

Wealden District Council

Landscape and Visual Appraisal - Appendix A.12

Potential Development Sites in the High Weald AONB: LCA 6A - Tunbridge Wells South-West

Final report

Prepared by LUC

August 2026



Wealden District Council

Landscape and Visual Appraisal - Appendix A.12

Potential Development Sites in the High Weald

AONB: LCA 6A - Tunbridge Wells South-West

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Contents

Appendix A .12

Tunbridge Wells South-West Assessment Unit

A-1

Settlement location, evolution and pattern	A-2
Mapped information for the core character components of natural beauty of the High Weald AONB	A-3
Landscape sensitivity context for the Tunbridge Wells South-West assessment unit	A-6
Land at Ramslye Farm (Spratsbrook Farm) (729/1610) and Strawberry Hill Farm, Eridge Road (443/1610)	A-8
Baseline Analysis	A-10
Baseline Summary	A-13
Potential effects of developing the site, including on the core character components of natural beauty	A-15
Summary and recommendations	A-20
Cumulative effects of development sites proposed in the Tunbridge Wells South-West assessment unit	A-22

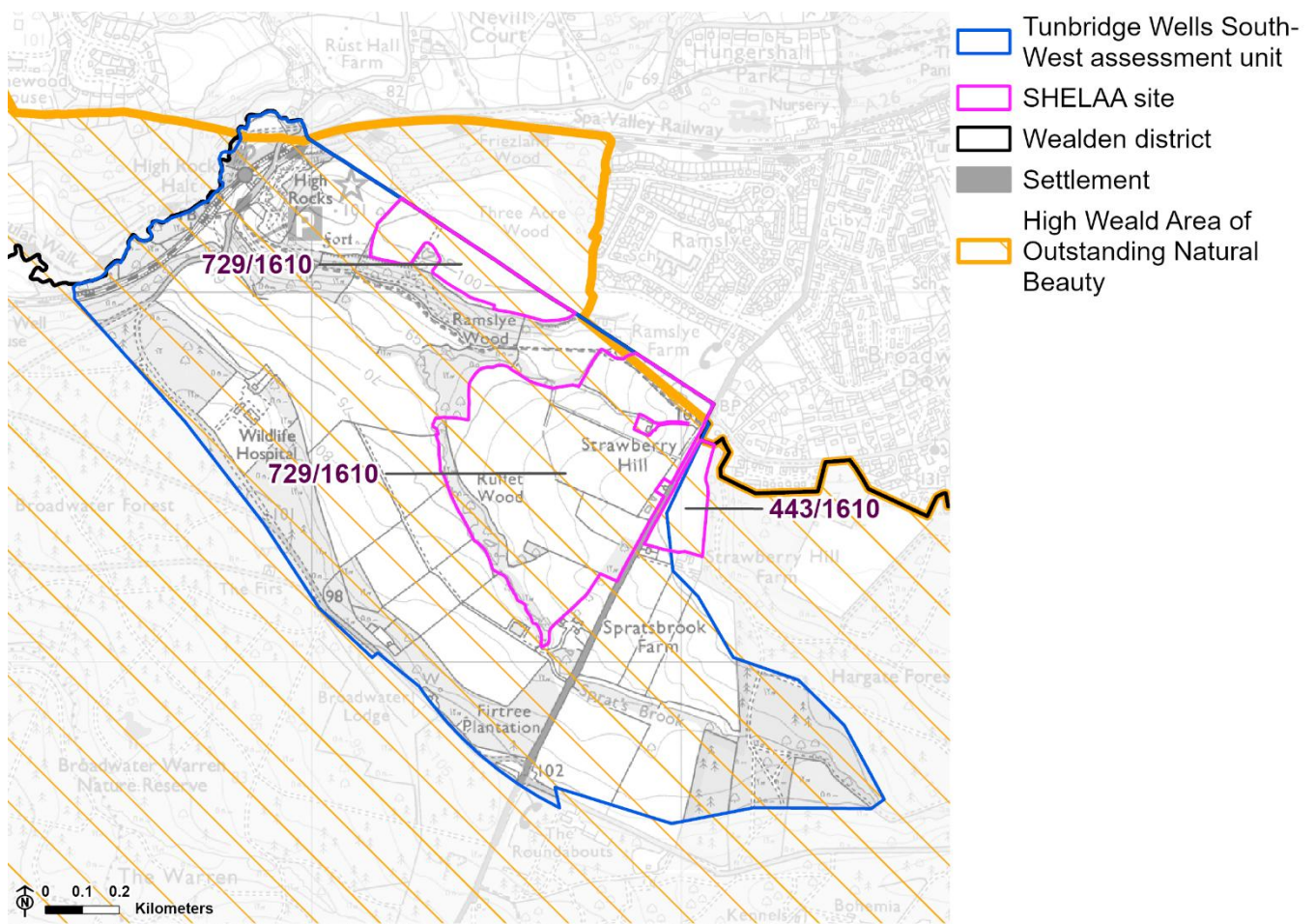
Appendix A.12

Tunbridge Wells South-West Assessment Unit

The following potential development sites are considered within the Tunbridge Wells South-West assessment unit:

- Group comprising **Land at Ramslye Farm (Spratsbrook Farm) (729/1610)** and **Strawberry Hill Farm, Eridge Road (443/1610)**

Figure 1: Location of assessed sites in relation to the assessment unit



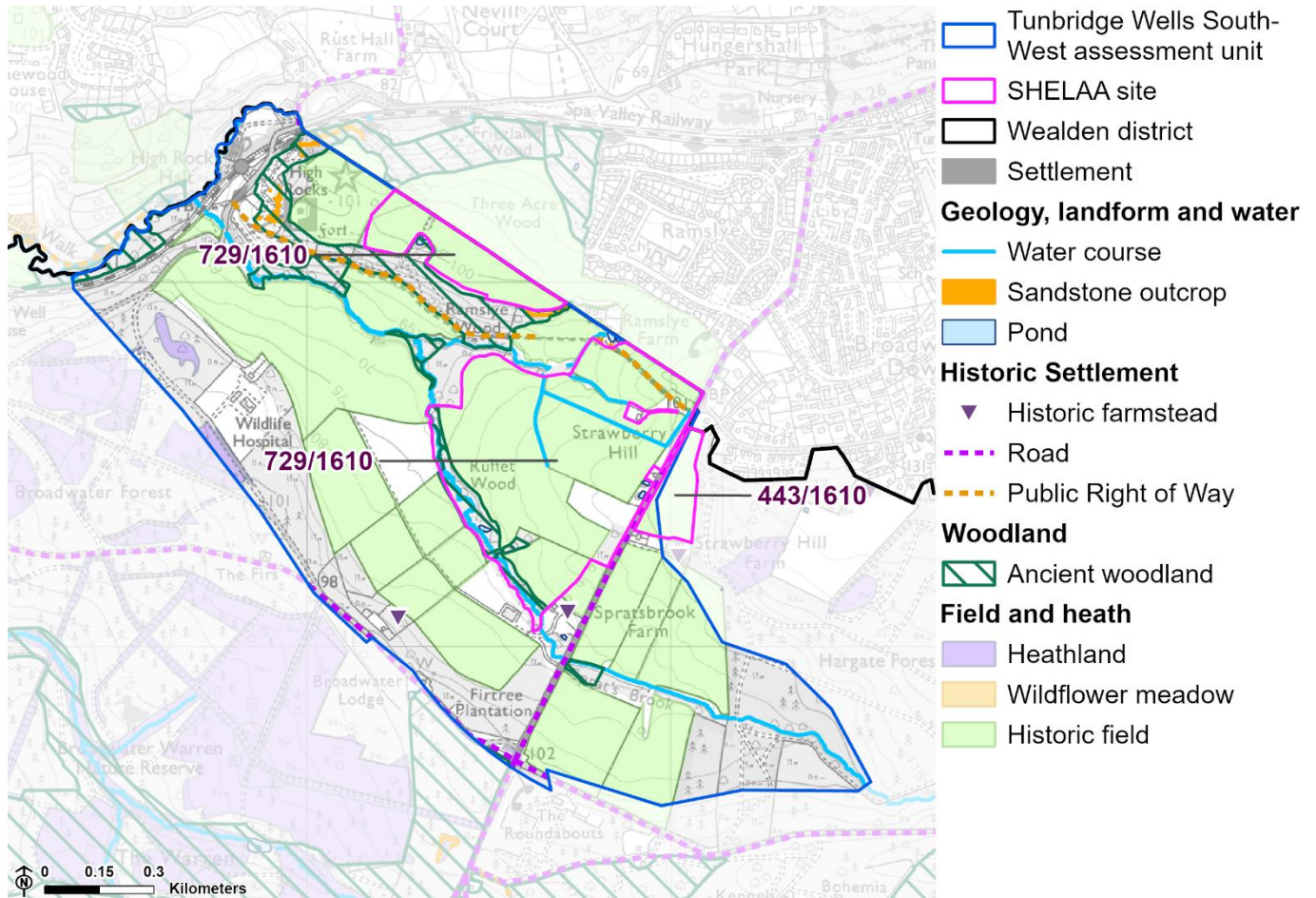
Settlement location, evolution and pattern

