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The Lower River Medway Strategy

Improving the river offer, together.



Photo by Jason Arthur

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Executive Summary – Cllr Simon Curry, Portfolio Holder for Climate Change and Strategic Regeneration



The River Medway is an integral part of Medway’s past, present, and future — one of our most valuable natural, economic, and cultural assets. This strategy sets out a shared vision for its sustainable future, fostering environmental stewardship, community wellbeing, and economic opportunity.

Working alongside key stakeholders, we aim to create a thriving river corridor that supports biodiversity, enhances public access, improves wellbeing, celebrates heritage, and promotes responsible growth. Collaboration with local authorities, businesses, community groups, and environmental organisations will drive a series of targeted actions.

Our key priorities are to achieve:

- Greater accessibility for Medway’s community and visitors.
- A productive, sustainable river economy that supports local livelihoods.
- A healthier, more biodiverse river catchment.
- A river that enhances community health and wellbeing.
- Recognition of the river as one of North Kent’s defining cultural, visitor, and investment assets.

By delivering on these priorities, the Lower River Medway will remain a source of pride, prosperity, and inspiration for generations to come and the Lower River Medway Strategy will be instrumental to achieving this.

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1. The River Medway: An Introduction

Geography

- 1.1 The River Medway rises from a spring at Butchers Wood, near the village of Turners Hill in West Sussex. From its source, it flows through areas of Kent Downs National Landscape and a series of locks and weirs that maintain water levels for navigation. The final lock is located at Allington, near Maidstone. Beyond this point, the river becomes tidal, flowing past Snodland, Halling and Cuxton, under M2 motorway bridge and through the urban centres of Strood, Rochester, Chatham, and Gillingham before widening into the Medway Estuary and eventually joining the Thames Estuary between Sheerness and the Isle of Grain. In total, the river stretches approximately seventy miles from source to sea.
- 1.2 The unitary authority area of Medway includes the towns of Strood, Rochester, Chatham, Gillingham, and Rainham, together with the rural communities of the Hoo Peninsula and the villages of Cuxton and Halling. The river lies at the heart of these communities and has shaped their history, economy, environment, and identity over many centuries.
- 1.3 As one of Medway's greatest natural assets, the river provided the focus for early settlement and continues to define the character of the area. In addition to the River Medway, the authority also has an extensive frontage to the River Thames along the northern edge of the Hoo Peninsula, forming part of the nationally important North Kent Marshes landscape.
- 1.4 The River Medway supports a rich and diverse natural environment. The estuary contains more than 11,000 acres of saltmarsh, mudflats and intertidal habitats that play a critical role in supporting biodiversity, storing carbon, and providing natural flood management through the absorption of tidal surges and stormwater.
- 1.5 These habitats provide important nursery grounds for fish and support a growing marine ecosystem. Recent increases in fish populations, aided by conservation initiatives such as the no-take zone at Stoke Marshes, are believed to have contributed to expanding seal populations and increasing sightings of dolphins, including sightings as far upstream as Rochester Bridge.
- 1.6 The Medway Estuary and its surrounding marshes support internationally important populations of migratory and overwintering birds. The ecological significance of these habitats is recognised through a range of national and international designations. The estuary is designated as a Special Protection Area (SPA), a Ramsar Site of international importance for wetlands, a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), and a Marine Conservation Zone extending from the estuary upstream to Allington Lock.
- 1.7 Along the Thames frontage of the Hoo Peninsula, the North Kent Marshes provide further valuable habitat for a wide range of species, contributing to one of the most important coastal wetland landscapes in the United Kingdom. There is also an emerging proposal led by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) to seek UNESCO World Heritage Site recognition for the East Coast Wetlands network, which includes parts of the Hoo Peninsula and surrounding Medway marshes.

History

- 1.8 The lower River Medway is fundamental to Medway's history and heritage. Its use and significance have evolved over generations, shaping the development of settlements, industries and communities along its banks and the estuary.
- 1.9 Rochester's geographical strategic importance was recognised by the Romans, who established a crossing point over the River Medway in AD 43, creating a fortified settlement known as the "stronghold by the bridge". The establishment of Rochester Cathedral in AD 604, rebuilt in 1079 and now the second oldest cathedral in England, together with the construction of Rochester Castle in 1078, reinforced the area's importance as a religious, military, and administrative centre.
- 1.10 The arrival of the Royal Navy in 1547 and the subsequent establishment of Chatham Dockyard further transformed the river's role. For more than four hundred years, the Dockyard was a major centre of naval shipbuilding and maritime innovation, producing world-famous vessels including HMS Victory. The wider riverside landscape became characterised by military and defensive structures such as Upnor Castle, Darnet Fort, Hoo Fort and Fort Amherst, many of which remain important heritage assets today.
- 1.11 The closure of Chatham Dockyard in 1984 had a significant impact on employment, industry, and river traffic. However, reduced industrial activity contributed to improvements in water quality and allowed important habitats and biodiversity to recover and flourish. Habitats within the large dockyard basins have flourished and need to be protected, particularly mussels and other sessile organisms which deliver clean bathing water via natural sustainable processes.
- 1.12 Today, the River Medway remains a working river while also supporting a wide range of recreational, sporting, environmental and tourism activities. It accommodates commercial and industrial operations particularly at the Isle of Grain where Thamesport, the container operator and significant installations owned by National Grid are located. Boating, sailing, rowing, kayaking, angling, paddle sports, wildlife observation, walking, and heritage tourism are key factors in the use and enjoyment of the river.
- 1.13 It is widely recognised across the river's diverse stakeholder community that there is a strong sense of goodwill and a broad wealth of knowledge, experience, and ideas for enhancing the river's offer. This should be reflected in the formation of the river stakeholder groups that will help deliver this strategy, ensuring that future projects provide meaningful benefits to all user groups.
- 1.14 The river's stakeholders represent a diverse mix of interests and perspectives. Some are new to Medway and its wider catchment, while others have deep historical connections to the river. For example, the *Rochester Oyster and Floating Fishery* has maintained an Admiralty Court that has sat and presided for more than five hundred years, with the mayor, in the role of Admiral of the River, serving as its figurehead. Recognising and valuing both longstanding traditions and newer voices will be essential to the success of the strategy.
- 1.15 The Medway and Swale Boating Association (MSBA) represents more than thirty clubs and organisations, encompassing around 4,000 members who regularly use the waters of the Medway and Swale for recreational activities. Collectively, these organisations provide a wide range of leisure boating opportunities, including water-skiing, dinghy racing, canoeing, rowing, motor cruising,

and yacht racing. Guided by its constitutional objective, "to promote and protect boating on the tidal Medway and Swale", the MSBA advocates for all forms of waterborne sport and recreation. MSBA representation and consultation will be fundamental in successful delivery projects which improve the river offer.

- 1.16 The estuary hosts numerous yacht clubs, marinas, and boatyards, providing access to extensive cruising waters both downstream towards the Thames Estuary and upstream beyond Maidstone towards Tonbridge. National walking routes, including the King Charles III England Coast Path and the Thames Path, provide opportunities for residents and visitors to experience the river and its surrounding landscapes.
- 1.17 Significant public access is available through locations such as Riverside Country Park, a 100-hectare coastal park, and riverside leisure facilities including The Strand in Gillingham, which offers direct access to the river at Commodore's Hard and includes the UK's only remaining saltwater lido.
- 1.18 The River Medway is valued by a wide range of stakeholders, including commercial operators, businesses, sports clubs, educational institutions, environmental organisations, heritage groups, residents, and visitors. It provides opportunities for recreation, learning, volunteering, and community engagement and contributes significantly to Medway's economy, health, and wellbeing.
- 1.19 The Medway area benefits from a vibrant arts and creative community. Sun Pier House at Chatham Intra and LV21 at Chatham Historic Dockyard are notable cultural assets, providing a diverse programme of inclusive events, exhibitions, and performances. Through their activities, they contribute to the promotion of the River Medway, support community engagement, and help strengthen the connection between residents, visitors, and the river environment.
- 1.20 The river's many functions are closely interconnected. Environmental protection, navigation, recreation, heritage conservation, tourism, economic development, and public access each influence one another, creating both opportunities and competing demands. As a result, the river cannot be considered through a single lens, and a coordinated approach is required to balance its many roles.



Figure 1-1: Outline of Key Challenges Influencing the River Strategy

2. Vision and Purpose

- 2.1 The first iteration of the river strategy was coordinated by SQW. The strategy is considered an iterative one that looks to progress and evolve over the next decade, and this version is the second iteration. Work on this second iteration commenced following the appointment of a River Strategy Delivery Team in Summer 2026, as agreed by Cabinet in February 2026, and has been done so with input from a variety of river stakeholders.
- 2.2 This strategy seeks to recognise and realise the full potential of the river within the Medway catchment area and aims to provide a basis for both continued and increased collaboration between the Council, river stakeholders, partner organisations and local communities to further enhance the river's role in Medway's identity, in user experience, and its regeneration story.
- 2.3 This strategy is underpinned by a vision for a thriving, accessible, and sustainable river corridor achieved through:

- A more accessible river.
- A more productive and sustainable river economy.
- A healthier and more biodiverse river.
- A river that contributes demonstrably to health and wellbeing.
- A river recognised as one of North Kent's defining cultural, visitor and investment assets.

- 2.4 The strategy therefore begins by examining the strategic context within which this vision sits, considering river-related heritage and assets, challenges, user needs and key stakeholders to inform its development and delivery, with a review of progress reported to the Council annually.
- 2.5 It considers key themes including the natural environment and climate change, economic development, tourism, heritage, leisure and sport, and future growth opportunities. It also responds to issues identified through engagement with stakeholders, including the need to improve physical and visual access to the river, health and wellbeing, to strengthen the river's role within the wider Medway identity and visitor offer, increase community engagement, and improve the management of safety, security and infrastructure.
- 2.6 This strategy has been designed for institutional longevity rather than around the current structure of Medway Council in isolation. It has reflected upon potential future changes to the strategic environment in which the river strategy may be delivered if Local Government Reorganisation takes place in the future.
- 2.7 The broad challenges, opportunities and associated issues that have been identified, are set out in Figure 1-1.
- 2.8 Recognising the scale and breadth of these challenges, together with the overlap between them, a set of Key Themes has been developed, around which the strategy has been configured. This represents the most efficient way of examining the different roles that the river performs, the critical considerations that need to be highlighted under each, and how these challenges need to be addressed and taken forward into a programme of actions.



Figure 1-2: Key themes for the River Strategy

- 2.9 As a whole, across each of these themes, there are opportunities for the river, and river-based activities which contribute to wider well-being and public health outcomes – through physical activity, mental health improvement, and by combating social isolation, and address climate change through both mitigation and adaptation of natural resources and existing human made flood defence infrastructure.
- 2.10 It then considers each of the river’s Key Themes set out above and highlights the perspectives of each under the following headings: -
- Background and Context
 - Key Challenges
 - Key Opportunities
- 2.11 This is followed by a chapter, discussing the ways in which an Implementation Strategy and Initial Action Plan can be developed which will be done alongside the creation of and in with key stakeholder groups, for which more detail can be found later in the strategy.
- 2.12 Most of the lower river, forming the Medway Estuary, is designated as a Special Protection Area (SPA) under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 and as a Ramsar site under the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance, signed in the Iranian city of Ramsar in 1971. It is also recognised as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and a Marine Conservation Zone, which includes the whole of the estuary and tidal section of the river up to Allington Lock.

- 2.13 The estuary hosts many yacht clubs, marinas, and boatyards, offering a wide range of leisure boat moorings providing access to explore downriver to the estuary and the Thames, and upriver all the way to Tonbridge over 40 miles away. There are three national walking trails within the Medway area, King Charles III England Coast Path, the Medway Valley Walk which starts at Tonbridge and ends in Rochester, and the Thames Path which ends at the Isle of Grain, all three routes provide riverside access by foot to the Thames, north of the Hoo Peninsula and Medway estuary in the south.
- 2.14 There is also significant public access to parts of this landscape, such as the Riverside Country Park forming a 100ha coastal park and the newly established King Charles III England Coast Path.
- 2.15 The river is a place for recreation and enjoyment, with The Strand leisure park at Gillingham providing access into the river at Commodores Hard and safe swimming at the Strand Lido, the only remaining saltwater lido in the UK. It is also home to Medway Watersports Club which is volunteer led and was awarded the Kings Award for voluntary service in 2025, offering a variety of watersports of all ages and abilities.
- 2.16 There is, however, a critical set of interlinkages and overlaps between these various functions and uses on the river. This creates different and sometimes competing priorities and responsibilities, and these cannot be thought of in isolation. This strategy has identified several different topic areas to help assess the role of the river, encompassing such broad issues as the natural environment and climate change, economic development activities, tourism, visitors and heritage, leisure and sport, and future key development areas.
- 2.17 The complexity of the various interlinkages is significant and creates some key challenges and opportunities for the strategy, which revolve around the above key topic areas.
- 2.18 Consultations with a variety of river stakeholders have also highlighted some other critical issues which overlap the above themes and ideally need to be addressed on a comprehensive and consistent basis, such as significantly better access to and from the river, positioning the river as a central theme within the “Medway offer”, encouraging residents to understand and use the river more, and looking at ways of managing the health and safety, security and condition of the river. Importantly, timing is a key feature, as some of the above need to be addressed now and others progressively over the next 10 to 20 years.
- 2.19 There are opportunities for the river, and activities around the river to contribute to wider well-being and public health outcomes – through physical activity, mental health improvement, and by combating social isolation.
- 2.20 This strategy is underpinned by a vision for a thriving, accessible, and sustainable river corridor and commences examining the strategic context within which this vision sits, considering river-related assets, challenges, user needs, and key stakeholders to inform its development and delivery.

3. Context and Identity

- 3.1 The Lower River Medway strategy is a document which is designed to align with the ambitions and objectives of the statutory bodies and other organisations, Medway Council, businesses, community, and interest groups that rely on, are impacted by, and responsible for, various aspects of the River Medway.
- 3.2 The strategy sits alongside and aligns with Medway Council’s One Medway Plan, the emerging Local Plan, the Medway 2037 strategy and its successor, the draft Medway 2041 Strategy, the Medway Climate Change Action Plan, the Medway Cultural Strategy, the Medway Joint Local Health and Wellbeing Strategy and the Medway Heritage Strategy, which is in development.

- 3.3 It also recognises the priorities and responsibilities of the Environment Agency, Natural England, the Marine Management Organisation, the Statutory Harbour Authority, central government policies relating to rivers and coastlines, and the important natural designations which apply to parts of the estuary.
- 3.4 The strategy aligns with Medway Council's Local Transport Plan (LTP), which sets out the vision for a sustainable, integrated transport network across the borough. The LTP supports active travel, improved public transport, and reduced reliance on private vehicles, all of which are reflected in the Lower River Medway Strategy's emphasis on walking and cycling infrastructure, river-based transport, and connectivity between key sites.
- 3.5 Medway's Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) and Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) are key transport strategies that support the Council's ambitions for sustainable mobility. The Lower River Medway aligns with these plans by incorporating promoting active travel routes as a requirement within river side development sites along the river. Relevant guidance includes:
- Cycle infrastructure design (LTN 1/20) - Guidance for local authorities on designing high-quality, safe cycle infrastructure, including green infrastructure.
 - Active travel guidance – incorporating green blue infrastructure design
<https://www.activetravelengland.gov.uk/planning-active-places/green-and-blue-infrastructure>
 - Transport for South East's Strategic Investment Plan which includes 'Medway Passenger Ferry Infrastructure & Services' (Scheme GT05) and 'Queenborough Passenger Ferry Infrastructure & Services' (Scheme GT07) as potential river transport links to the Isle of Sheppey.
<https://transportforthesoutheast.org.uk/app/uploads/2026/04/SIP-2026.pdf>
 - Integration of green blue infrastructure this strategy and riverside walkways and cycle routes will need early consideration and coordination to ensure routes are high quality, freely accessible, attractive safe places have climatic resilience - flood and heat. These routes could also be an opportunity to align with Highways Asset Management Strategy of implementing decarbonisation of surfaces materials.
- 3.6 In line with the One Medway Council Plan and Joint Local Health and Wellbeing Strategy's ambition to improve health and wellbeing levels for all residents, the river is an opportunity to not just improve the health of residents but also tackle health inequalities. Medway is working towards becoming a Marmot Place, highlighting our commitment to addressing issues like the ten-year life expectancy difference between our most and least affluent wards. The strategy can contribute towards our ten-year ambition of halving these health inequalities, by taking a universal proportionalism approach to actions that come from the strategy development.
- 3.7 The River Medway is at the heart of Medway's identity, shaping its landscape, history, communities, and visitor economy. For centuries, the river has been the defining feature of the area, supporting trade, industry, defence, and settlement, while creating the distinctive character that connects Medway's towns and waterfronts today. The river underpins many of Medway's most important visitor assets, including maritime heritage, natural habitats, recreational opportunities, and cultural attractions. The River Medway offers significant potential to enhance Medway's offer for its community and for tourists by creating opportunities for residents and visitors to engage with the water through leisure, active travel, events, heritage experiences, and nature-based activities.
- 3.8 While the strategy relates to the River Medway within the boundaries of the current Medway unitary authority, it should be recognised that there are important links upstream to Maidstone, Tonbridge & Malling, and downstream to Swale, where other local authorities have some responsibility for the river and adjacent land. The policies of Kent County Council, Environment Agency and Internal Drainage Boards are all relevant to effectively managing the river and making the most of opportunities. This strategy should not be seen in isolation, but as part of a broader picture in terms of organisations and policies that relate to the river, water management, flood defences, waterside placemaking, and other themes.

- 3.9 Medway Council is publishing this updated document (second iteration) and will support its implementation, acting as animateur and facilitator, but the strategy is intended for the River Medway community as a whole and is intended to align the objectives and future activities of a wide range of stakeholders collaboratively. It is also aligned with Medway Council's sustainable development principles, addressing economic, community and environmental issues.

Medway Local Plan

- 3.10 This strategy sits alongside Medway's submitted Local Plan, which aims to plan positively for the development and infrastructure that the area needs, whilst conserving and enhancing the natural, built, and historic environment
- 3.11 The Local Plan's key strategic objectives are:
- Prepared for a sustainable and green future.
 - Supporting people to lead healthy lives and strengthening our communities
 - Securing jobs and developing skills for a competitive economy
 - Boosting pride in Medway through quality and resilient development
- 3.12 The Lower River Medway Strategy has the potential to make a positive contribution to the vision and the strategic objectives of the Local Plan.
- 3.13 The Local plan includes references to:
- The role of the river in the identity and function of Medway and in establishing place-making for various riverside developments
 - New opportunities for river transport and the economic role of the river
 - The fact continuous riverside paths provide attractive and healthy connections [which are] a draw for visitors and residents.
 - Approximately 462 houseboats in Medway" across six marinas
 - The severance caused by the river as the river bisects the area and movement is constrained by three main crossings.
 - The opportunity for introduction of a new river crossing and riverside in facilitating sustainable transport and addressing restrictions that apply to pedestrians and cyclists who are unable to use the Medway Tunnel.
 - A vision that the "highest quality place-making standards will be realised along the urban waterfront, with public spaces as focal points, and increased access to the riverside and the river itself."
 - In addition to site specific policy (including SA1- Chatham Town Centre, SA4 - River Waterfront, SA5 – Strood Town Centre and Surrounds, and SA13 – Frindsbury Peninsula Opportunity Area), the Local Plan also includes policy specific to the river including:
 - Policy T20 focused on the Riverside Path
 - Policy T21 focused on Riverside Infrastructure (including reference to river taxis).

One Medway Plan

- 3.14 The One Medway Plan, published in 2025, sets out a vision for Medway as a place where people are proud to live, work, learn, and visit. It emphasises community engagement, economic growth, and environmental sustainability. The Lower River Medway Strategy aligns with this vision across a range of different themes, but in following key areas:
- 3.15 Medway 2037 is the Council's core economic and regeneration strategy which focuses on deliverability, partnerships, and embedding key themes such as climate change and innovation in future years. This document aligns with Medway 2037 in the following key areas:

- **Supporting Economic Development** - Developing opportunities for business growth along the river, including tourism, leisure, and commercial activities supporting the goal of driving economic regeneration and creating vibrant waterfront areas.
- **Enhancing Innovation and Skills** - By promoting river-based activities and events, this document helps foster innovation and skills development. It aligns with Medway 2037's emphasis on creating spaces for creative industries and educational opportunities.
- **Improving Town Centres and Connectivity** - By enhancing physical and visual connections between the river and town centres, supporting Medway 2037's aim to renew, diversify, and activate town centres. Improved river access and transport links contribute to a more connected and accessible Medway.
- **Addressing Climate Change** - By promoting environmental sustainability and climate resilience this document aligns with Medway 2037's commitment to achieving net zero carbon emissions and addressing climate impacts. Initiatives to manage flood risks and enhance biodiversity are integral to this goal.

3.16 Medway 2041 will be the successor to Medway 2037 and is currently at consultation stage, for which the River Strategy Delivery Team are involved.

