

Kent Downs highway design

TP Notes January 2006

Potential Issues

- Conversion from rural to urban character from development (e.g. introduction of footways and concrete kerbs and walls and street lighting)
- Loss of rural character due to highway design and equipment – signs, markings, lighting
- Standardisation of highway widths and profiles that does not reflect local character (see SPG Tunbridge Wells)
- Cutting of verges and mechanical hedging/trimming, removal of trees for sight lines
- Development of designs appropriate to modern levels of traffic
- Potential to return rural lanes or streets to pedestrian priority?
- Village and hamlet special features and qualities – conservation of these, or adaptation, or recreation of these features when new development occurs
- Trail riding (motor bikes using lanes and tracks for fun/sport). Maybe this conflicts with safety/conservation objectives?
- Creation of Quiet Lanes – see
Kent has been one of the leading counties for Quiet Lanes (see DfT weblink above). Have had some success in limiting traffic volumes, though speed reductions have been small.
- Countryside access – paths and walks, and their interruption/severance by roads
- Safety – excessive speed, measures to tackle this.
- Large vehicles, narrow lanes. Restrictions and farm access requirements
- Issue of creating passing places and its impact on the character of the lanes, and also the risk of creating more attractive “rat runs”.

Special features of Kent lanes

- On chalk downs, lanes that also acted (still act?) as drainage channels from the fields, with consequent confined space and footpaths separated. Eg Pilgrim’s Way, Boxley Hill. (The use of lanes as drainage channels may also explain the high frequency of them, and also the sometimes large differences in level from the surrounding fields)
- Footways at higher level than carriageway in villages (with or without protection with post and rail) e.g. Sutton Vallence, Chiddingston, Boxley
- White picket fences in village streets as property boundaries. E.g. Chilham, Goudhurst
- Village squares, with lanes leading to them (sometimes subsequently by-passed). E.g. Chilham, Elham, Smarden. (Bearsted village green in quintessentially English and manages not to be damaged by excessive traffic)

- Hedges define lanes, and offer protection from frost. E.g. Bredhurst to Boxley and in the Medway valley. (This is not specific to Kent of course)
- On the chalk downs escarpment, the lanes are usually heavily wooded, with both conifer and broadleaf woods either side. In some cases, these lanes go through a “tunnel” of trees, with Boxley Hill being perhaps the most extreme example
- The topography creates varied and extensive views. The North Downs escarpment (which is steep to the south, and gently sloping to the Thames and Medway valley to the north) is a key area affording long views where the lane or road is clear of woodland (for example the descent of the Downs at Detling Hill). But there are also more local views across and through the many smaller valleys cut into the Downs. The relatively flat Low Weald is perhaps less interesting in terms of landscape, but the villages are often extremely attractive e.g. Staplehurst, Smarden.
- The geology creates variations in character. The channel lanes on chalk has already been mentioned.

The Wikipedia entry on Kent offers the following description:

Physical geography

Kent is the southeasternmost county in England. It is bounded on the north by the River Thames and the North Sea, and on the south by the Straits of Dover and the English Channel. The continent of Europe is a mere 21 miles across the Strait. The major geographical features of the county are determined by a series of ridges running from west to east across the county. These ridges are the remains of the Wealden dome, which was the result of uplifting caused by the Alpine movements between 10-20 million years ago.

