

Wealden District Council

Landscape and Visual Appraisal – Appendix A.8

Potential Development Sites in the High Weald

AONB: LCA 5B - Wadhurst

Final report

Prepared by LUC

August 2026



Wealden District Council

Landscape and Visual Appraisal – Appendix A.8 Potential Development Sites in the High Weald AONB: LCA 5B - Wadhurst

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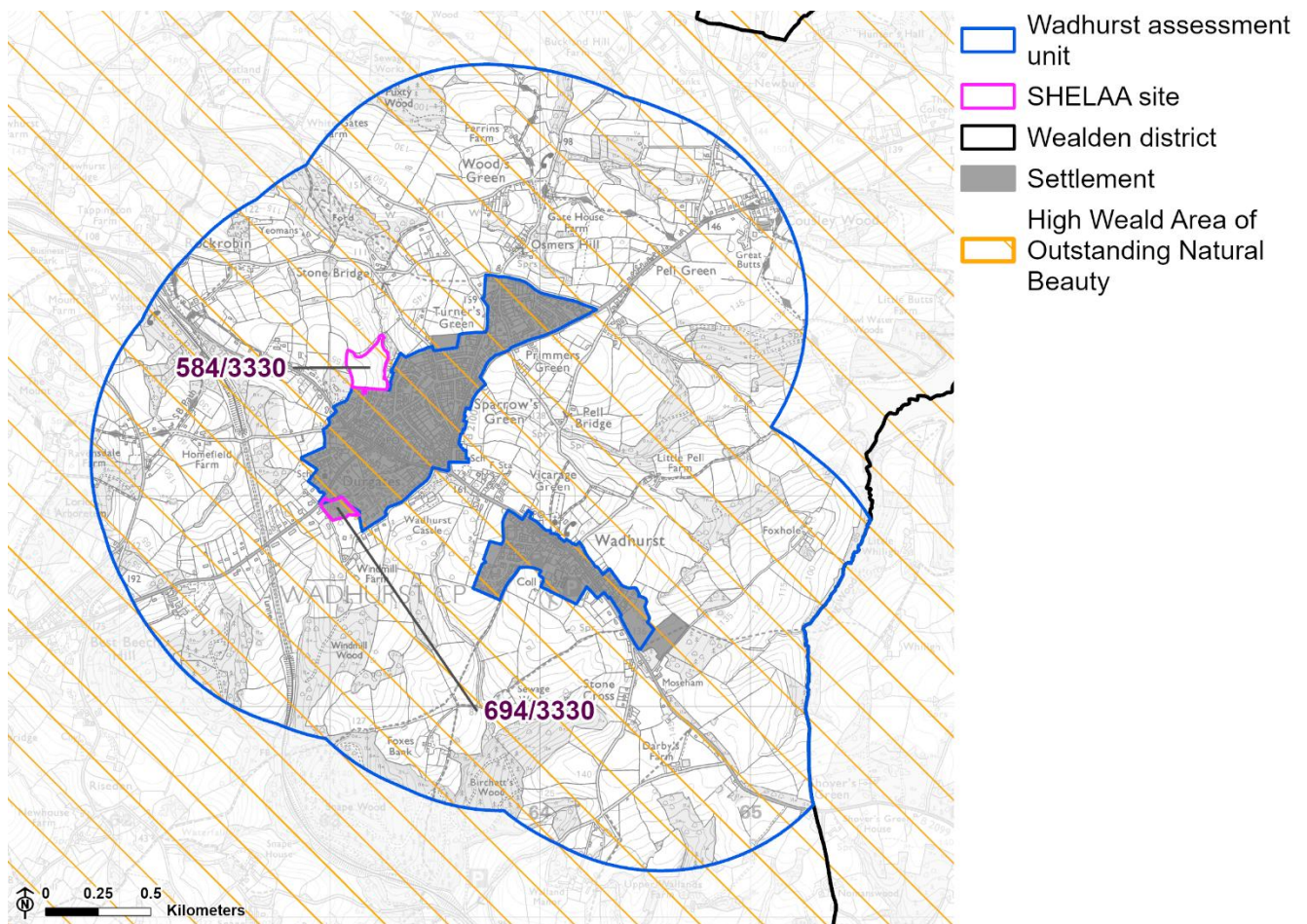
Appendix A.8

Wadhurst Assessment Unit

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

- Land adjacent to Jonas Drive (584/3330)
- Land at Windmill House, Windmill Lane (694/3330)

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



Created by LUC - 16036_001_Project_3_AONB_Report/002_r5_AssessedSitesRelationToAssessmentUnit_A5L 30/06/2026

Settlement location, evolution and pattern

Settlement location and context	Wadhurst is a linear village located in the north-east of Wealden District. The village is located on one of the principal east-west ridges within the High Weald AONB. The historic core of the village is centred around the former market place at St James' Square, located along the B2099. Wadhurst is designated as a Conservation Area, which extends to the north-west beyond the settlement boundary to include the churchyard, two large Georgian houses and their associated grounds and pastoral fields which form the setting to these historic residences and Wadhurst Castle. This assessment unit includes the village of Durgates, which is located to the north-west of Wadhurst near the junction of the B2099 and B2100. The Wadhurst Conservation Area extends to the southern boundary of Durgates. The small historic villages of Pell Green and Cousley Wood, designated as Conservation Areas, are located in the north-east of the unit along the B2100.
Settlement evolution	Wadhurst has its origins as a market village, with further growth of the village between the 15th to 18th centuries attributed to the iron industry in the locality. Agriculture, particularly the growing of hops, also played a role in the expansion of the village. The village has retained much of its historic linear form, apart from some modern development that extends south-west, including Uplands Community College. Late 20th century growth of the village can be attributed to the London to Hastings railway, which enables residents to commute to London.
Settlement pattern and edge character	Development consists of one and two storey detached and semi-detached houses, including historic properties within the Conservation Area, with some two storey 20th century terraced properties in the south-west. The surrounding pastoral fields form the context for the settlement, with the Wadhurst Castle Registered Park and Garden forming a soft boundary feature to the south-west of the settlement. The spire of the village church forms a prominent skyline feature in the landscape.

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 Wadhurst 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

