Wealden Design Guide

Wealden Characterisation Study

Final Report - June 2026

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Control Sheet

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Contents

1.0 Introduction 4

1.1 Study Background 5

1.2 Study Approach 6

1.3 Local Geography 7

1.4 Regenerative Design & Sustainability 9

2.0 Legislative, Policy & Planning Context 11

2.1 Sustainability, Climate & Environment 12

2.2 Legislative Context 13

2.3 National Plans and Initiatives 15

2.4 National Planning Policy Framework 16

2.5 Benchmarking 18

2.6 Local Plan and Neighbourhood Plans 20

2.7 Local Transport Plans 27

2.8 Urban Surveys & Landscape Character Assessments 29

2.9 Biodiversity & Landscape Policy Context 32

2.10 National Guidance 39

2.11 Existing Design Guidance 40

3.0 Anthropogenic Evolution of Wealden 41

3.1 Historical Development Overview 42

3.2 Settlement Evolution and Colonisation 45

3.3 Landscape Evolution 51

3.4 Movement & Communications Evolution 53

4.0 Wealden Society Today 55

4.1 Socio-Economic profile 56

5.0 Wealden Physical Foundations 59

5.1 Geology 60

5.2 Topography 61

5.3 Soils 63

5.4 Hydrology 65

5.5 Land Uses 67

5.6 Transport Connectivity 68

5.7 Wealden Distinctiveness 69

6.0 The Built Environment & Wealden Vernacular 75

6.1 Overview 76

6.2 Settlement Types 77

6.3 Settlement Features 84

6.4 Materials & Craft 100

7.0 Engagement 110

7.1 Engagement Overview 111

7.2 Phase 1 Feedback Summary 111

8.0 Conclusion 112

8.1 Summary Opportunities & Constraints 113

8.2 Glossary 115

8.3 Bibliography 117

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Study Background

Study Context

1.1.1. In 2026 Wealden District Council appointed AR Urbanism (ARU) to produce an updated Wealden Design Guide, in order to provide evidence to inform design policies in the Council's emerging Local Plan. In addition, the new Design Guide will inform Development Management decisions on planning applications and pre-application discussions, encouraging and enabling applicants to secure higher standards of design. It will also assist in the production of Neighbourhood Plans by Wealden Town and Parish Councils.

1.1.2. In March 2024 the Council published the draft Wealden Local Plan (Regulation 18). However, in December 2024, changes were made to the Standard Method which is used to calculate housing need. This resulted in a higher housing need within Wealden District compared to that cited in 2024 draft local plan. Subsequently, the Council decided that a further consultation stage was needed. This further consultation stage on a 'focused' plan was completed in March 2026.

1.1.3. Feedback to the 2024 draft Local Plan stated a need for greater emphasis in the design policies on context and identity and a requirement to adopt Sussex contextual and distinctive design. This new Design Guide will help provide the evidence for what Wealden local character and identity is, as well as help support the emerging Local Plan in delivering its strong ambitions in achieving well designed and high-quality places.

1.1.4. The Council currently has a **current Wealden Design Guide** which was adopted as a Supplementary Planning Document in November 2008. Since then, the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) has been updated a number of times and new guidance has been issued, including the National Design Guide. The revised NPPF (December 2024) states at paragraph 133 that 'to provide maximum clarity about design expectations at an early stage, all local planning authorities should prepare design guides or codes consistent with the principles set out in the National Design Guide and National Model Design Code, and which reflect local character and design preferences'. It is therefore necessary to review and update the 2008 Design Guide as an important part of the evidence base to support the design policies in the emerging Local Plan.

1.1.5. Wealden District is currently part of a two-tier local government system, whereby Wealden District Council handles local services (planning, waste collection, council tax billing and leisure) while East Sussex County Council handles wider services such as education, adult social care and highways. The English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill (2025) requires councils to submit proposals for the **local government reorganisation of two-tier areas.** WDC and other councils across East and West Sussex are still awaiting a decision from the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, who has identified modified proposals for local government reorganisation in East Sussex and Brighton and Hove, that is out to consultation at the time of writing.

1.1.6. In late 2025 and early 2026, the UK government launched two significant consultations aimed at overhauling the planning system in England. Both closed in March 2026, and represent a shift toward a more "rules-based" and "growth-focused" system:

- The December 2025 **National Planning Policy Framework consultation** proposed a comprehensive restructure of the NPPF. The primary goal is to accelerate housing delivery and simplify the planning process.
- The January 2026 **Design and Placemaking Planning Practice Guidance consultation** focused on a new, consolidated Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) document for design, merging the four existing documents: National Design Guide, National Model Design Code (Part 1), National Model Design Code (Part 2), and Design Process and Tools PPG.

Purpose and Scope of the Project

1.1.7. The overall objectives of the Wealden Design Guide are:

- To outline what good design is and how current guidance defines it.
- To set out what makes Wealden district distinctive/special.
- To explain the design process and masterplanning process that we expect development schemes to follow.
- To establish clear, easy to follow guidelines that set out WDC's design expectations for developments and that, when adhered to, will produce a higher standard of design across the district, without stifling innovation and creativity.
- To produce a user friendly, visual document, where guidance is easy to find and that is supported by meaningful illustrations, photographs and plans.
- To promote design that addresses common existing design issues/ challenges in the district but that is also adaptable and able to respond to future challenges such as climate change and its effects.
- To provide a checklist or lists that applicants can use to help ensure schemes meet design expectations and that can assist officers in assessing design issues on developments coming forward.

1.1.8. The development of the Design Guide is underpinned by a Characterisation Study which comprises a review of existing policies, relevant best practice and benchmarking as well as distilling the character of the settlements, landscapes and built environment in Wealden District, to identify what makes it distinctive, i.e. to define its character.

This Report

1.1.9. This report is a Characterisation Study delivered by ARU, Studio Engleback and Cazenove Architects in support of the Wealden Design Guide. It represents the first stage in the development of the new Wealden Design Guide and focuses on identifying Wealden's distinctive character through:

- Detailed desktop analysis of all national, regional and local policy, guidance, and existing evidence-base documents. This includes an in-depth review of the draft Wealden Local Plan, the Landscape Character Assessment for Wealden District, the Wealden District Character and Density Study, and existing Neighbourhood Plan design guides and codes.
- Spatial analysis through GIS mapping of heritage assets, settlement patterns, movement, ancient landscapes, as well as a study of building forms and typologies.
- Site visits & photographic surveys across the district's towns, villages, and rural landscapes. This primary research is essential for capturing the local vernacular, traditional materials, building forms, and distinct character.

Structure of This Report

1.1.10. This Characterisation Study is structured as follows:

- **Introduction** - summarises the context of the study as well as the landscape-led, regenerative approach to design championed by our team and that will be observed throughout the study.
- **Legislative, Policy and Planning Context** - a detailed review of relevant legislation (from international to local), design policy, best practice as well as the development and socio-economic context of Wealden.
- **Wealden Physical Foundations** - analysis of the physical characteristics of the district including topography, soils, hydrology etc.
- **Anthropogenic Evolution of Wealden** - analysis of the historic development of Wealden from ancient to present times, including an analysis of Wealden distinctiveness.
- **The Built Environment and Wealden Vernacular** - a detailed analysis of the built environment of Wealden, its development and cultural heritage, including the relationship between settlements, buildings and the landscape.

Next Steps

1.1.11. The interim findings of the Characterisation Study will be tested at stakeholder engagement with statutory consultees as well as Town & Parish Councillors and stakeholder groups in April 2026. The Wealden Design Guide will be drafted in May and a second round of engagement in June 2026 will test the principles of the new Design Guide.



1.2 Study Approach

1.2.1. This Characterisation Study integrates comprehensive desktop research with extensive field surveys conducted across the district. Recognising that landscape and environmental systems are inextricably linked, this study adopts a holistic approach to capture the district's overarching spatial context. The analysis builds upon existing LUC Landscape Character Assessments while investigating the multi-layered historical evolution of the region- an area widely regarded as part of the best-preserved medieval landscape in Western Europe.

1.2.2. The character of Wealden extends far beyond its rural classification. This landscape is a sophisticated product of millennia of anthropogenic (ie: that which is caused or created by human beings) activity, including woodland clearance and agricultural husbandry. By using site appraisals, specific 'landscape signatures' were identified that define the local vernacular. These signatures, categorised across three distinct landscape types, provide the essential evidence base for the forthcoming Design Guide, together with brief settlement analyses and a built environment vernacular study.

1.2.3. The district faces significant challenges arising from developmental pressure and environmental change caused by human activity. To address these challenges, this study advocates a transition toward a circular economy and regenerative planning. This approach emphasises the proactive stewardship of the natural environment to ensure that the ecosystem and human society continue to provide each other with mutual benefits. The Design Guide is intended to facilitate this transition. By utilising the granular data provided in this Characterisation Study, the Guide will move beyond traditional mitigation, providing a framework for design that actively restores and sustains the district's natural and heritage assets.

Study area

1.2.4. The study area of this report covers the entire Wealden District, with the exception of the area south of the A27 to the west of Eastbourne and Polegate, which is designated within the South Downs National Park (SDNP). This is subject to the SDNP Authority as local planning authority and is therefore outside the scope of this study.

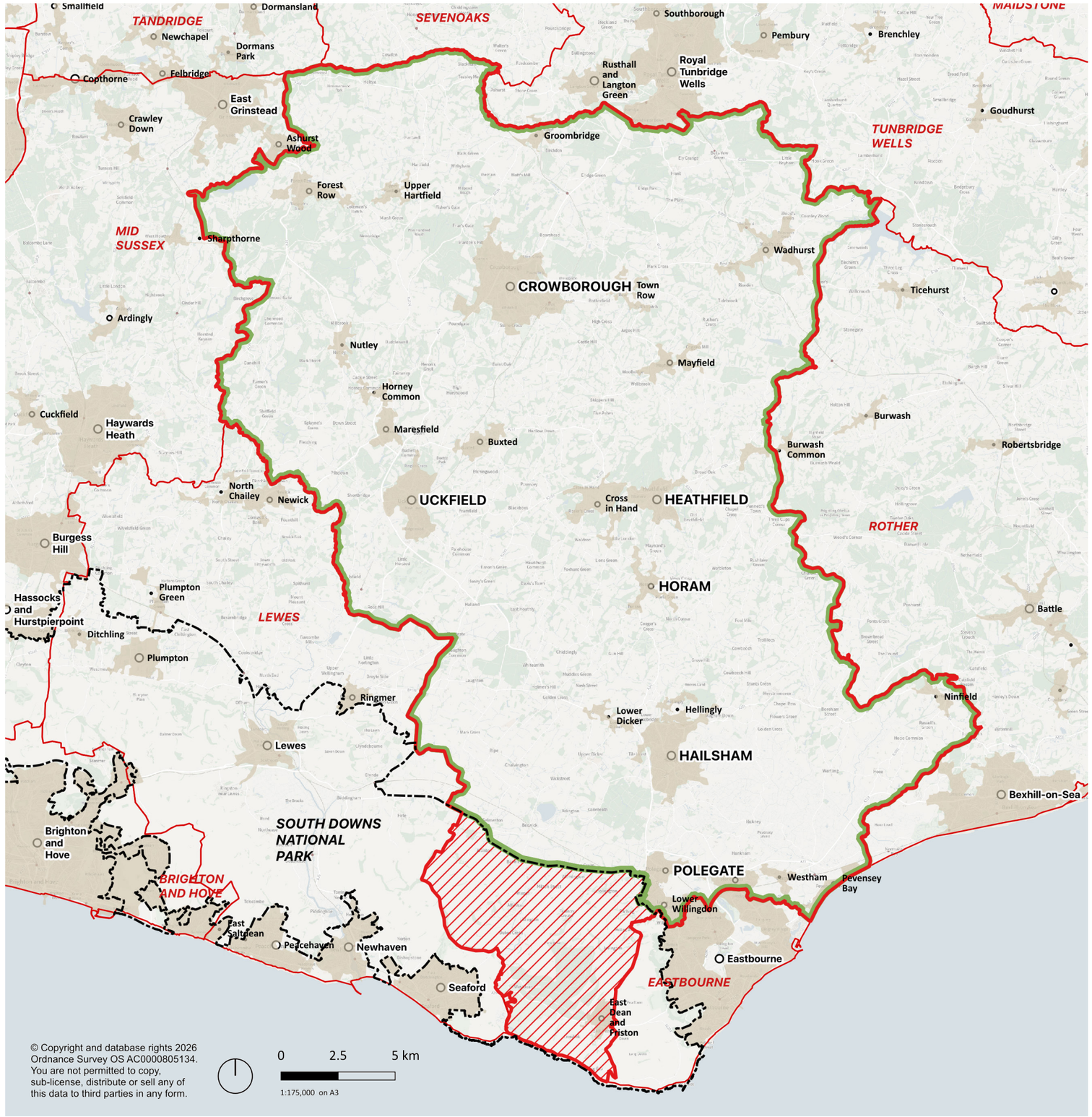


Fig 1. Study Area Map

Key:

- Wealden District Boundary
- Local authority district boundary
- South Downs National Park
- Area of WDC within the South Downs National Park, excluded from study area
- Study area

1.3 Local Geography

1.3.1. Wealden District is a largely rural area of 835km2. The highest landscape designations apply to most of its area including The High Weald National Landscape covering 53% of the District. Its 56km (35miles) distance from north to south traverses the wooded ridges of the High Weald, transitions to the more gently rolling, more open Low Weald, finishing at the extensive Pevensey Levels. The High Weald extends outside the District to the east and the South Downs to the west, also outside the District.

1.3.2. This is one of the best preserved medieval landscapes in Western Europe, with time depth that goes back 1600 years to the period of Saxons and Jutes. It is from the German word for forest (Wald) that we get Weald, an untamed oak forest in those days. Saxon place-names abound, including hurst, ley and field recalling cleared woodland, while those with den and fold relate to wooded countryside where droves of swine were attended to by swineherds in woodland glades.

1.3.3. There is also evidence of Roman occupation, including the outer walls of Pevensey Castle, and earlier still, iron age forts such as at High Rocks near Tunbridge Wells.

1.3.4. The pales of hunting forests can still be seen, notably around Ashdown Forest, as well as evidence of the iron industry. This includes former mine pits and hammer ponds, which were fuelled by charcoal, which is apparently reflected in the name of the village of Blackboys.

1.3.5. There are ancient trackways everywhere, some now modern roads, others form footpaths or bridleways. The deep sunken lanes in the High Weald and hedged lanes with broad verges recall ancient droving. Settlements are dispersed and often on ridges, connected by ridge-line roads.

1.3.6. There are 41 conservation areas in Wealden District, of which 8 are located in the southern part of the district that lies within the South Downs National Park and are therefore outside the scope of this study. Currently Character Appraisals are being carried out for the 33 conservation areas within this study area.

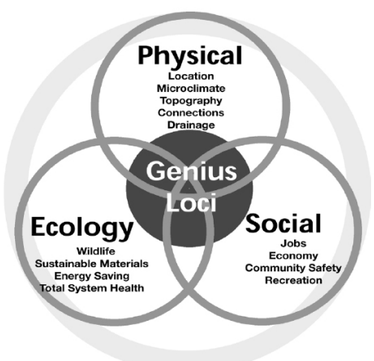


Fig 2. The special quality of place or genius loci is an amalgam of physical qualities that have influenced local ecology and early social-cultural development.

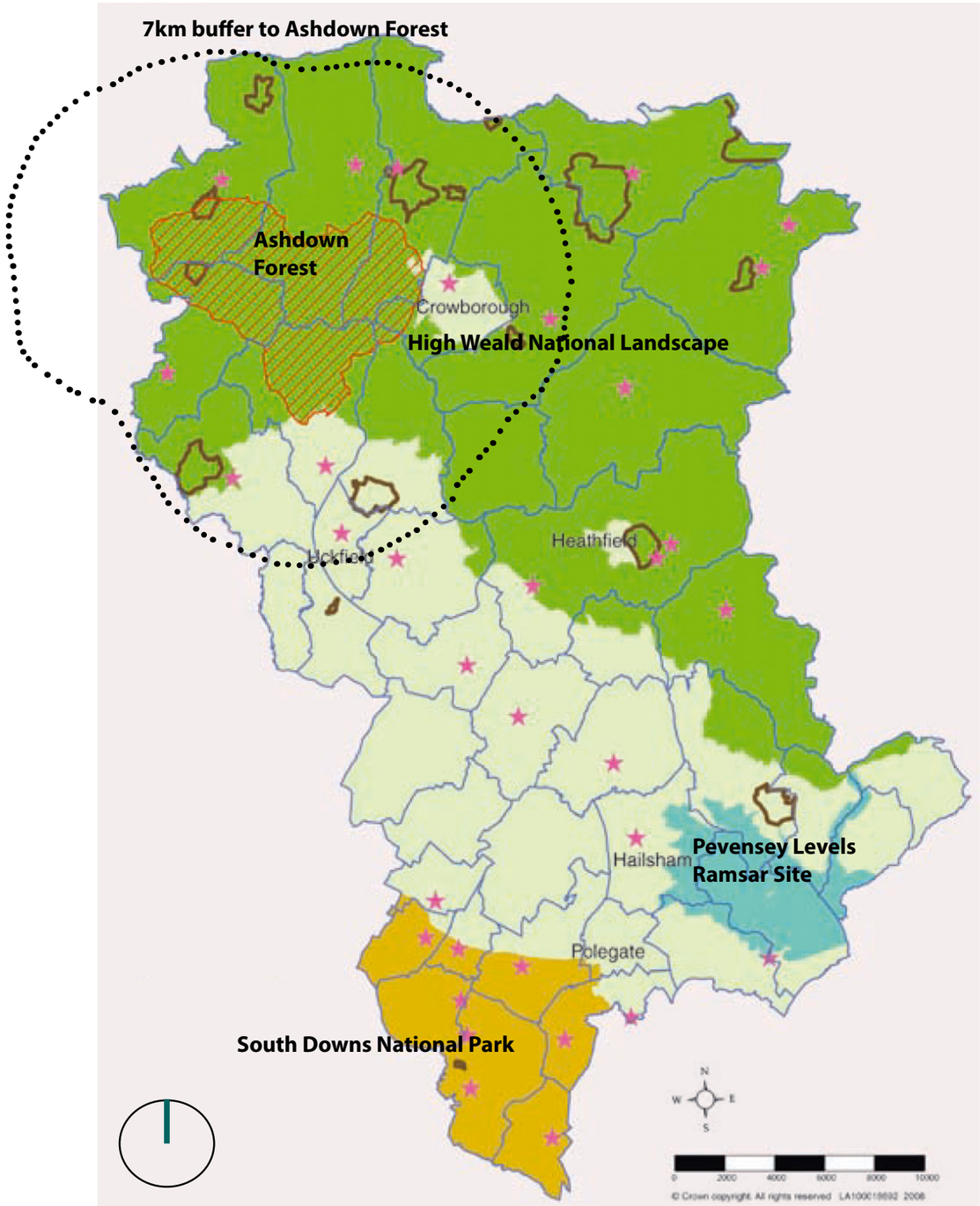


Fig 3. Wealden District Landscape Designations Overview

Heritage Assets

1.3.7. The Heritage Strategy Document (recent draft release as part of a separate commission) focuses on heritage designations in the district, and proposes a strategy for their access, enhancement and protection. This has identified the landscape and settlements of the district as reflecting a unique character in medieval development.

1.3.8. The post war legislative framework of protection assigns significance and value to the following assets:

- Designated assets such as listed buildings, scheduled monuments and Conservation Areas;
- Non-designated historic assets such as locally listed buildings;
- Landscape designations such as National Landscapes, National Parks etc.

1.3.9. Although not considered “heritage” landscape is an important aspect of the setting of heritage assets. The heritage and landscape of the Wealden District is unique and highly significant. Designated and non-designated assets reflect the distinctive character through form, materiality, weathering and survival, providing townscape and landscape continuity. Their significance should be understood in reference to their context in time and place.

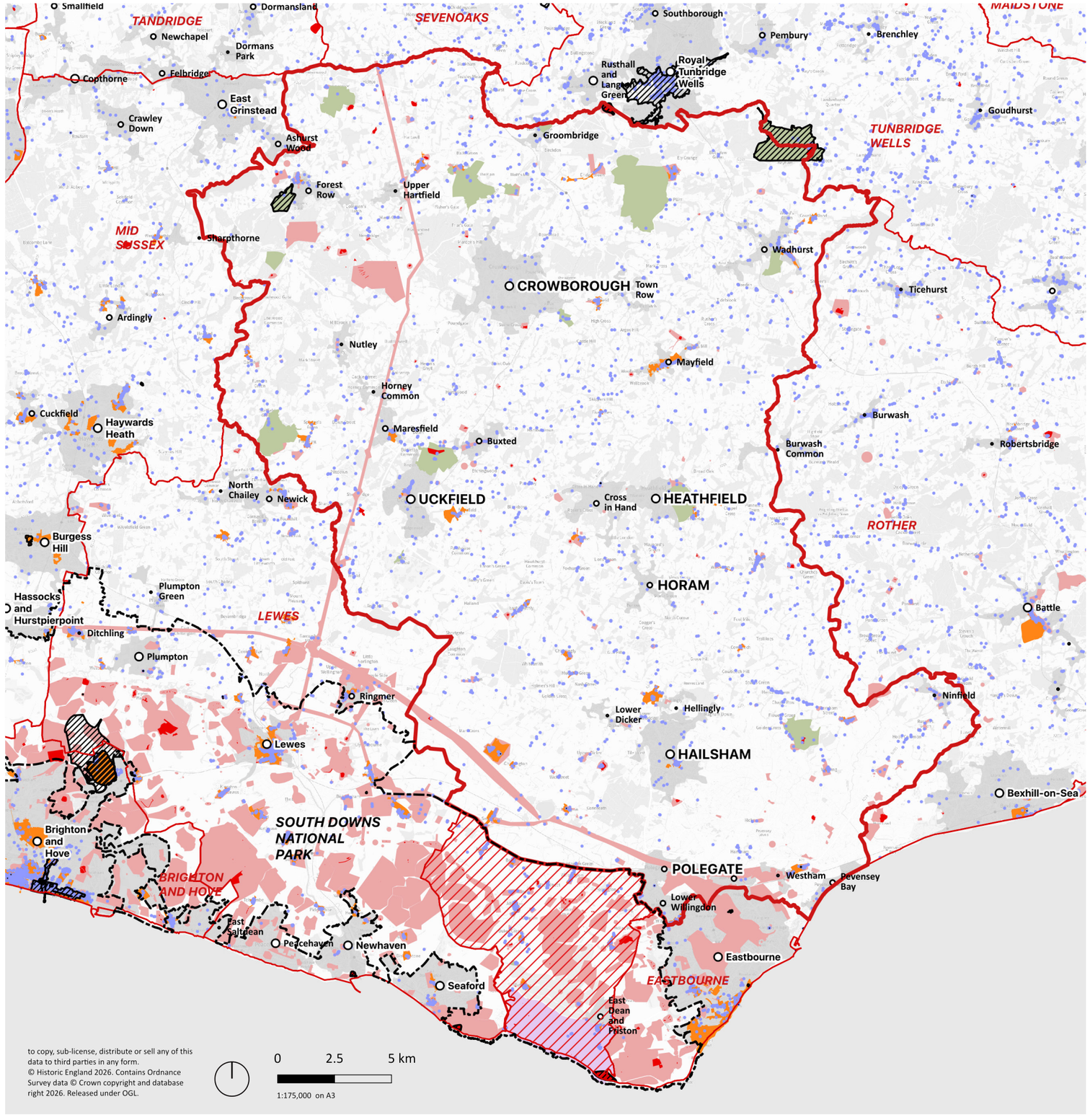


Fig 4. Wealden District Heritage Assets

Key:

- Study area
- South Downs National Park
- Area of WDC within the South Downs National Park, excluded from study area
- Local authority district boundaries
- Built up areas
- Listed buildings
- Conservation Area
- Scheduled Monuments
- Registered Parks and Gardens
- Heritage Coast
- Historic England Heritage at Risk Register 2025
- Archaeological Notification Areas

1.4 Regenerative Design & Sustainability

1.4.1. The Wealden Design Guide presents an opportunity to embed a regenerative, landscape-led approach in the design of new development in Wealden, to support the long-term resilience of the communities and ecosystems in the district and surrounding areas.

1.4.2. The transition toward a regenerative paradigm in planning and development represents a shift from “traditional sustainability” to a model that actively seeks to do more good, for longer into the future, for the benefit for future generations. This approach realigns the built environment with living systems, enabling a beneficial co-evolution of communities and their ecosystems.

Sustainability

1.4.3. The widely used term 'sustainability' means curating an environment, economy or society that endures to benefit future generations without failing or declining. From 1987, sustainability was defined as ***“meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”.*** These needs include food, good health, energy, water, housing and travel. There are three pillars of sustainability: environmental, social and economic; but ultimately, people and the human economy are completely reliant upon and embedded within the natural environment.

1.4.4. The Sustainable Development Goals were adopted by 193 member states of the United Nations in 2015, including the UK. These goals were developed from the eight Millennium Development Goals of 2000. SDGs cover a range of issues ranging from climate action, good health, life on land and below water, to affordable clean energy, clean water & sanitation, sustainable cities & communities, responsible consumption, decent work & economic growth, reduced inequalities, zero hunger & poverty, peace & justice, plus partnerships for these goals.

1.4.5. SDG progress has been monitored constantly, and some goals remain a big challenge. Achieving these goals requires thinking in systems rather than ticking boxes of separated issues. However, as far back as 2006, leading British scientist James Lovelock declared that it was already too late for sustainable development and that we needed a ‘sustainable retreat’. This means taking a regenerative approach to achieve the SDGs.

Regenerative Design

1.4.6. Going beyond ‘sustainability’ means learning from how nature does this, and making better more efficient use of resources is part of this. People used to live in greater harmony with nature and in better tune with natural cycles. The ancient landscape of Wealden District was sustained by regenerative stewardship, but this connection has been eroded or lost in our modern age. Governments are now seeking greater ‘circularity’ for economies because it reduces waste, adverse impacts and unnecessary costs.

1.4.7. Regenerative planning and design is a pragmatic and holistic way to a world where human and natural systems co-exist and co-evolve in harmony. This is not about recreating a pre-human world, but about the way infrastructure, buildings, spaces and landscapes today are designed and cared for so that they can perform a wide range of vital functions for people and improve wellbeing. Therefore, it is more than ‘Green Design’ which only seeks to reduce harm, or ‘Sustainable Design' that seeks a recovery of equilibrium; it is positive and proactive, with nature incorporated as a key stakeholder and enabler.

1.4.8. For example, passive design uses energy from the sun to make homes comfortable in winter and keep it cool in summer by using orientation, materials and design features. Building orientation is also important to maximise the output from any roof top renewable energy – both approaches can save on energy bills. Harvesting roof water saves on water bills for watering the garden in summer to keep cool, or to flush toilets where properly integrated. Water harvesting also saves on the energy needed to treat water and pump it, whilst reducing stress on our overstretched water system. Damper summer soils support trees to cool streets day and night, also whilst cleaning the air. Water sensitive urban design captures and uses raindrops as close to where they falls in ‘rain gardens’, swales, rills or porous surfaces, rather than piping it underground to a deep basin on the edge of a development where it cannot bring these benefits to the street.

Planetary Boundaries

1.4.9. The extractive and high energy dependent industrial processes that are seen as essential to our modern lives have affected the Earth’s systems cumulatively. The concept of Planetary Boundaries, published in 2009, describes issues that affect the resilience and sustainability of the world we live in. The ***safe operating space for humanity*** is within these nine boundaries; crossing one or more boundaries would be harmful or catastrophic.

1.4.10. In 2022 an assessment of the status of planetary boundaries concluded that we had already crossed five of them: climate change, biodiversity, biochemical flows (fertilizers – phosphorus & nitrogen), land-system change, and novel entities (plastics, heavy metals, forever chemicals etc.). The limits to ocean acidification are fast approaching. This is caused by the absorption of atmospheric carbon dioxide by the seas, the resultant acidification affects plankton, the food source for many fish and some whales, corals and shellfish.



Fig 5. The 17 Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nationals. Source: United Nations



Fig 6. Cover of McHarg’s ‘Design with Nature’ (1969)

Reducing carbon emissions from construction

1.4.11. The Built Environment is directly responsible for 25% of the UK's carbon emissions, this is carbon that is 'embodied' in the materials chosen for construction. 19% of the UK carbon footprint comes from operational emissions caused by the energy needed to heat, cool and power buildings. Some 80% of the buildings that will be occupied in 2050 are already standing, so de-carbonising these assets is a priority. Re-using old buildings is positive, and where buildings must be demolished, re-using materials is essential. Crushed concrete can be used to fill porous paving to capture carbon dioxide by simple chemistry – mineralisation. Work at Newcastle University has shown that a hectare of crushed concrete can absorb up to 80-86 tonnes of carbon dioxide annually – this is the area needed for 606 car park spaces. The absorption rate is 30-40 times that of mature woodland.

1.4.12. The Doughnut Economics model proposes an economic space that sits between a social foundation (meeting human needs) and the ceiling of planetary boundaries. Planning should operate within these safe operating zones to avoid exceeding environmental limits.

1.4.13. There is an increasing recognition that Gross Domestic Product (GDP), the current measure used to describe a nation's economic health, fails to account for the true cost to nature and that new metrics are required that value natural capital assets and the ecosystem services they provide to people.

1.4.14. Re-thinking the use of hard materials—specifically concrete, which now accounts for half of all human-made mass—is fundamental. The regenerative approach advocates for using less impermeable material, such as paving, to allow landscapes to function more naturally.

Landscape-led Design

1.4.15. Landscape-led design means using landscape as a framework to understand the site and formulate a design response. This is essential for regenerative design. The term 'landscape' used here includes:

- Landscape history;
- Physical character and perceived qualities;
- Socio-economic and ecological functioning.

1.4.16. All of these issues contribute to understanding a place. A design response may include addressing site capacity, layout, built form, colour, scale, detailing, landscape & ecology plans.

1.4.17. Taken together, by addressing these issues it helps to make a place resilient, beautiful and distinctive and to integrate it into the surrounding countryside.

1.4.18. " 'Landscape' means an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural forces and/or human factors. The term 'landscape' is thus defined as a zone or area as perceived by local people or visitors, whose visual features and character are the result of the action of natural and/or cultural (that is human) factors. This definition reflects the idea that Landscapes evolve through time, as a result of being acted upon by natural forces and human beings. It also underlines that a landscape forms a whole, whose natural and cultural components are taken together, not separately." (Article 2 of The European Landscape Convention)

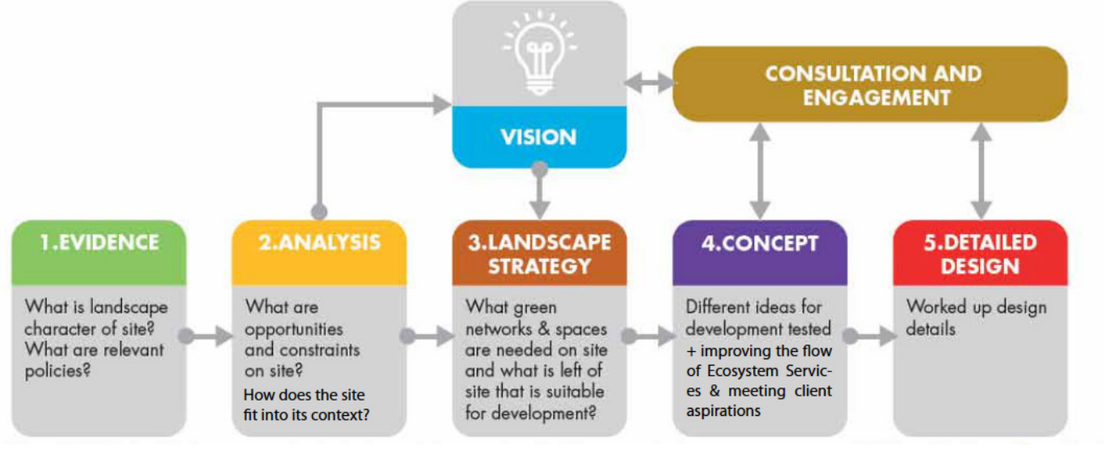


Fig 7. South Downs National Park Authority (SDNPA) simplified process map for the landscape-led approach applicable to most developments. Source: SDNPA, Studio Engleback

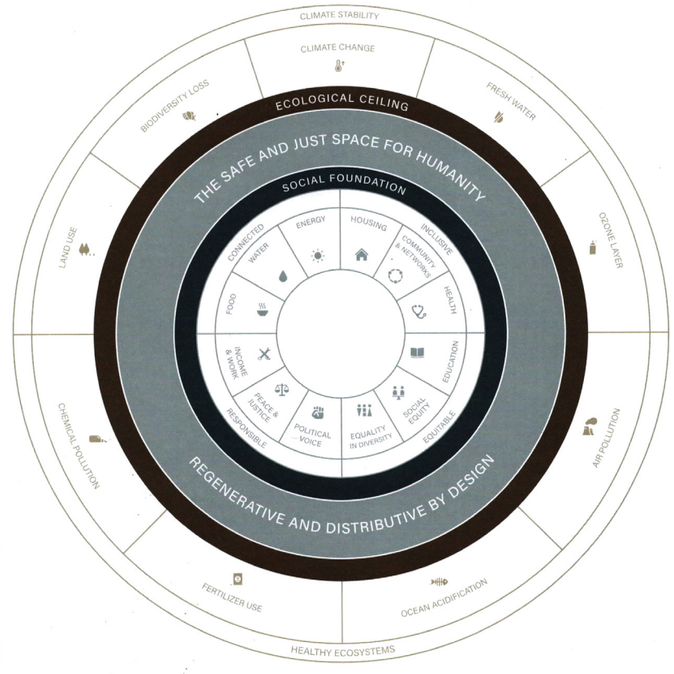


Fig 8. The Doughnut for Urban Development. Source: Danish Architectural Press 2023

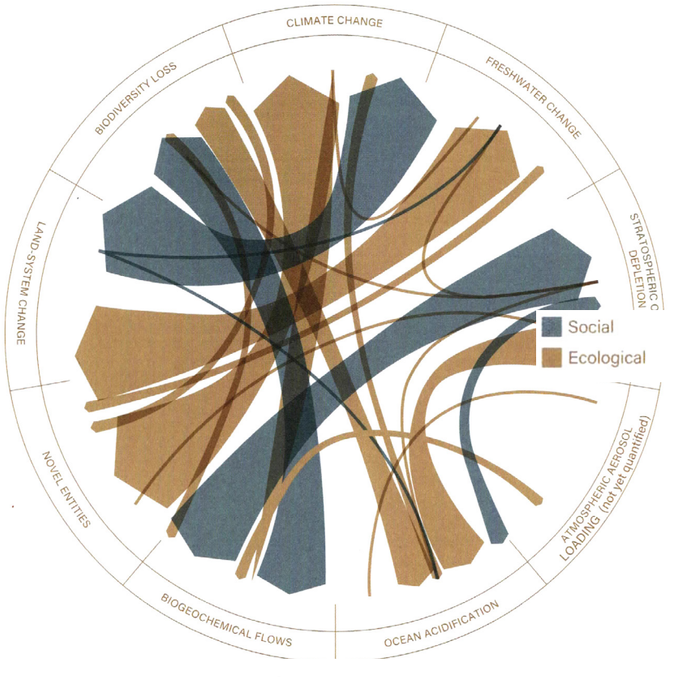


Fig 9. Planetary boundaries are often conceptualised and measured separately, but complex Earth Systems are deeply connected. Source: Danish Architectural Press 2023

'Landscape' – an area perceived by people whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors.

'Landscape policy' – an expression by the competent public authorities of general principles, strategies and guidelines that permit the taking of specific measures aimed at the protection, management and planning of landscapes.

'Landscape protection' – actions to conserve and maintain the significant or characteristic features of a landscape, justified by its heritage value derived from its natural configuration and/or from human activity.

'Landscape management' – action, from a perspective of sustainable development, to ensure the regular upkeep of a landscape, so as to guide and harmonise changes which are brought about by social, economic and environmental processes.

'Landscape planning' – strong forward-looking action to enhance, restore or create landscapes.

The European Landscape Convention (Florence, 2000)

2.0 Legislative, Policy & Planning Context

2.1 Sustainability, Climate & Environment

2.1.1. The broader sustainability, climate and environment policy context for the Wealden Design Guide is shaped by a hierarchy of international, national, and local documents that mandate a transition to net zero and the integration of nature recovery into the built environment.

National and International Frameworks

The European Landscape Convention (2004)

2.1.2. The European Landscape Convention (ELC) was initiated by the Council of Europe at the turn of the millennium. This reflects European identity and diversity by recognising the landscape as our "living natural and cultural heritage".

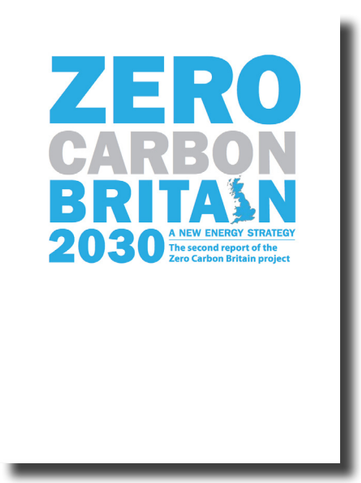
2.1.3. The convention was adopted in 2000 and came into force in 2004 (Council of Europe Treaty Series No 176). Overall it is concerned with achieving "sustainable development based on a balanced and harmonious relationship between social needs, economic activity and the environment".

The ELC in Wealden District

2.1.4. Landscape Character Assessment is the method that England uses to discharge its obligations as a signatory of the ELC. Landscape Assessments have been produced by LUC for Wealden District Council and both authors of this report have a long history of Landscape Character and Landscape Sensitivity Assessment.

2.1.5. Because landscapes vary over Wealden District from the Pevensey Levels to the ridges and ghylls of High Weald, there is no single prescription for landscape actions to mitigate and incorporate development into a given area; instead this depends upon recognising and using 'landscape signatures' (i.e.: specific identifying characteristics or environmental patterns) in a given area, and an understanding of how it came to look and work the way it does.





2.1.6. This study provides an overview a of a complex and ancient cultural landscape, which is one of the best preserved medieval landscapes in Europe.

2.1.7. The District is constrained by high landscape designations to the north and south, but as stated above, the ELC applies to ALL landscapes. The danger of major development is that the particular qualities that give an identity to a place over centuries are cast aside by road-led planning that has more in common with suburbia than local towns and villages. The Design Guide can show a better response to place, although highways, drainage and building standards can make this hard to achieve.

Other Frameworks

2.1.8. The **Stern Review (2006) and Climate Change Act (2008)** established the legal basis for reducing carbon emissions through quinquennial budgets, now targeting a 78% reduction by 2035 and net zero by 2050.

2.1.9. The **2015 Paris Agreement** was an international commitment to limit global warming to below 2°C, which sits alongside the 2015 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, both of which have targets for 2030.

2.1.10. The **Zero Carbon Britain 2030 (2010)** report proposed integrated solutions for energy security and land use, highlighting that the domestic sector is responsible for approximately 30% of greenhouse gas emissions.

Regional Climate and Environmental Strategies

2.1.11. **ESCC Climate Risk & Vulnerability Assessment (2024)**. This document, following the ESCC Climate Emergency road map (2022-25), identifies high-risk scenarios for East Sussex, including flash flooding, water scarcity, and extreme temperatures.

2.1.12. The **East Sussex Environment Strategy (2020)** is a partnership-led strategy focusing on five themes: Climate Change, Natural Capital, Air Quality, Water, and Resource Efficiency (aiming for a circular economy).

2.1.13. **South Downs National Park Climate Change Adaptation Plan (2016)**. Although covering the south-western area of the district which outside the scope of this study, its principles of maintaining ecological resilience and accommodating change are highly relevant to Wealden's similar landscapes.

Nature Recovery and Natural Capital

2.1.14. The **Natural England Climate Change Risk Assessment and Adaptation Plan (2021)** emphasises a joined-up approach to Nature-Based Solutions and the use of a natural capital and ecosystem services approach to account for societal benefits.

2.1.15. **Recovering Nature for Growth, Health & Security (2025)** is an English Nature publication advocating for 30% of land to be managed for nature and ensuring everyone is within a 15-minute walk of nature-rich spaces.

2.1.16. The **Carbon Storage by Habitat (2012)** report provides a detailed assessment of carbon stocks in soils and vegetation (such as woodlands, saltmarshes, and bogs), which is used to map carbon sequestration potential across the landscape.

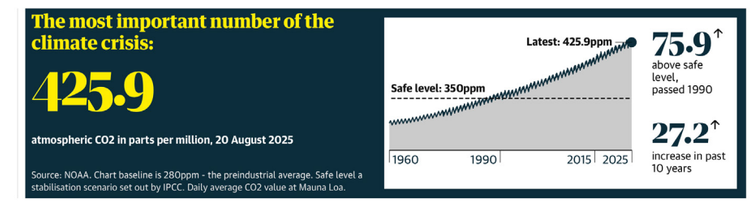
National and Wealden Specific Landscape Assessments

2.1.17. Natural England has designated 159 **National Character Areas (NCAs).** epresents an area of distinct and recognisable character at the national scale. Their boundaries follow natural lines in the landscape, not county or district boundaries. In Wealden district there are four NCAs: the High Weald (NCA 122), the Low Weald (NCA 121), the Pevensey Levels (NCA 124) and the South Downs (NCA 125), which is excluded from this study.

2.1.18. The **Glover Review (Landscapes Review, 2019)** was a seminal report with 27 proposals to strengthen the natural beauty and accessibility of National Landscapes (formerly AONBs) and National Parks in England.

2.1.19. The **Wealden Landscape Character Assessment (2022)** divides the district into six types (e.g., High Weald wooded ridges, Low Weald clay vales, Pevensey Levels) to ensure development respects the "genius loci" and historical time depth.

2.1.20. **Landscape Sensitivity Assessments (2023 & 2024)** studies by LUC evaluate the impact of residential, employment, and renewable energy developments (such as wind and solar) on the district's character.



The range in atmospheric carbon over the recent series of Ice Ages that began 2.7 million years ago as seen from Ice Cores and Sediments sow that atmospheric carbon was always under 300 parts per million (ppm) and the range between the coldest period and warmest interglacial was between +/-180ppm and +/-280ppm. At the dawn of the step change Industrial Revolution and the birth of the Capitalist idea in Adam Smith's book 'The Wealth of Nations' 250 years ago was 280ppm the usual inter-glacial maximum; current atmospheric levels exceed this by 146ppm and they continue to rise. Driving down carbon emissions whilst increasing carbon sequestration and storage is a matter of survival and resilience to significant climate change challenges already in train (there is an approximate 30 year lag in effects from global climate forcing from CO2 levels)

Fig 10. Change in atmospheric carbon since 1960 to 2025. Source: The Guardian

2.2 Legislative Context

2.2.1. The Wealden District Council Design Guide must reflect the Local Plan within the context of national legislation. Post Brexit, new laws were enacted to replace legislation linked to the EU and currently the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) is undergoing a major overhaul. It is notable that Landscape is addressed in some form in each of the chapters.

The Environment Act (2021)

2.2.2. This Act replaces EU-aligned legislation and sets legally binding longer term environmental targets lasting at least 15 years, over four priority areas - water, air quality, biodiversity, waste/resource efficiency. For Biodiversity this includes Local Nature Recovery Strategies and the implementation of Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) with regards to new developments. BNG is outlined in more detail later in this section.

2.2.3. Targets at the heart of the Environment Act require:

- Halting the decline in species populations by 2030;
- Increasing wildlife populations by at least 10% more than current levels by 2042;
- Restoring water bodies to their natural state by focussing on pollution from sewers, abandoned mines and improving water usage in households;
- Delivering net zero carbon ambitions;
- Boosting nature recovery by increasing national tree and woodland cover to 16.5% of total land area in England by 2050;
- Halving the waste per person sent to residual treatment by 2042;
- Cutting exposure to PM2.5 air pollutants;
- Restoring 70% of designated features in UK Marine Protected Areas to a favourable condition by 2042, and the remainder into a recovering condition.

The 25 Year Environment Plan (2018)

2.2.4. The Environment Act was preceded and influenced by the 25 year Environment Plan (25YP). This had been informed by the work of the Natural Capital Committee that reported on the state of the country's Natural Capital between 2012 and December 2020 and this legislation was published at the end of January 2018. The goal is to leave the environment in a better state within a generation than it is today. The **concept of environmental gain was addressed in ten environmental goals**, which include:

- Thriving plants and wildlife, clean & plentiful water;
- Maximising resources & minimise waste;
- Using resources from nature more sustainably;
- Mitigating & adapting to climate change;
- Enhancing beauty, heritage and engagement with the natural environment.

The Environmental Improvement Plan (2023)

2.2.5. The 25YEP was updated following a review of progress made over the 5 years since it was introduced. To advance progress, the new EIP launched a Species Survival Fund to restore habitats, to create, restore and extend about 70 areas for wildlife in the next round of **Nature Recovery Projects**, and to implement '30 by 30', the conservation of 30% of land for nature conservation.

2.2.6. About 26% of England's land area is already protected in some way by National Park or National Landscape status; the additional 400,000 hectares (the size of the South Downs and Lake District) is to be won through combined Nature for Climate Fund and the new Environmental Land Management (ELM) scheme, brought in with the Agriculture Act.

The Agriculture Act (2020)

2.2.7. The Act covered various aspects of agriculture and food following UK's exit from the EU, including supply chain fairness, market intervention and food security. It set out the legislative framework for replacing EU agricultural Support Schemes, and promoted payment of support for land management and production of 'public goods' as opposed to food, such as environmental and animal welfare improvements. Payments are no longer related to the amount of land farmed. The 'public goods' eligible for financial assistance in England include:

- Managing land/water that protects/improves environment e.g. clean air & water;
- Supporting public access to/enjoyment of the countryside;
- Managing land/water that maintains/restores/enhances cultural or natural heritage;
- Managing land/water to adapt to climate change- protecting existing carbon store & reducing carbon emissions;
- Managing land/water to prevent/protect from environmental hazards e.g. reducing flood risk by improving soil porosity;
- Protecting/improving welfare for livestock;
- Conserving native livestock/equines e.g. incentivising rearing rare/native breeds/species;
- Protecting/improving health of plants e.g. reducing risk introduction/spread of plant pests/diseases/biosecurity;
- Conserving plants gown/used in agri-forestry activity e.g. utilising crop wild relatives to improve capacity to adapt to new diseases;
- Protecting/improving quality of soils;
- Support ancillary activities e.g. selling/distributing/horticultural or forestry products.

2.2.8. DEFRA's 2018 consultation 'Health & Harmony: the future for food, farming & the environment in a green Brexit' described the new land management system as:

- Taking a natural capital approach that 'properly values the natural environment';
- Paying for delivery of public goods which the markets do not naturally provide for;
- Moving towards an effective 'polluter pays' principle.

The Climate Change Act (2008)

2.2.9. Initiated by the Stern Review of the Economics of Climate Change in late 2006, the Act originally sought to reduce emissions by 80% against a 1990 baseline by 2050. Since the 2015 Paris Agreement on climate change, the target was revised to net zero. The quinquennial Carbon Budgets are ratified by parliament, and the pathway currently requires a 78% reduction on UK territorial emissions against an 1990 baseline by 2035. In effect this brings forward the original target by 15 years.

Flooding & Water Management Act (2010)

2.2.10. This is an important piece of legislation following floods attributed to a changing climate in which we expect more rainfall in winter, less in summer and more frequent heavy rain events. It improved previous laws such as the Land Drainage Act whilst enforcing new duties and mechanisms and introduced the concept of 'flood risk management' rather than 'flood defence'.

2.2.11. There is no single agency addressing flood risk. Instead**,** this is delivered by Risk Management Authorities (RMAs) which are:

- The Environment Agency (lead body, strategic overview)
- Local Lead Flood Authorities (County level)
- District & Borough Councils (Local level)
- Coastal Protection Authorities
- Water & Sewage Companies
- Internal Drainage Boards
- Highways Authorities

2.2.12. The Act requires these RMAs to:

- Co-operate with each other;
- Act in a manner consistent with the National Flood & Coastal risk Management Strategy for England and local flood risk management strategies developed by the Lead Local flood Authorities;
- To exchange information.

2.2.13. The role of District Councils includes planning decisions and ensuring new developments have proper drainage. They are also responsible for management of minor water courses not covered by Internal Drainage Boards.

2.2.14. Sustainable Drainage Systems were proposed under schedule 3 of the Act and changes were made in the NPPF to facilitate this. It stipulates that decisions on planning applications relating to major developments (10 or more dwellings, or equivalent non-residential developments) should ensure that SuDS are put in place, unless demonstrated to be inappropriate. The Local Planning Authority in consultation with the Lead Local Flood Authority needs to approve drainage schemes (in line with non-statutory standards) and ensure they are appropriately maintained.

The Planning & Infrastructure Act (2025)

2.2.15. This Act, which received Royal Assent in December 18th 2025, seeks to re-shape the planning landscape in England & Wales. It aims to accelerate progress on housing and infrastructure projects across the UK. New powers are already in force, but other measures will be phased in the months ahead. These affect how development is planned, approved and challenged. These include:

- A **Nature Restoration Fund** & delivery plans to enable developers to start more quickly;
- Pre-application process over-hauled to shorten timetables;
- Tightening of legal challenges on major infrastructure & reduction in judicial review;
- Planning Committee procedures modernised to speed up decisions on new homes;
- Simplified land acquisition rules for housing, GP surgeries & Schools;
- Development Corporations to have extra powers to accelerate new towns with an emphasis on affordability and public transport;
- Introduction of **Strategic Spatial Development Strategies** covering multiple local authorities & sustainable identification for growth, ensuring infrastructure is planned alongside homes;
- Ability of non-water sector bodies to build reservoirs treated as Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIPs), whilst streamlining approvals for large reservoirs;
- Electric vehicle charger approvals on public roads to be simplified;
- Grid connection regime to change to 'first ready, first connected' to prioritise clean power projects deemed ready for connection;
- Powers to SoS to provide discounts on electricity bills for communities living within 500m of new electricity pylons & transmission lines;
- Integration of some renewable projects into the Public Forest Estate and exporting this to the National Grid.

The Countryside and Rights of Way (CRoW) Act 2000 (section 85)

2.2.16. Section 85 of the CRoW Act 2000 (as amended by the Levelling-up and Regeneration Act in December 2023) now requires relevant authorities to ***'seek to further the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the National Landscapes'.***

2.2.17. This is a statutory duty and is not discretionary; it applies to plan and policy-making as well as decision-making, in relation to or affecting land in a National Landscape (NL) and also to proposals which would affect the setting of a NL.

2.2.18. The Management Plan for each NL is a statutory document which will have been adopted by the LPA and is the principal tool for ensuring that the statutory purposes of the NL are met. It is also a material consideration in the planning process. Conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the specific NL will normally mean as a minimum :

- Conserving and enhancing the character components or special qualities identified in the Management Plan;
- Supporting the Management Plan Objectives, Policies &/or Principles (as applicable) as set out for each of these; and
- Following the Management Plan actions set out for each.

2.2.19. For decisions relating to the drafting of policies such as Design Guidelines, LPAs and their consultants should:

- Assess the degree to which each policy aligns with objectives principles/ policies of the relevant NP Management Plan'
- Assess the degree to which each policy would help deliver any actions/ outcomes of the relevant NP Management Plan;
- Consider if the range and scope of the policies is sufficient to fully deliver the Management Plan's objectives/actions/outcomes, i.e. are any additional policies/policy areas needed? (In this regard, a stand-alone policy closely aligned to the Management Plan objectives/principles/policies is recommended, although it is not considered sufficient to demonstrate compliance with the strengthened duty);
- Consider amendments if a draft planning policy would not align with the duty to seek to further the applicable legislative purpose (e.g. if it would conflict with any of the Management Plan's objectives/principles/policies), such that you could confidently say the decision does seek to further the relevant purpose.

Great British Energy Act (2025)

2.2.20. This Act received Royal Assent in May 2025 and follows on from the Clean Power 2030 Action Plan published in December 2024 that set out a detailed plan for transitioning to an electricity system to produce at least 95% of UK generation from clean sources. The Act will increase domestic clean energy production and public ownership of clean energy assets. Great British Energy, publicly-owned and operating independently facilitates, encourages and participates in:

- Production, distribution, storage & supply of clean energy;
- Reduction of greenhouse gas emissions from fossil energy;
- Ensuring security of supply;
- Ensuring slavery & human trafficking is not part of supply chains (which also alludes to infrastructure which is being manufactured abroad).

2.2.21. In March 2026, the government announced that 'Plug in Solar' for mounting on balconies or outdoor spaces would be made available through supermarkets for the first time. This has benefits for low income and non-home-owners as well as implications for planning and design.

2.2.22. There are several large rural photovoltaic arrays in Wealden District, and a landscape sensitivity assessment for such arrays was carried out by LUC in 2024, grading landscapes from low to high sensitivity. There is scope to retrofit commercial buildings, modern barns and homes to produce clean energy.

2.3 National Plans and Initiatives

The Land Use Framework For England, DEFRA (2026)

2.3.1. This is a plan for delivering new homes, nature restoration, clean energy and food security; to make better use of land and to recognise this as a finite resource and a key national asset. In the launch press release, Environment Secretary Emma Reynolds in 18.3.26 stated that "to avoid false choices between building homes, producing food, restoring nature, supporting farmers, delivering clean energy and protecting landscapes…….with better data, smarter tools and strategic panning, we can meet all these needs".

2.3.2. Action is required to make optimal use of land for a variety of reasons including: three of the worst harvests that have occurred in the last five years, a third of farmland now at high risk of flooding (including 59% of grade one agricultural land), 1 in 4 homes are now at risk of flooding. These challenges are forced by climate change, but affected by land use. The move towards wind and solar renewable energy has been made more acute by the second Gulf War, so more power lines will be needed to transfer the energy.

2.3.3. No requirement is made for design and planning of development to use less energy by design or orientation to maximise rooftop renewables, but it is clear this is important and is something that can be addressed in the Design Guide.

2.3.4. The Land Use Framework Vision 2030-2050, is long term and informed by consultation responses, but there is also a recognition that there would be an evolution as local areas and regions adopt and adapt to meet their own priorities and plans for efficient land use. It is based on advanced use analysis to support food security and national resilience in a somewhat unpredictable world in terms of climate and geopolitical events.

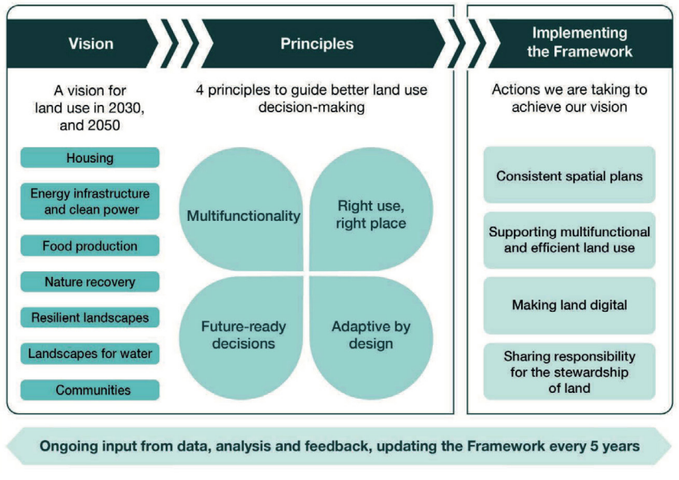
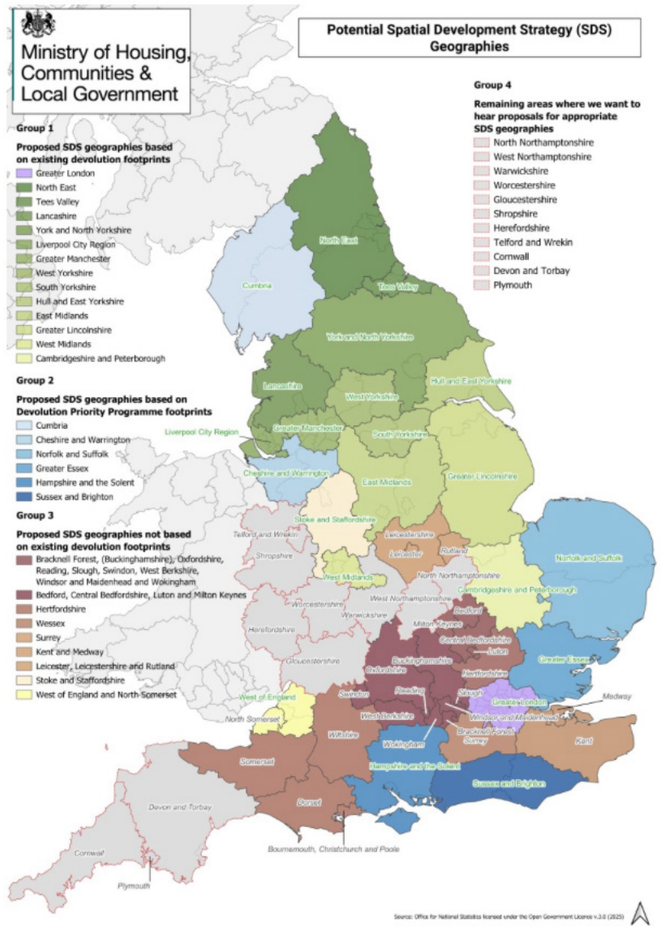


Fig 11. Overview of the Land Use Framework. Source: DEFRA 2026

Spatial Development Strategies

2.3.5. MHCLG published 'Areas for producing spatial development strategies' in February 2026, and this was out to consultation until 26th March 2026. The consultation sought views on the 'geographies' of spatial development strategies being proposed. This includes devolution areas once they have become mayoral authorities. Annex B shows a map of proposed SDS areas, and Wealden District falls within the Sussex and Brighton area.



Annex B is a map of England that shows the proposed SDS areas. It is colour coded based on the 4 groups outlined in Annex A.