Settlement location and context	Royal Tunbridge Wells is a large town located within Tunbridge Wells Borough, just to the north of Wealden and outside the local authority's boundary. The settlement is excluded from, but surrounded in all directions by, the High Weald AONB. The landscape to the south of the town is located within LCA 6A: High Weald – Medway Catchment and LCA 5B: High Weald – Central.
Settlement evolution	The origins of the town date to the 17 th century when Tunbridge Wells was established as a spa retreat due to the presence of a chalybeate spring. Rising popularity of the town's healing springs led to further expansion in the 18 th century. The historic core of the settlement is located along the Pantiles promenade, which extends south-west from the wells. Railway services were introduced in the 19 th century and, given its proximity to London, the town grew steadily throughout the 19 th and 20 th centuries. As the town expanded from the valley-floor Pantiles, development was originally focussed along the ridge lines that carry the major roads. However, more recently development has also expanded from this down on to the slopes. Despite this later expansion of development, the settlement edge is often enclosed by woodland or contained by roads.
Settlement pattern and edge character	The south-western edge of Tunbridge Wells consists mostly of one and two storey detached and semi-detached houses, and is partially defined by the flood zone of the River Grom (a tributary of the River Medway), the Spa Valley Railway and associated woodlands. The southern settlement edge is less defined due to the expansion of late 20th century development south of the River Grom at Ramslye. The settlement edge here is fringed by woodland, which is denser along the River Grom.

Mapped information for the core character components of natural beauty of the High Weald AONB

The High Weald AONB's defining components of character that are found within the Tunbridge Wells South-West assessment unit have been mapped in **Figure 2**. Tranquillity (which forms part of the 'aesthetic and perceptual qualities' character component) and dark skies are shown in **Figures 3 and 4** respectively.

Figure 2: Core character components of natural beauty of the High Weald AONB



Created by LUC - 16036_001_Project_3_AONB_Report/003_r5_CoreCharacterComponentsNatBeautyAONB_A5L 24/06/2026

Figure 3: Tranquillity

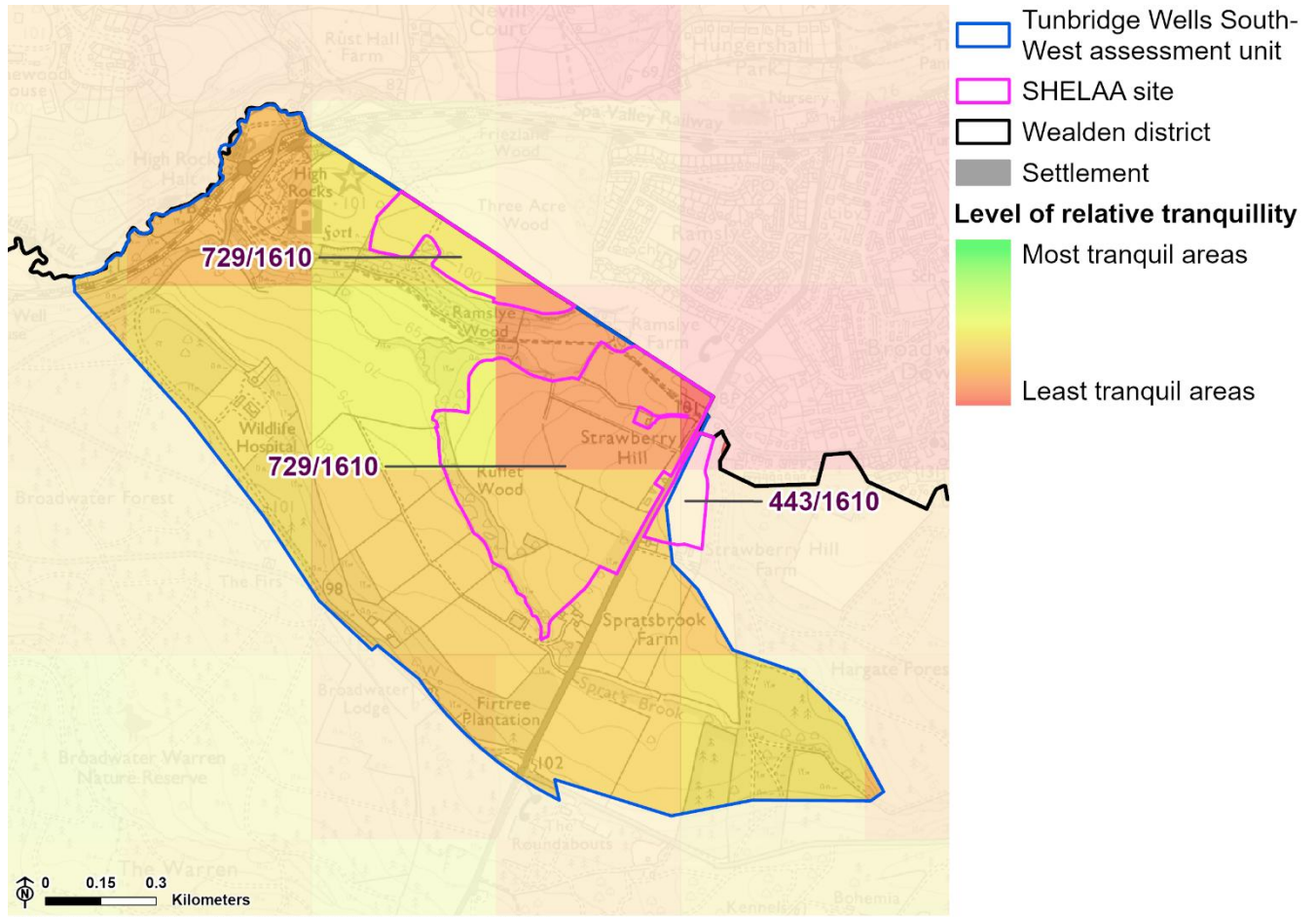
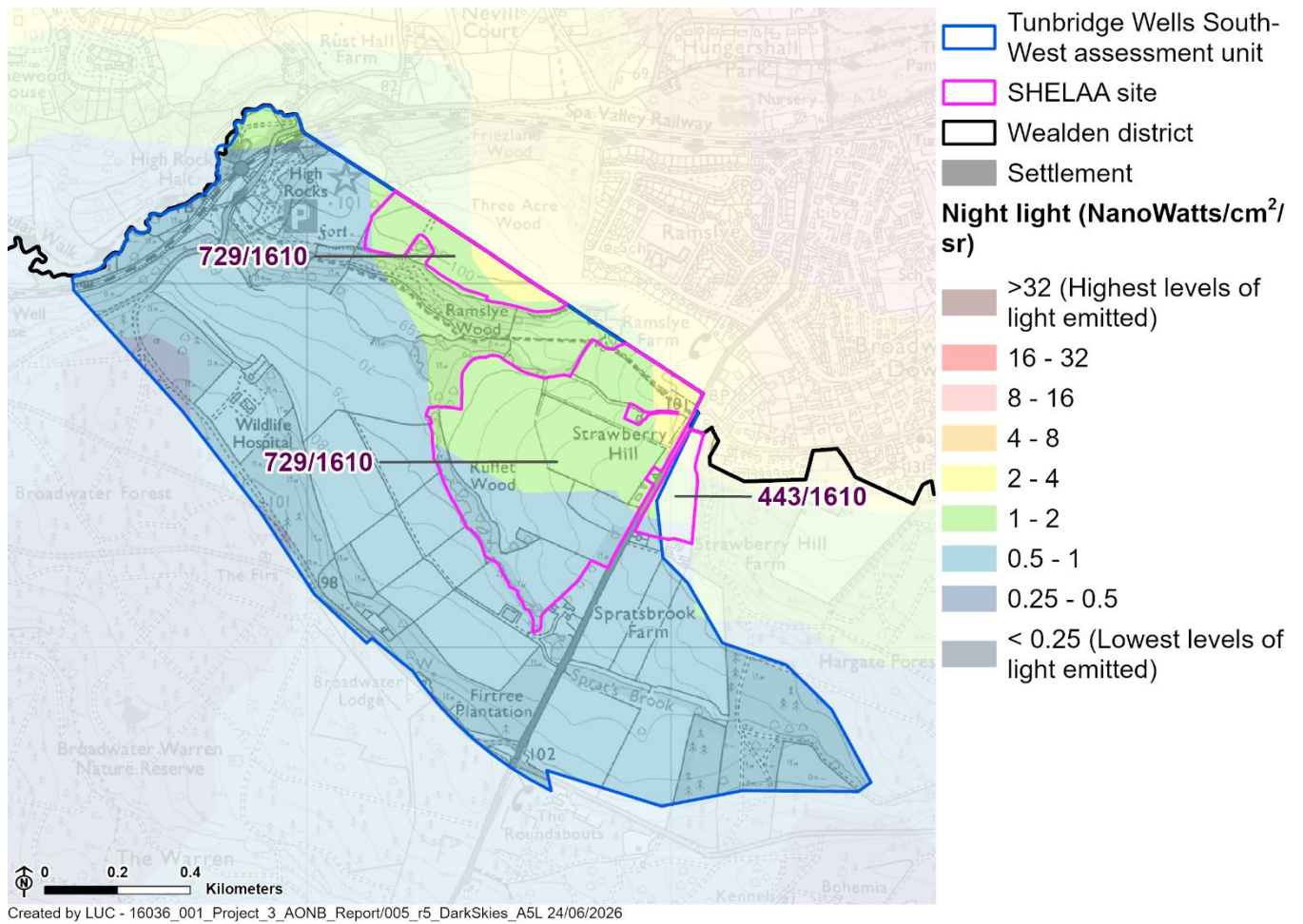


