2.0 STRATEGIC GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE ASSESSMENT

2.1 General

2.1.1 This section sets out a high level, strategic audit of existing GI assets and assessment of GI needs and opportunities across the study area as a whole, taking into account GI provision in adjoining areas where relevant (see **Figure 2.1a**).

2.1.2 This section should be read in conjunction with **Sections 3.0** and **4.0**, which provide more detailed assessments of GI needs and opportunities within sub-district scale 'GI Zones' and for the five main towns respectively.

Strategic Context

2.1.3 The strategic context for GI planning in Wealden District is summarised below based on the 2013 Core Strategy[6].

Settlements and Communities

2.1.4 Wealden is a large rural district, encompassing a large number of settlements and communities. It has a dispersed and varied settlement pattern with a choice of a number of small market towns, villages and hamlets. Each settlement has its own unique characteristics and functions, depending on its location and historical influences.

2.1.5 Historically, five main towns are identified within Wealden namely Crowborough, Hailsham, Heathfield, Polegate and Uckfield (see **Figure 2.1a**). However, because of location, environmental attributes, infrastructure and the close proximity of larger towns/cities (including Brighton and Hove, Eastbourne, Tunbridge Wells and Crawley/Gatwick), Wealden's towns have not grown to be significant centres in the South East. The larger settlements outside the District exert a significant influence in terms of providing for jobs, health care, leisure, further education and shopping.

2.1.6 Unlike other Districts, Wealden is not dominated by any one of its towns and overall it is a District of many centres. The towns generally serve the local population, with interactions between smaller settlements and towns and between the towns themselves.

[6] Wealden District Local Plan: Core Strategy (2013) – see Section 2 for details

TANDRIDGE DISTRICT
SEVENOAKS DISTRICT
Tunbridge Wells
TUNBRIDGE WELLS BOROUGH
East Grinstead
A264
River Medway
River Teise
A26
A22
MID SUSSEX DISTRICT
Crowborough
WEALDEN DISTRICT
A275
A267
River Rother
A272
A265
Uckfield
Heathfield
ROTHER DISTRICT
River Uck
LEWES DISTRICT
A271
Waller's Haven
Lewes
Hailsham
River Cuckmere
Bexhill
Polegate
A27
Eastbourne
Seaford
EASTBOURNE BOROUGH

N
0 2.5 5 Kilometres

KEY

Wealden Local Plan Area
South Downs National Park
Rivers
Key Roads
Railways
Main Settlements

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WEALDEN DISTRICT COUNCIL

FIGURE 2.1a
GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE STUDY
CONTEXT PLAN

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2.1.7 Wealden attracts a small workforce from outside of the District, with some settlements and areas attracting visitors due to the environmental and historical qualities of the area. In such a large rural District, it is recognised that the rural areas contribute to the general economy by underpinning tourism, which in turn provides opportunities for creating jobs, attracting investment and bringing in wealth.

2.1.8 Half of the District's population of around 146,000 live outside the towns in the rural parts of the District. This dispersed settlement pattern creates particular challenges for local service provision, and makes an efficient and viable public transport system more difficult to provide. The lack of access to a frequent public/sustainable transport system in a number of the rural settlements has led to reliance upon the private motor vehicle. In addition to this, existing networks of main roads and railways tend to focus on routes to London and large towns outside the District, rather than between the towns themselves. This has restricted investment in the local economy, and impacted upon access to employment and leisure opportunities for residents within the District.

2.1.9 The impact of the dispersed settlement pattern and the resulting reliance of the private motor vehicle, including decreasing social mobility, local traffic issues, environmental impact and high carbon emissions, are all strategic challenges for sustainable development in the District.

The Environment of Wealden

2.1.10 One of Wealden's principal assets is the high quality of its environment. This is reflected in the high proportion of the District which is protected for its landscape and biodiversity importance. The High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and the South Downs National Park together cover some 60% of the District, in formal recognition of its landscape quality. The internationally important areas of conservation at Ashdown Forest and the Pevensey Levels are also situated within the District. The location and scale of future development will be restricted by its potential impact on all these designated areas, although opportunities exist to enhance the quality of the District's biodiversity and geodiversity overall.

2.1.11 The countryside is also a recreational resource for residents and visitors, with attractions including the South Downs National Park, Ashdown Forest, High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and the Pevensey Levels. In this way, Wealden helps makes a unique contribution to the quality of life of those who live outside the District, in more built up areas of the region, as well as to its own residents.

2.1.12 The richness and diversity of its biodiversity, landscape and heritage are significant factors in making the District such a desirable place in which to live. This coupled with a limited legacy of brownfield land places additional pressures on the abundant supply of greenfield land.

2.1.13 Ensuring that growth required to meet local needs makes the best use of resources without compromising future requirements, and makes an overall positive contribution to the environment where possible, is a strategic challenge for environmental sustainability and sustainable development in the District. Working in partnership to manage natural resources is crucial, ensuring that the attractiveness of the resource is not diminished through uncontrolled visitor pressure or development.

2.1.14 Other strategic challenges for environmental sustainability and sustainable development in the District include contributing to mitigating climate change by seeking to reduce carbon emissions and other greenhouse gases through: the appropriate selection of areas for growth; providing sustainable transport alternatives to the private motor vehicle; sustainable construction techniques; and use of renewable and low carbon energy sources. There is also a need for adapting to and mitigating climate change through avoiding inappropriate development in areas of high flood risk and supporting appropriate flood risk infrastructure; providing for a resilient environment within built up areas; protecting the landscape; and planning for the future effects of climate change on biodiversity through the green infrastructure network.

Working in Wealden

2.1.15 The District's economy is heavily dependent on the service sector as well as, to a lesser extent, the construction industry, agriculture, fishing, energy and water sector. Whilst this has helped generate high levels of employment, workplace salaries in the District are relatively low. There are high levels of out-commuting with higher paid earners to the north of the District accessing jobs outside of the District compared to the south.

2.1.16 Although the economy is dominated by small businesses, with only a few employers employing more than 10 people, very few of these are in what are generally regarded as the main business growth sectors. However, Wealden's contribution to the overall East Sussex economy is greater than other East Sussex Authorities.

2.1.17 Three quarters of small businesses in the District are farm based, often in former agricultural buildings converted to business space, and increasing numbers of people work from home. The diversified agricultural sector makes a significant impact on the area both in terms of its economy and by shaping the landscape. Because of its rural character and dispersed settlement pattern, the limited provision of high speed/capacity broadband in the District seriously restricts business development, particularly but not exclusively in the rural areas.

2.1.18 The special features of the District attract visitors to Wealden. The coast, attractive villages, and the South Downs and Ashdown Forest are particularly popular visitor destinations. Employment related to tourism in such activities as hotels, catering, camp sites and other visitor facilities is a significant employment sector.

2.1.19 With an ageing population, prospects for economic growth could be undermined by a workforce of insufficient size and skills. There is also an identified shortage of good quality modern business premises, particularly freehold, and especially those suitable for smaller and starter businesses.

2.1.20 Strategic economic challenges for sustainable development in the District include creating better prospects for economic growth, with particular emphasis on the south Wealden area to reduce out commuting, reduce the wage gap between north and south of the District, as well as tackling pockets of unemployment across the area, and increasing the contribution to the economy, and to enhance the prospects of East Sussex as a whole.

Living in Wealden

2.1.21 Wealden's good quality of life, and its proximity to London and the Crawley/Gatwick growth area, creates a high demand for housing, especially in the north of the District. Demand has in the past exerted considerable upward pressure on house prices, and has caused a widening gulf between local incomes and market prices, and led to severe shortages of affordable housing. Whilst the affordability gap between incomes and house prices can be addressed in part by economic processes, the need to provide affordable housing stock remains. This demand for affordable housing also provides a need to increase the stock of market housing within the District, with an established need for smaller dwellings in north Wealden and family homes in south Wealden.

2.1.22 While the general picture is of an attractive and reasonably affluent area with high car ownership and low population and crime rates, Wealden is not without social problems that also need to be addressed. There are significant inequalities within the District, with areas of relative affluence masking pockets of deprivation and health inequality. There is a sharp contrast between high and low incomes and there are strong geographical disparities, with higher mean incomes in the north contrasting with lower incomes around Hailsham and Polegate in the south. Individual experiences of hardship are no less important, and often more difficult to target in such an extensive rural area. However, it is necessary to seek to reduce inequalities and imbalance in the District's population by addressing problems and creating opportunities for a better quality of life, for example through improved education, health, leisure and recreation. This involves ensuring accessibility to services and determining the best

pattern of development across the District to ensure it is sustainable and supports the future role and function of settlements. There is a need to ensure that the sustainability of development is not compromised by the lack of adequate infrastructure, including public transport, recreational facilities and green space.

2.1.23 Wealden's population comprises around 62,000 households. The District has a comparatively small ethnic minority population. The age structure has a much smaller proportion of the population in the 15-39 age range than the national average, with a significantly above average number of people of pensionable age. Without some intervention, this structure is set to continue with predicted increases in the proportion of the population over 75 years, and continuing net loss of the population within the 15 to 24 year age range.

2.1.24 The ageing population and comparatively low birth rate would result, without in-migration, in an overall reduction in Wealden's population. Even with a net increase in in-migration, assisted by the provision of housing, the ageing population has an impact on the amount of people living in Wealden in the workforce. In order to maintain and enhance the working age population to sustain and grow the economy, and to sustain the District's town centres and services, Wealden is reliant upon in-migration. Coupled with the changing nature of household formation this provides an overall increased need and demand for housing and accompanying growth.

2.2 Green Infrastructure Assets

2.2.1 The existing GI network within and around the study area at the district-scale is illustrated on **Figure 2.1b**. The GI network comprises a range of GI assets that provide multiple functions. These are summarised below based on the GI typology in Natural England's Green Infrastructure Guidance (2009).

Natural and Semi-natural Greenspaces

2.2.2 Natural and semi-natural greenspaces encompass a broad range of habitat types that can be found both within and outside of designated sites and nature reserves, such as woodlands, heathlands, grasslands and wetlands, and recolonised previously developed land. In addition to supporting a range of habitats for wildlife, these natural and semi-natural greenspaces can also provide access for informal recreation (such as walking and bird watching), provide economic functions (such as land for agriculture and forestry) and provide other environmental and social functions (such as reducing the impact of climate change, providing predominantly undeveloped natural floodplains and connecting people with the countryside leading to mental health and well-being benefits).

2.2.3 The contribution of natural and semi-natural greenspaces to Wealden's GI network is explored under the Biodiversity and Geodiversity theme in **Section 2.3** and the Accessible Natural Greenspace and Access Links theme in **Section 2.7**. Existing natural and semi-natural greenspaces within Wealden District are shown on **Figure 2.2a** (Designated Biodiversity and Geodiversity Sites), **Figure 2.2b** (Wildlife Habitats) and **Figure 2.6a** (Existing Accessible Natural Greenspace).

Green and Blue Corridors

2.2.4 Green and blue corridors are predominantly linear landscape features that typically follow natural features, such as rivers, streams and ditches, or semi-natural features such as road/railway verges, recolonised disused railway lines or hedgerows. In addition to their vital function as 'stepping stones'/corridors for the dispersal of wildlife between otherwise fragmented and isolated habitats within the agricultural landscape and urban areas, these corridors can also provide access links for connecting people between settlements and the surrounding landscape via walking and cycling routes where these functions coincide.

2.2.5 The contribution of green and blue corridors to Wealden's GI network is explored under the Biodiversity and Geodiversity theme in **Section 2.3**, the Water Resources theme in **Section 2.6** and the Accessible Natural Greenspace and Access Links theme in **Section 2.7**. Existing green

N

0 2.5 5 Kilometres

KEY

Wealden Local Plan Area

GI Zones

Existing Green Infrastructure

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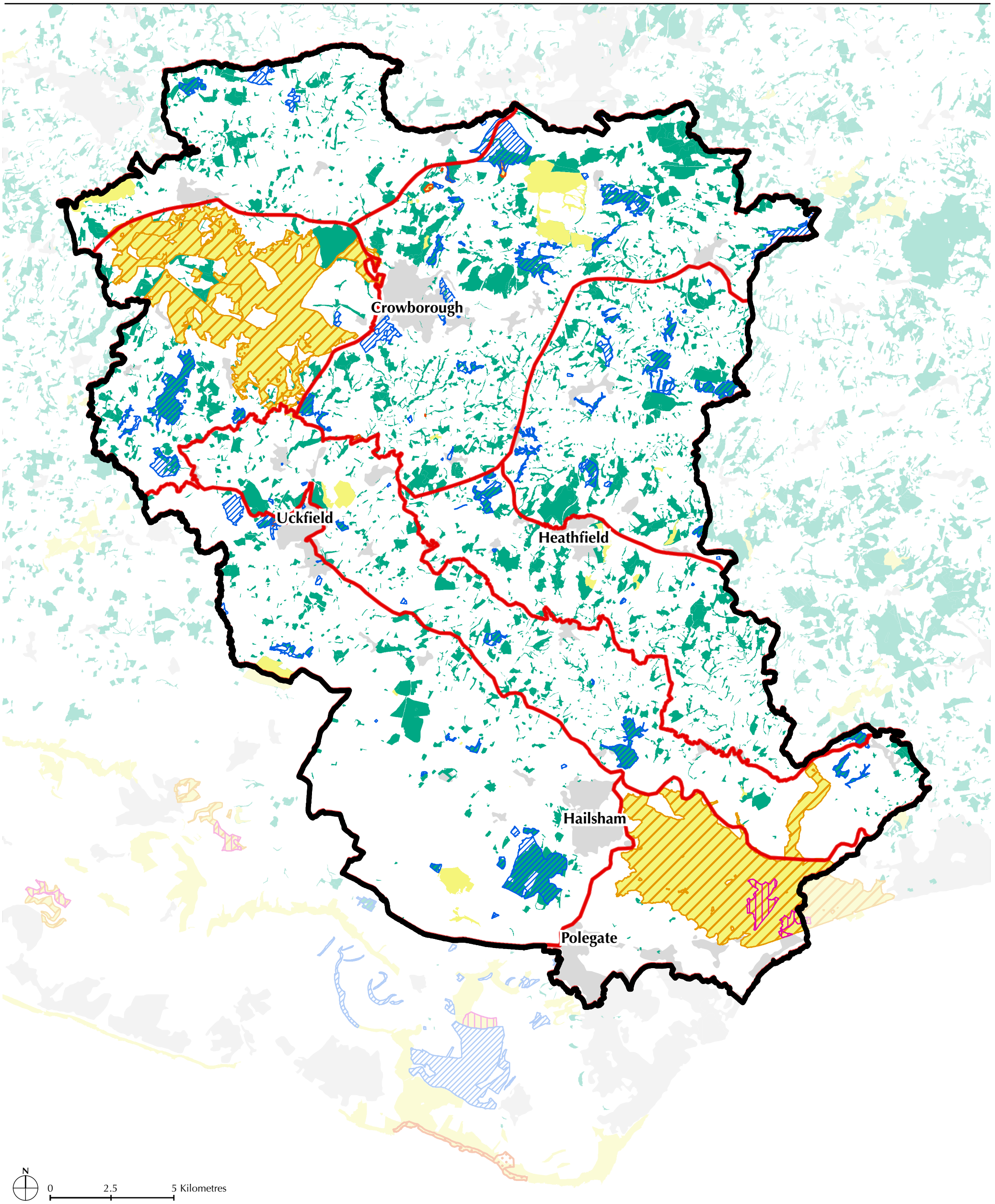
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FIGURE 2.1b
EXISTING GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE NETWORK

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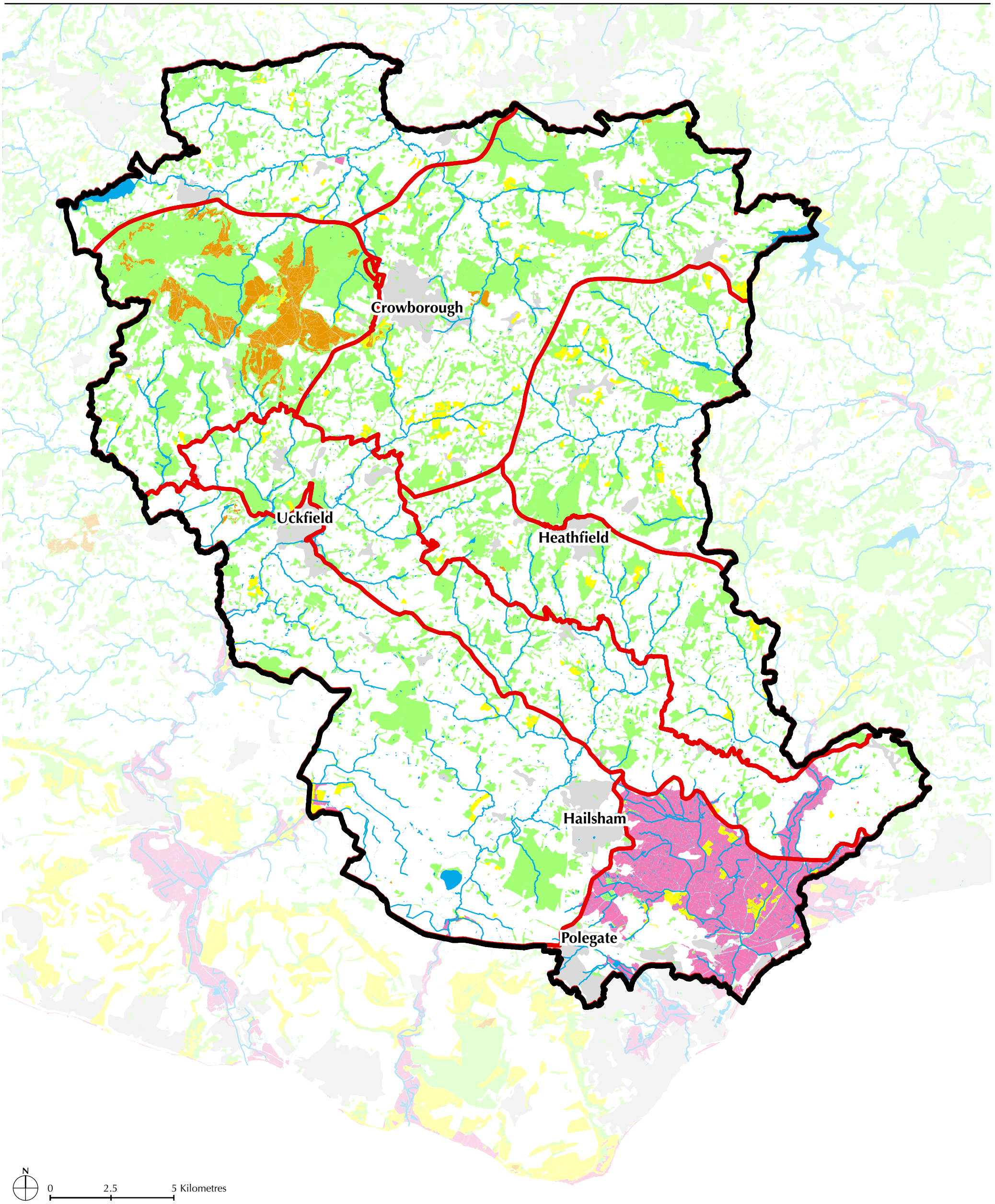
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FIGURE 2.2a
DESIGNATED BIODIVERSITY & GEODIVERSITY SITES

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KEY

- Wealden Local Plan Area
- GI Zones

Broad Habitat Types:

- Woodland Habitats (National Forest Inventory/ BAP Priority Habitats Inventory)
- Lowland Heathland Habitats (BAP Priority Habitats Inventory)
- Freshwater Habitats (Main Watercourses & Waterbodies)
- Wetland and Coastal Habitats (BAP Priority Habitats Inventory)
- Grassland Habitats (BAP Priority Habitats Inventory)

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FIGURE 2.2b
BIODIVERSITY - WILDLIFE HABITATS

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and blue corridors within the study area are shown on **Figure 2.1a** (Green Infrastructure Study Context Plan), **Figure 2.5** (Water Resources) and **Figure 2.7** (Access Links).

