

# **MEDWAY LOCAL PLAN 2041**

## **Retail Topic Paper**

### **Definition of Town Centre Boundaries and Primary Shopping Areas**

**July 2024**

# Definition of Town Centre Boundaries and Primary Shopping Areas

1.	INTRODUCTION.....	1
	Policy context.....	1
	<i>National Policy</i> .....	1
	<i>Planning Policy Guidance (PPG)</i> .....	2
	<i>Permitted Development</i> .....	2
	<i>Local Policy</i> .....	3
	<i>Structure of the topic paper</i> .....	3
2.	ROLE, FUNCTION AND MANAGEMENT OF USE & DEFINITION OF ASSOCIATED BOUNDARIES/DESIGNATIONS.....	4
	Town Centre Boundaries .....	4
	<i>Background</i> .....	4
	<i>Methodology for defining city/district/town centre boundary</i> .....	4
	<i>Methodology for defining city/district/town centre boundary</i> .....	5
	Primary shopping area, Primary and secondary frontages .....	6
	<i>Background</i> .....	6
3.	DEFINITION OF TOWN CENTRE BOUNDARIES AND PRIMARY SHOPPING AREAS	7
	Chatham Town Centre .....	7
	Gillingham District Centre .....	7
	Rainham District Centre .....	7
	Strood District Centre .....	8
	Rochester District Centre.....	8

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 Medway Council is preparing its new Local Plan, which once adopted will supersede the current 2003 Local Plan. The Council has previously consulted on the Local Plan as it progressed in the plan making process. Medway Council is now consulting on a Regulation 18 draft, which includes consideration of vision, strategic objectives, options for strategic growth and policy approaches.
- 1.2 The following is a technical paper prepared in support of redefining town centre boundaries across all of Medway's City and District Centres. In doing so, it will set out the methodology for undertaking the work and will summarise national and local policy on town centre boundaries and the evidence used to guide the discussion and proposed options.
- 1.3 Medway Council has a main City Centre (Chatham), five district Centres (Rainham, Rochester, Gillingham, Strood and Hempstead Valley Shopping Centre) and more than 74 Local, Village and Neighbourhood centres. This paper will focus on the five main centres.
- 1.4 Centres provide places to do business, work, enjoy leisure time and live. Successful town centres aid in supporting growth and investment within the district, and ensure that the retail, employment, service and leisure needs of Medway can be met.

### **Policy context**

#### ***National Policy***

- 1.5 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) sets out a presumption in favour of sustainable development with three key dimensions, i.e. economic, social and environmental. Planning is charged with the role of achieving this and through retailing and town centres create places for people to live, work and visit. Town centres provide important cultural destinations and provide supportive environments for business to prosper. Town centres are therefore recognised as the heart of local communities and require local planning authorities to plan positively through a 'town centre first' approach and pursue policies in support of their vitality and viability.
- 1.6 To do this, local planning authorities are required to define the extent of town centres and primary shopping areas based on clear definitions of primary and secondary frontages; and set policies that make clear what forms of development will be permitted in such locations. Local Authorities are required

to take a positive approach to the growth, management and adaptation of town centres.

1.7 The 2023 NPPF defines a town centre as:

*‘Area defined on the local authority’s policies map, including the primary shopping area and areas predominantly occupied by main town centre uses within or adjacent to the primary shopping area. References to town centres or centres apply to city centres, town centres, district centres and local centres but exclude small parades of shops of purely neighbourhood significance. Unless they are identified as centres in the development plan, existing out-of-centre developments, comprising or including main town centre uses, do not constitute town centres.’*

and main town centre uses as:

*Retail development (including warehouse clubs and factory outlet centres); leisure, entertainment and more intensive sport and recreation uses (including cinemas, restaurants, drive-through restaurants, bars and pubs, nightclubs, casinos, health and fitness centres, indoor bowling centres and bingo halls); offices; and arts, culture and tourism development (including theatres, museums, galleries and concert halls, hotels and conference facilities).*

### **Planning Policy Guidance (PPG)**

1.8 PPG advises local planning authorities to plan positively to support town centres to generate local employment; promote beneficial competition within and between town centres; and create attractive, diverse places where people want to live, visit and work.

