

## APPENDIX B

### Published Landscape Character Assessments (Extracts)

Natural England – National Character Areas (2014)

West Sussex County Council Landscape Character Assessment (2003)

Horsham District Council Landscape Character Assessment (2003)

Introduction & Summary

Description

Opportunities

Key facts  
and data

Landscape  
change

Analysis



## Summary

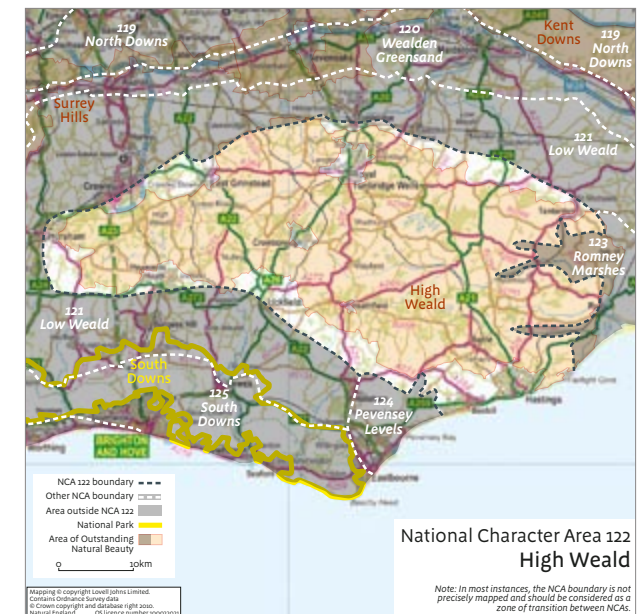
The High Weald National Character Area (NCA) encompasses the ridged and faulted sandstone core of the Kent and Sussex Weald. It is an area of ancient countryside and one of the best surviving medieval landscapes in northern Europe. The High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) covers 78 per cent of the NCA. The High Weald consists of a mixture of fields, small woodlands and farmsteads connected by historic routeways, tracks and paths. Wild flower meadows are now rare but prominent medieval patterns of small pasture fields enclosed by thick hedgerows and shaws (narrow woodlands) remain fundamental to the character of the landscape.

Some 26 per cent of the NCA is covered by woodland, comprising wooded shaws, pits and gills, farm woods and larger woods; of this 26 per cent, 17 per cent is ancient semi-natural woodland and 5 per cent is ancient replanted woodland. The majority of the woodland cover is ancient, managed in the past as coppice with standards surrounded with native woodland flora such as bluebells and wood anemones in the Spring. Evidence of the area's industrial past is prominent, from the large iron-master houses to iron industry charcoal hearths, pits and hammer ponds found throughout the ancient woodlands.

The small scale and historical patterning of the landscape, interwoven woodland, wetland and open habitats, with many hedgerows and historic routeways supporting semi-natural vegetation, provide a flourishing, accessible landscape for wildlife. Exposed sandstone outcrops along the wooded gills provide nationally rare habitat and support an array of ferns, bryophytes and lichens. The Weald meets the sea at Hastings Cliffs which are a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and an area of undeveloped coastline consisting of actively

eroding soft cliffs of sands and clays. A small section (35 ha) of the Pevensey Levels Ramsar site also falls within the NCA. The numerous gill streams of the High Weald give rise to the headwaters and upper reaches of rivers which were previously important trade routes for timber, iron and wool out to the coastal ports around Walland Marsh.

Today the High Weald, and particularly Ashdown Forest, is internationally known as the home of the character Winnie-the-Pooh. Ashdown Forest is both a Special Protection Area (SPA) due to its populations of Dartford warbler and nightjar and an SAC as it is one of the largest single continuous blocks of lowland heath in England. The forest also inspired William Robinson who pioneered the English natural garden movement and writers such as Rudyard Kipling. The NCA is also home to 56 historic parks and gardens covering 4,599 ha. The High Weald provides an example of one of the best preserved medieval landscapes in north-west Europe and



Click map to enlarge; click again to reduce.

has a strong sense of history. This is enhanced by many features such as Battle Abbey, numerous churches and chapels and an abundance of locally distinctive traditional buildings. The eroding sea cliffs at Hastings provide one of the finest exposures of Lower Cretaceous, Wealden sediments in Britain, containing a range of internationally important fossil plant material and non-marine animal fossils.

The High Weald provides many services to communities living within the area's towns and villages and adjacent urban populations through the supply of drinking water, flood mitigation and carbon storage and a range of open-air recreational activities based around its distinctive character, from walking its ancient routeways to off-road cycling in Bedgebury Forest, water sports at Bewl Water and soft rock climbing at Harrison's Rocks. Future challenges include continuing high demands for housing in south-east England, and rural areas in particular, resulting in strong pressure for development within the NCA, and pressure to bring forward land for housing in and around larger villages, threatening the dispersed settlement character of the landscape and the sustainable development of smaller settlements.



Ashdown Forest consists of open rolling heathland and birch woodland on the sandstone ridge of the High Weald. The forest forms the literary landscape of the children's classic, 'Winnie the Pooh'.

## Statements of Environmental Opportunity

**SEO 1:** Maintain and enhance the existing woodland and pasture components of the landscape, including the historic field pattern bounded by shaws, hedgerows and farm woods, to improve ecological function at a landscape scale for the benefit of biodiversity, soils and water, sense of place and climate regulation, safeguard ancient woodlands and encourage sustainably produced timber to support local markets and contribute to biomass production.

**SEO 2:** Maintain and restore the natural function of river catchments at a landscape scale, promoting benefits for water quality and water flow within all Wealden rivers, streams and flood plains by encouraging sustainable land management and best agricultural practices to maintain good soil quality, reduce soil erosion, increase biodiversity and enhance sense of place. Maintain and enhance the geodiversity and especially the exposed sandrock.

**SEO 3:** Maintain and enhance the distinctive dispersed settlement pattern, parkland and historic pattern and features of the routeways of the High Weald, encouraging the use of locally characteristic materials and Wealden practices to ensure that any development recognises and retains the distinctiveness, biodiversity, geodiversity and heritage assets present, reaffirm sense of place and enhance the ecological function of routeways to improve the connectivity of habitats and provide wildlife corridors.