Productive Landscapes (Farmland, Coppice Woodlands and Allotments)

2.2.6 Farmland can contribute to local food production and landscape character. Within the study area, farmland includes both commercial farming businesses and small holdings. Coppice woodlands are a significant feature in the study area and contribute to local energy production and landscape character. Allotments are public open spaces set aside for the purposes of domestic gardening and small scale horticulture, typically for fruit and vegetable production. As well as facilitating local food production, allotments can provide wildlife habitats, green corridors within urban areas and social, health and community benefits. Predominantly located in the main towns within the study area, allotments are generally managed by Town and Parish Councils.

2.2.7 The contribution of farmland, coppice woodlands and allotments to Wealden's GI network is explored under the Energy & Food theme in **Section 2.5**. Existing farmland and coppice woodlands within the study area are shown on **Figure 2.4** (Energy & Food). Allotments are shown at the town scale on **Figure 4.2i** (Crowborough: Open Space Typology), **Figure 4.3i** (Uckfield: Open Space Typology), **Figure 4.4i** (Heathfield: Open Space Typology) and **Figure 4.5i** (Hailsham & Polegate: Open Space Typology).

Cemeteries and Churchyards

2.2.8 Often located adjacent to places of worship, cemeteries and churchyards provide important habitats for wildlife and opportunities for quiet reflection and spiritual enrichment that can contribute to people's mental health and well-being. They also play an important community role, providing a venue for religious ceremonies and practices. The majority have historic connections and are managed by religious organisations. Within the study area, there are urban cemeteries and churchyards associated with small rural parish churches.

2.2.9 The contribution of cemeteries and churchyards to Wealden's GI network is explored under the Accessible Natural Greenspace and Access Links theme in **Section 2.7**. Existing cemeteries and churchyards are shown at the town scale on **Figure 4.2i** (Crowborough: Open Space Typology), **Figure 4.3i** (Uckfield: Open Space Typology), **Figure 4.4i** (Heathfield: Open Space Typology) and **Figure 4.5i** (Hailsham & Polegate: Open Space Typology).

Parks and Gardens

2.2.10 Parks and gardens include formal and informal private, semi-private or public open spaces for sport, leisure and recreation that contribute to people's health and well-being. In addition to

these social functions they can also provide a variety of environmental and economic functions, including provision of habitats for wildlife, reducing the impact of climate change and improving neighbourhoods, enhancing house prices and creating a sense of place. Parks and gardens are generally associated with the main towns within the study area.

2.2.11 The contribution of parks and gardens to Wealden's GI network is explored under the Accessible Natural Greenspace and Access Links theme in **Section 2.7**. Existing parks and gardens are shown on **Figure 2.6a** (Existing Accessible Natural Greenspace), and at the town scale on **Figure 4.2i** (Crowborough: Open Space Typology), **Figure 4.3i** (Uckfield: Open Space Typology), **Figure 4.4i** (Heathfield: Open Space Typology) and **Figure 4.5i** (Hailsham & Polegate: Open Space Typology).

Amenity Greenspaces

2.2.12 Amenity greenspace is publically accessible or private greenspace often without formal designation or categorisation including village greens and play areas, communal greenspaces and street trees within housing areas. Amenity greenspaces primarily provide opportunities for formal outdoor sports and recreation that contribute to people's health and well-being. In addition, amenity greenspace can contribute to the character, structure and setting of settlements, often also providing important habitat corridors through urban areas. Amenity greenspace is predominantly located in the main towns within the study area.

2.2.13 The contribution of amenity greenspace to Wealden's GI network is explored under the Accessible Natural Greenspace and Access Links theme in **Section 2.7**. Existing amenity greenspace is shown at the town scale on **Figure 4.2i** (Crowborough: Open Space Typology), **Figure 4.3i** (Uckfield: Open Space Typology), **Figure 4.4i** (Heathfield: Open Space Typology) and **Figure 4.5i** (Hailsham & Polegate: Open Space Typology).

Heritage Sites

2.2.14 Heritage sites provide opportunities for informal recreation and intellectual access to history that contributes to people's health and well-being. Examples within the study area include historic estates, parks and gardens managed by organisations such as the National Trust, listed buildings, conservation areas and scheduled monuments.

2.2.15 The contribution of heritage sites to Wealden's GI network is explored under the Landscape & Historic Environment theme in **Section 2.4**. Heritage sites within the study area are shown on **Figure 2.3b** (Historic Environment).

2.2.16 The primary roles that the above GI assets play in contributing to the District's GI network are explored under the GI themes set out in **Sections 2.3-2.7** below. As illustrated in **Box 2.1**, reflecting the multi-functional nature of GI, it should be noted that there is often overlap between GI themes. For example, 'Biodiversity & Geodiversity' and 'Accessible Natural Greenspace & Access Links' are often related to the same GI assets (e.g. 'Natural & Semi-natural Greenspace and/or Green Corridors).

Box 2.1 – GI Assets and GI Themes

GI Assets	**GI Themes**				
	Biodiversity & Geodiversity	Landscape & Historic Environment	Energy & Food	Water Resources	Accessible Natural Greenspace & Access Links
Natural & Semi-natural Greenspaces	✓	✓	✓		✓
Green Corridors	✓	✓			✓
Blue Corridors	✓	✓		✓	✓
Productive Landscapes		✓	✓		
Cemeteries & Churchyards	✓	✓			✓
Parks & Gardens	✓				✓
Amenity Greenspaces	✓		✓		✓
Heritage Sites	✓	✓			

2.3 Biodiversity & Geodiversity

2.3.1 Wealden's varied geology and its rural environment supports a rich variety of habitats and wildlife. Around 24% (18,780ha) of the study area is designated as an international, national or local site of biodiversity and geodiversity value, and there are also a range of habitats of conservation importance within and outside of these designated areas that are also afforded high priority for protection. These natural and semi-natural habitats are a key GI asset and make a significant contribution to Wealden's GI network, although there are considerable opportunities to further improve the condition of biodiversity and geodiversity assets within the study area.

Audit

2.3.2 The biodiversity and geodiversity resources within the study area are outlined below. As shown on **Figure 2.2a**, there are many sites of nature conservation value that have more than one designation and are protected at the international, national and local level as described below.

International/European Nature Conservation Sites

2.3.3 **Special Areas of Conservation** (SAC) are areas given special protection under the European Union's Habitats Directive, which is transposed into UK law by the Habitats and Conservation of Species Regulations 2010. There are two SACs within the study area with a combined total area of 5,826ha – Ashdown Forest SAC and Pevensey Levels SAC.

- **Ashdown Forest SAC**[7] – 2,729ha of Ashdown Forest was designated as a SAC in 2005 primarily for its heath habitats, which comprise one of the largest single continuous blocks of lowland heath in south-east England (approximately 1589ha). The qualifying features of Ashdown Forest SAC are: (i) Northern Atlantic wet heaths (comprising bog-mosses, bog asphodel, common cotton-grass, marsh gentian and marsh clubmoss that support important assemblages of beetles, dragonflies, damselflies and butterflies, including the nationally rare silver-studded blue); (ii) European dry heaths (comprising heather, bell heather and dwarf gorse that support important lichen assemblages and the most inland remaining population of hairy greenweed in Britain); and (iii) a significant presence of great crested newts. The conservation objectives for the Ashdown Forest SAC[8] are to *'avoid the deterioration of the qualifying natural habitats and the habitats of qualifying species, and*

[7] http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/file/6357909449474048
[8] http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/file/6746917321048064

the significant disturbance of those qualifying features, ensuring the integrity of the site is maintained and the site makes a full contribution to achieving Favourable Conservation Status of each of the qualifying features by maintaining or restoring the extent and distribution of qualifying natural habitats and habitats of qualifying features'. Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) often coincide with the European sites and therefore, can be used as a guide to determine the current condition of the habitats within Ashdown Forest SAC. Although it should be noted that SSSIs are designated for national (as opposed to international) nature conservation interest. Therefore, while favourable condition of a SSSI cannot guarantee favourable conservation status of a European site, it can help to illustrate the situation. The condition of the 127 units within the Ashdown Forest SSSI has been assessed by Natural England and the information was last reviewed on 1st March 2013. Currently, 14.6% of the units are in favourable condition and 85.4% are considered to be in an unfavourable but recovering condition[9]. It should be noted that the impacts of air pollution on the condition of SSSIs are considered to be substantially under-represented given the complex interactions between pollution impacts, management and abiotic influences (JNCC, 2006a). The Ashdown Forest SAC's extensive areas of lowland heath are vulnerable to nitrogen dioxide pollution associated with emissions from motorised vehicular traffic. The majority of units have been classified as 'unfavourable recovering condition', which means that these SSSI units are not yet fully conserved but all the necessary management measures are in place. Provided that the recovery work is sustained, the SSSI will reach favourable condition in time. The remaining units are deemed to be in 'favourable condition', which means that the SSSI land is being adequately conserved and is meeting its 'conservation objectives'; however, there is scope for the enhancement of these units.

- **Pevensey Levels SAC[10]** – the Pevensey Levels was designated in 2016 as a SAC primarily for its importance in supporting the largest known population of Little whorlpool ram's-horn snail in the UK, which is found in both a wide spatial distribution and in good population density across a number of the levels, including at Hooe level, Manxey level, Glynleigh and Horse Eye Levels. The SAC designation covers approximately 3585ha. The conservation objectives for the Pevensey Levels SAC[11] are to '*Ensure that the integrity of the site is maintained or restored as appropriate, and ensure that the site contributes to achieving the Favourable Conservation Status of its Qualifying Features, by maintaining or restoring the extent and distribution of the habitats of qualifying species; the structure and function of the habitats of qualifying species; the supporting processes on which the habitats of qualifying species rely; the populations of qualifying species; and the*

[9] Details of the condition assessment for each unit can be found on www.naturalengland.org.uk
[10] https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/497844/pevensey-levels-sac-documents.pdf
[11] http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/file/5358500674797568

distribution of qualifying species within the site. The condition of the 37 units within the Pevensey Levels SSSI has been assessed by Natural England. Currently, 99.50% of the units are considered to be in an unfavourable but recovering condition, which means that these SSSI units are not yet fully conserved but all the necessary management measures are in place.

2.3.4 **Special Protection Areas** (SPA) are areas which have been identified as being of international importance for the breeding, feeding, wintering or the migration of rare and vulnerable species of birds found within European Union countries. They are European designated sites, classified under the Birds Directive. There is one SPA within the study area which extends to 3,207ha:

- **Ashdown Forest SPA**[12] – Ashdown Forest was designated in 1996 as a SPA primarily for its importance in regularly supporting nationally important numbers of breeding populations of Dartford warbler and European Nightjar, which are both Annex 1 species protected under the European Birds Directive. Other Annex 1 species include woodlark, hen harriers and great grey shrike. The SPA also supports an important assemblage of other breeding bird species including hobby, tree pipit, redstart, stonechat and wood warbler. The conservation objectives for the Ashdown Forest SPA[13] are to '*Ensure that the integrity of the site is maintained or restored as appropriate, and ensure that the site contributes to achieving the aims of the Wild Birds Directive, by maintaining or restoring the extent and distribution of the habitats of the qualifying features; the structure and function of the habitats of the qualifying features; the supporting processes on which the habitats of the qualifying features rely; the population of each of the qualifying features; and the distribution of the qualifying features within the site*. As described above, the majority of the 127 units within the Ashdown Forest SSSI have been classified as 'unfavourable recovering condition', which means that these SSSI units are not yet fully conserved but all the necessary management measures are in place. Provided that the recovery work is sustained, the SSSI will reach favourable condition in time. The remaining units are deemed to be in 'favourable condition', which means that the SSSI land is being adequately conserved and is meeting its 'conservation objectives'; however, there is scope for the enhancement of these units.

[12] http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/file/6015157973024768
[13] http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/file/6291482747076608

2.3.5 **Ramsar Wetland sites** are wetlands of international importance, designated under the 1971 Ramsar Convention. There is one Ramsar site within the study area which extends to 3,099ha:

- **Pevensey Levels Ramsar Site** – Pevensey Levels represents one of the largest and least fragmented lowland wet grassland systems in South East England. The low-lying grazing meadows are intersected by a complex system of reed/scrub fringed ditches, which support a variety of important wetland communities. The Pevensey Levels was designated as a Ramsar site in 1999 covering approximately 3585ha. It is of international importance because (a) the site supports an outstanding assemblage of rare, vulnerable and endangered invertebrate species, including many British Red Data Book species (such as the of Little whorlpool ram's-horn snail and the fen raft spider, one of Britain's largest and rarest spiders); and (b) the site is of special value as probably the best site in Great Britain for freshwater molluscs, one of the five best sites for aquatic beetles and supports an outstanding assemblage of dragonflies; it also supports 68% of the 160 vascular plant species in Great Britain that can be described as aquatic. Other features of non-qualifying interest supported by the site include an important assemblage of birds typical of lowland wet grassland such as wintering lapwing, snipe and golden plover and breeding sedge warblers and reed warblers. A small area of shingle and intertidal muds and sands is also included within the site[14].

National Nature Conservation Sites

2.3.6 **Sites of Special Scientific Interest** (SSSI) are designated by Natural England under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). There are 26 SSSIs within the study area with a total combined area of 7,897ha. The condition of these SSSIs is summarised in **Table 2.1**.

Table 2.1: Condition of SSSIs[15]

SSSI	Condition Summary[16]
Ashdown Forest (also SAC/SPA)	**99.60%** of the SSSI is in a **favourable** or **unfavourable but recovering** condition.
Pevensey Levels (also SAC/Ramsar site)	**99.50%** of the SSSI is in a **favourable** or **unfavourable but recovering** condition.
Arlington Reservoir	**100%** of the SSSI is in a **favourable** or **unfavourable but recovering** condition.
Binglett's Wood	**100%** of the SSSI is in a **favourable** or **unfavourable but recovering** condition.
Bream Wood	**100%** of the SSSI is in a **favourable** or **unfavourable but recovering** condition.
Burgh Hill Farm Meadow	**100%** is in an **unfavourable – declining** condition.

[14] http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/pdf/RIS/UK11053.pdf
[15] https://designatedsites.naturalengland.org.uk/SiteSearch.aspx accessed April 2017
[16] The condition of SSSI land in England is assessed by Natural England using six reportable condition categories: favourable; unfavourable recovering; unfavourable no change; unfavourable declining; part destroyed and destroyed. See glossary for definitions https://designatedsites.naturalengland.org.uk/SSSIglossary.aspx

SSSI	Condition Summary[16]
Buxted Park	**100%** of the SSSI is in a **favourable** or **unfavourable but recovering** condition.
Eridge Green (also RIGS)	**100%** of the SSSI is in a **favourable** or **unfavourable but recovering** condition.
Eridge Park	**100%** of the SSSI is in a **favourable** or **unfavourable but recovering** condition.
Hastingford Cutting (also RIGS)	**100%** of the SSSI is in an **unfavourable – no change** condition.
Heathfield Park	**100%** of the SSSI is in a **favourable** or **unfavourable but recovering** condition.
Herstmonceux Park	**100%** of the SSSI is in a **favourable** or **unfavourable but recovering** condition.
High Rocks (also RIGS)	**100%** of the SSSI is in a **favourable** or **unfavourable but recovering** condition.
High Woods	**100%** of the SSSI is in a **favourable** or **unfavourable but recovering** condition.
Lower Dicker	**100%** of the SSSI is in an **unfavourable – declining** condition.
Milton Gate Marsh	**76.25%** of the SSSI is in a **favourable** or **unfavourable but recovering** condition. **23.75%** is in an **unfavourable – declining** condition.
Penn's Rocks (also RIGS)	**100%** of the SSSI is in a **favourable** or **unfavourable but recovering** condition.
Plashett Park Wood	**100%** of the SSSI is in a **favourable** or **unfavourable but recovering** condition.
Paines Cross Meadow	**100%** of the SSSI is in a **favourable** or **unfavourable but recovering** condition.
Park Corner Heath	**100%** of the SSSI is in a **favourable** or **unfavourable but recovering** condition.
Rock Wood	**100%** of the SSSI is in a **favourable** or **unfavourable but recovering** condition.
Sapperton Meadows	**100%** of the SSSI is in a **favourable** or **unfavourable but recovering** condition.
St. Dunstan's Farm Meadows	**100%** of the SSSI is in a **favourable** or **unfavourable but recovering** condition.
Stockland Farm Meadows	**100%** of the SSSI is in a **favourable** or **unfavourable but recovering** condition.
Waldron Cutting (also RIGS)	**100%** of the SSSI is in a **favourable** or **unfavourable but recovering** condition.
Weir Wood Reservoir	**25.46%** of the SSSI is in a **favourable** or **unfavourable but recovering** condition. **74.54%** is in an **unfavourable – no change** condition.

2.3.7 Overall, the SSSIs within the study area are identified by Natural England to be in a favourable or unfavourable but recovering condition. 'Favourable condition' means that the designated feature(s) are being adequately conserved in line with all the mandatory site specific monitoring targets). 'Unfavourable but recovering condition' means that the designated feature(s) are not yet fully conserved but all the necessary management mechanisms are in place.

2.3.8 **National Nature Reserves** (NNR) are areas which are among the best examples of a particular habitat in the country. There is one NNR within the study area extending to 177ha:

- Pevensey Levels NNR

Local Nature Conservation Sites

2.3.9 **Local Nature Reserves** (LNR) are designated by local authorities under the Section 21 of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949, and amended by Schedule 11 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006. There are 6 LNRs within the study area with a total area of 256ha:

- Arlington Reservoir LNR
- Crowborough Country Park LNR
- Hempstead Meadows LNR
- Old Lodge, Nutley LNR
- West Park, Uckfield LNR
- Weir Wood Reservoir LNR

2.3.10 In addition to the LNRs identified above, there are also 91 **Local Wildlife Sites** within the study area with a total area of 2,479ha. These sites are of local importance for nature conservation but are not legally protected except through the planning system.

Ancient Woodland and Veteran Trees

2.3.11 Woodland and trees classed as 'ancient' or 'veteran' are irreplaceable. Ancient woodland takes hundreds of years to establish and is considered important for its wildlife, soils, recreation, cultural value, history and contribution to landscapes.