Figure 4: Dark skies



Landscape sensitivity context for the Tunbridge Wells South-West assessment unit

The landscape sensitivity of the Tunbridge Wells South-West assessment unit described in the <i>Wealden Landscape Sensitivity Assessment to Residential and Employment Development (2023)</i>			
Landscape sensitivity The rating that applies to the assessment unit	Small scale residential 2-2.5 storey housing	Medium scale residential 3-4 storey flats/ care homes	Commercial/ industrial e.g. industrial units or hotels
	MH	MH	H
Key sensitivities The key landscape sensitivities to development identified for the assessment unit	- The undulating valley landform. - Interconnecting mature deciduous woodlands (many of which are ancient in origin) within the Eridge and Broadwater BOA. - The ecological, historic and recreational value associated with the High Rocks Scheduled Monument and SSSI. - The strong rural character and dispersed settlement pattern with areas of relative remoteness and tranquillity. - The rural context that the area forms for views south from Tunbridge Wells towards the High Weald AONB.		
Guidance	- Be located on elevated ground in close proximity to settlement to the north-east, where development would better relate to the existing pattern of ridgetop development. Avoid the perception of development 'spilling' into the valley landscape. - Avoid the valley sides and in the incised and heavily wooded stream valleys in the centre and north-west of the assessment unit. - Retain broadleaved woodland, including linear riparian woodland along watercourses. Avoid loss of, harm, or deterioration to the interconnecting ancient semi-natural woodlands in this area and allow an appropriate buffer zone around them (to avoid root damage). Replace any unavoidable losses, with native species where possible, ensuring an appropriate maintenance schedule is prepared and implemented for remedial planting. - Take up biodiversity opportunities listed in the Eridge and Broadwater BOA, especially woodland management and restoration, where possible. - Retain in-field and roadside trees along the A26, protecting mature specimen trees from the impacts of development. - Replace any unavoidable losses, with native species where possible, ensuring an appropriate maintenance schedule is prepared and implemented for remedial planting. - Retain and where possible enhance hedgerows, particularly where field boundaries are deteriorated in the centre and west of the assessment unit and take opportunities to strengthen the local habitat network. Where there is unavoidable loss of, or damage to, hedgerows, mitigation / compensation in the form of suitable hedgerow replacement should be sought, using native species where possible. - Avoid sites in areas of habitat interest, notably deciduous woodland, the High Rocks SSSI and riparian habitats along the River Grom. - Preserve historic field patterns, locating development away from intricate small-scale historic field patterns, particularly medieval assarts in the north. - Ensure development does not adversely affect the historic qualities of the High Rocks Scheduled Monument and listed buildings associated with the High Rocks Inn.		

	■ Retain woodland along the public rights of way, the Spa Valley Heritage Railway and near the High Rocks Scheduled Monument to maintain the wooded landscape character and screen views towards development. ■ Be carefully integrated into the landscape, utilising existing woodland, or using species that are in character with the wider landscape, preferably native. ■ Ensure opportunities to access and enjoy the landscape are preserved and enhanced. ■ Ensure new building reinforces and responds to local character in its scale, layout and design, reflecting the local vernacular in use of materials. Developments should draw on the principles contained within the High Weald AONB 'High Weald Housing Design Guide'¹, 'Guidance on the selection and use of colour in development'² and objectives of the High Weald AONB Management Plan³. ■ Ensure development does not affect the scenic rural character of the landscape, and areas of relative tranquillity, particularly the defining components of character relating to the High Weald AONB.
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¹ <https://www.highweald.org/look-after/planning/design-guide.html>

² <https://www.highweald.org/look-after/planning/colour-study.html>

³ <https://www.highweald.org/high-weald-aonb-management-plan.html>

Land at Ramslye Farm (Spratsbrook Farm) (729/1610) and Strawberry Hill Farm, Eridge Road (443/1610)

Site Details	
Potential development	Site 729/1610 - Residential development proposed on entirety of site mapped below, but site is only considered an Option (OFR1) for 300 dwellings in the Focused Wealden Local Plan (2026). Site 443/1610 - Residential development proposed on entirety of site mapped below, but site is only considered an Option (OFR2) for 50 dwellings in the Focused Wealden Local Plan (2026). Total: 350 residential dwellings For the purpose of this landscape and visual appraisal the above SHELAA sites have been considered together.
Site location	These sites are located to the south-west of Tunbridge Wells, on the northern boundary of Wealden District. The sites lie west of Hargate Forest and north of Sprat's Brook. The A26 separates Sites 729/1610 and 443/1610. Site 729/1610 is separated into two parcels by the valley of an unnamed tributary of the Sprat's Brook, and Ramslye Wood. Adjacent to the northern boundary of site 729/1610 is the allocation AL/RTW 16 that is contained within the adopted Tunbridge Wells Local Plan 2020-2038. This allocated site is subject to a planning application (26/00094/FULL) for 125 proposed dwellings, although is undetermined at the time of writing.