**SEO 4:** Manage and enhance recreational opportunities, public understanding and enjoyment integrated with the conservation and enhancement of the natural and historic environment, a productive landscape and tranquillity, in accordance with the purpose of the High Weald AONB designation.



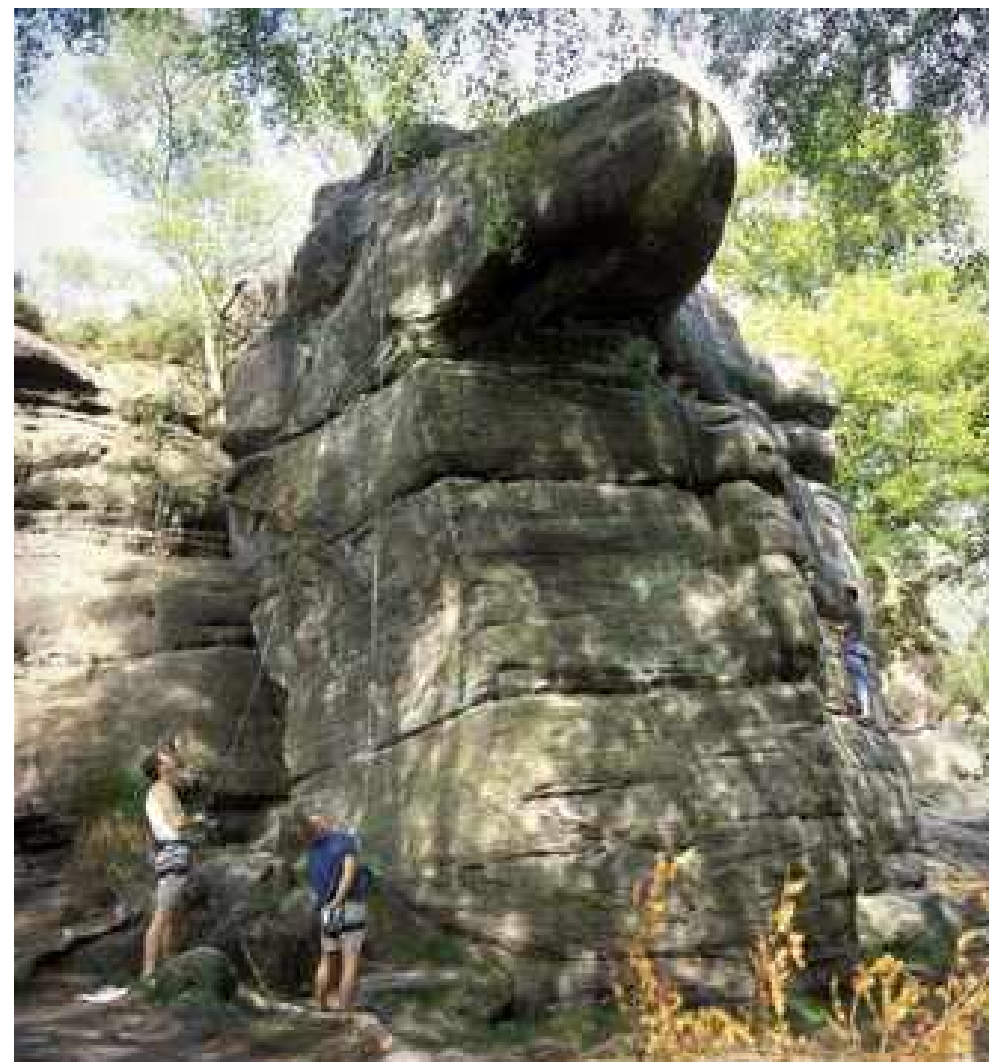
Small and medium-sized irregularly shaped fields enclosed by a network of hedgerows and wooded shaws, predominantly of medieval origin.

## Description

### Physical and functional links to other National Character Areas

The High and Low Weald National Character Areas (NCAs) together form an area known from Saxon times as the Weald whose landscape is the product of transhumance (the seasonal movement of people and animals between the settlements on the borders of the Weald and its interior) and a traditional system of integrated farming and forestry. Early in its history the Weald was linked economically and socially with its more habitable fringes where farming was easier. A dense network of droveways connects the Downs and the Weald, a visible legacy of the seasonal movement of people and animals into the woodland to take advantage of acorns and mast (fruit of forest trees). Today these routes can still be travelled as roads and public rights of way. The wooded nature of these linear routes together with the wooded gills provides a high degree of interconnectivity to ancient woodland habitats across the High and Low Weald.

From vantage points in the surrounding North and South Downs NCAs sweeping views extend across the densely wooded countryside of the Weald, an area of heavy soils and the natural habitat of the oak. Views from vantage points within the High Weald extend along the low-lying clay vale of the Low Weald NCA which largely wraps around the northern, western and southern edges of the High Weald NCA in a rough horseshoe shape. To the south-west pocket of the NCA, there are views towards the low-lying wetlands of the Pevensey Levels, and to the south-east corner there are long ranging views across the flat topography of the Romney Marshes NCA.



Rock climbing at Harrison's Rocks is managed carefully to protect the friable sandstone rocks from erosion.

The sandrock geology of the High Weald, notably on the ridge top settlements, is shared with only the northern part of the Isle of Wight NCA and parts of Boulonnais and Pays de Bray in France. It comprises fissured sandrock and ridges running east–west, deeply incised and intersected with numerous gill streams which give rise to the headwaters and upper reaches of rivers, with those to the east of the area also providing historical trade routes for timber, iron and wool out to the coastal ports on Romney Marsh.

In the High Weald, where the rivers Rother, Brede and Tillingham originate, the impermeable clay and silt layers of the Hastings Beds give rise to rapid run-off and quickly responding watercourses following heavy rainfall. Maintaining flows in the Rother catchment is important due to the dependency of the Walland Marsh on water transferred into the Royal Military Canal from the Rother, and hence the High Weald and Romney Marsh are inextricably linked in terms of water resources.

The catchments of the rivers Cuckmere, Ouse, Adur and Arun drain south through deep valleys in the eastern chalk ridge from the High Weald via the Low Weald NCA, and the later via the Wealden Greensand NCA, into the sea along the south coast, passing through major coastal settlements.

