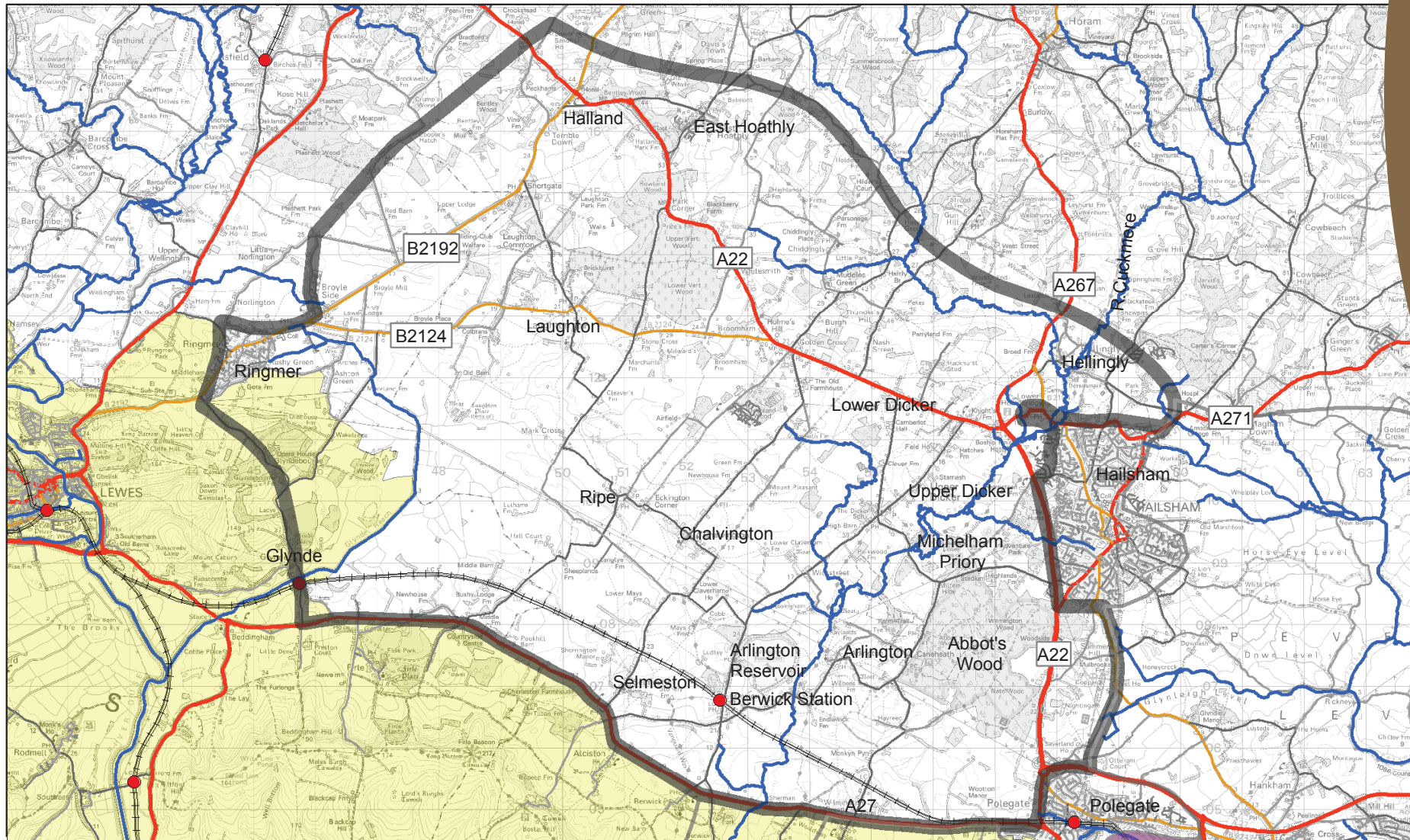


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