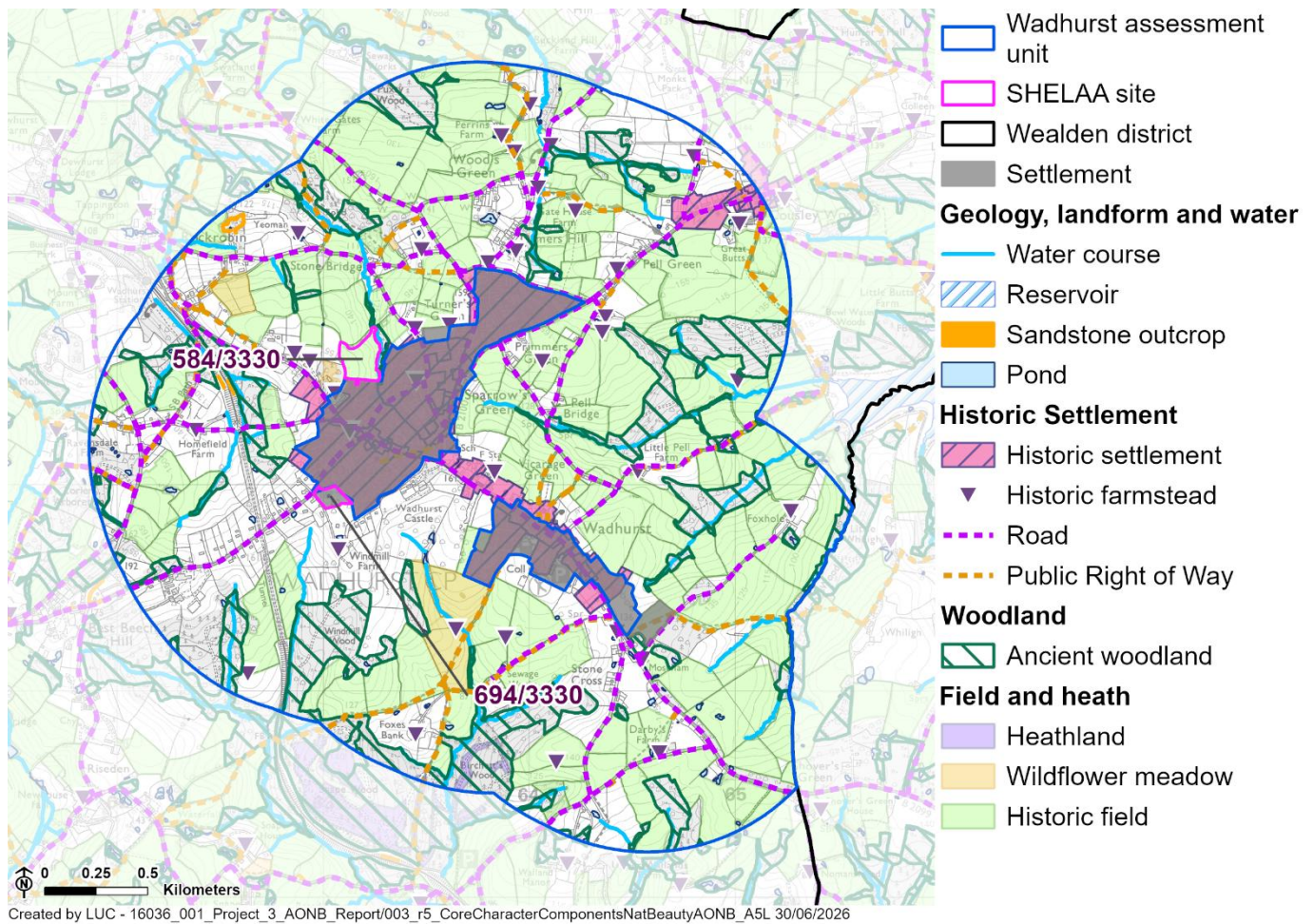
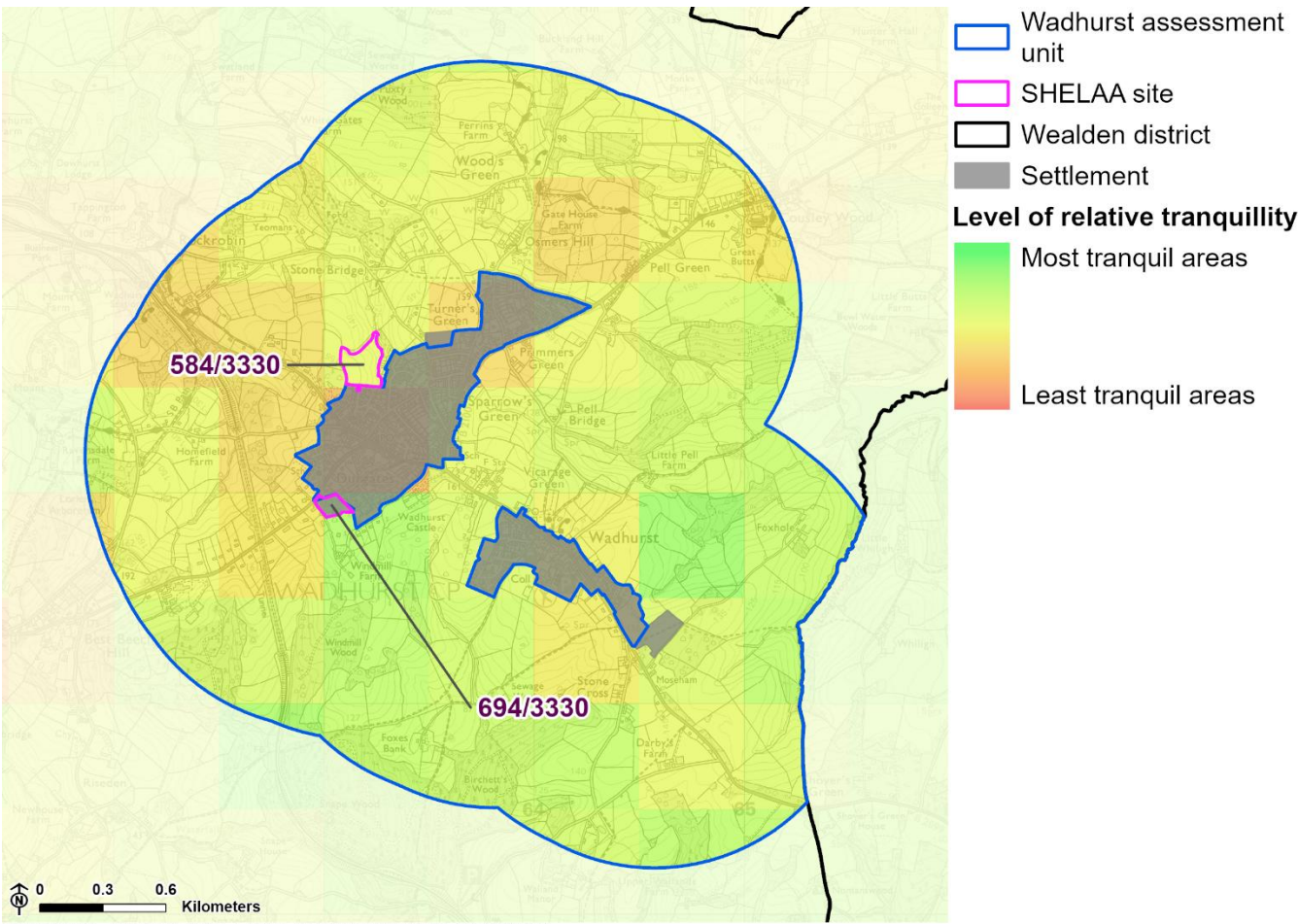
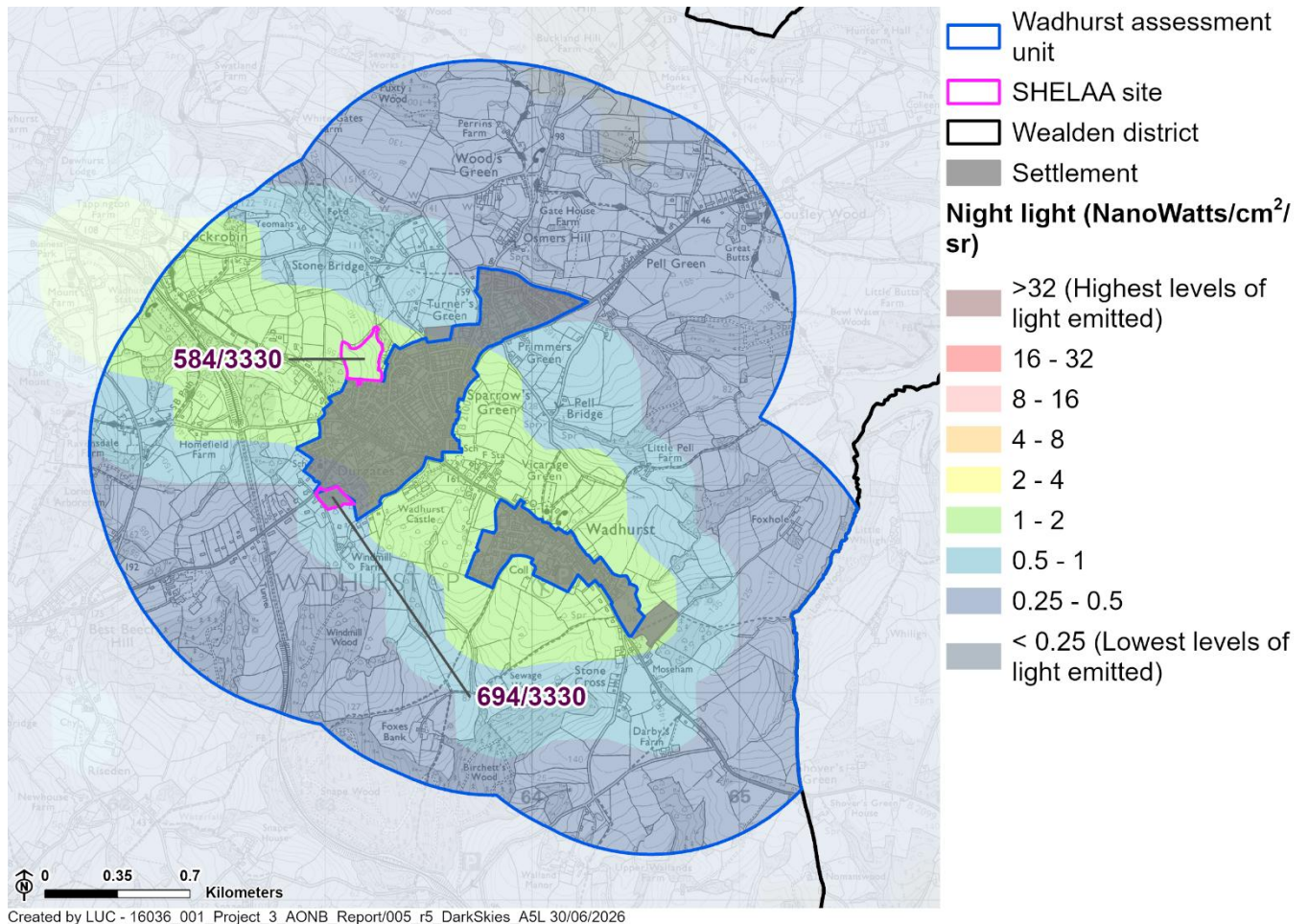


