

Wealden District Council

**Landscape and Visual
Appraisal – Appendix A.6**
**Potential Development
Sites in the High Weald
AONB: LCA 5B –
Rotherfield**

Final report

Prepared by LUC

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Wealden District Council

Landscape and Visual Appraisal – Appendix A.6

Potential Development Sites in the High Weald

AONB: LCA 5B – Rotherfield

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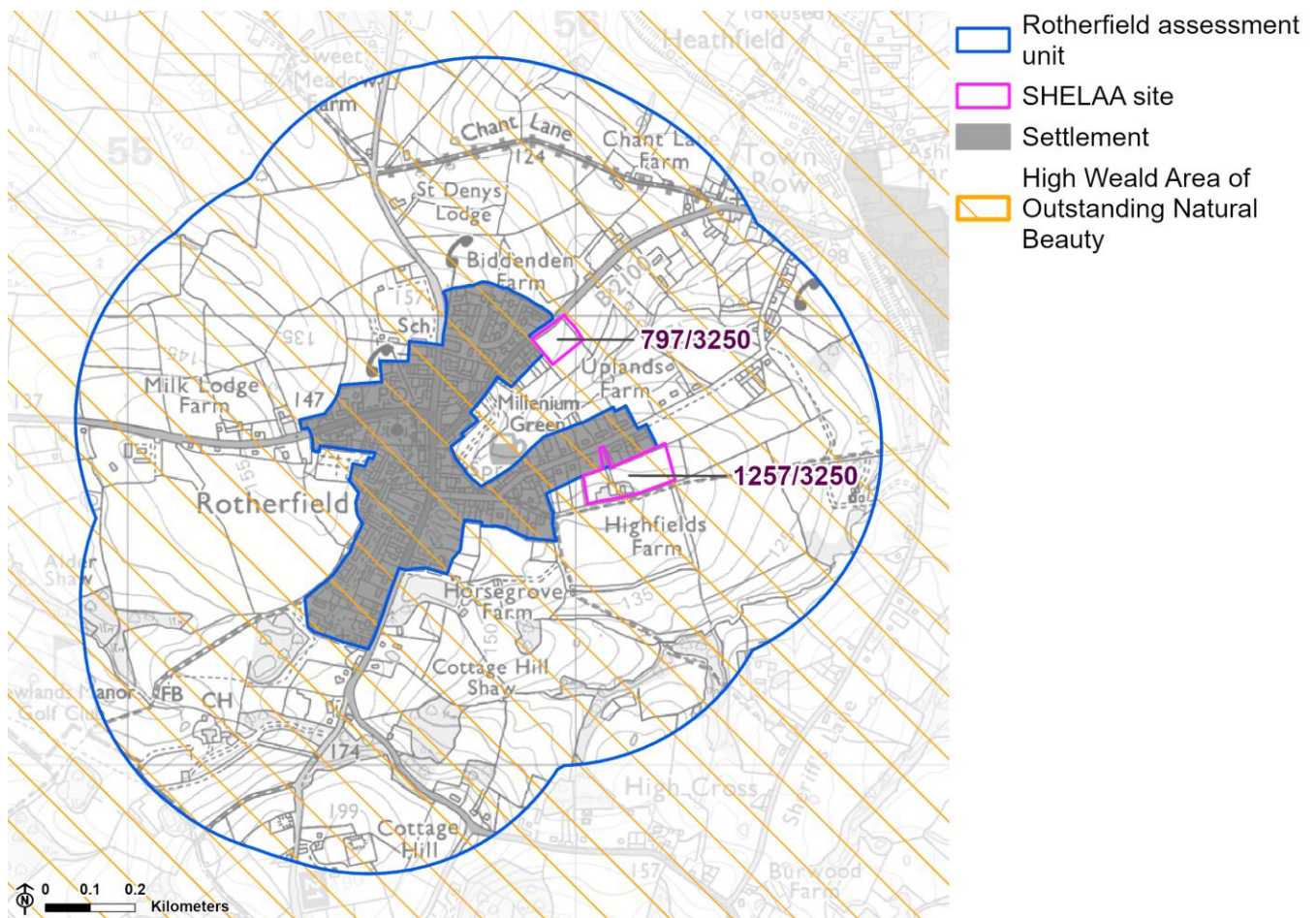
Appendix A.6

Rotherfield Assessment Unit

Two potential development sites are considered within the Rotherfield assessment unit:

- Land at Station Road (797/3250)
- Highfields Farm (1257/3250)

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



Settlement location, evolution and pattern

Settlement location and context	Rotherfield is a nucleated settlement located in the north of the district. The village is located on one of the principal east-west ridges of the High Weald, within the High Weald AONB.
Settlement evolution	The historic core of the village (designated as Conservation Area) is centred around the High Street and St Denys Church. The settlement is one of the oldest in the High Weald, and dates to the establishment of a church and priory in the 8 th century. The settlement took a nucleated form in the 13 th century with growth centred around the market and church. Growth of the village can be attributed to the iron industry in the locality, prominent from the 16 th century, with further modest growth of the village resulting from agriculture, including the growing of hops. There was some 20 th century redevelopment within the historic core and settlement expansion, most notably to the north, south-west and east.
Settlement pattern and edge character	Development consists of bungalows and two storey detached and semi-detached houses, and some terraced properties within the historic core of the Conservation Area and in the north. Development is typically fringed by pastoral fields and occasionally by woodland (primarily in the south). Historic buildings, including the spire of St Denys Church, form prominent focal features locally and within the surrounding landscape, given the elevated ridgeline position of the village.

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 Rotherfield 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