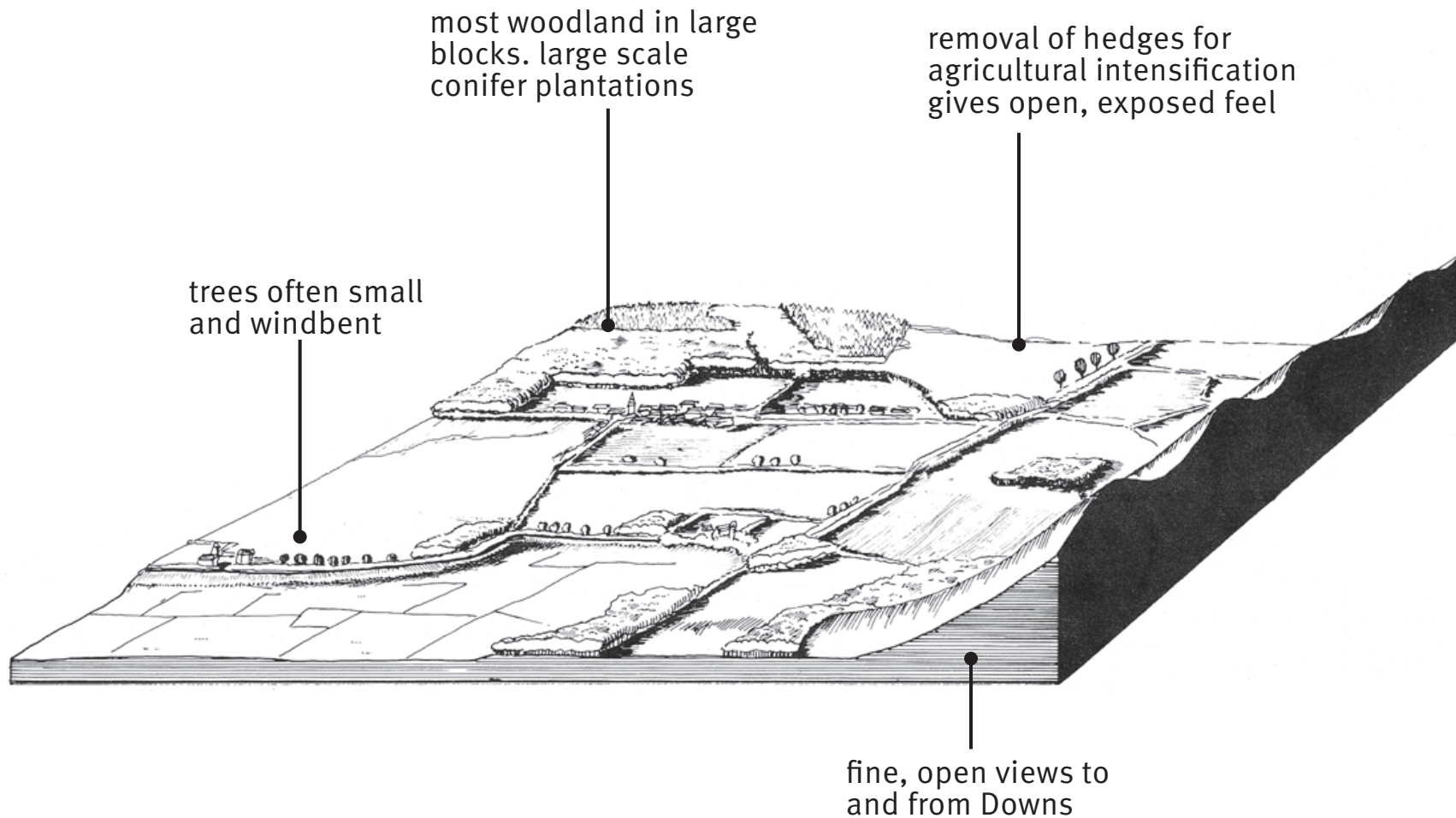
15 Eastern Low Weald Landscape Character Area