2.3.12 **Ancient Woodland**[17] is 'any wooded area that has been wooded continuously[18] since at least 1600 AD. It includes:

- 'Ancient semi-natural woodland' mainly made up of trees and shrubs native to the site, usually arising from natural regeneration.
- 'Plantations on ancient woodland sites' areas of ancient woodland where the former native tree cover has been felled and replaced by planted trees, usually of species not native to the site.

[17] Ancient Woodland and Veteran Trees - Standing Advice for Planning Authorities (Natural England and Forestry Commission, updated October 2015)
[18] 'Wooded continuously' doesn't mean there has been a continuous tree cover across the entirety of the whole site. Open space, both temporary and permanent, is an important component of woodlands.

2.3.13 Ancient semi-natural woodland and plantations on ancient woodland sites have equal protection under the National Planning Policy Framework.

2.3.14 Ancient wood pastures and historic parkland can be a distinct form of ancient woodland. Many have not been included on the Ancient Woodland Inventory because their low tree density meant that they didn't register as woodland on historical maps. Where ancient wood pastures are identified they have the same consideration when determining planning applications as other forms of ancient woodland.

2.3.15 There are 2,713 Ancient Woodlands within the study area included on Natural England's Ancient Woodland Inventory, collectively occupying 11,492ha (14%) of land and representing 61% of all woodland. Ancient Woodland is protected from loss or damage through the planning system.

2.3.16 **Veteran trees**[19] are trees which, because of their age, size or condition are of cultural, historical, landscape and nature conservation value. They can be found as individuals or groups within ancient wood pastures, historic parkland, hedgerows, orchards, parks or other areas. There are a number of veteran trees within the study area included on the Ancient Tree Inventory[20].

Biodiversity Conservation

2.3.17 **UK Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) Priority Habitats** are a range of semi-natural habitat types identified by the UK BAP as being at most threat and requiring conservation action. There are 11 UK BAP priority habitats within the study area represented within the five broad habitat types shown on **Figure 2.2b**, which collectively cover 26% (2,0497ha) of the study area. A number of these are also Habitats of Principal Importance included in the England Biodiversity List published by the Secretary of State under Section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006.

2.3.18 **Figure 2.2b** highlights the significance of **woodland habitats**, which cover 18,755ha (24%) of the study area. Whilst they are common throughout the area, larger woods are more frequent and woodland density is generally greater in the northern part of the study area within the High Weald AONB. These patterns reflect the underlying character of the landscape, with large woodlands on ridge-tops and smaller often narrow woods on slopes and along steep-sided

[19] Ancient Woodland and Veteran Trees - Standing Advice for Planning Authorities (Natural England and Forestry Commission, updated October 2015)
[20] http://www.ancient-tree-hunt.org.uk/

stream corridors (gills). Many woods form part of wider landscape-scale woodland complexes which extend beyond the study area boundary.

2.3.19 **Lowland heathland habitats** cover 1,722ha (2.2%) of the study area, and as shown on **Figure 2.2b** are found particularly in the north of the study area concentrated around Ashdown Forest.

2.3.20 As shown on **Figure 2.2b**, **freshwater habitats** include the main rivers of the Medway, Rother, Ouse and Cuckmere and their tributaries, numerous small ponds and the Weir Wood, Bewl and Arlington Reservoirs.

2.3.21 **Wetland and coastal habitats** cover 3,730ha (4.8%) of the study area, and are found in the south of the study area concentrated around the Pevensey Levels, and include the network of ditches and the coastal zone.

2.3.22 **Grassland habitats** cover 1,236ha (1.6%) of the study area, and are also an important element of the mosaic of habitats found within the study area. Some grassland habitats are generally small and fragmented, typically associated with water courses and woodland.

2.3.23 A strong link exists within much of the study area between biodiversity and landscape history. As noted in the High Weald Biodiversity Statement[21], the High Weald AONB is essentially medieval in origin and it is likely that many of its extant **hedgerows** pre-date the 18th and 19th century Parliamentary Enclosures that created straight, uniform hawthorn hedges. An important consequence of this is that a significant proportion of the study area's hedgerows, particularly in the north, are likely to be both ancient and species-rich.

2.3.24 There are also over 150 **UK BAP priority species** recorded in the study area, including legally protected species and Species of Principal Importance included in the England Biodiversity List published by the Secretary of State under Section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006.

Geodiversity Conservation

2.3.25 Geodiversity is the variety of rocks, fossils, minerals, natural processes, landforms and soils that underlie and determine the character of the landscape and environment. **Regionally Important Geological and Geomorphological Sites** (RIGS) are locally designated sites of local, and regional and national importance for geodiversity. As shown on **Figure 2.2a**, there are 10 RIGS within the study area with a total area of 32ha: In 2011, condition surveys of East Sussex RIGS

[21] High Weald AONB Biodiversity Statement, High Weald JAC (2014)

were completed by the Sussex Geodiversity Partnership in conjunction with East Sussex County Council. This information is currently not publically available.

Needs and Opportunities

2.3.26 The existing natural and semi-natural habitats and geodiversity sites identified within the study area, including the Ashdown Forest SPA/SAC/SSSI and the Pevensey Levels Ramsar site/SAC/SSSI, are key GI assets that make a significant contribution to Wealden's GI network. In addition to contributing to biodiversity and geodiversity services, these assets also contribute to a number of other important ecosystems services including climate regulation; regulating water quality and flow; regulating soil quality and erosion; pollination; pest regulation; genetic diversity; sense of place/inspiration; tranquillity; and recreation.

2.3.27 European and national legislation and guidance set out how sites of biodiversity and geological importance will be protected and enhanced. Furthermore, Section 40 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006 places a statutory duty on all local authorities to have regards to biodiversity in the carrying out of all their functions.

2.3.28 Future development within the study area has the potential to contribute to the further fragmentation, loss and deterioration of important habitats and species. The creation, protection, enhancement and management of ecological networks to link areas of high biodiversity value can help to militate against fragmentation, biodiversity loss and climate change in accordance with the NPPF. Adopting such as approach can assist Wealden District Council in meeting its statutory duty.

2.3.29 There are opportunities to ensure the continued protection and management of the study area's statutory and non-statutory sites through partnership working with the Sussex Biodiversity Partnership to deliver improved connectivity between these sites at the landscape-scale.

2.3.30 Conflict can often occur between conservation objectives of a site; for example a site of biodiversity importance and using it for recreational use. Through the development of a GI Strategy there is an opportunity to protect those sites which are ecologically sensitive and require appropriate protection and sensitive management, whilst balancing increased accessibility to sites to enable greater opportunities for human interaction with nature. This will often relate to site level management.

2.3.31 With increased development pressure, important biodiversity and ecological assets could be under threat within the study area. As part of the evidence base for the Local Plan, a number of studies have been undertaken to assess the potential effects of housing allocations and growth

scenarios on the Ashdown Forest SPA/SAC and the Pevensey Levels SAC. Some of the key needs and opportunities that this presents are explored below.

Ashdown Forest SPA

2.3.32 The qualifying features of the Ashdown Forest SPA (breeding birds) are vulnerable to disturbance from recreational and other activities.

2.3.33 The Council is currently developing a strategy to mitigate the impact of recreational pressure on Ashdown Forest SPA with regards to residential and tourism related development. This includes work to deliver Suitable Alternative Natural Green Space (SANGS) relevant to Ashdown Forest, which is supported by guidelines agreed by Natural England. The SANGS Guidelines[22] identify the type of site that can constitute a SANGS and identifies measures that can be taken to enhance sites so that they are suitable to be used as SANGS provision whilst ensuring compliance with the requirements of the Habitats Regulations. The Council is also working with partner authorities and organisations to identify and implement a Strategic Access Management and Monitoring Strategy (SAMMS) for Ashdown Forest.

Ashdown Forest SAC

2.3.34 The qualifying features of the Ashdown Forest SAC (heath habitats, plant communities and plant species) are vulnerable to air pollution in the form of nitrogen deposition from motorised vehicular traffic emissions.

2.3.35 The Council is committed to investigating the impacts of nitrogen upon the Ashdown Forest SAC so that its effects on development in the longer term can be more fully understood and mitigated if appropriate. In 2014, the Council implemented a programme of monitoring, modelling and assessment to determine the effects of atmospheric pollution on the Ashdown Forest SAC. The programme involves: regular monitoring of air quality and vegetation along certain road corridors within and adjacent to the SAC; evaluating the results to identify the effects of atmospheric pollution on habitat and vegetation diversity; and modelling the current and future impacts that road traffic associated with future developments will have on ambient concentrations and nitrogen deposition within the SAC. The results of this monitoring and research is demonstrating that the impact on the Ashdown Forest SAC is significant in the immediate vicinity of the roads across the Forest with high levels of nitrogen deposition recorded and consequent ecological damage. Taking into account existing levels of traffic and development commitments that are in place, the Council considers that there is already an unacceptable level of impact from nitrogen deposition in the areas close to the Forest's roads.

[22] http://www.wealden.gov.uk/nmsruntime/saveasdialog.aspx?lID=13843&sID=3484

2.3.36 In this context, there is a need to adopt an approach which is based on delivering development over the plan period at a level which will be below that which, applying the precautionary principle, would be deemed to be potentially damaging to the SAC overall. Following full consideration of alternative development scenarios and mitigation measures to protect the SAC, it may be in the public interest to consider putting in place measures to provide equivalent comparable habitat to that being lost in order to compensate for the damage already being done to the SAC in the vicinity of the Forest's roads. In conjunction with this, there is also a need to set a level of development across the district which will ensure that the overall integrity of the SAC is not damaged due to traffic movements and the consequent nitrogen deposition.

Pevensey Levels SAC/Ramsar site

2.3.37 There is also a need to maintain and enhance the conservation features of the Pevensey Levels SAC/Ramsar site in accordance with its conservation objectives to meets its requirements under the Habitats Regulations. The key environmental conditions of importance in sustaining the integrity of the Pevensey Levels SAC/Ramsar site are: unpolluted water; low levels of nutrient enrichment (primarily from surface runoff and hydrological pathways, but also from atmospheric deposition); control of non-native species (e.g. pennywort); maintenance of an appropriate hydrological regime; and control of recreational disturbance.

2.3.38 It may be appropriate to consider developing policies for more stringent water efficiency measures in new housing development than specified in Building Regulations, together with phasing of additional wastewater treatment capacity alongside housing development, should information on water availability and wastewater treatment capacity identify concerns in relation to protecting the integrity of the Pevensey Levels SAC/Ramsar site.

Biodiversity Opportunity Areas

2.3.39 In addition to a high percentage of designated sites, there are also numerous Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) habitats present within the study area. The majority of these BAP habitats are reflected in Biodiversity Opportunity Areas (BOAs). Biodiversity Opportunity Areas (BOAs) are priority areas for the enhancement, restoration and creation of BAP habitats identified in the South East Biodiversity Strategy[23]. Outside of the formally designated sites, BOAs are considered to be the most important areas for habitat enhancement, restoration and creation of BAP habitats and provide an opportunity to positively contribute to national BAP targets, create links between sites of biodiversity value to allow species to respond to changing conditions such as climate change and also increase the quality of habitats within the District. The Sussex

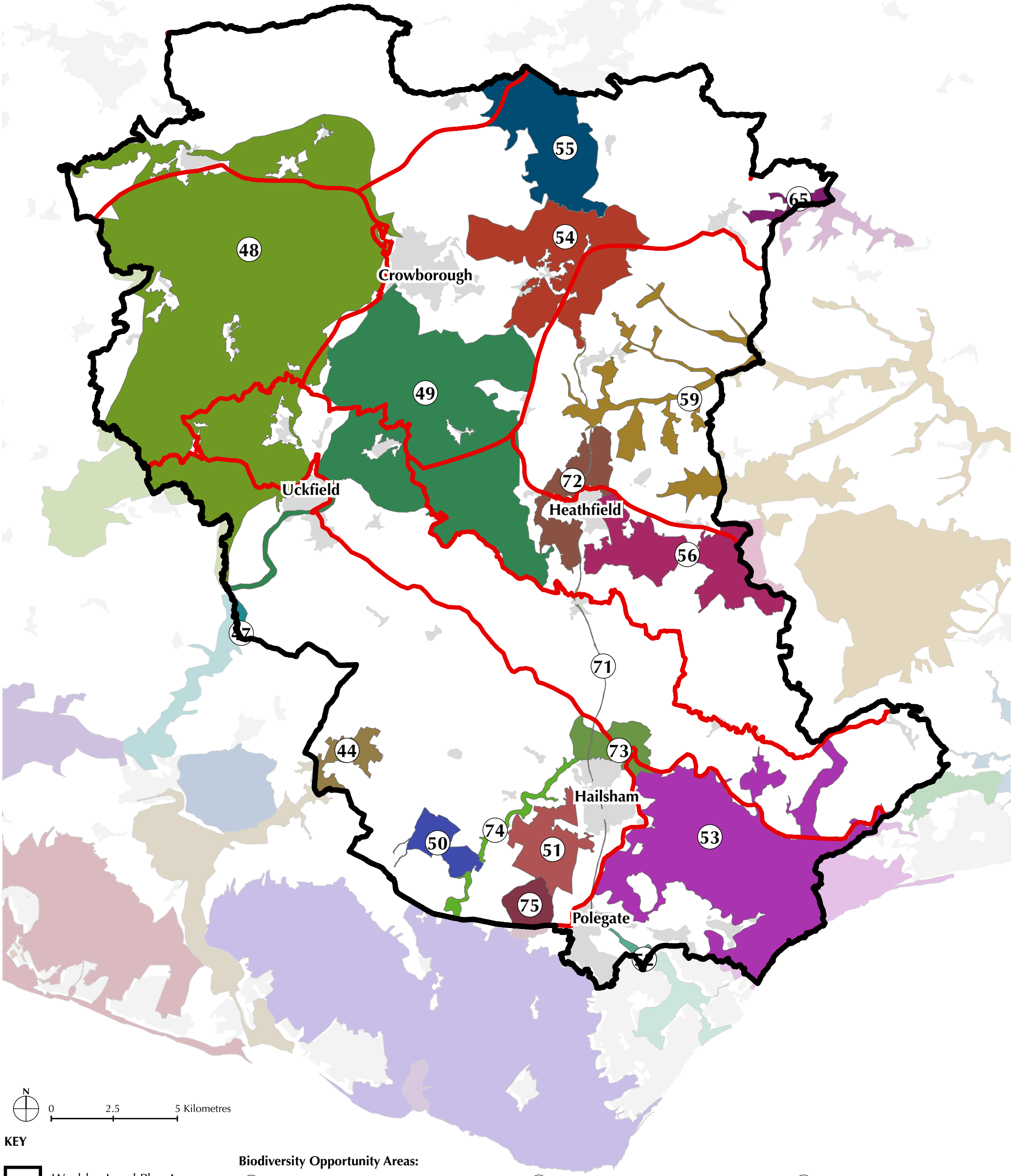
[23] South East Biodiversity Strategy (South East England Biodiversity Forum, undated)

BAP[24] provides targets for maintaining, restoring and creating BAP habitats in Sussex, and gives priority to actions in the BOAs. As shown on **Figure 2.2c**, there are 18 BOAs within the study area. The full statements can be found on the Sussex Biodiversity Partnership's website[25] and a summary is provided in **Table 2.2**.

Table 2.2: Biodiversity Opportunity Areas in the Study Area

BOA Name	Summary Description	Relevant Opportunities
Lewes Brooks and the Ouse Valley (44)	*The River Ouse is heavily embanked, which is currently protecting freshwater habitats in a tidal floodplain. The area around Iford has good ditch ecology being particularly rich in dragonflies.*	• *Wetland habitat management, restoration and creation* • *Education and community engagement* • *Landowner advisory and agri-environment schemes* • *Floodplain restoration and reconnection* • *Water quality improvement*
Mid Ouse Floodzone (47)	*This area, upstream of Lewes is severely affected by flooding. The River Ouse is heavily embanked here with some historic meanders still evident in the landscape. The area is agricultural with some existing wet grassland.*	• *Education and community engagement* • *Wetland habitat management, restoration and creation* • *Floodplain restoration and reconnection* • *Water quality improvement*
Western Ouse Steams & Ashdown Forest (48)	*European protected heathland, Ashdown Forest consists of a matrix of open heath, ancient woodland, gill woodland and wetlands. The eastern River Ouse and its headwaters.*	• *Heathland management, restoration and creation* • *Wetland habitat management, restoration and creation* • *Woodland management and restoration* • *Floodplain restoration and reconnection* • *Access improvements* • *Water quality improvement* • *Grazing management* • *Education and community engagement* • *Landowner advisory and agri-environment schemes* • *Working with and attracting new businesses*
River Uck & its Headwaters (49)	*This area contains tributaries of the River Uck and has a scattering of ancient woodland, gill woodland and lowland meadows. The River Uck passes through the urban area of Uckfield and through the agricultural land of the Low Weald*	• *Wetland habitat management, restoration and creation* • *Woodland management and restoration* • *Control of non-native invasive*

[24] Sussex Biodiversity Action Plan (Sussex Biodiversity Partnership, undated)
[25] https://www.biodiversitysussex.org.uk/landscapes/wealden-district



KEY

Wealden Local Plan Area

GI Zones

Biodiversity Opportunity Areas:

- 44 Lewes Brooks and the Ouse Valley
- 47 Mid Ouse Floodzone
- 48 Western Ouse Streams and Ashdown Forest
- 49 River Uck and its Headwaters
- 50 Cuckmere Ouse Watershed
- 51 Wilmington Woodlands and Watershed
- 52 Eastbourne Marshes
- 53 Pevensey Levels
- 54 Medway, Ouse, Rother Watershed
- 55 Eridge and Broadwater
- 56 Pevensey, Rother, Cuckmere Watershed
- 59 Rother, Brede and Tillingham Woods
- 65 Bewl Water
- 71 Cuckoo Trail Habitat Link
- 72 Heathfield Habitat Link
- 73 Pevensey & Cuckmere Valley Link
- 74 River Cuckmere Habitat Link
- 75 Wooton Manor Grasslands Link

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WEALDEN GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE STUDY
WEALDEN DISTRICT COUNCIL

FIGURE 2.2c
BIODIVERSITY OPPORTUNITY AREAS

April 2017
11123101_Figures_20-04-17.indd

BOA Name	Summary Description	Relevant Opportunities
	until the confluence with the River Ouse north of Lewes.	*species* • *Water quality improvement* • *Education and community engagement* • *Working with and attracting new businesses*
Cuckmere Ouse Watershed (50)	*This area is dominated to the southeast by Arlington Reservoir, with rest of the area included for its role as a watershed between the Cuckmere and Ouse rivers. It is comprised of Low Weald agricultural land with streams and small ancient woodlands.*	• *Wetland habitat management, restoration and creation* • *Access improvements*
Wilmington Woodlands & Watershed (51)	*This BOA traverses the Pevensey and Cuckmere watershed and includes large ancient woodland at Abbots and Wilmington Wood which dominates the south. To the east the area is bounded by the A22 yet follows a small stream connecting the area to Pevensey Levels.*	• *Wetland habitat management, restoration and creation* • *Woodland management and restoration*
Eastbourne Marshes (52)	*This wetland area is confined by the urban extent of Eastbourne. The area comprises open water, reedbed and wet grassland.*	• *Wetland habitat management, restoration and creation* • *Coastal habitat management, restoration and creation* • *Education and community engagement* • *Access improvements* • *Flood alleviation* • *Control of invasive species on vegetated shingle* • *Survey and monitoring*
Pevensey Levels (53)	*Pevensey Levels is a site of international importance for its wetland ecology that is badly afflicted by the invasive aquatic weed Floating Pennywort.*	• *Wetland habitat management, restoration and creation* • *Coastal habitat management, restoration and creation* • *Control of non-native invasive species* • *Wetland bird interest* • *Landowner advisory and agri-environment schemes* • *Access improvements*
Medway, Ouse & Rother Watershed (54)	*The Ouse, Rother and Medway headwaters all meet in this area of small ancient woodland and gill woodland. There is a high density of ponds in the eastern area. This watershed could have an important role to play in the migration of key species between river catchments.*	• *Wetland habitat management, restoration and creation* • *Heathland management, restoration and creation* • *Woodland management and restoration* • *Access improvements*

