

## [PARISH ANALYSIS STUDY]

Salehurst and Robertsbridge Neighbourhood Development Plan  
June 2016

‘Salehurst and Robertsbridge will continue to be a thriving safe and friendly village where people want to live, work and play. We will maintain and enhance our village whilst supporting sustainable development that respects our location within an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty for the benefit of all residents and visitors alike.’ (Our Vision)

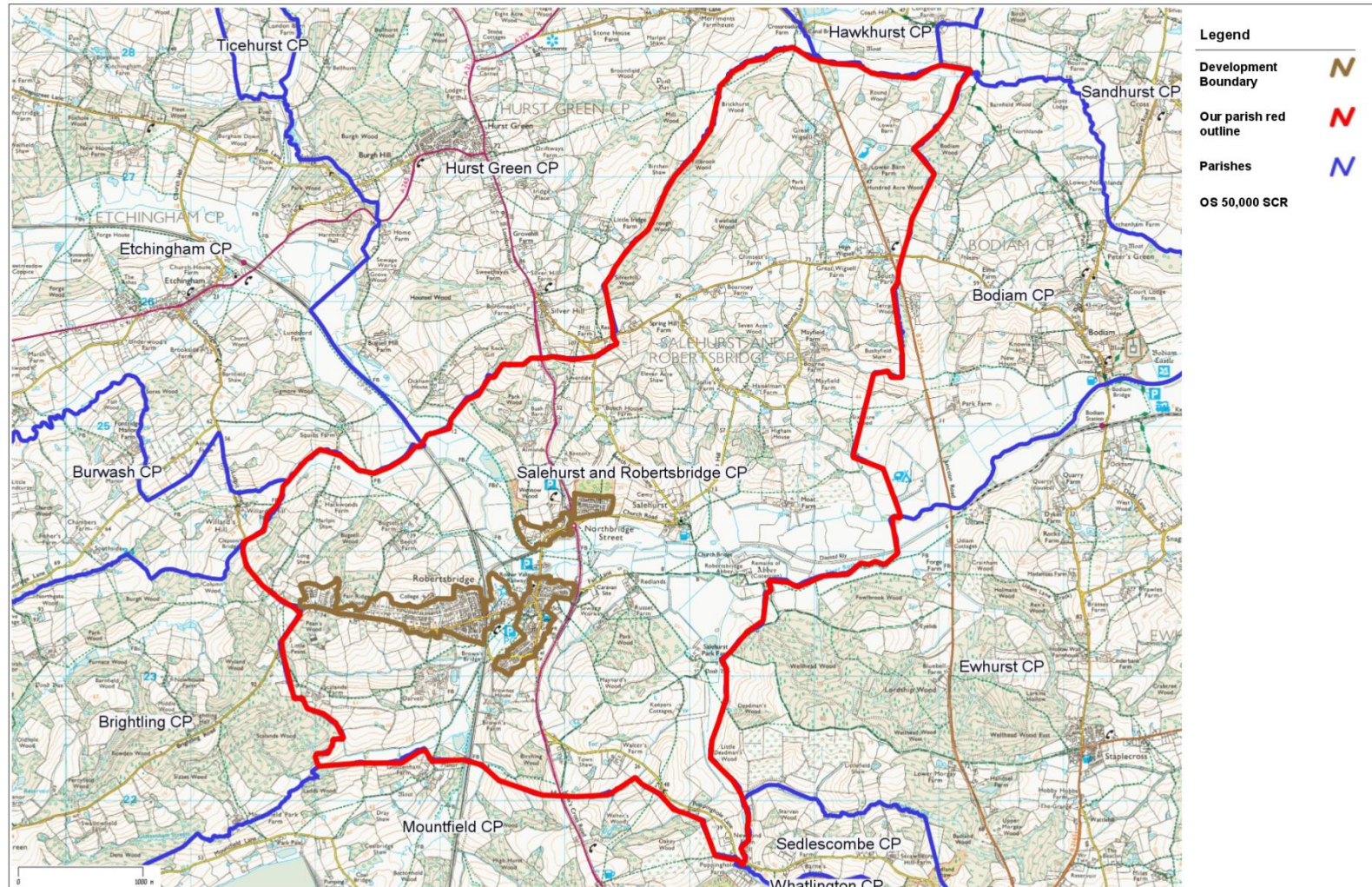


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## 1.0 Introduction

- 1.0 The Salehurst and Robertsbridge Neighbourhood Development Plan (SRNDP) is being prepared in accordance with the Neighbourhood Planning Regulations 2012, the Planning & Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 and the European Directive on Strategic Environmental Assessment 2004.
- 1.1 Neighbourhood planning provides communities with the power to establish their own policies to shape future development in and around where they live and work.  
*“Neighbourhood planning gives communities direct power to develop a shared vision for their neighbourhood and deliver the sustainable development they need”* (Paragraph 183, National Planning Policy Framework)
- 1.2 The purpose of this report is to summarise the character of the parish and the context within which the SRNDP will be prepared and to establish the baseline data of the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), by which the Plan will be assessed and refined.
- 1.3 There already exists a great deal of published data for the parish and this document aims to bring together the relevant data for developing the plan. In order to effect real change, it is essential that the Plan is backed up with evidence and extensive community engagement.
- 1.4 The data contained in this document is intended to help with discussing issues like:
  - Where are we now?
  - What change has taken place?
  - What changes would we like to see in the future and hence throughout the plan period?
- 1.5 The Neighbourhood Plan area has been designated and follows the parish boundary. See Map 1 below.



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## 2.0 Spatial Characteristics of the Parish

Robertsbridge is comprised of several identifiable communities, Robertsbridge itself, Northbridge Street, Salehurst and Higham. Robertsbridge is situated to the south of the River Rother, with Northbridge Street, Salehurst and Higham being situated on the north side. The Darwell Stream flows through Robertsbridge dividing the historic High Street area from the railway and twentieth century development to the west. Robertsbridge lies wholly within the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The village lies at the divide of what is generally considered to be the Lower Rother Valley and the Upper Rother Valley. The surrounding landscape is dominated by the broad valley of the River Rother and its tributaries. It is at this point in the valley that the predominantly wooded area of the upper valley gives way to a more open landscape dominated by pasture and arable land. The village has a population of some 2,728 making it the most populated village (and fourth most populated settlement overall) in the District. The wider Salehurst District Council ward, including Hurst Green and Bodiam has a population of 4,602 (2011 Census).

### Population

#### 2.1.0 Population by age groups in 2011

This dataset shows the resident population by broad age groups from the 2011 Census. Source: 2011 Census, Office for National Statistics

Age	All people	Percent aged 0-14	Percent aged 15-29	Percent aged 30-44	Percent aged 45-64	Percent aged 65+
Geography						
England and Wales	56,075,912	17.6	19.9	20.5	25.4	16.4
South East	8,634,750	17.8	18.6	20.4	26.1	17.2
East Sussex	526,671	16.1	15.9	17.2	28.0	22.7
Rother	90,588	14.6	13.3	14.4	29.3	28.4
Salehurst & Robertsbridge	2,728	18.6	14.3	17.5	29.8	19.7

### 2.1.1 Population density and area in hectares in 2011

This dataset shows the area in hectares and also the population density - that is, the number of persons per hectare from the 2011 Census.

Measure	Area in hectares	Density (persons per hectare)
Geography		
England and Wales	15,101,354	3.7
South East	1,906,965	4.5
East Sussex	170,871	3.1
Rother	50,943	1.8
Salehurst and Robertsbridge	1,815	1.5

Source: 2001 and 2011 Census, Office for National Statistics

### 2.1.2 Population by gender and broad age groups in 2011

This dataset shows the resident population by gender and broad age groups from the 2011 Census.

Age		All people	Percent aged 0-14	Percent aged 15-29	Percent aged 30-44	Percent aged 45-64	Percent aged 65+
Gender	Geography						
All people	England and Wales	56,075,912	17.6	19.9	20.5	25.4	16.4
	South East	8,634,750	17.8	18.6	20.4	26.1	17.2
	East Sussex	526,671	16.1	15.9	17.2	28.0	22.7
	Rother	90,588	14.6	13.3	14.4	29.3	28.4
	Salehurst and Robertsbridge	2,728	18.6	14.3	17.5	29.8	19.7
Males	England and Wales	27,573,376	18.4	20.5	20.8	25.6	14.9
	South East	4,239,298	18.6	19.2	20.5	26.3	15.5
	East Sussex	253,764	17.2	16.8	17.3	28.1	20.5
	Rother	43,021	15.6	14.5	14.5	29.4	26.0
	Salehurst & Robertsbridge	1,332	19.6	15.2	17.2	30.6	17.5

Females	England and Wales	28,502,536	16.9	19.4	20.3	25.3	18.0
	South East	4,395,452	17.0	18.0	20.3	25.9	18.8
	East Sussex	272,907	15.1	15.0	17.2	27.9	24.8
	Rother	47,567	13.6	12.2	14.3	29.2	30.7
	Salehurst & Robertsbridge	1,396	17.6	13.5	17.8	29.2	21.8

### 2.1.3 Population in urban and rural areas in 2011

This dataset shows the percentage of people living in urban and rural areas from the 2011 Census. The 2011 rural-urban classification (RUC2011) for small area geographies provides a rural/urban view of datasets at output area (OA), super output area (SOA) and ward level. Data presented here are aggregated from the output area level classification. An output area (OA) is treated as 'urban' if it was allocated to an area with a population of 10,000 or more. The rest is treated as 'rural'.

