
Sustainable Settlement Study

October 2025

1. Introduction

1.1 Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council (TMBC) is currently preparing a new Local Plan which will provide a framework to help guide development in the borough to 2042.

1.2 In July 2024, following the general election, the Government announced that a revised National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) would be published by the end of the year. A new NPPF was published on 12th December 2024. In addition, it has been confirmed that local authorities are to progress plan-making and a date in which to submit a Local Plan has been confirmed, that being December 2026.

1.3 Given that we are now progressing a plan under a new NPPF and the associated timescales to submit a Local Plan, the Council has taken the opportunity to review and consider many of its workstreams and evidence bases. One of these workstreams relates to understanding the sustainability of settlements within the borough and progressing a Sustainable Settlement Study.

1.4 The Sustainable Settlement Study looks to understand the role and function of settlements, providing a basis for understanding the sustainability of settlements, which in turn will inform the Local Plan spatial strategy and settlement hierarchy. It will provide the council's evidence on the role and function of settlements, surveying a wide range of settlements to determine the services and facilities present and the accessibility to existing public transport networks, providing a basis for understanding the sustainability of settlements across the borough.

1.5 It is important to note that the Sustainable Settlement Study will not determine how much growth can be delivered in each settlement. The level of growth that will be distributed across the borough will be dependent on many factors, for example, the availability of land, environmental constraints such as landscape and flooding as well as physical and social constraints such as the availability of infrastructure to support new growth. All of these aspects will be considered in other evidence base documents and through the preparation of the Local Plan, in combination with this sustainable settlement study, the Sustainability Appraisal (SA) and the Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA). The Sustainable Settlement Study will be one of many evidence bases that we will need to consider when defining the growth strategy for the borough.

2. Purpose of the Study

2.1 The purpose of the study is to understand the current sustainability of the borough's settlements.

2.2 For the purposes of this study, a settlement is defined as a minimum as 'a cluster of housing located along more than one street/road'. There is no definition within the NPPF or within Case Law, rather it is up to the decision maker to judge (see Section 5 of this document for further discussion around this).

2.3 Those settlements with the most services and facilities and good level of public transport provision and accessibility are typically the most sustainable settlements in the borough. However, it can also be the case that a settlement with fewer services and facilities can be categorised higher in the hierarchy if, for example, it is in close proximity (800m walking distance) to a sustainable settlement and has sustainable access to the services and facilities within that settlement.

2.4 This Study has been based on the existing level of services and facilities offered by a settlement, together with its location and the provision of sustainable access to other settlements, for example, by public transport. It is therefore a snapshot in time.

The Purpose, Aims and Objectives of this study are:

- To provide an audit of the current provision of services, facilities, infrastructure and access to public transport in settlements, which will then be scored;
- To provide a qualitative consideration of the sustainability of the district's settlements taking into account location of places and connectivity, to understand the interplay and relationships between settlements;
- To determine the sustainability of settlements;
- and to propose a new settlement hierarchy for Tonbridge and Malling.

3. Previously Adopted Settlement Hierarchy

1998 Local Plan

3.1 The council's current settlement service provision was established through the 1998 Tonbridge and Malling Local Plan, which was prepared in conformity with the Kent Structure Plan 1996. This Plan identified an urban area which included the Medway Gap (inclusive then of Snodland and Kings Hill), Tonbridge and the Walderslade part of the Medway Towns. The 1998 Local Plan also defined different categories of 'Rural Settlement'. At the time, the list of villages in the Local Plan tended to be determined by the physical characteristics of the settlement, rather than sustainability or accessibility.

Kent and Medway Structure Plan 2006

3.2 The hierarchy was also identified in the Kent and Medway Structure Plan 2006 Key Diagram and at Policy SS1, which identified the Medway Gap (including Aylesford, Ditton, Larkfield, New Hythe, Snodland, Leybourne and Kings Hill) as a 'Major Urban Area', and Tonbridge as an 'Other Principal Urban Area'. Policy EP14 included Borough Green and West Malling as 'Rural Service Centres.'

Tonbridge and Malling 2007 Core Strategy

3.3 The [Adopted Core Strategy](#) (2007) carried forward the Urban Area definition from the Kent and Medway Structure Plan 2006. Core Strategy Policies CP11, CP12 and CP13 set out the settlement service provision as:

Urban Areas:

- Tonbridge (including Hilden Park)
- The Medway Gap (i.e. the major developed parts of Kings Hill, Leybourne, East Malling, Larkfield, Lunsford Park, Ditton and Aylesford south of the River Medway, Aylesford Forstal, and Snodland);
- The part of the Medway Towns urban area that lies within Tonbridge and Malling Borough (Walderslade)

Rural Service Centres:

- Borough Green, Hildenborough, East Peckham, Hadlow and West Malling

Other Rural Settlements

- Addington, Ightham, Addington Clearway, Mereworth, Aylesford Village, Offham, Birling, Platt, Blue Bell Hill, Plaxtol, Burham, Ryarsh, Crouch, Snoll Hatch, Dunks Green, Trottiscliffe, East Malling Village, Watlington, Eccles, West Peckham, Fairseat, Wouldham, Golden Green, Wrotham Heath, Hale Street, Wrotham

3.4 These are shown on the Key Diagram, below. There are also several named areas that are washed over by Green Belt designation or not named above.