The High Weald provides many services to adjacent populations, not only through the supply of drinking water, flood mitigation and carbon storage but also through extensive opportunities for a range of open-air recreational activities based around its distinctive character. Activities including walking the ancient routeways, off-road cycling in Bedgebury Forest and soft rock climbing at Harrison's Rocks provide benefits to the various towns that straddle the border between the High and Low Wealds, namely Crawley, East Grinstead, Horsham, Haywards Heath and Uckfield.



The High Weald has a wealth of ancient woodland.

## Key characteristics

- A faulted landform of clays, sand and soft sandstones with outcrops of fissured sandrock and ridges running east-west, deeply incised and intersected with numerous gill streams forming the headwaters of a number of the major rivers – the Rother, Brede, Ouse and Medway – which flow in broad valleys.
- High density of extraction pits, quarries and ponds, in part a consequence of diverse geology and highly variable soils over short distances.
- A dispersed settlement pattern of hamlets and scattered farmsteads and medieval ridgetop villages founded on trade and non-agricultural rural industries, with a dominance of timber- framed buildings with steep roofs often hipped or half-hipped, and an extremely high survival rate of farm buildings dating from the 17th century or earlier.
- Ancient routeways in the form of ridgetop roads and a dense system of radiating droveways, often narrow, deeply sunken and edged with trees and wild flower-rich verges and boundary banks. Church towers and spires on the ridges are an important local landmark. There is a dense network of small, narrow and winding lanes, often sunken and enclosed by high hedgerows or woodland strips. The area includes several large towns such as Tunbridge Wells, Crowborough, Battle and Heathfield and is closely bordered by others such as Crawley, East Grinstead, Hastings and Horsham.
- An intimate, hidden and small-scale landscape with glimpses of far-reaching views, giving a sense of remoteness and tranquillity yet concealing the highest density of timber-framed buildings anywhere in Europe amidst lanes and paths.
- Strong feeling of remoteness due to very rural, wooded character. A great extent of interconnected ancient woods, steep-sided gill woodlands, wooded heaths and shaws in generally small holdings with extensive archaeology and evidence of long-term management.
- Extensive broadleaved woodland cover with a very high proportion of ancient woodland with high forest, small woods and shaws, plus steep valleys with gill woodland.
- Small and medium-sized irregularly shaped fields enclosed by a network of hedgerows and wooded shaws, predominantly of medieval origin and managed historically as a mosaic of small agricultural holdings typically used for livestock grazing.
- A predominantly grassland agricultural landscape grazed mainly with sheep and some cattle.
- There is a strong influence of the Wealden iron industry which started in Roman times, until coke fuel replaced wood and charcoal. There are features such as a notably high number of small hammer ponds surviving today.
- Ashdown Forest, in contrast to the more intimate green woods and pastures elsewhere, is a high, rolling and open heathland lying on the sandstone ridges to the west of the area.
- An essentially medieval landscape reflected in the patterns of settlement, fields and woodland.
- High-quality vernacular architecture with distinct local variation using local materials. Horsham Slate is used on mainly timber structures and timber-framed barns are a particularly notable Wealden characteristic feature of the High Weald.

# Overall Character

Heavily-afforested, dissected plateau landscape enclosing a post-medieval rural landscape cut from the forest. Includes the western end of the High Weald Forest Ridge within West Sussex and the ridge and valley landscape of St Leonards Forest. Adjoins Crawley, Horsham and the M23 Motorway.

## Key Characteristics

- Densely wooded, confined, dissected plateau landscape with extensive coniferous and mixed afforestation within the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).
- The Worth forests mark the plateau-like western end of the High Weald Forest Ridge, drained by the Rivers Mole and Ouse.
- Drained by the River Arun, St Leonards Forest is a unique High Wealden wooded and pastoral landscape of long, parallel ridges and steep-sided narrow valleys.
- Long views over the Low Weald to the downs, but fewer long views north.
- Large, regularly-enclosed and some smaller, irregular, assart fields within a woodland setting comprising an arable and pastoral landscape enclosed by shaws, hedgerows (including tall hedges) and fencing.
- Despite the closeness of large towns and roads, a secluded, tranquil nature exists in many parts of the forests.
- Clearance and re-planting of large tracts of ancient woodland.
- Heathland remnants and significant areas of rich woodland biodiversity.
- Network of ridge-top roads and lanes, driveways, tracks and footpaths.
- Sparse, dispersed settlement pattern of hamlets, farmsteads and ridgetop development, mainly in St Leonards Forest.
- Adjoins Crawley to the north and Horsham to the east.
- Bounded by A and B roads, some busy, and crossed from north to south by the A23 Trunk Road and by the M23 Motorway at Tilgate Park.
- The London to Brighton Railway Line crosses the area via the Balcombe Tunnel.
- Secluded mill sites, sizeable hammerponds and ornamental lakes and ponds.
- Varied traditional rural buildings built with diverse materials including timber-framing, Horsham Stone roofing, Wealden stone and varieties of local brick and tile-hanging.
- Designed landscapes and exotic treescaping including rhododendron hedgerows.
- Country parks at Buchan and Tilgate and golf courses.

