

Wealden District Council

Landscape and Visual Appraisal – Appendix A.1

Potential Development Sites in the High Weald

AONB: LCA 5B - Bells Yew Green

Final report

Prepared by LUC

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Wealden District Council

Landscape and Visual Appraisal – Appendix A.1 Potential Development Sites in the High Weald AONB: LCA 5B - Bells Yew Green

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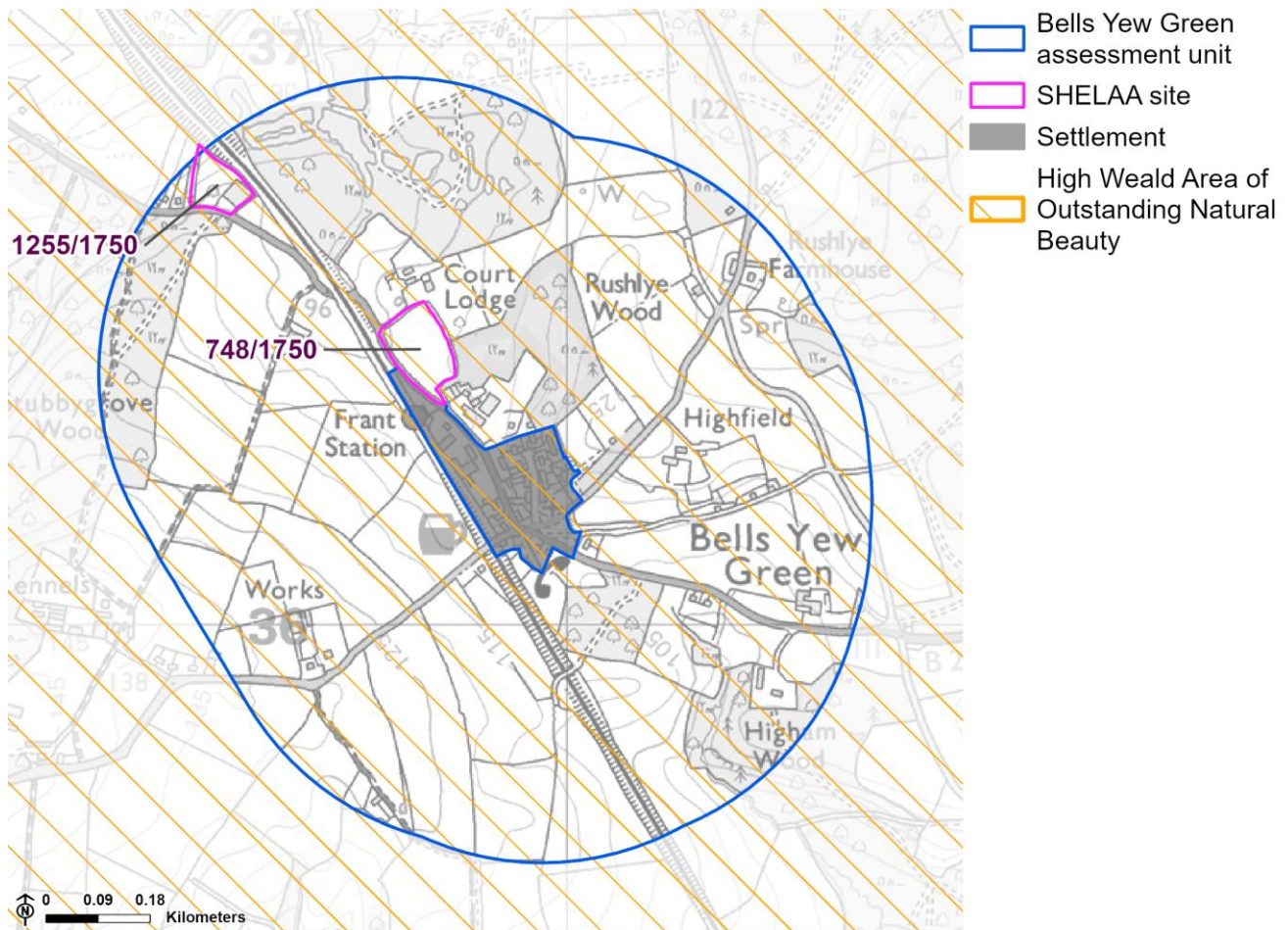
Appendix A.1

Bells Yew Green Assessment Unit

Two potential development sites are considered within the Bells Yew Green assessment unit:

- Land between Court Lodge and Bells Yew Green Industrial Estate (748/1750)
- Buckhurst Works (1255/1750)

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



Settlement location, evolution and pattern

Settlement location and context	Bells Yew Green is a small commuter village located in the north-east of the district, with fast rail connections to London. It is located on a low ridge, with valleys to the north and south, and sits within the northern part of the High Weald AONB. The settlement lies within the Wooded Ridges of the High Weald (LCT 5).
Settlement evolution	Historically the area was heavily wooded, and the village lightly settled. The original settlement pattern comprised buildings that were dispersed around the common green, with isolated farmsteads dispersed along radiating country lanes. Buildings included the chapel, the Brecknock Arms public house and a Goods Shed by the station. New housing (along Rushlye Close) was introduced in the middle of the 20 th century to the north-east of the chapel and further housing was later constructed between the railway line and Bayham Road.
Settlement pattern and edge character	Modern infill development off Bayham Road (in proximity to the rail station) and along Rushlye Close has slightly altered the dispersed pattern (focussed around the village green) and generally consists of two storey detached, semi-detached and terraced buildings. The settlement is contained east of the railway line, and dense woodlands soften the settlement edge to the north and east. The Bells Yew Green Industrial Estate is located adjacent to the northern settlement boundary and contains large sheds/units that are enclosed by the woodland to the north and east.

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 Bells Yew Green 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