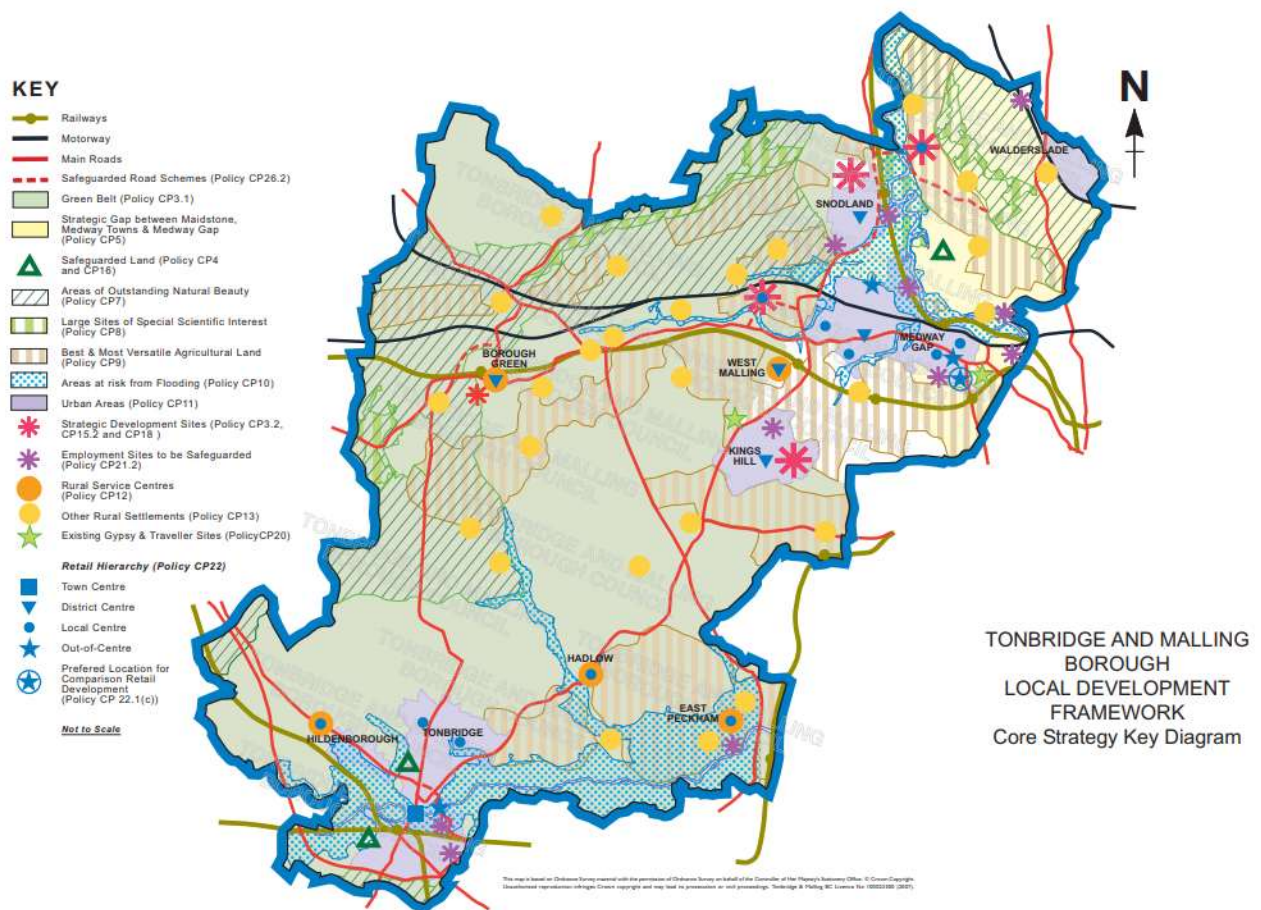


Figure 1: Key Diagram, Core strategy 2007

3.5 A sustainability checklist for settlements was introduced for the Core Strategy, for the purposes of the Urban Capacity Study prepared at the time. This was based on the previously agreed Kent District methodology. The Urban Areas classified in the 1998 Local Plan remain unchanged, but the methodology identified those rural settlements where a minimum range of services were available or accessible. Rural settlements with access to the following services were considered to be the most sustainable locations for further development:

- A post office
- A village shop selling convenience goods (including one combined with a post office)
- A doctors or clinic
- A primary school
- A public transport route with frequent services to one or more of the main urban areas (a frequent service was defined as a minimum of an hourly bus or train service in each direction during weekday peak periods)

3.6 Following consultation, the council decided to substantially review its approach to the rural settlement hierarchy with a view to concentrating development within those relatively few larger

rural settlements that have a good range of services. As a result, Policy CP13 of the Core Strategy concentrated development at the following areas, which were defined as ‘Rural Service Centres’:

- Borough Green, East Peckham, Hadlow, Hildenborough, West Malling

These Rural Service Centres had, at the time, the following services and facilities:

- Primary school
- Doctor’s surgery/clinic
- Library
- Small supermarket
- A series of small shops including -
a post office
a Newsagent and
a Pharmacy
- An hourly bus service in each direction during weekday peak periods.

Village	Post Office	Primary School	Doctor's Surgery	Small Shops	Small Supermarket	Newsagent	Pharmacy	Library	Frequent Bus Service
Aylesford	N	Y	N	Y	N	N	N	Y	Y
Burham	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	N	N	Y
East Malling	Y	Y	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y
Eccles	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	N	N	Y
Plaxtol	Y	Y	N	Y	N	N	N	N	Y
Wateringbury	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	N	N	Y

Figure 2: Sustainability Checklist used in the preparation of the Core Strategy 2007

2019 Withdrawn Local Plan

3.7 This settlement service provision from the Core Strategy 2007 was then carried forward in the withdrawn Local Plan (2019) and confirmed at Policy LP5, but with the additional category of ‘Rural Areas’, defined as ‘*all areas outside of the defined confines of the urban areas, rural service centres and other rural settlements*’. This has no weight or bearing on decision making given that the Local Plan was withdrawn and is included as context only.

