

4.0 Site Appraisal

4.2 Airport Operations

The Rochester Airport site has been in operation as an airport since 1933, and has been leased to an airport operator - Rochester Airport Limited (RAL) by Medway Council since 2000. Currently the airport is home to a variety of activities including:

Leisure aviation	Helicopter sightseeing (London and Kent), Private Pilots Licence training, Microlight, Autogyro, fixed wing light aircraft and helicopters.
Public service	Police, Air ambulance, Medivac fixed wing, Network Rail, Royal Navy, Army and Royal Air Force. Operating on a 24/7 basis.
Training	Training for a one off experience or to qualify for a licence, Microlight, Autogyro, Fixed wing and Helicopters and any conversion of different types. Including advanced training to Commercial Pilots Licence.
Business	Small business and Charter flights (single or twin engine), Fixed wing or Helicopters. In bound from UK/Europe for day trips or longer.
Museum	A private collection of fuel pumps as well as other petrol station memorabilia.

The site's current use as an airport is to be maintained in order to safeguard the important aviation activity with the airport's facilities being invested in to secure a sustainable future for the airport operation.

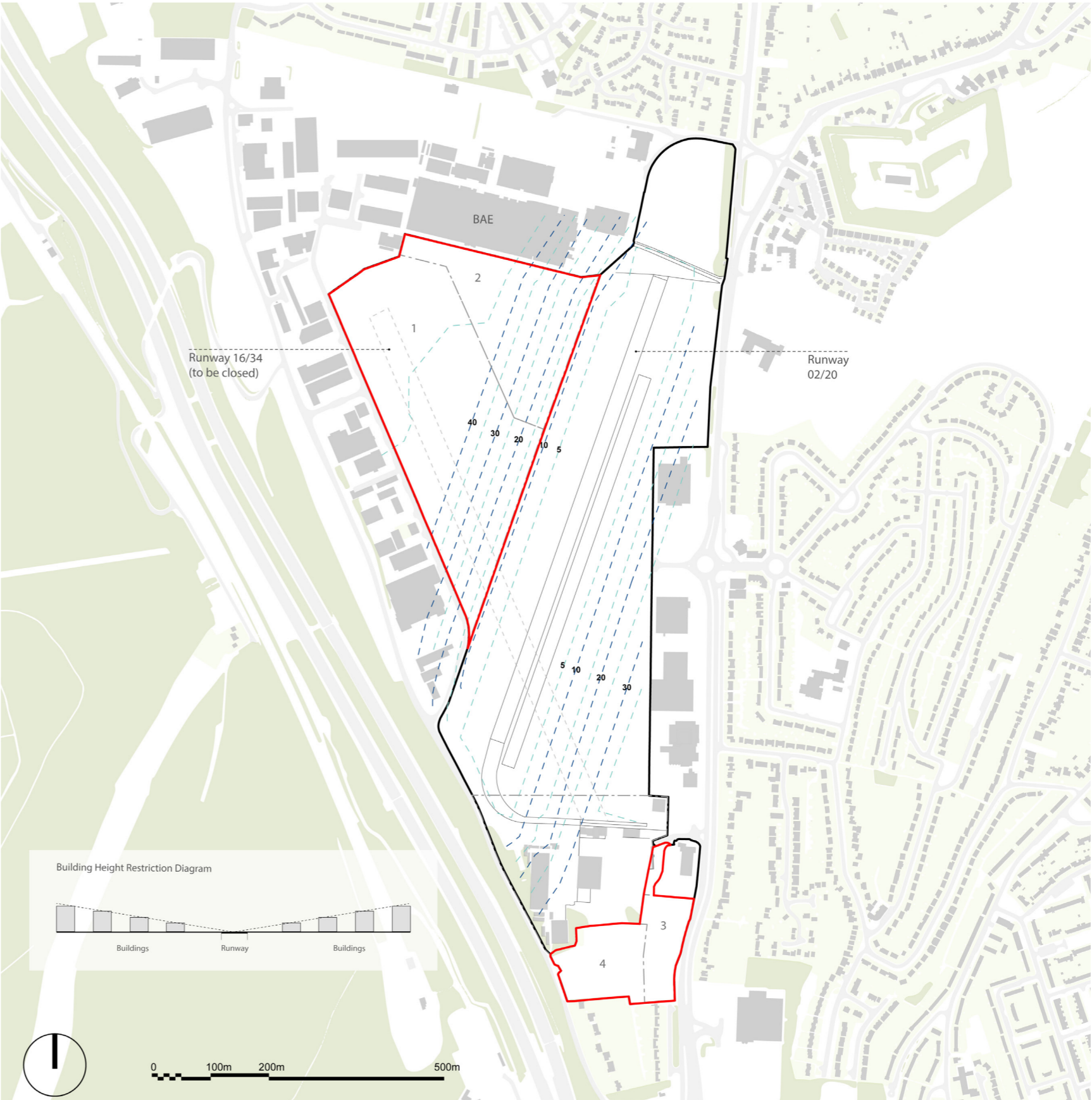
4.2.1 Airport proposals

In addition to proposed new facilities for users and visitors, the primary change proposed for the airport is to remove one of the two grass runways. These moves will make operational improvements and increase efficiency to safeguard Rochester Airport as a viable and sustainable airport with improved facilities for Medway residents and visitors. In addition the development proposals will:

- * Release new land for job creation - with a focus on increasing the skilled jobs in the region;
- * Improve access to aviation related heritage attractions;
- * Preserve existing green views of the airport from Maidstone Road; and
- * Views of AONB through greenspace at airport

4.2.2 Key considerations

The views from the A229 through the residential area to the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) is an integral consideration for the proposed scheme. The height of any proposed development must work within the parameters set by the requirements of the adjacent continued use of the airport as an operational airport. The plan opposite summarises the safeguarding constraints for development to consider and respect the maximum height of buildings and structures that may be accommodated within the safeguarded zones. A height contour is applied with the acceptable height of development increasing with distance from the runway. In addition, the risk of birdstrike on the airport should be considered by development proposals on site.





View of existing hangar building on Rochester Airport site



View from control tower looking north-west along runway 16/34



View looking north west along runway 16/34



View looking north along runway 02/20

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4.3 Access and Movement

Rochester Airport is bounded by the A229 to the east and the B2097 to the west. These roads meet to the south of the site at the Bridgewood roundabout interchange, with the A229 continuing to the south via a grade-separated flyover and a signalised roundabout.

The site is well-connected to the surrounding road network. Emergency access points are located at the southwestern, eastern and western boundaries.

Access to Parcel 1 is currently from the east, across the airport, with an emergency access from Laker Road.

Access to Parcel 2 is via the main entrance to the BAE Systems land from the A229 (aspirational link).

Access to Parcel 3 is from the east, off the A229, with ingress possible via an unused driveway, or via the existing Innovation Centre.

Access to Parcel 4 is via the B2097.

The majority of the existing pedestrian and cycle facilities are found to the east of the airport with limited facilities in the vicinity of the B2097. There are no footways on a section of the B2097 to the south of Laker Road. Existing pedestrian facilities include a signalised crossing on the A229 providing access to the Davis Estate area and southbound bus stops on the A229. There is a cycle route along the A229 consisting of both on street and off street paths. This route connects the Walderslade area with Rochester town centre.

