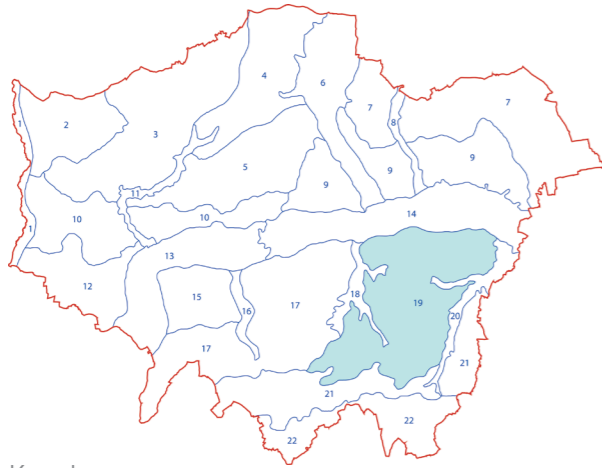


19. South London Pebbly Sands

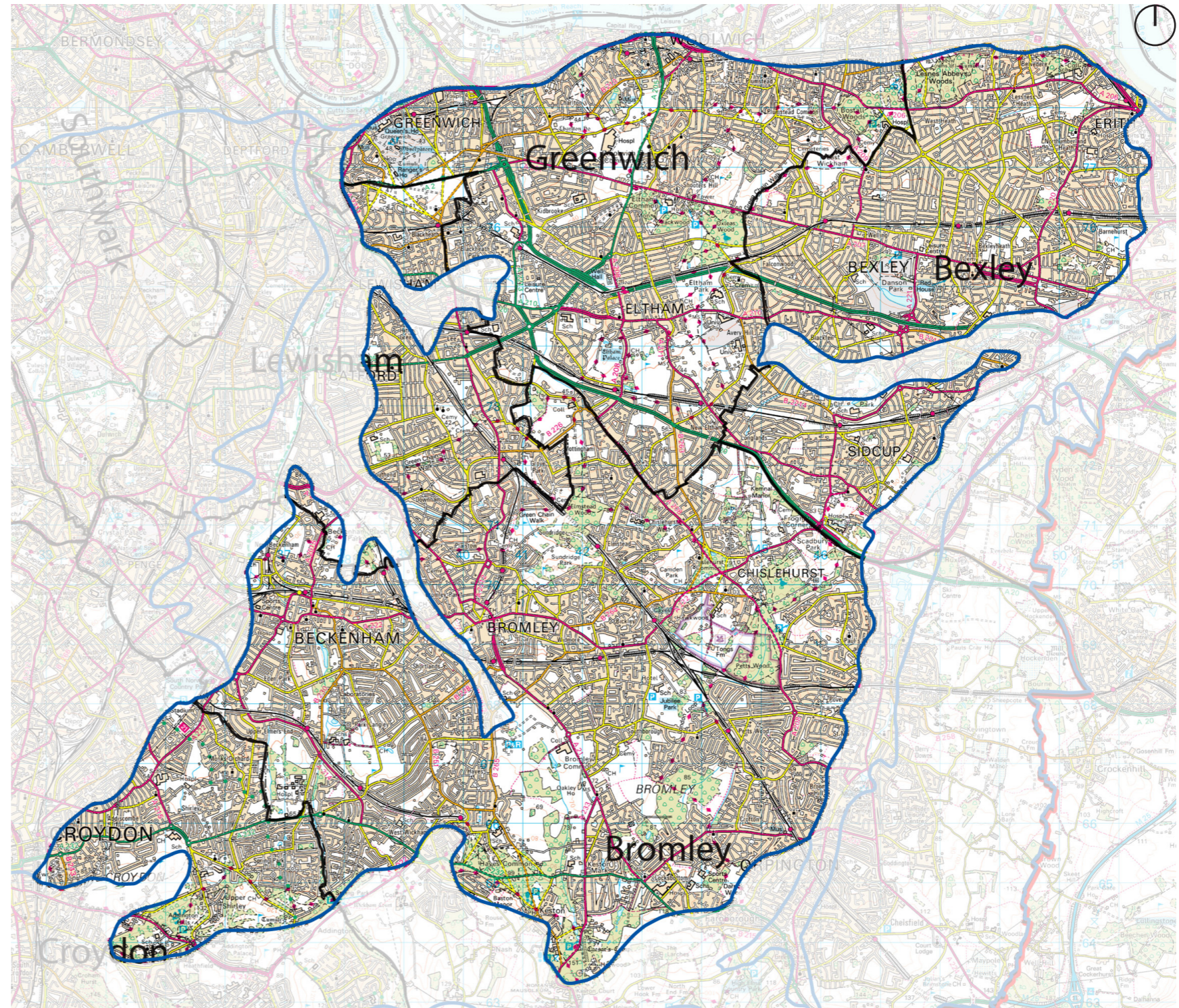


Key plan

Description

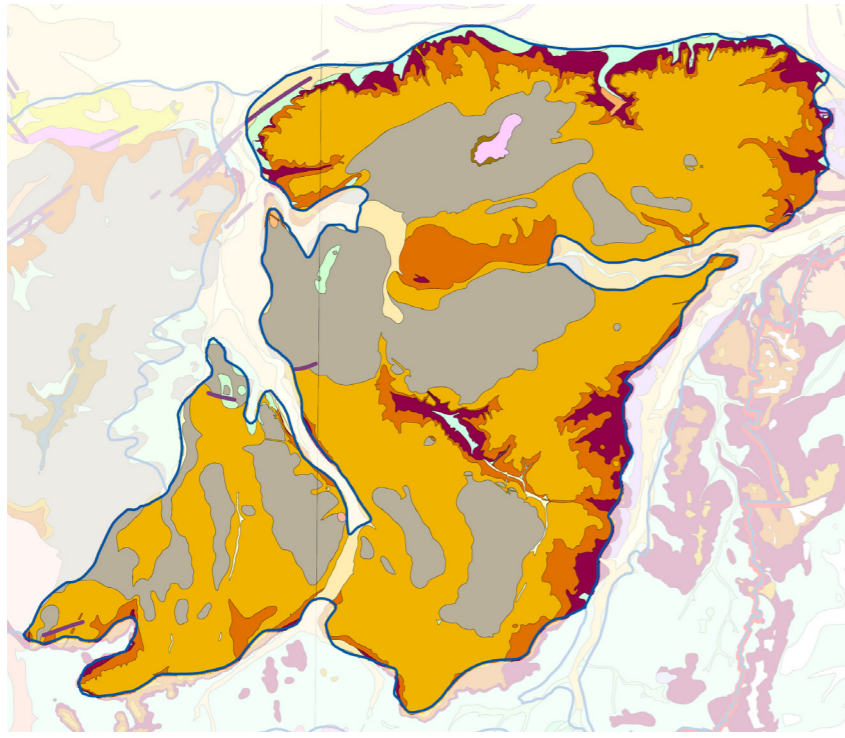
The South London Pebbly Sands Natural Landscape Area includes parts of Greenwich, Eltham, Bromley and Beckenham. It lies between the River Thames and the chalk slopes of the North Downs and is bordered to the west and to the east by the valleys of the rivers Ravensbourne (NLA18) and Cray (NLA 20). Uniquely in the London area, it is characterised by significant surface deposits of Harwich Formation pebbly sands, with some overlying London Clays. Around the edges, particularly along the valley of the River Cray and the Thames floodplain, the underlying clays, sands and gravels of the Lambeth Group protrude in a narrow band.

The topography reflects the underlying geology: the land rises sharply from the edge of the floodplain, reaching 45m AOD in Greenwich Park and 65m AOD in Lesnes Abbey Woods. It is highest in the areas of London Clay (more than 100m AOD on Shooters Hill and at Chislehurst), but there are also a number of small rivers, such as the Quaggy, a tributary of the Ravensbourne, and the Shuttle, a tributary of the Cray, which have cut a wide valley between Shooters Hill in the north and Chislehurst, effectively dividing the higher ground into two areas. Further south, the Kyd Brook also drains off the London Clay; the ground then continues to rise gradually towards the Lower Chalk Dip Slope of the North Downs.