Fig 12. Potential Spatial Development Strategy (SDS) Geographies (Consultation extract 2026)

Micro Energy initiatives

2.3.6. In June 20205 the government published a '**Solar Roadmap: United Kingdom powered by solar'**. This set out the role of solar in 'making Britain a Clean Energy Superpower', addressing actions including: rooftop solar, electricity networks and supply chains, planning and delivery, followed by implementation. The **Clean Power Action Plan** calls for a rapid acceleration in solar deployment from the current over 18 GigaWatts (GW) to 45-47GW by 2030.

2.3.7. The roll out of rooftop PVs has implications for the orientation of roofs, colour and reflectivity in the landscape and challenges where PV Arrays may be placed within urban areas, such as over large car parks. For some passive solar schemes in Germany entire roofs are PVs, and coupled with passive design, these houses export more energy over the year than they consume. In the UK, innovations for the energy supplier Octopus include the 'Octopus Zero Bills' new developments which combine PV roofs and heat pumps to create smart energy systems.

2.3.8. Long forgotten, are six ground-breaking studies in 1988 by the then government Property Services Agency advocating for **Energy Saving through Landscape Planning.** Whilst issues such as drafts have largely been eliminated in modern housing, many others, like microclimate control are still relevant. The Wealden Design Guide should address these wider issues of roof orientation and microclimate as part of energy saving, energy producing, lower carbon planning & design.



Fig 13. Small scale PV deployment advocated for in the Department of Energy & Net Zero's Solar Roadmap (Dept.ENZ,2025)

2.4 National Planning Policy Framework

NPPF December 2024

2.4.1. The current National Planning Policy Framework was published in December 2024, setting out the Government's planning policies for England. Although originally published in 2012, the NPPF underwent multiple revisions since. The 2024 version focused on boosting housing supply and reforming the Green Belt policies.

The key principles of the NPPF are

- Sustainable development, with three objectives: build a competitive economy, support healthy communities in well-designed places and protect and enhance the natural and historic environment.
- Presumption in favour of sustainable development: requires that decision makers approve without delay development proposals which are in accordance with an up-to-date development plan.
- Plan-led system: the NPPF emphasises a "genuinely plan-led" system where succinct, up-to-date plans provide positive vision for the future, allowing local people to shape their surroundings.
- Boosting housing supply: meet an area's identified housing need through a variety of land types and mix of housing tenures.
- Effective use of land: encourage the use of previously developed land and under-utilised buildings, while safeguarding the environment and ensuring healthy living conditions.
- Green Belt policy: the 2024 NPPF retained the core objective of the Green Belt i.e. preventing urban sprawl, but also introduced the category of Grey Belt, defined as land in the Green Belt that was previously developed or which does not contribute to the Green Belt's purposes.

2.4.2. At the time, the December 2024 National Planning Practice Guidance also included several notable changes, including a revised "standard method" of calculating minimum mandatory housing need for Local Authorities.

Design considerations

2.4.3. Fundamental to the NPPF is the creation of high-quality, "beautiful" and sustainable buildings and places.

- All LPAs are required to prepare **design guides or codes** consistent with the National model Design Guide and National model Design Code, to reflect local character and design preferences; these can be prepared either at an area-wide or site-specific scale.
- Design policies must be developed with **local community input** and reflect local aspirations, while being grounded in an understanding of an area's defining characteristics.
- The key **design criteria** for developments says that these should:
  - function well and add to the overall quality of the area over their lifespan;
  - be visually appealing through good architecture, layout and effective landscaping;
  - be sympathetic to local character and history, including the surrounding built environment and landscape setting while allowing for appropriate innovation;
  - establish a strong sense of place through building types, building groupings, materials etc.
- New streets should incorporate **nature and greenery** i.e. be tree-lined, and existing trees retained wherever possible.
- Poorly designed development should be refused, particularly where it fails to reflect local design policies. Conversely, significant weight should be given to development that reflects local design policies or demonstrates outstanding/innovative design.

2.4.4. For a rural, heritage-rich area like Wealden District, the NPPF provides specific protections that must be integrated into any design guidance.

Landscape considerations

2.4.5. Great weight must be given to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty in **National Parks and National Landscapes.** The scale and extent of development in these areas should be limited, and development within their setting must be sensitively located and designed to avoid adverse impacts.

2.4.6. Planning policies should recognise the **intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside**, supporting the wider benefits of natural capital such as the best and most versatile agricultural land and woodland.

2.4.7. In rural areas, the NPPF allows for **isolated homes in the countryside** only in specific circumstances, such as when the design of exceptional quality, is truly outstanding and significantly enhances its immediate setting while being sensitive to local defining characteristics.

Heritage considerations

- **Heritage assets** range from local historic value to World Heritage Sites and must be conserved in a manner appropriate to their significance. When determining applications, authorities should require applicant to describe the significant of any heritage asset affected, including the contribution made by their setting
- When considering the **impact of development** on a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to its conservation and any harm or loss must have "clear and convincing justification".
- Local authorities should look for **opportunities for new development** within Conservation Areas and the setting of heritage assets to enhance or better reveal their significance.

NPPF December 2025 Consultation

2.4.8. The December 2025 NPPF consultation draft proposes significant restructuring of the national planning policy, with the most fundamental proposed change being the separation of its thematic chapter into “Plan-making policies” and “National decision-making policies”.

2.4.9. The most significant proposed changes are:

- Another revision to the **'Standard method'** for housing need, which is also to be included in the NPPF Annex rather than in separate guidance.
- New policies regarding **sustainable development** state firstly that within settlements development should be approved unless benefits are “substantially outweighed by any adverse effects” and secondly that development outside settlements should be limited to agriculture, rural business or redevelopment of previously developed land
- Formalised **Grey Belt policy and green belt assessments**, which are set out in detail in an Annex to the draft document, with the note that Green Belt boundaries should be changed in order to allow development near railway stations
- Introduction of **Supplementary Plans** to replace Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs) and which would be a formal part of the statutory development plan, would be subject to independent examination and are limited to setting locally-specific design standards
- **Accelerated Local Plan preparation**, with proposed time-frames of 30 months and supported by maximum 10 measurable outcomes
- **'Substantial weight'** should be given to improving energy efficiency in existing buildings and using low-carbon energy sources, proposals for commercial development in support of the National Industrial Strategy, the provision of new or improved public service infrastructure and community facilities and remediation of contaminated or unstable land.
- In order to diversify the housing mix, the draft proposes requiring local plans to accommodate 10% of their housing need on **small sites**, no larger than 2.5ha

Specific proposed design policies

2.4.10. The 2025 draft formalises eight key principles in Policy DP3:

- **Context:** Responding to history and character while allowing for innovation
- **Liveability**: Supporting healthy, vibrant, and durable communities
- **Climate:** Using massing and materials to conserve energy and minimise overheating
- **Nature:** Connecting to green infrastructure and sustainable drainage
- **Movement:** Prioritising walking, wheeling, cycling, and public transport
- **Built Form:** Using patterns of buildings to define streets and focal points
- **Public Space:** Ensuring inclusive, safe spaces with natural surveillance
- **Identity:** Creating distinctive development with a coherent palette of materials

2.4.11. The 2025 draft reiterates that poor design should be refused and that 'substantial weight' should be given to compliance with local design policies, guides and codes.

- A specific addition to the 2025 decision-making criteria (Policy HE6) states that energy efficiency and low carbon heating (like heat pumps and solar panels) should be considered as 'important public benefits' when weighing the harm to a designated heritage asset.
- Another specific new requirement in Policy N2(1)(f) mandates that development proposals 'should incorporate integrated nest boxes' (commonly known as swift bricks) unless there are compelling technical reasons not to.
- Policy N1(2) introduces a new restriction stating that local authorities should only set BNG standards higher than the statutory 10% for specific site allocations where it is 'fully justified and deliverable'.
- Policy N2(1)(b) strengthens the preference for using poorer quality agricultural land over 'best and most versatile' land.
- The 2025 draft reiterated that development within the setting of National Parks or National Landscapes must be sensitively designed to avoid adverse impacts.

2.5 Benchmarking

2.5.1. In the context of this report, the process of comparing the contents and scope of similar design guides sets a benchmark for the current work in order to check the topics and level of detail used for similar target audiences for the design guide. Best practice benchmarking is commonly used to evaluate processes in relation to company practice, here it is to check the topics and level of detail used for similar target audiences for the design guide.

2.5.2. Wealden District abuts Rother Lewes, Mid Sussex Districts within East Sussex and Tunbridge Wells District in Kent, plus the High Weald National Landscape and South Downs National Park. The following design guides are summarised for benchmarking purposes:

- High Weald National Landscape Management Plan
- High Weald Housing Design Guide
- SDNP Design Guide
- Mid Sussex Design Guide



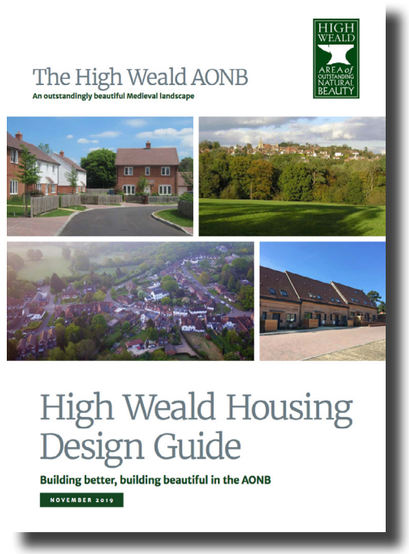
High Weald National Landscape Management Plan, 2024-29 - HWNL, 2024

Part 1 : Natural Beauty & the legislative purpose of NLs Character components & drivers of change 2024-2029

- Geology, soils, water, climate (key characteristics, top issue objectives G1 to G4, actions)
- Settlement (key characteristics, top issues, objectives S1 to S3, actions)
- Routeways (key characteristics, top issues: objectives R1- R2,
- Woodland (key characteristics, top issues,:objectives W1- W4
- Fieldscape & heath (key characteristics, top issues, objectives FH1 to FH4, actions)
- Dark skies (key characteristics, top issues, objectives DS1 to DS2, actions)
- Aesthetic & perceptual qualities (key characteristics, top issues, objectives PQ1 to PQ3, actions)
- Land-based economy & rural living (key characteristics, top issues, objectives LBE1 to LBE3, actions)

Part 2 : cross-cutting themes, programmes, principles for action & investment 2024-2029

- Restoring soil health & regenerative land management
- Nature recovery & biodiversity
- Climate crisis, achieving net zero
- People & access
- Planning & development (Local Plan Policies, setting of the NL, NPPF, Planning Principles 1 to 6



High Weald Housing Design Guide - HWNL, 2019

1) About this guide

- Purpose/aim

2) Understanding the High Weald

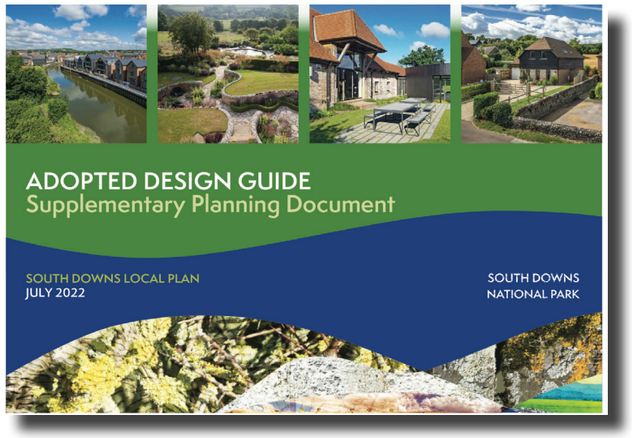
- What makes this special/settlements in the HW: brief history of the formation of their character/settlements & built form characteristics

3) Design Guide

- Overview
- DG1: Responding to the site & landscape context: History/setting/ views/topography/watercourses/site features
- DG2: Connecting beyond the site: streets, lanes, routeways/walking & cycling/permeability/way-finding & views/site edges & transitions
- DG3: Layout & structuring the site: street layout/street hierarchies/ street character/accessing gardens/street geometry & junctions/locating meaningful public realm/multi-functional green spaces
- DG4: Using buildings to define streets & spaces: Relating buildings to the street/street definition/boundaries & front gardens/addressing public space/turning corners/left over space
- DG5: The right built form: Grain& density/scale, form & massing
- DG6: Parking strategies; Integrating parking into the design/parking solutions
- DG7: Building appearance, local details & sustainable design: built details/colour/materials/sustainable building design
- DG8: Ancillary & storage
- DG9: Detailing the street
- DG10: Reinforcing local planting character & habitats

4) Appendices

- Creating a meaningful design & access statement



SDNP Design Guide - SDNPA, 2022

A. How to use this guide

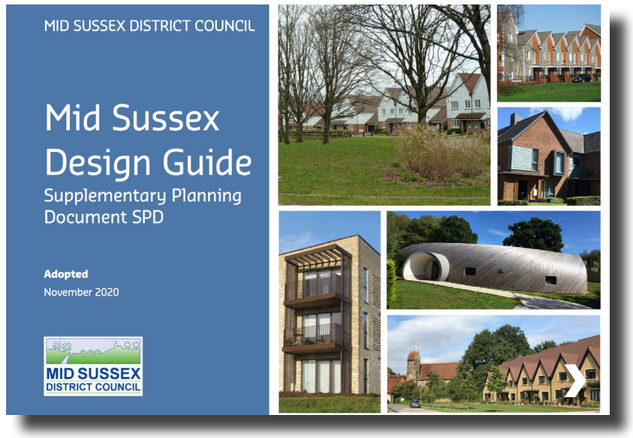
- Good design in the South Downs
- Other important design guidance (SDNP Management Plan/ Neighbourhood plans/Local design guidance)

B. Design Process

- Landscape-led approach to design in practice
- Small scale development
- Larger scale development

C. Design Guidance

- Layout: Landscape strategy/access & permeability/orientation/density/ legibility & street hierarchy/perimeter blocks/active frontages/countryside/ settlement edge
- Character: enhancing local character/ restoring positive character
- Development in Conservation Areas
- Household extensions: roof extensions to existing residential buildings/ front, side/rear extensions to existing residential buildings
- Development type: Single dwellings/farmstead developments/new agricultural developments/rural holiday accommodation/shop fronts/non-residential development/multi residential development
- Scale: Grain/massing
- Public realm: rural highway design/streets/public open space/ play spaces/ natural surveillance
- Parking and services
- Green & blue infrastructure: Conserving and enhancing/trees, hedgerows & woodland/ SuDS/green roofs and walls/ ornamental planting
- Residential amenity: Private gardens/communal gardens/ balconies/privacy & daylight/
- Boundaries: Residential boundaries/edge of countryside boundaries/public boundaries to non-residential development/public open space boundaries)
- Materials: Building materials/surfacing materials
- Architectural detail: Architectural styles & proportions/roofs/ windows/entrances and doors/chimneys
- Social and environmental sustainability: place making/ public art/internal space and access standards/ environmental sustainable design
- Dark skies



Mid Sussex Design Guide - MSDC, 2020

1) Purpose/status

2) Understanding the Context

- Overview/Character Study/Landscape Character/Settlement Character/ Town Centres/Site Appraisal/Checklist

3) Establishing the Structure

- Natural resources/Movement Network/Existing Townscape & Heritage Checklist

4) Site Layout, Streets and Spaces

- Urban Structure – Perimeter Block/Positive Frontages/ Enclosure/Legibility and Image/Pedestrian-friendly Streets & Street Hierarchy/Parking/Refuse, Storage and Utilities/ Open Space and Public Realm/Checklist

5) Site Optimisation and Mixed Use Layouts

- Planning for Increased Density/Town Centre Intensification/ Optimising the Development Potential of Urban Extensions/Mix of Uses/Checklist

6) High Quality and Sustainable Building Designs

- Sustainable Buildings/Delivering Architectural Integrity & Sense of Place/ Height and Scale/Designing Buildings with Active Frontages/ Designing Buildings on Sloping Sites/Accommodating Services

7) Business Parks /Employment Areas

- Layout of new Employment Areas/Design of Commercial Buildings/

8) Residential Amenity

- Privacy/External amenity space/Daylight/sunlight/Noise/Air and Light Pollution

9) Household Extensions

- Building Conversions
- Traditional Buildings with Heritage Value/Office to Residential Conversions/ Checklist

2.6 Local Plan and Neighbourhood Plans

2.6.1. This section outlines local policies related to design. While not exhaustive, this summary provides the necessary policy context for this study, including key design-related policies from local Neighbourhood Plans.

1998 Wealden Local Plan Saved Policies

2.6.2. The 1998 Wealden Local Plan contains several “saved policies” that remain part of the statutory development plan for the District. These are structured around the following key themes:

General Development Principles

- GD1: Permits new development in principle within defined boundaries for towns and villages, provided other plan policies are met.
- GD2: Resists development outside development boundaries to protect the countryside, unless specifically allowed by other policies.

Environmental Protection and Design

- EN6 to EN9 and EN11: Provides specific protection for the High Weald AONB (now the High Weald National Landscape), Sussex Downs AONB (now the Sussex Downs National Park), Ashdown Forest, and the Coastal Levels (now Pevensey Levels).
- EN12-EN15: Protect ancient semi-natural woodland, Tree Preservation Order trees, and designated nature conservation sites.
- EN19: Conservation Areas to be preserved or enhanced through development.
- EN27: All development must respect the scale, form and character of adjoining development and promote local distinctiveness.
- EN29: Light spillage to be minimised and intensity of light in new developments to be kept to minimum necessary to protect dark skies.

Development in the Countryside

- Policies DC2, DC17 and DC18 restrict new housing in the countryside generally limiting it to agricultural or forestry dwellings, replacement dwellings or appropriate extensions.
- Policies DC6, DC7 and DC8 establish criteria for converting rural buildings, giving priority to small-scale commercial uses (workshops, offices, or tourism) over residential uses.
- Policies DC9 to DC14 manage uses and activities in rural areas such as golf driving ranges, stables and motor or gun sports to prevent environmental harm.

Housing

2.6.3. The housing policies 'saved' from the 1998 Local Plan focus on housing quality and specific housing needs.

- Policies HG5 to HG7 set out development standards such as requiring a mix of dwelling types and sizes on new estate developments; mandating that new housing layouts must incorporate safety measures such as street lighting and natural surveillance; and, requiring large new housing developments to incorporate energy conservation design, particularly through housing types proposed and the orientation of dwellings.
- Policies HG8 to HG10 manage existing housing stock by resisting the loss of residential accommodation by only permitting removal of housing in special circumstances, such as for a development of wider community benefit; as well as permitting the subdivision of large houses into smaller units and the extension of dwellings to supplement housing supply, provided the designs are in keeping with the context.
- Policies HG11 and HG12 provide criteria for special needs housing, allowing them within development boundaries and strictly controlling them in the countryside.

Business (BS) and Shopping (SH)

2.6.4. The saved policies focus on economic activity within established urban and village cores by concentrating industrial and commercial development within designated Town and Village Business Areas (Policies BS3, BS6); directing new shopping development to Main Shopping Areas to maintain the vitality of town centres (Policy SH2); and providing criteria for farm shops and garden centres to ensure they do not harm rural character (Policies SH11, SH12). Additional BS and SH saved policies focus on controlling the uses and development in business parks and main shopping areas.

Transport (TR) and Community Services (CS)

- Policies TR1 to TR3 require new road schemes and developments to minimise environmental impact and not create unacceptable traffic conditions.
- Policies TR17 to TR19 protect former railway lines from any development that may prevent their potential reinstatement, such as the Uckfield-Lewes, the Polegate-Pevensey link and the Eridge-Tunbridge Wells lines.
- Policies CS1 and CS2 ensure that capital works, particularly drainage, are provided alongside new development.
- Policies CS4 and CS5 require the provision of recycling facilities with both residential and commercial developments.

Leisure (LR) and Tourism (TM)

- Policies LR1 to LR3 set standards for the provision of outdoor playing space and children’s play areas, particularly in developments of 30+ dwellings.
- Policies LR4 to LR8 control the development of artificial turf pitches, informal amenity spaces, indoor sports facilities and community halls, depending on impact to context character.
- Policies TM1 to TM10 support small-scale tourist attractions and facilities while strictly managing caravan and camping sites, especially within AONBs (now National Landscapes) and the Ashdown Forest.

Settlement-specific saved policies

2.6.5. With the exception of Crowborough, all main towns have specific saved policies permitting new housing development in principle within their development boundaries. Other key saved policies are:

- Crowborough: The most notable saved policies include the Mead House site allocation (CR8) (now built), protection for the 'arcadian' character of Crowborough Warren (CR2), restriction of intensification of business and storage uses in Western Road Goods Yard (CR4) and the protection of the Crowborough Ghyll landscape area from inappropriate development (CR12).
- Hailsham: Saved policies focus on town centre regeneration by allocating 2ha of business use on land off Station Road / Old Swan Lane (HA5), traffic calming and pedestrian priority improvements in the High Street and Market Square (HA8, HA9) and on land for a new primary school on Ingrams Farm (HA11) (now built).
- Heathfield: Notably Policy HE2 requires a woodland management plan for the business site allocation at Land at Ghyll Road, while Policy HE3 Burwash Road Commercial Area permits intensification or redevelopment for business and roadside facilities.
- Uckfield: Policy UC3 Framfield Road to New Place encourages the conversion of large Victorian properties into offices or flats rather than redevelopment, Policy UC5 Framfield Road Neighbourhood Centre resists any development causing a material increase in traffic or on-street parking to maintain emergency vehicle access to the nearby Fire Station and Community Hospital, while Policy UC8 Riverside Walk commits to providing a public walk along the river corridor from Hempstead Mill to the Uckfield Bypass.
- Polegate: PW5 Willingdon Levels Recreation Policy Area supports the extension of the Cuckoo Trail into Eastbourne Park and allows for informal recreation and golf courses, provided they protect the area's hydrology and nature conservation interests.

The Core Strategy 2013

2.6.6. The strategy focuses development in the most sustainable locations to reduce the carbon footprint and ensure ease of access to services.

2.6.7. The Plan classifies settlements based on their sustainability and service range:

- District Centres: Crowborough, Uckfield, and Hailsham
- Service Centres: Heathfield, Polegate and Willingdon, Stone Cross, Wadhurst, and Forest Row
- Local Service Centres: 13 villages including Mayfield, Pevensey Bay, and Horam
- Neighbourhood Centres and Unclassified Settlements: Smaller villages where development boundaries were generally revoked to apply countryside constraints

2.6.8. Revoked development boundaries for several “neighbourhood centres” and “unclassified settlements” resulted in the principle of development no longer being automatically acceptable at these locations. The removal of development boundaries means that the "in principle" acceptability of development under GD1 is replaced by Policy GD2.

2.6.9. The Core Strategy aimed to deliver a total of 9,414 homes (averaging around 450 per annum) and around 38,000 square metres of net additional employment floorspace between 2006 and 2027, with growth directed primarily toward “sustainable urban extensions” (Policy WCS2). Strategic development areas were identified to ensure delivery, such as Land at West Uckfield (SD1) for 1,000 homes and employment land, and extensions to North and East Hailsham (SD2, SD3).

Area-specific policies

2.6.10. Crowborough: Growth is more limited due to the proximity of the High Weald AONB (now National Landscape) and Ashdown Forest, focusing on a 400-metre exclusion zone for new dwellings around the Special Protection Area.

2.6.11. Hailsham: Aims for significant growth and town centre revitalisation while managing wastewater discharge constraints related to the Pevensey Levels.

2.6.12. Uckfield: Focuses on town centre regeneration, flood risk management (following 2000 floods), and a major urban extension to the west

2.6.13. Rural Areas: Development is restricted primarily to meeting essential rural needs or supporting diversification. Development boundaries were removed for 25 smaller 'neighbourhood centres', such as Berwick Station, East Hoathly, and Nutley, to protect the countryside

Draft Wealden Local Plan 2024

2.6.14. The March 2024 Draft Local Plan (Regulation 18) represents a significant shift from the 2013 Core Strategy, moving toward a more prescriptive and sustainability-focused policy framework. Once adopted this draft will replace all previous local plan policies, including the 1998 Saved Policies and the 2013 Core Strategy.

2.6.15. The draft Wealden Local Plan proposes key changes in relation to the spatial strategy, climate-responsive design, a landscape-led approach and heritage principles:

- The 'Hybrid' Growth Model: The 2024 draft shifted away from a single growth option to a hybrid model that combines focused growth in sustainable settlements with extensions to the edge of major towns adjacent to the district.
- The 20-minute neighbourhood: This design principle requires that new developments facilitate active travel (walking and cycling) so residents can meet most daily needs within a short distance from home.
- The Energy Hierarchy: the 2024 draft introduced the ambition for Net Zero Development Standards. This requires applicants to embed the energy hierarchy from the start, prioritising building orientation, massing, and 'fabric-first' efficiency to minimise energy consumption.
- Sustainable Drainage: Policy CC8 is retained but strengthened in the 2026 draft to ensure SuDS are multi-functional, integrated into the layout from the start, and contribute to green/blue infrastructure.
- Landscape-led approach: New developments are required to provide appropriately sized landscape buffers to the open countryside and use native species for boundary treatments; Policies to protect the district's dark night skies by minimising light pollution through sensitive housing design (e.g., avoiding large uncurtained glazed areas) are introduced.
- Policy HE1 requires that the significance of heritage assets and their settings be understood at an early stage to ensure heritage is at the heart of place-making. Additionally there is a requirement for early-stage archaeological research and building investigation to inform the design process.

Key design policies

2.6.16. The 2024 draft introduced a dedicated design chapter (Chapter 10) with new strategic and non-strategic policies (DE1–DE4).

2.6.17. Policy DE1 ***Achieving well designed and high quality places*** requires all new development to be 'beautiful' and achieve high-quality architectural design that contributes positively to a sense of place. Proposals must be locally distinctive, responding to the topography and using high-quality local materials and traditional building forms (such as timber framing in the High Weald or flint in the Low Weald).

2.6.18. Policy DE2 ***Masterplans and Design Codes*** provides thresholds for coordinating design with masterplans required for residential developments of 100 or more dwellings and significant non-residential sites and design codes required for large strategic sites of 500 or more dwellings to ensure consistency across multiple phases.

2.6.19. Policy DE3 ***Spaces for people, nature and the public realm*** requires public spaces and public realm to be an integral part of the design from the outset, incorporating existing natural features and delivering tree-lined streets. Layouts must follow 'Secured by Design' principles, using active frontages and natural surveillance to reduce the fear of crime.

2.6.20. Policy DE4 ***Shop Fronts and Advertisements*** require applications for new or replacement shopfronts to respect the architectural style, materials, scale and vertical alignment of the buildings they relate to and includes a presumption against the loss of traditional and historic shopfronts. Overdominant advertisements are to be prevented, especially in rural settings.

2.6.21. The Focused Local Plan Draft 2026 concentrates specifically on updates to housing need and the spatial strategy, especially in response to the publication of the December 2024 NPPF, which established a new standard method for calculating housing need. The key changes introduced by the 2026 draft include:

- Revised housing need, in line with the new NPPF standard method calculation, reflected in an updated delivery target by the of the plan period;
- Affordable housing policy shift, including removal of 'first homes' policy, a new tenure mix and a requirement for schemes of 10 or more units to provide affordable housing, with social rent as a priority;
- Removal of the development boundary around Pevensey Bay;
- New coastal and climate policies, including a special designation for a Coastal Change Management Area (CCMA) at Pevensey Bay, based on the updated 2025 National Coastal Erosion Risk Mapping;
- Extensively revised sustainable drainage policy for technical accuracy following recommendations from the lead local flood authority;
- Updated site allocations, to accommodate the revised housing need and targets;
- Revisions to the economy and town centre policies to provide increased floorspace to reflect population growth.

Potential development types

2.6.22. The Draft Focused Local Plan (2026) provides several scenarios for growth to accommodate the housing needs in the district. Most of the housing is envisaged to be built in the Low Weald, in sustainable locations nearby existing settlements such as Uckfield, Horam, Hailsham and Polegate. Some sites were identified in the north of the district near existing settlements.

2.6.23. The majority of potential development areas are earmarked for residential uses, with some exceptions such as sites in Berwick and Heathfield, which are identified as suitable for mixed-use development. Additionally there is some potential across the district for unlocking brownfield sites, such as surface car parking redevelopment in town centres. These would also likely be suitable for mixed-use development, depending on context and subject to individual assessments.

2.6.24. Although limited, there are some retrofitting/re-development opportunities in the district such at Old Mint House.

2.6.25. There are a number of smaller infill sites around the District as well, particularly in the High Weald.

Summary Feedback to Draft Local Plan Reg 18 (2024)

2.6.26. The Regulation 18 consultation received 12,210 representations, highlighting a strong demand for a design guide that establishes clear expectations to counteract “formulaic, characterless, generic and poor-quality housing design” from large developers. Respondents emphasised that the current lack of an up-to-date District-wide design guide / design code is a critical issue for identifying and protecting the defining characteristics of Wealden’s diverse settlements.

2.6.27. The following bullets are a summary of comments relating to the design policies during the consultation. These were received from 1,516 individuals and organisations.

Local Vernacular and Identity

- There was a call to move beyond generic standards and mandate ‘Sussex-specific’ design cues that reflect the immediate locality rather than ‘pattern book pastiche’.
- Feedback suggested that a new design guide must explicitly define what a ‘landscape-led’ approach involves in practice, ensuring development respects the “genius loci” and the diverse characters of the High Weald, Low Weald, and Pevensey Levels.
- Multiple respondents cautioned against using the term ‘beautiful’ in policy, arguing it is too subjective and should be replaced with clearer, objective criteria within the Design Guide.

Climate and Sustainable Construction

- Some respondents suggested that the guide should mandate the inclusion of solar energy, grey water re-use, and rainwater management as integral design features rather than optional extras.
- There was support for encouraging new buildings to approach or achieve Passivhaus standards and establishing a clear energy source hierarchy for both new builds and retrofitting existing structures.

Movement and 'Healthy Streets'

- Feedback strongly supported the '20-minute neighbourhood' concept, requiring developments to be situated in sustainable locations where day-to-day needs are accessible via walking, wheeling, and cycling
- Respondents suggested that public spaces be designed for the community rather than vehicles, with suggestions to adopt the 'Healthy Streets' indicators and prioritise pedestrian safety
- Concerns were raised regarding how poorly designed parking leads to vehicle dominance and street clutter, which inhibits active travel and harms the character of villages like East Hoathly.

Built Form and Density

- Residents expressed concern over high-rise or high-density accommodation in rural areas, which is often seen as 'cramming' and incongruous with the surrounding character.
- In line with national policy, respondents suggested that the guide should ensure lower densities at settlement perimeters to provide a sympathetic transition to the open countryside.

Heritage and the Natural Environment

- Some respondents suggested that the guide needs to provide 'leniency' and specific technical advice for the energy-efficiency retrofitting of historic buildings (e.g., heat pumps and solar panels) to ensure they remain habitable without losing their significance.
- To protect Wealden’s dark night skies, the guide should require external and street lighting to be fitted with movement detectors and maximum illumination times to minimise light pollution and energy waste.
- There was a popular demand for mandatory, strictly enforced buffer zones (often suggested between 15m and 25m) to protect Ancient Woodland and Veteran Trees from the impacts of adjacent development.



Fig 14. The Nutley Windmill a Grade II* listed mill in Ashdown Forest

Neighbourhood Plans

2.6.28. Neighbourhood Plans are valuable sources of information regarding local aspirations. Neighbourhood Plan work will not be superseded by this Characterisation Study nor by the Wealden Design Guide. Instead the documents will work alongside each other.

Made Neighbourhood Plans to date:

- Herstmonceux (2019)
- Hailsham (2021)
- Hellingly (2021)
- Wadhurst (2024)
- Ninfield (2024)
- East Hoathly with Halland (2024)
- Horam (2024)

Emerging Neighbourhood Plans:

- Hellingly (Review)
- Hailsham (Review)
- Fletching
- Frant
- Hartfield
- Uckfield

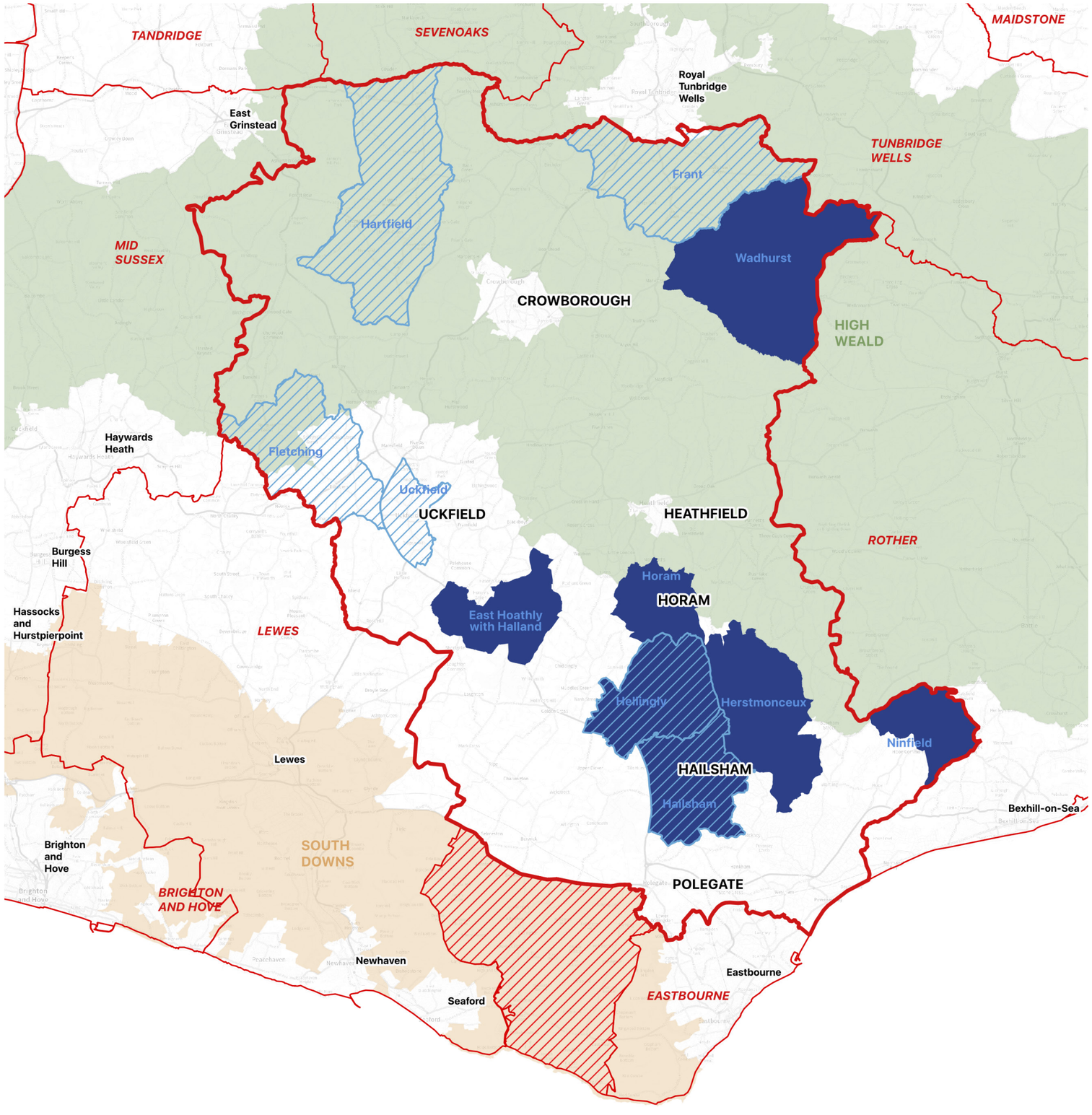


Fig 15. Wealden District Made and Emerging Neighbourhood Plans

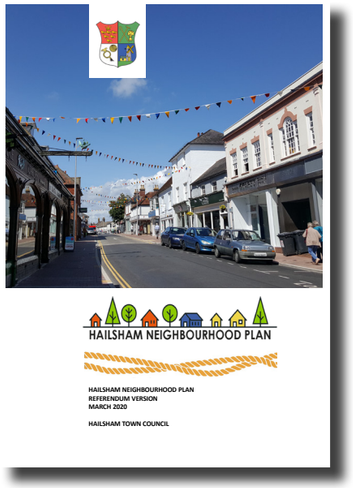
Key:

- Study area
- Area of WDC within the South Downs National Park, excluded from study area
- South Downs National Park Authority
- High Weald National Landscape
- District boundaries
- Areas with a made Neighbourhood Plan
- Areas with emerging Neighbourhood Plans (including reviews)

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Hailsham Neighbourhood Plan (2021)

2.6.29. Hailsham is the District's largest settlement and is facing significant growth pressures. This Neighbourhood Plan provides a robust local evidence base and policy framework.

Key principles:

- **The 'ten-minute town' concept**- Hailsham is identified as a compact town where all everyday uses are within a 5-to-10-minute walk, cycle, or bus journey. This promotes permeability and accessibility of all new developments to create integrate extensions to existing fabric rather than isolated 'cells'.
- **Landscape-led and character-led design**- the documents suggest that high-quality design must respond to site-specific analysis and 'local context,' including the historic grain of the town and traditional materials (sandstone, brick, and timber).
- **Movement and sustainable travel** - The plan advocates for the 'Five Cs' of walking routes: Connected, Convenient, Comfortable, Convivial, and Conspicuous. It also emphasises the Cuckoo Trail as a primary green artery for non-motorised travel.
- **Regenerative and sustainable construction** - there is a strong focus on air quality and reducing carbon emissions by supporting Passivhaus standards, on-site renewables (solar, heat pumps), and mandatory EV charging points (one per dwelling).
- **Town Centre vitality** - the plan views the town centre as the 'beating heart' of the community, where 'public, economic and cultural life all come together'. It identifies the Market Square as Hailsham's 'outdoor room'.
- **Nature and Blue-Green Infrastructure**- New developments must incorporate visible biodiversity enhancements, including green walls, roofs, and multi-functional SuDS. It also identifies the need to better utilise 'underused roadside verges' for wildlife habitats.
- **Design process and implementation**- For large-scale growth, the plan encourages Development Frameworks and Design Codes to ensure comprehensive site planning across different landownerships. It also introduces 'Plot Passports' as a tool for regulating self and custom-build schemes.

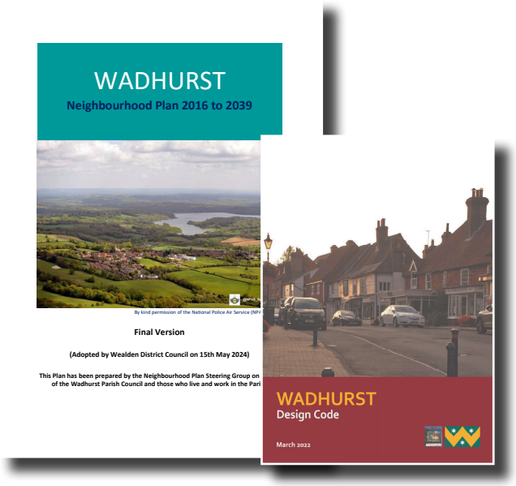


Horam Neighbourhood Plan (2024)

2.6.30. The Horam Neighbourhood Plan (HNP) and its accompanying Horam Design Guidelines (HDG) provide a granular, evidence-based template for managing growth in rural contexts. Their findings offer specific lessons for the Wealden Design Guide on balancing housing delivery with the protection of the High Weald's 'Southern Slopes' character.

Key principles:

- **Landscape-led development -** The Waldron Ghyll is a valued landscape and development here must be sensitive to its open character and incorporate natural flood management to mitigate flash flooding. The HNP requires a smooth transition from built-up areas to the countryside through 'edge lanes' (low-speed streets fronting green space) and rich vegetation rather than hard building fronts.
- **Local built form** - building heights are preferred at 1–2 storeys, with 2.5 storeys only permitted if they do not dominate the skyline. The former Merrydown Cider factory is seen as a negative case study, noting that its apartment typology and massing are 'incongruous' and offers 'poor visual containment' in a village setting.
- **Movement and active travel -** as a strategic asset, the Cuckoo Trail should be the 'spine route' for active travel, with all new developments required to provide direct pedestrian and cycle links to it. The HNP advocates for permeability, discouraging cul-de-sacs unless they are strictly linked to the wider footpath network to avoid blocking movement.
- **Environmental design -** the documents focus on 'life cycle thinking', encouraging the reuse of building elements like old timbers, bricks, and tiles to reduce embodied carbon.
- **Commercial core -** any development in the commercial core of Horam must provide active ground-floor active frontages (Use Classes E and F) with residential uses restricted to upper floors to support the viability of local services.
- **Materials and details** - The HDG requires development to reflect the local brick and tile industry through the use of mottled red/burnt orange bricks (due to iron deposits), clay tile-hanging, and white-painted weatherboarding. There is a strong preference for soft boundaries (hedgerows and trees) or low-height brick walls (<90cm) over panel fencing to maintain the rural street scene.

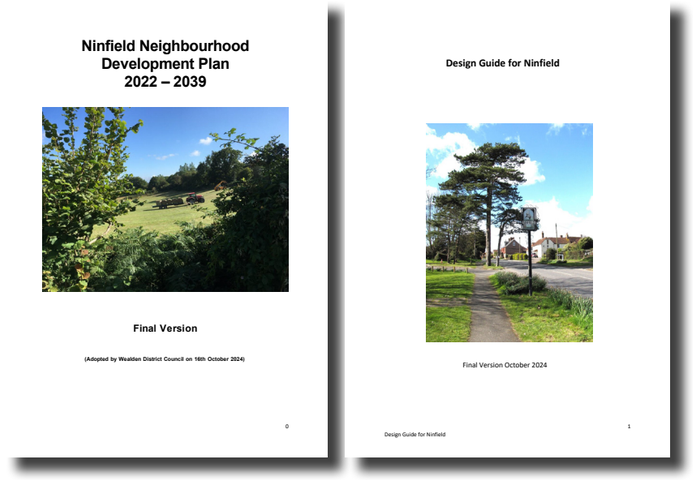


Wadhurst Neighbourhood Plan (2024)

2.6.31. The Wadhurst Neighbourhood Plan (WNP) and Wadhurst Design Code (WDC) provide a highly granular, evidence-based framework for development within the High Weald National Landscape.

Key principles:

- **Guidance structure** - The WDC establishes a clear hierarchy using 'MUST' (mandatory), 'SHOULD' (highly recommended), and 'CAN' (aspirational) to provide developers with maximum clarity on non-negotiable requirements. Guidance is tailored to three distinct area types—Town Centre, Neighbourhood Settlements, and Rural Hamlets—ensuring that the density and scale of development are appropriate to their specific location.
- **Built form** - the plan required new buildings in the town centre to be maximum three storeys. In the town centre development is also required to maintain a continuous building line set close to the street to reinforce historic character.
- **Materials** - the WNP requires a strict vernacular of locally sourced red brick (often with burnt/grey headers), clay peg tiles, and horizontal timber weatherboarding.
- **Movement and parking** - the design code actively discourages cul-de-sac streets unless no other option exists, prioritising direct walking and cycling routes. Residential parking should not obstruct the building line, and courtyard parking must be limited to 12 spaces to avoid a car park feel.
- **Landscape and nature** - given Wadhurst's ridgetop location, the WNP identifies and strictly protects specific valued views across the High Weald and Bewl Water. All lighting is required to be Dark Sky compliant, human-scale (maximum 5m height), and use a warm colour temperature (<3,000K) to protect nocturnal biodiversity. Sustainable drainage systems must be integrated into the landscape (e.g., rain gardens and swales) rather than being treated as hidden grey infrastructure.
- **Sustainability and Retrofit-First -** The WNP champions the 'Retro First' movement, supporting the reuse and refurbishment of existing buildings to reduce embodied carbon before considering demolition. Developers are encouraged to use low embodied carbon materials like local timber and orientate buildings or roofs to optimise passive solar gain.

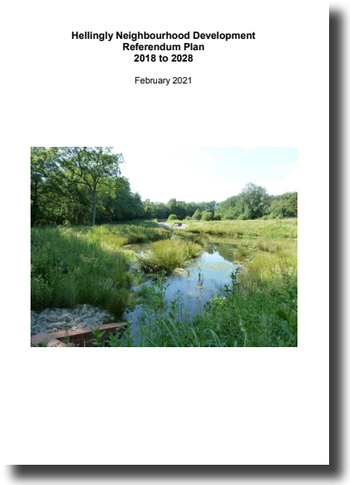


Ninfield Neighbourhood Plan (2024)

2.6.32. The Ninfield Neighbourhood Development Plan (NNDP) and its accompanying Design Guide (NDG) provide a rigorous framework for maintaining the identity of a ridge-top village within the High Weald.

Key principles:

- **Landscape character**- As a characteristic High Weald ridge-top village, the documents require significant and exposed side slopes in Ninfield to be kept free from development. The guide mandates that design must work with existing site levels to minimise 'cut and fill' and avoid large, urbanising retaining structures.
- **Built form and grain** - Ninfield is characterised by a coarse grain and low density (typically 6–15 dph). The NDG suggests that higher densities should be reserved for junctions or site centres, while lower densities should facilitate the transition to the rural edge. There is a clear presumption against the repetitive use of standard house types. Instead, the guide promotes individuality in building design to reflect the village's incremental historic growth. Terraces should be kept very short (historically no more than three cottages). Deep plan buildings are discouraged as they result in inappropriate roof volumes and ridge heights.
- **Local vernacular** - The guide codifies a specific vernacular of mottled red brick (often with grey headers in Sussex Bond), deep terracotta clay tile-hanging, and white-painted or black-stained weatherboarding. The 'barn-hip' roof is a common local feature that helps reduce the perceived bulk of buildings.
- **Public realm** - A major takeaway is the resistance to standard concrete-kerbed, tarmac pavements which 'urbanise' the rural scene. The guide advocates for grass verges or granite/stone setts instead. Enclosed front curtilages with hedges are preferred to maintain 'greenness', while low-level ornamental planting is deemed insufficient for providing vertical enclosure in the streetscene.
- **Environmental design**- Preservation of the dark night sky is a core priority. The guide recommends no street lighting in residential areas unless essential for safety. Where lighting is required, it must be downward-pointing, PIR-activated, and capable of night-time switch-off. Ninfield requires that BNG be integrated into the design from the start, not as an afterthought. Scots pine and orchard trees (apple, cherry) are identified as characteristic species to be encouraged in new planting schemes.
- **Heritage protection** - In the absence of a designated Conservation Area, Ninfield has identified specific Local Heritage Areas and non-designated heritage assets to protect clusters of historic buildings.

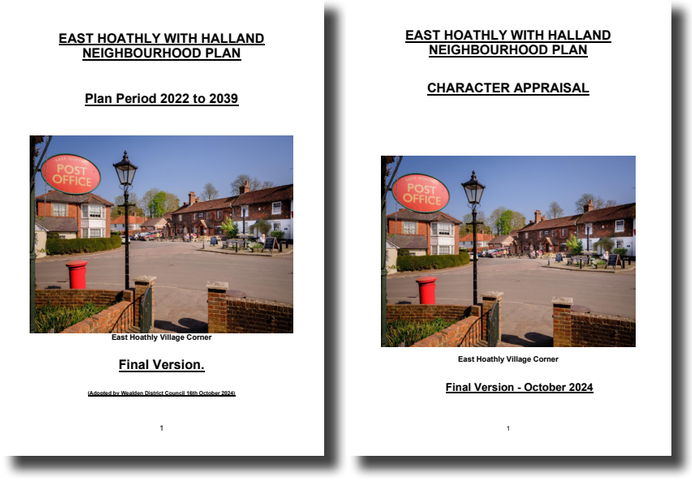


Hellingly Neighbourhood Plan (2021)

2.6.33. The Hellingly Neighbourhood Development Plan (HNP) provides a detailed framework for managing significant growth while preserving a 'green and accessible lung' for the expanding town of Hailsham. It focuses on maintaining settlement identity and protecting the sensitive hydrological links to the Pevensey Levels.

Key principles:

- **Landscape protection -** The HNP designates the northern part of the parish as an Area of Locally Valued Landscape to protect its 'quintessential English countryside' character, including small fields, species-rich hedgerows, and Ancient Woodland. The HNP emphasises that the distinct character and identity of the four main settlements (Hellingly Village, Lower Horsebridge, Lower Dicker and Roebuck Park) are to be retained.
- **Hydrology** - Reflecting the 'regenerative mindset' of the wider project, any development must demonstrate it will not adversely affect the Pevensey Levels SAC/Ramsar site, particularly regarding wastewater capacity and surface water run-off. Due to heavy clay soils and 'flashy' river systems (Cuckmere and Bull), the HNP mandates that flood risk assessments model local conditions over a minimum of three occasions between November and January to capture the full scale of winter flooding. The plan maps specific 'Wildlife Hubs' (e.g., Hurst Haven, Hellingly Mill) and requires major developments to provide ecological impact assessments and long-term management plans.
- **Local assets** - Five areas, including Hellingly Country Park and Lower Horsebridge Recreation Ground, are designated as Local Green Spaces where development is ruled out except in very special circumstances.
- **Movement** - The plan identifies the Cuckoo Trail as a core habitat and movement link. It also mandates that all new housing provide Electric Vehicle (EV) charging points to reduce local air pollution.
- **Heritage protection**- The HNP identifies specific 'non-designated heritage assets' (e.g., Hellingly Pond Cottage, the Primary School) that contribute to the district's local distinctiveness and must be considered in planning decisions.



East Hoathly With Halland Neighbourhood Plan (2024)

2.6.34. The East Hoathly with Halland Neighbourhood Plan (EHHNP) and its supporting Character Appraisal (EHHCA) provide a robust, evidence-led framework for a rural parish facing significant growth pressures.

Key principles:

- **Landscape**- The village of East Hoathly is built along a ridgetop spur. The parish has a high proportion of Ancient Woodland (72% of its total woodland) and a vast network of species-rich hedgerows. The EHHNP requires developers to use these as 'wildlife transit corridors' and to provide a minimum 10% Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) on site wherever possible, in accordance with statutory requirements.
- **Built character** - Historically, the housing density in East Hoathly is very low, averaging 14 dwellings per hectare (dph). The plan explicitly identifies 'character detractors', such as Roman-style interlocking roof tiles, machine-made bricks that lack irregularity, and the repetitive use of standard house types which creates a repetitive feel unsuited to historic settlements.
- **Climate resilience** - A critical takeaway is that the parish suffers from overloaded sewage systems leading to untreated overflows into river catchments and therefore drainage solutions must be carefully considered and well integrated into design. The EHHNP expresses support for renewable energy systems (solar panels, heat pumps) and EV charging points to be integrated in developments.
- **Movement** - There is a strong preference for permeable layouts that avoid cul-de-sacs, which are seen to inhibit social cohesion and exclude residents from the wider community and countryside.
- **Growth pressures**- The EHHNP seeks to redress an imbalance in housing stock by prioritising smaller 1-3 bedroom homes for young families and those wishing to downsize, supporting the work of the Community Land Trust. Halland lacks any community facilities (green space, play areas, or meeting halls), identifying a specific need for developer contributions to provide these within the settlement.


Herstmonceux Parish
Neighbourhood Plan 2017 - 2027

Submission Plan

Published by Herstmonceux Parish Council for Submission Consultation under the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012 and in accordance with EU Directive 2001/42

July 2017

Herstmonceux Parish Neighbourhood Plan

Design Guide

July 2017

Page | 1

Herstmonceux Neighbourhood Plan (2019)

2.6.35. The Herstmonceux Parish Neighbourhood Plan (HPNP) and supporting Design Guide provides a detailed framework for managing growth in a parish that straddles the High Weald National Landscape and the Low Weald, while bordering the internationally protected Pevensey Levels.

Key principles:

- **Landscape**- The village of Herstmonceux is situated on a prominent ridge with significant views southwards across the Pevensey Levels and northwards into the High Weald. The plan emphasises protecting the High Weald's character components, such as small pasture fields enclosed by Ancient Woodland and historic hedgerows.
- **Built form**- The plan requires new development to be in keeping with the existing village context. The plan requires that new developments be genuinely integrated into the existing village fabric through sensitive siting and landscaping.
- **Movement** - A priority project is the creation of a safe shared-access route between Windmill Hill and Herstmonceux village to accommodate walkers, cyclists, and mobility users. The HPNP identifies a critical conflict in the village centre where all-day parking by school and business staff prevents visitor access. It proposes refurbishing and extending the Recreation Ground car park to alleviate this pressure. The plan commits to protecting and upgrading the extensive network of public footpaths and bridleways, which are essential for both local health and the tourism economy.
- **Sustainability**- The plan supports the creation of a Community Land Trust to deliver affordable housing and specialist homes for the elderly that remain in community ownership in perpetuity.

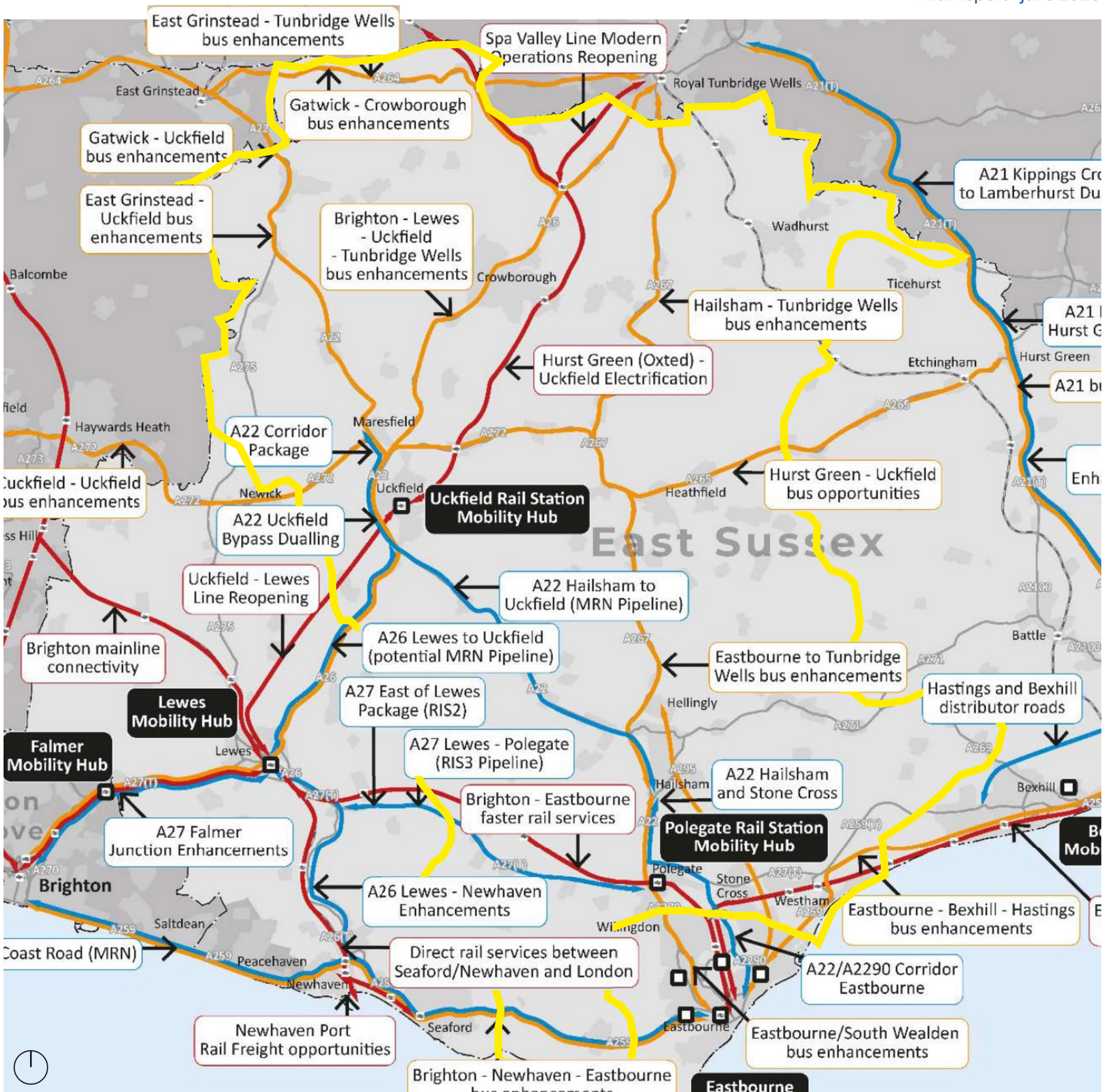


2.7 Local Transport Plans

East Sussex Local Transport Plan (LTP4)

2.7.1. LTP4 prioritises decarbonisation, public health and social inclusivity through the physical reconfiguration of the built environment. A new LCWIP is being prepared to address some transport issues and will be consulted on mid-2026. The key takeaways from LTP4 are as follows:

- The **"Healthy Streets" Framework** is a central requirement in the LTP4 to ensure everyone feels welcome, streets are easy to cross, and there are places to stop and rest; this implies designing environments that feel safe and relaxed so people choose to walk, wheel or cycle.
- LTP4 uses a **Sustainable Movement and Place Framework** to guide allocation of road space based on function: in urban centres (high place function) design must prioritise pedestrians, cyclists and public transport; on key corridors (high movement function) design prioritises efficient transit but must also incorporate parallel segregated active travel routes.
- **Active travel infrastructure** requirements mandate high-quality design through physical segregation from motor traffic where feasible, especially along major roads, as well as adherence to LTN 1/20 (Cycle Infrastructure Design) and emerging Active Travel England rural guidances and integration of Public Rights of Way in a wider safe, attractive network of off-road routes for inter-urban trips.
- **Mobility hubs** are proposed to provide seamless, integrated journeys; these should be created at strategic interchange points with high quality public realm, facilities for cycling, taxi call points, car clubs and real-time information.
- **Digital Demand Responsive Transport (DDRT)** is proposed as part of the solution to provide an inclusive and accessible transport network, where traditional fixed-route bus services are not seen as commercially or operationally viable. This is seen as a way to adopt Mobility as Service (MaS) principles, using digital platforms to optimise vehicle routes based on actual demand rather than fixed timetables.
- LTP4 emphasises that **transport infrastructure should function as a natural asset**, through 'daylighting' culverted watercourses and integrating Sustainable Drainage Systems into the public realm, as well as delivering material biodiversity net gain and supporting habitat connectivity. Additionally LTP4 requires infrastructure to be designed for extreme weather, using heat-resilient materials and urban greening to mitigate the 'heat island' effect.
- LTP4 requires design guide to mandate **independent access audits** for public space schemes to ensure the needs of those with both physical and hidden disabilities are met; a co-production approach is encouraged, involving local communities and stakeholders early in the design process.