Medway Climate Change Action Plan

- 3.17 Medway Council declared a Climate Emergency in 2019 and developed a Climate Change Action Plan for Medway which is regularly updated. The action plan aims to reduce or prevent greenhouse gas emissions, to reach net zero by 2050, and to increase resilience against the impacts of climate change. This ambition also aligns with the One Medway Council Plan 2024 to 2028 and the priority of "enjoying clean, green, safe and connected communities". In addition to aligning with climate action goal 13 within the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals plan.
- 3.18 To achieve the action plan aims, five priority areas of action have been identified for Medway, namely Knowledge and Empowerment, Clean, Efficient and Equitable Energy, Sustainable Travel and Transport, Resource Efficiency and Green and Resilient Medway. The strategy has the potential to support every one of these priority areas.
- 3.19 The Climate Change Action Plan also recognizes the wider benefits of climate action such as reducing improved health and wellbeing and supporting a stronger local economy, which the Lower River Medway Strategy can also support.
- 3.20 The strategy aligns in the following key areas:
- Increasing resilience against the impacts of climate change.
 - Promoting flood risk management and protection against coastal erosion, which are critical in the face of rising sea levels and increased storm surges.
- 3.21 These efforts help safeguard communities and ecosystems along the river. Over the next 10 years, rising sea levels and more frequent intense rainfall events are likely to result in a gradual increase in both tidal and fluvial flood risk, particularly during extreme weather.
- 3.22 Over the next 20 to 30 years, these trends are expected to become more pronounced, with higher river flows during winter storms, increased surface water runoff, and further rises in tidal water levels within the estuary.
- 3.23 This is likely to increase the frequency and severity of flooding unless ongoing investment in flood risk management, adaptation measures and resilient development is maintained. Areas adjacent to the lower River Medway and estuary are expected to be particularly vulnerable due to the combined effects of sea level rise and tidal influence. The strategy should therefore recognise the need for a long-term, adaptive approach to flood risk management that reflects changing climate conditions.

- 3.24 Reducing or preventing greenhouse gas emissions, to reach net zero by 2050. By promoting walking, cycling, and river-based transport, this document helps reduce reliance on car travel, contributing to the lowering of carbon emissions. It also supports the development of renewable and alternative energy projects along the river. Also, the enhancement and increase in saltmarsh and sea grass habitats which act as valuable carbon sinks.
- 3.25 Promoting Sustainable Practices - Developing initiatives to improve water quality, reduce pollution, and enhance biodiversity to ensure a functioning ecosystem that can mitigate against and adapt to climate change.
- 3.26 Blue space has the potential to reduce the impacts of extreme heat, when planned carefully alongside the surrounding green space and built environment.

Medway Cultural Strategy

- 3.27 The Medway Cultural Strategy aims to make Medway internationally recognised for its creativity and culture by 2030. It focuses on connectivity, shared ambition, spaces and places, creative people, and community engagement. The Lower River Medway Strategy aligns with these themes by:
- **Creating Spaces and Places** - It will promote the development of cultural and recreational activities and spaces along the river and will rely on the physical improvements, integrated high-quality sustainable public realm and green spaces, to include promoted footpath and cycle routes. Early engagement and coordinated infrastructure will be essential to enable cohesion of riverside/riverwalk enhancements to support the vision with evening and night use factored.
 - **Nurturing Creative People** - It supports events and activities that celebrate both Medway's cultural heritage and its forward-looking creative and artistic talent, helping to nurture local creativity.
 - **Fostering Connectivity** - Improves access to the river and enhances water transport links between cultural sites along the riverfront. This helps connect people and places, supporting the Cultural Strategy's goal of creating a more inclusive and connected community.

Medway Heritage Strategy

- 3.28 Medway Council's Heritage Strategy was published in 2018 and sets out to make the most of the opportunities identified in the Medway Heritage Asset Review 2017:
- **Objective 1:** Conserve and enhance Medway's heritage assets
 - **Objective 2:** Work with Medway's heritage assets to help deliver sustainable development
 - **Objective 3:** Increase the understanding and community involvement with Medway's heritage assets
- 3.29 Through the delivery of these objectives, the Medway Heritage Strategy aims to provide the framework for how Medway Council conserves, enhances and promotes its heritage assets in the immediate and long-term future.
- 3.30 The Heritage Strategy recognises the historic importance of the river, as well as its key significance as part of the landscape of Medway, and this strategy aligns with it in those respects. A new emerging Heritage Strategy is being developed during 2025.

Marmot Place

- 3.31 The Medway Joint Local Health and Wellbeing Strategy has a number of themes that align to the Medway River and this strategy, The related priorities of the strategy are:
- Theme 1: Healthier, longer lives for everyone.
 - Theme 2: Reduce poverty and inequality.

- Theme 3: Safe, connected, and sustainable places
- Theme 4: Connected communities and cohesive services.

- 3.32 Medway is working towards becoming a Marmot Place, which means we recognise that health and health inequalities are mostly shaped by the social determinants of health the conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work and age, and take action to improve health and reduce health inequalities.
- 3.33 There are eight principles that shape the work focus of a Marmot Place, with four being particularly relevant to the strategy: ensuring a healthy standard of living for all, creating and developing healthy and sustainable places and communities, strengthening the role and impact of ill health prevention, and pursuing environmental sustainability and health equity together.

Estuary Edges

- 3.34 Estuary Edges is an ecological design initiative supported and promoted by the Environment Agency, aimed at transforming areas on shoreline in front of or on hard engineered riverbanks made of brick, concrete, and sheet metal into more natural, habitat-rich environments. The initiative focuses on urban estuaries, with pioneering work done by the Thames Estuary Partnership at various sites within the inner Thames Estuary. The strategy, through its stakeholders, should explore key themes of this work that are relevant to the River Medway.
- 3.35 The key objectives of the Estuary Edges agenda include:
- **Habitat Creation:** by softening the edges of estuaries, the project encourages the return of wildlife, including saltmarsh plants, invertebrates, fish, and birds.
 - **Ecological Design Guidance:** the website serves as a practical "how-to" guide for developers, planners, and environmentalists to incorporate ecological features into estuary edge designs.
 - **Sustainability and Adaptability** emphasises using materials and techniques suited to local conditions while considering the entire estuarine system from tidal limits to the ocean.
- 3.36 The establishment of Design Principles that promote:
- The use of intertidal vegetated terraces, creek erosion management, and timber structures to create diverse habitats.
 - The integration of public access, education, and aesthetic improvements into redevelopment projects.
 - A focus on salt marsh protection, creation and enhancement to mitigate flood risk, protect existing carbon sequestration, and filter pollutants in the river.
- 3.37 Creation of the Natural Environments & Habitats stakeholder group will enable greater focus on estuary edges to explore opportunities to improve habitats and reduce flood risk.

Port of Sheerness Limited, Statutory Harbour Authority

- 3.38 Port of Sheerness Limited (PoSL), which trades as Peel Ports London Medway, is the Statutory Harbour Authority and Competent Harbour Authority. Its jurisdiction covers the River Medway from Allington Lock at Maidstone to the Medway Buoy at the junction with the Thames. Within this jurisdiction, the authority sets speed limits and manages navigation, including through Vessel Traffic Services and is responsible for marine safety, conservancy, environmental protection, and related statutory harbour functions.
- 3.39 Its environmental responsibilities should be understood within that statutory context and relate to environmental protection connected with the exercise of its statutory harbour authority functions, rather than general environmental management or preservation of the river as a whole.

- 3.40 Vessel Traffic Services (VTS) are essential maritime safety services that enhance navigation safety and improve the efficiency of vessel movements. They are implemented at different levels based on navigational risk and traffic density. VTS services for the lower river Medway are coordinated and managed by the river authority for this area, Peel Ports who ensure safe and expeditious flow of vessel traffic, contributing to the protection of the marine environment and the overall safety of maritime operations.
- 3.41 As part of its statutory harbour authority functions, Port of Sheerness Limited has the power to dredge for the safety of navigation, as well as to licence dredging and river works, including the construction, demolition, and maintenance of works below the high-water mark. These consents sit alongside, and do not replace, other regulatory approvals that may be required from bodies such as the Marine Management Organisation, the Environment Agency, landowners, and other relevant statutory bodies. The responsibility for dredging, maintenance, pollution, abandoned vessels, and environmental management will depend on the relevant asset, activity, and statutory remit.
- 3.42 In addition to being the Competent Harbour Authority, Port of Sheerness Limited should be consulted where river infrastructure or works may affect navigation, harbour operations, safety, conservancy, or other statutory harbour authority functions. Land ownership, seabed interests and any lease or licence requirements should be separately verified with the relevant landowner or competent body before any project is progressed.
- 3.43 Port of Sheerness Limited works with commercial and leisure users of the river on matters relating to navigation, marine safety, security, and statutory harbour authority functions, in addition to the operation of the ports of Sheerness.
- 3.44 In addition to issuing relevant permits and licences, Port of Sheerness Limited charges harbour dues and pilotage fees to vessels navigating the river, and leisure users are charged conservancy fees. These charges support safety, navigability, conservancy, and related statutory harbour authority functions.
- 3.45 Port of Sheerness Limited's statutory harbour authority jurisdiction extends beyond the boundaries of the Medway authority area, which is the subject of this strategy.
- 3.46 Port of Sheerness Limited supports improvements to the river where they are compatible with navigation safety, statutory harbour authority duties, operational requirements, and the necessary consent processes. Any new or improved access points would need to be assessed on their merits, including navigational safety, environmental, planning and land ownership considerations. The authority also engages with river user groups, other regulators, and stakeholders to coordinate responses to relevant navigation, safety, and operational challenges.

4. Theme 1: The River as a Location for Health, Leisure, and Sport

Background and Context

- 4.1 The lower River Medway has an active leisure and sporting community enjoying a wide range of activities, including sailing, yachting, canoeing, kayaking, jet skiing, stand up paddle boarding, rowing, and angling, in addition to using walking and cycling routes adjacent to the riverbanks and coast.
- 4.2 The river is used in different ways for different activities from small to large endeavours, free and at a cost, privately organised or publicly available. Although these types of activity are currently wide ranging, they all have the potential to grow exponentially in terms of numbers and type of users:
- with investment in river access and other infrastructure

- by developing the “Medway offer,” as a destination in the Southeast through providing more events, attractions, competitions, other opportunities, and facilities, including the development of nationally and internationally recognised teaching and training facilities
 - coordinated promotions of the Medway offer opportunities, and
 - better management of the river to address maintenance, health and safety and security concerns, including river infrastructure and a strategy for a “clean” River Medway to eliminate any environmental and health concerns.
- 4.3 The river can make a major contribution to the health and wellbeing agenda, and to broader public health priorities across all age ranges linked to physical activity, mental health, and addressing social isolation by working with stakeholders and the councils public rights of way team, the strategy will enable further development of the existing walking and cycling offer of riverside path and identify sections which improve accessibility beside and into the river.
- 4.4 The river also plays an important role in supporting physical and mental wellbeing in the context of climate change. The river helps cool the local area during hot weather and working with stakeholders, the strategy should explore the potential to create safe, shaded routes for walking, cycling and relaxing to support intergenerational health and wellbeing as summer temperatures are predicted to significantly rise.
- 4.5 These priorities can be promoted by identifying key projects for which business cases for internal, external, and private investment should be developed.
- 4.6 Discussions emerging from these challenges have suggested the need for a new coordinated, representative group, involving all the key leisure and sports related parties with an interest in the river (statutory, planning, management, operational, recreational, and promotional).
- 4.7 The river is already a focus for a range of leisure and sporting activities; some are undertaken simply for pleasure, others are highly competitive, and can be performed at a local, regional, national, or even international level.
- 4.8 The use of the river by children, young people, and families is of key importance; it is used through education, recreation, and volunteering.
- 4.9 The leisure and sporting community and usage is therefore vibrant and diverse and includes:
- Being near the river can:
 - Reduce stress and anxiety through the calming effects of flowing water, natural sounds, and attractive scenery.
 - Improve mood and emotional wellbeing, with studies showing positive associations between exposure to blue spaces and better mental health outcomes (<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/41724225/>)
 - Support psychological restoration by helping people recover from mental fatigue and attention overload.
 - The river can support a number of the five ways to wellbeing, specifically connect, get active and take notice.
 - Increase feelings of relaxation, tranquility, and connection with nature.

4.10 Well-designed River environments can:

- Provide places for people to meet, socialise, and participate in community activities (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-social-benefits-of-blue-space-a-systematic-review>)
- Strengthen community identity and local pride
- Reduce social isolation by creating accessible public spaces for all ages

4.11 In addition to the immediate health benefits of the river, it also presents longer term health improving possibilities through employment opportunities through business and regeneration. There is a potential inequality of access to the river for some populations who have travel barriers.



Table 3-1: Leisure and sporting usages of the river

4.12 It is important to acknowledge that access to blue space in areas such as Medway can often be unequally distributed, so it is critical that we ensure the river's benefits are equally distributed. For example, there is evidence at the national scale in one country that people who consider themselves to be part of an ethnic minority group or who are from a lower socioeconomic category are less likely to access both the natural environment as a whole and the blue Spaces within it. There is also evidence at the national scale that people over the age of seventy-five are more likely to visit the marine environment than those aged between 16 and 24.

Sailing, Rowing and Boating

- 4.13 There is an abundance of leisure craft facilities on the Medway with multiple marinas, clubs and boatyards offering a range of services. Thirty-four facilities are currently identified, varying in size, offering, and charges. Of these, half are privately owned marinas, boatyards, and water sport facilities and some 17 are club-owned facilities clubs, associations, and trusts, including registered charities with an estimated 4,000 members.
- 4.14 The Medway Towns Rowing Club (MTRC), the only organisation currently rowing competitively on the tidal stretches of the Medway, provided feedback during consultation that the tidal Medway is one of the best natural racing rivers in the Southeast due to being unaffected by the stream warnings that often close non-tidal stretches. It was noted that nearby events can attract up to 1,000 visitors. Relevant stakeholder groups working with the council should explore ways to support and grow rowing events on the river.
- 4.15 It is estimated there are around 2,400 moorings and some 10,000 individual boat users including dinghies, canoes and vessels located on or near the lower river Medway with the tidal Medway supporting an active sailing, cruising and motor-boating community. Organised through clubs and associations represented by the Medway and Swale Boating Association (MSBA), member clubs between run year-round racing programmes, cruising and rallies, Royal Yachting Association (RYA) recognised training for adults and young people, and open events which attract visiting boats from the Thames Estuary, the East Coast and the near Continent. Clubs also maintain a substantial proportion of the river's leisure infrastructure, including pontoons, slipways, moorings and clubhouses. The sector's priorities are the retention and maintenance of access points into and out of the river, the maintenance dredging of hoards, slipways and approaches, and the condition of the pontoons and landing places on which visiting and resident boats depend.
- 4.16 The River Infrastructure Policy (Policy T22) of the Medway Local Plan states that “the existing network of piers, jetties, slipways, steps and stairs will be safeguarded to support the marine heritage sector and to potential for visitor and river taxi services and to accommodate visiting vessels and river taxi services, while any new facilities will be encouraged.”

Swimming

- 4.17 Swimming in the river is a part of Medway's heritage – The Strand lido at Gillingham was built so enable a sheltered swimming space for the public as an alternative to the tidal shoreline and is one of two remaining saltwater lidos in the United Kingdom. Currently the lido opening times are favour school summer holidays. To open throughout the year, weekends and with pre-work, post-work would be more equitable and bring a difference to the lido, supporting ventures and different activity around The Strand throughout the year - extending the life guard season, helping to bring a wider water safety awareness to more within the community.
- 4.18 Cold water swimming is growing in popularity across the country and in the Medway area with the well-known local, all women's swimming club The Blue Tits being regular swimmers off Commodore Hard throughout the year and Chatham Maritime Watersports Centre offers open water saltwater swimming with over 60 members swimming weekly including those training for Channel swims.

Angling and Shooting

- 4.19 Recreational fishing occurs at many locations within the tidal stretches of the Medway, including shoreline angling, personal boat angling, and organised charter trips into the Medway and Thames estuaries. These types of recreational angling have declined in recent years. Working with river stakeholders, the council should explore ways to support responsible angling on the Lower Medway and provide accessible resources to help anglers understand the local marine life and importance of sustainable fish stocks.

- 4.20 To protect and grow fish stocks, the UK's largest No-Take Zone (NTZ) was established at Stoke Marshes on the northern side of the Medway Estuary by Rochester Oyster and Floating Fishery (ROFF) in 2015 and followed up by a byelaw 2016 - covering 12.1 square kilometres of saltmarsh and invertebrate rich mudflats provide a diverse habitat and nursery grounds to a wide variety of fish and it understood increase local fish stocks which has been a factor in an increase of dolphin, seal and porpoise sightings within the wider estuary and river. The NTZ is monitored by Kent and Essex Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority (KEIFCA) and does not restrict navigation, anchoring or mooring. Working with river stakeholders, the council should explore how the No Take Zone could be replicated in other areas of the estuary to improve biodiversity.
- 4.21 Wildfowling is the hunting of ducks and geese, a practice that has existed for centuries. Today, it is considered a blood sport and takes place across the UK during the shooting season between 1st September and 20th February. Local Wildfowling clubs and syndicates within the Medway estuary are known to carry out habitat management of salt marsh within their ownership.
- 4.22 Wildfowling takes place on privately owned tidal salt marshes and areas of foreshore within the Medway Estuary. Those who take part, known as wildfowlers, may only shoot a prescribed list of twenty bird species which includes Golden Plover, Mallard, and Canada Geese. The Firearms Act 1968 and the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 regulate the activity, and participants are expected to follow the codes of practice set by the British Association for Shooting and Conservation.

Walking, Cycling and Running – Coastal Pathways

- 4.23 Access alongside the river is important, and it is currently possible to walk around much of the Medway Estuary using existing, designated routes, particularly the King Charles III England Coast Path.
- 4.24 Various initiatives are ongoing, particularly between Natural England and the Council, to affect some additions and improvements to existing provision, by avoiding busy road stretches and filling gaps in the current, coastal pathway network.
- 4.25 Further improving existing signage can increase their usage resulting in attracting tourism, offer business opportunities and encourage regular upkeep of footpaths for local residents and those visiting Medway.
- 4.26 Active travel and riverside connectivity is supported by the objectives of Medway Council's Local Transport Plan (LTP) and Climate Change Action Plan Priority Area: Sustainable Travel and Transport; these initiatives are supported by Medway Council's Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) which supports riverside walking and cycling routes and sets out a strategic approach to improving cycling and walking infrastructure across the borough, including riverside routes.
- 4.27 There is a wealth of evidence to show that investing in infrastructure to support walking can increase physical activity levels and improve mobility among children, adults, and older adults. The National Planning Policy Framework states that access to a network of high-quality open spaces, including opportunities for walking and physical activity, important for the health and well-being of communities. Working with internal and external stakeholders, the council should explore opportunities to increase riverside access balanced with mitigating over wintering bird disturbance.

Key Challenges

Sailing, Rowing, Boating and Cruising

- 4.28 There is a wide concern, expressed across the sailing and boating fraternity, that there is a severe lack of provision to enable access to be gained both into the river and from the river onto shore. This is linked to the fact that real improvements could significantly change the way in which the river is used and the levels of usage.
- 4.29 Where public facilities of pontoons, wharfs and slipways were historically available for river access, many of these have deteriorated over recent years, or have become privately owned with limited access. Working with internal and external stakeholders, the council should explore opportunities to improve river access for the public via private pontoons, wharfs and slipways to include condition surveying of existing facilities where appropriate and seek investment to provide greater access for the public to use the river from council owned river assets.
- 4.30 The only free to use, all tide, public slipway within the Medway is Commodore's Hard at the Strand leisure park, Gillingham. The next nearest slipway of this type is 18 miles away at Queenborough on the Isle of Sheppey. The council, working with stakeholders, should explore ways of improving Commodore's Hard for users and approach owners of private slipways, pontoons, and piers to provide greater access to these for public use.
- 4.31 It is understood that many of the sailing and boating facilities, particularly clubs and associations, are in marginal financial positions and not able to generate surplus funds to invest in improvements, replacements, expansions, or new facilities. This financial fragility is a challenge. The council, where appropriate, should provide advice and guidance to find long-term solutions with help from river stakeholder groups.
- 4.32 This fragility also has an impact on the ability to cover the significant cost of maintaining current infrastructure in a serviceable condition, into the future.
- 4.33 Ensuring there is affordable leisure and teaching provision within Medway reduces the risk of rising health inequalities. Training is a key component in any successful sailing location, and it is important to support efforts to increase awareness of options available to overcome barriers to improving access to the river.
- 4.34 Training on the tidal Medway is currently delivered by an established network of Royal Yacht Association-recognised providers, including the charitable trusts Medway Watersports Trust and Chatham Maritime Watersports Centre, club-based training at Medway Yacht Club and Wilsonian Sailing Club, commercial training centres such as Elite Sailing and Guardian and other training businesses based at Chatham Marina, and the Medway Towns Rowing Club's learn-to-row programme, supported by the RYA at regional and national level. The clubs also develop seamanship informally through organised rallies, cruises in company and racing.
- 4.35 Lack of parking facilities along parts of the tidal stretch limit the option for large scale events at present, for example competitive sporting events.

Management, Security, Health & Safety and River Maintenance

- 4.35 Consultations have highlighted challenges in relation to the way in which the river is "managed" and how raises concerns over health and safety, security and anti-social behaviour including:
- The general level of management and security of current infrastructure and other installations – piers, pontoons, and slipways, which is deterring regular use by both residents and visitors.
 - The problems of floating or abandoned wreckage and rubbish, which is a hazard to existing users and causes damage to current operations.

- The relationships between the general sailing and boating community and the modern users such as jet skis & hovercrafts requires improvement.
- Lack of dredging free public access points and many club and marina approaches which limits accessibility to the river to increasingly shorter time periods.

The River Medway Offer - Promotion of Activities & Facilities on the River

- 4.36 Although the river provides a range of activities and it is well placed in terms of communications and accessibility in the Southeast and the London market, it does not attract significant footfall in terms of sailing, boating and other river-related activities, comparable to similar locations such as the Solent.
- 4.37 This is demonstrated by the type, range and numbers attracted by the “water based” offer and the relative prices and income that can be generated from such uses. This view is supported by MDL Marinas, who operate the Chatham Maritime marina, alongside several other similar facilities around the country. MDL have confirmed that Medway achieves the lowest mooring fees within their portfolio.
- 4.38 Understanding the reasons behind these trends are critical and how the offer can be varied, expanded, and improved to attract more users to the area.