1.9 In order to assess the viability and vitality of town centre, PPG advises on a list of factors for consideration, which have been carried forward in this paper and the assessment undertaken.

### **Permitted Development**

1.10 Recent changes to permitted development rights enable developers to change premises between uses specified through prior approval permission from Local Authorities rather than the formal full planning permission route. Prior approval permission is less stringent than planning permission and no longer allows for the for strategic policy consideration of the sustainability of centres. This helps fast track the permission process and is therefore

beneficial for developers but makes it more difficult for the Council to manage changes of use through policy. The aims and ambitions for centres do still need to be set out at a strategic level within the broader ambitions for Medway's growth.

### ***Local Policy***

- 1.11 The 2003 Medway Local Plan has an array of policies set out to manage uses and the hierarchy of centres and will be referred to in the sections to follow.

### ***Structure of the topic paper***

- 1.12 The sections to follow set out the methodology for undertaking the review of boundaries and definition of the primary shopping areas. It should be noted that further work will be undertaken to update this assessment prior to the next stage of the Local Plan consultation at Regulation 19 in 2025.
- 1.13 The current Regulation 18 document contains town centre boundary maps in Appendix A to aid in answering questions beneath policies S17 to S21. Those town centre maps are replicated in this paper in the appendix and should be read alongside chapter 3 to assist in answering those questions.

## **2. ROLE, FUNCTION AND MANAGEMENT OF USE & DEFINITION OF ASSOCIATED BOUNDARIES/DESIGNATIONS**

2.1 For retailing purposes and as set out in national policy (paragraph 23), it is required that Local Authorities define the extent of town centres and primary shopping areas. The following designations are proposed:

- Centre boundaries
- Primary shopping area

### **Town Centre Boundaries**

#### ***Background***

2.2 Medway's 2003 Local Plan defines retail core areas, which are effectively used as town centre boundaries. Many retail policies hang off this town centre designation thereby emphasising its importance. For office and leisure uses, the town centre boundary informs whether a site is in-centre or out of centre. However, where retailing is concerned, primary shopping areas perform a town centre boundary function when defining a site in sequential terms, i.e. whether it is an in-centre, edge of centre or out of centre. To support the effective management of Medway's centres it is therefore important that primary shopping areas are defined alongside town centre boundaries.

2.3 Much change has taken place since the 2003 Local Plan was adopted and as such the existing town centre designation requires review.

#### ***Methodology for defining city/district/town centre boundary***

2.4 The following considerations have been used to define town centre boundaries. These are partly based on:

- the NPPF town centre definition.
- historic guidance contained within the now superseded Planning Policy Statement 4: Planning for Sustainable Economic Growth (which still has relevance); and
- guidance contained in the now superseded Planning for Town Centres (which still has relevance)

2.5 National policy (glossary) defines town centres and main town centre uses as set out in paragraph 1.6 above. In conjunction with the NPPF definition, there is a clear steer for the inclusion of primary shopping areas, primary and secondary frontages, and areas for other main town centre uses such as leisure and office use within a town centre boundary. Planning for Town Centres provides further guidance in relation to wider town centre boundaries:

*'It may be appropriate to define other areas within the town centre but outside the Primary Shopping Area where specific uses are encouraged e.g. specialist retail, offices, bars/restaurants etc. To ensure that such uses are able to benefit from the centre's accessibility by alternative means of transport (and facilitate linked trips), it is important to ensure the town centre boundary is not drawn too widely'.*

2.6 The above provides a suitable basis to understand the fundamentals for inclusion in a town centre. Below are further considerations that have been drawn out from PPS4 guidance, which still holds value going forward in reviewing existing boundaries:

- **Land Uses:** will correspond with that listed in the NPPF definition of main town centre uses. A breakage in the continuity of such uses will be defined as the point of boundary definition, unless earmarked for development in the near future or within the Local Plan period. Edge-of-centre sites identified for redevelopment for town centre uses will generally be included, subject to other considerations and considering needs identified in the evidence base.
- **Architectural and Built Form:** Areas of larger scale buildings and urban design, and historic architectural forms are often indicative of public realm. In the borough, settlements are typically centred around a historic core and identification of (particularly sudden) changes of scale and design may suggest a boundary to a town centre area. Buildings greater than two storeys in height and groups of buildings with common architectural themes in particular may be considered.
- **Geographical Features & Barriers:** Physical and natural features that form either a sense of enclosure (e.g. sudden changes in contour, rivers etc.); a clear delineation of function (e.g. park boundaries, industrial estates); or a permanent barrier (e.g. railway line, major road) should be used to form compact, defensible and well-defined town centre boundaries.