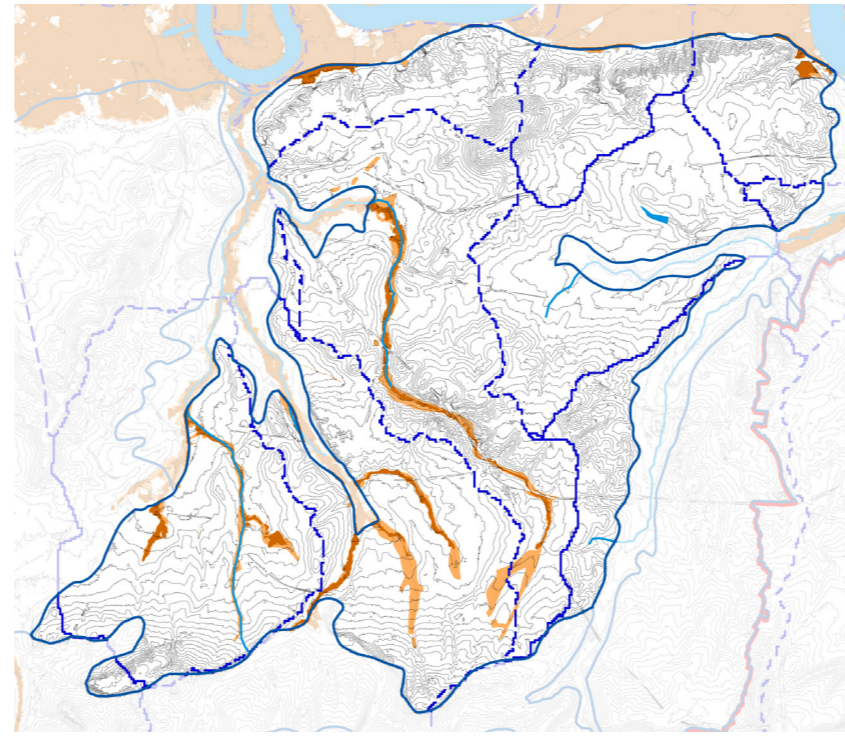


19. South London Pebbly Sands

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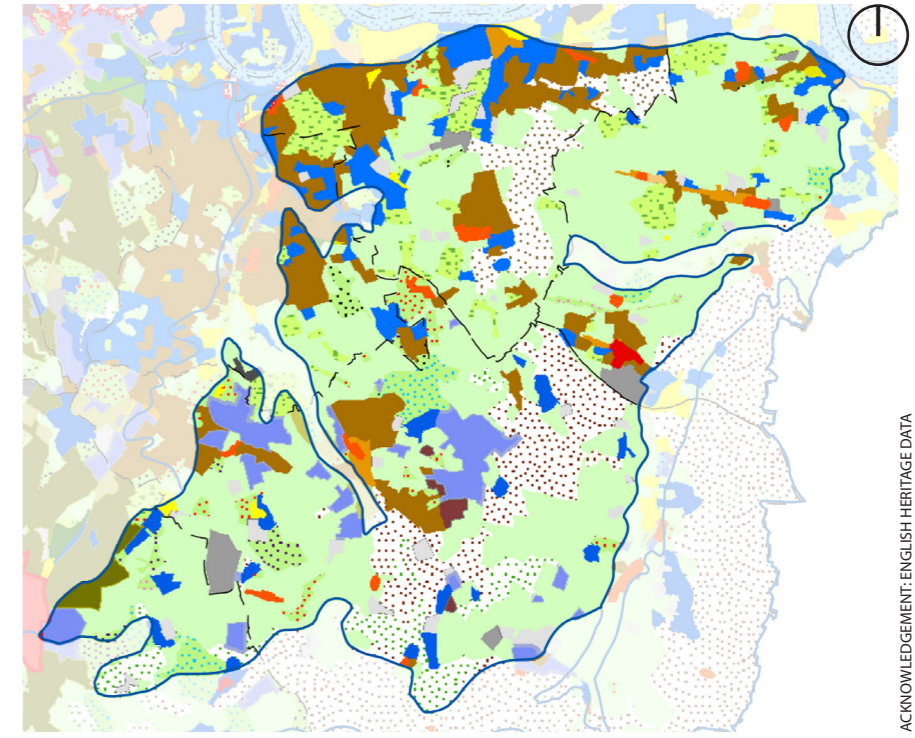


