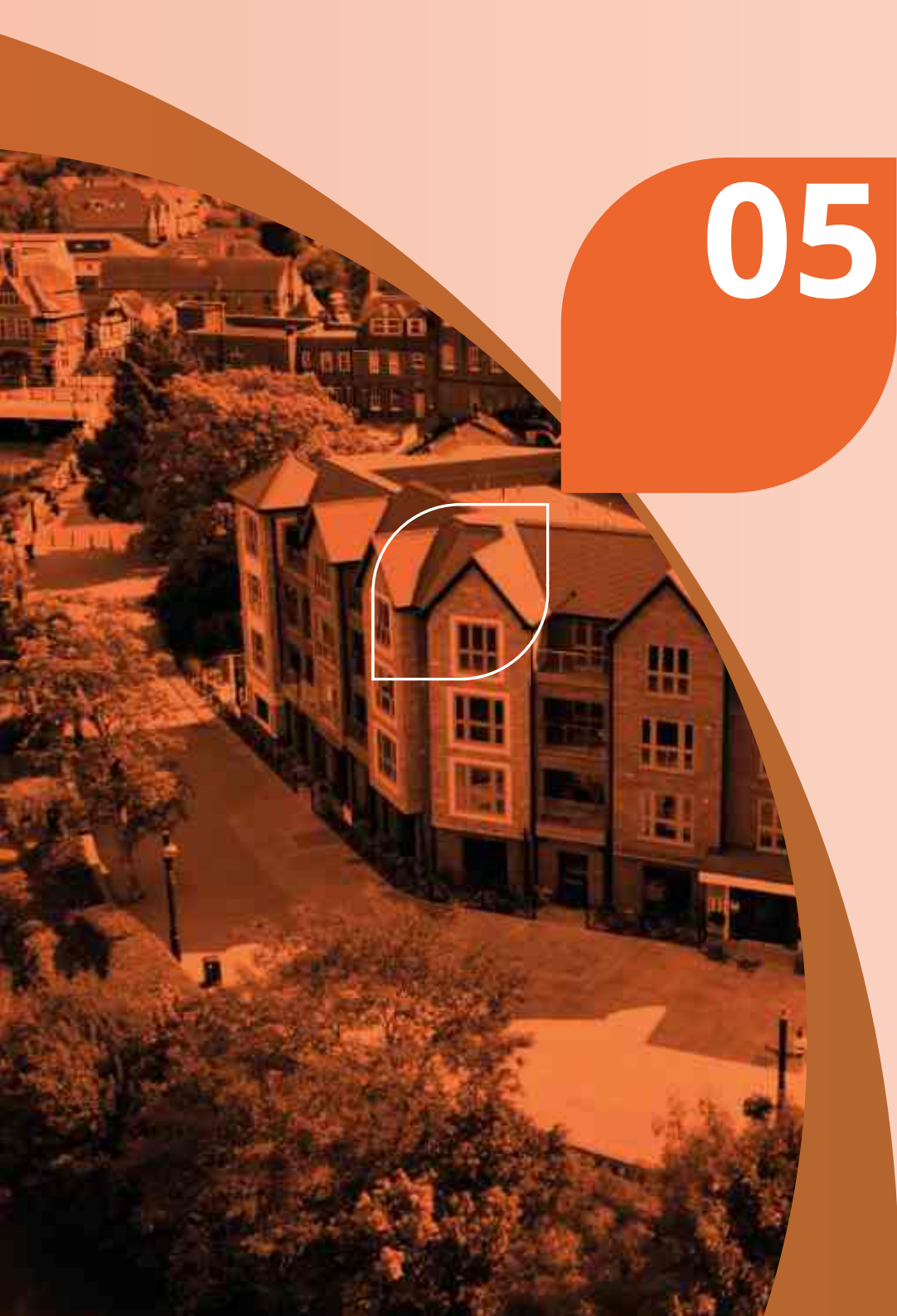




05

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05

SPATIAL STRATEGY FOR THE BOROUGH

Introduction



Spatial strategy

5.1 The spatial strategy sets out the overarching framework for the distribution of growth across the borough during the Local Plan period to 2042. It provides the basis for directing housing, employment, infrastructure and other development to the most appropriate locations, ensuring that growth is planned, coordinated and sustainable.

5.2 The strategy has been informed by a comprehensive evidence base, including the Sustainable Settlement Study, Green Belt Assessment, Strategic Flood Risk Assessment, Infrastructure Delivery Plan, transport evidence, environmental assessments and wider sustainability considerations. It responds to national planning policy requirements whilst reflecting the borough's specific characteristics, opportunities and constraints.





5.3 The strategy supports the delivery of the Local Plan Vision and Objectives by providing for the borough's identified housing, employment and infrastructure needs in a manner that promotes sustainable development, supports economic growth, addresses climate change and protects the borough's valued natural, historic and built environment.

5.4 Tonbridge and Malling borough includes a diverse range of settlements over a varied geography, and our spatial strategy seeks to deliver patterns of sustainable growth, in a way that supports climate resilience, protects and enhances the natural environment and heritage assets, provides opportunities for regeneration and promotes inclusive and prosperous communities.

5.5 The spatial strategy is informed by the settlement hierarchy, which identifies the relative sustainability of settlements across the borough. The hierarchy takes account of factors including access to services and facilities, employment opportunities, public transport, active travel opportunities and infrastructure capacity. The strategy therefore focuses the majority of growth within and adjoining the borough's most sustainable settlements, whilst supporting proportionate development in villages to help meet local needs and maintain their vitality.

5.6 Tonbridge, as the borough's principal centre, is the primary focus for growth and investment. Additional growth is also directed towards other higher-tier settlements, including service centres and primary villages, where development can make effective use of existing services, facilities and transport networks, support investment in infrastructure, and reinforce the role and function of those settlements.

5.7 The spatial strategy seeks to maximise the use of suitable previously developed land. However, evidence demonstrates that there is insufficient previously developed land available within the borough to meet identified development needs in full. Consequently, a balanced approach has been taken that prioritises suitable brownfield opportunities whilst also identifying sustainable greenfield locations capable of delivering homes, employment opportunities and supporting physical and community infrastructure.

5.8 The borough is significantly constrained by the Metropolitan Green Belt, National Landscapes, areas at risk of flooding, important habitats, heritage assets and valued landscapes. The spatial strategy has therefore sought to balance the need to meet development requirements with the protection and enhancement of these environmental assets. Green Belt boundaries have only been amended where exceptional circumstances have been demonstrated through the evidence base and where sustainable patterns of development can be achieved through this Local Plan.

5.9 The spatial strategy is delivered through a combination of strategic allocations, other site allocations and windfall development. Strategic allocations make a significant contribution towards meeting the borough's housing, employment and infrastructure needs and have been selected because of their ability to accommodate growth in sustainable locations whilst delivering essential infrastructure, services, facilities and environmental enhancements.

5.10 The strategic allocations identified within this Plan include a number of urban extensions and large-scale mixed-use developments which are capable of delivering comprehensive, masterplanned growth. These sites provide opportunities to deliver new schools, healthcare facilities, employment opportunities, transport improvements, community facilities, green and blue infrastructure, open space and other measures required to support sustainable development. Their scale enables infrastructure to be planned and delivered alongside development in a coordinated manner.

5.11 Large strategic allocations play a particularly important role in supporting the Plan's infrastructure-led approach to growth. The delivery of key infrastructure, including highways infrastructure and junction improvements at Borough Green and other key locations, new primary schools, a secondary school at Kings Hill, healthcare facilities, community facilities including sports and recreation, sustainable transport infrastructure and strategic areas of green infrastructure, forms an integral part of the spatial strategy and has informed both the selection and distribution of development sites.

5.12 Infrastructure delivery is a fundamental component of the spatial strategy. The distribution of growth has been informed by engagement with infrastructure providers and consideration of existing capacity and future requirements. Development will be supported by the timely provision of transport infrastructure, education facilities, healthcare services, utilities, water supply and wastewater infrastructure, digital connectivity, community facilities, sports provision and green and blue infrastructure.

5.13 Strategic allocations will be required to be comprehensively planned and delivered in accordance with Policy A2 and the relevant site allocation policies. Strategic Framework Masterplans will ensure that development is coordinated across sites, that infrastructure and community facilities are delivered in an appropriate and timely manner, and that individual phases contribute towards the creation of cohesive, well-connected and sustainable communities. Piecemeal development that would prejudice the comprehensive development of allocated sites will not be supported.



5.14 The spatial strategy also supports the transition to a low-carbon future. Growth is directed towards locations where opportunities for walking, cycling and public transport can be maximised, helping to reduce the need to travel by private car whilst recognising that the private car will continue to play an important role in parts of the borough, particularly within rural areas.

5.15 Taken as a whole, the spatial strategy, together with the policies and allocations contained within this Local Plan, provides a positive, justified and deliverable framework for sustainable growth. It will ensure that development is directed to the most appropriate locations, supported by the timely provision of infrastructure, whilst protecting and enhancing the borough's environment, strengthening communities, supporting economic prosperity and improving quality of life for existing and future residents.

Policy SP1: Spatial Strategy

During the plan period the Local Plan will:

Growth

- 1 Deliver sustainable communities that balance the provision of housing, employment and infrastructure with effective flood risk management, while securing the protection and enhancement of biodiversity, landscape, the natural and historic environment, and the Green Belt, and contributing to the borough's pathway to net zero and climate resilience.
- 2 Respond to the borough's diverse geography, including supporting and sustaining the role of both our urban and more rural settlements by providing growth in the most sustainable and appropriate locations across the borough, having regard to the settlement hierarchy and the role and function of individual settlements.
- 3 Focus the majority of growth within or adjacent to our most urban and sustainable settlements, as identified in the settlement hierarchy, including those with reasonable proximity to existing transport hubs and sustainable movement opportunities. In these locations, residential, employment, retail and leisure development will take place in a comprehensive and well-connected manner.

- 4 Support improvements to local services, community facilities and infrastructure through facilitating growth in the right locations to contribute to the continued sustainability of our towns and villages and ensure healthy and vibrant communities. This includes allocating growth in nearly all of our sustainable settlements, with development phased to align with infrastructure capacity and delivery, ensuring that necessary infrastructure is provided in a timely manner to support development and mitigate its impacts.

- 5 Meet our housing need requirement in a way that maximises development on suitable previously developed land/brownfield sites. Given the limited amount of previously developed land in the borough, greenfield sites have been identified in sustainable locations to meet our development needs. This includes a number of 'edge of settlement' large strategic development sites that can be developed for housing, employment and supporting infrastructure, as well as help to deliver infrastructure to support both new and existing communities, through comprehensive masterplanning, ensuring the coordinated delivery of development, infrastructure, green and blue infrastructure and community facilities.

- 6 Maintain the role of our more rural settlements (Tier 5) through supporting appropriate growth to help sustain existing services and facilities or to sustain communities through appropriate small-scale housing that meets need, including supporting rural affordability, as supported by policies within this plan.

Town centres

- 7 Ensure that town centres are supported to be vibrant, accessible, and resilient hubs for retail, leisure, employment, healthcare, and community activities.
- 8 Protect and enhance the role of our town, district and local centres encouraging a range of uses, services and facilities commensurate with the role and function of the centre. Proposals should enhance the historic character while supporting modern retail formats and flexible workspaces, and improving accessibility by sustainable transport modes.