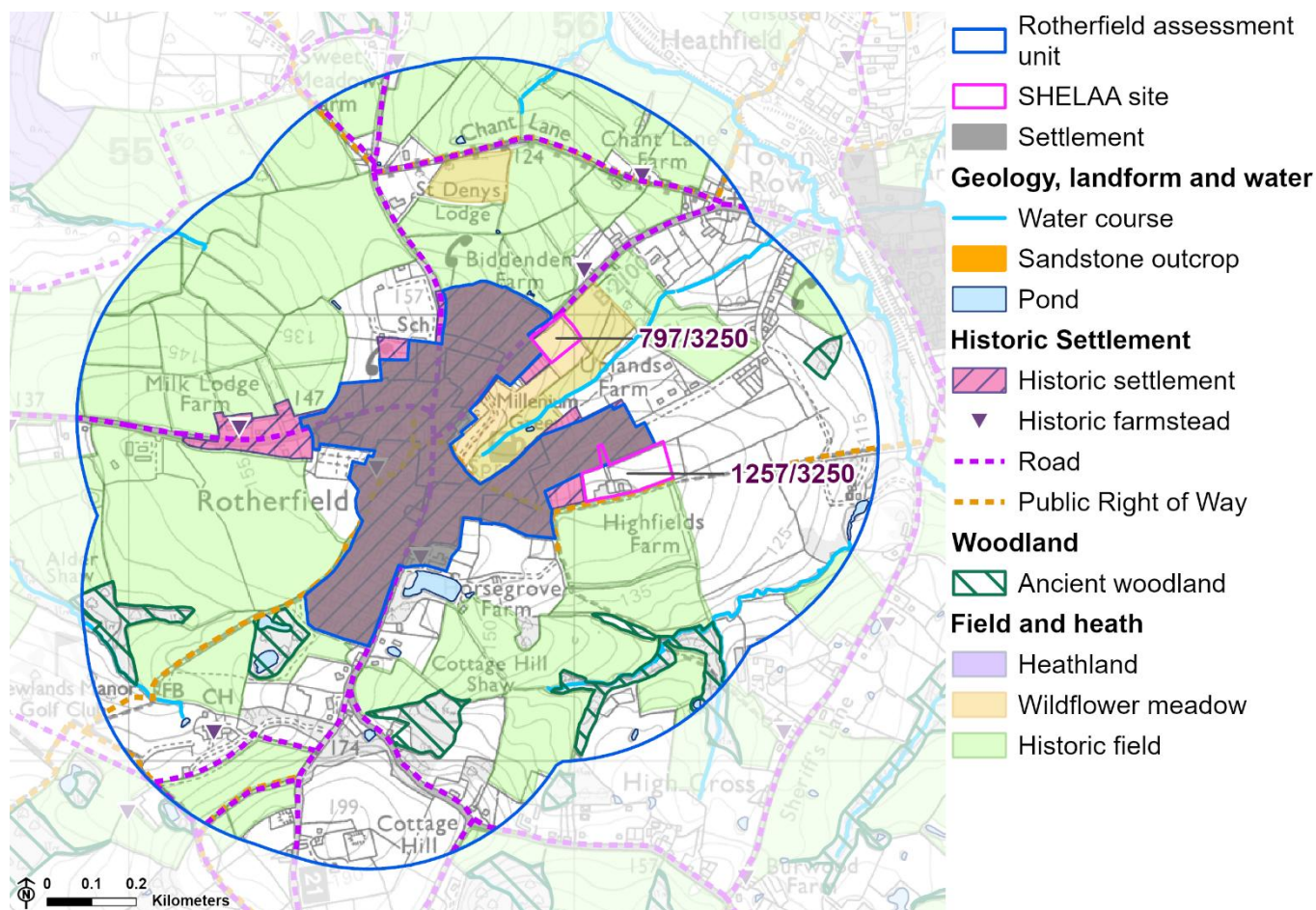


Figure 3: Tranquillity

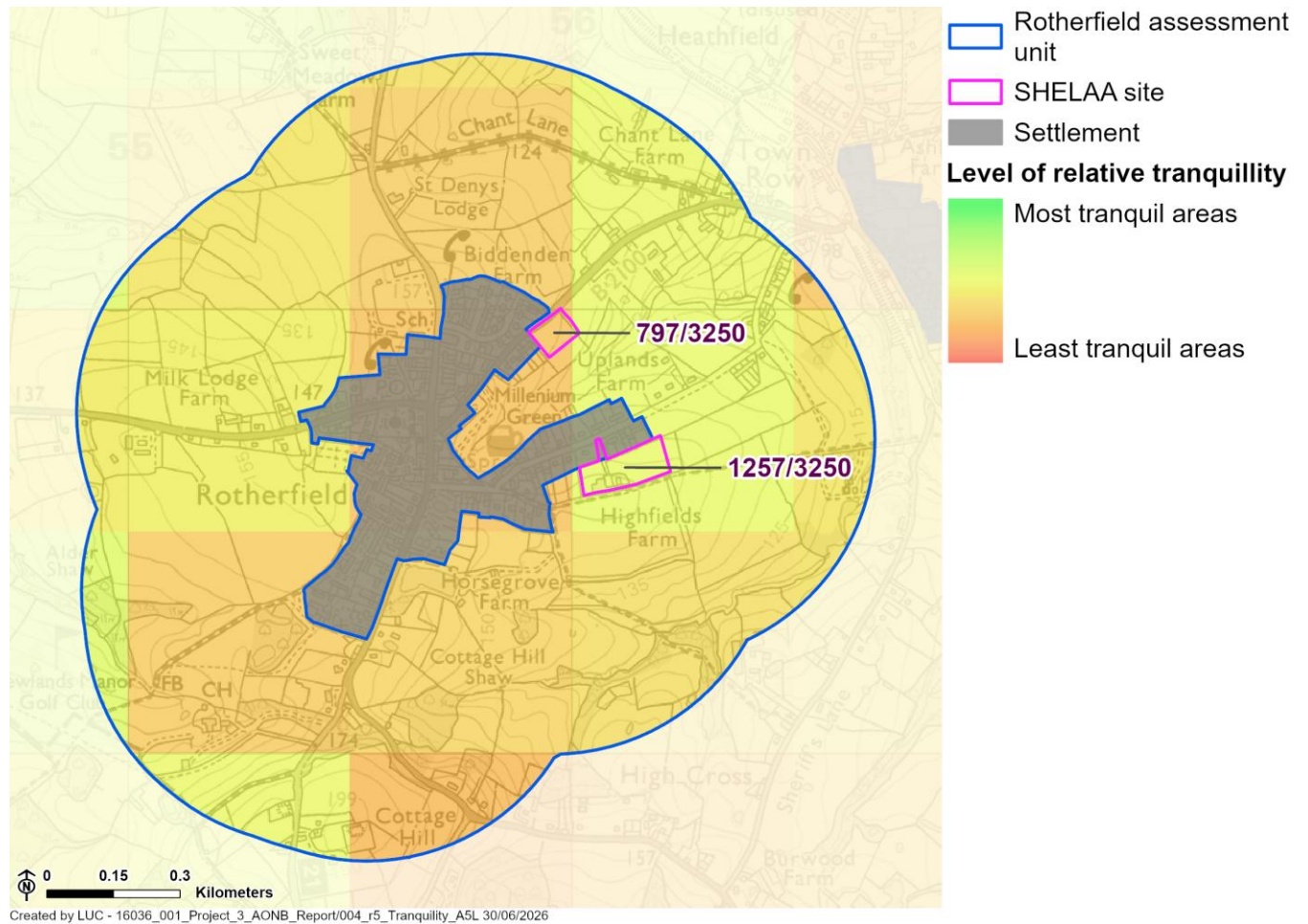
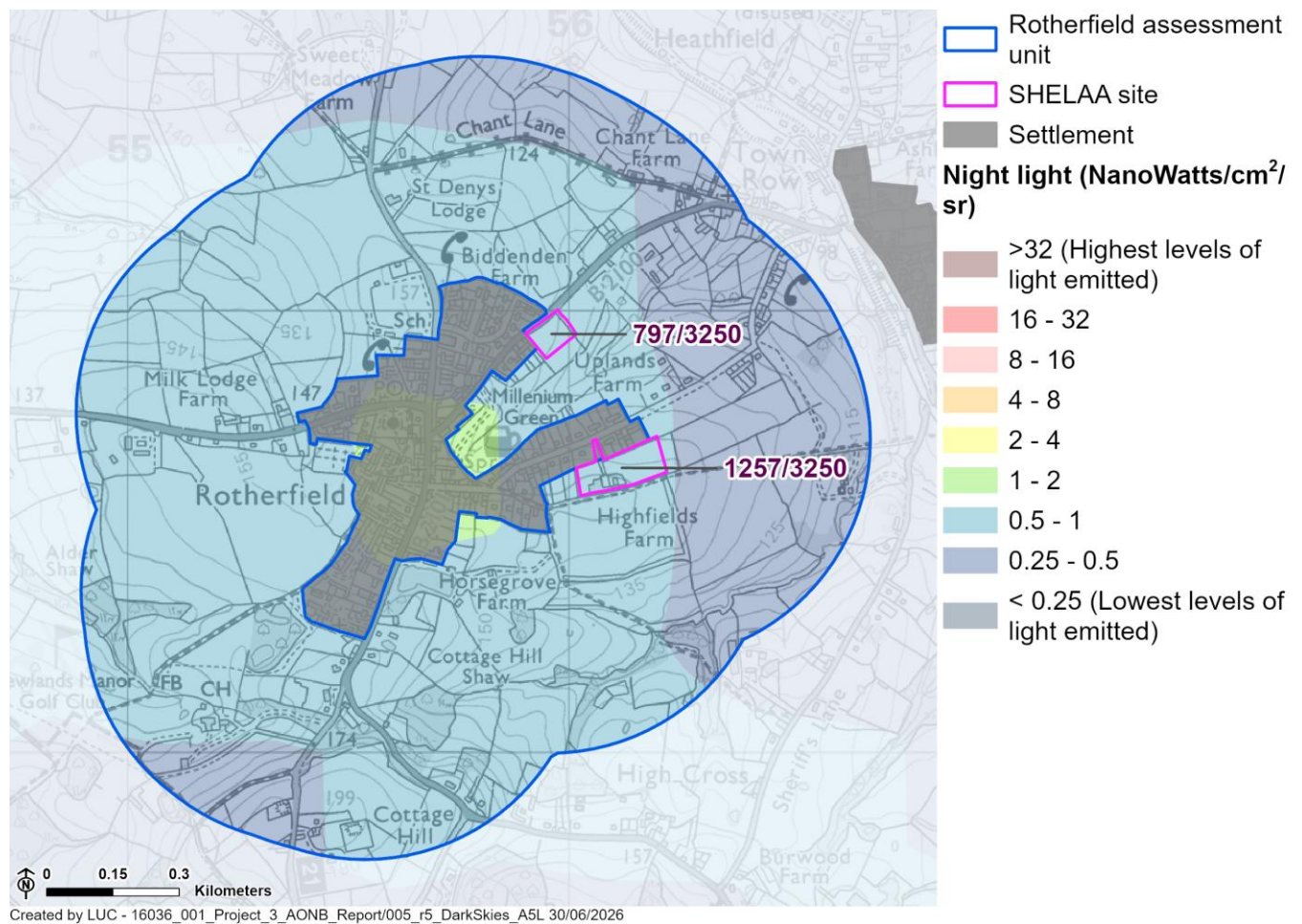