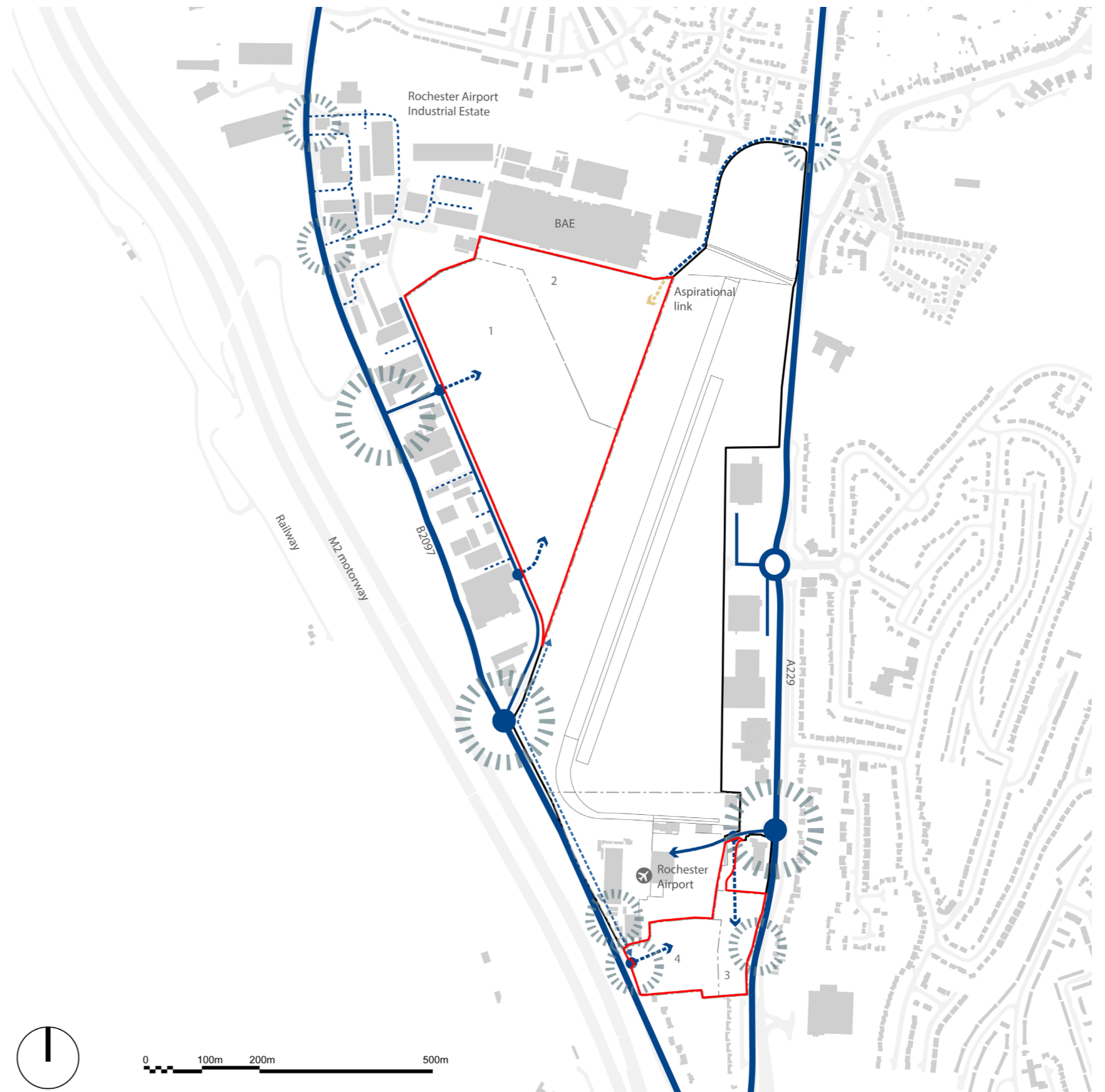
The area is served by a number of bus routes, primarily Service 101 which links to rail stations and runs via the A229 to Maidstone in one direction and Chatham and Gillingham in the other direction. On the western side of the site, Service 142 runs from Chatham out to Kits Coty/Blue Bell Hill Village via the B2097. The 101 service is a key express link between towns and Chatham bus station with links to services across Medway.

4.3.1 Key Considerations

The aspiration for the future of the site is to deliver a new employment site that attracts investment and provides a home for employers where they can attract and retain high quality, skilled staff.

The identity and environmental quality of the site is, therefore, a crucial consideration that the masterplan must make a positive response to. The masterplan must therefore achieve a range of viable, high quality access points that celebrate a sense of arrival and aid legibility for visitors.

Building on existing bus routes which provide good north-south links, opportunities for public transport services to penetrate the site should also be considered along with potential pedestrian and cycle connectivity as part of a green travel plan. Within the internal layout of the masterplan priority should be given to pedestrians and cyclists to ensure that the public realm is of the highest quality and can encourage collaboration to 'spill out' of buildings into shared spaces. Capturing vehicular movements in strategic parking areas that minimise impact upon the public realm is also a key consideration to explore. In addition, pedestrian connectivity between the two sites would be beneficial to support placemaking and community building objectives.





Eastern site entrance to the airport via Innovation Centre and direct link to A229



Former WWII ablutions block along airport boundary with the Innovation Centre



View looking north west along boundary with Laker Road



View looking from the site towards Lankester Parker Road

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4.4 Topography, Ground Conditions and Hydrology

4.4.1 Topography

As befitting the site's past and current use as an airport, the area is relatively flat. Levels Above Ordnance Datum (AOD) are between 127m AOD in the south, and 120m AOD in the north.

Significant gradients are absent from all land parcels, with the only variation being the level of surface cover as a result of current or previous use. There are localised areas of uneven ground on the southern area due to previous demolition and remnant material.

The topography of Parcel 1 and 2 is predominantly flat with falls of approximately 1:80 from the south to the north.

The topography of Parcel 3 is fairly undulating, probably a result of the building demolitions and debris stockpiles. The southern part of the area is higher than the northern part, and assumed to be the remains of the BAE Systems office building, and the level change appears to be remnants of the building foundations.