Strategic Policy

- 9 Focus new retail development within our town centres in accordance with the sequential approach, which support the services and facilities provided, and improvements to the public realm which will increase footfall and improve the night-time economy.

Town centre strategy

- 10 Tonbridge Town Centre will remain the principal retail and service centre, with investment in public realm, active travel infrastructure, sustainable urban drainage infrastructure and redevelopment opportunities including new leisure and retail facilities delivering well designed, accessible, mixed-use developments to support the local community, including improved connectivity between key parts of the town centre. This includes strengthening the evening economy.
- 11 District centres will continue to evolve as mixed-use locations with a focus on convenience retail, employment, and community services. Development should support walkability and cycling and integration with surrounding residential areas, and enhance their role as accessible local service hubs.

- 12 Local centres across the borough will be protected and enhancements supported to ensure access to day-to-day services, particularly in rural areas, including supporting their role in reducing the need to travel.

Employment

- 13 Ensure that the borough sustains its strong economic base, supporting a diverse, low carbon and resilient economy, improving its range of job provision in key sectors including logistics, technology and rural enterprise.
- 14 Strategic and key employment sites will be protected, expanded and regenerated to ensure that employment provision is fit for purpose, including the reconfiguration of offices, and the efficient use of land and premises.
- 15 Allocate and focus new employment provision in sustainable locations with good transport access for all modes and in locations where the business can be supported locally by workers, and where opportunities for sustainable travel can be maximised.

- 16 Support economic growth in the rural economy to ensure that the needs of land based and other rural businesses can be achieved, while respecting environmental constraints and local character.

Environment, landscape and Green Belt

- 17 Maintain and, where possible, enhance the identity, distinctiveness and character of valued landscapes and places, including National Landscapes and their settings, recognising that National Landscapes must be conserved and enhanced in accordance with national policy and statutory duties, giving great weight to their protection.
- 18 Protect the Metropolitan Green belt by amending Green Belt boundaries only where 'exceptional circumstances' exist and in locations where sustainable patterns of development can be achieved. The focus will be releasing the Green Belt in the borough's most sustainable locations, as per our settlement hierarchy, as defined through this Local Plan.

Policy SP1: Spatial Strategy continued

- 19 Balance the release of the Green Belt between delivering the development needs of the borough whilst limiting and mitigating as far as possible, the impact that Green Belt release may have on Green Belt purposes. Green Belt release will be defined by allocations proposed in this Local Plan.
- 20 Ensure the setting, character and identities of Kings Hill and Medway Gap settlements, East Malling, Mill Street and West Malling are protected and conserved through the identification of Green Gaps to allow the appropriate management of development, and to prevent coalescence of settlements and maintain their separate identity and landscape setting.
- 21 Development will be prioritised outside National Landscapes and their settings; however, within appropriate, sustainable locations, limited non-major, landscape-led development may be supported where it demonstrably conserves and enhances the National Landscape and helps meet local community needs, consistent with national policy.

Strategic Policy

Figure 5.1: Delivering the Spatial Strategy

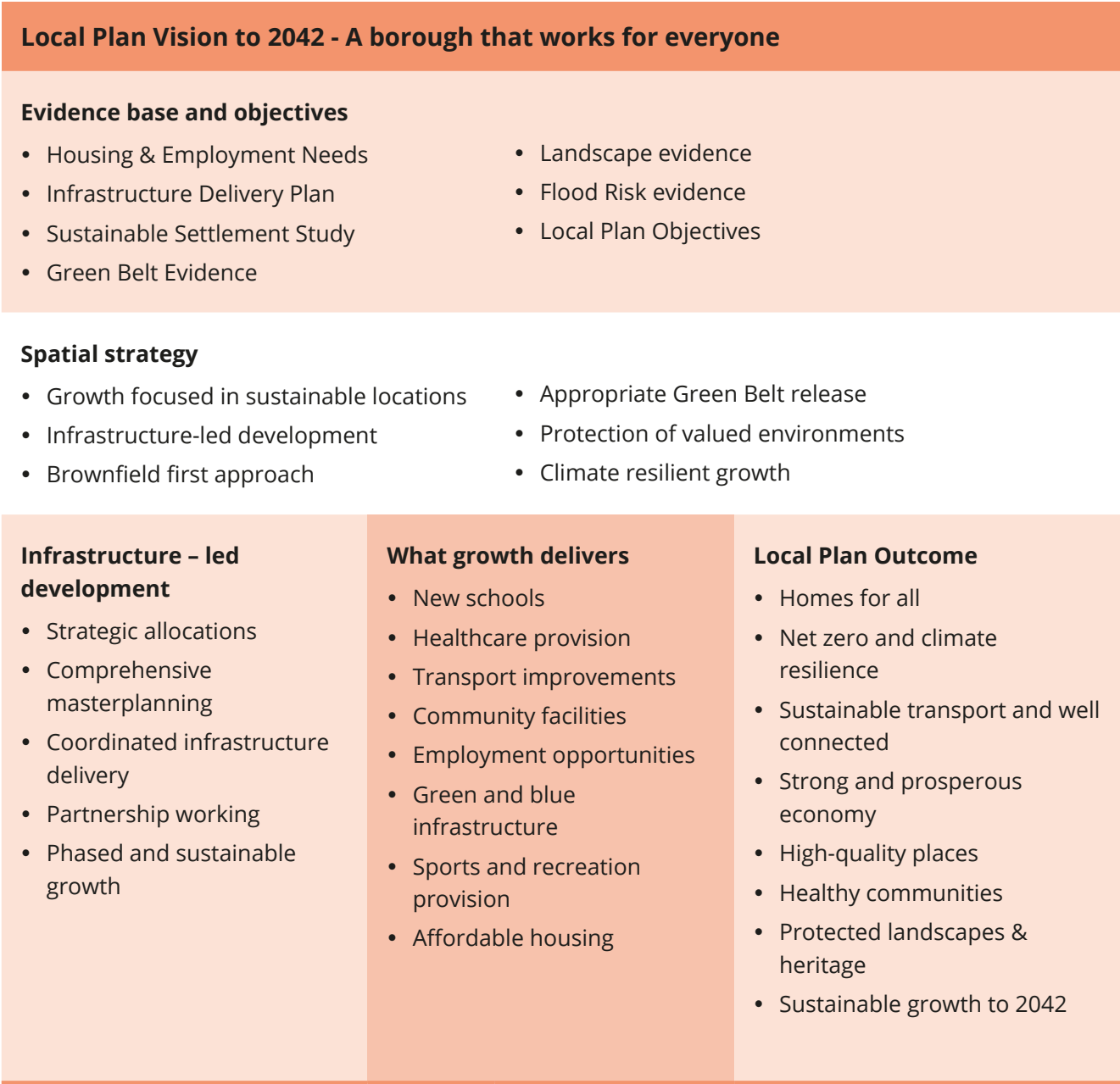


Figure 5.2: Where growth will be

Where growth will be	What growth will deliver
Tonbridge and Hilden Park	Around 2,000+ new homes, 47,200 sqm of employment space, new primary school, healthcare facilities, community facilities, convenience retail, sports and recreation provision, strategic green infrastructure, active travel improvements, link road infrastructure, regeneration opportunities and enhanced connectivity.
Borough Green	Around 2,000 homes, 33,200 sqm employment floorspace, primary school, healthcare facility, community hub, retail provision, sports facilities, strategic open space and delivery of a new road to serve the development.
Kings Hill	Around 1,600 homes, new secondary school, sports facilities, community infrastructure, green infrastructure and enhanced links to Kings Hill and West Malling Station.
Medway Gap	Around 1,700+ homes, 99,306 sqm of employment space, primary school, community facilities, retail provision, sports facilities, extensive open space, active travel improvements and investment in supporting infrastructure.

Where growth will be	What growth will deliver
Snodland	Around 1,300 homes, 3,000 sqm of employment space, primary school, community hub, retail provision, sports facilities, strategic open space, biodiversity enhancements and improved walking and cycling connections.
Aylesford / Eccles	Around 1,100 homes, retail and leisure facilities, sports provision, strategic green infrastructure, highway improvements including a new link road and enhanced connections to surrounding communities.
Hildenborough	Around 1,200 homes, convenience retail, sports facilities, significant green infrastructure, active travel links and improved connectivity to Hildenborough Station.
Hadlow	Around 780 homes, green infrastructure, active travel improvements and a new link road helping support movement and connectivity within Hadlow.
Villages and Rural Settlements	Smaller-scale housing growth, affordable housing, investment in local services, environmental enhancements and support for sustainable rural communities.

Future Housing Provision



Housing requirement

5.16 Providing sufficient homes to meet the needs of existing and future residents is a key objective of the Local Plan. National planning policy requires strategic policies to provide for housing needs and set out a clear strategy for bringing forward sufficient land to meet identified needs over the plan period. The National Planning Policy Framework requires housing need to be assessed using the Government's standard method unless exceptional circumstances justify an alternative approach. The standard method provides an unconstrained assessment of housing need and establishes the minimum number of homes that should be planned for. Applying the Government's standard method to Tonbridge and Malling indicates a local housing need of 1,117 dwellings per annum. Over the Local Plan period between 1 April 2024 and 31 March 2042 this equates to a minimum housing requirement of 20,106 dwellings.

5.17 The Local Plan seeks to meet the borough's full identified housing requirement over the plan period. In preparing the Local Plan, the Council has carefully considered reasonable alternatives for accommodating growth, having regard to environmental constraints, infrastructure capacity, national policy requirements and the availability of land. The preferred strategy seeks to maximise the use of suitable previously developed land whilst recognising that previously developed land alone is insufficient to meet identified development needs.

5.18 The Local Plan seeks to deliver sufficient homes to meet identified needs whilst ensuring that growth is aligned with the spatial strategy, supported by the timely provision of infrastructure, and directed towards the borough's most sustainable settlements. The distribution of housing growth has been informed by the settlement hierarchy, infrastructure capacity, environmental constraints and the evidence base supporting the Plan.

Housing needs

5.19 The Strategic Housing Market Assessment (2025/2026) provides detailed evidence regarding housing need across the borough, including the need for affordable housing, specialist accommodation and homes for different groups within the community. The evidence identifies a significant need for affordable housing and accommodation to meet the needs of an ageing population and other specialist housing requirements.

5.20 The evidence indicates a need for a range of housing types, sizes and tenures, including affordable housing, family housing, accommodation for older persons, housing with care, residential institutions and accommodation for Gypsies and Travellers. Other policies within this Plan establish the approach to meeting these needs.

5.21 Our borough's identified housing needs over the plan period include:

- A need to deliver approximately **647** affordable homes per annum¹.
- Gypsy and Traveller accommodation
- **1,050** additional housing units with support (sheltered/retirement housing)
- **250** housing units with care, such as extra care units
- **800** nursing and residential care bedspaces.

¹ Please note that it will not be possible to deliver this level of affordable housing on an annual basis, therefore this figure is provided as a guide to show the significant affordable housing need in the Borough.