Figure 4: Dark skies



Landscape sensitivity context for the Rotherfield assessment unit

The landscape sensitivity of the Rotherfield assessment unit, described in the Wealden Landscape Sensitivity Assessment to Residential and Employment Development (2023)			
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
	H	H	H
Key sensitivities The key landscape sensitivities to development identified for the assessment unit	- The complex ridge and valley landform. - Interconnecting areas of mature deciduous woodland (some of which is ancient in origin), primarily located in the south of the assessment unit, and which typically fringes settlement. - Areas of priority habitat semi-improved grassland in the east. - Intact historic field patterns, particularly small to medium scale piecemeal enclosure, and some planned private enclosure and small areas of medieval assarts in the south-east. - The historic qualities, distinctive settlement form and architectural vernacular of the Rotherfield Conservation Area. - The strong rural character with areas of tranquillity and dark night skies, which forms the context for outward views from the Rotherfield Conservation Area. - Location within and intervisibility with more distant areas of the High Weald AONB particularly elevated areas on the ridgeline.		
Guidance	- Avoid being located on prominent ridgelines. Any development should be located where well enclosed by vegetation, to be less visible from lower-lying landscapes and have less influence on landscape character. Avoid development in the incised stream valleys and heavily wooded valley slopes, particularly in the east of the assessment unit. - Avoid development in areas of habitat interest, notably ancient woodland and semi-improved grasslands. - Retain broadleaved woodland and hedgerow trees. - Take up biodiversity opportunities listed in the Medway, Ouse and Rother Watershed BOA, especially woodland management and restoration, where possible. - Avoid loss of, harm or deterioration to the semi-improved grasslands and to the interconnecting ancient semi-natural woodlands in this area and allow a 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. - Retain and where possible enhance hedgerows, particularly where deteriorated, 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, using native species where possible. - Preserve historic field patterns, locating development away from intricate small-scale historic field patterns, particularly concentrations of medieval assarts located in the south-east. - Ensure development does not adversely affect the nucleated historic form and character of Rotherfield. Particular attention should be given to the historic settlement edges of the Conservation Area, where development would further influence the historic settlement edge to the east and south-east.		

	■ Consider views from public rights of way when considering the siting and design of development in the landscape. ■ Ensure opportunities to access and enjoy the landscape are preserved and enhanced. ■ Any development should be carefully integrated into the landscape, utilising existing woodland, and / or using species that are in character with the wider landscape, preferably native.. ■ Consider views from the wider landscape of the High Weald AONB, particularly lower-lying landscapes to the north and south, towards the prominent ridgelines of the assessment unit. ■ 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, where the defining components of character relating to the High Weald AONB are most strongly expressed.
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¹ <https://www.highweald.org/look-after/planning/design-guide.html>

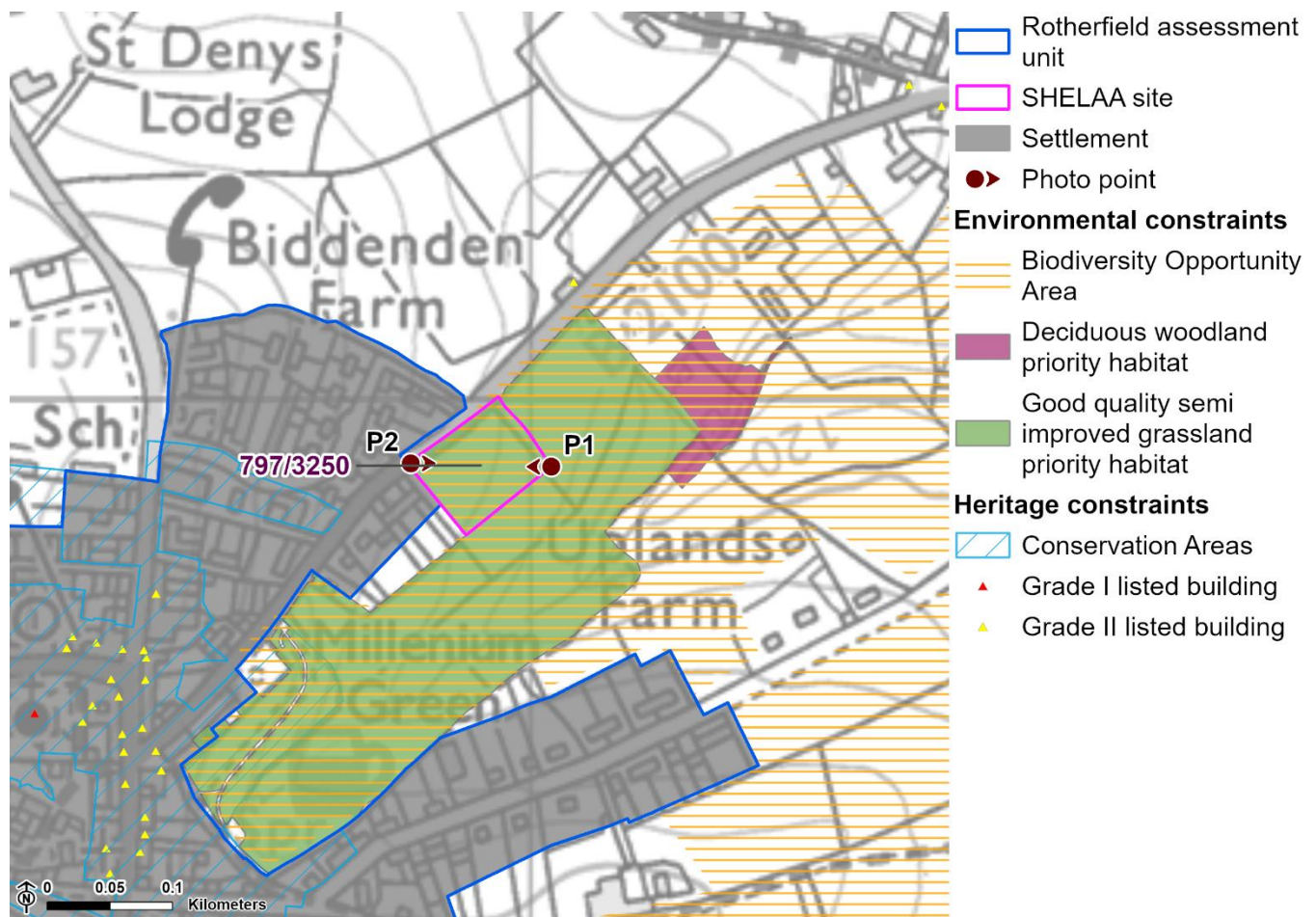
² <https://www.highweald.org/look-after/planning/colour-study.html>