Urban/Rural	Urban				Rural			
Age group	All people	0-15	16-64	65+	All people	0-15	16-64	65+
Geography								
England and Wales	81.5	82.9	82.4	76.4	18.5	17.1	17.6	23.6
South East	79.6	80.2	80.5	75.7	20.4	19.8	19.5	24.3
East Sussex	74.0	74.2	74.5	72.7	26.0	25.8	25.5	27.3
Rother	47.7	44.1	45.4	54.1	52.3	55.9	54.6	45.9
Salehurst and Robertsbridge	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: 2011 Census, Office for National Statistics

## Households

### 2.2.0 Household composition in 2011

This dataset shows the total number of households and percentage by household type from 2011 Census. A household is defined as one person living alone, or a group of people (not necessarily related) living at the same address who share cooking facilities and share a living room, sitting room or dining area. Household composition here classifies households according to the relationships between householders.

Household sub-type	All households	All one person households	All family households	All other households	One person households aged 65 and over	All other households aged 65 and over	All households with dependent children	Lone parent households with dependent children
Geography								
England and Wales	23,366,044	7,067,261	14,448,646	1,850,137	2,903,930	1,971,560	6,790,815	1,671,396
South East	3,555,463	1,023,154	2,270,868	261,441	449,969	329,263	1,044,637	216,366
East Sussex	231,905	75,991	141,826	14,088	37,635	26,736	58,996	14,343
Rother	40,877	13,889	24,891	2,097	8,084	5,855	9,017	2,098
Salehurst and Robertsbridge	1,052	296	704	52	144	128	292	54

Source: 2011 Census, Office for National Statistics

### 2.2.1 Households in poverty in 2015

This dataset shows the number and percentage of households living in poverty. A household in poverty is one whose income is below 60% of national median household income, which in 2015 was £17,217.

Measure	Median household income	Total number of households	Number of households below 60% of national median	Percentage of households below 60% of national median
Geography				
England	29,164	22,818,109	6,453,002	28.3
South East	34,186	3,692,838	845,538	22.9
East Sussex	28,572	239,884	68,802	28.7
Rother	26,963	41,741	12,731	30.5
Salehurst and Robertsbridge	38,075	1,134	209	18.4

Source: CACI

## Healthcare

### 2.3.0 Limiting long-term illness in 2011

This dataset shows the percentage of people that have a limiting long-term illness or disability from 2011 Census.

Type	All people	Percent people with long-term health problem or disability	Percent day-to-day activities limited a lot	Percent day-to-day activities limited a little	Percent people without a long-term health problem or disability
Geography					
England and Wales	56,075,912	17.9	8.5	9.4	82.1
South East	8,634,750	15.7	6.9	8.8	84.3
East Sussex	526,671	20.3	9.2	11.2	79.7
Rother	90,588	23.4	10.7	12.8	76.6
Salehurst and Robertsbridge	2,728	17.0	7.1	10.0	83.0

Source: 2011 Census, Office for National Statistics

### 2.3.1 Provision of unpaid care in 2011

This dataset shows the number of people who provide unpaid care for others and the number of hours provided.

Provision unpaid care	All people	People provides no unpaid care	People provide unpaid care	Provides 1 to 19 hours unpaid care a week	Provides 20 to 49 hours unpaid care a week	Provides 50 or more hours unpaid care a week
Geography						
England and Wales	56,075,912	50,275,666	5,800,246	3,665,072	775,189	1,359,985
South East	8,634,750	7,787,397	847,353	577,114	96,883	173,356
East Sussex	526,671	467,262	59,409	39,537	6,745	13,127
Rother	90,588	79,327	11,261	7,279	1,250	2,732
Salehurst and Robertsbridge	2,728	2,381	347	244	38	65

Source: 2011 Census, Office for National Statistics

Provision unpaid care	All people	Percentage of people who provide any unpaid care	Percentage of people who provide 1 to 19 hours of unpaid care	Percentage of people who provide 20 to 49 hours of unpaid care	Percentage of people who provide 50 or more hours of unpaid care	Percentage of people who provide no unpaid care
Geography						
England and Wales	56,075,912	10.3	6.5	1.4	2.4	89.7
South East	8,634,750	9.8	6.7	1.1	2.0	90.2
East Sussex	526,671	11.3	7.5	1.3	2.5	88.7
Rother	90,588	12.4	8.0	1.4	3.0	87.6
Salehurst and Robertsbridge	2,728	12.7	8.9	1.4	2.4	87.3

### 2.3.2 General health

The respondents of the 2011 Census were asked to rate their health. These are the results for Rother. The percentage of residents in Rother rating their health as 'very good' is less than the national average. Also the percentage of residents in Rother rating their health as 'very bad' is more than the national average, suggesting that the health of the residents of Rother is generally worse than in the average person in England.

HEALTH	ROTHER	EAST SUSSEX	ENGLAND
Very Good	40.55%	43.80%	47.17%
Good	36.60%	35.64%	34.22%
Fair	16.51%	14.77%	13.12%
Bad	4.93%	4.48%	4.25%
Very Bad	1.41%	1.31%	1.25%

Sources: Office for National Statistics & Department for Work & Pensions.

## Education

### 2.4.0 Qualifications in 2011

This dataset shows the percentage of all people aged 16 and over by highest level of qualification held from the 2011 Census.

Qualifications	All usual residents aged 16 and over	No qualifications	Highest level of qualification : Level 1	Highest level of qualification : Level 2	Highest level of qualification: Apprenticeship	Highest level of qualification : Level 3	Highest level of qualification : Level 4 and above	Highest level of qualification: Other qualifications
Geography								
England and Wales	100.0	22.7	13.3	15.3	3.6	12.3	27.2	5.7
South East	100.0	19.1	13.5	15.9	3.6	12.8	29.9	5.2
East Sussex	100.0	22.6	14.1	16.8	3.5	12.0	26.2	4.7
Rother	100.0	24.7	13.8	16.5	3.8	11.2	25.5	4.6
Salehurst and Robertsbridge	100.0	19.3	12.4	16.4	3.0	12.2	31.0	5.7

Source: 2011 Census, Office for National Statistics

### 2.4.1 Educational attainment in Year 11

This table gives details of the educational attainment levels achieved by Year 11 pupils (usually aged 16) who attend schools maintained by East Sussex County Council. The information is presented according to where pupils live. Pupils may not live in the same area as where they go to school and some pupils attending East Sussex schools live outside the county. Data is provided on the results achieved by pupils taking GCSEs and equivalent qualifications (such as NVQs). Most pupils take GCSEs in National Curriculum and vocational subjects at the end of Key Stage 4 (Year 11), aged 16. This data appears skewed because of the way it has been compiled. The figure for Robertsbridge is very low, because of out of county education and private education, and from the criteria also if pupils are at academies.

Subject	5 or more passes at grades A*-C		5 or more passes at A*-C (including Maths and English)	
Measure	number	percentage	number	percentage
Geography				
All areas	4,065	80.2	2,911	57.5
East Sussex	3,940	80.6	2,825	57.8
Rother	672	75.4	497	55.8
Salehurst and Robertsbridge	22	81.5	18	66.7

Source: Children's Services Department, East Sussex County Council.

## Transportation

Robertsbridge is on a main transport corridor, being on the route of both the Hastings-London (Charing Cross) railway and the Hastings-London A21 Trunk Road. In 1992, the Robertsbridge A21 bypass was opened, greatly improving the environment for those living, working or shopping in the High Street and Northbridge Street.

Robertsbridge Station is conveniently central and trains to London and Hastings offer at least an hourly service. Peak time bus services allow commuting to and from Hastings, Battle and Tunbridge Wells.

Transport, particularly to hospital, is the most requested 'task' by residents contacting the village Community Friends Group, Helping Hands.

### 2.5.0 Households without a car in 2011

This table shows the number and percentage of households who do not have access to car or van.

Car ownership	All households	Number of households with no car	Percentage of households with no car
Geography			
England and Wales	23,366,044	5,989,770	25.6
South East	3,555,463	660,430	18.6
East Sussex	231,905	50,674	21.9
Rother	40,877	7,781	19.0
Salehurst and Robertsbridge	1,052	119	11.3

Source: 2011 Census, Office for National Statistics

### 2.5.1 Method of travel to work in 2011

This dataset shows which modes of transport are used by those who are in employment to get to their place of work, by broad transport type. The information in this table has been produced using only people's response to method of travel to work questions in the 2011 Census. This data is not comparable with 2001.