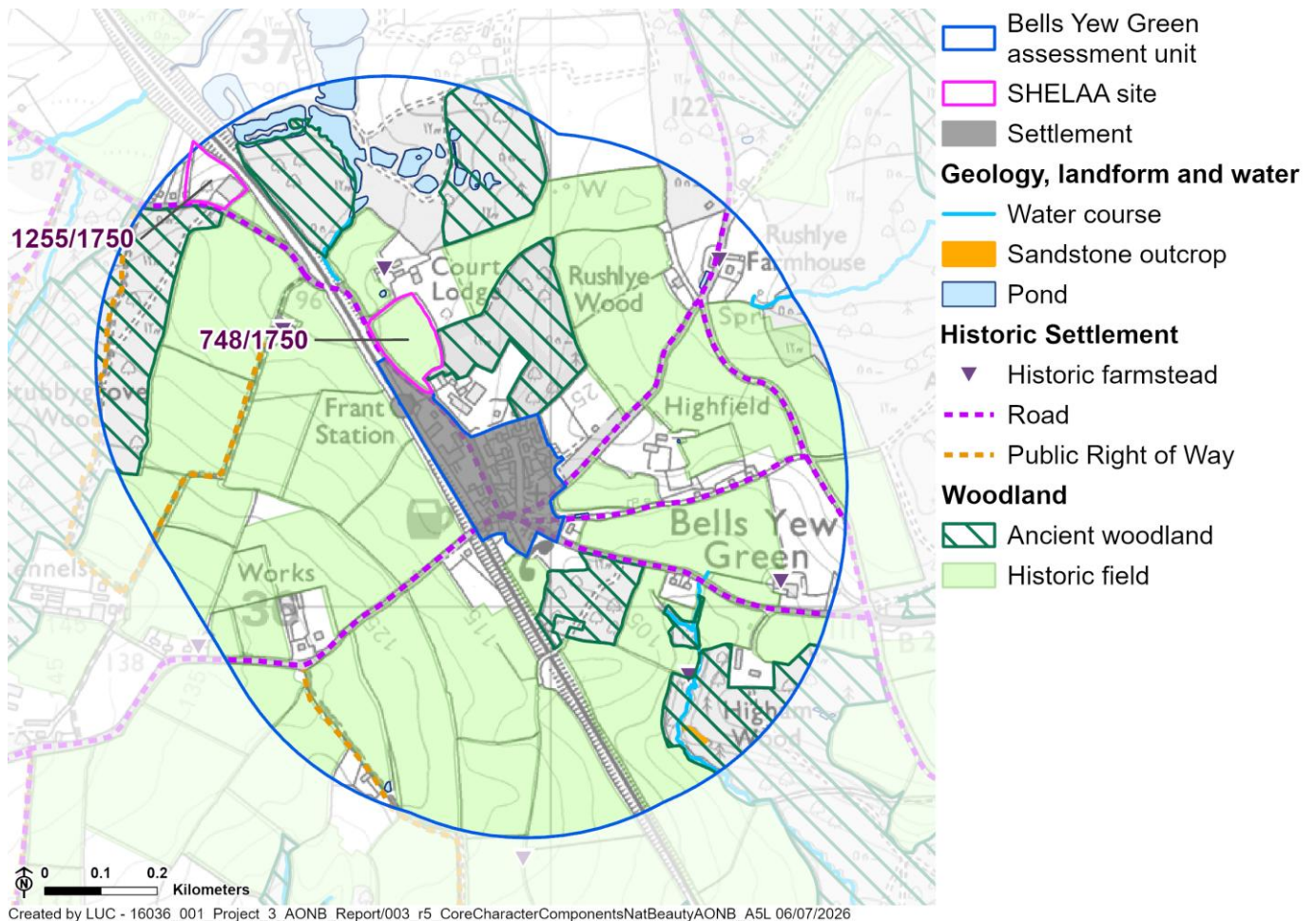


Figure 3: Tranquillity

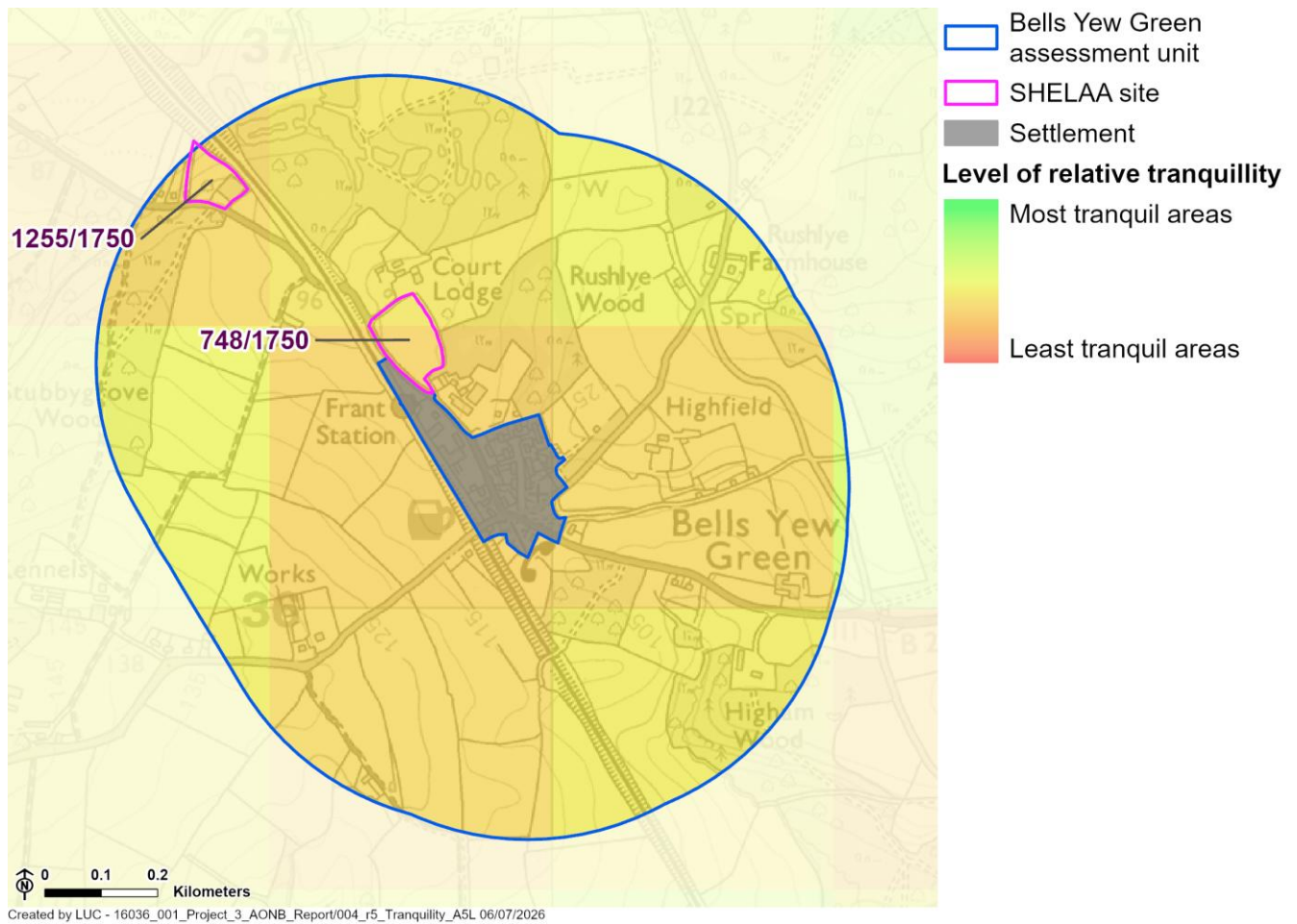
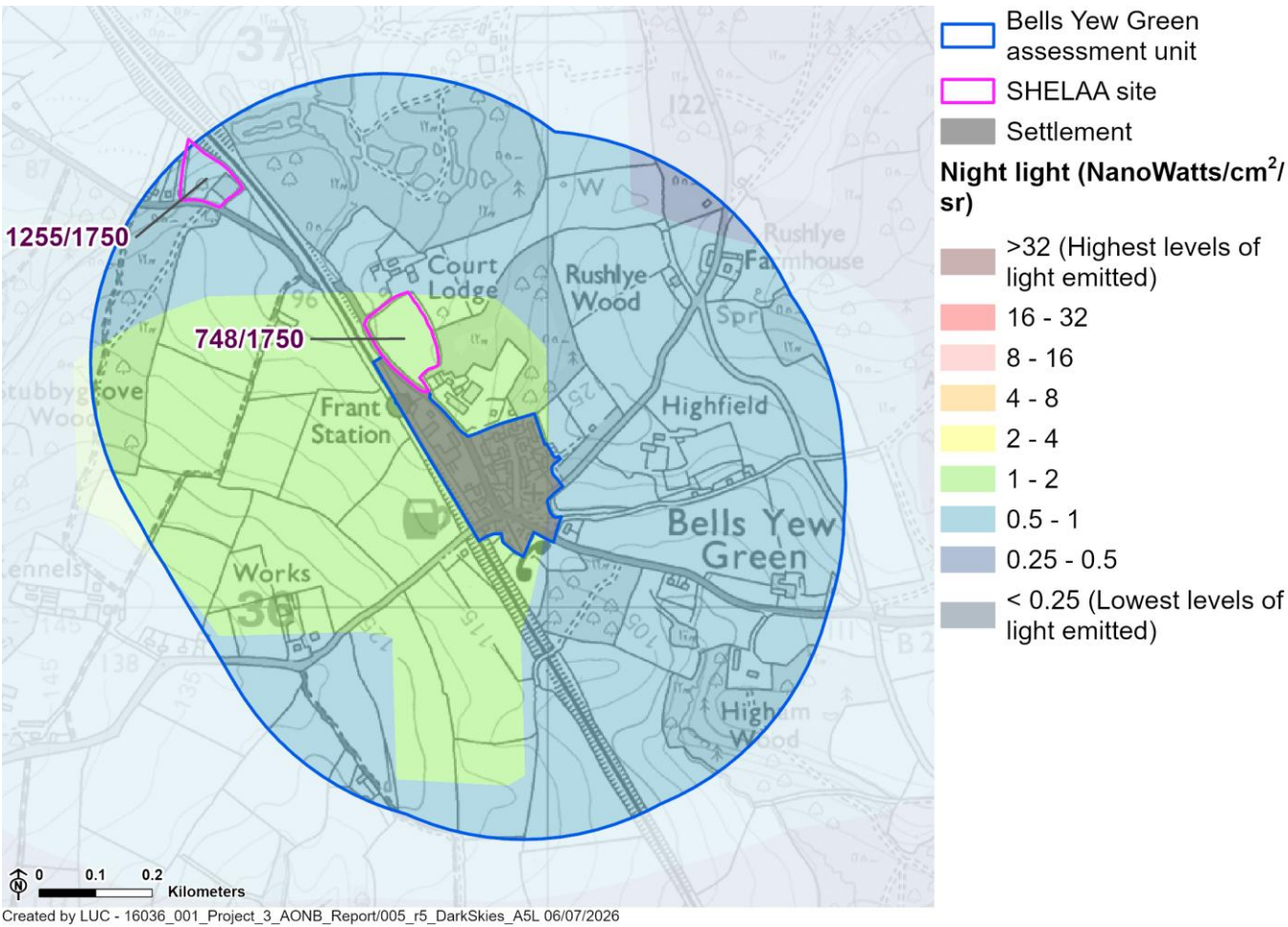


