillespies.

**Author: Barrie Neaves**

**Growth Manager, Kent and South London, Environment Agency**

## Contents

Foreword .....	1
Acknowledgements .....	3
Contents .....	4
Localism and new ways of thinking about our urban rivers .....	6
How ‘Localism’ can help bring about better management of the Stour in Ashford .....	8
‘Localism’ – the national context .....	10
Love Your River – now more than ever .....	11
Water Framework Directive – Water for life and livelihoods .....	13
Previous work.....	17
<i>Vision</i> .....	19
Management guidance.....	23
Riparian rights and responsibilities.....	25
<i>Our Stour</i> River Character Areas .....	27
Strategic parks .....	28
List of Character Areas:.....	29
<i>Our Stour</i> Character Area A: Buxford Meadow .....	31
<i>Our Stour</i> Character Area B: Singleton Lake .....	37
<i>Our Stour</i> Character Area C: Chart Leacon .....	41

Our Stour Character Area 1: Watercress Fields .....	46
Our Stour Character Area 2: Victoria Park .....	52
Our Stour Character Area 3: Bowen's Field .....	57
Our Stour Character Area 4: International Quarter .....	62
Our Stour Character Area 5: Civic Quarter (including Commercial Quarter and East Hill) .....	68
Our Stour Character Area 6: Queen Mother's Park (Martyrs' Field) .....	76
Our Stour Character Area 7: East Stour South (aka Whitewater Causeway) .....	81
Our Stour Character Area 8: Aylesford Stream (Boys Hall and Aylesford Green) .....	85
Our Stour Character Area 9: Aylesford Stream (Newtown) .....	88
Our Stour Character Area 11: Canal District .....	94
Our Stour Character Area D: Little Burton .....	99
Other potential Our Stour Character Areas .....	103
Potential governance .....	107
Case Study: RiverCare Groups (from Natural Environment White Paper) .....	116

## Localism and new ways of thinking about our urban rivers

It is recognised that urban river corridors can deliver a wealth of social, economic and environmental services including landscape value, flood control, water quality, ecosystem vibrancy, economic opportunity, recreation and wellbeing. These potentially attractive and ecologically interesting urban spaces are increasingly prime targets for development, offering the opportunity to create high-quality sustainable communities.

In February 2011 the Government published its vision for sustainable development '*Mainstreaming Sustainable Development*' recognising that the three pillars of sustainable development: economy, society and natural environment are interconnected; and that the needs of all three must be met in order to achieve sustainable growth in the long term. And in July 2011 the Government launched its draft National Planning Policy Framework, in which the Planning Minister, Greg Clark MP, recognised the importance of greenspaces when he stated<sup>2</sup>:

*'Our natural environment is essential to our wellbeing, and it can be better looked after than it has been. Habitats that have been degraded can be restored. Species that have been isolated can be reconnected. Green belt land that has been depleted of diversity can be refilled by nature – and opened to people to experience it, to the benefit of body and soul.'*

---

<sup>2</sup> Forward to draft National Planning Policy Framework July 2011.

So why look after urban watercourses? The URSULA project<sup>3</sup> at the University of Sheffield integrates research from multiple disciplines and institutions to demonstrate that there are significant social, economic and environmental gains to be made by integrated and innovative development and regeneration in urban river corridors.

The current political agenda is encouraging greater community engagement and 'localism'. It is prompting a fundamental rethink about the way we deliver improvements to urban rivers, not least with the increased engagement of community and voluntary sector groups and the private sector. Whilst the way we think about urban water and rivers has changed out of all recognition in the last 20 years this could be another major step that helps transform the way we view, value and use urban rivers.

The Rt. Hon Eric Pickles MP, Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, has said of localism:

*'If you want people to feel connected to their communities. Proud of their communities. Then you give people a real say over what happens in their communities. And the power to make a difference.'*

The same could quite easily be applied to rivers – if you want people to be proud of their rivers then you give people a say over what happens in their rivers, and the power to make a difference.

---

<sup>3</sup> The Urban River corridors and SUsustainable Living Agendas (URSULA) project.



## How 'Localism' can help bring about better management of the Stour in Ashford

'*Our Stour*' seeks to help increase awareness of the River Stour through Ashford, and suggest ways in which 'civic society' can help improve the river. It is envisaged that there would be an overarching *Our Stour* trust organisation (ideally the Kentish Stour Countryside Partnership<sup>4</sup>?) but that the river would actually be looked after at an even smaller, more local, level – the river character area – perhaps using 'Friends of' groups.

The word 'Stour' means 'Strong and powerful' in Latin, and we are hopeful of establishing strong and powerful community groups to look after *Our Stour*.

Community engagement at this river character area scale should ensure that management of the river is undertaken sympathetically, considering the aspirations and involvement of the local community, whilst at the same time raising awareness of the river environment, water quality and flood risk.

The role of the public bodies in this approach would be to advise on the consequences of certain actions in terms of flood risk, water quality, biodiversity, recreation, amenity and landscape, and health and safety. But it would be for the local community to

---

<sup>4</sup> Since 1994, the Kentish Stour Countryside Partnership (KSCP) has been working with Ashford Borough Council, the Environment Agency and other organisations and landowners to conserve, create and enhance a range of wildlife habitats along the Ashford Green Corridor plus improve access and enjoyment of the Ashford Green Corridor for the public. The Ashford Green Corridor Management Plan was produced in 2000 by KSCP, and subsequently

decide which approach to adopt. Public bodies would, of course, continue to perform their regulatory role and exercise permissive powers, as well as facilitating the actions of others. Of course, the impact of one community's decisions affecting other communities up or down stream can lead to perverse or unforeseen outcomes. Conflict can occur if no one is looking at the bigger picture and this is where we expect the regulators to step in.

We foresee that community pride in individual stretches of river could take on a similar momentum to the nationally successful 'Best Kept Village' competition. Friendly rivalry between 'Friends of' groups could encourage a real sense of community to improve the local riverside environment by caring for riverside buildings, clearing litter and promoting schemes to improve the general appearance of the area. As with BKV, communities would be rewarded for making best of what they have got rather than architectural merit, prettiness or an abundance of flowers.

This approach accords with the principles espoused in programmes such as Muck In4Life<sup>5</sup> and Love Where You Live<sup>6</sup>. *Our Stour* could be a great example of 'Big Society' in action with government working closely with local authorities, civil society groups and business to develop a new approach to bringing about river improvements for people and wildlife.

---

used as Supplementary Planning Guidance to the Ashford Borough Local Plan, and is continuing to be used to inform the Local Development Framework as a 'saved' policy. The Ashford Green Corridor website is run by KSCP.

<sup>5</sup> Muck In4Life is a family-orientated programme for conservation / environmental volunteering.

<sup>6</sup> Love where you live is a Keep Britain Tidy / Defra anti-littering initiative.

In the words of Ross Perot:

***‘The activist is not the man who says the river is dirty.***

***The activist is the man who cleans up the river.’<sup>7</sup>***

## **‘Localism’ – the national context**

In April 2011 the Environment Secretary Caroline Spelman announced a programme of measures to revamp rivers across England. An initial £110 million has been allocated to improve the health of more than 880 lakes, streams and other water bodies, while boosting local involvement in caring for our blue spaces enjoyed by millions every year. Announcing the funding, Mrs Spelman said:

*“The health of our rivers has come along in leaps and bounds, but we still see nasty invasive weeds and lifeless waters blight blue spaces in cities and across our countryside. With this funding, we’ll help all our waterways and streams thrive by tackling problems that until now have been sitting in the ‘too hard’ basket. Our new grass-roots approach to boosting healthier waterways and flourishing wildlife has local experience and knowledge at its heart.”*

It is anticipated that £92 million will be provided over the next four years to remove non-native invasive weeds and animals, clear up pollution, and remove redundant dams, weirs, landings and other man-made structures so that wildlife can thrive in water catchments across England. The funding will be shared between the Environment Agency, Natural England and civil society

---

<sup>7</sup> Attributed to Ross Perot, businessman from Texas best known as a candidate for President of the United States.

associations such as the Association of Rivers Trusts, and a significant portion of the funding will support new local projects across the country through a Catchment Restoration Fund.

It is believed funding from the Catchment Restoration Fund will be available from 2012 to co-fund projects that restore and protect the health of our water catchments by bringing together those responsible for causing pollution, with those who want to see cleaner waters and the agencies that provide scientific evidence to base decisions on.

**Our Stour** puts Ashford in a favourable position to bid for Catchment Restoration funding to undertake those projects that Carolyn Spelmen identified as sitting in the 'too hard' basket. It also responds to the principles promoted by the Our Rivers Campaign.<sup>8</sup>

## Love Your River – now more than ever

In March 2012 the 'Love Your River' campaign was launched. Backed by Defra, the National Trust, the Environment Agency, the Wildlife Trusts, Keep Britain Tidy, water companies and Waterwise, this campaign seeks to promote the value and benefits of our rivers to our everyday life. Launched at a time when the South East is in official drought, the need to protect our rivers has become even more urgent.

---

<sup>8</sup> The Our Rivers campaign is supported by WWF-UK, RSPB, the Angling Trust and the Salmon and Trout Association, although its strength comes from its roots – over two thousand Our Rivers supporters and the wealth of knowledge that exists within local river networks.

The 'Love Your River' campaign concentrates on the issues that affect rivers, and encourages people to think about:

- how the water we use in our homes or businesses affects the water in our local river;
- how the pollutants we dump down our drains harms our local water;
- the fact that there is likely to be less water available for people and businesses in the future and the knock-on effect this will have on the natural world around the river; and
- how we could get by with less in the event of drought measures in our areas.

The 'Love Your River' campaign is not just about educating people about the difficulties that many rivers face. It is also about celebrating the importance of rivers to local people – for their health, well-being, leisure and sport. It's about recognising the great work that local groups already do to look after their rivers. It's about honouring the community spirit and the inspirational individuals who give up their time and energy to improve their local environment.

Speaking at the launch of the 'Love Your River' campaign, Rivers Minister Richard Benyon said:

*"We all love our rivers. They are the lifeblood of our country. They've shaped our landscape, and our towns and cities have been designed around them. They are vitally important for our everyday lives and our environment, and we've all got a role to play in making sure our rivers are as healthy as they can be. I hope the 'Love Your River' campaign will inspire people to value their local rivers and take action to look after them. It's especially important that we care for our rivers when they're facing the added pressure of drought, as well as the constant threats they face from over-use and pollution. The fact that so*

*many organisations have come together to back this campaign shows the depth of feeling about this issue, and the importance we all place on making sure our actions don't damage our rivers."*

The website for the 'Love Your River' campaign can be found at <http://www.defra.gov.uk/loveyourriver>



## **Water Framework Directive – Water for life and livelihoods**

The Water Framework Directive (WFD) revolutionises the way that the water environment is managed and protected. It replaces previous piecemeal legislation with integrated management of water quality, quantity, physical habitat and ecology. The WFD is the most substantial piece of environmental legislation ever produced by the European Commission (EC). It provides the impetus for better water management in the UK and the other Member States for many years to come.

Under WFD there is a requirement that water in rivers, estuaries, coasts and aquifers will improve. Measures are set out in River Basin Management Plans (RBMPs), drawn up for river basin districts across England and Wales. RBMPs are plans for protecting and improving the water environment and have been developed in consultation with organisations and individuals. They contain the main issues for the water environment and the actions we all need to take to deal with them. The plans recognise that everyone uses water in their daily lives, whether for recreational activities, industry, agriculture or as a water consumer. WFD implementation is being managed at the macro level by the Environment Agency in its role as the 'Competent Authority'.

In order to meet these targets, it is important for everyone to play their part now and in the future. River basin management is an opportunity for this generation – for people and organisations - to work together to improve the quality of every aspect of the water environment – to create an environment we are all proud of and can enjoy. The South East River Basin District contains nine catchments, including the Stour.

Whilst river basin management planning has been extremely valuable in setting strategies and defining river basin district-wide actions from various sectors, it is recognised that implementation requires activity 'on the ground'. It is essential that there is the maximum involvement and action from locally based organisations and people. Innovative ways of working together need to be identified that will deliver more for the environment than has been captured at the river basin planning level.

A catchment-based approach to implementation needs to be adopted, that is efficient and cost-effective. This will complement existing networks and relationships, and enable better dialogue and more joined-up approaches to action.