Policy SP2: Delivering Homes for our Communities

- 1
- A minimum of 20,106 dwellings will be delivered within Tonbridge and Malling Borough between 1st April 2024 and 31st March 2042, equivalent to an average of 1,117 dwellings per annum.
- 2
- Housing delivery will be achieved through:

a

Existing commitments;

b

Allocated housing and mixed-use sites identified in this Plan;

c

Development within settlement boundaries, where supported by relevant policies;

d

Windfall development;

e

Other sources of housing supply consistent with the spatial strategy and other relevant policies within the Plan including small scale development that comes forward in accordance with Policy SP3; and

f

Allocations contained within any ‘Made’ Neighbourhood Plans.
- 3
- The Council will seek to maintain a sufficient supply of deliverable and developable land to meet identified housing needs.

Strategic Policy

Housing supply

5.22 The Local Plan identifies a range of housing supply sources which collectively provide sufficient land to meet the housing requirement over the plan period. Housing supply is derived from existing commitments, site allocations and an allowance for windfall development. Figure 5.3 sets out the sources of housing supply that contribute towards meeting the borough’s housing requirement.

Figure 5.3: Housing Supply

Housing Supply	Number of Dwellings
Completions (from 1 st April 2024-2025)	689
Completions (from 1st April 2025 – 2026)	1,058
Extant permissions	3,786
Windfall allowance	2,062
Site allocations	13,469
Total supply	21,064
Housing requirement	20,106
Surplus / buffer	958 (5%)

Housing delivery and flexibility

5.23 The Council considers that the Local Plan provides sufficient land to meet the identified housing requirement over the plan period. The housing trajectory demonstrates that housing will be delivered from a range of sources and locations across the borough.

5.24 The housing strategy is deliberately diversified across strategic allocations, smaller allocations, existing commitments and windfall development. This approach helps to provide flexibility within the housing land supply and reduces reliance on any single site or source of supply.

5.25 The Council will continue to monitor housing delivery through the Authority Monitoring Report and will review delivery performance, site progress and infrastructure provision throughout the plan period. Where necessary, appropriate action will be taken to ensure that housing delivery remains consistent with the objectives and requirements of the Local Plan.

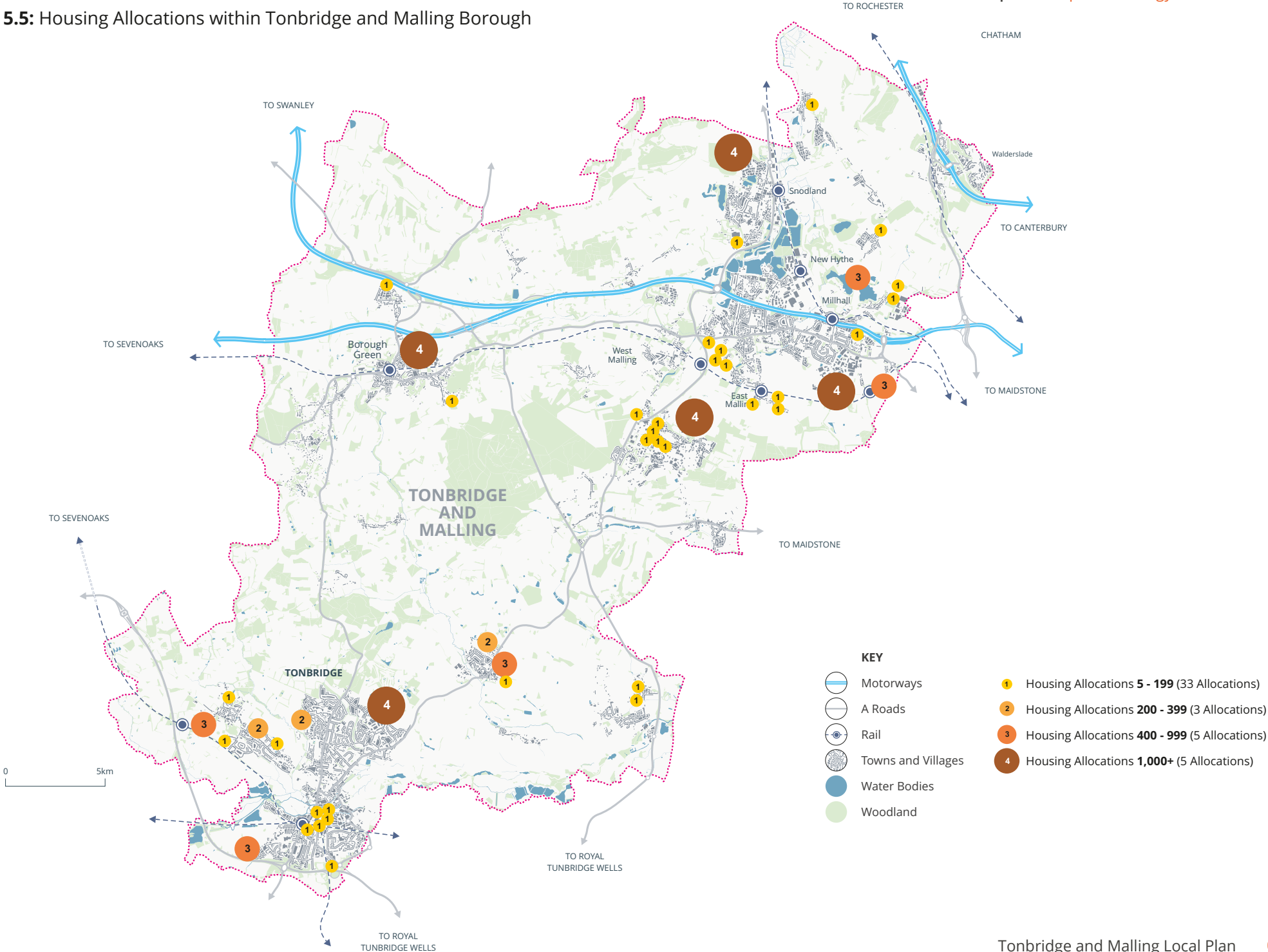
5.26 Figure 5.4 sets out the distribution of growth within the borough proposed within this Regulation 19 (Publication) Local Plan.

Figure 5.4: Housing and Employment Growth by Settlement to 2042

Settlement or Nearest Settlement	Settlement Tier (1 to 5)	Total Housing Numbers	Total Employment (sqm)
Aylesford Village	Tier 4 - Secondary Village	589	0
Borough Green	Tier 2 - Service Centre	2,000	33,200
East Malling & Mill Street	Tier 3 - Primary Village	294	45,080
Eccles	Tier 4 - Secondary Village	539	0
Hadlow	Tier 3 - Primary Village	782	0
Hale Street	Tier 4 - Secondary Village	228	0
Hildenborough	Tier 3 - Primary Village	698	0
Kings Hill	Tier 2 - Service Centre	1,638	0
Medway Gap	Tier 1 - Principal Service Centre	1,923	99,306
Platt	Tier 4 - Secondary Village	16	0
Snodland	Tier 2 - Service Centre	1,336	3,000
Tonbridge including Hilden Park	Tier 1 - Principal Service Centre	3,361	47,200
Walderslade	Tier 1 - Principal Service Centre	0	14,000
Wouldham	Tier 4 - Secondary Village	39	0
Wrotham	Tier 4 - Secondary Village	26	0
Totals		13,469	241,786

Please see Annex 1 for a list of housing completions and extant permissions on a settlement basis and Annex 2 which sets out the Local Plan Housing Trajectory

Figure 5.5: Housing Allocations within Tonbridge and Malling Borough



Unmet housing need and cross boundary matters

5.27 Strategic planning issues, including housing, employment, transport, infrastructure and environmental matters, frequently extend beyond local authority boundaries. The Council has therefore engaged constructively and on an ongoing basis with neighbouring authorities, infrastructure providers and other prescribed bodies throughout the preparation of this Local Plan. This engagement has informed the development of the spatial strategy, site allocations and supporting policies contained within the Plan.

5.28 The Council has considered whether it is capable of accommodating unmet development needs arising from neighbouring authorities. Having regard to the borough's own housing requirement, environmental constraints, infrastructure capacity and the need to release Green Belt land to meet identified housing needs within the borough, the Council is not in a position to accommodate unmet housing needs from neighbouring authorities through this Local Plan.

5.29 The Council has also engaged with neighbouring authorities regarding the borough's own development needs and is satisfied that this Local Plan identifies sufficient land to meet Tonbridge and Malling's housing requirement in full over the plan period. Statements of Common Ground and other supporting evidence provide further detail regarding the consideration of strategic cross-boundary matters and the cooperative working undertaken during plan preparation.

Infrastructure and Transport

5.30 The spatial strategy and site allocations have been informed by transport evidence and strategic highway modelling undertaken in partnership with Kent County Council and National Highways. The evidence has assessed the cumulative impacts of planned growth and identified mitigation measures required to support the delivery of the Local Plan.

5.31 The Council's evidence indicates that the scale and distribution of growth proposed through this Plan can be accommodated subject to the delivery of appropriate mitigation measures and infrastructure improvements. Infrastructure requirements have informed both the spatial strategy and site allocations and will continue to be refined through the development management process and the Infrastructure Delivery Plan.

5.32 Development proposals will be required to contribute towards the delivery of transport mitigation and infrastructure improvements where necessary and proportionate to do so. Further detail regarding transport evidence, mitigation measures and delivery mechanisms is provided within the Infrastructure Delivery Plan and transport evidence base.

Green Belt

5.33 Approximately 71% of Tonbridge and Malling Borough lies within the Metropolitan Green Belt. The Council recognises the important role that the Green Belt plays in preventing urban sprawl, safeguarding the countryside from encroachment, preserving the setting and character of settlements and supporting the wider objectives of sustainable development.

5.34 The Council has undertaken a comprehensive review of the Green Belt as part of the preparation of this Local Plan. This has included consideration of opportunities to maximise development on suitable previously developed land, optimise the use of land in sustainable locations and direct growth towards the most sustainable settlements within the borough.

5.35 The evidence demonstrates that it is not possible to meet the borough's identified housing, employment and other development needs in full without making changes to Green Belt boundaries. The Council considers that exceptional circumstances exist to justify alterations to Green Belt boundaries through this Local Plan.

5.36 Green Belt boundary alterations have been informed by the Green Belt evidence base and have sought to balance the need to meet development requirements with the need to protect the overall integrity and function of the Green Belt. Changes have been focused on the borough's most sustainable locations and are reflected in the site allocations and Policies Map.

5.37 The Green Belt strategy is not limited to the release of land for development. Through the Local Plan, the Council is also proposing the designation of additional land as Green Belt in an appropriate location where this would strengthen the purposes of the Green Belt, improve the long-term durability of the Green Belt boundary and support the overall spatial strategy of the Plan.

5.38 Where Green Belt land is released for development, revised Green Belt boundaries have been defined using recognisable and permanent physical features capable of enduring beyond the plan period.

5.39 In accordance with national policy and guidance, the Council has considered the role of previously developed land, Grey Belt and other Green Belt land as part of the plan-making process. The Green Belt evidence base has informed decisions regarding site selection and Green Belt boundary alterations, alongside wider environmental, infrastructure, sustainability and deliverability considerations.

Settlement Hierarchy

5.40 The settlement hierarchy is a key component of the spatial strategy and provides the framework for directing growth to the most sustainable locations within the borough. It identifies the role and function of settlements and helps ensure that new development is focused in locations where residents have access to services, facilities, employment opportunities and transport connections.