South Downs National Park

0 0.5 1 2 3 4 Kilometers

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A Landscape Description

Key Landscape Characteristics

- A low lying topography with few high points and extensive areas of flat, treeless and windswept landscape.
- Generally more open and exposed than the Western Low Weald with areas of tranquillity and remoteness away from the main roads.
- A largely pastoral landscape especially on the heavy clay soils, Red Sussex cattle and Southdown sheep are local breeds which have been present for many centuries.
- More mixed and arable farming on the higher ground and lighter soils.
- Some large woodland areas which are ancient in origin, but have been extensively replanted with coniferous trees, notably Abbots and Vert Woods.
- Many of the woods are classified as Semi-Natural Ancient Woodland by Natural England and are local nature sites, notably Abbots Wood.
- Many scattered areas of woodland with Ancient woodland species providing seasonal impact of carpets of celandine, wood anemone and bluebells.
- Hedges and hedgerow trees are less abundant than the Western Low Weald and trees often wind sculpted.
- Oak and ash as predominant mature tree species in woods and hedges with field maple, wild cherry, aspen and hornbeam (coppice) also frequent, there are a few remnant mature elm trees. Alder and willow and grey poplar are common in the river valleys. Lime trees and horse chestnut are frequent in designed landscapes and along roadsides.
- Small airfields at Ringmer and Ripe
- A distinctive patchwork of angular fields enclosed by low hedges.
- Some areas of intensive arable agriculture and large fields where trees and hedges have been lost especially between the A27 and A22.
- Some smaller historic designed landscapes in the grounds of modest country houses for example at Wooton Manor.
- Evidence of former manor houses, often with medieval origins and remnant moats, such as Laughton Place, Claverham, Halland Park Farm and Horselunges Manor.
- The medieval moated priory at Michelham which is open to the public.
- The area has sites which are important to understanding the complex Wealden geology.
- There is a disused clay pit at Glynde and a quarry famous for Dickerware pots which is a geological SSSI.
- The winding channel of the upper Cuckmere River and its tributaries.
- Glynde Reach and many artificial straightened drains and channels.

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- Arlington Reservoir LNR, an important wildlife habitat and visitor attraction.
- There are SSSI designations at Arlington reservoir and Milton Gate Marsh, the former is also a Local Nature Reserve.
- Small vernacular churches in hamlets and villages.
- Distinctive vernacular buildings associated with farmsteads including ancient farm houses and barns.
- The vernacular for the area is timber framed buildings and weather boarding with local brick and clay hanging or roof tiles appearing in the late 18 century.
- Scattered farm ponds and larger ancient fish ponds, for example at Chalvington village and Sherrington Manor.
- Scattered remote focal villages and hamlets with characteristic ribbon development along the roads and lanes.
- Wide open views of the north slope of the Downs to the south and 'big skies'.
- Large rectilinear fields in the central area as evidence of previous formal enclosure.
- A geometric pattern of north south orientated route ways and lanes which are considered to be drove roads along which farmers traditionally took their stock to the Downs. These tend to be straighter than those of the Western Low Weald creating a distinctive rectilinear pattern around the edges of large fields.
- The busy main A27 forms the southern boundary of the area and gives access to the many lanes which cross the area. The A22 cuts across the northern part of the area. Other busy local routes are the B2192 and B2124 which connect the A roads. Some of the minor roads suffer fast rat run traffic, notably though Berwick and Upper Dicker, but otherwise the rural lanes are quiet backwaters.

- The south coast railway crosses the southern edge of the area.
- Part of the National Cycle Network route 21 uses the disused Eastbourne to Heathfield railway as an important recreational route.
- Electricity pylons crossing the area and large modern farm buildings are prominent in this open landscape.
- The scattered business and retail development along the A22 detracts for this part of the area but otherwise there is little urban influence.

Cultural Associations

Serge Chermayeff, architect of the De La Warr Pavilion in Bexhill designed and built for himself one of the most influential Modernist houses of the time at Bentley Wood near Halland, the original gardens were designed by Christopher Tunnard.