Mode of travel to work	All people aged 16-74 in employment	Percentage of people who work at or mainly from home	Percentage of people who use public transport	Percentage of people who use a private vehicle	Percentage of people who walk or cycle	Percentage of people who use another mode of transport
Geography						
England and Wales	26,526,336	5.4	16.4	64.0	13.6	0.6
South East	4,260,723	6.6	12.1	66.8	13.9	0.7
East Sussex	239,319	7.9	11.4	66.8	13.3	0.6
Rother	37,583	9.6	8.9	68.8	12.1	0.7
Salehurst and Robertsbridge	1,189	12.9	14.1	64.3	8.2	0.6

Source: 2011 Census, Office for National Statistics

### 2.5.2 Number of cars in 2011

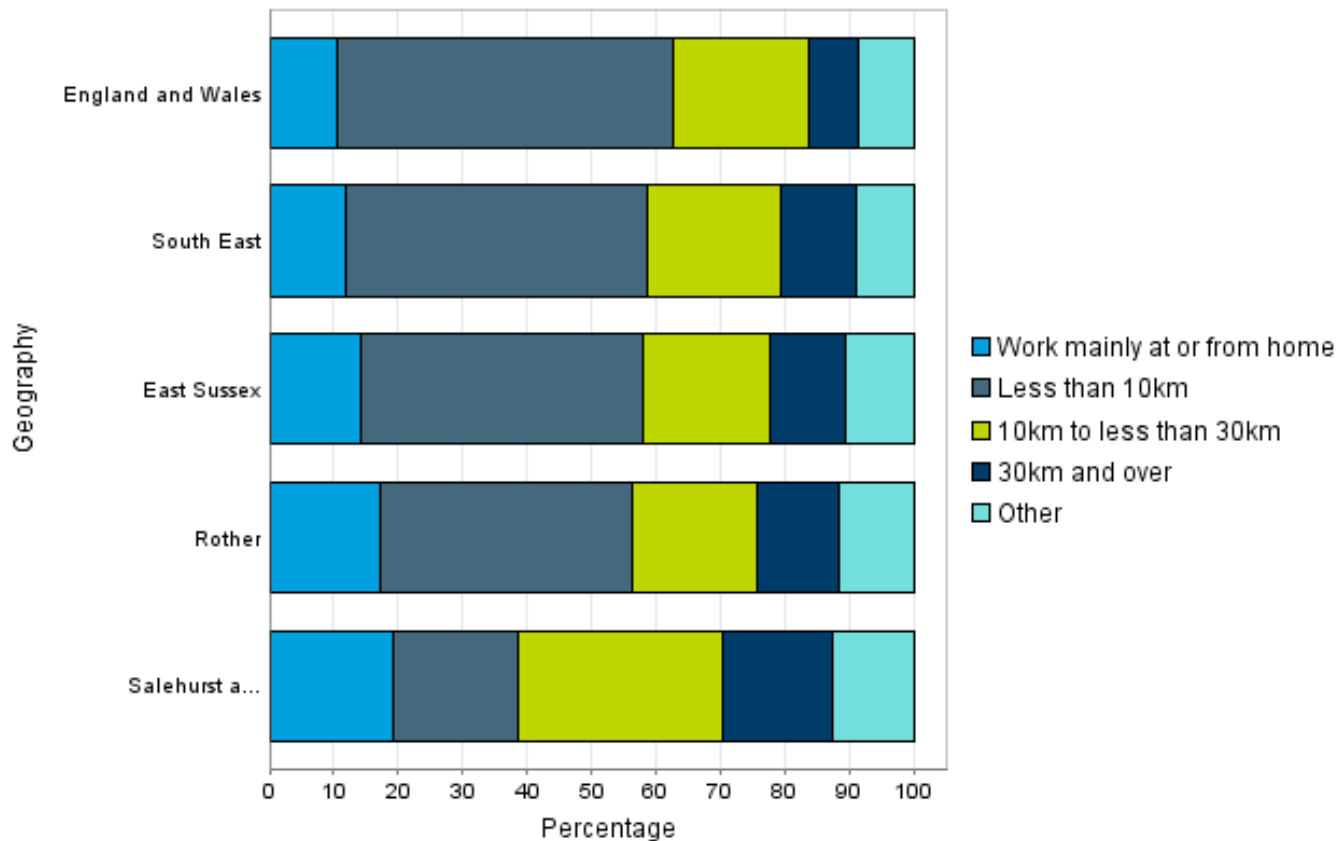
This dataset shows the number of cars or vans, including any company car or van if available for private use, the number of households in the area and the number of cars/vans per household. Also shown is the percentage increase in households, cars and vans, and the number of cars/vans per household since 2001.

Measure	All cars or vans in the area	All households	Number of vehicles per household
Geography			
England and Wales	27,294,656	23,366,044	1.2
South East	4,803,729	3,555,463	1.4
East Sussex	292,118	231,905	1.3
Rother	54,241	40,877	1.3
Salehurst and Robertsbridge	1,636	1,052	1.6

Source: 2011 Census, Office for National Statistics

### 2.5.3 Distance travelled to work

This dataset shows the distance travelled to work by those who are in employment. The information in this table has been produced using both a person's place of work and their method of travel to work and therefore 2011 data is comparable with 2001.



Source: 2011 Census, Office for National Statistics

## Economy

### 2.6.0 Average household income in 2015

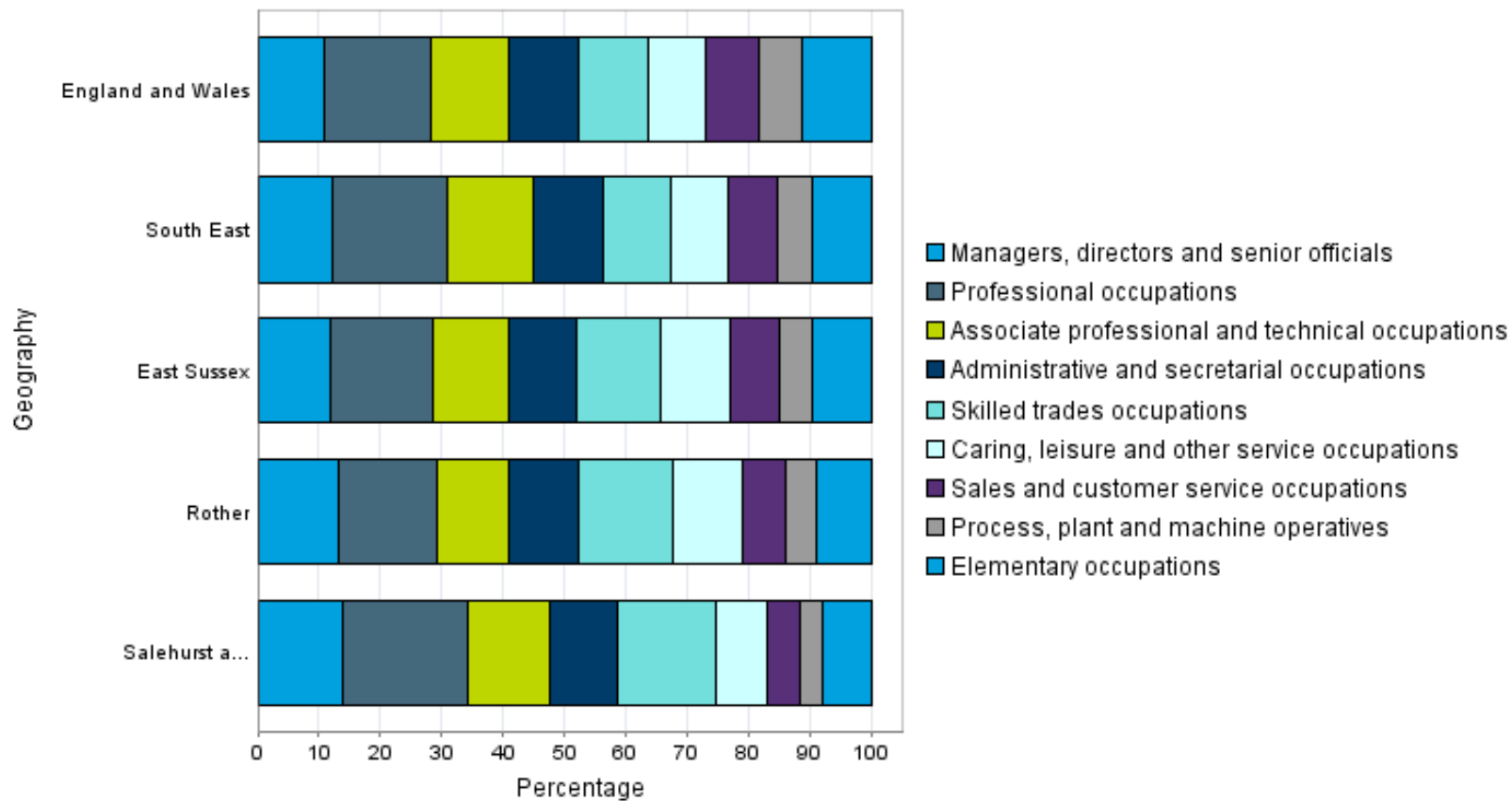
This dataset gives modelled estimates of median average household income. This data is modelled using a variety of Government data sources combined with data from lifestyle surveys. Household income includes gross income before tax from: wages, investments, income support and other welfare benefits such as tax credits and pensions. Household income is the combined income of all household members.

Average	Median income
Geography	
England	29,164
South East	34,186
East Sussex	28,572
Rother	26,963
Salehurst and Robertsbridge	38,075

Source: CACI

### 2.6.1 Employment by occupation in 2011

This dataset shows the percentage of all people in employment aged 16-74 by occupation from the 2011 Census.



Source: 2011 Census, Office for National Statistics

## 2.6.2 Economic activity and inactivity in 2011

This table shows the percentage of people aged 16-74 who are economically active and inactive, from the 2011 Census.