(Not to scale)

Fig 16. LTP4 Investment Plan "Keeping East Sussex Connected". Source: LTP4 (2024)

Wealden District boundary

Mobility Hub

Note: Number and location of mobility hubs displayed in areas are indicative

Railway schemes

Inter-urban public transport schemes

Highway schemes

East Sussex Local Cycling Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP 2020)

2.7.2. The LCWIP 2020 is the East Sussex's first strategic plan to identify a proposed network of cycling and walking routes over a ten-year period to make active travel the "natural choice" for short journeys by integrating infrastructure into placemaking and development design. The strategy focuses on areas with the highest potential for travel change, specifically the coastal strip and larger market towns, as these offer the greatest opportunities to secure external funding. It aims to enable people to choose walking or cycling for all or part of their everyday journeys, ensuring it is an easy, safe, and inclusive option. To progress these aims, a new LCWIP is currently being prepared, with a public consultation expected to launch in the second half of 2026.

2.7.3. Strategic drivers:

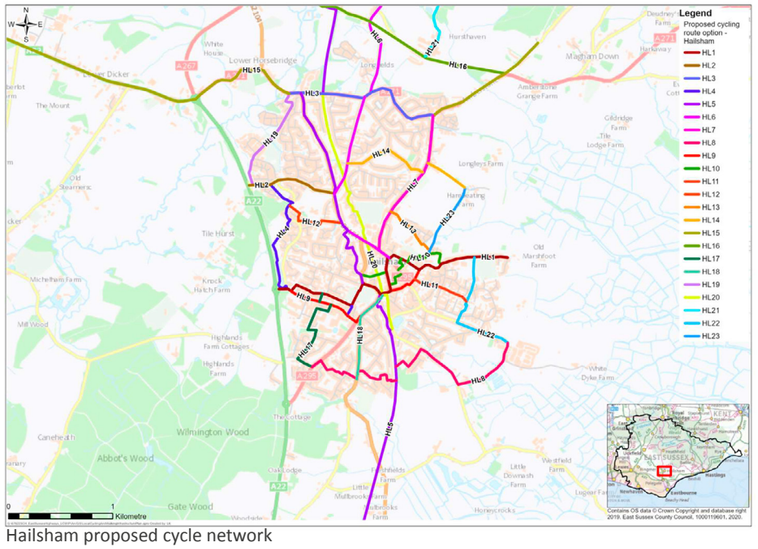
- Tackling health inactivity, which accounts for one in six deaths in the UK, and supporting mental well-being;
- Addressing the climate emergency, noting that transport accounts for a third of CO2 emissions nationally, and improving air quality in management areas;
- Supporting access to jobs and training, noting that most local work journeys in the county are 5km or less.

2.7.4. The key overarching principles put forward by the LCWIP are:

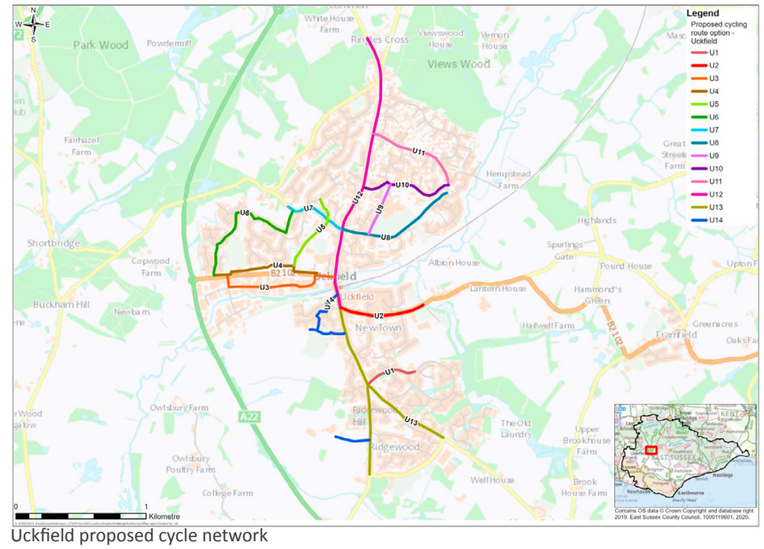
- **Integration with placemaking:** The provision of cycling and walking infrastructure defined as a fundamental element of place making for high streets, town centres and new residential developments.
- **Better streets:** Streets designed for people of all ages and abilities. Infrastructure is required to be coherent, direct, safe, comfortable and attractive, following the inclusive transport strategy, accommodating people with both physical and hidden disabilities, as well as under-represented groups like the elderly or children.
- **The '10-minute town':** Focus on market towns that have the greatest potential to increase active travel levels. This is similar to the Hailsham aspiration to be a '10 Minute Town' where all local services (schools, healthcare, shops) are accessible within a ten-minute walk or cycle.
- **Focus on shorter journeys:** By providing attractive active travel alternatives for journeys up to 2km walking or 5km cycling.
- **Permeability and connectivity in new developments:** This must be ensured to provide connections to existing networks and trip attractors.
- The LCWIP is intended to strengthen Local Plan policies to 'fully integrate walking and cycling into development allocations' and provides a basis for assessing planning applications and securing developer contributions (CIL/ S106) for active travel infrastructure.

2.7.5. The document identifies several Wealden-specific priorities:

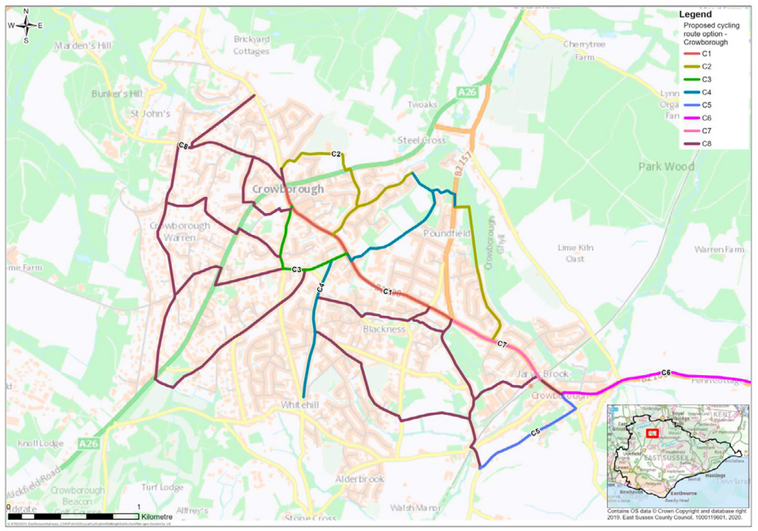
- **Hailsham/Polegate:** Create a high-quality movement corridor between these settlements, utilising the Cuckoo Trail as a core spine;
- **Uckfield:** Focus on improving the High Street public realm and connectivity between new strategic sites and the town centre;
- **Crowborough & Heathfield:** Despite undulating topography, these are considered 'compact settlements' where most journeys are within 3km, making active travel feasible with the right infrastructure.



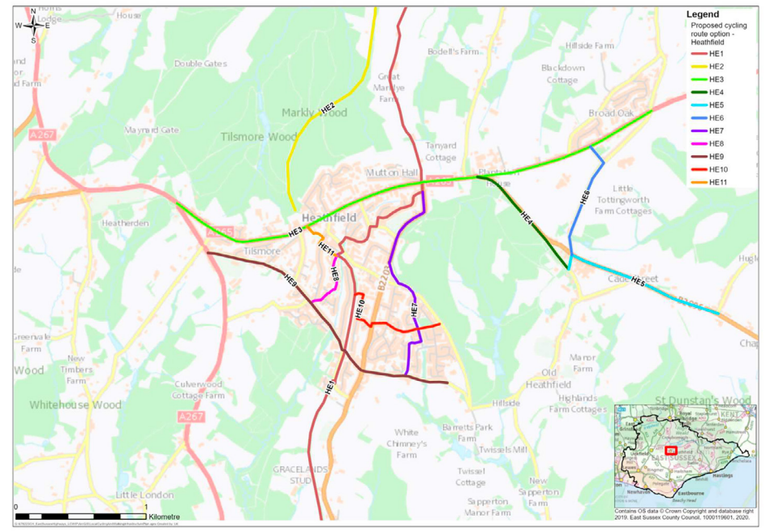
Hailsham proposed cycle network



Uckfield proposed cycle network



Crowborough proposed cycle network



Heathfield proposed cycle network

Fig 17. Extracts from the LCWIP (2020) showing proposed cycle networks in Hailsham, Uckfield, Crowborough and Heathfield

2.8 Urban Surveys & Landscape Character Assessments

Sussex Extensive Urban Surveys

2.8.1. The Sussex Extensive Urban Survey (Sussex EUS) is a comprehensive archaeological, historical, and historic urban character assessment of 41 significant towns across the ancient county, including Crowborough, Hailsham, Heathfield, and Uckfield. Funded by English Heritage, these reports identify county-wide Historic Character Types (HCTs) and specific Historic Urban Character Areas (HUCAs) for each town to inform strategic planning and historic environment management.

Hailsham (2008)

2.8.2. Hailsham has medieval origins, having been granted a weekly market in the 13th century. It sits at the transition between the High and Low Weald. The town's history is defined by its relationship with Hailsham Common (enclosed in 1855) and its late 19th-century boom in rope-making and related production.

2.8.3. The core of the town preserves its medieval focus around the Market Square and the 15th-century parish church of St Mary the Virgin.

2.8.4. Six HUCAs were identified in Hailsham. The Church area (HUCA 1) holds the highest value (HEV 4) due to the presence of the medieval church and other significant historic structures.

Crowborough (2008)

2.8.5. Crowborough is primarily a 'new town' of the railway age, originating in the late 19th century following the arrival of the railway station at Jarvis Brook in 1868. It is located on the Forest Ridge in the High Weald and contains the highest point in the district.

2.8.6. The town developed as a polyfocal settlement with several distinct commercial and residential nuclei, including Chapel Green, The Cross/High Street, and Jarvis Brook. While much of the town dates to the post-railway building boom, several pre-urban houses formerly scattered around the heath (such as the 17th-century Hydehurst) survived and remain important landmarks.

2.8.7. The survey identified seven HUCAs in Crowborough. The highest Historic Environment Value of 2 was assigned to Chapel Green and The Cross/High Street due to their role as early commercial nuclei and the survival of 18th-century buildings like the Sir Henry Fermor school.

Uckfield (2008)

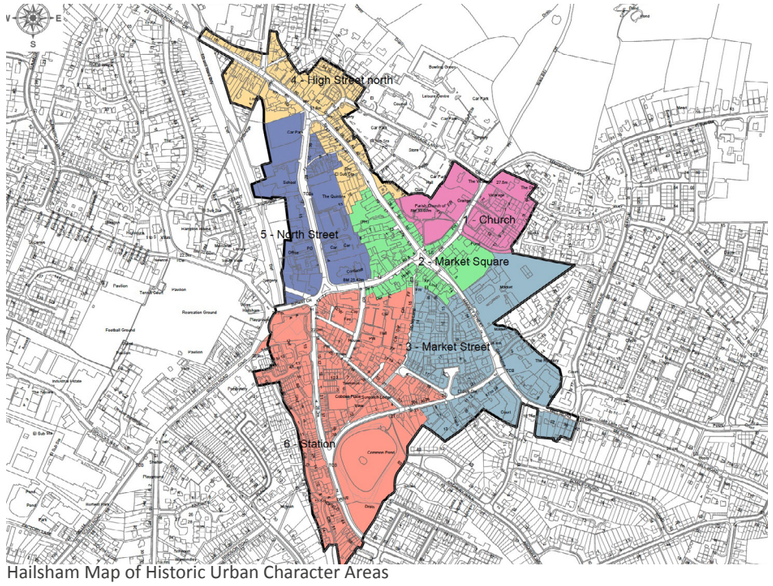
2.8.8. Uckfield is a medieval market town with a market granted in 1220. It grew as a vital transit point on the Lewes-Tonbridge road and sits at the boundary of the High and Low Weald.

2.8.9. The town's historic core is a nucleated cross-roads formed by Church Street, High Street, and Hempstead Road. The town features significant medieval survivals, most notably Bridge Cottage (a Wealden house dated to 1436) and the 13th-century west tower of Holy Cross Church

2.8.10. Six HUCAs were identified in Uckfield. The Upper High Street (HUCA 2) holds the highest value (HEV 4) because it preserves the town's dense medieval and post-medieval architectural core.

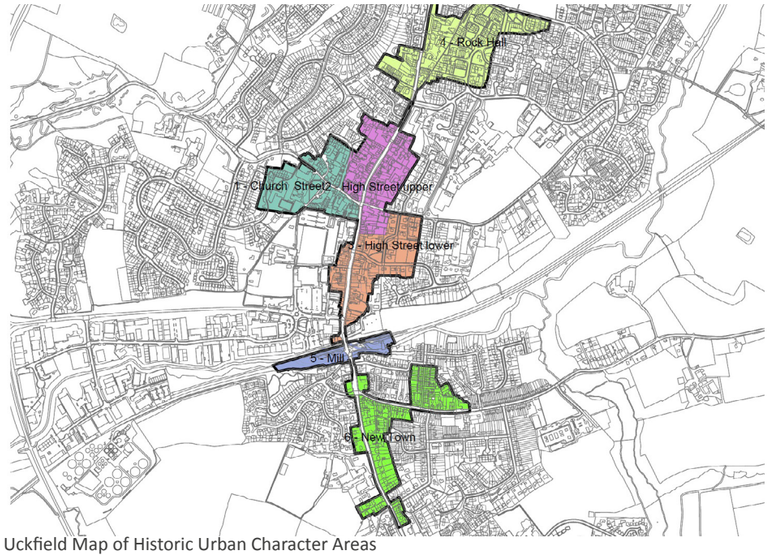
Heathfield (2008)

2.8.11. Heathfield is a bifocal town consisting of the medieval village of Old Heathfield as well as the 'new town' that developed rapidly after the station opened in 1880. It is situated on the Battle Ridge in the High Weald.

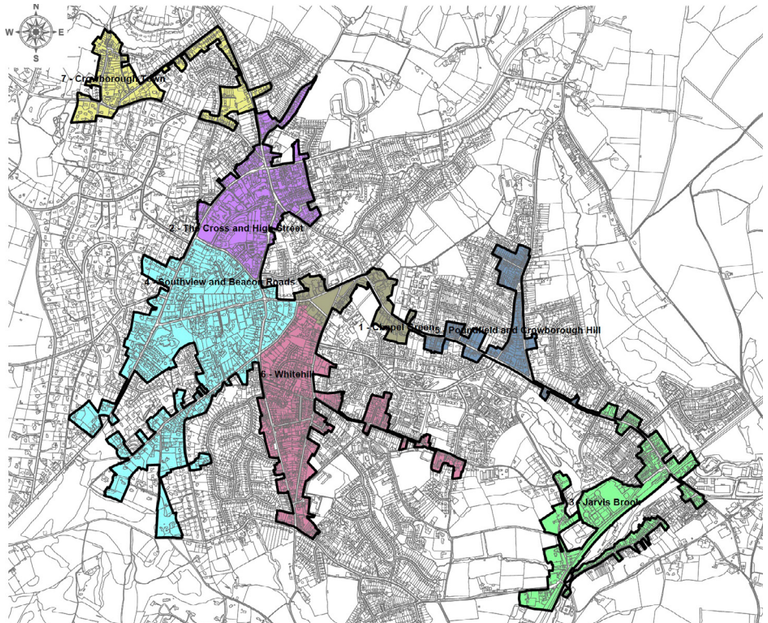


Hailsham Map of Historic Urban Character Areas

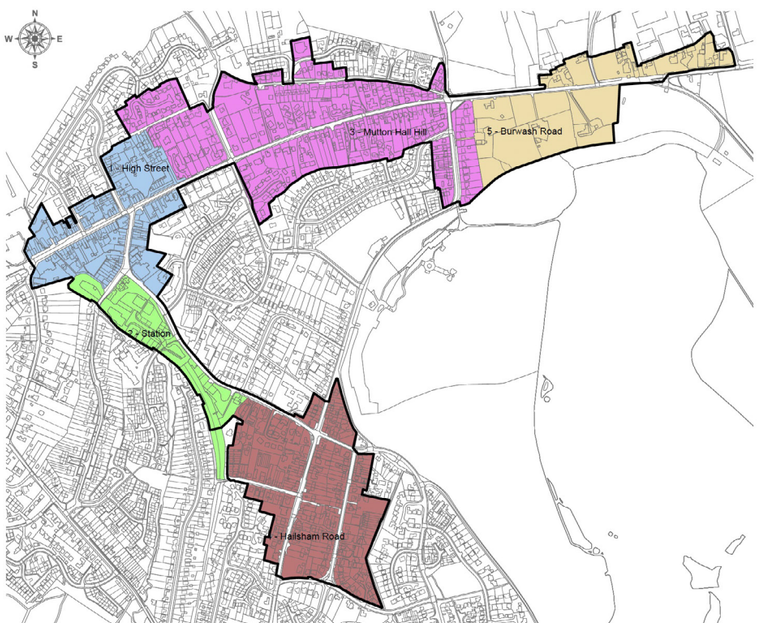
2.8.12. The new town's early economy was notably driven by the "chicken cramming" industry (artificial poultry fattening), which peaked between 1850 and 1950. There are few pre-19th-century buildings in the new town itself; most historic fabric consists of late Victorian and Edwardian commercial architecture on the High Street. Five HUCAs were identified in Heathfield. The Station area and Burwash Road (HUCAs 2 and 5) were assigned HEV 2.



Uckfield Map of Historic Urban Character Areas



Crowborough Map of Historic Urban Character Areas



Heathfield Map of Historic Urban Character Areas

Fig 18. Extracts from the Sussex Extensive Urban Survey showing the HUCAs identified in Hailsham, Uckfield, Crowborough and Heathfield

Landscape Character

2.8.13. Natural England identified four National Character Areas (NCAs) in Wealden district, of which three are in the study area of this study: the High Weald, the Low Weald and the Pevensey Levels.

2.8.14. The District has also been divided into six Landscape Character Types. Distinction is made between the wooded ridges and wooded slopes in the High Weald. The Low Weald is divided into three areas:

- The open clay vale which is relatively level and lies at the foot of the scarp slope to the South Downs;
- The more wooded clay vale to the north of it;
- A small area of river floodplain for the Cuckmere near Berwick.

2.8.15. The Pevensey Levels are extensive and much of this was shallow sea at the time of the Norman Conquest. This is at increased risk of flooding due to climate change forced sea level rises.

2.8.16. Other notable assessments are:

- **Landscape Sensitivity Assessment (Residential & Employment) LUC, Nov 2023**- The relative sensitivity of landscapes affected by the SHEELA potential development sites was published in 2023 to aid decision making on subsequent site allocations in the District. Each area was considered in some detail and strategic landscape guidance was given for each area.
- **Landscape Sensitivity Assessment Renewable Energy Development, LUC, Feb 2024** - This is part of WDC commitment to the Climate Emergency and work towards achieving net zero carbon emissions by 2050, and it looks into the potential impact of wind and photovoltaic array electricity generation.

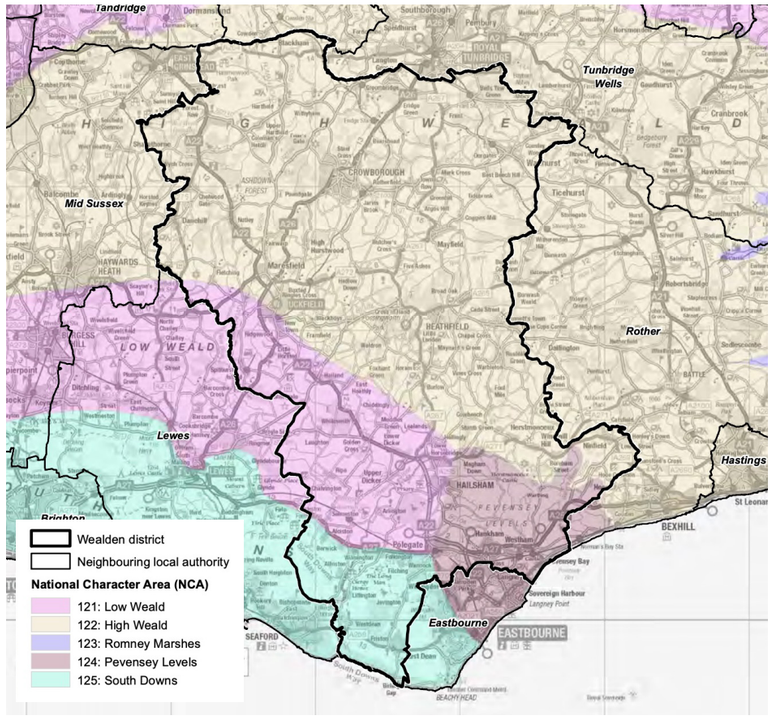


Fig 19. National Character Areas. Source: LUC LVIA

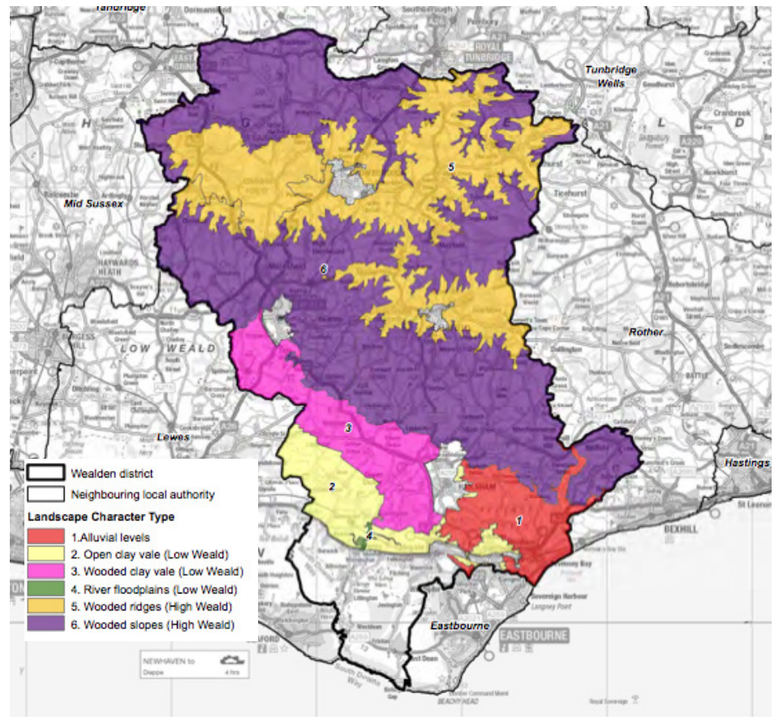
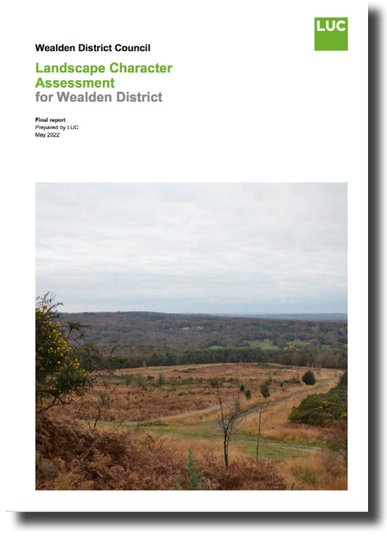


Fig 20. Landscape Character Types. Source: LUC LVIA



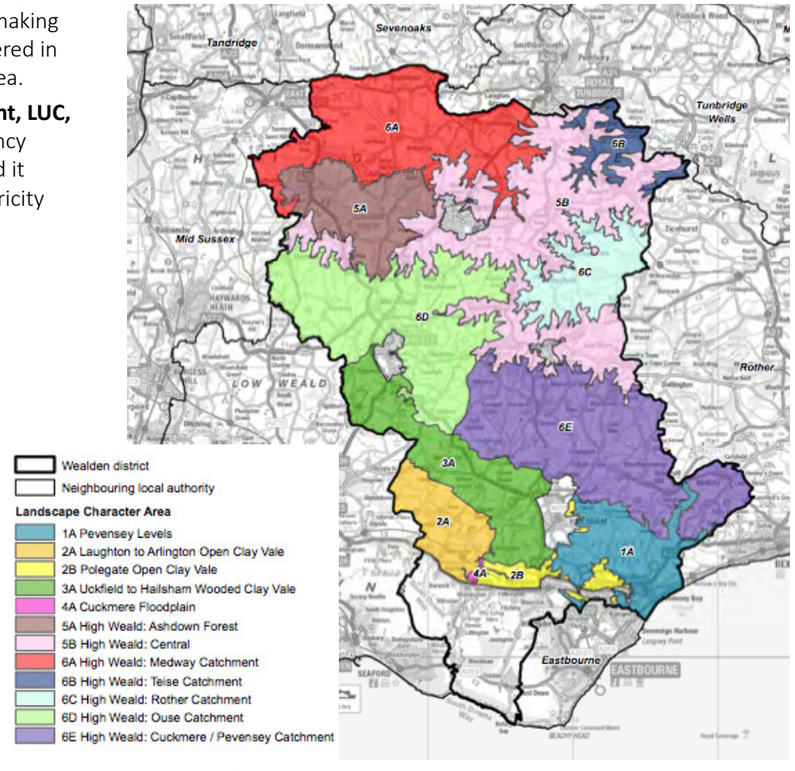


Fig 21. Landscape Character Areas. Source: LUC LVIA

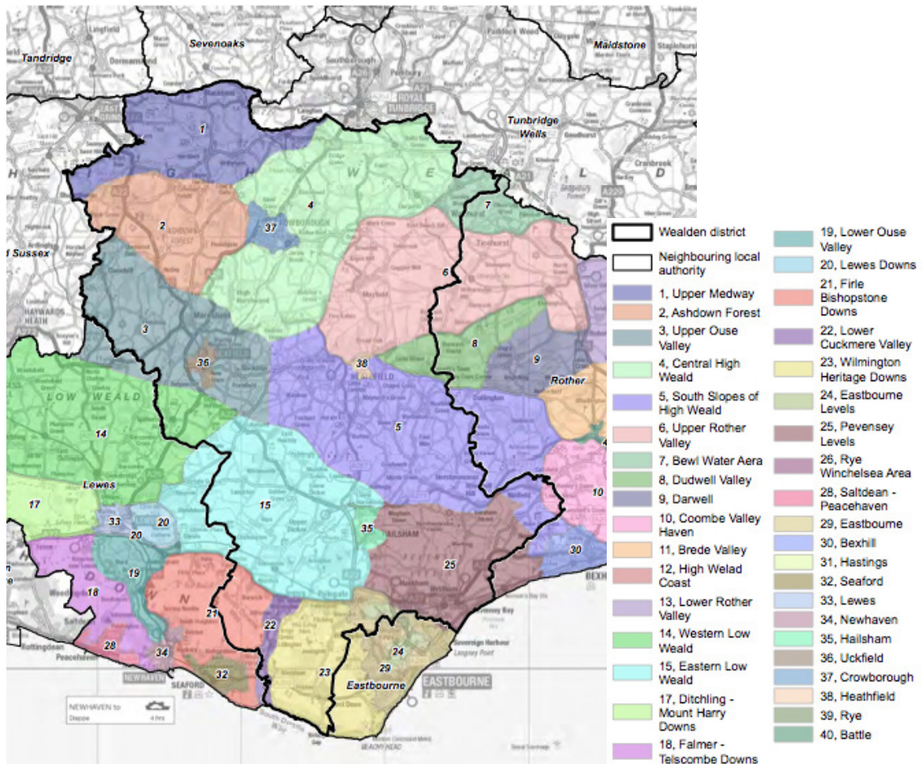
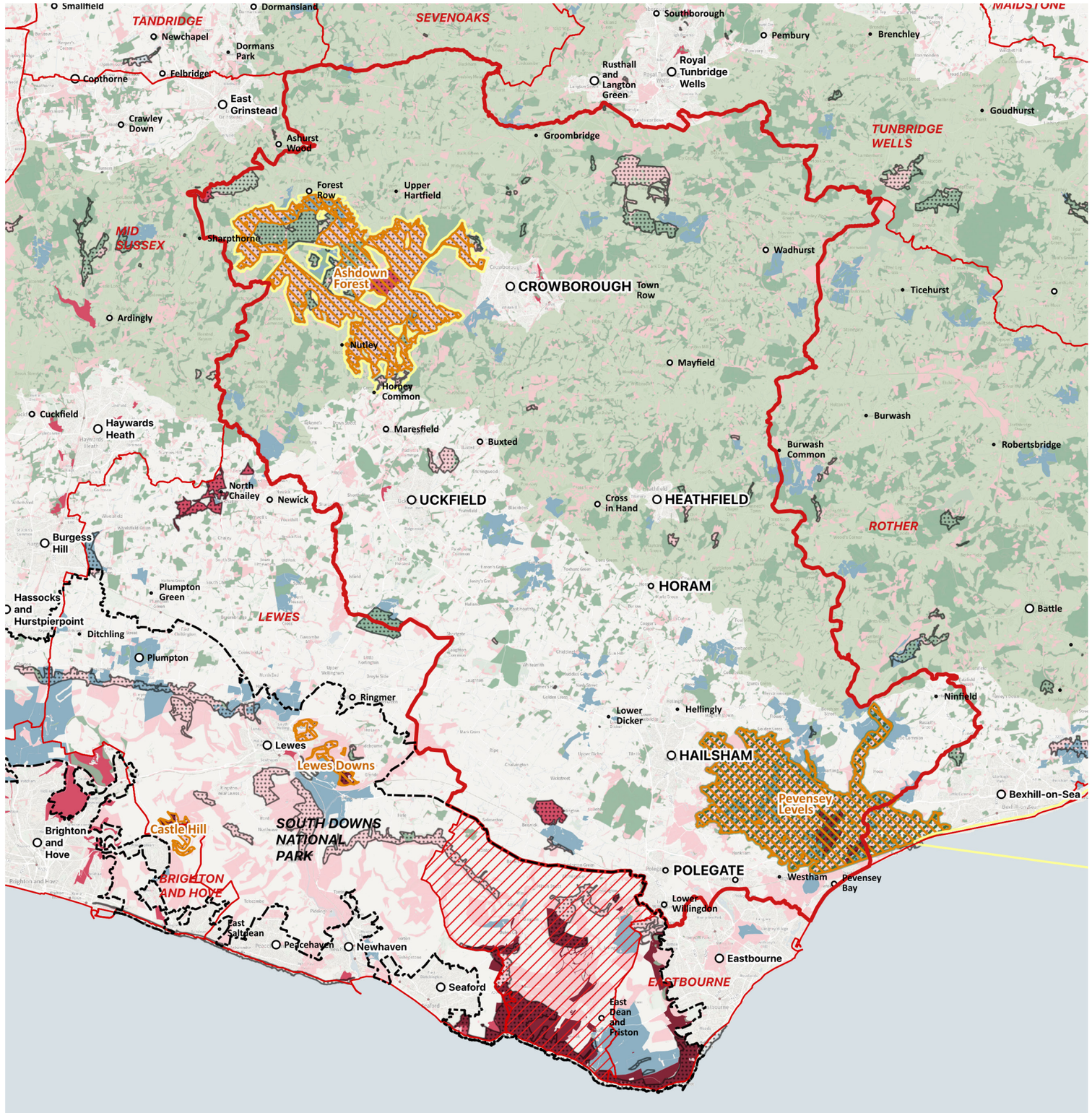


Fig 22. East Sussex Landscape Character Assessment 2016. Source: LUC LVIA

Fig 23. Wealden District Landscape and Habitat Designations



Key:

- Study area
- South Downs National Park
- Area of WDC within the South Downs National Park, excluded from study area
- Local authority district boundaries
- Special Areas of Conservation (SAC)
- Ramsar sites
- Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)
- National Nature Reserves (NNR)
- Local Nature Reserves (LNR)
- High Weald National Landscape
- Ancient Woodland
- Priority Habitats Inventory
- Environmental Stewardship Scheme Agreements
- Special Protection Areas

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0 2.5 5 km

1:175,000 on A3

2.9 Biodiversity & Landscape Policy Context

Biodiversity Net Gain

The Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework

2.9.1. England is one of the most nature depleted countries in the world, much of the loss caused by intensification of agriculture as well as urbanisation since the end of WWII, especially since the 1970s. A list of UK Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) priority species and habitats was published in August 2007 following a 2 year comprehensive analysis and review of the BAP process and priorities. This represented the most comprehensive analysis of such information ever undertaken in the UK. The list now contains 1150 species and 65 habitats that have been listed as priorities for conservation action under the UK BAP.

2.9.2. The UK Post 2010 Biodiversity Framework (published 2012) set out a strategic plan for biodiversity 2011-2020 whose vision is that: 'By 2050, biodiversity is valued, conserved, restored and wisely used, maintaining ecosystem services, sustaining a healthy planet and delivering benefits essential for all people'.

2.9.3. Biodiversity 2020 : A strategy for England's wildlife and ecosystem services sets out the aims and actions for a decade up to 2020, which includes a more integrated approach to conservation, reducing environmental pressures and putting people at the heart of biodiversity policy. This is reflected in the integrated way landscape and biodiversity is being addressed today. Having lapsed in 2020, the UK is actively involved now in the **Post-2020 Convention on Biological Diversity framework**. This sets four long term goals to be achieved by 2050:

- Enhancing integrity of all ecosystems;
- Valuing, maintaining or enhancing Nature's contributions to people through conservation & sustainable use;
- Fair and equitable sharing of the benefits from utilisation of genetic resources;
- Closing the gap between available financial/other means of implementation to achieve 2050 goals.

2.9.4. In the UK, 14 out of 24 biodiversity indicators show long-term decline, and 60% of the UK's most important wildlife populations have fallen in the past 50 years. To combat this, the legislation supporting nature recovery includes the Environmental Act, the quinquennial Environmental Improvement Plan, an England-wide system of local nature recovery strategies, plus BNG, protected site strategies, species conservation strategies and conservation covenants and a biodiversity duty on public bodies.

2.9.5. The Local Nature Recovery Strategies were published in 2024, within which 48 strategy areas cover the whole of England without gaps or overlaps, lead by 48 responsible authorities. **Each strategy contains a local habitat map and a written statement on biodiversity priorities.** The preparation of the strategies must follow the local nature recovery strategy regulations. Natural England published the 'Nature Networks Evidence Handbook' in 2020, building on 'Making space for nature'(Lawton, 2010).

2.9.6. The broad aims of the Sussex Nature Recovery Areas include catchment partnerships within Wealden District: the Pevensey Levels, Romney & Eastern Rother, Cuckmere, River Ouse and to the north the Medway. Overlaying this are the National Bee Lines - 3km wide corridors favouring pollinators. A detailed plan for the areas within Wealden are available via an online tool including a 50m buffer either side of waterways, Network Expansion Zones, Habitat Priority Areas & areas listed on the Priority Habitats Inventory.

Biodiversity Net Gain & The Wildlife Trusts (2024)

2.9.7. The Wildlife Trusts are working towards the restoration of 30% of UK's land and sea areas by 2030- **the '30 by 30' initiative,** but they note the huge gap between the State of Nature report (2023) that found UK to be one of the most nature depleted countries in the world, and these goals.

2.9.8. The Trusts note that the new obligations:

- Do not replace existing requirements to avoid impacts to wildlife;
- Do not give developers free rein to damage habitats on a promise that harm can be rectified elsewhere;
- Do say that if damage to habitats cannot be avoided, developers will be required legally to ensure an increase of at least 10% more biodiversity in addition to the required compensation, maintained for at least 30 years.

2.9.9. The Wildlife Trusts support the mandatory requirement, but recognise that to succeed, this is not a charter to build everywhere. They state the obligation should be applied ambitiously and with care, and must be monitored effectively and enforced. In the context of the biodiversity crisis the Wealden Regulation 18 Local Plan states that BNG should be set at 20% and linked with Nature Recovery Strategies in perpetuity.

2.9.10. The Trusts state that delivery of green infrastructure and positive nature enhancements for both wildlife and people should be through good, multifunctional design of all developments. They call for Biodiversity Net Gain to be considered only once the planning mitigation hierarchy of avoid, reduce, mitigate and compensate has been fully and sequentially followed at both strategic and site base level, and for BNG to be targeted where it delivers the best outcomes for nature in line with the Local Nature Recovery Strategy or equivalent.

2.9.11. Due to the uncertainties surrounding habitat creation, The Trusts say 10% will hold the tide at best, providing a contingency against lost habitat to ensure no net loss of biodiversity. The trusts acknowledge that some developers do exceed the minimum requirement, but worry that **current Government guidance makes this difficult, as it allows developers to sell excess gains created for one development** (i.e. gains over and above the 10%) **to meet obligations for another development**. The Wildlife Trusts state that this approach is unacceptable and could effectively cap BNG at 10% and stifle local ambition. They want this practice to be forbidden. **The Trusts say this practice is especially worrying with regard to mineral & solar farm sites,** because many iconic wildlife sites are former mineral workings, and sale of excess gains for mineral/solar development could mean little or no gain on other developments. They want:

- Developers & local authorities go beyond the minimum requirements and aim for at least a 20% gain for nature;
- All development to have a positive impact on wildlife;
- BNG to be 'additional' to existing mechanism for nature conservation and enhancement;
- Government to change policy and guidance so the sale of excess biodiversity units is prevented.



Biodiversity Net Gain in Wealden District

2.9.12. The Statutory Biodiversity Metric User Guide states that where Local Nature Restoration Strategies are not published, the Local Planning Authority should produce alternative documents for assisting strategic significance. This was published by WDC in 2025.

2.9.13. In March 2024 Wealden District published a draft local plan (Regulation 18) which sets out a 20% **Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG)** requirement. Following national guidelines, householder applications and certain smaller changes of use are typically exempt from mandatory BNG.

2.9.14. The **East Sussex Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS)** sets out a blueprint for nature recovery across the county. WDC published in October 2025 Strategic Significance Biodiversity Net Gain, an interim guidance note for ecologists and planners valid until the publication of the LNRS.

2.9.15. WDC has partnered with the Sussex Wildlife Trust to launch a 5-year initiative, **Wilder Wealden,** to restore ecosystems, expand ancient woodlands and build connected nature recovery networks within the district.

2.9.16. The Wealden Local Plan incorporates policies to protect essential ecosystems, support nature-based solutions to climate change and conserve habitats such as Ashdown Forest.

2.9.17. Several priority **Biodiversity Opportunity Areas (BOAs)** occur within the Wealden district, strongly influenced by the local geography:

- **Pevensey, Rother and Cuckmere Watershed BOA** is a priority area for protecting and restoring ancient woodland, fragmented heathland remnants and floodplain grazing marsh.
- **High Weald BOA**: much of Wealden sits within the High Weald, which contains a large network of interconnected, species-rich ghyll woodlands and ancient wooded commons.

Issues with BNG

2.9.18. The problem with the BNG metric is that some habitats gain more points than others. For example, this tends to demote the value of trees, not least because they are measured in 2 dimensions, whereas in reality they can have a major 3D presence above and below ground. To get around high value existing assessments, it is not unknown for red lines to be moved to exclude old trees for example to lower the threshold for achieving 10% net gain. Consequently, the drive to gain the BNG minimum can trump properly multifunctional design. Furthermore, assessments are site specific and tend not to consider wider networks.

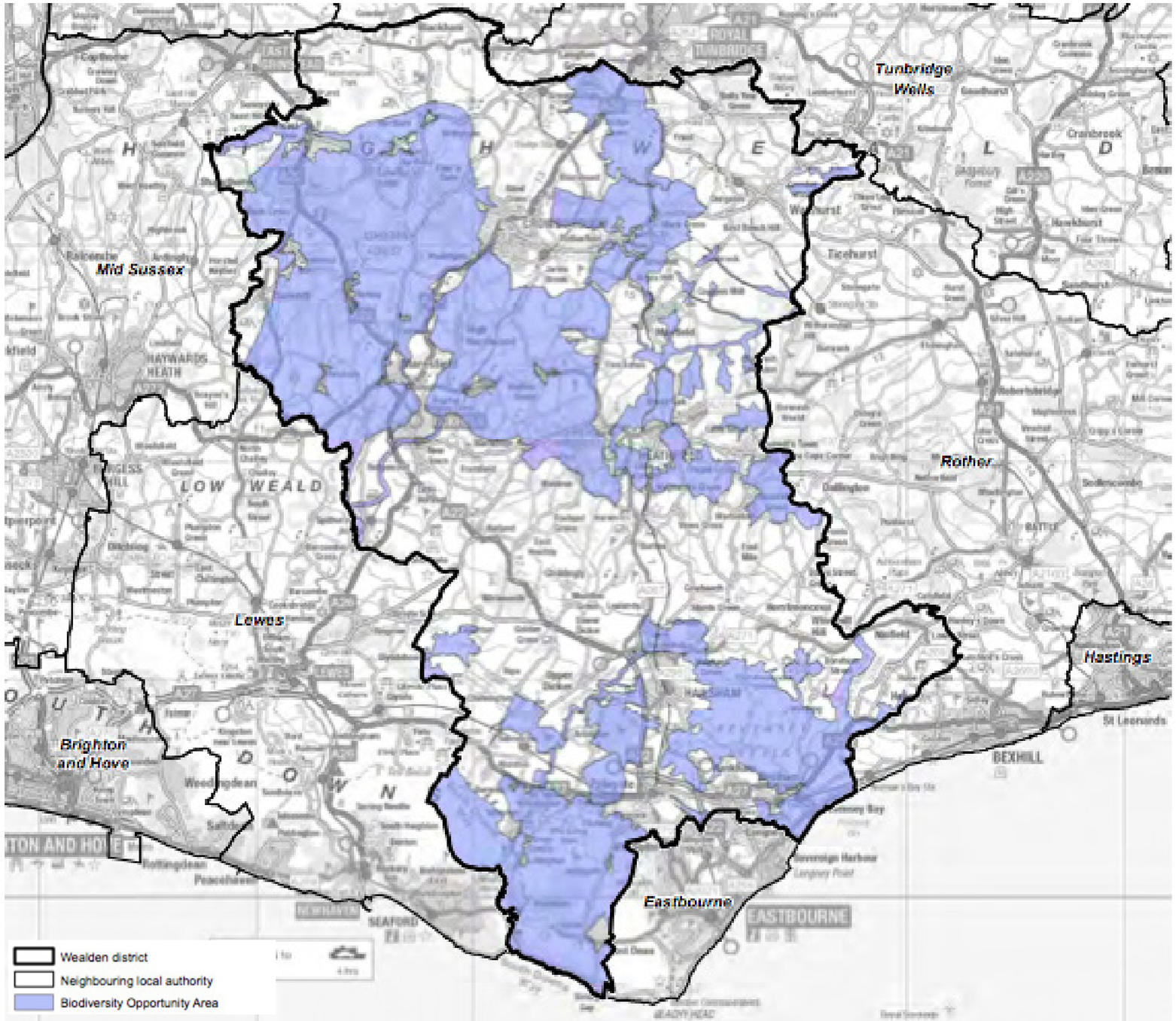


Fig 38. Biodiversity Opportunity Areas. Source: LUC Wealden Landscape Character Assessment (2022)

Trees & Woodland

Ancient Woodland

2.9.19. Ancient woodland covers only 2% of the UK land and are irreplaceable features with high biodiversity and cultural value. A significant area of England's ancient woodland is located in the Weald. The term 'ancient woodland' refers to land that has been wooded continuously since at least 1600, it is not about the age of the trees as these may have been managed, but the woodland soils and the woodland flora they support. Ancient Woodland and veteran trees are irreplaceable assets-. Specific trees may not necessarily be old, but the undisturbed biodiverse soil is, containing the largest organism in the wood one cannot see- mycorrhiza. These soil fungi form vast networks that are intimately connected to tree roots aiding, plants to access nutrients they cannot manage by themselves. They also play a crucial role in soil carbon sequestration and storage.

2.9.20. Woodland areas can be divided into two types:

- **Ancient Semi-natural woodland** comprising native trees that have been managed as productive woodland.
- **Plantations on Ancient Woodland Sites**, which were planted with non-native broad leaf or coniferous trees after World War 2.

2.9.21. Ancient woodlands (AW) have been mapped using old maps and records as well as observation of veteran trees and features such as old coppice stools. Key indicator species in Sussex include bluebells, wood anenome, dogs mercury etc. Long standing reference books on AW are Oliver Rackham's 'Ancient Woodland' (1980) & ' Trees & Woodland in the British Landscape' (1976).

2.9.22. Ancient woodlands have been insufficiently protected in legislation in the past, but this is changing. The Woodland Trust considered 'Impacts of nearby development on ancient woodland' (2012), noting 5 areas of potential effects: chemical, disturbance (e.g. noise, vegetation clearance, light pollution, trampling), fragmentation (including increased edge effects, decreased moisture, effects on moths, nutrient recycling), invasion of non-native species and cumulative effects (e.g. edge/interior ratio, increased predation). The Woodland Trust recommended woodlands be considered at a landscape scale and not in isolation.

2.9.23. Microbial activity associated with root zone can extend at least 50m beyond the canopy (Malmivaara-Lamsa et.al 2008). A 15m buffer was established by appeal and published in standing advice, which is a 'material' consideration in the planning process. Natural England and the Forestry Commission published an update in November 2017 increasing the 15m buffer to 50m in certain circumstances to prevent pollution and trampling, but this was removed in a revision in 2018, stating the 15m as a minimum distance. The High Weald Partnership Management Plan (2024-9) calls for a 25m buffer for all woodland unless evidence is provided that 15m is sufficient, and WDC have this requirement in the draft Local Plan.

Residential Developments & Trees (2019)

2.9.24. The Woodland Trust wrote this guide for planners and developers. It emphasised the benefits of trees including:

- Placing a break on surface water runoff (by up to 62% compared to asphalt);
- Removal of water by urban trees by evaporation after rainfall (average 6.24m^3/tree/year);
- Individual canopies intercept 79% of a 20mm, 24 hour rain event in full leaf; increase ground infiltration due to roots in compacted ground by 63%;
- Reduction of run off (even when not in leaf), by 60% compared to asphalt, help diffuse pollution that is point-loaded by storm drains, work well when integrated with SUDs design.

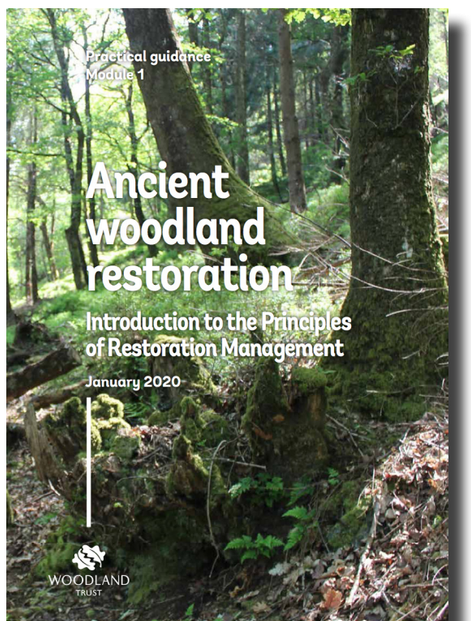
2.9.25. The leaves filter air of particulate matter (PM), oxides of nitrogen (NOX), sulphur dioxide and ground level ozone. They mitigate the urban heat island assist in reducing noise modestly, and foster biodiversity.

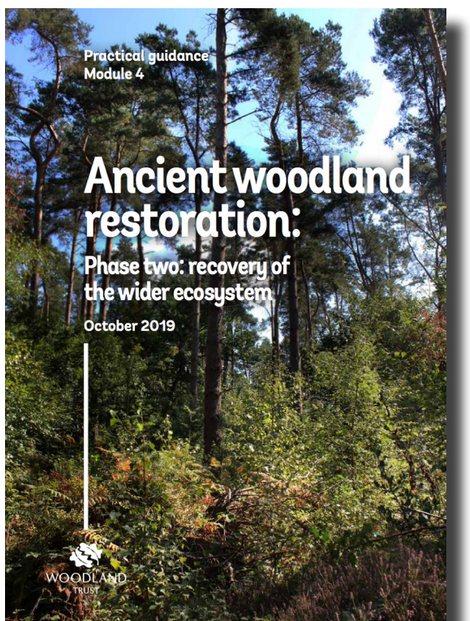
Ancient & Veteran Trees

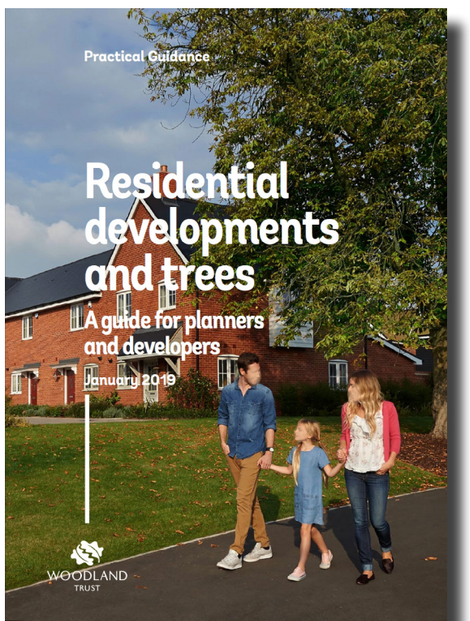
2.9.26. These are among the largest and oldest living organisms on Earth, they may well have dead or dying branches- which are integral to them and the range of habitats they provide. An ancient tree is in the last third of its life. This varies with species, for example, 150 years for a birch, at least 400 years for an oak and 800 years for a yew. Veteran trees show some signs of ancient trees but are younger. The temptation to prune or fell for tidiness or misplaced thinking about how to make them safe, should be avoided. Some high profile cases have made the headlines in recent years.

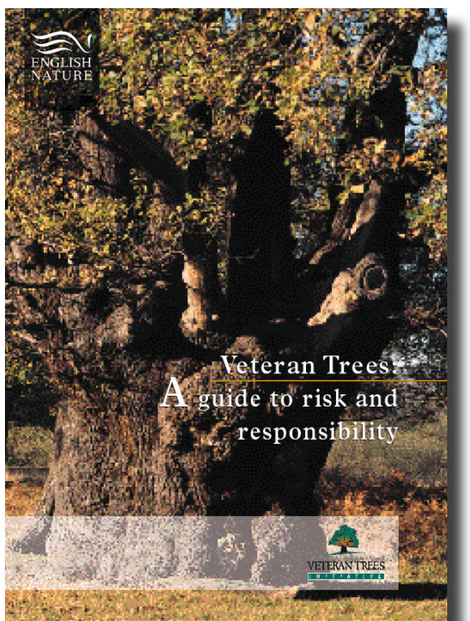
2.9.27. There is an ancient tree inventory and guidance from the Woodland Trust, English Nature, Historic England, and Government Guidance (2022) 'Ancient woodland, ancient trees & veteran trees: advice for making planning decisions'.

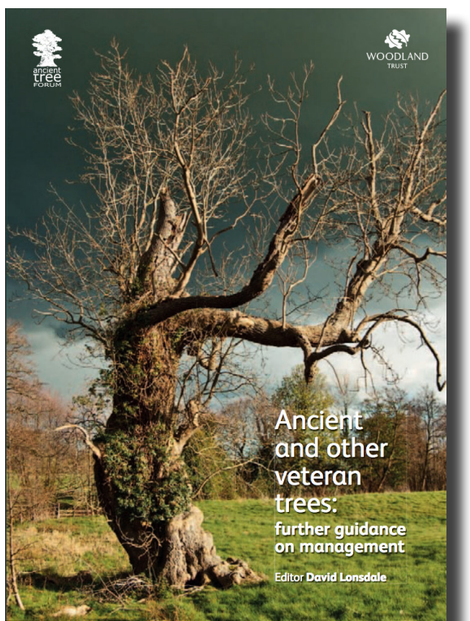
2.9.28. Avoidance of any compaction under & around Ancient /Veteran trees is essential to their well-being.









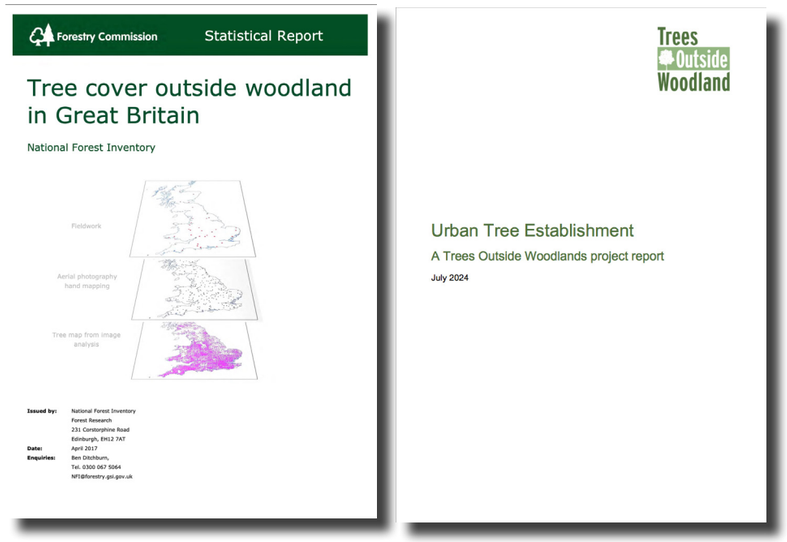


2.9.29. Woodlands and forests over 2 hectares in size cover roughly 18% of Sussex overall (>69,000 ha, Forestry Commission). Ancient semi-natural woodlands cover 11% of Sussex (<43,000 ha) and the counties as a whole contain a large number of ancient forest complexes, and these are increasing seen as a means of storing carbon to manage climate change.

2.9.30. The rarest of the woodland types is wet woodland. The three wettest types are:

- **Floodplain Woodlands**;
- **Wet Woodland** found in hollows, or combined with springs & geological features like impermeable soils, characterised by presence of alder, birch and willows. The Sussex Wildlife Trust say around 38% of ancient woodland is on naturally wet soils;
- **Ghyll Woodland**- the steep sided valleys or ghylls have a particular microclimate that favours bryophytes (ferns) & other moisture-loving plants. Many ghylls have been untouched and may be primary woodland sites. They play an important role in slowing down run-off /erosion and in thermostatic regulation of downstream area by cooling water temperatures, Cool river temperatures are important for reproduction in many fish species. About 6% of the High Weald in Sussex is classed as Ghyll Woodland.

2.9.31. Other rare wet woodlands include acid wet woodlands in Broadwater Forest and chalk spring fed wet woodland in the South Downs.



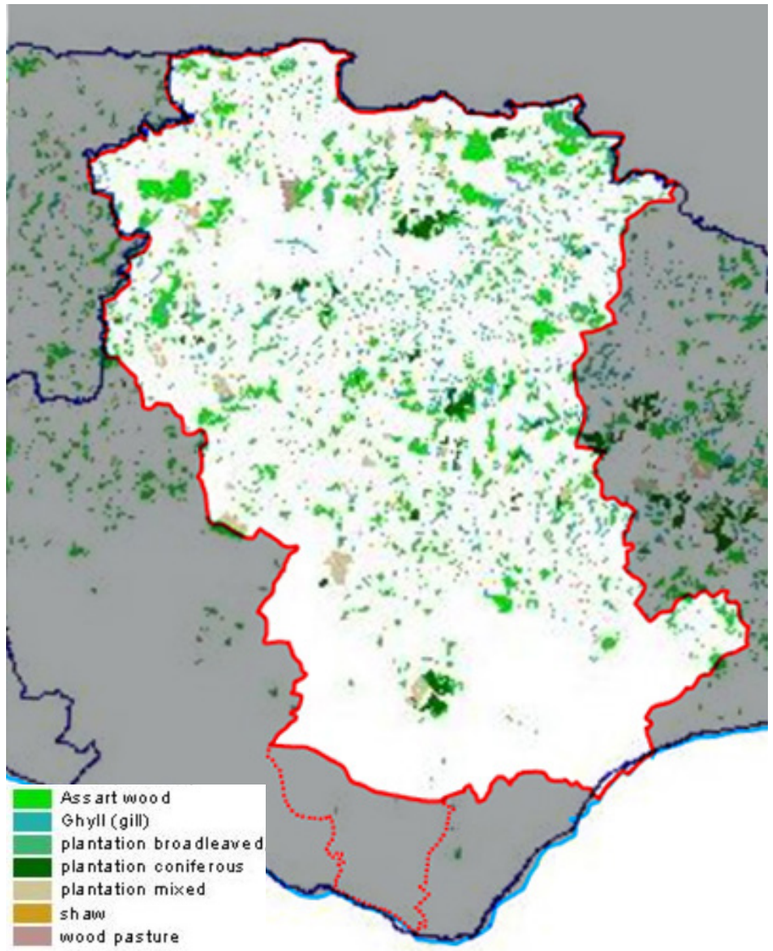


Fig 24. Ancient Seminatural Woodland in Wealden District. Source: Sussex Historic Landscape Characterisation (2014)



Fig 25. Wet woodland - alders

Trees outside woodlands

2.9.32. A Forestry Commission study in 2017 estimated that trees outside woodland occupied 742 000 hectares, this is equivalent to one fifth of the woodland cover of 3.8 million hectares.

2.9.33. At the time of the study there were 452,000 km of hedgerows in Britain, the majority being in England (336,000 km) and this is a defining feature of the English Landscape. However, this figure is about half of what had been present in 1945, field enlargement simplified the landscape, the ecological networks and numbers of hedgerow trees.