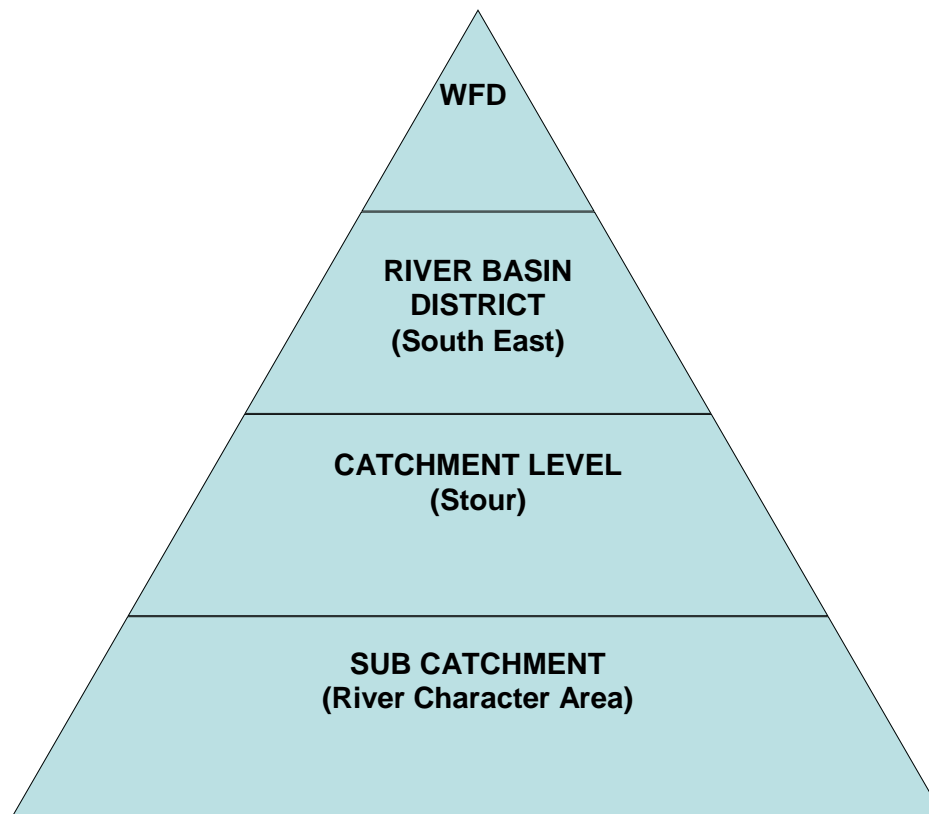
In some places there will be added value from adopting more detailed plans to help deliver river basin management plan objectives. It is at this sub-catchment level – the river character area - that we see *Our Stour* being particularly beneficial. Indeed, the WFD Programme of Measures includes a specific action promoting an ‘Adopt-a-river approach’.

The WFD sets five statuses for waterbodies: high, good, moderate, poor and bad. The stated aim is to get all waterbodies to at least good status by 2027.

Ashford’s rivers are classified as follows:

	Ecological status (2009)	Ecological status (2010)
River Great Stour upstream of Ashford	Bad	Poor
River Great Stour between Ashford and Wye	Moderate	Poor
East Stour (including Whitewater Dyke)	Moderate	Moderate
Aylesford Stream	Good	Good
Kennington Stream	Moderate	Moderate





**WFD Hierarchy**

## Previous work

In Ashford, there is a long-standing appreciation of the important role that the town's riverside greenspace plays. It was back in December 2002 that Ashford Borough Council officially designated the Green Corridor as a Local Nature Reserve (LNR) recognising it as a place of interest for wildlife, that offers opportunities for the enjoyment and study of nature, and for people to get involved in events, education and practical management.

In 2006 the former Countryside Agency commissioned a study titled 'Ashford Integrated Water Management and Green Space: Towards a Green & Blue Grid for Ashford'. And in 2008 Shiels Flynn produced Ashford's Green and Blue Grid Strategy - the green standing for outdoor spaces such as parks and wildlife areas, and the blue for rivers, ditches, ponds, lakes and other wetland. The Strategy set the agenda for environmental action across Ashford Borough.

In November 2010 the Kentish Stour Countryside Partnership (KSCP) produced a report on the impacts and opportunities presented by new developments on wildlife habitat in the Ashford Green Corridor. The principal objectives of the report were to identify all confirmed and potential developments to be built adjacent or close to the Ashford Green Corridor, establish the population increase this was likely to engender, and then to propose suitable management strategies and actions to mitigate or minimise the possible negative impacts on wildlife, and to identify opportunities for improvements. Subsequently, KSCP have identified a list of projects that they could deliver, subject to funding.

In March 2011 consultants Gillespies produced a visioning document for Ashford's Future: Ashford Town Centre - River Landscapes. The Gillespies' work, informed by the previous KSCP report, set an overall framework, identifying issues and opportunities and suggesting specific projects. This *Our Stour* River Character Area document takes Gillespies' work, and by association the KSCP work, as a starter and relates it to the communities which we hope will turn it into a reality.

The Gillespies' work identified seven character areas in the town centre. This document suggests further character areas on the edge of town, and has a different approach to the Character Areas to the rivers south of the station – East Stour, Whitewater Dyke and Aylesford Stream. The Singleton Stream, Kennington Stream and Bockhanger Dyke could also form Character Areas of their own.



A vision is adopted in this plan to reflect the aspirations for **Our Stour** in shaping Ashford's town centre as a better place to live, work, relax and visit:

## ***Vision***

***Our Stour* will be a valued and attractive river for local communities and wildlife, promoting healthy lifestyles whilst reducing flood risk and the impacts of climate change.**

Considering the historic importance, significant length and central location of *Our Stour* through Ashford's urban heart, the river has the potential to play an even more important role in defining the character of the borough. Improvements to the river corridor offer a unique opportunity to enhance the distinct urban and suburban landscapes, strengthening the image and identity of communities along the river.

New developments along the river corridor have the potential to enhance the use, enjoyment and setting of *Our Stour*. This can be achieved by integrating land and water; opening up access to, from and along the river, exploring the added value and use of water space; and viewing the waterway, cycle paths and environs as part of the public realm to unlock the economic, environmental and social benefits of *Our Stour*.

By working in partnership the following objectives will help deliver the Vision for *Our Stour*.

**Objective 1: Enhance and maintain the unique image and identity of *Our Stour***

- Strengthen the image and identity of local communities along the river by enhancing the landscape and urban characteristics of the river corridor.
- Generate value and a sense of local pride by providing high quality public spaces along or near the river.
- Provide and improve community facilities to encourage wider use across the generations.
- Stimulate commercial and residential development along the river to acknowledge the river positively.

- Work with local education providers to ensure young people understand the historic, present and future importance of the rivers in Ashford; continuing the excellent work of the Ashford Green Corridor Heritage Project.

**Objective 2: Ensure an attractive, safe and secure river corridor for people and wildlife**

- Use environmentally sensitive designs to enhance the river environment for wildlife, providing better conditions for habitats to flourish and adapt to climate change.
- Provide high quality public open space along the river, encouraging opportunities to access leisure, cultural and sport facilities, with an overall aim to promote healthy lifestyles and improve well-being.
- Encourage safe and legible cycling and pedestrian routes along and across the river corridor taking into consideration any negative impact on wildlife and private property.
- Support and encourage water-related activities such as fishing, bird watching and paddling.
- Ensure buffer areas along the river's edge are created, maintained and managed when new development along the river is proposed. This shall allow for a balance of undisturbed low-maintenance areas, but shall provide for access, amenity and flood storage use where appropriate.
- Ensure invasive species such as Japanese knotweed and Himalayan balsam are eradicated.
- Ensure that sympathetic and appropriate lighting is used to avoid a negative impact to bat commuting and foraging routes.
- Promote bird and bat nesting and roosting sites, as well as niches for invertebrates built into all new developments through incorporation of ledges, crevices and boxes wherever possible.

### **Objective 3: Reduce and manage flood risk and deal with a changing climate**

- Identify the options for river maintenance and explain the consequences of flood risk.
- Raise awareness of the expected increased risk of flooding and extreme weather conditions and encourage appropriate adaptation and mitigation measures.
- Maximise opportunities from development to consider the location, layout and design of riverside sites to help reduce and manage flood risk, both to the site and the wider community.
- Suitable provision should be provided on-site to allow for the inspection and maintenance of the river and associated flood risk management structures.
- Whenever there is an increased built footprint within the floodplain, compensation storage will be required.
- A Flood Risk Assessment should be produced as early as possible in the design of proposed development. Successful, cost-effective flood risk design requires the assessment and necessary mitigation measures to inform, and be carefully integrated into, the overall site layout and design. Site design and layout should be informed by the latest Environment Agency flood maps and Ashford's Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA).
- Ensure new development considers climate change in design and layout.
- Provide sustainable management surface water run-off in accordance with Ashford's adopted Sustainable Drainage Supplementary Planning Document.
- Encourage sustainable consumption of water within buildings as well as for external watering/irrigation, recognising that saving water saves wildlife.

## Management guidance

Just as the design of new development is important for *Our Stour* to reach its full potential, the long-term management of community facilities, biodiversity and flood risk in any new development along the river edge should be ensured as part of landscape management plans. Management of Ashford's Green Corridor needs to consider all its different functions:

### *Flood protection*

Because the Green Corridor areas are right next to Ashford's rivers, many of them hold and convey floodwater, protecting homes and businesses. Some, such as Singleton Lake and Bowen's Field, are specifically designed for this purpose. This is particularly important now because floods seem to be occurring more frequently.

### *Wildlife*

The Green Corridor brings wildlife to the town - to your doorstep! Ashford's rivers are surprisingly natural considering their urban surroundings, and are home for many wild plants and animals. Kingfishers, grass snakes, dragonflies and damselflies can all be seen. Ponds like the one at Bowen's Field attract amphibians. Singleton Lake is a habitat for wetland birds and Buxford Meadow is a wet grassland with an enormous range of plants, insects and other species. It is because these habitats are so close to where people live that the Green Corridor has been designated as a Local Nature Reserve.



## History

From the manors of Singleton and Buxford in the west, to Boys Hall Moat (a scheduled ancient monument) in the east, the Green Corridor is rich in heritage. Victoria Park, with its fountain and commemorative trees, the intriguingly named 'Watercress Fields', and Martyr's Field with its macabre past - all have stories to tell. Many areas were farmed until relatively recently and are living links to Ashford's past as an agricultural market town.

The following general principles should be followed:

- Retain and improve the management of existing waterside habitats and features of wildlife value, as well as other nature conservation sites within the river corridor.
- Selective tree and shrub clearance to allow more light into the river where appropriate.
- Should loss of habitat be unavoidable, mitigation will be required on site, or in exceptional circumstances off-site.
- Where possible, allow for natural colonisation rather than planting. Native species are the priority, but in more formal areas near-native species – particularly those that provide valuable habitat – may be appropriate.

## **Riparian rights and responsibilities**

The rivers through Ashford are generally owned by the riparian owners along their length; that is, the owner of the land adjoining the river is likely to own the river as well. If land registry plans do not show otherwise, it is presumed the riparian ownership extends to the centreline of the watercourse.

Riparian owners have rights and responsibilities. They have a duty to those upstream and downstream. In general terms, riparian owners must accept water from their upstream neighbour and pass it on, together with drainage from their own land, to their neighbour downstream. The ultimate responsibility for maintenance of the watercourse, including the riverbanks, rests with the riparian owner. This could include clearing obstructions, repairing the banks, protecting vegetation, maintaining and managing trees, removing debris and litter clearance. Riverside owners also have a role to play in pollution prevention, reporting pollution incidents and flooding, safeguarding and enhancing habitats, improving fisheries, and encouraging walkers and anglers.

Most of the rivers in Ashford are designated 'main' rivers under the jurisdiction of the Environment Agency. This does not remove the riparian owner's responsibilities but it does confer 'permissive powers' on the Environment Agency to carry out certain activities. It is important that riparian owners preserve access to the banks of watercourses for maintenance and safety purposes.

The consent from the Environment Agency is required for any works in, over, under or on the banks of a main river. This is in addition to any planning permission that may be required.

There is no right of navigation on any of the rivers in Ashford; although everyone has a right to enjoy them.

## Our Stour River Character Areas

Stretches of rivers can be defined in many ways: by habitat, water quality, flood risk, ownership, neighbouring land use.

The Character Areas for **Our Stour** should be stretches that communities can relate to, and thereby take pride in and be prepared to maintain and enhance – in effect: to ‘own’.

Below we have set out what we believe to be the Character Areas of **Our Stour** through the urban heart of Ashford. It could be that these areas can be sub-divided to give more local context or, perhaps, combined where local communities relate to larger areas.

Using KSCP and Gillespies’ work – and referencing Ashford’s Green Corridor Heritage Project - we have identified the existing characteristics of the **Our Stour** Character Areas, and suggested potential opportunities which will help meet the overall vision for **Our Stour**. Where possible we have outlined specific design guidance which will help deliver the above objectives and vision and provided further guidance on the long term management of the river environment.

**Our Stour** provides a Green (and Blue) Corridor and the character areas should not therefore be seen as an isolated piece of land. This corridor through Ashford creates a line for wildlife to either reside in or pass through on a migratory basis. Isolated pockets of habitat vegetation are of course important, but a link between them that extends out of an individual park creates migration paths and interwoven links for wildlife that are far more beneficial. The corridor is also important for the movement of people.

This section highlights the different urban and suburban characteristics of the environment along **Our Stour** so that these are considered and enhanced when opportunities arise. The stretch of **Our Stour** that this plan focuses on flows along areas with distinct character and function through Ashford's urban heart. The characteristics of these areas, described one by one below, highlight not only the spatial quality of the river itself but also how the built and natural environment around it is defined, used and experienced. These key characteristics then inform the design principles to which any future development should be tested, to help deliver the three main objectives underlying the vision for **Our Stour**.