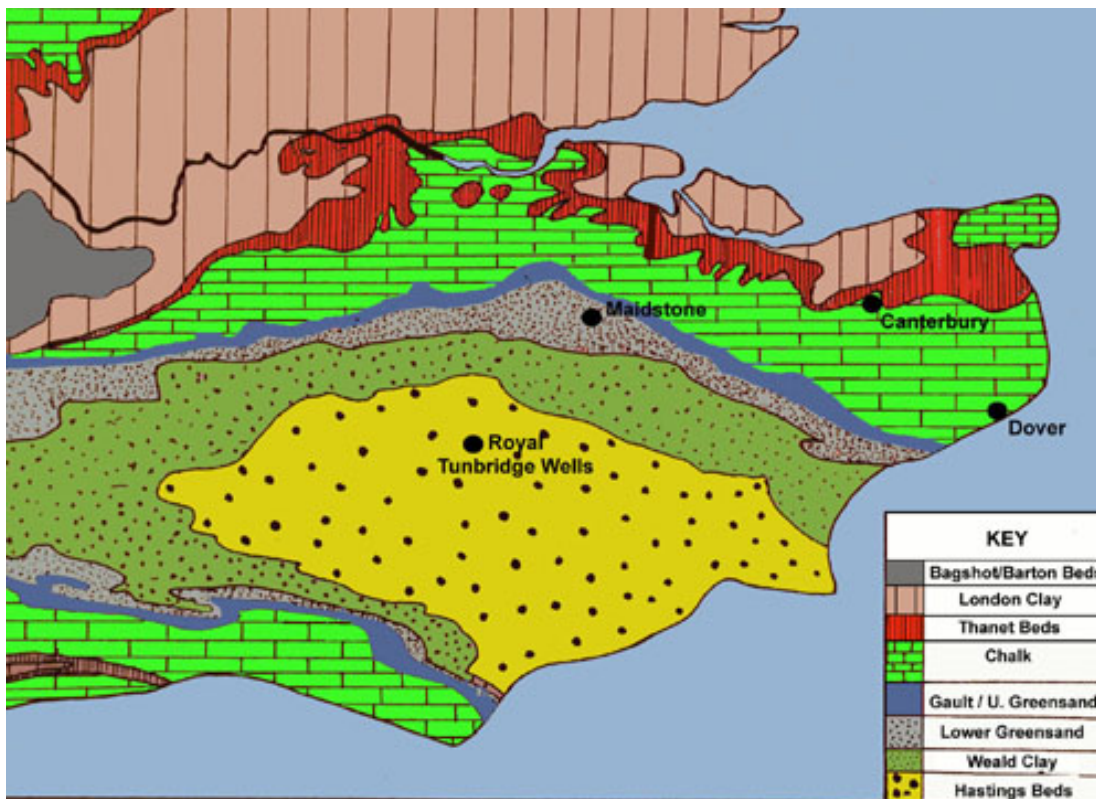
Erosion has resulted in these ridges and the valleys between. From the north they are: the marshlands along the Thames/Medway estuaries and along the North Kent coast; the chalk North Downs reaching heights of around 600ft; the sandstone and clay valley containing the River Medway and its tributaries; the Greensand ridge; the Wealden clay valley and finally the sandstone High Weald.

The highest point of the county is Betsom's Hill, GR TQ435563, at 251m/823ft.

Probably the most significant geographical feature of Kent is the White Cliffs. It is here that the North Downs reaches the sea. From there to Westerham is now the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty AONB.

The Weald derives its ancient name from the Germanic word wald meaning simply woodland. Much of the area remains today densely wooded; where there are also heavy clays the tracks through are nearly impassable for much of the year.

Kent's principal river, the River Medway, rises near Edenbridge and flows some 25 miles (40km) eastwards to a point near Maidstone when it turns north. Here it breaks through the North Downs at Rochester before joining the River Thames as its final tributary near Sheerness.



Source <http://www.kentrigs.org.uk/geolomap.html>

- Historical features are also important, with the “Pilgrim’s Way probably one of the most significant. However, there is controversy about which route is the one actually used by the Pilgrims to Canterbury. The currently marked route is mostly at the foot of the Downs, but some argue they would have taken the drier route along the ridge. However, the ridge is heavily wooded, and would have had less readily available water. Perhaps they mixed and matched.

Types of “lane”

Public Rights of Way (PROW)

Kent has over 4,200 miles (6,876 kms) of public footpaths, bridleways and byways providing free public access to the Garden of England.

Like a public road, a public right of way is a highway which anybody may use at any time. Public rights of way are recorded on a Definitive Map and Statement (a legal record of public rights of way). Each route is classified according to the nature of the public's rights along them.

Who can use PROWs? There are four categories of Public Right of Way intended for a variety of users:

1. **Footpath:** For walkers only. You are allowed to take a pram, pushchair or wheelchair along a public footpath but please be aware that many routes may not be physically suitable for that purpose. Public Footpaths are mostly waymarked with yellow arrows.
2. **Bridleway:** For walkers, horseriders and pedal cyclists. Cyclists must give way to walkers and horseriders. Bridleways are mostly waymarked with blue arrows.
3. **Byways Open to All Traffic (BOAT):** Often just referred to as Byway, for vehicles, cyclists, horseriders and walkers. Because of its nature, it is used mainly as a footpath or bridleway. BOATs are mostly waymarked with red arrows.
4. **Roads Used as Public Paths (RUPP):** For walkers, horseriders and pedal cyclists. Some RUPPs may also be available to motor vehicles. You will need to make local enquiries to find out whether you are allowed to take a vehicle along any particular RUPP. All RUPPs are soon to be reclassified as Restricted Byways. These will be available for walkers, horseriders, cyclists and horse drawn vehicles only.



Above: Example of raised footpath or sunken road – Sutton Valence



Above: informal street space in village