BOA Name	Summary Description	Relevant Opportunities
Eridge & Broadwater (55)	*Eridge Park contains modern and medieval wood pasture. Exposed sandstone outcrops are rich in bryophytes and lichens. Extensive heathland restoration at Broadwater Forest and Hargate Forest. Rhododendron clearance is an important aspect of woodland restoration in this part of Sussex.*	• *Heathland management, restoration and creation* • *Woodland management and restoration* • *Access improvements* • *Landowner advisory and agri-environment schemes* • *Working with and attracting new businesses* • *Education and community engagement*
Pevensey, Rother & Cuckmere Watershed (56)	*In this area three Sussex catchments meet. In the agricultural landscape several small ancient woodlands are found, including gill woodlands. A heathland remnant is all that remains of a once more heathy landscape.*	• *Wetland habitat management, restoration and creation* • *Access improvements*
Rother, Brede & Tillingham Woods (59)	*The River Rother flood zone is an area that is rich in opportunity for wetland restoration; and its tributaries and those of the Brede and Tillingham flow through the heavily wooded landscape of the High Weald. Within this area there are also many lowland meadows.*	• *Wetland habitat management, restoration and creation* • *Meadow management, restoration and creation* • *Woodland management and restoration* • *Education and community engagement* • *Working with and attracting new businesses* • *Access improvements*
Bewl Water (65)	*This reservoir is the largest expanse of open water in Sussex and was created by damming the River Bewl and flooding its three main tributary stream valleys. Bewl Water is extremely important for large numbers of waders and wildfowl during the winter and as a stopping point during migration.*	• *Wetland habitat management, restoration and creation* • *Access improvements*
Cuckoo Trail Habitat Link (71)	*The Cuckoo Trail passes through two major towns and penetrates a third urban area. Bringing benefits for urban wildlife and also for facilitating species movement. It provides key links for the conservation and enhancement of wildlife habitats in the area between Hailsham and Polegate.*	• *Access management* • *Education and community engagement*
Heathfield Habitat Link (72)	*This area identifies opportunities for continuing a habitat link around Heathfield.*	• *Access management*

BOA Name	Summary Description	Relevant Opportunities
Pevensey & Cuckmere Valley Link (73)	*This opportunity area straddles the Cuckoo Trail and is an area in which many enhancements for wildlife are possible amongst, the woodlands, streams and small developments of this area of Sussex. Biodiversity value could be increased considerably through providing connections to major natural networks like the Cuckoo Trail and the Cuckmere Valley.*	• *Access management* • *Minimising development impacts*
River Cuckmere Habitat Link (74)	*This BOA follows the mid reaches of the River Cuckmere, eastward towards the Pevensey catchment covering the natural floodplain of the river.*	• *Access management* • *Wetland habitat management, restoration and creation*
Wooton Manor Grasslands Link (75)	*This small opportunity area has several small ancient woodlands and shaws within it, but is predominantly composed of agricultural land and some hedgerows.*	• *Access management* • *Woodland management and restoration* • *Meadow management, restoration and creation* • *Landowner advisory and agri-environment schemes*

Embedding Biodiversity into Development

2.3.40 Development that successfully plans for and subsequently incorporates biodiversity into its design can also contribute to the creation of new wildlife habitats and corridors and also restoration of degraded habitats. This is particularly important in and around urban areas where existing GI can be enhanced so that it can better contribute to the ecological network. Both existing and new green spaces, such as urban verges, amenity planting and formal landscaped zones, have the potential to be of value when considering green corridors through urban areas and improving links with rural areas. Whilst these amenity greenspaces may not always have as much value as natural habitats, they are very useful when planning links to rural areas. There is therefore an opportunity to carefully consider and ensure that these areas are of value for biodiversity, and can contribute to climate change adaptation through use of appropriate plant species.

2.3.41 Opportunities for embedding biodiversity into new development schemes should be informed by the GI design principles set out in **Section 6.3**. Specific opportunities for retaining and enhancing existing wildlife habitats, and/or creating new habitats, related to GI provision for residential development sites in the new Local Plan are detailed in the Wealden Local Plan Sites Landscape and Ecological Assessment Studies[26].

[26] Wealden Local Plan Sites Landscape and Ecological Assessment Studies (CBA and TLP for Wealden DC, 2017)

Summary

2.3.42 In summary, working with partners, developers, local communities, landowners and other relevant bodies, the key strategic opportunities for GI to help address identified needs for protecting biodiversity and geodiversity, and enhancing the condition and connectivity of wildlife habitats within the study area, are considered to be:

High Weald

- Maintain and enhance habitats and species of European importance within the Ashdown Forest SAC/SPA through appropriate management.
- Provide equivalent comparable habitat to compensate for impacts of the damage already being done to the Ashdown Forest SAC in the vicinity of the Forest's roads due to nitrogen deposition from existing traffic, and to address the ecological impacts of traffic generated by new development on the SAC where appropriate.
- Consider setting a level of development across the District which will ensure that the overall integrity of the Ashdown Forest SAC is not damaged due to increased nitrogen deposition from traffic.
- Manage recreational pressures at key sites in the High Weald recognised for their sensitive habitats and species, in particular Ashdown Forest SPA.
- Where required to mitigate the impacts of recreational pressure from new residential and tourism development likely to affect the Ashdown Forest SPA, encourage provision of SANGs in line with the Council's 'Guidelines for the Creation of Suitable Alternative Natural Green Space'[27].
- Retain and enhance key habitats in the High Weald's green and blue corridors to provide improved connectivity for wildlife to allow species to disperse and adapt to climate change, giving priority to the identified BOAs.
- Restore and enhance suitable habitats in the High Weald to support key species and reduce their vulnerability to fragmentation through development, giving priority to the identified BOAs.
- Deliver landscape-scale biodiversity restoration and enhancement projects for priority BAP habitats in the High Weald, giving priority to the identified BOAs.
- Improve the biodiversity value of greenspaces and green corridors within the High Weald for the benefit of wildlife, ensuring in particular the sensitive management of Ancient Woodland, veteran trees and hedgerows.

[27] http://www.wealden.gov.uk/nmsruntime/saveasdialog.aspx?lID=13843&sID=3484

- Ensure that, wherever possible, new development delivers net gains in biodiversity that contribute to BAP targets in the High Weald.
- Enhance ecological networks, including the condition and connectivity of habitats along routeways for wildlife.
- Maintain the extent and prevent further loss or degradation of unimproved grassland and heathland, and increase the favourability of designated sites by appropriately managing all sites and expanding, linking and buffering them where appropriate.
- Establish ecological habitat networks to assist vulnerable species such as heathland birds and lichens and bryophytes in parkland and on rocky outcrops in adapting to climate change, including connectivity beyond the AONB.
- Enhance, buffer and connect the High Weald habitats, and ensure that ecological networks also contribute positively to landscape character.
- Explore opportunities for working with landowners to ensure sympathetic management of semi-natural grasslands such as mowing for hay, low intensity grazing by livestock, or a combination of both management techniques as appropriate.
- Encourage opportunities that provide wildlife benefits such as bird boxes and bat roosts through the repair, restoration and conversion of buildings.
- Control invasive non-native species to prevent or reduce damage to native species populations and habitats.
- Maintain views of and access to geological features and exposures and where appropriate, improve access to cuttings, quarries and other exposures of geological features to enable improved understanding and enjoyment of geodiversity and sense of history.
- Develop further understanding and appreciation of sandrock exposures to help reduce threats and or inappropriate use and management.
- Maintain the nationally important sandrock exposures to conserve the fern, moss and liverwort communities they support and protect their value as some of the most significant sites of prehistoric archaeology in the area.
- Maintain and enhance all existing rock exposures and natural land forms that are important for understanding the origin and geological development of the High Weald.

Low Weald

- Retain and enhance key habitats in the Low Weald's green and blue corridors to provide improved connectivity for wildlife, allowing species to disperse and adapt to climate change, giving priority to the identified BOAs.
- Restore and enhance suitable habitats in the Low Weald to support key species and reduce their vulnerability to fragmentation through development, giving priority to the identified BOAs.

- Deliver landscape-scale biodiversity restoration and enhancement projects for priority BAP habitats in the Low Weald, giving priority to the identified BOAs.
- Improve the biodiversity value of greenspaces and green corridors within the Low Weald for the benefit of wildlife, ensuring in particular the sensitive management of Ancient Woodland, veteran trees and hedgerows.
- Manage recreational access at key sites in the Low Weald recognised for their sensitive habitats and species.
- Ensure that, wherever possible, new development delivers net gains in biodiversity that contribute to BAP targets in the Low Weald.
- Enhance or reinstate woodland management, including restoration of rides and glades where appropriate, and restore plantations on ancient woodland sites to native woodland.
- Ensure planned development includes high quality green and blue infrastructure that benefits well-being and access to nature of local communities as well as enhancing biodiversity.
- Protect the area's historic parkland and wood pasture sites by supporting restoration projects and initiatives.
- Support the creation and restoration of ponds, particularly those with high biodiversity or historical interest.
- Restore meadows and create margins to fields and roads to buffer farmland and rivers watercourses and continuing to support projects such as the Weald Meadows Initiative.
- Identify, monitor and control non-native invasive species and diseases.
- Promote use of locally sourced building materials as an expression of local geodiversity.
- Maintain and enhance earth science features by seeking to enhance existing exposures and agreeing retention of conservation sections in active and disused quarries.
- Improve access to, interpretation of and promote the use of geological sites as an important educational and research resource to improve understanding and appreciation of geodiversity.
- Ensure that the importance and sensitivity of earth science SSSIs and RIGS are recognised in the planning process.

Pevensey Levels

- Maintain and enhance habitats and species of European/national importance within the Pevensey Levels SAC/Ramsar site through appropriate management of water levels and water quality.
- Manage recreational access within the Pevensey Levels SAC/Ramsar site to protect sensitive habitats and the species supported by these habitats.

- Retain and enhance key habitats in the Pevensey Levels' blue corridors to provide improved connectivity for wildlife to allow species to adapt to climate change.
- Deliver landscape-scale biodiversity restoration and enhancement projects for priority BAP habitats in the Pevensey Levels BOA.
- Improve the biodiversity value of greenspaces and green corridors within the Pevensey Levels BOA for the benefit of wildlife.
- Ensure that, wherever possible, new development delivers net gains in biodiversity that contribute to BAP targets within the Pevensey Levels BOA.
- Encourage the reinstatement of permanent pasture from arable to help extend and link wetland habitats.
- Encourage best practice farming methods to reduce use of pesticides and fertilizers and reduce agricultural run-off.
- Seek opportunities to improve sites and deliver multiple benefits through incentives such as agri-environment schemes, for example by raising water levels and creating new features for wading birds.
- Establish new areas of reed beds and wet meadows, including giving consideration to the encouragement of seasonal inundation in appropriate areas.
- Maintain water levels in ditches and encourage appropriate dredging regimes to maintain optimum conditions.
- Support local farmers to build on recent improvements and work towards restoring the Pevensey Levels Important Bird Area status.
- Support measures to maintain and enhance hydrological links between Pevensey Levels and surrounding areas, encouraging movement of key species while promoting vigilance against spread of non-native invasive species.
- Support control of Dutch elm disease and encourage research initiatives to prevent infection and breed resistant strains.
- Support measures to maintain and extend protected areas of vegetated shingle.
- Increase allotment provision, and seek to ensure that allotment management provides long-term benefits for biodiversity.
- Ensure that coastal defence plans have regard for geological and geomorphological interests where possible, and discourage aggregate extraction which would affect sensitive geomorphological and coastal sediment processes.

2.4 Landscape & Historic Environment

2.4.1 Wealden is a predominately rural district characterised by a number of different types of landscape extending from the coast and low-lying wetlands of Pevensey Levels in the south; the gently undulating countryside of the Low Weald within the central part of the district (which provides the setting for the adjacent South Downs National Park); and the ridge and valley landscapes of the High Weald in the north. Approximately 58% (44,624ha) of the study area is designated as part of the nationally protected landscape of the High Weald AONB, which includes the distinctive open heathland of Ashdown Forest. Wealden also has a rich and varied historic environment that makes a significant contribution to the character of the study area's landscapes; GI provides greenspaces that conserve, enhance and preserve the cultural value of historic places and their settings. These landscapes and historic environment features are key assets of Wealden's GI network that make a significant contribution to well-being and sense of place. There are considerable opportunities to strengthen the character of the landscape and improve the condition of historic environment assets within the study area.

Audit

Landscape Character

National Character Areas

2.4.2 From a regional landscape perspective, the study area is covered by three National Character Areas (NCAs) defined by Natural England:

- The **High Weald** (NCA 122) extends across the northern part of the study area.
- The **Low Weald** (NCA 121) extends through the central part of the study area.
- The **Pevensey Levels** (NCA 124) extends into the south-eastern part of the study area.

2.4.3 These NCAs are summarised below:

- **The High Weald** – *the High Weald NCA encompasses the ridged and faulted sandstone core of the Kent and Sussex Weald. It is an area of ancient countryside and one of the best surviving medieval landscapes in northern Europe. The High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) covers 78 per cent of the NCA. The High Weald consists of a mixture of fields, small woodlands and farmsteads connected by historic routeways, tracks and paths. Wild flower meadows are now rare but prominent medieval patterns of small pasture fields enclosed by thick hedgerows and shaws (narrow woodlands) remain*

fundamental to the character of the landscape[28]. Within the study area, the High Weald landscape is characterised by two bold sandstone ridges running east-west. The northern ridge runs from the Ashdown Forest to Wadhurst with Crowborough Beacon being the highest point of the High Weald. The area is geologically complex with numerous streams, valleys, gills and scattered outcrops of Sandstone nodes. It is a unique landscape of rolling ridges and deeply incised valleys. There is a mosaic of woodlands, small fields divided by hedgerows and thick shaws, sunken lanes and scattered villages. The majority of the High Weald within the study area is designated as an AONB. A detailed assessment of the High Weald landscape outside of the AONB within the study area is provided by the Wealden Landscape and Settlement Character Assessment (2014)[29].

- **The Low Weald** – *the Low Weald NCA is a broad, low-lying clay vale which largely wraps around the northern, western and southern edges of the High Weald. It is predominantly agricultural, supporting mainly pastoral farming owing to heavy clay soils, with horticulture and some arable on lighter soils in the east, and has many densely wooded areas with a high proportion of ancient woodland*[30]. The Low Weald NCA extends across East Sussex into West Sussex, Surrey and Kent. Within the study area, the Low Weald landscape is characterised by broad low lying and gently undulating clay vales. It is a small-scale, intimate landscape enclosed by small woodlands, a patchwork of fields and hedgerows. The landscape is essentially rural in character and settlements are mainly villages or small hamlets. A detailed assessment of the Low Weald landscape within the study area is provided by the Wealden Landscape and Settlement Character Assessment (2014)[31].

- **The Pevensey Levels**[32] – *The term 'Pevensey Levels' refers to the low-lying area between Eastbourne and Bexhill in East Sussex. It is a wetland of national and international conservation importance and 37 per cent of the NCA is a Site of Special Scientific Interest and Ramsar site. The Levels are predominantly rural and mostly grazed pasture, and consist of extensive drainage networks and flood plain. The NCA also includes the urban centre of Eastbourne which is a busy seaside town with a population of nearly 100,000 and up to 5 million visitors each year. A coastline of shingle beach stretches along the length of the area, punctuated by settlements, historic military buildings and sea defence structures. The area is framed by the steep scarp of the South Downs in the west and the higher ground of the High Weald in the north, with views of the English Channel to the south.* The majority of the Pevensey Levels lies within the study area, with the remainder extending into Rother District to the east. A detailed assessment of the Pevensey Levels

[28] National Character Area Profile 122: High Weald http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/publications/nca/high_weald.aspx
[29] http://www.wealden.gov.uk/nmsruntime/saveasdialog.aspx?lID=16777&sID=2131
[30] National Character Area Profile 121: Low Weald http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/file/5212877774389248
[31] http://www.wealden.gov.uk/nmsruntime/saveasdialog.aspx?lID=16778&sID=2131
[32] National Character Area Profile 124: Pevensey Levels http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/file/5850781349576704

landscape within the study area is provided by the Wealden Landscape and Settlement Character Assessment (2014)[33].

2.4.4 The South Downs NCA[34] lies to the south and outside of the study area. The dramatic chalk escarpment and open skyline of the South Downs provides the backdrop to many views from within the study area. The majority of the South Downs NCA falls within the South Downs National Park, recognising its natural beauty and importance for access and recreation,

East Sussex Landscape Character Assessment

2.4.5 The East Sussex Landscape Character Assessment (2016)[35] sub-divides the three NCAs within the study area into 13 broadly defined County Landscape Character Areas as shown on **Figure 2.3a**. The current condition of the County Landscape Character Areas is summarised in **Table 2.3**. The variations in the character of the landscape reflected in these Landscape Character Areas are strongly influenced by the study area's underlying topography, soils and woodland cover.