### ***Methodology for defining city/district/town centre boundary***

2.7 The definition of town centre boundaries and primary shopping areas are fundamental to the consideration of planning applications in relation to the sequential approach for locating main town centre uses and in order to support the health of our centres. Policies to protect our centres will be based on these designations. It will also provide the basis to manage appropriate

uses in the retail core, which is fundamental to supporting the health, vitality and vibrancy of our centres.

- 2.8 Officers undertook various reviews of centres in Medway supported by monitoring information sourced from within Medway Authority. This information combined with a simple methodology of plotting the uses across each centre on a map and identifying concentrated areas of E class uses (historically A1predominantly) will assist in defining the primary shopping area, primary and secondary frontage.

### **Primary shopping area, Primary and secondary frontages**

#### ***Background***

- 2.9 National policy defines town centres in its glossary (Annex 2), primary shopping areas and primary and secondary frontages, which provides a steer for defining these boundaries on maps with due consideration to the main town centre uses as defined above:

- **Primary shopping area:** A defined area where retail development is concentrated, generally comprising the primary and those secondary frontages which are adjoining to the primary shopping frontage. For purposes of this topic paper and the definition of the PSA, the primary and secondary frontages are taken not account in informing this definition but will not be illustrated in the mapping.
- **Primary frontages:** Includes a high proportion of retail uses which may include food, drinks, clothing and household goods.
- **Secondary frontages:** Provide greater opportunities for a diversity of uses, such as restaurants, cinemas and businesses.



### **3. DEFINITION OF TOWN CENTRE BOUNDARIES AND PRIMARY SHOPPING AREAS**

#### **Chatham Town Centre**

- 3.1 The map presents the existing town centre boundary in grey which includes the Go Outdoors site and extends a bit further west along the lower high street. It is proposed that these areas are removed from the town centre boundary to offer a more compact centre but also recognising that the road network provides a very hard boundary segregating and defining the centre clearly.
- 3.2 The primary shopping area in hatched green treatment on the map is indicated centrally along the high street but essentially having a stronger focus on the shopping centre. This would offer a more compact shopping area and recognises the changes in shopping patterns in recent years.

#### **Gillingham District Centre**

- 3.3 In contrast to the existing boundary, there are three further options to consider in expanding the district centre boundary. Option A offers an opportunity for further growth of the centre in an area that is changing in a positive way in support of this option. Option B was a recommendation from some master planning work Medway Council commissioned which provides an entrance to the centre and creates a sense of arrival. Alongside other interventions, this option with option A could work in a positive way to further enhance and grow the centre and build on its strengths. Option C acknowledges the supermarket and the role it plays adjacent to the centre. Its contribution warrants inclusion. The town centre boundary option A also extends across the railway line to include the health centre.
- 3.4 The primary shopping area appears also to be quite central, being informed by the existing mix of uses in this area.

#### **Rainham District Centre**

- 3.5 There are a few options to also consider for the expansion of Rainham district centre, which is quite constrained at present. Option A includes uses that meet the criteria for inclusion. Option B indicates a stretch of units along one side of the high street offering main town centre uses, but appears unbalanced with residential across on the opposite side of the street. Option C includes a community hall and church which could be further options for inclusion.