2.9.34. Trees in hedgerows and shaws (linear small woods) play a key role in the wooded character of the High Weald. There are fewer trees outside woodland in the Low Weald, where most of the new housing is located, which provides a significant opportunity to increase tree cover in and around new settlements, as well as in hedgerows nearby. More street trees would help deliver multiple benefits, and would mitigate the colour of development (red/ grey tiles) to keep more green in townscape views.

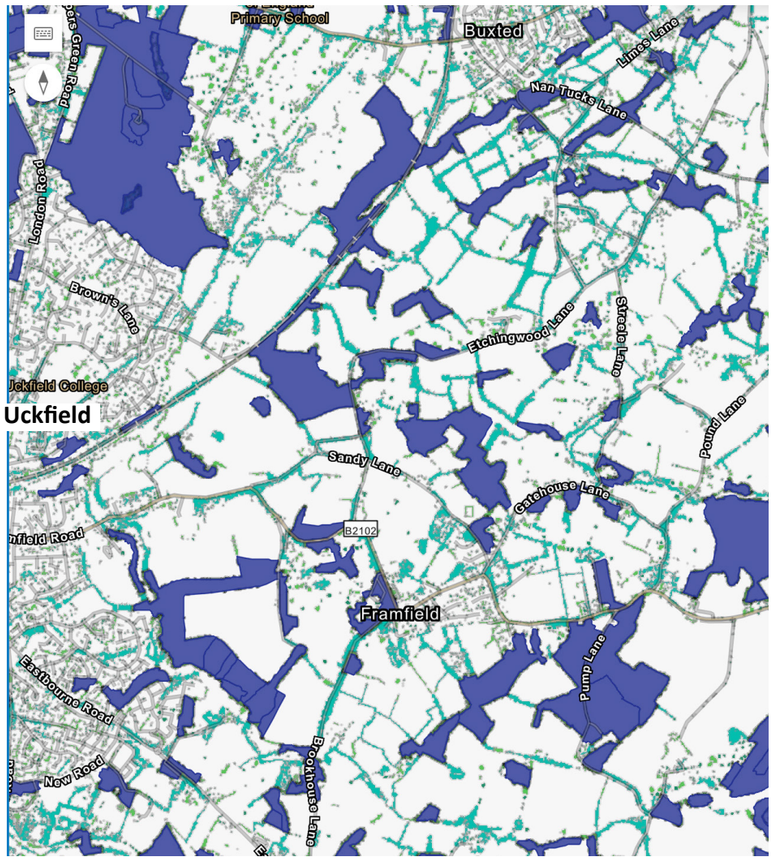


Fig 26. Trees outside woodland (turquoise) and woodlands (blue) between Uckfield, Framfield & Buxted

Dark Skies

2.9.35. Over half of Wealden District falls within the High Weald National Landscape which has a dark skies policy and published a Technical Note on Dark Skies in July 2024. The South Downs National Park, part of which is within Wealden District (and not part of this study,) became an International Dark Sky Reserve since 2016.

2.9.36. Sky-glow resulting from standard lighting in towns affects a much larger area that the town footprint, especially when on high ground- the map opposite shows the effect of Eastbourne and Hailsham on the Pevensey Levels, or of Crowborough on the surrounding area for example.

2.9.37. The Institute of Lighting Professionals (ILP produced a guidance note GN01.21 'The Reduction of Obtrusive Light (2021). ALAN (Artificial Light at Night) has modified the natural environment significantly in some areas with adverse effects on people & wildlife. It affects human circadian rhythms and those of nocturnal and migratory animals including moths, bats and birds. To enhance biodiversity, ALAN must be addressed, because it impacts primary production, animal behaviour, and inter-specific interactions including competition, predation & even soil characteristics. The loss and fragmentation of habitats is a key threat to biodiversity, and ALAN reduces and blocks movements of native species by creating barriers, and so generating habitat fragmentation and loss.

2.9.38. The Welsh Government was the first in the UK to introduce an agenda in 2025 to reduce light pollution in association with the ILP. The Bortle Scale has nine levels relating to brightness of the night sky as a specific location, with level 1 corresponding to excellent dark skies & level 9 to very bad night sky. There are four main forms of glare: Distracting Glare, Discomforting Glare, Disabling Glare, Blinding Glare.

2.9.39. Wealden District Council's draft Local Plan contains a new **Dark Sky Policy NW10** "which will ensure lighting associated with new development does not harm the quality of night skies, nor contribute to skyglow, glare and light slippage or impact.." A wider guidance on lighting is needed in the new Design Guidance.

Lighting Colour

2.9.40. Artificial Light at Night (ALAN) is recognised as a significant problem for a wide range of nocturnal animals and invertebrates ranging from bats to moths and glow worms, and covered in some depth in 'Ecological consequences of artificial night lighting' (Loncore & Rich, 2004).

2.9.41. Over the past 20 years the number of ALAN Database papers has quadrupled to almost 4000, yet the more subtle consequences of artificial lighting on the behaviour and community ecology of species is less well recognised.

2.9.42. The change from orange and golden Sodium and SON street lighting to the blue light of LEDs has adverse effects on wildlife and people. Generally speaking the warmer the light source the less damaging it is for nocturnal life and general visibility. There is a wider range of lighting available now to address these concerns.

2.9.43. There are five key steps to eliminating light pollution:

- Useful and Careful: the lighting should have a clear purpose and take into consideration how it might adversely impact the area in terms of wildlife and habitats and nuisance to neighbours.
- Targeted Direction: light should always be directed downwards to minimise light trespass and light dispersal into the night sky
- Intensity: There needs due regard to the appropriateness to the environment, and light should never be any brighter than absolutely necessary, to avoid disruption to circadian rhythms.
- Colour: Warmer longer wave colour temperatures minimise emission of short wave blue light, which tends to scatter more in the atmosphere, also reducing adverse impacts on many species.
- Adaptive Controls: The quality of light can be altered with dimmers, motion sensors and timers that manage light levels.

2.9.44. The concentration of development in the Low Weald has consequences for adjacent dark skies protection areas in the high Weald and the South Downs National Park.

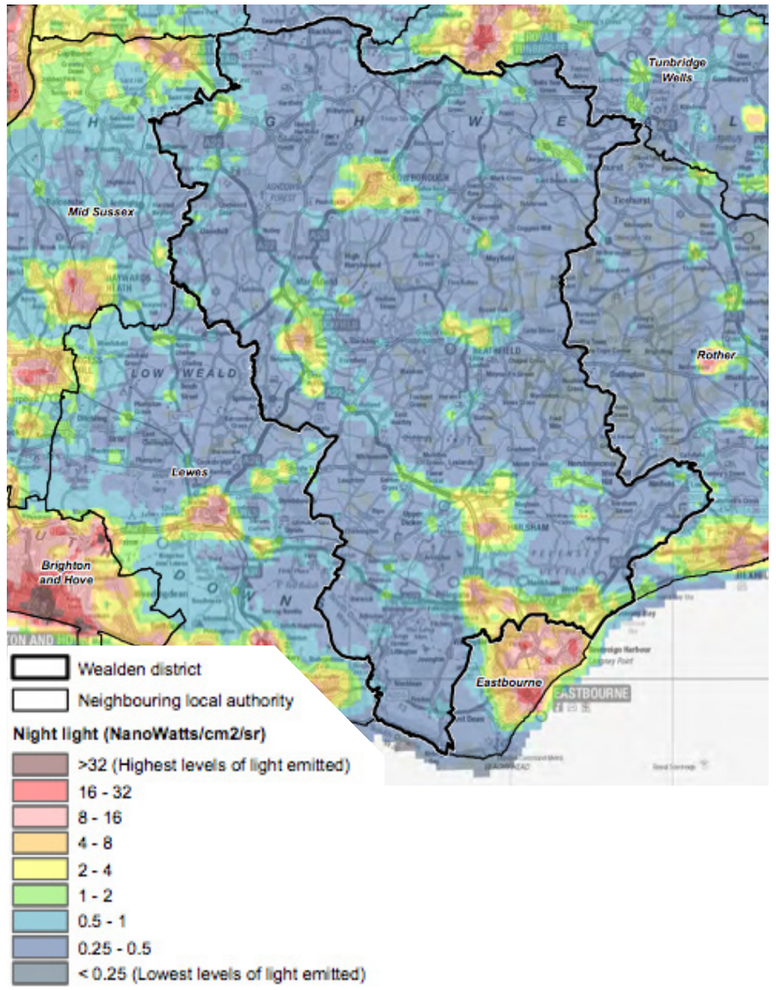


Fig 29. Dark Skies in Wealden

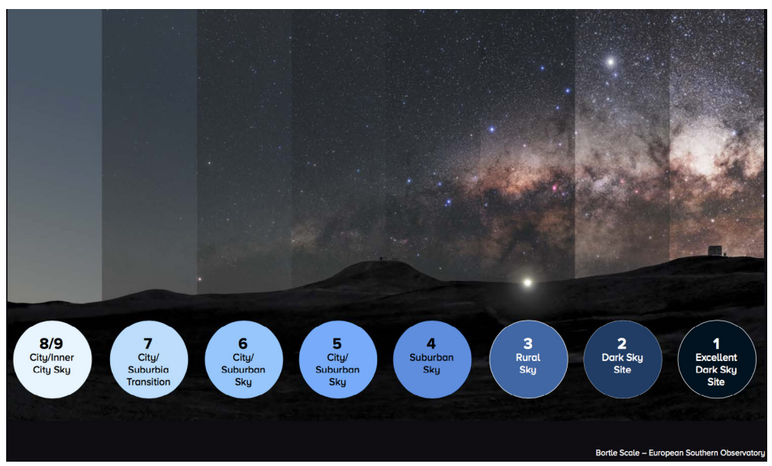


Fig 27. The Bortle Scale of Light Pollution. Source: Welsh Government 2025

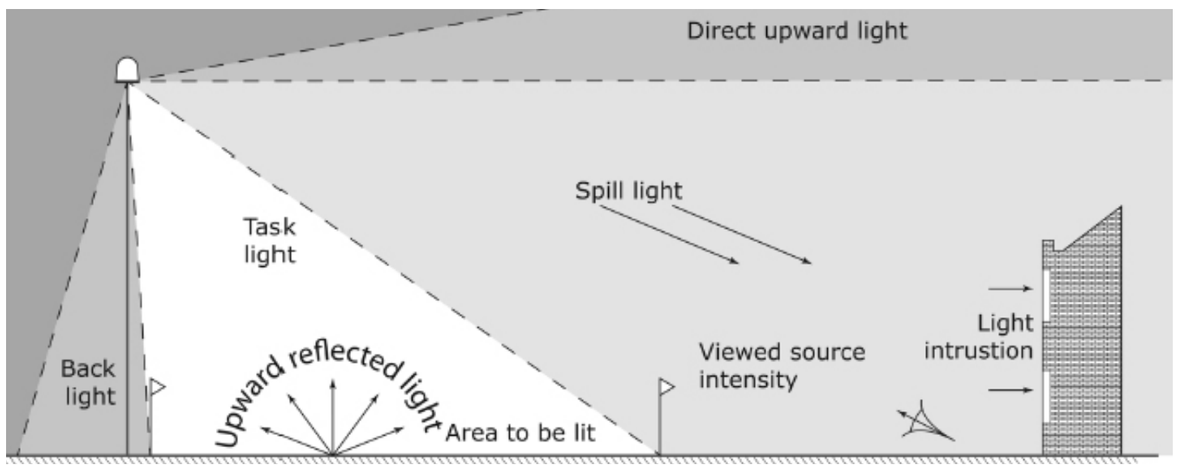


Fig 28. Types of obtrusive Light. Source: Institute of Lighting Professionals (2021)

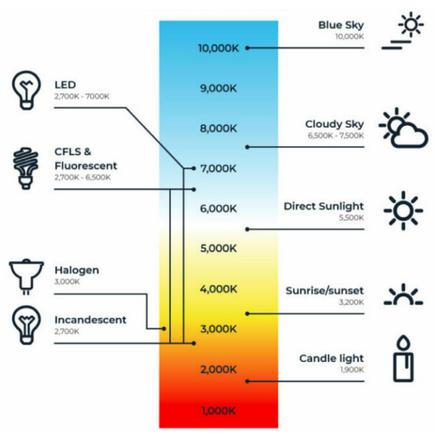


Fig 30. Kelvin Colour Temperature Scale Chart. Source: atomlighting.com.au

Tranquility

2.9.45. The CPRE and LUC mapped intrusion from movement corridors and towns, and started to map the level of tranquillity in England in 2007. We now know that tranquillity and the perception of tranquillity plays a role in the health and well-being of people.

2.9.46. One of the special qualities experienced in much of Wealden District is the perception of tranquillity, the map opposite demonstrates this spatially. The least tranquil areas are around towns, especially those that are expanding, where greatest attention is needed to attenuate detractors whilst increasing positive qualities. Tranquillity is an environmental quality that is linked to two groups of indicators:

- Experiential Indicators: Sense of tranquillity, Remoteness, Perceived naturalness, Landscape quality.
- Performance Indicators: Noise, Light Pollution, Access to the countryside, Air Quality, Cleanliness, Water Quality, Biodiversity.

2.9.47. Positive Factors that contribute to tranquillity include seeing a remote landscape, streams and rivers, deciduous trees, stars at night; as well as hearing bird song, peace and quiet and running water.

2.9.48. Negative Factors include seeing lots of people, overhead light pollution, any signs of human impact or scattered development; as well as hearing constant or even occasional noise from cars/lorries/ motorbikes.

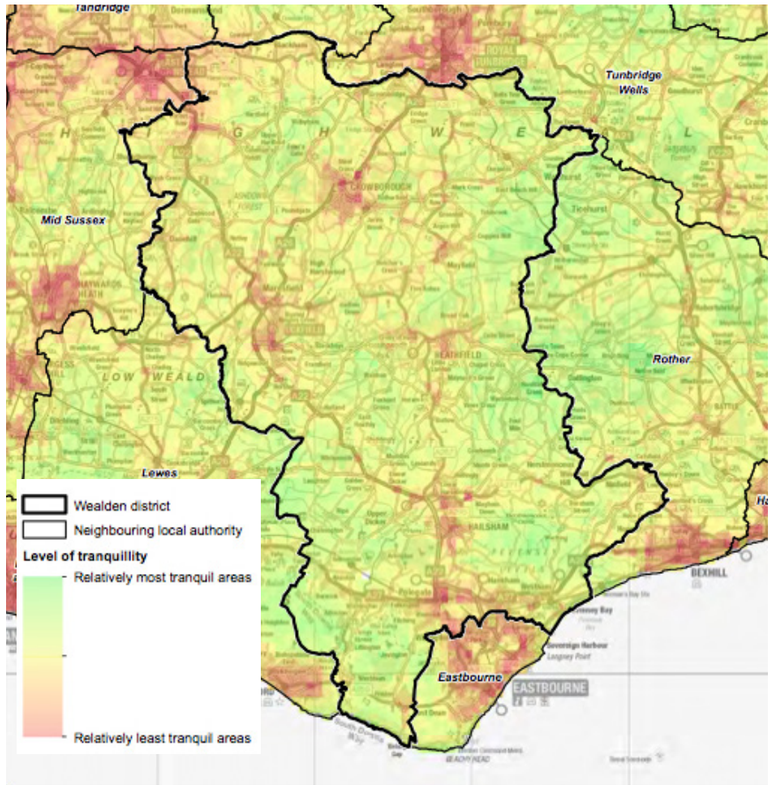


Fig 31. Levels of tranquility in Wealden District. Source: LUC, Wealden Landscape Character Assessment



Fig 32. Tranquil places in Wealden District: View over the Pevensey Levels from Herstmonceux



Fig 33. Tranquil places in Wealden District: Heathy Woodland in Ashdown Forest



Fig 34. Tranquil places in Wealden District: Ashdown Forest - Long views, big skies

Natural Beauty

The All England Strategic Landscape Mapping Hub (2022)

2.9.49. Natural England published the 'All England Strategic Landscape Mapping Hub' in 2022. This work formed the government's response to the Glover Report in the light of the 25 Year Environment Plan (2018) and the legislation flowing from it, including the Environment Act 2021. The Technical Advisory Group for the project included members from the CPRE, Historic England, The Landscape Institute, National Trust, Wildlife Trusts, and the Butterfly Conservation.

2.9.50. The tool aims to reflect the spirit of the 1947 Hobhouse Map which led to the establishment of the first National Parks 70 years ago, and seeks to: help identify areas which may have potential to be new or extended National Parks and/or National Landscapes; and identify places where alternative forms of landscape action or approaches may be more appropriate.

2.9.51. This interactive mapping tool is an evidence-based, strategic snapshot of landscapes that considers natural beauty on the one hand, and human and environmental needs on the other. The country has been divided into 3km wide hexagons, each reflecting an average score of a range of criteria for that particular area, all of the scores used can be accessed. The plan aggregates these hexagon scores according to the national landscape character types in which they are located. The landscape classification shows six factors of Natural Beauty plus three optional additions that address: access diversity & inclusion, democratic landscape value, and education, with 55 criteria divided between them.

Wealden District

2.9.52. The human and environmental need mapping shows lower scores for the Low Weald, where much of the proposed housing is located. This is an opportunity to improve natural beauty by sensitive planning and quality landscape design within and around the developments in the form of multi-functional green-blue infrastructure. Pressure on attractive areas is placed by dog-walkers (about 36% of households have a dog in the UK). This can trigger the need for SANGS (Suitable Alternative Natural Green Space) to relieve pressure on protected habitats. SANGS Design must deliver a variety of local quality spaces that attract dog owners, and others.

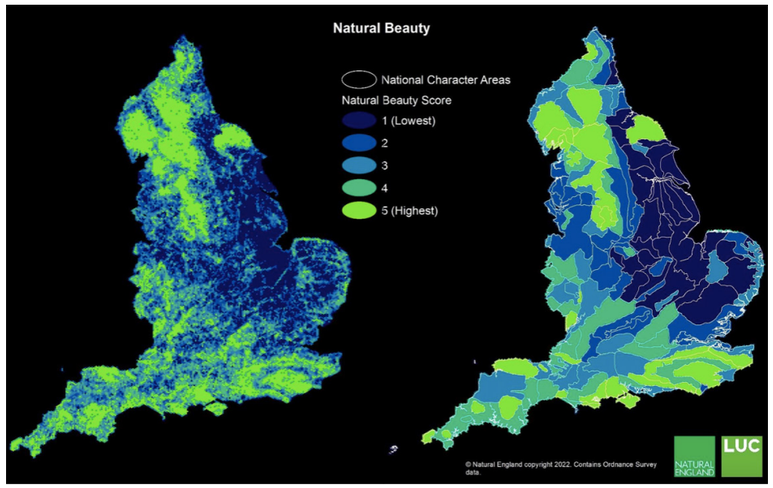


Fig 35. All England Natural Beauty Scoring across the UK. Source: LUC and Natural England

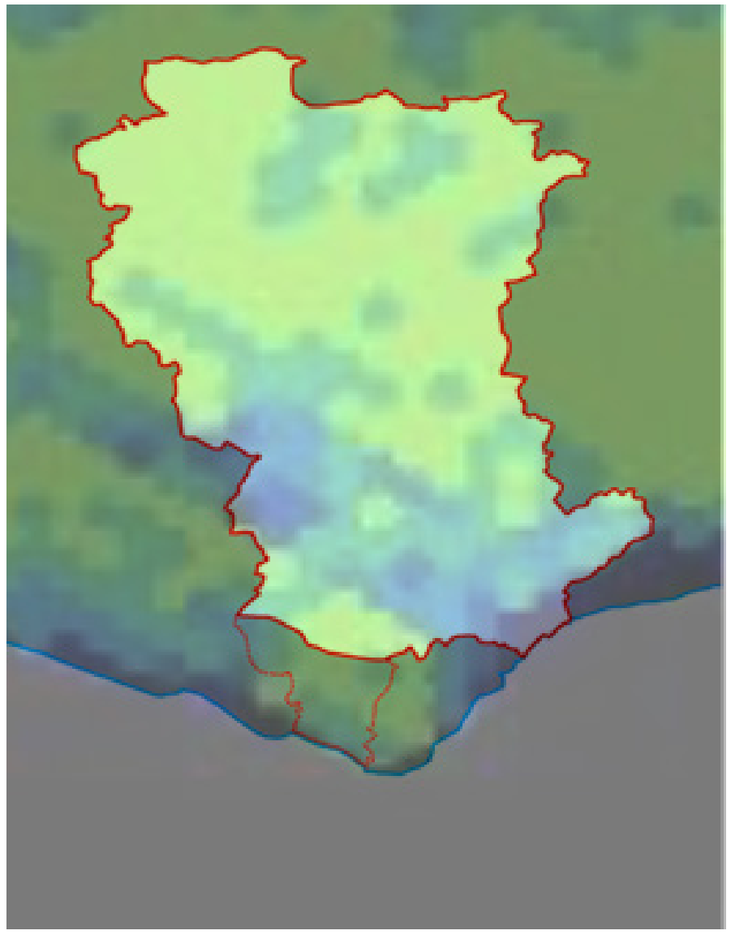


Fig 36. All England Natural Beauty Scoring (approx WDC area). Source: LUC and Natural England

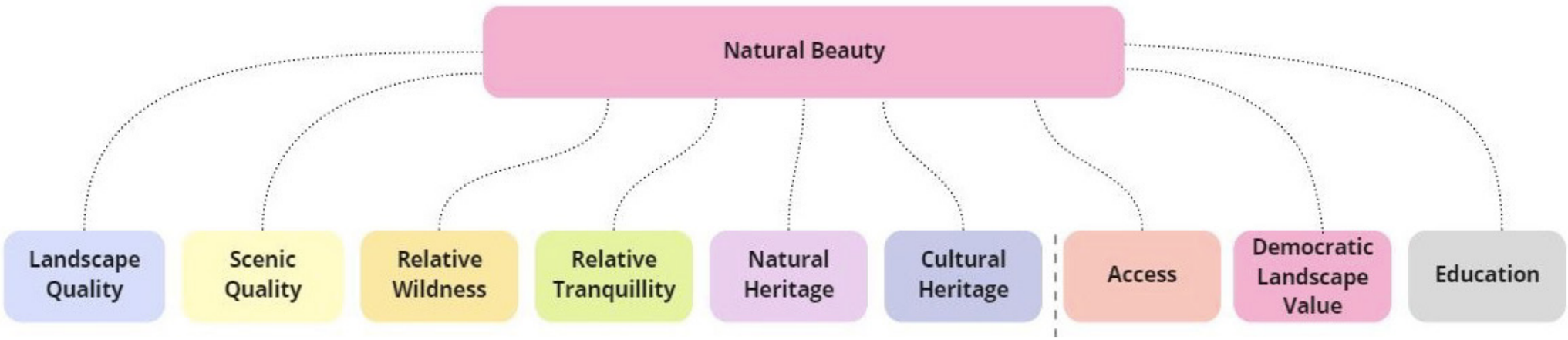


Fig 37. All England Strategic Landscape Mapping tool (2022). Source: LUC and Natural England

2.10 National Guidance

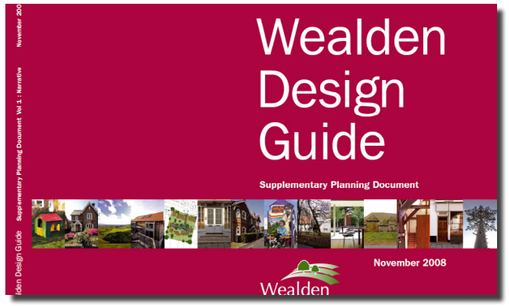


Design & Placemaking Planning Practice Guidance (Draft), MHCLG, Feb 2026

2.10.1. The new MHCLG draft guidance, Design and Placemaking Planning Practice Guidance (January 2026), marks a significant shift in national policy by streamlining previous frameworks into a more integrated, climate-focused, and delivery-oriented document.

- **Principles**. A primary difference to previous guidance is the consolidation of the 10 characteristics of well-designed places (from the National Model Design Code) into seven features: Liveability, Climate, Nature, Movement, Built Form, Public Space, and Identity. Unlike the NMDC, this guidance treats Liveability as an overarching feature rather than a standalone technical issue to be coded for.
- **Climate**. This draft introduces much more stringent requirements for Climate than previous planning practice guidance. The guidance explicitly encourages the use of WLCA and circular economy principles (minimising waste, designing for disassembly); it introduces a new technical concept, 'Form Factor' (the ratio of floor area to external wall area) as a measurable design parameter for energy efficiency; and it also mandates a strict Energy Hierarchy, placing 'Energy Saving' (passive measures like orientation) above renewable energy technologies.
- **Movement**. The guidance adopts a vision-led approach to transport, moving further away from highways-led engineering. A new starting point for design is that residents should be within a 10-minute walk (800m) of a railway/tram stop and a 5-minute walk (400m) of a bus stop.
- **Nature**. The draft mandates that local codes use Natural England's Green Infrastructure Framework (GIF) as a baseline. It recommends access to green and blue spaces within a 15-minute walk from home. It also requires SuDS to be integrated early as multi-functional features that enhance biodiversity and play, rather than just hidden engineering.
- **Landscape.** The guidance explicitly recommends using Natural England's Character Area profiles to establish the baseline for local design. It highlights that landscape identity includes functional and sensory elements. The guidance requires developers to consider dark skies, light pollution, and environmental colour assessments. It also emphasises that landscape features (such as topography, views to landmarks, and existing watercourses) should inform site layout. New design codes should specify how buildings "meet the ground" and relate to surrounding landscapes, ensuring that the transition between built form and natural space is coherent and legible.
- **Heritage.** Identity is shaped not just by Listed Buildings but by the wider cultural and regional history. The guidance stresses valuing the local vernacular, including traditional building typologies and local materials. A major point of difference in the new guidance is the emphasis on sensitive re-use and adaptation as a primary way to value heritage sustainably. Importantly, the draft states that well-designed places do not need to copy their surroundings in every way. It encourages '21st-century architecture and placemaking' that complements the historic context through scale, proportion and quality rather than through "pastiche" or superficial imitation.
- **Identity**. Design codes can specify a palette of materials and textures for a given location, which is particularly relevant when developments are adjacent to heritage assets or sensitive landscapes. Applicants should use diagrams and maps to show how they are retaining key landscape features or how their built form responds to historic routes. Heritage and landscape features should be used as markers or landmarks to aid navigation and create a 'memorable' sense of place.
- **Implementation**. LPAs are encouraged to embed Post Occupancy Evaluations (POE) into planning conditions to assess if completed developments actually meet their design intent regarding energy, comfort, and social value. The guidance recommends that compliance checklists are used to streamline the assessment of applications against adopted codes.

2.11 Existing Design Guidance



Wealden Design Guide (2008)

2.11.1. Since its publication in November 2008, the Wealden Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) has been well-used and consistently carries weight in appeal decisions, with planning inspectors frequently citing it. At the time of adoption the Guide introduced forward-thinking approaches, such as starting from a whole landscape perspective and integrating sustainability and biodiversity into the design process from early stages.

2.11.2. However, since 2008 the Guide has been superseded by significant national policy shifts, including the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and post-Brexit environmental legislation. Furthermore, the establishment of the South Downs National Park Authority (SDNPA) means a portion of the district is now governed by the SDNPA Design Guide (2022).

2.11.3. While the core principles of the 2008 Guide remain relevant, the following areas require updating to address contemporary planning challenges.

Character Zones & Local Distinctiveness

2.11.4. Future guidance must integrate recent Landscape Character Assessments published between 2023 and 2025 and align with the ESCC Environment Strategy, specifically regarding nature recovery and water management. Local distinctiveness must extend beyond building typologies to encompass the “cultural landscape” and its historical time-depth. Wealden’s heritage includes features often older than its listed buildings, such as the industrial and agricultural legacy of drove roads, medieval deer park pales, and the remnants of the Wealden iron industry. Hydrological features like hammer ponds, estate lakes, and ponds formed from historic ore and marl pits- alongside vernacular details such as shaws, assarted fields, and traditional white finger posts- should form the basis for new 'green and blue' infrastructure that celebrates and renews the district’s historic fabric.

2.11.5. The 2008 report does not mention the European Landscape Convention (ELC), an international treaty that is not part of the EU and not affected by Brexit, although it had entered into force in the UK in 2007. The ELC states that all landscapes are important, not just the designated areas.

2.11.6. There is updated standing advice on Veteran Trees (Natural England/ Forestry Commission 2017). This is now a material consideration in the planning process, and a minimum buffer of 15m between ancient woodland and development won through appeal. The Woodland Trust also published advice ‘Planning for Ancient Woodland’ in 2017.

2.11.7. The British Standard BS5837 ‘Trees in relation to construction & demolition’ was updated in 2012, and there is also better guidance on soils in relation to construction. The Environment Act 2021 brought in a slew of wildlife related requirements including a minimum 10% uplift in the biodiversity of development sites, and nature restoration areas and biodiversity opportunity mapping.

2.11.8. Addressing modern technology is also vital, as the prevalence of blue-white LED lighting, which disrupts human circadian rhythms and nocturnal wildlife, must be replaced by guidance specifying warmer light temperatures and stricter directional shielding.

Sustainability and Water Management

2.11.9. Despite the 2015 withdrawal of the Code for Sustainable Homes, the urgency for resilient design has increased. Current “pale green” engineering practices (where runoff is piped into fenced-off, deep attenuation basins) are often insufficient. Future street design should instead prioritise distributed nature-based solutions such as rain gardens and porous paving. These interventions provide essential evaporative cooling to mitigate urban heat islands, offer superior pollution filtration, and facilitate carbon sequestration within biomass and soils. This holistic approach ensures that water management serves as a multifunctional asset rather than a siloed engineering requirement.

Energy and Embodied Carbon

2.11.10. The UK’s energy landscape has transformed, with renewable generation rising from under 3% in 2008 to over 50% by 2024. This shift necessitates the sensitive integration of solar arrays, turbines, and battery infrastructure into the landscape. Passive design remains critical to reducing the energy demand created by electric vehicles and data centres.

2.11.11. Additionally, there is a clear need for greater material efficiency to reduce embodied carbon. For instance, reducing tertiary road widths from 5.5m to 4.5m can save approximately 3 tonnes of embodied carbon per 10 linear metres. Utilising reinforced grass for parking or crushed concrete substrates can further support decarbonisation by sequestering atmospheric carbon through mineralisation.

Urban Design

2.11.12. While the original 2008 principles were fundamentally sound, they must be updated to address cross-cutting issues of climate adaptation and resource use. Guidance should consider the cumulative visual impact of large developments on the rural landscape palette to maintain aesthetic integrity.

2.11.13. Finally, the role of soil stewardship must be formalised within the planning process. As a critical asset for carbon storage and water regulation, soil must be preserved on-site to prevent unnecessary transport to landfills and to ensure the long-term viability of new biodiversity initiatives.

Useability

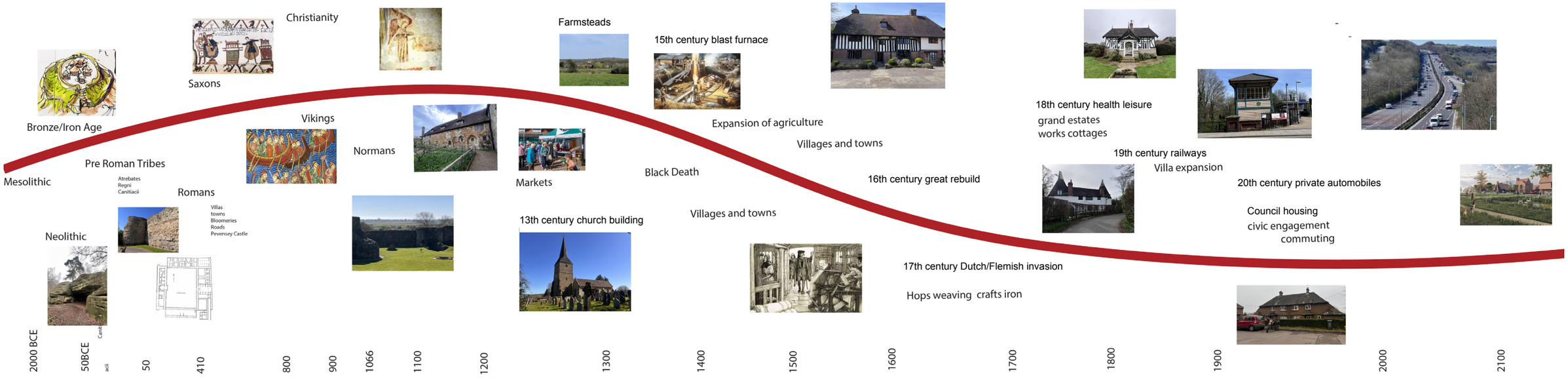
2.11.14. From a useability point of view, the Guide has been critiqued for providing an unclear hierarchy of policy, with information “diffused” throughout the document, sometimes making it difficult for users to find specific statistics or requirements. This can be addressed by a new guide that provides a clear hierarchy of ‘needs’ versus ‘wants’, using stronger language (such as MUST, SHOULD and COULD) to provide more leverage during planning negotiations.

2.11.15. Additionally, although comprehensive, the Guide is at times too focused on superficial elements and details, such as building appearance and types of windows, rather than addressing deeper site structure and settlement character issues.

3.0 Anthropogenic Evolution of Wealden

3.1 Historical Development Overview

Timeline





From cave dwelling hunter gathering.....



....to food shopping at Tescos in Hailsham

Fig 44. Overview of historic development in the district since 2000BCE to present

Historical Overview

3.1.1. The Wealden District reflects a singular panoramic narrative of human intervention and settlement on its landscape over millennia. With a southern coast line facing onto the English Channel and seagoing access to northern Europe, the area has been influenced and shaped by waves of invasion, settlement and migration. The relative impenetrability of the High Weald has been a major factor in the area's development.

3.1.2. Key periods over chronological time within Wealden District:

- Bronze age: Cave dwelling, limited husbandry and woodland management.
- Iron age: Hill top castles, ironwork woodland management.
- Romano British settlement focused in the south: Iron foundries and Bloomeries.
- Roman roads to West and East of the High Weald: Pevensey an important coastal port and fortification.
- Post Roman: Saxon incursion, woodland management and animal husbandry. Many paths and drove ways originate from this period.
- Nodes of settlement begin to appear as focus for tribal tribute, celebration and surplus exchange.
- Establishment of Christianity 7th century: Monastic settlements at Rotherfield, Beddington and Michelham. HIdeage and tythe system of land management.
- Norman invasion at Pevensey: Replacement of Saxon land management with manorial estates, church and monastic foundations.
- 13th century stone church building programme at focal points of farming settlement, often on Saxon foundations.
- 13th & 14th centuries market charters granted by Monarchy and church, licensing weekly market and annual fairs on a tariff system.
- Trade and exchange increased, hunting forest, the coalescence of larger settlements over time in response to increased market activity and surplus production.
- Development of skilled craft workshops, leather, joinery, small scale iron works.
- 15th &16th centuries: iron foundries and associated industry expanded.
- Introduction of blast furnace expanded iron production and associate skilled trades. Increased trade in armaments and tools.
- Silk weaving and hop growing introduced from Flanders.
- Agricultural open field system replaced by enclosures.
- 18th century foundation of health resorts; turnpike roads improved transport and communication.
- Villages south of Tunbridge Wells became fashionable areas of retreat, expanding large houses into rural areas around villages, eg Frant and Eridge.
- 19th century Railway network opened transport from London access to the south coast and development of small towns including, Crowborough Hailsham and Heathfield.
- 20th century social housing to provide for rural workforce.
- 1960s closure of smaller rail lines and connections, dominance of cars, reduction in farming and rural employment, increase in planning-led housing development.
- Digital Revolution. Housing Shortages.

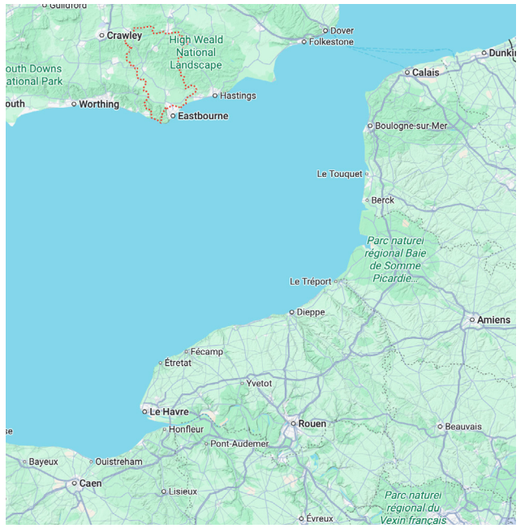


Fig 39. Connectivity across the Channel with Northern Europe
Source: Google Maps, 2026.

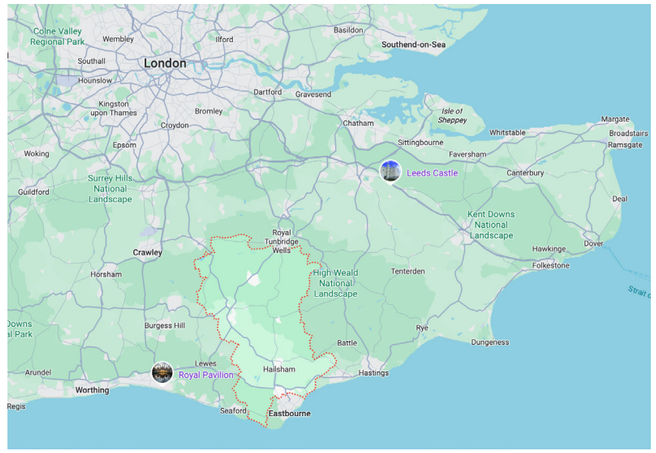


Fig 40. Wealden District crosses the sandstone ridges of High Weald in the north and centre, the clay and sandstone of the low Weald and the chalk formed limestone of the south Downs. The area to the East of Eastbourne forms the Pevensey Levels, where land and water have been interchangeable over the centuries. Source: Google Maps, 2026 - Wealden District boundary highlighted.

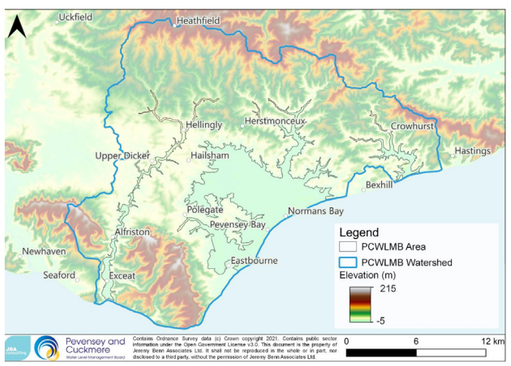


Fig 41. The changing coast line around Pevensey.
Strategic landing place for Romans, Saxons and Normans,
Source: JBA Consulting

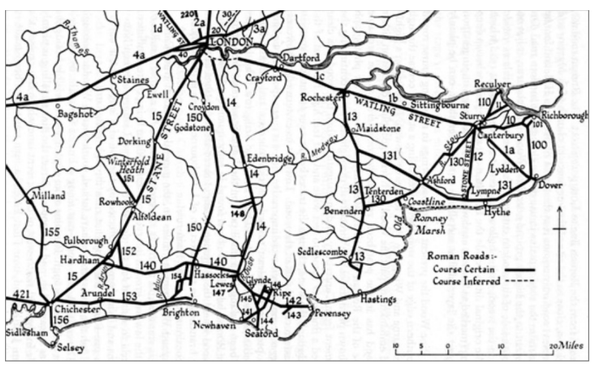


Fig 42. Roman roads in southeast England. Roman roads skirted the impenetrable High Weald, connecting the south coast to London. Source: momentousbritain.co.uk

Invasion, Settlement and Defence

3.1.3. The Wealden District has been the focus of invasion, forced colonial settlement, peaceful integration, threat of invasion and a defence industry, over the course of human habitation of the area. From the Bronze Age Beaker people, the Belgae of the Iron age period, the Romans, the Saxons, the Vikings and Danes, the Normans, the French, the Spanish, Dutch and latterly the Germans. The threat of invasion has stimulated the development of defensive structure and an early defence industry. Each wave and threat of immigration has transformed the society and landscape of the area.

Summary

3.1.4. The behaviours of invasion and defence are stitched firmly into the development pattern of the Wealden District. New development, to some, represents a further invasion of outsiders into the district. Past patterns of assimilation and integration can be understood and reflected so that new settlements can enhance and serve existing communities. The results of both threats and actual invasions include the following:

- Iron age hill forts camps;
- Roman settlements, villas, roads, agriculture;
- Pevensey fortifications and Saxon Shore forts from 3rd century;
- Saxon settlements and spread of Religious Houses;
- Norman invasion and settlements. Feudal and manorial land administration;
- 13th century programme of church building;
- 15th century onward development of iron and defence industry. Cannon and guns forged in foundries of the Weald;
- Shipbuilding used timber resources of Weald and Ashdown Forest for maritime dominance;
- Wars with the Dutch Spanish and French resourced with cannons and timber sourced from the Weald;
- Large houses built with defensive structures. Herstmonceux castle in 15th century many houses close to the coast surrounded by moats;
- Early 19th century construction of Martello Towers on coastline to deter Napoleon's threatened invasion;
- Pill boxes and anti-tank 'dragons teeth' to deter potential German invasion.



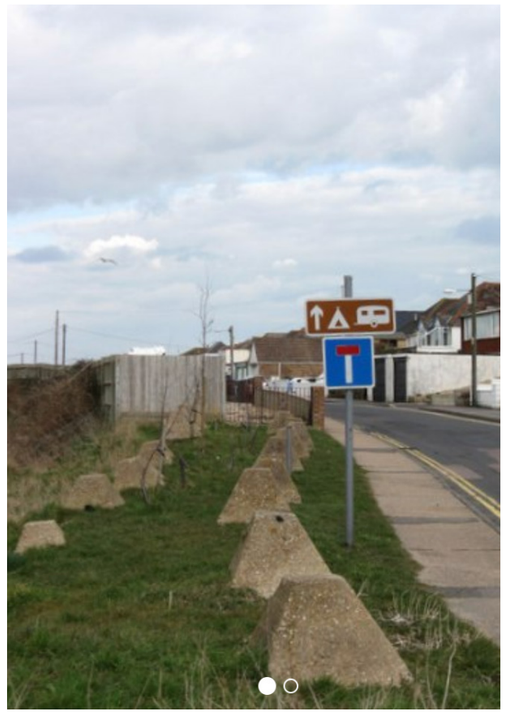
Fig 43. Norman Landings at Pevensey shown in the Bayeux Tapestry



Defensive structures - Saxon Shore Forts



16th century Cannon from Wealden Iron



Dragons Teeth in Pevensey Bay



Martello Tower 19th century



Pill Box on Frant Village Green

Fig 45. Defensive structures and remnants in Wealden District

3.2 Settlement Evolution and Colonisation

3.2.1. Various human species intermittently occupied Britain for almost a million years, when these islands were connected to mainland Europe as part of Weald-Artois anticline, the population ebb and flow being affected by cycles of glaciation. The oldest human fossils are from Boxgrove near Chichester dating from 480,000 years ago. Hunter-gatherer groups have left evidence that they were active on the Downland where flint pits have been found; river valleys and in the High Weald, where a number of rock shelters have been identified.

3.2.2. The oldest known inhabitants in Sussex were from the Old Stone Age - a vast period the encompasses the Lower and Middle Palaeolithic period from circa 75,000- 12,000 years ago, when the last Ice Age transitioned to the current Inter-Glacial period.

3.2.3. The human heritage of this region and its special qualities today, are rooted in the gradual occupation of a vast forest over millennia, and the trial and error involved to create isolated farmsteads over the centuries. This gradual occupation had begun as Stone Age hunting camps around 8000 years ago, and charcoal patches at High Rocks in the north of Wealden District have been dated to about 6500 years ago.

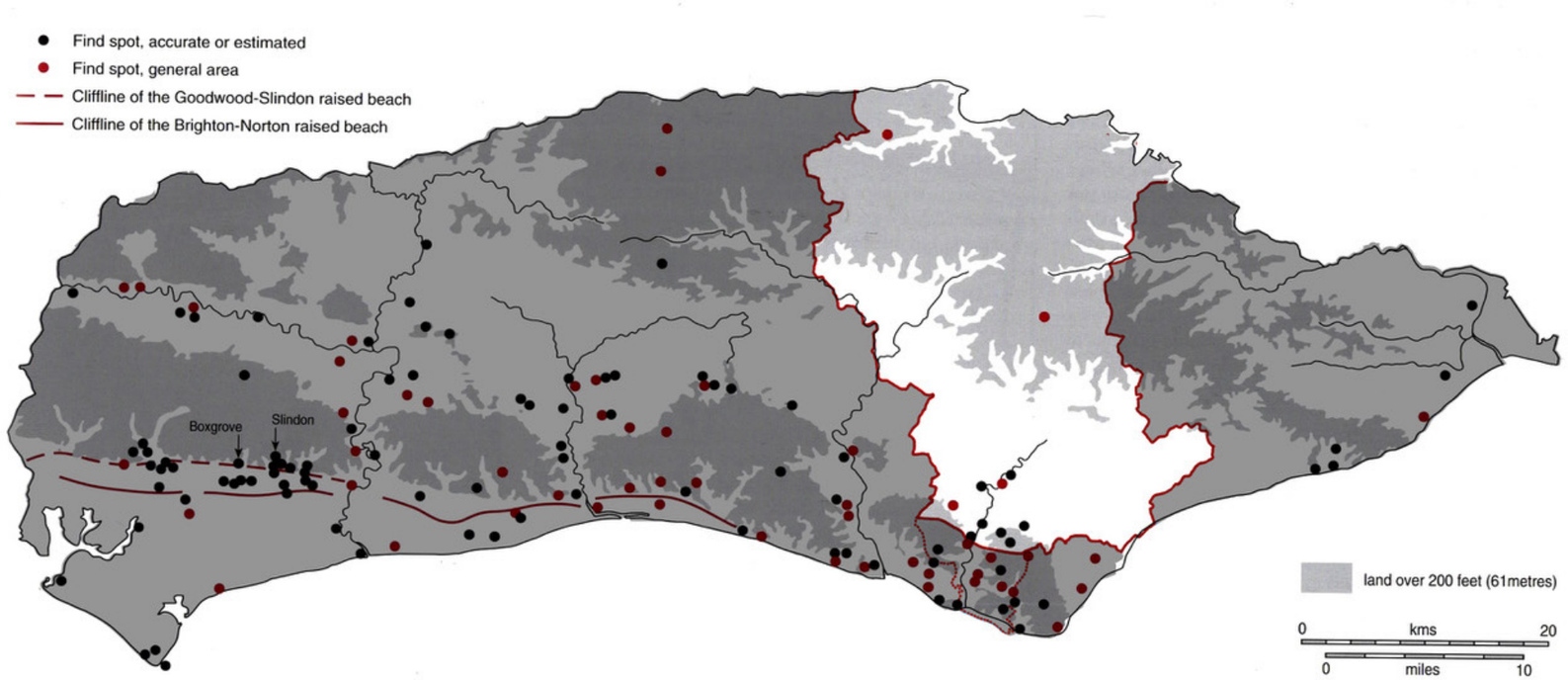


Fig 47. Pre-history - earliest inhabitants Lower & Middle Palaeolithic (Old Stone Age) up to 500 000 years ago source: An Historical Atlas of Sussex 1999 - elaborated by SE



Fig 46. Pre-history land - at time of hunter gatherers. Source: bradford.ac.uk

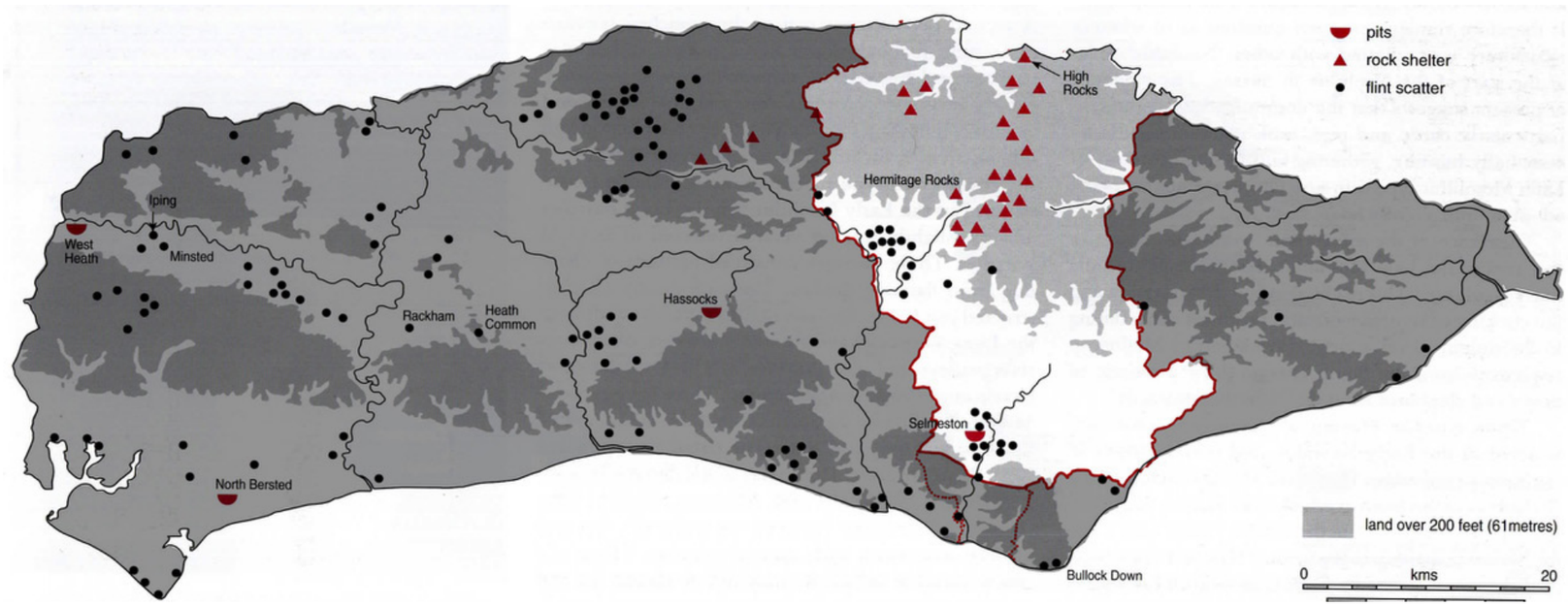


Fig 48. Pre-history - Later Hunter Gatherers in the Mesolithic (c.8000-6000BCE). Source: An Historical Atlas of Sussex 1999 - elaborated by SE

Land Colonisation - Iron Age

3.2.4. During the late Bronze Age and early-middle Iron Age, there is little evidence in Wealden District to show settlement, but Hill Forts are located in the High Weald at High Rocks, Saxonbury, Garden Hill and Philpots. There would have been routes between these on higher ground. However, most of the finds are along the south coast.

3.2.5. The Belgae migration about 2,100 years ago is attributed to the Roman expansion into northern Europe. They settled along the south coast, introduced advanced agricultural techniques, advanced metalworking and created defensive earthworks, playing a significant role in shaping the prehistoric landscape. They put up fierce resistance to the Roman invasions in 55 and 54 BCE.



Fig 49. Late Bronze Age and early Iron Age settlements. Source: An Historical Atlas of Sussex 1999 - elaborated by SE

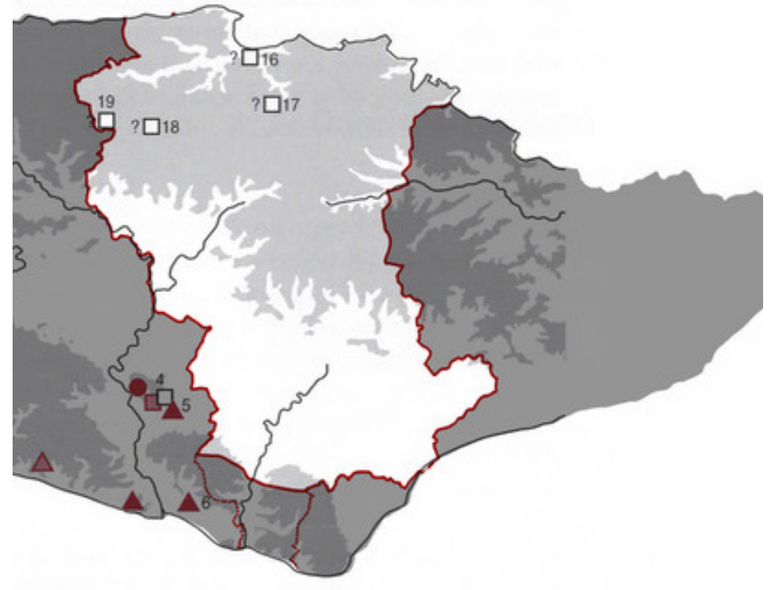


Fig 50. Middle Iron Age. Source: An Historical Atlas of Sussex 1999 - elaborated by SE

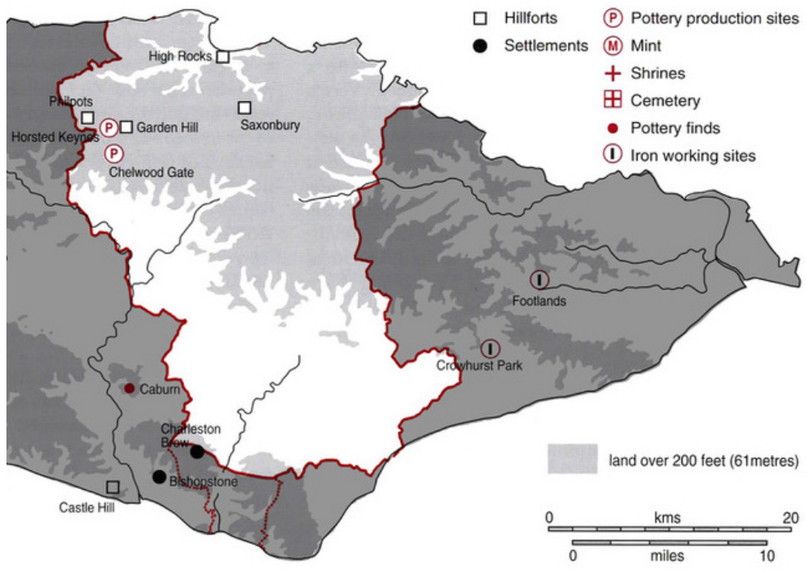


Fig 51. Late Iron Age. Source: An Historical Atlas of Sussex 1999 - elaborated by SE

Roman Britain & the Saxons

Roman Britain

3.2.6. The Roman occupation in Sussex was mostly along the coastal plain and Downs, with Chichester its capital. However, the High Weald was important for iron production accessed by Roman Roads- one passing through Maresfield to Camp Hill on Ashdown Forest, then north through Hartfield towards Edenbridge. There is little known about how timber was managed for the charcoal production essential in iron making. Oliver Rackham has suggested it was the Romans who introduced coppicing, as the practice was used elsewhere in the Roman world.

3.2.7. The abundance of timber and clay was used to make pottery and tiles in Hartfield, the products transported along the road north to Beddington in Surrey and south to Beddingham at the foot of the Downs.

3.2.8. The Roman iron industry peaked in the 2nd century CE and was in decline from the 3rd Century CE.

3.2.9. There are a number of Roman sites in the Low Weald in Wealden District between Pevensey (Anderitum), where the significant outer Roman Walls (293CE) survive, and the lower land towards Ripe.

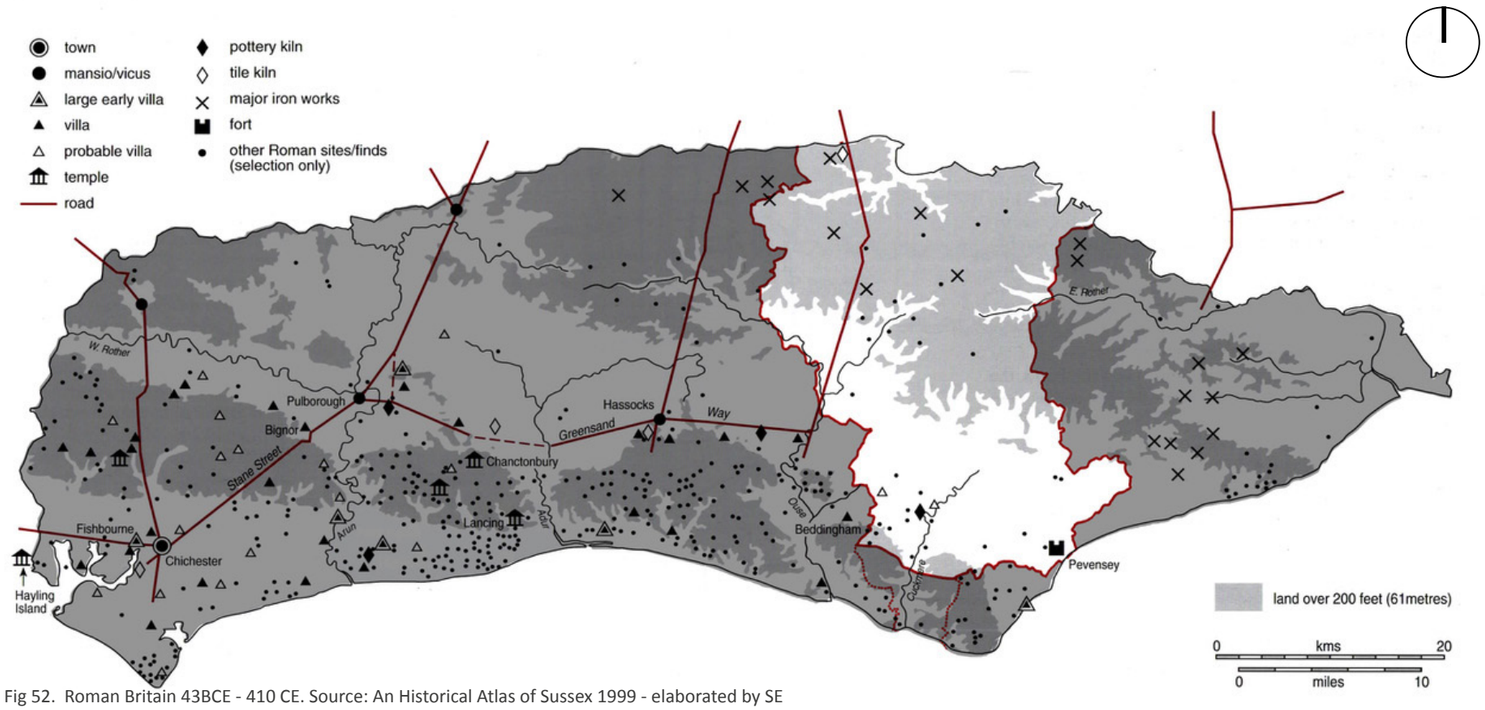


Fig 52. Roman Britain 43BCE - 410 CE. Source: An Historical Atlas of Sussex 1999 - elaborated by SE

Saxon Britain

3.2.10. Few Saxon buildings survive as they used the plentiful supply of timber available to them. Woodland management over the 600 year Saxon period is the basis for the landscape of today, and between 650-1066 there was considerable change as settlements emerged, the names of many surviving to this day. The place names are often much older than the villages that bear these names, as many came about when the forest was used for summer pastures and autumn pannage for pigs (acorns).