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

Land at Station Road (797/3250)

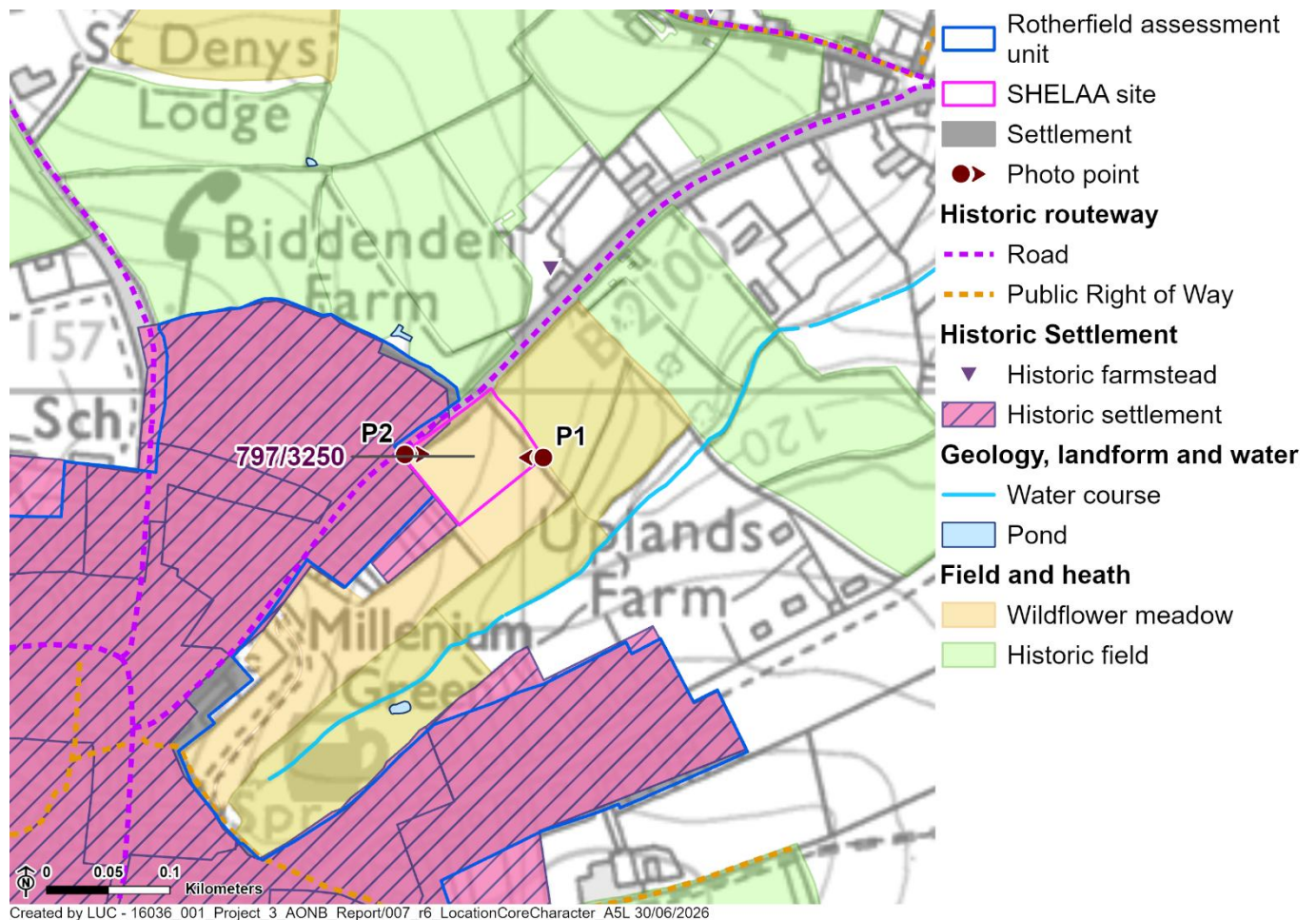
Site Details	
Potential development	Residential development of 10 dwellings, proposed on the site as shown below. Site not Allocated or considered an Option.
Site location	This site is located to the north-east of the settlement and situated to the east of the B2100 Station Road.

Figure 5: Site location and constraints



Created by LUC - 16036_001_Project_3_AONB_Report/006_r6_LocationConstraints_A5L 30/06/2026

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



Representative site photos



Photo 1: View north-west across the site looking towards residential properties along Station Road and Hornshurst Road



Photo 2: Screened views looking south-east towards the site from Station Road

Baseline Analysis

Baseline landscape character	
Key features and qualities of the site in relation to the wider assessment unit	Landform ■ The site is located on the upper slopes to one of the elevated ridgelines of the High Weald – Central LCA and forms a small part of the ‘complex undulating ridged landform’ of the wider assessment unit. ■ It comprises a gentle slope, which falls from 135m AOD in the west to 130m AOD in the east towards an incised stream valley. Natural character ■ The site is pastoral in character, bounded by mature hedgerows to the north, east and south (which is typical of the wider assessment unit); however, a garden fence forms one of the boundaries (along the western edge). ■ The north-eastern site boundary comprises a wooded tree belt and occasional mature trees are located along the other boundaries. ■ All of the site is identified as priority habitat good quality semi-improved grassland and is located within the Medway, Ouse, Rother Watershed BOA (typical of the wider assessment unit). Landscape pattern and time depth ■ The site consists of a small pasture grazed field derived from planned private enclosure (as classified in the Sussex HLC and typical of the wider assessment unit). Perceptual aspects ■ The site is influenced by its proximity to the settlement edge of Rotherfield and the B2100 Station Road, which reduce levels of tranquillity (which are recorded as relatively low in CPRE’s Tranquillity Mapping); however, some dark night skies are experienced (light levels are recorded in the lower/darker bands of CPRE’s Night Blight Mapping) which is typical of the wider assessment unit (Figures 3 and 4).
Settlement form and edge character and extent of built development	The site forms part of the Rotherfield Millennium Green and the pastoral context to Rotherfield; particularly the 20th century settlement expansion to the north and north-east of the historic settlement core along Station Road and Hornshurst Road. The adjacent settlement edge to the north-west of the site consists of thick hedgerows along the B2100 Station Road, beyond which are gardens associated with two storey semi-detached properties along Hornshurst Road. The adjacent settlement edge to the south-west of the site consists of a property boundary in the form of a garden fence beyond which are the gardens and two storey detached and semi-detached properties along the B2100 Station Road. The mature hedgerow along the B2100 Station Road provides a strong boundary feature between the site and settlement.
Baseline visual character	
Potential visual receptors	Slightly elevated views overlooking the site are afforded from the upper storeys of residential properties along Hornshurst Road to the north-west of the site. Relatively open views to the north-east and east are also afforded from the residential properties located to the south-west of the site along Station Road. However, views into the site from Station Road are screened by the hedgerow and embankment, with some glimpsed views into the site at field gates or in between gaps in vegetation.