Key Opportunities

Sailing, Rowing, Boating and Cruising

- 4.39 Key opportunities to improve the sailing, boating, and cruising experience on the Medway and to provide existing clubs and organisations with better prospects for operating viable and sustainable facilities, in the long term are:
- Working with the river authority and river stakeholder groups, the council could establish suitable areas of the river and estuary for visiting eye catching vessels such as super yacht and tall ships
 - Developing a Medway Offer that promotes existing and emerging water-based activities such as rowing, water skiing, paddleboarding, kayaking and canoeing
Identify suitable locations for jet skiing, hovercrafts, and speed boats to operate away from other river users and swimmers.
 - Develop a programme of activities that appeal to the adventurous side of people looking to engage with the river, rather than just concentrating on the “function” of the river.
 - Supporting the establishment of a long-distance canoe trail beyond Allington Lockup to the Strand at Gillingham.
 - Supporting the development of existing national and internationally recognised teaching & training facilities for sailing and other water sport activities within the lower river Medway.
 - Seeking to support existing structured youth pathways created by sailing clubs and similar providers to increase the membership of clubs and associations, with engagement and inclusion in the youth community such as schools, colleges, the councils children services and fostering agencies. Working with river stakeholders to identify a programme of visits, river-themed events, and presentations with an integral link to training and education opportunities.
 - Considering more broadly how best to engage with children, young people, and families with river-based recreation through partnerships with schools, Council youth services, and relevant teams. This could provide opportunities to build strong habits of physical activity in young people that they carry with them into adulthood.

- Establishing the case for a clean river that attracts visitors and eliminates any environmental and health concerns, for those participating in “organised” activities on the river. Further work is required to identify specific pollution issues, including the challenges with grey and blackwater being discharged from boats (primarily houseboats) and stormwater overflows, and potential funding sources to tackle these issues.
- Establishing a business case of potential projects both “hard” (physical infrastructure projects) and soft projects¹ to support the leisure and sporting agenda and to secure funding sources either from the public sector, or from private investors and sponsors.
- Establishing a community of interested parties to include the private sector, to develop a programme of events which link sailing and boating activities with local communities.
- Improving the experience for those who use the river in these ways will bring positive benefits to Medway’s public health, furthering access to the river for all age groups, supporting active travel and social prescribing.

Fishing and Angling

- 4.40 Outside of the No Take Zone, responsible angling should be encouraged and promoted to attract residents and visitors. However, it is the right and privilege of Freemen of the River Medway (members of the Rochester Oyster and Floating Fishery) to fish with nets traps pots etc within the exclusive boundaries of the River Medway. No other individual who is not a Freeman are permitted to fish with nets of any description within the exclusive area.
- 4.41 There are angling opportunities at Rochester Riverside and Medway City Estate which will need to fit with other riverside users.

Access to the River and New Access Provision

- 4.42 The council recognises the need to assess and improve existing river infrastructure within its ownership and should work with stakeholders to identify additional locations to create new access points to support short- and long-term ambitions to:
- Significantly increase demand to use the river
 - Create opportunities to enable passenger ferry and tourist river boat services.
 - Install marine facilities and mooring space to enable significant volumes of visiting vessels associated with large scale river events.
- 4.43 The degradation of the river infrastructure and assets over time is an issue which will require a broader and more strategic approach across the river. As such, there is a need to look at the feasibility of a much wider investment strategy across a range of existing and new assets that balances increased demand with investment, returns, and benefits over the long term.
- 4.44 Working with river stakeholders the council should identify areas on the river where additional moorings would enable visiting vessels to access the historic sites at Rochester, Upnor and Gillingham with a focus on provision of all tide landing opportunities and collaboration with existing mooring providers.

River Based Infrastructure Improvement Opportunities

- 4.45 Improving the all-tide public slipway, Commodores Hard at the Strand with additional surface works and regular dredging to ensure accessibility at the lowest tides would benefit river users by:

- 4.46 Working with river stakeholders and the river authority to create designated sea no wake lanes and speed restricted lanes on the water to separate non powered vessels and swimmers from jet skis and power boats.
- 4.47 Chatham Maritime Watersports centre delivers training and education to numerous local schools and colleges, Sea Scouts, Marine Scouts and other organised groups. 2026 has seen over 300 children achieving BTEC and other national curriculum qualifications, alongside Royal Yacht Association and other formal training. The feasibility of an outdoor education and training centre on a tidal section of the lower River Medway at The Strand leisure park could be considered in collaboration with CMT, the Sea Scouts, Medway Cruising club and Medway Watersports Trust. Opportunities for seating areas to foster intergenerational social interaction.
- 4.48 Working with river stakeholder groups the council should explore the potential for a wider use of Riverside Country Park, such as establishing the park as a key part of the wider “green spaces network” strategy, promoting wildlife and habitat friendly riverside walkways linked with key strategic green spaces and environmental “hubs.”
- 4.49 As Gillingham and Strood Riversides are re-developed, opportunities for enhanced river access into the river and additional docking areas for riverboat services should be explored within the relevant river stakeholder groups.
- 4.50 As the strategy works to increase river access investment water safety and planning must be promoted across the district and stakeholders, working with the council should be encouraged to develop a water safety plan to include emergency access, provision of life rings at key locations, training, raising awareness of water safety in schools and higher education campuses. The Council should explore options to develop this in collaboration with stakeholders, including Chatham Maritime Watersports Centre, which delivers the float for life programme via the RLSS to organised groups. Any resource developed should be as widely accessible as possible to help support improving the river’s offer.

Riverside Access Pedestrian and Cycle Links

- 4.51 The establishment of improved footpath and, where possible, cycle path access along the Medway in the next few years, not only improves access for more residents and visitors but also helps to raise awareness of Medway’s exceptional recreational and natural environmental offers. In addition, it helps to encourage more people to walk or cycle for both short and long journeys, easing congestion and tackling air pollution.
- 4.52 A comprehensive network of footpaths and cycleways, well-maintained and promoted, as part of the potential “green spaces network”, will also support both physical and mental wellbeing and help Medway to realise its ambition for the river to promote community benefits. Being physically active is strongly linked to better health and wellbeing. There is an established causal link between physical activity and many chronic health conditions, including coronary heart disease, stroke, cancer, type 2 diabetes, and mental health problems. Walking has been described as “the nearest activity to perfect exercise,” being the easiest, lowest cost and enjoyable way for most people to increase their physical activity and to enjoy the natural environment / outdoors.
- 4.53 The councils Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP) highlights ambitions to improve riverside access by creating new riverside footpaths with potential cycle upgrades. River stakeholder groups should use this improvement plan as a guide when identifying links to future river improvement projects and existing river infrastructure to reduce vehicle journeys, easing congestion and contributing to reducing air pollution.
- 4.54 The shores of the Thames and Medway estuaries, within Medway Council boundary enjoys two national trails; The Thames Path which starts/begins at Grain village and the King Charles III England Coast Path which is established along coast from Cliffe to Otterham Creek via Rochester Bridge. River stakeholders and the council should consider both promoted trails as a factor when establishing river improvement projects.

- 4.55 The council and the relevant river stakeholder group(s) should research and support both physical and mental wellbeing to consider evidence-based benefits related to being engaged with the river when promoting community benefits as part of wider projects.
- 4.56 Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) and the Climate Change Action Plan Priority Area of Sustainable Travel and Transport should be used to inform planning of future river access improvement projects.
- 4.57 Working with the relevant river stakeholder groups, the Council should support and promote the creation of easy to access webpages for residents and visitors to find details on the coastal footways, cycle paths, links between green and blue spaces, and educational resources relating to ecology and geography of the river and estuary for schools, colleges and universities.
- 4.58 The Council should also consider supporting and promoting an improvement in information sources and resources, making it easier to find details on the coastal footways, cycle paths and linked green spaces both online and elsewhere, for visitors and residents. Improving river related information on Medway Council's website will be an integral part of this Strategy.

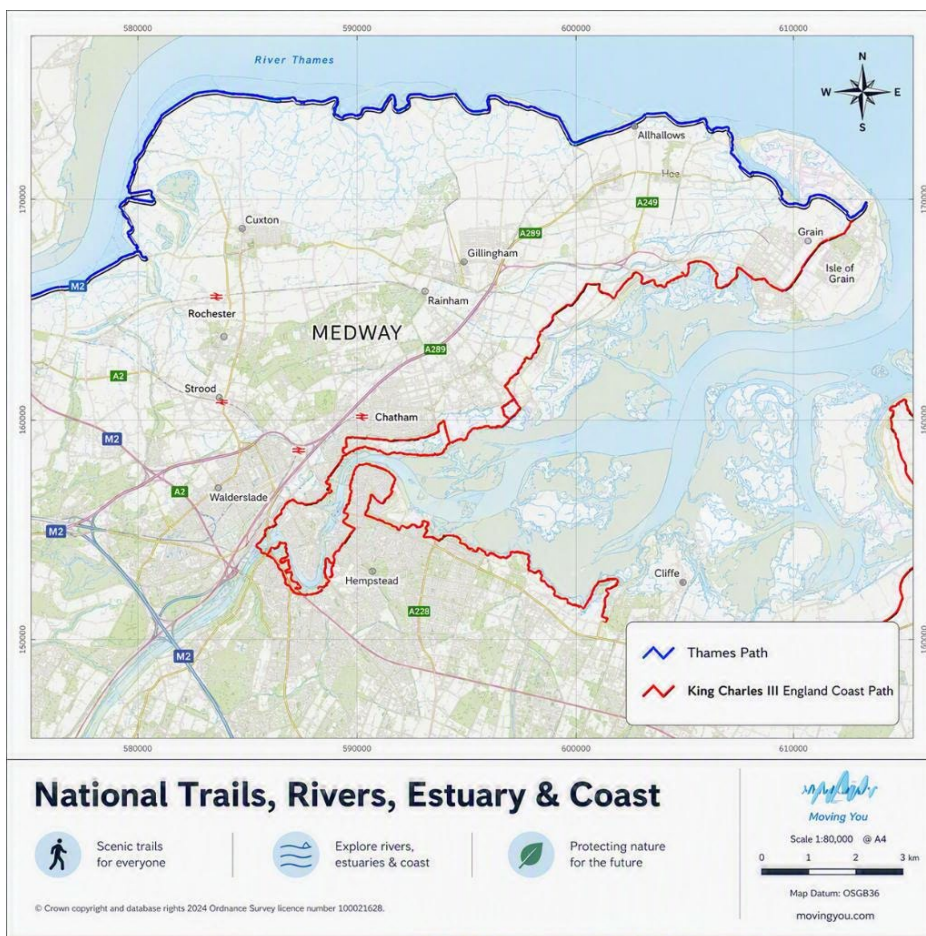


Figure 3-1: Map showing the two National Trails within the Medway district

Health & Wellbeing

- 4.59 It is important to ensure that the Lower River Medway Strategy contributes to the health & wellbeing agenda and the objectives set out in the Local Plan, to support people to lead healthy lives through promoting physical activity and providing access to local nature and opportunities for walking and cycling.

- 4.60 River activities that can improve health and fitness include sailing, rowing, canoeing and tour kayaking and should be considered a factor when agreeing projects which support increasing these activities.
- 4.61 Supporting more people to access these activities, through the better use of information, and the development of easy routes into clubs and organisations able to help, together with the benefits that can be gained, is an important part of the Strategy. Activities need to be easy to find and attractive to use, for both visitors and residents. Improving information on Medway Council's website is again an integral part of this.
- 4.62 Advice for paddlers and small, unpowered watercraft should be developed to assist with safe and responsible exploration of the river with emphasis on salt marshes and islands within the Medway Estuary, to include paddle routes, awareness of water conditions, weather, seasons and least impactful times of the year relating to wildlife disturbance.
- 4.63 The Medway Canoe trail ends at Allington Lock where the river becomes tidal, relevant stakeholders and the council should explore how this trail can be safely extended into the Medway Estuary and create a code of conduct for trail users with emphasis on the importance of wildlife and habitats of the Medway estuary.

Management, Security, Health & Safety, and upkeep of the river

- 4.64 Consultations have highlighted the importance of improving the way in which the river is "managed" and how this raises significant concerns over health, safety, and security. The opportunities for improvement include:
- A more coordinated approach to the management, maintenance and security of current infrastructure and other installations between stakeholders
 - Developing a coordinated approach, involving the Council, the Statutory Harbour Authority, regulators, landowners and river users, to address floating and abandoned wreckage and rubbish where this affects navigation, safety, amenity or environmental quality.
 - Developing a coordinated approach to the promotion of the Medway offer and the range of facilities available.
 - Establishing better relationships, regulations & guidance, between the general sailing and boating community, Peel Ports and the specialist users such as jet skis, hovercrafts and those involved in shooting activities such as wildfowling.
 - Working up proposals to engage and educate the residents of Medway as to the range of opportunities and facilities available on the river.
 - Consultees have expressed the view that this should not be seen as a "talking shop", and the participation of the Council, the Statutory Harbour Authority and relevant regulators is seen as essential to coordinating initiatives on access, safety and environmental matters, while respecting each body's statutory remit.
 - Whilst the river offers many health and wellbeing benefits, in the context of suicide prevention there are risks to be managed, particularly in higher risk locations such as piers and bridges and specific entry points along the river. Monitoring response incidents and data sharing between partner agencies helps to build a clear picture of higher risk locations and enables preventative measures to be taken in a timely manner.

- 4.65 Medway Swale Estuary Partnership (MSEP) hold quarterly meetings with a wide group of stakeholders to discuss issues impacting upon the estuary and the development of related projects and this could form the catalyst for a wider grouping. MSEP are also in the process of establishing a Scientific Advisory Group.
- 4.66 The Medway and Swale Boating Association (MSBA) represents the recreational boating clubs and associations of the Medway and Swale and, together with the Royal Yachting Association (RYA) as the national body for recreational boating, should be recognised as the representative voice of the sailing and boating community within the strategy and its delivery arrangements. The MSBA already meets regularly with Peel Ports on navigation, safety and river management matters.

The Medway “Offer” Promotion of Activities & Facilities on the River

- 4.67 The opportunity to broaden and improve the Medway sporting and leisure offer to increase visitor footfall to similar locations, such as the Thames, Solent and Orwell estuaries when considering projects and future planning related to riverside and river-based facilities and activities. It is recommended the undertaking of market research and similar evidence gathering processes to understand the challenges and how to address them to improve the river offer through increased activities and enhanced facilities.
- 4.68 Leisure and Tourism is a critically important aspect for Medway, particularly in terms of placemaking and creating a destination that appeals at a national and international level. The river could be a vital component here and significantly contribute to Medway’s unique selling point.
- 4.69 The objective is to establish a strategy that provides more of a reason to be on the river with more significant events of a national appeal, more attractions, more competitions, more opportunities and facilities to enable sailing, boating and other sporting activities.
- 4.70 Promotion of joined-up sustainable travel should be explored to include links between high-speed s and river boat services to reduce car journeys and demonstrate the river as an alternative form of transport.
- 4.71 In the longer term, the potential Leisure and Sporting opportunity is exponential, assuming a strategic approach to “up” the offer in terms of what is available, the quality, breadth and scale of the offer, the range of assets on offer, and the way in which it is promoted.

Looking Forward

- 4.72 Over recent years, traditional marina infrastructure has moved from a storage operation into a destination, with waterfront developments for retail and food as well as maritime and ancillary services. There is also a major market in clubs and commercial training centres in the UK, which provide sailing and power boating activities to the people of UK and overseas. These are opportunities to be explored in Medway.
- 4.73 Existing clubs and facilities that are looking to redevelop and expand should be supported to develop a financial, business plan, to understand the return of the investment and identify where grant or other funding can be sourced.
- 4.74 Opportunities should also be identified, for development initiatives that have a visionary approach to capitalising on the advantages of a riverside location, a mix of leisure, commercial, sporting, training uses. Potential sites should undertake preliminary viability and deliverability testing, linked to the creation of a prospectus to test in the market.

Theme 1 Summary

The river's Leisure and Sporting community is vibrant and diverse:

- The river is a focus for a wide range of leisure and sporting activities, both on the water and along its banks. These include general sailing and boating activities, personal watercraft e.g. paddleboarding, kayaking, canoeing, and jet skiing, cruising and motor vessels, fishing, rowing, water skiing and many opportunities for walking and cycling.
- Activities use the river in different ways, in the river, on the river, or alongside the river.
- The facilities offering this mix of activities are also very wide, ranging in their nature from small to large, free and at a cost, privately organised or publicly available.
- Although these types of activity are currently wide ranging, they all have the potential to be grown exponentially in terms of the number and type of users with investment in river access and other infrastructure, more coordinated promotion of the offer and opportunities, and better management, maintenance, and security.

Developing a “Medway Offer”

There is an opportunity to further develop the “Medway offer,” developing the river as a destination in the Southeast through providing much more of a reason to be on and along it with more events, more attractions, more competitions, and more opportunities and facilities to enable sailing, boating and other sporting activities. This includes:

Establishing the case for a “clean” River Medway, attracting visitors, eliminating any environmental and health concerns and encouraging participation in organised activities on the river

Establishing a business case of potential projects, including both hard projects such as physical infrastructure and soft projects to support the Leisure and Sporting agenda to secure further public and private funding sources into river activities.

Contributing to the health and wellbeing agenda. Encouraging people to walk more as a form of low cost and enjoyable physical activity through developing the river's walking offer. This could involve creating good quality riverside pathways and developing walking schemes for residents and visitors. Stakeholders working with the council are encouraged to explore opportunities to increase participation of children and young people through structured youth activities, volunteering, environmental projects and outdoor education directly related to the river.

Improve access to the river

Access to and from the river is a challenge at present. Improvements to the river's accessibility could significantly change the type and level of outdoor awareness of the river, the range of activities undertaken and the volume of vessels coming into the area by water. This could include:

Undertaking a feasibility study to assess the opportunities and viability of a medium-term strategy to maintain, refurbish, and reinstate a range of river access infrastructure (pontoons, moorings, slipways) and to construct new access points.

Improving the use of river-based infrastructure at the Strand, including making better use of The Stand facilities, particularly the public slipway; improving River frontage access and links to adjoining sites; and improving river access provision.

Widening the use of the Riverside Country Park, considering any additional river access options that could be developed around the park and linking the park with riverside walkways, whilst factoring in any environmental limitations such as disturbance to habitats and sea-level rise eroding sections of flood defences putting areas of the park at risk.

Making more of the connections to London via High-Speed Rail – for example, to Strood, Rochester and Chatham to attract a wider visitor profile to the river, as well as developing a sustained campaign to promote locations where public transport dovetails with river boat services as found at Limehouse Landing at Rochester Riverside.

Management of the river

Establishing a coordinated advisory and collaborative body to support strategic discussion about the river and improving its offer, while ensuring that statutory responsibilities remain with the relevant authorities, including the Statutory Harbour Authority, Environment Agency, Natural England, Marine Management Organisation, local authorities, Rochester Oyster and Floating Fishery and other competent bodies.

Addressing management, maintenance, health and safety and security concerns, including in the river and infrastructure along the river,

Coordinating the ‘Medway offer’, including promoting the river, organising events, and searching for funding opportunities.

The term ‘soft projects’ refers to those projects which do not involve physical construction intervention.

5. Theme 2: The River as an Important Business and Economic Driver

Background and Context

- 5.1 The River Medway has long been a hub for industrial and commercial activities, facilitating the import and export of a wide range of goods. However, recent years have seen a shift in market dynamics, favouring facilities along the Thames Estuary and the East Coast. Currently, the Medway hosts two major port operators, Hutchinson Port Holdings and Peel Ports.
- 5.2 Most of the cargo shipping on the Medway is short sea, serving regional needs in the construction sector, waste products and liquids fuels and chemicals, mainly running from four cargo handling facilities in use on the river, namely Thamesport wharves, Grain oil and gas jetties, Chatham Docks, and the wharves on the Medway City Estate. These are considered in more detail below. It is essential for an estimated 73 businesses to have direct access to the river which provides local employment and supports economic activity through ancillary businesses which include marine engineering, wastewater pump out systems, bunkering providers and maritime insurers.
- 5.3 Opportunities to help young people into jobs, apprenticeships and volunteering roles to support businesses with maritime interest should be explored and supported, with an emphasis on the historic ship restoration sector where engineering skills are in steep decline.
- 5.4 The operations at the ports have wider importance to the regional economy. In addition to the businesses directly serving the port operations, these activities serve significant supply chains in the construction, aviation, and many other sectors which rely on imports from the Medway’s ports. These continue to have key importance in the energy sector, and are the locations for interconnectors from mainland Europe, providing a new energy link between the UK and Germany via the Neu Connect project, with construction works now underway on a new UK converter station at the Isle of Grain. The new link will allow electricity to flow in either direction, helping to boost energy security and resilience while also helping to integrate renewable energy sources in the UK and Germany.

- 5.5 In addition, National Grid Ventures is also in the process of developing plans to deliver Nautilus, a new subsea cable allowing electricity to flow between the UK and Belgium, with a preferred connection to the UK electricity system identified at the Isle of Grain.
- 5.6 The recreational sector within the lower Medway includes many clubs, marinas and boatyards which offer a wide range of services that supports thousands of leisure and commercial craft including, brokers, chandlers, dry dock facilities, training businesses and engineering expertise. These services provide local employment opportunities, attract visiting vessels and help drive the river economy and local spending. The council, working with river stakeholders, should seek to quantify the economic value of these services and seek ways to support their expansion which improves the river offer and builds a regional and national reputation for the lower Medway as a hub for dependable marine services.