Economic activity category	All people aged 16-74	All economically active	Employee	Self-employed	Unemployed	Economically active full-time student	All economically inactive	Long-term sick or disabled	Looking after home or family	Retired	Economically inactive student (including full-time students)	Other economically inactive
Geography												
England and Wales	100.0	69.7	52.2	9.7	4.4	3.4	30.3	4.2	4.3	13.8	5.8	2.2
South East	100.0	72.1	54.2	11.0	3.4	3.3	27.9	2.9	4.4	13.7	5.2	1.8
East Sussex	100.0	68.1	48.2	13.4	3.6	2.8	31.9	4.1	4.2	17.8	4.0	1.8
Rother	100.0	63.4	43.2	14.8	3.2	2.1	36.6	4.1	4.3	22.5	3.8	1.9
Salehurst and Robertsbridge	100.0	64.4	44.3	16.0	2.3	1.8	35.6	2.9	5.4	15.6	4.1	7.7

A person aged 16 to 74 is described as economically active if, in the week before the census, they were in employment as an employee or self-employed, not in employment, but were seeking work and ready to start work within two weeks, or not in employment, but waiting to start a job already obtained and available. Full-time students who fulfil any of these criteria are classified as economically active and are counted separately in the 'Full-time student' category of economically active - they are not included in any of the other categories such as employees or unemployed.

A person aged 16 to 74 is described as economically inactive if, in the week before the census, they were not in employment but did not meet the criteria to be classified as 'Unemployed'. This includes a person looking for work but not available to start work within two weeks, as well as anyone not looking for work, or unable to work - for example those who are retired, looking after home/family, permanently sick or disabled. Students who fulfil any of these criteria are also classified as economically inactive. This does not necessarily mean in full-time education and excludes students who were working or in some other way were economically active.

Source: 2011 Census, Office for National Statistics

### 2.6.3 Employment by industry in 2011

This dataset shows the percentage of people in employment aged 16-74 by industry from the 2011 Census.

Industry	All industries	Agriculture, Mining and Utilities	Manufacturing	Construction	Wholesale and retail trade; repair of motor vehicles	Transport and storage	Accommodation and food service activities	Information and communication	Finance, insurance and Real estate	Professional, scientific and technical activities	Administrative and support service activities	Public administration and defence; compulsory social security	Education	Human health and social work activities	Other
Geography															
England and Wales	100.0	2.3	8.9	7.7	15.9	5.0	5.6	4.0	5.8	6.6	4.9	6.0	9.9	12.5	5.0
South East	100.0	2.1	7.2	8.0	15.6	5.2	5.0	5.5	5.9	7.5	5.2	6.0	10.1	11.6	5.1
East Sussex	100.0	2.1	6.1	9.4	16.0	4.1	5.6	2.9	5.9	6.2	4.5	5.5	10.3	15.6	5.7
Rother	100.0	3.0	5.7	10.1	14.9	3.8	5.6	2.8	6.3	6.6	4.6	5.5	10.0	15.2	5.8
Salehurst and Robertsbridge	100.0	3.7	4.7	8.7	15.1	3.4	4.3	4.9	8.7	8.1	5.9	4.4	11.1	10.7	6.3

Source: 2011 Census, Office for National Statistics

## 3.0 Parish Concerns and Needs

### 3.1 Flood Risk

Due to its location at the confluence of the River Rother and the Darwell Stream and that the River Rother was once tidal as far as Robertsbridge, much of the land is highly susceptible to flooding and falls within the Environment Agency's 'Flood Risk Area'.

- 3.1.1 In autumn 2000, some 100 premises were flooded at Robertsbridge and Northbridge Street. Both modern and historic buildings were affected. Following this event, construction of new tidal walls and embankments has been completed, to ensure protection against the 1 in 100 year extreme event. In subsequent years, floods would have caused damage to properties, had it not been for the construction of the flood defences and the operation of dedicated pumping. The village further suffered as a result of the flooding of December 2013 as seen in the photographs below.





### 3.2 Heritage

The historic part of Robertsbridge is situated on the eastern side of a spur above the Rother Valley. Much of the more recent twentieth century growth, including the Secondary School, has taken place on a spur and ridge to the west of the Darwell Stream and main railway. In the historic core the majority of the buildings are listed and in 1986 a Conservation Area was designated. More recently, in 2009, Rother District Council published a Conservation Area Character Appraisal for Robertsbridge and Northbridge Street which further extended the Conservation Area boundary to include an area at the eastern end of Fair Lane, land and farm buildings around Grove Farm, and a separate parcel of land at Northbridge Street.

- 3.2.1 Predominant building materials include clay tiled (and some slate) roofs, while walls are of a variety of materials including brick, clay tiles, weather boarding and framed panel. The central High Street exhibits brick footways. The central High Street and George Hill, Fair Lane and Bishops Lane are all 'Historic Routeways'. There are several 'Historic Field Boundaries' fringing Robertsbridge and Northbridge Street.

### 3.3 Facilities and Services

Robertsbridge has a good range of services and is the only village with a secondary school, as well as a pre-school offering full time day care and primary school. Together with Ticehurst, it has been classed as one of the District's two 'Rural Service Centre' villages.

- 3.3.1 The Doctors' surgery is located on Station Road. There are also 2 dentists, an osteopathic clinic, a vets, 4 public houses, 2 convenience stores with one including a post office counter, 2 florists, a chemist, a bakery and cafe, a book shop, a country/agricultural/hardware store, a garden machine repairer/supplier, a community hall, 2 play areas, 2 sets of allotments, 1 cricket pitch, 1 football pitch and 2 places of worship and a restaurant with take away facility. There is a local aspiration to combine the GP Surgery and two dental surgeries onto a single site in a new 'medical centre'.
- 3.3.2 Robertsbridge benefits from a train line to London via Tunbridge Wells, and in the other direction to Hastings. Many residents do commute to larger towns and cities. The nearest hospital with A&E is the Conquest in Hastings (about 8.6 miles), with Pembury Hospital in Tunbridge Wells almost twice as far again in the opposite direction.
- 3.3.3 Robertsbridge has a number of smaller settlements that to some extent relate to it, depending on the service. For example, as the sole village in Rother District with a state secondary school, school children from a wide area travel to the village on a daily basis (by car, train and at least six busses). The High Street shops and services support residents beyond the village, as does the train station.
- 3.3.4 Hurst Green is a 'Local Service Village', less than a 5 minute drive away and relies to some extent on Robertsbridge services. To the south, John's Cross and Mountfield are both less than 5 minutes' drive away, but gravitate more towards the larger market town of Battle. Although more than 5 minutes' drive away, residents of somewhat smaller settlements such as Etchingham and Staplecross also seem likely to rely on Robertsbridge services to a more limited extent.

### 3.4 Education

Robertsbridge has both a primary school (Salehurst CE Primary School) and a secondary school (Robertsbridge Community College). It is the only village in Rother to have a secondary school and as such serves a much wider catchment than the village itself.

As of May 2013, the primary school has 156 pupils from a capacity of 210. The Education Authority advised that there are likely to be sufficient spaces available to cope with additional demand arising from the proposed extra housing numbers as set out in the Core Strategy. There is also a currently over-subscribed pre-school (Robertsbridge Children's Services), providing places for children 0 to 4 years old, running 50 weeks per year, open 8 am to 5.30 pm five days per week.

### 3.5 Existing Open Space, Sport and Recreation Facilities

There are two Parish Council run play areas, 'Bishops Meadow' and 'The Clappers' Recreation Ground. There was a skateboard ramp adjacent to the Youth Centre, although this deteriorated in condition due to problems with surface water run-off and was scrapped. In 2009, the village was the beneficiary of Play Pathfinder funding to provide a wider range of equipment for all ages. However it suffers from its position in the flood plain and as such the Parish Council consider it unsuitable for skate facilities, particularly given the problems the previous ramp suffered at the Youth Centre as a consequence of surface water run-off.

Bishop's Meadow is a play area that is more 'rural' in character, with wooden equipment that blends in with the surrounding landscape.

An additional play area was proposed as part of the 2006 Local Plan allocation for land at Grove Farm, which remains unimplemented.

The Parish Council also maintain the Pocket Park, a well frequented wild life area adjacent to the Cricket Ground.

See below for a list of the open spaces as listed on the Parish Council website.

#### **Recreation Ground**

The Recreation Ground lies at the centre of the village on The Clappers - the stretch of road between the High Street and Northbridge Street. It provides a large open space for games and general recreation as well as the village football pitch. It is also used for other occasional events and celebrations, including the annual bonfire and fireworks display in November organised by the Robertsbridge Bonfire Society, an annual Summer Event and sometimes a visiting funfair. There is an enclosed playground with modern play equipment for younger children and an adjacent open area with several items of equipment suitable for older children, plus four items of adult exercise equipment. The pavilion which provides changing facilities for sports clubs, and public conveniences, which are open daily, is situated adjacent to the small car park.

Whilst there are no public footpaths across the Recreation Ground, there is access to the adjacent Pocket Park and the public footpath that runs between the two, giving access to the wider footpath network. The enclosed play area is subject to the district-wide Dog Exclusion Order, however the rest of the Recreation Ground is only subject to a Dogs on Leads order, allowing dog-walkers to access the Pocket Park and footpaths.