Farley Farm House at Chiddingfold was the home of Surrealists Lee Miller and Roland Penrose and from 1949 became a gathering place for many famous artists. The house and gardens are now a gallery and sculpture garden offering guided tours.

Former Prime minister James Callaghan lived at Upper Clayhill Farm in Ringmer from 1979.

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Table 1 Key Positive Landscape Attributes

- Generally more open and exposed than the Western Low Weald with areas of tranquillity and remoteness away from the main roads.
- A largely pastoral landscape especially on the heavy clay soils, Red Sussex cattle and Southdown sheep are local breeds which have been present for many centuries.
- Some large woodland areas which are ancient in origin, but have been extensively replanted with coniferous trees, notably Abbots and Vert Woods.
- Evidence of former manor houses, often with medieval origins and remnant moats, such as Laughton Place, Claverham, Halland Park Farm and Horselunges Manor.
- The medieval moated priory at Michelham which is open to the public.
- The winding channel of the upper Cuckmere River and its tributaries.
- Small vernacular churches in hamlets and villages.
- Distinctive vernacular buildings associated with farmsteads including ancient farm houses and barns.
- Scattered farm ponds and larger ancient fish ponds, for example at Chalvington village and Sherrington Manor.
- Scattered remote focal villages and hamlets with characteristic ribbon development along the roads and lanes.
- Wide open views of the north slope of the Downs to the south and 'big skies'.
- A geometric pattern of north south orientated route ways and lanes and large rectilinear fields.
- Arlington Reservoir

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B Landscape Evaluation

Table 2 Current Condition

A largely unspoilt tract of countryside with much of the historic rural character intact. The distinctive pattern of rural lanes and scattered unspoilt villages reinforces the historic character. Agricultural intensification has caused the removal of some hedgerows and hedgerow trees which has detracted from the historic landscape character in some areas. Farm diversification on small holdings and estates has led to the replacement of hedges with wire fencing for horse paddocks which dilutes field patterns. Lack of management and under exploited productivity of some farm land. The Cuckmere River channel follows a meandering route across the area. The river and drainage channel management has in places removed water side trees and vegetation. Some farms have intrusive modern buildings and associated clutter. There is a programme of woodland management for Abbots Wood to fell and replant conifer plantations with native deciduous species. Other smaller woods remain largely unmanaged. The few detracting features are related to scattered modern development spreading along the main road corridors. The Low Weald is identified in the NCA as of outstanding priority for woodland conservation.

Forces for Change impacting on positive Landscape Attributes

Past / Current forces for change

- Pressure for agricultural diversification which involves new built development and changes to land management.
- Loss and decline of hedges and hedgerow trees and consequential fragmentation of the landscape due to farm diversification and reducing management.
- Creeping fragmentation of farmland by hobby farming, pony paddocks and garden expansion.
- Increasing levels of traffic throughout the area.
- Development pressures for housing and commerce.
- Loss of mature trees due to natural ageing and lack of replacement and disease, notably elms and more recently a potential risk to ash trees.
- Loss of trees along river, streams and ditches due to maintenance regimes, agricultural intensification and engineering works.
- Loss and decline of unimproved traditional hay meadow.
- Loss and decline of ancient woodland due to coniferisation.
- Creeping suburbanisation and cumulative changes in the rural landscape, roads and villages which are not in sympathy with local distinctiveness or vernacular architecture.
- Water quality in the Cuckmere catchment and a small area of Nitrite Vulnerable Zone in the south east corner of the area.