## Sheet HW2

# High Weald Forests

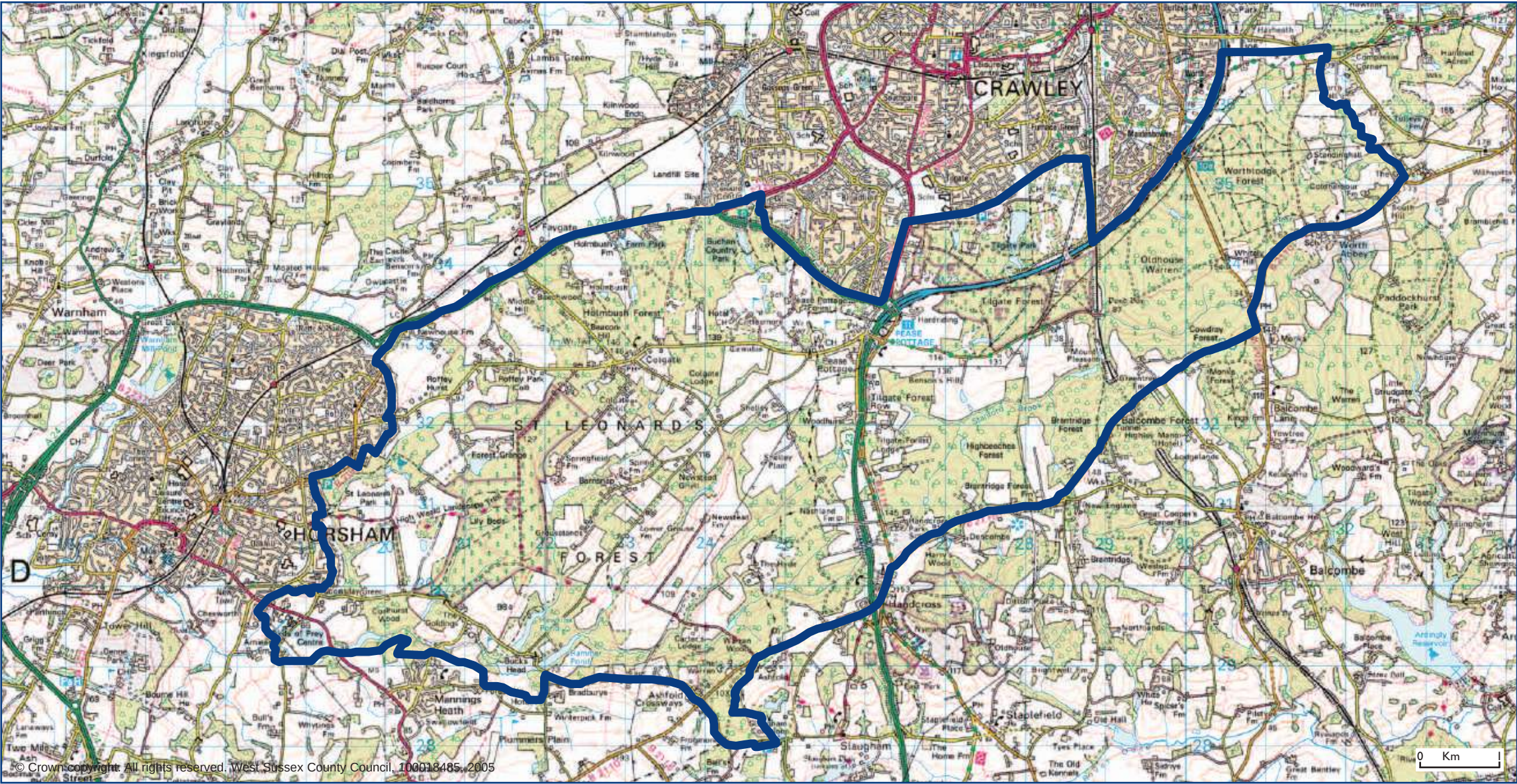
## High Weald

The area covered by the Sheet includes:

The Worth Forest (Area 8) Landscape Character Area in Mid Sussex District.

The St Leonards Forest (Area 11) defined in the unpublished **Horsham District Landscape Character Assessment** (October 2003).

The Tilgate Forest Landscape Character Area and a small part of St Leonards Forest at Pease Pottage (yet to be included in a Borough Assessment) in Crawley Borough.



# Historic Features

- Ancient routeways and droves.
- Post-medieval assart landscape reclaimed from hunting forest.
- Extensive ancient woodland sites, mainly replanted.
- Old commercial rabbit warrens (‘pillow mounds’).
- Important Wealden iron hammerponds, pond bays and mill sites.

# Biodiversity

- Species-rich gill and semi-natural woodlands.
- Variety of woodland tree species including beech and oak-birch.
- Local areas of self-seeded Scots pine.
- Remnant hornbeam coppice.
- Remnant and dormant wet and dry acid heathland.
- Rare and uncommon woodland plant communities.
- Lakes and hammerponds.

# Change - Key Issues

- Decline in traditional woodland management techniques such as coppicing.
- Extensive planting of coniferous forest on former ancient woodland.
- Spread of invasive introduced species, particularly rhododendron.
- Reduction of heathland to a few pockets due to cessation of grazing management and subsequent woodland invasion and woodland replanting.
- Continuing field amalgamation with hedgerow loss and the ageing and loss of hedgerow and field trees.
- Continuing pressures for urban development on the northern fringes of the area and an attendant increase in the pervasiveness of traffic movement and noise.
- Visual impact of pylon lines and development including ridgetop properties, modern farm buildings, horse riding centres and paddocks.
- Increasing pressures for a variety of recreational activities.
- Perceived increased traffic levels on small rural lanes with consequent demands for road improvements.
- Gradual loss of locally distinctive building styles and materials.
- Gradual suburbanisation of the landscape including the widespread use of exotic tree and shrub species.

# Landscape and Visual Sensitivities

- Woodland and forest cover limits the visual sensitivity of the landscape and confers a sense of intimacy, seclusion and tranquillity.
- Unobtrusive settlement pattern in most parts.
- Large blocks of assart pastures on the ridges and valley sides impart breadth and depth to the scenic quality to the landscape.
- Heathland remnants and significant areas of rich woodland biodiversity are vulnerable to loss and change.
- Network of lanes, droveways, tracks and footpaths provides a rich terrain for horse-riding, cycling and walking and for the appreciation of nature.
- The few long views from open ground have a high sensitivity to the impact of new urban development, modern farm buildings, masts and pylons and new roads.
- Settlement pattern currently sits well within the rural landscape although there is a danger of the cumulative visual impact of buildings and other structures.