Figure 3: Tranquillity



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Figure 4: Dark skies



Landscape sensitivity context for the Wadhurst assessment unit

<i>The landscape sensitivity of the Wadhurst assessment unit, described in the 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
	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 (many of which are ancient in origin), located throughout the assessment unit. ■ The pastoral landscape with areas of semi-improved grassland and lowland meadows in the south-west and west. ■ Historic features including the Wadhurst, Pell Green and Cousley Wood Conservation Areas, with a strongly expressed architectural vernacular, the Wadhurst Castle Registered Park and Garden and numerous listed buildings. ■ Intact historic field patterns, particularly medieval assarts located throughout the assessment unit. ■ The strong rural character with areas of remoteness and tranquillity, particularly on the wooded slopes and valleys away from main settlements. ■ Location within and intervisibility with some significant distant views of the High Weald AONB. ■ The scenic rural backdrop provided to Wadhurst, Pell Green and Cousley Wood.		
Guidance	■ Consider views of development from the wider AONB, particularly from lower-lying landscapes (within LCA 6B/6C), siting development where well enclosed by vegetation and where it would relate to the existing ridgeline settlement pattern. ■ Avoid development 'spilling' beyond the ridge crest onto heavily wooded valley sides and the lower-lying incised stream valleys of LCA 6B/6C. ■ Avoid development in areas of habitat interest, notably ancient woodland, semi-improved grasslands and lowland meadows. ■ Retain broadleaved woodland. Avoid loss of, harm or deterioration to the interconnecting ancient semi-natural woodlands 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 or replace hedgerow or in-field trees, including tree clumps, protecting mature specimen trees from the impacts of development. Any new planting should be in character with the locality, using native species where possible. 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 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 medieval assarts located throughout the assessment unit.		

- Ensure development does not adversely affect the intact historic form and character of the villages of Wadhurst, Pell Green and Cousley Wood.
- Retain and enhance the historic settlement edges of Conservation Areas, particularly where development would influence the linear form of the historic villages.
- 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 adversely affect the parkland landscape setting of the Wadhurst Castle Registered Park and Garden.
- Minimise the potential for further coalescence between Wadhurst and Durgates, maintaining the separation between the settlements.
- Consider views from popular public rights of way when siting and designing 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, or using species that are in character with the wider landscape.
- Consider views from the wider landscape of the High Weald AONB, particularly lower-lying landscapes to the north and south (LCA 6B/6C), towards the prominent ridgelines of the assessment unit.
- Ensure development does not affect the scenic rural character of the landscape, and areas of relative tranquillity, and where the defining components of character relating to the High Weald AONB are most strongly expressed.

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 adjacent to Jonas Drive (584/3330)

Site Details	
Potential development	Residential development of 30 dwellings, proposed on the site as shown below. Site not Allocated or considered an Option.
Site location	This site is located to the north-west of the settlement of Durgates and situated between Station Road and Old Station Road.