## Strategic parks

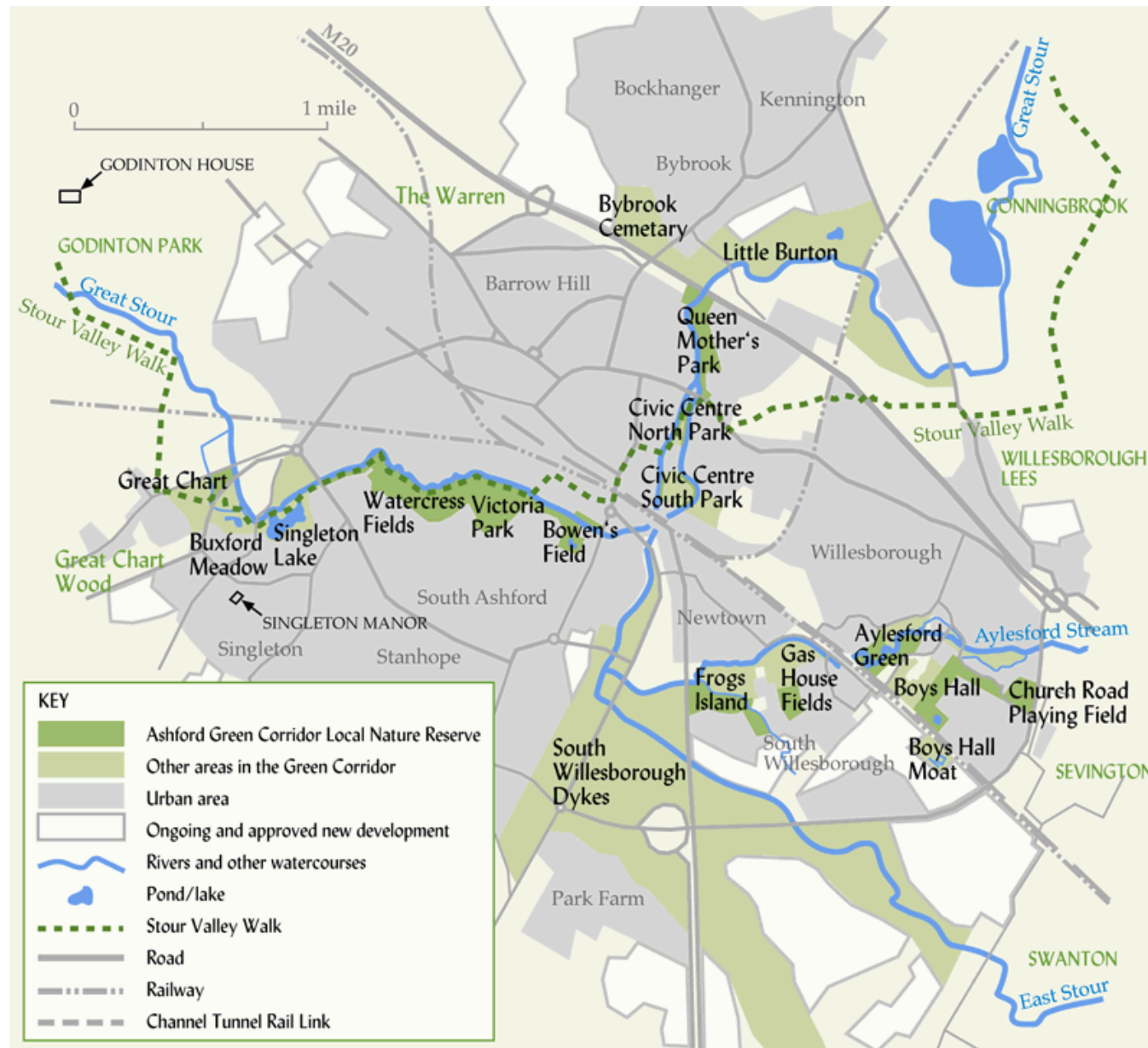
The Greater Ashford Development Framework (GADF) identified three strategic parks to serve Ashford: Conningbrook Water Park, Willesborough Dykes Nature Park and Chilmington Discovery Park. All of these parks have an interface to a greater or lesser extent with Ashford's rivers.

The strategic parks are not included in the **Our Stour** Character Areas as it is likely that each park will have its own vision and objectives. However, the rivers will provide an important link between the parks for people and wildlife.

## List of Character Areas:

Area A	Buxford Meadows
Area B	Singleton Lake
Area C	Chart Leacon
Area 1	Watercress Fields
Area 2	Victoria Park
Area 3	Bowen's Field
Area 4	International Gateway
Area 5	Civic Quarter (South & North Park)
Area 6	Queen Mother's Park (Martyrs' Field)
Area 7	East Stour South (aka Whitewater Causeway)
Area 8	Aylesford Stream (Boys Hall and Aylesford Green)
Area 9	Aylesford Stream (Newtown)
Area 10	Canal District – Whitewater Dyke
Area D	Little Burton





## **Our Stour Character Area A: Buxford Meadow**

**Great Stour: A28 to Bucksford Lane**

**320 metres**



### **Existing character**

Buxford Meadow can be considered as the place where Ashford's Green Corridor meets the countryside; an extremely important area to ensure habitat connectivity for wildlife in and out of the Green Corridor. It is one of the most valuable wildlife areas of the Ashford Green Corridor, with wetland, wet woodland and chalk river habitats.

The name Buxford refers to the presence of bucks (male deer) at a ford (a crossing point on the river). The deer have long gone but the area is still important for wildlife.



The river emerges from under the A28 in two distinct channels, flowing in a predominantly south easterly direction. The northern channel is the larger of the two and flows through the grounds of Buxford Mill (private). The left bank is in the ownership of Wyvern School.

The site consists of a wet meadow and wet woodland. In the middle of the meadow is a pond whose margins consist predominantly of reedmace. Despite being a fairly recent addition to the site – it is not shown on the 1876 map of the area - the pond supports a diverse array of wildlife including common frogs, toads, smooth newts, dragonfly & moth. The site is also ideal for small mammals - field vole, pygmy shrew, woodmouse and bank vole in the woodland. Several species of bat inhabit the area.

The wet woodland is likely to be a secondary woodland as it is not shown on historic maps. It incorporates ash, alder, English oak and grey willow. The wet glades support large areas of water mint. The triangle formed between the two branches of the river contains remnants of old mill workings and minor watercourses. The Stour Valley Walk passes through the wood, connecting Buxford Meadow to Great Chart and beyond via an underpass.

The adjacent Buxford Mill is a historical feature of the site – it has been the site of a mill since at least the 13th century. Although the mill is a private residence the mill stream can be viewed from the bridge along Buxford Lane. Some of the mill structures are rather dilapidated and have an adverse impact on water management.

The Environment Agency has recently (2010) undertaken some in-channel enhancement works to the southern arm to improve the river habitat at low flows.

The area is accessed by the public for informal walking and for angling (in the river) by children. Access is often degraded or restricted by narrow bridges, overgrowing vegetation or boggy areas. The area is relatively quiet and is designated a Local Wildlife Site. KSCP have recently (2011) prepared a management plan for the site.

### **Vision and opportunities**

The vision for Buxford Meadow could be an area of informal exploration where people and wildlife co-exist. An area for education and experience. In size and context it is not dissimilar to the successful Oare Gunpowder Works at Faversham.

There is opportunity to improve the habitat in the wet-woodland and to improve access. More water could be allowed into the woodland by cutting small channels or leats, to create specialist habitat. Fish passage could be improved. Selected tree removal and thinning will allow more light penetration to allow ground level vegetation to flourish.

The footpath might be extended and upgraded to include a cycle path as far as the underpass, so extending a green transport link into this area of Ashford and access to the Green Corridor and town centre.

The area lends itself to the creation of boardwalk features to keep people and biodiversity close but apart. More could be made of the historic remains – the area lends itself to informal exploration.

The mill structures could be refurbished / repaired to improve water management.

At key points throughout the site there could be interpretation panels helping to educate and inform visitors, reflecting the unique blend of wildlife and history.

If access to the pond is improved - perhaps with the provision of a viewing deck - it should be limited to discreet locations - angling in the pond should be discouraged; the water fowl habitat could be enhanced. Existing invasive plant species in the pond should be controlled.

More scrapes / ponds could be created for further beds of reedmace, although any new standing water would decrease the amount of wet meadow.

Further in-channel works to the river – such as installing coir rolls to encourage marginal growth - may be appropriate to create more shelter for the White-clawed crayfish – a good population is already present.

The woodland could be managed by coppicing, with cut timber used to create terrestrial habitat shelters.

The school site could be enhanced to provide viewing / dipping platforms; a two-stage channel could be provided to encourage emergent vegetation; an otter holt, crayfish habitat and bird boxes could be installed; the use of in-channel woody debris will provide a variety of habitat.

In the past the grassland would have been managed by grazing – traditionally by deer. In the longer term perhaps deer could be reintroduced? They are a popular attraction in Hatch Park to the east of Ashford. However, currently the open boundaries, and usage by dog owners, means this option is unsuitable.

### **Potential Specific Projects**

1. Access improvements through installing boardwalks, improving footbridges, surfacing eroded paths and clearing overgrown vegetation.
2. In channel improvements to enhance habitat and restore fish passage.
3. Creation of leats to increase water flow into wet-woodland.
4. Installation of benches, interpretation boards and viewing platforms.
5. Enhanced approach at underpass.
6. Coppicing of woodland to allow light in.
7. Expose more of the historic mill structures to encourage informal exploration / climbing.
8. Repair / refurbish mill control structures to improve water management.
9. Various improvements on school site.

### **Activities to be encouraged**

Informal exploration – walking, dog-walking.

Wildlife interaction – bird watching, pond dipping.

Cycling, recreational and commuting (A28 – town centre / International Station).

Informal angling in river (discourage in pond).

Education.

**Prospective partners – ‘Friends of’**

Buxford Mill owners / Residents of Hoppers Way and Haymakers Lane / Local schools

## Our Stour Character Area B: Singleton Lake

Great Stour: Bucksford Lane to Brookfield Road

340 metres



### Existing character

The name Singleton is a corruption of the Old English *shyngle tone*, meaning a farmstead with a shingled roof. The origins of the name of the lake therefore can be traced to nearby Singleton Manor, a former 14th century farmstead. The picturesque moat of Singleton Manor dates back far earlier to a time when the original manor house was located towards the back of the present day gardens and is a Scheduled Ancient Monument.

Singleton Lake is a large, man-made lake that helps reduce flood risk and provides an amenity for fishing and bird-watching. Despite being a recent addition, Singleton Lake has quickly developed into a wildlife haven in the Ashford Green Corridor and sits

comfortably in its surroundings. Those living close to or visiting Singleton Lake may find it hard to think of it not being there – it looks like a natural feature. It demonstrates what can be achieved with a little imagination as development takes place.

It has areas of willow and alder around its perimeter as well as small areas of reedbed. At night Daubentons bats can be seen flying over the water. There is good access to the lake including a stretch of boardwalk. The lake helps to manage flood risk in the area, accepting and balancing surface water run-off before it enters the Great Stour.

Singleton Lake supports a variety of common bird species, as well as birds that are unlikely to be seen elsewhere in the Green Corridor including Great Crested Grebe and Reed Warbler. Two damselfly species have been recorded at the site, common blue damsel fly and blue tailed damsel fly. Singleton Lake has parking, picnic areas and good links to the rest of the Green Corridor and wider countryside in the Great Chart area. Angling in the lake is managed by Ashford Angling Society.

The river flows roughly easterly along the north bank of the lake. There is a good footpath / cycleway between the lake and the river. The river banks are fairly heavily vegetated with medium / large trees, these obscure views and limit light penetration. There is a small weir across the river with an associated Environment Agency gauging station housed in a utilitarian brick building. This area is popular with children attracted by the site – and importantly, sound – of water passing over the weir.

To the north of the river is Bucksford Park, an area of informal open space incorporating a car park and picnic tables.

## **Vision and opportunities**

The vision for this area could be to maintain and enhance its current, semi-formal, character.

The Singleton Lake area appears to work well at the moment. The area is generally fairly well used by locals and is popular for walking and cycling. Angling is popular in the lake and appears to be well governed by the angling club. The lake is well populated with wildfowl and other species. The lake and its environs should remain an area of informal recreation, with angling in particular promoted and encouraged.

The importance of the lake for flood risk management should be recognised.

There is opportunity to improve the habitat to the north west of the river.

Further in-channel works to the river may be appropriate – the weir is popular with children as it is one of the few locations in Ashford where the river is audible as well as visible. Perhaps further low weirs / riffles could be created. Some pollarding of the riverside trees to enhance views and allow more light into the river may be appropriate.

Despite the proximity of the lake to the A28 it is well screened and there are few way-markers to encourage visitors to this 'hidden gem'. It could be that the local community and, in particular, the angling club, would not wish to see visitor numbers increase significantly.



### Potential Specific Projects

1. In channel improvements to enhance habitat.
2. Installation of benches, interpretation boards and viewing platforms.

### Activities to be encouraged

Walking, jogging, dog-walking.

Wildlife interaction – bird watching, pond dipping.

Cycling, recreational and commuting.

Angling in Singleton Lake.

Picnicking.

Paddling in the river.