	Views across the site are also available by recreational receptors visiting the Rotherfield Millennium Green, which the site forms a part of. Distant views of the site from properties along New Road, to the south-east of the site, are partially screened by intervening woodland.
Extent of visibility within the High Weald AONB	Whilst relatively close views of the site are afforded from the surrounding area, landform and woodland partially encloses the site in more distant views across the wider AONB, although there are glimpsed long views south across the wooded valley.

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 site is located on the edge of the <u>principal ridge (Forest Ridge)</u> of the High Weald, contributing to the <u>pattern of faults and folds</u> of the AONB. There are no distinctive geological 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.	Rotherfield is a <u>village of medieval origin</u> with its modern settlement edge along the north-western and south-western boundaries of the site.
Routeways – a dense network of historic routeways (now roads, tracks and paths).	No historic routeways cross the site. However, Station Road along the northern boundary of the site is recorded as a ridgeway on high ground, and contributes towards the <u>dense radiating network</u> of historic routeways, although its expression is altered by its use as the B2100 with associated modern road markings.
Woodland – an abundance of ancient woodland mostly in small holdings, highly interconnected with hedges and shaws.	The mature and wooded field boundaries contribute to the <u>highly interconnected and structurally varied mosaic of ... outgrown hedges</u> of the AONB.
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 small field is used for <u>grazing livestock</u> and enclosed by woody and thick hedged boundaries. The good quality priority habitat semi-improved grassland contributes to the <u>high proportion of good quality semi-improved grassland</u> of the wider AONB.
Dark night skies – intrinsically dark at night with our own galaxy (the Milky Way) visible.	The site forms parts of an <u>intrinsically dark landscapes with a sense of naturalness</u> . It is located adjacent to the edge of Rotherfield which is a <u>rural village with few street lamps</u> .
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	Glimpsed <u>long views</u> south across the wooded valley are afforded, which contribute to a <u>deep sense of rurality</u> . Public access and use of the site as the Rotherfield Millennium Green contributes to the <u>sense of freedom arising from...opportunities to discover many accessible green spaces...</u> The sense of rurality and tranquillity is influenced by proximity to the village and the surrounding existing residential development.

and ideas left by writers, poets and gardeners inspired by the landscape.	The combination of grazing and mature tree and hedgerow boundaries provides a <i>pastoral feel</i> and contributes to the <i>recognisable and unifying mosaic of open field and wooded habitats</i> .
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>predominantly pastoral mixed farming</i> . There is <i>an absence of industrial scale farming</i> .

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 Rotherfield assessment unit to have a **high** sensitivity to small scale residential development (2-2.5 storey housing). The sensitivity analysis indicates that areas of complex landform, priority habitat woodland (including ancient woodland) and grassland, areas with an intact historic field pattern, historic features in the Rotherfield Conservation Area and the rural setting provided to it, the separation provided between settlements, the visual prominence of the assessment unit and its location within and visual relationship with the wider High Weald AONB increase sensitivity to built development. However, the occasional influence of modern development, the few known historic features (outside of the conservation area), partially contained nature of outward views in wooded areas along the southern and north-western edges of the assessment unit and existing expansion beyond the historic settlement edge decreases sensitivity.

The Site

Whilst the site has some characteristics which are atypical of the wider assessment unit and decrease sensitivity, including a regular field pattern, gently sloping topography and limited intervisibility with the Rotherfield Conservation Area, overall, it is considered that the site is of **high** sensitivity to small scale residential development (2-2.5 storey housing), in line with the wider assessment unit. The site is a pastoral field of good quality semi-improved grassland (enclosed by mature and partially wooded field boundaries) that forms part of the Rotherfield Millennium Green and the wider pastoral context in outward views from the settlement edge, and so the site demonstrates a number of characteristics which increase sensitivity to development across the 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 several core character components of natural beauty of the High Weald AONB. In summary:

- The elevated landform forms part of the principal Forest Ridge;
- The mature field boundaries contribute to the highly interconnected woodland habitats in the locality;
- The good quality semi-improved natural grassland contributes to the high proportion of good quality flowery grassland within the AONB;
- The grazing of livestock contributes to the pastoral feel of the landscape, linking to the history of the land-based economy;
- The glimpsed long views south contribute to the rurality of the landscape;
- The use of the site as part of the Rotherfield Millennium Green contributes to the opportunities for informal outdoor recreation; and
- The site forms part of a landscape with dark skies.

Overall, it is considered that there is a **strong 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 ... outgrown hedges...</i>	■ Retain, protect and enhance all mature vegetation surrounding the site, especially the mature hedgerows to the north, east and south, and the wooded tree belt along the north-eastern boundary (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). ■ Take up biodiversity opportunities listed for the Medway, Ouse and Rother Watershed BOA where possible (in accordance with the AONB's Objective W2).
Loss or deterioration of pastoral semi-improved grassland.	Fieldsapes and heath	■ <i>High proportion of fragmented species-rich grassland scattered within a landscape containing a high proportion of good quality semi-improved grasslands.</i> ■ <i>Fields, mostly permanent pasture, used for grazing livestock...</i>	■ Retain habitat connectivity of the wider area of semi-improved grassland by enhancing and maintaining structural complexity and species diversity along the southern and eastern site boundaries (in accordance with the AONB's Objective FH3). ■ Loss of pasture and good quality semi-improved grassland 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

	Land-based economy and rural living	<i>Predominantly pastoral mixed farming with an absence of industrial scale farming.</i>	scale of the site. However, field boundaries around the edge of the site should be retained and enhanced where possible to avoid complete loss of field pattern (in accordance with the AONB's Objective FH2).
Modifications to Station Road (recorded as a historic ridgeway on high ground) 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 lighting in the dark night skies resulting in night, including the potential introduction of more streetlights along Station Road if used for access.	Dark night skies	■ <i>Intrinsically dark landscapes with a sense of naturalness.</i> ■ <i>Many rural villages with few street lamps or no street lighting.</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 guidance⁴ and use dark sky-friendly lighting (in accordance with the AONB's Objectives DS1 and DS2).
Settlement form edge and setting			
Deterioration of the rural character of the site which contributes to the setting of Rotherfield.	Settlement	<i>Villages and towns mostly of medieval origin...</i>	■ Minimise visibility of development and maintain the wooded character of views from within Rotherfield, including the north-eastern settlement edge (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).

⁴ 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/>

			Development to draw on the principles contained within the High Weald AONB 'High Weald Housing Design Guide'⁵, 'Guidance on the selection and use of colour in development'⁶ and objectives of the High Weald AONB Management Plan⁷ (in accordance with the AONB's Objective S2).
Extension of development beyond the robust boundary provided by mature hedgerows between the site and properties on the edge of the settlement.	N/A	N/A	Maintain the existing settlement pattern by following the scale and built form of the adjacent existing development along the south-eastern edge of the B2100, supporting the pattern of single row dwellings along the edge of the road (in accordance with the AONB's Objectives S1 and S2).
Visual amenity			
Visibility of development seen by: - users of the Rotherfield Millennium Green, which includes the site; - residents along the settlement edge, including along Hornshurst Road and Station Road; and - motorists, cyclists and pedestrians along the B2100 Station Road.	Aesthetic and perceptual qualities	<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>A sense of freedom arising from...opportunities to discover many accessible green spaces...</i>	- Retain, protect and enhance all existing vegetation, including the mature hedgerows along the north-eastern and north-western boundaries of the site (in accordance with the AONB's Objectives W1 and PQ2). - Screen new development with additional planting, particularly in views from the residential properties along Hornshurst Road and Station Road to the north-west and south-west respectively using native local species, where possible, to maintain the rural character of the wider area. - Reduce the density 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). - Existing public access across the site, which provides connectivity across the Rotherfield Millennium Green, should be retained (in accordance with the AONB's Objective PQ3).