Geology



Rivers and Topography

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Historic Development

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT: ENGLISH HERITAGE DATA

The soils also reflect the geology: poor draining soils over the London Clay, sandier soils over the older rocks of the Harwich Formation and Lambeth Group.

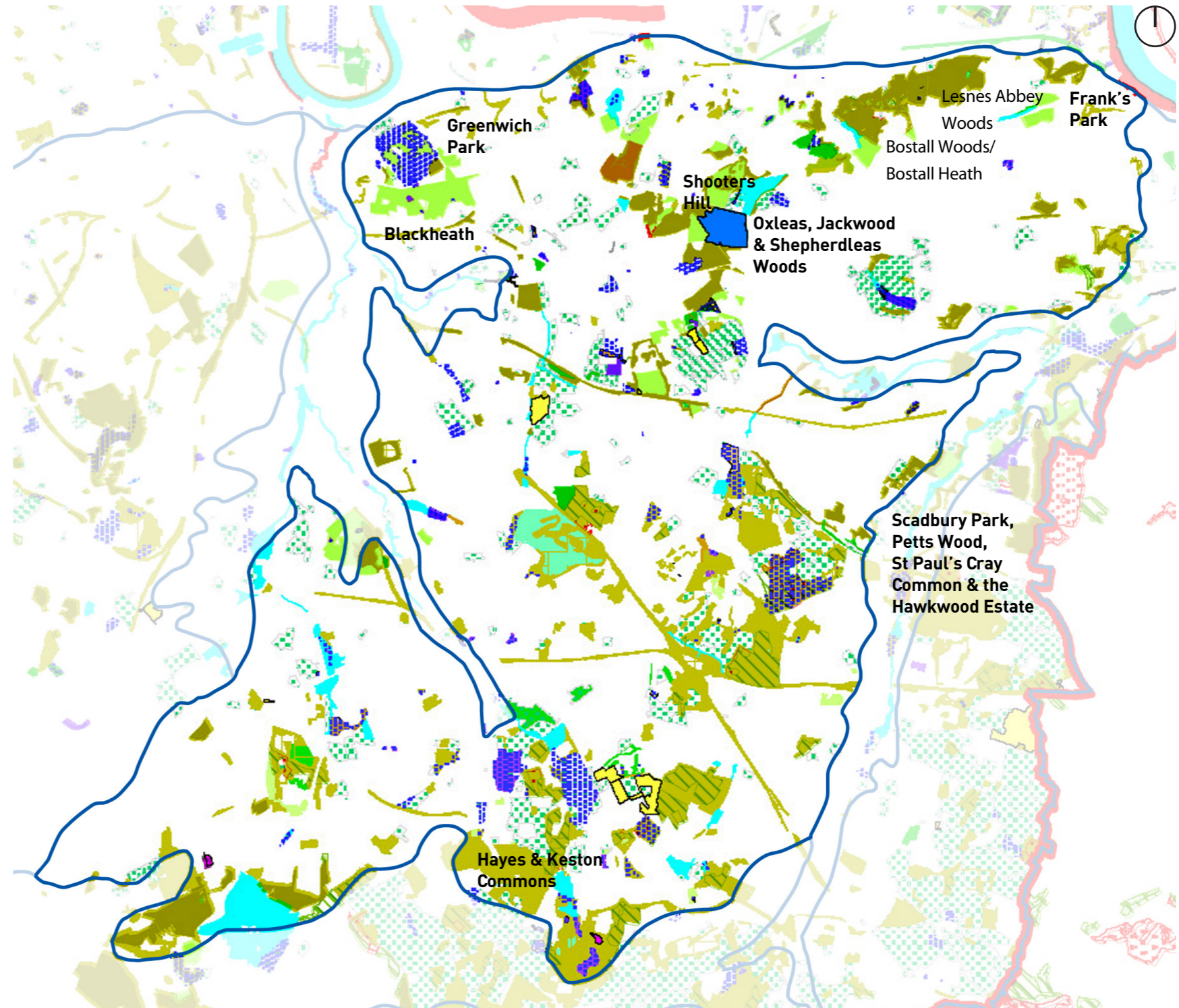
Historically, the area was lightly settled: a combination of awkward topography and poor draining soils discouraged arable farming, and the area is still characterised by a high percentage of surviving woodland and common land. The majority of early settlements are positioned on the main roads out of the capital, such as Welling and Bexley on the A207, the old Roman Road to Dover. There was limited 19th-century expansion around Bromley and Eltham, and along the top of the ridge overlooking the Thames – the latter in response to the riverside industrial developments. But the majority of this landscape type remained largely undeveloped until the 20th century, when there was large scale suburbanisation – mainly interwar, but with some major postwar housing. Suburban development was generally low density and its coverage is far from total, so extensive areas of open space survive.