### Prospective partners – ‘Friends of’

Ashford Angling Club / Singleton residents / Wyvern School

## ***Our Stour* Character Area C: Chart Leacon**

**Great Stour: Brookfield Road to Ford Way cyclepath**

**600 metres**



### ***Existing character***

Downstream of Brookfield Road the River Great Stour becomes more urban; in particular on the left bank. This section of the Green Corridor has a lot of human pressures. Brookfield Road and Leacon Road are both busy routes and the industrial estate lies close

to the northern river bank. Housing comes close to the southern bank and there is limited cover for wildlife on either side of the river here.

Not far downstream of Brookfield Road is a concrete ford, which seems to have been the crossing point of Beaver Lane before this area became built up and the nearby bridge was constructed. There are some wildlife-themed sculptures in this area. This is an extremely popular place for children and dogs to paddle.

There is a good footpath / cyclepath adjacent to the river on the right bank. This is popular route into town. The river itself is sometimes screened from the path and the habitat is often terrestrial rather than aquatic.

The left bank has industrial units, a thick tree screen and limited access. There is limited opportunity to cross the river.

The run-off from the Cobb's Wood industrial estate outfalls to the river in this stretch. The occupiers of the industrial estate have worked hard to improve the quality of run-off water entering the river. Indeed, fish are often present in the outfall structure.

The area immediately to the west of Ford Way is an extension of the Watercress Fields character.

## **Vision and opportunities**

The vision for this area could be to maintain and enhance its informal character, concentrating interventions in specific locations to emphasise gateways.

The Brookfield Road / Leacon Road junction has become strategically important with the completion of the Victoria Way highway scheme. More could be made of the river at this gateway setting, and the existing popularity of the ford should be preserved, and perhaps enhanced.

Development of the previously used land on the industrial site potentially presents an opportunity for more ambitious interventions in this area.

Opportunities should be sought to remove terrestrial habitat from the river banks and replace / encourage more aquatic habitat.

The character of the river on the left bank can be improved with discrete pollarding of trees, and improved access.

Mitigation for loss of brownfield habitat by incorporating a green buffer zone as part of any potential development design.

Small tree and shrub planting along the northern margins of the river, between the road and river, to screen the development and road plus provide more cover for wildlife.

A new feature foot / cycle bridge could link Ford Road with Leacon Road.

Further in-channel works to the river may be appropriate, including the provision of shelter for White-clawed crayfish.

The public open space to the west of Ford Road could be subject to different grassland management to create a richer and softer landscape character with lower maintenance requirements, perhaps with sports pitches to be defined within. Or perhaps the extent of community woodland could be increased.

The woodland could be improved to create a safer, permeable edge to the cycle / pedestrian route by removing the mid storey field layer and establishing a wet woodland with pollarded river species and grassland understorey. The mid-storey woodland layer could be re-established at the park boundary to prevent loss of habitat.

Community orchards / productive landscapes could be established to increase diversity of the park offer and encourage community involvement. This could include gardens for target species (bees, butterflies).

### **Potential Specific Projects**

1. New 'gateway' - more could be made of the river at the gateway setting at the Brookfield Road / Leacon Road junction and the existing ford.
2. New bridge - a new feature foot / cycle bridge linking Ford Road with Leacon Road.

3. Grassland management - change management regime to create a richer and softer landscape character with lower maintenance requirements, sports pitches to be defined within.
4. Sports pitches – improved sports provision.
5. Woodland management - Woodland improvement to create a safer, permeable edge to the cycle / pedestrian route by removing the mid storey field layer and establishing a wet woodland with pollarded river species and grassland understorey. Mid-storey woodland layer to be re-establish at park boundary to prevent loss of habitat.
6. Community orchards / productive landscapes to increase diversity of the park offer & encourage community involvement.
7. Provide wildlife gardens for target species – bees / butterflies.

### Activities to be encouraged

Walking, jogging, dog-walking.

Wildlife interaction – bird watching, river dipping.

Cycling, recreational and commuting.

Paddling at ford.

Picnicking

Community gardening / food production.

### Prospective partners – ‘Friends of’

Matalan / Bretts / School / Industry / Commercial interests on Cobbs Wood Industrial Estate / Local residents

## Our Stour Character Area 1: Watercress Fields

Great Stour: Ford Way cyclepath to Victoria Park

625 metres



### Existing character

Watercress Fields is a large open area of grassland alongside the River Great Stour, to the west of Victoria Park. It includes formal and semi-formal play areas and pitches. It is likely the area takes its name from a watercress farm, long-since lost to urban spread.

The river here has a seemingly natural profile, with many meanders and good bank-side vegetation - it is a good wildlife habitat and educational resource. There is anecdotal evidence that during 1940 the Great Stour was scooped deeper by the army as an anti-tank ditch; sand and gravel was removed from the river bed and dumped on the bank. This would explain its deeply incised channel. During minor river improvement works in the autumn of 2010 a concrete tank trap was discovered, giving weight to this theory.

Large parts of the site are close-mown amenity grassland, but some areas have been sown as meadows. Small stands of trees have been planted to break up the large area of grass. The good quality of the river corridor here means that the range of riverine species is probably greater than along other urban reaches. Certainly the bank-side flora appears to be particularly good. Watervole are known to inhabit this stretch.

The site's name is the most obvious link to its land-use history. The 1876 Ordnance Survey map shows a Watercress Farm here, with the main farm buildings in the vicinity of a modern street called Clockhouse. There is every possibility that watercress was commercially cultivated here (perhaps for London markets following the coming of the railway).

The left bank of the river is heavily wooded, providing a screen to the industry located on Leacon Road and Dencorra Way, including the old gas works.

### **Vision and opportunities**

The vision for this area could be to maintain and enhance its semi-formal character, providing a link between the wilder, informal Chart Leacon and the formality of Victoria Park. The scale of the site and its green infrastructure gives scope for a wide-range of interventions.



The construction of Victoria Way to the north of the river potentially opens up the industrial sites – including the gas works – for mixed-use development. And provides an opportunity to greatly improve the river corridor in this location. The provision of more river crossings would encourage north south movement between Victoria Way and Watercress Fields.

Currently the river forms a boundary; opportunities should be taken to make the river the centre of the public open space rather than the edge. Opportunities should be sought to remove terrestrial habitat from the river banks and replace / encourage more aquatic habitat. The character of the river on the left bank can be improved with discrete pollarding of trees, and improved access.

Further in-channel works to the river may be appropriate.

More tree planting / hedge restoration / wild flower meadows in Watercress Fields to replace short-mown grassland. Perhaps even watercress beds could be re-created?

Introduce boulevards into the parkland setting and improve the woodland.

Community orchards / productive landscapes could be established to increase diversity of the park offer and encourage community involvement. This could include gardens for target species (bees, butterflies). Create a sensory garden.

New bridge(s) to connect Watercress Fields with the future residential communities and Victoria Way. Increase points of access to the river – viewing platforms, steps.

Enhanced biodiverse buffer landscape to north bank with development of small scale innovative enterprise 'pods', designed sensitively to protect the wildlife habitat.

Introduce outdoor gym / urban sports strip to promote healthy exercise.

The offer at Watercress Fields could be similar in character to that provided at Whatman Millennium Park in Maidstone. This 18-acre site combines a natural landscape of woodland and wildflower meadow with adventure play areas, a treetop walk, skate-park and river-stage open-air performance arena, offering a retreat with countless activities for all the family. For comparison, Watercress Fields is about 25 acres.

### Potential Specific Projects

1. Park boulevard – establish a new park boulevard and southern edge condition to broaden the visual amenity and use of the park, creating a strong backbone from which new active areas can be hung off. Perhaps seeking to recreate the famous 'Avenue' that used to grace Godinton Park - an avenue of trees planted in a triple row, along an access route in its southern boundary area that would "shiver making a gorgeous and magnificent sound"<sup>9</sup>.
2. 'Wet Walk' – a new pathway connection with Victoria Park to enhance links with new boulevard.

---

<sup>9</sup> Reminiscent of the Tennyson's poem 'The Lady of Shalott': Willows white, aspen quiver / Little breezes dusk and shiver / Tho' the wave that runs forever / By the island in the river / Flowing down to Camelot

3. Grassland management - change management regime to create a richer and softer landscape character with lower maintenance requirements, sports pitches to be defined within. 3a – improved sports provision.
4. Woodland management - Woodland improvement to create a safer, permeable edge to the cycle / pedestrian route by removing the mid storey field layer and establishing a wet woodland with pollarded river species and grassland understorey. Mid-storey woodland layer to be re-establish at park boundary to prevent loss of habitat.
5. Community orchards / productive landscapes to increase diversity of the park offer & encourage community involvement.
6. Provide wildlife gardens for target species – bees / butterflies. Re-create watercress beds.
7. New bridge to connect Watercress Fields with the future residential communities and Victoria Way.
8. Enterprise Ecology Park - enhanced biodiverse buffer landscape to north bank with development of small scale innovative enterprise 'pods', designed sensitively to protect the wildlife habitat.
9. River platforms - construct river platforms to increase points of access to the river.
10. Activity strip - create an urban sports strip / trim trail / outdoor gym.

### Activities to be encouraged

Walking, jogging, dog-walking.

Wildlife interaction – bird watching, river dipping.

Cycling, recreational and commuting.

Community gardens / productive landscapes / sensory garden

Formal sports pitches.

Picnicking / barbeques

Adventure play and toddler play.

Tree-top walk.

Outdoor gym / urban sports strip.

Skate / BMX park

**Prospective partners – ‘Friends of’**

Industry / Commercial interests / Developers / Local residents

## ***Our Stour* Character Area 2: Victoria Park**

**Great Stour: Victoria Park to Bowens Field**

**278 metres**



### ***Existing character***

Victoria Park is a formal park with mature ornamental trees, and a small area of woodland. Some of the trees were planted in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to commemorate local towns people and members of the royal family. A local art dealer donated the large fountain in one corner of the park to the town of Ashford. It was originally designed for the Great Exhibition and resided on the Olantigh Estate at Wye. There is a small pond at the bottom of the park surrounded by a rocky garden. There are two pedestrian bridges over the River Stour.

Victoria Park was purchased by Ashford Urban District Council from Mr George Elwick Jemmett and Mr William Francis Bond Jemmett for the sum of £2,760.00 in 1898. The land purchased for Victoria Park comprised of seventeen acres.

The Hubert Fountain in Victoria Park was made in France for the Second Great International Exhibition in the Horticultural Society Gardens, Kensington, London in July 1862. In 1910 Mr George Harper bought the fountain to put in the garden of Olantigh House, Wye, which he was having rebuilt. On 24 July 1912, the fountain was formally presented to the Town, one of the conditions attached to the handing over of the fountain, was that it should be turned on each year on Mr Harper's birthday, which is 23rd July (1841).

For many years the fountain stood idle, as the pumps and mechanism had fallen into disrepair. In 1977 the fountain was restored with the help and financial assistance from local businessmen to celebrate the Queen's Silver Jubilee. In 1998 the fountain was completely restored at a cost of £490,000, with much of the money coming from the Heritage Lottery Fund. The fountain was refurbished again in 2007. It was shot blasted to remove the old paint, repairs were carried out to the structure and it was repainted with long-lasting specialist paint.

The park is occasionally used for cultural events, such as the annual Create music festival. The festival attracts more than 10,000 people making it one of the biggest free music festivals in the South East.

Historically, Victoria Park used to be surrounded by iron fencing restricting entry to two gates on opposite sides of the park that were locked at night.

To the north of the park is Victoria Way. This is a new route to the south of the town centre to link the International Station at Beaver Road and the A28 Chart Road. It follows the route of the previous Victoria Road to Cherry Court where a new road has

been built to join the end of Leacon Road by Matalan at the Fairwood Industrial park. The new Victoria Way allows the town to grow and develop to the south of the town centre and railway line and provides opportunities for new developments including shops, restaurants and cafes and homes. Victoria Way will be delivered in phases as development along the route takes place.

The initial phase includes the provision of a new road from Beaver Road to the A28 Chart Road, the introduction of a tree lined street and the creation of a new public square adjacent to the Victoria Road Primary school – to be known as John Wallis Square to commemorate the town's famous mathematician. Construction of Victoria Way was completed in 2011.

### **Vision and opportunities**

The vision for Victoria Park could be to maintain and enhance its formal character, respecting the concept of the town park. This could be further enhanced by creating formal gardens and associated infrastructure, such as public art, bandstands, an amphitheatre, follies and pavilions.

The construction of Victoria Way to the north of the river potentially opens up the industrial sites – including the gas works – for mixed-use development. And provides an opportunity to greatly improve the river corridor in this location. The existing river crossings can be improved – these routes are already important for north-south movement between south Ashford and the town centre and are set to become even more so.

Redesign the historic fountain setting and appropriate riverside landscape, linking with John Wallis Square.

.

Seek to make the river the centre of the public open space rather than the boundary.

Redesign park gateways to prioritise and clarify key routes and views.

Strengthen edge definition of park along Jemmett Road with new seasonal / colourful planting under trees and possible reintroduction of railings to re-establish the boundary and enhance gateways.

Improved link north to town centre, enhancing views to Victoria Park, improving sense of safety through lighting, reducing enclosure and increasing views to park.

Develop an appropriate north bank riverside setting to future development. Introduce a new north bank boardwalk to increase access for future communities to access the park.

Create an 'Infinity' feature to continue the John Wallis theme.