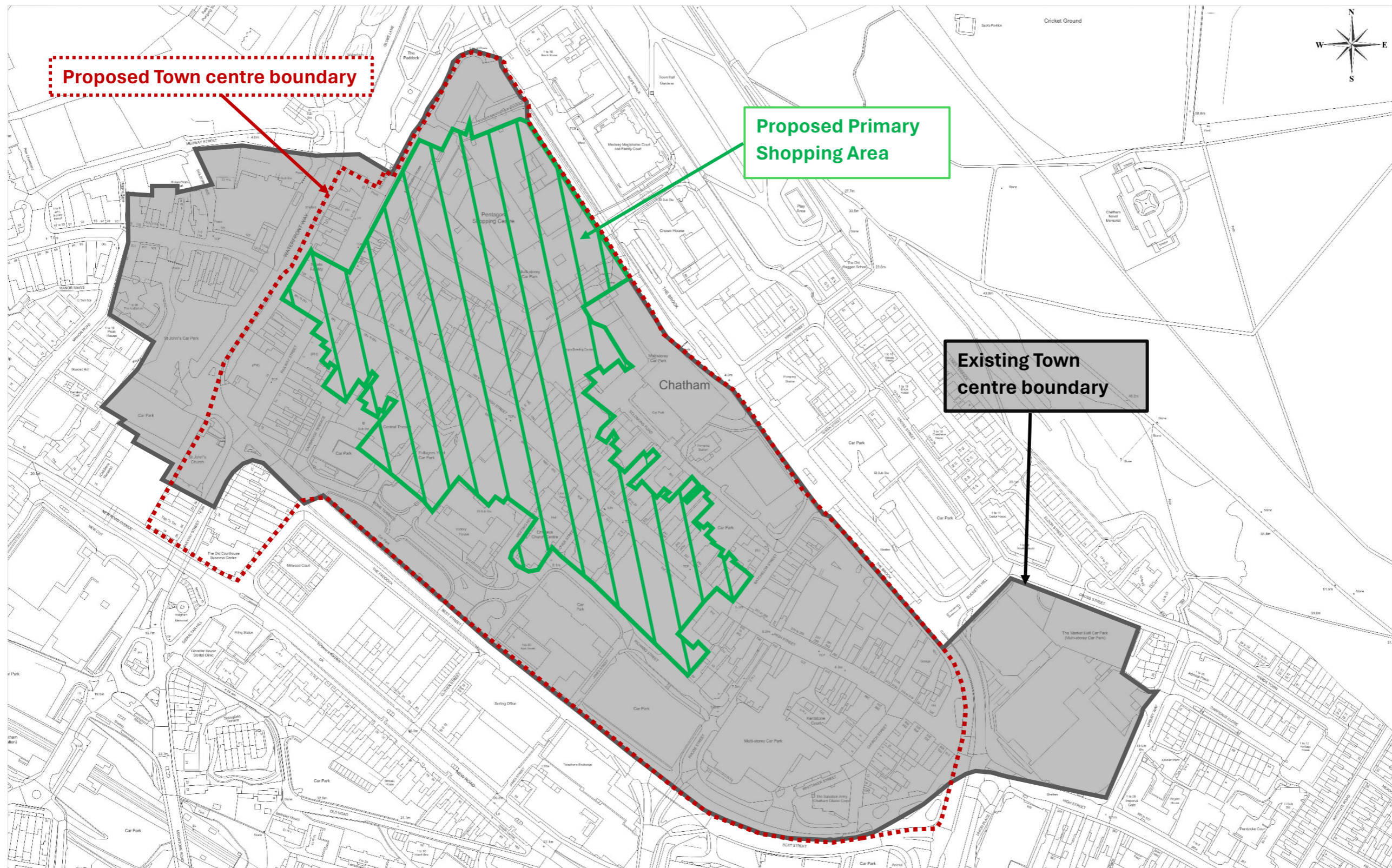
- 3.6 The primary shopping area is defined as predominantly focussed on the shopping centre and further units along station road. This is where the concentration of uses exist.

### **Strood District Centre**

- 3.7 The local centre to the east of Strood District Centre has been proposed as being included since public realm works have made better connections to this area. Option A to the west also includes other main town centre uses and opportunity areas for further growth. Option B identifies a strip of residential uses, which if included could offer a future opportunity for growth.
- 3.8 Strood has a wider primary shopping area due to the mix of uses across this stretch.

### **Rochester District Centre**

- 3.9 There is no change to the district centres boundary.
- 3.10 The primary shopping area in contrast to the other centres is much smaller, but again this is recognising the concentration of appropriate uses rather than there not being main town centre uses across the entire high street. This does present an opportunity for further expansion of the primary shopping area over time.