Worth Forest



St Leonards Forest



Cowdray Forest, Balcombe



St Leonards Forest

# Land Management Guidelines

Encourage the inclusion in existing coniferous plantations of a broadleaved woodland element to emphasise natural landscape features

Establish management agreements with existing golf courses to retain tree cover

Encourage careful woodland management of broadleaved woodland areas including coppice and newly planted areas

Manage heathland areas within the forests and re-establish heathland where feasible

**Conserve and enhance the secluded, tranquil nature of the forests and the agricultural landscape, and the unobtrusive settlement pattern throughout the area.**

- Conserve the forests and their seclusion for scenic, nature conservation and recreational purposes, plan for long-term woodland regeneration, and promote a diverse mosaic of woodland types.
- Reduce the impact of forestry where possible by encouraging sensitive forestry practice including small-scale felling rotation, and incorporating mixed species.
- Maintain and restore the historic pattern and fabric of the agricultural landscape.
- Protect existing views and resist further infill within, and extension of, roadside development patterns, paying particular attention to the siting of telecommunications masts.
- Increase tree cover around agricultural, ridgetop and other development and maintain and extend woodland cover on the rural urban fringe including within the Horsham-Crawley corridor.
- Conserve and replant single oaks in fields and hedgerows to maintain succession.
- Conserve, strengthen and manage existing hedgerows (including tall hedges) and hedgerow trees and replant hedgerows where they have been lost.
- Conserve woodland biodiversity and the landscape of the gills including wet woodland, protecting rare and uncommon woodland plant communities associated with them.
- Enhance the biodiversity of woodland rides and glades and reduce rhododendron invasion and bracken cover.
- Conserve and manage remnant open heathland by preventing the encroachment of scrub and create new, interconnected heathlands.
- Maintain and manage all lakes and ponds and their margins for their landscape diversity and nature conservation value.
- Protect the tranquil and historic character of rural lanes and manage road verges to enhance their nature conservation value.
- Reduce the visual impact of golf courses, and stabling and grazing for horses.
- Minimise the effects of adverse incremental change by seeking new development of high quality that sits well within the landscape and reflects local distinctiveness.

The guidelines should be read in conjunction with:

- County-wide Landscape Guidelines set out in *A Strategy for the West Sussex Landscape* (November 2005) published by West Sussex County Council.
- Objectives and actions contained in the *High Weald AONB Management Plan 2004* (Adopted March 2004) published by the High Weald AONB Joint Management Committee.



## L1 ST LEONARD'S FOREST



### *Key Characteristics*

- Narrow flat topped ridges and steep sided ghylls.
- Large commercial conifer plantations interspersed with beech and oak-birch woodland.
- Heathland concentrated along woodland rides (open avenues through woodland areas).
- Regular pasture and arable fields.
- Confined views.
- Steep sided wooded ghylls, with occasional waterfalls and sandstone outcrops.
- Hidden hammer ponds.
- Ridgetop roads.
- A few isolated farmsteads.
- Victorian hamlet of Colgate with estate cottages and much modern development along roads.
- Traditional local building materials of sandstone, tile hanging and brick.



### ***Overall Character***

A very densely wooded area, with a landform of flat top ridges and steep sided ghylls, which cuts into the underlying Tunbridge Wells Sand. The combination of forest cover and ghylls creates a strongly enclosed landscape with confined views. However, a medium scale field pattern of regular arable fields divides the woodlands. Much suburban modern development has spread along the ridgetop roads. However, a sense of isolation and remoteness prevails in much of the area.

### ***Historic Features***

- Medieval hunting forest.
- Hammer ponds and mills.
- 18th Century and 19th Century large fields cut out of woodland (assarts).

### ***Biodiversity***

- Small areas of heathland, beech, oak and hornbeam woodland.
- Important moss flora in ghylls.
- Extensive coniferisation has resulted in loss of deciduous woodland and heathland.

### ***Key Issues***

- Continuing loss of heathland through development pressure or poor management.
- Widespread conifer plantations on ancient woodland/heathland.
- Rhododendron invasion along roads.
- Expansion of horse paddocks.
- Urban fringe development along ridgetop roads, e.g. ribbon development.
- Suburbanisation along roads, e.g. pastiche architecture, inappropriate fences, boundaries, gates.
- Localised erosion of lanes from car parking, associated with fishing at hammer ponds..

### ***Landscape Condition***

Overall condition is declining.

### ***Sensitivity to Change***

Overall sensitivity to change is high. Key sensitivities are to:

- Suburbanisation/urban edge development.
- Small scale incremental changes to roads.
- Changes in farmland management, expansion of horse paddocks.

### ***Planning and Land Management Guidelines***

- Conserve the traditional dispersed settlement pattern. Any further infill and extension of ribbon development along roads, or building of new large dwellings on existing plots, would further erode this pattern and therefore damage character.
- Screen visually intrusive urban fringe development along ridgetop roads with selective tree planting.
- Conserve the strongly wooded character of the area.
- Conserve and manage ancient semi-natural woodland and pollarded trees.
- Take opportunities to restore heathland.
- Restructure conifer plantations where possible to include a higher native deciduous element.
- Conserve existing native tall hedgerows and plant new ones around paddock boundaries.

**HORSHAM DISTRICT LANDSCAPE CAPACITY  
ASSESSMENT APRIL 2014**

## **Zone 2: South Horsham-Southwater**

This zone extends from the southern boundary of Horsham town and continues southwards to encompass the settlements of Tower Hill, Christ's Hospital and Southwater. The land falls within Low Weald National Landscape Character Area and at a District Level is covered by Landscape character areas P1, M1, H1 and G4. The land includes the narrow river valley of the River Arun to the south of Horsham. In the west and south of the zone the landscape is well wooded, and includes a number of ridges and ghylls. The landscape also contains irregular to regular pasture fields. The north east of this landscape Zone is more open in nature with views to Christ's Hospital School. There are some urban influences in this area, particularly around the settlement edges and also from the A24. The location of Zone 2 and the results of the Capacity Assessment can be viewed on Maps 4a (Housing) and 4b (Employment).

## **Local Landscape Character Area 19: Land South East of Horsham**

### *Landscape Character Sensitivity*

- This area contains a rounded ridge with small wooded stream valleys on both the northern and southern sides
- The area has a small to medium scale field pattern of pasture with some parkland. There is a wooded character to the river banks
- Landscape condition is generally good
- There is a well defined urban edge due to the presence of a wooded shaw along the edge of Horsham.

### *Visual Sensitivity*

The visual sensitivity to housing development is moderate due to relatively open character and the moderately elevated landform. The greater scale and height of employment development would be more intrusive.

### *Landscape Value*

- Most of the area is within the High Weald AONB
- Some historic parkland is present
- Low-moderate tranquillity due the presence of the A281 running through the area.