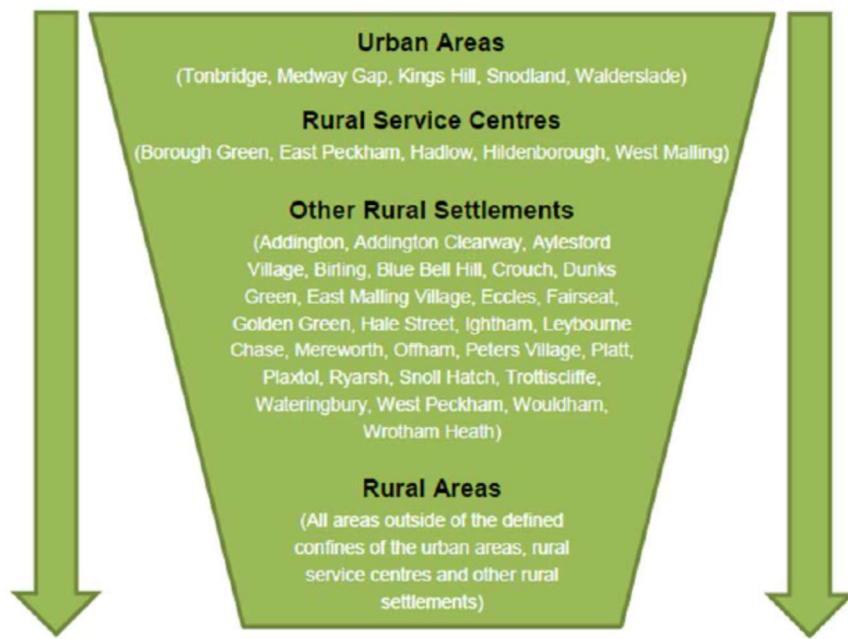


Figure 3: Withdrawn Local Plan Policy LP5 Settlements

2022 Regulation 18 Local Plan

3.8 Section 4.1 of the [Regulation 18 Local Plan 2022](#) asked whether or not the current adopted settlement hierarchy (as shown in Figure 3 above) should be retained to help inform the spatial strategy for the Local Plan.

3.9 Responses received from the Regulation 18 consultation highlighted the importance of facilities and infrastructure to those living in the borough and the need to look again at the settlements to ensure that areas are now categorised appropriately.

4. Discussion and Scope

4.1 There is no specific guidance provided by national policy in relation to how to undertake a Sustainable Settlement Study, however, throughout national policy there are many references to what we must consider when plan-making or making decisions.

National Planning Policy

4.2 The NPPF 2024 at paragraph 7 sets out that the purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development. Sustainable development can be achieved through meeting three overarching and interdependent objectives including:

- an economic objective - to help build a strong, responsive and competitive economy, by ensuring that sufficient land of the right types is available in the right places and at the right time to support growth, innovation and improved productivity; and by identifying and coordinating the provision of infrastructure;
- a social objective – to support strong, vibrant and healthy communities, by ensuring that a sufficient number and range of homes can be provided to meet the needs of present and future generations; and by fostering a well-designed and safe built environment, with accessible services and open spaces that reflect current and future needs and support communities' health, social and cultural well-being; and
- an environmental objective - to contribute to protecting and enhancing our natural, built and historic environment; including making effective use of land, helping to improve biodiversity, using natural resources prudently, minimising waste and pollution, and mitigating and adapting to climate change, including moving to a low carbon economy.

4.3 Paragraph 9 details that planning policies and development should play an active role in guiding development towards sustainable solutions, but in doing so should take local circumstances into account, to reflect the character, needs and opportunities of each area.

4.4 Each of the chapters in the NPPF refer to different elements. Chapter 5 Delivering a sufficient supply of homes refers to planning policies and decisions being responsive to local circumstances and to support housing developments that reflect local needs. It also refers to promoting sustainable development in rural areas and that housing should be located where it will enhance or maintain the vitality of rural communities. It sets out that planning policies should identify opportunities for villages to grow and thrive, especially where this will support local services. It also states that where there are a group of smaller settlements, development in one village may support services in a village nearby.

4.5 Chapter 6 Building a strong competitive economy at paragraph 88 sets out that policies and decisions should enable the retention and development of accessible local services and community facilities, such as local shops, meeting places, sports venues, open space, cultural buildings, public houses and places of worship. It also sets out at paragraph 89 that sites to meet local business and community needs in rural areas may have to be found adjacent to or beyond existing settlements, and in locations that are not well served by public transport. This policy therefore confirms the acceptability that sometimes services and facilities may not be within the confines of a settlement boundary and further text stipulates that opportunities should be

exploited to improve sustainability through better accessibility on foot, by cycling or by public transport.

4.6 For town centres (chapter 7) this sets out that policies and decisions should support the role that town centres play at the heart of local communities, by taking a positive approach to their growth.

4.7 Chapter 8 promoting healthy and safe communities says that we should aim to achieve healthy, inclusive and safe places which....promote social interaction....and enable and support healthy lifestyles...for example through the provision of safe and accessible green infrastructure, sports facilities, local shops, access to healthier food, allotments and layouts that encourage walking and cycling.

4.8 Paragraph 98 sets out that to provide the social, recreational and cultural facilities and services the community needs that policies and decisions should: plan positively for the provision of shared spaces, community facilities (such as local shops, meeting places, sports venues, open space, cultural buildings, public houses and places of worship) and other local services to enhance the sustainability of communities and residential environments. It also states that access to a network of high-quality open spaces and opportunities for sport and physical activity is important for the health and well-being of communities. Specific facilities mentioned includes open space, sports and recreational buildings and land including playing fields.

4.9 Chapter 9 sets out infrastructure including promoting walking, cycling and public transport and chapter 10 is about supporting high quality communications in relation to mobile network and broadband.

What Defines a 'Settlement'?