Figure 4: Dark skies



Landscape sensitivity context for the Bells Yew Green assessment unit

The landscape sensitivity of the Bells Yew Green 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 complex ridge and valley landform. ■ Areas of ancient and priority habitat woodland at Stubbygrove, Rushlye, Higham, and Park Woods. ■ Intact historic field patterns in the east and north, including large areas of cohesive assarts, characteristic of the AONB. ■ The network of thick hedgerows with hedgerow trees in the west. ■ A rural landscape with areas of dark skies and tranquillity.		
Guidance	■ Locate development away from steeper slopes and where it is well enclosed by landform and vegetation, where development would be less visible and have less influence on landscape character. ■ Retain broadleaved woodland. Avoid loss of, harm, or deterioration to ancient semi-natural woodlands and allow a buffer around them. ■ Retain and where possible enhance hedgerows and take opportunities to strengthen the local habitat network. Where there is unavoidable loss of hedgerows, mitigation / compensation in the form of suitable hedgerow replacement should be sought. ■ Preserve historic field patterns, locating development away from intricate small-scale historic field patterns, particularly cohesive assarts which are concentrated in the south, north and east of this assessment unit. ■ Consider views from public rights of way, when considering the siting and design of development in the landscape. ■ Any development should be carefully integrated into the landscape, utilising existing woodland, or using species that are in character with the wider landscape. ■ Ensure development does not cause the perception of coalescence between Bells Yew Green and Frant, avoiding further ribbon development along Bells Yew Green Road. ■ Ensure opportunities to access and enjoy the landscape are preserved and enhanced. ■ Ensure development does not affect the rural character of the landscape, and areas of tranquillity in the assessment unit, where the defining components of character relating to the High Weald AONB are most strongly expressed. ■ 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.		

¹ <https://www.highweald.org/look-after/planning/design-guide.html>

	'Guidance on the selection and use of colour in development' ² and objectives of the High Weald AONB Management Plan ³ .
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² <https://www.highweald.org/look-after/planning/colour-study.html>

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

Land between Court Lodge and Bells Yew Green Industrial Estate (748/1750)

Site Details	
Potential development	Residential development proposed on entirety of site mapped below, and entirety of the site is proposed as draft Allocation FR4 (identified for 20 dwellings) in the Focused Wealden Local Plan (2026)
Site location	This site is located to the north of the settlement and situated to the north-west of Bells Yew Green Industrial Estate, south of Court Lodge, west of Rushlye Wood and east of Bayham Road and Frant railway station.