5.41 The settlement hierarchy has been informed by the Sustainable Settlement Study, which assesses settlements against a range of sustainability criteria, including access to education, healthcare, retail, employment, community facilities, public transport and opportunities for active travel. The hierarchy provides an evidence-based assessment of the relative sustainability of settlements and has been used to inform the distribution of growth across the borough.

5.42 In preparing this Local Plan, the Council has reviewed and updated the Sustainable Settlement Study to ensure that it reflects current circumstances across the borough. This has included further engagement with parish councils to verify and update information relating to services, facilities, infrastructure and accessibility

within individual settlements. The study has also been updated to take account of changes that have occurred since earlier stages of plan preparation.

5.43 The settlement hierarchy does not determine where development will take place in isolation. In identifying the spatial strategy and site allocations, the Council has also considered other factors including environmental constraints, Green Belt considerations, infrastructure capacity, site availability and deliverability, landscape character and national planning policy requirements.

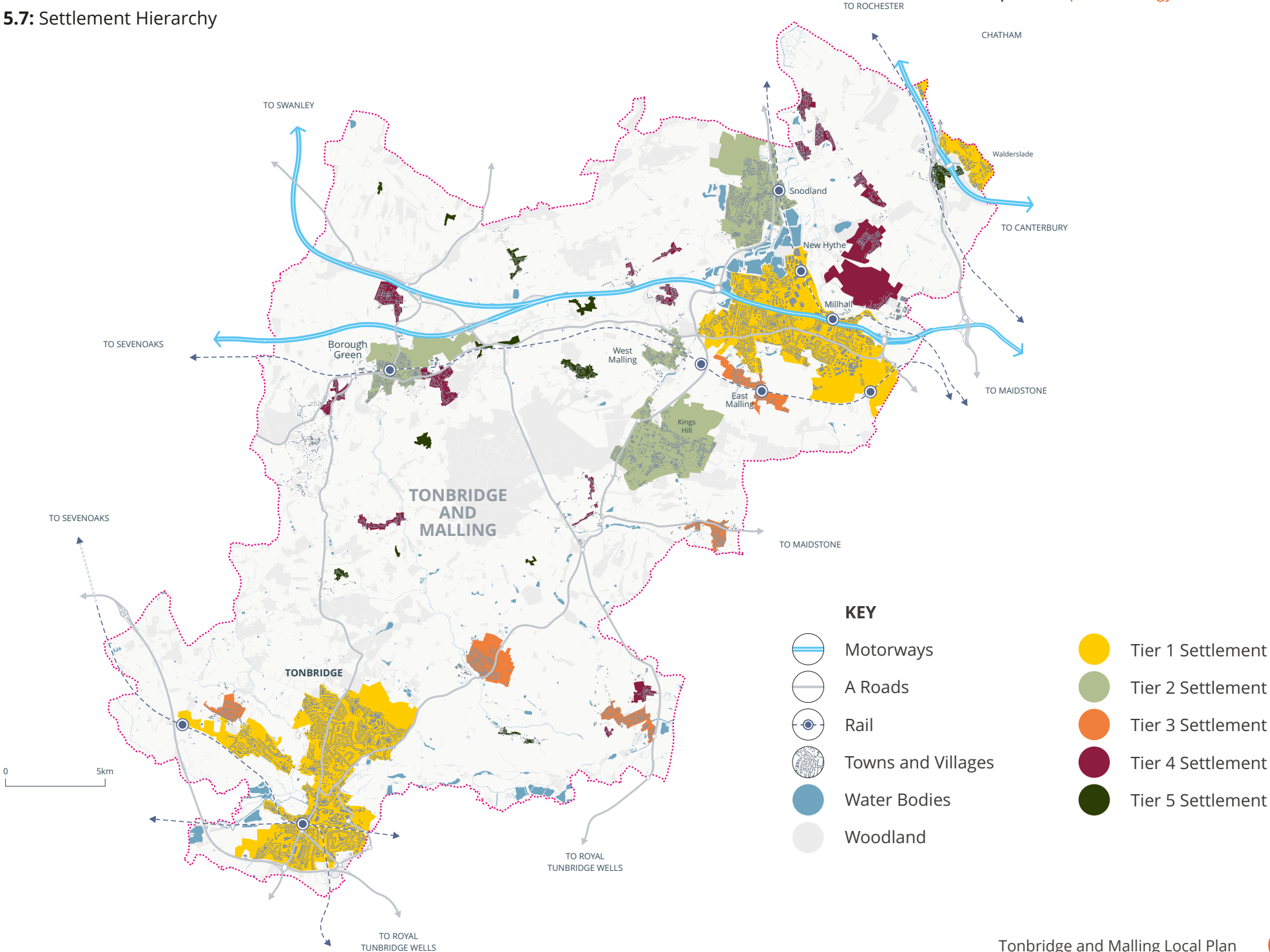
5.44 The hierarchy assists in ensuring that the majority of development is focused within and adjoining the borough’s most sustainable settlements, whilst also supporting proportionate levels of growth in villages to help meet local needs, support local services and facilities, and maintain the vitality and viability of rural communities.

5.45 Figure 5.6 sets out the settlement hierarchy for Tonbridge and Malling Borough. Further information on the methodology, assessment criteria and outcomes is contained within the Sustainable Settlement Study.

Figure 5.6: Settlement Hierarchy

Settlement Category	Settlement Name
Tier 1: Principal Service Centre	Tonbridge and Hilden Park, Medway Gap, Walderslade
Tier 2: Service Centre	Snodland, Borough Green, West Malling, Kings Hill
Tier 3: Primary Village	Hildenborough, Hadlow, East Malling, East Peckham, Wateringbury
Tier 4: Secondary Village	Aylesford Village, Hale Street, Burham, Snoll Hatch, Wrotham, Eccles, Leybourne Chase, Peter’s Village, Plaxtol, Platt, Ightham, Birling, Ryarsh, Mereworth & Herne Pound, Wouldham
Tier 5: Other rural settlements	Stansted, Offham, Shipbourne, Fairseat, Addington, Addington Clearway, Golden Green, West Peckham, Wrotham Heath, Dunks Green, Crouch, Trottiscliffe, Blue Bell Hill

Figure 5.7: Settlement Hierarchy



5.46 The settlement hierarchy comprises five tiers of settlement. It is based on the settlements previously identified within the development plan, together with Leybourne Chase and Peters Village which have been established as new communities. In addition, Stansted and Shipbourne have been assessed in accordance with the definition of a settlement contained within the Sustainable Settlement Study. Tonbridge and Hilden Park, and the Medway Gap, have been assessed as single settlements reflecting their close functional relationships, shared services and facilities, and strong physical and transport connections.

5.47 The settlements identified within Tiers 1 to 4 are considered to be the most sustainable locations for growth within the borough, reflecting the range of services, facilities, employment opportunities and transport connections available. Settlements within the higher tiers generally provide greater opportunities to access day-to-day services by walking, cycling or public transport. Settlements within Tier 5 have a more limited range of facilities and services and are generally more reliant on travel to larger settlements.

5.48 Settlement boundaries are identified for Tier 1 to Tier 4 settlements. Settlement boundaries assist in directing development towards the borough's established settlements and provide a distinction between the built-up area and the countryside. Land outside of settlement boundaries is defined as 'countryside' for the purposes of this Plan.

5.49 The settlement hierarchy is an important component of the spatial strategy. However, it does not determine the level of growth that will be accommodated within individual settlements. In defining the spatial strategy and selecting site allocations, the Council has also considered a range of other factors including land availability, deliverability, environmental constraints, Green Belt considerations, landscape character, flood risk, infrastructure capacity and wider sustainability objectives.

5.50 Development allocations have been made for the majority of Tier 1-4 settlements, apart from Birling, Ightham, Mereworth and Herne Pound, Peters Village, Plaxtol, Ryarsh and Watlingtonbury. This is because there are no suitable sites in these locations to bring forward for development. However, development in these locations is supported in principle and can come forward within the defined settlement boundary, subject to other policies in the Plan.

5.51 Settlements within Tier 5 are not identified as locations for planned growth through site allocations. This reflects their limited range of services, facilities and transport connections. However, this does not preclude development from coming forward where supported by other policies within the Plan, including proposals that meet local housing needs, support rural communities or are otherwise justified by national or local planning policy.

5.52 The Open Countryside comprises land outside identified settlement boundaries. Development within the 'countryside' will be managed in accordance with the policies of this Plan and national policy. Proposals will be expected to recognise the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside whilst supporting sustainable rural communities and the rural economy where appropriate.

Policy SP3: Settlement Hierarchy and General Development Principles

- 1 Development will be supported, in addition to allocations proposed within this plan, within sustainable settlements (Tier 1 – 4 settlements), as defined by the settlement hierarchy. Development will be supported, subject to compliance with other relevant policies of this Plan and any (made) Neighbourhood Plans.

Development in the countryside

- 2 Areas outside the defined settlement boundaries will be protected and will be considered to be countryside for planning purposes, unless development is supported by a specific policy referenced within this plan, (made) Neighbourhood Plan, or national policy.

Tier 5 Rural settlements

- 3 As an exception to criterion (2), limited residential development either within a Tier 5 settlement (infill) or directly adjoining a Tier 5 settlement (limited frontage development) may be supported, subject to compliance with other relevant policies of this plan, where it can be demonstrated that the proposal would help to support the vitality and sustainability of the settlement and meet an identified local need. Such development will only be supported where all of the following criteria are met:
 - a The scale of development is proportionate to the size, character and function of the settlement;
 - b The proposal responds positively to its rural location and surrounding countryside setting and would not result in unacceptable harm to the character, appearance or setting of the settlement or surrounding countryside;
 - c The proposal would support the retention, enhancement or provision of local services, facilities or community infrastructure, or would meet an identified local housing need;
 - d The proposal has regard to any relevant Neighbourhood Plan or other locally prepared evidence where available; and
 - e Suitable and safe access arrangements can be provided for all users, including pedestrians where appropriate.

Gypsy, Traveller and Travelling Showpeople



5.53 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) requires local planning authorities to assess and plan for the accommodation needs of Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Showpeople and to maintain an appropriate supply of sites to meet identified needs. The council recognises the importance of facilitating the traditional and nomadic way of life of these communities, whilst promoting social inclusion and ensuring fair and equal access to suitable accommodation.

5.54 The council's Gypsy and Traveller and Travelling Showpeople Accommodation Assessment (GTAA) provides the evidence base for understanding accommodation needs within the borough and informs the approach set out in this Local Plan.

5.55 Planning Policy for Traveller Sites (PPTS) provides the national policy framework for assessing accommodation needs and determining planning applications. Annex 1 of the PPTS defines Gypsies and Travellers and Travelling Showpeople for planning purposes and forms the basis for the assessment of need within the GTAA.

5.56 The GTAA identifies a need for 27 permanent Gypsy and Traveller pitches over the plan period to 2042 for households that meet the definition contained within Planning Policy for Traveller Sites. The assessment also considers the accommodation needs of Travelling Showpeople and requirements for transit provision.

5.57 The identified need for Gypsy and Traveller pitches will be met through a combination of the regularisation of temporary authorised sites, the intensification of existing authorised sites and the anticipated availability of pitches arising from household dissolution and turnover on existing sites. In addition, appropriate windfall proposals may contribute towards meeting identified needs over the plan period.