Figure 5: Site location and constraints

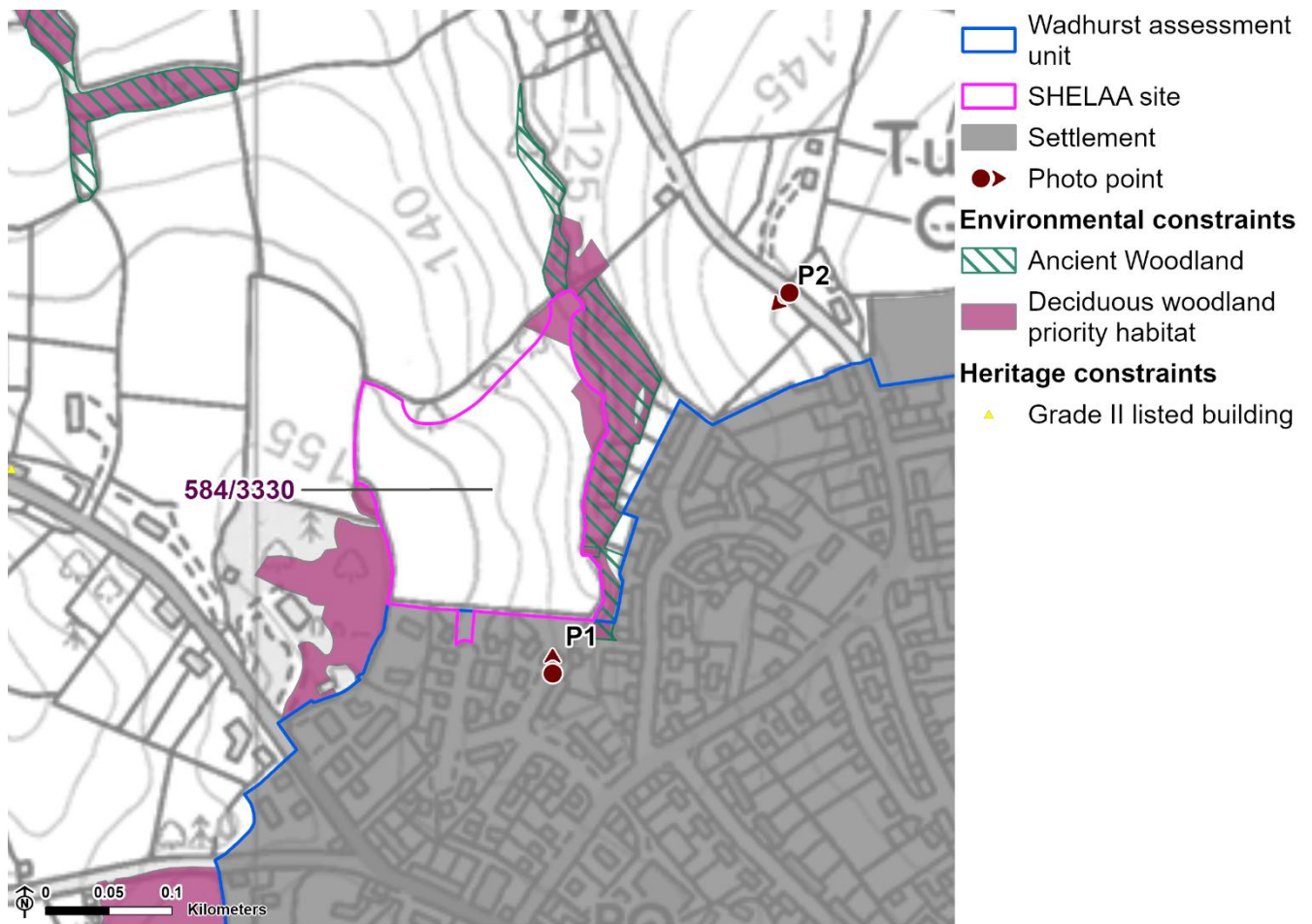
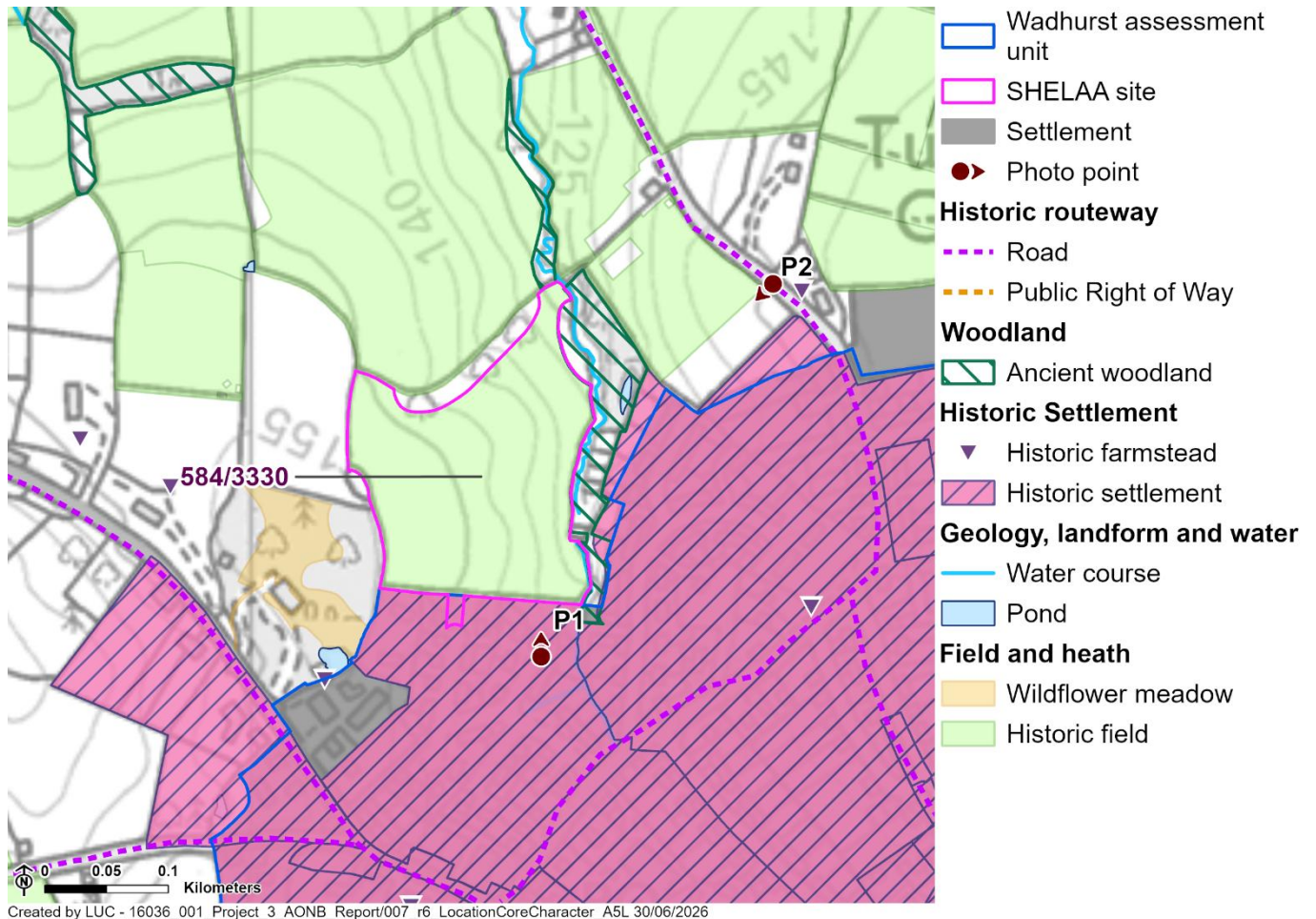


Figure 6: Site location and core character components of natural beauty of the High Weald AONB



Representative site photos



Photo 1: View north from the end of Jonas Drive with the site obscured by vegetation along the southern boundary



Photo 2: View south-west from Old Station Road with glimpses of the site visible between vegetation including Pump House Shaw

Baseline Analysis

Baseline landscape character	
Key features and qualities of the site in relation to the wider assessment unit	Landform ■ The site forms part of an incised stream valley of the High Weald: Central and Teise Catchment LCAs and forms a small part of the 'complex undulating ridged landform' of the wider assessment unit. ■ It comprises a steep slope rising between 125m AOD in the north-east to 155m AOD in the south-west, where it forms part of ridge that extends south-west to Best Beech Hill. ■ A stream runs along the eastern boundary of the site and a pond exists on its opposite side (approximately 20m from the site boundary), a feature not identified as being typical of the wider assessment unit. Natural character ■ Ancient deciduous woodland and priority habitat at Pump House Shaw lines the stream and encloses the site to the east, and other priority habitat woodland encloses the site to the west, which is representative of the numerous woodlands found across the assessment unit. ■ Infield trees / tree clumps, which are typical features of the wider assessment unit, are scattered across the site extending from the woodland edges, with particularly dense coverage in the north, east and south. ■ Shaws enclose the northern and southern boundaries which is characteristic of the assessment unit, where areas of woodland are interconnected by wooded shaws. Landscape pattern and time depth ■ The site consists of a small-scale assarted field (as classified in the Sussex HLC) surrounded by woodland and shaws – a key feature of the wider assessment unit. ■ The ancient semi-natural woodland on the steep slope that falls towards the incised stream corridor contributes to time depth. Perceptual aspects ■ The site is influenced by its proximity to the settlement edge of Durgates, as well as Old Station Road and Station Road, which reduces levels of tranquillity (which are recorded in the middle bands in CPRE's Tranquillity Mapping, Figure 3) and the experience of dark skies (light levels are recorded in the middle bands of CPRE's Night Blight Mapping, Figure 4).
Settlement form and edge character and extent of built development	The adjacent settlement edge to the south of the site consists of a wooded shaw, beyond which are bungalows and 2-storey semi-detached houses along the cul-de-sacs of Jonas Drive and the large, detached houses of Little Foxes and Birch Lodge. The ancient woodland at Pump House Shaw forms the settlement edge to the east, beyond which are 2-storey semi-detached houses along Queens Cottages. Beyond the woodland to the south-west of the site are the detached dwellings, outbuildings and gardens of Marling House/ Marling Cottage. The shaws and woodlands provide strong boundary features between the site and the built edge of Durgates.

Baseline visual character	
Potential visual receptors	The surrounding and internal woodland, trees and shaws enclose the site and limit visibility from the surrounding landscape including from the properties along Jonas Drive. Open views are afforded from the Little Foxes and Birch Lodge properties which abut the south-western corner of the site, as vegetation does not intervene. A brief glimpse of the site is afforded from along Old Station Road, seen over a field gate directly to the north-east. Due to the elevated nature of the site (particularly its western part), there may also be glimpsed views through gaps in vegetation in the winter months (when not in leaf), from some of the properties along Queens Cottages. This may also be the case from an isolated dwelling (Brookfields) along Old Station Road and from higher elevations, including the footpath between Turner's Green and Stone Bridge, which crosses the upper valley slopes north-east of the site.
Extent of visibility within the High Weald AONB	Long views to and from the site are limited by the surrounding and internal woodland, trees and shaws. Within winter months (when vegetation is not in leaf) there may be glimpsed middle distance views from the site northwards and eastwards towards the opposing ridge across the adjacent valley (between White Gates Farm and Turner's Green). Views towards the western part of the site may be afforded from this area.