Figure 5: Site location and constraints

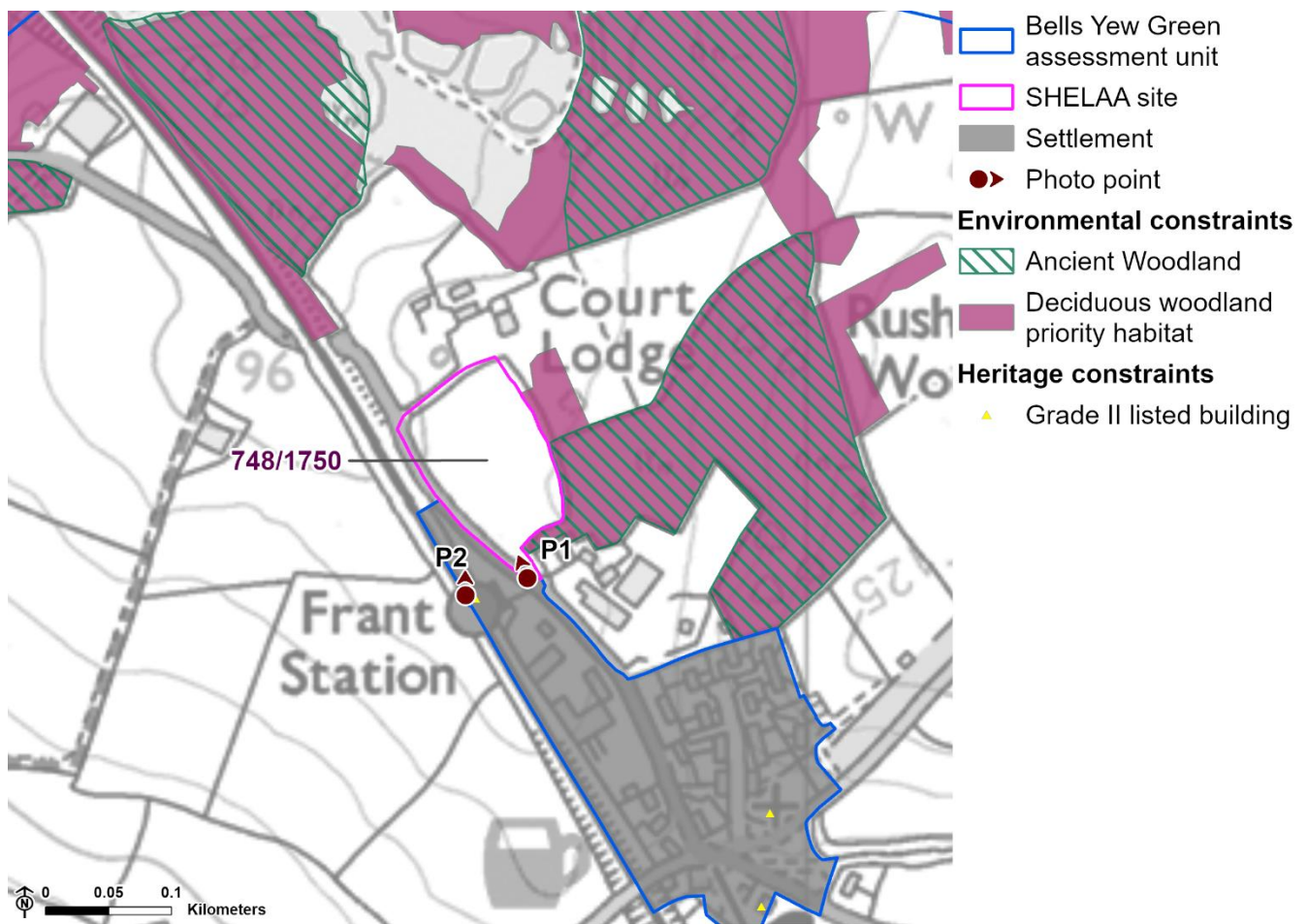
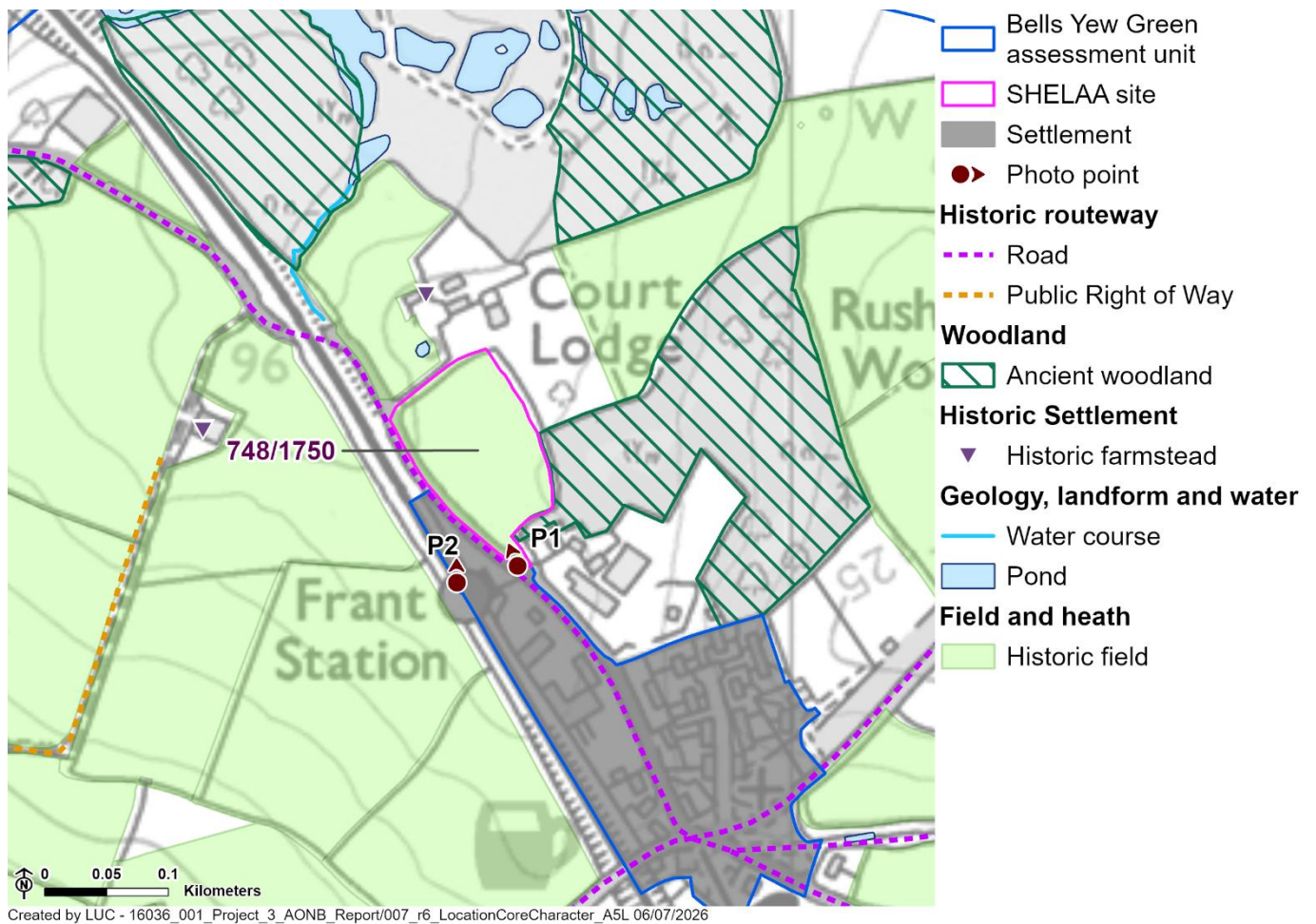


Figure 6: Site location and core character components of natural beauty of the High Weald AONB



Representative site photos

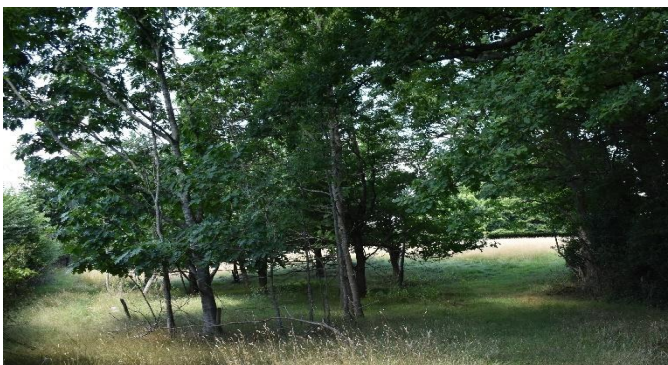


Photo 1: View from the south-western corner with views between the edge of Rushlye Wood and hedgerow along Bayham Road



Photo 2: View north-east over the hedgerow along Bayham Road from the pedestrian bridge over the railway line

Baseline Analysis

Baseline landscape character	
Key features and qualities of the site in relation to the wider assessment unit	Landform - The site is relatively flat, comprising a gentle slope rising between 100m AOD in the north-west to 105m AOD in the south-east, which is not typical of the wider assessment unit. However, the site forms part of an elevated ridgeline which is typical of the 'relatively complex ridge and valley landforms' of the wider assessment unit. Natural character - Ancient deciduous woodland and priority habitat at Rushlye Wood encloses the site to the south-east, which is typical of the wider assessment unit. - Other trees/woodland associated with Court Lodge adjoin the eastern and northern boundaries which is also typical of the wider assessment unit. - Thick, tall hedgerows along Bayham Road enclose the western boundary and a clump of mature deciduous trees lies within its centre, which is representative of the wider assessment unit. Landscape pattern and time depth - The site consists of a small pasture grazed field bounded by hedgerows and woodland that forms part of the 'Informal parkland' landscape associated with Court Lodge (as classified in the Sussex HLC, although this is atypical of the wider assessment unit). Perceptual aspects - The site is influenced by its proximity to the settlement edge of Bells Yew Green, Bayham Road and Frant railway station, which reduce the experience of dark skies (light levels are recorded in the middle bands of CPRE's Night Blight Mapping, Figure 3) and levels of tranquillity (which are recorded as relatively low in CPRE's Tranquillity Mapping, Figure 4).
Settlement form and edge character and extent of built development	The site provides separation between the settlement edge of Bells Yew Green and Court Lodge. The adjacent settlement edge to the south of the site consists of woodland and Bayham Road, beyond which is a car park and some modern infill development, including two-storey detached, semi-detached and terraced housing in proximity to the rail station. Industrial units are located beyond Rushlye Wood, to the south-east of the site. Rushlye Wood provides a strong boundary feature between the south-east of the site and the industrial estate. Bayham Road, and thick, tall hedgerows along its edges, also provide a strong boundary between the south-western edge of the site and the adjacent train station car park/ railway line.
Baseline visual character	
Potential visual receptors	The surrounding woodland, trees and hedgerows enclose the site and limit its visibility from the surrounding landscape, including from the nearby residential properties along the settlement edge. Views into the site are afforded from the pedestrian bridge that crosses the railway line and from the edge of Rushlye Wood (designated as open access land), with glimpsed views from Court Lodge. There are also some open views of the site from higher elevations, including the footpath between Bayham Road and Bells Yew Green Road, which crosses the upper valley slopes.