5.58 The Council is satisfied that sufficient capacity exists within existing authorised sites and other identified sources of supply to meet the accommodation needs identified within the GTAA. Consequently, the allocation of additional Gypsy and Traveller sites is not required through this Local Plan.

5.59 The GTAA identifies no requirement for additional Travelling Showpeople plots during the plan period. Whilst a limited need for transit provision has been identified, the evidence indicates that this can be addressed through the continued use of negotiated stopping arrangements and partnership working, rather than through the allocation of a specific transit site.

Policy SP4: Gypsy, Traveller and Travelling Showpeople - Accommodation Needs

- 1** To meet the identified accommodation need for Gypsies and Travellers who meet the definition set out in Planning Policy for Traveller Sites, the council will seek to provide at least 27 pitches within the Borough over the plan period to 2042.
- 2** Pitch provision will be supported through:
 - a** the regularisation of existing temporary authorised pitches;
 - b** the intensification or extension of existing authorised sites where appropriate;
 - c** the provision of new pitches on sites allocated within this Plan;
 - d** the re-use of pitches that become available through household dissolution or turnover on existing authorised sites; and
 - e** windfall sites where they accord with relevant policies of this Plan.

Strategic Policy

Future Economic Development Needs



5.60 Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) requires local planning authorities to prepare robust evidence to understand existing business needs and to keep this under review to reflect local circumstances and market conditions.

5.61 In gathering evidence to plan for business uses we need to liaise with the business community, and take account of relevant economic strategies, to understand current and potential future requirements. This includes identifying and assessing the following:

- the best fit functional economic market area(s);
- the existing stock of land for employment uses within the borough;
- the recent pattern of employment land supply and loss;

- evidence of market demand including the locational and premises requirements for existing and inward investing businesses, drawing upon known market intelligence;
- wider market signals relating to economic growth, diversification and innovation; and
- any evidence of market failure, such as physical, ownership or other constraints that have prevented employment sites being used or delivered.

5.62 PPG also advises that local planning authorities need to develop an understanding of future needs based on a range of data that is current and robust.

5.63 To achieve this, the council commissioned the Tonbridge and Malling Economy Study Update (2025), which was subsequently updated through the Economy Study Addendum (2026).

Together these studies provide the most up-to-date assessment of employment floorspace and land requirements across the borough for the period 2024 to 2042. The Addendum confirms that the borough's commercial property market continues to be characterised by strong demand for industrial and distribution floorspace, reflecting Tonbridge and Malling's strategic location and role within the freight and logistics sector. The Addendum also concludes that whilst office demand remains comparatively modest, there is likely to be an

ongoing requirement for modern, high-quality office accommodation to support growth in professional, administrative and business service sectors.

5.64 The study considers a number of different scenarios of future employment space requirements in the borough, reflecting forecast economic growth, past development trends, labour supply associated with housing growth and sensitivity testing for hybrid and home working. The assessment identifies a range of potential employment floorspace requirements of between approximately 283,000 sqm and 409,000 sqm (gross) over the plan period, equivalent to between 72.3 hectares and 95.8 hectares of employment land.

Figure 5.8: Gross Employment Floorspace Requirements in Tonbridge & Malling, 2024 to 2042 (sqm GEA)

Type of Space/Use Class	Scenario 1: Labour Demand		Scenario 2: Development Trends		Scenario 3: Labour Supply	
	1A: Central	1B: Home- working sensitivity	2A: Central	2B: Latent demand	3A: Central	3B: Home-working sensitivity
Office E(g)(i)/(ii)	12.3	7.7	-3.5	-3.5	14.1	8.8
Industrial and distribution E(g)(iii)/B2/B8	70.1	70.1	75.8	89.0	81.7	81.7
Total	82.4	77.8	72.3	85.5	95.8	90.5

5.65 Having regard to commercial property market signals, development trends and forecast economic growth, the Economy Study Addendum (2026) recommends that the council plan, as a minimum, for:

- 45,400 sqm of office floorspace (Use Class E(g)(i)/(ii)); and
- 327,000 sqm of industrial and distribution floorspace (Use Classes E(g)(iii), B2 and B8).

5.66 This equates to a total minimum employment floorspace requirement of 372,000 sqm between 2024 and 2042. For office uses, this reflects increased home-and hybrid working patterns in the sector and recent activity levels within the local market. For industrial and distribution uses, this requirement reflects both the latest housing evidence and past development trends.

5.67 Accordingly, the Council identifies a minimum employment need of 45,400 sqm of office floorspace and 327,000 sqm of industrial and distribution floorspace over the period 2024-2042, reflecting the recommendations of the Tonbridge and Malling Economy Study Addendum (2026).

Employment Land Supply

5.68 Through ongoing annual monitoring, the council has an understanding of recent employment floorspace losses and gains as well as consented but not yet implemented employment developments, otherwise known as commitments.

5.69 Between 1 April 2024 and 31 March 2026, a net gain of approximately 110,000 sqm of employment floorspace was completed within the borough. As at 31 March 2026, outstanding extant planning permissions represented a further net gain of approximately 26,500sqm of employment floorspace. Taking account of completions and extant permissions, the residual requirement arising from the minimum recommended employment requirement identified in the Economy Study Addendum (2026) is approximately 41,670sqm of office floorspace and 190,630sqm of industrial and distribution floorspace. Mixed-use floorspace contributes towards meeting needs but does not sit directly within the office or industrial/distribution requirement categories.

Figure 5.9: Employment Planning Requirements

Type of Space/ Use Class	Recommended Scenario	Floorspace Requirement (sqm)	Land Requirement (ha)
Office E(g)(i)/(ii)	Scenario 1B: Labour Demand	45,400	7.7
Industrial and distribution (E(g)(iii)/ B2/B8)	Scenario 3A: Labour Supply	327,000	81.7
Total		372,000	89.5

5.70 The Local Plan seeks to maximise employment provision to meet employment need through site allocations, existing commitments and the continued protection, intensification and redevelopment of employment areas. Policy A1 in Chapter 14 of this Local Plan identifies the sites that will contribute to meeting the borough’s employment floorspace needs over the plan period.

Figure 5.10: Balance of supply and demand for minimum employment floorspace requirement in Tonbridge & Malling (sqm):

Employment and Retail Needs Accounting for Completions and Extant Permissions 2024-25					
Type of space (Use Class)	Minimum Requirement	Completions to date (net gain)	Extant permissions (net gain)	Proposed allocations	Remaining unmet need
Office (E(g)(i)/(iii))	45,400	3,730	-1,810	51,386	+7,870
Light/general industrial (E(g)(iii)/B2 and distribution (B8)	327,000	101,000	30,100	190,400	-5,900
Mixed (B/E(G))	-	5,270	-1,780		+3,800
Remaining Need 2025-42	372,000	110,000	26,500	241,786	+5,700

Policy SP5: Future Employment Growth

- 1 The council will support sustainable economic growth across the borough and will seek to maximise the delivery of employment floorspace having regard to the employment needs identified in the Council's economy evidence base.
- 2 The Economy Study Addendum (2026) recommends planning for a minimum requirement of 45,400 sqm of office floorspace and 327,000 sqm of industrial and distribution floorspace between 2024 and 2042.
- 3 The Local Plan allocates land capable of delivering approximately 241,786 sqm of employment floorspace and supports the delivery of additional employment development through existing commitments, redevelopment, intensification, mixed-use schemes and appropriate windfall development. Future employment growth will be achieved through the following measures:
 - a The allocation of employment sites as set out in Policy A1 (chapter 14);
 - b The delivery of existing commitments for employment uses;
 - c The retention, protection and appropriate intensification of existing employment premises and areas;
 - d Supporting existing business through new floorspace, redevelopment, conversion, upgrading, intensification or reconfiguration of employment sites and premises;
 - e Supporting economic development in rural areas, including farm diversification and the growth of rural enterprises;
 - f Supporting the provision of employment floorspace within Use Class E and other employment generating uses in sustainable locations; and
 - g supporting appropriate windfall employment development where it accords with the spatial strategy and other relevant policies of the Plan.

Strategic Policy

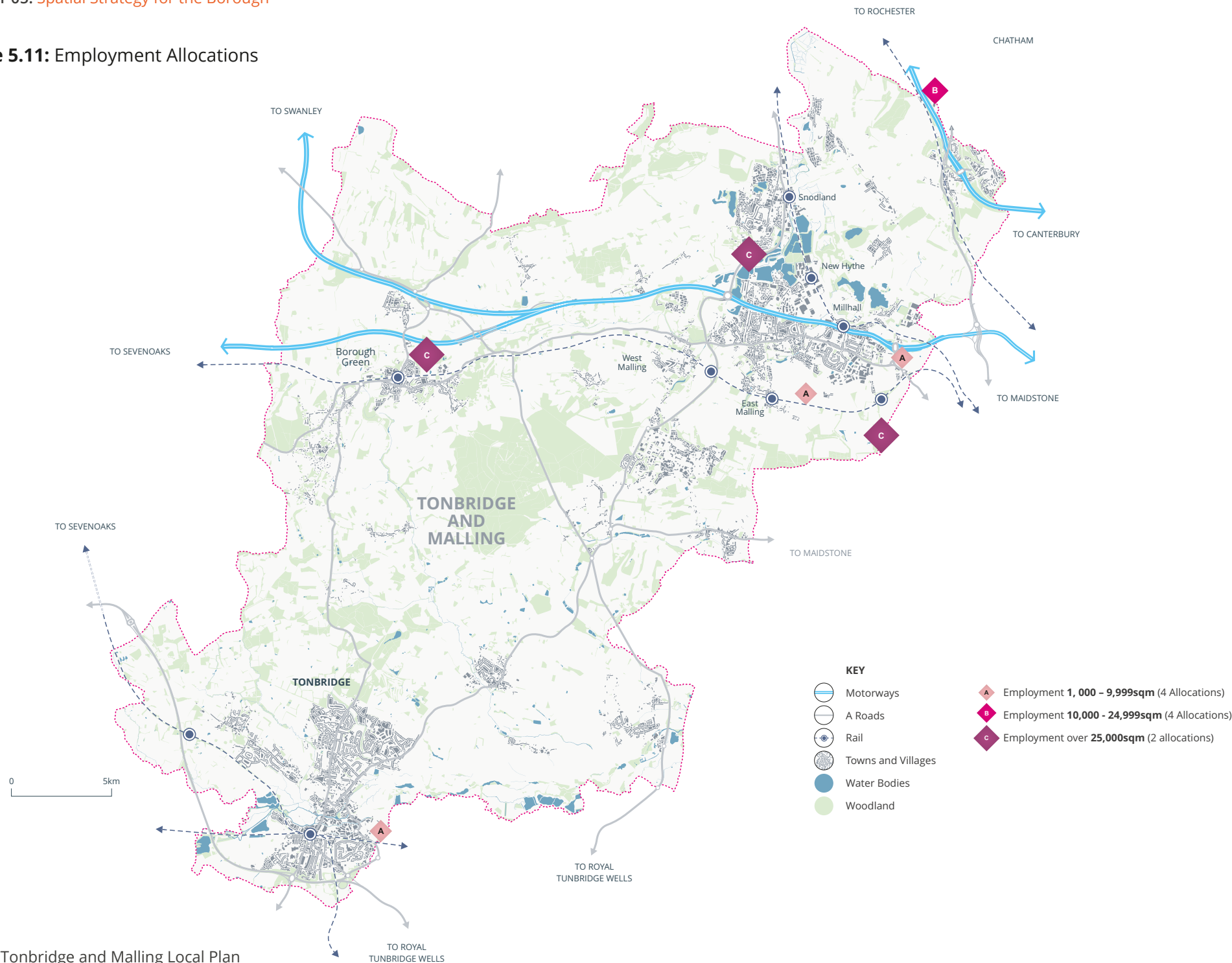
5.71 The Local Plan allocates employment sites capable of delivering approximately 241,786 sqm of employment floorspace over the plan period.