4.10 One of the first matters to address when undertaking a Sustainable Settlement Study is to identify what settlements to include in the study. There is a little information contained within national policy to assist with this. Relevant Case Law has therefore been interrogated. The case of *Braintree District Council v Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government & Ors* [2018] EWCA Civ 610, whilst not entirely relevant to the nature of this study, does provide a useful discussion and states:

"What constitutes a settlement for these purposes is also left undefined in the NPPF. The NPPF contains no definitions of a "community", a "settlement", or a "village". There is no specified minimum number of dwellings, or population. It is not said that a settlement or development boundary must have been fixed in an adopted or emerging local plan, or that only the land and buildings within that settlement or development boundary will constitute the settlement. In my view a settlement would not necessarily exclude a hamlet or a cluster of dwellings, without, for example, a shop or post office of its own, or a school or community hall or a public house nearby, or public transport within easy reach. Whether, in a particular case, a group of dwellings constitutes a settlement, or a "village", for the purposes of the policy will again be a matter of fact and planning judgment for the decision-maker. In the second sentence of paragraph 55 the policy acknowledges that development in one village may "support services" in another. It does not stipulate that, to be a "village", a settlement must have any "services" of its own, let alone "services" of any specified kind."

4.11 National planning policy or guidance does not provide specific advice for how settlements should be assessed and categorised. However, it is important to note that the NPPF places great importance on the role of town centres (Section 7), “planning policies and decisions should support the role that town centres play at the heart of local communities, by taking a positive approach to their growth, management and adaptation” (Paragraph 86).

4.12 As there is no definition within the NPPF or within Case Law as to what a settlement is, as the decision maker and for the purposes of this study, we have defined a settlement as a minimum as ‘a cluster of housing located along more than one street/road’.

Services Criteria and Transport Infrastructure

4.13 Responses received from the 2022 Regulation 18 consultation highlighted the importance of facilities and infrastructure to those living in the borough, to support new development. When considering what services and facilities to include there are also a number of other considerations. This is to factor in emerging trends in a post-Covid world, including home working. The trend of working from home can also reinforce places in terms of utilising local shops. Furthermore, the move to online working and the spread of high-speed broadband in facilitation of this, has potentially reduced reliance on buses and other public transport and also access to some types of employment, i.e., people can now work anywhere.

4.14 It is up to the individual authority to decide what falls under this definition, taking into account a range of factors. Typically, Key Services are those which are key for the day-to-day functioning of a settlement. The next tier of services is those which it is important to access relatively easy for day-to-day purposes.

4.15 In terms of transport infrastructure, it is the frequency and variety of services that is typically considered most important.

Accessibility

4.16 How services are accessed is an important component of a Sustainable Settlement Study. For the smaller settlements, which may not contain Key Services, the ease and ability to access those facilities elsewhere is a determining factor in settlement sustainability.

4.17 Within our Sustainability Appraisal we have referred to ‘easy walking distance’ in the appraisal assumptions, which will also be utilised within this Study.

4.18 There are several pieces of research that give a variety of recommended guidance distances for walking. For example, the Chartered Institute of Highways and Transportation (CIHT) found that the average length of a walk journey is one kilometre. The CIHT categorises distances depending upon location and purpose of the trip, and ‘desirable’, ‘acceptable’, and ‘preferred maximum’. In relation to this, Planning for Walking (2000, 2015) and The Manual for Streets (2007, and 2010) suggest that typical walking/cycling distances are 400m for bus stops and 800m for train stations.

4.19 It is also important as part of the study to consider travel distance between settlements and the nearest area providing most or all of the services and facilities identified. Paragraph 79 of the NPPF states that “where there are groups of smaller settlements, development in one village may support services in a village nearby”, the importance of which has been underlined in Case Law.

4.20 Sitting alongside this is the concept of '20 minute neighbourhoods/15 minute cities' ([link: RTPi](#) and [TCPA](#)). This ties in closely with the sustainability, climate change and health and wellbeing agendas in terms of meeting people's needs through access to shops, jobs, schools, play/open spaces, doctors etc, within a short walk or cycle.

Point-based Scoring

4.21 A common approach to undertaking Sustainable Settlement Studies is to use a point-based scoring system to rank settlements, focussing on availability of services within existing defined settlement boundaries.

4.22 Points are typically awarded for access to key services. There are numerous variations for awarding points. A key matter to consider however is the distance of services and facilities from settlements. This ties into accessibility. In general, 800m is considered to be an acceptable walking distance. This equates to approximately half a mile and is generally considered a standard walkable distance (The Manual for Streets (2007), and guidance from the Chartered Institute of Highways and Transportation). The National Design Guide also defines 'walkable' developments as having local facilities within 800m. There is a robust reasoning therefore for assigning points in this way.

Settlement Definitions

4.23 In identifying a settlement hierarchy, it is normal practice to define settlement categories. These can include separation of larger settlements into 'Principal Town' and 'Urban Areas', or 'Main Borough Urban Centre' and 'Other Borough Urban Centres', for example. For rural areas, a range of terms are often used, including 'Rural Local Service Centres', 'Larger Rural Settlement' and 'Villages with Built up Area Boundaries'. A Tiered approach is also often utilised. The most important factor in defining settlement categories is to ensure that this is reflective of the information from the study as well as an understanding of each of the settlements.

Other Evidence

4.24 There is overlap with the settlement service provision study and other pieces of evidence including the Green Belt Study, Climate Change and Infrastructure Delivery Plan for example.

4.25 The formulation of our new spatial strategy offers opportunity to consider the provisions of services and infrastructure going forward, and how this might enhance existing settlement provision. There will likely be opportunities as part of development coming forward to rectify any deficiencies and make places more sustainable through the provision of either new or enhanced services and facilities, for example.

5. Methodology

5.1 This section sets out the methodology that has been used to assess the sustainability of settlements within the borough. The study has used a desk-based approach along with local knowledge of the settlements, site visits and consultation with Members to understand which facilities and services are present within each settlement included in the study.

5.2 We have used the settlements listed in the adopted Core Strategy as the starting point for consideration of settlements. However, since this was adopted, Leybourne Chase and Peters Village have been constructed and therefore now also require consideration. Stansted and Shipbourne were not previously listed within the Core Strategy, but under our definition of 'settlement' as set out in Section 2 of this document, they have been deemed suitable for inclusion within the assessment.