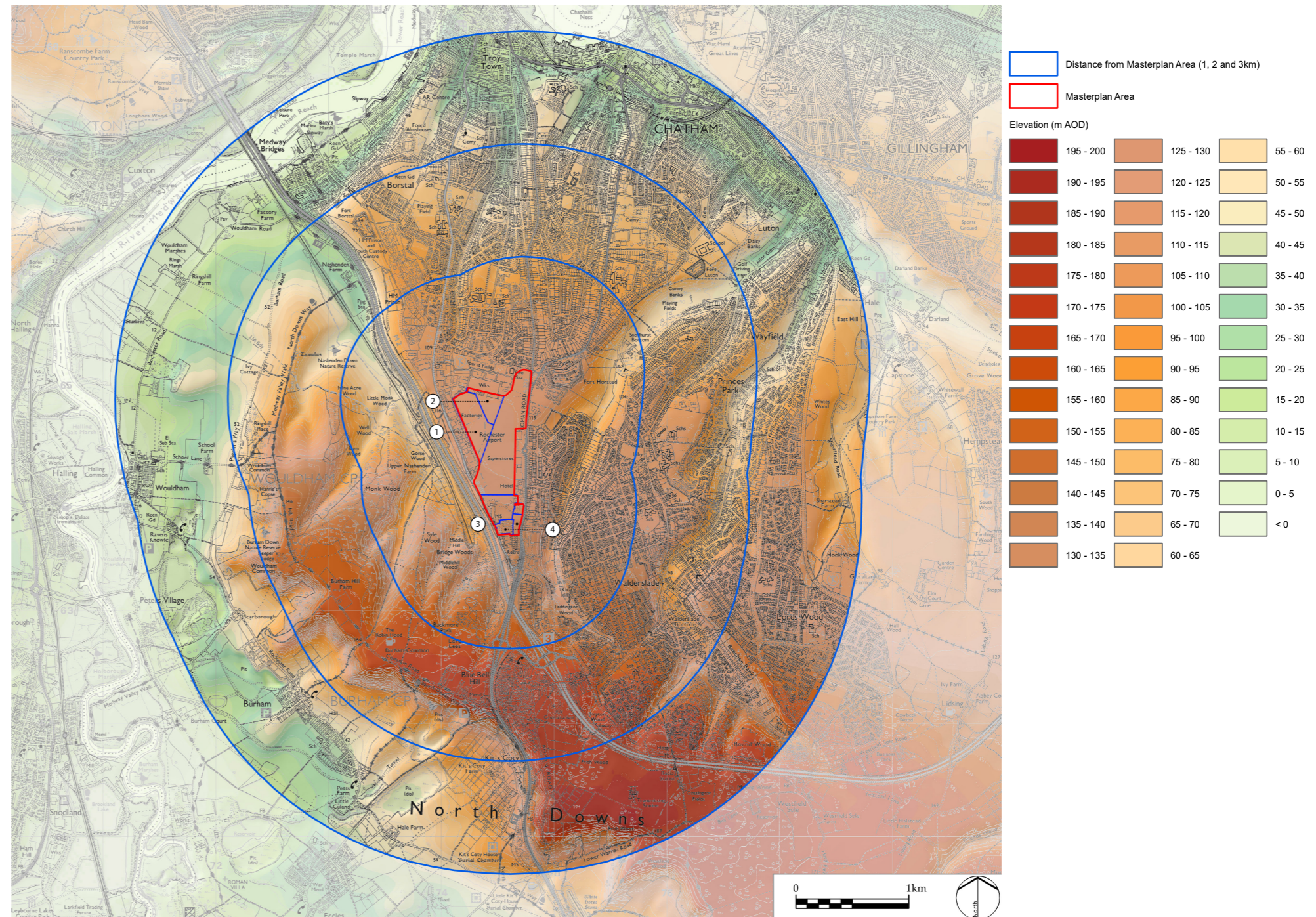
4.4.2 Ground Conditions

Underlying geology of the site is Clay with Flints, underlain by Seaford Chalk. The previous uses of the site as an airport, especially during the Second World War, and aircraft and machinery manufacture means that there is the potential for contamination to be present on site. However, the proposed use as a technology park is a low sensitivity use meaning that overall contamination risk is likely to be controllable during the design process.

4.4.3 Hydrology

The closest main watercourse, the River Medway, lies to the north and west of the site and runs approximately 1.5km to the west of the site boundary. A drainage ditch lies within the site area. The site is located within a Flood Zone 1.

The site lies within an Outer Protection Zone 2 and Source Catchment Protection Zone. The site lies on a Principal Bedrock Aquifer which may support water supply/and or river base flow on a strategic scale. Part of the site is overlain by a Secondary Undifferentiated aquifer.