Natural Signature and natural landscape features

Natural Signature:
South London Pebbly Sands – Historic heathy commons and extensive woodland on elevated land with views over the Thames Basin from ridgetops and summits.

This area has extensive areas of surviving native woodland. Some survive because they occupy land which is unsuitable for building (such as Lesnes Abbey Woods in an area of steep topography above Erith Marshes); Petts Wood, by contrast, was preserved in 1927 by the National Trust after a public campaign to save it from suburban development. Areas of open ground, many of them former commons, which contain surviving acid grassland, heathland and heather are also significant elements of the Natural Signature. Those at Blackheath and Shooters Hill allow views to the north and an appreciation of the dramatic topographic relationship between the high ground of this landscape type and the wide floodplain of the Thames. Elsewhere, the generally undulating topography does not in general provide opportunities to appreciate the local geography.

There are a number of significant Green Corridors in this area, which are connected by paths, such as the Green Chain Walks and the London Loop. It is, for example, possible to walk from Woolwich Common to Frank's Park, above Erith, almost entirely on open land. These reinforce the Natural Signature of the Natural Landscape Area by giving a reminder of the pre-suburban (i.e. overwhelmingly pre-1930s) landscape of wood and common.



Natural Habitats & Landscape Key Features

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Examples of natural landscape features within the South London Pebbly Sand Natural Landscape Area are:

- **Franks Park, Lesnes Abbey Wood and Bostall Woods** – Three nearly continuous areas of ancient woodland (sweet chestnut, beech and oak), with some acid heath, along the top of the ridge above the Thames. Part of Lesnes Abbey Wood is designated a Geological SSSI on account of fossils of early Tertiary mammals and birds that have been found. The remains of Lesnes Abbey (founded in 1178), which owned and managed the woods, lie immediately to the south.
- **Shooters Hill, Oxleas Wood, Jackwood and Shepherdleas Wood** – A complex of interlinked sites which demonstrate characteristics of this Landscape Area on the London Clay. The ancient woodland of Oxleas Wood, Jackwood and Shepherdleas Wood contains oak and hazel, some of it actively coppiced, together with a rich variety of flora, invertebrates and newts. Shooters Hill, which contains a working farm, is more open, with acid grassland and fine hedges. Shooters Hill itself is steep and there are fine views from the summit across parts of London, Kent and Essex; a beacon stood on it in the 16th century, as did a gibbet to display the corpses of those hanged at a gallows nearby. Crossed by the (originally Roman) main road to Dover, it was famously remote and the haunt of highwaymen.
- **Greenwich Park and Blackheath** – Two contrasting historic landscapes: Greenwich Park, first enclosed in 1433 and later the favourite residence of Henry VIII, has been open to the public since the 18th century. Blackheath – named, according to some, for the colour of its soil and, according to others, because of its use as a burial ground for victims of the plague – was unsuitable for agriculture and has long been a place of public assembly; it is also said to be the site of the first golf course in England. Greenwich Park reflects its long history of emparkment, with fine ancient parkland trees. It also provides superb views across to Canary Wharf, allowing an understanding of the topographical relationship of this landscape type to the wider Thames Basin. Blackheath, once famous for its acid grassland, has been compromised by over-intensive management for many years, though this is now being relaxed. Both areas have high archaeological sensitivity.
- **Scadbury Park, Petts Wood, St Paul's Cray Common and the Hawkwood Estate** – Another complex of interlinked sites. Scadbury Park and Petts Wood are ancient woodlands with important trees and flora characteristic of their soil type. Petts Wood was saved from development in the 1920s and now belongs to the National Trust. St Paul's Cray Common contains relict acid heathland, with heather and oak-birch woodland. There are also areas of hedged farmland and wet grassland associated with small streams.
- **Hayes and Keston Commons, and areas to the south** – A varied and complex series of sites related to the upper part of the River Ravensbourne catchment. The course of the river (more a stream here) appears natural and it is associated with acid grassland, heathland, bog and ancient woodlands. Three of the woods (Brook, Scrogginhall and Barnet Woods) are actively managed and contain coppiced and mature alder, aspen and oak. The acid grassland and heaths contain a variety of otherwise uncommon plants and reptiles. Keston Common includes one of the very few valley bogs remaining in London.
- **Addington Hills** – Heath and acid grassland surviving in broad glades within a larger area of secondary woodland. The heathland is dominated by heather, with some bell heather. The acid grassland is composed of fescues wavy hair-grass and purple moor-grass. Wood sage and heath bedstraw are other characteristic plants. The regenerating woodland consists mainly of oak, birch and pine, with much bracken and holly. Two small ponds add to the diversity of the site, where hard-fern, a London rarity, occurs. Breeding birds include spotted flycatcher, all three British woodpeckers, coal tit and goldcrest. The site is also important for protected reptiles. Tree invasion and recreational pressures are a constant problem and management aims to prevent further heathland losses.

Underlining the natural signature of the South London Pebbly Sands

Key influences

- Ancient woodland.
- Historic commons with acid grassland and lowland heath.
- Mosaic of secondary woodland (oak and birch), scrub and heathland.
- Hazel coppice.
- Scots pine.
- Hedgerows and meadows.
- Panoramic viewpoints from ridgetops and summits, particularly views from the ridge overlooking the River Thames.
- Acid bogs on valleys and at springlines on slopes.

Design clues

Ideas for place making and shaping future design decisions - how the Natural Signatures for each natural landscape area might be expressed within the wider public realm, through new development and landscape management projects.

- Native woodland, belts of trees and street trees on higher land, to give emphasis to topography.
- Areas of acid grassland and heathland as a focus for public open spaces on soils that have been stripped of their nutrient content.
- Natural mosaics of grassland, scrub and native woodland with no defined edges.
- Heather, acid grassland flora and silver birch as a focus for courtyard spaces.
- Groups of multi-stem trees.
- Bog vegetation on the fringes of flood attenuation basins.