### **Pocket Park**

Robertsbridge Pocket Park lies to the north of the Recreation Ground beyond the Rother Valley Railway embankment. Within its 2.25 acres the site contains a pond of ecological interest with flag iris and water-forget-me-not, dense areas of blackthorn scrub which are covered in blossom in spring and in autumn are laden with sloe berries, and a mosaic of grassland and riverbank habitats. There are also a number of mature, broad-leaved trees including ash, oak, maple and hazel.

The park is owned by the Council except for the old Mill owner's garden area alongside the river which was leased from SCATS in 1995. In this part it is possible to find the remains of an old footbridge over the river and old fruit trees remain from the former garden. Practical conservation management, including coppicing hazel trees, is carried out by local volunteers.

The entrance to the park is via footpaths under the disused railway line. Once inside there are a number of informal paths kept open by periodic cutting of the vegetation which also helps to provide a range of habitats for birds, insects and mammals. Ducks and moorhens can be seen on the river, and occasionally kingfishers. Other species include field grasshoppers, dark bushcricket, dragonflies, speckled wood butterfly and common lizard.

### **Piper's Field**

This area of approximately 2 acres lies along Station Road and was purchased by the Parish Council in 1998. A number of covenants were imposed on the sale by the previous owners to ensure that the land remains as public open space. Some years ago, willow trees were planted in the area by Gray-Nicolls to be harvested for cricket bat manufacture; several have been harvested already.

In 2003 some of the area was taken up with a flood embankment as part of the village flood defences (Robertsbridge Flood Alleviation Scheme) but the grassy mound has blended in well and it remains a valuable green area for the use of the village.

### **Jubilee Garden**

This small area of Pipers Field, separated by the road into Willowbank, is maintained as a quiet area for rest and reflection, with wooden benches, a willow sculpture and pretty flower planters. It was created to commemorate the Golden Jubilee of H.M. Queen Elizabeth II and was created with generous funding from South East water and Southern Water following disruption to the village by the installation of the Bewl to Darwell pipeline. It is also home to a carved wooden sculpture (fondly known as Noah) which was commissioned by Robertsbridge Arts Partnership (carved by Sue Nunn), and was donated to the parish to mark the completion of the Flood Defences in 2004.

### **Bishop's Meadow**

This area of land (approximately 10 acres) was formerly part of the Stenning's Woodyard which, before its closure in 1986, occupied this site and the site across Bishop's Lane which is now Mill Rise. When development permission was sought (for Mill Rise) the land was offered to Rother District Council as a public open space. In 1995, the Parish Council acquired the land from Rother D C on a very long lease and is now responsible for its maintenance.

A number of mature trees were already growing around the edge of the site and before the developers gave up the site a certain amount of tree planting was done; more have been planted since by the Parish Council. Over the last few years, the grassy areas have developed into a natural wild flower meadow. Since the 2nd WW Britain has lost over 95% of its wild flower meadows, partly through intensive farming methods, partly through development and also partly by over-picking of the flowers. The Parish Council decided to develop this area to encourage the wild flower meadow. A small area at the lower end of the field is kept cut short for informal children's play and rustic climbing-log type play equipment has been installed but the bulk is kept as meadow.

There is an official public footpath running diagonally through the field from NE to SW and paths are cut around the edges of the meadows. There is also a 'permissive path' in the SE corner which links the Glottenham public footpaths and which is there by agreement of the Darvell community. The footbridges were installed by volunteers from the village.

### **Millennium Wood**

The wood occupies 12 acres of land on the northern edge of the village. The raising of the money for its purchase and planting was organised by the Robertsbridge Millennium Committee by public subscription and grants from Parish Council, District Council and other sources. It is part of an initiative called 'Woods on your doorstep' by the Woodland Trust and ownership and maintenance is vested in them.

Approximately 10,000 trees were planted in the area and planting started on 14th February 1999 when more than 150 village residents, young and old, braved a cold, damp day to help with the planting.

The wood is open at all times.

### 3.6 Environment

The extent of landscape and nature conservation designations, as well as the number of listed buildings and conservation areas, reflects Rother's high quality environment. Only 11% of the District is not designated of national or international landscape or nature conservation importance.

- 3.6.1 82% of the District falls within the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Its landscape is of national importance and was designated by the former Countryside Commission (now the Countryside Agency) and confirmed by the Secretary of State for the Environment in 1983.

A further 7% of the District, not within the AONB, is within a nationally or internationally designated site of nature conservation importance.

### 3.7 Housing Need

#### 3.7.1 Existing Households

The Rural Settlements Study 2008 (The Rural Settlement Strategy covers only Robertsbridge and Northbridge Street – not Salehurst) estimated there were 908 households in Robertsbridge. There has been a net gain of just 4 completions since 2008, suggesting a best estimate of 912 households today. Based upon average household size, the *parish* (Salehurst & Robertsbridge) population is estimated to be 2,728 (2011 Census).

#### 3.7.2 Recent Pattern of Development and Commitments

There have been 20 completions in Salehurst & Robertsbridge Parish over the last 9 years.

Table 3.1: Housing Completions in Salehurst & Robertsbridge Parish

Completions	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	Total
Salehurst & Robertsbridge Parish	4	6	6	2	0	0	0	2	0	20

Source: Local Plan Monitoring (Oct 2013)

There are 53 commitments in the Parish comprising 6 permissions on small sites and 47 from outstanding allocations.

Table 3.2: Housing commitments in Salehurst & Robertsbridge Parish (Oct. 2013)

	Small Sites	Large Sites	Allocations	Total
Salehurst & Robertsbridge Parish	6	0	47	53

### 3.7.3 Local Housing Need Survey

In 2008, a Housing Needs Survey was produced for Salehurst & Robertsbridge Parish by Action in Rural Sussex. In order to prove their eligibility for a local needs housing scheme, respondents need to demonstrate that they have a local connection and that they are unable to meet their needs on the open market. 36 households fulfilled the two criteria across the Parish, broken down as follows:

Table 3.3 Affordable Housing Needs Survey

Single person households	11
Couple without children	12
Single people sharing households (2 people)	2
Families with children	11
Total	36

### 3.7.4 Affordability

Although, affordability ratio figures are not available for Robertsbridge, there is no reason to suppose the affordability problems in Robertsbridge are any less acute. Indeed, available information regarding Council Tax banding indicates that the problem may actually be far worse in the village, since Robertsbridge has a disproportionate amount of expensive property even when compared to the affluent South East. The fact that incomes are actually lower further emphasises the affordability gap.

Evidence contained in the 2010 Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) suggested that on the basis of existing household incomes in Rother only about 30% of households are able to buy. A further 30% may be able to rent privately, but the remaining 40% are unable to rent or buy in the market. These figures are income based and is caveated by the fact that households may have access to equity from savings or property. Furthermore, in practice, many households stretch themselves further than their incomes would imply, although access to credit has become more restricted in the last couple of years. The evidence suggests that the need for affordable housing currently outweighs the supply and there is little reason to believe that Robertsbridge is in any more fortunate a position than the rest of Rother in this regard.

### 3.7.5 Village housing provision

Following the Core Strategy Main Modifications in August 2013, the village has been identified as having potential for 100 dwellings from *newly identified* sites, which will result in at approximately **155 dwellings** in the plan period 2011-28. There may be further ‘small site windfalls’ in addition to this number (i.e. sites of less than 6 dwellings and not formally allocated).

Table 3.4: Rother District Core Strategy Housing Number

Settlement/Area	All Net Completions in Plan Period (01/04/2011 to 31/03/2013)	Current Commitments	Allocations (Remaining from 2006 Local Plan) See Footnote 1	Proposed New Core Strategy Allocations See Footnote 2	Total New Housing 2011 - 2018 See Footnote 3
Robertsbridge	2	6	47 (+1)	100	155

1. Subject to review and re-assessment as part of SHLAA process. Numbers in brackets indicate any revisions as part of re-assessment.

2. Estimated from suitable and developable (green and amber) SHLAA sites. Core Strategy policy expectation that new allocations are within or immediately abutting a village development boundary.

3. Individual village number may be higher as a result of additional windfalls and rural exception sites.

### 3.7.6 Older Persons Housing

According to the 2011 census, Robertsbridge Parish has 302 residents in just 2 communal establishments. The vast majority of this number (291) can be accounted for by the Darvell Community south of Robertsbridge, so it is clear that there is a lack of older person's accommodation for the rest of the community.

The RDC Older Peoples Housing Needs Survey Report' June 2011 document reported that 33 households aged over 55 had reported a need to move to a property more suited to their needs. Of these, 60% wanted sheltered/retirement housing and 34% wanted a bungalow. 64% were owner occupiers, 21% rented from a housing association and 15% rented from a private landlord. 49% had a preference to buy on the open market, 42% wanted to rent from a Housing Association.

ESCC 'Information to support Robertsbridge Older People's Housing Needs Survey Report, September 2012 suggests that there is not a strong need for residential and nursing care in the area. However, it also suggests that there may be scope for a sheltered housing scheme of 14-15 units in Robertsbridge.

Sheltered housing with flats would generally be classed as a residential use, so would be subtracted from the village housing total, and be subject to a 40% affordable housing requirement, which reflects reasonably accurately the stated aspirations from the RDC the 'Older Peoples Housing Needs Survey Report' June 2011. Whilst it appears from the evidence that the need is for sheltered housing, it may be appropriate to allocate simply for 'designated housing for older people' in order to maintain a degree of flexibility.