Table 2.3: Condition of Landscape Character in the Study Area

County Landscape Character Area	Current Condition
Upper Medway Valley (1)	*This is a largely unspoilt and tranquil rural landscape with few intrusive features. The landscape is in generally good condition and well managed as farmland with a strong historic structure. Agricultural change and diversification has led to some gentrification of the rural landscape and farm steads. Some areas of more intensive agriculture have larger fields due to shaw and hedgerow removal. Creeping suburbanisation and urban fringe pressures are evident around the towns and larger villages detracting from local distinctiveness. As with most of the High Weald landscape the historic field patterns of small fields and significant hedgerows remain intact. Many woodlands have been affected by lack of management, rhododendron invasion and coniferisation.*
Ashdown Forest (2)	*Ashdown Forest is a fragile landscape vulnerable to continuous change in management and recreational disturbance. The special duty of the Conservators to regulate and manage the forest as an amenity and place of resort helps protect the forest from encroachments and to conserve it as a quiet and natural area of outstanding beauty. The Conservators help to protect the historic rights of common and therefore the continuation of the historic management of the area which has contributed to the unique sense of place. The board works with Natural England and in 2006 was given a 10 year contract to bring the heathland into 'favourable condition'.*

[33] http://www.wealden.gov.uk/nmsruntime/saveasdialog.aspx?lID=16779&sID=2131
[34] National Character Area Profile 125: South Downs http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/file/6754252288425984
[35] https://www.eastsussex.gov.uk/environment/landscape?acc=1&ae=1&ah=1&al=1&ar=1&aw=1



KEY

- Wealden Local Plan Area
- GI Zones
- High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
- South Downs National Park

East Sussex County Landscape Character Areas:

- 1 Upper Medway Valley
- 2 Ashdown Forest
- 3 Upper Ouse Valley
- 4 Central High Weald
- 5 South Slopes of the High Weald
- 6 Upper Rother Valley
- 7 Bewl Water
- 8 Dudwell Valley
- 10 Coombe Valley Haven
- 14 Western Low Weald
- 15 Eastern Low Weald
- 24 Eastbourne Levels
- 25 Pevensey Levels

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CHRIS BLANDFORD ASSOCIATES
landscape | environment | heritage

WEALDEN GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE STUDY
WEALDEN DISTRICT COUNCIL

FIGURE 2.3a
LANDSCAPE CHARACTER & PROTECTED LANDSCAPES

April 2017

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County Landscape Character Area	Current Condition
Upper Ouse Valley (3)	*This is a largely unspoilt and tranquil rural landscape with few intrusive features. The landscape is in generally good condition and well managed as farmland with a strong historic structure. Agricultural change and diversification has led to some gentrification of the rural landscape and farmsteads. Creeping suburbanisation and urban fringe pressures are evident around the towns and larger villages detracting from local distinctiveness. As with most of the Wealden landscape the historic field patterns of small fields and significant hedgerows remain intact. Many woodlands have been affected by lack of management, rhododendron invasion and coniferisation.*
Central High Weald (4)	*This is a largely unspoilt and tranquil rural landscape with few intrusive features. The landscape is in generally good condition and well managed as farmland with a strong historic structure. Agricultural change and diversification has led to some gentrification of the rural landscape and farm steads. Creeping suburbanisation and urban fringe pressures are evident around the towns and larger villages detracting from local distinctiveness. As with most of the High Weald landscape the historic field patterns of small fields and significant hedgerows remain intact. Many woodlands have been affected by lack of management, rhododendron invasion and coniferisation.*
South Slopes pf the High Weald (5)	*This is a largely unspoilt and tranquil rural landscape with few intrusive features. The landscape is in generally good condition and well managed as farmland with a strong historic structure. Agricultural change has led to some gentrification of the rural landscape and loss of landscape features. Ribbon development and roadside clutter has added to suburbanisation on the edges of villages. As with most of the High Weald landscape the historic field patterns of small fields and significant hedgerows remain intact.*
Upper Rother Valley (6)	*This is a largely unspoilt and tranquil rural landscape with few intrusive features. The landscape is in generally good condition and well managed as farmland with a strong historic structure. The lack of main roads and large settlements in the heart of the area means that it retains a relative remoteness. Agricultural change and diversification has led to some fragmentation of farm steads. There is evidence of creeping suburbanisation around the villages and on country estates which detracts from local distinctiveness. As with most of the Wealden landscape the historic field patterns of small fields and significant hedgerows remain intact, apart from in the wider more fertile river valleys where farming is more intensive. Woodlands have been affected by lack of traditional coppice management, rhododendron invasion and coniferisation.*
Bewl Water (7)	*This is a largely unspoilt and tranquil rural landscape with few intrusive features. The reservoir has become an established natural and recreational feature. The landscape is in generally good condition and well managed as farmland with a strong historic structure. The lack of main roads and large settlements in the area means that it retains a relative remoteness. Agricultural change and diversification has led to some fragmentation of farm steads. There is evidence of creeping suburbanisation around the villages and on country estates which detracts from local distinctiveness. As with most of the Wealden landscape the historic field patterns of small fields and significant hedgerows remain intact. Woodlands have been affected by lack of traditional coppice management, rhododendron invasion and coniferisation. Historic designed landscapes contribute to the character of the area.*

County Landscape Character Area	Current Condition
Dudwell Valley (8)	*This is a largely unspoilt and tranquil rural landscape with few intrusive features. The landscape is in generally good condition and well managed as farmland with a strong historic structure. The lack of main roads and large settlements in the area means that it retains a relative remoteness. Agricultural change and diversification has led to some fragmentation of farmsteads. There is evidence of creeping suburbanisation around the villages and on country estates which detracts from local distinctiveness. As with most of the Wealden landscape the historic field patterns of small fields and significant hedgerows remain intact. Woodlands have been affected by lack of traditional coppice management, rhododendron invasion and coniferisation. The historic designed landscape contributes to the character of the area.*
Coombe Valley Haven (10)	*This is a largely unspoilt and tranquil rural landscape with few intrusive features. The landscape is in generally good condition and well managed as farmland with some surviving historic structure. Agricultural change has led to some gentrification of the rural landscape and villages. As with most of the High Weald landscape the historic field patterns of small fields and significant hedgerows remain intact in the northern part of the area. The Combe Haven Valley is a farmed landscape and generally in positive management. Woodlands have been affected by lack of traditional coppice management, rhododendron invasion and coniferisation.*
Western Low Weald (14)	*This is a largely unspoilt and pleasant rural landscape with few intrusive features. The landscape is in generally good condition and well managed as farmland with a strong historic structure. This is reflected in the southern part of the area which is in the South Downs National Park and is the setting for the downland scarp. The larger villages have some modern urban edges which intrude into the rural countryside. In areas with more intensive arable agriculture the hedgerows and hedgerow trees have been removed which detracts from the distinctive pattern and character of the landscape. In areas around settlements and on large estates the replacement of hedges with wire fencing for horse paddocks dilutes field patterns. Loss of trees along the rivers and especially in the southern part of the Ouse Valley and creation of engineered flood defences and channels has detracted from the landscape. Some farms have intrusive modern buildings and associated clutter. Lack of traditional woodland management has led to a decline in the condition of the Wealden woodland with the significant exception of Plashett Wood. The Low Weald is identified in the NCA as of outstanding priority for woodland conservation.*
Eastern Low Weald (15)	*A largely unspoilt tract of countryside with much of the historic rural character intact. The distinctive pattern of rural lanes and scattered unspoilt villages reinforces the historic character. Agricultural intensification has caused the removal of some hedgerows and hedgerow trees which has detracted from the historic character in some areas. Farm diversification on small holdings and estates has led to the replacement of hedges with wire fencing for horse paddocks which dilutes field patterns. Lack of management and under exploited productivity of some farm land. The Cuckmere River channel follows a meandering route across the area. The river and drainage channel management has in places removed water side trees and vegetation. Some farms have intrusive modern buildings and associated clutter. There is a programme of woodland management for Abbotts Wood to fell and replant conifer plantations with native deciduous species. Other smaller woods remain largely unmanaged. The few detracting features are related to scattered modern development spreading along the main road corridors. The Low Weald is identified in the NCA as of outstanding priority for woodland conservation.*

County Landscape Character Area	Current Condition
Eastbourne Levels (24)	*The areas of green infrastructure are managed as public open space. The rest of the Levels are grazed and generally in good management. Typical urban edge problems encroach on the area with horsiculture, small holdings, intrusive ad hoc development and fly tipping. The hard urban edges are intrusive with most views terminating in views of factories and houses. Traffic on the main roads intrudes into the tranquillity. Two power lines cross the area and are dominating in the flat landscape.*
Pevensey Levels (25)	*This is largely unspoilt and pleasant rural landscape with few intrusive features and areas of relative remoteness. The Pevensey Levels area is generally a well-managed pastoral landscape. The landscape is largely intact with many historic features which provide a sense of place and local distinctiveness. The nationally important wildlife designations over much of the area have improved the management of the Levels and water bodies. The scattered hamlets and villages have a strong sense of place and there are few intrusive suburbanising elements to detract from this. The coastal areas have a scatter of typical holiday development but these areas are generally well managed and have a seaside character of their own. The A259 is the busiest road in the area but does not detract from the more remote parts of the levels or the coast. The rural lanes serving the coast can be congested and busy at the height of summer. The coastal habitats on the shingle are in good condition where not disturbed by coastal defence works.*

Wealden Landscape and Settlement Character Assessment

2.4.6 The Wealden Landscape and Settlement Character Assessment (2014) provides a more detailed assessment of the character, sensitivity and value of the District's landscapes outside of the High Weald AONB and the South Downs National Park. The assessment sub-divides the broad brush County Landscape Character Areas within the study area outside of the AONB into finer grained Local Landscape Character Types and more detailed Local Landscape Character Areas as outlined in **Table 2.4.** Full details can be found in the Wealden Landscape and Settlement Character Assessment[36].

Table 2.4: Local Landscape Character Areas in the Study Area

Local Landscape Character Types	Local Landscape Character Areas	County Landscape Character Areas	National Character Areas
A: Ridges and Valleys	• A1: Fletching and Maresfield • A2: Budlett's Common and Five Ash Down • A3: Buxted • A4: Blackboys and Framfield • A5: Hawkhurst Common • A6: Horam	• 3. Upper Ouse Valley • 4. Central High Weald • 5. South Slopes of High Weald	**122: HIGH WEALD**

[36] www.wealden.gov.uk/Wealden/Residents/Planning_and_Building_Control/Planning_Policy/CoreStrategy/CoreStrategyLibrary/Planning_Evidence_Base_Landscape.aspx

Local Landscape Character Types	Local Landscape Character Areas	County Landscape Character Areas	National Character Areas
B: Ridges and Slopes	• B1: Cowbeech Hill • B2: Magham Down and Flowers Green • B3: Herstmonceux Castle and Wartling • B4: Ninfield and Hooe	• 5. South Slopes of High Weald • 10. Combe Haven Valley • 25. Pevensey Levels	
C: Gently Undulating Wooded Valleys	• C1: Fletching and Piltdown • C2: Uck Valley • C3: High Cross • C4: Little Horsted	• 3. Upper Ouse Valley • 14. Western Low Weald	**121: LOW WEALD**
D: Wooded Clay Vales	• D1: East Hoathly and Halland • D2: Laughton • D3: Upper and Lower Vert Wood • D4: Golden Cross • D5: Chiddingly • D6: Upper Dicker • D7: Wilmington and Abbots Wood	• 15. Eastern Low Weald	
E: Open Clay Vales	• E1: Laughton Place • E2: Selmeston, Chalvington and Ripe • E3: Arlington • E4: Wilmington Green • E5: Hailsham and Lower Horsebridge • E6: Hellingly		
F: Open Levels	• F1: Down and Whelpey • F2: Waller's Haven • F3: Manxey and Hooe • F4: East Polegate Levels	• 25. Pevensey Levels	**124: PEVENSEY LEVELS**
G: Settled Levels	• G1: Pevensey and Hankham	• 24. Eastbourne Levels • 25. Pevensey Levels	
H: Coastal Levels	• H1: Pevensey Bay	• 25. Pevensey Levels	

2.4.7 The Wealden Landscape and Settlement Character Assessment (2014) provides a detailed assessment of the character, sensitivity and value of more detailed Landscape Setting Areas identified around all the main towns and many of the villages within the study area. Full details can be found in the Wealden Landscape and Settlement Character Assessment[37]. The key findings of these assessments have been used to inform the town scale GI assessments in **Section 4.0.**

Tranquillity and Dark Skies

2.4.8 The character of the landscape within the study area is also influenced in many places by the perceived sense of tranquillity and remoteness. Ashdown Forest, Pevensey Levels and a large

[37] www.wealden.gov.uk/Wealden/Residents/Planning_and_Building_Control/Planning_Policy/CoreStrategy/CoreStrategyLibrary/Planning_Evidence_Base_Landscape.aspx

area of the Low Weald to the west of Hailsham are the most extensive tranquil areas within the study area[38]. Within East Sussex as a whole, the area of land affected by noise and visual intrusion has increased from 22% in the early 1960s to 56% in 2007[39].

2.4.9 The nocturnal character of the study area is influenced by light pollution from artificial sources of lighting, primarily associated with towns and villages, transport corridors and other land uses. Opportunities for enjoyment of the night sky in areas of intrinsically dark landscape are becoming increasingly limited within the study area. The Campaign to Protect Rural England's (CPRE) Night Blight mapping data[40] shows much of the study area's rural locations are some of the darkest in the country; Wealden District is placed 20th in the top 20 darkest districts, with an average brightness value of 0.64[41]. The unusually dark skies over the High Weald AONB have been identified as worthy of conservation by the International Dark Skies Association[42], and the South Downs National Park adjacent to the study area was awarded Dark Sky Reserve status in May 2016. Within the study area, Wadhurst is seeking to maintain its dark skies through an initiative led by the local Astronomical Society.

2.4.10 Large settlements produce significant light pollution which spills into the surrounding landscape. Uckfield, Polegate, Hailsham and Crowborough are all particularly bright, where light pollution ranges from between 4 and 16 nano watts/cm^2/sr (the brightest in the country is over 32). Main transport corridors throughout the study area can be distinguished through relatively higher light levels, in particular the A22 and parts of the A267. Significant urban areas outside the District also affect the study area's Dark Skies as light pollution extends into the study area, notably from Tunbridge Wells, East Grinstead and Eastbourne.

2.4.11 Parts of landscapes within the study area suffer from recreational pressures, for example the erosion of sandstone outcrops through walking and rock climbing, and the increasing demand for recreational activities on Ashdown Forest.

High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

2.4.12 As illustrated on **Figure 2.3a**, over two-thirds of the study area is the nationally protected landscape of the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) designated in 1983. The Statement of Significance in the High Weald AONB Management Plan[43] defines the natural beauty of the AONB, its character and the special qualities associated with it as being:

[38] Tranquillity Map (CPRE, 2007)
[39] Tranquillity Map (CPRE, 2007)
[40] Night Blight: Mapping England's light pollution and dark skies CPRE (June 2016)
[41] Brightness values are measured in nanowatts/cm2/steradian (nw/cm2/sr). This calculates how the satellite instruments measure the light on the ground
[42] http://www.highweald.org/look-after/dark-skies.html
[43] High Weald AONB Management Plan 2014-2019 (High Weald JAC 2014)

'characterised by dispersed historic settlement, ancient routeways, an abundance of ancient woodland, wooded heaths and shaws, and small irregularly shaped fields. These are all draped over a deeply incised and ridged landform of clays and sandstones with numerous gill streams, and are closely related to socio-economic characteristics that have roots extending deep into history.' The Management Plan identifies five character components that are fundamental in defining the High Weald's natural beauty and special qualities:

- Geology, landform, water systems and climate
- Settlement
- Routeways
- Woodlands
- Fields and heath

2.4.13 The 2012 High Weald AONB Condition Monitoring Report[44] provides an assessment of the condition of the AONB's character components. The key findings show that across the High Weald the condition of the character components is 'average' or 'good', but the remainder (35%) is in 'poor' condition. Only 18% of the AONB's character components are considered to be in a 'stable' state, with the remainder (58%) under threat and 24% considered vulnerable or declining. While the overall condition is reasonably good, most of the AONB's landscape is under threat, at a severe risk of being damaged or its condition deteriorating. This includes features within the study area. Further details are provided in **Table 2.4**.

Table 2.4: Condition of AONB Character Components

Character Component	Summary Condition Assessment
Geology, landform, water systems and climate	***River catchments: 'Poor' condition and 'under threat'*** *The major river catchments are well understood and actively managed by the Environment Agency, however practice is not generally compatible with AONB objectives. Condition is controlled but not ideal in approach. Ghyll streams are more vulnerable and less well 'policed' and vulnerable from neglect. Catchment Management Plans are beginning to have a positive effect. There is a threat to landform and water courses from agricultural practices flattening the landscape by repeatedly ploughing soil downhill when following the contours and causing erosion and stream pollution when they plough across contours.* ***Sandrock: 'Good' condition but 'under threat'*** *Geology is a stable component but the ecological value of sandstone outcrops and gill streams is vulnerable to change. Climate is a significant variable into the future but its impact on the components is hard to predict with certainty.* ***Climate Change: 'Poor' condition and 'under threat'*** *Management policies and approaches should be seeking more sustainable and low carbon impact solutions to contribute to offsetting the impacts of climate change. Little detailed knowledge of the impacts and threats from climate change, and confusion between mitigation and adaptation and the appropriate responses.*

[44] High Weald AONB Condition Monitoring Report, High Weald AONB Unit (2012)

Character Component	Summary Condition Assessment
Settlement	***Reconnect settlements with surrounding countryside: 'Average' condition 'stable'*** *Desire for rural quality of life and personal privacy are threats to a connected rural community. Climate change and local supply green awareness are all helping to educate and raise awareness of what the local environment can supply. However economic and service supply trends present considerable barriers to achieving a local lifestyle based on rural services.* ***Dispersed Settlement Pattern (including Historic Farmsteads): 'Average' condition but 'vulnerable'*** *Extensive loss of farmsteads to residential use has already occurred with a high proportion of very affluent owners. Farmsteads command very high market prices and lead to variable quality conversion and adaptation. Farmsteads are vulnerable to change and redevelopment and are at risk. Key settlement planning threatens to isolate and marginalise rural settlement by assuming they are inherently unsustainable. The High Weald retains a landscape of settlement pattern that is the most coherent surviving example of a medieval landscape - this condition is threatened by the current policy direction.* ***Historic Built Form: 'Average' condition but 'under threat'*** *Current protectionist approaches to historic buildings concentrate on the architecture in isolation which helps to protect individual features but not the use and character of the historic stock. A wider appreciation of the role buildings play in the landscape and contribution to rural character will assist in raising the profile. Poor understanding at a local level leaves these features under threat.*
Routeways	***Tracks and paths: 'Average' condition and 'Stable'*** *Lack of understanding and appreciation means that features may be being affected or damaged in isolation. Recreational use is probably expanding and placing an additional burden on existing and known routes. Undirected highway management is a threat to the character and quality of routeways where they coincide with rural lanes, increasing threat of small hard engineering and highway management systems.* ***Ecology of routeways: 'Poor' condition and 'under threat'*** *Cutting of lane verges in spring/early summer is allowing large vehicles to ride the banks to pass each other and, because the cut is so severe, it destroys much of the floral diversity. A late summer cut once a year would save the flowers, save the councils money and ensure control of tree/bush invasion.*
Woodlands	***Woodland extent: 'Good' condition and 'stable'*** *High profile of woodland and major resources has established a solid foundation for on-going woodland management and protection.* ***Woodland ecology: 'Average' but 'vulnerable'*** *Undermanaged/unmanaged status of the majority of woods in the High Weald, dramatic fall in woodland bird populations the AONB needs to be pushing hard for more grant aid to manage woodlands.* ***Woodland archaeology: 'Good' condition and 'under threat'*** *Growing awareness and local action with dedicated local groups but lack of recording and official recognition leaves it vulnerable.* ***Timber economy: 'Poor' Condition but 'under threat'*** *Poor economic conditions in recent years with currently improving prices and market conditions, a changing situation.*

Character Component	Summary Condition Assessment
Fields and heath	***Agriculturally productive use of fields: 'Poor' and 'Vulnerable'*** *Changing economics of farming make this a very challenging time for the efficient and economic use of farmland and the future is highly changeable* ***Historic field boundaries: 'Good' condition but 'under threat'*** *Substantial survival but not well understood or appreciated in policy. The biggest threat to these boundaries is probably where they are (or become) part of a domestic curtilage, and are outside the scope of the Hedgerow Regs.* ***Unimproved & semi improved grassland: 'Poor' condition and 'vulnerable'*** *Changing agricultural practices and economy. Productive small scale use of fields – local goods and services from the land by Hobby farmers, threat or positive force if harnessed. A new ELS+ stewardship scheme is being mooted which could contain capital payments for things like fencing.* ***Heathland: 'Good' condition and 'under threat'*** ***Archaeology of field and heath: 'Average' condition and 'under threat'*** *Lack of recording and profile of these features make them highly vulnerable and are also very sensitive to changes in farming practices and mechanisation. Awareness is increasing but no adequate protection or recognition.*

The Historic Environment

Listed Buildings

2.4.14 Designated and protected by the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990. Listed buildings have special architectural or historic interest. Within the study area there are a total of 1975 listed buildings across all three grades of listing as identified in **Table 2.5**.