Figure 5: Site location and constraints

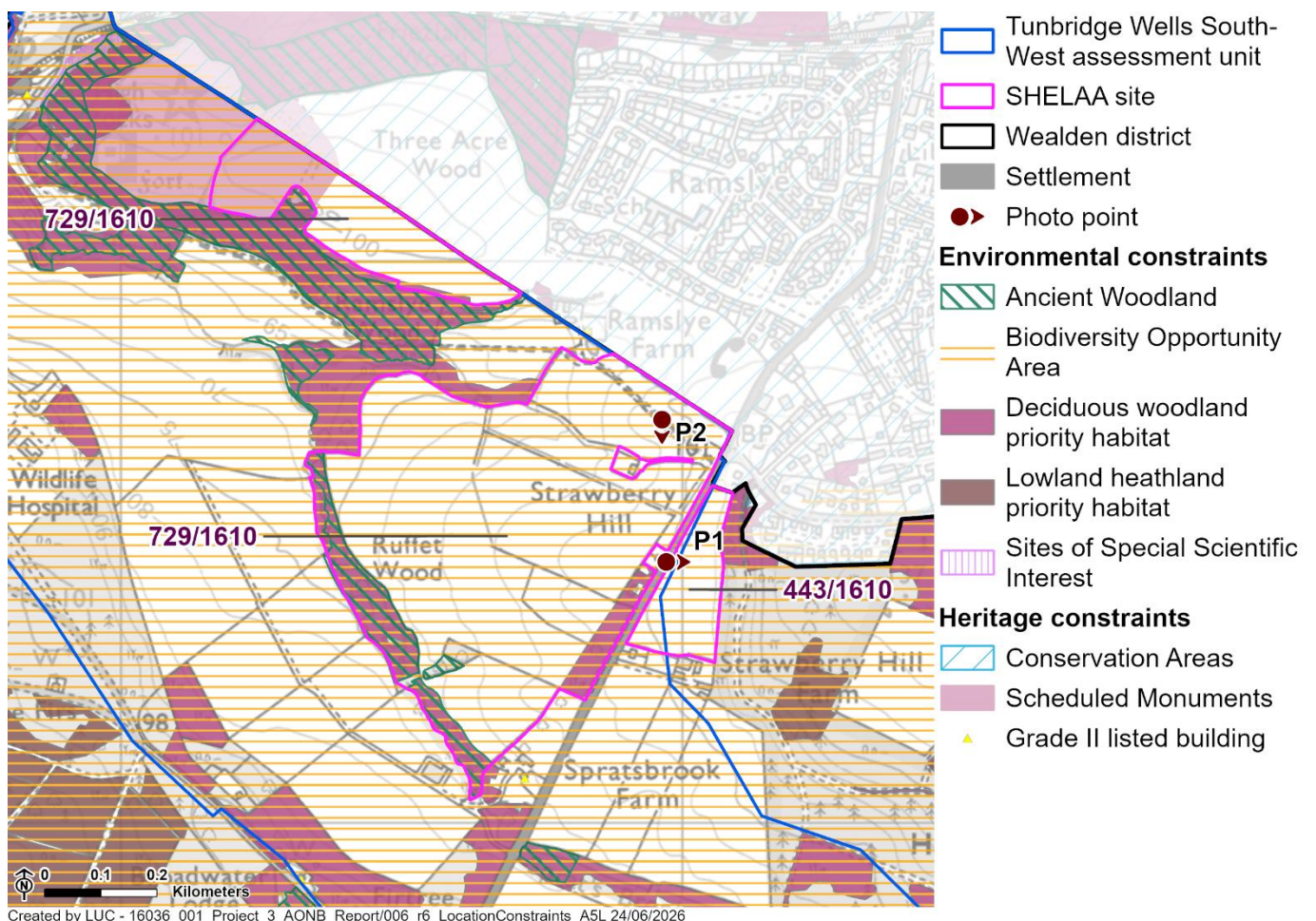
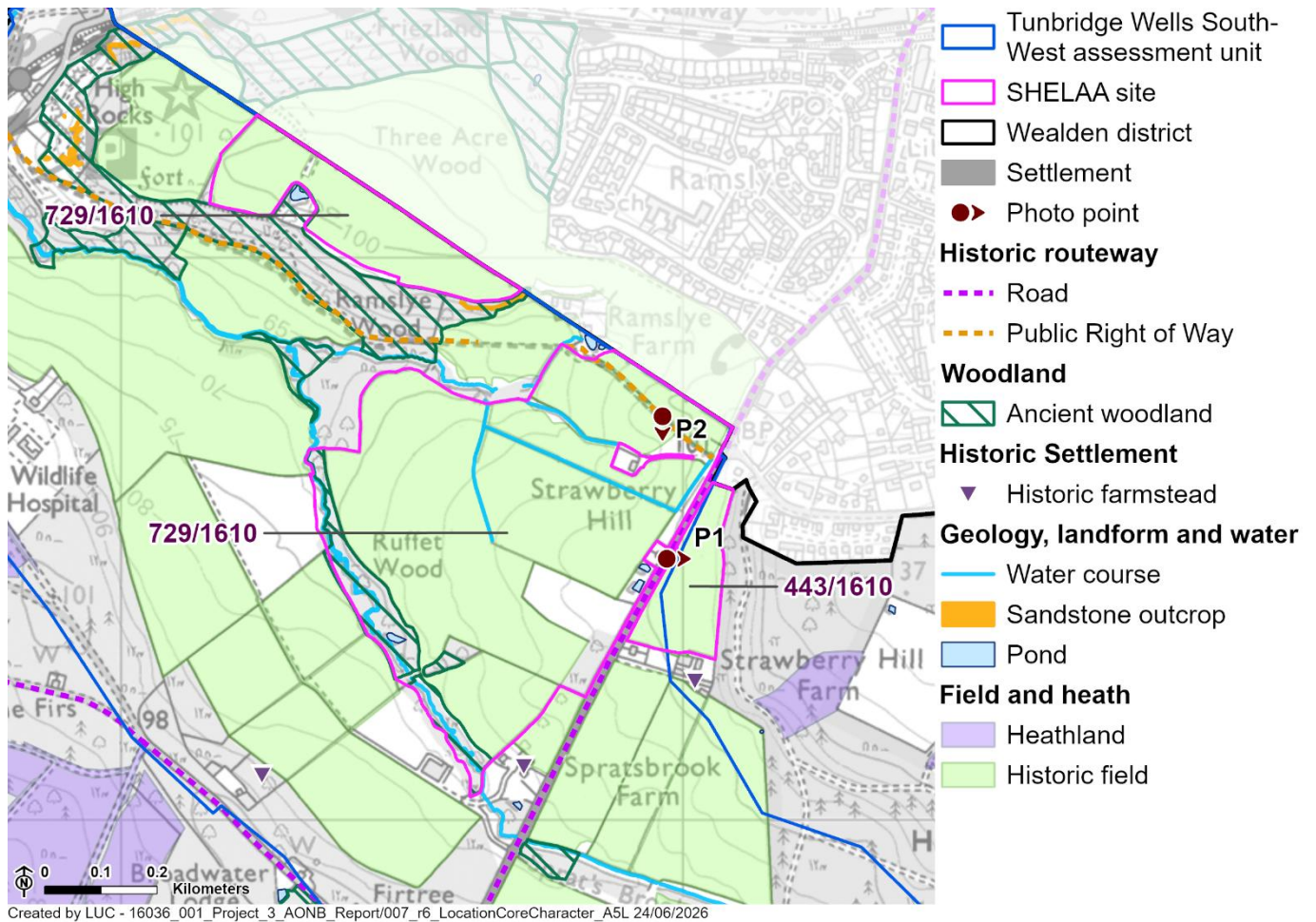