### 3.7.7 Home care contracts in Robertsbridge:

East Sussex County Council's Adult Social Care (ASC) department helps to find providers of home care for those assessed by ASC as being eligible for support. There were 15 older people (aged 65+) receiving home care services via ASC as of 5 September 2012: A breakdown of the level of need of these people, and a comparison with the figures 18 months previously, is provided below:

Level of need	31 March 2011	5 Sept 2012
High (15+ hours a week)	1 person	4 (+ 3 compared to March 2011)
Medium (10-15 hours)	5	2 (-3)
High Low (5-10 hours)	7	6 (-1)
Low low (Under 5 hours)	4	3 (-1)
<b>Total</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>15 (-2)</b>

The total number of older people who received home care packages in Robertsbridge throughout 2010/11 and 2011/12 were:

	April 2010-March 2011	April 2011- March 2012
<b>Total No. of People Receiving Home Care</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>30 (+4)</b>

\*nb: Figures only include those aged over 65 who receive services via an ASC assessment. Home care contracts set up through Direct Payments are not counted in the figures.

These numbers are reasonably low, though this may be because of a higher number of self-funders in the area who may decide to employ their own home care agencies without seeking help from Adult Social Care.

### 3.8 Deprivation

There is a mixed picture regarding deprivation across different parts of Robertsbridge.

- 3.8.1 However, in terms of 'Barriers to Housing and services' both Robertsbridge SOAs compare quite unfavourably. This indicator includes analysis of problems concerning overcrowding, homelessness and access to owner-occupation. Robertsbridge centre and east specifically scores relatively poor in relation to 'Crime' and 'Living Environment'.

### 3.9 Employment Need

The emerging Core Strategy identifies a need of at least 10,000sq.m of employment floorspace over the plan period in rural areas. The evidence from this total stems from the Hastings and Rother Employment Strategy Review, together with its Update.

- 3.9.1 The Employment Strategy Review recognises there is on-going demand for workshops and other light industrial accommodation and, to a lesser degree, office space in rural Rother, as evidenced by the number of small sites, conversion schemes and high occupancy rates. Most provision is of small workshop and office units, with some demand for larger units. Rural sites can also provide valuable accommodation for various uses with a warehousing and/or open storage requirement. Many of the smaller developments stem from the reuse of former agricultural buildings and, collectively, these provide an important source of business space in the area. The Employment Strategy Review further notes that the high proportion of people who work from home in Rother, suggests a potential for more office based employment particularly in rural areas. A broad distribution of accommodation across the rural area therefore meets wider objectives. Robertsbridge, being one of two Rural Service Centres and accessible by rail and car to the A21, offers one of the most sustainable locations to locate this need.

## 4.0 Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats analysis

### 4.1 The key aims of the Neighbourhood Plan are to:

- To create local planning policies for Salehurst and Robertsbridge to which development proposals need to adhere;
- To protect against inappropriate and speculative development;
- To bring forward action on facilities and improvements, which are needed by the village.

### 4.2 Major issues identified for the Parish are:

1. Flooding
2. Parking
3. Housing allocation of 155 units for the plan period
4. Protection, maintenance and enhancement of the nationally and locally important heritage assets and historic character
5. Provision of new education and leisure facilities
6. Protection and enhancement of local open spaces and access to the countryside

### 4.3 Strengths

1. A rural area with a friendly community character
2. Within an area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
3. High quality of natural and built environment

### 4.4 Weaknesses

1. Prone to flooding.
2. Parking difficulties
3. Burden of maintenance of heritage assets
4. Closing of public spaces (URC church sold, threat to Mission Room, Club, Youth Centre, Seven Stars)

#### 4.5 Opportunities

1. To create economic growth and development in the parish
2. To plan and deliver a range of housing mix, sizes and types that is integrated into the community which reflects both current and future housing needs of the village.
3. To promote principles of good design and high quality that encourages local context and rural locality.
4. To minimise the risk of flooding
5. To improve parking
6. To strengthen the historic and heritage aspects of the built and natural environment
7. To improve community cohesion even more than it is already

#### 4.6 Threats

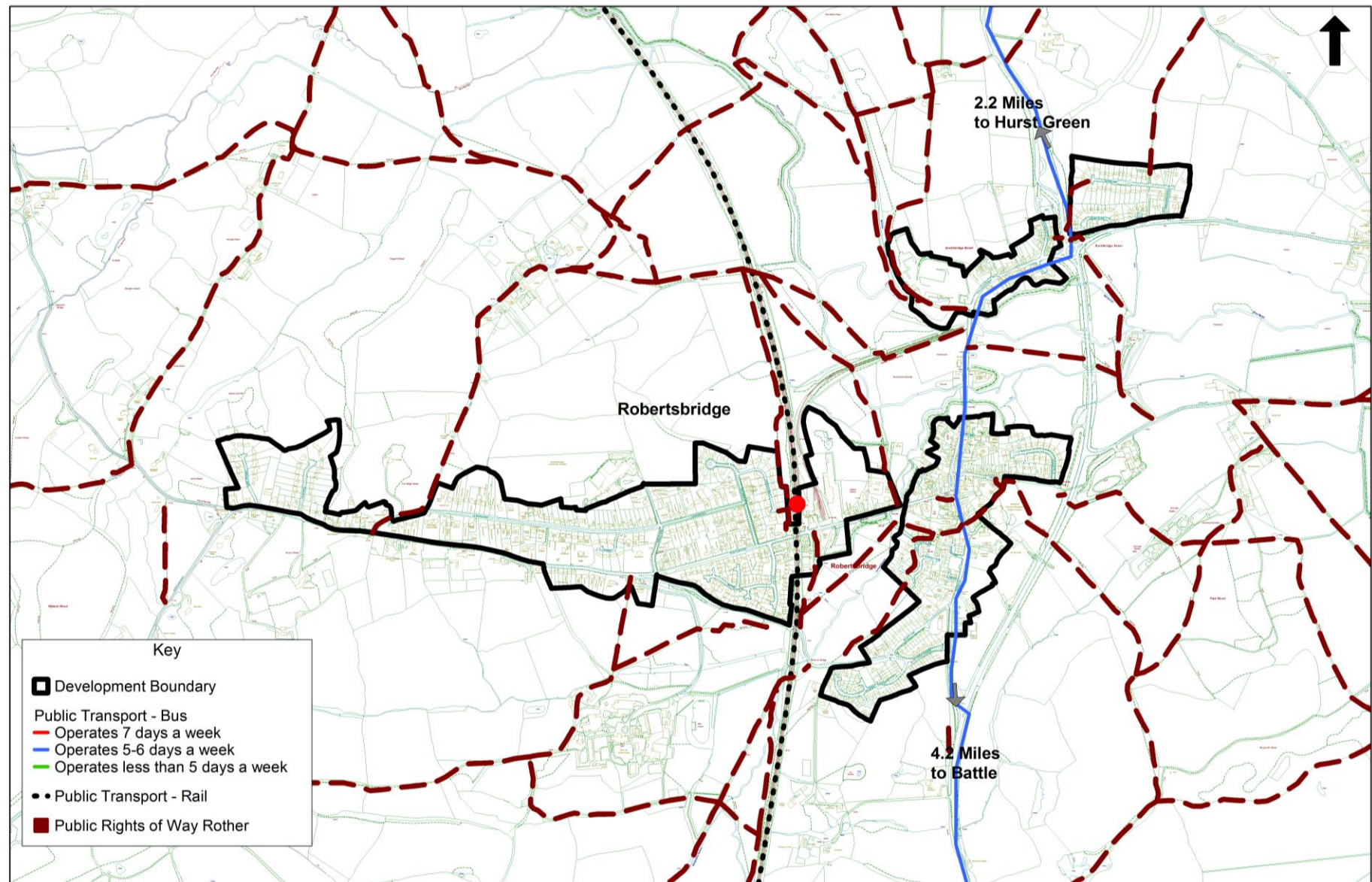
1. Risk of getting housing provision which does not reflect the needs of the community whilst the plan is being produced
2. Failure to provide ideas and resources to achieve our Vision

## 5.0 Constraints

The challenge for the Neighbourhood Plan is to encourage and support a sustainable balance of new housing and local employment whilst protecting the existing quality of life and the existing environment. As such it is imperative that economic, social and infrastructure development proceed in an integrated manner and that the existing historic and environmental infrastructure is both protected and enhanced.