⁵ <https://www.highweald.org/look-after/planning/design-guide.html>

⁶ <https://www.highweald.org/look-after/planning/colour-study.html>

⁷ <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	
High impact	The baseline analysis identifies that the site (and its immediate surrounds) expresses several core character components of natural beauty, with a strong level of expression. This is due to the elevated landform and glimpsed long views south; mature hedgerows; grazed pastures and good quality semi-improved natural grassland; its use as part of the Rotherfield Millennium Green; and being part of a landscape with dark night skies. Development of the site is judged to have a high impact on the landscape and visual qualities/features that define the AONB, therefore 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> There is no variation to the overall impact considered above.

Summary and recommendations

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

- Retain, protect and enhance the mature hedgerows to the north, east and south, and the wooded tree belt along the north-eastern boundary.
- Take up biodiversity opportunities listed for the Medway, Ouse and Rother Watershed BOA where possible.
- Retain habitat connectivity of the wider area of semi-improved grassland by enhancing and maintaining structural complexity and species diversity along the southern and eastern site boundaries.
- Minimise visibility of development and maintain the wooded character of views from within Rotherfield, including the north-eastern settlement edge.
- Maintain the existing settlement pattern by following the scale and built form of the adjacent existing development along the south-eastern edge of the B2100, supporting the pattern of single row dwellings along the edge of the road.
- Screen new development with additional planting, particularly in views from the residential properties along Hornshurst Road and Station Road to the north-west and south-west respectively using native local species, where possible, to maintain the rural character of the wider area.
- Existing public access across the site, which provides connectivity across the Rotherfield Millennium Green, should be retained.

Highfields Farm (1257/3250)

Site Details	
Potential development	Residential development proposed on entirety of site mapped below, but only the western half of the site is considered an Option (ORO2) for 8 dwellings in the Focused Wealden Local Plan (2026).
Site location	This site is located to the east of the settlement and situated to the north of Highfields Farm and to the south and east of properties along New Road.

Figure 7: Site location and constraints

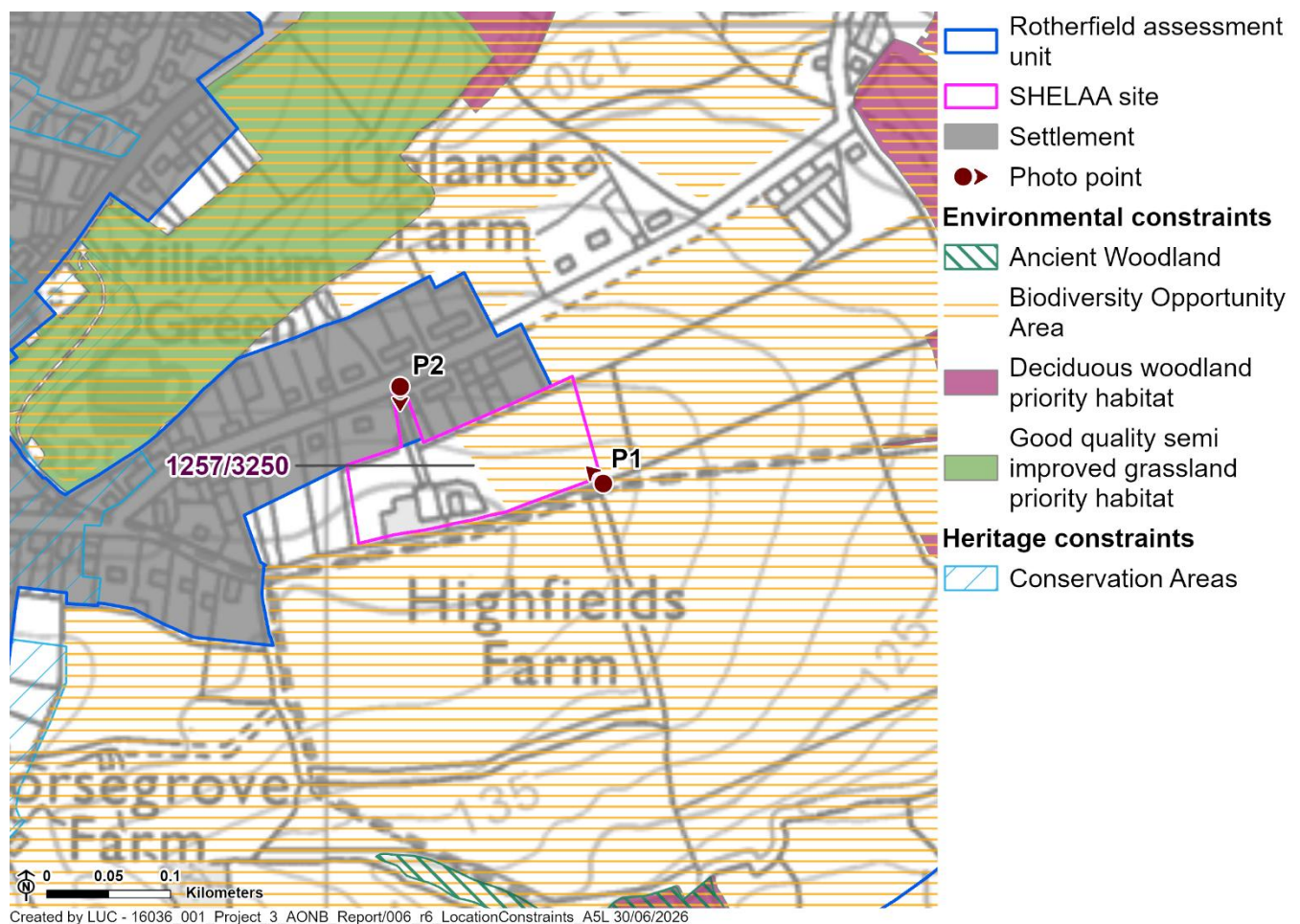
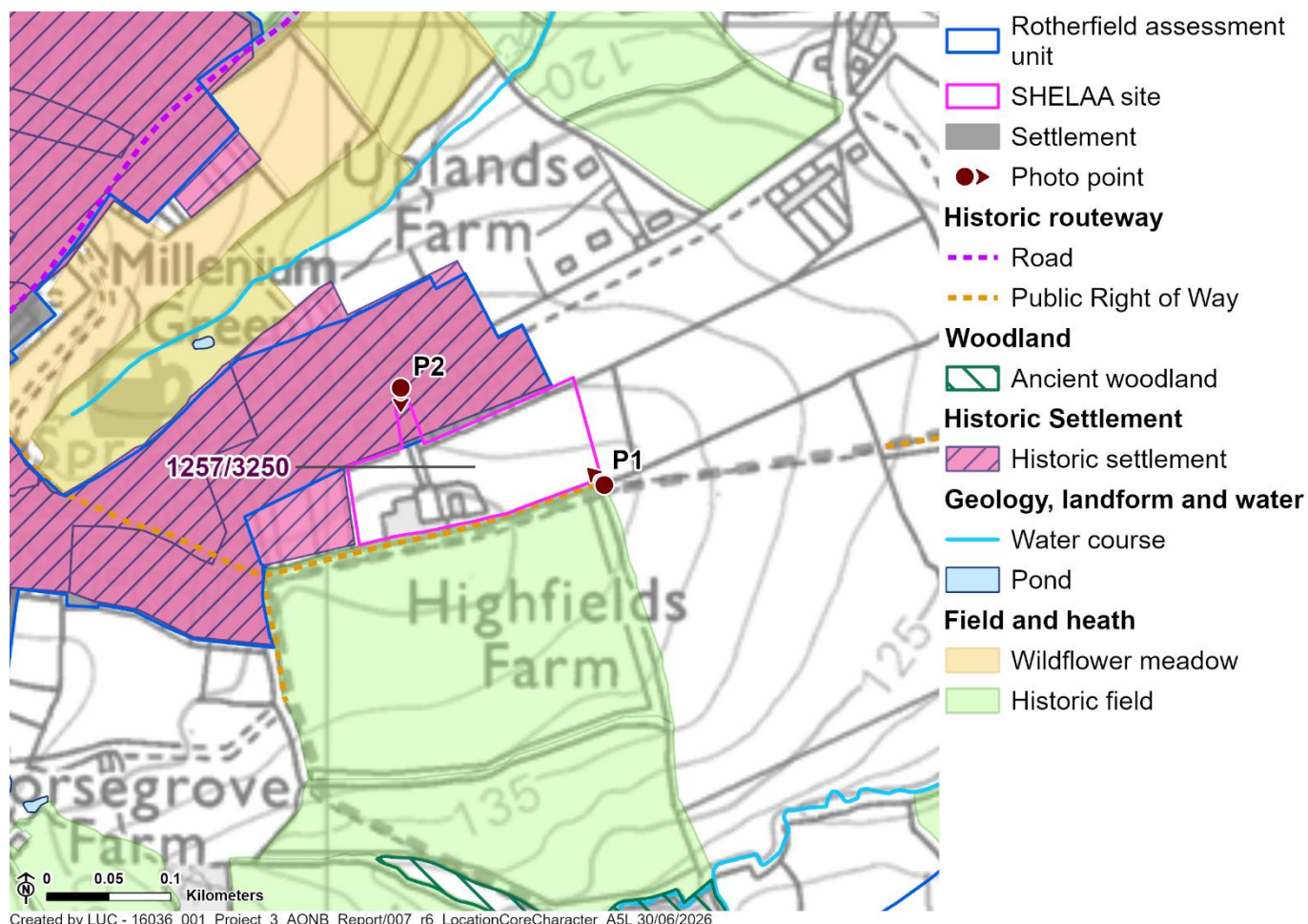