Figure 6: Site location and core character components of natural beauty of the High Weald AONB



Representative site photos



Photo 1: View into site 443/1610 from the A26



Photo 2: View south from the public right of way in site 729/1610 towards Strawberry Hill Farm

Baseline Analysis

Baseline landscape character	
Key features and qualities of the site in relation to the wider assessment unit	Landform ■ The sites form part of the transitional slope of the High Weald: Central LCA and part of the 'complex undulating landform' of the wider assessment unit. ■ The landform descends from the ridge crest (to the north-east and east of the sites) at approximately 115m AOD, towards the stream corridor of Sprat's Brook to the south (80m AOD) and an unnamed tributary of the Sprat's Brook (70m AOD, between the two parcels of site 729/1610). The northern parcel of site 729/1610 is flatter, forming part of a ridge that extends west from the settlement edge and lying around 100m AOD. Natural character ■ Linear ancient deciduous woodland and priority habitat at Ruffet Wood along Sprat's Brook and priority habitat deciduous woodland west of the A26 partially enclose the sites. Ancient woodland at Ramslye Wood lies immediately south of the northern parcel of site 729/1610. Both sites lie within the Eridge and Broadwater BOA. This is typical of the wider assessment unit. ■ Site 443/1610 is predominately pastoral in character, while site 729/1610 is predominantly arable fields bound by mature hedgerows and hedgerow trees, which is typical of the wider assessment unit. ■ The natural character of the sites is influenced by development including agricultural buildings to the south of site 443/1610 and to the north-east and south-west of site 729/1610. Landscape pattern and time depth ■ The Sussex HLC suggests that the sites form part of a medium scale planned private enclosure pattern with discrete areas of small-scale assarts in the north (within the northern parcel of site 729/1610). However, field amalgamation is evident across the majority of site 729/1610 which is identified as being typical of the wider assessment unit. ■ The northern parcel of site 729/1610 is part of the prehistoric rock shelters and hillfort at High Rocks (Scheduled Monument). ■ The Tunbridge Wells Conservation Area (designated by Tunbridge Wells Borough Council) lies 40m to the north of site 443/1610, however woodland and existing built development limits intervisibility between the site and the Conservation Area. Perceptual aspects ■ The sites are influenced by proximity to Tunbridge Wells and the A26 Eridge Road, with levels of tranquillity recorded as relatively low in CPRE's Tranquillity Mapping, Figure 3), and which disrupts the experience of dark skies (light levels are recorded in the middle of CPRE's Night Blight Mapping, Figure 4). The southern corner of site 729/1610 and the western edge of its northern parcel transition to darker skies.
Settlement form and edge character and extent of built development	Site 443/1610 lies adjacent to the southern settlement edge of Broadwater Down (part of Tunbridge Wells) along the A26. Its northern boundary is partly open affording framed long distance views to be experienced from Strawberry Hill House (retirement/assisted living apartments). The north-eastern part of site 729/1610 is separated from the settlement edge of Broadwater Down (part of Tunbridge Wells) by the A26 (which runs along the south-eastern edge of the site), with mature vegetation along its edge forming a robust boundary. The northern edges of site 726/1610 are between 100 and 150m from the Tunbridge Wells settlement edge, with the north-eastern edge abutting

	land within Tunbridge Wells Borough that is allocated for residential development within their Local Plan, and is subject to an undetermined planning application at the time of writing. Tunbridge Wells is located within a relatively elevated area and the settlement pattern strongly relates to the underlying ridged landform. However, 20th century development on the edge of Tunbridge Wells at Ramslye extends beyond the ridge crest towards the River Grom. Farmsteads and agricultural buildings lie to the south of both sites at Strawberry Hill Farm and Spratsbrook Farm. There are two small residential buildings excluded from the boundaries of site 729/1610 which are accessed from the A26.
Baseline visual character	
Potential visual receptors	Mature roadside vegetation along the A26 creates an enclosed character to the west of site 443/1610 and east of site 729/1610. The mature Ruffet Wood and Ramslye Wood provides an enclosed character to the south of the two parcels of site 729/1610. Three Acre Wood and Friezland Wood provide wooded enclosure further north of the northern parcel of site 729/1610. Hargate Forest provides a wooded character to the east of site 443/1610. The forest is an area of Open Access, and therefore there are views into site 443/1610 from users of the forest. A public right of way crosses the north of site 729/1610 and users experience clear, close views into the site from along it. Wider views across the site are glimpsed by mature hedgerow vegetation. There is also unfettered public access to the northern parcel of site 729/1610, which is subject to informal recreational use (e.g. dog walking). There is no public access to site 443/1610. Residential receptors adjacent to site 729/1610 including at Ramslye Road to the north, Spratsbrook Farm, Ramslye Farm and Strawberry Hill have glimpsed views into the site. Residents along the A26 Eridge Road have glimpsed views into both site 729/1610 and site 443/1610. All these views are partially screened and filtered by intervening vegetation and woodland. Despite its enclosed character, there are framed views from the northern edge of site 443/1610 and from Strawberry Hill House (retirement/ assisted living apartments) which extend south across the site.
Extent of visibility within the High Weald AONB	The woodland within and adjacent to the sites generally limits views towards and from the wider AONB. There are some glimpsed views south across the undulating landform towards the wooded skyline formed by Broadwater Forest and Whitehill Wood, and a clear framed view from the northern edge of site 443/1610.