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- Changes in the types and frequency of grazing animals in the countryside impacts on character as they are a characteristic feature. Lack of grazing can give an unmanaged appearance to the landscape and reduce the biodiversity value.
- Farm Environment Plans including organic farming on the Glynde Estate and at Wilmington Green. Much of the area is covered by Higher Level Stewardship agreements.
- Woodland Grant Schemes are scattered across the area, the largest covering Abbots Wood near Hailsham.
- Mineral extraction from clay pits notably Glynde and The Dicker.
- Decline and neglect of Riparian landscapes and farm ponds, which is being addressed by Stewardship agreements
- Butterfly conservation measures notably to conserve the Pearl Bordered fritillary in woodland areas.
- Increased water abstraction reducing water in stream and rivers.
- Increased water abstraction reducing water in stream and rivers.
- Climate change affecting species composition and increasing the risk of drought / flood events.

Future Forces for Change

- Settlement growth around the larger villages and adjacent towns, particularly Hailsham, Polegate, Lewes and Ringmer.
- The impact of traffic on rural roads and increasing recreational visitors due to expansion of towns on the edges of the character area, notably Lewes, Hailsham and Polegate.
- Increasing traffic on rural lanes and in villages impacting on tranquillity and on the rural character where passing vehicles cause erosion to banks and verges.
- Pests and diseases of trees which could impact significantly on the mature tree stock. E.g. Ash dieback.
- Demands for traffic calming and road improvements which could introduce increasing urban clutter to rural roads, villages and lanes.
- Continued agricultural change due to changing markets, economic pressures and response to climate change, for example bio crops.
- The spread of small agricultural holdings, to hobby farming, paddocks and allotments for local food production.
- Pressure for locating renewable energy facilities for solar, wind and bio energy.
- Pressure for more local waste recycling facilities down to the domestic level.
- Water quality in the Cuckmere catchment and in Nitrate Vulnerable Zone which extends into the south east corner of the area.
- The potential extension of Arlington Reservoir to increase capacity.

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Table 3 Potential Impacts of Climate Change

- Potential changes in woodland / tree species composition and accelerated growth of species such as birch.
- Changes in ground flora which produce very distinctive seasonal displays e.g. bluebells may disappear.
- Increased magnitude of storm events could make woodland edges and trees features vulnerable, especially over mature and champion trees
- Increased prevalence of pests and diseases due to warmer weather, wetter conditions could have devastating effect as DED did in the 1970s e.g. Phytophthora on Oak and Alder and the recent spread of horse chestnut diseases.
- Changes in precipitation and temperatures will change the types of crops that farmers grow.
- Potential impact on the viability of grazing sheep, dairy and beef.
- Increased temperatures and a decline in precipitation levels may dry out wetland habitats and ponds and alter stream flows.

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C Vision and Strategy

Table 4 Vision
(as an update of the County Landscape Assessment 2009)

A high quality distinctive and unspoilt lowland Wealden landscape.

An open landscape with big skies and wide uninterrupted views of the Downs. A sense of remoteness strengthened by improved tree, woodland and hedgerow structure, particularly near built up edges and around large modern farm complexes. A strong sense of the historic landscape reflected in the distinctive geometric layout of fields and lanes. A strong landscape structure which can accommodate pressure for change and development without detracting from the historic character. A scattered settlement pattern centred on the established and historic service villages. A strong sense of place provided by local vernacular design and architecture. Enhanced and protected natural habitats and a rich wildlife resource. Well managed recreational opportunities on the extensive rights of way and lanes network. The area recognised as a gateway area to the South Downs National Park.

As noted in the current Landscape Character Guidance – A Landscape Strategy identifies *“what change if any is desirable for any landscape character area as a whole?”*

Landscape change and adaptation to meet the strategy requires:

1. Planning for the enhancement of the Biodiversity Opportunity Areas of the Cuckmere Ouse watershed, the Pevensey Cuckmere Valley Link, the Wilmington Woodlands and watershed, the Wooton Manor Grasslands Link and the extension of the Ouse catchment around Glynde and Laughton.
2. Protect and manage existing habitats and plan for restoration of hedges and riverside vegetation to restore habitat linkages and continuity.
3. Consider the potential to plan for multifunctional Green Infrastructure (GI) in this character area particularly in response to a growing population and new development in the towns and larger villages.
4. Build on the existing GI assets of woodland, river catchments, extensive rural lane network and Arlington Reservoir to maximise recreational opportunities.
5. Through planning controls integrate proposed and existing development into the landscape where appropriate using planting of tree features and woodland to define the village boundaries with the countryside.
6. Ensure that the design and layout of new developments respect the character and form of the landscape and existing settlements.
7. Control the spread of suburbanisation by minimising clutter of signage and other urban features in lanes and villages.
8. Encourage the production and implementation of a comprehensive landscape strategy to integrate the recent and future developments along the A22 from Golden Cross to Polegate.
9. Consider appropriate species for new plantings to maintain landscape character and biodiversity but also adaptation to climate change influences.

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D Guidelines for Managing Change

Development considerations for housing and other development

Proposals in or adjacent to the South Downs National Park need to have regard to the SDNP: Partnership Management Plan

The main pressures for development in this character area will be to accommodate housing for the rural populations. The pressure will be concentrated on the larger village service centres of which there are few in this area. There will be pressure to find opportunities for affordable housing in the smaller villages and hamlets. Any new development should respect the key positive attributes in the landscape outlined in Table 1 above.

There is an ongoing requirement for farm diversification driven by a changing agricultural economy and practices.

Proposed development should consider opportunities for proactively meeting the Landscape Change Strategy aims for this Landscape Character Area as outlined in 1-9 above

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Table 5 – Review and adapt

Opportunities for protection and enhancement	Landscape Management Guidelines	Benefits delivered by Ecosystem Services for each area of interest
Countryside and Farmland Pressure for farm diversification and development of hobby farms, solar arrays, wind farms waste operations etc. Decline of dairy farming. Land falling out of positive management and dereliction of farm buildings. Loss of historic field patterns and other boundary features. Deterioration of by ways and lanes due to erosion of un-surfaced routes by horses, bikes and 4 wheel drives. Damage to verges on narrow country lanes caused by increasing size of farm vehicles and passing traffic. Flooding of farmland and properties affecting the viability of farms. Overstocking and arable production on some soils can result in soil erosion and reduce soil quality. Poor water quality in some ponds, ditches and streams.	Countryside and Farmland Encourage farm conservation schemes to conserve the essential landscape structure of fields, hedges, trees and woods. Maintain the mixed farmed character of the area. Protect and manage historic field patterns and rural lanes. Restore the structure and historic character of the landscape by strengthening hedgerow networks and field patterns through re-planting of lost sections and re-stocking with hedgerow trees. Conserve and enhance historic farm buildings and farmsteads. Use tree and woodland planting to screen intrusive farm buildings and other agricultural development. Enhance the biodiversity value of old pasture, wet meadows, and river and stream channels. Restore farm ponds. Plan for and manage changes which may occur in the landscape due to changes in farm management brought about by economic influences and climate change. Address existing flooding issues of farmland and properties. Use flood relief and SuDs as an opportunity for enhanced biodiversity and amenity.	Provisioning services Water availability Food production Regulating services (water purification, air quality maintenance and climate regulation) Water quality and protected aquifers. Regulating water flow and preventing flooding Soil conservation and erosion control Habitat and species resilience to climate change Carbon sequestration. Areas of peat in the river valleys, hedges, trees and grassland regulate air quality by absorbing and retaining CO₂.