Isle of Grain

- 5.7 The area of land at the end of the Hoo peninsula, called St James, Isle of Grain is a major national energy hub hosting a large-scale gas power station and liquified natural gas imports with storage capacity of up to 20% to meet UK demand. International energy interconnectors to the Netherlands and Germany provide another power link for the UK's needs. Featuring a major aviation fuel import and storage area combined with a large rail loading facility enables the transportation of hundreds of thousands of metric tons of jet fuel each year to the Colnbrook rail terminal near Heathrow airport. Significant private investment for enhancement and expansion of these facilities in recent years demonstrates confidence in the Isle of Grain as a location for long term use and provider of stable, local employment.

Centrica

- 5.8 Centrica purchased a significant site, to the NE of the Isle of Grain immediately adjacent to the river, from National Grid in 2025. At the present time, their main business area within the Grain facility is the importing and storage of Liquid Natural Gas (LNG). This is primarily the subject of import contracts which are estimated to run until 2045 - 2050. Even though current national policy is to try and dilute the main gas supply with green hydrogen, to create a mixed fuel network, there are limits to this dilution. Even if it is possible to introduce more hydrogen into the network in future years, the prevailing view is that there will continue to be a need for an imported LNG supply for many years to come.
- 5.9 In terms of infrastructure, there are currently two main jetties at Grain, servicing the LNG operation, and a third jetty, which is currently unused but available for additional trade, as and when required. It is the UK's largest LNG importation terminal, and Europe's largest regasification facility. The balance of their site is largely occupied by storage tanks, although there are significant areas which are unused and available for other purposes. Consultations have indicated that irrespective of future and emerging uses, there is likely to be a need for significant investment in the Grain infrastructure, over the next few years.

Thamesport

- 5.10 Recent years have seen many competitors move into the specialist, automated container terminal arena, which Thamesport occupied almost exclusively some 20 years ago, and consequently the operation has had to diversify to provide a range of current facilities, which include:
- Deep water quays with road, rail & barge connections
 - LOLO (Lift On / Lift Off) container services
 - Bulk cargo handling solutions
 - Short sea services to continental Europe (Holland and Spain)

- 5.11 As such, the Thamesport landholding now accommodates several other operations, which include elements of the construction sector, imported aggregates, steel and cement. A manufacturing specialist creates reinforced concrete sections for major infrastructure projects including, High Speed Rail 2 and London Tideway. There are further opportunities for business expansion on site 40 acres, undeveloped land available.

Grain Power Station

- 5.12 Uniper Energy continues to operate the Grain Power Station (three turbines) and are aiming to fully decarbonise by 2035, through Carbon Capture and the integration of hydrogen into the system (as a low carbon alternative to natural gas).
- 5.13 They also own several parcels of undeveloped land at present, including some 8.2 hectares in the middle of the Grain complex, and a further 40 hectares. They are currently considering several alternative uses for these areas.

Kingsnorth at Hoo St Werburg

- 5.14 The former Kingsnorth power station estate has a total area of 279 acres with significant river frontage and two deep water, all-tide landing wharfs; Long Reach Jetty and Oakhamness Jetty which are separately owned by Peel Ports. The estate was rebranded as Medway One it is owned and managed by Uniper Energy whose vision is to redevelop the entire site for new employment space to attract leading national and international companies to deliver long-term investment in local area. The development has the potential to include a mixture of commercial, manufacturing, industrial, distribution, data centre, and energy use with the potential to expand marine services and freight.
- 5.15 Stakeholder groups supported by the council should engage with the owners of Medway One to explore the feasibility of introducing river boat services for the public and alternative modes of transport to employment zones which emphasis on nodal transport links such as high-speed rail services

Medway City Estate at Strood

- 5.16 Medway City Estate constructed in 1987 was originally a salt marsh network which naturally absorbed flood and rainwater. Now built over with industrial units the majority of which have sealed goods yards. Predicted sea level rise combined with effects of climate change resulting in wetted winters will create higher volumes of rainwater runoff which impacts the local water table and leads to increased localized flooding. This issue is increasingly becoming a factor when considering the types of future use that can be sustained on the Medway City Estate and whether provision needs to be allowed for some areas to be restored as salt marsh or the creation of strategic unsealed open spaces to absorb rainwater runoff to reduce surface water flooding.
- 5.17 There are three significant companies operating on the Medway City Estate; Scotline, Heidelberg Materials Aggregates, and VeeTee Rice with Scotline and VeeTee Rice utilising access to the river as a fundamental part of their business model, both enjoy significant river frontage and marine infrastructure. River stakeholders supported by the council should explore how existing assets can be retained and expanded to improve river connections for potential river boat services for the public and additional moorings for visiting leisure craft.

Scotline

- 5.18 Scotline, are a major importer of construction related products, such as sawn timber, wood pulp, cement, refuse-derived fuel (RDF), together with some palletised products and steel products and their current facilities are operating at maximum capacity. Some 99% of the goods passing through their terminals are inward bound arriving by sea their ships are a familiar sight on the river and moor along the wharfage at Limehouse Reach.
- 5.19 The river access channel alongside the Medway City Estate is currently described as adequate, however there is a need to undertake regular maintenance dredging every 12 to 18 months. The

company have indicated operations will get significantly more challenging over the next 10 to 15 years; therefore, expansion and eventual relocation will be required.

- 5.20 Scotline long term vested interest in its current site having invested in a new substation with a contribution towards the cost from the council. A high demand for the current business model exists and their current facilities are operating at maximum capacity.

Heidelberg Materials Aggregates

- 5.21 Heidelberg are located on the Frindsbury Wharf site, which is a significant import facility. They produce and distribute aggregates such as crushed rock, sand and gravel from a network of quarries, depots, and wharves. These are supplied for a variety of construction uses including ready-mixed concrete production, pre-cast concrete, brick and block manufacture and asphalt production. The specific products include industrial sands, SUDS (Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems) aggregates, and sea defence aggregates, together with specialist sands for glass making, horticulture, agriculture and leisure.

VeeTee Rice

- 5.22 VeeTee is a family run business, located on the river and occupying two sites within the Medway City Estate it employs local workforce of 350+, It is understood that the company's current proposals are for the business to grow further and will require a more flexible location where transport and access provision is less congested. It is understood there is an intent to move current facilities within the next 5 years with Kingsnorth being a potential location. The potential to import raw materials directly by sea might also be an advantage as currently most materials arrive by road from Holland.

Chatham Docks

- 5.23 Proposals are being put forward for the redevelopment of this whole area. Future development options will be addressed by the Local Plan and subject to planning approvals in due course, with appropriate consultation as part of the planning process. This is a complex matter which requires significant local authority and stakeholder engagement.
- 5.24 The proposed development of the operational Docks can be seen as an extension to Peel L&P's transformation of the neighbouring Chatham Waters site which includes the Waterfront UTC, Asda, the Mast and Rigging pub, and a total of 950 homes, over 600 of which have already been developed.

Chatham Marina

- 5.25 Chatham Maritime Trust was created after Chatham Dockyard closed and its ownership includes the former Royal Navy dockyard land which includes Chatham Marina, the commercial area of Dockside Outlet Centre, and the significant residential area of St Mary's island, with over 5000 residents between 1700 dwellings. The Marina includes 412 pontoon berths with shore storage of over 100 boats and is considered one of the best mooring providers on the river. The Trust also owns neighbouring land which has three universities on one campus, a thriving water sports centre which includes sailing, paddleboarding, windsurfing, open water swimming and kayaking, as well as formal training and recognised qualifications. The estate has further opportunities for redevelopment which will be brought forward in due course and are a significant contributor to local Medway charities including the Living River Foundation, Black Lions Swimming and Wet Wheels.
- 5.26 Chatham Marina is an important venue for events, including the annual Chatham Maritime Food and Drink festival which was attended by more than 23,000 people in 2026. The festival is hosted by and funded entirely by Chatham Maritime Trust

Other Uses

- 5.27 There are several small boat repair yards and contractors with varying facilities catering for both the larger commercial vessels and the leisure craft market with three commercial repair facilities currently available. These comprise Turks Shipyard at Chatham Historic Dockyard, GPS Marine at Upnor and European Active Projects at Chatham Docks.

- 5.28 Upnor enjoys a popular beach with key historical sites such as Upnor Castle, whilst Lower Upnor is home to two long established clubs; Medway Yacht Club and Wilsonian Sailing Club, among others, which between them offer sailing, racing, cruising and RYA training for adults, children and young people.

Key Challenges

- 5.29 The consultations with organisations owning and operating within the locations described above have identified several challenges, which impact on the functioning and sustainability of both current operations and the potential for long-term growth and sustainability.

Isle of Grain

- 5.30 The challenges for the Isle of Grain are mainly focused on the provision of infrastructure. The availability of public transport is a concern for businesses in Kingsnorth and Grain, which creates difficulties in getting staff without a car to the facilities, particularly for shift work.
- 5.31 Rail is a potential asset in terms of alternative access for businesses on Grain generally. Provision consists of a single line constructed to Loading Gauge W9, which is not the largest loading gauge, and at present, Thamesport is the only Grain based operation with a functioning rail link. Proposals have been put forward over recent years, to improve pathways and rail access to the Isle of Grain, with a proposed link to HS1.
- 5.32 There is only one road access point onto the Isle of Grain, a concern expressed by several consultees, which is considered a constraint on commercial development in the area. The original Housing Infrastructure Fund (HIF) programme for the Hoo Peninsula, included proposals to upgrade Four Elms roundabout, road access and investment in rail infrastructure to include a new station. In 2023 the withdrawal of HIF funding stopped these proposals. Work initiated on preparations for Arriva providing a bus route from Strood Station. This featured as part of the planning requirements for businesses moving to Kingsnorth to fund, but difficulties lining up shift patterns prevented this from progressing.
- 5.33 Despite the scale, nature and diversity of the businesses and users operating at both Kingsnorth and Grain, there is a need for increased strategic planning for future development, growth and transition to new uses in these key locations. This is potentially more important now, given the significant economic changes which have been experienced over the last 5 to 10 years, and how the sectors represented at these locations will continue to fundamentally change over the next 5 to 10 years.

Chatham Docks

- 5.34 The closure of Chatham Docks presents many opportunities to transform the last section of the former dockyard estate into a new mixed-use area of commercial and residential units and increase public access to the waterfront with new walking and cycling links to Gillingham and beyond. Where appropriate, the council, working with river stakeholders, should seek to present evidence and experienced based ideas to be considered as part of the site regeneration

Other Uses

- 5.35 A diverse range of river-based operators and businesses were able to rely on local repair and servicing facilities for their vessels and operations. Many of these companies ceased trading in recent years and local servicing has almost ceased and operators now source facilities and expertise further afield on the Thames and East Coast.

- 5.36 Stakeholder groups working with the council should explore how to determine the level of sufficient demand which can be developed for marine services in the future to be re-established at key locations on the river and generate local employment.

Key Opportunities

- 5.37 Key issues to consider in terms of future maritime related activities on the River Medway. These need to be seen in the context of a range of national and international opportunities that are being considered by the maritime sector at the present time.
- 5.38 Although it is thought that the global reliance on shipping will decline in certain respects in future years, due to new technologies the move to more circular economies, and the forecast energy transition; it is still expected that the Maritime Sector will continue to be a primary mode of transport for international trade in the foreseeable future.
- 5.39 The sector therefore remains a vital part of the UK economy, and the UK remains an important player in the international arena, particularly in terms of skills and expertise in systems, design, and marine engineering.

5.40 Globally, future opportunities could include:

- more specialisation – fewer ports handling the majority of UK goods
- ports will need to offer port-centric transport and distribution removing a leg of the logistics chain e.g. logistics parks with the port as a key distribution centre, manufacturing sites with ready access to ports and 3D printing supply chains
- green maritime technologies, integrating green fuels and hybrid systems.
- digitisation, and the adoption of “smart shipping” technologies
- the evolution of marine science, to develop the role of oceans in our environment and economy
- the importance of a skilled workforce – with close links to Universities and Colleges

5.41 There are, however, challenges in the River Medway, capitalising on many of these opportunities, due to the location, scale, and configuration of competitor ports and facilities elsewhere across the South and East of the UK.

5.42 Irrespective, there are some significant opportunities for the Medway to pursue, and it is important to consider how businesses can survive and grow, and who needs to pursue actions to deliver on such opportunities.

Uniper Energy at Isle of Grain

5.43 One of the key opportunities is the provision and development of potential Carbon Capture operations, which could be a focus for the available land parcels within their ownership, some 8.2 hectares in the middle of the Grain complex, and a further 40 hectares of available land for other related uses.

5.44 Uniper have developed a Carbon Capture business plan to establish a carbon capture and storage (CC) project at the power station with post combustion carbon capture technology, with CO₂ transported by ship, or pipeline to permanent storage offshore.

5.45 Uniper are considering up to three CC Units to accommodate their own requirements for the power station, plus any external business that they can generate servicing for other emitters who are having difficulty dealing with CC.

5.46 Uniper are proposing a phased, low carbon hydrogen production facility delivering 700MW in late 2026 and growing to 7.4GW by 2040, together with capturing and storing up to 1.2m tonnes of CO₂ per year. Alternatively, Carbon Capture Utilisation and Storage (CC) protocols, introduce the idea of producing “Food Safe” CO₂ from the process for use in the food & beverage industries, or synthetic fuel and low-carbon building materials.

5.47 Identifying a route out for the carbon capture, which could be via liquefaction, is a critical factor, and close cooperation with neighbouring National Grid to utilise their jetties, could be one solution.

National Grid

- 5.48 National Grid identified Carbon Capture as a key element of their business plan. The use of their three jetties could be an important component of any future operation to transport liquified carbon dioxide to what is expected to be a growing number of carbon stores offsite or around the country.
- 5.49 National Grid is looking at other uses for their jetties, including the potential for ammonia storage and green ammonia which has good energy storage properties which solve the problem of electricity storage for renewable energy plants, and the production of Food Grade CO₂.
- 5.50 The future exploitation of these sectors will depend on significant investment over the next few years however the location of Grain is seen as having major potential for a significant energy hub “potentially including:
- Hydrogen manufacture & Green Hydrogen
 - Carbon infrastructure – to lead on de-carbonisation
 - Ammonia and/or Green Ammonia storage
 - Links to high energy consumption industrial process plants and blue hydrogen linked to carbon capture and storage.

Thamesport

- 5.51 Thamesport could have a role within the CC agenda set out above. They are considering how they can develop their existing construction sector focus, with a wider range of importers and manufacturers, who can efficiently supply the London and Southeast markets from their location. This could establish a “one stop shop” for such products and services.
- 5.52 There could also be an opportunity to better coordinate timber, steel or other construction imports and exports through Thamesport, by relocating some of the existing businesses, from elsewhere in Medway, including operations looking to relocate from Chatham Docks, but this would need a coordinated approach, and discussions between all interested parties. Thamesport has highlighted the potential for discussions with the Amazon Distribution Warehouse in Kingsnorth, regarding any opportunities to consider either rail-related or sea-related imports, via the Thamesport operation.

Kingsnorth - Uniper and Medway One and adjoining land opportunities

- 5.53 Medway One is the regeneration and redevelopment of the former Kingsnorth power station site of 279 acres to create a new employment space on the Hoo Peninsula, the international energy company Uniper owns the site and is responsible for its redevelopment.
- 5.54 Uniper’s proposals for Medway One are to deliver:
- a mix of commercial, manufacturing, and industrial spaces, and potential for storage, distribution, and data centre facilities.
 - A potential option is to create a heat network energy hub generating sustainable power heating for local housing and businesses.
- 5.55 An access route to the river is protected within the Outline Planning Application (OPA) and consultations have highlighted that the existing Kingsnorth jetties of Oakham Jetty and Long Reach Jetty should be seen as an opportunity for river transport. River stakeholders working with the council should explore opportunities to support initiatives to bring both jetties back into use.

- 5.56 Peel Ports owns Oakham and Long Reach jetties and are leased to Uniper. This should be considered when making future planning and strategy for this.
- 5.57 Businesses within the Medway City Estate have voiced proposals to relocate their existing facilities to Kingsnorth, which could provide a need for the jetties to be brought back into use. the river.
- 5.58 Businesses within the Medway City Estate have also raised the possibility of a wider partnership coming together, to refurbish and upgrade the existing Kingsnorth jetties, which could lead to a coordinated approach to upgrading the access to the river for freight, industrial use and passenger boat services with links to Limehouse Landing at Rochester, Gillingham Pier Western Arm, Isle of Sheppey, Southend and London Gateway.
- 5.59 Medway Council could potentially support this and there could be additional businesses, who might be prepared to consider a relocation to Kingsnorth, if such a facility were available. For example, as described earlier, Scotline need to expand and better coordinate the different components of their operation and have started considering alternative sites and locations within Medway; there is also the potential to consider relocating certain businesses from Chatham Docks.

Medway City Estate

- 5.60 The prospect of two or three major occupiers moving out of the Medway City Estate to a more efficient, nearby location, in the short to medium term introduces some urgency into the consideration of the mix and focus of future uses within this area, and whether considering future options should be grasped now. Opportunities include:
- The potential to considerably improve the river frontage throughout the Medway City estate, which currently creates a bleak and unattractive vista from the key riverside vantage points throughout Rochester and Chatham.
 - establishing a policy which seeks to avoid any future industrial river-based operations locating on important river frontage sites and encourages such operations to consider suitable alternative locations at Kingsnorth or Grain.
 - the introduction of a mix of residential and commercial uses, and new environmental floodplains to better accommodate rising water levels and seasonal flooding and make best use of the river frontage.
 - establishing a clear strategy now that identifies the future locational and operational requirements of companies like VeeTee Rice, Scotline and Heidelberg Aggregates, and establishes the future development potential and value of their current locations. This will be an essential ingredient of any planning framework for this area.

For identification and indicative purposes only, Figure 4 below broadly identifies the land holdings that would be impacted by a decision from VeeTee Rice, Scotline and Heidelberg Aggregates, to move to an alternative location.

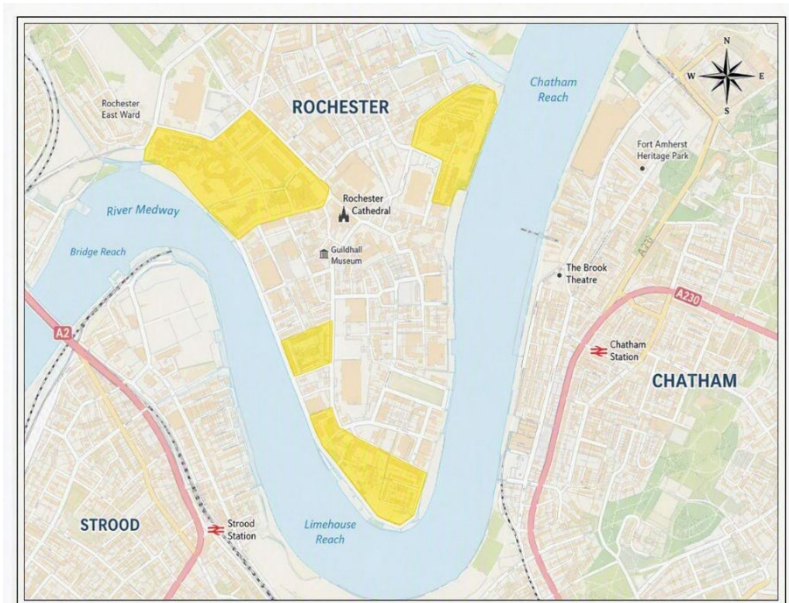


Figure 4-1: Medway City Estate sites, potentially impacted by key river businesses moving location

Chatham Docks

- 5.61 The Medway Local Plan 2041 is at Examination in Public Stage, with hearings due to start in Autumn 2026. Strategically, there is opportunity for the remaining Chatham Waters development to include improved river access and links to Gillingham Waterfront subject to adjoining landowner agreements and consent

Other Challenges

- 5.62 This strategy should enable the appropriate river stakeholders, working with the council to identify sufficient demand to potentially reintroduce a range of marine support services, including repair companies, engineers, electricians and welders with an emphasis on apprenticeships to meet future demands for historic ship restoration and provide opportunities for skilled and specialist workers within the marine servicing sector.
- 5.63 A strong marine servicing sector would be an important driver in regenerating the river related industry, and those taking forward the opportunities within this theme, may wish to commission some analysis to identify the point at which increased demand might warrant efforts to grow the support services sector again.
- 5.64 The council, working with river stakeholders, will need to engage with business owners to gather evidence to support the commissioning of a feasibility study to assess options and opportunities for transportation and accessibility of the Isle of Grain and Kingsnorth and which can support the development port-centric manufacturing, transport and distribution capacity with perceived increase in pilotage availability identified.

Theme 2 Summary

The River Medway has traditionally been a focus for a range of industrial and commercial businesses, importing and exporting by sea, a wide spectrum of goods and providing essential support services. However, the market context had changed over recent years, with better located facilities along the wider Thames Estuary and East Coast.

The river currently hosts two major port operators: Hutchinson Port Holdings and Peel Ports.

There are four key locations across the Medway area, where river based economic drivers are located:

Grain. There are three operations within the Grain site: importing and storage of LNG by National Grid using two main jetties at Grain; London Thamesport, a small container seaport on the River Medway, serving the North Sea, which mainly supports operations in the construction sector; and the Grain Power Station three turbines operated by Uniper.

Kingsnorth. The key site at Kingsnorth is owned by Uniper, formerly the site of the now cleared Kingsnorth Power Station. The site is now the subject of an Outline Planning Application for the development of Medway One, which will comprise a mixture of commercial, manufacturing and industrial spaces. The site also contains access to the river shoreline and the former Kingsnorth Jetties owned by Peel Ports and leased by Uniper.

Medway City Estate. There are three key operations on the Medway City Estate, two of which utilise access to the river as a fundamental part of their business model Scotline and Heidelberg Materials Aggregates, and one which has a major river frontage with the potential to utilise the river for the importation of raw materials VeeTee Rice. There is the potential for all three to move to alternative sites to permit growth and more efficient operations.