**Proposed Town centre boundary**

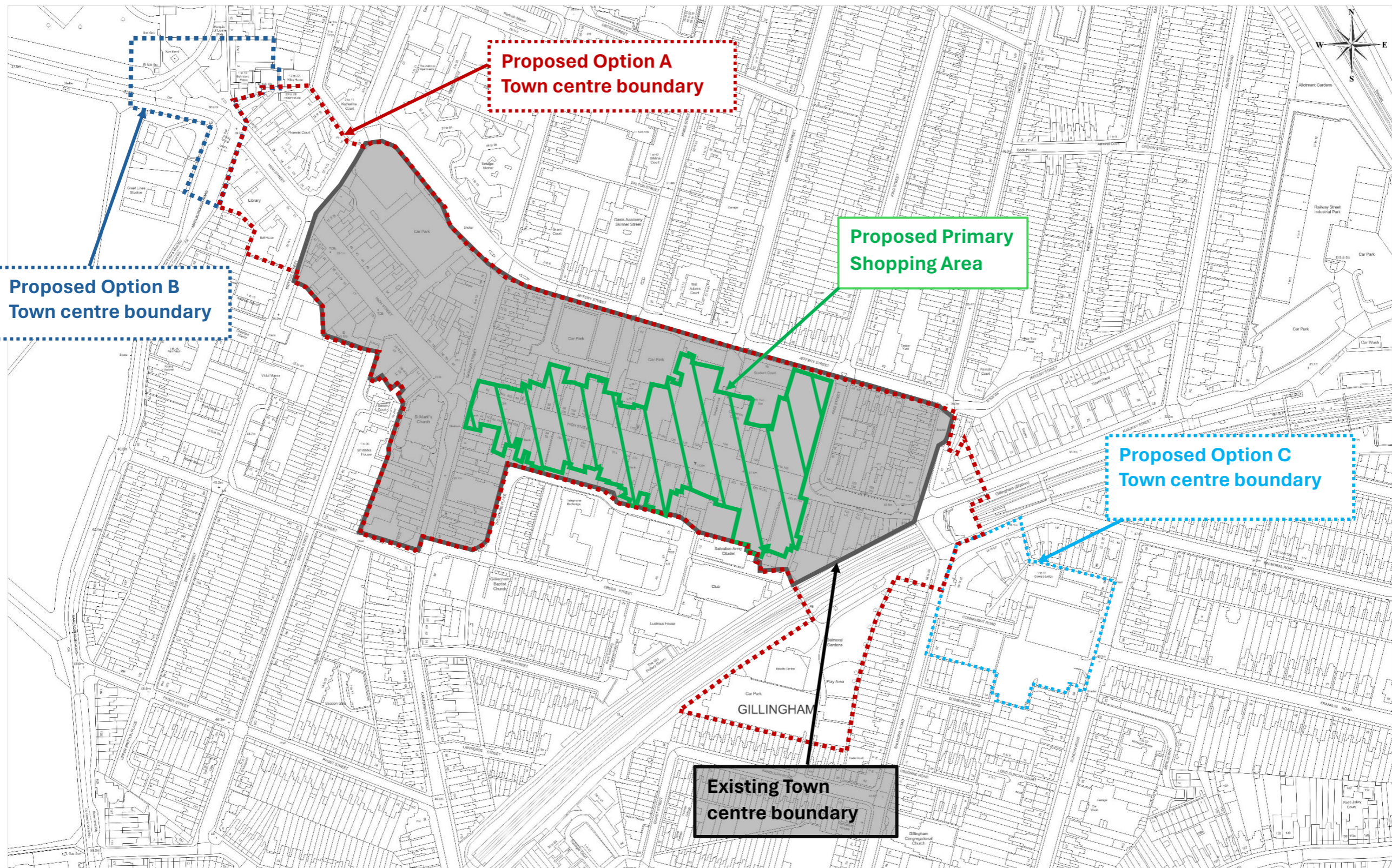
**Proposed Primary Shopping Area**

**Existing Town centre boundary**

**Chatham Town Centre Boundary Options**

© Crown copyright and database rights 2024 Ordnance Survey licence number 100024225.