Table 2.5: Listed Buildings within the Study Area

Grade	Total Number	Description	Examples
Grade I	36	Grade I buildings are of exceptional interest, sometimes considered to be internationally important. Just 2.5% of listed buildings are Grade I.	The Parish Church of All Saints, Waldron
Grade II*	98	Grade II* are particularly important buildings of more than special interest. 5.5% of listed buildings are Grade II*.	Ashdown House School, Forest Row
Grade II	1841	Grade II buildings are nationally important and of special interest. 92% of all listed buildings are in this class and it is the most likely grade of listing for a home owner.	Framfield Place, Framfield

Conservation Areas

2.4.15 Conservation Areas are designated by Local Planning Authorities, and represent areas of particular architectural or historic interest. Many of the Conservation Areas within the study area are typically associated with the historic core of settlements and Listed Buildings. Following a review of Conservation Areas within Wealden District[45], there are a total of 33 Conservation Areas within the study area as shown on **Figure 2.3b** and listed in **Table 2.6**.

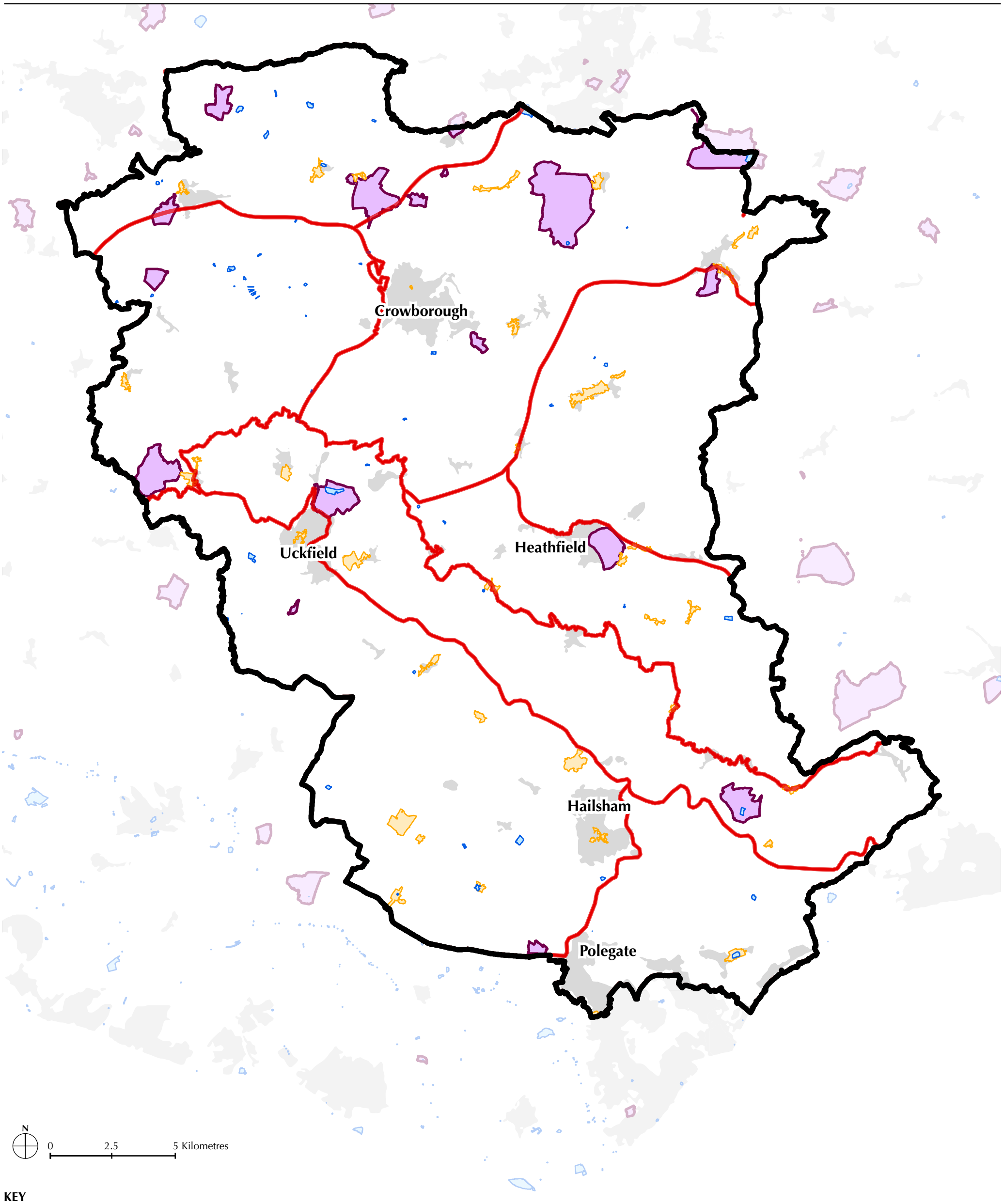
Table 2.6: Conservation Areas within the study area

Conservation Area	Conservation Area
Arlington	Maresfield
Boreham Street	Mayfield and Coggins Mill
Chalvington	Old Heathfield and Cade Street
Chiddingly and Muddles Green	Pell Green and Cousley Wood
Cowbeech	Pevensey and Westham
Crowborough	Ripe
Danehill	Rotherfield
East Hoathly	Rushlake Green
Eridge Green and The Forstal	Selmeston
Five Ashes	Uckfield
Fletching and Splaynes Green	Wadhurst
Forest Row	Waldron
Framfield	Warbleton
Frant	Wartling
Hailsham	Willingdon, Church Street
Hartfield	Withyham
Hellingly	

Scheduled Monuments

2.4.16 Scheduled Monuments are protected under the Ancient Monument and Archaeological Areas Act (1979) and the Secretary of State has responsibility for compiling and maintaining the Schedule. Within the study area there are a total of 54 Scheduled Monuments as shown on **Figure 2.3b**.

[45] On 22nd March 2017, Full Council resolved to approve the designation of the new conservation area boundaries across the District.



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FIGURE 2.3b
HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT

April 2017
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Registered Parks and Gardens

2.4.17 The Register of Parks and Gardens is managed by Historic England under the Historic Buildings and Ancient Monuments Act (1953). The majority of sites within the study area are or were originally the grounds of private houses, but the register also includes public parks and cemeteries. Registered Parks and Gardens are not necessarily accessible by the public.

2.4.18 Registered Parks and Gardens within the study area are shown on **Figure 2.3b**. As listed in **Table 2.7**, in total there are 19 Parks and Gardens, which cover an area of 2065 hectares. Of these 19, one is listed as Grade I, 8 are Grade II listed, and 10 are listed as grade II*.

Table 2.7 Registered Parks and Gardens within the Study Area

Name	Grade	Area (Ha)
Bayham Abbey	II	368.11
Groombridge Place	II*	43.04
Herstmonceux Castle and Place	II*	26.13
Horsted Place	II	8.97
Penns in the Rocks	II*	12.12
Wych Cross Place	II*	47.60
Eridge Park	II*	546.02
Rotherfield Hall	II*	27.22
Buckhurst Park	II*	215.36
Wootton Manor	II	28.90
Hammerwood Park	II	81.50
Sheffield Park	I	208.32
Heathfield Park	II	144.55
Kidbrooke Park	II	65.65
Wadhurst Castle	II	58.85
Buxted Park	II*	172.98
The Hoo	II*	0.41
Glen Andred Garden	II*	5.25
Frant Court	II	3.82

The Historic Landscape

2.4.19 The Sussex Historic Landscape Characterisation (HLC)[46] provides a detailed assessment of the historic character of the East Sussex landscape. Much of the High Weald, Low Weald and the

[46] Sussex Historic Landscape Characterisation, N. Bannister (2010)

Pevensey Levels landscape within the study area has a strong historic time-depth where their history is evident in landscape features that survive today.

2.4.20 The High Weald is essentially a medieval landscape. Its character was established by the 14th Century and has largely survived despite major historical events, and social and technological changes[47]. The High Weald is considered to be one of the best surviving medieval landscapes in Northern Europe[48]. Ashdown Forest has a rich landscape history as a medieval deer park[49].

2.4.21 Historic farmsteads are a particular feature of the historic landscape[50].

Heritage at Risk

2.4.22 Historic England's Heritage at Risk Register (South East) 2016[51] identifies listed buildings, scheduled monuments, registered parks and gardens, and conservation areas at risk. Heritage assets at risk within the study area are shown in **Table 2.8**. Overall, this shows there are currently 5 heritage assets at risk within the context of 36 heritage assets at risk within East Sussex as a whole.

Table 2.8: Heritage Assets at Risk within the Study Area

Heritage Asset	Designation	Condition
Argos Hill Windmill[52], Argos Hill, Mayfield	Listed Building Grade II*	Poor
Parish Church of All Saints, Heathfield and Waldron	Listed Place of Worship Grade I, Conservation Area	Poor
Parish Church of St Nicolas, Church Lane, Pevensey	Listed Place of Worship Grade I, Conservation Area	Very bad
High Rocks Camp, Frant	Scheduled Monument	Extensive significant problems
Kidbrooke Park, Forest Row	Registered Park & Garden Grade II, 2 Listed Buildings	Extensive significant problems

[47] Making of the High Weald, R. Harris (2003)
[48] High Weald AONB Management Plan 2014-19, High Weald JAC (2014)
[49] Medieval Deer Parks and Designed Landscapes in the High Weald; HLC Analysis Stage 1 & 2, N. Bannister (2009)
[50] South East Farmstead Character Statement, Historic England (2014)
[51] Heritage at Risk Register South East , Historic England (2016)
[52] Despite being included on the 2016 at risk register, Argos Hill Windmill has been recently restored http://www.argoshillwindmill.org.uk/

Needs and Opportunities

2.4.23 The character and quality of the landscape and historic environment within the study area, including the High Weald AONB, are key GI assets that make a significant contribution to Wealden's GI network. These assets contribute to a number of important ecosystems services including sense of place/inspiration; sense of history; tranquillity; recreation; and biodiversity and geodiversity.

Managing Landscape Change

2.4.24 There is continued pressure for development within the sensitive rural landscapes of the study area that includes the High Weald AONB, the fragile landscapes of the Ashdown Forest and Pevensey Levels and the setting of the South Downs National Park. Opportunities for protecting and strengthening the District's landscape character within new development schemes should be informed by the GI design principles set out in **Section 6.3**. Specific opportunities for enhancing landscape features related to GI provision for residential development sites in the new Local Plan are detailed in the Wealden Local Plan Sites Landscape and Ecological Assessment Studies[53].

2.4.25 There are a number of threats to the landscape within the study area. These include the fragmentation or loss of characteristic landscape features/habitats, a rapidly decreasing extent of farmland, non-agricultural use of farmland, lack of sensitive land management, agricultural intensification and a lack of sensitive or traditional grazing. It is therefore important to ensure that the study area's landscapes and habitats are managed appropriately and enhanced where possible.

2.4.26 The landscapes within the study area are ultimately characterised by woodlands, including a high percentage of designated Ancient Woodlands, and hedgerows. Meadows and heathland are an important characteristic of the study area, typically being historic. These features need to be protected, enhanced and restored as a valuable landscape asset. These characteristic landscape features represent a shared natural heritage, still surviving today and showing how the landscape used to be managed. The historic land management practices contribute to the management of the greenspaces and green corridors that underpin Wealden's GI network.

Tranquillity and Dark Skies

2.4.27 The main tranquil areas within the study area (Ashdown Forest, Pevensey Levels and a large area of the Low Weald to the west of Hailsham provide important well-being benefits for

[53] Wealden Local Plan Sites Landscape and Ecological Assessment Studies (CBA and TLP for Wealden DC, 2017)

Wealden's communities and visitors, and there is a need to protect these areas from excessive noise and visual intrusion that can reduce their perceived sense of tranquillity and remoteness.

2.4.28 The nocturnal character of the study area is influenced by light pollution from artificial sources of lighting, primarily associated with towns and villages, transport corridors and other land uses. Opportunities for enjoyment of the night sky in areas of intrinsically dark landscape are becoming increasingly limited within the study area, and there is a need to examine the impact of light pollution from artificial light on local amenity, intrinsically dark landscapes and nature conservation in more detail.

High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

2.4.29 Action and intervention to mitigate the threats and vulnerabilities to the condition of the AONB's character components identified in the 2012 High Weald AONB Condition Monitoring Report[54] is needed to continue to conserve and enhance the AONB's character components within the study area.

Historic Environment

2.4.30 Opportunities for protecting the District's historic environment, such as farmsteads, settlements and semi-natural landscape features of historic value, in new development schemes should be informed by the GI design principles set out in **Section 6.3**.

2.4.31 There is a need to take action to improve the condition of the heritage assets within the study area identified as being at greatest risk of loss through neglect, decay or inappropriate change on Historic England's Heritage at Risk Register (South East) 2016[55].

[54] High Weald AONB Condition Monitoring Report, High Weald AONB Unit (2012)
[55] Heritage at Risk Register South East , Historic England (2016)

Summary

2.4.32 In summary, working with partners, developers, local communities, landowners and other relevant bodies, the key strategic opportunities for GI to help address identified needs for enhancing the character and condition of the landscape and historic environment assets across the study area are considered to be:

High Weald

- Identify, protect and reinforce the distinctive elements and features of the landscape that are essential to maintaining the distinctive and inspirational character of the area in line with the objectives of the High Weald AONB Management Plan.
- Ensure that new development respects local settlement patterns and building materials to avoid the loss of historic evidence through insensitive development or management.
- Maintain the dispersed settlement pattern by managing the setting of villages together with the integrity of their vernacular styling.
- Maintain the historic division of field patterns.
- Ensure that the repair, restoration or conversion of vernacular buildings is carried out with due regard to their historic environment, using local materials and techniques to maintain local distinctiveness, construction techniques and traditions.
- Encourage the continuation of traditional land management practices and land uses that are intrinsic to the High Weald landscape and sense of place.
- Explore opportunities to conserve the cultural heritage of local authors and artists by maintaining the traditions that create the High Weald's distinctive landscape and local sense of place.
- Give due regard to the core components of natural beauty in relation to planning of development for towns and villages within and adjacent to the High Weald AONB.
- Increase protection of above and below ground archaeology and designed parkland.
- Provide recreational opportunities such as circular walks linked to the positive management and conservation of historic features to aid understanding, enjoyment and sense of well-being.
- Increase protection for and awareness of the best preserved examples of networks of historic routeways.
- Increase identification, recording, management, promotion and understanding of the historic environment.
- Ensure that new development enhances the setting, interpretation and legibility of heritage assets.

- Promote the widespread use of local timber in construction with support for good design and specification, and merging of traditional skills with new management practices.
- Promote information on the historical development of towns, villages, hamlets, farmsteads and their hinterlands, and historic parks and gardens, including historic maps and accessible online information.
- Improve the condition of heritage assets identified as being at risk of loss through neglect, decay or inappropriate change.
- Promote improved design quality through High Weald AONB specific design guidance on built form, architectural detail, composition and layout of space and local materials.
- Maintain the tranquillity of the area and limit the visual impacts of large infrastructure through careful design and planning.
- Support projects that contribute to the conservation and management of the area's special qualities and locally valued features such as dark skies and historic farmsteads.

Low Weald

- Restore and create, where appropriate, hedgerows, shaws and areas of woodland within existing and new developments to maintain boundaries and protect the characteristic wooded feel of the area.
- Support the protection of heritage assets such as traditional farmsteads and historic oast houses from inappropriate conversion where they make a significant positive contribution to the landscape.
- Ensure that new development does not intrude upon the essential character of and views from the surrounding protected landscapes (the High Weald AONB and South Downs National Park[56]).
- Identify opportunities to enhance the setting and interpretation of heritage assets.
- Promote the appreciation and understanding of historic sites and nationally important industrial heritage.
- Encourage preservation of historic buildings and the use of traditional building materials such as locally produced bricks and tiles and stone from local quarries in their conservation.
- Support efforts to protect intact extremely rare examples of unconverted oast houses with surviving hop industry equipment.
- Encourage protection of characteristic field patterns and boundary features.

[56] South Downs National Park View Characterisation and Analysis Study, LUC (2015)

- Retain the remaining sense of tranquillity associated with wooded farmland and protect villages from excessive light and noise pollution by buffering development with woodland and shaws.
- Encourage improvement of the public transport network to reduce disturbance of increased traffic on rural roads and lanes.

Pevensey Levels

- Protect from inappropriate development the open, exposed character of the low-lying wetland landscape, with its strong sense of remoteness and wide open views to the coast, South Downs and High Weald.
- Conserve the distinctive irregular field boundary network of drainage ditches and banks to enhance cultural heritage and sense of place.
- Promote interpretation to ensure that visitors and local people are aware of the key interest features of the coastal shingle areas.
- Encourage local schools to participate in environmental education opportunities and management of wildlife habitats.
- Conserve the historic landscape features (such as evidence of early reclamation), early sea defences (such as the 14th century "Crooked Ditch") and mounds left by the salt-making industry.
- Ensure development does not undermine the fragile structure of surviving Martello towers and preserves their settings.
- Ensure land management activities such as ditch clearing and ploughing do not damage important historic features.
- Support continued research and promotion of the Shinewater bronze-age site through interpretation and education.
- Improve the condition of heritage assets identified as being at risk of loss through neglect, decay or inappropriate change.
- Incorporate measures into new development that integrates green and open space to enhance and extend the network of existing undisturbed and tranquil places.
- Realise opportunities to introduce greenspace, and particularly tree planting, into existing developments to buffer and minimise the effects of noise and light pollution on the Levels.

2.5 Energy & Food

2.5.1 Wealden's rural environment and greenspaces support a rich variety of productive landscapes including farmland, coppice woodlands and allotments in and around towns within the study area. As well as supporting local energy and food production, these GI assets can make a significant contribution to Wealden's GI network through provision of wildlife habitats, green corridors and a range of social, health and community benefits. There are a number of opportunities to further improve the provision of these assets within the study area.