Chatham Docks. Although there are still several river-related businesses on site, using the docks, the imminent closure and redevelopment of this facility mean that there is a need to consider relocation options elsewhere along the Medway, if possible.

Opportunities

Isle of Grain

There are several opportunities at Grain relating to existing operations. These include:

- The development of Carbon Capture operations which could be a focus for the available land parcels within Uniper's ownership; Uniper have developed a Carbon Capture "business plan" to establish a Carbon Capture and Storage (CCS) project at the Grain power station
- National Grid has identified Carbon Capture as a key element of their business plan going forward. The use of their three jetties could be an important component of future operations to transport liquified carbon dioxide. National Grid is also looking at other uses for their jetties, including the potential for ammonia storage and green ammonia
- Thamesport are considering how they can develop their existing "construction sector" focus, with a wider range of importers who can efficiently supply the London and Southeast markets from this location. There could also be an opportunity to better

coordinate timber, steel or other construction imports and exports through Thamesport by relocating existing businesses from elsewhere in Medway.

Medway City Estate

The Strategy considers the mix and focus of future uses within this area with a focus on improving the river frontage, potentially avoiding any future industrial river-based operations along river frontage sites, and introducing a mix of leisure, residential and commercial uses to attract residents and visitors to the river.

Kingsnorth

Although Uniper's proposals for Medway One are not currently for river related users, the route to the river is protected within their Outline Planning Application (OPA), and consultations have highlighted that the existing Kingsnorth jetties should be seen as an opportunity. There are some challenges in terms of the viability of reconfiguring the existing structures, and operational issues which would need to be closely investigated. Peel Ports, the current owners of the jetties, would need to play a key part future planning for this area.

It is suggested that a Strategic Planning, Development, and Feasibility Study be undertaken to appraise the opportunity of establishing a strategic employment location around the wider Kingsnorth area the viability of re-purposing the existing jetties and linking this to new users, relocating from elsewhere in Medway or further afield. The study should also consider whether relocations from the Medway City Estate are feasible, and how that would impact on the medium-term planning and development strategy for that estate.

Chatham Docks

Peel L&P, the current owner of the Docks, does not consider the continuation of the existing operational docks to be viable. The area is the subject of a proposal to develop the next phases of Chatham Waters.

6. Theme 3: The River as an Exceptional Natural Environment and Wildlife Habitat

Background and Context

- 6.1 The lower River Medway and its estuary's natural environment and wildlife habitats support significant biodiversity which is recognised by several, local, national and international designations at key locations within the estuary, and the northern coastline of the Hoo peninsula on the River Thames, which is part of the wider, 4,800-hectare Thames Estuary Special Protection Area and Ramsar designated site.
- 6.2 The Medway Estuary and Marshes, covers 4,748 hectares and is designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest, a Marine Conservation Zone (MCZ), a Ramsar internationally important wetland site, and a Special Protection Area under the European Union Directive on the Conservation of Wild Birds and is a small but significant part of the East Atlantic Flyway, a globally significant migratory bird route stretching from southern Africa to the Arctic.

- 6.3 Within the United Kingdom is an 800-mile area extending from the Humber Estuary to the mouth of the Thames and forms part of a larger network of ecologically connected coastal wetlands, including estuaries and open coast ecosystems. The East Coast Wetlands were added to the UK's tentative list of World Heritage sites in 2023 and is now going through the lengthy assessment stages. The RSPB are leading on this with National Trust. There is the potential to demonstrate this value both through the role the wetlands play in supporting migratory birds along the East Atlantic Flyway migratory route, as well as the globally leading examples of coastal adaptation in the face of a changing climate. If accepted, this will be only the third Natural World Heritage site in the UK.
- 6.4 The consequence of these designations is:
- A statutory responsibility to safeguard the habitats of migratory birds and certain threatened birds (SPA)
 - An obligation to conserve, manage and protect the wetlands (Ramsar)
 - A legal duty to protect important fauna, flora, geological or physiographical features (Site of Special Scientific Interest - SSSI)
 - A legal duty to protect and conserve the marine ecosystem (MCZ)
- 6.5 These responsibilities are currently covered in Policies S2 and S3 of the emerging Medway Local Plan, which outlines the Council's commitment to promoting the conservation, restoration and enhancement of priority habitats and species, avoiding damage to protected areas, as well as seeking opportunities to deliver biodiversity net gain.

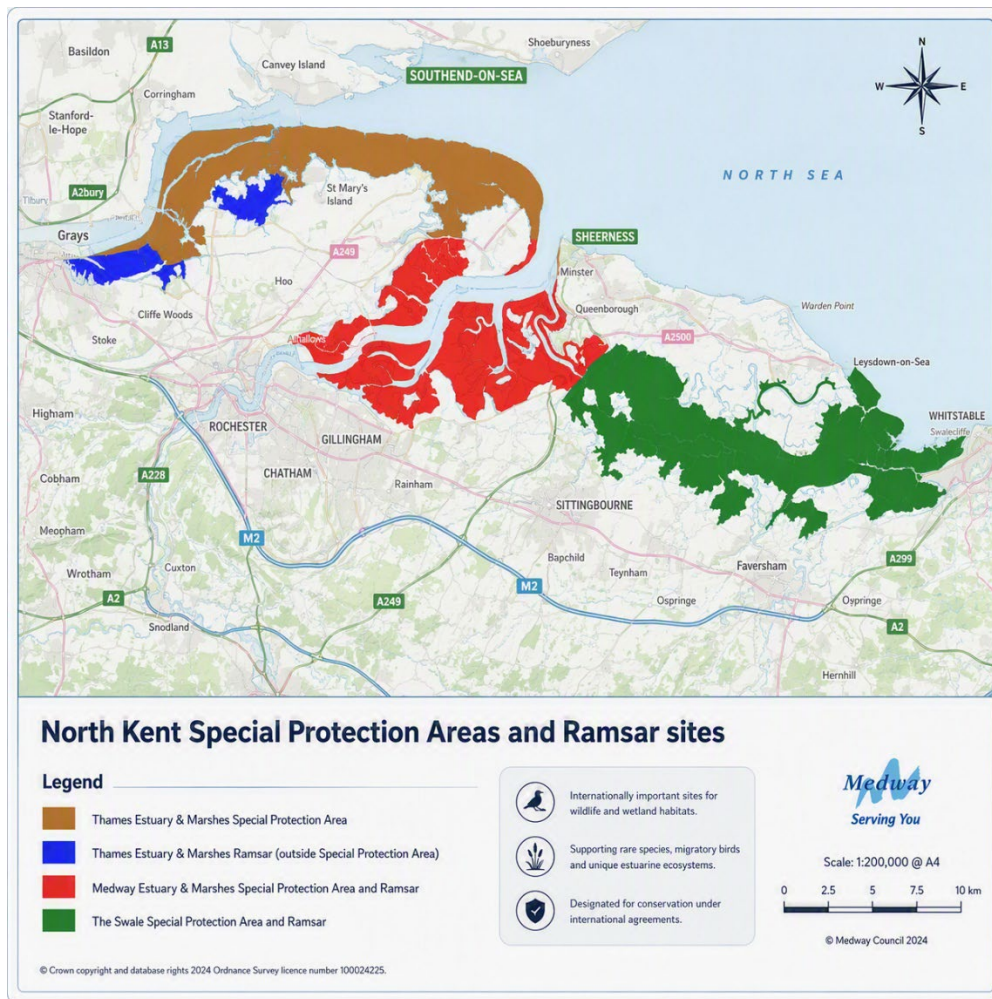


Figure 5-1: North Kent Special Protection Areas and Ramsar sites

Intertidal Habitats - Saltmarshes and Mudflats

- 6.6 The intertidal habitats, which fall the above designations, are particularly important, with large areas of sediment, mudflats and saltmarshes.
- 6.7 The Saltmarshes, are dynamic, vegetated coastal wetlands that form in the intertidal zones of sheltered shorelines, where saltwater and freshwater mix. These ecosystems serve as vital buffers between land and sea and play a crucial role in coastal protection, carbon sequestration, water purification, and biodiversity support.
- 6.8 The Medway Estuary salt marshes, are among the most ecologically significant in the UK, being important for their bird populations, supporting internationally significant numbers of wintering wildfowl and waders, including species like the avocet, redshank, and brent goose.
- 6.9 The area also acts as a fish nursey, supports vast numbers of invertebrates, provides breeding grounds for nationally important bird species and is home to rare flora such as oak-leaved goosefoot and slender hare's-ear
- 6.10 Studies over recent years have highlighted a marked decline of key bird species, particularly at the SPA level within the Medway Estuary. However, there is insufficient evidence to adequately assess the cause of these declines, although recreational

disturbance is one potential factor. A further study to understand this decline is recommended.

- 6.11 This highlights the sensitivities, and the need to balance the competing uses on the river, and to manage what happens where. Ecologically, the estuary's brackish conditions foster a unique and productive environment, with the river in essence forming an exceptional and highly important biodiversity corridor.

The Marine Conservation Zone

- 6.12 The Marine Conservation Zone (MCZ), designated under the Marine and Coastal Access Act (2009), extends from Rochester to the river mouth, and the area of sea between the Isle of Grain and Sheerness. Its purpose is to protect nationally important marine wildlife, habitats, geology and geomorphology, which will help maintain clean, healthy, productive, and biologically diverse seas and estuaries.
- 6.13 This 60 sq km area is host to a complex and dynamic ecosystem, of both fresh and sea waters, which combined with tidal movements, creates changing levels of salinity and nutrients providing a fertile environment for wildlife, fish, and birds.

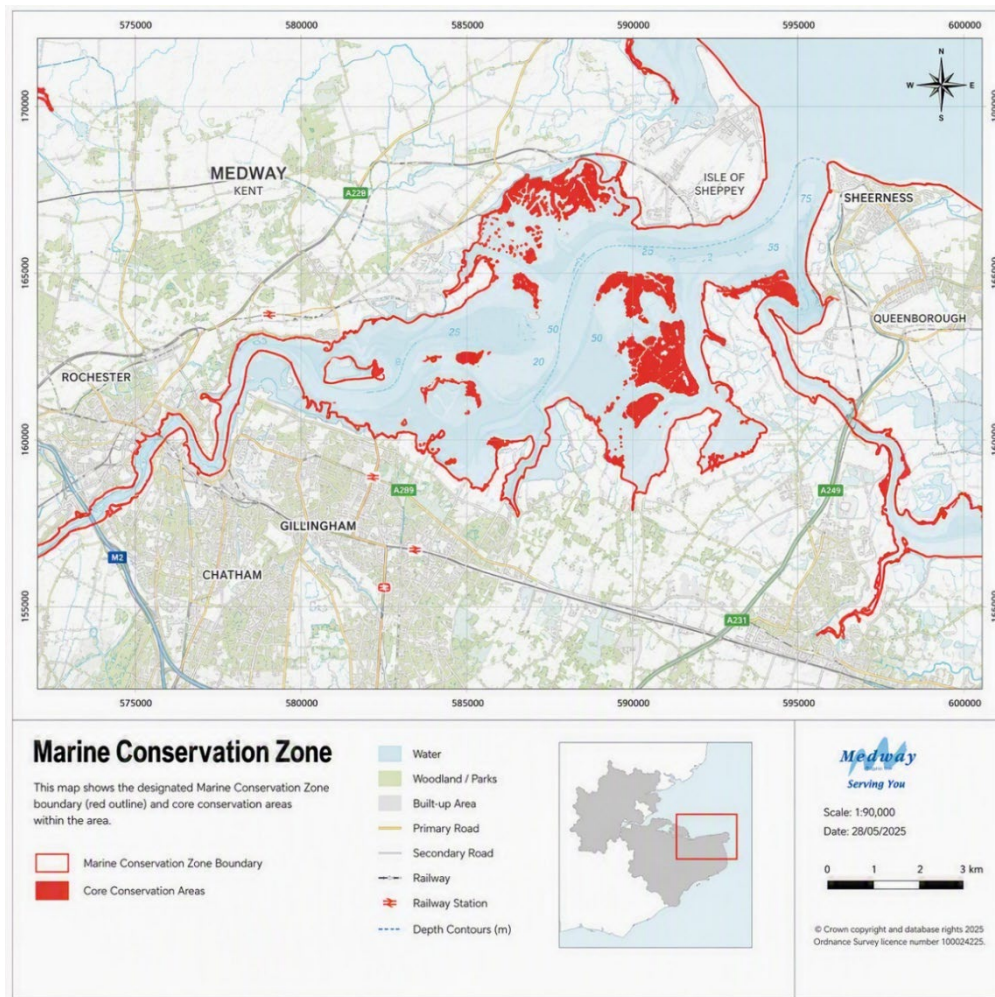


Figure 5-2: Marine Conservation Zone based on source from GOV.UK Medway Estuary MCZ: 2019 designation map

Fishing

- 6.14 There are numerous species of commercially important fish to be found in the Medway, including bass, herring, cod, plaice, sole and smelt. Significant stretches of the river are used as a nursery area for many of these species, which is important given the declining levels of fish in recent years.
- 6.15 To assist with the important rebalancing of stock levels in certain parts of the Medway, a 'No Take Zone' (NTZ) order has been established, running from Kingsnorth to Hoo Marina. This is the largest marine protected area in the UK, covering 4.6 square miles of saltmarsh and mudflats, which are vital for the survival of many fish species.
- 6.16 The NTZ is supported by The Rochester Oyster and Floating Fishery (ROFF) and is being monitored by the Kent and Essex Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority (K&E IFCA).
- 6.17 The Salt Fleet Flats Reserve on the north coast of the Hoo Peninsula is a new area of inter tidal habitat, constructed to compensate for losses elsewhere in the Thames estuary. Approximately 700m of the sea wall was breached and an inland wall of 2.4km constructed to create some 65 hectares of new mudflat and saltmarsh habitat
- 6.18 To the northwest of the Hoo Peninsula, Cliffe Pools is a series of pools and saline lagoons formed from former clay diggings and depositions of river dredgings and has since 2001 been owned by the RSPB as a significant reserve with public access.
- 6.19 The Kent and Medway Local Nature Recovery Strategy, which was published in November 2025, is coordinated by Kent County Council and aims to deliver the maintenance, restoration and creation of wildlife and plant habitats, over a 25-year period.
- 6.20 The strategy includes estuaries and coastal areas, and proposes that these are sustainably and strategically managed, to create functionally linked coastal habitats, where natural dynamic processes are restored, to create resilience to climate change and minimise the loss of intertidal habitats.
- 6.21 The Medway Blue and Green Infrastructure Framework identifies a set of priorities across Medway to protect and enhance biodiversity, create ecologically resilient networks to join habitats and help nature to adapt to climate change, link people and nature, and ensure development is sustainable. This, together with the Medway Local Plan provides a basis from which to develop strategic options for the River Medway.

The River and Climate Change

- 6.22 The river will be a significant conductor of the effects of climate change through storm surges, sea level rise and unpredictable weather conditions. The council, working with stakeholders and relevant external organisations, should gather information to determine ways in which the effects of climate change from a river perspective can be mitigated.
- 6.23 Climate change is causing rainfall events to become more frequent and severe and sea levels to rise. The Medway area is at risk of flooding from several sources, including rising sea levels, inland rivers and watercourses, surface water and groundwater. There is increasing evidence of how flooding is impacting the area on an annual basis, particularly in the Rochester, Strood and Medway City Estate areas.

- 6.24 Climate Change is also causing more frequent and extreme weather events, leading to heatwaves, periods of drought and more storms. The role of the river in local cooling will become more important but the river itself will also be affected in terms of water levels, water temperature, the impact of storms which may lead to new pests and diseases and issues such as increases in harmful algal blooms, and water temperature changes.
- 6.25 Medway Estuary and Swale Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management (ME) strategy, approved in 2019, aims to manage the coastline and tidal defenses within the Medway estuary and includes a collaborative approach with local councils and communities to develop sustainable solutions for managing flood and coastal erosion risks.
- 6.26 A national assessment of surface water flood risk indicates that Medway is one of 116 communities considered to be at significant risk of flooding. Currently, tidal flood risk infrastructure provides varying levels of protection to the areas of ecological importance, however it is certain that Climate Change impacts will cause:
- Coastal erosion: due to increased storm surges, higher tides, compounded by isostatic rebound.
 - Sea level rise: resulting in significant losses of inter-tidal mud flats, saltmarsh, and other habitats through coastal squeeze, with increased pressure on wildlife and coastal defence structures.
- 6.27 The management of Medway's coastline is covered in two Shoreline Management Plans – for the Medway Estuary and for the Isle of Grain alongside the Environment Agency's Medway Estuary and Swale Strategy (MEASS) and the Thames Estuary 2100 Plan (see Figure 8). These are intended to plan and co-ordinate coastal flood and erosion risk management over the next 100 years.
- 6.28 Flood protection strategies to deal with these issues will vary, depending on location and uses, but will impact riverside areas in different ways and are described as:
- Hold the line
 - Enhancement
 - Managed re-alignment

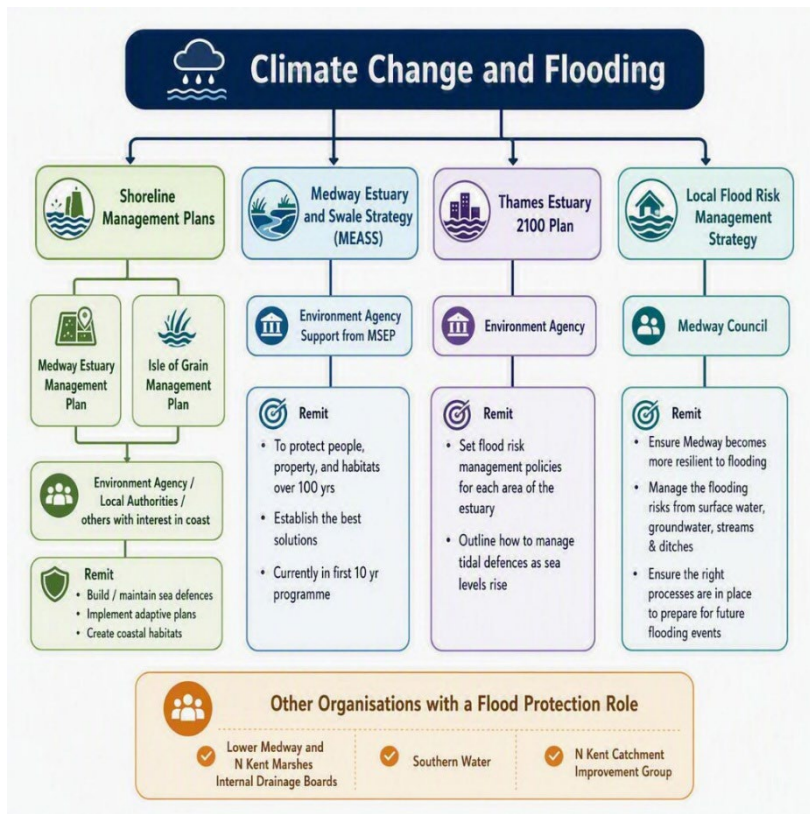


Figure 5-3: Flooding strategies and plans

- 6.29 Planning mitigation of flood risk should factor isotactic change, where northern England is rising by 1-2mm a year and southern England is sinking by 1-2mm a year which is a result of glacial pressure release from the ice age to create a see-sawing effect. It is predicted the north Kent area be 10cm lower by the end of the 21st century.
- 6.30 The river has potential to provide clean, renewable energy through a river source heat network. A heat source network will provide alternative energy for local businesses and homes and reduce reliance of fossil fuels. This is already being explored by the council and is subject to several years of feasibility planning.

Managing and overseeing the river

- 6.31 Environmental and habitat designations. Policies and protections are managed and monitored through several organisations, including Natural England, Environment Agency, Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authorities (IFCA) and the Marine Management Organisation.
- 6.32 These organisations provide consents and permissions for flood defence works river infrastructure improvements and habitat restoration projects. It is recognised by many stakeholders that obtaining the required licenses can be significant time and resources burden, particularly with salt marsh restoration where it typically takes up to 5 years to secure consent before work can begin.
- 6.33 River stakeholders, supported by the Council, should explore how processes for habitat improvements to the river and estuary can be streamlined to enable faster project delivery.

- 6.34 Other organisations which manage aspects of the river, estuary and its wildlife include Royal Engineers, Medway Council, Rochester Oyster and Floating Fishery, Kent Police, Coastguard, Royal National Lifeboat Association, Border Force, North Kent Marshes Water Level Management Board, Southern Water, Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, Coastal Partnership Network, and the North Kent Catchment Improvement Group.

Key Challenges

Wildlife Disturbance

- 6.35 Research undertaken between 2009-2014 by the North Kent Environmental Planning Group (NKEPG) found that areas with high levels of human recreational activity on the coast had seen the largest declines in bird numbers. It also established that 75% of coastal visitors surveyed had travelled from within six kilometres to undertake their chosen activity. The research also suggested that if left unmanaged, increased recreation arising from new development could lead to a 15% increase in disturbance.
- 6.36 The NKEPG research led to the publication of the North Kent Strategic Access Management and Monitoring Strategy (SAMMS) in 2014. SAMMS set out a suite of mitigation measures designed to reduce disturbance to coastal birds arising from human recreational activity. These measures are funded through a developer tariff applied to all new dwellings build within 6km of the Special Protection Areas.
- 6.37 The SAMMS mitigation is delivered by Bird Wise, a partnership of eleven organisations including local authorities, developers, and conservation organisations.
- 6.38 Mitigation measures focus on education and engagement to raise awareness of coastal birds and other wildlife and how to avoid disturbance whilst enjoying recreation on the coast. Face-to-face activities include on-site engagement, events, guided walks, talks and presentations to clubs and schools. In addition to this, codes of conducts have been developed for a range of recreational activities, including water-based activities.
- 6.39 A project aimed at promoting wildlife friendly behaviour on the water is in development which will include training sessions with water-based recreation participants, installation of signage at launch points, zoning to exclude activity from the most sensitive areas and production of printed and digital information to inform recreational users of where, when and how activities should take place.
- 6.40 Any zoning, codes of conduct or signage affecting water-based recreation will be developed in consultation with stakeholders before being finalised.
- 6.41 The aim of the mitigation measures is to allow people to benefit from spending time on or near the water in Medway, without a detrimental effect on the internationally significant wildlife that shares this coastline.