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 forms part of the rolling ridges of the High Weald AONB contributing towards the <u>pattern of faults and folds</u> and a small part of the wider <u>principal ridge (Forest Ridge)</u> which it sits on the edge of. The eastern boundary of the site contributes to the <u>numerous small streams</u> found across the AONB. There are no distinctive geological features.
Settlement – dispersed historic settlement including high densities of isolated farmsteads, hamlets and late-medieval villages founded on trade and non-agricultural rural industries.	Durgates is a village of <u>medieval origin</u> , however its modern settlement edge along the eastern and southern boundaries of the site is influenced by 20 th and 21 st century residential development.
Routeways – a dense network of historic routeways (now roads, tracks and paths).	There are no historic routeways which cross or abut the site.
Woodland – an abundance of ancient woodland mostly in small holdings, highly interconnected with hedges and shaws.	Woodland at Pump House Shaw encloses the site to the east and contributes towards the <u>high proportion of ancient woodland</u> and the <u>high density of gill woodlands</u> , and along with other woodland surrounding the site, also contributes towards the <u>highly interconnected and structurally varied mosaic of many small woods...and numerous linear gill woodlands, shaws...</u> of the AONB. Infield trees/ tree clumps also form 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 small field was created through assarting, contributing towards the <u>dominant medieval fieldscape character</u> of the AONB. It is used for <u>grazing livestock</u> and enclosed by thick woody boundaries. The field is aligned to the linear watercourse (running along its eastern boundary) and is an example of the <u>strong influence exerted by topography</u> .
Dark night skies – intrinsically dark at night with our own galaxy (the Milky Way) visible.	Dark skies are influenced by lights from the properties along the adjacent settlement edge and street lighting along nearby roads.
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 gardeners inspired by the landscape.	The ancient woodland at Pump House Shaw and the assarting of the field contribute to the <u>sense of history and timelessness</u> . The combination of grazing and woodland provides a <u>pastoral feel</u> and contributes to the <u>recognisable and unifying mosaic of open field and wooded habitats</u> . The sense of rurality and tranquillity is limited by the adjacent properties and roads. Long views of the site are limited by vegetation enclosing the site which contributes to the <u>sense of intimacy, enclosure and remoteness...</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 relates to the <u>predominantly pastoral mixed farming with an absence of industrial scale farming</u> 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 Wadhurst assessment unit to have a **high** sensitivity to small scale residential development (2-2.5 storey housing). The sensitivity analysis indicates that the complex landform, ecological value of strong natural character including areas of interconnecting woodland, grassland and lowland meadows, areas of intact historic field pattern, historic features throughout the assessment unit, the role the landscape as a rural setting to Wadhurst, Pell Green and Cousley Wood, strongly expressed linear historic settlement form, visual prominence and the location within and visual relationship with the wider High Weald AONB increase sensitivity to built development. However, the influence of modern development at Durgates, partially contained nature of views and existing coalescence between settlements reduce the sensitivity of the assessment unit.

The Site

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 an assart on an incised stream valley with steeply sloping landform, enclosed by ancient and priority habitat woodland, and shaws, forming part of a wooded backdrop in surrounding views, and so the site demonstrates a number of the characteristics that increase sensitivity across the assessment unit. Although adjacent to 20th/21st century housing along the settlement edge of Durgates, the woodland within and surrounding the site separates the site from the settlement edge.

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 eastern boundary contributes to the density of streams within the AONB;
- The ancient woodland (also a gill woodland) and shaws enclose the site and contribute to the highly interconnected woodlands in the locality;
- The site forms part of a wider assart field pattern, which contributes to the medieval character of the AONB;
- The grazing of livestock contributes to the pastoral feel of the landscape, linking to the history of the land-based economy; and
- A sense of history and timelessness is provided by the ancient woodland and assarted field.

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			
Changes to the steeply sloping valley side 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 'spilling' beyond the ridge crest onto the steep wooded valley side and the lower-lying incised stream valley to minimise alterations to the landform and retain its expression as part of the principal Forest Ridge, its contribution to the pattern of faults and folds and as an aligned field to the watercourse (in accordance with the AONB's Objective G2).
	Fieldscape and heath	<i>Strong influence exerted by topography with many field systems aligned to or 'hanging' from (at right angles to) linear features such as watercourses...</i>	
Deterioration of and/or encroachment on the small stream that runs along the eastern boundary of the site.	Natural systems	■ <i>Numerous small streams...</i>	■ Set development back from the small watercourse and enhance the stream by increasing biodiversity and improving the water quality (in accordance with the AONB's Objective G1).
Removal of mature deciduous woodland, trees and shaws,	Woodland	■ <i>Highly interconnected and structurally varied mosaic of many</i>	■ Retain, protect and enhance all mature vegetation within and surrounding the site where possible, especially the infield trees/ tree clumps, and the shaws

affecting the role they play in defining and partially screening the settlement edge, and contributions to the interconnectivity of habitats.		<i>small woods....and numerous linear gill woodlands, shaws...</i> ■ <i>Many irregularly shaped small woodlands interlinked with shaws...forming an intimate part of the farmed landscape.</i> ■ <i>High density of gill woodlands...</i>	along the northern and southern boundaries (in accordance with the AONB's Objectives W1 and PQ2). ■ Improve the connectivity of woodlands and shaws through new tree planting that is in character with the locality, using native species where possible / suitable (in accordance with the AONB's Objective W2).
Loss of the grazed pastures and the assart which contributes to the medieval character and time depth.	Fieldscape and heath	■ <i>Fields, mostly permanent pasture, used for grazing livestock...</i> ■ <i>Medieval fieldscape character dominant, with a high proportion of field systems created by assarting (woodland clearance) with sinuous mixed woody boundaries and shaws, and thick hedges common.</i>	■ Loss of pasture and assart 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, the surrounding woodland should be retained and enhanced where possible to avoid complete loss of field pattern (in accordance with the AONB's Objective FH2).
Deterioration of and/or encroachment on the ancient woodland at Pump House Shaw which abuts the eastern edge of the site.	Woodland	<i>High proportion of 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>	
Settlement form edge and setting			
Deterioration of the rural character of the site which contributes to the setting of Durgates. Extension of development beyond the robust boundary provided by woodland and shaws between the	Settlement	<i>Villages and towns mostly of medieval origin...</i>	■ Focus development in the west of the site, to relate better to the existing adjacent settlement pattern, and to avoid the perception of development extending onto the steeply wooded incised valley side (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).

site and properties on the edge of the settlement.			Development to draw on the principles contained within the High Weald AONB 'High Weald Housing Design Guide'⁴, 'Guidance on the selection and use of colour in development'⁵ and objectives of the High Weald AONB Management Plan⁶ (in accordance with the AONB's Objective S2).
Visual amenity			
Visibility of development seen by: - residents of Jonas Drive; - residents of Queens Cottages; - residents at Little Foxes and Birch Lodge; - motorists/cyclists and residents along Old Station Road (which is recorded as a historic lane); and - walkers on the public footpath between Turner's Green and Stone Bridge.	Aesthetic and perceptual qualities	<i>A sense of history and timelessness arising from an ancient countryside with a human-scale agricultural tapestry; veteran and ancient trees...</i> <i>A sense of intimacy, enclosure and remoteness owing to the heavily treed landscape.</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>	- Retain, protect and enhance all existing vegetation including the woodland, shaws and trees, 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). - 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). - Consider views of development from the wider AONB to the east, siting development where well enclosed by vegetation and where it would relate to the existing ridgeline settlement pattern (in accordance with the AONB's Objective PQ2).
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; the small stream along the eastern boundary; the presence of mature woodland (including ancient/ gill woodland), trees and shaws; the grazed pastures; and forming part of an assart field pattern (contributing to the medieval character). 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.		

⁴ <https://www.highweald.org/look-after/planning/design-guide.html>

⁵ <https://www.highweald.org/look-after/planning/colour-study.html>

⁶ <https://www.highweald.org/high-weald-aonb-management-plan.html>

Variation to overall impact

There is no variation to the overall impact considered above.