Audit

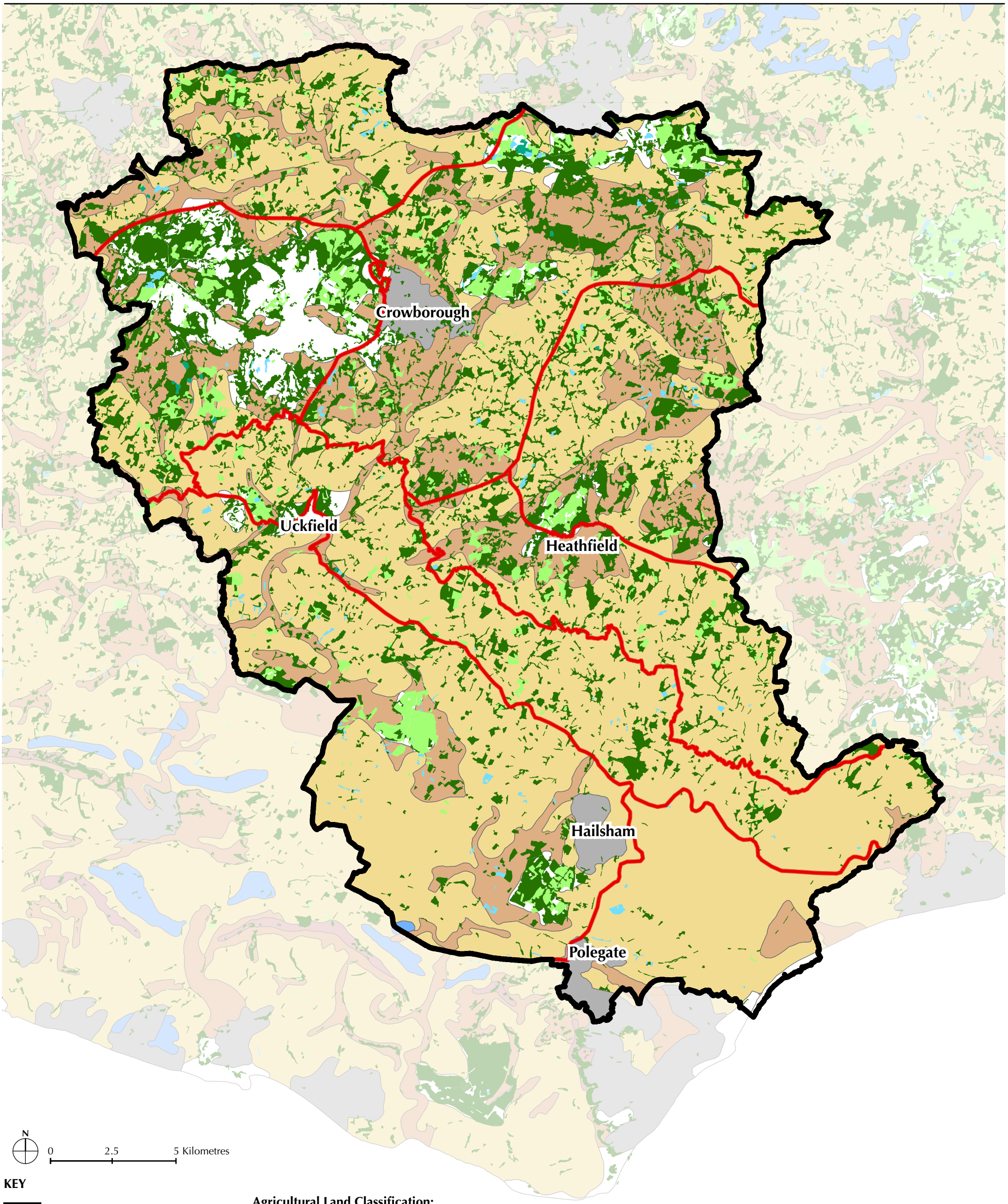
Local Energy Production

2.5.2 Energy use is an important consideration when tackling climate change and local authorities are required to adapt to the effects of climate change through planning, and mitigate through adopting proactive strategies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions[57]. In 2014, Wealden District produced the highest CO_2 emissions in East Sussex (828kt) but the lowest CO_2 emissions per capita (5.3t)[58]. Whilst the emissions in Wealden and across East Sussex have been declining, as the largest Wealden produces almost twice the emissions of other Districts and Boroughs in the County. In 2014 energy consumption in Wealden District was 3,088GWh[59], which represents nearly twice as much as neighbouring authorities in the County. A significant proportion of this energy is derived from petroleum products, which relates mainly to transport and vehicle use. In Wealden, there is a known culture of dependence upon private car use[60] primarily as a result of its size and predominantly rural nature.

2.5.3 As shown on **Figure 2.4**, deciduous woodlands are a significant feature in the study area, contributing around 75% of the total woodland resource. Many of these woodlands have been managed over considerable periods of time as coppice, and therefore represent a potential significant source of local fuel. The decline in coppicing and ride management of Ancient Woodland is identified in the High Weald AONB Management Plan[61] as one of the top five issues in the High Weald, caused in part by barriers to affordable housing for coppice workers, policy to support rural forestry practices and pressure from increasing deer populations.

2.5.4 Improved management of the woodland resource can also contribute to climate change targets, helping to improve the ability of trees to absorb carbon emissions, and is a good example of

[57] Climate Change Act (2008)
[58] East Sussex in Figures, (October 2016)
[59] East Sussex in Figures (October 2016)
[60] Wealden Local Plan Sustainability Appraisal, Scoping Report, WDC (2015) – para 3.3.50
[61] High Weald AONB Management Plan, High Weald JAC (2014-19)



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FIGURE 2.4
ENERGY & FOOD

April 2017

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the multiple benefits generated by improved woodland management. Across the High Weald, if production were increased to 50% of the potential sustainable level of production, it would mitigate 96,000 tonnes of CO_2 emissions each year. More information on the carbon account of woodlands in the High Weald is provided in the High Weald Woodlands Carbon Report[62].

2.5.5 Whilst the woodlands within the study area are numerous, on average many are relatively small. Woodlands are typically associated with a long history of management, supporting the iron-industry from the Roman period onwards. As such these woodlands have a high potential for landscape archaeology to be preserved within them[63]. The combination of the small size and potential for archaeology, lend these woodlands to small-scale, sensitive and/or traditional woodland management.

2.5.6 There is anecdotal evidence that deer populations are increasing in the south-east of England, and on Ashdown Forest there are estimated to be over 500 deer collisions with vehicles annually and the number is rising every year[64]. Deer numbers are having a significant impact upon woodlands through excessive browsing of young shoots of recently coppiced trees, preventing natural regeneration of trees and threatening ground flora; the Forestry Commission estimates the cost of deer damage to forestry woodlands nationally is £4.5 million per year[65].

2.5.7 The towns within the study area all have poorer air quality than the surrounding countryside.[66] Trees have a significant ability in terms of their potential for 'pollutant scrubbing' and helping to remove airborne pollutants from vehicle emissions, for example. This is explored further and guidance provided within the Woodland Trusts Urban Air Quality Report.[67] This guidance recommends trees with a high propensity to remove pollutants from the air, and suitable for incorporating into new and existing urban landscapes and streetscapes.

Local Food Production

2.5.8 As shown on **Figure 2.4**, the majority of the study area is generally good to moderate quality agricultural land (Grade 3) intermixed with areas of poor quality agricultural land (Grade 4). In the northern part of the study area, the extensive areas of poorer quality agricultural land support mainly pastoral farming within the distinctive patchwork of small-scale, irregular-shaped fields characteristic of farmland within the High Weald. In the southern parts of the study area, the generally better quality agricultural land (Grade 3), intermixed with smaller pockets of poorer quality agricultural land (Grade 4), supports mixed arable farming within the

[62] High Weald Woodlands Carbon Report, Sandy Greig (2010)
[63] The Cultural Heritage of Woodlands in the South East, N. Bannister (2007)
[64] Ashdown Forest Deer Leaflet (undated)
[65] EWGS Support for Deer Management, Forestry Commission (2008)
[66] Underlying indicators for Indices of Multiple Deprivation, DECC (2015)
[67] Urban Air Quality, Jim Smith for the Woodland Trust (2012)

larger-scale fields characteristic of farmland in the Low Weald. In general, the richer soils in the southern part of Wealden support larger more arable-dominated farming and food production. Further north, the significant woodland cover offers opportunities for livestock rearing, smaller-scale market gardening or fruit-growing.

2.5.9 Small-mixed farming systems are uncompetitive in the current market with economic pressures favouring industrial-scale farming. The traditional small-scale farming that dominates a significant part of the District is under threat[68].

2.5.10 Allotments are public open spaces set aside for the purposes of domestic gardening and small scale horticulture, typically for fruit and vegetable production. As well as facilitating local food production, allotments can provide wildlife habitats, green corridors within urban areas and social, health and community benefits. Predominantly located in the main towns within the study area, allotments are generally managed by Town and Parish Councils. Allotments are shown on **Figure 4.2i** (Crowborough: Open Space Typology), **Figure 4.3i** (Uckfield: Open Space Typology), **Figure 4.4i** (Heathfield: Open Space Typology) and **Figure 4.5i** (Hailsham & Polegate: Open Space Typology).

Needs and Opportunities

2.5.11 Farmland (fertile grasslands and arable systems), coppice woodlands, orchards and allotments supporting local energy and food production within the study area are key GI assets that make a significant contribution to Wealden's GI network. In addition to contributing to biomass and food provision services, these assets also contribute to a number of other important ecosystems services including biodiversity; climate regulation; regulating water quality; regulating soil quality and erosion; pollination; pest regulation; genetic diversity; sense of place/inspiration; sense of history; tranquillity; and recreation.

Local Energy Production

2.5.12 In respect of energy, 8% of households in Wealden are recorded as being in fuel poverty[69] this equates to just over 5000 homes. This percentage varies widely across the study area, but peaks at 16% of households in east Heathfield. Many areas experiencing fuel poverty are those in deprived areas, or within isolated rural settlements. This in percentage terms is the lowest in East Sussex, but still represents a significant proportion of people struggling to afford the cost of heating their homes. Wood fuel, particularly logs which require no additional energy inputs (unlike processed pellets for example), are a simple carbon neutral form of energy. Cleaner or

[68] Restocking the Weald, Dr Bill Vorley IIED (2013)
[69] East Sussex in Figures, (Accessed October 2016)

carbon neutral forms of energy can also help to improve air quality. Overall air quality within Wealden District does not exceed the relevant air quality objectives[70]. However, carbon dioxide emissions are known to be high within the study area and air quality within towns has the potential to be poor[71].

2.5.13 The timber economy across the AONB is considered to be under threat. Poor economic conditions, increased mechanisation and a decreasing skills base are cited as some of the drivers for this change.

Local Food Production

2.5.14 In respect of food, and particularly larger scale farm production, social as well as economic impacts are affecting the study area. 'Lifestyle' or 'hobby'[72] farmers now make up at least 75% of the High Weald AONBs land managers[73] . This statistic clearly has implications for land management and food production within the study area. The trend is most notable within easy reach of London. This trend has led to a gradual reduction in skills and loss of social or knowledge capital in relation to small-scale farming and woodland management within the High Weald.

2.5.15 However the economic significance of historic farmsteads being in primarily residential use should not be underestimated as these properties are highly sought after. In the High Weald AONB, 38 in every 100 residential historic farmstead addresses are owned by directors of £1million turn over companies, particularly around Tunbridge Wells and Crowborough[74]. Whilst supporting the study area economically this trend is raising land values and continuing to push new farmers away, and making only the biggest intensive farms economically viable. Support for small-scale mixed farmers in the High and Low Weald is further reduced through agri-environment schemes where payments are made on acreage. Farmers markets and supporting local growers and growing cooperatives or community supported agriculture schemes is needed to ensure the study area remains part of a viable and valued food producing region. There are 11 regular farmers/country markets within the study area, many of which are held in the main towns and larger villages.

2.5.16 Restocking the Weald is a project seeking to address some of the barriers to new up and coming livestock farmers across the Weald. Livestock and farming support and maintain landscape character across the Weald by managing hedgerows and grasslands. Food

[70] Updating and Screening Assessment for Wealden District Council Air Quality Report, AECOM (2015)
[71] Updating and Screening Assessment for Wealden District Council Air Quality Report, AECOM (2015)
[72] Farmers with a smallholding or small farm that is maintained without expectation of it being a primary source of income
[73] Farmstead Assessment Guidance South East England, English Heritage (2014)
[74] Historic Farm Complexes in Current Socio-Economic Context: High Weald, Dept. of Town and Regional Planning, University of Sheffield (2007)

production is considered to be vulnerable[75], primarily as a result of changing economics and the decline in agricultural ownership.

2.5.17 The importance of pollinators to both direct food production from large-scale arable cultivation to orchards and allotments, as well as producing 'wild foods' along hedgerows for example is underlined by the number of national pollination-focused projects, such as B-Lines and Polli:Nation. Agriculture continues to form an important part of the economy of the study area, and therefore healthy invertebrate populations remain important. Pollinators are affected by changing land management practices, habitat loss and the use of insecticides. Related to understanding sustainable food production, the High Weald AONB Unit investigated[76] the potential for the landscape to feed its own population, under both conventional and organic means. Whilst clearly reliant upon numerous external factors, in principle the report concluded the local landscape could support local food production under all scenarios. As a result this demonstrates there is potential for further increase and diversification in sustainable and sensitive food production within the study area.

2.5.18 Each family in East Sussex throws away food worth £420 per year[77]. Opportunities to allow communities, individuals and schools to have the choice to grow their own produce not only improves knowledge of food growing and the value of food, but also provides numerous mental health and well-being benefits. Gardening and food growing has long been successfully used therapeutically to tackle depression, stress and anxiety and other mental health conditions. The mental health charity Mind's economic analyses of their Ecotherapy Programme highlights that getting 254 people from the programme back in to full-time employment resulted in £1.46 million worth of savings and contributions to the state in a single year[78]. The benefits of gardening and growing plants and food are far-reaching and include physical, social and behavioural benefits; a summary of key evidence has been produced by the federation of city farms and community gardens[79]. Wider health benefits of greenspace more generally are covered in **Section 2.7**.

2.5.19 In addition to community spaces, private gardens also have a key role to play by providing opportunities for local food production, representing a valuable resource particularly within the urban environment. Even balconies and small patios can be used to grow a wide variety of produce.

[75] High Weald AONB Condition Monitoring Report, High Weald JAC (2012)
[76] The Potential of the High Weald to Supply the Food Needs of its Population under Conventional and Organic Agriculture, University of Reading (2009)
[77] Environment Strategy for East Sussex (2011)
[78] www.mind.org.uk/ media/338566/The-EconomicBenefits-of-Ecominds-report.pdf
[79] https://www.farmgarden.org.uk/

Summary

2.5.20 In summary, working with partners, developers, local communities, landowners and other relevant bodies, the key strategic opportunities for GI to help address identified needs for the provision of local energy and food production across the study area are considered to be:

High Weald

- Encourage jobs and economic growth in local low-carbon industries, promote markets for local timber, wood fuel, High Weald venison, wine and fisheries.
- Enhance the profitability of farming businesses, for example by supporting expansion of small-scale horticulture enterprises.
- Encourage flexible, adaptable and multi-functional food production systems particularly on underused improved pasture.
- Increase awareness and enthusiasm for local food and the benefits of short supply chains, improving understanding of the links between a farmed landscape and biodiversity benefits.
- Incorporate new allotments or community orchards within greenspaces as part of new development proposals.
- Support and encourage the use of locally sourced timber in housing development and building restoration projects.
- Support a sustainable woodland industry in the High Weald by developing new markets and products for locally sourced timber, wood fuel and underwood, and marketing to connect local woodland owners with local customers.
- Retain the genetic resource of traditional cattle that provide breed options suitable for quality meat.
- Encourage the use of traditional breeds on High Weald grasslands to contribute to the sustainable management of soils and benefits for biodiversity.
- Rebuild populations of traditional varieties of top fruit where appropriate, maintaining genetic diversity, biodiversity, pollination and sense of place and sense of history.
- Bring local woodlands under traditional coppice management, at the same time improving the woodland habitat for wildlife by extending the area of appropriately managed woodland to enhance habitats and species populations.
- Promote sustainable woodland management techniques (such as coppicing, pollarding and wood fuel production) to increase carbon sequestration and the resilience of tree species to climate change and disease.
- Maintain, and where appropriate expand, the area of woodland and permanent pasture to ensure continued contributions to carbon storage.

- Encourage further research to understand the role of trees and woodlands in a changing climate and impact of climate change on the woods themselves.
- Retain, and where appropriate extend, the area of permanent grassland, woodland and heath to protect soils, particularly in areas where a reduction in condition would result in erosion and subsequent impacts on productivity and watercourses.
- Identify and apply grazing regimes that increase sward diversity and increase the deposition and overall levels of organic matter.
- Encourage extensive grazing regimes to reduce stocking densities and avoid soil compaction, and also avoid compaction through unnecessary machinery use particularly during protracted periods of wet weather.
- Maintain areas of permanent pasture and be alert to the risks of soil erosion associated with any changes in land use, maintaining pasture in areas particularly prone to soil erosion or adjacent to rivers and streams.
- Maintain and enhance the floristic diversity of hedgebanks, where possible, to increase the range of flowering plants and increase the area, range and connectivity of habitat mosaics making connections between existing sites attractive to pollinators.
- Maintain and expand the area of semi-natural habitats throughout the High Weald to provide a range of niches to support pest regulating species, including invertebrates, birds and mammals.
- Work with partners to encourage the use of field margins and beetle banks and headlands in arable land to encourage pest regulating species in close proximity to food crops.

Low Weald

- Encourage management of the agricultural landscape to retain its distinctive character and productivity, while improving its contribution to biodiversity and protection of vulnerable soils and historical evidence (for example by restoring boundaries such as shaws and hedgerows, returning arable land to pasture where appropriate and creating field margins to buffer fields and improve connectivity).
- Encourage woodland conservation within the Low Weald, particularly in relation to coppice restoration.
- Encourage positive and sensitive management of existing woodlands to increase the commercial production of quality hardwood timber and benefit biodiversity, woodland structure and the local economy.
- Extend the area of broadleaved woodland to create new and sustainable sources of timber on less sensitive woodland sites, further supporting the market for quality hardwood timber.

- Selectively fell conifer plantations on former ancient woodland sites to provide a one-off source of timber and replant with appropriate native broadleaved species.
- Support brewers and growers to exploit the resurgence in interest in traditional ales, local produce and current research into new hop varieties to revive the hop industry.
- Support initiatives to promote local, historical varieties of fruit.
- Promote creation of new allotments or restoration of community orchards within greenspaces as part of quality GI and recreation provision in new development.
- Encourage use of Sussex cattle for conservation grazing locally and commercial beef production, supporting local marketing initiatives which promote its local and heritage qualities.
- Incorporate short rotation coppice into the existing pattern of mixed types of woodland, including coppice, taking care to maintain the balance between woodland and other land uses and avoid over-planting which could adversely affect character.
- Encourage opportunities for increasing provision of woodfuel by increasing the area of native woodland, improving management of existing woodlands and supporting initiatives to explore and promote local markets for sustainable woodfuel.
- Support the potential Low Weald "Forest District" initiative for creation of woodland for woodfuel, including reinstating traditional coppice management to produce woodfuel in appropriate locations for local use.
- Identify opportunities for the restoration and creation of wetlands as identified by the Low Weald Wetland Vision.
- Work with partners to enhance carbon sequestration by increasing soil organic matter on cultivated soil and reducing the frequency or area of cultivation.
- Encourage extensive grazing and best practice in soil management, particularly in areas prone to flooding, to reduce compaction and capping and increase water infiltration rates.
- Increase regulation of soil erosion through landscape-scale improvements in soil management and more informed nutrient management, including the application of Nitrate Vulnerable Zone guidelines.
- Encourage agricultural practices that retain permanent cover and build up organic matter on cultivated land, especially on free draining loamy soils.
- Restore hedgerows, shaws and buffer farmland to control velocity of cross-land water flows to reduce soil erosion risks.
- Improve agricultural practices to reduce problems of localised soil compaction (e.g. by reducing cultivation where appropriate and adopting extensive grazing regime), reduce soil erosion risks around watercourses and increase organic matter content to improve soil structure and cohesion.
- Enhance the network and connectivity of suitable habitats in the agricultural landscape by creating conservation headlands, arable field margins and meadows to provide biodiversity

benefits by linking and creating a network of habitats and provide foraging, resting and breeding sites for pollinators.