River Pollution

- 6.42 The River Medway contains a wide range of pollutants, from many sources, which cause varying levels of harm to the local environment, wildlife, and population.

6.43 The two main categories, which are measured by the Environment Agency to assess the 'overall status' of the river, are chemical health and ecological health. Within this, the key components causing the levels of pollution being found are:

- Nutrients from farming and water sector run-offs, which are exacerbated by climate change
- The discharge of untreated sewage, with increasing rainfall, which also adds further nutrients, compounding the seriousness of that problem
- Chemicals, including pesticides, hydrocarbons, pharmaceuticals and a range of plastics
- Urban run-off from roads etc and urban discarding, including plastics
- Soil erosion discharging sediment and exposing former tip sites, adjacent to the river, potentially containing contaminated waste

6.44 River testing and monitoring are essential, and these responsibilities are with the Environment Agency, although budgetary pressure over the last two decades has resulted in water monitoring declining significantly. This has resulted in other local testing arrangements needing to be considered to "fill the gap".

6.45 Another challenge is agreeing what actions are needed to address river pollution. It has been suggested that bringing together a range of parties with a role in monitoring and controlling river quality, to find the most effective and economic way of funding and delivering interventions, would provide a way forward.

Regulating Fishing

6.46 Given the establishment of the No Take Zone order, the challenge is now keeping the success of this initiative under review by monitoring and evaluating the quantity and type of fish stocks developing and the effectiveness of these protected areas. This should be compared with the performance of newly created habitats.

6.47 This will enable decisions to be made about whether to expand or reduce the area covered by the order.

Hunting

6.48 There are several wildfowling syndicates across the Medway estuary practicing the hunting of birds using a combination of dogs and guns operating on privately owned salt marshes with no public access. The sport is strictly regulated, and the shooting season occurs from September to February. Generally wildfowling is considered to a solo sport with hunters hidden in locations across salt marshes for long periods of time. Considered a blood sport, clubs and individuals carry out extensive habitat restoration work across the Medway estuary and areas of North Kent, including the Swale.

Biodiversity Net Gain

6.49 The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) introduced in England a new planning requirement called Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG). Designed to ensure new developments leave biodiversity in a better state than before. Most developments must achieve at least a 10% net gain through habitat creation, enhancement, or biodiversity credits.

- 6.50 BNG is opportunity to seek contributions from new developments on or near the river and estuary to fund ecological projects such as salt marsh restoration, sea grass planting and other projects which improve the biodiversity of the river by creating habitats which also contribute towards mitigating the effects of climate change from flooding and storms.
- 6.51 Section 106 of the Town & Country Planning Act obligates developers to make contributions towards improving local infrastructure, housing, schools and other community resources. This funding mechanism could potentially be used in conjunction or in place of BNG.
- 6.52 By linking to current and future habitat plans and strategies, including the Kent and Medway Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) and BNG guidance, this incentivises habitat creation and enhancement where most needed.
- 6.53 To assist developers and local authorities, Natural England published a Biodiversity Metric tool for future developments. A need for improved policy guidance and monitoring of how developer contributions are ongoing. River stakeholders working with the council should work to clarify how BNG can be applied to improve the ecological health of the lower river Medway and estuary.
- 6.54 The residential and commercial development obligations across the Medway that cannot meet BNG targets on site may also be able to contribute financially to habitat enhancement if appropriate BNG credit schemes are brought forward.

The River and Climate Change

- 6.55 Climate change impacts will continue to lead to wetter winters, longer summers and short-lived extreme and irregular weather events occurring more frequently, and rising sea levels. These will all have localised effects on the Thames and Medway estuaries, leading to flood and coastal erosion, drought, and habitat and species loss. Actions are required to enable the natural environment to adapt to these changes which should include creation of natural flood defences and managed realignment.
- 6.56 There is a need for several responsible bodies (Figure 9 below) to be involved. Cooperation and coordination between them will be essential, both in the planning and strategy stages, to reduce the risks of flooding and maximise the levels of protection during an event. Stakeholders should be encouraged to explore projects which can support flood mitigation.
- 6.57 New developments on riverfront sites must take account of the flood risks and create necessary mitigation measures. during the planning application process.

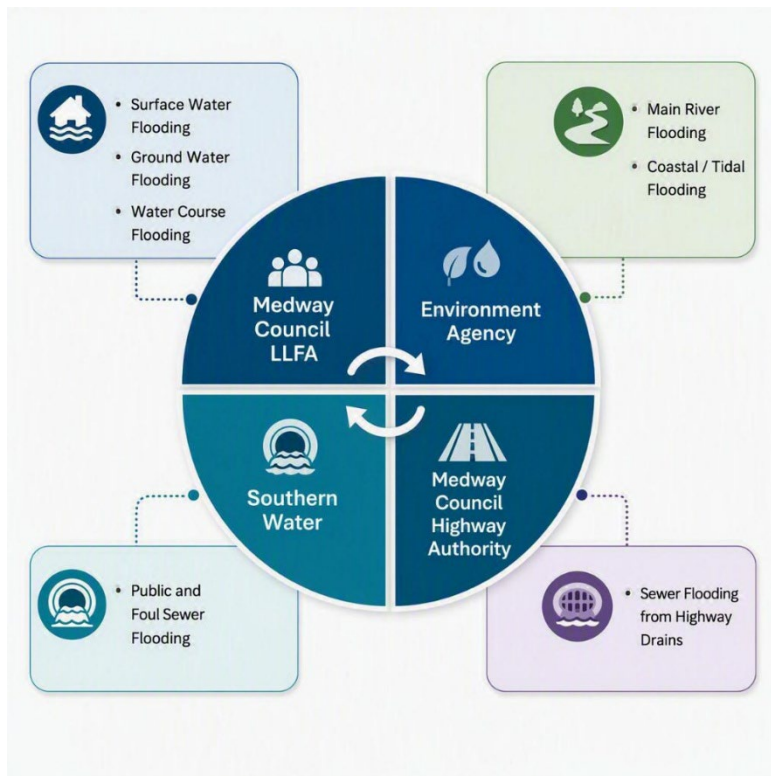


Figure 5-4: Flood risk responsible bodies

Managing the River

- 6.58 Importantly the coastline and estuary, does need to be comprehensively monitored, managed, maintained, reinstated as and when climate change impacts its integrity and carefully used and enjoyed by residents and visitors alike.
- 6.59 The challenge is how to address the complex overlays between the range of national and international designations and strategies, governing the Medway Estuary and the organisations responsible for monitoring and managing them.
- 6.60 Enforcement and regulatory powers on the river are held by a range of bodies according to their statutory responsibilities, including the Statutory Harbour Authority, Environment Agency, Marine Management Organisation, Maritime and Coastguard Agency, Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority and others. The Statutory Harbour Authority's powers relate to its harbour authority functions, including navigation, marine safety and conservancy. It should not be presented as the principal coordinating body for managing the ecological and natural environments of the river. Natural England and the Environment Agency would be well placed to support an overview of relevant environmental matters, subject to their statutory remits and resources.

Key Opportunities

Balancing Access with Conservation

- 6.61 While tourism and the natural environment may have some conflicting interests, there are also opportunities to develop "eco-tourism" and different approaches to sensitively bring together the recreational activities of visitors and residents, while protecting and enhancing vitally important natural habitats.

- 6.62 Experience over recent years has shown that “education” is key to raising awareness of the problems associated with accessing protected areas. It provides the opportunity to explain why there is a problem and enables the showcasing of best practice and guidance to both residents and visitors, including the potential to deliver presentations to schools and community groups, where appropriate.
- 6.63 This also reflects the work undertaken through the Strategic Access Management and Mitigation strategy (SAMMS) which has considered the development of a code of conduct, targeted activities with dog owners, managing access and site works, and ongoing monitoring.
- 6.64 Specially designated areas could also be created to permit limited access near or within sensitive sites, at key times of year, to provide a more efficient way to manage and monitor recreational disturbance.
- 6.65 A further opportunity would be the establishment of additional Visitor and Interpretation Centres, which attract significant numbers of visitors who only travel short distances into the surrounding habitats. Riverside Country Park is an example where there is some disturbance immediately around the centre, but most of the wider habitats are better protected.
- 6.66 Centres could also be located some distance from the riverbanks and salt marshes but specifically designed to tell the riverside story. It has been found that such centres have a similar impact by attracting visitors to well-managed and resourced visitor centres, which helps to reduce unmanaged access by visitors to the river banks.

Developer Contributions

- 6.67 The SAMMS tariff is ring fenced to deliver the mitigation strategy objectives only and is currently set at £350.16 per new dwelling within 6km of the Special Protection Areas of the Thames Estuary and Marshes, Medway Estuary and Marshes and The Swale. This is separate from other Medway Developer contributions as it is a requirement under the Habitats Regulations and the funding is for the whole coastline between Gravesend and Whitstable, not just within Medway.
- 6.68 A more extensive approach to new development, contributing to the river environment and wildlife habitat, is proposed, and where possible, consideration should be given to Section 106 payments across a wider area, to fund for example, essential river infrastructure, inter tidal area restoration and expansion works, together with other aspects of the strategy.
- 6.69 The introduction of an appropriate Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) credit scheme could be brought forward to contribute financially to habitat enhancement.
- 6.70 This will require further detailed feasibility examination, alongside more detailed planning guidance around the key principles and objectives of riverside development.
- 6.71 Another opportunity is to establish a working partnership between organisations with a role in the natural wildlife environment for example, the EA, Natural England, Bird Wise, MSEP, Medway Council and IFCA. This could be funded by the developer contributions, which are then reinvested into a management and monitoring structure, and specific mitigation projects.

Protecting the River from Pollution

- 6.72 The Thames River Basin District River Basin Management Plan (RBMP) is a strategic plan that outlines the objectives for water bodies within the Thames River Basin District. It aims to improve the ecological status of surface waters and groundwater bodies, as well as address pressures on the water environment.
- 6.73 The Thames RBD lists Medway among the twenty management catchments within the district with the broad aim of protecting the river's aquatic ecology, habitats, water abstraction resources, and the river as a leisure resource. Such a grouping would aim to fill the governance gap in coordinating across a range of river-related strategies and priorities.
- 6.74 Opportunities should be taken to harness inputs from volunteer and community groups, not just on clean-up operations, (such as those run by the SE Rivers Trust volunteers and MSEP estuary clean-ups) but also developing "citizen science" groups, to increase regular sampling, surveying, and work with the North Kent Catchment Improvement Group, to ensure that these samples are fed into the wider EA monitoring.
- 6.75 Opportunities to develop nature-based solutions could also be developed, to restore critical wetlands, install SUDS where possible, and address key pollution hotspots.

Climate Change

- 6.76 The Council's statutory responsibility is to assess development proposals to ensure that flood risk is not increased and where possible reduced. All key river fronting development sites, brought forward over the next 10 to 20 years, will need to include design measures such as flood protection infrastructure and sustainable SUDS, to protect against medium term flooding.
- 6.77 Appropriate protection techniques, design and construction criteria, should be embodied in a Planning and Development Guidance document that the Council will prepare, to address the range of challenges which any developer should consider for a riverside development.
- 6.78 Where significant mitigation measures are not required onsite because of works being undertaken by others the potential for developments to contribute to offsite mitigation should be explored. This could include works to extend and reinforce areas of saltmarsh in other locations or establish new flood plains.
- 6.79 Despite their ecological value, saltmarshes face threats from coastal erosion, sea level rises, drought and warming water temperatures. Conservation efforts should aim to systematically preserve, restore and extend these habitats. The benefits of such works should also be assessed in terms of added coastal protection, carbon sequestration, water purification and biodiversity support.
- 6.80 The Beneficial Use of Dredged Sediment (BUDS) Group, formed of river-based stakeholders and hosted by Medway Council, is exploring opportunities to use suitable material already being dredged to protect, enhance and establish additional saltmarshes. Any such proposal would require appropriate technical assessment, environmental licensing, regulatory approvals and agreement from the relevant parties, including the dredging operator, regulators and landowners.

- 6.81 Detailed feasibility studies should also be continued to assess the river being developed as a potential heat source, as part of a green energy hub initiative, to supply the urban areas of Medway into the future.
- 6.82 Opportunities to take advantage of cooling effect of the river and associated habitats to support Medway's resilience to climate change.
- 6.83 The need for a water recycling scheme in the River Medway is also thought likely by Southern Water if the current levels of water abstraction are to be retained in future years.
- 6.84 Implementation of the Council's Flood Protection Plan to ensure that flood risk in Medway is maintained or reduced where possible, will require significant funding from a range of third parties. A Business Case should assess a range of projects and initiatives that require support, together with the outputs and benefits they will deliver. Funding sources could include Grant in Aid, Local Levies, Section 106 agreements, Defra Grants, and LLFA Funding.

Managing the River

- 6.85 There are opportunities to better coordinate the wide range of responsibilities held by those organisations charged with monitoring and managing the Medway Estuary. This particularly applies to the areas covered by both national and international designations.
- 6.86 The proposal is for a group of key agencies and stakeholders with a role and commitment to the river, to come together and collaborate to:
- overview the river's current environmental and habitat status,
 - better understand the river's condition and challenges
 - coordinate responsibilities, actions and projects,
 - identify any immediate priorities and actions, and
 - consider longer term monitoring, designation extensions and improvements.
 - A fully resourced Medway Swale Estuary Partnership could be the focal point for bringing together the above group

Theme 3 Summary

The key challenges associated with the river as an exceptional natural environment and wildlife habitat are:

- **Mitigating against disturbance to birds and other wildlife.** While the tourism potential of the Medway natural environment is significant, higher levels of publicity and greater usage of the river's open spaces leads to potentially higher disturbance to birds and other wildlife. There is particular concern around visitors and residents keeping to designated paths, keeping dogs under control, anti-social behaviour and noise pollution - all of which have been linked to a decline in key species of birds along the river.

- **Protecting, enhancing, and establishing additional saltmarshes.** The salt marshes are an important coastal habitat, providing a range of ecosystem services for fish, birds and plants and acting as a natural flood defence.
- **Pollutants.** There are challenges with a wide range of pollutants, from many sources with the most widespread currently from excess nutrients such as phosphate and compounds of nitrogen in air and water, as well as from plastics pollution. This requires further investigation with the key bodies involved.
- **Regulations for fishing.** There is a need to protect nursery areas and increase fish stock levels. There is currently a No Take Zone (NTZ) order, which stretches from Kingsnorth to Hoo Marina, covering 4.6 square miles of saltmarsh and mudflat environments which are vital for the survival of many fish species. The NTZ is being monitored and evaluated
- **Biodiversity net gain.** DEFRA's mandatory biodiversity net gain policy and the passing of the Environment Act require a minimum 10% net gain for most developments. Natural England published Biodiversity Metric 3.0 which will be the principal measuring tool, but there is no funding to support a wider programme of activity and there is a need for better policy guidance and monitoring around Developer Contributions.
- **Climate impacts on the river.** These are likely to include flood and coastal erosion, habitat and species loss, crop changes, decline and migration. Work is ongoing to explore how the natural environment can adapt to these changes, for example how the saltmarshes can provide valuable flood control and storm buffering benefits.

Key actions

Key actions for the strategy are listed as follows:

- **Managing the river.** To effectively address the issues and challenges facing the Medway's outstanding natural environment, the existing set of national and international designations will need to continue to be managed according to their existing principles and approaches. Concerns have been expressed about the range of designations that apply to the river, and the wide range of organisations who have a role in managing these areas. There is a view that much better coordination between these various facets of the river needs to happen and new opportunities must be examined to consider wider, overarching, coordination approaches.
- **Balancing access with conservation.** There are opportunities for further developing "eco-tourism", considering approaches to sensitively bring together visitors and residents for recreation purposes while protecting natural habitats. A programme of educational activities could raise awareness of the problems in accessing protected areas and why this need protection. The provision of additional Visitor and Interpretation Centres could also provide a focal point for visitors, by concentrating on the disturbances around the centre and reducing access into the wider habitats.
- **Potential funding options.** Investigate potential funding options, such as finance in relation to new development and the implementation of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy.
- **Protecting the River from pollution.** Further prioritise engagement with the Thames River Basin District management plan to protect the aquatic ecology, unique and valuable habitats, protection of drinking water resources, and protection of bathing water in a combined approach with controls on stopping pollutants reaching

ivers and a new “working partnership” between organisations with a role in the natural environment.

- **Flood risk management.** It will be important to consider the medium-term requirements to accommodate additional flooding within key development sites adjacent to the river. The Council’s statutory responsibility is to assess proposals to ensure that flood risk is not increased with development, and to ensure that landowners and developers take opportunities to reduce flood risk. The Council does recognise that to fully implement its Flood Protection Plan, significant funding from a range of third parties will be required.
- **Coordination.** Peel Ports have several enforcement powers on the river; however, they are not sufficiently resourced to pursue all incidents and would be unable to perform a wider, coordinating role across the river on all ecological and environmental aspects. Natural England and the Environment Agency would be well placed to take on a coordinating role but are also likely to be insufficiently resourced. Consultations have highlighted the need to bring together a more broadly based grouping of interested parties; the council, working with river stakeholders, should seek solutions which support initiatives to tackle anti-social behaviour on the water
- **Saltmarshes and Climate Change–** The benefits which saltmarshes bring to the estuary are significant in terms of natural habitat, climate change and flood protection. river stakeholder groups should consider the feasibility of extending saltmarshes, where rising water levels are impacting existing areas and where wider catchments are required to improve levels of flood protection.
- Feasibility studies should also be undertaken to fully understand the benefits of using new saltmarshes as carbon sinks.,

7. Theme 4: Tourism, Culture and Heritage

Background and Context

- 7.1 The River Medway is a defining element of Medway's identity and one of its most significant cultural assets. For thousands of years, the river has created a legacy for Medway, having shaped patterns of settlement, industry, trade, defence, and recreation that continues to influence the character of the area today. As the physical and cultural thread connecting Medway's towns and rural areas with heritage destinations, arts and cultural venues, and waterfront communities, the river plays a vital role in supporting the visitor economy. It is key to Medway’s sense of Place and the future offer of Medway to its community and beyond.
- 7.2 Significant heritage assets, as well as centres of arts and culture line the River Medway, giving the river and its surrounding area significant potential as a driver of the visitor economy and a valuable cultural resource to be used and enjoyed by residents and visitors.
- 7.3 As a strategic crossing point on routes between continental Europe and the rest of the British Isles, the Medway has been significant for thousands of years. The river ‘is engrained in the cultural heritage of Medway’ and has ‘been the lifeblood for settlement in the area for millennia’ as a source of food, raw materials, transport, employment, leisure, artistic inspiration, and defence.³

- 7.4 Significant maritime heritage uses along the river include salt workings from the Bronze Age to the eighteenth century, a flourishing fishing industry until the last century, brick and cement manufacture, shipbuilding for the Royal Navy at Chatham, and barge building.
- 7.5 Major tourism destinations include the Historic Dockyard in Chatham, historic Rochester with its Norman castle and cathedral, Fort Amherst, Upnor Castle, and Temple Manor.
- 7.6 Chatham Historic Dockyard is a mixed-use heritage estate, home to over 200 organisations employing in excess of 1000 people, a museum and visitor attraction that tells the story of the Royal Navy's 400-year connection with the River Medway which physically and economically shaped Medway as we know it today. It is also home to 400 people, a thriving heritage film location and a hospitality venue.
- 7.7 Cultural and arts attractions feature numerous theatres, arts organisations, and cultural hubs such as Intra Arts, Sun Pier House, and the University of Kent Institute of Cultural and Creative Industries.
- 7.8 It is generally recognised that the river is a significant connecting feature, that links many of the above heritage and other assets, and this can be capitalised upon to enhance the visitor experience and to establish the river as an attraction in its own right.
- 7.9 Enhancing the narrative around the river and its connection to Medway's heritage and cultural assets will increase its attractiveness and broaden the tourism offer, as well as providing a catalyst for new joint events and historic interpretation initiatives.
- 7.10 There are several strategies which have been adopted by Medway Council, and it is important that there are compatibility and synergy between these themes and objectives.
- 7.11 The Medway Draft Local Plan identifies Medway's historic environment as a vital, irreplaceable asset that shapes its unique identity and sense of place. It highlights the potential to use key heritage assets along the river's frontage as a focus for cultural activities and to drive the tourism and visitor agenda.
- 7.12 Medway Council adopted the Medway Cultural Strategy 2020-2030 in January 2021. The strategy puts culture at the heart of Medway's identity and sets out to make Medway "internationally recognised for its creativity and culture" through five key themes, namely Connectivity, Shared Ambition, Spaces & Places, Creative People, and Community Engagement.
- 7.13 While the Cultural Strategy does not concentrate on the river specifically, the maritime character of the area forms a strong background context, and the emerging Lower River Medway Strategy should ensure that the cultural vision plays a major part in developing activities and projects on the river, in future years.
- 7.14 Medway Council's Heritage Strategy was published in 2018 and sets out to conserve and enhance the heritage assets and to work with the community to increase their understanding of the area's history and to promote community involvement.⁴ The Heritage Strategy recognises the historic importance of the river, as well as its key significance as part of the landscape of Medway. A new strategy is currently being developed and is at consultation stage.