5.72 Additional employment floorspace may come forward through the implementation of existing commitments, the redevelopment, intensification and upgrading of existing employment sites, mixed-use developments and appropriate windfall schemes.

5.73 The Economy Study Addendum (2026) tested a sensitivity scenario to reflect increased levels of hybrid and home working and concluded that the homeworking-adjusted Labour Demand scenario provides the most appropriate basis for assessing future office requirements. Whilst office demand may be lower than historic trends suggest, there remains uncertainty regarding the long-term effects of changing working practices. The Addendum (2026) also identifies continued strength in the industrial and logistics market, including evidence of latent market demand.

5.74 The council will continue to monitor office market performance, employment land delivery, market signals and changing working practices through its monitoring framework and will review the evidence as necessary.

Figure 5.11: Employment Allocations



Town Centre Needs



5.75 National planning policy recognises the important role that town centres play at the heart of communities and requires local planning authorities to plan positively for their growth, management and adaptation. Town centres provide a focus for retail, commercial, leisure, cultural and community activity and make an important contribution to the local economy and the vitality of places.

5.76 The Council's Retail and Town Centre Study has assessed the need for retail and other main town centre uses across the borough over the plan period. The evidence identifies a small requirement for additional retail floorspace 18,250 sqm (gross) to 2042 and considers the future role of the borough's centres in responding to population growth, changing consumer behaviour and wider economic trends.

5.77 The evidence indicates that there remains capacity for additional retail floorspace over the plan period. However, much of this need can be met through the more effective use of existing floorspace, including reducing vacancy levels, reoccupation of vacant units and the redevelopment or refurbishment of existing premises.

5.78 The Council recognises that town centres continue to evolve, with increasing demand for food and beverage uses, leisure, cultural activities, health services, flexible workspace and other community-focused uses. The Local Plan therefore supports a diverse mix of uses that contribute towards the vitality and viability of centres and help ensure that they remain resilient and attractive destinations.

5.79 Population growth associated with growth in the local plan, particularly in locations where strategic growth is allocated, will generate demand for additional local services and facilities. New local centres and neighbourhood parades are therefore proposed within strategic allocations where appropriate to serve new communities and reduce the need to travel for day-to-day needs.

5.80 The scale, location and function of new local centres have been informed by the Retail and Town Centre Study, the spatial strategy and the masterplanning of strategic allocations. New provision will complement rather than undermine the role and function of existing centres within the borough's retail hierarchy.

Policy SP6: Town Centre Needs

- 1** The council will seek to meet the identified retail and other main town centre use needs throughout the plan period through:
 - a** the retention, enhancement and regeneration of existing town, district, local and village centres;
 - b** the reuse and occupation of vacant premises within existing centres;
 - c** existing commitments for retail and main town centre uses;
 - d** the delivery of local centres and neighbourhood parades within strategic allocations where appropriate; and
 - e** the provision of additional retail and other main town centre uses in locations consistent with the centre hierarchy and relevant policies of this Plan.

Strategic Policy

Green Belt

5.81 The Green Belt is a fundamental element of the spatial strategy, providing a permanent and enduring framework to manage development while safeguarding the openness and character of the countryside. Approximately 71% of Tonbridge and Malling is designated as Metropolitan Green Belt (which surrounds Greater London). Many hamlets and small groups of buildings are ‘washed over’ by the Green Belt designation, while larger settlements are inset within it. The extent of the Green Belt is defined on the Policies Map.

5.82 The essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and their permanence. The fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open.

5.83 In accordance with national policy, the Green Belt serves the following purposes:

- b** to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas;
- c** to prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another;
- d** to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment;
- e** to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns; and
- f** to assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.

5.84 In addition to preventing sprawl, the Local Plan promotes a positive and proactive strategy for the beneficial use of Green Belt land, consistent with national policy. Opportunities for enhancement should support the delivery of multiple benefits, including improvements to natural capital, landscape quality and visual amenity, public access and recreational opportunities, biodiversity and ecological networks, sustainable water management, climate change mitigation and adaptation, local food production, and the restoration and enhancement of damaged or degraded land.

Exceptional circumstances

5.85 The council has robustly assessed whether development needs could be met outside the Green Belt as part of plan preparation, including through the Sustainability Appraisal. However, with approximately 71% of the borough designated as Green Belt, the Land Availability Assessment demonstrates that the supply of suitable sites in sustainable locations beyond the Green Belt is insufficient to meet identified needs.

5.86 In accordance with paragraphs 146-147 of the NPPF, the council has fully explored all reasonable alternatives to Green Belt release. The Exceptional Circumstances Strategic Note (2026) confirms that the council has sought to maximise the use of suitable previously developed land, optimise site densities where appropriate, and have engaged constructively with neighbouring authorities through the Duty to Cooperate and the continuing obligations of soundness to determine whether unmet needs could be met elsewhere. This evidence concludes that these measures are insufficient to meet development needs in full outside the Green Belt.

5.87 The council has therefore concluded that exceptional circumstances exist to justify alterations to Green Belt boundaries. In identifying land for release, the council has followed a sequential approach, prioritising previously developed land, followed by grey belt land and then other Green Belt locations, while promoting development in sustainable locations across the borough.

5.88 A robust evidence base underpins this approach, including a Stage 1 Green Belt Assessment (2025) and a Stage 2 Assessment (2025) with Addendum (2026), which assesses land parcels against the five Green Belt purposes and identifies areas considered to be grey belt.

5.89 All land proposed for Green Belt release is located in sustainable locations, including settlements within the hierarchy (Policy SP3, Tiers 1-4) including other accessible locations such as rail stations. Proposed allocations comprise either previously developed land or sites identified as provisional grey belt. To contribute to meeting housing need, a small number of sites have been allocated that are considered to be Green Belt, however these allocations as well as all other allocations avoid areas that would, individually or cumulatively, fundamentally undermine the purposes of the remaining Green Belt.

5.90 In accordance with paragraph 149 of the NPPF, the amended Green Belt boundaries follow clearly defined and permanent physical features wherever possible. Development proposals will be required to reinforce and, where necessary, strengthen these boundaries to ensure they remain readily recognisable and durable.

5.91 Further detail on the spatial strategy and site selection process is provided in the Spatial Strategy Topic Paper (2026) and Site Selection Topic Paper (2026), with site-specific exceptional circumstances set out in the Green Belt Topic Paper (2026).

Extension of the Green Belt boundary

5.92 In addition to altering the Green Belt boundaries to meet identified development needs in full, the council is also proposing a limited extension to the Green Belt to the east of West Malling to prevent neighbouring towns merging and preserve the setting and special character of the historic town of West Malling.

5.93 National planning policy does not distinguish between extensions and releases from the Green Belt in terms of the need to demonstrate exceptional circumstances; both are treated as alterations to Green Belt boundaries. As such, the proposal has been prepared in accordance with paragraph 145 of the National Planning Policy Framework (2024).

5.94 The Green Belt Extension Study (2026) considered land between Kings Hill, West Malling and the Medway Gap, an area subject to significant development pressure, and considered whether an extension to the Green Belt was justified. The Green Belt Extension Study assessed the land against the five Green Belt purposes, applying a methodology consistent with national guidance. It concluded that land between West Malling and the A228 (Ashton Way) performs strongly against one or more purposes, includes areas unlikely to constitute provisional grey belt, and in parts makes a significant contribution to the fundamental aim of the Green Belt. The A228 provides a clear, permanent and defensible boundary.

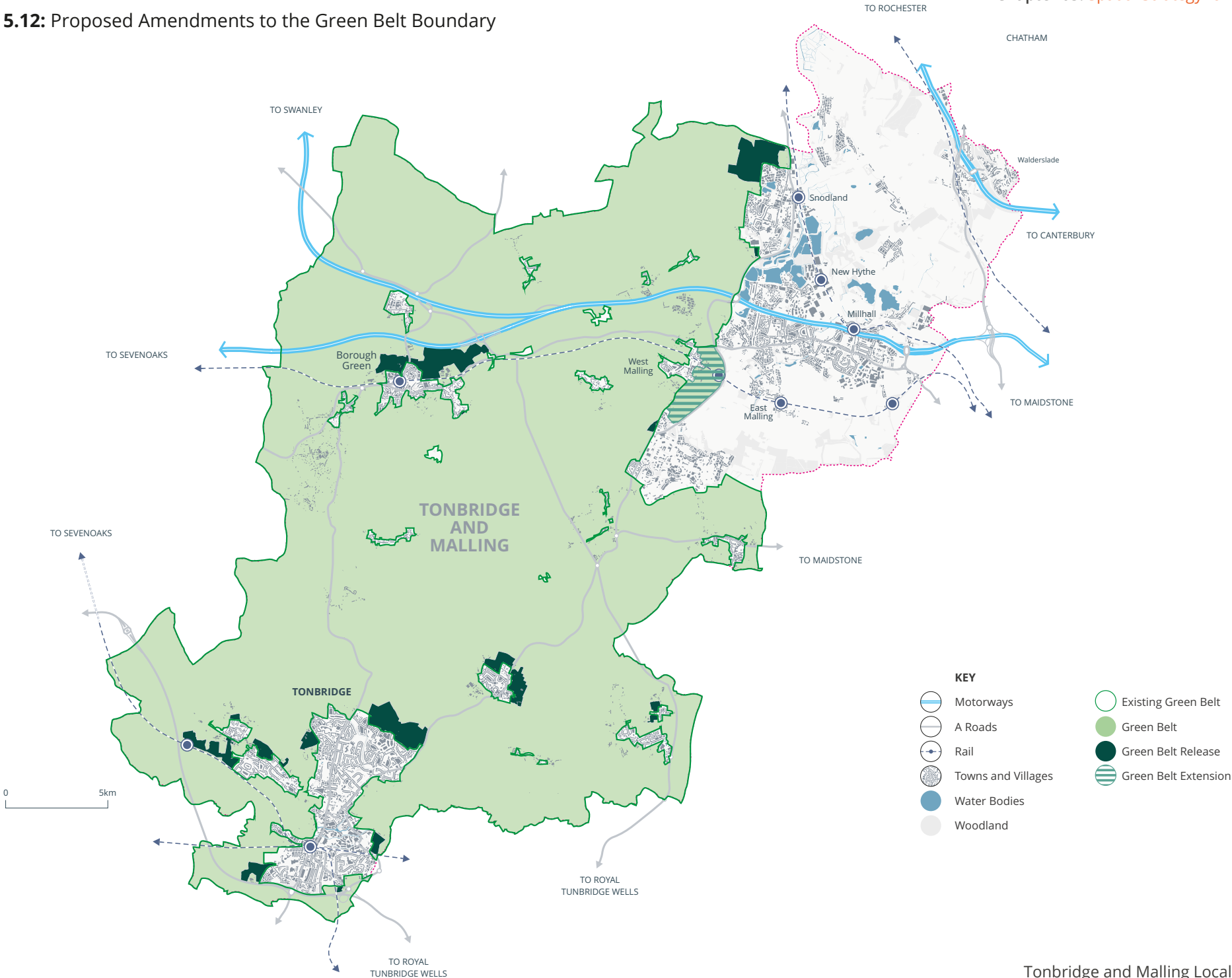
5.95 While West Malling Station lies within the proposed extension, the approach maintains the strategic function of the Green Belt while the spatial strategy directs growth to more sustainable, previously developed land and provisional grey belt sites elsewhere in the borough, which is consistent with national policy. Policy SP7 establishes the new boundary for the Green Belt in the borough.