Extent of visibility within the High Weald AONB	Long views to and from the site are limited by landform, as the site sits lower than surrounding slopes, as well as by trees around the site.
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.	There are no distinctive geological, landform or water features within the site.
Settlement – dispersed historic settlement including high densities of isolated farmsteads, hamlets and late-medieval villages founded on trade and non-agricultural rural industries.	Court Lodge (adjacent to the site) contributes towards the <i>high density of historic farmsteads</i> ⁴ found within the AONB and while it is not within the site it lies adjacent to it.
Routeways – a dense network of historic routeways (now roads, tracks and paths).	No historic routeways cross the site. Bayham Road along the western boundary of the site is recorded as a historic lane and contributes towards the <i>dense radiating network</i> of historic routeways, although its expression is altered by its use as the B2169 with associated modern road markings.
Woodland – an abundance of ancient woodland mostly in small holdings, highly interconnected with hedges and shaws.	Rushlye Wood encloses the site to the south-east and contributes towards the <i>high proportion of ancient woodland</i> and the <i>highly interconnected and structurally varied mosaic of many small woods...and outgrown hedges</i> of the AONB. Other trees/woodland associated with Court Lodge adjoin the eastern and northern boundaries and also form an interconnected habitat network. Although the above features are outside (and adjacent) to the site, the central clump of trees <i>provide additional connectivity to the wider landscape</i> and contribute towards the <i>wood-pasture and parkland</i> character.
Fieldscapes 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 small field is used for <i>grazing livestock</i> and enclosed by woody and thick hedged boundaries.
Dark night skies – intrinsically dark at night with our own galaxy (the Milky Way) visible.	The adjacent Bayham Road is an <i>unlit road</i> but dark skies are limited by the adjacent railway car park and associated lighting.
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 Rushlye Wood and the historic Court Lodge (adjacent to the site) contribute to the <i>sense of history and timelessness</i> . The combination of grazing, the central clump of trees and surrounding woodland provides a <i>pastoral feel</i> and contributes to the <i>recognisable and unifying mosaic of open field and wooded habitats</i> . The sense of rurality and tranquillity is limited by the adjacent road and railway. Long views of the site are limited by vegetation enclosing the site which contributes to the <i>sense of intimacy, enclosure and remoteness...</i>

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

gardeners inspired by the landscape.	
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 the site relates to the <i><u>predominantly pastoral mixed farming with an absence of industrial scale farming</u></i> key characteristic.

Baseline Summary

How the site relates to the sensitivity of the wider assessment unit

The Assessment Unit

The *Wealden Landscape Sensitivity Assessment to Residential and Employment Development* assesses the Bells Yew Green assessment unit to have a **moderate-high** sensitivity to small scale residential development (2-2.5 storey housing). The sensitivity analysis indicates that the ridge and valley landform, with historic field patterns, extensive ancient and priority habitat woodland, wooded settlement edge, the role the landscape plays in providing separation between Bells Yew Green and Frant, and the rural setting increases the unit's sensitivity to development. The relatively enclosed visual character in the east, lack of recreational or heritage assets, and presence of larger scale development in proximity to the railway station reduces sensitivity.

The Site

Overall, it is considered that the site has a lower sensitivity than the assessment unit as a whole and is considered to be of **moderate** sensitivity to small scale residential development (2-2.5 storey housing). The site is a pastoral field (enclosed by thick hedgerows and ancient and priority habitat woodland) that forms part of a historic field pattern on the edge of Bells Yew Green, and so the site demonstrates a number of the characteristics that increase sensitivity across the assessment unit. However, the site is visually enclosed and is influenced by proximity to settlement, larger scale industrial units and the train station, decreasing its sensitivity (compared to the wider assessment unit).

Variations in Sensitivity

There is no variation in sensitivity across the site.

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

The site expresses some of the core character components of natural beauty of the High Weald AONB. In summary:

- Court Lodge (adjacent to the site) contributes to the high density of historic farmsteads with the site contributing towards its setting;
- Rushlye Wood and site vegetation contribute to the high proportion of ancient woodland and the highly interconnected and structurally varied mosaic of many small woods, outgrown hedges, and isolated trees, as well as providing a sense of intimacy, enclosure and remoteness;
- The grazing of livestock and central clump of trees contribute to the pastoral feel of the landscape, wood-pasture and parkland character, with links to the history of the land-based economy; and
- A sense of history and timelessness is provided by the ancient woodland and Court Lodge.

Overall, 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>	■ Retain, protect and enhance all mature vegetation within and surrounding the site, especially the priority habitat at Rushlye Wood, the hedgerow along Bayham Road and clump of mature deciduous trees within the centre (in accordance with the AONB's Objectives W1 and PQ2). ■ Improve the connectivity of woodlands and hedgerows around the site 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>	
Loss or deterioration of features contributing towards the parkland character of the site, particularly the circular clump of deciduous trees within the centre of the site and the grazed pastures.	Woodland	■ <i>Large numbers of isolated trees (often remnants from lost woodlands or hedges), such as in-field trees that provide additional connectivity to the wider landscape, as well as shelter and food source to a wide range of species.</i> ■ <i>Wood-pasture and parkland...</i>	■ Retain, protect, and set back development from, the central clump of deciduous trees (in accordance with the AONB's Objective W1). ■ Loss of pasture would be unavoidable with development of the site, as development would remove land from agricultural use with limited opportunities to retain areas due to the small scale of the site. However, field boundaries should be retained and enhanced where possible to avoid complete loss of field pattern (in accordance with the AONB's Objective FH2).