South London Pebbly Sands – Key environmental assets

| Environmental asset | Relevant borough | Notes |
|---|------------------------|--|
| Frank's Park | Bexley | Area of native woodland along the crest of the ridge above the Thames, part of a group with Lesnes Abbey Wood and Bostall Woods. Survives because topography not suitable for development. Green Chain Walk runs through it. |
| Lesnes Abbey Wood | Bexley | Area of native woodland along the crest of the ridge above the Thames, part of a group with Frank's Wood and Lesnes Abbey Wood. Contains fossilised mammal and bird remains. Survives because topography not suitable for development. Green Chain Walk runs through it. Ruins of Lesnes Abbey immediately to the north. |
| Abbey Wood | Bexley | An important geological site, Lesnes Shell Bed containing many fossils, particularly of mammals from the early Tertiary age |
| Bostall Woods/Bostall Heath | Greenwich | Area of native woodland along the crest of the ridge above the Thames, part of a group with Lesnes Abbey Wood and Bostall Woods. Survives because topography not suitable for development. Green Chain Walk runs through it. |
| Plumstead Common | Greenwich | Former common with acid grassland and, along the eastern and southern edge, an area of Native woodland. Green Chain Walk runs through it. |
| East Wickham | Bexley, Greenwich | A large area of open space, with some acid grassland surviving. Currently being managed to improve its value for wildlife. Green Chain Walk runs through it |
| Shooters Hill | Greenwich | A mosaic of acid grassland, ancient woodland and fen carr. A high point giving important views and sense of topography. Green Chain Walk runs through it. |
| Oxleas, Jackwood and Shepherdleas Wood | Greenwich | A significant area of ancient woodland on London Clay. Local Nature Reserve and on Green Chain Walk. |
| Eltham Park | Greenwich | Grassland managed as meadow, adjacent to the Oxleas, Jackwood and Shepherdleas Wood complex. Green Chain Walk runs through it. |
| Woolwich Common | Greenwich | Area of common containing some acid grassland. Green Chain Walk runs through it. |
| Charlton Park | Greenwich | Linear park, connecting the Thames Floodplain to the higher ground at Woolwich Common. Native wood and some wet marginal vegetation. Green Chain Walk runs through it. |
| Greenwich Park | Greenwich | Ancient parkland trees and areas of native wood, ponds and acid grassland. Superb views across the Thames. High archaeological and historical sensitivity. |
| Blackheath | Greenwich, Lewisham | Ancient common land. Acid grassland, now being managed to improve its habitat. |

| Environmental asset | Relevant borough | Notes |
|---|------------------|--|
| Sutcliffe Park | Greenwich | A recent flood alleviation scheme has restored the River Quaggy to a naturalistic course, associated with damp grassland, reeds and wetlands. |
| Avery Hill Park | Greenwich | Playing fields with important surviving hedgerows River Shuttle (tributary of the Cray) runs across the site. Green Chain Walk runs through it. |
| Danson Park | Bexley | Historic house park. Contains lake with fen carr and wet woodland. |
| Bursted Wood | Bexley | Ancient woodland. |
| Martens Grove Park | Bexley | A combination of ancient woodland and acid grassland. |
| Bexley Woods | Bexley | Ancient hornbeam coppice woodland. River Shuttle runs through it. |
| Royal Blackheath Golf Course | Greenwich | Areas of native wood and acid grassland, and a pond which sustains a large population of great crested newts. |
| Eltham Palace Fields | Greenwich | Area of herb-rich grassland and hedgerows. Green Chain Walk runs through it. |
| Forster Memorial Park | Lewisham | An historic 'assart' with an enclosing ring of ancient woodland. |
| Elmstead Wood and Lower Marvels Wood | Bromley | Ancient woodland. Green Chain Walk runs through it. |
| Scadbury Park, Petts Wood, St Paul's Cray Common and the Hawkwood Estate | Bromley | An important mosaic of high quality ancient woodland, relict heathland and farmland. Part owned by the National Trust. London Loop runs through it. |
| Crofton Heath | Bromley | A large area of ancient woodland. Kyd Brook runs through it. |
| Jubilee Country Park | Bromley | Ancient woodland and grassland. Country Park. |
| Hayes and Keston Commons, and area to the south | Bromley | An important and complex area at the source and upper reaches of the Ravensbourne. Contains ancient woodland, heathland and bog habitats. Ravensbourne appears to follow its natural course. |
| Darrick Wood | | Ancient woodland with a stream and associated wetland vegetation. |
| Addington Hills | Croydon | Area of acid grassland and native woodland with views to the south. |
| Shirley Heath, Spring Park and Threehalfpenny Wood | Croydon | Area of heath and ancient woodland on the boundary of Character Area 20. |
| Long Lane Wood | Croydon | Native woodland. |
| Gilbert's Pit | Greenwich | Important geological site - a disused pit cut into a sequence of Palaeogene sediments dating from around 55 million years ago |
| Elmstead Pit | Bromley | An important geological site consisting of an exposure of the Oldhaven (Blackheath) Beds with many fossils dating back around 50 million years (on private land) |