5.3 Tonbridge and Hilden Park, and the Medway Gap have continued to be assessed as 'wholes' within this Study – that is, they have been deemed, through both this study and historically, to function as standalone settlements, sharing services across named areas with close relationships in both proximity, geography, services and accessibility.

5.4 For the purposes of the study, we have therefore assessed 40 named settlements within the district. These are:

- Addington
- Addington Clearway
- Aylesford Village
- Birling
- Blue Bell Hill
- Borough Green
- Burham
- Crouch
- Dunks Green
- East Malling
- East Peckham
- Eccles
- Fairseat
- Golden Green
- Hadlow
- Hale Street
- Hildenborough
- Ightham
- Kings Hill
- Leybourne Chase
- Merworth and Herne Pond
- Medway Gap (includes the areas of Leybourne, New Hythe, Lunsford, part of East Malling, Larkfield, Ditton and Aylesford south of the River)
- Offham
- Peters Village
- Platt

- Plaxtol
- Ryarsh
- Shipbourne
- Snodland
- Snoll Hatch
- Stansted
- Tonbridge including Hilden Park
- Trottiscliffe
- Walderslade
- Wateringbury
- West Malling
- West Peckham
- Wouldham
- Wrotham
- Wrotham Heath

5.5 In terms of which services and facilities we should include, the NPPF was used as the starting point. It should be noted that the NPPF is not explicit in setting out a definitive list of services and facilities to define a settlement's sustainability, however it provides a good basis in which we can consider sustainability. Based upon the NPPF and a review of the services and facilities criteria in previous settlement hierarchy work, a list of services was therefore identified. It is also important to consider which services are most important for day-to-day functioning and which services are perhaps less important. Figure 5 sets out our approach to services and facilities and justifies their inclusion. This includes and reflects feedback from Member engagement.

5.6 Typically, 'Key Services' are those which are key for the day-to-day functioning of a settlement. The next tier of services labelled 'Important Community Services' are those which it is important to access relatively easily for day-to-day purposes. 'Other Services' are perhaps less vital.

5.7 A GIS map was also produced to understand the location of services and facilities, and this was then sense checked through desktop survey, internet research and site visits where necessary.

Member Engagement

5.8 We engaged with Members on both the inclusion of specific services within categories (our methodology), and the list of services within settlements (our assessment) to ensure accuracy and completeness. Final and checked proformas for each settlement are included at **Appendix A**.

5.9 A number of suggestions were made by Members to the methodology, which were mostly incorporated as per Figure 4 below.

Member Suggestion	Outcome
Include Petrol stations at Key Services	Accepted and included
Include Post offices/ATMs as Key Services	Accepted and included
Include access to green spaces in key Services	Officers felt that open spaces are covered adequately in the methodology
Consider accessibility to train stations	To be used as part of the qualitative

	assessment
--	------------

Figure 4: Outcome from Member engagement

5.10 The Study therefore utilises the following categorisation:

Key Services within area/settlement or within 800m walking distance from settlement.	Justification
Primary School	Catchment areas typically smaller for primary education
Preschool or Day Nursery	A vital service for those with children
Doctors Surgery	Important for urgent and non-urgent appointments
Dentist	Regular check-ups encouraged by NHS and typically offer emergency appointments
Pharmacy	Important to be able to easily pick up prescribed and regular medication
Convenience Store	Vital for those who cannot access larger supermarkets regularly and for smaller purchases like bread and milk
Petrol Station	Can also provide convenience store facility
Post Office/ATM	Useful to access relatively easily but post boxes usually available for day to day posting purposes. Stamps etc can be purchased in convenience stores. Can also access money.
Community Centre/Village Hall	Can provide multiple uses such as for community groups, clubs, meet-ups etc
Equipped play area	Important for children in terms of health, wellbeing and socialisation
Access to fibre or super-fast broadband	Considered important as remote working/working from home is now so popular
Important Community Services within area/settlement or within 800m walking distance	Justification
Secondary School	Settlements can be in multiple catchment areas and are typically accessible by bus services in term time
College or Further Education	Useful to access relatively easily but courses often held virtually too. Can also offer less rigid attendance patterns
Large Supermarket <400sqm	Online delivery services typically available, for larger shops transport is also often necessary
Optician	The NHS recommends people should have their eyes tested every two years and

	prescriptions can now be delivered to home
Hospital, Community Diagnostics or Minor Injuries Unit	For emergency and routine appointments
Other areas of open space/pitches	Useful for health and wellbeing purposes
Indoor Sports Facilities	Useful for health and wellbeing purposes
Place of worship	Services can also be weekend based or online
Other Services within area/settlement or within 800m walking distance	Justification
Library or mobile library	The use of libraries has decreased with people getting books via digital methods
Vets	For routine/emergency appointments
Other Shops (ie charity shops, lifestyle shops)	Not vital for everyday access
Pub/Restaurant/Café/Takeaway	Not a vital service but useful for recreation/social use
Employment areas/sites	Access to area such as industrial areas, depots and factories

Figure 5: Service categorisation

Approach to the Assessment and Scoring Methodology

5.11 In order to use the indicators set out in Figure 5 to assess settlements in terms of their sustainability, a scoring mechanism is needed. As discussed, a review of published settlement studies by other LPA'S led to the conclusion that there is no 'one size fits all' approach. However, many authorities have used a point-based scoring system to help rank settlements, focussing on the availability of services within settlements.

5.12 As part of our engagement with Members, we set out 3 options for scoring different services and facilities:

Scoring Method	Services	Points
<i>System 1 scoring</i>	Key Services	10
	Important Community Services	5
	Other Services	1
<i>System 2 scoring</i>	Key Services	3
	Important Community Services	2
	Other Services	1
<i>System 3 scoring</i>	Key Services	1
	Important Community Services	1
	Other Services	1

Figure 6: Scoring approach

5.13 These scores are applied to each settlement where the service/facility existed, regardless of the

number of each service/facility present i.e. if a settlement had two primary schools, it would only receive one set of points.