Proposed Option B  
Town centre boundary

Proposed Option A  
Town centre boundary

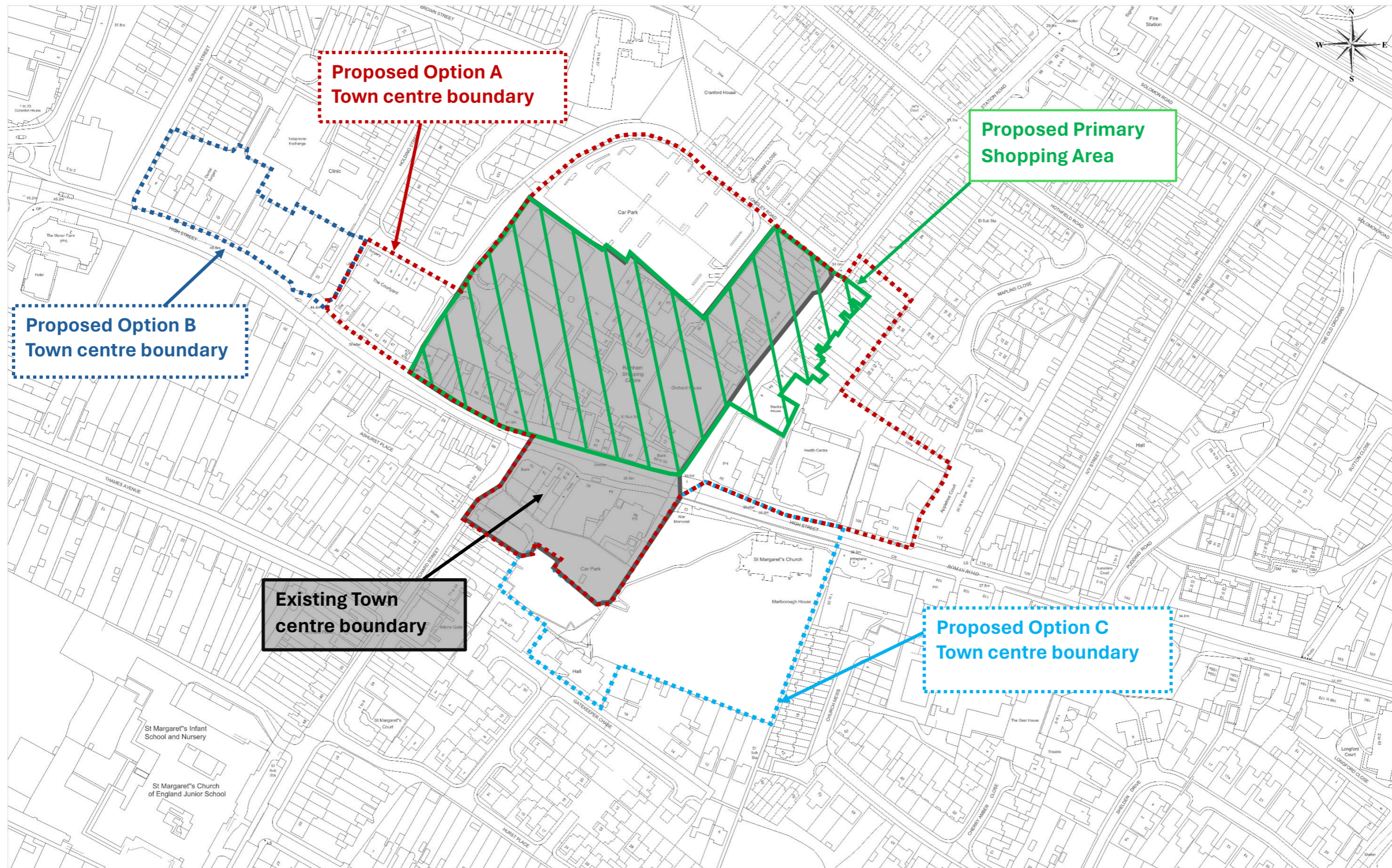
Proposed Primary  
Shopping Area

Proposed Option C  
Town centre boundary

Existing Town  
centre boundary

**Gillingham Town Centre Boundary Options**

© Crown copyright and database rights 2024 Ordnance Survey licence number 100024225.