5.96 The proposed extension is consistent with the spatial strategy for delivering sustainable development, includes only land that it is necessary to keep permanently open, is defined using clear, readily recognisable and permanent physical features and contributes to the long-term permanence and integrity of the Green Belt.

5.97 In accordance with paragraph 156 of the NPPF, the 'Golden Rules' will apply to major development involving the provision of housing proposed on land to be released from the Green Belt through plan preparation, or on sites in the Green Belt subject to a planning application.

2 Any scheme over 10 units.

Figure 5.12: Proposed Amendments to the Green Belt Boundary



Policy SP7: Green Belt

- 1 Tonbridge and Malling's Green Belt as designated on the Policies Map, will be protected against inappropriate development in line with national policy.
- 2 The beneficial use and management of land in the Green Belt will be supported, particularly where it:
 - a promotes public access to greenspace,
 - b protects and enhances the wider blue green infrastructure network as set out in the Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy,
 - c contributes to the Kent and Medway Nature Recovery Strategy and where it lies wholly or partially within a National Landscape, supports the objectives of the Management Plan, and
 - d is consistent with the essential characteristics of openness and permanence of the Green Belt.
- 3 Where land has been removed from the Green Belt for development, new boundaries with the Green Belt should be reinforced to provide permanent long-term defensible boundaries that can endure beyond the plan period.

Strategic Policy

Development in the Green Belt

5.98 Although Policy SP7 defines the Green Belt boundary in the borough, given the extensive Green Belt land across the borough around many sustainable settlements experiencing pressure for development, as well as the introduction of grey belt, applications for development in such locations are likely to continue to come forward during the plan period.

5.99 The NPPF states that substantial weight should be given to any harm to the Green Belt and inappropriate development will only be permitted in very special circumstances. National policy also identifies what types of development are considered 'not inappropriate' in the Green Belt. Policy SP8 establishes the local criteria against which proposals in the Green Belt will be tested.

5.100 The NPPF defines grey belt as Green Belt land comprising previously developed land and/or land that does not strongly contribute to purposes (a), (b), or (d), excluding land where application of the policies referred to in footnote 7 would provide a strong reason for refusing/restricting development.

5.101 Policy SP8 sets out local criteria against which development proposals will be considered, in order to ensure that where development does take place, that it is high quality, well designed, and sustainable.

Policy SP8: Managing Development in the Green Belt

- 1 Inappropriate development within the Green Belt (as shown on the Policies Map) will be resisted in accordance with national planning policy. Inappropriate development is by definition harmful to the Green Belt and will only be approved in very special circumstances.
 - 2 Development that is not inappropriate development in the Green Belt, as defined by national policy, will be supported where its siting, scale, height and bulk are appropriate to its rural setting and where it integrates successfully with the surrounding landscape character.
- Development that is not inappropriate should:
- a display a high standard of design and landscaping, and take measures to ensure that the visual impact is minimised in accordance with Policy D1;
 - b ensure that the nature, quality, finish and colour of materials reflect the local landscape character (as defined in the Landscape Character Assessment and National Landscape Management Plans where relevant) in accordance with Policy NE3; and
 - c consider appropriate parking provision, safe access, egress for all modes, and landscaping is provided to ensure vehicles are parked safely in accordance with Policy INF3.
- 3 Proposals for development in the Green Belt must be supported by proportionate evidence, as appropriate to their scale and nature, demonstrating compliance with national Green Belt policy. This should include where relevant:
 - a an assessment of the contribution of land to Green Belt purposes;
 - b consideration of whether the site constitutes grey belt land, having regard to national policy and guidance; and
 - c the establishment or reinforcement of boundaries with the Green Belt to provide permanent long-term defensible boundaries that can endure beyond the plan period.
 - 4 Where major development involving the provision of housing is proposed on land in the Green Belt, or on land released from the Green Belt (as identified on the Policies Map), proposals should demonstrate compliance with the Golden Rules as set out in national policy, and be supported by evidence within a Planning Statement. This will include:
 - a The provision of 50% affordable housing¹ in accordance with Policy H2;
 - b The necessary improvements to local or national infrastructure as set out in the Infrastructure Delivery Plan; and
 - c The provision of new, or improvements to existing, publicly accessible green space and measures to protect and enhance green and blue infrastructure, having regard to the Kent and Medway Nature Recovery Strategy and the Tonbridge and Malling Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy. The provision of any new open space should be in accordance with the open space standards set out in Policy INF5.

¹ The 50% cap does not apply to rural exceptions sites or community-led development exception sites.

Extensions, Alteration and Replacement Buildings

- 5 Extensions and alterations to buildings in the Green Belt should not be disproportionate to the original building and should be in accordance with Policy D2. Replacement buildings should be in the same use as and not materially larger than the building they replace.
- 6 In all cases, whether a development is disproportionate to or materially larger than the original building will be assessed by considering:
 - a The scale, mass, height, footprint and volume of the development proposed;
 - b the effect of the proposal on the spatial characteristics and openness of the site having regard to national Green Belt policy; and
 - c The extent of existing development on the site.

Strategic Policy

Policy Implementation

5.102 When attempting to prove ‘very special circumstances’, the onus is on the applicant to demonstrate that the exceptional nature of the proposal clearly outweighs the harm it might cause to the Green Belt.

5.103 Where development is proposed in the Green Belt, applications are required to be supported by proportionate evidence, which may include a Green Belt Assessment (including a grey belt assessment), to support their proposal. This assessment should be carried out in accordance with the Planning Practice Guidance. Where the proposal is for major development involving the provision of housing, the applicant must demonstrate how the proposal meets the Golden Rules.

5.104 Applicants should, through design and access statements, demonstrate how their development has been designed to reduce all types of harm to the Green Belt. Furthermore, they should clarify how it will improve the attractiveness and quality of the landscape through positive enhancements including hedgerows and tree planting in line with the Landscape Character Assessment, Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy and Kent and Medway Nature Recovery Strategy.

Local Green Gap

5.105 Green Gaps are designated areas of open land between settlements, intended to maintain separation, prevent coalescence, and preserve each settlement's distinct identity, character and setting. The Local Plan identifies a specific Green Gap between Kings Hill and the Medway Gap (including East Malling and Mill Street), where the Green Gap Study (2025) confirms the openness and landscape play a critical role in maintaining separation.

5.106 The Green Gap forms part of the Borough's spatial strategy, enabling growth in sustainable locations while safeguarding a strong sense of place. It provides physical and visual breaks between built-up areas, supports the appreciation of nearby countryside, and helps shape long-term settlement patterns.

5.107 Within the Green Gap, development will be carefully managed to ensure proposals do not harm its openness, character or function, either individually or cumulatively. Policy SP9 does not prohibit all development but ensures it respects the gap's purpose.

5.108 Although the NPPF does not explicitly require policies to prevent coalescence outside the Green Belt, it emphasises well-designed places, local character and distinctiveness. Green Gaps are therefore justified as a place-shaping tool that protects spatial and visual relationships between settlements.

5.109 Locally, the need for this policy arises from:

- Settlements in close proximity, particularly outside protected designations, experiencing significant development pressure around the settlement edges; and
- Landscapes of moderate or lower sensitivity, which are less resilient to change.

5.110 Without policy intervention, incremental development risks eroding separation and undermining settlement identity.

5.111 The designation is supported by robust evidence, including analysis of settlement character, development pressures, landscape sensitivity, and physical and perceptual gaps. Boundaries follow clear physical features and include only land necessary to maintain separation, ensuring flexibility while retaining purpose.

5.112 The boundary as set out on the policies map is up to date taking into account changes such as planning permissions and site allocations, which have required the boundary to be reviewed and refined. This ensures the Plan remains positively prepared, justified and deliverable, aligning with the spatial strategy and supporting growth in appropriate locations.

5.113 The revised boundary focuses on land that performs a clear role in preventing coalescence, maintaining effective separation while avoiding unnecessary constraints on suitable development sites. Overall, it represents a targeted, evidence-led approach that balances protection with sustainable growth.

Policy SP9: Local Green Gap

- 1** A Green Gap between the settlements of Kings Hill and the Medway Gap (including East Malling and Mill Street), as shown on the Policies Map is defined to retain the existing settlement pattern by maintaining openness, provide long-term protection against coalescence and to protect the setting and separate identities of these settlements.
- 2** Within the Green Gap, countryside policies will apply, and only proposals that demonstrably maintain the character of the gap will be supported. Such proposals must contribute positively to the landscape, biodiversity, or recreational value of the area including through the provision or enhancement of accessible greenspace, particularly where deficiencies in provision have been identified in the Open Space Study.