4.5 Landscape & Visual

4.5.1 Landscape

The site lies within an “Urban and Industrial” area, as identified in the Medway Landscape Character Assessment (March 2011). The Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) is located approximately 100m from the site at its closest point, separated from the site by the M2 motorway and Rochester Road (B2097). Two Areas of Local Landscape Importance (ALLI) are located near the site, namely Horsted Valley (300m east) and Nashenden Valley (100m west)

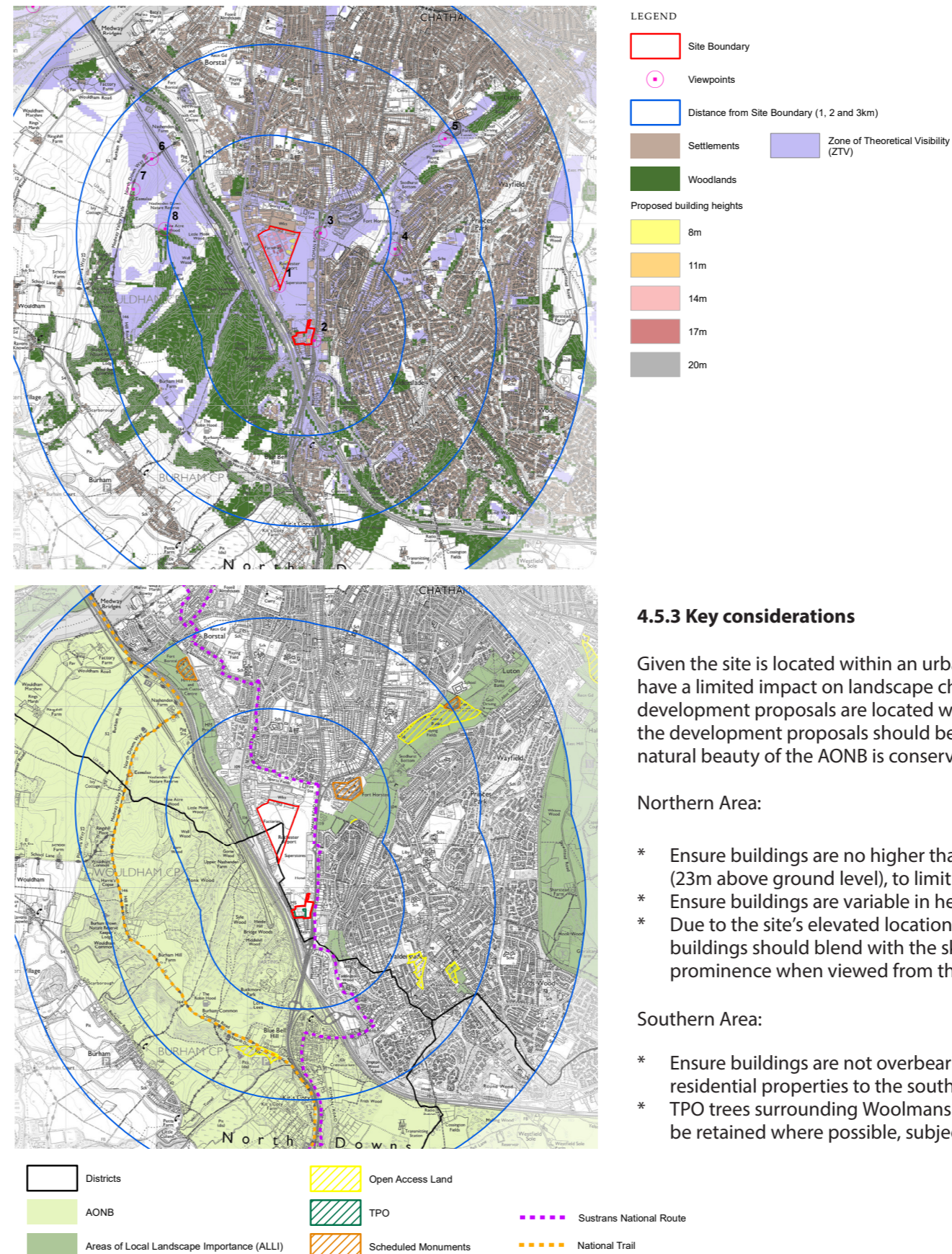
The land surrounding the site comprises the following:

- 1) BAE Systems – mixture of industrial and office accommodation between 1 and 5 storeys, the highest of which is approximately 23m above ground level. There is no uniformity between building styles, ages and heights;
- 2) Horsted Retail Park – double height retail units, Holiday Inn Hotel and a variety of frontages;
- 3) The Airport – varied buildings including 2 hangars and 2 grass runways, plus additional buildings with planning consent;
- 4) Laker Road Industrial Estate – variety of varying office and industrial / manufacturing uses with no uniformity in building types, materials and heights;
- 5) Rochester Airport Industrial Estate – variety of building types including office and industrial with no uniformity in building types, height and materials; and
- 6) Southern area – which includes Woolmans Wood Caravan Park, surrounded by a belt of trees, the majority of which are protected by Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs); Innovation Centre Medway, a 3 to 3.5 storey building approximately 12.5m above ground level at its highest point; 2 storey residential properties immediately to the south of Parcel 3 and to the east of the A229.