### **Potential Specific Projects**

1. Historic Fountain – redesign fountain setting and improve local riverside landscape.
2. Park gateways – re-design park gateway between Victoria Park, Bowen's Field & footbridge to prioritise and clarify key routes and views.



3. Jemmet Road Park Edge Definition - strengthen edge definition of park along Jemmett Road with new seasonal / colourful planting under trees and possible reintroduction of railings to re-establish the boundary and enhance gateways.
4. Learning Link Connections - improved link north to town centre, enhancing views to Victoria Park, improving sense of safety through lighting, reducing enclosure & increasing views to park.
5. North Bank Residential Riverside Setting - develop an appropriate north bank riverside setting to future development.  
Introduce a new north bank boardwalk to increase access for future communities to access the park.
6. Gasworks Lane Bridge - improved bridge connection to Gasworks Lane for future communities as a connection to Southern Expansion Quarter.

### **Activities to be encouraged**

Walking, jogging, dog-walking.

Wildlife interaction – bird watching, river and pond dipping.

Cycling, recreational and commuting.

Informal greenspace.

Picnicking / barbeques.

Performing arts & cultural events

### **Prospective partners – ‘Friends of’**

Industry / Commercial interests / Local residents / Developers / K College / Stour Valley Arts

### ***Our Stour* Character Area 3: Bowen's Field**

**Great Stour: Victoria Park to Trumpet Bridge**

**468 metres**



## **Existing character**

Bowens Field is an informal recreation area, adjacent to the Great Stour. It is thought that this site was one of the last areas to be farmed in Ashford; it belonged to a local livestock trader called Sid Bowen, and he is commemorated on a plaque at the entrance to the site from Victoria Park. This area was also adjacent to the town's lido (outdoor swimming pool) which was built in 1867 and was at the time the largest in Britain. Water from the River Stour was pumped via sediment basins into the lido. The water was apparently then released back into the Great Stour.

The site is now a flood storage area consisting of damp grassland, with a large pond where banded demoiselle, blue tailed damselfly, azure damselfly, smooth newt, and common frog have been recorded.

In 2004 a scheme was undertaken to construct a wetland area to filter urban run-off through reedbeds before it reaches the River Stour. The resulting habitats support a wide-range of species, including reptiles, aquatic and avian. Central to the design is access for local residents via series of boardwalks and bridges. A hardwood viewing platform offers a command of the river that was previously hidden behind bankside vegetation. The hydrology of the area was subsequently changed to allow more water into the wetland to keep the habitat wetter for longer – though it should be noted that the area is designed to dry out on occasions. The outflow from Bowen's Field discharges, via a convoluted route, to the East Stour.

There is a further pedestrian bridge over the river and to the north is a vacant development site.

Trumpet Bridge, where Beaver Road passes over the Stour, is probably the site of the original ford from which Ashford gets its name, and is therefore historically significant. The river here also used to be known locally as the 'Horse River', supposedly because the horses involved in droving used it for refreshment after their journey from Romney Marsh.

### **Vision and opportunities**

The vision for Bowen's Field could be to retain its flood risk management and biodiversity function in an informal but accessible setting. There may be possibilities to extend the Bowen's Field landscape character north and east into development sites.

If the opportunity should arise it would be good to establish a wider green corridor between Bowen's Field and the East Stour, along the course of the existing outflow channel – known as the Pumping Station Dyke. Note: in times of flood this is an area where water would naturally flow.

Create appropriate development edge with sweeping path to enhance linear river connections between Beaver Road and Bowens Field where the path twice crosses the river.

Establishing an expanded riverine habitat, and associated flood storage, to the north bank.

New foot / cycle bridge to improve access to the town centre and future residential communities in the Southern Expansion Quarter, including an improved Beaver Road cycle / pedestrian node.

### Potential Specific Projects

1. Bowen's Field Extension - extend Bowen's Field Landscape character north into development site and protect rich habitat diversity.
2. The curved Walk - create appropriate development edge with sweeping path to enhance linear river connections between Beaver Road and Bowens Field where the path twice crosses the river.
3. Riverine habitat - establish an expanded riverine habitat to north bank.
4. New Bridge - to improve access to the town centre and future residential communities in the Southern Expansion Quarter.
5. Beaver Road Route - improved Beaver Road cycle/pedestrian node.
6. Widen and improve corridor between Bowen's Field and River East Stour via South Stour Avenue.

### Activities to be encouraged

Walking, jogging, dog-walking.

Wildlife interaction – bird watching, river and pond dipping.

Cycling, recreational and commuting.

Informal greenspace.

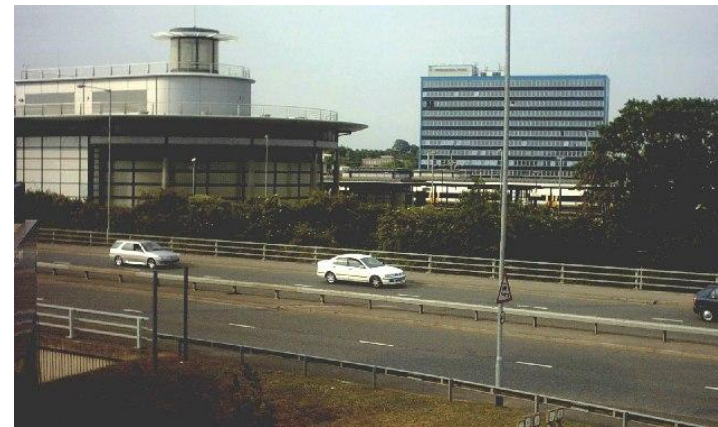
### Prospective partners – 'Friends of'

Industry / Commercial interests / Local residents / Developers

## ***Our Stour* Character Area 4: International Quarter**

**Great Stour: Trumpet Bridge to Station Approach (Hitachi Bridge) 455 metres**

**East Stour: Romney Marsh Road to Station Approach (Hitachi Bridge) 257 metres**



## Existing character

From Trumpet Bridge the River Stour passes between industrial units and the car park for the International Station before passing under the Romney Marsh Road elevated dual carriageway. From here it passes under the railway in a long, unwelcoming underpass, emerging adjacent to the forecourt of the International Station. In all there are ten crossings of the Great Stour along this short length.

This location used to be the historic confluence of Ashford's two principal rivers: the Great Stour and East Stour. Back in the 15<sup>th</sup> century an artificial cut was made to create the stretch on the western side – the current route of the Great Stour. This cut is shown on the 1898 Ordnance Survey map as the 'Lords Cut'. The reason behind the cut was based on a need to improve the flow of water to the mill at the bottom of East Hill. The cut is a different character to the rest of the Stour, being deep and slow flowing. As such the channel tends to silt up, water quality deteriorates and vegetation chokes the natural habitat.

There is still a link between the two rivers that operates to balance flows during times of flood. Confusingly also called 'The Cut' this concrete channel is all-but hidden between the railway bridges.

There is a certain irony in that this stretch of the River Stour is probably the least loved and worst in terms of habitat, yet it is the first impression many visitors to Ashford – including international visitors - get of the river and of the town. It is also an important link



for pedestrians and cyclists as it is one of the few places the railways can be crossed. Although it should be noted that there is no access along the Great Stour under the railway – the access follows the East Stour.

The underpasses are particularly unattractive and sever the continuity of the river corridor for humans and wildlife. The distance from the domestic station to the Outlet Shopping Centre – Ashford's most popular visitor attraction – is about 600 metres yet visitors are not encouraged to walk.



### **Vision and opportunities**

The vision for this area should be to create a visually attractive and welcoming international gateway to Ashford.

Because this area is the least looked after it presents the greatest opportunity for improvement.

The proximity of the two rivers – the Great Stour and East Stour – suggests they should both be included in the overall vision for the area.

The Great Stour passes the site of the former B & Q store. This area is visually unattractive and the river is constrained. As this site is redeveloped the opportunity should be taken to make more space for the river for the benefit of flood risk, habit and amenity, through river terracing and habitat improvements / creation.

The area is already well-used by cyclists and pedestrians as it is one of the few crossing points of the railway. More could be done to improve the experience of users, especially through the tunnels – perhaps better lighting, community arts etc. And improvements to way-marking would assist.

The tunnels are not only unattractive to humans they offer little in terms of habitat. Creating habitat within the tunnels, using innovative techniques to instigate planted habitats, will assist migration.

Given the relatively high footfall in this area it potentially could support commercial activities. The High Speed 1 (HS1) bridge is at a high level and there is potentially scope beneath to accommodate uses similar to Transport for London's railway arches project. It is estimated that about 8,000 ft<sup>2</sup> could be provided. Units in London are available from 500 ft<sup>2</sup>. Design would need to be flood resilient. These units could perhaps house arts and crafts galleries or cycle hire / repair facilities.



The East Stour under the railway is a popular place for young people to gather for paddling and informal fishing. The use has caused erosion to the river banks. Providing steps and platforms would improve access and reduce damage to the river banks.

Improvements to the Station Forecourt should include riverside gardens and terracing.

### **Potential Specific Projects**

1. Station Forecourt - enhancement to domestic station forecourt including river garden, terracing and wetland habitat creation.
2. East Stour Pathway – new cycleway / footpath on west bank of East Stour to improve north / south access between station and Civic Centre.
3. International Gateway Space – improved environs for the International Station to improve orientation and sense of place for pedestrians & cyclists negotiating connections under the rail & road bridges; improve gateway approach for local/national & international visitors. Include formal gardens to add colour.
4. Habitat improvements – in channel and riverbank improvements, including improved access and fishing / viewing platforms.
5. Tunnel treatment – improve lighting and install public art to enhance security and experience of tunnels.
6. Tunnel habitat creation - use innovative techniques to instigate planted habitats to encourage migration.
7. Making space for water at former B & Q site – when the site is redeveloped set buildings back from river and construct river terracing. Improve the interface with Bowen's Field.

8. The Railway Arches – incorporate commercial units under the High Speed 1 viaduct.

### **Activities to be encouraged**

Walking, jogging, dog-walking.

Wildlife interaction – bird watching, river observation, informal fishing.

Cycling, recreational and commuting.

Sitting-out.

Informal greenspace and formal gardens.

Commercial activities – arts and crafts, cycle hire.

Public art.

### **Prospective partners – ‘Friends of’**

Railway companies / Industry / Commercial interests – Macarthur Glen? Hitachi? / Local residents / Developers – particularly on former B & Q site.

## ***Our Stour* Character Area 5: Civic Quarter (including Commercial Quarter and East Hill)**

**Great Stour: Station Approach (Hitachi Bridge) – Mace Lane 638 metres**

**East Stour: Station Approach (Hitachi Bridge) - Mace Lane 753 metres**



## **Existing character**

This area is essentially an island formed by the Great Stour and East Stour. During extreme flood events virtually the whole island is inundated. Any proposals for the area would need to be flood resilient.

The island is occupied by the recently re-modelled Stour Centre, the Civic Centre, a skate park, extensive car parking and landscaped areas. The park is divided into two – South Park and North Park - with the Stour Centre and Civic Centre between the two.

South Park is low-lying and it is likely this was flood meadow. A small embankment runs along the west bank of East Stour though this does not prevent the area from flooding in extreme events. An area to the east of the East Stour is also low-lying, generally under-valued, greenspace

A Tithe map of 1843 identifies the land forming North Park as being pasture fields at that time. In this pastoral landscape a much needed wood supply was gained through the growing of willows along the river edge, also helping to stabilise the river bank. These willows still exist today and show clear signs of having been cut in the traditional way, known as pollarding, where the whole crown is cut to a height of about two meters from ground level. It grows back like a shaving brush effect, and provides an ideal habitat for birds, lichen and insects. In these modern times mechanical means as opposed to grazing cattle are relied upon to keep the grass neatly mown.

At the far end of North Park stands Pledges Mill. A mill has occupied this site at least since the Domesday book of 1086. The existing building dates from 1864 and was one of two large mills owned by Lawrence Pledge. As alternative power sources progressed during the 20th century, water mills declined generally. By the early 1970s Pledge's Mill lay derelict and, following a fire in 1974, it was renovated and turned into a night club. The weir at Pledges Mill is a major obstruction to flow and to fish passage; it is thought the weir is one of the main reasons that the river upstream of Ashford is of poor ecological status. On the opposite bank to the nightclub is Star Inn.



The character of the area is set to change with the proposed development of a 'Commercial Quarter' on the west bank of the Great Stour between the station and Tannery Lane. Tannery Lane (formerly Tanyard Lane) itself is quite utilitarian in appearance. Whist

House on Tannery Lane is a Grade II\* listed riverside house dating from 1707. It is a two-storied, Georgian fronted, red brick building with steep, hipped tile roof.

### **Vision and opportunities**

The vision for this area could be to re-establish town meadows in South Park for the benefit of wildlife and flood risk, introducing an evocative landscape character and setting to the Civic Quarter. Pollarded willows could be reintroduced, with the timber used as a renewable energy source.

The area provides a comprehensive recreational offer with the Stour Centre and adjacent Skate Park. Further recreational uses could be encouraged.

The Lord's Cut suffers from poor flow and water quality due to the obstruction to flow at Pledges Mill. Opportunities should be taken to improve the flow through Lord's Cut and to restore fish passage. At the same time the area at the bottom of East Hill incorporating the Star Inn and the nightclub could be enhanced. The possibility of generating hydropower could be investigated.