- 7.15 There is a wide range of events held across Medway, some on an annual basis such as the Rochester Sweeps Festival, the Dickensian Christmas festivals and the Rochester Castle concerts. More recent innovations include the Medway River Literary Festival, celebrating the history and future of literature, poetry, and the spoken word.
- 7.16 Although many of these events are close to the river, they do not interface with it. Specific river-based events include the annual Admiral of the River “beating the bounds” ceremony, and others which have not been held on a regular basis, such as the Festival of Chatham Reach which celebrates the heritage of the River Medway and its vessels, the 350th anniversary of the Battle of Medway and events which have historically involved the Tall Ships.
- 7.17 The river also hosts an established programme of competitive sailing and rowing events organised by the clubs, including the Medway Regatta, national and regional dinghy championships and open meetings, Dragon class and keelboat events, and rowing regattas, which bring competitors, supporters and visiting boats to Medway throughout the season.

Major Tourist Attractions

- 7.18 Alongside the Historic Dockyard, both Fort Amherst and Upnor Castle are open to the public as successful tourist attractions, as is the Royal Engineers Museum, located in Gillingham.
- 7.19 Chatham Marina, owned by Chatham Maritime Trust and managed by MDL Marinas is a popular tourist attraction for both water sports, sailing and historical boat spotting; including the VIC 96 vessel and a number of historic river tugboats and walking opportunities including St Mary’s Island with views of Upnor Castle along the river walk. Dockside Outlet Centre is easily accessible and a popular destination for locals and tourists for shopping and dining.
- 7.20 The western reach of the estuary passes through historic Rochester with its bridges, Norman castle and the second oldest cathedral in England, both of which are open to the public and house several events and exhibitions each year.
- 7.21 Rochester High Street runs down to the river and has a range of significant buildings, with its links to Charles Dickens. The wider estuary has links to artist JMW Turner and includes a 100- hectare Riverside Country Park in Rainham and the King Charles III Coastal Path running along the Thames estuary and around most of Medway’s river frontage.
- 7.22 There are several historic vessels moored either temporarily or permanently at various locations along the Medway; these include the historic paddle steamer the Medway Queen, Light Vessel 21 a floating arts venue known as LV21, and the Soviet era U475 Black Widow submarine anchored off Strood riverside There have been several attempts over the years to create a grouping of heritage vessels, to form a major visitor attraction outside of Chatham Historic Dockyard. Stakeholder groups working with the council should explore opportunities to create a riverside wayfinding via walking and cycling network routes to these and other historic vessels of interest or similar.
- 7.23 With funding from Historic England and its designation as a High Street Heritage Action Zone, the Chatham Intra area provides a focus for heritage-led regeneration to

help bring buildings back into use, re-establish links to the river and revitalise this attractive and characterful historic area.

- 7.24 Chatham Intra falls within a conservation zone which runs from Sun Pier and provides public access to the river and a venue for local events, to Star Hill in Rochester. The area is an important creative and heritage hub, with the potential to develop a unique destination for visitors, capitalising on its significant river frontage and capacity to provide permanent moorings for heritage and other vessels.
- 7.25 There is a small but growing community of Thames barge owners at Chatham with Tiller & Wheel a non-profit Community Interest Company providing an annual sailing programme on the river include tours around the estuary and Isle of Sheppey. Recent expansion of the fleet includes bring Ship Pier back into use with the Intra Maritime Heritage project based at Chatham Intra.

Other heritage assets

- 7.26 There are 24 Conservation Areas in Medway, many with river access. There are also numerous non-designated heritage assets, listed buildings and Scheduled Monuments that are accessible from or visible from the River Medway and all contribute to the heritage of the river.

Culture and Arts Attractions

- 7.27 The banks of the Medway are host to a range of theatres, arts organisations and cultural hubs. Theatres include the Brook and Central Theatres in Chatham, the Glassbox Theatre at Mid- Kent College and the Medway Little Theatre. Art galleries are located at Sun Pier House and the Nucleus Arts Centre.
- 7.28 Nucleus Arts is a charitable arts organisation founded by the Halpern Charitable Foundation and aims to be Medway's cultural and creative heart. Its activities include running galleries, hosting an artists-in-residence programme, and organising events to connect artists and creative people and promote their work.
- 7.29 Intra Arts is a community run arts venue and maker space operating from the former Spemco building in Rochester High Street and runs projects, events, workshops and exhibitions to promote the arts.
- 7.30 Sun Pier House enjoys a riverside location and supports Medway's creative culture by offering a base for established and start-up artists to develop their practice and promote their work. The centre provides studio space and organises events and exhibitions throughout the year.
- 7.31 The University of Kent Institute of Cultural and Creative Industries (ICCI) is located at Chatham Dockyard, and delivers an arts programme, alongside research and creative knowledge expertise within the University. This supports the development of new creative industry businesses.
- 7.32 The ICCI in partnership with Medway Council and the Chatham Historic Dockyard Trust, has developed the former dockyard police house into the Docking Station, a unique creative facility that delivers a world-leading centre of creative digital production, education and community engagement.
- 7.33 The LV21, a decommissioned Lightship based within Chatham Historic Dockyard, is a prominent floating arts venue which provides a range of exhibitions, lectures and

shows, with programmes designed to include people from a broad range of backgrounds.

- 7.34 The River Medway and its surrounding area is part of the 'Creative Estuary' initiative, which aims to transform the Thames and Medway estuaries into a hub for the creative and cultural industries, encouraging businesses to locate and grow in this area.
- 7.35 Another important driver of the visitor economy is the natural environment and the wildlife habitats of the river. These are covered specifically in Section 5 of this report.
- 7.36 There are many green areas close to heritage sites that experience significant footfall, such as Esplanade, Baty's marsh and The Paddock greenspace by Chatham library which has historically held events.

Key Challenges

- 7.37 One key challenge is the lack of a Medway offer that fully recognises and makes the connections between the heritage sites of significance and the fundamental role which the river had in their formation and history and can still have in promoting their identity in the future.
- 7.38 The lack of river access points, particularly to the heritage and other retail and leisure assets, is another challenge. At present, the river is seen more as a barrier, and accessing places on both sides of the river, throughout its length, can be costly and time consuming. Using the river with additional pick up and drop off points could be a key solution.
- 7.39 Linked to the above, the development of a transportation strategy, to use the river to move tourists and commuters around Medway more efficiently and sustainably, is currently seen as challenging. However, with a review of access points and within a broader, strategic approach to the river this should be reconsidered.
- 7.40 Despite the number of events which occur across Medway, the larger ventures are primarily land based, and the river events are relatively small, and are difficult for the public to view, due to the limited riverside access provision along key stretches of the river.
- 7.41 The challenge is therefore to make the river a part of the larger land-based events, to develop events that link land and water-based activities, and to explore how the river can provide a backdrop for events that are not necessarily linked to traditional river activities.
- 7.42 A further challenge for larger, river-based events is the gradual decline in obvious locations that could provide the necessary space and infrastructure, required for larger vessels to use moorings, pontoons, account for low tide water depth. Significant cooperation and coordination between owners and operators would be required, to deliver such an event, today.

Key Opportunities

- 7.43 The river provides an opportunity to connect, both physically and strategically, to Medway's heritage assets, bringing together individual heritage centres, cultural centres, and other visitor attractions into a connected narrative and sense of place.
- 7.44 This will require a significant degree of cooperation and coordination between the organisations responsible for managing these assets and programmes. There are, however, opportunities for initiatives to be developed, and for communication to be enhanced.

Accessing Built Heritage Assets

- 7.45 The linking together of the key heritage assets through an improved river access strategy (potentially linked to a river transport offer) is one of the key opportunities to be researched and tested.
- 7.46 This will require a feasibility study to understand the best physical locations and infrastructure to enable the most convenient access arrangements to be gained, together with ownership details, likely costs and longer-term management issues.
- 7.47 This should not prevent investment in other infrastructure proposals being pursued to link these different heritage destinations, but it will be important to bring together all the options being considered to ensure a comprehensive review can be undertaken.
- 7.48 The development of direct and safe walking and cycling routes that connect key waterfront destinations and provide a network of public open spaces, footpaths and cycleways should be encouraged. This would protect and enhance biodiversity through the creation of wildlife corridors and other open spaces. It would also establish a high-quality public realm which improves access to the river, links the key waterfront sites and encourages healthy activities such as walking, jogging and cycling as well as supporting climate change objectives.
- 7.49 Such initiatives would also transform the role of the river from a barrier to a means of connecting key assets with new development and infrastructure. This would foster a sense of pride, respect and understanding of the river.

River Based Transportation Opportunities

- 7.50 Assessing the viability and deliverability of a "regular", river based, transportation service along the river is a potential opportunity particularly during the main visitor season (April to September), if sufficient pick-up and drop-off points can be established at key heritage sites and other popular locations such as Chatham Maritime, Strood riverside and Gillingham Pier and Gillingham Marina.
- 7.51 Creating a seamless water link between key heritage assets, retail and leisure facilities could:
- widen transport choice
 - improve public transport options
 - create a visitor attraction in its own right.
 - establish the first step in a wider service around Medway and beyond.

- 7.52 A typical route could visit Gillingham Marina and the Strand, St Mary's Island, Chatham Maritime (retail and leisure), Chatham Historic Dockyard, Sun Pier, Limehouse Landing (for the castle, cathedral and High St in Rochester), Medway Valley Park (Diggerland), Strood waterfront and Upnor Castle.
- 7.53 This will require a feasibility study to both understand the potential access points being considered in the River Access Study above, together with other locations which could benefit from a river link. The study would need to assess the likely demand for river transport from both visitors and residents, together with the costs of operating a service. This aligns with Medway Council's Local Transport Plan (LTP) and its ambitions for integrated transport and visitor movement. This also complements the Medway Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP), by exploring alternative modes of transport, including river-based services, which enhance connectivity to key destinations and reduce reliance on private vehicles.

Tourism and the Visitor Economy

- 7.54 There are sensitivities around developing an eco-tourism offer, for the estuaries, however the unique environment and the presence of a significant and varied bird population at certain times of year does create opportunities to attract visitors to the area. This would need to be carefully planned and managed between all interested parties and could be linked to educational visits and organised river trips.
- 7.55 The potential for the Medway wetlands to become part of a UNESCO World Heritage Site could also create a significantly stronger visitor offer.
- 7.56 The Strategy has already highlighted the use of the river for leisure activities such as sailing, rowing, paddle boarding, and other water-based activities, and a coordinated approach to promoting these opportunities could attract significant visitors to the area. This could also be linked to other heritage and cultural opportunities, to appeal to a variety of different interests within a family or visiting group.
- 7.57 Consideration should be given to bringing together some of the key built heritage assets through joint events, which make the most of river linkages. This could attract a wider range of visitors and promote the river as a key attraction.
- 7.58 Reflecting the above proposals will enable an opportunity to tell a much stronger story about the river and the way it has created and shaped both the environmental and heritage characteristics of Medway today.
- 7.59 Linked to the above and the potential for other visitor-based activities, there should be an economic study undertaken, to assess the range of actual benefits and outputs that can be generated through increased visitor numbers.

Events

- 7.60 The council working with river stakeholder should harness the existing goodwill or river users to create imaginative and unique river related events to promote inclusiveness and break down economic barriers to people wanting to be on the river. Events can include:
- Landside events held on riverside green spaces within town centres would help celebrate and promote the area's maritime heritage, complementing existing schemes such as the Whose Hoo project a Heritage Fund-supported initiative focused on the Hoo Peninsula, which is characterised by its rich heritage, extensive river frontage and diverse habitats. Through engaging activities, educational

programmes, and community involvement, the project aims to highlight the hidden treasures of the Hoo Peninsula, creating a stronger bond between residents and their local environment. activities including sailing, kayaking, learning to sail and similar activities.

- Establish new events which are led by river stakeholders and related organisations to promote river heritage.
- Develop a mix of large and small events with the potential for building strong links and partnerships with national and international maritime events on an annual or biannual basis.
- Consider events that use the river as a backdrop and location for theatrical events. The river has the potential to provide scalability for big events as demonstrated by the successful 'Medway in Flames' event, a commemorative event lasting two weeks, marking the 350th anniversary of the Dutch raid on the river Medway with firework spectacular.

- 7.61 The Council, working with river stakeholders should explore the feasibility of creating a programme of small river-based events of storytelling, craft making, and workshops as part of a new annual river festival with links to the Netherlands and locations with similar history to the Medway area.

Whose Hoo

- 7.62 Whose Hoo is a heritage funded, landscape scale project focusing on the Hoo Peninsula, which has a rich heritage, significant river frontages to both the Medway and the Thames and a range of diverse habitats.
- 7.63 Through engaging activities, educational programs, and community involvement, the project aims to highlight the hidden treasures of the Hoo Peninsula, creating a stronger bond between residents and their local environment.

Looking Forward

- 7.64 A group of key arts, cultural, heritage and tourism organisations and key individuals should be assembled to explore longer term plans and further enhance cooperation and coordination along the lines of the Key Opportunities discussed above.
- 7.65 An initial investment strategy should be prepared to test the feasibility and viability, as well as the outputs and benefits to be gained from investing in such a programme of tourism, visitor economy, arts and culture, and heritage initiatives and a linked events programme.
- 7.66 A key action will be to establish a new 'story' for Medway that incorporates the river, its role and importance as the lifeblood of the Medway area. This new story should then be embodied into the profiles of the heritage assets along the river, and the stories of the towns, settlements and attractions along the river.
- 7.67 A further key action will be to develop a five-year rolling event programme with some national or international profile activities. These could create some funding challenges; however, the benefits would need to outweigh the costs and the viability of this should be tested by the feasibility study.

Theme 4 Summary

Significant heritage assets, as well as centres of arts and culture, line the River Medway, including the Medway towns. There are 24 Conservation Areas in Medway, several of which have river access, as well as numerous non-designated heritage assets. There are several recent strategies that have been adopted by the Council, and which the Lower River Medway Strategy needs to consider and reflect on including the Medway Cultural Strategy 2020-2030 and Medway Council's draft Heritage Strategy.

Tourist and visitor attractions along the river include:

- **Several significant maritime heritage assets.** The river itself has a long heritage of “salt working” from the Bronze Age (c2,000 BC) to the eighteenth century; evidence of these practices remains, and the stewardship of the salt marshes is a key example of the cultural heritage of the area.⁵ Fishing has a significant heritage on the River Medway as exemplified by the long history of the Rochester Oyster and Floating Fishery. The shipbuilding heritage of the Medway is significant, with a long history of ship construction for the Royal Navy centred around the Historic Dockyard at Chatham. The river also has a heritage of barge building.
- **Numerous major tourism destinations**, including: the Historic Dockyard in Chatham; Fort Amherst and the Lines, a series of fortifications built originally to defend the dockyard; historic Rochester with its bridges, Norman castle and the second oldest cathedral in England; Chatham Intra, a creative and heritage hub, which is a focus of heritage-led regeneration schemes; several historic vessels, moored at various locations along the Medway; and Temple Manor, a historic medieval manor house.
- **Culture and arts attractions.** Near to the river area range of arts organisations and cultural hubs, including: Intra Arts, a community run arts venue and maker space on Rochester Highstreet; Sun Pier House, a not-for-profit organisation which is a base for artists to develop their practice and promote their work; and the University of Kent Institute of Cultural and Creative Industries (ICCI), which is located at Chatham Historic Dockyard. The River Medway and its surrounding areas are part of the ‘Creative Estuary’ (referring to the Thames Estuary) initiative, which aims to transform the Thames Estuary area, including Medway, into a hub for the creative and cultural industries.

There is an opportunity to link together key heritage assets through an improved river access strategy to provide a more joined-up and compelling visitor offer. The provision of more frequent, river-based modes of transport would link river access points to key attractions. This could be supported by direct and safe walking and cycling routes that connect key waterfronts.

Medway Heritage Asset Review 2017, p. 10.

Key Actions

Key Actions include:

- A group of key arts, cultural, heritage and tourism organisations and key individuals should be assembled to explore longer-term plans and further enhance cooperation and coordination.

- An initial investment strategy should be prepared to test the feasibility and viability, as well as consider the outputs and the benefits to be gained from and integrated approach to tourism, visitor economy, arts and culture, and heritage initiatives as suggested above.
- Establishing a new 'story' for Medway that incorporates the river, its role and importance as the lifeblood of the Medway area. This new story should then be embodied into the stories of the heritage assets along the river, and of the stories of the towns, settlements and attractions along the river.
- Developing a five-year rolling event programme with some big events with a national or international profile.
- Consider the potential for the private sponsorship of new events and initiatives that combine the heritage, arts and culture aspects of Medway; and opportunities for investment in both expanding current assets and creating new assets, to promote the tourism and visitor economy.
- Relevant river stakeholder groups, supported by the Council, should explore feasibility of the creation of affordable, accessible river transport services for the local population and visitor with links to existing transport hubs to reduce car journeys and promote more sustainable modal shift.

8. Theme 5 - The River and New Development Opportunities

Background and Context

- 8.1 Over the past 20 years, the Medway riverfront has evolved from a predominately industrial hub, characterised by shipbuilding and maritime trade and industry connected with the Historic Dockyard at Chatham, to a more vibrant area with mixed residential, leisure, commercial and other uses having been developed across several key sites. Access to riverside areas has also begun to open significantly.
- 8.2 The Council's Medway Renaissance Strategy, initiated in 2004, has driven this transformation, focusing on redeveloping 900 hectares of brownfield land into a dynamic waterfront city, composed of a series of urban quarters.
- 8.3 Key projects include Chatham Maritime, Rochester Riverside and Chatham Waters, amongst others. The main, key strategic sites are shown in Figure 7.1 below.

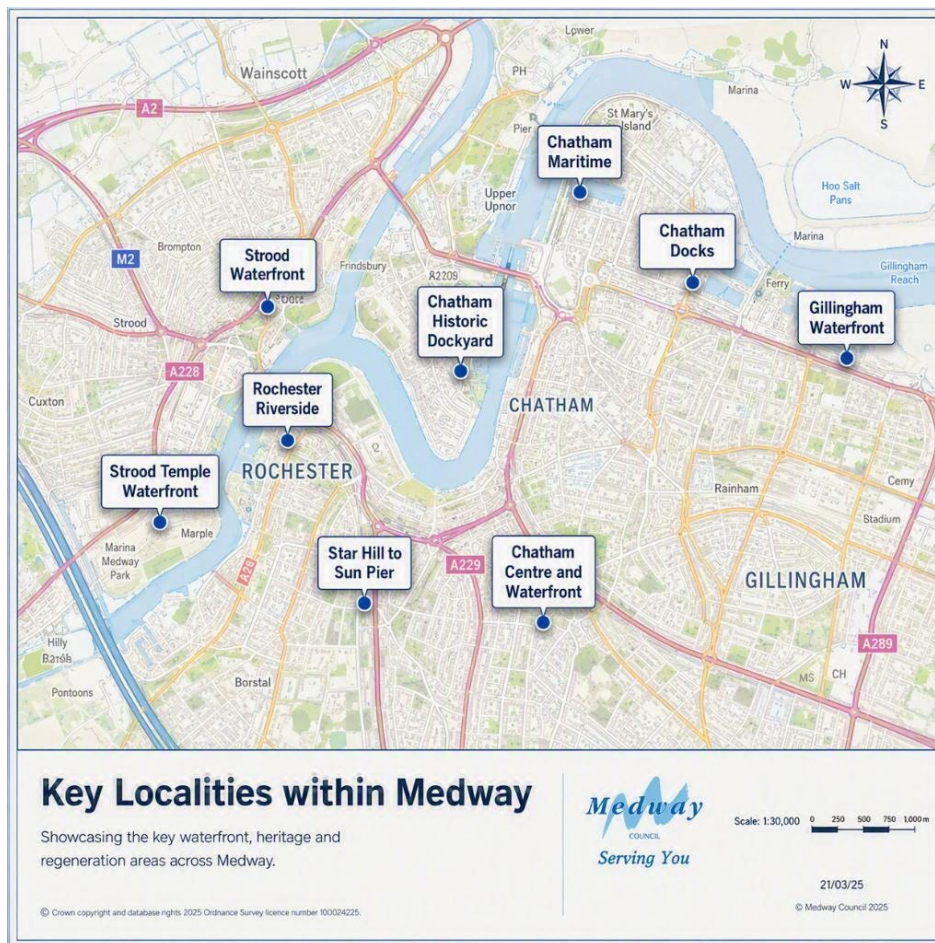


Figure 7-1: Map showing key development sites.

- 8.4 Chatham Maritime was one of the first major redevelopment projects to come forward. Now complete, the project has developed over 2000 homes, retail, office and entertainment spaces, marina, community centre, 3 universities, a primary school and doctor's surgery.
- 8.5 Chatham Waters, forming part of the former Chatham Docks area, is a Peel Land & Property development to the east of Basin 3. This will be a mixed-use development, spanning 26-acres along the waterfront and planned to deliver 1,350 homes commercial retail and leisure space with potential for a new business and enterprise district.
- 8.6 At Gillingham waterfront, Berkeley Homes completed the redevelopment of a former industrial area brown field site adjacent to Gillingham Pier. Residential units totaling 841, and creation of 3,800 sqm of retail and commercial space, a hotel, and a 1,106-bedroom student village to serve the University of Kent.
- 8.7 In Rochester, housing developer Vistry are progressing with their flagship development of building 1,400 homes and 100,000 sq of non-residential space to be completed by 2030. The site includes a hotel, primary school, coffee shop and convenience store in addition to the construction of Limehouse Landing in 2025 to accommodate river tour operators Jetstream Tours and the Waverley Steam Navigation Co Limited providing links to Queensborough on the Isle of Sheppey, Whitstable, Gravesend, Southend and London.