4.5.2 Visual

From within the urban area, Rochester Airport is visually contained by surrounding buildings and by trees and vegetation around Woolmans Wood Caravan Park to the south and along Rochester Road to the east.

From the wider area, particularly to the west within the Kent Downs AONB, the site is largely screened by intervening terrain and woodland, although there are areas of elevated ground where the development proposals would be visible. As such consideration should be given to potential impacts on the AONB.



4.5.3 Key considerations

Given the site is located within an urban area, the development proposals would have a limited impact on landscape character within Chatham. However, as the development proposals are located within the setting of the Kent Downs AONB, the development proposals should be of an appropriate scale, ensuring the natural beauty of the AONB is conserved.

Northern Area:

- * Ensure buildings are no higher than the BAE Systems buildings (23m above ground level), to limit visual impacts on the AONB.
- * Ensure buildings are variable in height, providing a staggered roof line.
- * Due to the site's elevated location, the colour of proposed buildings should blend with the skyline, reducing their prominence when viewed from the AONB.

Southern Area:

- * Ensure buildings are not overbearing to the amenity of residential properties to the south and east.
- * TPO trees surrounding Woolmans Wood Caravan Park to be retained where possible, subject to condition.

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4.6 Ecology

An initial Phase 1 survey assessed the habitats on site and their potential to support protected species. This was combined with a desk study and review of previous ecology reports of the site. A survey schedule was then formulated for further investigation into habitats of conservation importance and protected species likely present on site; some surveys of which are still ongoing at the time of writing.

Surveys undertaken before consultation include bat emergence (of off-Site buildings), bat activity, reptile and dormouse.

The species-specific surveys that underpin the masterplan include:

- * Breeding bird surveys of the grassland
- * Bat activity surveys of the site, include static monitoring over an extended period
- * Ground based tree assessments for roosting bat potential
- * Dormouse surveys
- * Reptile surveys
- * Badger survey
- * Botanical survey of the grassland

4.6.1 Summary of Findings from Previous and Current Surveys

Parcel 1 – Supports reptile; common lizard have previously been recorded along the northern boundary. Small numbers of ground nesting birds and foraging bats have also been recorded. The airfield grassland is cut as a meadow and supports a semi-improved grassland community.

Parcel 2 – Unlikely to support protected species.

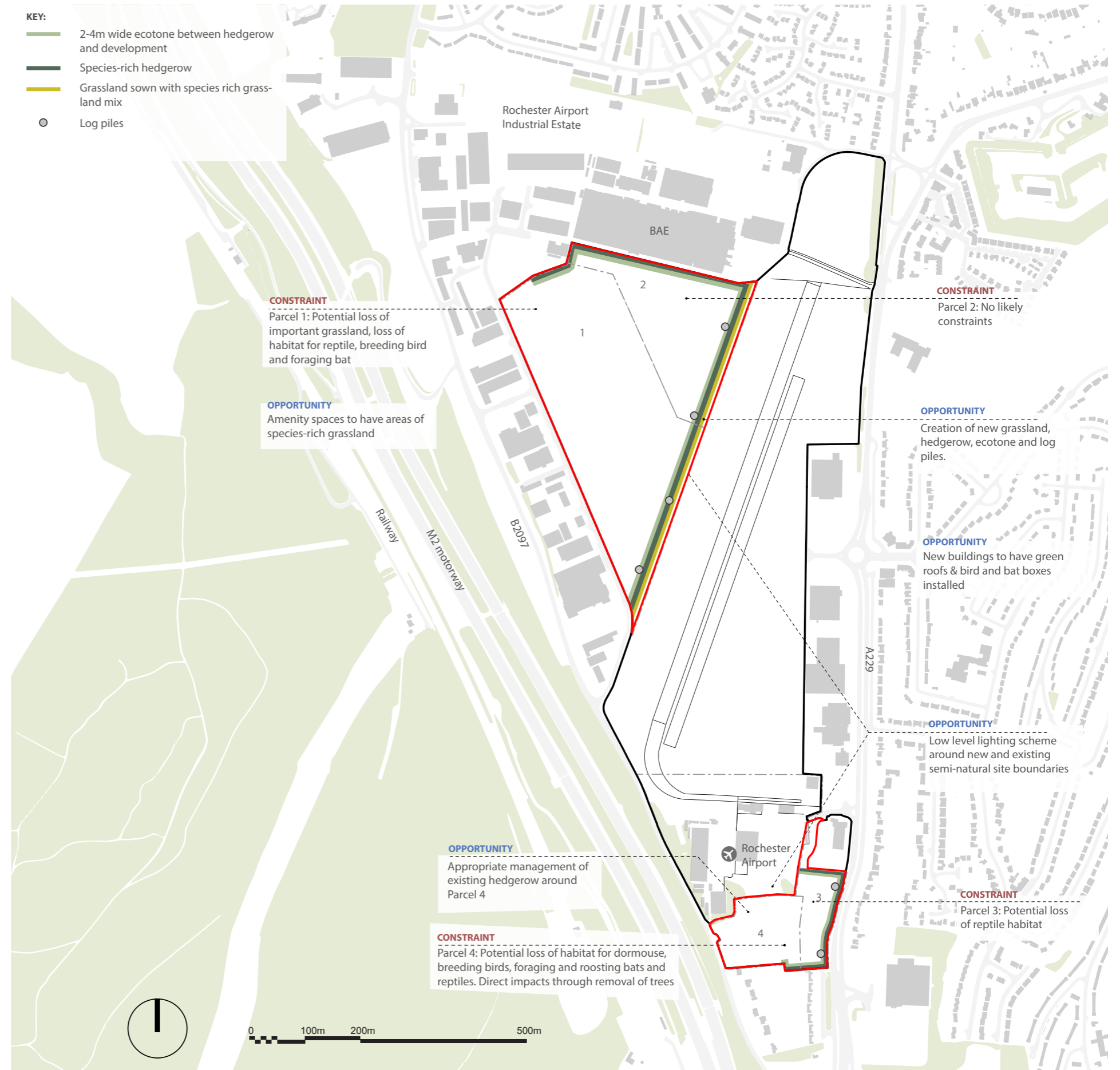
Parcel 3 – No protected species recorded here thus far.