	Fieldsapes and heath	<i>Fields, mostly permanent pasture, used for grazing livestock...</i>	
	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 Rushlye Wood which adjoins the southern and south-eastern edges of the site.	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>	
Modifications to Bayham Road (recorded as a historic lane) to facilitate site access (e.g. road widening, creation of junction)	Routeways	<i>A dense radiating network with a variety of origins...</i>	■ 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).
Influence of further lighting in the dark night skies resulting in night blight, including the potential introduction of streetlights along Bayham 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 guidance ⁵ and use dark sky-friendly lighting (in accordance with the AONB's Objectives DS1 and DS2).
Settlement form edge and setting			

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/>

Extension of development beyond the robust boundary provided by woodland between the site and industrial units on the edge of the settlement.	N/A	N/A	■ Locate development in the south of the site to relate better to the existing settlement pattern, taking into account appropriate buffers from ancient woodland (in accordance with the AONB's Objective S1). ■ 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). ■ Maintain the existing settlement pattern and its character by following the intimate scale, built form and streetscape of the recent terraced development on the western side of Bayham Road (in accordance with the AONB's Objectives S1 and 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).
Reduction in the separation between the settlement of Bells Yew Green and the Court Lodge historic farmstead, and impingement on the setting of Court Lodge.	Settlement	<i>High density of historic farmsteads...</i>	■ Locate development in the south of the site to relate better to the existing settlement pattern and to minimise encroachment towards the boundary of Court Lodge historic farmstead (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:	Aesthetic and perceptual qualities	■ <i>A sense of history and timelessness arising from an ancient countryside with a human-scale agricultural</i>	■ Retain, protect and enhance all existing vegetation including the thick hedgerow boundaries that enclose the site (in accordance with the AONB's Objectives W1 and PQ2).

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>

■ users of the pedestrian bridge over the railway line; ■ recreational users of Rushlye Wood; ■ walkers on the public footpath between Bayham Road and Bells Yew Green Road; ■ residents of Court Lodge; and ■ motorists/cyclists along Bayham Road (which is recorded as a historic lane).		<i>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>	■ 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). ■ Reduce the density of buildings to encompass more space between/around buildings, interspersed with soft landscaping and tree planting, to soften visual impact and enhance integration of built form within the landscape (in accordance with the AONB's Objective PQ2). ■ Consider views of development from the Court Lodge historic farmstead along the northern edge 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 experience the surrounding woodlands (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 the site (and immediate surrounds) expresses some of the core character components of natural beauty, with a moderate level of expression. This is due to the presence of mature woodland (including ancient woodland), trees and hedgerows; grazed pastures; and Court Lodge historic farmstead (adjacent to the site). Development of the site 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. If the potential mitigation and enhancement opportunities set out above are applied, potential impacts as a result of the development on the site could potentially be reduced. However, there would still be inevitable adverse impacts on the grazed pastures which would be lost. <u>Variation to overall impact</u> There is no variation to the overall impact considered above.		

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 and enhance woodland, trees and hedgerows.
- Apply suitable offsets in the form of buffer zones to the ancient woodland at Rushlye Wood.
- Locate development in the south of the site, taking into consideration suitable offsets to ancient woodland, to better relate to the existing settlement and minimise encroachment towards the historic farmstead at Court Lodge.
- Enhance public access and provide opportunities to experience the surrounding woodlands.

Figure 7: Summary map of constraints and opportunities



Buckhurst Works (1255/1750)

Site Details	
Potential development	Employment development with floorspace of 3,500sqm proposed on the site as shown below. Site not Allocated or considered an Option in the draft Focused Wealden Local Plan 2026.
Site location	This site is located approximately 0.5km to the north-west of Bells Yew Green and situated to the north-east of Stubbygrove Wood, west of Park Wood and south-east of Nevill Golf Club, in-between the B2169 Bayham Road and railway line.

Figure 8: Site location and constraints

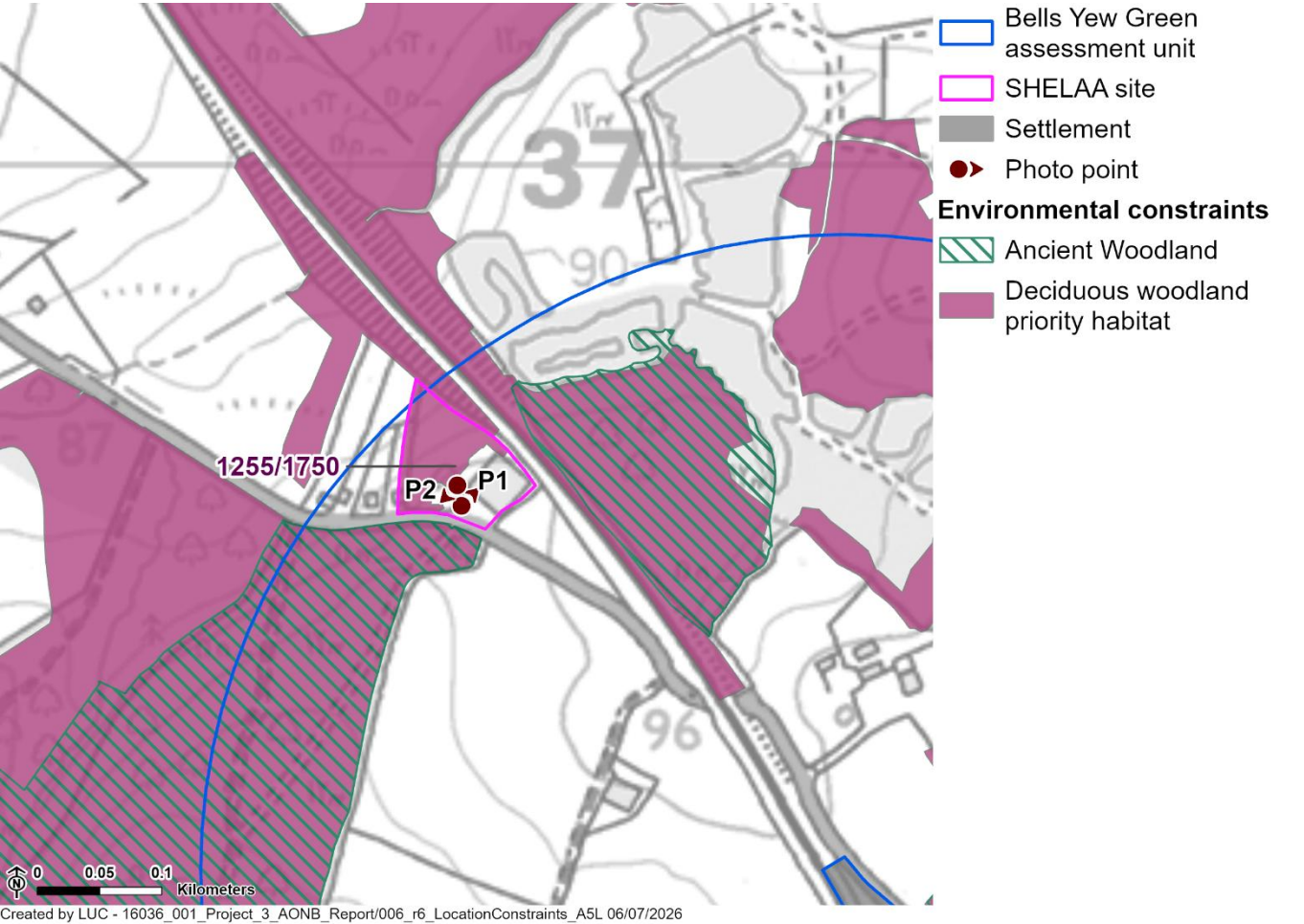
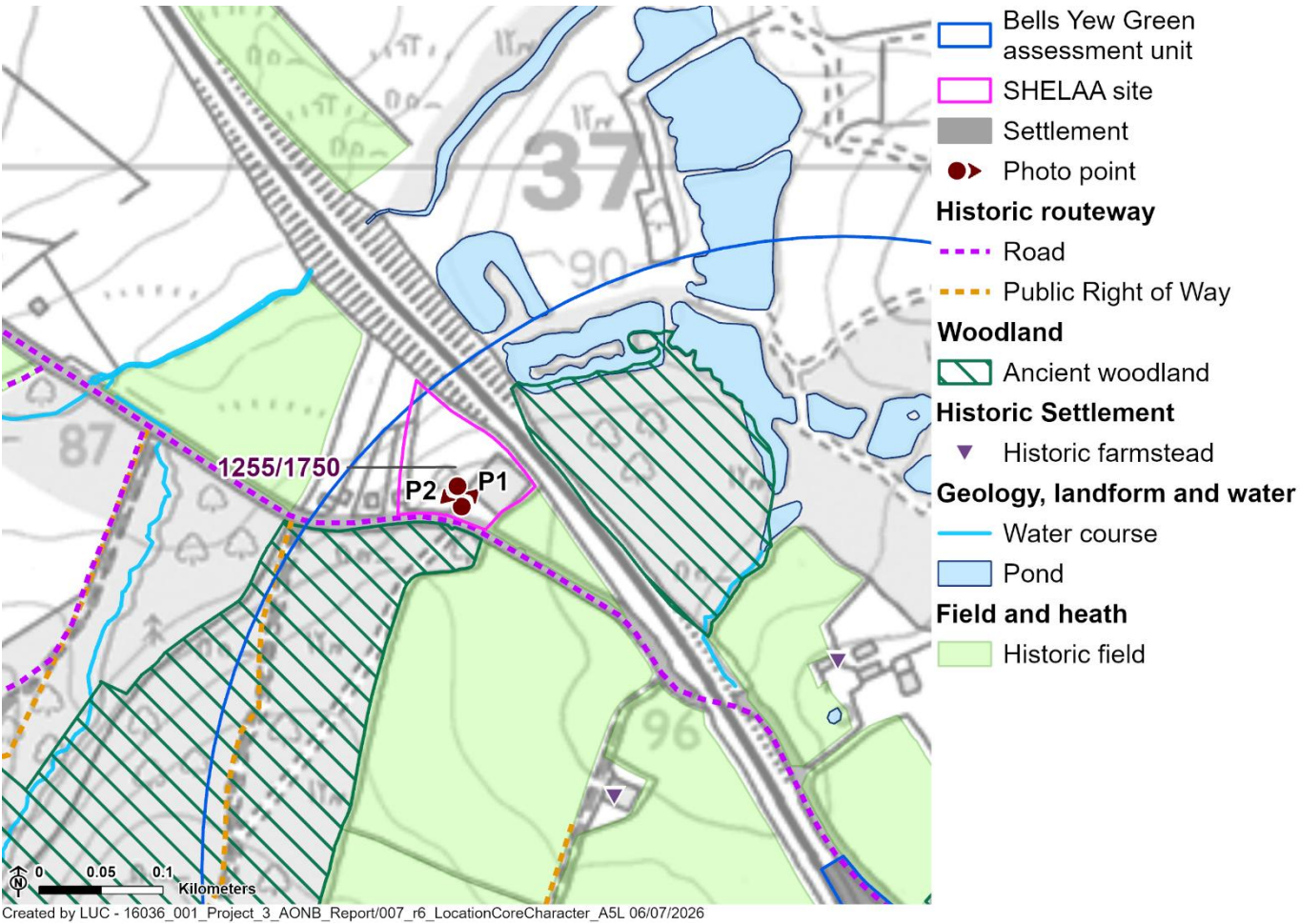