Expression of the 'core character components of natural beauty' of the High Weald AONB on the site	
Natural systems (geology, soils, water and climate) – a deeply incised, ridged and faulted landform of clays and sandstone with highly variable, relatively undisturbed soils and numerous headwaters (gill streams) functioning under an oceanic climate.	The sites are located on the transitional slopes descending from the <u>principal ridge (Forest Ridge)</u> of the High Weald, contributing towards the <u>pattern of faults and folds</u> . <u>Numerous small streams</u> cross site 729/1610 and a <u>pond</u> is located along the south-western boundary of site 729/1610 with another close to the boundary of the northern parcel of site 729/1610 .
Settlement – dispersed historic settlement including high densities of isolated farmsteads, hamlets and late-medieval villages founded on trade and non-agricultural rural industries.	Strawberry Hill Farm and Spratsbrook Farm are not located within the sites but lie close to their boundaries and contribute towards the <u>high density of historic farmsteads</u> ⁴ found within the AONB.
Routeways – a dense network of historic routeways (now roads, tracks and paths).	A historic routeway (public right of way) crosses through the north-eastern part of site 729/1610 . It provides a connection to the A26 Eridge Road which separates sites 729/1610 and 443/1610 . This road is recorded as a historic lane, although its expression is masked by its use as a A-road with associated modern road markings. These routes contribute towards the <u>dense radiating network</u> of historic routeways.
Woodland – an abundance of ancient woodland mostly in small holdings, highly interconnected with hedges and shaws.	Ruffet Wood within site 729/1610 and Ramslye Wood to the south of the northern parcel contribute towards the <u>high proportion of ancient woodland</u> and together with trees and hedgerow boundaries within the sites and along site boundaries, form part of a <u>highly interconnected and structurally varied mosaic of many small woods...and outgrown hedges</u> .
Fieldsapes and heath – small, irregular and productive fields, bound by hedgerows and woods, and typically used for livestock grazing; with distinctive zones of lowland heaths and inned river valleys (reclaimed marshland).	The northern parcel of site 729/1610 was created through assarting, although its use as intensive arable cultivation slightly limits its contribution towards the <u>dominant medieval fieldscape character</u> of the AONB. Whilst the majority of site 729/1610 has been subjected to field amalgamation, some internal field boundaries remain in the north-east and south (defined by hedgerows and mature vegetation) and retain an <u>irregular field pattern</u>. Fields are aligned to the linear watercourses of the Sprat's Brook and an unnamed tributary of the Sprat's Brook (running along the south-western boundary of Site 729/1610 and through its north-eastern part respectively) and is an example of the <u>strong influence exerted by topography</u>. Site 443/1610 is a pastoral field used for <u>grazing livestock</u>.
Dark night skies – intrinsically dark at night with our own galaxy (the Milky Way) visible.	The adjacent A26 Eridge Road separating sites 729/1610 and 443/1610 is a mostly <u>unlit road</u> (apart from where it approaches the junction with Broadwater Down) but dark skies are limited by proximity to Tunbridge Wells.
Aesthetic and perceptual qualities – arising from the interaction of people with the landscape, including the notion of a quintessential English pastoral landscape, intimacy of scale, a sense of history and timelessness; rurality and tranquillity; glimpsed long views; freedom to explore and make connections with the natural world, and a rich legacy of features and ideas left by writers, poets and	The ancient woodland at Ruffet Wood, prehistoric hillfort at High Rocks in the northern parcel of site 729/1610 and the historic farmsteads at Spratsbrook Farm and Strawberry Hill Farm (adjacent to the sites) contribute to the <u>sense of history and timelessness</u> . The combination of grazing within site 443/1610 and surrounding woodland provides a <u>pastoral feel</u> and contributes to the <u>recognisable and unifying mosaic of open field and wooded habitats</u> . There are some <u>long views</u> south across the undulating landform towards the wooded skyline formed by Broadwater Forest and Whitehill Wood. These views are more glimpsed from within site 729/1610 , whereas the northern edge of site 443/1610 is afforded with clear framed views.

⁴ As identified in the High Weald AONB character components dataset (see Figure 6)

gardeners inspired by the landscape.	The public right of way that crosses the north-eastern part of site 729/1610 contributes to the <u>sense of freedom arising from access to a dense network of public rights of way...suitable for walking...</u>
Land-based economy and rural living – with roots extending deep into history, and which has visibly and culturally shaped the landscape.	The current use of site 443/1610 relates to the <u>predominantly pastoral mixed farming with an absence of industrial scale farming</u> key characteristic.

Baseline Summary

How the sites relate to the sensitivity of the wider assessment unit

The Assessment Unit

The *Wealden Landscape Sensitivity Assessment to Residential and Employment Development* assesses the Tunbridge Wells South-West assessment unit to have a **moderate-high** sensitivity to small scale residential development (2-2.5 storey housing). The sensitivity analysis indicates that the complex landform; ecological, historic and recreational values, particularly associated with the High Rocks Scheduled Monument and SSSI; strong rural character and dispersed settlement pattern increases the unit's sensitivity to development. The presence of modern farm buildings and field amalgamation; visual enclosure by woodland and hedgerows; and proximity to Tunbridge Wells and the busy A26 reduce the sensitivity.

The Sites

Overall, it is considered that the sites have the same sensitivity as the assessment unit as a whole and are considered to be of **moderate-high** sensitivity to small scale residential development (2-2.5 storey housing). The sites are partly in pastoral use (site **443/1610**), enclosed by thick hedgerows and ancient and priority habitat woodland, and are crossed by a public right of way. The complex topography of the sites, limited development and relationship to the High Rocks Scheduled Monument (within the northern parcel of site **729/1610**) and to historic farmsteads at Strawberry Hill Farm and Spratsbrook Farm, are characteristics that increase sensitivity across the assessment unit. However, much of the historic field pattern within site **729/1610** has been eroded by the amalgamation of fields, the sites are visually enclosed and are influenced by proximity to the A26 Eridge Road and Tunbridge Wells, decreasing sensitivity as is typical for the wider assessment unit.

Variations in Sensitivity

Whilst some of the contributing landscape features/ elements to sensitivity differ across the two sites, overall there is no variation in the level of sensitivity.

How strongly the core components of character are expressed on the sites

The sites express several core character components of natural beauty of the High Weald AONB. In summary:

- The sites form part of the principal ridge of the High Weald and contribute to the pattern of faults and folds, with a number of streams and ponds both within and on the edge of site **729/1610**;
- Ruffet Wood, Ramslye Wood and site vegetation contribute to the high proportion of ancient woodland and the highly interconnected woodland habitats, as well as providing a sense of intimacy, enclosure and remoteness;
- Strawberry Hill Farm and Spratsbrook Farm (adjacent to the sites) contribute to the high density of historic farmsteads with the sites contributing towards their setting;
- The northern parcel of site **729/1610** forms part of an assart field pattern, although contribution to the medieval character of the AONB is limited by its use as intensive arable cultivation;
- The public right of way through site **729/1610** is a historic routeway (contributing to the sense of freedom for walkers), and along with the A26 Eridge Road (between the two sites) contributes to the dense radiating network of historic routeways;
- The grazing of livestock within site **443/1610** contributes to the pastoral feel of the landscape, linking to the history of land-based economy;
- A sense of history and timelessness is provided by the High Rocks prehistoric hillfort, ancient woodland and historic farmsteads; and

- There are some long views south across the undulating landform towards the wooded skyline formed by Broadwater Forest and Whitehill Wood, experienced from within site **729/1610** and from the northern edge of site **443/1610**.

Overall, whilst there are several features present that contribute to the core character components, their expression is somewhat affected by the large scale, arable landscape of site **729/1610** which has evidently undergone human intervention in the form of intensive arable cultivation, including the amalgamation of fields. On balance it is considered that there is a **moderate expression** of the core components of character.

Potential effects of developing the site, including on the core character components of natural beauty

The section below sets out the potential effects of developing the site, particularly on the core character components of natural beauty, and the potential mitigation and enhancement opportunities that should be considered to minimise impacts upon the landscape and visual baseline should this site be considered suitable for development.