Parcel 4 – Dormouse present in woodland/trees, foraging bats present. Reptile and roosting bat have not been recorded here thus far.

4.6.2 Key Considerations

The findings of the current surveys (and those of previous surveys) have identified a number of likely constraints and opportunities on site as shown in the Constraints and Opportunities Plan.

Constraints will require mitigation to allow the development to proceed without significant adverse impact. Compensation will be required for the loss of grassland in Parcel 1 and loss of woodland in Parcel 4. Opportunities will help mitigate any impacts and enhance the site for biodiversity, with consideration required to ensure that any proposals should also minimise the risk of bird strike on the airfield.



4.7 Heritage

4.7.1 Airfield features of heritage interest

The two runways - the line of the 16/34 runway should be retained in the design to allow continued appreciation of the historic interest of the airport. Surviving early 20th Century buildings in the South East of the site, and the presence of WWII defences.

A water tank and several small structures of unknown function are located within Parcel 3. Below ground remains of these may still be present and may require further investigation to gather information on their function, state of preservation and significance.

The majority of the former WWII buildings in Parcel 3 have been previously removed, but an "Ablutions Block" remains adjacent to the airport viewing area, and another building standing in the south of Parcel 3 may be of WWII date. These were not examined internally and are likely to require some historic building recording prior to any works being carried out, but are unlikely to merit retention.