### *Landscape Capacity*

Due to the areas predominantly attractive, rural landscape character which arises from the pasture and parkland character with woodland fringes, together with the moderately elevated landform are highly sensitive to development, and the area it has no/low capacity to absorb large scale development. To extend large scale development beyond the existing well defined boundary to the town would be perceived as intrusion into the wider countryside.

## **Assessment Summary**

|                                        | <b>Medium Scale Housing</b> | <b>Large Scale Housing</b> | <b>Large Scale Employment</b> |
|----------------------------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------------|-------------------------------|
| <b>Landscape Character Sensitivity</b> | High                        | High                       | High                          |
| <b>Visual Sensitivity</b>              | Moderate                    | Moderate                   | Moderate-High                 |
| <b>Combined Landscape Sensitivity</b>  | High                        | High                       | High                          |
|                                        |                             |                            |                               |
| <b>Landscape Value</b>                 | High                        | High                       | High                          |
|                                        |                             |                            |                               |
| <b>OVERALL LANDSCAPE CAPACITY</b>      | <b>No/Low</b>               | <b>No/Low</b>              | <b>No/Low</b>                 |

# The High Weald National Landscape an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty



**High Weald**  
National  
Landscape



## AONB Management Plan

**A 20-year strategy for the conservation and enhancement of the High Weald's natural beauty**

THIS EDITION: 2024-2029

A statutory plan adopted by 15 local authority partners setting out their policies for the management of the area and providing an agreed public policy vision for the High Weald 2024-2044

## Core Character Components of the High Weald's natural beauty comprise

1

**Natural systems (geology, soils, water and climate)** – a deeply incised, ridged and faulted landform of clays and sandstone with highly variable, relatively undisturbed soils and numerous headwaters (gill streams) functioning under an oceanic climate.

2

**Settlement** – dispersed historic settlement including high densities of isolated farmsteads, hamlets and late-medieval villages founded on trade and non-agricultural rural industries.

3

**Routeways** – a dense network of historic routeways (now roads, tracks and paths).

4

**Woodland** – an abundance of ancient woodland mostly in small holdings, highly interconnected with hedges and shaws.

5

**Landscapes and heath** – small, irregular and productive fields, bound by hedgerows and woods, and typically used for livestock grazing; with distinctive zones of lowland heaths and inned river valleys (reclaimed marshland).

6

**Dark night skies** – intrinsically dark at night with our own galaxy (the Milky Way) visible.

7

**Aesthetic and perceptual qualities** – arising from the interaction of people with the landscape, including the notion of a quintessential English pastoral landscape, intimacy of scale, a sense of history and timelessness; rurality and tranquillity; glimpsed long views; freedom to explore and make connections with the natural world, and a rich legacy of features and ideas left by writers, poets and gardeners inspired by the landscape.

8

**Land-based economy and rural living** – with roots extending deep into history, and which has visibly and culturally shaped the landscape.





## CHARACTER COMPONENT

# Natural Systems (Geology, Soils, Water and Climate)

The High Weald AONB is characterised by a deeply incised, ridged and faulted landform of clays and sandstone creating soils which are highly variable over short distances. The ridges tend east-west, and from them spring numerous gill streams that form the headwaters of rivers. Wide river valleys dominate the eastern part of the AONB. The landform and water systems are subject to, and influence, a local variant of the British sub oceanic climate.



## TOP 5 ISSUES

1

Climate crisis – the impact of rising temperatures and extreme weather events such as flooding, drought, inundation, tidal surges and storms.

2

Pressure on sensitive geological features from invasive species and recreation.

3

Soil health, the need to improve soil conservation and prevent detrimental soil erosion.

4

Pollution (and diffuse pollution) affecting biodiversity – including from public and private sewage treatment facilities; artificial fertilisers, pesticide and fine sediment run-off into ponds, streams and rivers.

5

Invasive species in rivers, water bodies, wetlands and bankside vegetation.

## OBJECTIVE G1

**To restore the natural function of rivers, water courses and water bodies.**

### Rationale

To improve water quality, water resource and structural habitats associated with water; to enhance the role of rivers, water courses and water bodies in supporting and increasing biodiversity, cooling the environment, protecting people and communities from flooding, and promoting enjoyment of wetlands.

## OBJECTIVE G3

**To pursue net zero across the High Weald without compromising its characteristic landscape beauty.**

### Rationale

To ensure that transformative mitigation and adaption policies are tailored to the High Weald's defining landscape character.

## OBJECTIVE G2

**To protect landform and geological features including sandstone outcrops.**

### Rationale

To conserve landform and topography on which the High Weald's character depends, and maintain nationally important geological exposures, allowing for erosion where appropriate, conserving the fern, moss and liverwort communities they support, and protecting their value as significant sites of prehistoric archaeology in the AONB.

## OBJECTIVE G4

**To restore soil health across the High Weald.**

### Rationale

To increase carbon sequestration and storage potential of soils, as well as water holding capacity to reduce flooding following high rainfall. Improve the soil ecosystem which supports above-ground and below-ground biodiversity and habitats across the High Weald. Healthy soil has higher nutrients for plants, which reduces the need for artificial fertilizer use in the long-term.



## CHARACTER COMPONENT

# Settlement

The High Weald AONB is characterised by dispersed historic settlements of farmsteads, hamlets, and late medieval villages and market towns founded on trade and non-agricultural rural industries. The landscape setting of these settlements underpins the distinct and picturesque small-scale landscape character, with rolling pastures and small ancient woodlands of the countryside interspersed with the rich clay-tiled roofscapes of historic buildings.



## TOP 5 ISSUES

1

Increase in greenfield development pressure for housing, threatening the character of the AONB.

2

Generic layout and design of new housing developments failing to reinforce AONB character.

3

Erosion of AONB character through the cumulative effects of suburbanisation, including the residential fragmentation of farmsteads; the extension of residential curtilage boundaries, additional annexes and outbuildings, inappropriate boundary treatments, hard surfacing and kerbing, and large intrusive replacement buildings.

4

Declining housing affordability, including lack of social housing and key worker housing suitable for land-based workers.

5

Infill development eroding the greenness and open space of villages, threatening the character of settlement and reducing green connectivity and opportunities for community enjoyment.