3.2.11. Ham was a substantial enterprise, **Tun** which originally meant enclosure by a hedge or a fence related to farms persisting as a reference to a farm or nucleated settlement. Other terms for habitation are **cot**(e) and **wick** (which was ultimately for the Roman vicus). Tun became ton as in Dallington, Warbleton, Jevington etc. Wic as in Berwick and Newick.

- 'Hurst' meant patches of remaining woodland near cleared fields;
- 'Den' was a swine pasture;
- 'Stede' meant place;
- 'Burna', meaning stream became Bourne, as in Eastbourne;
- 'Leye' meant a clearing;
- 'Hao' meant heath; 'Hao' + 'leye' meant heath clearing, which became Hoathly.

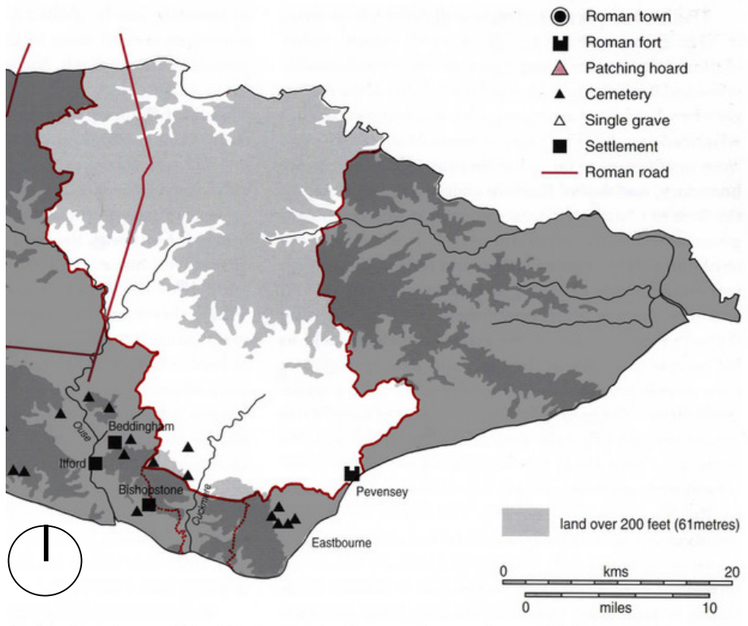


Fig 53. Early Saxons 410 - 650. Source: An Historical Atlas of Sussex 1999 - elaborated by SE

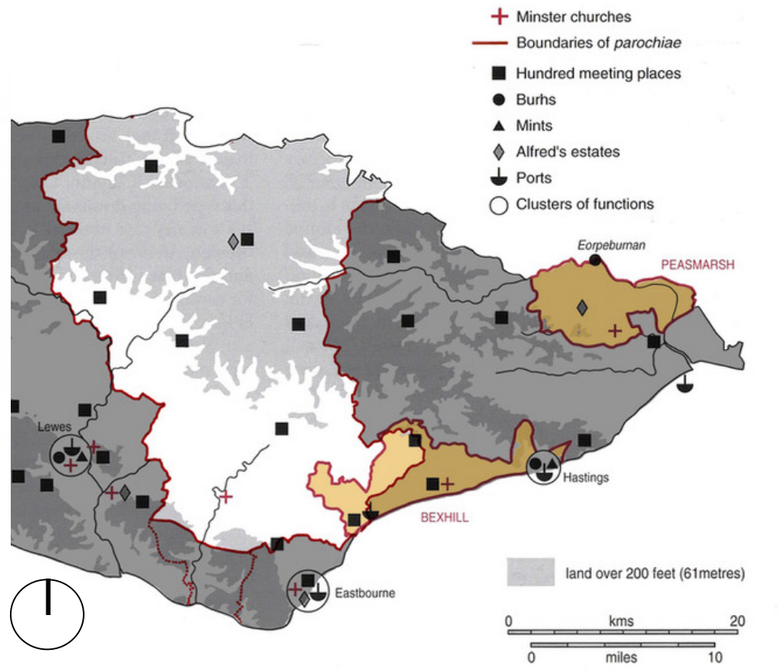


Fig 54. Late Saxons 650 -1066 and patochiae 650-1066. Source: An Historical Atlas of Sussex 1999 - elaborated by SE

The Dispersed Settlement Pattern

3.2.12. Peter Brandon's authoritative book on 'The Kent and Sussex Weald' (2003) noted the dispersed nature of Wealden settlements, in which hamlets evolved from relatively large but mostly unimproved holdings held by a family or clan over generations. In the mid 14th century, the keeper of the Rotherfield custumal (inventory of customs), noted how these holdings had evolved into clusters of settlements by the pioneer farmers.

3.2.13. He illustrated how a discrete estate located in the low weald or Downs operated with its outliers in the Weald. Some of these outliers were seasonal settlements- with a system of transhumance that involved the movement of livestock and people tending them, creating the drove routes that characterise so much of this area.

3.2.14. The large number of swine pasture names (den) in the northern part of Wealden District, and over the border in Kent, is the largest concentration of swine pasture names in England, and this had a major impact on the landscape.

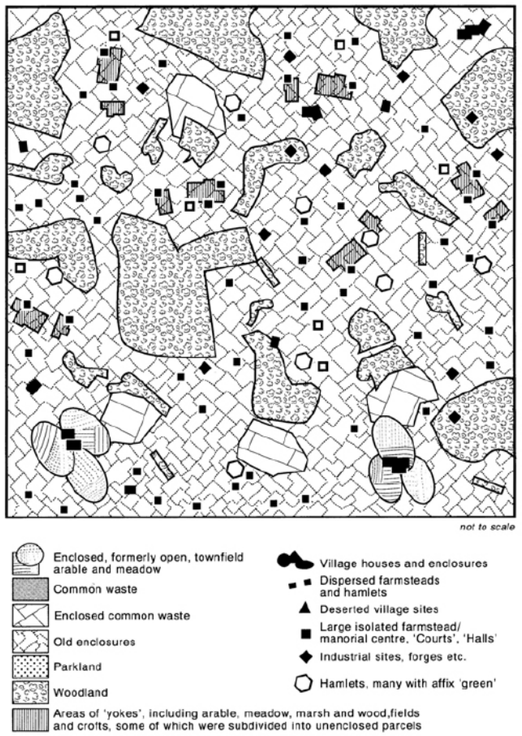


Fig 58. Diagrammatic model of the Weald sub-province showing the scattered settlement pattern. Source: Atlas of Rural Settlement in England, English Heritage, 2000.

3.2.15. The Forest named Anderita or Aneritum by the Romans is referred to in early Saxon chronicles (477CE), but by 1086 the Normans referred to it as the Weald in the Domesday Book. The term Wald is translated as forest, but it has been suggested that in the Middle Ages the meaning implied an uncultivated wilderness where livestock were grazed on leaf fodder and mast, and where wood was collected and bees kept. Also, the land shaping was not entirely made by people as the effects of grazing by wild and domesticated large mammals created a mosaic of grassland, scrub, solitary trees and groves as well as more extensive areas of woodland. Droving livestock showed that the Weald was integrated into the farming system located the edges of the forest from prehistoric times. The lack of archaeological sites is likely due to the area being used seasonally, a system referred to as transhumance. The droving over millennia produced the distinctive sunken lanes in the District. The open field system occurred in the Low Weald.

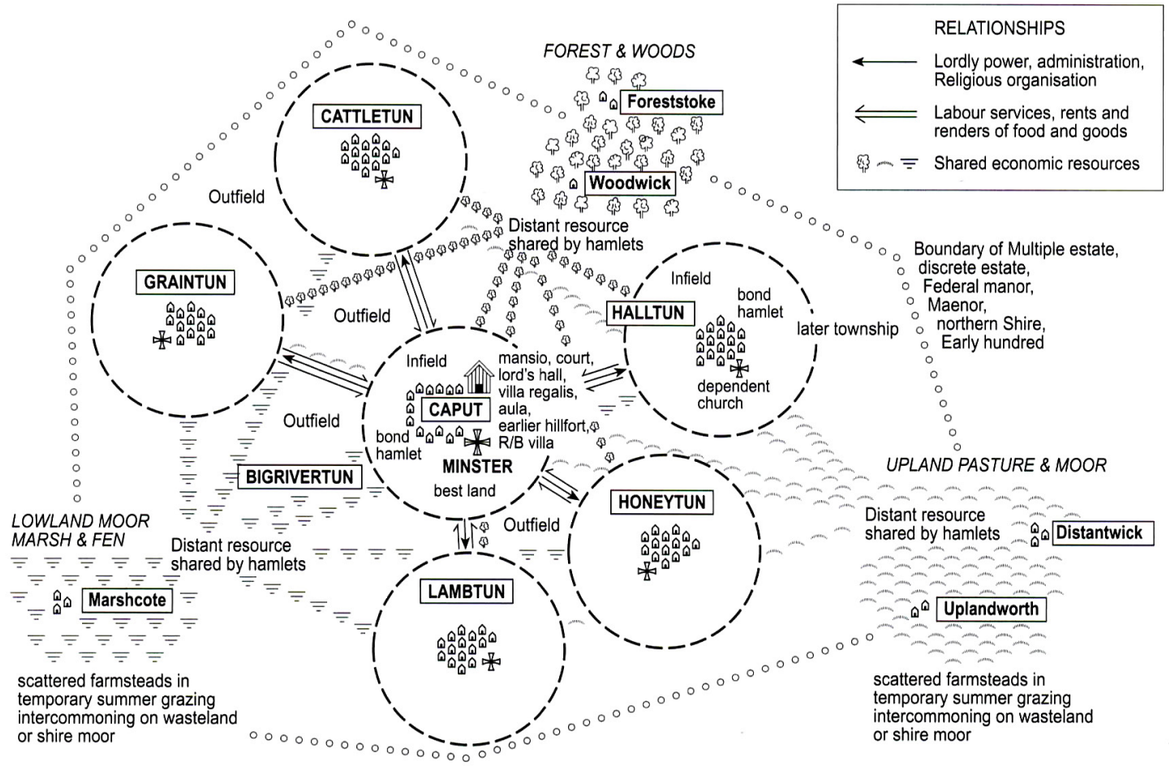


Fig 59. Diagram showing the typical land organisation in 12th century of Saxon/Jutish Caput or headquarters on the edge of the Wealden forest Source: Brandon, 2003.

Medieval Period

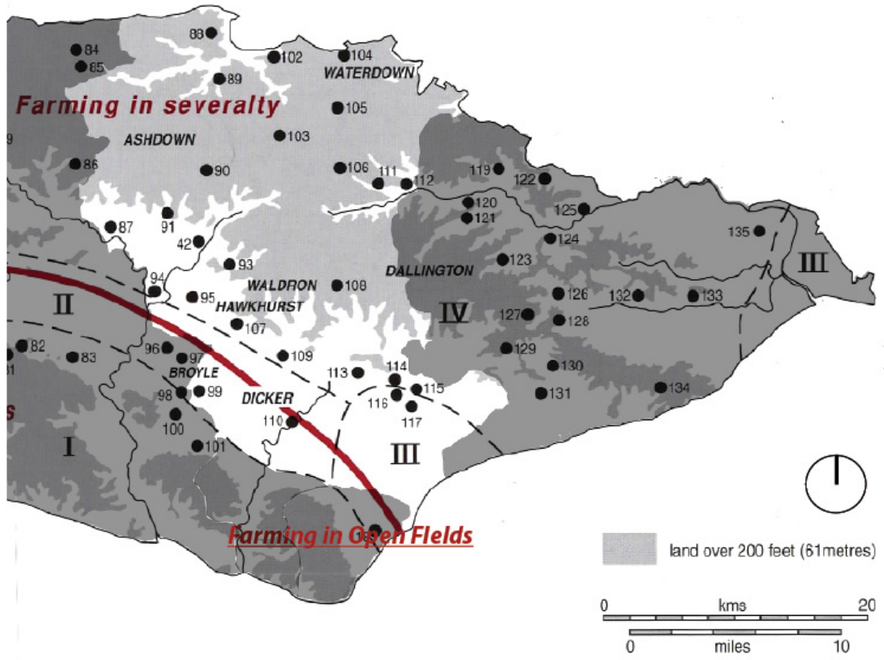
3.2.16. The great period of time from earliest habitation until the medieval period set the overall qualities of this landscape, which is one of the best preserved medieval landscapes in northern Europe, but in the centuries since, there have been further layers superimposed by land management. At the time of the Domesday Book, the number of ploughs noted gives an idea of cultivation, but eastern Sussex had far fewer plough teams than the south and west as this area was less productive for arable.

3.2.17. Individual farm settlements were not noted in the Domesday Book but listed with manors, which varied in size. The division of land ownership was mostly to the Lords of the Rapes, but there was also land controlled by the English and French churches, and some areas were under multiple lordships and other dominated by lay tenants. The King owned little land here but some deer parks were his, such as Ashdown Forest.

3.2.18. Medieval Deer Parks leave a legacy that can be seen today as they were enclosed by a pale on a bank. The Normans began enclosing Royal Hunting Parks, where local peasants were denied access. The Charter of the Forest (1217) is less well known than Magna Carta of the same year but it remained on the statute book until 1972. This re-established the rights of access to free men to the Royal forests, and was sealed originally by Henry II. There are 30 Medieval Deer Parks in Wealden District.

3.2.19. The Great Famine (1315-17) caused by bad weather affected much of northern Europe. This weakened livestock, which succumbed to disease causing cattle and sheep numbers to fall precipitously.

3.2.20. Major volcanic eruptions in 1345 far away triggered more bad weather in the prelude to the Black Death (1348-9), which greatly reduced the population. There are 109 deserted villages in Sussex, 16 of these are in Wealden District. A result was that land clearance by assarting the forest, and tilled land dwindled. This was notable in Waterdown Forest, Ashdown Forest ad Dallington Chase. There is evidence of this farming collapse in Hellingly and Heathfield between 1291-1340. As land degenerated, hedges grew wider, possibly forming shaws, whilst silted ditches made land boggy. The shrinking arable land prompted the 1489 Act of Parliament that forbade the conversion of arable land to pasture, where increasing enclosure to keep sheep may have reflected the depopulation of this area. A 1524-5 tax record reveals that key revenues were derived from the cloth-making, glass, tanning and iron industries.



87 Sheffield
88 Blackham
89 Buckhurst
90 Newham
91 Maresfield
92 Buxted

94 Isfield
95 Little Horsted
96 Plashett
97 Broyle
98 Moorland
99 Laughton
100 Glynde
101 Firle

102 Hamsell
103 Rotherfield
104 Frant
105 Frankham
106 Mayfield
107 Bentley
108 Saperton
109 Chiddingly
110 Michelham
111 Hawksden
112 Bivelham
113 Warlington
114 Lime
115 Wartling
116 Herstmonceux
117 Old Court

Fig 55. Map of Medieval deer parks. Source: An Historical Atlas of Sussex 1999 - elaborated by SE

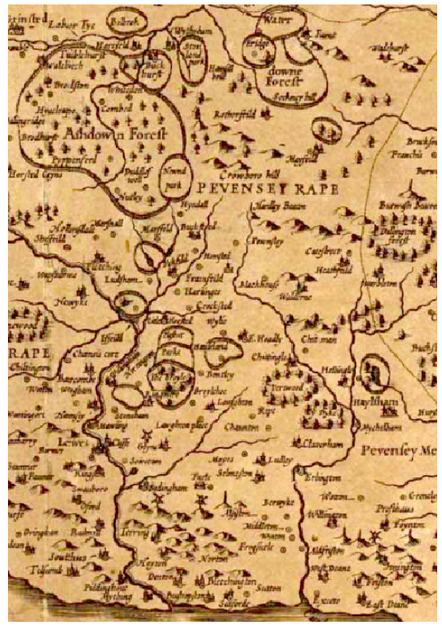
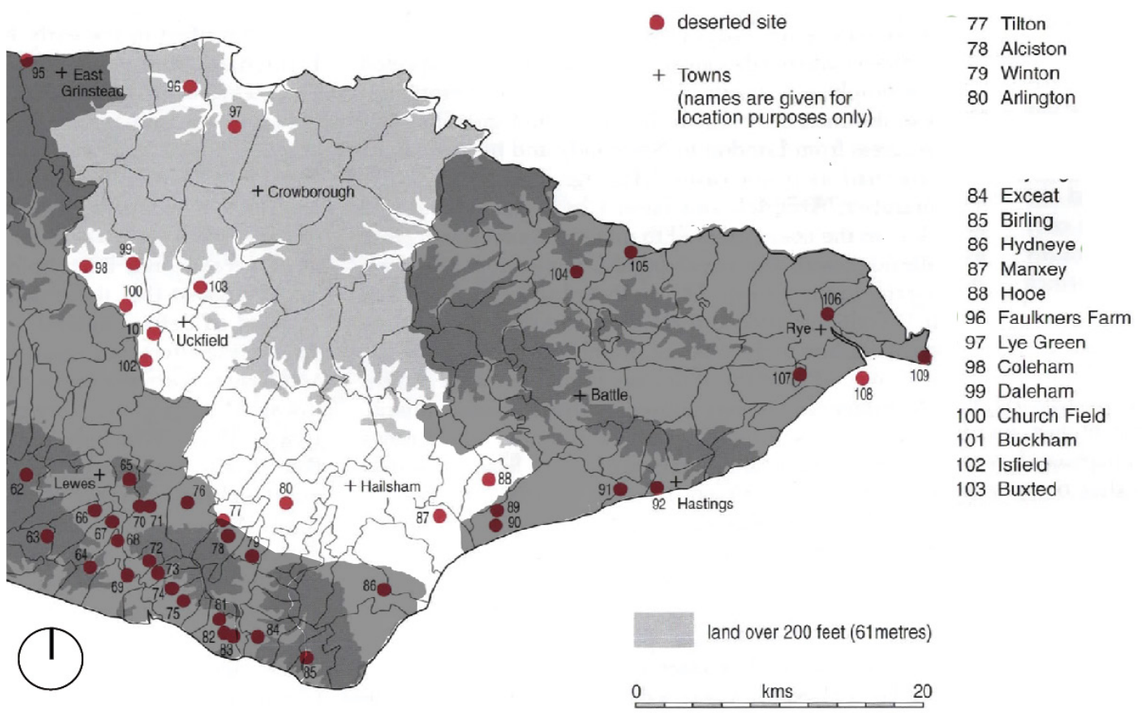


Fig 56. John Speed's Map of Sussex 1610, showing deer parks in Wealden District. Note the hunting forestes surrounded by 'pales'.



77 Tilton
78 Alciston
79 Winton
80 Arlington

84 Exceat
85 Birling
86 Hydneye
87 Manxey
88 Hooe
96 Faulkners Farm
97 Lye Green
98 Coleham
99 Daleham
100 Church Field
101 Buckham
102 Islield
103 Buxted

Fig 57. Deserted settlements in the 16th century. Source: An Historical Atlas of Sussex 1999 - elaborated by SE

Pre-modern Period

3.2.21. Common land was an essential right for grazing, hunting, fishing and gathering wood in Saxon times and there is a strong association between commons and area of poorer soils. Pasture Commons included some oaken wood pastures on clay lands, as well as heaths. 'Stinting' operated to limit the number of animals that could be out-pastured, 'litter' tree foliage and mulched gorse and holly were used as animal feed by poor farmers. Many commons still existing in the 18th and 19th centuries started to be enclosed by Acts of Parliament between 1700-1900. The resistance to enclosure resulted in the commons that survive today.

3.2.22. From 1700 accessibility to the area improved, first with turnpike roads and later with the railways and national roads. The proximity to London made this an attractive area for Georgian and Victorian countryside estates, as well as the expansion of towns. About 50% of land ownership in the Victorian era was limited to a few owners (Wilson's Gazetteer, 1870). In Wealden District this applied mainly to southern areas, as most of the High Weald was subdivided.

Table 2. The pattern of Sussex landownership (by region and category)

	1	2	3	4	5	
	One estate 90%+	Not much divided 75–89%	In few hands 50–74%	Sub-divided 25–49%	Much sub-divided up to 25%	Total
Marshland	1	1	7	3	1	13
Low Weald	1	2	10	16	8	37
High Weald	3	2	10	19	19	53
Scarpfoot	11	10	40	7	6	74
Downs	21	8	25	5	1	60
Coastal Plain	17	8	17	14	7	63
Sussex total	54	31	109	64	42	300

1. The columns represent the categories assigned by J.M. Wilson in his *Imperial Gazetteer* (1870) or (in percentage figures) the amount of the total area of each parish owned by the three largest landowners in the tithe surveys of Sussex (taken from the 'Summary' at the rear of each tithe schedule).
2. The parish totals exclude those parishes which together constituted Chichester, Hastings and St Leonards, Lewes, and Newhaven, being primarily urban, and also Broomhill and West Thorney for which parishes no figures were available.

Table 3. The broad pattern of Sussex landownership

	Essentially 'Close'	%	Essentially 'Open'	%
Marshland	9	69.2	4	30.8
Low Weald	13	35.1	24	64.9
High Weald	15	28.3	38	71.7
Scarpfoot	61	82.4	13	17.6
Downs	54	90.0	6	10.0
Coastal Plain	42	66.7	21	33.3
Sussex total	194	64.7	106	35.3

1. 'Essentially Close' parishes are those in Columns 1–3 in Table 2; 'Essentially Open' are those in Columns 4 and 5.

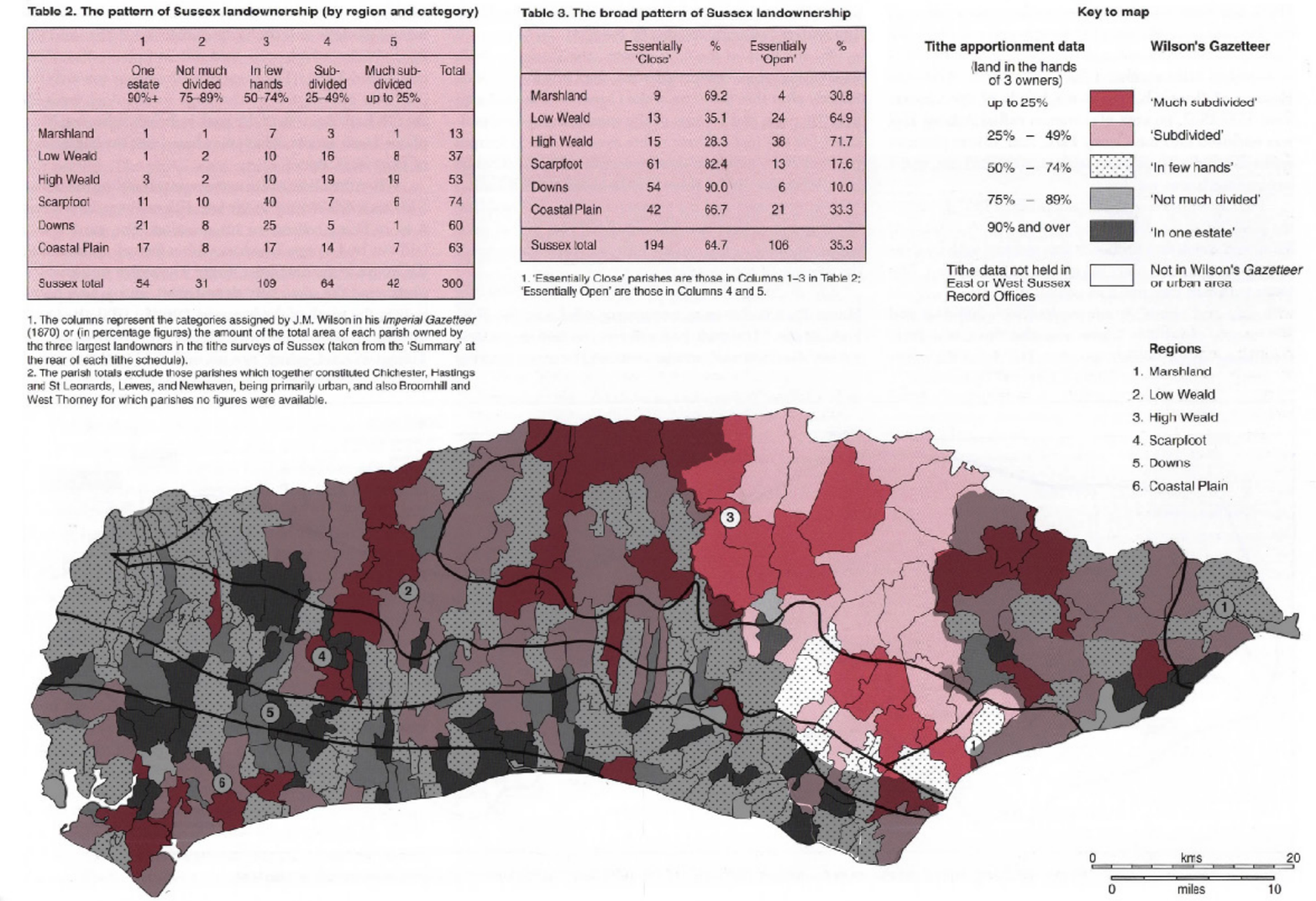


Fig 60. Pattern of land ownership in Wealden District in Victorian times. Source: An Historical Atlas of Sussex 1999 - elaborated by SE

3.3 Landscape Evolution

Neolithic Period

3.3.1. The bursting of an ice dam in North America, holding back the vast glacial Lake Agassiz, raised sea levels significantly and shut down the Gulf Stream for a millennium leading to very cold conditions affecting the tree line from 8,470 years ago. It is now thought that the underwater Storegga landslide off Norway triggered further flooding around 8,200 years ago. This did not stop migration by boat.

3.3.2. The first neolithic farmers arrived about 6,000 years ago (Historic England). As the Wealden Forest was so dense and soils were so intractable, they were generally concentrated along the Downland. The old Times Atlas map shows the progression farming from the Anatolian Plateau and Balkans along the Danube to the north. Eastern Britain was connected to mainland Europe by the low lying 'Doggerland' until about 7,000 years ago. Rising sea levels as ice sheet melted, broke the broad land bridge into islands.

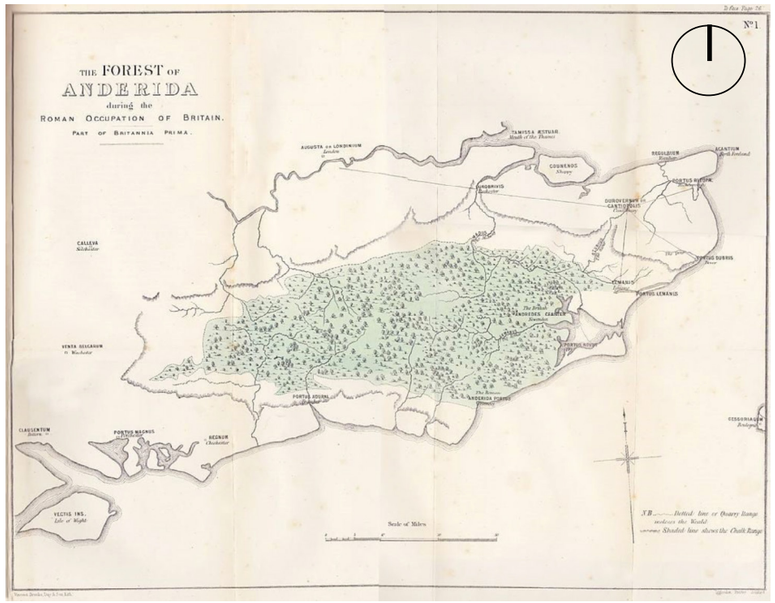


Fig 62. The Forest of Anderida - The Weald in Roman Times. Source: gaslightandsteam.com

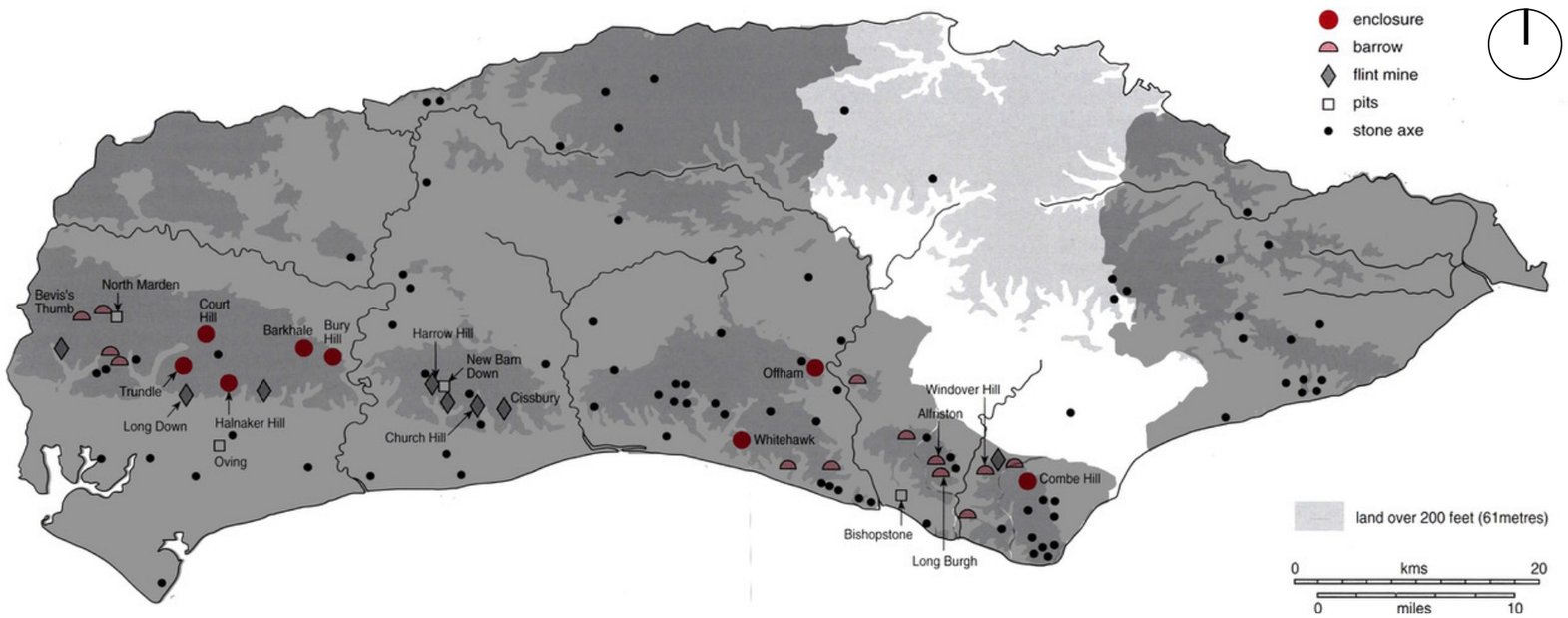


Fig 61. Pre-history first farming communities. Domestication of animals (especially cattle & pigs) occurred alongside hunting & gathering as Neolithic idea arrived around 4300BCE. Enclosures and flint mines date from around 3470-3290 BCE, Emma Wheat seed has been dated to 2510 BCE. Communal monuments appeared in this era 2760-2360BCE Source: An Historical Atlas of Sussex 1999 - elaborated by SE



Fig 63. The spread of agricultural settlements from the Danube to Britain About 5-6,000 years ago source: Times Atlas 2007

Historic Landscape Characterisation of Sussex

3.3.3. The History of the English Landscape has been investigated for some time. Hoskins 'Making of the English Countryside' (1954) was the forerunner of others including Oliver Rackham's 'History of the Countryside' (1987) and more technical volumes such as Rippon's Historic Landscape Analysis (2004), which showed techniques that can be used to understand physical components in the landscape such as settlement patterns, field systems, woodland and open water.

3.3.4. This direction of travel led to 'The Historic Characterisation of Sussex Project' (2008), published in a series of reports and on GIS in 2014. The mapping in the atlas shows the density of ancient assarted fields (cleared from the forest) in the High Weald and the predominance of formally enclosed fields in the Low Weald.

3.3.5. Wealden District is an ancient cultural landscape. The map of fieldscapes show a predominance of assart in the High Weald and of formal fields in the Low Weald, an area that had been under the open field system. Assarted fields were cleared from woodland, and typically have an irregular shape. It was extraordinary work requiring not only cutting of trees but grubbing up of roots too. Much of Wealden District has pre or post medieval fields (dark red- map opposite).

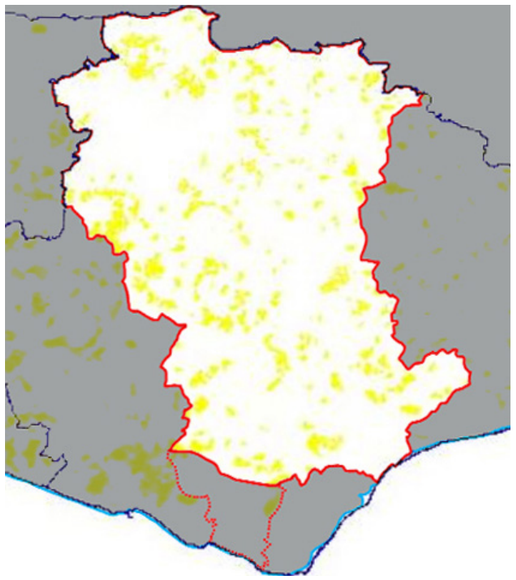


Fig 64. Fields that have lost >51% internal boundaries. Source: The Historic Landscape Characterisation of Sussex elaborated by Studio Engleback (Wealden District is approximate)

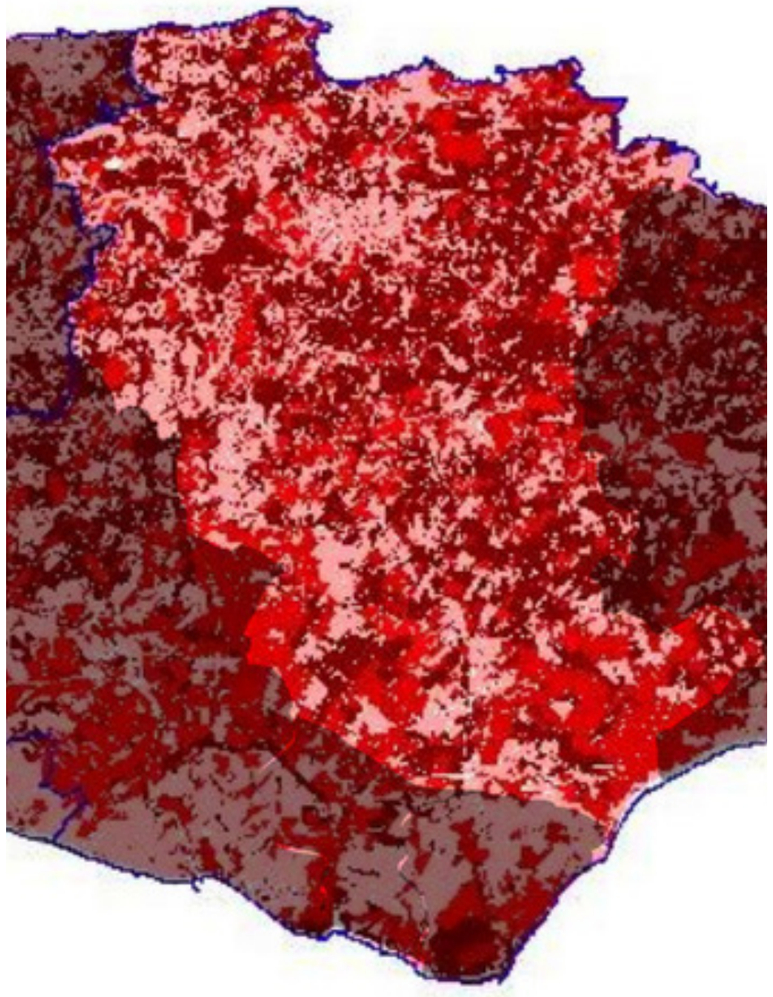


Fig 65. Historic Landscape Characterisation Main Periods. Source: The Historic Landscape Characterisation of Sussex elaborated by Studio Engleback (Wealden District is approximate)

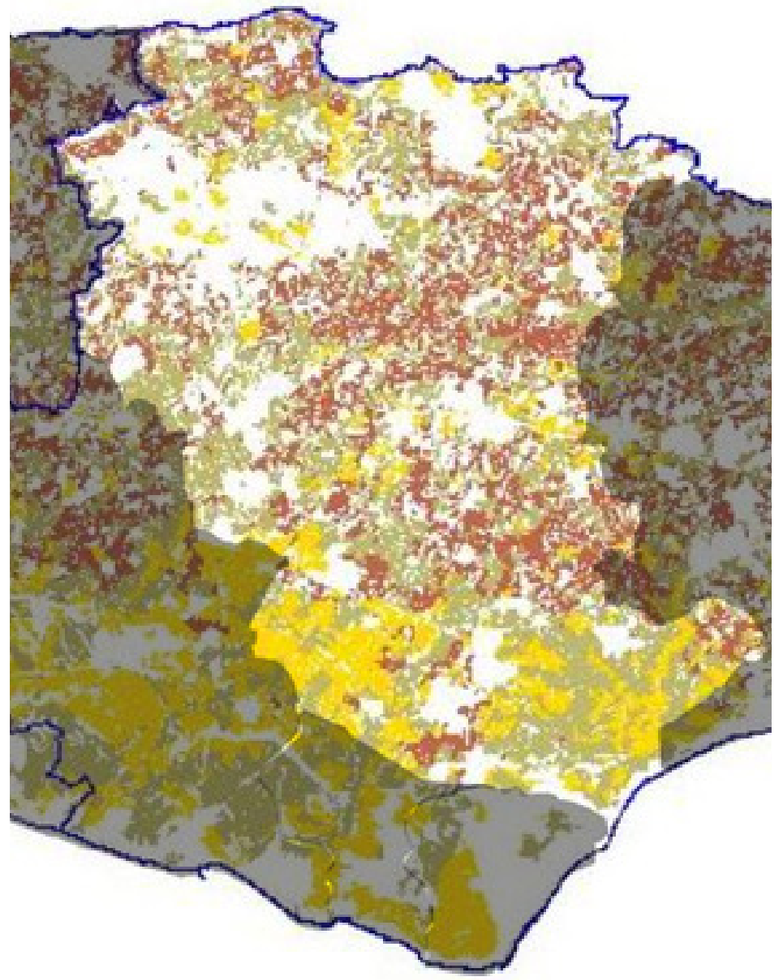


Fig 66. Historic Landscape Characterisation Field Types - sub character types. Source: The Historic Landscape Characterisation of Sussex elaborated by Studio Engleback (Wealden District is approximate)

3.4 Movement & Communications Evolution

Droves and Ancient Routeways

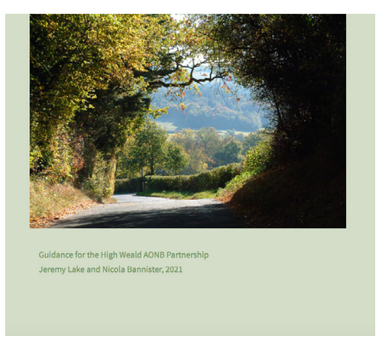
3.4.1. The Weald was the stronghold of pannage in Britain- the practice of releasing pigs into forests to forage for acorns and other nuts. In 1086 – when the practice was already past its peak – Domesday records indicate that around 150,000 pigs would have been driven to and from the woods of the High and Low Weald.

3.4.2. Farmers returned with their pigs to the same woodland place year after year. These woodland pig pastures were called dens. The frequent passage of pigs being driven to and from the dens formed tracks known as droves, connecting the dens to their parent villages – often as much as 20 miles away.

3.4.3. Over time the dens became settlements in their own right, and the roughly north-south droving routes remained, and can be seen today in the pattern of lanes, bridleways and footpaths radiating away from the High Weald.

3.4.4. Centuries of use by many trotters, feet, hooves – and, later, cartwheels – have worn the soft ground away so that, today, many of the routes have deeply sunken sections.

3.4.5. In spring and summer, the High Weald's narrow, sunken lanes with their ancient, wooded banks are transformed into shady 'tree tunnels'. Many are lined in places with wildflower-rich verges, important wildlife refuges – some even designated as 'Roadside Nature Reserves'.



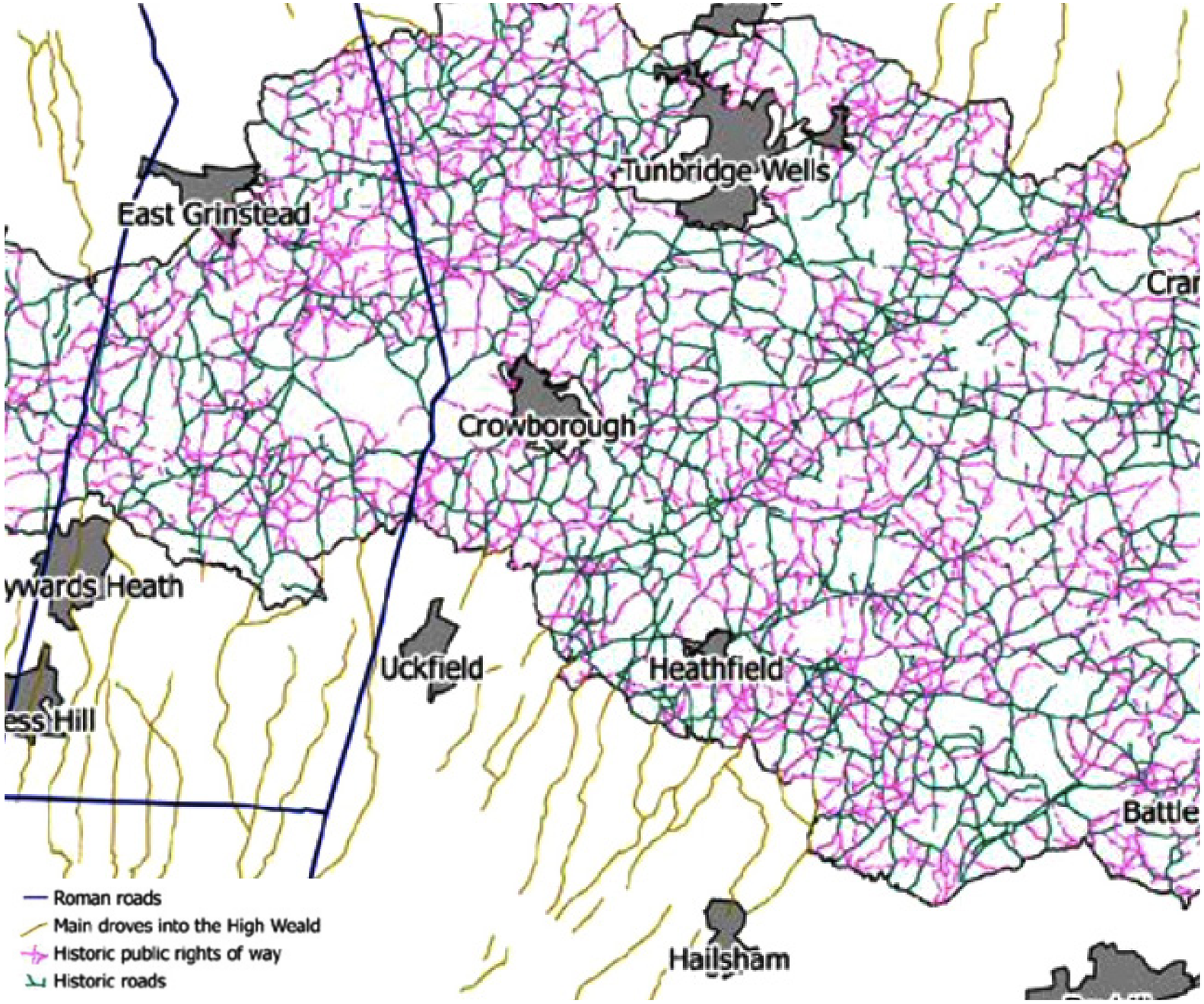


Fig 67. Ancient Routeways in the south east UK. Source: High Weald NL Management Plan

Modern Connections

3.4.6. In 1723, Richard Budgen published a map of the primary road network in Sussex that connected market towns, comprising routes recommended to travellers. Nothing is said of the condition, which may have been challenging. But travel over the Low Weald and parts of the High Weald was constrained by boggy ground in winter. Roads were improved by turnpike trusts, which in Sussex started from 1749, and by 1764 improvements were authorised to existing roads radiating from London. In the late 1760s cross-country routes emerged particularly around Tunbridge Wells and Lewes, and to Brighton from 1770 when it was becoming a resort.

3.4.7. Progress slowed in the last decade and a half of the eighteenth century, but leisure travel was a conspicuous influence on road building by 1800, initially to Tunbridge Wells and then to the seaside resorts. Turnpiking resumed in 1801, and standards of engineering and maintenance rose around 1820. By 1840 the whole of Sussex had 1091km of turnpiked road and 3811km of repaired routes. The last scheme was authorised in 1841, the year in which the London to Brighton Railway opened. The competition for the railways resulted in the Turnpike Trusts losing money and they were wound up between 1864 and 1885.

3.4.8. Communications expanded between 1840 and 1914. The Eastbourne to Hailsham railway was built in 1849 by the London Brighton and South Coast Railway (LBSCR). In 1851-2 the South Eastern Railway crossed from Tunbridge Wells, and two lines were added to Tunbridge Wells by the LBSCR – one via East Grinstead in 1866, the other via Lewes and Uckfield in 1868. However, very early on these country routes were losing money, ceasing work on new routes. Sussex had no extractive industries or bulky manufacturing of national importance, so commercial traffic tended to be local. Instead, it was passenger traffic that provided the greater amount of revenue, driven by the seaside resorts.

Fig 68. Roads 1720-1840

Source: An Historical Atlas of Susse
1999 - elaborated by SE

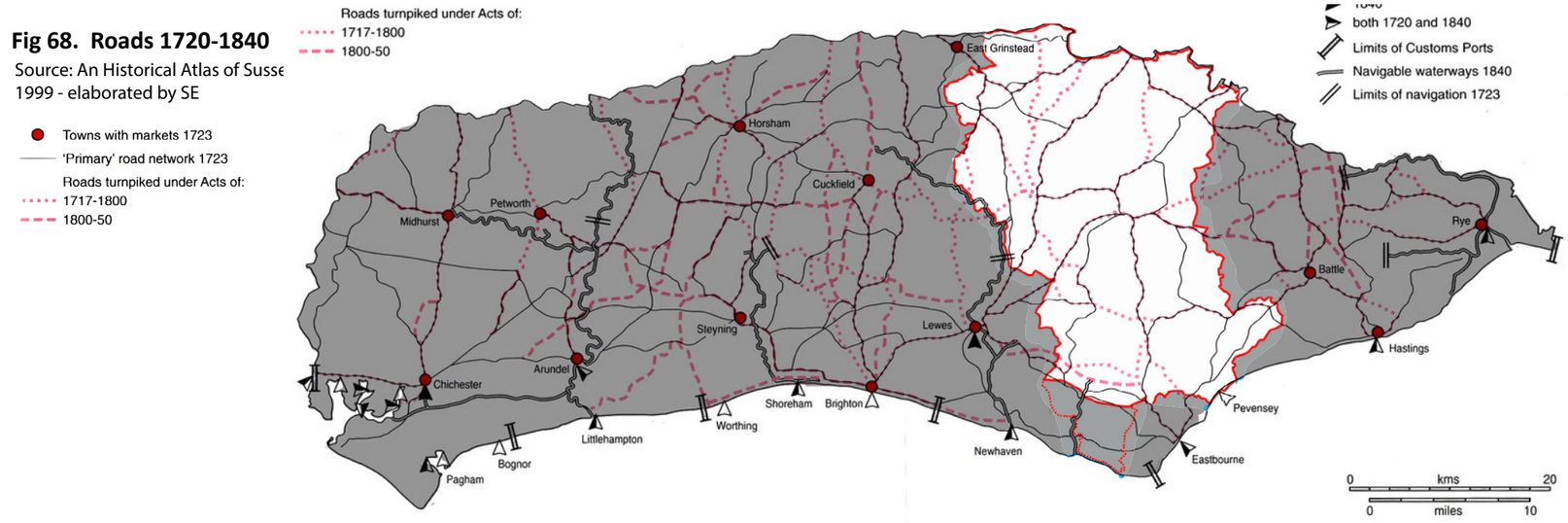


Fig 69. Railways & Roads 1840-1914

Source: An Historical Atlas of Sussex
1999 - elaborated by SE

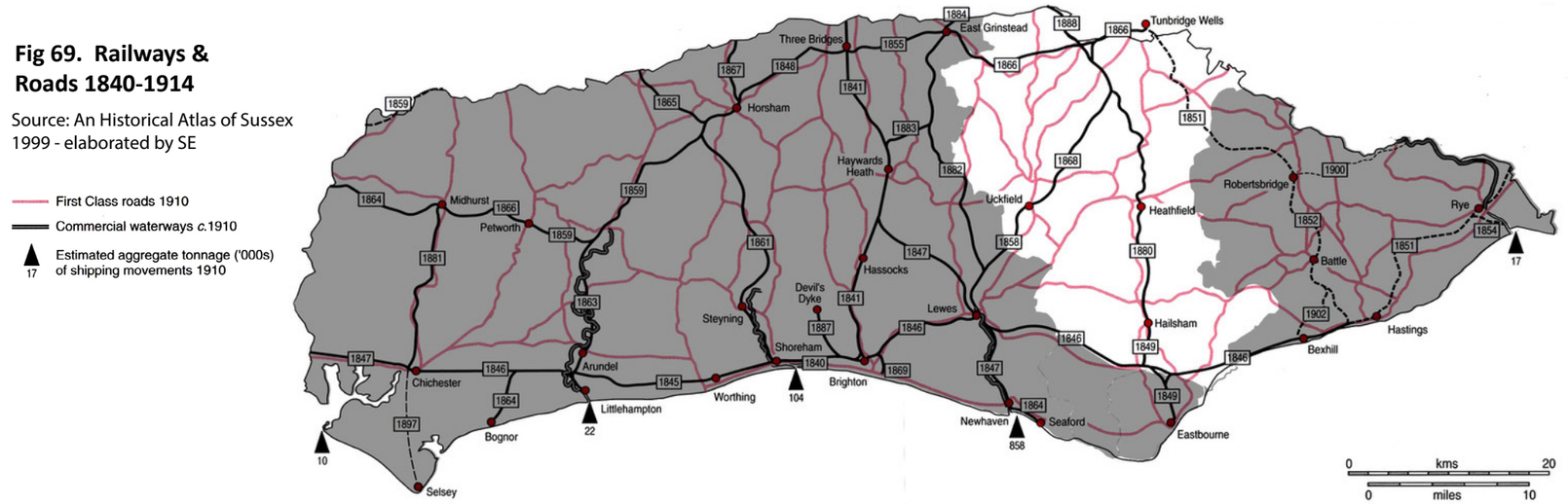
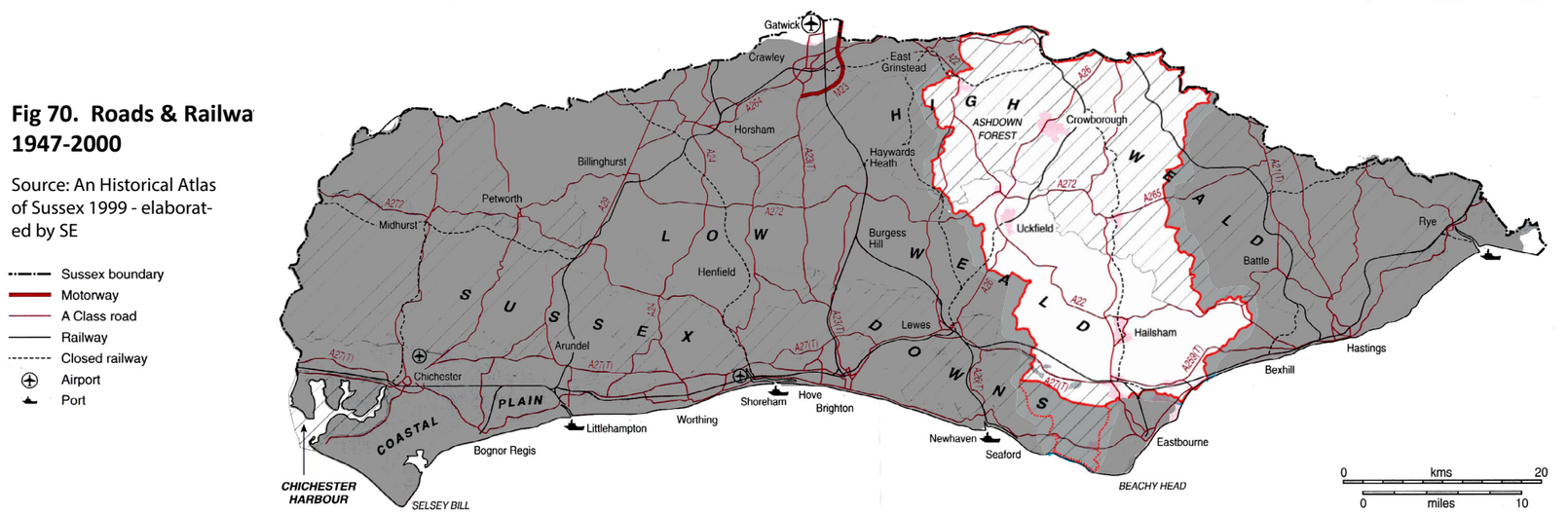


Fig 70. Roads & Railwa 1947-2000

Source: An Historical Atlas of Sussex 1999 - elaborated by SE



4.0 Wealden Society Today

4.1 Socio-Economic Profile

Selected Demographic Indicators

Population Growth

4.1.1. Between the last two censuses (held in 2011 and 2021), the population of Wealden District increased by 7.5%, from around 148,900 in 2011 to around 160,200 in 2021. The population increased at a similar rate to the overall population of the South East (7.5%), but by a greater percentage than the overall population of England (up 6.6% since the 2011 Census).

4.1.2. Wealden District was among the lowest 25% of English local authority areas in terms of population density at the last census.

Age change

4.1.3. Between the last two censuses, the median age of Wealden increased by three years, from 46 to 49 years. It is higher than the South East as a whole in 2021 (41 years) and England (40 years). The number of people aged 65 to 74 years rose by just over 4,300 (an increase of 24.6%), while the number of residents between 35 and 49 years fell by around 4,200 (13.7% decrease).

Health

4.1.4. Health and well-being data reflect people's own opinions in describing their overall health on a five-point scale, from very good to very bad.

4.1.5. In 2021, 51.4% of Wealden residents described their health as 'very good', increasing from 49.6% in 2011. Those describing their health as 'good' fell from 34.6% to 33.8%. The proportion of Wealden residents describing their health as 'very bad' was 0.8% (similar to 2011), while those describing their health as 'bad' was 3.0% (similar to 2011).