**Proposed Option A  
Town centre boundary**

**Proposed Primary  
Shopping Area**

**Proposed Option B  
Town centre boundary**

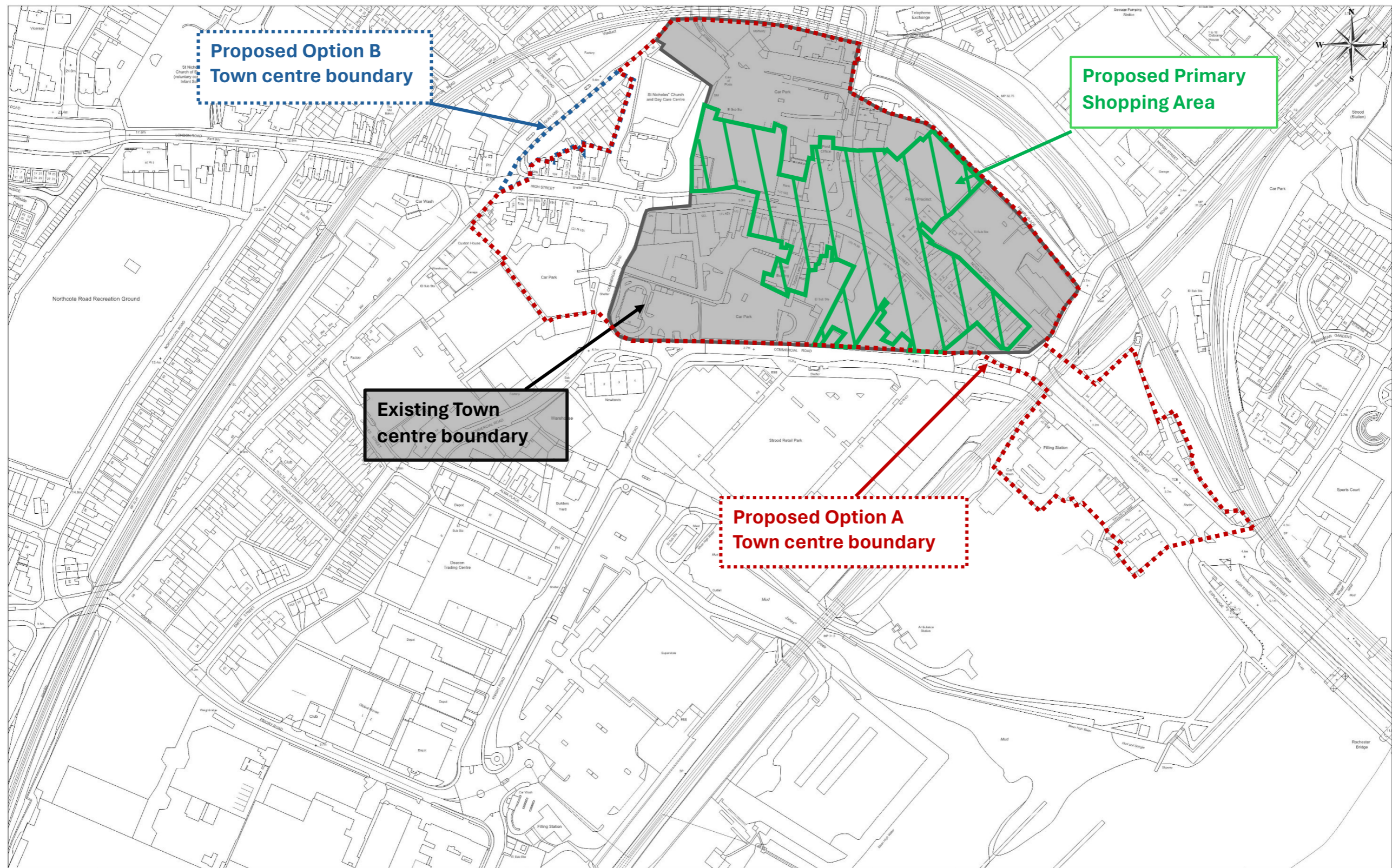
**Existing Town  
centre boundary**

**Proposed Option C  
Town centre boundary**

**Rainham Town Centre Boundary Options**

© Crown copyright and database rights 2024 Ordnance Survey licence number 100024225.