The riverside adjacent to the proposed Commercial Quarter could be enhanced. This could be a more formal edge giving a different character than other parts of the town.



The access and way-finding could be improved on all sides of the river to enhance use of the civic amenity, including provision of a cycleway beneath Tannery Lane.

North Park could become more formal within the 'lozenge' - of a similar character to the Memorial Gardens.

Whist House is central to the *Our Stour* Character Areas and could be a focal point for community groups, volunteering activities and raising awareness of the river. The Alan Baxter & Associates Ashford Town Centre Character Appraisal 2006 identified that Whist House has been vacant for some time, but is also still in relatively good condition and could be put to a new use. Furthermore, this building in particular represents an opportunity to revitalise a historic landmark on an otherwise uninspiring street.



## Potential Specific Projects

1. South Park Town Meadows project: establish a strong riverside setting to the town in this strategic location. Enhance recreational uses and increase routes through and into the park. Set-back the flood embankment and plant more willows for pollarding.
2. Enhanced North park: strengthen the formal geometry of the existing park layout with formal tree planting and new focal point. Soften the river bank with long grassland management to enhance the contrast between the more formal interior of the 'lozenge' and improve the gradation of riverine and terrestrial habitats.
3. Pedestrian enhancement - define a stronger pedestrian and cycle environment to prioritise routes through the car park and across the river.
4. Streetscape enhancement - enhance the streetscape on East Hill and Mace Lane adjacent to The Flour Mill / Star Inn with improved pedestrian / cycle prioritisation across Mace Lane.
5. Flour Mill revitalisation - maximise the potential of The Flour Mill / Star Inn as a cultural or community anchor at this strategic junction between River and Town.
6. Tannery Lane underpass - create cycle path under Tannery Lane road bridge to provide a continuous link by clearing vegetation from the north & south approaches and establishing a well lit suitable environment beneath.
7. Civic Centre Approach - improve pedestrian approach / entrance space to the Civic Centre from Tannery Lane: consider removal of traffic engineered barriers where possible, tree planting, way-finding and improved pedestrian crossings to link river routes.

8. Develop an appropriate Commercial Quarter riverside, which protects riverine habitats whilst allowing strategic points of visual access to the river and greenspace of the Civic Quarter.
9. Town Meadows (East) - extension of the meadow environment to the east of the East Stour, including enhanced play provision, and making the river the centre of the area rather than the edge.
10. Pledges Mill Weir Removal: improve water quality and flow of the Great Stour; remove obstruction to fish passage.  
Investigate whether hydropower could be incorporated. Introduce two-stage channels and meanders upstream of mill.
11. Whist House improvements.

### **Activities to be encouraged**

Walking, jogging.

Wildlife interaction – bird watching, river observation.

Cycling - recreational and commuting.

Sitting-out.

Alfresco dining.

Street theatre / performing arts.

Informal greenspace / play areas and formal gardens.

Skateboarding.

Education.

**Prospective partners – ‘Friends of’**

Local residents / Developers – particularly on Commercial Quarter / Owners of the Nightclub and pub / Businesses in East Hill / Ashford School.



## Our Stour Character Area 6: Queen Mother's Park (Martyrs' Field)

Great Stour: Mace Lane – M20 649 metres



### Existing character

Leaving North Park in the direction of Mace Lane, you will come to a place where the river used to be crossed via a ford, before any bridge was built. This is one of several locations that lay claim to being the ancient ford from which Ashford gained its name. The rivers pass under Mace Lane / Hythe Road (A282) in two separate channels but quickly join to form one river.

The area immediately downstream of Mace Lane is known as Martyrs' Field: it has a gruesome past. During the 16th century, a number of local people were burnt at the stake for their religious beliefs. In remembrance of these people there is a bed of roses and 'The Martyr's Seat'. The seat was erected in 1974 and was funded by Mrs Lucy Fagg; the seat was refurbished in 2005 by the Council. On the opposite bank to Martyrs' Field is a low-grade industrial / commercial estate – Riverside Industrial Park.

The Queen Mother's Park, known previously as Henwood Nature Park, is an area that has been set aside for informal relaxation with a pleasant riverside walk. Historic maps suggest that in the late 19th century this area was sheep pasture. This rural past is celebrated by one of a series of three sculptures installed in 2007 by Martin Brockman and Mark Sidders as part of the Ashford Green Corridor project. In the early 1980s the Kent Trust for Nature Conservation improved the habitats in the park. There are areas that have been set aside for native wild flowers and natural habitat. It is an important part of the Green Corridor with a mixture of meadow grass and shrubbery. The park is linear in form and, as elsewhere in Ashford, the river forms a boundary edge rather than being integral to the park setting.

There is a high embankment alongside the right bank of the river that constrains the river corridor and obstructs river views. The Kentish Stour Countryside Partnership and the Environment Agency have recently (2008/09) undertaken in-channel works to improve the river habitat in discrete locations. Just upstream of the M20 motorway about 50 metres of the river bank has been re-profiled. Before the restoration the bank was very steep with very little marginal habitat. The re-profiled section has now been planted with native plant species and will be allowed to establish into a reed bed which will provide a habitat for wildlife such as the water vole.

Before



During



A green corridor at Gore Hill links the river corridor with Bybrook Cemetery. This is the most north-westerly point of the Ashford Green Corridor.

The river passes under the M20 with a cyclepath cantilevered out over the river to allow cyclists and pedestrians to follow the river to the north east.

### **Vision and opportunities**

The vision for this area could be to retain local amenity and access for existing and new communities, whilst enhancing the nature conservation value.

Perhaps more could be made of the historic Martyrs' Field?

The dry meadow character of Queen Mother's Park could be expanded. Or wetter habitats created.

The riverine habitats could be protected and enhanced, extending the in-channel work already completed.

Removal of the high embankment could improve floodplain capacity and restore river views.

The green link to the cemetery could be improved.

Additional footpath / cyclepath crossing points of the river would aid east – west movement and encourage circular walks.

If Riverside Industrial Park should ever be redeveloped the opportunity should be taken to set development back from the river. Further art could be incorporated into the park to give additional interest.

Street lighting could be made more discrete.

### **Potential Specific Projects**

1. Bund removal – remove the bund from the right bank and re-profile the riverbank upstream of the M20 to create larger emergent / marginal riverine habitats, and make space for water.



2. Bund relocation - the removed material could form a new dry access to the east of Queen Mother's Park which would have the added advantage of screening Henwood Industrial Estate and protecting the estate from flooding during extreme events.
3. Dry meadows extension – extend the dry meadows with secondary mown exploratory paths.
4. Circular Walks Bridge – construct a new feature footbridge across the river to allow for circular walks within the park and draw in visitors from potential new development on the west bank.
5. West Fields – extend the meadow character to the west bank of the river and create secondary paths for local circular walks.
6. M20 Tunnel treatment – enhance the underpass environment and sense of safety. Integrate public art, way-finding and lighting projects.
7. Gore Hill – strengthen the green link between the river corridor and Bybrook cemetery.

### **Activities to be encouraged**

Walking, jogging, dog-walking.

Wildlife interaction – bird watching, river observation.

Cycling - recreational and commuting.

Informal greenspace for sitting-out.

### **Prospective partners – 'Friends of'**

Local residents / Developers – particularly on Riverside Industrial Estate / Henwood & Mace Industrial Estate businesses – including Kent Fire & Rescue

## **Our Stour Character Area 7: East Stour South (aka Whitewater Causeway)**

**East Stour: Norman Road to Romney Marsh Road      665 metres**



### **Existing character**

In Gillespies' Town Centre Riverside Landscapes Vision, the whole of the East Stour area south of the railway (International Gateway) is termed the Whitewater Causeway to reflect the fact that the Whitewater Dyke, a tributary of the East Stour, is a well

defined north south route. In fact the area is a complex area where four rivers meet. Each of these has distinctive characteristics and for the purposes of *Our Stour* River Character Areas have been sub-divided.

Progressing upstream from Romney Marsh Road the East Stour is bounded on the west bank by commercial / industrial uses. Although the west bank is occupied there is little access to the river from this side. As such, the west bank provides an undisturbed habitat. The east bank has a riverside path / cyclepath and is generally more active.

At the end of Torrington Road lies the Riverside Inn, though little is made of the pub's riverside location. A bridge over the river leads to a high-level bridge over the Romney Marsh Road which links to the Designer Outlet Centre – Ashford's most distinctive building (designed by Lord Richard Rogers) and most popular visitor attraction. As has been mentioned, from the domestic station to the Outlet Shopping Centre is about 600 metres yet visitors are not encouraged to walk; the route is currently ill-defined. The area between the East Stour and the Romney Marsh Road is at risk of flooding and is partly paved for car parking and partly used for low-grade grazing.

The residential area on the west bank, comprising Torrington Road, Riversdale Road, Whitfield Road, South Stour Avenue, Eastmead Avenue and Providence Street, has Ashford's largest concentration of properties at risk of flooding, with some properties at risk of flooding from an event as frequent as a 1 in 20 year flood. There are also potential in-fill development sites – both residential and employment – that currently cannot progress due to flood risk.

Along this whole length the river is deeply incised with little visual, amenity or habitat value. The river is a popular attraction for informal fishing by children but the access is poor and as a result the banks are worn. Beneath Romney Marsh Road is a particularly popular gathering spot.

### **Vision and opportunities**

The vision for this area could be to improve the link between the station and the Outlet Centre, exploiting the linear connectivity of the river corridor, to make it a more active route and pleasurable experience. In particular way-marking and lighting could be improved, especially through the underpass.

The west bank buffer zone could be protected and enhanced to encourage biodiversity.

Terracing and tree planting could give better definition to the river's edge adjacent to the footpath on the east bank.

Access platforms and steps could be provided for young anglers to access the river. This may concentrate the activity and reduce the risk of bank erosion in less accessible areas.

The South Stour residential / employment area could benefit from new flood risk management works – perhaps a new flood wall?

The car parking and low grade grazing could be re-configured as open-space to provide additional flood storage.

### Potential Specific Projects

1. East Bank cycle route – enhance the cycle route setting with new tree planting and terraced east bank to create a more appropriate stylised ecological edge and identifiable sinuous & efficient cycling / walking corridor.
2. West Bank naturalisation - protect and enhance the bio-diverse west bank buffer zone, prioritising habitat creation.
3. Way-marking - improve cycle and pedestrian route definition via branding, way-finding and distinctive lighting to help define the route from the station to the Designer Outlet site.
4. Romney Marsh Road - improve underpass environment: lighting and way-finding beneath the Romney Marsh Road. Improve access to water level through provision of steps and platforms.
5. Riverside Inn – improvements to the local setting of the pub.
6. South Stour Flood Risk Management Scheme – a new wall and associated infrastructure to protect the South Stour area from flooding.

### Activities to be encouraged

Walking, jogging, dog-walking.

Wildlife interaction – bird watching, river observation, informal fishing

Cycling - recreational and commuting.

Sitting-out / alfresco dining at Riverside Inn.

### Prospective partners 'Friends of'

Local residents / B & Q and other commercial / developers / Designer Outlet Centre / Riverside Inn

## Our Stour Character Area 8: Aylesford Stream (Boys Hall and Aylesford Green)

Aylesford Stream: A2070 Bad Munstereifel Road to the Railway Bridge (Crowbridge Road) 1,300 metres



### Existing character

The source of the Aylesford Stream is north of the M20 close to the William Harvey hospital. It runs in an easterly direction for approximately 5km before entering the East Stour just downstream of the Romney Marsh Road close to the Designer Outlet Centre.

For the purposes of this *Our Stour* River Character Area assessment the river has been divided into two distinct reaches, Area 8 from the A2070 Bad Munstereifel Road to the Railway Bridge; and Area 9 from the railway bridge to the confluence with the East Stour.

The Aylesford Stream emerges from under the Bad Munstereifel Road in a single channel but soon splits into two, one being a mill race. Old maps show a corn mill where Sevington Lane crossed that stream and a weir is still visible today. As it runs through Aylesford Green, the watercourse remains quite natural as it slowly meanders through the surrounding woodland and grassland. Whilst the woodland is home to small mammals such as wood mice and bank voles, the bankside vegetation provides good habitat for damselflies, dragonflies and birds.

Although not directly adjacent to the Aylesford Stream, one of the most important houses in the area is Boys Hall. This is a Jacobean Manor house originally built in 1616 by the Boys family (the original family name was De Bois, but it was gradually anglicised), with Victorian additions made in 1833. The impressive building is currently a hotel. On passing through Aylesford Green the stream is a popular place for children paddling and fishing for tiddlers and tadpoles.

### **Vision and opportunities**

The vision for this area could be to retain and enhance its existing character.

Access platforms and steps could be provided for young anglers to access the stream. This may concentrate the activity and reduce the risk of bank erosion in less accessible areas.

### **Potential Specific Projects**

1. To be identified.

### **Activities to be encouraged**

Walking, jogging, dog-walking.

Wildlife interaction – bird watching, river observation, informal fishing

Cycling - recreational and commuting.