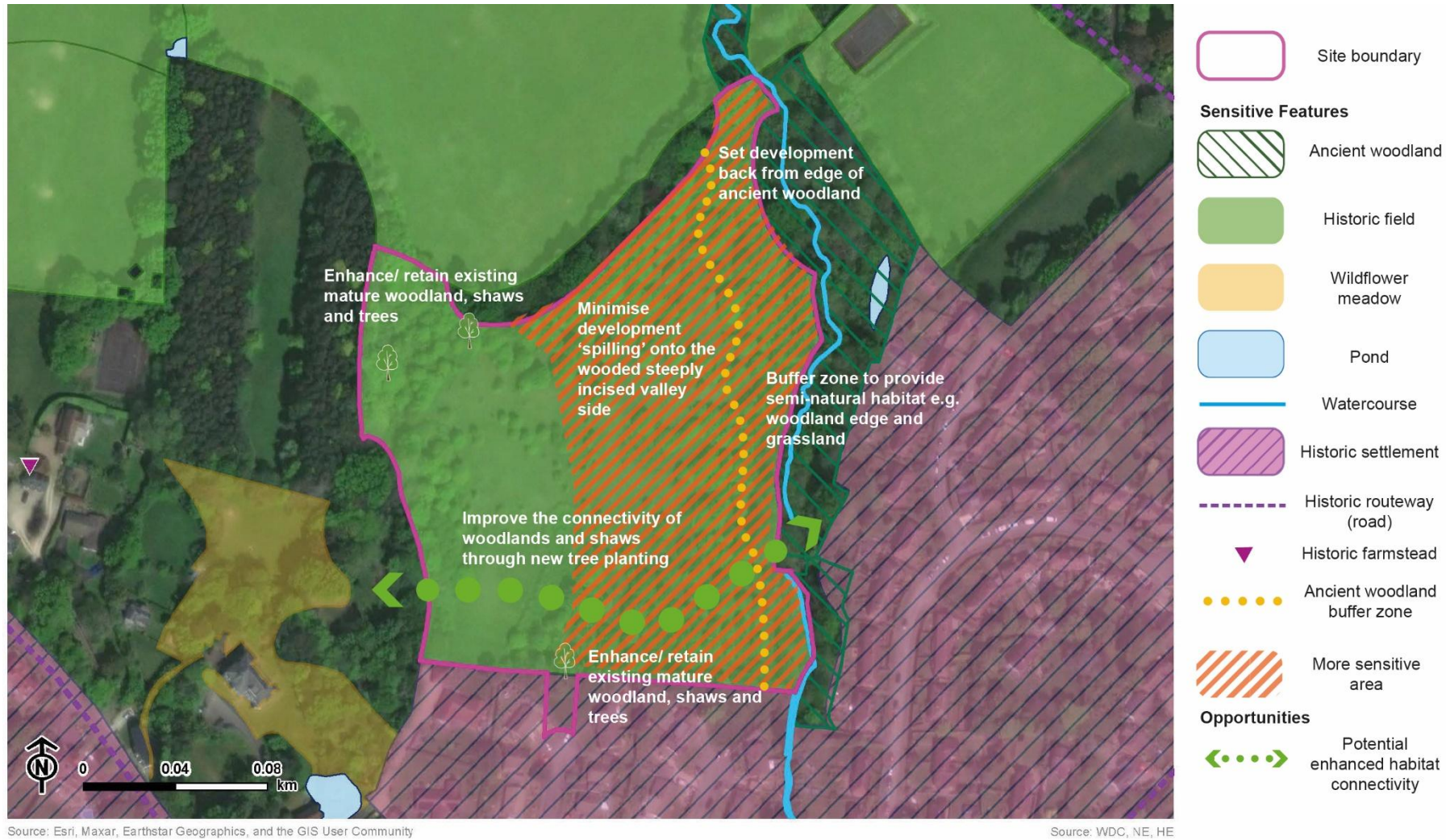
Summary and recommendations

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:

- Limit the extent of development 'spilling' beyond the ridge crest onto the steep wooded valley side and the lower-lying incised stream valley to minimise alterations to the landform.
- Set development back from the small watercourse and enhance the stream by increasing biodiversity and improving the water quality.
- Retain, protect and enhance the infield trees/ tree clumps, and the shaws along the northern and southern boundaries.
- Set development back from the edge of the ancient woodland to the required minimum buffer zone.
- Focus development in the west of the site, to relate better to the existing adjacent settlement pattern.
- Consider views of development from the wider AONB to the east, siting development where well enclosed by vegetation and where it would relate to the existing ridgeline settlement pattern.

Figure 7: Summary map of constraints and opportunities



Land at Windmill House, Windmill Lane (694/3330)

Site Details	
Potential development	Residential development proposed on entirety of site mapped below, and entirety of the site is proposed as draft allocation WAD1 (identified for 20 dwellings) in the Focused Wealden Local Plan (2026).
Site location	This site is located to the south-west of the settlement of Durgates and situated to the south-east of the B2100 Mayfield Lane, south of Baldock Road, east of Windmill Lane, and west of Bocking Close.