Potential effects as a result of development on the site	Core character component of natural beauty potentially affected	Relevant key characteristics of the core character component potentially affected	Potential mitigation and enhancement opportunities
Landscape character and features			
Removal of mature deciduous woodland, trees and hedgerows, affecting the role they play in defining and screening the settlement edge, and contributions to the interconnectivity of habitats.	Woodland	■ <i>Highly interconnected and structurally varied mosaic of many small woodlands....and outgrown hedges, and isolated trees.</i> ■ <i>Many irregularly shaped small woodlands interlinked with shaws...forming an intimate part of the farmed landscape.</i>	■ Retain, protect and enhance all mature vegetation within and surrounding the sites, especially the mature woodlands, trees, and hedgerows along the outer boundaries of the sites and the limited internal field boundaries within site 729/1610 (in accordance with the AONB's Objectives W1 and PQ2). ■ Improve the connectivity of woodlands and hedgerows through new tree planting and hedgerow corridors that are in character with the locality, using native species where possible / suitable (in accordance with the AONB's Objective W2).
	Aesthetic and perceptual qualities	<i>A sense of intimacy, enclosure and remoteness owing to the heavily treed landscape.</i>	
Deterioration of and/or encroachment on the small streams and pond within site 729/1610 .	Natural systems	■ <i>Numerous small streams...</i> ■ <i>A high density of ponds...</i>	■ Set development back from the small streams, and ensure the ecological integrity of the watercourses is maintained. Enhance the streams by increasing biodiversity and improving the water quality (in accordance with the AONB's Objective G1). ■ Retain and set back development from the pond in the south-west of site 729/1610 to create an appropriate buffer zone. The buffer zone should incorporate new semi-natural habitat relating to the ponds (in accordance with the AONB's Objective G1).

Loss of the grazed pastures within site 443/1610 and assart within the northern parcel of site 729/1610 .	Fieldscapes and heath	■ <i>Fields, mostly permanent pasture, used for grazing livestock...</i> ■ <i>Medieval landscape character dominant, with a high proportion of field systems created by assarting (woodland clearance) with sinuous mixed woody boundaries and shaws, and thick hedges common.</i>	■ Loss of pasture within site 443/1610 and assart within the northern parcel of the site 729/1610 would be unavoidable with development within these parcels, as development would remove land from agricultural use with limited opportunities to retain areas due to the small scale of these parcels. However, vegetation along the outer boundaries of these parcels should be retained and enhanced where possible to avoid complete loss of field pattern (in accordance with the AONB's Objective FH2).
	Land-based economy and rural living	<i>Predominantly pastoral mixed farming with an absence of industrial scale farming.</i>	
Deterioration of and/or encroachment on the ancient woodland at Ruffet Wood in the south-west of site 729/1610 and on the southern boundary of the northern parcel of site 729/1610 at Ramslye Wood.	Woodland	<i>High proportion of woodland is categorised as ancient woodland...</i>	■ Set development back from the edge of the ancient woodland to the required minimum buffer zone (in accordance with the AONB's Objective W1). ■ The buffer zone could provide a valuable habitat for woodland wildlife and should consist of semi-natural habitat (e.g. a mix of woodland edge and semi-improved grassland to provide structural complexity and species diversity – in accordance with the AONB's Objective W2).
	Aesthetic and perceptual qualities	<i>A sense of history and timelessness...</i>	
Loss of the historic routeway and public right of way that crosses through site 729/1610 , which provides a connection to other historic routeways.	Routeways	<i>A dense radiating network with a variety of origins...</i>	■ Retain, protect and enhance existing recreational access via the public right of way which crosses the site and the rural character of the historic route by improving the hedgerow boundaries along it (in accordance with the AONB's Objectives R1, R2 and PQ3).
Modifications to A26 Eridge Road (recorded as a historic lane) to facilitate site access (e.g. road widening, creation of junction).			■ Reduce the impact of access works required to the road, where possible, protecting the hedgerows along it (in accordance with the AONB's Objectives R1 and R2).
Deterioration of and/or encroachment on the Scheduled Monument prehistoric hillfort at	Aesthetic and perceptual qualities	<i>A sense of history and timelessness...</i>	■ Locate development away from the prehistoric hillfort Scheduled Monument (partly located in the northern parcel of site 729/1610).

High Rocks in the northern parcel of site 729/1610 .			■ Increase opportunities for learning by improving information/ interpretation about the hillfort (in accordance with the AONB's Objective PQ1).
Influence of further lighting in the dark night skies resulting in night blight, including the addition of streetlights along the A26 Eridge Road if used for access.	Dark night skies	<i>Numerous unlit roads...</i>	■ Minimise the influence of lighting associated with new development and only install outdoor lighting where necessary (in accordance with the AONB's Objective DS1). ■ Follow the Institute of Lighting Professionals guidance⁵ and use dark sky-friendly lighting (in accordance with the AONB's Objectives DS1 and DS2).
Settlement form edge and setting			
Extension of development beyond the ridge crest is not in keeping with the existing pattern of settlement.	N/A	N/A	■ Locate development in the north of the main parcel of site 729/1610 to relate better to the existing settlement pattern, and to avoid the perception of development extending onto lower-lying ground to the south (in accordance with the AONB's Objective S1). ■ Given the location of the site on the edge of the ridge crest, the height and massing of any development should be carefully considered in relation to the scale of existing development and underlying topography in the area (in accordance with the AONB's Objective S2). ■ Design of new buildings to respond appropriately to the character and appearance of the surroundings by using high quality materials in keeping with the local vernacular (in accordance with the AONB's Objective S2). ■ Development to draw on the principles contained within the High Weald AONB 'High Weald Housing Design Guide'⁶, 'Guidance on the selection and use of colour in development'⁷ and objectives of the High Weald AONB Management Plan⁸ (in accordance with the AONB's Objective S2).

⁵ See the Institute of Lighting Professionals guidance for further information: <https://theilp.org.uk/publication/guidance-note-1-for-the-reduction-of-obtrusive-light-2021/>

⁶ <https://www.highweald.org/look-after/planning/design-guide.html>

⁷ <https://www.highweald.org/look-after/planning/colour-study.html>

⁸ <https://www.highweald.org/high-weald-aonb-management-plan.html>

Reduction in the separation between the settlement edge of Tunbridge Wells and historic farmsteads at Strawberry Hill Farm and Spratsbrook Farm, impinging on their settings.	Settlement	<i>High density of historic farmsteads...</i>	■ Locate development in the north of site 443/1610 and in the north of the main parcel of site 729/1610 to relate better to the existing settlement pattern and to minimise encroachment towards the boundary of Strawberry Hill Farm and Spratsbrook Farm historic farmsteads (in accordance with the AONB's Objective S3). Further assessment relating to the setting of heritage assets is advised.
	Aesthetic and perceptual qualities	<i>A sense of history and timelessness...</i>	
Visual amenity			
Visibility of development seen by: ■ visitors to the prehistoric hillfort at High Rocks (Scheduled Monument); ■ walkers on the public footpath through site 729/1610; ■ visitors to the open access land at Hargate Forest; ■ residents on the edge of Ramslye Road; ■ residents of Strawberry Hill House , and the residential properties located along the A26 Eridge Road; ■ residents of Spratsbrook Farm, Strawberry Hill and Ramslye Farm; and ■ motorists/cyclists along the A26 Eridge Road (which is recorded as a historic lane).	Aesthetic and perceptual qualities	■ <i>A sense of history and timelessness arising from an ancient countryside with a human-scale agricultural tapestry; veteran and ancient trees...historic buildings.</i> ■ <i>The homely, pastoral feel to the whole landscape arising from its human-scale pattern and productivity.</i> ■ <i>A recognisable and unifying mosaic of open field and wooded habitats.</i> ■ <i>Sense of freedom arising from access to a dense network of public rights of way...suitable for walking...</i> ■ <i>Unexpected panoramic and long views, often uninterrupted, extending out along the valleys...</i>	■ Retain, protect and enhance all existing vegetation including the thick hedgerow boundaries that enclose the site in views from the A26 (in accordance with the AONB's Objectives W1 and PQ2). ■ Screen new development with additional planting, using local native species where possible / suitable to maintain the rural character of the wider area (in accordance with the AONB's Objective PQ2). ■ Consider the height and position of development within the sites to retain the glimpsed long views south towards the wooded skyline formed by Broadwater Forest and Whitehill Wood ancient woodlands (in accordance with the AONB's Objective PQ2). ■ Intersperse green open space and tree planting within development to help soften and break up the perceived mass of built forms, strengthen green infrastructure, and enhance the integration of built forms within the landscape (in accordance with the AONB's Objective PQ2). ■ Consider views of development from the Strawberry Hill Farm and Spratsbrook Farm historic farmsteads along the southern edges of the site, retaining and enhancing trees/ woodland to screen views into the site (in accordance with the AONB's Objective PQ2). ■ Enhance public access and provide opportunities to link to the open access land at Hargate Forest and experience the surrounding woodlands including Ruffet Wood and Ramslye Wood (in accordance with the AONB's Objective PQ3).