5.14 From the feedback received, it was clear that in order to test facilities comprehensively, we should score across all 3 options and then provide a mean figure. An additional score for public transport accessibility would then be added to provide a final total.

Transport Infrastructure and accessibility

5.15 Accessibility is also a key factor for the study in relation to how to score the provision of bus and rail services including their frequency. This would also require scores to be identified alongside identifying frequency ranges.

5.16 In terms of transport infrastructure (ie buses and trains), it is the availability, frequency and variety of services that is typically considered most important. It is prudent, given the location of train stations in the borough, to separate out scoring for bus accessibility and train accessibility.

Accessibility - BUS	Rating	Points
Services available Monday to Sunday with reduced service on evenings and Sundays 30-40 minute daytime frequency across services	Good	3
Services Monday to Friday. Reduced or no service on evenings and weekends 60-120 minute daytime frequency across services available	Fair	2
Limited bus service, available at least 2 days or more a week	Limited	1

Figure 7: Bus categorisation and scoring

Accessibility - TRAIN	Points
Train station offering <u>direct</u> services to London, and services to other Kent/local stations	3
Train station offering services to London <u>with changes</u> , and services to other Kent/local stations	2

Figure 8: Train categorisation and scoring

Qualitative Assessment

5.17 A qualitative assessment helps to sense check the results, identify any anomalies and to ensure that there is enough flexibility to ensure that settlements are categorised appropriately. This includes proximity to other settlements including by walking and road/public transport, and to the types of services available nearby, whether there is support or sharing of services between settlements, and furthermore a consideration of a settlement's population figures and the community it supports.

5.18 Accessibility is also an important factor. For example, a settlement may have a limited number of services or facilities but may have very good sustainable transport links with another settlement that does provide a good range of services and facilities. This provides a justification to consider that settlement to be more sustainable. This approach reflects one of the main objectives of the NPPF, which is to focus growth where residents have the opportunity to use non-car modes of travel.

5.19 A qualitative assessment is also useful for scoring transport accessibility, whereby access to a train station may have accessibility issues and challenges for disabled residents (at East Malling for example).

6. Findings and outcomes

6.1 The scoring method was applied to the list of services and facilities for each settlement (included at **Appendix A**), the results of which are set out in the tables below. Settlements are listed from highest final scoring to lowest.

Settlement Name	System 1 Scoring	System 2 Scoring	System 3 Scoring	Average	Acessibility Score	Final Score
Tonbridge (including Hilden Park)	155	54	24	77.67	6	83.67
Medway Gap	155	53	23	77.00	5	82.00
Snodland	135	46	20	67.00	6	73.00
Borough Green	135	46	20	67.00	4	71.00
Walderslade	134	45	19	66.00	3	69.00
Hildenborough	133	44	18	65.00	3	68.00
Hadlow	123	41	17	60.33	3	63.33
West Malling	114	39	17	56.67	5	61.67
Kings Hill	119	41	18	59.33	2	61.33
East Malling	92	31	13	45.33	5	50.33
East Peckham	94	32	14	46.67	3	49.67
Watlingbury	92	30	12	44.67	5	49.67
Wouldham	100	31	11	47.33	1	48.33
Aylesford Village	92	30	12	44.67	1	45.67
Hale Street	84	29	13	42.00	3	45.00
Burham	91	29	11	43.67	1	44.67
Snoll Hatch	78	27	12	39.00	3	42.00
Wrotham	81	26	10	39.00	2	41.00
Eccles	81	26	10	39.00	1	40.00
Leybourne Chase	81	26	10	39.00	1	40.00
Peter's Village	81	26	10	39.00	1	40.00
Plaxtol	81	26	10	39.00	1	40.00
Platt	71	23	9	34.33	1	35.33
Blue Bell Hill	62	21	9	30.67	1	31.67
Ightham	61	20	8	29.67	2	31.67
Birling	61	20	8	29.67	1	30.67
Ryarsh	61	20	8	29.67	1	30.67
Trottiscliffe	61	20	8	29.67	1	30.67
Mereworth & Herne Pound	51	17	7	25.00	3	28.00
Stansted	51	17	7	25.00	0	25.00
Offham	44	17	9	23.33	1	24.33
Shipbourne	46	15	6	22.33	1	23.33
Fairseat	40	13	5	19.33	2	21.33
Addington	41	14	6	20.33	0	20.33
Addington Clearway	37	13	6	18.67	1	19.67
Golden Green	36	12	5	17.67	2	19.67
West Peckham	31	11	5	15.67	0	15.67
Wrotham Heath	17	7	4	9.33	1	10.33
Dunks Green	11	4	2	5.67	1	6.67
Crouch	0	0	0	0.00	0	0.00

Figure 8: Scoring outcome, ranked in order

6.2 It is noted that scoring for the settlements varies widely across the alternative scoring systems. Averaging the score works well however to allow analysis and comparison. Overall, we feel that by applying the various scoring methods, we have provided a thorough sensitivity check for the scoring and ranking of the borough's settlements. The analysis above shows that whilst the scores for each settlement vary considerably between methods, their overall scores and rankings do not fundamentally change.

6.3 Figure 8, above, shows the average scores, and does not indicate a settlements place in the settlement hierarchy, as a qualitative element also needs to be applied. This has been carried out below.

Identification of Settlement Categories

6.4 We need to define settlement categories in order to enable us to develop a new settlement heirarchy.

6.5 To enable us to group settlements into a particular category, we need to understand the type, quantity and quality of the services and facilities present, and other sustainability criteria, including accessibility and sustainable transport opportunities to a town or larger settlement with a good level of services, facilities and employment. This approach allows for a qualitative and officer-led assessment.