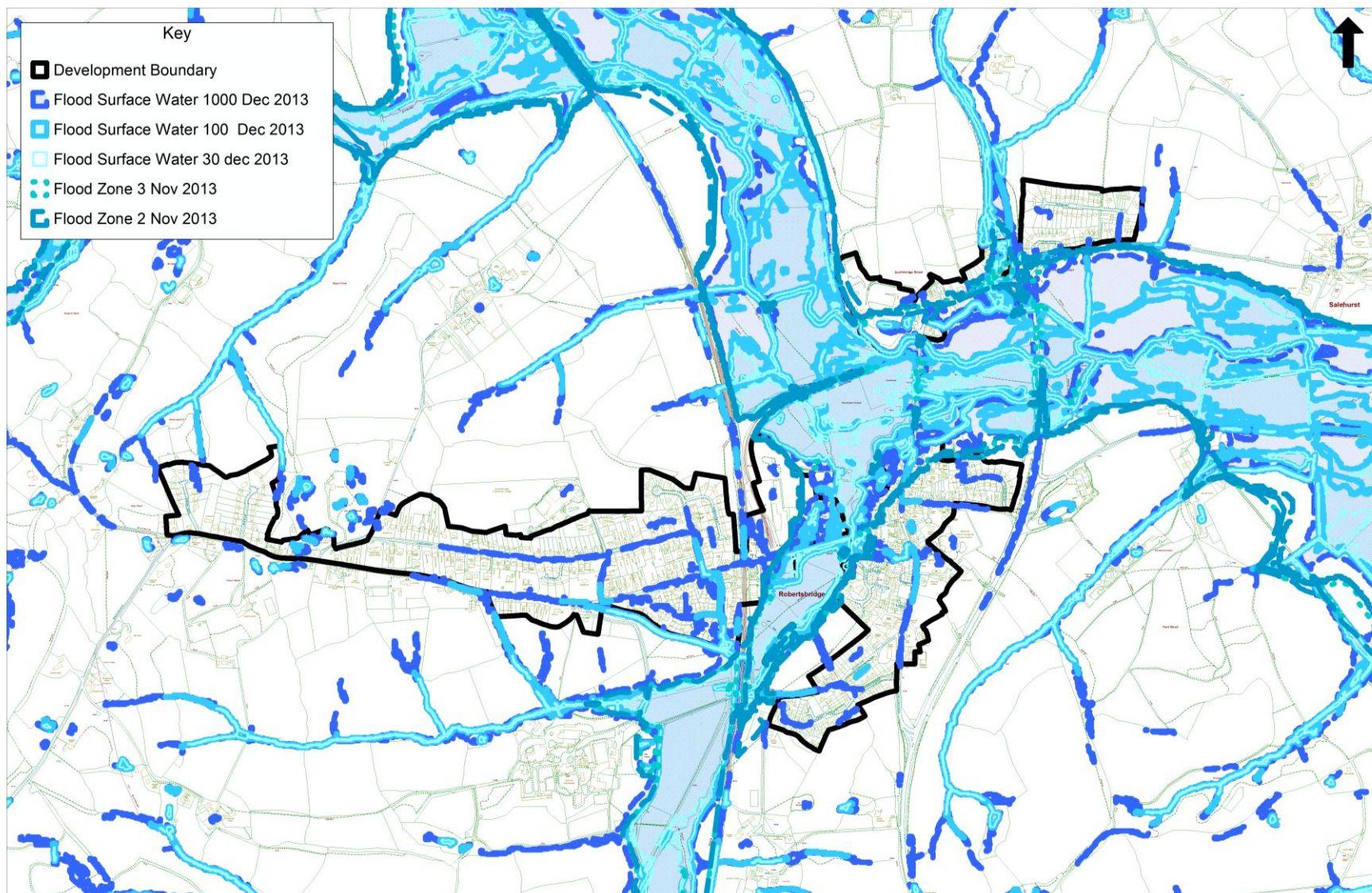
The following are considered to be the key constraints for the parish and can be seen on the maps following:

- Accessibility
- Flood risk
- Environment and Habitat Designations
- Heritage and historic environment designations
- Employment areas
- Open space