## OBJECTIVE S1

**To protect the historic pattern and character of settlements.**

### Rationale

To protect the distinctive character and landscape settings of towns, villages, hamlets and farmsteads, remove despoiling influences, and maintain the hinterlands and other relationships (including separation and green infrastructure) between settlements that contribute to local identity.

## OBJECTIVE S3

**To conserve the distinct built heritage of the High Weald.**

### Rationale

To protect and preserve the character and setting of heritage assets (designated and non-designated); historic traditional buildings and built features distinct to the High Weald area, including the historic public realm (e.g., traditional signs, railings, milestones and paving treatments).

## OBJECTIVE S2

**To enhance the architectural quality of the High Weald and ensure new development reflects the character of the High Weald in its siting, scale, layout and design.**

### Rationale

To enhance the beauty and quality of buildings in the High Weald, and ensure new development reflects intrinsic High Weald character and place-making, embedded with a true sense of place, along with re-establishing the use of local materials and rich colour palette as a means of protecting the environment and adding to local distinctiveness.

*‘[development should be] fully sympathetic to, and in scale with, the land use and local building style’.*

**Lord Strang, Chairman of the National Parks Commission, speaking about designated landscapes in 1959.**

*‘Places and buildings... tend to be enriching elements in the sum of scenic beauty’.*

**Report on National Parks 1945**



## CHARACTER COMPONENT

# Routeways

The High Weald AONB is characterised by historic routeways (now roads, tracks, bridleways and paths), the oldest being in the form of ridge-top roads and a dense system of radiating droveways. These are often narrow, deeply sunken and edged with trees, hedges, wildflower-rich verges and boundary banks. These locally distinctive lanes and rights of way often display quietness and rurality in their visual and perceptual character, and they are valuable green infrastructure, creating high public accessibility within the AONB and good connections between settlements.



## TOP 5 ISSUES

1

Extinguishments of public rights of way (PROWs) and diversions away from the historic route.

2

Loss of historic roadside character through development and erosion from motor vehicles and wide agricultural machinery, particularly in wet conditions

3

Damage to paths, tracks and Byways Open to All Traffic from the erection of fences; erosion from off-road vehicles, inappropriate surfacing and planting, fly-tipping, and ploughing up of lost routeways.

4

Insensitive management of veteran trees/roadside coppice and poorly planned verge cutting regimes and ditch clearance, resulting in the smothering of woodland flora on shady banks with wood chip, and of wildflowers on relic grassland verges with grass cuttings/spoil.

5

Insensitive highway engineering including passing bays, deep visibility splays to entrances, and urbanising features such as roundabouts, signage and lighting.

## OBJECTIVE R1

**To maintain the historic pattern, morphology and features of routeways.**

### Rationale

To maintain and restore a routeway network that has a symbiotic relationship with settlement location, hinterlands and identity, and is a rare UK survival of an essentially medieval landscape; to protect the individual archaeological features of historic routeways such as sunken lanes; and to avoid harming character of routeways with urbanising features.

## OBJECTIVE R2

**To protect and enhance the ecological function of routeways.**

### Rationale

To protect, and improve the condition of, the complex mix of small-scale habitats along routeways, including verges, for wildlife and nature recovery, and maintain routeway boundaries as part of a highly interconnected habitat mosaic.





## CHARACTER COMPONENT

# Woodland

The High Weald AONB is characterised by the great extent of woodland including ancient woods, gills and shaws, the product of traditional long-term management. The nationally important assemblage of ancient woodland in the High Weald has immense wildlife, landscape and historical value, while the wider cumulative visual character of trees and hedgerows dividing small irregular fields is fundamental to the verdant nature and appearance of the landscape.



## TOP 5 ISSUES

1

Predicted increase in tree diseases such as ash dieback and spruce bark beetle, partly through imported stock or soil, and continued damage from invasive species including rhododendron, grey squirrel and deer damage from over-population of deer across the High Weald.

2

Procurement practices and lack of investment restricting market growth for higher value locally sourced wood products.

3

Lack of management where needed, particularly cessation of traditional coppicing affecting ground flora, and fauna species such as fritillaries.

4

Impact of increasing mechanisation and machinery size on soils, the variation and structural complexity of woodlands, and archaeology.

5

Impact of development close to ancient woodland resulting in increased noise and disturbance, and pressure to fell trees and hedgerows as part of development, (including post-development) with a cumulative impact on ecology and reduction in tree cover.

## OBJECTIVE W1

**To maintain and restore the existing extent and pattern of woodland cover and particularly ancient woodland.**

### Rationale

To ensure irreplaceable habitats and biodiversity loss are repaired for the benefit of nature and future generations. To maintain a key component of the cultural landscape, and to preserve the high levels of carbon storage in woodland soils and biomass.

## OBJECTIVE W3

**To protect the archaeology and historic assets of AONB woodlands.**

### Rationale

To protect the historic environment of the AONB woodlands.

## OBJECTIVE W2

**To protect and restore the ecological quality and functioning of woodland at a landscape scale.**

### Rationale

To increase the viability of the woodland habitat for wildlife, by identifying and extending the area of appropriately managed woodland (including restoring plantations on ancient woodland) to link and enhance isolated habitats and species populations, providing greater connectivity between woodlands and other important wildlife areas, and helping to facilitate species' response to climate change.

## OBJECTIVE W4

**To increase the output of sustainably produced high-quality timber and underwood for local markets.**

### Rationale

To achieve the most effective management that will deliver the other objectives for woodland, to contribute to sustainable domestic timber production, and to support a working countryside.



## CHARACTER COMPONENT

# Fieldscape and Heath

The High Weald AONB is characterised by an intricate and scenic mosaic of small, irregularly shaped and productive fields often bounded by hedgerows, shaws and small woodlands and in-field trees, and typically used for livestock grazing and small-scale horticulture; within which can be found distinctive zones of lowland heath and inned / reclaimed river valleys. Predominantly undisturbed and highly productive Grade 3 good agricultural grazing land, reflecting the typical and historic agricultural practices of the area, and as such is intrinsically valuable to the landscape character.



## TOP 5 ISSUES

1

Fragmentation of farm holdings due to an increase in non-farming land ownership and loss of farm infrastructure e.g., barns at a holding level

2

Declining agricultural workforce and consequential reduction in sustainable food production

3

Increasing costs of maintaining grazing infrastructure (including reducing supporting agricultural infrastructure such as livestock markets and abattoirs) and costs of managing significant levels of associated habitats such as hedgerows.