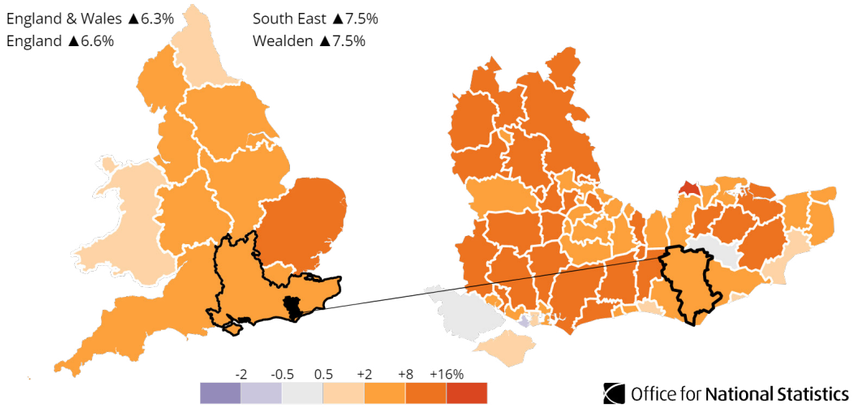


Fig 71. Population change in Wealden: Census 2011 to Census 2021

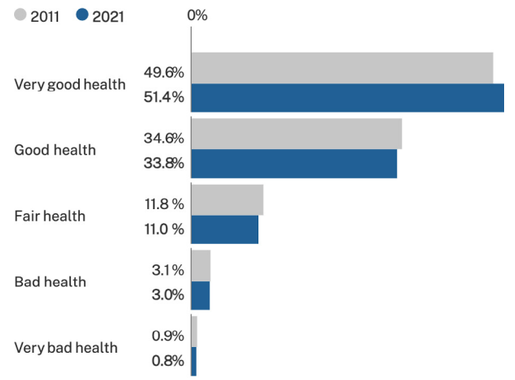
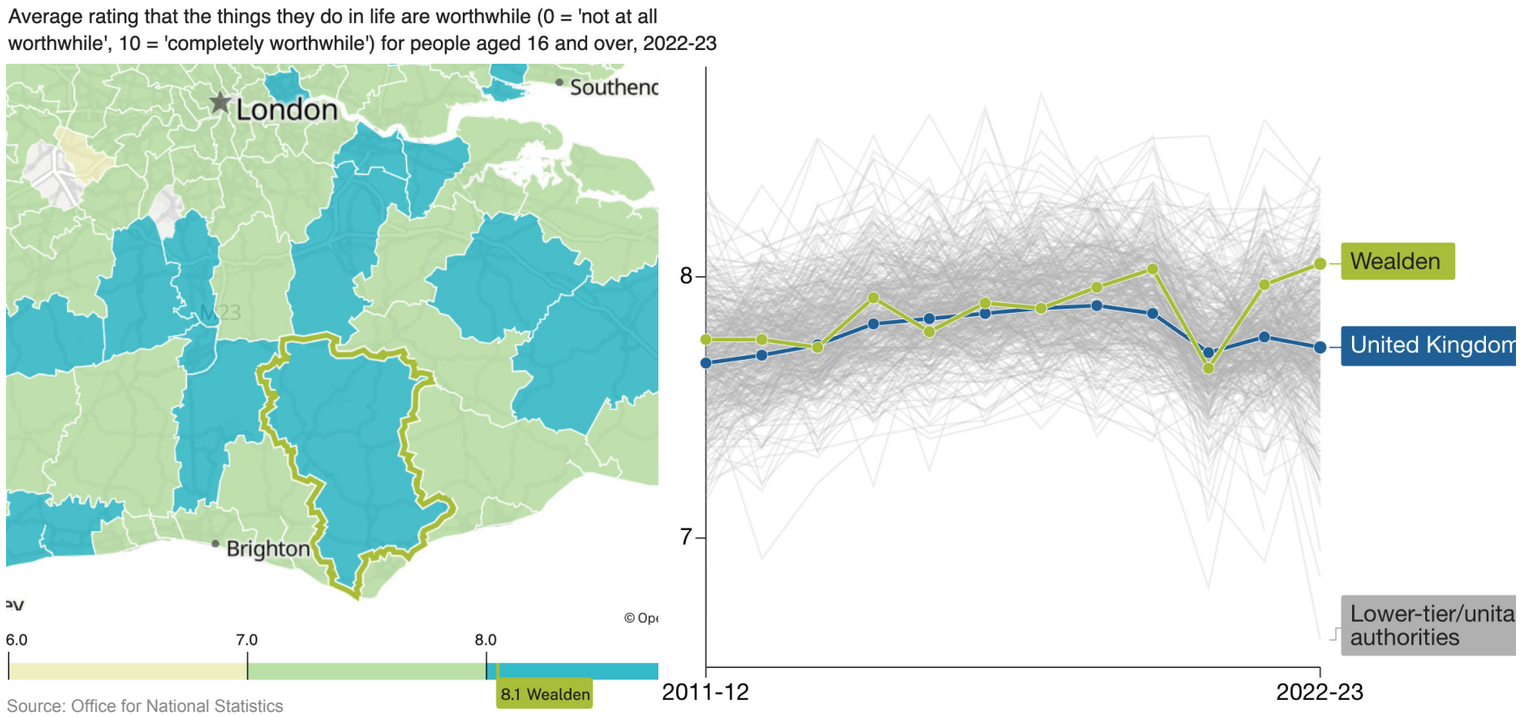


Fig 72. Change in self-reported health among the residents: Census 2011 to Census 2021



Source: Office for National Statistics

Fig 73. Wealden is among the local authorities with highest resident happiness indicators. The graph to the right shows the indicator 'Feeling than the life is worthwhile'

Economic activity

Employment

4.1.6. Estimates of employment and economic inactivity are based on the Annual Population Survey. Unemployment estimates are modelled to improve their precision compared to those based only on responses provided via the Annual Population Survey.

4.1.7. Employment in Wealden has increased compared with the previous year – it was slightly lower than across the South East as a whole in the year ending December 2023. Of people aged 16 to 64 years living in Wealden, 79.0% were employed in the year ending December 2023. This is an increase compared with the year ending December 2022 when the local rate was 72.6%.

Unemployment

4.1.8. Around 2,400 people aged 16 and over in Wealden were unemployed in the year ending December 2023. This is a rate of 2.9%. This was a decrease compared with the year ending December 2022 when the unemployment rate was 4.0%. Across the South East, from the year ending December 2022 to the year ending December 2023, there was a decrease in the unemployment rate from 3.1% to 2.9%.

Economic Activity

4.1.9. Economic inactivity has decreased in Wealden compared with the previous year. Around 17,500 people or 19.1% of the population aged 16 to 64 years in Wealden were 'economically inactive' in the year ending December 2023. This compares with around 18,500 people (20.2%) in the year ending December 2022.

4.1.10. People are classed as 'economically inactive' if they are not in employment but don't meet the criteria for being 'unemployed'. This means they have not been seeking work within the previous four weeks or were unable to start work within the next two weeks. Common reasons include being retired, looking after the home or family or being temporarily or long-term sick and disabled.

4.1.11. Economic inactivity in Wealden is higher than across the South East.

79%
Employment rate

2.9%
Unemployment rate

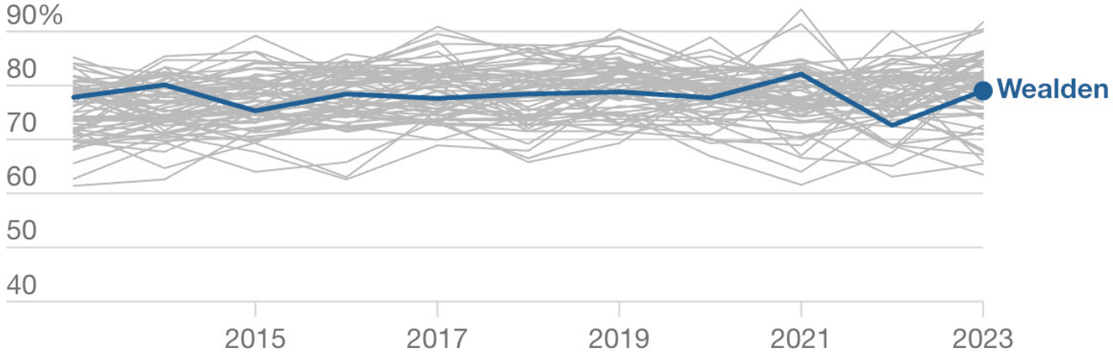
2.1%
Claimant Count

19.1%
Economic inactivity



This indicator shows an estimate of earnings after tax and receiving benefits. Wealden residents earned £30,000 on average – higher than the national average (£23,192).

Fig 74. Gross disposable household income per capita



Source: Annual Population Survey from the Office for National Statistics

Fig 75. Employment rates of areas in the South East

Deprivation

4.1.12. Overall, Wealden District is less deprived than 80% of local authority districts in England.

4.1.13. The map opposite illustrates the deciles of the Index of Multiple Deprivation in Wealden. Areas coloured red are most deprived if all deprivation types are taken into account. The data for this research have been provided by the Geographic Data Service (geods.ac.uk), a Smart Data Research UK Investment: ES/Z504464/1. Copyright 2025. Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government.

Local patterns

4.1.14. Local pockets of deprivation exist on the edges of the key settlements, and in the villages to the south of the District.

4.1.15. The most deprived area is south-east Hailsham, which falls into 20% most deprived areas in the UK, particularly due to the lower levels of education, employment and income.

4.1.16. Indoor living environment sub-domain: homes are of high quality. Southeast Hailsham falls within the 20% highest quality homes in the UK (2019 data).

4.1.17. Outdoor living environment: outdoor spaces are of average to good quality. Southeast Hailsham falls within the 50% (or 70% locally) least deprived areas in this aspect in the UK (2019 data).

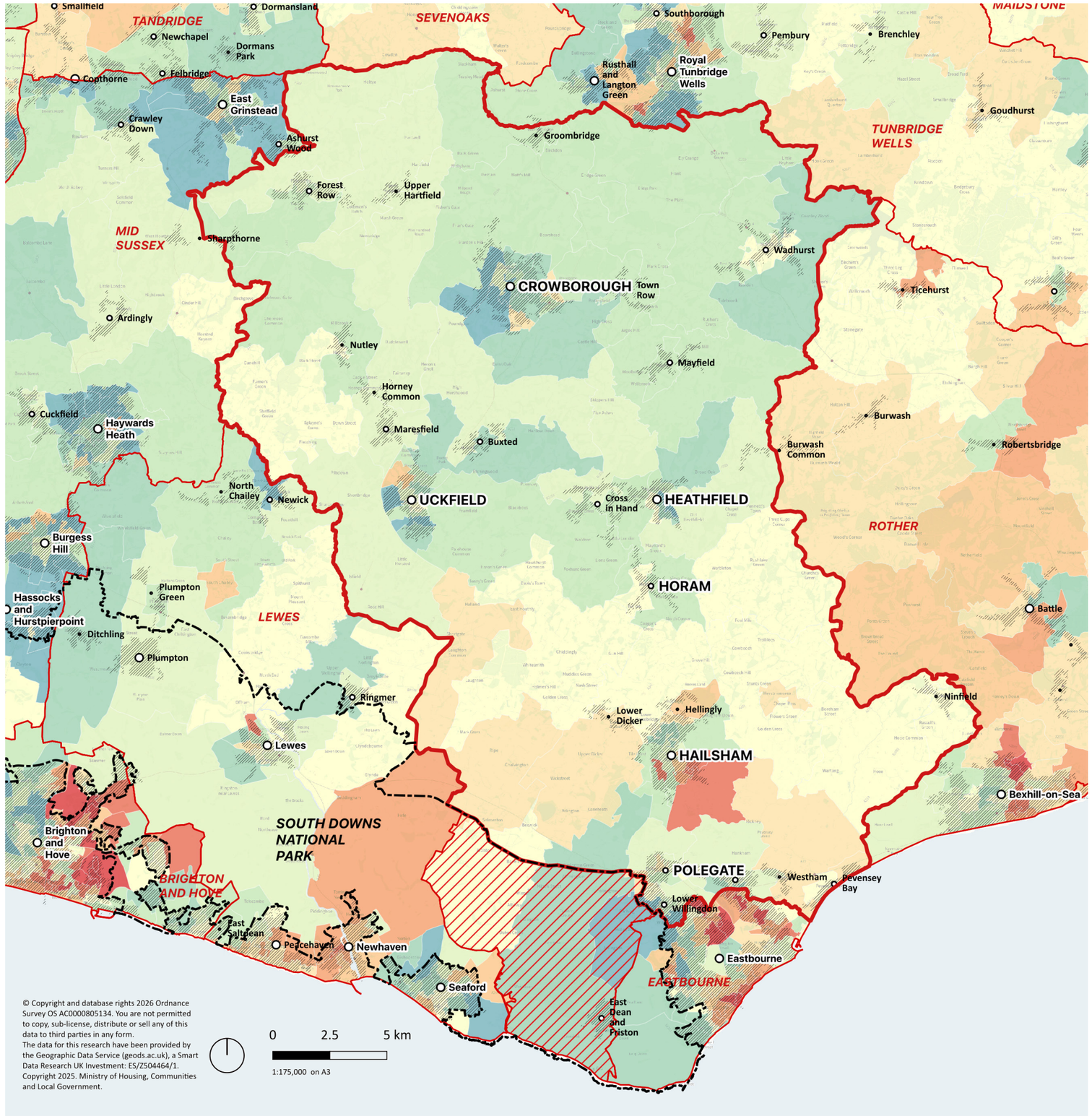


Fig 76. Wealden Deprivation Map

Key:

- Study area
- Local authority district boundary
- South Downs National Park
- Area of WDC within the South Downs National Park, excluded from study area

Indices of Multiple Deprivation 2025, deciles:

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7
- 8
- 9
- 10

5.0 Wealden Physical Foundations

5.1 Geology

5.1.1. The area of the Weald had been under water- seas and lakes- when the successive layers of sedimentary rocks were laid down- sandstones, mudstone and chalk. Plate techtonics pushing the African plate into Europe created the Alps and a series of hilly regions including the Vosges, Ardennes and the Wealden Dome.

5.1.2. Wealden was not under the ice sheets that covered the north of the country but had been tundra for successive periods of glaciation since the Quaternary glaciation. This had commenced some 2.58 million years ago, the last period having ended around 11,700 years ago. During these periods the Weald was joined to mainland Europe, and in the inter-glacial periods it was eroded, exposing a series of ridges and clay vales.

5.1.3. Over 50% of Wealden District is in the High Weald where layers of Tunbridge Wells beds comprising Wadhurst clay with thin bands of sandstone threading through it plus areas of more massive Ardingly Beds that are up to 16 metres deep. Faulting exposes some of the Ardingly sandstone, which forms the iconic outcrops of rock at High Rocks, Harrisons Rocks, Buxted and elsewhere. Where the Ardingly Sandstone meets the Tunbridge Wells there is often an abrupt change in level.

5.1.4. The softer mudstones in the Low Weald led to more gently rolling topography and the level floodplains. The intractable clay in this area was made useable with drainage ditches.

5.1.5. The Pevensey Levels are only a few metres above sea level, and at the time of the Norman invasion in 1066 much of it was underwater and the coastline was very different to what we see today. Local high spots were islands (ey), referenced in local names such as Horse Eye and Rickney. The coastline of Southern England was altered during several major storms in the thirteenth century, particularly the great storm of 1287. This threw up the pebble and shingle bar from Pevensey to Bexhill. This low lying area is at risk of global sea level rises in the decades ahead.

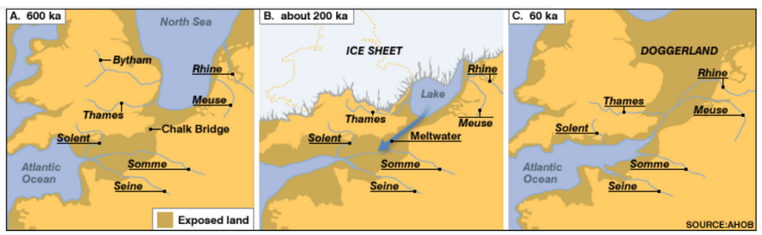
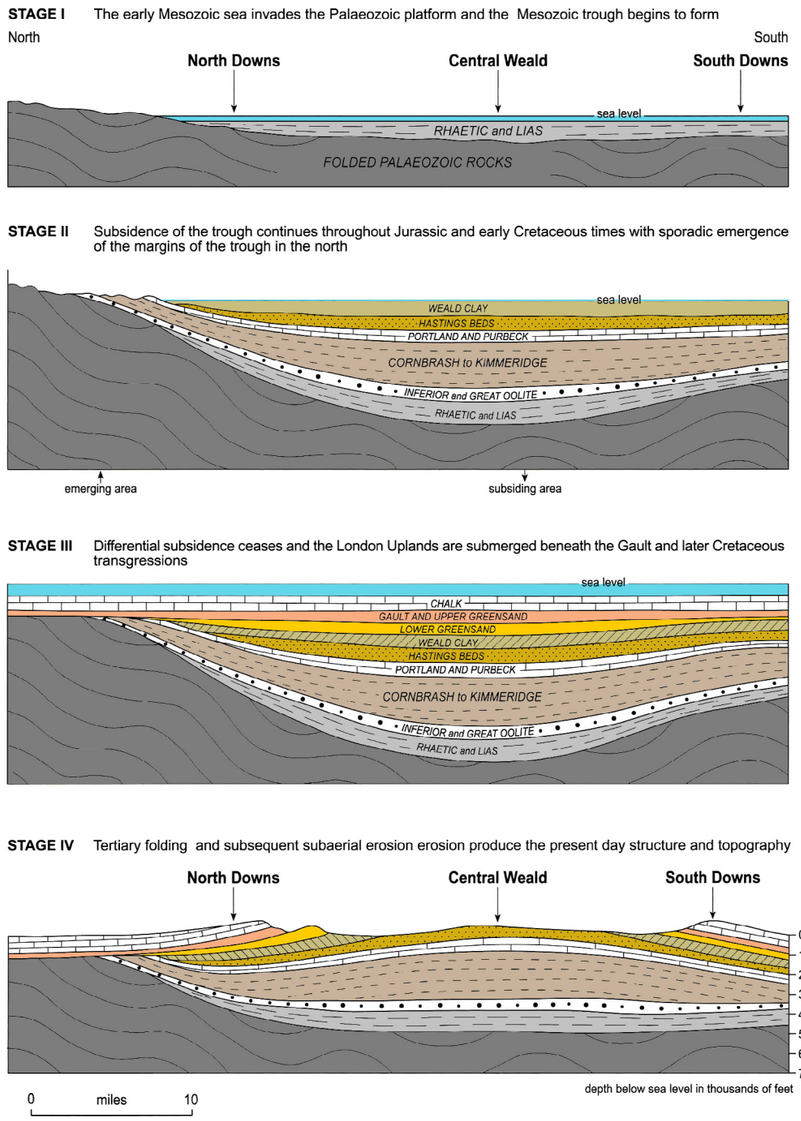


Fig 77. Geologic periods showing the movement of the ice sheets over Europe in the periods of glaciation and the change of exposed and submerged land. Source: AHOB



14 Geological evolution of the Weald (after Allen).

Fig 78. Geological evolution of the Weald (after Allen)

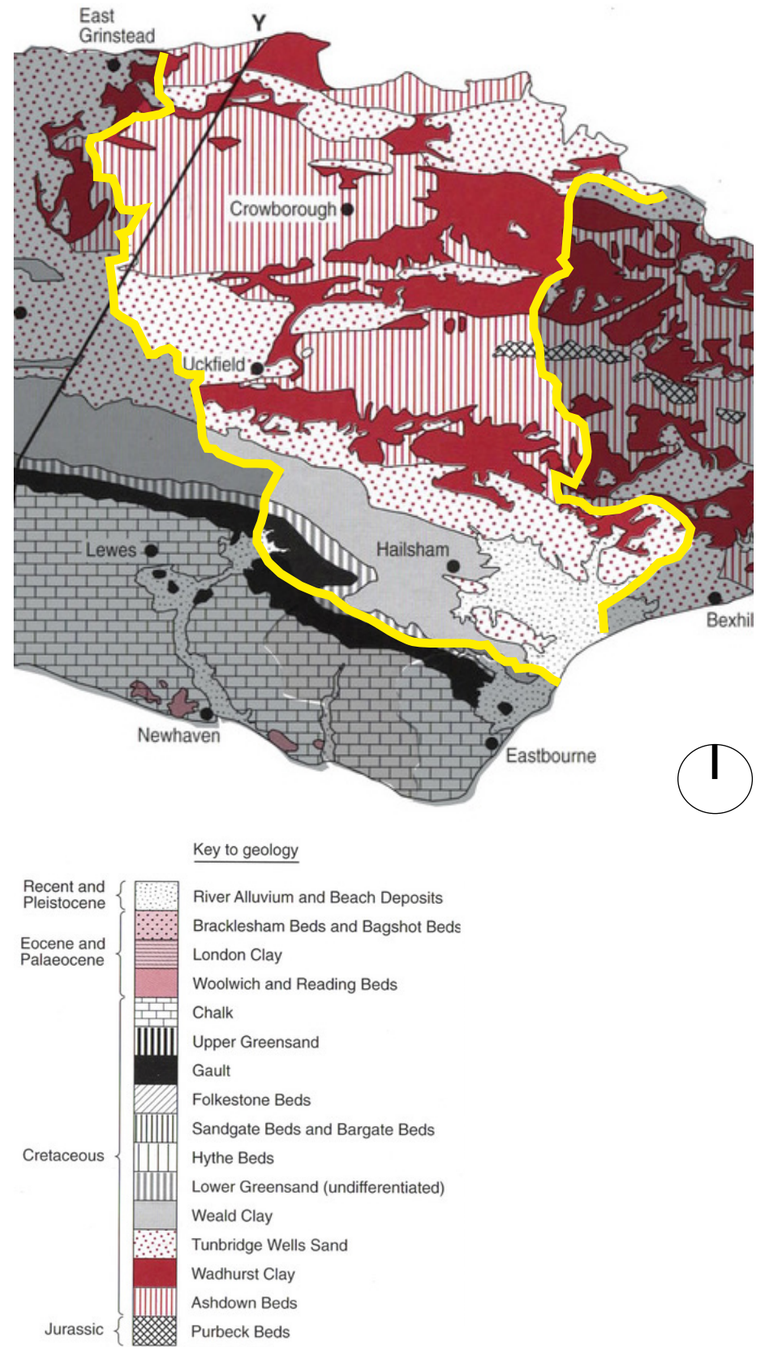


Fig 79. Geological map of Wealden. Source: An historical atlas of Sussex eds. Leslie & Short elaborated by Studio Engleback

5.2 Topography

5.2.1. Land rises from sea level at Pevensey to 223 metres above sea level at Greenwood Gate Clump on Ashdown Forest, the open nature of the top of Ashdown Forest allows views from a series of high spots over a large area in every direction. This includes sight of both the North and the South Downs. The undulating topography of the High Weald with distinctive steep-sided steam valleys or ghylls (gills) of the High Weald is well wooded, but nevertheless there are some long-range views within it. Crowborough borders Ashdown Forest and is the highest town in the High Weald (242m AOD) and the largest inland town in Wealden District.

5.2.2. This higher land transitions to the Low Weald around Uckfield and Horam, which has a softer rolling quality between 30-60m AOD and it is more open generally, descending to the clay vale around Laughton, Arlington Rips and Berwick, before rising abruptly as the scarp slope of the South Downs. At Herstmonceux, the High Weald changes abruptly to the Pevensey Levels.

5.2.3. The levels had been a shallow bay at the time of the Norman Conquest in 1066 and earlier Roman invasion in 43BC. Pevensey Castle had been built on a strategic low promontory controlling the entrance. At that time the bay had been surrounded by the Wealden Forest known as the Forest of Anderida, but in the 1280s violent storms changed the coastline of southern England and even diverted rivers, closing the harbour. The castle, once close to the sea, retreated inland and the levels were drained subsequently for agriculture. Former islands in the harbour remain as slight prominences up to 5 meters above sea level are remembered in the names such as Horse Eye, Chilley, and North Eye.

Fig 80. Wealden District Topographic Map



Study area
South Downs National Park
Area of WDC within the South Downs National Park, excluded from study area
Local authority district boundaries

Hillshade is a technique for visualizing terrain determined by a light source, slope and aspect of the elevation surface. It is combined with the color relief: the colours represent the elevation, and aid reading the map.

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0 2.5 5 km

1:175,000 on A3

Source: Office for National Statistics licensed under the Open Government Licence v.3.0 © Copyright and database rights 2025 Ordnance Survey OS EUL 100017428
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Settlement Settings and Long Views

5.2.4. The landscape of the Wealden district offers contrasts; from the hills, steep valleys and ghylls of the High Weald, to the broad gentle slopes of the Low Weald and open, flat marshland of the Pevensey Levels. The South Downs and the Sea create a backdrop to many of the long views to the south. The various landforms offer the opportunity for long views from and towards settlements. The ridge and hill top villages of Mayfield, Frant, Rotherfield and Crowborough have spectacular views south towards the Downs, east and west into the landscape. Views west from Pevensey toward the South Downs and the Eastbourne gap frame the course of the river Cuckmere. The edges of the Low Weald looking over the Pevensey Level flats from Wartling Church towards Hailsham with the south coast to the South.

5.2.5. These and many others are glorious views changing with the weather, time of day and season. Understanding and celebrating these view are central to an appreciation of the character of a place.

5.2.6. Views are kinetic, changing as the viewer moves through the landscape. They can also be broad or narrow vistas framed by buildings. Our viewpoint is invariably controlled by the buildings, road and pathways on which we, the viewers, are located.

5.2.7. Views are enhanced by tall structures and landmarks in the vista: church spires, towers and old windmills. They add a sense of orientation and pinpoint particular locations to aid navigation.

5.2.8. The setting of settlement in the landscape is sensitive to views. Ridge and hill top settlements such as Mayfield, Rotherfield, Crowborough and Frant follow the contours of the hill, reflecting the layout of roads and pathways by a gentle curve in the roofscape, interrupted by a church spire indicating the heart of the settlement. The vista indicates arrival and the edge of a place, drawing the traveller into the heart of the village, a spire piercing the skyline.

Summary

5.2.9. Long views, vistas and settings of settlements and buildings within the landscape are central to the identity and character of Wealden settlements.



Arrival view at Hartfield



Crowborough Beacon



Southern Slopes of Mayfield. Allotments looking toward the South Downs



Oast Houses and Tower North of Mayfield



North of Hartfield



View towards the South Downs from Pevensey Castle



Framed vista looking south. Mayfield

Fig 81. Views and vistas in Wealden

5.3 Soils

5.3.1. The soils in Wealden District range from alluvial gleys, which result from consistently being waterlogged and the action of microbes on them in the absence of oxygen, such as the Pevensey Levels, to Argilic Brown Earths which are loamy or clayey soils, to Podzols which are acid soils common on heathland. This is where sandy soils leach minerals and the upper portion is bleached whilst the subsoil becomes darker.

Pevensey Levels

5.3.2. In the Pevensey Levels, alluvial gleys have formed because the ground water lies at or close to the surface and in winter the soils are waterlogged.

Low Weald

5.3.3. The most homogenous and extensive group of soils are the heavy, poorly draining soils known as stanogleys. In the Low Weald these are waterlogged over the winter and early spring. The colour of the upper soils ranges from yellow ochre to grey-brown. In winter, water lies on the surface and in summer it dries out to become hard with extensive cracking. Lime applications and under draining have made this suitable for a cropping.

High Weald

5.3.4. The stanogleys are also found in the High Weald over Hastings beds such as Wadhurst Clay. On the steep slopes in this deeply dissected landscape the soils are less intensely waterlogged that those in the Low Weald. These are characterised by sub-surface mottles of grey and ochre formed by iron.

5.3.5. Where there is free-draining material in the High Weald, such as silts of the Ashdown Beds, gleyling is less common and brown earths develop. Brown soils under woodland are markedly darker due to annual leaf littler forming humus. The upper levels are free-draining but lower down they are less free draining due to the presence of an argillic horizon which is formed by the redeposition of clay carried down from upper layers in the soil, and in some areas this impedes drainage and causes gleying.

5.3.6. Argillic Brown Earths without a clay-enriched argillic horizon developed over the Hastings Beds which are rich in silt and fine sand. Over hard sandstones such as the Hythe bed, soils are frequently thin, dry and stony, and are vulnerable to erosion. These soils are relatively infertile, although they respond to fertilizer application and in some areas they are valued for agriculture, especially fruit-growing. Sand grains within these soils are often bleached white due to mobilization/removal of iron oxides that mark the onset of podzolisation. This process of degradation and depletion is seen on heathlands; where this occurs on less free draining finer sands and silts, such as on Ashdown Forest, shallow stanogley podzols develop. The acidity of these soils limits earthworm and other soil fauna, and they are deficient in nutrients.

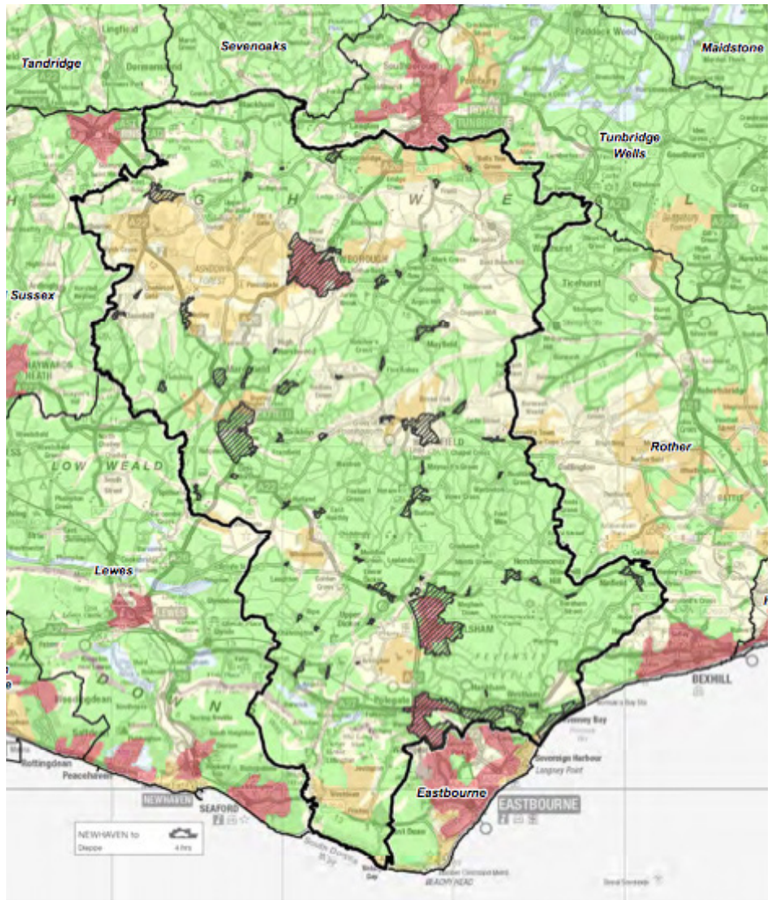


Fig 82. Agricultural Land Quality - no Grade 1, almost no grade 2, mostly grade 3 & 4 source: LUC /WDC

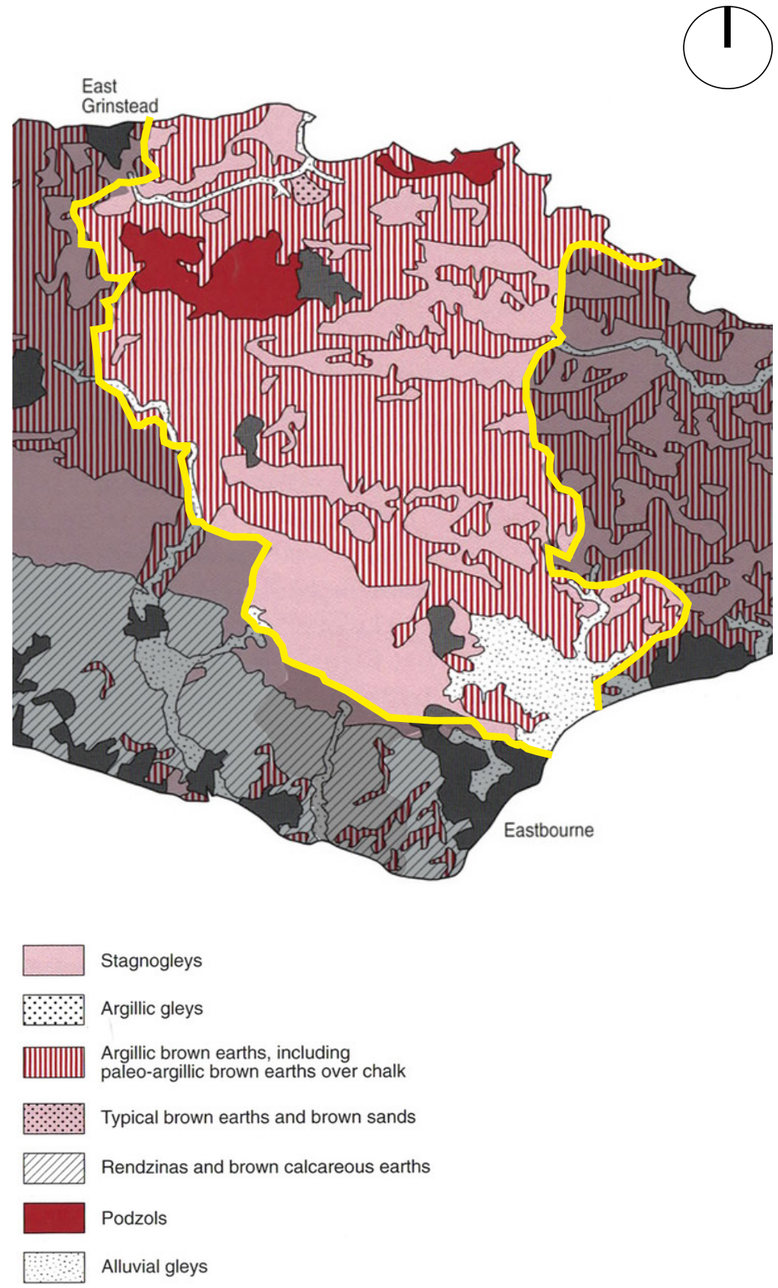


Fig 83. Soils in Wealden District (Wealden District Council boundaries approximate). Source: An historical atlas of Sussex eds. Leslie & Short elaborated by Studio Engleback

Soils & Natural Assets Sequestration & Storage of Carbon

5.3.7. Ashdown Forest is the largest area of high value for carbon storage (due largely to peat) and the woodlands in the High Weald, especially ancient woodlands also have high value for sequestration and storage. Generally, clay soils contain less organic carbon, and in the Low Weald there are fewer trees and woods and more arable land, a net emitter of greenhouse gasses.

5.3.8. In addition to grassland and woodland, hedges play a significant role in carbon sequestration- in woody growth above ground and in roots, leaf litter and other organic soil matter below ground level. In addition, hedgerows across slopes capture eroding soil and can increase soil organic carbon for up to 60m uphill from these.

5.3.9. Many mature field hedges in Wealden District may be around 3m wide with hedgerow trees, most of which are mature and fewer younger future replacements. Planting 3.33km of hedges with hedgerow trees such as these is equivalent to 1 hectare of land use cover, which may sequester up to 4 tonnes of CO2/year when fully grown (this can take 5-10 years).

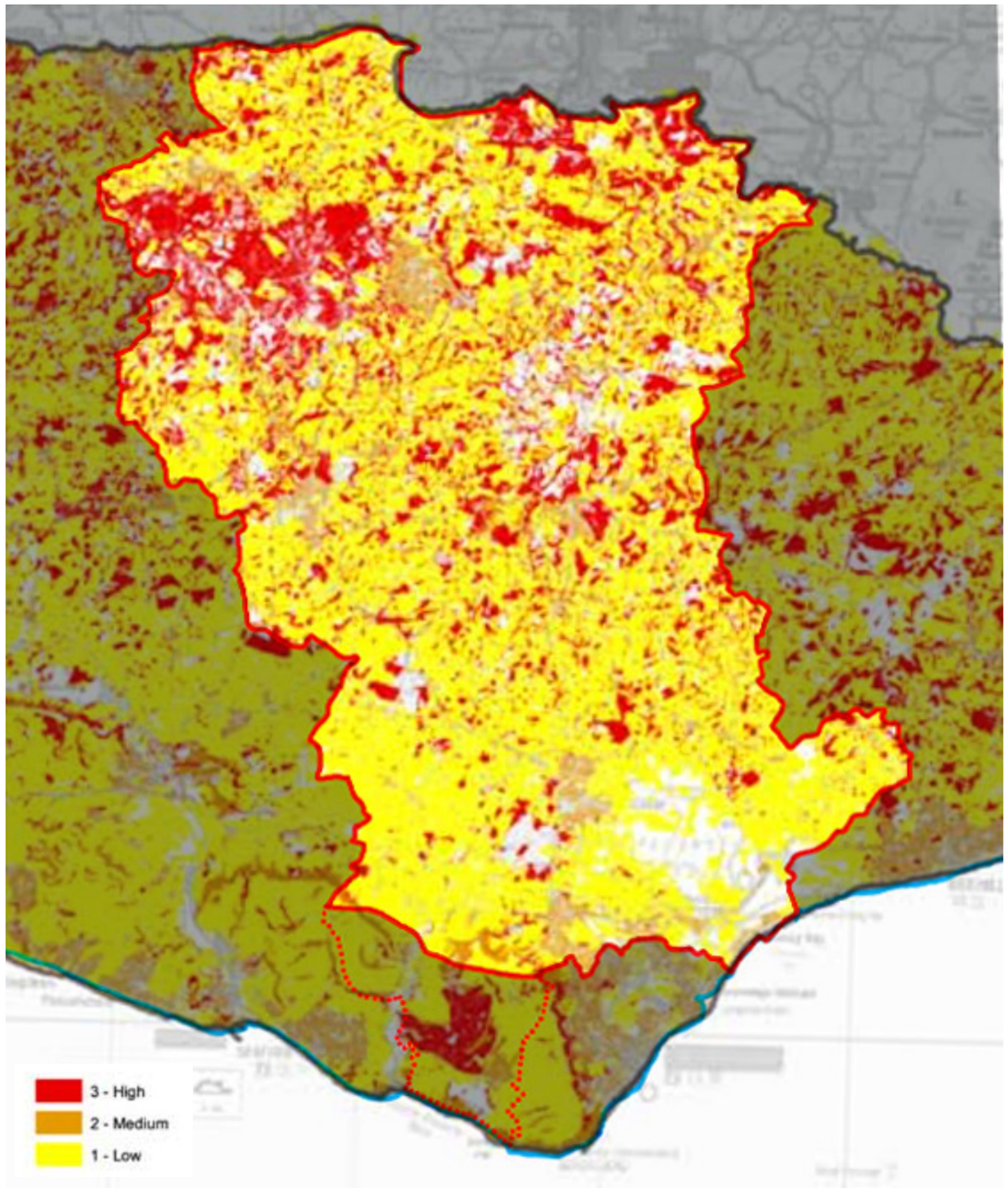


Fig 84. Natural Capital Assets current roles carbon sequestration & storage Sussex Nature Partnership - Natural Capital Investment Strategy

5.4 Hydrology

5.4.1. The headwaters of four significant rivers rise in the High Weald within Wealden District – the Ouse, Rother and Cuckmere and a part of the river Medway. These flow to the south-west, east, south and north respectively. In addition, the Ash Bourne and Nunningham stream flow from Rother District converging at Boreham Bridge from where they flow into Waller's Haven which flows across the Pevensey Levels.

5.4.2. Sea level rise and tidal surges in the English Channel are a threat to all low-lying areas such as the Pevensey Levels. Flooding is made worse when flows from streams and rivers meet high tides and back up stream. Climate change is delivering much more winter rain and less summer rain. Heavy rain events have become a regular feature.

5.4.3. This has to be dealt with at catchment level, including reducing water run-off from the land by increasing capacity to deal with it, such as the introduction of 'leaky dams' on streams to attenuate flows. In development areas a combination of thinking differently about excessive paving and associated water attenuation and cleaning is needed to deal with excessive run-off.

5.4.4. The NPPF calls for strategic policies to be informed by Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA), and management of flood risk from all sources, including cumulative impacts and climate change, and Planning Practice Guidance advocates for a staged approach:

- Level 1 SFRA- where flooding is not a major issue & development pressures are Low. Level 1 should be completed to see if a Level 2 SFRA is required.
- Level 2 SFRA- where land outside flood zones 2 & 3 cannot accommodate all necessary development creating the need to apply the NPPF's 'Exception Test'. In such cases the SFRA should consider the detailed nature of the flood characteristics within a flood zone & assess other sources of flooding.

5.4.5. The Council has produced two Level 1 SFRAs for the district. The first is the North Wealden Level 1 SFRA produced in January 2026 and the second is the Eastbourne & South Wealden Level 1 SFRA (which was updated in early 2025), on which the Council worked jointly with Eastbourne Borough Council. Refer to adjacent link for more information Strategic Flood Risk Assessment- Wealden District Council.

5.4.6. Action to reduce flood risk requires measures taken at catchment level as well as on site. Upstream decisions will have implications for flooding down stream. This includes low-cost leaky dam interventions in Ghyll Woodland, tree planting and land management techniques.

5.4.7. The Environment Agency states the importance of looking at the whole river catchment, and has called for space to be made for water. Depending on the means used, a range of areas are needed to attenuate surface water runoff for new development.

5.4.8. Surface Water management plans have been made for Uckfield, Heathfield, Hailsham & Hellingly, Forest Row and Crowborough. These studies consider local flood risk from surface run-off, ground water and ordinary watercourses, as defined by the Flooding & Water Management Act (2010). The aims and objects of each plan are specific to each location, based on collation of local flood history, mapping and identification of flood-prone areas, and where there is a lack of data. Researching where the flood risk originates and the likely effect on proposed developments, identification of 'easy win' opportunities as well as a plan for further work.

5.4.9. The natural assets of trees and woodlands in the District all play a part in surface water flow attenuation. The natural capital investment areas for the country highlight water bodies with poor water quality and bad ecological status in dark blue on the plan opposite, those with moderate/good status in light blue. Habitat creation would be good, but the urgency for investment are those watercourses that are up-stream of internationally protected sites (red) including Cuckmere Haven and the Pevensey Levels. The proposed housing areas are upstream from these reserves, so attenuation must be linked to Nature Based Solutions to remove nutrients and pollutants from attenuated water prior to discharge into the wider environment.

5.4.10. The CIRIA SUDS manual published in 2007 and updated significantly in 2015 shows the range of measures that can be deployed over nearly 1000 pages. It set out four pillars of SuDS: water quality, water quantity, biodiversity and amenity.

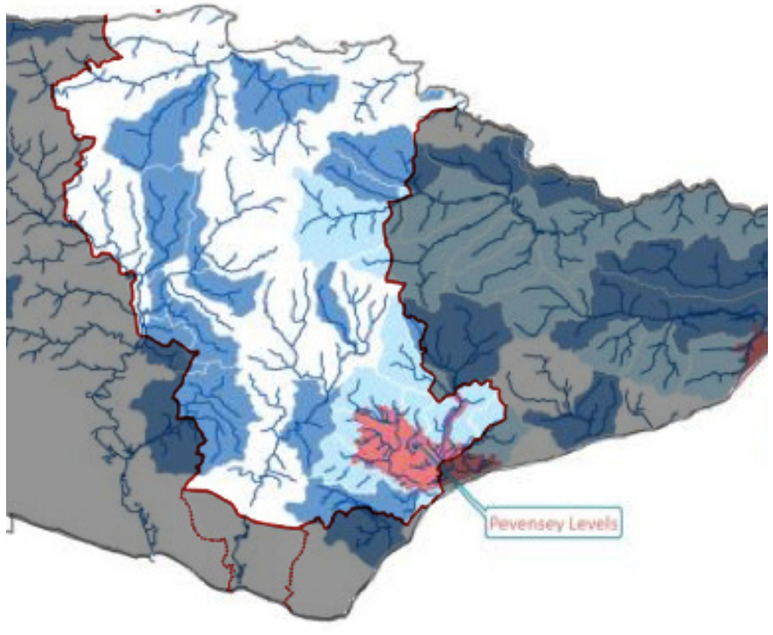


Fig 85. Areas requiring natural capital investment to improve water quality. Source: Sussex Wildlife Trust

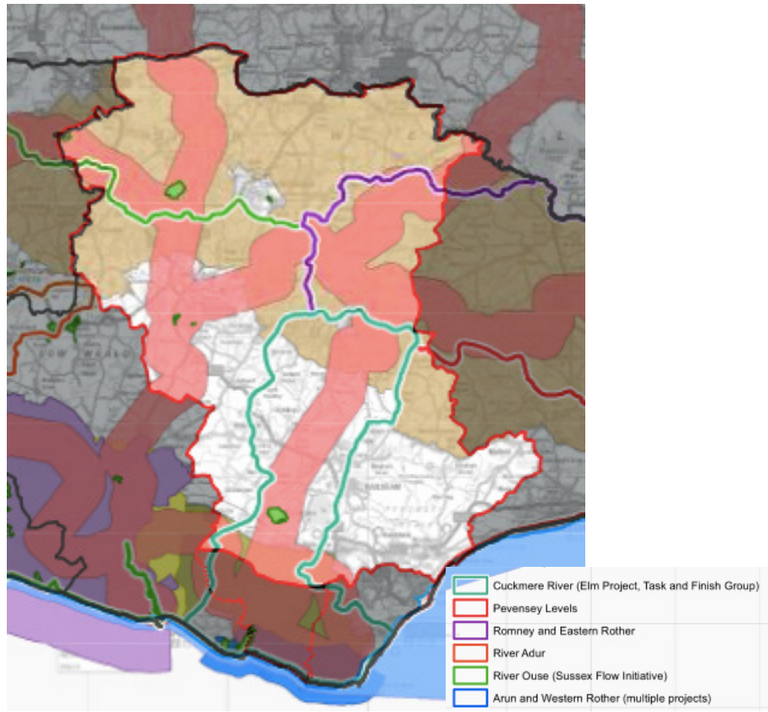


Fig 86. Catchments Partnerships. Source Wealden Sussex Nature Recovery Areas

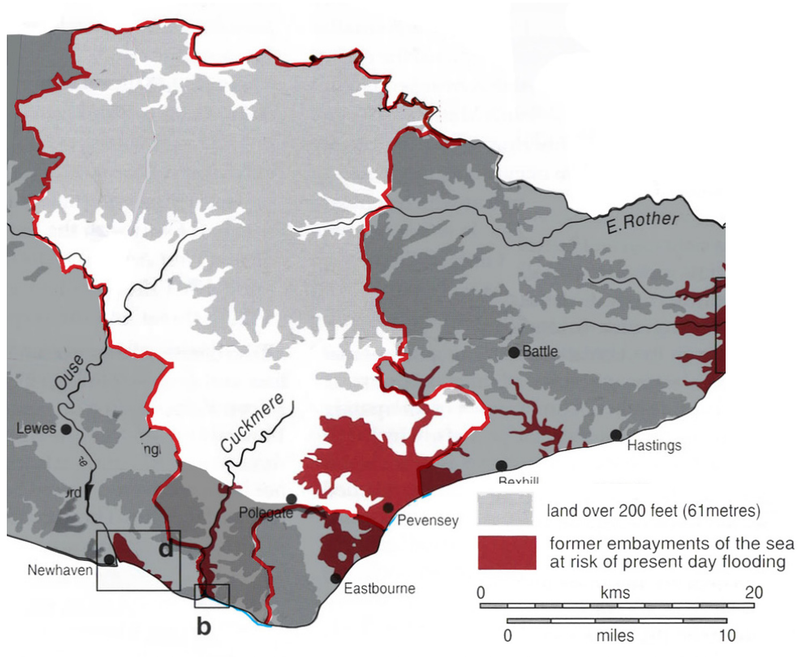


Fig 87. Areas at risk from inundation. Source: An historical atlas of Sussex eds. Leslie & Short elaborated by Studio Engleback

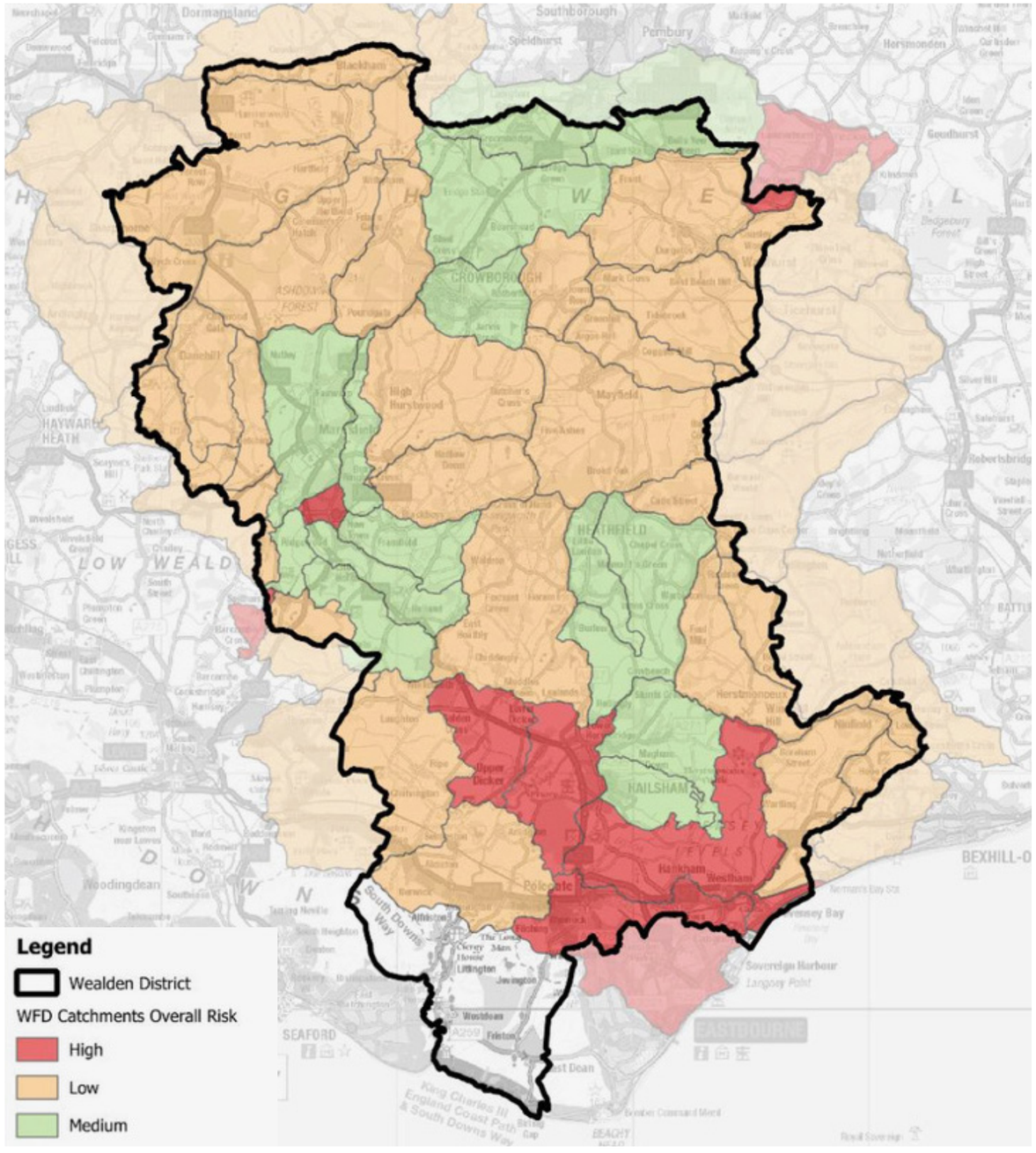


Fig 88. Cumulative Risk assessment of Catchments. Source: JBA December 2025

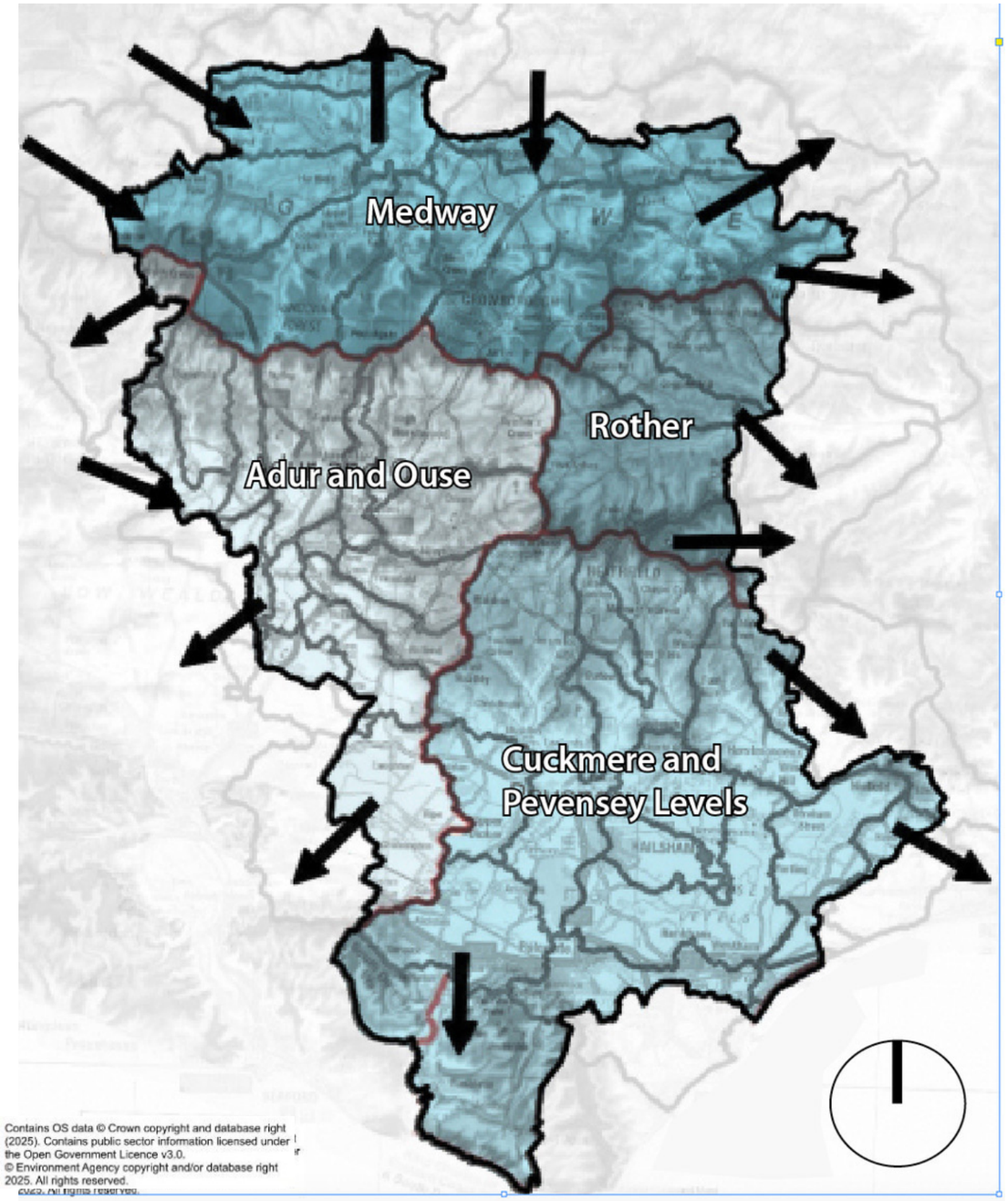


Fig 89. Wealden District Catchments & direction of cross boarder flows. Source: WDC / JBA Strategic Flood Risk Assessment 12.2025

5.5 Land Uses

5.5.1. Wealden District is predominantly rural in character, with residential uses (shown in grey on the map) clustered in the main settlements of Crowborough, Uckfield, Hailsham and Polegate, as well as in smaller villages predominantly dotted around the High Weald, in the northern half of the district. Conversely in the Low Weald there are fewer smaller settlements.

5.5.2. Retail and town centre uses (shown in red on the map) are located within these residential areas, typically at their centre; some of the smaller villages have small retail provision but most rely on the larger settlements for essential services. In exceptional instances these uses are on the edge of settlements, such as Forest Row, where retail and employment uses are located to the north of the settlement.

5.5.3. Employment and industrial areas (shown in blue on the map) are typically located near larger residential areas, especially in the High Weald. However in the Low Weald more of these uses are scattered across the rural landscape.

5.5.4. Sports and leisure uses such as outdoor activity centres or golf courses are clustered to the north west of Ashdown Forest , west and south of Uckfield, around Crowborough, south west of Horam and some smaller ones around Hailsham.

5.5.5. While the High Weald is more wooded, in keeping with the wooded ridge character, the Low Weald shows less trees outside woodlands and more farmland, especially west of Hailsham as well as east in the Pevensey Levels.

5.5.6. Public green space in Wealden District includes Ashdown Forest, a large protected and iconic heathland and historic Royal hunting ground, much of it designated Open Access Land. There are also areas of Common Land such as Hook Green and Free Heath, and woodlands including Selwyns Wood near Heathfield and Boothland Wood, Bridge Wood and Nightingale Wood near Uckfield. Hempstead Meadows is a Local Nature Reserve and wetland habitat along the River Uck, near Uckfield.

5.5.7. More formal greenspaces include village greens, some larger than others. Those at Rushlake Green and Frant are notable, fringed by a variety of dwellings. More recently there have been some successful Millenium Greens, such as those at Rotherfield and Uckfield.

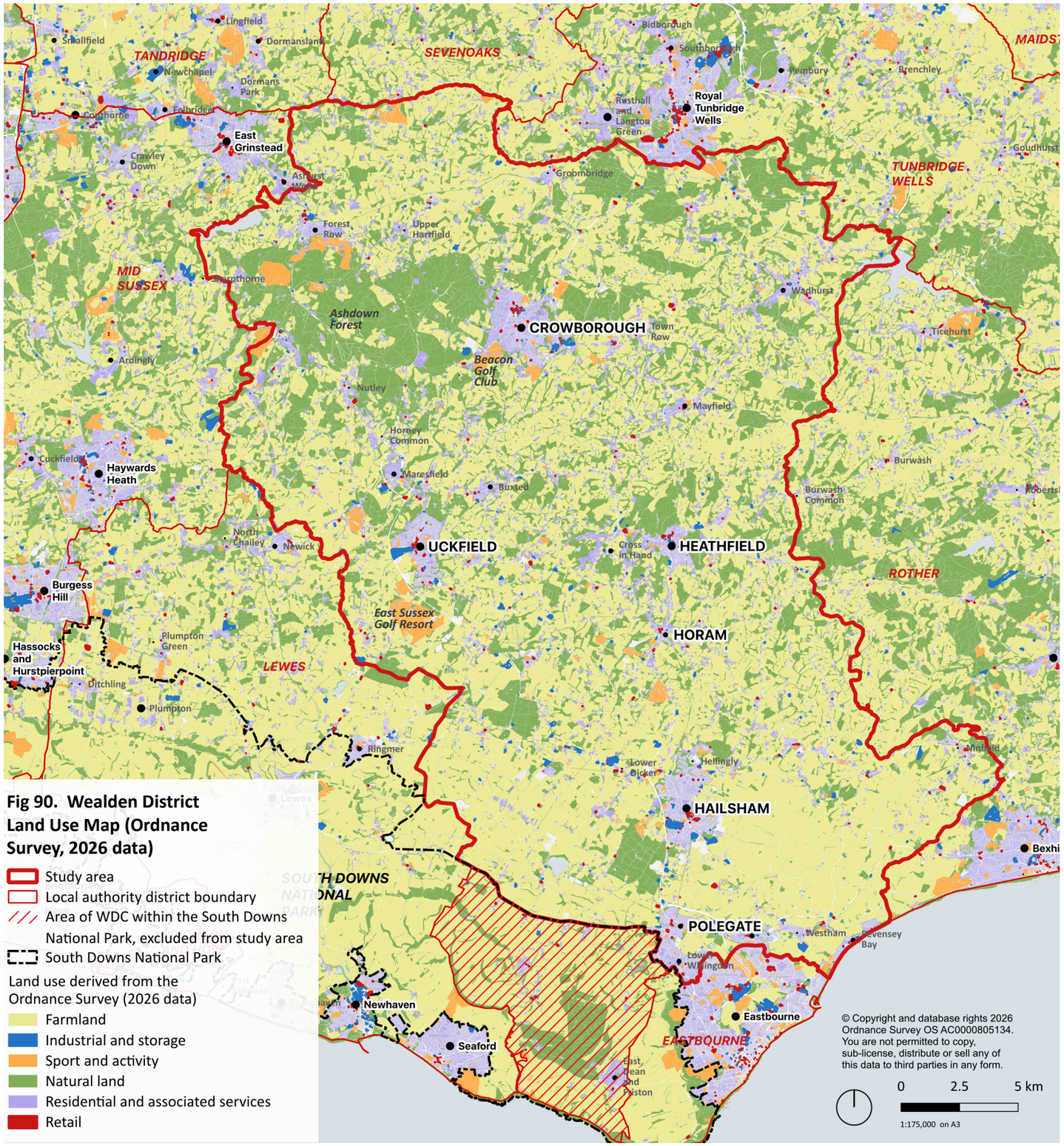


Fig 90. Wealden District Land Use Map (Ordnance Survey, 2026 data)

5.6 Transport Connectivity

5.6.1. Wealden district is covered by an exceptionally extensive network of public rights of way routes (PRoW). This network is especially dense to the south of the district in the Low Weald. In the High Weald the more challenging topography results in a relatively more fragmented PRoW network. The presence of Ashdown Forest in the north west of the district creates a gap in the public rights of way network; however, this area is accessible for walking.