Figure 8: Site location and constraints

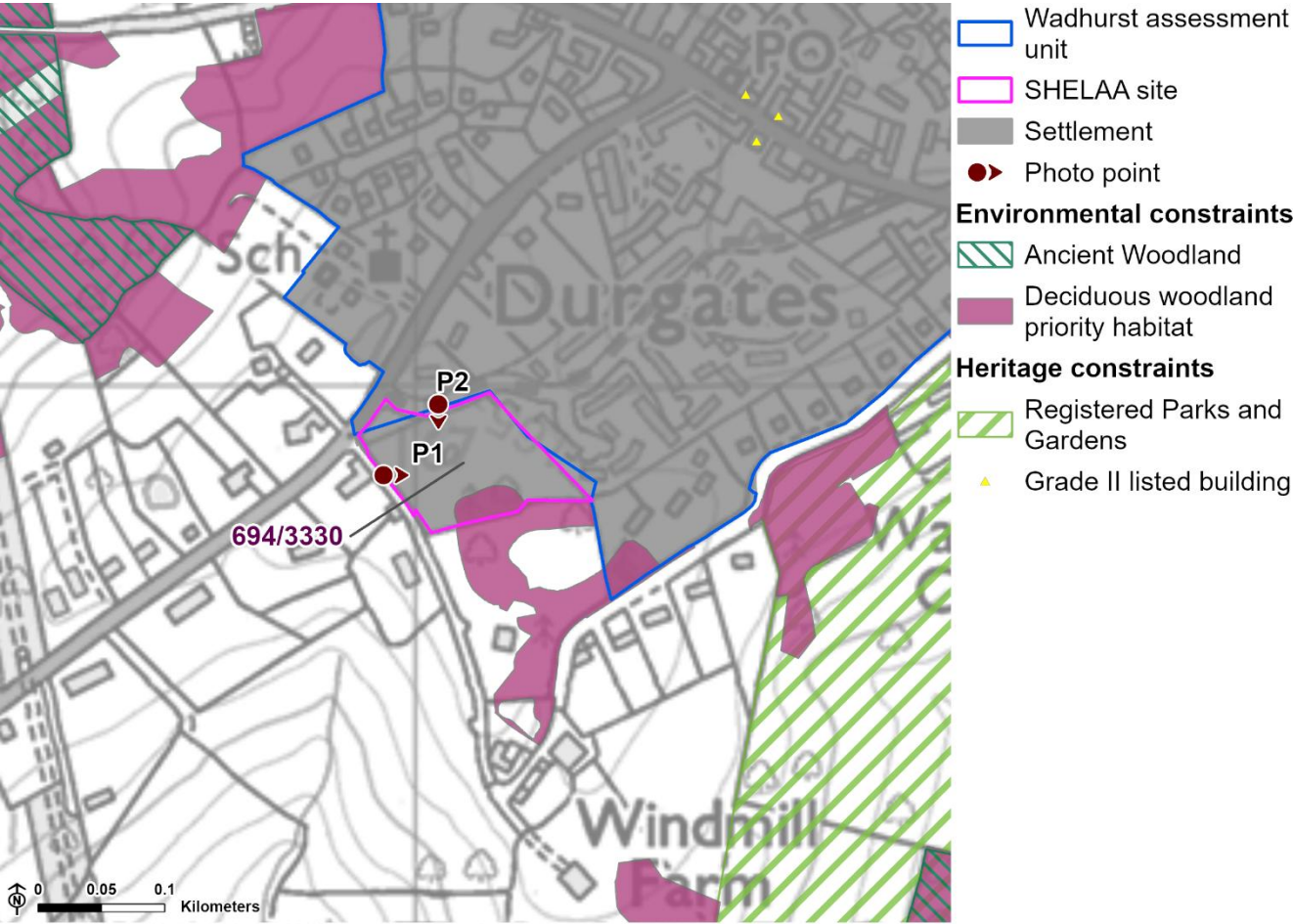
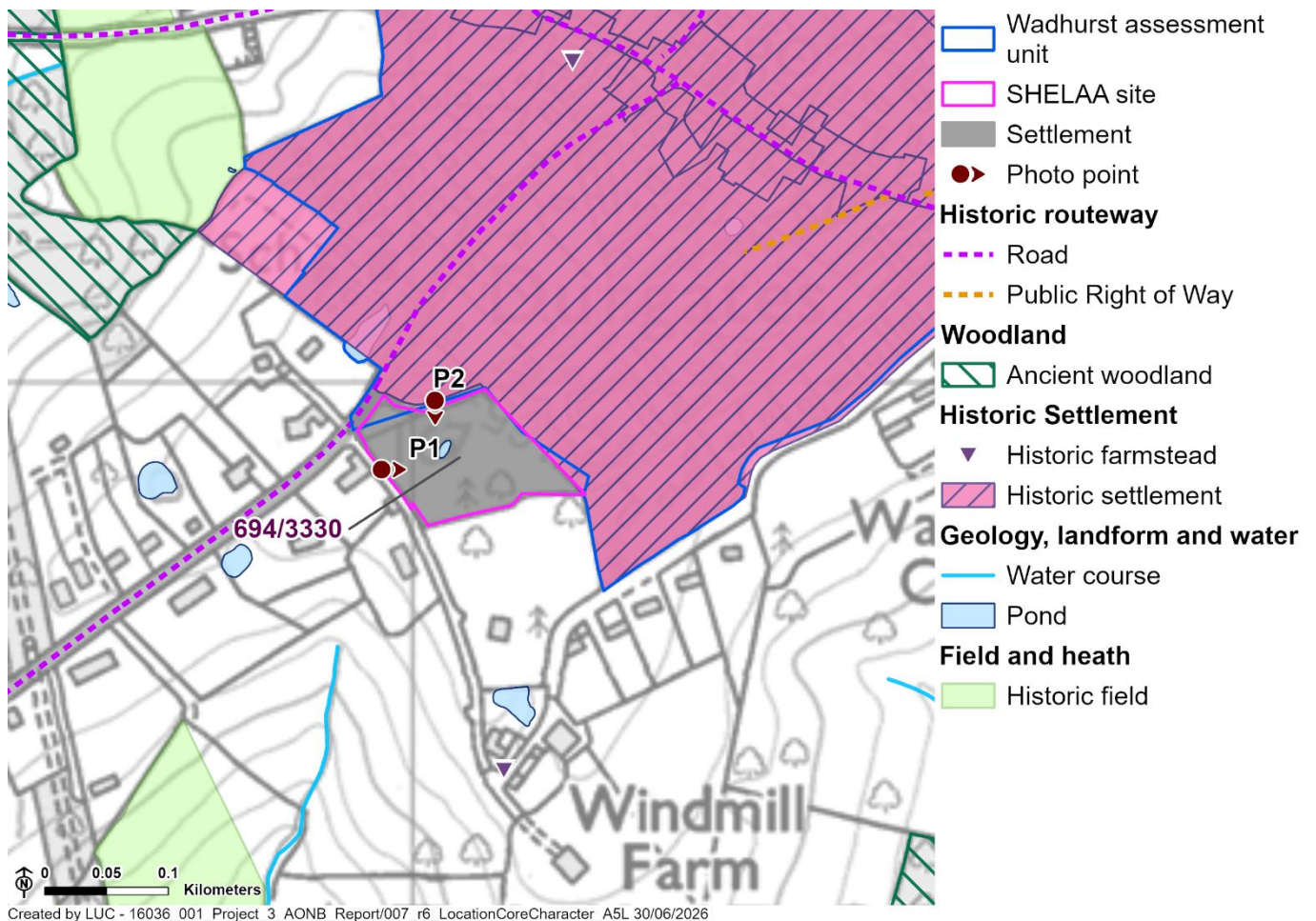


Figure 9: Site location and core character components of natural beauty of the High Weald AONB



Representative site photos



Photo 1: View east into the site from Windmill Lane, with priority habitat woodland and back of Bocking Close properties visible



Photo 2: View south into the site from Baldock Road, with the clump of mature trees around a pond visible in the centre

Baseline Analysis

Baseline landscape character	
Key features and qualities of the site in relation to the wider assessment unit	Landform - The site is flat (at 165m AOD) and forms a small part of a ridge that extends across the eastern part of the High Weald: Central LCA between Stone Bridge in the north and Best Beech Hill in the south-west and a small part of the 'complex undulating ridged landform' of the wider assessment unit. Natural character - Priority habitat deciduous woodland encloses the site to the south and partly extends into its southern part, which is representative of the numerous woodlands found across the assessment unit. - A clump of mature deciduous trees circle the small pond within the centre of the site, and other tall infield trees exist, extending from the northern and western boundaries of the site. Clumps of trees/ infield trees are also typical features of the wider assessment unit. - An avenue of trees along Windmill Lane abut the south-western edge of the site, reflecting the designed landscapes that characterise the LCA (e.g. around the Wadhurst Castle registered park and garden). Landscape pattern and time depth - The site consists of a small pasture grazed field of irregular piecemeal enclosure as classified in the Sussex HLC, which is atypical of the wider assessment unit, with boundaries largely defined by post and wire fencing and garden boundaries of adjacent residential properties, in the form of hedges and fencing, which are atypical of the wider assessment unit. Though currently used for livestock grazing, the site is of similar character to the informal parkland landscape directly south, although this landscape pattern is not identified as being typical of the wider assessment unit. Perceptual aspects - Although the site is partly influenced by its proximity to the settlement edge of Durgates and the B2100 Mayfield Lane, it experiences tranquillity (which is recorded as relatively high in CPRE's Tranquillity Mapping, Figure 3) and dark skies (light levels are recorded in the lower/ darker bands of CPRE's Night Blight Mapping, Figure 4).
Settlement form and edge character and extent of built development	The site provides separation between the formal settlement edge and a row of large, detached houses along the B2100 to the west. The adjacent settlement edge to the east of the site consists of garden boundaries in the form of a hedge and fencing, beyond which is a bungalow and 2-storey detached houses along the cul-de-sac of Bocking Close. The adjacent settlement edge to the north of the site consists of a post and wire fence running along the edge of Baldock Road, with garden fencing and properties located beyond. Clumps of trees line the northern edge of the site, providing some filtering of the settlement edge and the B2100 Mayfield Lane. Given the presence of ribbon development along the B2100 to the west of the site, Castle Walk and Windmill Lane to the south of the site, and limited defining boundary features along the settlement edge to the north and east, the settlement edge near the site is not very well defined.
Baseline visual character	
Potential visual receptors	The surrounding woodland provides enclosure to the southern boundary of the site and limits visibility from along Castle Walk and the properties located along it.