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Opportunities for protection and enhancement	Landscape Management Guidelines	Benefits delivered by Ecosystem Services for each area of interest
	Reduce the risk and incidence of soil erosion by restoring arable land to pasture. Encourage the restoration of species rich meadows. Encourage measures to improve water quality in the Cuckmere catchment. Apply best land management practices to prevent soil and fertiliser run off, thereby protecting surface and ground water	Cultural Services Sense of Place and local distinctiveness. Source of Inspiration Sense of History Tranquillity Biodiversity Informal Recreation
Woodland Many woods are not in positive management. The most extensive area of woodland at Abbots Wood is in positive management but many smaller woods are not and some e.g. Vert's Wood has been replanted with conifers. Traditional management has stopped as it is not commercially viable e.g. coppicing. Coniferisation and lack of management of plantations due to poor access and low demand for timber. Tree diseases Invasive species competing with natives e.g. Spanish Bluebell, Himalayan balsam, Japanese knotweed, rhododendron	Woodland Actively manage woodland through coppicing to create a diverse age structure. Replace conifers with mixed broadleaved woodland. Create new woodlands to help to integrate new and existing development using locally indigenous species. Consider the need to adapt to changes enforced by climate change, such as specific tree diseases and possible adaptation in species selection. Consider appropriate species to maintain landscape structure, character and biodiversity. Conserve and interpret important woodland archaeology Plant new woodland to absorb development and as a sustainable source of timber.	Provisioning Fuel (woodfuel for local communities from woodland management) Regulating Carbon sequestration, woodland absorbs and holds CO₂. Habitat and species resilience to climate change Cultural Tranquillity Sense of Place and local distinctiveness Cultural heritage (traditional woodland management) Biodiversity Informal recreation

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Opportunities for protection and enhancement	Landscape Management Guidelines	Benefits delivered by Ecosystem Services for each area of interest
Other key Habitats Arlington Reservoir SSSI is in favourable condition (NE). Deterioration and loss of habitats Loss of river and stream side vegetation in the Cuckmere catchment. Poor water quality in streams and ditches Deterioration and drying out of wetlands Loss of Hedgerows Agricultural improvements to Grassland/meadows which reduces species richness. In particular Milton Gate Marsh SSSI (condition unfavourable and declining) and Burgh Hill Farm Meadow (condition unfavourable but improving) SSSIs. Park Corner Heath SSSI (condition favourable) Ploughing up of old meadows.	Other key Habitats Maintain favourable condition of Arlington Reservoir. Encourage management of river and stream channels, especially conservation of riverside trees and vegetation. Encourage good agricultural practice to minimise pollution and improve water quality, including organic farming. Reed bed enhancement and creation in channels and ditches. Conservation and re-creation of wet meadow/pasture habitats. Management of water levels in streams and ditches. Conservation of hedges and ancient field boundaries. Farm stewardship schemes to maximise biodiversity and prevent further loss of species rich meadows.	Provisioning Nature's larder of free berries and herbs. Conservation of insect pollinators for pollination of crops. Water quality and protected aquifers. Regulating Habitat and species resilience to climate change. Cultural Appreciation of nature Educational value Biodiversity

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Opportunities for protection and enhancement	Landscape Management Guidelines	Benefits delivered by Ecosystem Services for each area of interest
Recreation, Green Infrastructure (GI) and ANGS (glossary) Pressure on bridleways and byways as multi use including cycling and 4 wheel drive vehicles increasing erosion. Reducing funding to maintain the comprehensive existing rights of way network and long distance paths. Erosion on well used routes e.g. Robin Post Lane Lack of funding to manage and enhance GI. Need for better sustainable transport linkages. Need for more ANGS and multifunctional GI including safe sustainable transport links and accessibility. Loss of tranquillity due to pressure from growing population in Hailsham and Polegate. Arlington Reservoir provides opportunities for fishing, bird watching and walking. Abbots Wood has areas which are readily accessible.	Recreation, Green Infrastructure and ANGS Where appropriate develop Green Infrastructure Strategies based on a county wide GI mapping. Plan for and manage recreational pressure on the countryside particularly the well used bridleways and byways which provide multi-use access. Identify green infrastructure needs and opportunities to address the future needs and growth in the populations of Polegate and Hailsham. Ensure that the comprehensive public rights of way network is well managed and sign posted. Discourage fast traffic and improvements to the network of rural lanes to maximise their value as recreational routes. Consider opportunities to create new green corridors and improve existing as safe ideally motorised traffic free recreational routes. Maximise recreational opportunities offered by Arlington Reservoir and Abbots Wood.	Provisioning Protected farmland Accessible farmland and grazing pasture Regulating Habitat and species resilience to climate change Water quality and protected aquifers. Regulating water flow and preventing flooding Carbon sequestration Cultural Recreation Heritage assets and cultural heritage Inspirational Tranquility Biodiversity Recreation