Paddling

### **Prospective partners ‘Friends of’**

Local residents / Boy’s Hall / South Willesborough and Newtown Environment Group (SWANEG)



## Our Stour Character Area 9: Aylesford Stream (Newtown)

Aylesford Stream: Railway Bridge (Crowbridge Road) to Romney Marsh Road 1,400 metres



## Existing character

Ashford became a railway town in the 19th century and as a consequence new housing was required for railway workers. Newtown (originally called Alfred Town) was built for this purpose. It had its own schools, shops, baths and other facilities. The railway works even had an influence on Ashford's watercourses.

On emerging from the railway bridge the stream takes a swift right hand turn next to Crowbridge Road. The watercourse was diverted at a time when Newtown Works were active in the railway industry and needed a constant supply of water. Thus, as opposed to running its original route across the bottom of Cudworth Road, it now makes a sharp bend towards the old railway works. As with many watercourses that have historically been diverted, during periods of flood the water tends to revert to its previous course. Buildings built on the historic course are potentially at risk to flooding.

Opposite the main entrance into the railway works, marked by a large clock, is Newtown Green. This greenspace houses a Railway Wheel monument that marks the importance of the railway to the area, and was a favourite venue for open air entertainment and still is today. It hosted regular vegetable and flower shows.

This area of South Willesborough was historically known as 'Frog's Island', believed to derive from the numerous frogs that used to inhabit the area when it was a patchwork of marshy fields with wildlife rich drainage ditches in between. The area immediately adjacent to the stream is known locally as Gas House Fields.

Alongside the Aylesford Stream, at the bottom of Cudworth Road, lies the South Willesborough and Newtown (SWAN) Community Centre. This has recently (2010) benefited from extensive refurbishment. Neighbouring the SWAN Centre is Waterside Youth and Children's Centre - a brand new community facility for the South Willesborough and Newtown communities to help boost the area's previously poor provision for children and young people. The Waterside Centre includes a multi-use games area, a new SureStart Children's Centre and a sports youth club.

The recreation ground has been transformed from a floodplain with football pitches bisected by river channels into a wildlife-rich public park. Fishing platforms and seating areas carved into the river channels allow full DDA access to the water's edge. Two elegant, low maintenance bridges sit comfortably in the flat landscape. New tree lined paths, native woodland, wet meadows, scrapes and picnic areas add to the new park. The key aims of the design were to improve access, contact with nature and reinstate disappearing Kentish landscape types while meeting flooding requirements. This included recreating relic apple orchards, beech woodland, hedgerows and wildflower meadows. The rivers were cleared of invasive species and sown with native wildflowers, which are now managed by a local environmental group (SWANEG).

The above works demonstrate what can be achieved – in a relatively short time. For example, the installation of 'scrapes' - shallow wet areas, close to Cudworth Road and Herbert Road have attracted an abundance of wildlife. In the summer months these scrapes sit against a backdrop of wildflowers reintroduced to the site - the Oxeye daisy making for a particularly beautiful display. Looking at old maps of the area this green space still retains the same shape as the original fields on the earliest Ordnance Survey maps. These maps also show that land in this area was once used for orchards - a traditional landscape that has been brought back by the recently planted community orchard.





## **Vision and opportunities**

Newtown Works is set to be developed and the opportunity should be taken to integrate the new community with the existing one.

Planning permission has been granted for a hotel south of Asda on the banks of the Aylesford Stream, incorporating a new bridge and wildlife viewing platform. Permission has also been granted for a new cycleway to link to Park Farm to the south.

Willesborough Dykes, to the south of the Aylesford Stream, has been identified as one of three strategic parks to serve Ashford.

The vision for this area could be to retain and enhance its existing character, building on the good work that has been achieved in recent years.

## **Potential Specific Projects**

1. Improve cycle route definition via branding, way-finding and distinctive lighting to help define the route through the traffic engineered Designer Outlet sites.
2. New bridge over Aylesford Stream to extend routes south across Willesborough Dykes wetland towards Cheeseman's Green.
3. Improve railway underpass environment: lighting and way-finding

**Activities to be encouraged**

Walking, jogging, dog-walking.

Wildlife interaction – bird watching, river observation, informal fishing

Cycling - recreational and commuting.

**Prospective partners – ‘Friends of’**

Local residents / South Willesborough and Newtown Environment Group (SWANEG) / Developers (Newtown) / New hotel / Asda / Designer Outlet Centre

## ***Our Stour* Character Area 11: Canal District**

**Whitewater Dyke:            Malcolm Sargent Road to Norman Road: 1,000 metres**



## Existing character

The Whitewater Dyke runs from its source near Shadoxhurst for 5.6 kilometers to the confluence with the East Stour just south of Norman Road.

The name 'Whitewater' conjures images of swiftly flowing water, rapids and hair-raising raft rides; the reality couldn't be further removed. The Whitewater Dyke is a heavily engineered, narrow, slow flowing watercourse traversing flat floodplains.

The original route of the Whitewater Dyke is thought to be different than that currently taken, and the remnants of the old course are still evident within the proposed Willesborough Dykes Nature Park. After passing under Malcolm Sargent Road the river used to take an easterly course to join the East Stour upstream of the Hastings Railway. Now the river runs virtually south to north to join the East Stour approximately 1.2 kilometres further downstream than it used to.

Although the Whitewater Dyke between the Malcolm Sargent Road and Norman Road is essentially an artificial channel the changes happened long enough ago – in excess of 100 years – to ensure the river has become naturalised. Indeed, the habitat along the Whitewater Dyke has been identified as particularly valuable.

Land to either side of the channel is flood prone on a regular basis and is currently used for poor grade grazing. A cycleway extends along the west bank of the watercourse in a southerly direction from Norman Road but this ends abruptly – the definitive



‘Road to Nowhere’. The adjacent Romney Marsh Road is a busy dual carriageway on an embankment that disconnects the Whitewater Dyke from the nearby Willesborough Dykes.

To the western edge of the floodplain is Beaver Road Industrial Estate. This forms a poor-quality boundary and visually unappealing edge.

### **Vision and opportunities**

The ‘Canal District’ is the name given to a potential major mixed-use development opportunity close to the International Station and adjacent to the proposed Willesborough Dykes Nature Park, albeit that the site is in a low-lying, flood prone area in the south east of Ashford. The site is bisected by the Whitewater Dyke. Most of the site is Flood Zone 3 that is High Probability, with a large proportion of the site being Flood Zone 3b, Functional Floodplain.

The site is primarily ‘greenfield’ and is used for grazing. Under national planning policy on development and flood risk, much of the site – as it currently stands - would not be considered suitable for anything except water-compatible development, such as open space for recreation. Applying a sequential approach, the site would be considered one of the least appropriate locations for more vulnerable development such as housing.

Just as the name ‘Whitewater Dyke’ is misleading the ‘canal’ sobriquet is confusing; there are no canals in the area, though the Whitewater Dyke, a natural watercourse, has been heavily engineered and straightened – effectively canalised.

The potential for the Canal District emerged during the formation of the Greater Ashford Development Framework (GADF April 2005), when it was initially identified as possibly accommodating 3,500 houses and 2,200 jobs. The support for development in the area stemmed from its proximity to the town centre, International Station and Smartlink route; reinforcing the 'compact growth model' that Ashford wished to progress. It was contended that the site offered the opportunity to develop a unique mixed-use community that would put Ashford 'on-the-map'. The GADF recognised the constraints that flood risk posed and modified the proposals, reducing the aspirations to 1,800 houses and 750 jobs. Development would be confined to west of the Romney Marsh Road, with the area to the east set-aside for the Willesborough Dykes Nature Park.

The Canal District has been omitted from the planning horizon to post 2016 to give time to investigate the potential further.

The 'vision' for this area should be that if development is to take place it will need to be exemplary. We envisage a high-quality; innovative, sustainable mixed-use development that can be used to demonstrate how development in flood risk areas can be done. Just as Ashford has become the destination for others to see how shared space can be achieved, the Canal District could be where developers come to see how Long-term initiatives for flood risk environments (LIfE) projects can be built. This will be increasingly important as we adapt to meet the challenges of climate change.

Should the Canal District come forward it gives tremendous opportunity to enhance the riverside environs for people and wildlife, whilst managing flood risk and water quality.

Until such time there are smaller scale interventions that could be considered.

### Potential Specific Projects

1. The Whitewater Dyke could be 'terraced' to form new emergent habitat.
2. Complete the cycleway along the west bank and improve cycle route definition via branding, way-finding and distinctive lighting.
3. Scrapes could be formed within the grassy areas to augment wetland habitat.

### Activities to be encouraged

Walking, jogging, dog-walking.

Wildlife interaction – bird watching, river observation

Cycling - recreational and commuting.

### Prospective partners – 'Friends of'

Local residents / South Willesborough and Newtown Environment Group (SWANEG) / Developers (Canal District) / Beaver Road Industrial Estate

## ***Our Stour Character Area D: Little Burton***

**Great Stour: M20 to Ashford / Canterbury Railway: 1,200 metres**



### **Existing character**

The River Stour downstream of the M20 flows in a north-easterly and then easterly direction. It is characterised by a tree-lined channel and wide floodplain. To the north of the river lies the sports pitches associated with Ashford Rugby Club, and to the south Bybrook Wastewater Treatment Works operated by Southern Water Services. The treatment works has recently received substantial investment to improve the quality of the effluent - the treated effluent from the works discharges to the river along this

length. A tributary known as the Bockhanger Dyke enters the Stour from the north bank. Ashford Rugby Club has pitches within the river corridor that ensure the area remains green.

Further downstream on the northbank is the residential development known as Little Burton Farm. Open space associated with the development stretches down to the river and incorporates a large pond that performs a sustainable drainage function, and planted woodland. Access is easy alongside the river – including National Cycle Route 18 - and into the open space next to the Little Burton housing estate. River habitats are good and there are many mature trees, including the species of willow used for making cricket bats, which is called – appropriately - cricket bat willow!

As recently as 1992, this land was farmed - there was a large orchard where the houses now stand - now there is a strong, thriving community growing where once there were crops.

The cycleway / footpath finishes at the railway bridge. Ideally the route would continue through to the proposed Conningbrook Park and beyond to link up with the Great Stour Way to Canterbury.

Immediately downstream of the railway, Givaudan – the international flavours and fragrance company – has created the Great Stour Meadow wildlife trail. This is an excellent example of riverside habitat creation that could serve as an exemplar for other locations along Ashford's Green Corridor. And yet further downstream is Conningbrook Park, one of Ashford's strategic parks. The river in this area is slow flowing due to being widened in the past. The low flow causes siltation and weedgrowth.

## **Vision and opportunities**

Immediately downstream of the motorway is an area of rough ground that could be enhanced to provide wetland habitat, better public access and, perhaps, more intensive use. The area would benefit from better screening from the M20. Given the wide floodplain in this area, the river corridor is likely to remain free from built development. The establishment of wetland and woodland along the Little Burton frontage, and again at the Givaudan site, shows what can be achieved. This approach could be adopted elsewhere on this stretch. Including, perhaps, in-channel works.

The river channel is quite deeply incised with little opportunity for interaction with the water. Public access to the river could be improved in selected locations. Bank terracing could help improve habitat and flow.

The Bockhanger Dyke could be enhanced.

The National Cycleway 18 is an important route and should be maintained and enhanced. Where possible the high chain-link security fencing should be removed / replaced. The links from the town out to Conningbrook Park, including way-marking, could be improved. Options for crossing the railway should be investigated.

The habitat in the rugby club grounds could be improved, perhaps by using hedging as natural screening and security, as could that along the treatment works frontage.

Further tree-planting could be undertaken to provide 'fingers' of shelter leading down to the river. Further willows for pollarding could be incorporated.

The lake at Little Burton, whilst a visually attractive feature, has artificial, steep banks, that are unattractive to wildlife. More natural banks could be provided.

### Potential Specific Projects

1. In-channel works and bank terracing to improve flow and support river banks at Little Burton.
2. Improve cycle route definition via branding, way-finding and distinctive lighting. Extend access beyond the railway.
3. Remove / replace chain-link fencing with natural barriers.

### Activities to be encouraged

Walking, jogging, dog-walking.

Wildlife interaction – bird watching, river observation

Cycling - recreational and commuting.

### Prospective partners – 'Friends of'

Local residents / Givaudan / Rugby Club / Southern Water Services

## Other potential *Our Stour* Character Areas

As well as the *Our Stour* Character Areas identified above there are other stretches of waterways that could potentially benefit from this approach.

### Whitewater Dyke

The Whitewater Dyke upstream of Malcolm Sargent Road passes between the historic settlement of Kingsnorth and the new community at Westhawk Farm. The roads on the new estate have roman names reflecting the fact that a roman road exists in the vicinity. The river is deeply incised and is often hidden. The sustainable drainage system installed as part of the Westhawk Farm development provide additional wetland habitat close to the river and could be included in any Character Area undertakings.

### Hart Dyke

The Hart Dyke runs along the northern edge of the Park Farm residential area for over 1 km. Alongside the natural watercourse runs an artificial drainage channel or swale, and alongside both runs a popular footpath. The area to the north of the Hart Dyke is grazing. There is opportunity here to create more wetland or, perhaps, standing water, as it links naturally to the Willesborough Dykes Nature Park.