Figure 8: Site location and core character components of natural beauty of the High Weald AONB



Representative site photos



Photo 1: View north-west from the PRow along the southern boundary, looking down the slope of the site towards houses along New Road.



Photo 2: View south from New Road towards the farm buildings and farm house within the centre of the site.

Baseline Analysis

Baseline landscape character	
Key features and qualities of the site in relation to the wider assessment unit	Landform ■ The site is located on the upper slopes to one of the elevated ridgelines of the High Weald – Central LCA and forms a small part of the ‘complex undulating ridged landform’ of the wider assessment unit. ■ It comprises a relatively steep slope, which falls from 150m AOD in the south-west to 140m AOD in the north-east towards an incised stream valley. Natural character ■ The site is pastoral in character, bounded by a hedgerow to the south and a mature tree group (associated with the domestic curtilage of a property along New Road) to the west boundary of the site (which is typical of the wider assessment unit); however, garden fences and an agricultural fencing also form boundaries (along the northern and eastern edges respectively). ■ Modern farm buildings and a farmhouse exist within the southern half of the site and influence the rural character locally although are partially enclosed by the mature tree group to the west (which is typical of the wider assessment unit). ■ The eastern half of the site is located within the Medway, Ouse, Rother Watershed BOA (typical of the wider assessment unit). Landscape pattern and time depth ■ The site consists of two small pasture grazed fields (separated by a farm track) which contribute to the small to medium scale piecemeal enclosure (as classified in the Sussex HLC and typical of the wider assessment unit). Perceptual aspects ■ The site is influenced by its proximity to the settlement edge of Rotherfield and New Road, which reduce levels of tranquillity (which are recorded in the middle bands of CPRE’s Tranquillity Mapping, Figure 3); however, some dark night skies are experienced (light levels are recorded in the lower/darker bands of CPRE’s Night Blight Mapping, Figure 4) which is typical of the wider assessment unit. ■ The modern farm buildings contribute to the occasional signs of modern development found throughout the assessment unit.
Settlement form and edge character and extent of built development	The site forms part of the pastoral context to Rotherfield; particularly the 20th century settlement expansion to the east of the historic settlement core along New Road, and contains this part of the settlement due to the relatively steep topography. The adjacent settlement edge to the west of the site consist of a mature tree group, beyond which are gardens associated with bungalows and occasional two-storey detached properties along New Road. The adjacent settlement edge to the north of the site consists of a property boundary in the form of garden/ agricultural fencing beyond which are the gardens and more properties along New Road. The site does not play a significant role in settlement separation, as ribbon development along New Road exerts an existing influence on the sense of separation between Rotherfield and Town Row to the north-east.
Baseline visual character	
Potential visual receptors	There are views from the upper storeys of residential properties along New Road to the north and north-east which look up the slope of the site, although views are partially filtered by garden vegetation along property boundaries. Views towards the site from properties further west along New Road and along Horsegrove Lane are

	filtered by the mature tree group that encloses the western edge of the site. More distant views from within the core of the settlement (and Conservation Area) are also filtered by mature vegetation including woodland within Millenium Green. To the east, an established woodland encloses the site and limits visibility from the wider landscape from this direction. Views of the site from the public right of way that runs along the southern boundary are largely filtered by the hedgerow that lines the route, although occasional views that look down the slope of the site can be seen above the hedgerow or through gaps.
Extent of visibility within the High Weald AONB	Long views to and from the site are limited by surrounding vegetation and landform, as the site sits below the central ridge of Rotherfield to the west, and more elevated land around Cottage Hill to the south-west. As a result, intervisibility with the wider High Weald AONB is limited, with views largely confined to the immediate landscape.

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 elevated landform of the site forms part of the <i>principal ridge (Forest Ridge)</i> and contributes to the <i>pattern of faults and folds</i> . There are no distinctive geological 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.	Rotherfield is a <i>village of medieval origin</i> with its modern settlement edge along the northern and western boundaries of the site.
Routeways – a dense network of historic routeways (now roads, tracks and paths).	A historic routeway (public right of way) runs along the southern boundary of the site and contributes towards the <i>dense, radiating network</i> of routeways.
Woodland – an abundance of ancient woodland mostly in small holdings, highly interconnected with hedges and shaws.	The mature tree group along the western boundary of the site contributes towards the <i>highly interconnected and structurally varied mosaic of many small woods... and outgrown hedges</i> typical of the AONB. The hedgerow long the southern boundary 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 site comprises two small pastoral fields used for <i>grazing livestock</i> and is bounded by a hedgerow to the south and mature tree group to the west.
Dark night skies – intrinsically dark at night with our own galaxy (the Milky Way) visible.	The site forms part of an <i>intrinsically dark landscapes with a sense of naturalness</i> . It is located adjacent to the edge of Rotherfield which is a <i>rural village with few street lamps</i> . The adjacent New Road is an <i>unlit road</i> .
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	The combination of grazing pasture and surrounding woodland contributes to the <i>recognisable and unifying mosaic of open field and wooded habitats</i> . Vegetation enclosing the site creates <i>a sense of intimacy</i> , although the sense of rurality and tranquillity is influenced by proximity to the village and the surrounding existing residential development.