- 8.8 At Strood Riverside, Medway Council have begun work on the Strood Waterfront Regeneration project⁹ to include over 1,100 homes and further upriver towards the Medway Bridge, Temple Waterfront project includes 200 new homes with Temple Marsh a strategic open space adjacent to the river to be partially relandscaped as a green space serving the new community.
- 8.9 Other riverfront sites, currently under consideration and design by their present landowners include:
- The historic Chatham Intra area, located between Sun Pier and Star Hill.
 - Interface land between Chatham Maritime and the Historic Dockyard)
 - Acorn Wharf, a former shipyard with a significant slipway north of Rochester Riverside

Employment and Economic Development Sites

- 8.10 Finally, it is also important to reference the potential new riverfront development sites, which will be primarily used for employment and economic development schemes.
- 8.11 There are several such sites along the river which are anticipated to deliver strong economic development prospects to the Borough. These have been referenced in detail within the Theme 2 of the strategy, but are briefly highlighted here, for completeness.
- 8.12 The former Kingsnorth Power Station site (owned by Uniper and now known as Medway One) is currently planned for the development of a modern manufacturing and logistics employment area. The site will include commercial, manufacturing, and industrial uses, totaling 33,000 sqm. of floor space and has protected a dedicated access route to the river and the remaining Kingsnorth jetties, for any occupiers requiring river access. The development received outline planning permission in November 2022.

7 Berkeley Group. 2024. Victory Pier webpage. Available [here](#)

8 Hyde Housing. 2024. Rochester Riverside. Available [here](#)

9 Medway Council, Strood Waterfront project page. 2024. Available [here](#)

- 8.13 There are also several energy-related projects progressing on the Isle of Grain.
- 8.14 The Acorn Partners (Storegga, Shell, Harbour Energy and North Sea Midstream Partners) and Uniper have signed a Memorandum of Understanding to jointly develop a carbon capture and storage project, to process and move CO₂ away from the Isle of Grain for long term storage¹⁰.
- 8.15 National Grid Grain LNG (Liquid Natural Gas) has also announced plans to expand their gas storage operations, to meet up to 33% of the UK's gas demand.
- 8.16 There is also development land available within the Thamesport complex, which is available for potential occupiers, looking to use the deep-water wharves available on the Medway at this point.

Houseboats

- 8.17 The Medway is the setting for a significant number of houseboats which are static floating residences of either a temporary or permanent nature. Floating residences

are a feature of many vibrant waterbodies elsewhere in the UK and across the world and are an important asset to the diverse community of river users.

- 8.18 In many communities of houseboat residences there is a strong sense of community and cohesion, and such communities can add considerably to the waterside environment.
- 8.19 It is noted that houseboats can provide placemaking benefits, reducing crime in quieter waterways, making waterside spaces engaging and active, and providing a link to the water and the riparian heritage of an area.
- 8.20 Medway Council has is exploring the opportunity for the potential of Heat Networks to be installed in Chatham and the Hoo Peninsula.
- 8.21 A Technical Feasibility Study and Detailed Project Design for Chatham has been achieved for Hoo, and the Detailed Project Design is due to be completed in 2027. This will provide the technical and economic viability for the potential Heat Networks and provide the platform to move on to the next stage, which is the Commercialisation Stage. We are working with a range of external partners identified as Key Anchor loads for recoverable energy, including Medway Maritime Hospital, Royal Engineers, Chatham Historic Dockyard, and University of Greenwich Medway Campus. Funding for the feasibility stages has been secured through the Department for Energy, Security and Net Zero's Heat Network Delivery Unit.

Key Challenges

- 8.22 Irrespective of the characteristics of the specific development sites under consideration, there are some common challenges that need to be addressed in respect of all sites that front or have a relationship with the river. This is to ensure that emerging development schemes make the most of the unique environment, introduce uses that will capitalise on the proximity to the water, create direct interfaces with the river to increase accessibility, and recognise the essential requirements needed to address climate change and rising water levels, into the future
- 8.23 So often, riverfront developments fail to address these challenges and deliver schemes that could exist on any other site, in any location.

Placemaking and urban design

- 8.24 The need to make effective use and enjoyment of the river and its environment, which holds the potential to deliver many important placemaking objectives on Medway, is a key challenge. Effective design needs to play a key role in encouraging new, local communities to engage directly or indirectly with the river for leisure and recreational activities.
- 8.25 The Medway Draft Local Plan (2024) outlines that riverside developments are to facilitate walking and cycling to high design standards and consider the opportunity to provide linkages with other path networks. New waterside property development needs to address how it can unlock currently inaccessible areas of the river, to improve both the visual and physical connections between development sites, the river, and publicly accessible spaces. New development should align with Medway Council's Local Transport Plan (LTP) infrastructure requirements and riverside development should support sustainable transport.

- 8.26 Visually, this could be implemented through the creation of waterside public green and seating spaces along the frontage of new developments, supporting Medway's Climate Change Action Plan priority of Green and Resilient; and physically, consideration should be given to the potential to create new footpaths, cycle ways, moorings, wharfage, pontoons, or slipways.

Habitat protection and developer obligations

- 8.27 The difficulty in securing habitat protection along the river, as part of any new development, is another key challenge. Further guidance and conditions are required, to ensure that developments optimise the benefits of the river while preventing ecological damage, enhancing biodiversity, and reducing flood risk. The difficulties in achieving consistency in these respects and ensuring that obligations are expanded to include more comprehensive protection and restoration requirements, is another major challenge.
- 8.28 Where sites are brought forward for development, there is a need for robust ecological surveys to be undertaken and careful consideration to be given where River access might be limited for ecological and environmental purposes. Developments must consider how to optimise the river whilst simultaneously reducing flood risk. This makes effective flood risk management crucial.
- 8.29 New development should also tackle the difficulties of preserving and enhancing existing local diversity, through delivering appropriate landscaping, and ensuring that less disturbed riverside areas are protected, and that habitats (either new or enhanced) are delivered for a range of species. The potential impacts of non-native plant species being used in landscaping should also be considered.
- 8.30 At present, Medway does have some obligations for developers to make S106 Developer Contributions in respect of sites within a 6km buffer of the Thames, Medway and Swale Special Protection Areas and Ramsar sites, to address bird disturbance mitigation. Flood areas are also required to make contributions towards flood risk management and sustainable drainage. Environmental mitigation is required for developments which have a direct or indirect impact on the natural environment.
- 8.31 However, these obligations are limited, and there is a growing requirement for the extension of such contributions to cover a wider array of river related infrastructure and challenges, and for this to apply to a wider range of new developments undertaken within a redefined, "river zone".

Houseboats

- 8.32 There is a small but significant minority of people living on houseboats or boats which have been adapted as residential accommodation known as 'live aboards', spread across several marinas and mooring providers on the lower Medway. There are specific challenges that need to be met in relation to provision of appropriate infrastructure to deal with disposal of black water and grey water, which causes localised pollution and concerns from an operational and river user perspective.

Resolving the black and grey water discharge into the river requires a focused multi-agency and organisational approach which includes cooperation of mooring providers and floating home residents. The council should support stakeholders to seek solutions, develop advice and provide guidance whilst ensuring the appropriate

organisations with legislative powers lead on implementing measures which will resolve this issue. _____

¹⁰ Insider.co.uk. 2024. Acorn project signs MoU with Uniper to ship and store captured CO2. Available here

- 8.33 The development of future moorings for static houseboats and residential floating homes should include adequate pump-out and waste disposal facilities which ensures pollution directly into the river is prevented.
- 8.34 Within the context of moorings within marinas, Local Plan Policy T22 supports the need for permissions for new and upgraded facilities to meet certain criteria which includes suitable infrastructure to handle wastewater from vessels.

Key Opportunities

- 8.35 The analysis of both past river front development and the range of new sites being brought forward for future development, has highlighted several opportunities, which should be progressed and explored further, to make the most of the river, and introduce new benefits to residents and visitors alike. These include:
- 8.36
- Implement and develop design guidelines for more effective use of river frontages to maximise access provision, views and climate resilience.
 - Encourage high-quality, mixed-use developments in appropriate locations, which integrate with the river and enhance its appeal and accessibility.
 - Create overarching development briefs to include design guidance for key sites to attract developers and investors and ensure sustainable growth.
 - Undertake detailed appraisals of Council-owned sites to assess the potential to optimise mixed-use development and promote the outcomes with developers.
- 8.37 The council should encourage stakeholders to explore the feasibility new types of development, such as floating homes based on existing, sustainable developments. There are many house boats and floating homes at sites along the river, but these have lacked sufficient investment in essential infrastructure, such as suitable waste collection and pumping out arrangements, new developments would provide the opportunity to address some of these issues.
- 8.38 The council should encourage stakeholders to explore the feasibility of establishing clusters of low maintenance, well-designed floating homes moored a suitable location which include environmentally robust waste pump out systems as a potential, to replace existing live-aboard and aging houseboats on the river Medway.
- 8.39 Floating home designs found in the Netherlands such as at Schoonschip in Amsterdam and at Fisherman's Wharf, Victoria in Canada provide tried and tested examples of good practice with high environmental standards.

Introducing Design Guidance

- 8.40 Consultations have highlighted the benefit of preparing a form of Planning and Design Guidance, which would articulate the key challenges, parameters and objectives that a developer should be trying to achieve in any new developments with a river frontage or link. Such guidance would highlight the importance of the river and

how development can benefit from this in the longer term and the obligations that would be associated with this.

- 8.41 This would particularly encourage sites in private ownership to make more effective use of river frontages, by encouraging new river access provision, capitalising on the potential placemaking benefits of riverside sites, and ensuring development complements the range of river assets, attractions, and settlements on the river.
- 8.42 This should also include guidance that plans for climate change, so that new development is designed to minimise flood impact, support community resilience during heatwaves, and mitigate effects that contribute to climate change, for example by including river related, energy efficiency measures.
- 8.43 As an example, the national Canal and River Trust has published guidance on waterside development which articulates the range of principles which could apply to river fronting and adjacent sites along the Medway.¹¹ This recommends that all waterside locations should be considered individually, but in each case, development should be structured by a series of clear and mutually agreed guiding principles.
- 8.44 Medway's Star Hill to Sun Pier Conservation Area Significance-led Development Framework SPD¹² also sets out some useful design guidance for riverside development, which to a certain extent could provide the basis for a district wide policy.

Improving Riverside Access

- 8.45 Integrating such design measures into new developments offers a unique opportunity to overcome private ownership restrictions on waterside access, for example, by ensuring this is dealt with as a planning condition. This would potentially enhance the public rights of way network across the Medway area, reducing the interruption of routes by land in private ownership, and increasing overall accessibility and connectivity.
- 8.46 The importance of enhancing the Public Rights of Way Network is covered within Medway's Rights of Way Improvement Plan 2020, and river stakeholders should explore ways to create Wayfinder routes along the river.
- 8.47 Using the opportunity of influencing the design of new development, to introduce new waterside pathways, creates the potential to integrate new transport routes into the wider area and establish a more coherent movement network, that links with existing pedestrian and cycle links across the Borough. These waterside routes could also serve as potential areas for recreation and leisure, contributing to the delivery of healthier communities and boosting wellbeing.

Widening Developer Contributions

- 8.48 Consideration should be given to undertaking a feasibility study in relation to section 106 strategic policy issues, and the opportunity to expand the types of obligations for developing riverside sites beyond bird disturbance and flood protection to encompass some of the wider Development Guidelines and principles set out in the strategy.
- 8.49 For example, this could include the introduction of requirements which directly relate to the protection, restoration and enhancement of the river. The management and maintenance of waterside spaces must also be considered at planning application stage, and these requirements can be regulated through planning conditions or S106 agreements.

Promoting a Wider Mix of Uses

- 8.50 Experience from other places demonstrates that river frontages have the potential to host a stronger mix of uses than has been seen in many developments to date. These might include food and beverage, retail and commercial spaces, such as studios and workspace and can optimise the unique benefits and appeal of being situated along the waterfront.
- 8.51 Culturally, the waterfront could also be a strong destination for the installation of public art along prominent Riverside areas, which would attract visitors to key corridors and waterside attractions.
- 8.52 Placemaking and good design can also encourage stronger community engagement with the river through leisure activities, retail spaces, and improved physical connections.

Encouraging New Development Opportunities

- 8.53 Local Authorities can take actions (in respect of sites in their ownership) to help ensure that the best development scheme is brought forward at each site and adheres to the design principles discussed earlier.
- 8.54 Consideration should be given to bringing forward some overarching Development Briefs for some of the key sites to test the developer and investor market in the most analytical and robust way. Furthermore, detailed viability appraisal work should be undertaken, especially in relation to the Council-owned sites, to understand the potential to deliver a better mix of uses that play to the strengths of the river and examine some of the ways site owners can better work with developers to achieve these objectives.

¹³ Read Lewisham' River Corridor Improvement Plan (2015) [here](#)

Read Lewisham' River Corridor Improvement Plan (2015) [here](#)

¹⁴ See <https://schoonschipamsterdam.org/>

9. Developing a Delivery Framework

Background and Context

- 9.1 This strategy provides the basis for a framework for the future use and management of the River Medway, by addressing key challenges and maximising key opportunities.
- 9.2 There are a series of key opportunities, priorities and actions required within each of the themes identified. These require the involvement of a range of stakeholders working collaboratively together. Many of the key themes and actions overlap and will need communication across the separate groups.
- 9.3 Delivering the strategy will require:
- an overarching Lower River Medway Strategy Delivery Partnership group and themed groups to deliver feasible and sustainable solutions.
 - stakeholders with multi-disciplinary skills which can deliver the different themes.

- combined funding and other resources, from a range of stakeholders
- 9.4 The strength of this strategy will be in the inclusion of a broad range of key river stakeholders, who, working with the council, will form four stakeholder groups with and the emphasis on positive dialogue, active contribution from all representatives and working together to improve the river offer.
- 9.5 The four themed stakeholder groups are:
- Health, Leisure & Sport
 - Economy & Business
 - Tourism, Heritage & Culture
 - Environment & Habitats.
- 9.6 It is not considered that a similar approach should apply to the development sites and planning theme, which will involve the Council in a much more direct way both as Planning Authority and as a key landowner. This theme would cover a disparate range of sites, at various stages in the development process, with a wide variety of landowners and potential developers.
- 9.7 For the development sites and planning theme it is suggested that appropriate officers within the Council lead on planning and regeneration issues, including the establishment of policy and development guidance. With regards to Council owned sites, these would be progressed via the Medway Development Company. At some stage, there may be a need to bring together certain landowners and developers where there are some common areas of interest to be explored.
- 9.8 Medway's Climate Change Action Plan (CCAP), Local Transport Plan (LTP), the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) and Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) as strategic documents will guide delivery and inform work in relevant areas across the themes. The LCWIP and BSIP plans aim to improve sustainable transport options, reduce car dependency, and enhance connectivity across Medway.
- 9.9 The wider River Medway Partnership needs to be an overarching group of stakeholders, including representatives from across each of the themed groups, to ensure that these cross-cutting issues are addressed at the right level, receive the widest support, create the best chance of identifying viability and long-term sustainability, and therefore funding.
- 9.10 Within each stakeholder group, a culture of positive engagement will be promoted within the terms of reference. Members of each group will discuss and agree with aims and objectives within a workshop setting to determine projects which they feel will improve the river offer.
- 9.11 It should be a long-term aim for the river stakeholder groups to grow, evolve and eventually create a sustainable river trust or similar organisation which is independent from the council and able to generate income to continue improving the river offer.



Figure 8-1: Planned structure for Partnership and Theme Groups

- 9.12 The River Medway Strategy Partnership Board will have 10 representatives from key river stakeholders' organisations supported by the council and their remit is to offer advice, help and guidance to the four themed stakeholder groups in a positive and collaborative way with the broad aim of improving the river offer. This advisory role will not replace or fetter the statutory responsibilities of the Council, Peel Ports and other competent authorities and contributions towards funding should not be assumed from attendance.
- 9.13 Representatives of youth organisations should be included in the relevant stakeholder groups to promote intergenerational cooperation and foster the next generation of river stakeholders.
- 9.14 Given the breadth of the Strategy, the relevant Portfolio Holder and a supported by council officers, will coordinate responsibility for all river related challenges for Medway Council and lead the inception of the River Medway Partnership Board.

Lower River Medway Partnership Board

- 9.15 The River Medway Partnership Board has been set up to include stakeholders with a remit and responsibility which covers key aspects of the river and its environs including:
- The Council's nominated Portfolio Holder and River Strategy Delivery Team.

- Representatives from organisations with a historical or significant influence on the lower River Medway.
- 9.16 It is recommended agenda and actions set out below are discussed by the River Medway Partnership Board or given feedback from the relevant themed stakeholder group within the first 6-12 months of the board being created:
- Overview of the current arrangements for managing and maintaining the river infrastructure.
 - How to make river access inclusive for everyone
 - Innovative ways of accessing the river.
 - Feasibility to improve river transports links beyond the lower river Medway.
 - How to expand visitor numbers arriving locally by river.
 - Ways to promote responsible use of the river.
 - Ways to tackle pollution.
 - Ideas for improving habitat restoration.
 - Promotion and collaboration on annual river related events
 - How to support historic ship restoration
 - Possibilities for income generation to create a sustainable river trust or similar organisation, including potential membership.
 - Ideas on how to advance economic development of the river.
 - examining how to coordinate actions and to improve key areas of concern such as pollution
 - Investigate the potential for the Medway to be developed as a Green Energy Hub, drawing on strategies already emerging elsewhere to use rivers and their tidal movements as a significant water source heat generator.
- 9.17 Medway Council is exploring the opportunity for the potential of Heat Networks to be installed in Chatham and the Hoo Peninsula. A Technical Feasibility Study and Detailed Project Design for Chatham have been completed, and a Technical Feasibility Study has been completed for Hoo, and the Detailed Project Design is due to be completed in 2027. This will provide the technical and economic viability for the potential Heat Networks and provide the platform to move on to the next stage, which is the Commercialisation Stage. We are working with a range of external partners across Chatham and Hoo that have been identified as key anchor loads for recoverable energy, including Medway Maritime Hospital, Royal Engineers, Chatham Historic Dockyard, University of Greenwich Medway Campus. Funding for the feasibility stages has been secured through the Department for Energy, Security and Net Zero's Heat Network Delivery Unit.

- 9.18 The governance and terms of reference of stakeholder group are to expressly include the understanding each group is a forum for positive and collaborative discussion to improve the river offer relevant to the groups theme.

Themed Stakeholder Groups

- 9.19 These groups will include key stakeholders with an interest in driving forward a particular theme within the Lower River Medway Strategy and the Council will facilitate and bring together the theme groups under the broad term of improving the river offer
- 9.20 The initial theme group meetings should be led by an appropriate Member or officer.
- 9.21 The theme groups should:
- Meet and discuss initial ideas and shared vision for the river within the groups theme
 - Attend workshops created by the council to distill ideas, ambitions and aims of how the river offer can be improved through an agreed set of deliverable projects.
 - Agree a representative(s) to represent the theme group with providing feedback to the Partnership Board
 - Agree several short- and medium-term activities, to form the initial work programme for the theme group, and identify any key priorities and actions that will transcend the other theme groups and therefore be considered by the wider River Medway Partnership Board
 - Identify and agree actions for every member of each stakeholder group for driving forward the agreed work programme and agenda for, with potential funding and other resource needs
 - Work to ensure that projects already being undertaken through other forums isn't duplicated, and helps to bring stakeholders together
 - Develop an Action Plan for the theme group detailing key projects proposed, who is responsible for leading, the key actions and next steps and all critical requirements including funding, human resources, and cooperation between parties
- 9.22 It is envisaged that these groups will work towards the eventual formulation of implementation plans for each theme, with appropriate consideration given to broader issues including but not limited to public health, community participation, wellbeing, and inclusion. Theme groups should also consider relevant performance metrics.

The River and New Development Sites / Opportunities

- 9.23 Development and Planning as a theme would not benefit from the establishment of a group at this time, but Medway Council will lead in driving forward river-related issues for this theme, working with key stakeholders as appropriate. This theme, however, should be looked at in more detail in the third iteration of the Lower River Medway Strategy.

Lower River Medway Strategy – strategic objectives for a delivery plan

- 9.24 The Lower River Medway Strategy presents the first genuine opportunity to harness the goodwill, expertise, and commitment of a broad range of river stakeholders. The Strategy demonstrates the Council's commitment to working in partnership with these valued stakeholders, enabling a direct contribution towards enhancing the river offer through improvements to biodiversity, leisure, business, tourism, investment, and future development.
- 9.25 To realise this ambitious vision, the following strategic objectives should be taken forward and where possible, be developed into a delivery plan to support improving the river offer

Enhancing Health, Leisure, and Sport Facilities
Investment in Infrastructure: Develop and upgrade river access points, marinas, and sporting facilities to accommodate a growing number of users.
Promotion and Events: Organize and promote events, competitions, and attractions to establish the Medway as a premier destination for water-based activities.
Training and Education: Establish nationally and internationally recognized training centres for sailing and other water sports.

Driving Economic Growth
Business Development: Support existing businesses and attract new enterprises by improving river frontage and access.
Strategic Employment Locations: Support existing landowners with new proposals, and where appropriate, assist in the conduct of feasibility studies to identify and develop new strategic employment sites and infrastructure opportunities along the river.
Funding and Investment: Secure public and private funding to support infrastructure projects and business initiatives.

Protecting Natural Environment and Wildlife

Habitat Conservation: Implement measures to protect and enhance biodiversity, including the creation of new habitats and the management of existing ones.

Pollution Control: Establish a river basin management plan to address pollution and protect aquatic ecosystems.

Climate Resilience: Develop strategies to mitigate the impacts of climate change, including flood risk management and coastal erosion prevention, including the identification of funding sources.

Boosting Tourism and Cultural Heritage

Heritage and Cultural Assets: Enhance and promote key heritage sites and cultural centres along the river.

Visitor Experience: Improve river-based transport and access to create a seamless visitor experience.

Events and Festivals: Develop a rolling programme of events to attract visitors and celebrate the river's cultural significance.