6.6 Therefore, in defining the settlement hierarchy categories, due consideration was given to how successfully a settlement provides for the day-to-day needs of its residents as well as its proximity and relationship to the wider area and potentially other settlements. Account was also taken of the relationship between settlements and the interplay between services – for example, a low scoring settlement may be close to a higher order settlement with access via sustainable transport and therefore an influence on its position in the hierarchy. Factors such as a settlement's location adjacent to an established urban area was also considered. This approach is deemed to reflect advice contained within the NPPF where it states that "planning policies should identify opportunities for villages to grow and thrive, especially where this will support local services. Where there are groups of smaller settlements, development in one village may support services in a village nearby" (paragraph 83).

6.7 The settlement categories are defined below. There are 5 categories:

Settlement Category	Description
Principal Service Centre (or an urban area that is directly related to and adjacent to a main urban area located outside the borough) Score 69-83	A key urban area providing a wide range of community infrastructure such as nursery, primary, and secondary schools, a good range of public transport options including train services to London as well as offering a retail and employment function, offering all services and facilities to meet community needs for those living within the urban area and wider.
Service Centre Score 61-73	A sustainable and accessible settlement (by road and public transport) that provides a very high level of community infrastructure including primary schools, shops and health

	services. Settlement meets the majority of its own needs and also meets the day-to-day services and facilities needs of surrounding smaller settlements.
Primary Village Score 48-68	Sustainable locations with a good range of services and facilities, but residents may travel to larger centres to meet wider shopping, leisure and employment needs.
Secondary Village Score 28-45	Sustainable settlements that have a more limited access to infrastructure and services, but where day-to-day needs can be met. Residents will depend upon other centres to meet a broader range of needs, with accessibility to those centres via road or public transport.
Other rural settlements	Unsustainable settlements with very few or no services or public transport connectivity and with no/limited access to higher tier settlements in walkable distance, typically in isolated locations.

Figure 9: New Categories and description

Analysis of settlements including application of qualitative assessment

6.8 **Appendix A** contains more detailed profiles for each of the settlements, providing more information on the type and level of services and facilities available as well as their public transport provision. This data, along with a qualitative assessment of settlements, has informed the hierarchy, with more detail set out below.

Principal Service Centres

6.9 This category includes Tonbridge and Hilden Park, the Medway Gap and Walderslade (parts falling within the urban area of Medway). It includes settlements within the scoring range of 69 – 83.

6.10 All of these settlements offer a good range of public transport options including access to train services to London, and the highest rating of bus services (3) to stations, across the settlement and to settlements nearby. They offer nursery, primary and secondary school education as well a wide variety of community services including doctors surgeries, recreational spaces, churches, pubs, supermarkets, cafes and restaurants. They also provide employment opportunities within their centres but also on industrial estates and in business areas.

- Tonbridge and Hilden Park (score 83.67) – Tonbridge provides services across all 3 service categories (Key Services, Important Community Services and Other Services), offering the widest range and choice of facilities and employment opportunities in the borough. It has good accessibility (including public transport connectivity and train service to London), meeting all its own needs.
- Medway Gap (score 82) - The Medway Gap provide services across all 3 service categories (Key Services, Important Community Services and Other Services),

offering the widest range and choice of facilities and employment opportunities in the borough. It has good accessibility (including public transport connectivity and train service to London), meeting all its own needs.

- Walderslade (score 69) – Walderslade falls into this category because it forms part of the Medway Towns urban area and is thus well served and connected to services located within Medway. It is within walking distance to services across all 3 categories (Key Services, Important Community Services and Other Services) providing a wide range of community infrastructure and has proximity to the M2 and bus services to stations in Medway.

Service Centres

6.11 This category includes Borough Green, Snodland, West Malling and Kings Hill. It includes settlements in the scoring range of 61- 73.

6.12 All of these settlements are sustainable and accessible (by road and public transport) and provide a very high level of community infrastructure including primary schools, shops and health services. Settlements within this category meet the majority of their own needs and also meet the day-to-day services and facilities needs of surrounding smaller settlements.

- Snodland (score 73) - Snodland provides for its community and also meets the needs of surrounding smaller settlements in respect of day-to-day services and facilities. The settlement includes a good range of shops and facilities across the 3 service categories and can meet the majority of its own needs. Has a train station offering services to London.
- Borough Green (score 71) - Borough Green provides for its community and also meets the needs of surrounding smaller settlements in respect of day-to-day services and facilities. The settlement includes a good range of shops and facilities across the 3 service categories and can meet the majority of its own needs. Has a train station offering services to London.
- West Malling (score 61.66) - West Malling provides for its community and also meets the needs of surrounding smaller settlements in respect of day-to-day services and facilities. The settlement includes a good range of shops and facilities across the 3 service categories with the addition of a monthly market and can meet the majority of its own needs. Has a train station offering services to London.
- Kings Hill (score 61.33) - Kings Hill provides for its community and also meets the needs of surrounding smaller settlements in respect of day-to-day services and facilities. The settlement includes a good range of shops and facilities across the 3 service categories. The settlement has a large population and offers a wealth of employment areas and regular bus services.

Primary Village

6.13 This category includes Hildenborough, Hadlow, East Malling, East Peckham, Watlingbury and Wouldham. It includes settlements in the scoring range of 48-68.

6.14 Settlements in this category are sustainable locations with a good range of services and facilities, but residents may travel to larger centres to meet wider shopping, leisure and employment needs.