Overall impact on the core character components of natural beauty of the High Weald AONB	
Moderate impact	The baseline analysis identifies that together the sites (and immediate surrounds) express several core character components of natural beauty, but with an overall moderate level of expression. This is due to the sites forming part of the principal ridge landform (affording glimpsed long-distance views); the presence of mature woodland (including ancient woodland), trees and hedgerows; assart field pattern in the northern parcel of site 729/1610; small watercourses; grazed pastures in site 443/1610; historic routeways through site 729/1610 and historic farmsteads (adjacent to the sites). However, as described above the expression is somewhat affected by the large-scale arable context of site 729/1610 and the human intervention that has occurred within this landscape. Development of the sites is judged to have a moderate impact on the landscape and visual qualities/features that define the AONB, therefore somewhat affecting / impacting the ability of the Council to fulfil its statutory duty to further the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the AONB. <u>Variation to overall impact</u> The greatest impacts on the core character components would likely arise if development occurred on the northern parcel of site 729/1610 (as its elevated landform contributes strongly to the expression of the principle ridge, its proximity to a Scheduled Monument and forming part of a historic assart field pattern), and within the south of site 443/1610 (given its rural pastoral character from the grazed pastures and surrounding woodland, its role in providing separation between the settlement edge and Spratsbrook historic farmstead and the long views afforded south across the wider AONB). The potential impacts would be less within the northern parts of the main parcel of site 729/1610 and site 443/1610 given their proximity to the settlement edge and the visual enclosure provided by wooded field boundaries.

Summary and recommendations

The following map illustrates a summary of the constraints and opportunities of development on the site.

The site-specific recommendations for these sites are as follows:

- Retain, protect and enhance the mature woodlands, trees, and hedgerows along the outer boundaries of the sites and the limited internal field boundaries within site **729/1610**.
- Set development back from the small streams, and ensure the ecological integrity of the watercourses is maintained.
- Retain and set back development from the pond in the south-west of site **729/1610** to create an appropriate buffer zone.
- Set development back from the edge of the ancient woodland at Ruffet and Ramslye Woods.
- Retain, protect and enhance existing recreational access via the public right of way which crosses the site and the rural character of the historic route by improving the hedgerow boundaries along it.
- Locate development away from the prehistoric hillfort at High Rocks Scheduled Monument (partly located in the northern parcel of site **729/1610**).
- Locate development in the north of site **443/1610** and in the north of the main parcel of site **729/1610** to relate better to the existing settlement pattern and to minimise encroachment towards the boundary of Strawberry Hill Farm and Spratsbrook Farm historic farmsteads.
- Given the location of the site on the edge of the ridge crest, the height and massing of any development should be carefully considered in relation to the scale of existing development and underlying topography in the area.
- Consider the height and position of development within the sites to retain the glimpsed long views south towards the wooded skyline formed by Broadwater Forest and Whitehill Wood ancient woodlands.
- Consider views of development from the Strawberry Hill Farm and Spratsbrook Farm historic farmsteads along the southern edges of the site, retaining and enhancing trees/ woodland to screen views into the site
- Enhance public access and provide opportunities to link to the open access land at Hargate Forest and experience the surrounding woodlands including Ruffet Wood and Ramslye Wood.

Figure 7: Summary map of constraints and opportunities



Cumulative effects of development sites proposed in the Tunbridge Wells South-West assessment unit

Two sites have been assessed within the Tunbridge Wells South-West assessment unit. The preceding site assessment has judged the overall impact on the core character components of natural beauty of the High Weald AONB to be:

Site	Overall impact on the core character components of natural beauty of the High Weald AONB	Variations
Group comprising Land at Ramslye Farm (Spratsbrook Farm) (729/1610) and Strawberry Hill Farm, Eridge Road (443/1610)	Moderate impact	The greatest impacts on the core character components would likely arise if development occurred on the northern parcel of site 729/1610 (as its elevated landform contributes strongly to the expression of the principle ridge, its proximity to a Scheduled Monument and forming part of a historic assart field pattern), and within the south of site 443/1610 (given its rural pastoral character from the grazed pastures and surrounding woodland, its role in providing separation between the settlement edge and Spratsbrook historic farmstead and the long views afforded south across the wider AONB). The potential impacts would be less within the northern parts of the main parcel of site 729/1610 and site 443/1610 given their proximity to the settlement edge and the visual enclosure provided by wooded field boundaries.

If both sites were brought forward for development to the extent as assessed, it would result in a potential of up to 350 dwellings being built. It is understood that both sites have been identified as options in the Focused Wealden Local Plan (2026). The two sites adjoin one another along the south-western settlement edge and have been assessed together above. The development of these sites would considerably expand the south-west of Tunbridge Wells and would likely lead to the perception of the settlement edge extending into the countryside. The assessment considers that potential development would likely have an impact on several components of character of the High Weald AONB, with the expression of being part of the principal Forest Ridge (and contribution to the pattern of faults and folds), ancient woodland, historic farmsteads, ponds, streams and long views across the AONB all likely to be affected to some degree. Cumulative visual effects would also be experienced by residents, motorists, pedestrians and cyclists on the A26 Eridge Road as there would be development to both the east and west of the road.

Five sites within the Tunbridge Wells South-East assessment unit are located approximately 1-1.6km to the east of site **443/1610** (separated by Hargate Forest), and so the cumulative impact with the addition of these sites has also been considered. The site appraisals for these sites are contained in **Appendix A.7**. They have judged the overall impact on the core character components of natural beauty of the High Weald AONB to be:

Site	Overall impact on the core character components of natural beauty of the High Weald AONB	Variations
Group comprising Land off Bayham Road (755/1610) and Land at Bayham Road (651/1610)	Moderate impact	No variation
Group comprising Land lying to the west side of Frant Road (1077/1610) and Pinewood Farm, Frant Road (979/1610)	High impact	Development on the southern half of site 979/1610 is considered to have a greater impact on the core character components than the northern half, and on site 1077/1610 . If the potential mitigation and enhancement opportunities set out are applied, which includes locating development within site 1077/1610 and the north of 979/1610 , then potential impacts as a result of the development on the sites would likely be reduced. However, there would still be inevitable adverse impacts on the grazed pastures which would be lost.
Land at Tunbridge Wells Rugby Club and Chase Farm, Frant Road (1201/1610)	Moderate impact	No variation

Development on these five sites (to the extent as assessed in **Appendix A.7**), would result in a potential of up to an additional 470 dwellings being built. This would lead to a greater cumulative impact on the pattern of faults and folds, and on the long views south towards the wider AONB. There would also be potential additional cumulative impacts on ponds and pattern of historic farmsteads as these features are also found within the sites along the south-eastern edge of Tunbridge Wells as well as within sites along the south-western edge.

Overall, it is considered that the cumulative impact of developing the two potential sites along the south-western edge of Tunbridge Wells and five potential sites along the south-eastern edge on the core character components of natural beauty of the High Weald AONB could potentially be greater than the sum of their individual impacts. This is due to the collective length of potential development extending across the southern edge of Tunbridge Wells as many of the sites adjoin one another.