5.6.2. The main active travel route in the district is the National Cycle Network Route 21, connecting Polegate to the south to Forest Way in the north. This is partially formed by the Cuckoo Trail, the 14-mile surfaced path that stretches from Heathfield to Shinewater Park in Eastbourne passing through Horam, Hailsham and Polegate.

5.6.3. There is some rail connectivity thanks to the London lines to Uckfield and Hastings that have several stops in the northern half of the district, including Crowborough and Wadhurst. To the south the east-west Lewes to Brighton line provides rail accessibility along the coast.

5.6.4. The railway line between Eridge and Tunbridge Wells South is the heritage line that runs steam trains for leisure through the High Rocks landscape on the edge of Wealden district. There are also two other heritage lines running in Wealden, the Bluebell Railway and Lavender Line.

5.6.5. Traffic volumes in Wealden are highest along its major roads: A26, A22, A259. The high traffic volumes on these roads reflect their role in providing strategic connectivity within the county, to London and international gateways such as Gatwick Airport in East Grinstead to the north west of the district, to the Port of Newhaven to the south west, and to other parts of the south east region.

Fig 91. Wealden District Transport Map



Study area
Area of WDC within the South Downs National Park, excluded from study area
South Downs National Park
Local authority district boundary
Railway stations

Railway lines
Railway lines
Heritage railways
Motorway
A Road

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0 2.5 5 km

1:175,000 on A3

5.7 Wealden Distinctiveness

Landscape Signatures

5.7.1. Landscape Signatures are features, inert and alive, natural and stewarded or built by people, particular to a given area. Some are linked to a particular association of plants or materials, to local history and/or landform. They are familiar elements that form a particular quality or character of a place. Some may be national signatures like red post boxes or rapidly disappearing phone boxes, or white timber finger posts - which have remained in use here, but have disappeared in other areas, and are a District/County signature. However, other features are more specific to places within the District. These local features or species associations, identified at the site appraisal stage of a project, should form part of the palette of interventions and measures that reinforce the local identity of a new development.

5.7.2. More closely related to place are materials used in buildings and enclosures, the style of field boundaries (hedges/ditches), which are linked to past and present land husbandry. This overlays topography, whilst soils impact plant associations.

5.7.3. For example, hedges tend to vary with landscape areas. In the High Weald many are still tall and broad, whereas in the Low Weald they tend to be lower, narrower and neater, whilst in the Pevensey Levels, field divisions frequently follow drainage ditches and because of the wind, vegetated divisions are often blackthorn scrub covered in lichen.

5.7.4. Walls are also different, although on the character area borders there is some mixing. In the Pevensey Levels flint cobble (not knapped flints) are used with red brick quoins and copes; in the Low Weald and High Weald brick walls are more usual, often with special brick coping. In the High Weald coping may be sandstone and for grander houses walls may also be sandstone.

5.7.5. Common to all areas are items like red letter boxes, some in brick pillars, a few remaining telephone boxes, and the distinctive white painted timber finger posts. Over 50 years ago these a were also common in Kent (although to a simpler design) but have now been replaced by aluminium international signage.



Fig 92. Finger post in Waldron



Fig 93. Post boxes/phone boxes are a national signature



Pevensey Levels - broad blackthorn hedges, Rickney Lane



Low Weald - low gappy hedges and hedgerow trees in Polegate



High Weald - taller hedges & Hedgerow trees in Warbleton



Pevensey Levels - flint cobble wall with red brick piers and coping



Low Weald - red brick wall and brick special coping to Hellingly Church



High Weald - sandstone wall in Rushlake Green

Fig 94. Examples of Landscape Signatures in Wealden District

Landscape Signatures: The High Weald


Sunken lanes


Leafy tunnel lanes


Views of rolling wooded countryside


Hammer ponds


Rock Outcrops e.g. Harrisons Rocks


Open Heathand - Ashdown Forest


Ghylls (Gills) -streams, Ashdown Forest


Remnants of old mine workings


Ashdown Forest Pale


Beech Green Lane, Balls Green


Ancient hedges Lanes, Trolliloes


Broad lane - droving origin, Beech Green

Fig 95. Landscape Signatures in the High Weald



High hedge to lanes, Monks Lane, Coulsey Wood



Wooded bank to lane, Herstmonceux



Church spire, Hartfield



Villages signs & green, Rushlake Green



Sandstone faced steep bank to country lanes



Woodland connected by broad hedges



Pit Pond, Blackham



Coppiced Woodland, Little Iwood



Views through high hedges, Hartfield



The Green at Fletching + brick pillar box, fingerpost, telephone box, timber bollards



Green Triangle Junctions, Golden Green



Remnants of past uses - mill at Mark Cross

Fig 96. Landscape Signatures in the High Weald (continued)

Landscape Signatures: the Low Weald



Broad lanes with low / no hedges, Upper Dicker



Intrusion: industrial buildings Lower Dicker



Flood plains & willows, Hellingly



The Green at Laughton



Remnant hedges & liens of trees, Polegate



The Cuckoo Line footpath from Hellingly to Heathfield



Macrocarpa shelterbelts, Lower Dicker



Retained hedgerow trees in village extension Horam



Woodland anemones in Hornbeam woodland, Halland



Verges of narrow lanes are being lost to lane widening and passing places, e.g.East Hoathly



Alder carr, Hailsham



Gently undulating landform, streamside trees, Hellingly

Fig 97. Landscape Signatures in the Low Weald

Landscape Signatures: The Pevensey Levels



Drainage Ditches, Sluice Lane, Beachlands



The levels from Herstmonceux



Chilley Farm



Pevensey Bridge Level



Beachlands



Pevensey Levels



Pevensey Levels Nature Reserve



Rickney



View over levels towards Wartling from Rickney



Rickney Lane adjacent to the Yotham near Horse Eye



Thorn hedges north of Pevensey



Grazing marshes south of Golden Cross

Fig 98. Landscape Signatures in the Pevensey Levels

Landscape Signatures: Seasonal



Fig 99. Seasonal landscape Signatures



6.0 The Built Environment & Wealden Vernacular

6.1 Overview

6.1.1. Wealden District has an extraordinary legacy of settlements that emerged from the Bronze Age through to the present day. The human environment has developed in response to the unique and varied natural landscape of this part of southern Britain. This study addresses the natural landforms, social, political and economic narratives that have shaped the farmsteads, hamlets, villages and towns of the Wealden District. The character of the settlements respond to the distinctive landscapes and their context in the High and Low Wealds, Pevensey Levels (and the South Downs, outside our study area).

6.1.2. To understand the built environment and the vernacular of Wealden, this study focuses on inheritance in a broader sense than simply 'heritage' - it includes the protected and designated heritage assets but goes broader, looking at all inherited assets, plus the connections and overlaps between these. The pattern of past settlement is not always evident from what remains, but it remains a strong influence on contemporary and future development.

6.1.3. The purpose of this exercise is to inform design guidance, not as prescriptive or as absolute 'do's and don'ts', but in such a way as to encourage the creation of new communities and built environments that will draw through the threads of past development and settlement. These threads must be linked to the past, the history, heritage and culture of each place, but they must also respond to very different stimulus and requirements from those that created settlements of the past, including:

- Car focus and dependence (including how to reduce this);
- Climate and extinction crises (developing resilience);
- Digital connectivity;
- Changing civic and civil social frameworks;
- Post war planning legislation;
- Housing shortages.

6.1.4. The existing settlements of the Wealden District have strong and identifiable characteristics that contribute to their unique sense of place, their Genius Loci. From the large Victorian, low density, nineteenth century villas of Crowborough, to the medieval farmstead hamlet of Wartling, the size and typologies of each settlement vary. However, the overlying concepts of landscape, hydrology, materiality, community, history, nature and culture remain guiding factors in the patterns of development of each place.

6.1.5. This approach within this study encourages meaningful and demonstrable understanding of the 'threads' of each settlement and context and how these are addressed, reflected and continued positively through new development.



Landscape and settlement landform



Settlement features



Water and hydrology



View points and Setting



Transport and connectivity



Designated protection

Fig 100. Images representing the narrative threads

6.2 Settlement Types

6.2.1. The district reflects a range of settlement typologies ranging from the smaller farmsteads and hamlets to larger towns such as Crowborough and Hailsham both of which have over 20,000 inhabitants.

6.2.2. Most of the settlements in Wealden District are ancient. Hailsham can be traced back to the Iron Age, it was also a Roman settlement and is mentioned as a substantial place in the Domesday Book.

6.2.3. The town of Crowborough is relatively new, stimulated by the wealthy in the 19th century taking advantage of the healthy climate and improved transport links. However, there are much older parts at the heart of the town, farmsteads and village hamlets which are still visible in the character and layout of the town.

6.2.4. Settlements coalesced and grew at the meeting points of pathways, crossroads and routes where travellers, local farmers and producers, foresters, timber workers and iron producers met. These meeting points became focal hubs, markets for exchange, tribute, tithe and tax collection; places for expression and exercise of power; places where education, health and welfare could be distributed. These settlements are hubs in a complex network of social, political and economic webs. The church, the market place, the high street and the village green (or common) all feature at the heart of a complex network, physical entities expressing a social and economic framework.

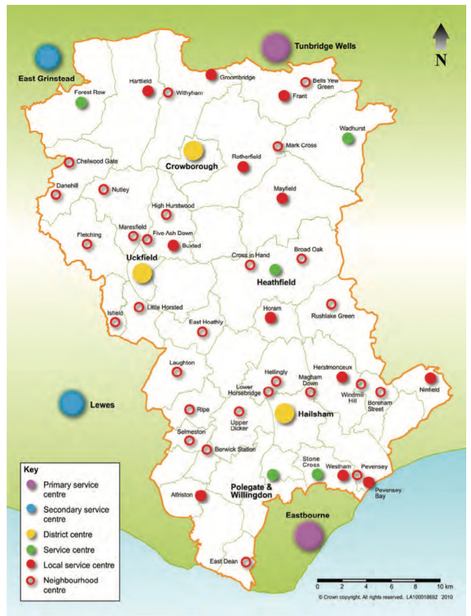


Fig 101. Settlement types in Wealden |from Wealden District (Incorporating part of the South Downs National Park) Core Strategy Local Plan adopted 2013.

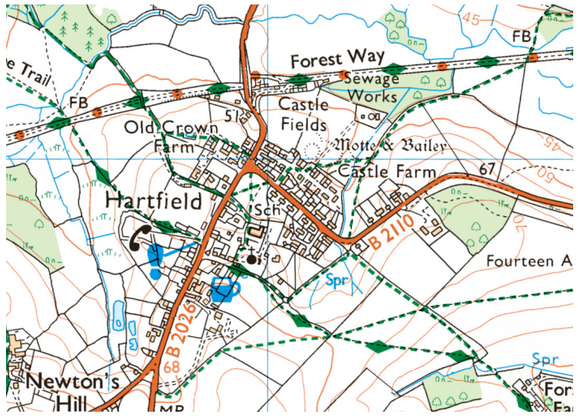


Fig 102. Hartfield: A village on the South slopes of Medway valley. Church located on high ground, High Street and Village Green



Fig 103. Mayfield: Hilltop village grew around St Dunstan church

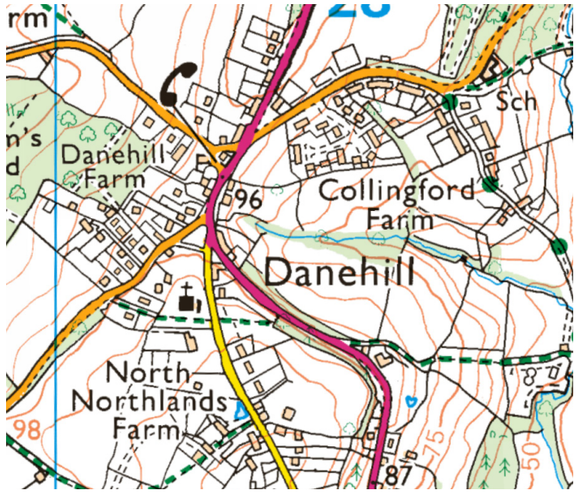


Fig 104. Danehill: A small village centred around the Church placed on hlgh ground above a fork in the road

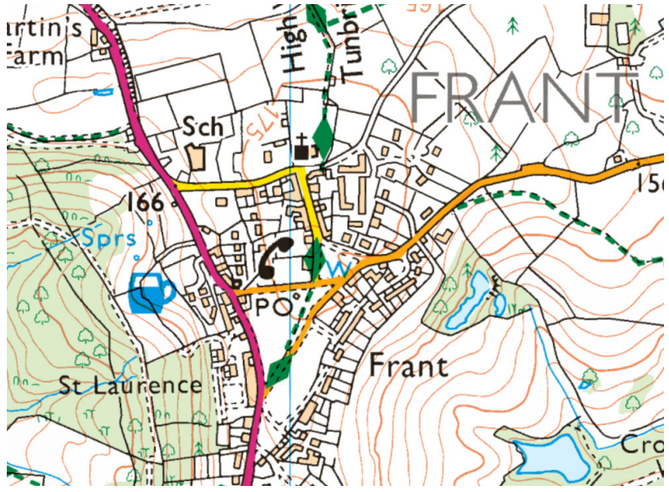


Fig 105. Frant: A village located on a ridge, now following the A267. It includes a Church, a High Street and large village greens

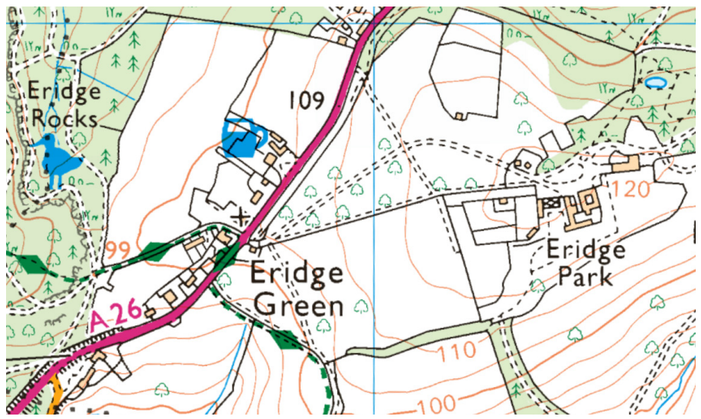


Fig 106. Eridge Green: A 19th century estate village serving Eridge Park Estate. On the busy A26. This Includes a village green enclosed by the Estate.

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Wealden Settlements and Landform

6.2.5. Landform in the Wealden District is characterised by a series of sandstone ridges, spurs and clay valleys scoured by streams and rivers. This landform, clothed in vegetation, irrigated by streams filtered through its cracks and fissures, is millions of years in the making and it is still becoming. Unlike oceanic chalk, greensand was formed by the death of crustaceans in a warm and shallow sea, the Wealden sandstone and clays are river formed in the lower Cretaceous period 150 million years ago by fresh water depositing sand from land mass.

6.2.6. The land is gently pushed upwards by the advances of the African continent northward. These are young rocks in comparison to the those of the west and north of Britain, but in human terms the length of time that our habitat and base stage has taken in its becoming is unimaginable. And yet the character of place that we inhabit, that have carved into the landscape over the last two thousand years is completely dependent and dictated by the sub layer of rock, of geology, its hydrology, its climate and natural ecosystems. As a result the landscapes of the distinct High Weald, the Low Weald and the marsh lands of the Pevensey levels, the chalk hills scape of the North and South Downs were formed.

Landscape underpins Settlement

6.2.7. The area to the south of Tunbridge Wells is an exemplar area to explore the High Weald. This area comprises the medieval settlements of Rotherfield, Mayfield, Wadhurst and Frant, including the 19th century linear village of Eridge Green and the coalesced hamlets that form the small town of Crowborough.

6.2.8. This area in the north of the district is at the watershed and headwater catchment of four of the major river systems in Wealden District and East Sussex: the Medway to the North, Rother to the East, Ouse and Cuckmere to the South.

6.2.9. The map opposite illustrates the complexity of the river systems, the numerous tributaries, brooks, stream and springs that feed them. The ridges, spurs and valleys of the High Weald form a complex landscape, with interlocking hills, ridges, spurs and valleys. The exposed land has been scoured and shaped over time by the opposing forces of continental drift and scouring water erosion.

6.2.10. The underlying geological and physical forces shaping the landscape are deeply influential in the development and character of settlements. The six villages illustrated are all situated on high ground or a ridge, above the water table, springs and stream head waters. They are connected by a series of routes, some roads, but originally a complex network of paths and drove ways.

6.2.11. The primary routes are predominately along ridges, keeping to the high ground to avoid the treacherous muddy and sometimes flooded conditions of the lower valleys. Occasionally the roads dip into the valley and bridge the stream at Coggins Mill to the east of Mayfiield, Tidebrook Manor, Jarvis Brook between Crowborough and Rotherfield, Riverhall between Frant and Wadhurst. These crossings at valley bottoms are also where mills were located. Similarly, it is at the valley bottoms that we find the foundry, furnace and cooling ponds of the iron industry from the Roman and early modern periods.

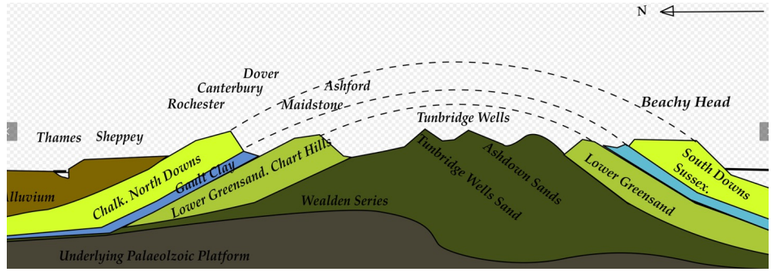


Fig 107. Geological cross section of the Weald, from the Wealden Local PLan

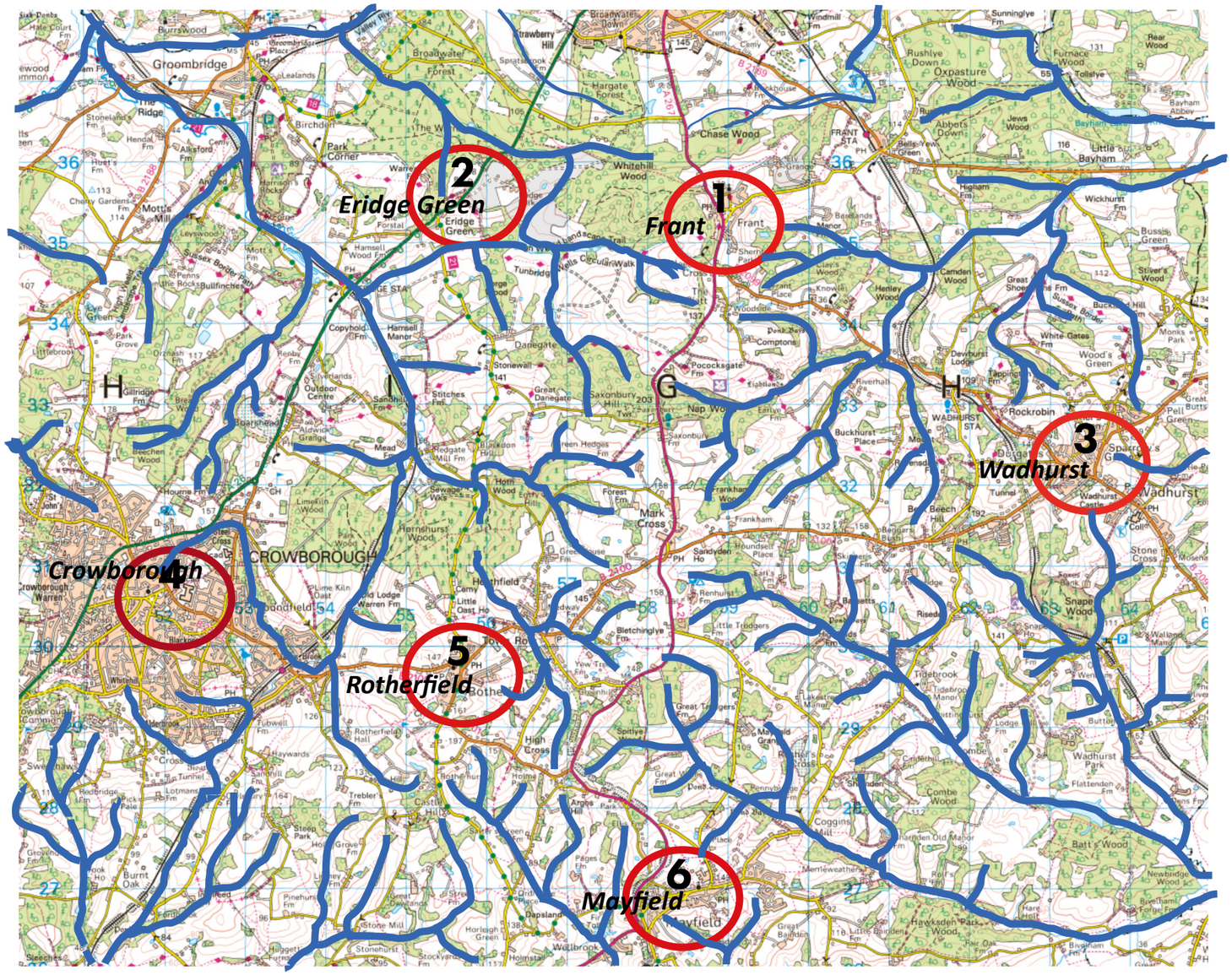


Fig 108. Detail Map showing inter-relationship between settlements and landscape

6.2.12. A more detailed focus on the relationship between Rotherfield and Mayfield reflects the influence of the stream and river systems, connecting pathways and routes and the siting of farmsteads on springs and headwaters of streams.

6.2.13. The position of the water table within the sandstone and clay aquifer is critical in terms of the siting of farmsteads. All of the identified farmsteads are located on springs or streams sourcing groundwater at the point water surfaces.

- Farmsteads connect into the stream network, some positioned by springs, some lower down the valley to a stream.
- A dense network of footpaths connect the farms, and the farms into their central focus of settlement, trade, tribute, celebration and worship.
- Farmsteads border the villages on the slopes.
- Old iron works in the valley bottoms, some of Roman origin, utilised the river systems for cooling and waste disposal.
- Note the railway line now redundant, curving through the farms along the valley, constructed in 1860 and closed 1969.

Summary

6.2.14. The underlying geology, land form and landscape of the area has given it its distinctive character and influenced the pattern of settlement. New development must play its part in reflecting and responding to the character of the landscape to enhance its unique sense of place.

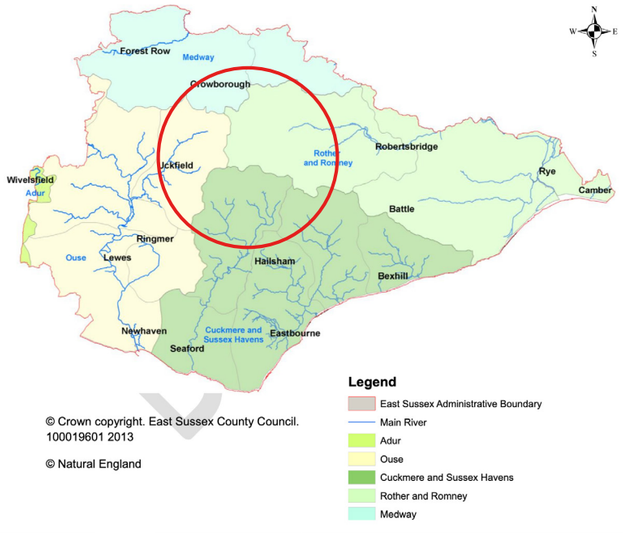


Fig 109. The river systems of East Sussex, the High Weald area highlighted with a red circle

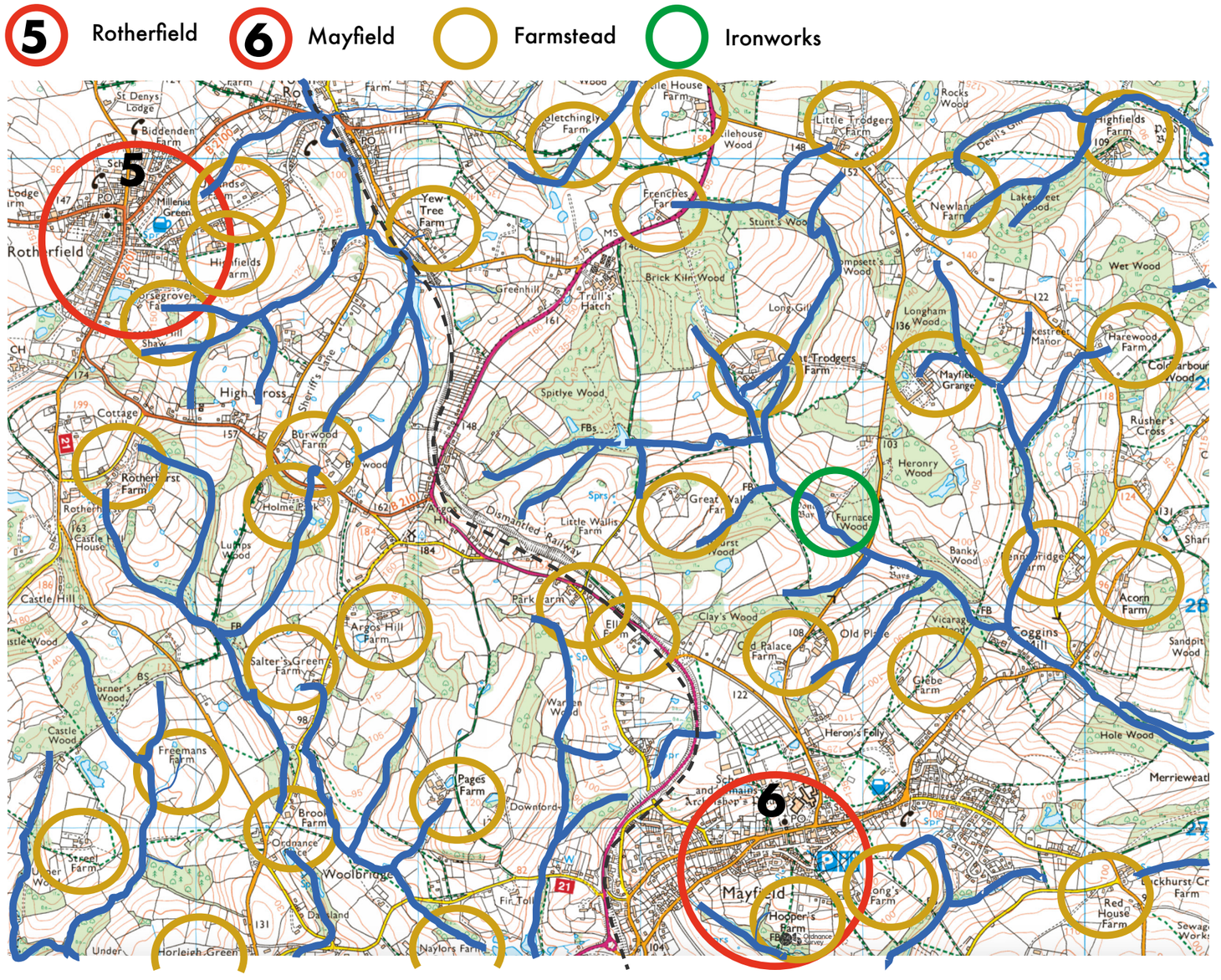


Fig 110. Detail Map showing inter-relationship between farmstead location and landscape between Rotherfield and Mayfield

Settlements and Water

6.2.15. The sandstone and clay folds of the High and Low Weald have been carved and eroded by a dense and intricate tracery of above ground drainage. The land includes the watershed from the four main river systems of East Susssex: The Medway, The Ouse, The Cuckmere and the Rother.

6.2.16. Water seeps through rock and gathers in underground wells and sponge-like artesian storage reserves. These have variable levels, rising and falling as the water is replenished and drained.

6.2.17. The sandstone ravines of the High Weald reveal dramatic water falls after a period of prolonged rainfall, reflecting the changing level of the water table at times of climatic transition. Many mills have made use of the energy produced by water as it emerges from the ground or steps down changing rock surfaces in dramatic shifts of level. Over time these sporadic bursts of energy have been harnessed and prolonged by channels, creating an energy source that offers a constant reliable flow.

6.2.18. As settlements grew at crossroads, at places of gathering for tribute and exchange, so the sources of water became more critical and focused. Many of the churches at the centres of settlement were located adjacent to or on top of wells in pre-Christian times. Ponds at high and low-level are evidence of the need to gather water. At lower levels the rivers that were joined by the hillside streams were important sources of power. Many of the bridging of the older tracks and routes have mills at their sides.

6.2.19. The iron industry developed through the Iron Age, pre-Roman and Roman eras, with less activity through the Saxon settlements, revived again in the fifteenth century. The use of furnace ponds and lakes at valley floors is still evident.

6.2.20. In the High Weald and Pevensey marshes water was captured from the rivers in both ponds and lakes as well as moats for the larger houses, a source of water and environmental control, signs of status and prestige, as well as occasional defence. The ditches and drainage channels of the Pevensey Levels indicate the control and use of water as it enters the final stages of a river course.



Water treatment plant at Forest Row

Fig 111. Examples of water infrastructure in Wealden

Water is the essential element for all settlements;

- Early settlements all focus around a water source;
- Farms are centred on the water table and spring line of a hill;
- Settlements coalesce around and above the spring line;
- Settlements emerge on pathways and highways above the valley and flood zone;
- Waterways have been important transport travel and trade links;
- Water has been at the forefront of power supply for agriculture and industry;
- Water drainage and waste expulsion is connected to the supply of water;
- The control and embankment of streams and rivers for industry, defence and agriculture has created lakes and ponds typical of the Wealden landscape. These remain central to the biodiversity and environment of the area;
- Large houses on the Low Weald and Pevensey Levels are built by ponds and by moats close to streams;
- Chalybeate Stream spring water became the original source for health spas stimulating tourist and visitor developments;
- Flooding;
- Water treatment plants;
- Biodiversity and ecosystems supported by natural hydrology;

Summary

6.2.21. Water should be at the heart of new development, for drainage, definition of landscape, integration with existing and to continue the healthy physical benefits and regenerating biodiversity. Over reliance on engineered SuDS is reductive.



13th century Mill at Hellingly



Drainage control Eridge Park



Wells and pumps



Ditches and Dykes



Furnace Lake Eridge Park



Water treatment plant



Moats



Springs at Chalybeate

High Weald

6.2.22. The landscape and environmental stimuli of each settlement has given them different characteristics. In the High Weald the large villages and towns are ridge top, following the pattern of the connecting transport routes. Large vilages such as Mayfield, Frant, Rotherfield, Wadhurst and Heathfield are typical high level villages, with spectacular long distance views and a ridge top pattern of development seen from neighbouring ridges. The church spire is often an identifiable landmark pricking the sky and identifying the centre of a settlement. The farmsteads and hamlets are located below the ridge, on the spring line, where water is immediately accessible.

6.2.23. Valley bottom settlements are coalesced around bridging points where mills and small scale industry can be also located, such as at Coggins Mills. These areas are prone to flooding, but medieval settlements took this into account.

6.2.24. High Weald settlements are distinctive and contained within a confined hill topography. They centre on a church and high street and have many medieval origin buildings. Some of the more significant settlements in the High Weald are Crowborough, Heathfield and Horam.

Crowborough

6.2.25. Crowborough is located to the east of Ashdown Forest and developed in the nineteenth century in response to the perceived health benefits and accessibility of the area through rail travel. It is located on the A26 between Tunbridge Wells and Lewes. The town emerged from the coalescence of rural hamlets of Jarvis Brook, Poundfield, Whitehill, Stone Cross, Alderbrook, Sweet Haws, St Johns, and Steel Cross.

6.2.26. The golf course opened in 1895, as well as a hospital in 1900. It is the highest point in Wealden at 800ft and is now mostly characterised by large suburban villas and low density housing. Nineteenth century All Saints Church faces the large town common, Chapel Green. The railway station in the valley at Jarvis Brook was originally called Rotherfield.

Heathfield

6.2.27. Heathfield received a market charter in 1234 and the rights to have an annual fair in 1316. The village grew in the 16th and 17th centuries in response to increased iron industry. The town developed in the 19th century with the arrival of the railway and the Cuckoo Line (formerly the railway line) is now a popular cycle greenway.

6.2.28. The hamlet of Old Heathfield is centred on the All Saints Church.

Horam

6.2.29. A large village which grew around the railway, now closed. It used to be home to the Merrydown Cider factory until 2004. The village is located across the valley and hills of the Cuckmere headwaters.

High Weald Settlements

- Buxted
- **Crowborough**
- Danehill
- Eridge Green
- Five Ashes
- Fletching
- Frant
- Forest Row
- Hadlow Down Hartfield
- **Heathfield**
- **Horam**
- Mayfield
- Ninfield
- Nutley
- Wadhurst
- Withyam



Fig 112. Crowborough. Paired cottages



Fig 113. Crowborough. Chapel Green

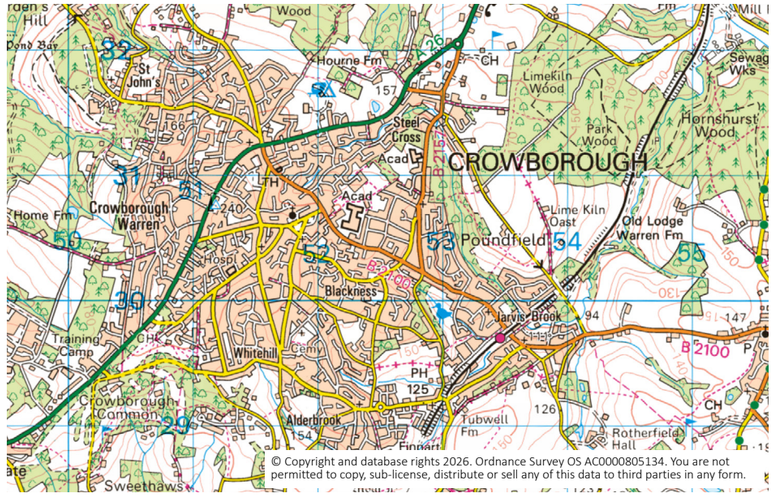


Fig 114. Crowborough. Medieval hamlets absorbed into 19th century town

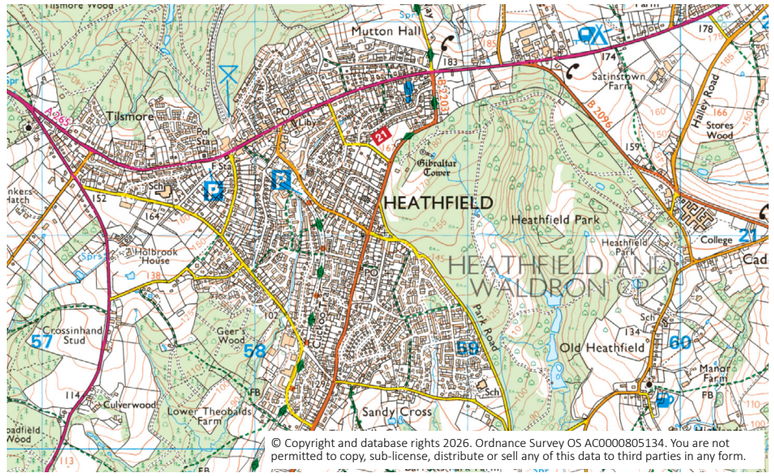


Fig 115. Heathfield. Ridge town on A265 E/W route. Timber and iron stimulated growth

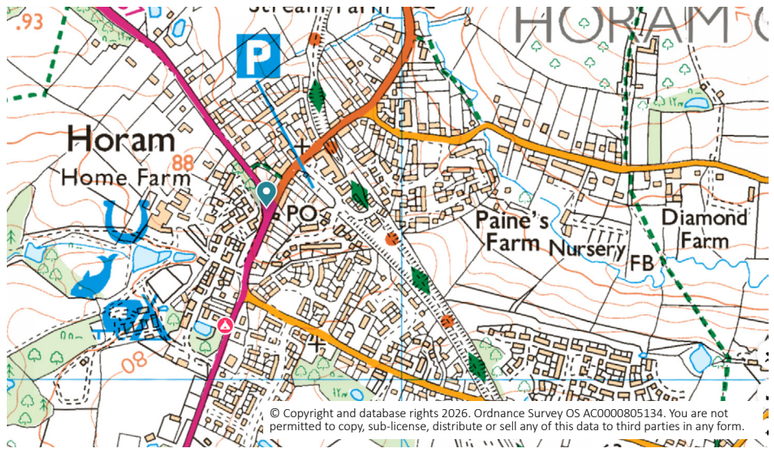


Fig 116. Horam. Village growing around the station and rail connectivity, though the railway was closed in the 1960s and is now the Cuckoo Line green cycle route. It is a valley and hillside settlement.

Low Weald

6.2.30. In the Low Weald the settlements are more dispersed and less concentrated, though each centre varies depending on geographical position. The small hamlets of Ripe, Eckington Corner and Chalvington are arranged in a linear pattern north of the A27 in the shadow of the South Downs. The pattern of roads and field boundaries are more grid-like compared to the hill and valley shaped field boundaries of the High Weald. The field and road layouts remain influenced by the Roman colonial history of the area. The Low Weald parishes are bounded by the Cuckmere and Ouse Rivers and are mentioned in the Domesday Book.

6.2.31. Some of the more significant settlements in the Low Weald are Uckfield and Hailsham.

Uckfield

6.2.32. Developed as a hamlet centred around the crossroads and church above the River Uck. The town has spread around the main bridge crossing and is currently the terminus for the London Railway Line.

Hailsham

6.2.33. The largest town in the district, strategically located close to the coast and at the crossroads of north-south and east-west routes. Its origins precede the Romans, settled by the Saxons and mentioned in the Domesday Book. The town grew around the Church, High Street and Market place.

Low Weald Settlements

- Chalvington
- Chiddingly
- East Hoathly
- **Hailsham**
- Halland
- Herstmonceux
- Hellingly
- Laughton
- Lower Dicker
- Ripe
- Rushlake Green
- Selmeston
- **Uckfield**
- Upper Dicker

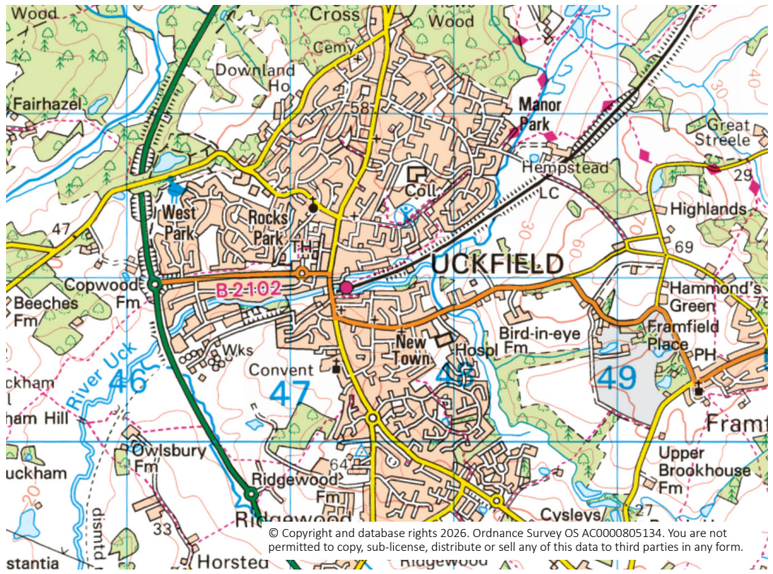


Fig 117. Uckfield. Town developed around church on hillside above river Uck.

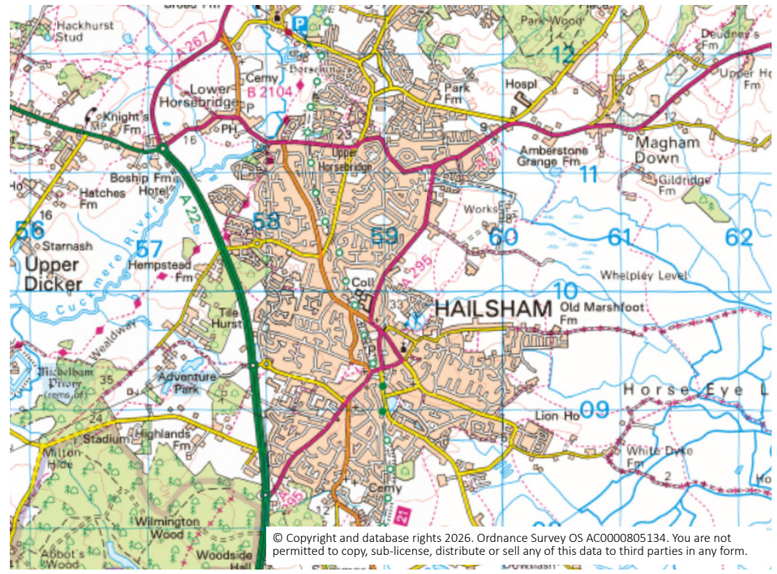


Fig 118. Hailsham. Largest town in Wealden, grew as a medieval port adjacent to Pevensey Levels to the East. Bypassed by A22.

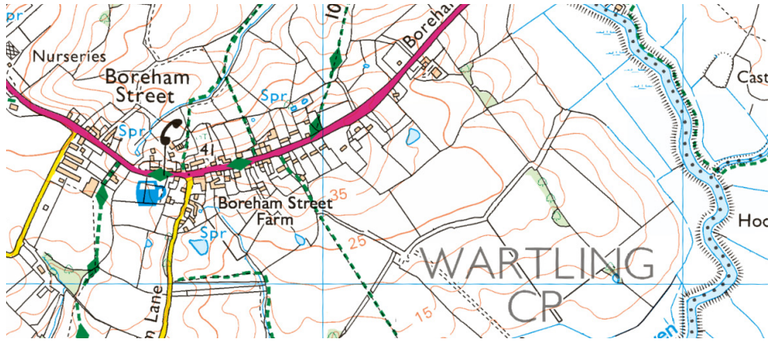


Fig 119. Boreham Street. A linear village on the edge of the Pevensey Levels



Fig 120. East Hoathly, Small lowland village at road crossing. Medieval centre, 20th century extension

Pevensey Levels

6.2.34. The settlements adjacent to the Pevensey Levels are focussed on the ancient Roman road connecting Hastings and Lewes. The villages emerged in response to coastal activity: invasion, migration, trade and commerce. Pevensey Harbour was once an active maritime shelter, but has now retreated southeast of the shingled coastline at Pevensey Bay. The settlements are now on busy road links and interchanges, but they retain their lowland character, broad skies backed by the South Downs and Sea. Flint is a common building material.

6.2.35. Polegate- On the Roman road between Pevensey and Lewes the town is now a suburb of Eastbourne. An important Medieval religious centre was based around Otham Abbey whereas now the settlement is focussed on rail and road links. The town grew around the St Johns Church, High Street and Village Green with 20th century cul de sac development along the B2247 Road

6.2.36. Westham- A medieval village to the west of the Roman walls. It has the oldest Norman Church in the UK.

6.2.37. Pevensey- A medieval port and focus of trade and connections to France. With a linear High street, the village of Pevensey grew outside the walls of the Roman Fort, formerly the iron age fortification of Anderida.

6.2.38. Pevensey Bay- The Coast line became a popular seaside resort in the late 19th century, stimulating the growth of Pevensey Bay along the shoreline. Hotels and visitor attractions grew and it now includes 1930s art Deco buildings.

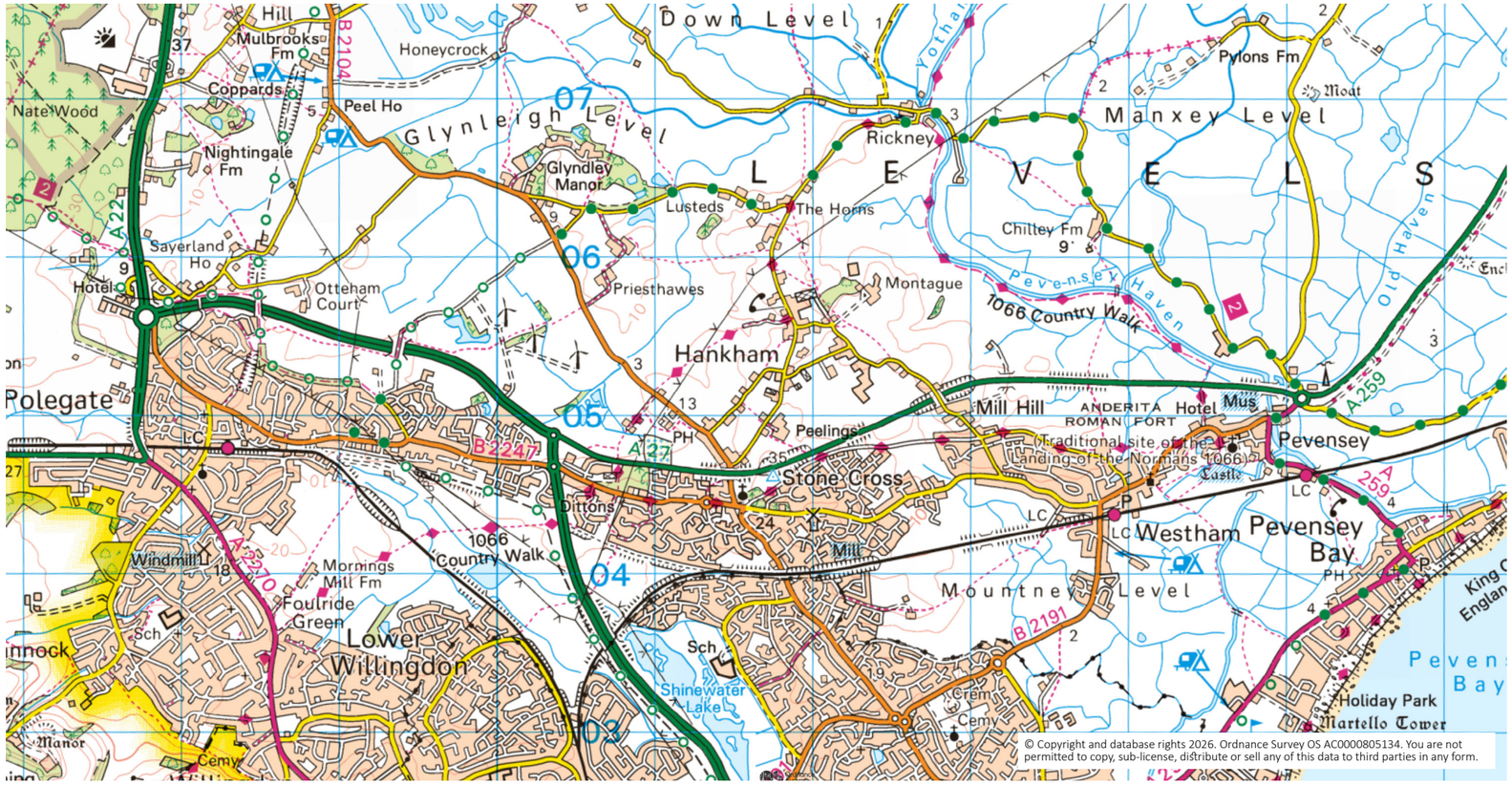


Fig 121. Map of area between Polegate and Pevensey



Polegate Church and Village Green



Westham Village Green



Twitten leading from Church to Pevensey High Street



Pevensey Bay terraces facing the beach



Pevensey Bay Art Deco

Fig 122. Pevensey Levels typical features

6.3 Settlement Features

Approach

6.3.1. Every settlement is unique. Each place of human intervention has evolved and continues to change through the distinct interrelationship between underlying conditions and human agency. Underlying conditions are part of a complex networks,inter-connected and continuous: geology, landscape, climate, hydrology, ecology. These conditions are overwritten by human intervention and mediation; connecting pathways and settlements through industry, trade and culture, water supply and drainage, the economic, social and cultural trends of history. Overall these add up to a complex framework of topography, ecology and culture. It is impossible to replicate these, but it is important to be aware how the character and identity of settlements have evolved. This is expressed through the local vernacular, building forms, place names, materials and settlement patterns.

6.3.2. Until the advent of the railways in the mid 19th century this unique vernacular character of place was identifiable through the buildings and settlement pattern. The choice of building materials reflected the local geology, flint and chalk to the south of Wealden, sandstone and brick in the High and Low Weald. Through the twentieth and into the present centuries the ease of movement, industrialisation of infrastructure and construction processes have created a more homogenised and standardised method of construction and settlement pattern.

6.3.3. The Victorian villas of Crowborough, the small paired railway cottages in Groomsbridge, the cul de sac neighbourhoods of Polegate and recent development in Uckfield, all owe more to a standardised national building typology than from a local resource of labour, skill and materials.

6.3.4. The Wealden district is significant in terms of its preservation and the active life of villages, farmsteads hamlets and small towns that continue to reflect the distinctive character of place from which they have evolved.

6.3.5. Regional styles, such as the hall houses and the Elizabethan hunting lodges, have been adapted into the local material and construction skills. This is particularly evident in the church buildings around which many of the villages are settled. They follow a particular national trend in plan and form, but they are constructed in positions responding to the landscape, dependent on the pathways and hydrology, and most significantly, constructed of stone quarried in close proximity.

6.3.6. New development must establish a balance between this local expression of identity and character, and the national construction industry, development, design, structure, fabric and assembly of which it is a part.

6.3.7. A contemporary vernacular can reflect the local conditions, landscape, ecology and culture echoing the conditions of place. New settlements must also address the issues most pressing to contemporary and future communities; climate change, biodiversity, connectivity, community, employment, civic and civil infrastructure, reducing reliance private cars.

6.3.8. This Characterisation Study focusses on the character of settlement before the standardised methods and materials are introduced from the Nineteenth century onwards.



Fig 125. St Peter and St Paul Church, Wadhurst

The key elements of Wealden Settlements

- Church
- High Streets & Markets
- Village Green/Common
- Housing
- Civic buildings
- Farmsteads
- Building Grouping
- Settlement Connectivity
- Visitors & Tourism

The Church

6.3.9. The settlements have grown up and coalesced around the church. These stone buildings are both gathering points and symbols of power. Most of the churches have their origins in the Saxon period, though were constructed in stone visibly from the 13th century replacing timber, wattle and daub. Later additions included 16th and 17th century modification as well as extensive 19th century reordering and refurbishments. Churches such as that at Frant were completely rebuilt in the nineteenth century, though the original 12th century foundations remain visible.

6.3.10. All of the churches in the medieval villages are set at high point of the settlements, often with the steeple set on a tower visible from the surrounding streets and countryside.

6.3.11. The network of churches created nodal points of community worship and influence across the settlements and landscape of the Weald. The buildings are the physical embodiment of a network of power and control, working in tandem with the secular authority and landownership. The churches were often established by the feudal lord, on the foundations of a Saxon and pre-Christian settlement or graveyard.

6.3.12. The church also represents an important power network stretching back to Roman settlements, working alongside the secular power, to take tythe payments and provide varying levels of health, education and welfare benefits. The churches worked alongside the monastic foundations, Minsters before the Norman conquest, monasteries and Priories after: Michelham Priory, St Pancras Priory, Bayham Abbey, Hastings Priory, Beddington Abbey, Wilmington Priory and Lewes Abbey.

Key features of the church buildings.

- Positioned at the heart of the settlement
- Raised on higher ground above the crossroads of interconnecting path ways
- Enveloped by green space on all sides, graveyard, burials and memorial gardens
- Backing onto the market place at the heart of the settlement
- Stone masonry of the church reflects the geology and available stone of the neighbourhood.
- Spire is seen throughout the village, at the rear of high street, and from valleys and ridges in the surround countryside.
- The orientation of the building indicates the compass points and direction of the sun in the sky.
- Footpaths cross the churchyard creating pedestrian connectivity through the settlement.
- The backs of houses from the high street back on to the church yards.
- Some cottages front onto the church yard.

Summary

6.3.13. Church buildings represent the focal point of historic Wealden settlements, reinforcing social and economic networks as well as representing a physical community focus. New development could offer a community hub that radiates a similar local hub network.



Fig 126. East Hoathly church



Fig 127. Hailsham church



Fig 128. Hailsham Graveyard



Uckfield. Church Street. Dominant spire behind the street. Church of Holy Cross. Rebuilt 1839. Foundation as chapel 1291 from Buxted



Ripe St John the Baptist. Part of the St Pancras Priory in Lewes. 13th century plan with 14C addition and 15C tower.



Old Heathfield All Saints



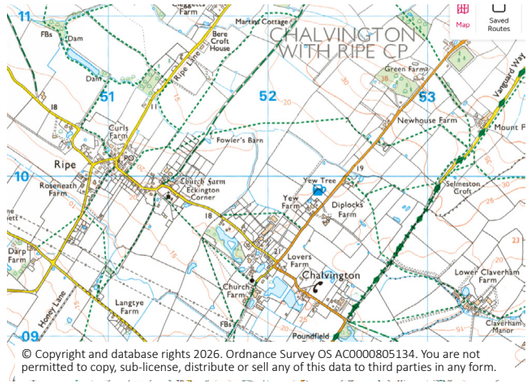
Selmeston Church St Mary's Flint reconstructed 19th century On a circular Saxon round. At the edge of the national park



Buxted St Mary's Church. The centre of a medieval village centre of iron and silk weaving village removed by Lord Liverpool to create landscaped park



Chalvington St Bartholomew's Flint structure. Part of the St Pancras Priory in Lewes. 13th century plan with 14C addition and 15C tower.



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Map of Ripe and Chalvington showing adjacencies in the Low Weald



Hartfield St Mary's the Virgin 13th century, 14th century 15th centuryth tower



Hartfield Graveyard and gatehouse



Forest Row. Holy Trinity. At a prominent crossing in the high street 1836 on earlier foundations

Fig 129. Wealden churches

High Street & Markets

6.3.14. Rotherfield is thought to have been one of the earliest post-Roman settlements in the remote and isolated region of this part of Britain, developed by the church around the Romano-Christian foundation of St Denis and connecting this to the Northern France church and fourth Century Christian Martyr of the same name.

6.3.15. All of the stone built churches in the medieval villages were constructed in the 13th century on Saxon foundations. Market charters were granted to the settlements in the same period: first Wadhurst in 1253, Mayfield in 1261, followed by Frant in 1296 and Rotherfield in 1318.

6.3.16. It is likely that fairs and markets were held before these dates. The importance of the market charters was to ensure that part of the surplus revenue was collected by the crown or by the church, centralising the economy with a network of tariffs and obligations over and above the local feudal framework of land ownership.

6.3.17. The high street developed adjacent to the market place and the church at a crossroad or focal point of radiating pathways. These provided permanent commercial premises to supplement the weekly market. Typically these comprised workshops, forges, small scale centres of craft serving local rural industry. They also had residential accommodation above the ground floor frontage.



Fig 130. Burgage plots. Rotherfield High Street







Wadhurst High Street







Mayfield High Street



Hailsham High Street





Frant High Street

Fig 131. High Streets in Wealden

Shops

6.3.18. Permanent shops added to the facilities of a weekly market by providing storage and sales outlets throughout the week rather than just on market days. Many houses with ground floors facing the market high street were converted into shop outlets, with storage and access to workshops and growing facilities down a narrow alley access to the rear. Shop frontages developed in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the windows used for display as well as letting light into the sales area. Workshops were converted into retail outlets , now important and diverse features in the high street of many towns and villages. Many have been recently converted to cafes and grocery stores and are important community hubs.

6.3.19. The land ownership was divided into thin strips, or burgage plots, providing high street presence at the front, courtyard and workshop at the rear, often with access out to fields and water supplies at the rear.



Rotherfield - shops



Rotherfield - shops



Rotherfield - shops



Rotherfield - shops



Hailsham - shops



Wadhurst shopfront

Fig 132. Shops in Wealden

The Village Green / Common

6.3.20. This was an area of Common land which was originally used for shared grazing. It was also the site of the annual fair, sports events and children's play. Latterly these were threatened by the enclosures and more recently many transformed for car parking.