4.7.2 Heritage assets in the wider area

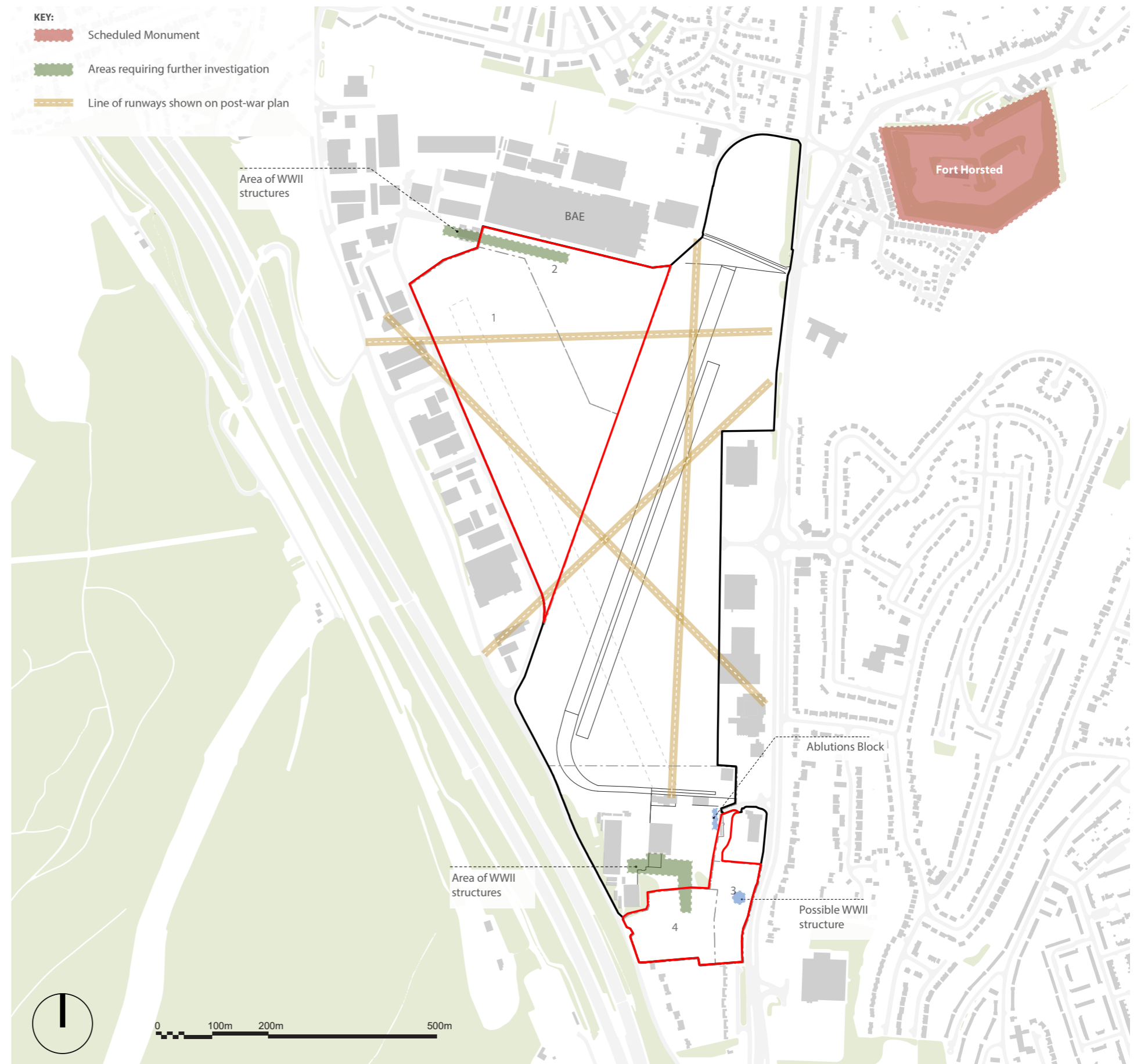
There are 26 Conservation Areas and 780 Listed Buildings within Medway. The site does not lie within a Conservation Area. The closest Conservation Area to the site is Maidstone Road, which was designated on the 19th September 2004, covers 4.42 ha, and lies approximately 1.2 mile northeast of the site.

Within 1.2 mile of the site there are four Scheduled Monuments (designated for their archaeological interest) and six listed buildings (designated for their architectural and historic interest). These comprise: *Fort Luton (Scheduled Monument 1003400); Fort Horsted (Scheduled Monument 1003401); Fort Borstal (Scheduled Monument 1003402); Bell barrow in Shoulder of Mutton Wood (1007459); Barn at Burham Hill (Grade II Listed Building 1070524); Robin Hood Public House (Grade II Listed Building 1099229); Snodhurst Farmhouse and attached outbuildings (Grade II Listed Building 1268177); The Homestead (Grade II Listed Building 1268217); Nashenden Farmhouse with Briar Cottage attached (Grade II Listed Building 1336151); Crimean War Memorial at Chatham Garrison Military Cemetery (Grade II Listed Building 133610).*

Although outside of the 1.2 mile radius, there are also Scheduled Monuments such as Kit's Coty House Long Barrow, Little Kit's Coty House Megalithic Tomb and White Horse Stone.

4.7.3 Local Heritage Interest

There is limited (but not insignificant) evidence of prehistoric and Roman activity within the study area. The area is likely to have been agricultural land or woodland between settlements in the medieval period and there is no evidence of activity within the site until the area was cleared of woodland in the post-medieval period.





5.0 THE VISION

VISION STATEMENT

‘INNOVATION PARK MEDWAY WILL OFFER UP TO 100,000M² OF HIGH QUALITY, INNOVATIVE COMMERCIAL SPACE IN A PRIME LOCATION BETWEEN LONDON AND THE CONTINENT. INNOVATION PARK MEDWAY WILL BE A MAGNET FOR HIGH VALUE TECHNOLOGY, ENGINEERING, MANUFACTURING AND KNOWLEDGE INTENSIVE BUSINESSES LOOKING TO GROW IN THE SOUTH EAST, JOINING THE 14,000 BUSINESSES WHICH HAVE ALREADY MADE MEDWAY THEIR HOME. PART OF THE NORTH KENT ENTERPRISE ZONE, THE SITE WILL OFFER ACCESS TO WORLD-CLASS RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT AND HIGHLY SKILLED TALENT THROUGH THE CLUSTER OF KENT AND MEDWAY BASED UNIVERSITIES.’