	However, due to the open nature of the other site boundaries (which typically comprise post and wire fencing with some clumps of trees), views are afforded from along Windmill Lane (including from the properties along it) and from Baldock Road which also doubles up as a footpath that extends north-east towards Sparrow's Green. Residents along Bocking Close will also experience views of the site including from within rear gardens which back onto the site. The wooded and built-up nature of the site's immediate surrounds generally limits views into the site from the wider landscape.
Extent of visibility within the High Weald AONB	Long views to and from the site are limited by landform, buildings and vegetation within the vicinity of 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.	Whilst the site itself is relatively flat, it forms part of the wider rolling ridges of the High Weald AONB contributing towards the <i>pattern of faults and folds</i> and a small part of the wider <i>principal ridge (Forest Ridge)</i> which it sits on the edge of. It also contributes towards the <i>high density of ponds</i> with one that lies within the centre. There are no distinctive geological features.
Settlement – dispersed historic settlement including high densities of isolated farmsteads, hamlets and late-medieval villages founded on trade and non-agricultural rural industries.	Durgates is a village of <i>medieval origin</i> , however its modern settlement edge along the northern and eastern boundaries of the site is influenced by 20 th and 21 st century residential development.
Routeways – a dense network of historic routeways (now roads, tracks and paths).	There are no historic routeways which cross the site. The B2100 Mayfield Lane along the north-western boundary of the site is recorded as a ridgeway on high ground and is lined by <i>earth banks</i> , although its expression is masked by its use as a B-road with associated modern road markings. It contributes towards the <i>dense radiating network</i> of historic routeways.
Woodland – an abundance of ancient woodland mostly in small holdings, highly interconnected with hedges and shaws.	Woodland along the southern boundary of the site contributes towards the <i>highly interconnected and structurally varied mosaic of many small woods</i> of the AONB. Infield trees/ tree clumps (including around the central pond) <i>provide additional connectivity to the wider landscape</i> and contribute towards the <i>wood-pasture and parkland</i> character, together with the avenue of trees along Windmill Hill.
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 <i>grazing livestock</i> .
Dark night skies – intrinsically dark at night with our own galaxy (the Milky Way) visible.	The site is located within an <i>intrinsically dark landscape</i> according to CPRE's Night Blight Mapping (Figure 4), although is partly influenced by existing lights from the surrounding properties and street lighting along the B2100 and Baldock Road.
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;	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 properties and roads. Long views of the site are limited by landform, buildings and vegetation within the vicinity.

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.	
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 <u><i>predominantly pastoral mixed farming with an absence of industrial scale farming</i></u> 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 Wadhurst assessment unit to have a **high** sensitivity to small scale residential development (2-2.5 storey housing). The sensitivity analysis indicates that the complex landform, strong natural character including areas of interconnecting woodland, grassland and lowland meadows, areas of intact historic field pattern, historic features throughout the assessment unit, the role of the landscape as a rural setting to Wadhurst, Pell Green and Cousley Wood, strongly expressed linear historic settlement form, visual prominence and the location within and visual relationship with the wider High Weald AONB increases the sensitivity of the assessment unit. The influence of modern development at Durgates, partially contained nature of views and existing coalescence between settlements reduces the sensitivity of the assessment unit.

The Site

Overall, it is concluded 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 priority habitat woodland to the south, and demonstrates a few of the characteristics that increase sensitivity to development across the assessment unit. The site is relatively flat, adjacent to 20th/21st century housing along the settlement edge of Durgates, which has few defining settlement boundary features, and is partly enclosed by woodland in views from the wider landscape, which lower its sensitivity from that of 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 some of the core character components of natural beauty of the High Weald AONB. In summary:

- It forms part of the wider principal Forest ridge and the pattern of faults and folds;
- The pond within the centre of the site contributes to the high density of ponds;
- The woodland that partly encloses the site, contributes to the highly interconnected woodlands in the locality,
- The grazing of livestock, the central clump of trees and avenue of trees along Windmill Lane contribute to the pastoral feel of the landscape, wood-pasture and parkland character, with links 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			
Removal of mature deciduous woodland and trees, affecting the role they play in providing enclosure to the southern boundary of the site and interconnectivity of habitats.	Woodland	<i>Highly interconnected and structurally varied mosaic of many small woodlands....., and isolated trees.</i>	■ Retain, protect and enhance all mature vegetation within and surrounding the site, especially the priority habitat deciduous woodland in the south and tree avenue along the south-western edge (in accordance with the AONB's Objectives W1 and PQ2). ■ Improve the connectivity of woodland around the site through new tree planting that is in character with the locality, using native species where possible / suitable (in accordance with the AONB's Objective W2).
Loss or deterioration of the small pond in the centre of site.	Natural systems	<i>A high density of ponds...</i>	■ Retain and set back development from the pond in the centre of the site to create an appropriate buffer zone. The buffer zone should incorporate new semi-natural habitat relating to the ponds (in accordance with the AONB's Objective G1).
Loss or deterioration of features contributing towards the parkland character of the site, particularly the infield trees/ tree clumps, avenue of trees along Windmill Lane 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>	■ Retain, and set back development from, the infield trees/ tree clumps including those around the central pond (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 around the edges of the site should be retained and enhanced

		■ <i>Wood-pasture and parkland...</i>	where possible to avoid complete loss of field pattern (in accordance with the AONB's Objective FH2). ■ Avoid using Windmill Lane as the access point into the site to ensure that the avenue of trees are protected and the character of the lane is preserved (in accordance with the AONB's Objective W1).
	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>	
Modifications to the B2100 Mayfield Lane (recorded as a historic ridgeway) to facilitate site access (e.g. road widening, creation of junction)	Routeways	■ <i>A dense radiating network with a variety of origins...</i> ■ <i>Earth banks...typically indicating the former width of the routeway or to separate users from farmland or woodland.</i>	■ Reduce the impact of access works required to the road, where possible, protecting the hedgerows and earth banks along it (in accordance with the AONB's Objectives R1 and R2).
Influence of lighting in the dark night skies resulting in night blight.	Dark night skies	<i>Intrinsically dark landscapes with a sense of remoteness and tranquillity.</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 guidance⁷ and use dark sky-friendly lighting (in accordance with the AONB's Objectives DS1 and DS2).
Settlement form edge and setting			
Extension of development from the settlement edge and reduction in its separation from properties along the B2100 Mayfield Lane.	N/A	N/A	■ 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).

⁷ 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'⁸, 'Guidance on the selection and use of colour in development'⁹ and objectives of the High Weald AONB Management Plan¹⁰ (in accordance with the AONB's Objective S2).
Visual amenity			
Visibility of development seen by: - residents of Bocking Close; - motorists/cyclists and residents along Windmill Lane; - motorists/ cyclists along Baldock Road; and - walkers on the public footpath that runs along Baldock Road and extends towards Sparrow's Green.	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 woodland and trees (in accordance with the AONB's Objectives W1 and PQ2). - Screen new development with additional planting, 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). - Enhance public access and provide opportunities to experience the surrounding landscape via the existing public right of way network (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 and trees; a pond; grazed pastures; 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 impacts on the grazed pastures which would be lost.		

⁸ <https://www.highweald.org/look-after/planning/design-guide.html>

⁹ <https://www.highweald.org/look-after/planning/colour-study.html>

¹⁰ <https://www.highweald.org/high-weald-aonb-management-plan.html>

	<u>Variation to overall impact</u> There is no variation to the overall impact considered above.
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Summary and recommendations

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

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

- Retain, protect and enhance the priority habitat deciduous woodland in the south and tree avenue along the south-western edge.
- Retain, and set back development from, the infield trees/ tree clumps including those around the central pond to create an appropriate buffer zone.
- Avoid using Windmill Lane as the access point into the site to ensure that the avenue of trees are protected and the character of the lane is preserved.
- Enhance public access and provide opportunities to experience the surrounding landscape via the existing public right of way network.

Figure 10: Summary map of constraints and opportunities



Source: Esri, Maxar, Earthstar Geographics, and the GIS User Community

Source: WDC, NE, HE

Cumulative effects of development sites proposed in the Wadhurst assessment unit

Two sites have been assessed within the Wadhurst 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 adjacent to Jonas Drive (584/3330)	High impact	No variation.
Land at Windmill House, Windmill Lane (694/3330)	Moderate impact	No variation.

If both sites were brought forward for development to the extent as assessed, it would result in up to 50 dwellings being built, and therefore a limited expansion of the settlement into the surrounding rural landscape. There would be limited cumulative impacts on the components of character, although the loss of fields, hedgerow boundaries, woodland, trees and shaws within the High Weald AONB would affect the pastoral feel of the landscape. Due to the small scale of the sites, the intervening distance between them (approximately 525m from one another), and the well-wooded character surrounding them, cumulative visual effects would be limited.

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.