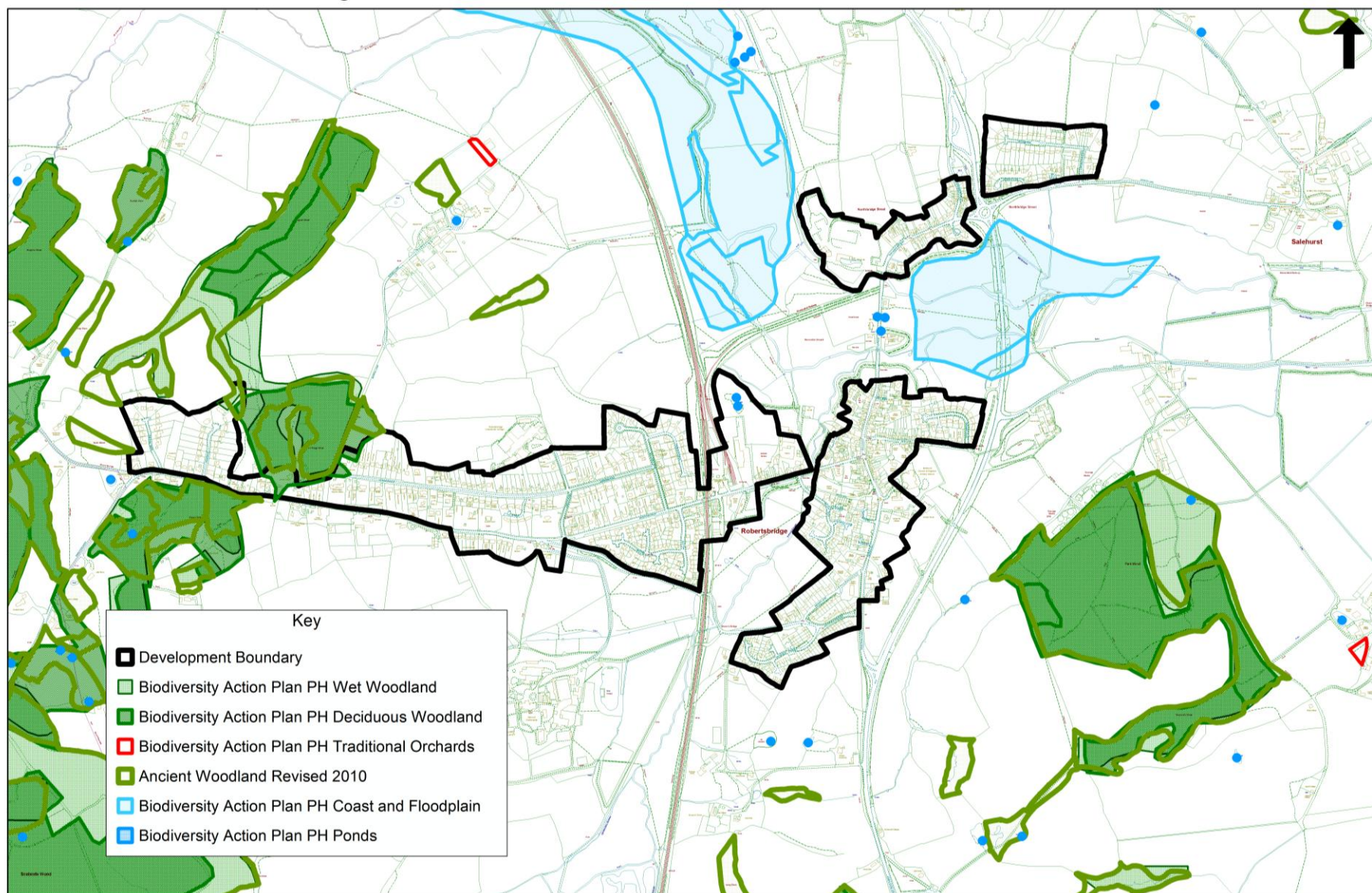
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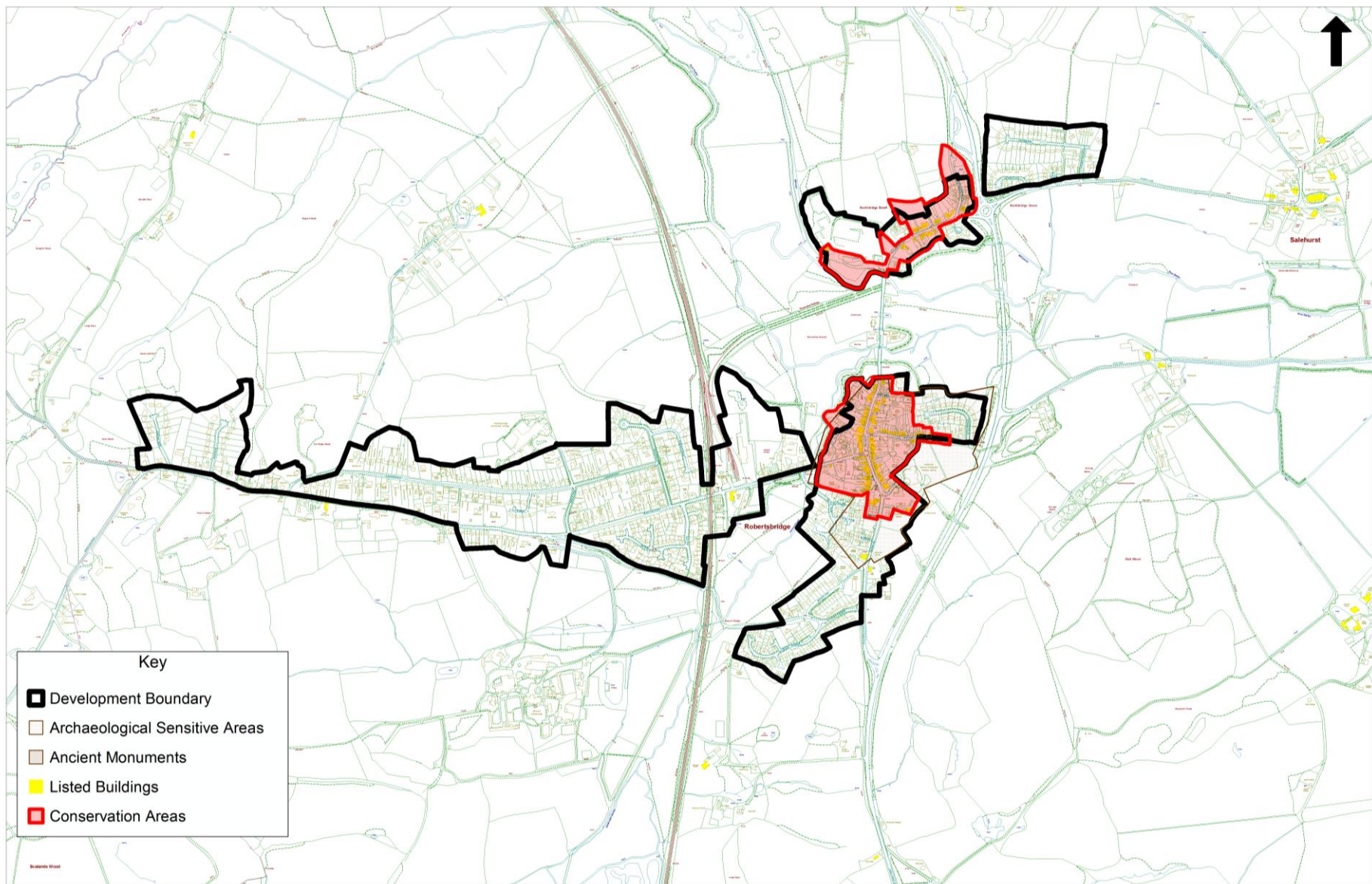
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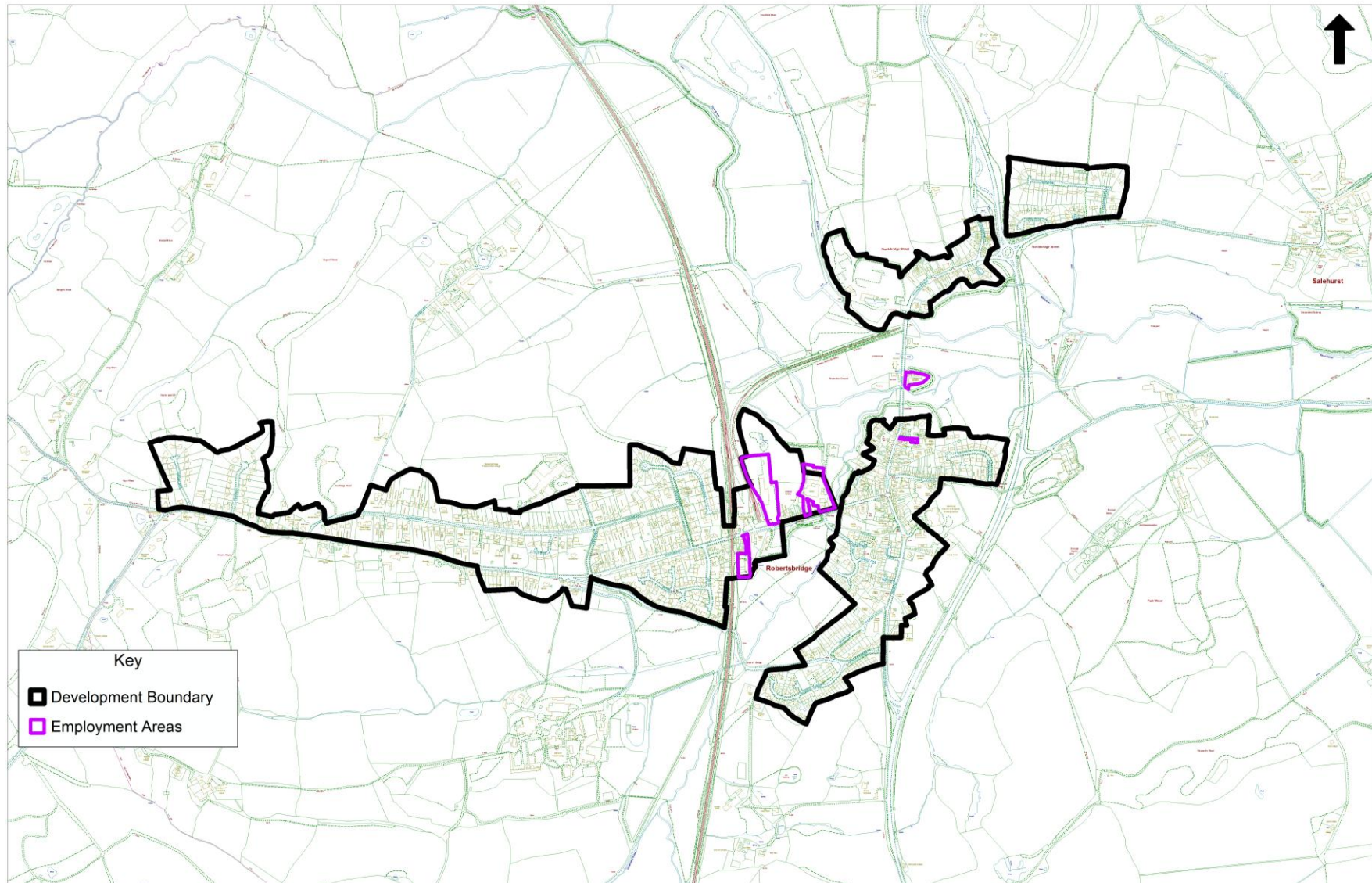
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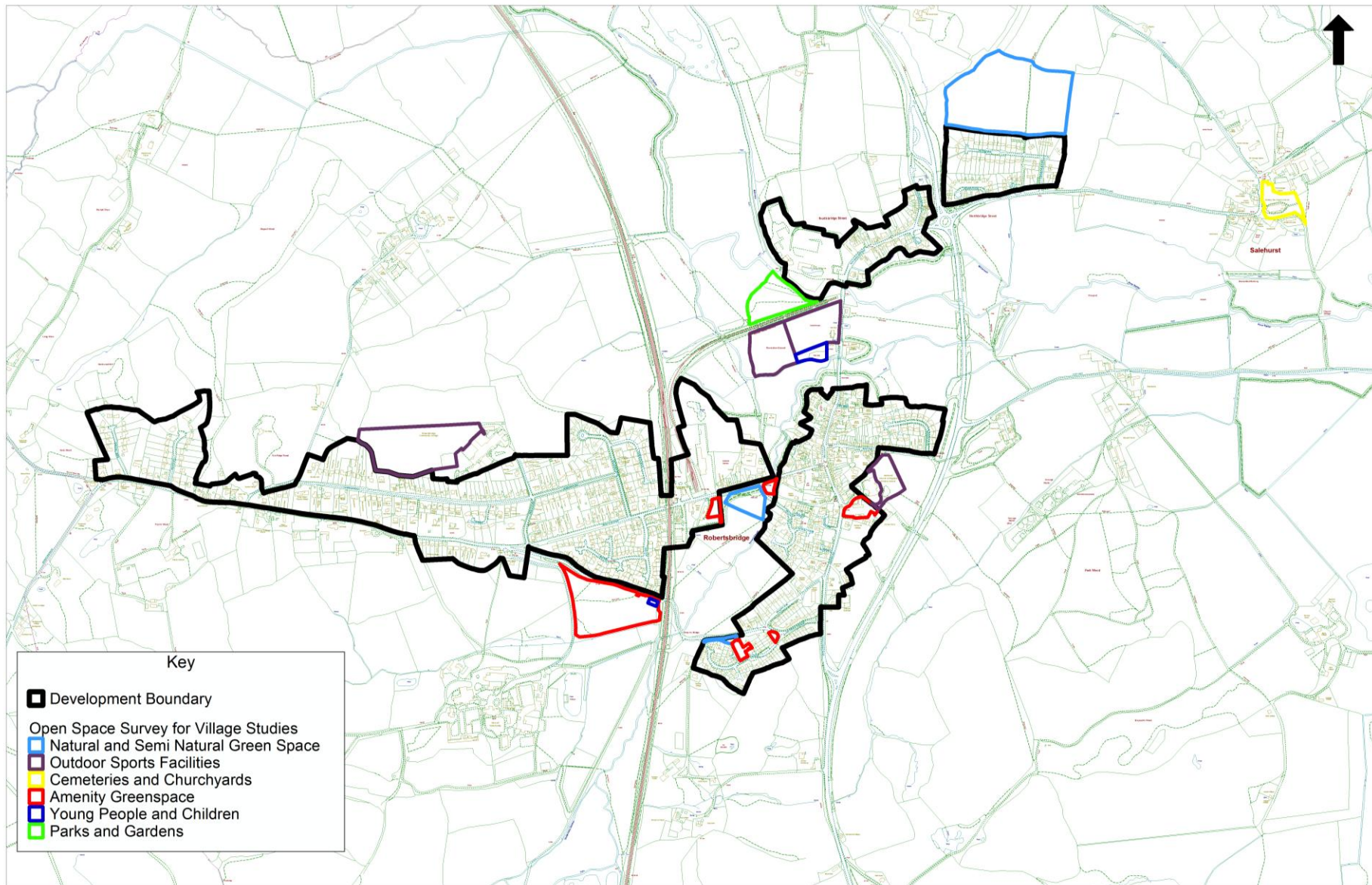
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