Strategic Policy



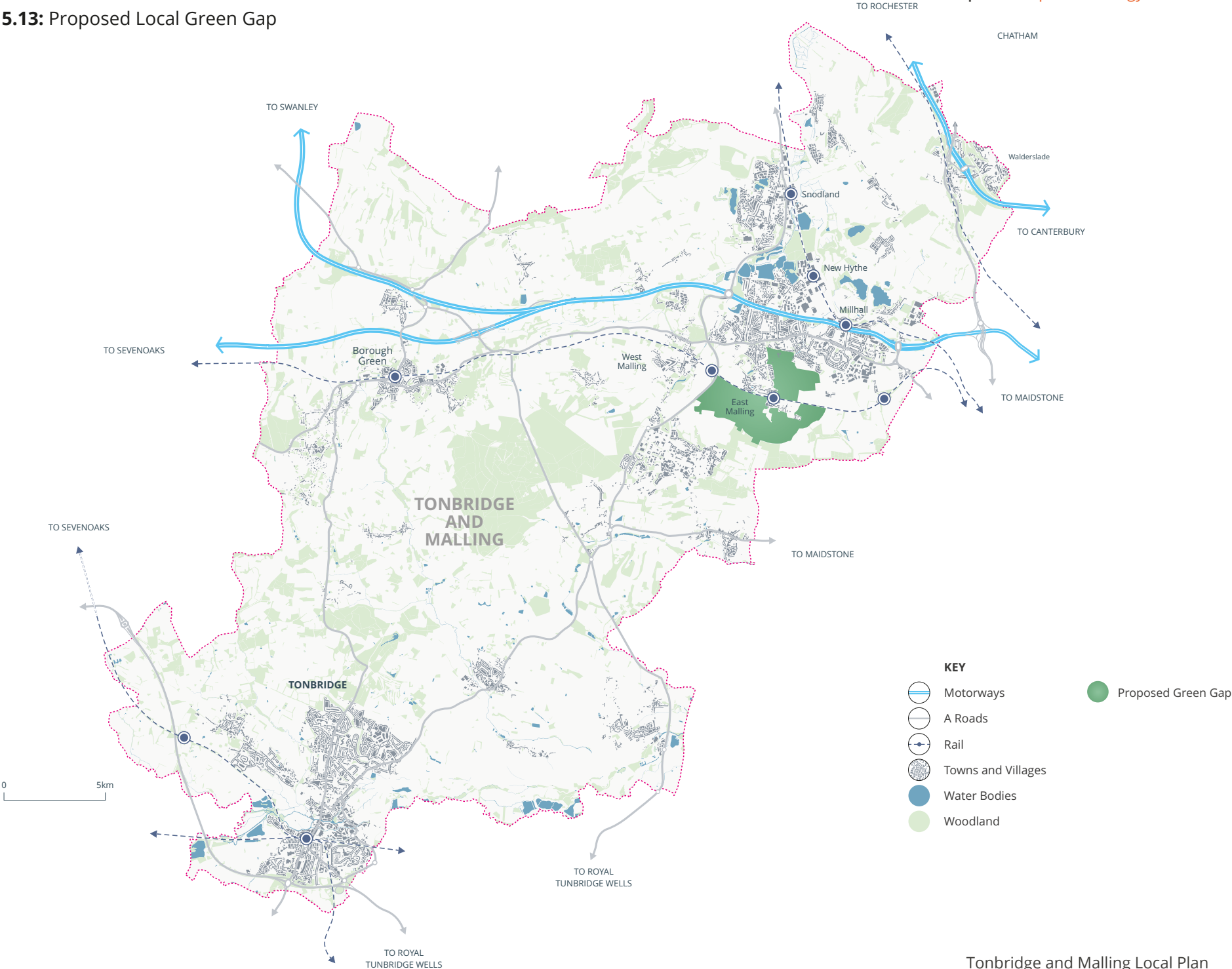
Policy Implementation

5.114 Planning applications within the Green Gap should be supported by proportionate, site-specific evidence to demonstrate how the proposal accords with Policy SP9.

5.115 Development proposals within the Green Gap will be assessed to ensure they do not undermine the openness, visual separation, or functional role of the gap.

5.116 Only proposals that demonstrably maintain the character and purpose of the designation, including preserving the separate identity and setting of settlements, while contributing positively to the landscape character, biodiversity, and/or recreational value of the area will be supported. Pre-application consultation is encouraged prior to the submission of planning applications within the Green Gap, and should any major applications be proposed then these will be expected to demonstrate early, proactive and effective engagement with both the LPA and the community.

Figure 5.13: Proposed Local Green Gap



Healthy Communities



Introduction

5.117 The planning system has an important role in creating healthy, inclusive and sustainable communities. Physical and mental health and wellbeing are influenced by a wide range of social, environmental and economic factors, including housing quality, access to services and facilities, opportunities for physical activity, transport choices, environmental quality, social interaction, employment opportunities, and access to healthy and affordable food.

5.118 Evidence from Kent's Joint Strategic Needs Assessment identifies obesity, physical inactivity, health inequalities and wider determinants of health as significant challenges affecting the health and wellbeing of residents. The evidence also highlights the importance of adopting a whole-system approach to improving health outcomes and reducing inequalities through decisions relating to growth and development.

5.119 Health and wellbeing services and support are delivered by a range of organisations across the public, private and voluntary and community sectors, including relevant NHS bodies, local authorities, health and care partnerships, independent providers and community organisations. The planning system has an important role in supporting the coordinated delivery of these services and ensuring communities have equitable access to them.

5.120 The Borough's future growth should contribute positively to health and wellbeing by supporting healthy lifestyles, promoting active travel, improving access to services and green infrastructure, reducing exposure to environmental hazards, and creating attractive and inclusive places that meet the needs of all sections of the community. Local Plan policies collectively contribute to these objectives through the delivery of homes, jobs, infrastructure, open space, active travel networks and high-quality design.

5.121 Development proposals should take account of existing healthcare, community and social infrastructure within the area, including known capacity constraints and planned commitments. Where growth generates additional demand, applicants should demonstrate that appropriate provision can be delivered through new facilities, expansion of existing facilities, financial contributions, or other agreed measures.

5.122 Health considerations are relevant across a wide range of development proposals. Health Impact Assessments provide a recognised mechanism for ensuring that health implications are considered at an early stage and that opportunities to improve health and wellbeing are maximised through the design and layout of development.

5.123 Food environments can influence dietary behaviours and wider health outcomes. In considering proposals for hot food takeaways, drive-through restaurants and similar uses, the Council will have regard to the potential effect of proposals on the local food environment, particularly in areas frequented by children and young people and within communities experiencing poorer health outcomes. Particular consideration will be given to the cumulative impact of existing food and drink uses and whether a proposal would undermine local health and wellbeing objectives or exacerbate existing health inequalities. Proposals that would result in unacceptable harm to the achievement of healthy community objectives may not be supported.

Policy SP10: Healthy communities and Health Impact Assessment

- 1 Development proposals should support the creation of healthy, inclusive and safe communities and support improvements to the physical and mental health and wellbeing of existing and future residents.
- 2 Major development, and other development which is likely to give rise to significant health and wellbeing effects, shall be supported by proportionate health evidence. This may include a Health Statement or Health Impact Assessment where appropriate to the scale, nature and location of the proposal.
- 3 Health evidence submitted in support of development proposals should demonstrate how the proposal has considered, where relevant:

Healthy Lifestyles

- a The extent to which the development supports healthy lifestyles through:
 - i opportunities for walking, wheeling and cycling;
 - ii access to public transport;
 - iii opportunities for recreation, sport and physical activity;
 - iv access to open space, green infrastructure and nature; and
 - v access to healthy and affordable food.

Healthy Environments

- b The extent to which the development contributes towards a healthy environment through:
 - i air quality, noise and environmental quality;
 - ii climate resilience and adaptation;
 - iii safe, attractive and accessible public spaces; and
 - iv community safety and perceptions of safety.

Healthy Communities

- c The extent to which the development provides:
 - i access to healthcare, education, community facilities and other social infrastructure;
 - ii accessibility and inclusion;
 - iii community cohesion and social interaction;
 - iv the needs of children, older people and other population groups that may experience poorer health outcomes;
 - v opportunities to reduce health inequalities;
 - vi appropriate provision for new or enhanced healthcare, community and social infrastructure where required to meet needs arising from the development; and
 - vii evidence that any proposed healthcare, community or dual-use facilities are deliverable and capable of being provided at the appropriate time to meet the needs generated by the development.

Policy SP10: Healthy communities and Health Impact Assessment continued

Mitigation and Enhancement

- 4 Development proposals shall demonstrate how potential adverse health effects have been avoided, minimised or appropriately mitigated and how opportunities to improve health and wellbeing outcomes have been maximised.
- 5 Where development proposals include the provision of healthcare, community or dual-use facilities, applicants shall demonstrate:
 - a how the proposed provision responds to identified needs and capacity constraints;
 - b that appropriate land, buildings and funding arrangements can be secured and delivered;
 - c that the proposed facility is capable of being implemented and brought into use within an appropriate timeframe; and
 - d that the site and design allow for future adaptation or expansion where this may reasonably be required to meet future needs.
- 6 Where necessary to make development acceptable in planning terms, mitigation measures may be secured through planning conditions, planning obligations and/or Section 106 Agreements.

Food Environment Considerations

- 7 Where development proposals involve food and drink uses, including hot food takeaways, drive-through restaurants, or other uses that may influence the local food environment, applicants should demonstrate, where relevant to the proposal:
 - a the relationship of the proposal to surrounding communities and facilities regularly used by children and young people;
 - b opportunities to support healthier food choices;
 - c impacts on local health and wellbeing objectives and impacts on health inequalities.
 - d whether the proposal would undermine the creation of a healthy food environment or conflict with local health and wellbeing objectives; and
 - e the cumulative impact of existing food and drink uses in the surrounding area and whether the proposal would contribute to an over-concentration of uses that may adversely affect health and wellbeing outcomes.
- 8 Proposals for hot food takeaways, drive-through restaurants and similar uses that would undermine the creation of a healthy food environment, exacerbate health inequalities, or have an unacceptable cumulative impact on local health and wellbeing objectives will not be supported.

Collaborative Working

5.124 The Council will work collaboratively with applicants, Kent County Council Public Health, healthcare providers, infrastructure providers and other relevant stakeholders to ensure that health considerations are integrated into development proposals at an early stage in the planning process.

5.125 Where appropriate, discussions should consider the need for mitigation, infrastructure provision, management arrangements and any planning obligations necessary to address identified health impacts.

5.126 This policy should be read alongside other relevant Local Plan policies, including those relating to infrastructure delivery, air quality, climate change mitigation and adaptation, sustainable transport, design, green infrastructure and community facilities. Health and wellbeing considerations should be integrated across all aspects of development planning and delivery.

Policy Implementation

5.127 The Council will apply this policy proportionately having regard to the scale, nature and location of development.

5.128 Health evidence should be focused on those health issues that are relevant to the proposal and should be proportionate to the potential health effects that may arise.

5.129 Health evidence should be informed by relevant and up-to-date information sources, where applicable to the proposal, including:

- the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment;
- Census data and mid-year population estimates;
- local authority evidence and monitoring data, including housing needs information and housing registers;
- Kent County Council assessments relating to specialist and supported housing needs;
- NHS data, strategies, corporate plans and service planning evidence;
- the Council's Infrastructure Delivery Plan;
- Air Quality Action Plans, Air Quality Assessments and other environmental evidence;
- the Local Plan evidence base; and
- other relevant Council strategies, plans and monitoring information.

5.130 Where healthcare, community or dual-use facilities are proposed as part of a development, applicants should demonstrate that the proposed facilities are deliverable and capable of meeting identified needs. Evidence should consider the capacity of existing facilities, planned growth, extant planning permissions, relevant NHS and local authority infrastructure plans, and any requirements identified through the Council's Infrastructure Delivery Plan.

5.131 The proposed site layout, masterplan and submitted drawings should clearly identify and safeguard any land or buildings intended for healthcare, community or dual-use purposes and should be consistent with the commitments set out within the Health Statement, Health Impact Assessment (HIA) and other supporting documents.

5.132 Where appropriate, land should be safeguarded to enable the future expansion or adaptation of healthcare and community facilities where changing needs may reasonably require additional capacity over the lifetime of the development.

5.133 Not all development proposals will require a standalone Health Impact Assessment. In some cases, health considerations may be addressed through a Planning Statement, Design and Access Statement, Environmental Statement or other supporting documents submitted as part of a planning application.

5.134 For smaller-scale development, a proportionate Health Statement may be required to demonstrate how relevant health and wellbeing considerations have been addressed. For larger-scale development, or development likely to result in significant health impacts, a Health Impact Assessment may be required.

5.135 As a guide it is likely that developments of 100 dwellings or more or 5,000 sqm of employment floorspace will require an HIA. Proposals involving food and drink uses will also require information to be provided to demonstrate how the policy has been met.

5.136 The Council's validation requirements and any adopted local guidance will provide further detail regarding the circumstances in which a Health Statement or Health Impact Assessment will be required.

Figure 5.14: Local Plan Key Diagram