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.	The public right of way that runs along the southern boundary of the site 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 the site for grazing reflects the <u>predominantly pastoral mixed farming</u> , including the farm buildings. There is <u>an absence of industrial-scale farming</u> .

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 Rotherfield assessment unit to have a **high** sensitivity to small scale residential development (2-2.5 storey housing). The sensitivity analysis indicates that areas of complex landform, priority habitat woodland (including ancient woodland) and grassland, areas with an intact historic field pattern, historic features in the Rotherfield Conservation Area and the rural setting provided to it, the separation provided between settlements, the visual prominence of the assessment unit and its location within and visual relationship with the wider High Weald AONB increase sensitivity to built development. However, the occasional influence of modern development, the few known historic features (outside of the conservation area), partially contained nature of outward views in wooded areas along the southern and north-western edges of the assessment unit and existing expansion beyond the historic settlement edge decreases 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 comprises two small pastoral fields (partly enclosed by a mature tree group to the west and hedgerow to the south) that forms part of a historic field pattern on the eastern edge of Rotherfield. Its elevated landform is seen on the skyline in views from adjacent properties along New Road and is overlooked by users of a public right of way which runs along the southern site boundary, and so the site demonstrates a number of characteristics that increase sensitivity across the wider assessment unit. However, the site has a partially enclosed character, which limits visibility into the site from the Conservation Area, and it is influenced by modern farm buildings within the site and modern residential development adjacent to it, 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:

- The elevated landform forms part of the principal Forest Ridge;
- The public right of way along the southern site boundary contributes to the radiating network of historic routeways and the sense of freedom for walkers;
- The mature tree group in the west and hedgerow in the south contribute to the highly interconnected woodland habitats;
- The grazing of livestock contributes to the pastoral feel of the landscape, linking to the history of the land-based economy; and
- The site forms part of a landscape with dark skies.

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			
Changes to the elevated landform as a result of interventions/ earthworks upon the landform.	Natural systems	■ <i>A principal ridge (Forest Ridge) running east – west from Horsham to Cranbrook...</i> ■ <i>A pattern of faults and folds that distinguishes the High Weald from the rest of the south and east of England, with a high concentration of springs associated with fault lines...</i>	■ Limit the extent of development extending up the slope onto the valley side to minimise alterations to the landform and retain its expression as part of the principal Forest Ridge and its contribution to the pattern of faults and folds (in accordance with the AONB's Objective G2).
Removal or deterioration of boundary vegetation 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.</i>	■ Retain, protect and enhance all mature boundary vegetation surrounding the site, especially the hedgerow to the south and mature tree group to the west (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 Objective W2). ■ Take up biodiversity opportunities listed for the Medway, Ouse, Rother Watershed BOA, where possible (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 of the grazed pastures.	Fieldsapes and heath	<i>Fields, mostly permanent pasture, used for grazing livestock...</i>	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 around the edge of the site should be retained and enhanced where possible to avoid complete loss of field pattern (in accordance with the AONB's Objective FH2).
Deterioration of the historic routeway and public right of way along the southern site boundary, which provides a connection to other historic routeways.	Routeways	<i>A dense radiating network with a variety of origins...</i>	Retain, protect and enhance the public right of way which runs along the southern site boundary and the rural character of the historic route (in accordance with the AONB's Objectives R1 and PQ3).
Influence of lighting in the dark night skies resulting in night blight, including the potential introduction of streetlights along New Road if used for access.	Dark night skies	<i>Intrinsically dark landscapes with a sense of naturalness.</i> <i>Many rural villages with few street lamps or no street lighting.</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 guidance⁸ and use dark sky-friendly lighting (in accordance with the AONB's Objectives DS1 and DS2).
Settlement form edge and setting			
Deterioration of the rural character of the site which contributes to the setting of Rotherfield, particularly the elevated nature of the site where the landform provides containment to the settlement edge and forms part of the rural	Settlement	<i>Villages and towns mostly of medieval origin...</i>	- Minimise visibility of development and maintain the wooded character of views from within Rotherfield, including the eastern settlement edge (in accordance with the AONB's Objective S1). - Avoid development along the top of the elevated slope of the site, which forms a visible skyline in outward views from the settlement edge (in accordance with the AONB's Objective PQ2).

⁸ 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/>

skyline in views from the edge of the settlement.			■ 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'⁹, '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).
Extension of development beyond the robust western boundary provided by the mature tree group between the site and properties to the west.	N/A	N/A	■ Locate development in the north of the site (where the existing settlement boundary is less robust) to relate better to the existing settlement pattern (in accordance with the Objective S1).
Visual amenity			
Visibility of development seen by: ■ walkers on the public footpath along the southern site boundary; ■ residents along the settlement edge, including along New Road; and ■ motorists, cyclists and pedestrians along New Road.	Aesthetic and perceptual qualities	■ <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>	■ Retain, protect and enhance all existing vegetation, including the mature tree group that encloses the site to the west, taking opportunities for new planting to soften the settlement edge along New Road to the north (in accordance with the AONB's Objectives W1 and PQ2). ■ Screen new development with additional planting, particularly in views from the residential properties along New Road to the north, using local species to maintain the rural character of the wider area (in accordance with the AONB's Objective PQ2). ■ Reduce the density 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).
Overall impact on the core character components of natural beauty of the High Weald AONB			

⁹ <https://www.highweald.org/look-after/planning/design-guide.html>

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

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

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 elevated landform; presence of the mature tree group to the west and hedgerow to the south; grazed pastures; a historic routeway (PRoW) running along the southern boundary of the site; and being part of a landscape with dark night skies. 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 effects on the grazed pastures which would be lost.

Variation to overall impact

There is no variation to the overall impact considered above.

Summary and recommendations

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

- Limit the extent of development extending up the slope onto the valley side to minimise alterations to the landform.
- Retain, protect and enhance the hedgerow to the south and mature tree group to the west.
- Take up biodiversity opportunities listed for the Medway, Ouse, Rother Watershed BOA, where possible.
- Retain, protect and enhance the public right of way which runs along the southern site boundary and the rural character of the historic route.
- Minimise visibility of development and maintain the wooded character of views from within Rotherfield, including the eastern settlement edge.
- Avoid development along the top of the elevated slope of the site, which forms a visible skyline in outward views from the settlement edge.
- Locate development in the north of the site (where the existing settlement boundary is less robust) to relate better to the existing settlement pattern.
- Screen new development with additional planting, particularly in views from the residential properties along New Road to the north, using local species to maintain the rural character of the wider area.

Cumulative effects of development sites proposed in the Rotherfield assessment unit

Two sites have been assessed within the Rotherfield 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 at Station Road (797/3250)	High impact	No variation.
Highfields Farm (1257/3250)	Moderate impact	No variation.

If both sites were brought forward for development to the extent as assessed, it would result in a potential of up to 18 dwellings being built, and therefore a limited expansion of the settlement into the surrounding rural landscape. The sites are located to the north-east and east of the settlement, within approximately 260m of each other. The development of both sites may lead to the perception of the settlement edge extending into the countryside, affecting the rural setting of the settlement. This could result in the loss of fields, good quality semi-improved grassland, hedgerow boundaries and trees within the High Weald AONB. There would likely be cumulative impacts on a few components of character of the High Weald AONB with the expression of the principal Forest Ridge and grazing pastures potentially being affected. However, due to the small scale of the sites, the intervening distance between them, and the well-wooded character surrounding them, cumulative landscape and visual effects would be limited, although given the prominence of the elevated southern extents of site **1257/3250**, development within this part of the site should be avoided to minimise potential for cumulative effects.

Overall, it is considered that the cumulative impact of developing the two 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.