6.3.21. Village greens and market places became the central focal points of Wealden Villages. Many of these are still key spaces, though in some instances they have become integrated into the traffic system of roads and parking. See Rotherfield and Wadhurst.



Frant Village Green



Five Ashes Village Green with 15th century pub on main road



Fletching Village Green



Muddles Green

Fig 133. Village Greens in Wealden



Hartfield Gathering



Hartfield Centre



Children's Playground Frant



Memorial seats

Fig 134. Other gathering elements in Wealden's settlements

Wealden Housing

Large Houses

6.3.22. Large houses developed as centres of power, economy and social status. Originally serving as centres for important households, including servants and workers, over time their function became more specialised.

Post-Norman large landholdings - The Rape of Pevensey

6.3.23. The pattern of large landholdings in Wealden began after the Norman Conquest, when William the Conqueror granted extensive estates to his supporters, including Odo of Bayeux and Robert of Mortain. The area then formed part of the Rape of Pevensey, controlled from Pevensey Castle, while much of the High Weald was designated royal hunting forest under strict forest law. This system created large, continuous land parcels that limited settlement and preserved extensive woodland. Over time, these medieval landholdings passed into private ownership and formed the basis of the great estates and stately homes that later developed across Wealden.

Seventeenth century stately houses

6.3.24. **Sheffield Park** house and gardens, to the West of Fletching Village, evolved from a Tudor deer park and Norman forested hunting grounds. Part of the Rape of Pevensey, passed down through aristocratic families, enriched by iron foundries and associated industry.

6.3.25. Situated in the upper springs of a tributary flowing to the River Ouse to the South, The house was rebuilt along with its park landscape at the end of the 18th century. John Holroyd commissioned James Wyatt (associated with Nash and Gothic revival) for this work. Grounds were also landscaped to designs by Capability Brown and Humphrey Repton, the house is positioned at the head of a valley with views over cascading lakes into the valley.

6.3.26. **Eridge Park.** This evolved from the Norman hunting reserve and Tudor deer park, spanning the valley to the west of Frant and south of Tunbridge wells. Initially gifted post conquest to Odo of Bayeux, brother of William the Conquerer.

6.3.27. The main house was rebuilt in the same period as Sheffield Park, designed by Wyatt in the Strawberry Hill early Neo Gothic style. This was replaced by a neo-Georgian mansion in the 1930s.

6.3.28. The Nevill Family, Lord Abergevennie, removed the Village Green from the small village of Eridge and constructed a road side church and small workers cottages in a Tudor Arts and Crafts style.

6.3.29. **Buxted Park.** Again a landed estate evolving from the Norman hunting ground and Tudor Deer park. The Neoclassical house overlooking the landscaped valley of the upper Uck, was built 1725. At the time the village, centred around the church, was demolished. New workers housing was established in the valley out of sight of the main house.



Uckfield Bridge Cottage



Ripe



Pevensey High Street



Five Ashes Yeomans farm house



Stonehill Farm, Horam. High status Oak frame Hall House



Uckfield Church Street. Georgian frontage



Bolebrooke Castle. Brick tudor Hunting lodge



Stonehill farmhouse. 15th century oak timber frame Wealden House. Lived in By JM Barrie 1920s Note the repair, and replacement of stone roofing tiles with red clay tiles.

Fig 135. Large houses in Wealden

Eighteenth century Town Houses

6.3.30. As trade and travel developed in the 17th century and 18th centuries the villages at strategic crossing points began to grow. Merchants' town houses lined the high streets radiating away from the town centre focussed on the church and market. Medieval houses were adapted to the neo-classical Georgian polite style (see Hailsham example) the addition of a frontage adapted from the London and Bath palace terrace, incorporating a parapeted flat frontage replacing the deep overhanging eaves, a boxed gutter front and vertical sash windows. Examples can be found in Uckfield, Hailsham, Heathfield.

Ninteenth century Victorian Villas

6.3.31. Victorian suburbs, including the common typology of small paired villas, grew in response to the accessibility of new places eg Groomsbridge.

6.3.32. The larger Victorian villas broke away from the pattern of palace-like terraces and adopted a more relaxed, less austere style incorporating front bays, gables, hipped roofs and rear extensions. The arts and crafts movement influenced this architectural style, bringing in a comfortable middle class, servant-served life-style. For instance, well-known architect Edwin Lutyens designed many of these houses including Forest House in Hartfield.

6.3.33. The Victorian villas of Crowborough were developed for this 19th century health resort for the wealthy middle classes. It was made accessible by the opening of Jarvis Brook railway and examples include Highwell House built for the rich Robert Halford, a London jeweller. This house was recently restored.



Buxted Park, Georgian Palladian mansion



Eridge Park, now demolished 19th century Gothic



Eridge Park, now demolished 19th century Gothic



Brick Georgian neo-classical frontage applied to earlier building - Hailsham



Crowborough Victorian mansion - Hillside House



Groombridge Victorian terraces

Fig 136. Continued Large houses in Wealden

Houses with Moats

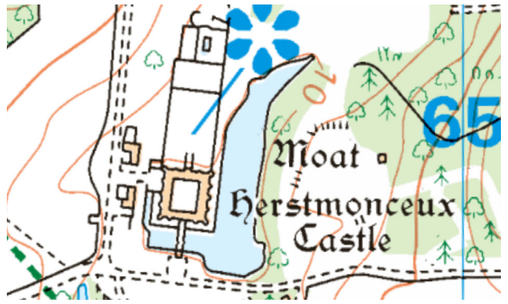
6.3.34. Moats are primarily a feature of large houses on the Low Weald and Pevensey Levels. Initially a defensive feature (see Pevensey, Norman Castle), they reflect the control of the local stream and water source. They were used for power, water supply and latterly as an aesthetically pleasing environment. Many moats survive as scars in the landscape, notably in the Pevensey Levels, but others survive in association with their buildings. The Cuckmere river has been diverted from the supply of the moat at Michelham Priory with the remaining empty moat being a sad memory of the former watery landscape.



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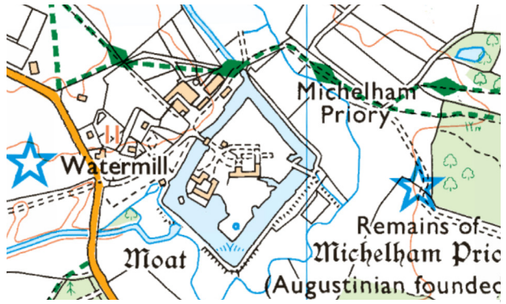
Horselunges



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Herstmonceux



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Michelham Priory

Fig 137. Example houses with moats in Wealden

Worker Housing

6.3.35. Separate housing for rural workers developed on the large managed estates in the 19th century (eg Eridge and Bolebrooke) and flourished In many villages and small towns under the government programme for Council Housing in the 20th century.

6.3.36. The council housing in Frant on Warren Ridge is a typical example of low density generous housing with spacious gardens.



Eridge Green



Frant



Mayfield



Eridge Green

Fig 138. Examples of worker housing in Wealden

Civic Buildings

6.3.37. The church provided the civic infrastructure of rural society, focussing on health, education and welfare until the 20th century and churches remain an important focus of social and cultural life. In many areas the village school is still Church of England affiliated, whilst Catholic, Methodist and other denominations also provide educational and social networks.

6.3.38. In the 19th century the larger estates, Sheffield Park, Eridge Park, began to provide some social functions as well as Sporting clubs and village halls.

6.3.39. The 20th century saw many civic roles taken on by secular state provision, particularly including education, health and welfare.

6.3.40. Currently the provision of sporting facilities in Wealden is a mix of council-managed leisure centres across the district (such as the Crowborough, Hailsham and Uckfield Leisure Centres) and upcoming major community hubs. A new Community Sports Hub in Hailsham is scheduled to open in summer 2026, providing a multi-sport facility.

6.3.41. Other civic networks that bind communities feature distinctive physical structures and buildings. These include the village pump, the postal system, represented by Village post offices and post boxes, telephone boxes - now often used as impromptu libraries and defibrillator stations - village sign posts and directional finger posts, bus stops and benches on the village green or at viewing points.

6.3.42. Many of these small incidental features of community are being made redundant in the digital age, although they retain their curiosity value. The school, village hall, church, doctor's surgery and pubs all remain important community hubs around which settlements and community focus and new development should enhance and reinforce these networks.



Uckfield Picture House


Village hall


Observatory


School House



Health centre


Institution


Archbishop Palace


School House. Frant


School House. East Hoathly


Fire Station. Mayfield


Crowborough Police Station



Uckfield Leisure Centre

Fig 150. Civic buildings in Wealden

Farmsteads

6.3.43. Many of the Wealden farmsteads have been in existence since Medieval times. The buildings and settlements reflect their environments, building materials, layouts and connectivity to local markets, as well as aspect. The location of farmsteads in the High Weald and Low Weald is connected to the spring line, namely the optimum position of the water table at which water emerges from the ground. Farmsteads express their “terroir”- a French word describing the unique combination of climate, soils, topography and hydrology. These factors provides a unique blend of elements as expressed in each settlement.

6.3.44. Traditionally farms have been mixed, combining grazing and arable land depending on the soil type and incline. Many farms diversified in the 19th century into hop growing, adding the distinctive circular hop house to existing farm buildings.

6.3.45. Traditional farmsteads focus around a farm yard, a central courtyard around which the main farmhouse, barn livestock holdings and storage buildings are arranged. This is the point of gathering from which the farm produce is distributed.

6.3.46. The High Weald has a high concentration of small farms connected by a dense networks of footpaths and bridle ways. 19th century estate farms produced a signature architecture including workers housing and farm buildings such as those at Eridge Green.

6.3.47. New farming methods, including regenerative farming and wine growing, are producing larger, more industrial-style buildings adjacent to the older farmstead buildings.

6.3.48. Farmsteads and their building components express their environment and function through their architecture, construction and layout. They have adapted over centuries to respond to changing conditions.



Glebe Farm Mayfield



Old Place Farm Entrance



Oast Houses add ears to the Farm House



Michelham Priory Great Barn



Horse Farm



Modern horticulture plastic tunnels



Michelham Priory Great Barn



Bunt House Farm Forest Row



Rickney Bridge Farm Pevensey Levels

Fig 139. Farmsteads in Wealden

Building Groupings

6.3.49. A key feature of Wealden village settlements is the diversity of building groups.

6.3.50. Buildings are arranged in various ways, featuring different materiality, forms, angles and relationships to connecting public spaces and pathways. The different groupings reflect a coalescence in response to various economic and social stimuli as well as responding to land ownership boundaries.

6.3.51. The distinctive and unique clusters have usually evolved without settlement plans, design codes or masterplan strategies.



Fig 140. Building grouping around St Peter's and St Paul's Church, Hellingly


East Hoathly


Hellingly Gables


Hartfield timber frame terrace


Rear Gable Character. Mayfield


Punctuation. Wadhurst


Individuality


Change in materials


Hellingly Terrace

Fig 141. Notable building grouping and juxtapositions in Wealden



Rotherfield Shop Fronts



Rotherfield Shop Fronts



Clay Roof Tiles



Expression of gable



Groomsbridge Terracing Village green



Diversity of size



Rotherfield corner shopfront with extension



Mirrored pair 19th century

Fig 142. Notable building groupings and juxtapositions in Wealden (continued)

Settlement Connectivity

- Pathways connecting places and moving through the landscape are some of the oldest indications of human inhabitation. Some have remained footpaths crossing fields and common land, others have become major roads with traffic speeding between London and the South Coast;
- The Roman roads between the south coast and Thames Basin and running along the south coast, broadly mirrored the pathways mapped out and used in the Iron Age before Roman Occupation;
- The waterways offered some traffic from the coast, into the Bay of Pevensey and limited canalisation of some rivers;
- The older pathways kept to high ground avoiding running alongside the rivers and flood prone valley bottoms. Where the roads crossed a valley the river bridge became a focus for industry, mills, forges and foundries;
- The paths include a rich legacy of transhumance, drovers ways and footpaths connecting landscapes, farms to local centres and villages;
- Earlier movement was largely on foot with horses and carts for goods and over longer distances;
- Carriages appeared from the 17th century onwards, needing better road surfaces, therefore Turnpike roads with gates appeared, funded through local tariffs. These were also stimulated by the health and leisure resorts of the south coast and the Chalybeate springs and spas of Tunbridge Wells;
- Mid 19th century railways further transformed connectivity between London and the South Coast, connecting isolated villages and stimulating commuting and visitor traffic;
- Later 20th century railway closures included that of the Cuckoo line which severed the connection between Hailsham and Heathfield;
- From the 1970s onward there was a growing proliferation of road traffic and transportation, including bus transport between settlements;
- Car dependency has created the challenge of parking in tiny villages, speeding on often narrow lanes, ubiquitous air pollution, noise and most recently larger and more impactful SUVs;
- The growing development of footpaths and cycle ways between and within settlements offers opportunities for healthier social connectivity.

Summary

6.3.52. Car dependency has increased and transformed communities in the district since the mid 20th century. This is a short period in the context of settlement development, however the harm to them has arguably outweighed the benefits. Old pathways and cycle routes, alongside forms of public transport (buses, trains etc), should be retained and encouraged, in order to mitigate the negative results of the increased use of the private vehicle.


Wagon ways


Drovers ways


Turnpikes


Stil crossing to a fence


Horse


Carriage


Railways


Cycle paths


Road Network

Fig 143. Transport means in Wealden

Inns

6.3.53. Coaching inns developed in the 17th century on high roads, often part of a village, sometimes isolated, sometimes part of an estate. They provided overnight accommodation, refreshments and a change of horses for travellers. The Inns also created a centre and gathering place for local people and important nodal hubs in a network connected by carriage ways, footpaths and high roads.

6.3.54. The inns were rooted into the local economy of farms, food, produce and labour. They presented a welcoming face to the road, advertising their position as they attracted passing trade. To the rear, the servicing of the transport was located, including wainwrights, farriers, a forge and a blacksmith, alongside stables and horse care.

6.3.55. Many inns would run a network, allowing horses to be changed and restocked over a length of stops.

6.3.56. Turnpike roads from the Mid 17th century ensured that roads were safer and better maintained. The improved conditions encouraged a broader network of coaching inns and stops, also enabling better postal services and opportunities for travel.

6.3.57. The advent of travel by rail in the mid 19th century undermined the role of the coaching inn as an integral part of the travel network, however they continue to exist, thriving on both quiet and busy roads. Popular inns are frequently sought out by local travellers as well as remaining important local hubs serving both the community and visitors.

Public Houses

6.3.58. Public Houses, Taverns, Inns, Ale houses, Coaching houses, centres of hospitality for locals and travellers along the road, can all be traced back to the Roman era. Public Houses or Ales houses such as the Catts Inn in Rotherfield Pic) grew up independently from the coaching houses and hostelries though many are now undistinguishable from these. A public house originated in a front room of a residence that had a licence to brew, ferment and sell alcohol, while today they are larger places with a broader clientele, however they still provide the same function as important gathering and exchange points for the community.



The Dorset Arms, Buckhurst Estate



The Castle Inn. Pevensey Bay



The Lamb Inn. Wartling



The Gallipot Inn. Hartfield



The Rose and Crown. Mayfield



Gatts Inn. Rotherfield

Fig 144. Inns in Wealden

Visitors and Tourism

6.3.59. Since the Roman settlements, with their villas and baths, this area of southern Britain has offered leisure and health treatments to the wealthier sections of society.

6.3.60. In the 18th century the development of health spas around the Chalybeate springs of the sandstone rocky outcrops stimulated growth of visitor activity focussing around Crowborough, Frant and Eridge.

6.3.61. Nineteenth century visitors to the coastal area were enabled by the railways to access Lewes and Eastbourne and rail access supported the development of many leisure activities, many of which continue today, along with the various impacts from more and cheaper private vehicles as well as recent developments like Airbnb. New leisure included the following:

- Golf Course development at Crowborough.
- Seaside and holiday activities at Pevensey Bay.
- Development of tourist attractions, English Heritage, National Trust
- Long distance walkways and cycling encouraged more leisure activities and visitors to the area.

6.3.62. Negative impacts to the leisure expansion included the closure of many railways in the 1960s-70s and the introduction of cheap flights to the Mediterranean and other warmer destinations. These all challenged the popularity of the district as a holiday destination, however it continues to function in this way.

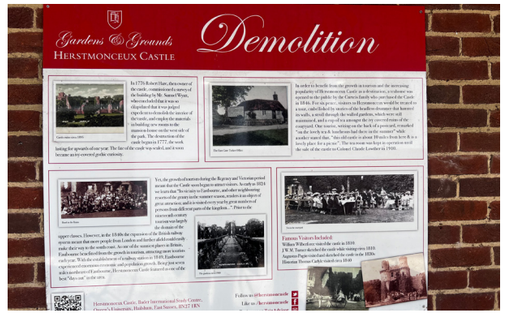
6.3.63. There are also tourism sites in the district around literary associations such as to Winnie the Pooh in Hartfield and Ashdown Forest. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle also lived in Crowborough until his death in 1930.

Summary

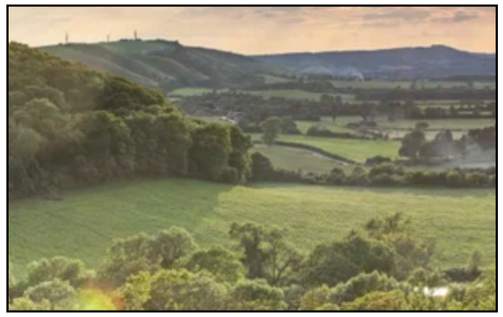
6.3.64. Wealden has always been a popular destination for visitors holiday makers and tourists. New Leisure activities based around walking, cycling and visitor attractions can attract more visitors and stimulate the service economy.



Shepherds Hut Airbnb



Nineteenth Century Tourism



Long and short distance walking



South Coast Seaside



Pevensey Bay Hotel



The Pevensey Court House Museum



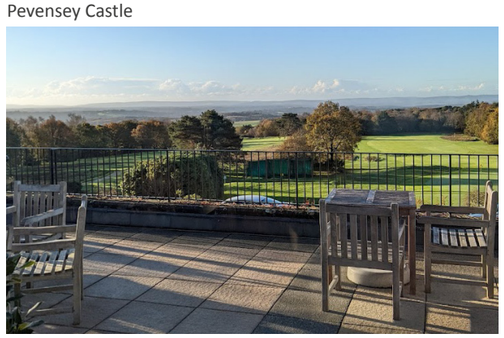
Pevensey Castle



Sheffield Park



Bluebell Railway



Crowborough Golf Course

Fig 145. Tourism destinations in Wealden

6.4 Materials & Craft

Construction Materials

6.4.1. Before rail transport, construction materials were limited by the proximity and availability of natural materials like local stone, along with renewable materials, notably timber for structure, wood products and thatch for protective coverings, weatherboarding and roofs.

6.4.2. The use of local natural materials for construction creates a blended effect of buildings in their landscape. The unique characteristics of the local materials encouraged localised craft and building techniques, reflected in local variations of construction and decoration.

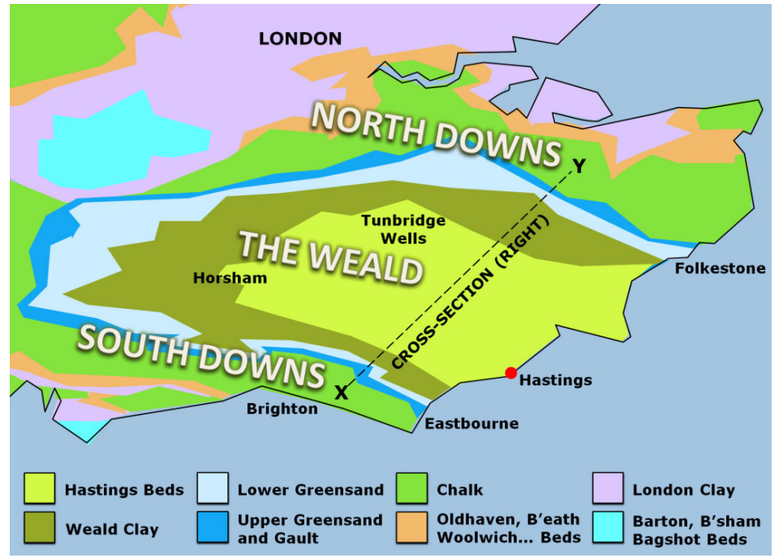
6.4.3. Types of materials and crafts typical of Wealden:

- Timber Structure
- Timber cladding
- Joinery
- Thatch
- Brick
- Mortar Mix
- Clay wall tiles
- Clay Roof Tiles
- Sandstone
- Beach cobbles
- Flint - knapped
- Flint - field sourced

6.4.4. The timber and clay building materials are found throughout Wealden and are generally locally sourced and easier to transport.

6.4.5. The heavier quarried materials, sandstones and flint are more area specific to the area in which they are quarried and sourced. Flints towards the chalk downs and southern coastal region, stones in the High Weald ridges.





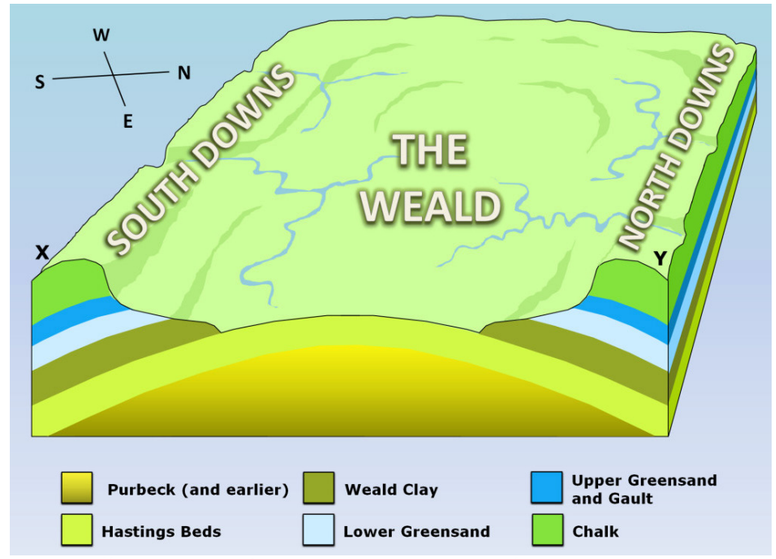


Fig 151. The Roman defensive wall at Pevensey reflect a mix of materials. Flint, sandstone and Brick. Source: http://www.discoveringfossils.co.uk/hastings-east-sussex/

Clay

6.4.6. Clay building products are the most ubiquitous construction material in Wealden. Clay tiles and bricks reflect a wide variety of shapes, applications and craftsmanship. The flexibility and adaptability of the raw material reflects the wide range of applications: from roof coverings and edgings, wall copings, brickwork load-bearing walls, brickwork patterned walls, mixed with tiles, timber, clay tiles, paving and walkways. Brickwork foundations and plinths, cills and arches, brickwork infill to timber frames.

6.4.7. The multiplicity of uses over time and locality reflect the availability of the material, the inventiveness of the craft, the ingenious engineering and the authenticity of use. In response to the requirement of function and the enjoyment of style and decoration, clay has been moulded and shaped into structures of both high and low status. From churches, manor houses and castles, to functional farming sheds and workers cottages, the red honed clay is the colour and texture of construction in Wealden.

6.4.8. Until the mid 19th century when materials began to be industrially formed and imported on the railways, local clay was the immediate answer to most needs of construction, whether as a mix with other materials like, flint, sandstone or timber, or as a standalone structural and decorative finish. The quality of hand made material, formed on site, taken from the ground on which the building is to rise, and the natural process of weathering, has moulded this most common of materials to create a signature for the Wealden vernacular.

6.4.9. The mix and quality of the mortar, size and constituency of aggregate and lime mix has a distinctive effect in the temperance and durability of the building element. Similarly the bonding of the brick, normally Flemish or English bond on solid nine inch walls, has a distinctive effect on the appearance. Burnt header bricks are often used as a diaper pattern for decorative effect. Modern materials, sourced from elsewhere, industrially formed, chemically infused, in-authentically applied, have neither the warmth or the longevity of the naturally locally sourced crafted clay products.

6.4.10. Typical clay building functions in Wealden:

- Mathematical tile: a clay tile fixed to timber sub frame simulating brick bonding, often patterned in herringbone or diaper diagonals.
- Wall tiles: hung on a timber frame over lapping to created a textured horizontal ridge effect.
- Patterned brickwork: using the burnt darker header ends of the brick to create a pattern, often diagonal or diaper.
- Brick bonding: affects the appearance of the brickwork. Flemish or English Bonding are the most common.
- Brick layering: brick is commonly used with other materials, as infill to timber frame, as alternate courses to stone infill, as the plinth ground floor to weather boarded upper stories, as a combination of tile and brick. It is used throughout the district in diverse and decorative permutations.
- Mortar mix: the mortar mix, aggregate and pointing method significant elements to the appearance and durability of brickwork.
- Roof tiles and ridges: common for roof covering until largely replaced in the 20th century by concrete tiles and the wider variety of finishes now used on both flat and sloping roofs. Ridge tiles were specifically created to suit the roof forms. Clay largely replaced the earlier use of thatch and large sandstone flags.


Mathematical Tiles. Farley Farm


Wall tiles. Rotherfield



Patterned. Wadhurst


Brick and Mix. Pevensey


Brick and Tile




Roof Tiles Five Ashes


Mortar mix Pevensey


Large aggregate mortar bond to flint work at Pevensey


Herringbone Brickwork infill to timber frame



Contemporary mathematical tiling. Mayfield


English Bond at Hersmonceux Castle

Fig 160. Examples of clay use in building detailing in Wealden

Timber

6.4.11. The method of jointing to create timber frame buildings was introduced to England in the twelfth century. The method of half timber frame construction developed in Europe, focused on the Rhinelands of central Germany, spread to France as Colombage and latterly to England. Each area has developed specific designs, styles and decorations in timber frame, expressing different cultural practices.

6.4.12. Medieval timber framing is oak based, reflecting the plentiful supply of timber. A base plate cill of supports is closely spaced with uprights as stud framing. Bracing and primary uprights are expressed with different materials used for infill, like wattle and daub, brickwork, stone and rubble.

6.4.13. Many of the older town and village houses are timber frame but covered in tiles or timber horizontal weatherboarding.

6.4.14. The method of framing-out a base plate allowed the buildings to jetty out (cantilever) at first floor level, typically used where space was at a premium, or to emphasise the architectural primacy of an element.

6.4.15. These ingenious jointing and framing techniques created buildings that survive after 600 hundred years to this day, a testament to the durability of the material and the skill of the joiners. No nails or screw are used, the tight but flexible joints relying on accuracy and wedges. The system also allows a flexibility allowing limited movement and settlement.

6.4.16. The Wealden district has a rich supply of timber frame buildings. Much of the older building stock, some from the fifteenth century has survived 600 years. The longevity and flexibility of the material is an exemplar for modern construction.

6.4.17. Green and seasoned oak can be supplied from responsible sustainable suppliers. The use of timber as a construction material, for both structure and cladding continues to be a practical and sustainable option for new development.



Timber frame at Five Ashes



Upper storey timber frame, Mayfield



Timber cladding, Wartling



19th century decorative timber frame and porch



Timber weatherboarding against brick



Black painted weatherboard gable barn



Painted timber weatherboarding



Timber weatherboarding against brick roofoast

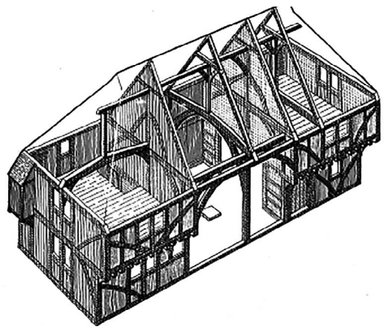


The white timber weather boarding elevates the clay roof form

Fig 152. Examples of timber frame buildings in Wealden



Fifteenth Century timber frame | Traditional bay wealden hall house. Outside Horam. Original stone tile roof has been replaced with jettied wings.



Weald and Downland centre | Cut away of 6 bay Hall House



Timber framed Riverside cottage in Uckfield



Timber framed town house in Uckfield



Timber framed herringbone brick infill Ripe



Timber frame tithe barn. Michelham Priory



Pevensey High Street House| Jettied first floor clay wall tile gable

Fig 153. Examples of timber frame buildings in Wealden (continued)

Sandstone

6.4.18. The deeper ghylls and valleys of the High Weald crossing the Greensand and Hastings beds provided the primary building stone used in many churches and high status buildings in the High Weald and Low Weald.


Bishops Palace


Sandstone


Michelham Priory sandstone mix


Mayfield Boarding School


Church and lychgate Roof Framfield slabs

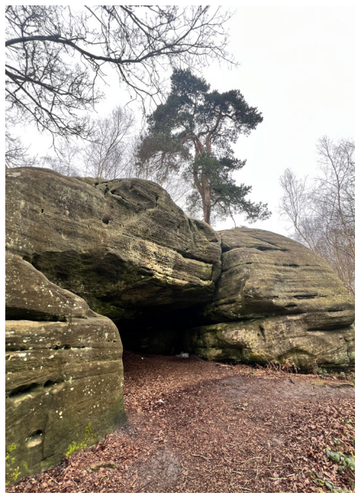

Michelham Priory


Sandstone Bricks at Pevensey Castle


Sandstone checker with flint


Stone House, Mayfield in ashlar sandstone


Sandstone quarry at Tidebrook


Eridge Rocks


13th century Gatehouse Michelham Priory


Stone Porch roof

Fig 154. Examples of sandstone in Wealden both in the landscape and in building detailing

Flint

6.4.19. Flint is evident in the Low Weald closer to the South Downs and the coast line at Pevensey. As one of the oldest materials used by humans as a tool and weapon, flint was adapted by the Romans as a construction material. It does not have good tensile or load-bearing properties to be used on its own, therefore it is invariably adapted and mixed with clay, timber and sandstone.

6.4.20. The different types of flint, from cobbles found on the coast, to knapped and squared, field flints harvested from chalk downland, or chalk mines, allow it to be used in various imaginative and decorative ways.

6.4.21. The predominant types of flint cobble building detailing in Wealden are field cobble (roughly dressed, often tumbled into uniform blocks) and beach cobble (rounded, naturally eroded).



Flint pebble street building in Pevensey



Flint cottage in Chalvington



Flint Mix



Flint Brick Mix



Rough flint work on Pevensey Castle



Flint infill to clay brick bonding on agricultural shed



Flint Stone chequer board porch



Flint Stone chequer board wall



Flint infill to Brickwork Gable



Square flint chequer with greensand ashlar



Stone brick flint mix to Roman construction

Fig 155. Examples of flint buidings in Wealden

Boundaries

6.4.22. Boundaries denote the extent of ownership and function of a property or land. Their physical expression reflect diverse features in human social and economic relationships. From the high defensive walls of the Roman and Norman fortifications at Pevensey Castle, to the low Picket fencing in the Frant High street cottages.

6.4.23. The material, height, permeability, and landholding condition express the relationship of neighbours on both sides of the boundary.

6.4.24. Boundaries and front areas to the front of properties create a threshold expressing ownership and security. Their height and materiality can frame a building, creating a display of status and potential hospitality.

6.4.25. Boundaries are expressed in natural hedgerows (see landscape section) and man made materials.

6.4.26. Evidenced throughout the district are:

- Low picket Fences, often painted white;
- Visually permeable railings;
- Defensive high walls in brick and locally sourced stone;
- Low walls in brick and locally sourced stone, indicating security but encouraging visual permeability;
- The position of a gate and entrance in the boundary is important , in its relationship to the building entrance and the public realm.



Arrow head iron fencing



Tall timber fencing



Horizontal slats timber fencing



Stone boundary



Post and chain fencing



Tall hedging boundary



Wooden panels fence



Mix of timber and brick low fencing



Timber low fencing



Brick wall boundary

Fig 156. Examples of plot boundaries in Wealden

Windows

6.4.27. Windows and doors are an important feature in the expression of a building. Their size, position, method of opening and fastening, the number of panes, the ratio of height to width, all are important aspects, reflecting the social positioning of the building and often its uses internally.

6.4.28. Most windows are made from wood, locally sourced and constructed. Stone mullions are occasionally found on early status buildings as well as 20th century steel crittal windows on coastal buildings from the 1930s.

6.4.29. The word window is derived from the old Norse language meaning 'Eyes of the Wind' The term indicates the original function of openings in walls, to allow ventilation, and exchange fresh external air with internal odours and stale air.

6.4.30. Early windows were formed from openings in the wall, either timber or masonry, and lined with timber shutters. These opening are still expressed in the earlier timber framed hall houses, lined with timber mullions.

6.4.31. Glass was used by the Romans, though it was only used in Church buildings during much of the medieval period

6.4.32. As buildings and particularly residences, became more sophisticated and tempered in moderating the external and internal environment, windows developed as a means to allow natural daylight into the building in addition to regulating the control of fresh air.

6.4.33. The introduction of glass lead lined panes in the sixteenth century was originally confined to buildings of higher status. Glass manufacturing was expensive and highly specialized and it use indicated wealth. These early windows are either fixed or timber framed casements, side hung and subdivided into small lead lined panes (Example timber frame building on Uckfield Church Street)

6.4.34. Timber side hung casements are the normal window typology until the mid 18th century. The position and dimensions of the window indicate the status of the house and the functions of the rooms into which they face. Light, air and visibility are important governing factors on their positioning and size, while the size of panes and subdivision through glazing bars are also important factors.

6.4.35. The double hung, weight balanced sash window, creating vertical sliding casements replaced the spatial encroachment of the inward opening side hung casement. It was introduced from Holland toward the end of the 17th century.



Neo classical Georgian frontage



Casement windows beneath eaves



Neo classical Georgian frontage



Shop front bay



Mix of casement and sash



Neo classical Georgian frontage sash and dormer

Fig 157. Examples of windows in Wealden

6.4.36. The sash window expressed a new fashion increasingly adopted in town houses through the 18th century. The proportions of the window related to the classical dimension of the new flat-fronted facades, many of which were fixed onto older timber frame houses. The sash typology generally has a greater height to width proportion, allowing both bottom and top sashes to be open in varying arrangements. The dimension allowed more light into the depth of a room, as well as altering the relationship of internal and external views.

6.4.37. Dormer windows, set into a roof space and often behind a parapet, created liveable rooms within the roof space. A common characteristic of the Wealden domestic building

6.4.38. Influenced by the Neo-classical Style, the windows of larger town houses, like in Uckfield and Hailsham, reflected the proportions of the golden ratio as recommended through the many available pattern bookof the time, exemplifying 'Good Taste' (EG Colen Campbell and Batty Langley.)

6.4.39. The industrialisation of glass making in the 19th century and the specialisation of building typologies has encouraged the adoption of larger window panes and a choice of window mechanisms. Proportion and scale remain important as does the choice of material.

6.4.40. The Arts and Crafts style housing of the 19th century used large windows in bays, often divided with glazing bars, and expressed small and large gable-end roofs.

6.4.41. 1930s Art Deco and Modernist architectural styles are expressed in a range of Pevensey Bay houses which feature horizontal steel framed windows, introduced by Crittal manufacturers. The windows reflect the modernist aesthetic in celebrating the corner opening and expressing the separation of wall to structural frame. The single pane steel frame caused environmental problems of condensation and mould, but the aesthetic can be replicated today by Crittal replica double glazed sections.

6.4.42. 19th and 20th century housing continued to use a mix of the sash and casement windows in varying sizes, proportions and positions. Most of the windows are of timber manufacture, utilising local joineries and local timber supply.

6.4.43. Double and even triple glazing has become the norm to increase the thermal efficiency of window openings, though they should be fitted with trickle vents to allow minimal ventilation.

6.4.44. Plastic or UPVC windows have begun to be introduced in replacement windows and new developments. These are environmentally harmful (based on fossil and oil extraction) and degrade over time without the option of repair and maintenance typical of timber windows. Their use is not recommended.



First floor bay casement and ground floor casement



Ground floor bays



Art Deco Steel windows



Bay window, sash windows and dormer attic casements. Note the positioning of the first floor windows central to the gutter and ground floor



Ground floor casements

Fig 158. Continued examples of windows in Wealden

Roofs and Chimneys

6.4.45. Roof shapes reflect a building's status, aspect and environment. Roof shapes have evolved over time with the development of different building typologies. A roof's primary functions are to provide protection, retain warmth and shed water. Many of the steeply angled vernacular buildings may have originally been thatched, but there is little evidence today of this material with clay tiles replacing this. Occasionally imported slate has been used, as exemplified in the High Street at Frant, while in the south of the Low Weald some of the churches have stone slab roof coverings.

6.4.46. Typically the roof shape features a high ridge sloping on two sides to the external walls, where the eaves are supported on the structure, frame or masonry. Water is shed beyond the building enclosure to the gutter held on a fascia, and from there to downpipes to drain away at ground level.

6.4.47. The angle of the sloping roof and the eaves overhang have evolved in response to the climatic conditions (amount and intensity of rainfall), the use of the attic roof space and the material of the roof covering.

6.4.48. A typical Wealden roof shape will feature half hips at the gable end, and a lower catslide roof at the rear of the property. Rear extensions are covered by a full hip and internal hipped gutters. Gables are often expressed at both the rear and terrace ends, while asymmetrical roof forms, created by the longer slope at the rear are a common characteristic. The roof shapes create a dynamic variety within a harmonized arrangement of building typologies.

6.4.49. Roofs are punctuated by chimney stacks and flues of varying sizes depending on their position and purpose, and some of these are expressed on gable ends creating a book-end typology, while others are contained within the building enclosure. Chimneys and flues sculpt the skyline making these important and integral features contributing to the character of settlement.

6.4.50. The pre-18th century Georgian buildings are rarely symmetrical in their roof shape, with cat slide roofs often falling away at the rear of the building. Many roofs are hipped or half hipped. Gables are a characteristic feature, either as a building end, or as an expression of a hipped change of angle.

6.4.51. The flues from the chimneys are expressed in a variety of stacks, sometimes internally to the gable, sometimes as an external added structure. They can be expressed as an internal structure appearing at the building ridge or, as at Michelham Priory on the external frontage on the lower edge of the ridge roof interrupting the gutter and eaves. Chimneys are a characteristic feature in the pattern of Wealden Vernacular, delineating the edge between sky and roof top.

6.4.52. Types of roofs and chimneys in Wealden:

- Ridge and slope
- Catslide asymmetry
- Hip and gable
- Gable end
- Chimney stack expressed externally to gable or main frontage
- Chimney stack appearing at eaves level central to the building plan
- Varying pattern of chimney pots and flue coverings.



Ridge roof with half hip and central chimney



Cat slide gable end with half hipped gablet



Half hip ridge gable end to low roofed barn



Ridge Roof bookended by roundel Oasts



Rear extension gables with long ridge



Half hip ridge gable end



Rear extension gable to ridge central not single slope rear addition







External gable end chimney stack

Fig 159. Examples of building roofs and gables in Wealden

7.0 Engagement

7.1 Engagement Overview

7.1.1. As part of this project there are three proposed stages of engagement:

- Stage 1. Listening & Gathering Information (April 2026)
- Stage 2: Testing & Looping Back (June 2026)
- Stage 3: Implementation (July 2026)

7.1.2. The purpose of the stakeholder engagement in this project is to:

- Validate our understanding of Wealden district's characteristics;
- Gather more information especially through engagement with technical (statutory) stakeholders;
- Test any proposals or guidance developed;
- Gather endorsement of the direction of travel from stakeholders organisations and/or local councillors;
- Ensure clarity / usability of the guidance with users (officers / councillors);
- Understand what current issues around design exist in the district and where design guidance is required/ would be of most benefit.

Stage 1 Listening & Gathering Information (April 2026)

7.1.3. The purpose of Stage 1 of engagement is to baseline local character and identify specific constraints (e.g., High Weald topography or accessibility gaps).For this first stage of engagement we engaged with Council officers, local stakeholders such as elected members, technical stakeholders and local community organisations. As part of this stage of engagement we completed the following activities:

- 31/03/2026- Technical Workshop with East Sussex Infrastructure
- 30/04/2026- Technical Workshop with High Weald National Landscape
- 14/04/2026- Wealden District Council Internal Officers Workshop
- 16/04/2026- Town & Parish Council Briefing
- 27/04/2026- Stakeholder Workshop- Active Travel & Accessibility
- 28/04/2026- Stakeholder Workshop- Nature & Environment
- 19/05/2026 (TBC- upcoming) Stakeholder Workshop- Youth & Community

7.2 Phase 1 Feedback Summary

7.2.1. Phase 1 engagement feedback focused predominantly on moving away from generic design approaches toward an integrated, landscape-led and people-focused approach to development. The feedback from a variety of technical, internal, and community stakeholders highlighted the following key takeaways:

Document structure and usability

- The guide must be easy to navigate and explicitly define what constitutes "good, bad, or indifferent" design.
- Stakeholders recommended following the successful structure of the National Design Guide and the High Weald Housing Design Guide (HWHDG), moving from "macro" elements (site structure and siting) to "micro" details (materials).
- Key guidance and coding should be placed at the start of each chapter to ensure important information is easy to find.

Movement and infrastructure

- Developments should not be designed in isolation but must "plug into" a coherent, district-wide active travel strategy.
- There is a strong push to move away from car-dependent cul-de-sacs toward greater permeability and potentially "School Streets" that improve safety and reduce car reliance.
- While promoting alternatives like car clubs and e-bike infrastructure, some respondents thought the guide should acknowledge that "20-minute neighbourhoods" are challenging in rural areas where car dependency remains high.
- Design standards should focus on the future lifestyles of residents, ensuring infrastructure supports health and fitness throughout a person's life.

3. Landscape, nature and gaps

- Participant feedback was supportive of "landscape signatures" (e.g., fieldscape, settlement, and woodland) to ensure new developments reinforce local character.
- For some participants, defining and preserving gaps between settlements to prevent "homogeneous urban development" is a priority.
- Officers support the idea of adopting the "3-30-300" rule (3 trees visible from every window, 30% canopy cover, and 300m proximity to green space) and prioritising planting for biodiversity over simple "mown grass".
- The guide must include evidence-based lighting guidance to protect nocturnal wildlife and the character of the rural night sky.

4. Policy strength and implementation

- There is demand for the guide to move from "aspirations" to firm, enforceable policy that can influence applications and planning decisions.
- To support officers in negotiations, the guide should define a hierarchy of "needs versus wants" to clarify which design features are non-negotiable.
- For large sites, the guide could mandate Masterplans and Design Codes to ensure quality is "built-in" from the outset.

5. Heritage and sustainability

- The guide needs to address the tension between conservation and the climate emergency, potentially allowing more flexibility for sustainability measures (e.g., solar panels or energy-efficient windows) in historic areas.
- There is a desire to "reset the conversation" on using natural and local materials, while acknowledging practical barriers such as cost, sourcing, and modern safety standards.
- High-quality wayfinding projects—such as marking the Meridian line or unique local landmarks—should be supported to help residents feel connected to their local heritage.



8.0 Conclusion

8.1 Summary Opportunities & Constraints

Opportunities

Regenerative Design and Landscape

8.1.1. Developments can adopt locality-specific design cues, such as sandstone-faced banks in the High Weald or flint cobbles in the Pevensey Levels.

8.1.2. Development layouts can be designed to incorporate and reveal ancient features like sunken lanes, drove roads and historic hedgerows.

8.1.3. Following the High Weald Housing Design Guide, the WDG provides the opportunity address site structure issues early to prevent generic schemes before they reach detailed stages.

8.1.4. The guide can move beyond 'no net harm' to a model that actively restores ecosystem functionality, realigning the built environment with living systems.

8.1.5. There is an opportunity to mandate masterplans that look beyond the 'red line', ensuring new developments connect seamlessly with adjacent sites and provide mutual benefits to existing places

Healthy and Walkable Neighbourhoods

8.1.6. Implementing infrastructure that makes walking or wheeling the 'natural choice' for short journeys, aiming for all services to be within a ten-minute walk or cycle in market towns.

8.1.7. New growth can implement the vision for 'complete, compact, and connected' neighbourhoods where all essential services are within a ten-minute walk or cycle.

8.1.8. Site design can combat loneliness and physical inactivity by creating 'social nodes', School Streets, and high-quality green routes that encourage social interaction and movement.

Built Form

8.1.9. Schemes can prioritise compact building forms (reducing the ratio of wall-to-floor area) and solar orientation to minimise heat loss and maximise natural light.

8.1.10. Establishing a strict energy hierarchy that prioritises 'Form Factor' (compact shapes), solar orientation, and dual-aspect layouts for cross-ventilation before bolt-on technologies.

8.1.11. Ensuring affordable housing is indistinguishable from market housing and designed to Building Regulation M4(2/3) standards for lifelong accessibility.

Blue-Green Infrastructure and Wellbeing

8.1.12. Rainfall management can be transformed into visible blue-green assets (rain gardens, swales, rills) that provide summer cooling, biodiversity, and community play areas

8.1.13. An opportunity to set clear standards for nature access: 3 trees visible from every window, 30% canopy cover, and a 300m walk to high-quality green space.

Retrofitting and heritage

8.1.14. Drawing on specific data for Crowborough, Hailsham, Heathfield, and Uckfield to ensure growth respects their unique historic nuclei and “Historic Environment Values”.

8.1.15. Providing technical pathways for retrofitting historic buildings (e.g., heat pumps, solar tiles) that balance conservation with the climate emergency.

8.1.16. Developers can prioritise the adaptation of existing buildings and the use of low-embodied carbon materials (timber, locally sourced stone) to reduce the total carbon footprint

8.1.17. Encouraging the reuse of buildings (“Retro First”) and the use of locally sourced materials to reduce the ecological and carbon footprint of construction.

8.1.18. Future projects can be “designed for disassembly,” using materials that can be easily reused or recycled at the end of the building’s life.

8.1.19. There are some opportunities for conversion and retrofitting in the District such as the Old Mint House.

Character-led innovation and design

8.1.20. Developments can promote high-quality, contemporary architecture that interprets historic scales, proportions, and 'settlement threads' without falling into cookie-cutter pastiche

8.1.21. Opportunities exist to use Hailsham’s 'plot passports' for self-build plots to support individual architectural creativity within a coherent district framework

8.1.22. New urban edges can be designed as 'soft' transitions to the countryside, showcasing the best examples of design rather than repetitive, screened-off blocks

Issues

Landscape and Settlement Identity

8.1.23. Generic development is diluting the unique characteristics / landscape signatures of Wealden's three distinct areas: the High Weald's wooded ridges and ghylls, the Low Weald's clay vales, and the Pevensey Levels' open lowland.

8.1.24. Settlements are at risk of merging, which erodes the 'time depth' of medieval field patterns and the historical 'spirit of place'.

8.1.25. Recent housing is critiqued for being formulaic, characterless, and generic, often using 'pattern book pastiche' that pays only lip-service to local character.

8.1.26. Large, urban-scale buildings are frequently 'crampmd' onto small rural plots with inadequate spacing, looking 'alien' in village contexts.

Movement and Connectivity

8.1.27. New developments are often engineered around cars, resulting in car-dominated streetscapes, inadequate visitor parking, and pavement-blocking.

8.1.28. Major roads (A26/A27) act as significant barriers to non-confident cyclists. Pavements in historic centres like Hailsham are often too narrow or blocked by bollards.

8.1.29. Night-time safety, particularly for women and girls, is compromised by poorly designed alleyways and lack of natural surveillance.

Climate, Water, and Environment

8.1.30. The district faces high risks from flash flooding and sea-level rises (particularly in the Pevensey Levels). Conventional piped drainage systems often result in deep, fenced-off balancing ponds that miss amenity opportunities.

8.1.31. A majority of existing building stock has lower energy standards, contributing to the fact that domestic buildings account for ~30% of Wealden's greenhouse gas emissions.

8.1.32. Standard construction compacts and destroys living soil, while development pressures cause habitat fragmentation and light pollution that harms dark night skies.

Heritage and Materials

8.1.33. Modern developments often use machine-made bricks and 'Roman style' interlocking tiles that lack the irregularity and texture of traditional Sussex vernacular.

8.1.34. Inappropriate piecemeal extensions and 'faux' details (like non-functional sashes or fake pitches) can detract from the original character of historic assets.

New/Recent Developments:

- Typically designed in isolation, focusing strictly on the site boundary rather than how the scheme integrates with or benefits the existing settlement fabric.
- Often 'turn their backs' on existing communities, using internal loop roads and cul-de-sacs that create a sense of exclusion and social fragmentation.
- Provide generic 'Anywhere UK' developments that dilute the unique characteristics of Wealden's three distinct areas: the High Weald, Low Weald, and Pevensey Levels
- Design interest often fades the further one moves into a site; developers may provide slightly higher quality materials on the 'gateway' site edges while using poorer, repetitive materials for the interior.
- Developments are often dictated by highways-first engineering approaches, resulting in inefficient junction designs, excessive tarmac, and sterile environments that prioritise vehicles over people.
- A lack of functional walking and cycling links force residents to rely on private vehicles for even short journeys, exacerbating congestion and carbon emissions.
- New streets often fail to link into existing movement networks, leaving pedestrians and cyclists to navigate safety barriers like major A-roads or narrow, bollard-blocked pavements.
- Green space is frequently provided as' space leftover'- unusable, disconnected strips or fragments - rather than being designed as integrated, multi-functional amenity assets.
- Landscape features are often used merely as 'screening' or buffers to hide development from the countryside, rather than integrating built form sympathetically into the landscape continuum.
- Sustainable drainage (SuDS) is often disappointing, featuring deep, fenced-off balancing ponds that lack biodiversity value and provide no community amenity.
- Standard construction methods compacts and destroys living soil.
- Lighting designs often fail to protect Wealden's dark night skies.

8.2 Glossary

Abbreviations

25 year Environment Plan **(25YP)**

Biodiversity Action Plan **(BAP)**

Biodiversity Net Gain **(BNG)**

Biodiversity Opportunity Areas **(BOAs)**

Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs **(DEFRA)**

Environmental Land Management **(ELM)**

Gross Domestic Product **(GDP)**

Local Planning Authorities **(LPAs)**

Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Govvernment **(MHCLG)**

National Character Areas **(NCAs)**

National Landscape **(NL)**

National Model Design Code **(NMDC)**

National Planning Policy Framework **(NPPF)**

Natural England's Green Infrastructure Framework **(GIF)**

London Brighton and South Coast Railway **(LBSCR)**

Permitted Development Rights **(PDRs)**

Photovoltaics **(PV)**

Planning Practice Guidance **(PPG)**

Secretary of State **(SoS)**

Spatial Development Strategies **(SDS)**

Supplementary Planning Document **(SPD)**

Sustainable Development Goals **(SDGs)**

Sustainable Drainage Systems **(SuDS)**

Wealden District Council **(WDC)**

Term / Definition

Anthropogenic – refers to the result of environmental, atmospheric, or physical changes, conditions, and structures that are caused or directly influenced by human activity rather than natural processes.

Atmospheric carbon – refers to the carbon present in the Earth's atmosphere, primarily in the form of greenhouse gases like carbon dioxide (CO2) and methane (CH4). It acts as a blanket, trapping heat and regulating the planet's temperature.

Brown-field development – is the process of redeveloping, reusing, or expanding land that has been previously developed.

Carbon sequestration – Carbon sequestration is the active, dynamic process of removing CO2 from the atmosphere and storing it securely in long-term reservoirs.

Carbon stocks – a carbon stock (or carbon pool) is the absolute quantity of carbon stored in a specific reservoir or system at a given point in time.

Circular economy – a model of production and consumption that minimises waste and pollution by keeping materials and products in use for as long as possible.

Clean energy assets – are physical infrastructure or financial investments dedicated to generating, storing, or managing energy with minimal to zero greenhouse gas emissions.

Designated heritage assets – refer to buildings, monuments, sites, places, areas, or landscapes that hold special architectural, historic, archaeological, or artistic value.

Design Guide – is a comprehensive set of recommendations and standards established to ensure consistency, usability, and best practices in the creation of a product, system, or environment.

Domestic clean energy production – refers to generating zero- or low-carbon power within a country rather than importing fossil fuels.

Ecosystem services – are the direct and indirect contributions that healthy natural environments provide for human well-being and quality of life. Ultimately sustaining all human life, they act as nature's "life-support system".

Environmental gain – is a development approach that ensures new projects leave the natural environment and local ecosystems in a measurably better state than they were beforehand.

Food security – having reliable, physical, and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food to meet your dietary needs for an active and healthy life.

Form Factor – a metric that measures a building's compactness and shape by calculating the ratio of its external surface area to its usable, heated floor space. It is a fundamental indicator of a building's baseline energy efficiency and potential for heat loss.

Functional and sensory elements of landscape – the functional elements manage the practical utility, safety, and physical movement of a space. Sensory elements address the experiential and emotional qualities of the surroundings, engaging all five senses to support human well-being and psychological connection.

Genius loci – the special quality of place or genius loci is an amalgam of physical qualities that have influenced local ecology and early social-cultural development.

Gross Domestic Product – is the total monetary value of all finished goods and services produced within a country's borders during a specific period. It serves as a comprehensive scorecard of a nation's overall economic health and size.

Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework – a historic United Nations agreement adopted by 196 countries in December 2022 to halt and reverse nature loss by 2030.

Landscape-led design – is a development and planning approach that puts natural environments, local topography, and green spaces at the center of the design process.

Landscape management – action, from a perspective of sustainable development, to ensure the regular upkeep of a landscape, so as to guide and harmonise changes which are brought about by social, economic and environmental processes.

Landscape – means an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural forces and/or human factors. The term 'landscape' is thus defined as a zone or area as perceived by local people or visitors, whose visual features and character are the result of the action of natural and/or cultural (that is human) factors. This definition reflects the idea that Landscapes evolve through time, as a result of being acted upon by natural forces and human beings. It also underlines that a landscape forms a whole, whose natural and cultural components are taken together, not separately. (Article 2 of The European Landscape Convention)

Landscape planning – strong forward-looking action to enhance, restore or create landscapes.

Landscape policy – an expression by the competent public authorities of general principles, strategies and guidelines that permit the taking of specific measures aimed at the protection, management and planning of landscapes.

Landscape protection – actions to conserve and maintain the significant or characteristic features of a landscape, justified by its heritage value derived from its natural configuration and/or from human activity.

Landscape signatures – specific identifying characteristics or environmental patterns in a given area. Landscape signatures are features, inert and alive, natural and stewarded or built by people, particular to a given area. Some are linked to a particular association of plants or materials, to local history and/or landform. These local features or species associations should form part of the palette of interventions and measures that reinforce the local identity of a new development.

Landscape "continuum" – describes how geographical environments and biological communities transition gradually along environmental gradients, rather than having sharp, rigid boundaries.

Local Plan – is a comprehensive document prepared by a Local Planning Authority that sets out a strategic vision and framework for the future use of land in a specific geographic area. It serves as the primary guideline for deciding local planning applications, balancing economic, social, and environmental needs.

National Model Design Guide – is an official UK government planning practice document that sets out what good design looks like, provides the foundation, focusing on design quality and the "10 characteristics of well-designed places". It serves as a practical, nationwide rulebook and benchmark for Local Authorities, developers, and communities to ensure new developments are beautiful, enduring, and climate-resilient.

National Model Design Code – is a toolkit which builds on the National Model Design Guide, detailing how local councils should write their own specific and measurable design codes. Its goal is to promote high-quality, sustainable, and well-designed places that are tailored to local character.

Natural capital assets – are the world's stocks of natural resources—including geology, soil, air, water, and all living things—that provide humans with a wide range of essential goods and services.

Nature-Based Solutions – are actions to protect, sustainably manage, and restore ecosystems to address societal challenges—such as climate change, biodiversity loss, and disaster risks—while simultaneously providing human well-being and biodiversity benefits.

Neighbourhood Plan – is a community-led statutory document used to guide the future development, growth, and conservation of a local area. It empowers residents and local businesses to create policies that shape where new homes, shops, and offices are built, while protecting valued green spaces and local heritage.

Net zero carbon – means balancing the amount of greenhouse gases released into the atmosphere with an equivalent amount removed.

Non-designated heritage assets – are buildings, monuments, sites, places, areas, or landscapes that have recognized heritage significance but do not meet the strict criteria for statutory national protection.

Photovoltaic – refers to the technology that converts light directly into electricity.

Plug in Solar – refers to compact, DIY-friendly solar kits that plug directly into a standard household wall socket to power your home.

Regenerative planning / regenerative paradigm in planning – is a transformative approach to urban and environmental development that moves beyond merely "sustaining" conditions or doing less harm. Instead, it views human and natural systems as deeply interconnected, aiming to actively restore depleted ecosystems and continuously enhance the capacity of places to thrive.

Sense of place – is the unique emotional and psychological connection people form with a physical setting. It transforms an ordinary geographical location into a meaningful, memorable destination through distinct architecture, local cultural integration, and inviting spatial planning.

Sustainable development – is a framework for economic and social growth that meets current human needs without depleting natural resources or compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

Sustainable Drainage Systems – It refers to environmentally friendly, nature-based approaches to managing surface water runoff.

The Doughnut Economics model – is a visual concept framework for sustainable development created by economist Kate Raworth. The Doughnut offers a vision of what it means for humanity to thrive in the 21st century- and Doughnut Economics explores the mindset and ways of thinking needed to achieve this goal. At its conceptual core, the Doughnut consists of two concentric rings: a social foundation, to ensure that no one is left falling short on life's essentials, and an ecological ceiling, to ensure that humanity does not destabilise the life-supporting systems that sustain all life on Earth.

The Environment Act (2021) – is a landmark UK law that establishes a post-Brexit framework for environmental protection. It creates legally binding targets for air quality, biodiversity, water, and waste, and established the Office for Environmental Protection (OEP) to hold the government and public bodies accountable for environmental laws.

UK Marine Protected Areas – are designated ocean zones established by law to conserve marine species, habitats, and historical or cultural features.

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