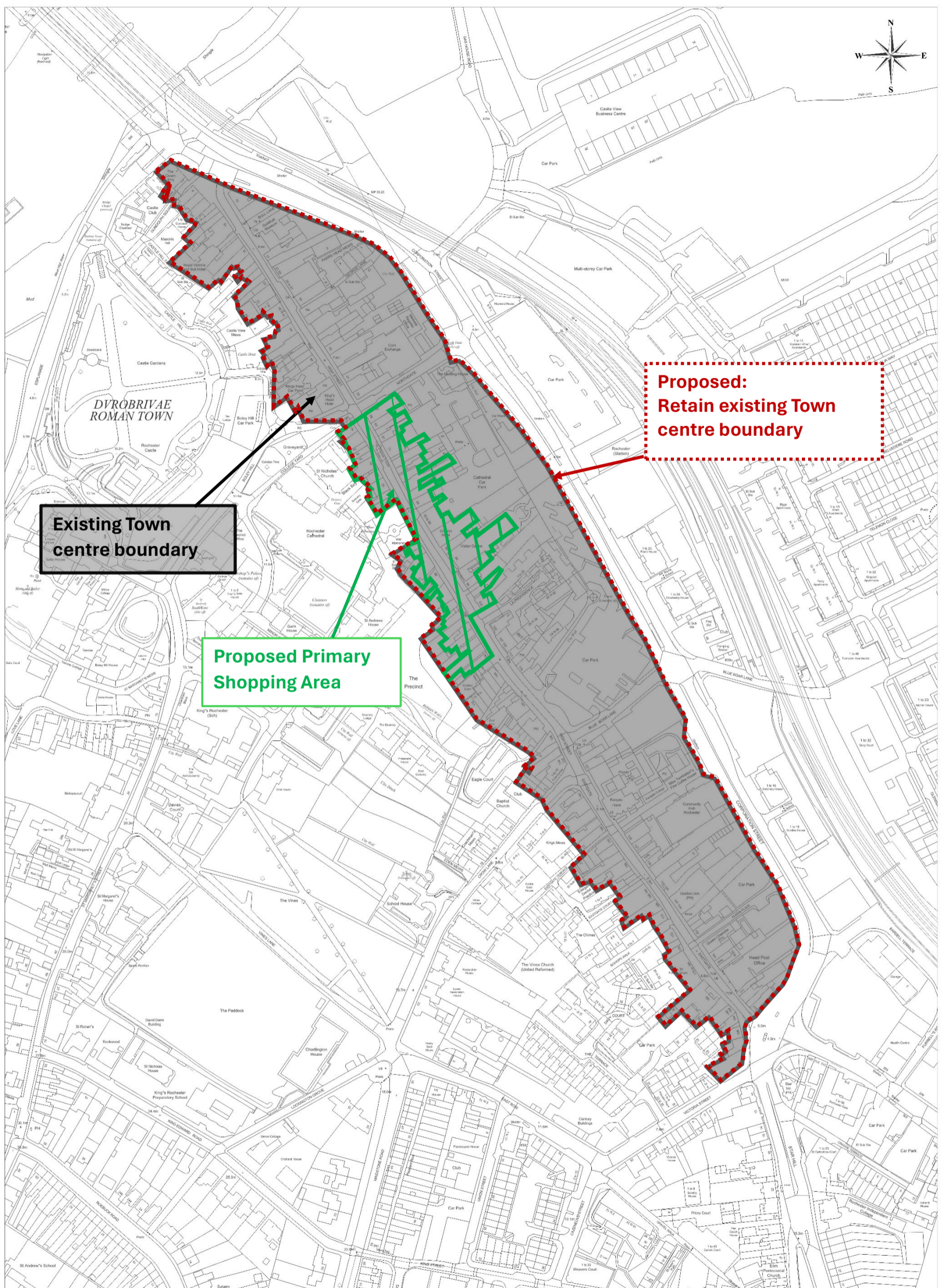
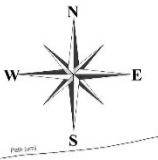




**Strood Town Centre Boundary Options**

© Crown copyright and database rights 2024 Ordnance Survey licence number 100024225.





Existing Town centre boundary

Proposed Primary Shopping Area

Proposed: Retain existing Town centre boundary

### Rochester Town Centre Boundary Options

© Crown copyright and database rights 2024 Ordnance Survey licence number 100024225.