- Hildenborough (score 68) – is included in this category because it has a dependence on other settlements (at Tonbridge and Hilden Park) rather than having a range of services in its own right. It therefore doesn't meet the definition of a service centre and falls more appropriately in the 'Primary Village' category.
- Hadlow (score 63.33) - Hadlow offers a range of services and a good bus service, but the settlement has a rural character and serves a smaller population and thus falls more appropriately in the 'Primary Village' category.
- East Malling (score 50.33) - East Malling has a range of services available, meeting the basic day to day needs of its community. Populations may travel to adjacent settlements to meet some of their wider needs (for example Medway Gap). Train station with services to London.
- East Peckham (score 49.67) - East Peckham has a range of services available, meeting the basic day to day needs of its community. Whilst it doesn't have a train station it does offer good bus services to other nearby settlements.
- Wateringbury (score 49.67) - Wateringbury has a range of services available, meeting the basic day to day needs of its community. Populations may travel to adjacent settlements to meet some of their wider needs (for example Kings Hill or East Malling). Train station with services to London.
- Wouldham (score 48.33) - Wouldham has a dependence on other settlements (at Peters Snodland for example) rather than having a range of services in its own right. It therefore doesn't meet the definition of a service centre and falls more appropriately in the 'Primary Village' category.

Secondary Village

6.15 This category includes Aylesford Village, Hale Street, Burham, Plaxtol, Snoll Hatch, Wrotham, Eccles, Leybourne Chase, Peter's Village, Platt, Ightham, Birling, Ryarsh and Mereworth & Herne Pound. It includes settlements in the scoring range of 28-45.

6.16 Settlements in this category are sustainable settlements that have a more limited access to infrastructure and services, but where day-to-day needs can be met. Residents will depend upon other centres to meet a broader range of needs, with accessibility to those centres via road or public transport.

- Aylesford Village (score 45.67) - Aylesford Village has a limited services offer but has a relationship with nearby well serviced settlements (at Medway Gap for example).
- Hale Street (score 45) - Hale Street itself has limited services but has a relationship with nearby well serviced East Peckham.

- Burham (score 44.67) - Burham offers some services but has limited public transport connectivity.
- Snoll Hatch (score 42) - Snoll Hatch itself has limited services but has a relationship with nearby well serviced East Peckham.
- Wrotham (score 41) - Wrotham offers some limited services/public transport connectivity.
- Eccles (score 40) - Eccles offers some limited services/public transport connectivity.
- Leybourne Chase (score 40) - Leybourne Chase offers some limited services/public transport connectivity.
- Peters Village (score 40) - Peters Village offers some limited services/public transport connectivity.
- Plaxtol (score 40) - Plaxtol offers some limited services/public transport connectivity.
- Platt (score 35.33) - Platt offers some limited services/public transport connectivity.
- Ightham (score 31.67) - Ightham has limited access to services.
- Birling (score 30.67) - Birling offers some limited services/public transport connectivity but has a close relationship with nearby Ryarsh which is walkable distance.
- Ryarsh (score 30.67) - Ryarsh offers some limited services/public transport connectivity but has a close relationship with nearby Birling which is in walkable distance.
- Mereworth and Herne Pound (28) - Mereworth has limited services but has a relationship with nearby Kings Hill with good bus services available to this area.

Other Rural Settlements

6.17 This category includes Stansted, Offham, Shipbourne, Fairseat, Addington, Addington Clearway, Golden Green, West Peckham, Wrotham Heath, Dunks Green, Crouch, Trottiscliffe and Blue Bell Hill.

6.18 Settlements in this category are unsustainable settlements with very few or no services or public transport connectivity and with no/limited access to higher tier settlements in walkable distance, typically in isolated locations.

- Blue Bell Hill (score 31.67) - Has limited public transport accessibility and a small population mean that this settlement falls more appropriately in the 'Other Rural Settlements' category.
- Trottiscliffe (score 30.67) - Has limited public transport accessibility and a small population mean that this settlement falls more appropriately in the 'Other Rural Settlements' category.

- Stansted (score 25) - Settlement has very few or no services/public transport connectivity.
- Offham (score 24.33) - Settlement has very few or no services/public transport connectivity.
- Shipbourne (score 23.33) - Settlement has very few or no services/public transport connectivity.
- Fairseat (score 21.33) - Settlement has very few or no services/public transport connectivity.
- Addington (score 20.33) - Settlement has very few or no services/public transport connectivity.
- Addington Clearway (score 19.67) - Settlement has very few or no services/public transport connectivity.
- Golden Green (score 19.67) - Settlement has very few or no services/public transport connectivity.
- West Peckham (15.67) - Settlement has very few or no services/public transport connectivity.
- Wrotham Heath (score 10.33) - Settlement has very few or no services/public transport connectivity.
- Dunks Green (score 6.67) - Settlement has very few or no services/public transport connectivity.
- Crouch (score 0) - Settlement has no services/public transport connectivity.

New Settlement Heirarchy

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

Figure 10: New Settlement heirarchy

7. Conclusions

Conclusions

7.1 This Study has assessed existing settlements within the borough. Robust criteria have been applied, and the scoring output has led to the creation of a new settlement hierarchy. This work is intended to feed into the Local Plan evidence base and Spatial Strategy and to help (amongst other evidence and information) to inform the appropriate distribution of new development.

7.2 It is important to note that a settlement's place within the hierarchy is not an overriding determining factor in locating future development to an area or the amount of development allocated to each settlement. Settlements at the top of the hierarchy will not automatically be allocated a higher amount of growth, rather factors such as on-site constraints e.g. areas at high risk of flooding, as well as the availability of sites will determine the location. This Study is one of a number of factors to be taken into consideration when considering the Local Plan spatial strategy and the selection of appropriate locations for new development. Transport, employment/economic, environmental, landscape, heritage and flooding considerations also need to be considered in order to determine the most appropriate and sustainable locations for growth within the district.

Monitoring and Review

7.3 This Study will need to be reviewed and updated at the Regulation 19 stage in light of any changing service and facility provision and changes in other pieces of evidence. The settlement hierarchy will therefore be reviewed and updated as appropriate.

Appendices

Appendix A – Settlement proformas

TMBC.GOV.UK
Serving our community