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Opportunities for protection and enhancement	Landscape Management Guidelines	Benefits delivered by Ecosystem Services for each area of interest
Horse Keeping ('horsiculture') and small holdings Deterioration of the character and quality of the landscape and loss of local distinctiveness. Can detract from historic field pattern where fences replace hedges. Can cause soil erosion.	Horse Keeping ('horsiculture') and small holdings Enhance the condition of areas of horsiculture and small holdings through the restoration of an intact, well managed hedgerow network and retaining a diverse grass sward by preventing overgrazing. Encourage local food production and allotment provision in areas where this will not detract from local landscape character.	Provisioning Grazing Regulating Habitat and species resilience to climate change Cultural Recreation Heritage assets Sense of Place and local distinctiveness Biodiversity
Protect and Enhance the character and heritage of the villages and countryside Development pressures in this area are small scale and the risk is more of creeping urbanisation and gentrification than major development. Small scale incremental change is more likely to affect the local character and distinctiveness. Gradual loss and deterioration of Heritage features. Increasing traffic on rural lanes and rat running to avoid the congested A27	Protect and Enhance the character and heritage of the villages and countryside Encourage the production of Neighbourhood Plans which incorporate village design guidance. Plan for new development in the villages to ensure it is designed to a high standard to reflect local character and sense of place. Establish defined development edges to villages with new tree planting. Prepare village design guides and tree conservation plans. Encourage local improvements to gardens and amenity areas through neighbourhood planning, amenity associations and 'Britain in Bloom' type initiatives. Consider traffic calming measures and improvements to the A27.	Provisioning Local amenities and facilities. Regulating Use of sustainable materials Habitat and species resilience to climate change Water quality and protected aquifers. Regulating water flow and preventing flooding Cultural Sense of Place and local distinctiveness Heritage assets Recreation Biodiversity

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Opportunities for protection and enhancement	Landscape Management Guidelines	Benefits delivered by Ecosystem Services for each area of interest
Catchments, Flood management and SUDS schemes? Flooding in the Ouse Valley Flash floods and run off. Flooding of properties in low lying areas by river and ground water. Deterioration in water quality in the Ouse catchment due to pressure from agricultural intensification and diffuse pollution.	Flood management and SUDS schemes? Plan for flood management by reinforcing the riparian character by restoring natural river geomorphology and re-linking watercourses to their floodplains by extending areas such as wet meadow and woodland. Conserve and enhance existing man made and natural drainage features. Maximise opportunities for the creation of SUDs schemes which contribute to local amenity and habitat creation.	Provisioning Water conservation Water supply Regulating Flood control Protection of aquifers Water quality Soil conservation Cultural Sense of Place and local distinctiveness Amenity and recreation Biodiversity

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Glossary

(also refer to the full version in the County Landscape Assessment).

ANGS: Accessible Natural Green Space Natural England - Accessible Natural Greenspace Standard (ANGSt)

Assart: Field created from the clearance of woodland

Clunch Barn: constructed of a building material composed of hardened clay or chalk marl.

Ecosystem Services: The services provided by nature which support living systems and can be evaluated.

Enclosure: The separation of land from the common by fence or private use.

GI or Green Infrastructure: Multifunctional green areas which provide areas for recreation, wildlife, water supply catchment, flood relief, food or timber production.

Local Nature Reserve: Local Nature Reserve (or LNR) is a statutory designation made under Section 21 of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949, and amended by Schedule 11 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006, by principal local authorities.

Ramsar sites are wetlands of international importance for biodiversity, designated under the Ramsar Convention.

SNCI or Local Site: a Site of Nature Conservation Importance.

SSSI: A national designation for Site of Special Scientific Interest, these may be of biodiversity or geological significance or both.