4

Loss of green fields to development and infrastructure, or conversion to other land uses such as woodland.

5

Loss of high value grasslands (unimproved and semi-improved) and hedgerows through land use change, inappropriate management and lack of management, leading to fragmentation of habitats, affecting biodiversity and species resilience.

## OBJECTIVE FH1

**To secure agriculturally productive use for the fields of the High Weald, especially for local markets, as part of sustainable land management.**

### Rationale

To contribute to sustainable domestic food and non-food agricultural production, to support a working countryside, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and to reduce the dependency of the UK on non-sustainably managed agricultural land and the need for long-distance transport that produces air pollutants, causing harm to health and the environment.

## OBJECTIVE FH3

**To protect and enhance the ecological function of field and heath as part of the complex mosaic of High Weald habitats.**

### Rationale

To improve the condition, landscape permeability and connectivity of fields and heaths and their associated and interrelated habitats (such as hedges, trees, woodlands, ditches, ponds and water systems) for wildlife.

## OBJECTIVE FH2

**To maintain the pattern of small irregularly shaped fields bounded by hedgerows and woodlands.**

### Rationale

To maintain fields and field boundaries that form a part of the habitat mosaic of the High Weald; and to maintain this key component of what is a rare UK survival of an essentially medieval landscape.

## OBJECTIVE FH4

**To protect individual archaeological features as well as historic assets and pattern of fields and heath.**

### Rationale

To protect the historic environment of the AONB that includes the pattern of fields, and individual archaeological features.



## CHARACTER COMPONENT

# Dark Skies

The High Weald AONB is characterised by having some of the darkest skies in the south-east of England. This gives the AONB a sense of remoteness and peacefulness and connects the natural environment to the cultural and historic landscape.



## TOP 5 ISSUES

1

Lack of minimum standards for external lighting that can be enforced. Standards are needed to set out basic principles of dark skies lighting and signpost to guidance and advice where needed.

2

Increased light pollution in rural areas from a variety of buildings and structures including new developments (street lighting and domestic light spill); housing designed with extensive glazing, such as wrap-around or floor-to-ceiling windows; external security lighting; rural out-buildings; public buildings and spaces such as railway stations; camping and glamping sites, and domestic lighting used to light-up homes and gardens at night.

3

Sky glow from adjacent built-up areas (including areas adjacent to the AONB), which reduces views of celestial bodies such as the Milky Way and Orion, leading to a loss of public connection and enjoyment of night skies.

4

Impacts on local wildlife, with light pollution disrupting circadian rhythms, migration, feeding and breeding across all animal groups including invertebrates, mammals, birds and amphibians.

5

Lack of education on the importance of dark skies to human health and wellbeing, as well as their significance to the natural environment.

## OBJECTIVE DS1

**To preserve the dark skies of the High Weald AONB by minimising light pollution, obtrusive external lighting and internal light spill from domestic, commercial and public premises in both existing and new developments within the High Weald, and from highways lighting.**

**Rationale**

To protect and maintain the existing dark skies within the High Weald for the benefit of all, including future generations, for our health, wellbeing and enjoyment, to increase our understanding and sense of place in the universe; and for the benefit of wildlife and to reduce energy consumption.

## OBJECTIVE DS2

**To protect wildlife and habitats from light pollution across the High Weald.**

**Rationale**

Light pollution affects a wide range of nocturnal species and those out during the day, from feeding to finding a mate and the ability to safely migrate. Light pollution is an additional stress to habitat loss for already declining populations of many species across the High Weald.

*‘Artificial light at night has revolutionized the way we live and work outdoors, but it has come at a price. When used thoughtlessly, lighting disrupts wildlife, damages human health, wastes money and energy, contributing to climate change, and it blocks our view of the starry sky’.*

**International Dark-Sky Association**



CHARACTER COMPONENT

# Aesthetic and Perceptual Qualities

Aesthetic and perceptual qualities are sense based, and are experienced as a result of people's interaction with natural beauty and their immersion in it, within the High Weald's landscape.



## TOP 5 ISSUES

1

Declining knowledge, connection and involvement with the countryside and its role in producing food and materials.

2

Increasing visitor numbers leading to urbanising infrastructure around villages and popular sites, and lack of awareness of the countryside code by new users, creating tension between different user groups.

3

Difficult accessibility for many, particularly those from urban areas, with declining or expensive public transport services and lack of travel routes for pedestrians, cyclists and riders, declining rights of way maintenance, and lack of signage.

4

Erosion of rurality and tranquillity through 'urbanising' development including new housing, camping/ glamping accommodation and activity, telecoms equipment, traffic and noise (including aircraft), including cumulative impacts.

5

Degradation of nature, including biodiversity decline, erosion of habitats and damage to natural systems reducing people's rich experience of nature.

## OBJECTIVE PQ1

**To increase opportunities for learning about and celebrating the High Weald's character and aesthetic qualities, and to promote and facilitate contributions by communities and individuals to the conservation and enhancement of the High Weald.**

### Rationale

To help develop emotional connection to the landscape, encouraging and enabling people to care for the High Weald and support its conservation.

## OBJECTIVE PQ2

**To protect the unspoilt rural landscape with its intrinsic sense of naturalness, valued views, and the extent of green space which foster experiences of rurality and tranquillity.**

### Rationale

To prevent the loss of contained green space, glimpsed and long views, and tree-canopied skylines, especially regarding developments that fringe existing settlements in the High Weald, which would impinge on people's perception of greenness and rurality.

## OBJECTIVE PQ3

**To foster and promote equitable access and informal enjoyment of the High Weald landscape and the integrated management of its resources for the enjoyment of natural beauty by all.**

### Rationale

To meet the demand for informal recreation from residents and those living close to the AONB, whilst ensuring infrastructure, services and activities are consistent with conserving and enhancing natural beauty and its quiet enjoyment for this and future generations.

**N.B.** For clarity, the pursuance of the above objectives or actions set out in this section should not harm the other character components or be at the expense of their contribution to the natural beauty of the High Weald AONB.