### **Singleton Stream**

The Singleton Stream is an ephemeral watercourse that rises close to John Wesley CoE Methodist Primary School. The channel is first visible to the north of the Wesley School Road.(TQ 9880 4108) which leads to the Singleton Environmental Centre. Here it runs in the northerly direction forming the boundary between the Highland Park development on the western (left) bank and a vacant site (Knoll Lane) on the right bank, currently (2011) used for rough grazing but due to be developed for housing and a community open space. It is known there used to be a pond in the grounds of the school that has been filled-in; this is the likely source of the watercourse. There is now no visible sign of the watercourse south of Wesley School Road.

The watercourse is extremely overgrown, barely visible through the undergrowth. The channel is typically no more than one metre wide with less than one metre high banks. 19<sup>th</sup> century maps of the area indicate that the area was at that time primarily agricultural with Singleton Manor being the only building of note. The fields and wooded areas were bounded by a network of small watercourses / ditches most of which are no longer in existence. In all, from its source to where it discharges to Singleton Lake, the watercourse is 1.1km long, about half of which is underground.

Singleton Stream is an under-valued and under-utilised watercourse that has suffered years of neglect. Recent development in the area has impacted on the inflow and it is likely the stream flows less now than it used to, though the watercourse was probably always ephemeral. This has an impact on the biodiversity present. That said, the historic course of the river provides a 'green-corridor' for both people and wildlife. Waterside paths are well used, particularly by families attending the two schools along its route.

Development in the area has ‘turned its back’ on the watercourse. This creates problems for future maintenance. It is likely that riparian ownership extends to the centre of the channel yet many properties on the left bank have fences on the top of the bank restricting access. It is important therefore to retain, and where possible, improve access provision.

Development opportunities and Ashford’s Green and Blue Grid Strategy offer an opportunity to make more of the watercourse. At the top end of the watercourse it may be possible to increase the inflow and retain water for longer by providing on-line storage. This water could discharge slowly – without increasing flood risk – thereby keeping the watercourse wetter for longer. The presence of water-borne wildlife in the SuDS feature in the grounds of Windsor Court show that these species could move in quite readily to appropriate habitat.

For much of its length the watercourse is overgrown and the lack of light penetration inhibits the growth of bank-side vegetation. Selective clearance could improve the visibility of the watercourse and encourage the growth of water-tolerant species. Immediately upstream of Great Chart Primary School a large fallen tree should be removed. Improvement to local drainage could reduce the incidence of water-logging in private gardens – particularly in Hedgerows.

Much of the watercourse is piped and opportunities should be sought to open-up the channel whenever the opportunity arises – though these will be limited. Proposals to further culvert the watercourse should be resisted except for access purposes. Within the grounds of Great Chart School there could be opportunities to create pond-dipping and such-like educational uses.

The moat at Singleton Manor is an important landmark that more could be made of, though, given it is in private ownership, this would require the co-operation of the owner.

### **Kennington Stream**

The Kennington Stream is sometimes known as Penlee or Pen Lee. It is a tributary of the Great Stour in north Ashford.

The stream runs from its source near Kennington, 2.3 km, past Penlee Point (the junction of the A28 and A251 roads) to the Great Stour, joining opposite Bybrook wastewater treatment works, adjacent to the M20. The watercourse passes through back gardens for much of its length and is culverted in parts.

### **Bockhanger Dyke**

The Bockhanger Dyke rises near Sandyhurst Lane in north Ashford and flows southerly through some former alderbeds into two on-line lakes known as Eureka Fisheries. The watercourse passes through the golf course before entering the Eureka Leisure complex. Here the watercourse passes through further lakes. Flowing along the northern edge of the M20 the watercourse enters the Great Stour close to Bybrook wastewater treatment works. The watercourse is about 3.6 km in length.

## Potential governance

There are potentially two options for governance of the *Our Stour* project: a new Rivers Trust or utilising the existing Kentish Stour Countryside Partnership.

### Rivers Trusts (with thanks to the association of Rivers Trusts)

Rivers trusts have been described as having “wet feet” because they have the reputation of being “doers”, concentrating much of their effort on practical catchment, river and fishery improvement works on the ground. In the history of almost every trust there has been a key trigger leading to their formation. As one might expect, the most common is a growing awareness of the wider environment or concern over the decline of certain key indicator species. In some cases following a pollution event where a successful claim has been made, a decision to form a new trust or similar body is often seen as a most appropriate and effective way forward in order to begin the restoration of the river.

Most rivers trusts start out as riparian, fishing or river associations by combining the use of best available science and data drawn from the Environment Agency etc. and their own resources, usually an energetic band of volunteers from angling clubs and riparian owners in each catchment or river basin. A river association covering the whole catchment provides an excellent means to identify problems and campaign for improvements. Typically though, having identified the problems, a separate and independent organisation with local knowledge and “wet feet” is required to implement solutions and deliver improvements on the ground.

A rivers trust is an independent organisation working for the public benefit. It is readily able to form partnerships without impeding the important campaigning benefit of angling and other interest groups. It can justifiably expect to gain charitable status, which confers several important benefits not always available to public bodies or vested interest groups.

Of vital importance is the public benefit, which can easily be demonstrated for larger catchments or groups of catchments, but may need greater consideration for smaller rivers and catchments where a few riparian interests may be perceived as deriving disproportionate benefits. Here angling clubs with wide public membership can be extremely helpful.

Typically, a trust starts with a Board of trustees overseeing and freely offering their time and a wealth of knowledge, covering important aspects of the trust's activity, including legal, business and accounting, fisheries, agriculture, tourism and education. As the trust develops, the demands on time become more onerous and, funds permitting, the Board will usually take the major step of appointing a small team of professionals, often beginning with a scientist or educationalist. This dedicated team will work very closely with the wider local community, including river owners and land managers, which is the path to success, healthy growth and sustainability.

The main benefits of a rivers trust with charitable status are broadly:

- It enables the rivers trust to display its charitable credentials, and not for commercial gain, so helping it to become a credible organisation worthy of attracting funds. Indeed many funding streams are limited to, or directed towards, charitable organisations.

- Charities are well placed to attract public funding grants. Further, private contributions to charitable organisations can be used as matched funding to lever down extra funding through grant aid, which can significantly add to the total amounts available to undertake environmental improvements. On a simple 50% matched funding basis, every £1 in grant couples with £1 from other sources to double the amount to be spent on the project.
- It is exempt from income/corporation tax, and can therefore make full use of its income.
- To be able to take advantage of tax concessions on donations made under Gift Aid. Additionally, donors do not generally pay inheritance tax on legacies or capital gains tax on assets donated to the charity.

Core funding for rivers trusts, like many charities, is a difficult issue and often there is insufficient riparian owner or angling wherewithal to sustain the work of trusts. As a result, rivers trusts generally need to apply for public funding to enable projects to be pursued and are becoming increasingly adept at matching the needs of the river with that of funding parameters. Although this leads to some compromise, it creates a spirit of partnership and desire to find sustainable environmental solutions to societal problems.

Of the trusts established so far, where eligible, many have successfully applied for European Union structural funds such as Interreg and Objectives One, Two and 5b or lottery funds. These grant sources, which often require matched funding and involve complex bidding procedures, have allowed many trusts to deliver major programs of physical works and practical, river improvements often in partnership with the Environment Agency, Natural England or the Countryside Council for Wales. From a government fund-holders position, partnerships like this can provide a very cost-effective conduit for delivery of environmental, social and economic outputs demonstrating strong community stakeholder involvement.

The “Association of River Trusts” for England and Wales was launched in 2001 following extensive consultation with existing charitable rivers trusts and other related interests. The need for such a body was a logical extension of the increasing level of liaison that had taken place for some time between established rivers trusts. As a result of the demands placed upon, ART was subsequently incorporated as a company limited by guarantee and granted registered charity status by the Charities Commission in 2004.

Trusts now represent over 30 catchments across a large part of England and Wales and new ones are continually forming. In addition, a similar movement is developing in Scotland, and there is excellent co-operation with the Rivers and Fisheries Trusts of Scotland (RAFTS).

#### ART Principles, Aims and Objectives...

The principles of ART are based on:

- Consent
- Subsidiarity - where ART will serve its members
- Partnership
- Education and technology transfer

The main aims of ART are, “to co-ordinate, represent and develop the aims and interests of the member Trusts in the promotion of sustainable, holistic and integrated catchment management and sound environmental practices, recognising the wider economic benefits for local communities and the value of education.”

Its objectives are to:

- Represent and promote the Rivers Trust movement nationally and internationally
- Develop best practice protocols, within a framework of sound science, partnership, avoiding duplication, consistency and a matrix approach
- Encourage innovation and the advancement of applied science
- Facilitate funding and working partnerships between Rivers Trusts and other organisations
- Guide and assist rivers trusts in making funding applications, either individually or in partnership with others
- Build capacity and sustainability in the Rivers Trust movement
- Form national and international networks to provide collaborative project and development opportunities for Rivers Trusts
- Guide and support new rivers trust start-ups
- Act as a conduit for communication, information exchange and technology transfer through projects, seminars, the web-site and e-newsletters
- Promote, guide and support good governance and issues of common interest to rivers trusts

There are currently no rivers trusts in Kent. The closest are the Sussex Ouse Conservation Society, the River Adur Conservation Society, the Wandle Trust and Thames 21 Ltd.



### **The Kentish Stour Countryside Partnership** (with thanks to KCC)

The Kentish Stour Countryside Partnership (KSCP) is a Countryside Management Partnership (or Project) (CMP). Across the country these have mainly been created through the partnership of local authorities with other organisations such as Natural England, The Environment Agency or commercial interests. They help manage habitat and landscapes in partnership with local communities.

In Kent there are nine CMPs providing a wide range of services across the county. These bring together many organisations to help maintain Kent's landscape and wildlife, as well as support Kent's communities. CMPs are the established approach to ensuring the conservation and enhancement of the Kent countryside. Kent County Council have a direct oversight of CMPs in the county.

Whilst each CMP is unique, and the actual services offered may differ in response to the landscape and community, the kind of work that is carried out includes:

- Providing advice and practical support to community initiatives to conserve landscape features and wildlife habitats.
- Working in partnership with statutory and non-statutory bodies in the management of special habitats in Kent, such as chalk grassland and lowland meadows.
- Providing opportunities for people of all ages to get involved on a voluntary basis in the conservation and enhancement of the Kent countryside.
- Working with landowners and local communities to raise funds for projects.

- Working with local communities and Kent's public rights of way department to improve access and recreation across the county.
- Encouraging landowners to play a positive role in enhancing the Kent countryside through conservation advice and the take up of schemes such as entry level and higher level environmental stewardship.
- Giving site visits, talks and presentations to groups to promote their work, and the value of the Kent countryside.
- Working with schools and youth groups to interpret their local landscape and environment through education.

Specifically, KSCP works closely with landowners and local communities to promote both landscape and nature conservation, and develop opportunities for appropriate countryside access and informal recreation throughout the Stour Valley. It operates as a working partnership of sponsoring organisations, project staff and local people.

Project staff have many years of experience of habitat management, practical conservation, working with farmers and local communities on a wide range of projects and can offer the latest grant information.

The KSCP is funded through a partnership of organisations. The core sponsors are: Kent County Council, Ashford Borough Council, Canterbury City Council, the Environment Agency and Robert Brett & Sons. The Project also receives Landfill Tax Credit and applies for grants from bodies such as the European Regional Development Fund.

CMPs have developed strong links with community groups all over the county, and KSCP is no exception. The flexible nature of the support that can be given to community groups allows help to be given as and when needed. From new groups hoping to make an impact on their local environment to well established groups with more complex needs, CMPs are able to provide services that create flourishing, sustainable local groups.

Examples of community groups:

- Local green space groups
- Parish Councils
- Schools
- Charitable trusts
- Community woodlands
- Allotment societies

Services offered:

The type of support offered can be tailored to the needs of each local community group but may include:

- Organising and running practical work days
- Advice on group structure, constitutions etc.
- Fund raising and grants
- Management plans
- Organising one-off events

- Project management
- Publicity and site interpretation

It can be seen that KSCP already successfully performs many of the functions envisaged for the organisation and oversight of community – ‘Friends of’ - groups within *Our Stour* and it is recommended that this approach is continued and supported; although best-practice from the rivers trusts should be adopted where appropriate.

## Case Study: RiverCare Groups (from Natural Environment White Paper)



RiverCare groups are made up of volunteers who want to improve environmental quality along their local river or waterside area. They clean-up litter, take surveys of local wildlife and carry out work to improve biodiversity. The scheme was created and is funded by Anglian Water, operated by Keep Britain Tidy and supported by the Environment Agency.

The groups rely on the commitment and passion of local people. They are self-sustaining, making links with local organisations such as Wildlife Trusts and councils to help them expand their activities. Volunteers receive training on running events and practical support on site, safety guidance, insurance cover and equipment.



There are nearly 50 registered RiverCare groups across the Anglian region, with more than 1,000 volunteers. In the last five years alone, volunteers have given 55,000 hours, collecting 32,000 bags of litter and 13,000 bulky items. They have made a significant contribution to the quality of the rivers and watercourses they work on. The groups report increased signs of otters, water voles and kingfishers. A member of Wensum RiverCare Group says: *“The dyke was absolutely full of litter. Over 40 tyres, a fridge, a sofa and a mattress were pulled out during the first clean-up. We are increasingly collecting less litter during our litter picks because the appearance is better and people are less inclined to drop litter when the area is clean.”*