Figure 9: Site location and core character components of natural beauty of the High Weald AONB



Representative site photos



Photo 1: View of the existing Buckhurst Works with associated industrial sheds, storage areas and hard surfacing



Photo 2: Existing woodland visually encloses the site

Baseline Analysis

Baseline landscape character	
Key features and qualities of the site in relation to the wider assessment unit	Landform ■ The site forms a small part of the lower valley slopes of the High Weald: Teise Catchment LCA and part of the 'complex ridge and valley landforms' of the wider assessment unit. ■ It comprises a gentle slope that descends from the south-east to the north-west, between 100m and 90m AOD, towards the River Teise, and sits between two wooded slopes. Natural character ■ Priority habitat deciduous woodland, recorded as ancient, encloses the site to the east (Park Wood) and south-west (Stubbygrove Wood), which is typical of the wider assessment unit. The western half of the site also contains priority habitat deciduous woodland. ■ The eastern half of the site contains the existing Buckhurst Works with associated industrial sheds, storage areas and hard surfacing which are atypical of the wider assessment unit. ■ A shaw extends from the woodland in the west, abutting the northern boundary of the site and the railway line, reflecting the wooded enclosure of the wider assessment unit. Landscape pattern and time depth ■ The site is classified as 'Industry' in the Sussex HLC, although this is atypical of the wider assessment unit. The existing industrial estate within the eastern half of the site limits time depth. ■ The surrounding woodlands include cohesive assarts which are more characteristic of the wider assessment unit. Perceptual aspects ■ The site is influenced by the industrial units within Buckhurst Works and the human activity that occurs across it, as well as its proximity to Bayham Road and the railway line, reducing tranquillity (which is recorded as relatively low in CPRE's Tranquillity Mapping, Figure 3). However, the site is located with a landscape that experiences dark skies (light levels are recorded in the lower bands of CPRE's Night Blight Mapping, Figure 4). ■ The surrounding woodland provides a sense of enclosure and separation from the wider landscape.
Settlement form and edge character and extent of built development	The site forms part of the wider wooded pastoral landscape of LCAs 5B and 6B. Settlement near the site is limited and consists of four detached properties and gardens along Bayham Road, immediately to the south-west of the site, and an isolated gentrified farmstead approximately 0.2km to the south-east. The wooded character of the area limits the influence and intervisibility of existing settlement in the area, and along with Bayham Road and the railway line, form robust boundaries to the site. Within the site, Buckhurst Works contains industrial buildings which create an urbanised character that contrasts with the surrounding wooded landscape.
Baseline visual character	

Potential visual receptors	The surrounding woodland, shaws and trees enclose the site and limit visibility from the wider landscape, including from the nearby residential properties along Bayham Road. There are clear open views from Bayham Road as it passes along the open southern boundary of Buckhurst Works. Glimpsed views of the existing buildings within the site are available from a PRoW that runs to the south-east of the site between Bayham Road and Bells Yew Green, and from the upper storeys of the isolated property to the south-east of the site that the PRoW runs past. Views from the neighbouring golf course are largely filtered/ screened by intervening vegetation.
Extent of visibility within the High Weald AONB	Long views to and from the site are limited by surrounding landform and vegetation.

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.	There are no distinctive geological, landform or water features within the site.
Settlement – dispersed historic settlement including high densities of isolated farmsteads, hamlets and late-medieval villages founded on trade and non-agricultural rural industries.	The existing commercial use of the site does not contribute to the dispersed historic settlement pattern of the wider area.
Routeways – a dense network of historic routeways (now roads, tracks and paths).	No historic routeways cross the site. Bayham Road along the southern boundary of the site is recorded as a historic lane and contributes towards the <u>dense radiating network</u> of historic routeways, although its expression is altered by its use as the B2169 with associated modern road markings.
Woodland – an abundance of ancient woodland mostly in small holdings, highly interconnected with hedges and shaws.	Ancient woodland encloses the site to the east (Park Wood) and south-west (Stubbygrove Wood), contributing to the <u>high proportion of ancient woodland</u> and the <u>highly interconnected and structurally varied mosaic of small woods...shaws...and outgrown hedges</u> of the AONB. The woodland within the western half of the site also forms an interconnected habitat network.
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 existing commercial use of the site does not contribute to the historic field pattern.
Dark night skies – intrinsically dark at night with our own galaxy (the Milky Way) visible.	The site forms part of an <u>intrinsically dark landscapes</u> although the sense of naturalness is limited by the commercial use of the site. The adjacent Bayham Road is an <u>unlit road</u> .
Aesthetic and perceptual qualities – arising from the interaction of people with the landscape, including the notion of a quintessential English pastoral	The ancient woodland at Park Wood and Stubbygrove Wood (adjacent to the site) contribute to the <u>sense of history and timelessness</u> . The sense of rurality and

landscape, intimacy of scale, a sense of history and timelessness; rurality and tranquillity; glimpsed long views; freedom to explore and make connections with the natural world, and a rich legacy of features and ideas left by writers, poets and gardeners inspired by the landscape.	tranquillity is limited by the adjacent road, railway and commercial use of the site. Long views of the site are limited by vegetation enclosing the site which contributes to the <u>sense of intimacy, enclosure ...</u> .
Land-based economy and rural living – with roots extending deep into history, and which has visibly and culturally shaped the landscape.	This character component of natural beauty is not expressed within the site.

Baseline Summary

How the site relates to the sensitivity of the wider assessment unit

The Assessment Unit

The *Wealden Landscape Sensitivity Assessment to Residential and Employment Development* assesses the Bells Yew Green assessment unit to have a **high** sensitivity to commercial/ industrial development. The sensitivity analysis indicates that the ridge and valley landform, with historic field patterns, extensive ancient and priority habitat woodland, wooded settlement edge, the role the landscape plays in providing separation between Bells Yew Green and Frant, and the rural setting increases the unit's sensitivity to development. The relatively enclosed visual character in the east, lack of recreational or heritage assets, and presence of larger scale development in proximity to the railway station reduces sensitivity.

The Site

Overall, it is considered that the site has a lower sensitivity than the assessment unit as a whole and is considered to be of **moderate** sensitivity to commercial/ industrial development. The site contains a block of priority habitat deciduous woodland that adjoins areas of ancient woodland and is partly enclosed by a shaw, which increases sensitivity across the assessment unit. However, the site is visually enclosed by woodland and mainly comprises existing industrial/ commercial development, which affects the rural character, remoteness and tranquillity of the area, along with the influence of the railway line and Bayham Road, reducing sensitivity.

Variations in Sensitivity

The priority habitat deciduous woodland within the western half of the site is more sensitive than the existing industrial/ commercial development within the eastern half.

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

The site expresses few core character components of natural beauty of the High Weald AONB. In summary:

- Stubbygrove Wood and Park Wood, together with vegetation within the site, contribute to the high proportion of ancient woodland and the highly interconnected and structurally varied mosaic of many small woods, shaws and outgrown hedges, as well as providing a sense of intimacy and enclosure;
- A sense of history and timelessness is provided by the ancient woodland; and
- The site forms part of a landscape with dark skies.

Although there are few core components of character present, on balance it is considered that there is a **moderate expression** primarily due to the woodland within and surrounding the site.

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, shaws and hedgerows, affecting the role they play in screening the site, and contributions to the interconnectivity of habitats.	Woodland	<i>Highly interconnected and structurally varied mosaic of many small woodlands...shaws...and outgrown hedges...</i>	Retain, protect and enhance all mature vegetation within and surrounding the site, especially the priority habitat deciduous woodland within the western half of the site and the shaw to the north (in accordance with the AONB's Objectives W1 and PQ2).
	Aesthetic and perceptual qualities	<i>A sense of intimacy...owing to the heavily treed landscape.</i>	
Deterioration of and/or encroachment on the ancient woodland at Park Wood and Stubbygrove Wood which adjoins the eastern and south-western edges of the site.	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>	

Modifications to Bayham Road (recorded as a historic lane) to facilitate site access (e.g. road widening, creation of junction)	Routeways	<i>A dense radiating network with a variety of origins...</i>	■ Reduce the impact of access works required to the road, where possible, protecting the trees and hedgerows along it where possible (in accordance with the AONB's Objectives R1 and R2).
Influence of further lighting in the dark night skies resulting in night blight, including the potential introduction of streetlights along Bayham Road if used for access.	Dark night skies	■ <i>Intrinsically dark landscapes with a sense of naturalness.</i> ■ <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 guidance⁹ and use dark sky-friendly lighting (in accordance with the AONB's Objectives DS1 and DS2).
Visual amenity			
Visibility of development seen by: ■ motorists/cyclists along Bayham Road (which is recorded as a historic lane); ■ walkers on the public footpath between Bayham Road and Bells Yew Green Road; ■ residents of the adjacent dwellings along Bayham Road; and ■ residents of the isolated dwelling to the south-east.	Aesthetic and perceptual qualities	■ <i>A sense of history and timelessness arising from an ancient countryside with...ancient trees...</i> ■ <i>A sense of intimacy, enclosure... owing to the heavily treed landscape.</i>	■ Retain, protect and enhance all existing vegetation including the mature woodland, shaws, trees and hedgerows that enclose the site (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). ■ 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 'Guidance on the selection and use of colour in development'¹⁰ and objectives of the High Weald AONB Management Plan¹¹ (in accordance with the AONB's Objective S2).

⁹ 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/>

¹⁰ <https://www.highweald.org/look-after/planning/colour-study.html>

¹¹ <https://www.highweald.org/high-weald-aonb-management-plan.html>

Overall impact on the core character components of natural beauty of the High Weald AONB	
Moderate impact	The baseline analysis identifies that the site (and immediate surrounds) expresses few core character components of natural beauty, with a moderate level of expression. This is due to the presence of priority habitat woodland and a shaw within the site, and ancient woodland surrounding it. Development of the site 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. If the potential mitigation and enhancement opportunities set out above are applied, potential impacts as a result of the development on the site could potentially be reduced. <u>Variation to overall impact</u> The moderate impact primarily relates to the woodland within the western half of the site. The overall impact is lower for the eastern half of the site given its existing industrial/ commercial use.

Summary and recommendations

The site-specific recommendations for this site are as follows:

- Retain, protect and enhance the priority habitat deciduous woodland within the western half of the site and the shaw to the north.
- Set development back from the edge of the ancient woodland at Stubbygrove Wood and Park Wood to create a buffer zone.

Cumulative effects of development sites proposed in the Bells Yew Green assessment unit

Two sites have been assessed within the Bells Yew Green assessment unit. The preceding site assessments 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
Land between Court Lodge and Bells Yew Green Industrial Estate (748/1750)	Moderate impact	No variation
Buckhurst Works (1255/1750)	Moderate impact	The moderate impact primarily relates to the woodland within the western half of the site. The overall impact is lower for the eastern half of the site given its existing industrial/ commercial use.

If both sites were brought forward for development to the extent as assessed, it would result in a potential of up to 20 dwellings being built (site **748/1750**) and the intensification of a small site with existing industrial/ commercial use (site **1255/1750**).

The sites are located over 0.3km from one another and both are partially surrounded by woodland and visually enclosed. Potential development on both sites could lead to encroachment of ancient woodland on the edge of the settlement and further to the north. However, due to the screening by intervening vegetation between the sites, and given that site **1255/1750** is in existing industrial/ commercial use, cumulative landscape and visual effects are considered unlikely.

Overall, it is considered that the cumulative impact of developing both potential sites on the core character components of natural beauty of the High Weald AONB will be no greater than the sum of their individual impacts.

It is understood that site **748/1750** has been identified as an allocation in the Focused Wealden Local Plan (2026), but that site **1255/1750** is not allocated or considered an Option. There would be no cumulative implications if only site **748/1750** was brought forwards for development.