- Encourage nectar rich planting in domestic gardens and public spaces.
- Re-link the fragmented landscape by restoring hedgerows and shaws and creating corridors using field margins, road verges and rivers to allow dispersal and movement of predator species.
- Maintain and expand the area of semi-natural habitats, including the restoration of ponds, throughout the Low Weald to provide a range of niches to support pest regulating species including invertebrates, birds and mammals.
- Maximise the effectiveness of mechanisms such as agri-environment schemes, by encouraging the use of field margins, beetle banks and headlands in arable land to encourage pest regulating species in close proximity to food crops requiring pollination.

Pevensey Levels

- Support and extend existing "local food brand" initiatives, such as Farmer's Weekly Dairy Farmer of the Year awards for the marketing of organic produce and forging local identity, or the RSPB's wildlife-friendly farming award
- Control Dutch elm disease and encourage research initiatives to prevent infection and breed resistant strains.
- Support promotion and use of traditional breeds such as Sussex cattle within the Pevensey Levels.
- Incorporate new allotments or community orchards within greenspaces as part of new development proposals.
- Explore opportunities for planting short-rotation coppice in wetter, less fertile areas where it compliments existing habitat and helps regulate water flow and quality, but does not impact heavily on the characteristic open landscape, damage buried archaeological features or obscure heritage assets.
- Increase carbon sequestration by increasing organic matter inputs on cultivated land where this does not impact on the fragile ecology of the area and by reducing the frequency and/or area of cultivation.
- Maintain the integrity of the hydrological system in order to protect and improve soil quality.
- Encourage creation of significant areas of attractive wetlands with restoration and further expansion of reed beds and wet grassland, both on the Levels and as part of sustainable urban drainage systems within adjacent built up areas.

- Encourage reinstatement of permanent pasture from arable to reduce soil erosion and need for artificial fertilizer, and encourage reduced fertiliser inputs on cultivated soils by ensuring Nitrate Vulnerable Zone guidelines are followed by farmers and land managers.
- Encourage best practice farming methods to reduce agricultural run-off such as the use of shallow cultivation techniques; maintenance of ditches and associated water control structures, and/or reinstatement of permanent pasture and introduction of grassland margins to arable fields.
- Maintain high water levels, particularly in areas with soils with high peat content, to avoid desiccation and oxidisation.
- Encourage agricultural practices that build up organic matter, reduce the risk of soil compaction and thus improve water infiltration.
- Ensure that livestock numbers are appropriate to prevent problems associated with over-grazing.
- Create multi-functional green spaces incorporating sympathetic management for pollination including appropriate management of road verges into cutting regimes, adding to the network of nectar sources close to pollinated food crops.
- Support the East Sussex Elm Protection Scheme and other measures to control tree diseases and pests.

2.6 Water Resources

2.6.1 Wealden's water resources provide a vital function in supporting the health of the natural environment and well-being of communities within the study area. For example, the numerous rivers and streams provide important blue corridors for the dispersal of wildlife between otherwise fragmented and isolated habitats within the agricultural landscape and urban areas. These blue corridors can also provide access links for connecting people between settlements and the surrounding landscape via walking and cycling routes. The network of drainage ditches within the Pevensey Levels is also of international nature conservation importance as wetland habitats for rare and endangered invertebrates and other fauna. These 'blue infrastructure' assets make a significant contribution to Wealden's GI network, although there are a number of opportunities to further improve the condition of water resources within the study area.

Audit

Catchment Areas

2.6.2 There are a number of rivers which either have their source within or pass through the study area. The main rivers and their catchment areas are outlined within **Table 2.9** below.

Table 2.9: Main River Catchments within the Study Area

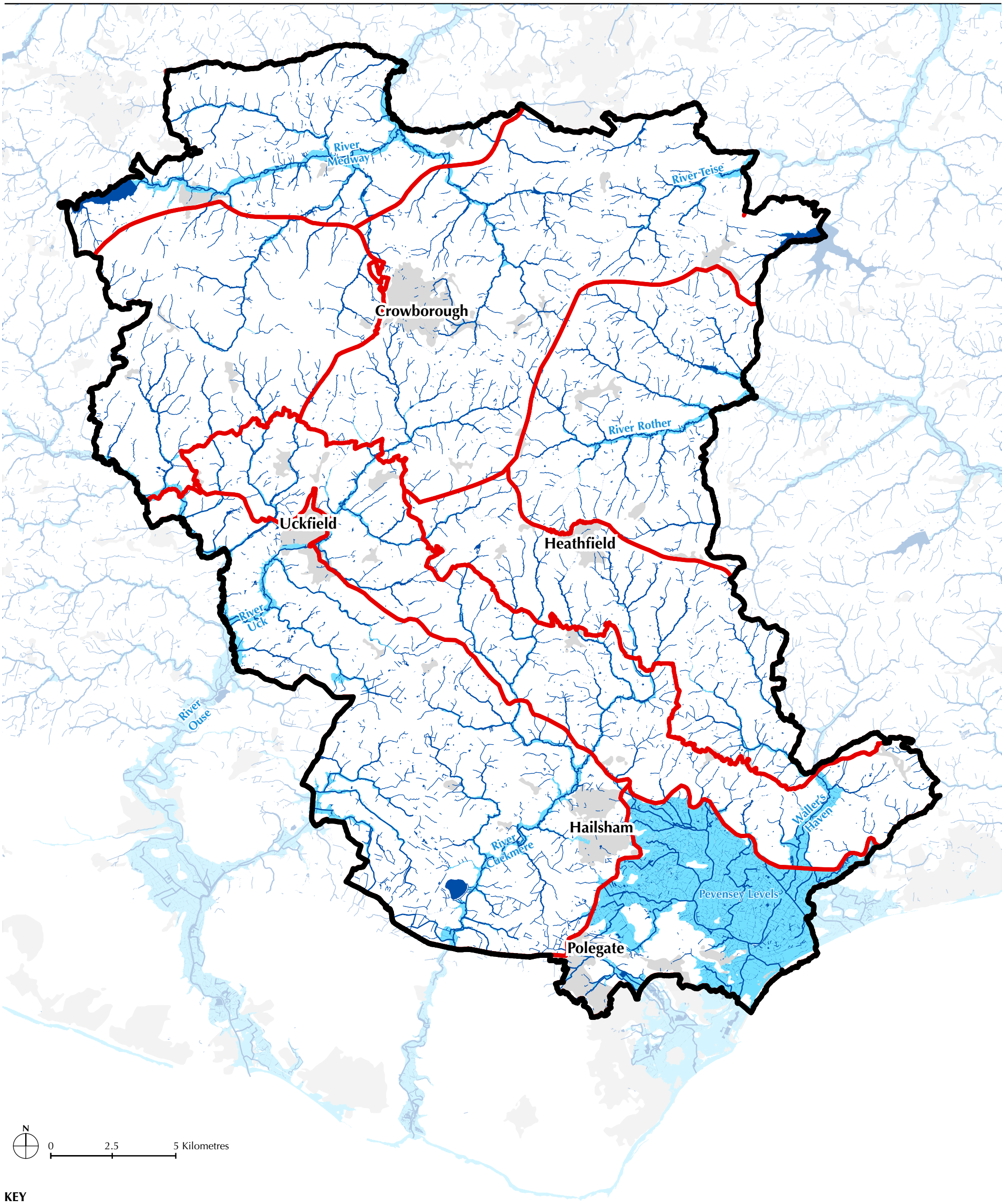
Catchment	Description
*The **River Uck***	*The Uck rises from tributaries surrounding Huggets Furnace and flows south-west and is joined by other streams before flowing through Uckfield. It is joined by the Framfield Stream from the south at Uckfield. This catchment includes the larger urban area of Uckfield and the smaller urban areas of Buxted and Hadlow Down.*
*The **River Ouse***	*The Ouse rises in the Mid Sussex District and flows in a south east direction forming the western boundary of the WDC SFRA study area. It flows through the study area near Fletching and then flows south along the study boundary. It is joined at Sharpesbridge by the Shortbridge Stream and converges with the River Uck and the Isfield Mill Stream north of Isfield. The catchment includes the urban areas of Nutley, Danehill, Maresfield and Isfield.*
*The **River Medway***	*The Medway flows from the Sevenoaks District along the northern boundary of the WDC SFRA study area and enters the study area near Groombridge, where it is joined by an unnamed tributary from the south. The Medway flows along the Sussex Border path and passes the village of Hartfield to the south. It continues west and flows through the centre of Forest Row. The River Medway catchment includes the urban areas of Forest Row, Rotherfield Groombridge and Hartfield. There has been significant historic*

Catchment	Description
	flooding along the River Medway; notably in 1960, 1968 and 2000.
River Teise	*Flows from the north-east of the study area into Tunbridge Wells District. It flows along the north-eastern boundary near Bayham Lake. The River Teise does not flow through Wealden District however, its catchment's and headwaters are located within Wealden. Approximately 30% of the River Teise catchment area is within the Wealden District. The catchment includes the urban area of Wadhurst and a number of smaller rural settlements.*
River Rother	*Rising near Mayfield in the east of the study area the Rother flows in an easterly direction before flowing into Rother District. 30% of the River Rother's catchment area is within the study area. The catchment of the River Rother includes the urban area of Mayfield and a number of smaller rural settlements.*
Waller's Haven	*Waller's Haven is the eastern most catchment. It drains an upland catchment of grazing marsh into the Pevensey Levels.*
Willingdon Levels	*This is the low lying area between the South Downs to the west and the Pevensey Levels to the east. The catchment is heavily urbanised including the towns / settlements of Eastbourne, Willingdon and Polegate.*
Pevensey Levels	*Pevensey Levels consists of a network of artificially drained channels and constitutes some of the lowest lying topography in the area. Pevensey Bay and parts of Hailsham are within the catchment area.*
Cuckmere River	*The Cuckmere rises from tributaries around Heathfield and flows south through the South Downs to its outfall into the English Channel west of Eastbourne. The lower catchment is tidal and the upper catchment is fluvial with many tributaries. The catchment is predominately rural with a few urban areas including Heathfield, Hailsham and Alfriston.*

2.6.3 As shown on **Figure 2.5 and Table 2.7**, there are nine main rivers with associated floodplains in the study area - the Medway, Rother, Ouse, Uck, Teise and Cuckmere, as well as the Pevensey and Willingdon Levels and Waller's Haven. There is also a dense pattern of smaller watercourses, notably in the north of the study area where there are numerous streams within steep sided wooded valleys or gills. These gill streams are typically flashy in nature as they react quickly to heavy rainfall events, a characteristic which can be seen further downstream on rivers such as the Uck where gradients are sufficiently steep. Weir Wood, Arlington and Bewl Reservoirs are major waterbodies within the study area.

Water Quality

2.6.4 The Water Framework Directive (WFD) (2000) is a European Union Directive, committing member states to achieve good water quality and quantity across all water bodies, including



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WEALDEN GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE STUDY
WEALDEN DISTRICT COUNCIL

FIGURE 2.5
WATER RESOURCES

April 2017

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coastal marine water. The Directive steers much of the work of the Environment Agency, which produces catchment and river basin management plans.

2.6.5 At the regional scale, the study area is covered by Thames and the South East River Basin Districts (RBDs). The Environment Agency produced the South East RBD River Basin and the Thames RBD River Basin Management Plans, which together identify the pressures facing the water environment within the study area. The South East RBD Plan[80] highlights that 98% of water bodies are in good chemical status. However, only 15% of water bodies are in 'good' ecological status. Equally within the Thames RDB[81]; 99% of water bodies are in 'good' chemical status. However, only 8% of water bodies are in 'good' ecological status.

2.6.6 Water quality within the study area is shown in **Table 2.10**. Overall, this shows a similar picture to that occurring at a regional scale. The majority of water bodies have 'poor' to 'moderate' ecological status or potential, whilst the most water bodies have 'good' chemical status.

Table 2.10: Water Quality in the Study Area[82]

Catchment	**Water Quality**						
	Ecological Status or Potential					Chemical Status	
	Bad	Poor	Moderate	Good	High	Fail	Good
Upper Ouse Catchment Area Number of waterbodies: 26	3	8	14	1	0	0	26
Pevensey Catchment Area Number of waterbodies: 8	0	3	5	0	0	0	8
Upper Rother Number of waterbodies: 6	0	3	2	1	0	0	6
Upper Cuckmere Number of waterbodies: 7	0	2	4	1	0	1	6
Teise Number of waterbodies: 9	0	1	8	0	0	0	9
Upper Medway Number of waterbodies: 12	1	3	7	1	0	0	12

2.6.7 In terms of marine water quality, bathing water at Pevensey Bay along the coast of the study area is 'excellent' quality based on 2016 sample data[83].

[80] Water for Life and Livelihoods, Part 1: South East RBD River Basin Management Plan (2015)
[81] Water for Life and Livelihoods, Part 1: Thames RBD River Basin Management Plan (2015)
[82] (Environmental Agency, 2015 Cycle II)
[83] https://environment.data.gov.uk/bwq/profiles/profile.html?site=ukj2201-14400

2.6.8 Farming practices can affect water quality. Within the study area, two catchments have been identified as priority catchments for catchment sensitive farming where water quality is particularly likely to be affected by farming practices. The Pevensey Levels Catchment is a priority due to the risk of livestock manures and effluent entering bathing waters at Pevensey Bay, abstraction and flow regimes, and inputs from water treatment works. The Medway Catchment is also a priority as a result of high levels of metaldehyde (found in slug pellets)[84].

Flood Risk

2.6.9 Wealden District Council has a Strategic Flood Risk Assessment[85] as part of its Local Plan evidence base. This assessment identifies areas potentially at risk from flooding across the study area. Within the study area, flood risk is experienced from three main sources; fluvial, surface and groundwater and tidal flooding. Each type of flooding presents its own type of risk and management solution.

2.6.10 Fluvial flood risk is the main source of flooding in the study area. Forest Row, Crowborough, Hailsham, Heathfield, Pevensey Bay and Uckfield are all identified as having some of the highest flood risk in the County. The Sussex Resilience Forum has identified six areas of high risk for multi-agency response planning. These include Uckfield and Pevensey Bay within the study area[86].

2.6.11 The whole of the Pevensey Levels is low lying and vulnerable to the effects of climate change, particularly coastal flooding. Sea defences consist mainly of open beach managed by periodic shingle replenishments, maintenance of groynes, recycling of material around the beach and re-profiling during and after storms. In the long term, these measures may need reviewing as sea levels rise. Managing the environmentally important Pevensey Levels is dependent on careful and continuous water management through a system of sluices and pumps.

2.6.12 Historically, Pevensey has seen numerous major breaches along the coastline[87]. These areas suffer from 'tidal locking' where high tides prevent the discharge of water to the sea after periods of heavy rainfall. The Shoreline Management Plan's policy is to 'hold the line' along this stretch of coast by maintaining the current management of the coast in the long-term. Ultimately, as a result of climate change, this will involve increasing coastal engineering works to retain the freshwater habitats and infrastructure behind the sea defences[88].

[84] Priority Catchment Target Summary, Natural England (2011-15)
[85] Wealden Local Plan SFRA (in preparation)
[86] East Sussex Flood Risk Strategy, ESCC (2016-2026)
[87] South Foreland to Beachy Head Shoreline Management Plan Environment Agency (2006)
[88] South Foreland to Beachy Head Shoreline Management Plan Environment Agency (2006)

2.6.13 In summary, the areas potentially at risk from fluvial and tidal flooding across the study area include:

- **River Teise:** there have not been any flooding incidences to date within the study area.
- **River Cuckmere**: flooding occurs fairly frequently to a small number of properties, although there are no major urban areas at risk. Most of the areas susceptible to flooding are outside of the study area (east of Alfriston, west of Litlington and west of Westdene). The settlement of Horam floods from the Cuckmere River due to a lack of capacity of culverts under roads. Parts of Hellingly are also often flooded due to a number of properties being located on the floodplain.
- **River Uck (Ouse)**: major flooding events have previously occurred in Uckfield due to channel capacity being exceeded.
- **River Rother**: there have not been any flooding incidences to date within the study area.
- **Pevensey Levels:** the area is the most significant floodplain in the study area, where ground water levels can be very high. In addition to the international value of the Levels for wildlife, it also provides important ecosystem services such as flood attenuation and protection from both fluvial and coastal flooding. Therefore the water systems within the Pevensey Levels are very vulnerable to change.
- **Willingdon Levels:** Polegate and developments on the margins of the Willingdon Levels are considered to be at flood risk. Past flooding has occurred as a result of lack of capacity of the river systems in the area.
- **Waller's Haven:** there is no identified flood risk to properties from the Waller's Haven, although some transport links may be exposed.
- **River Medway:** previous flooding events have occurred in Forest Row, Hartfield, Groombridge, Eridge Station and Bells Yew Green due to general causes such as insufficient channel capacity, constrictions at structures (e.g. bridges), debris blockages or inappropriate development in areas vulnerable to flooding.

2.6.14 Other sources of flooding within or adjacent to the study area include:

- The areas surrounding Polegate, Willingdon, Eastbourne and Hailsham suffer from flooding as a result of lack of capacity in the existing drainage infrastructure and/or the speed at which storm water is delivered to the Brooks.
- The areas around Pevensey and Willingdon suffer from flooding through overland flow.
- Uckfield is identified at being at risk of flooding from overland flow from urban areas.
- Buxted is also at risk of overland flow.

- The settlements of Uckfield, Crowborough, Mayfield, Wadhurst, Forest Row and Hartfield have suffered from flooding as a result of lack of capacity in the existing drainage infrastructure and/or the speed at which storm water is delivered to watercourses[89].

Needs and Opportunities

2.6.15 Water resources within the study area, including the internationally important wetland of the Pevensey Levels, are key GI assets that make a significant contribution to Wealden's GI network. These assets contribute to a number of important ecosystems services including regulating water quality and flow; regulating coastal erosion and flooding; biodiversity; geodiversity; climate regulation; regulating soil quality and erosion; sense of place/inspiration; sense of history; tranquillity; and recreation.

Water Quality

2.6.16 The water systems within the study area contribute significantly to the GI network, as a result of the connectivity they provide. Water quality, the natural function of water systems and associated riparian habitats, all have the potential to be integrated into and improved through GI in support of the Environment Agency's relevant catchment and river basin management plans.

2.6.17 The South East RBD River Basin Management Plan[90] and the Thames RDB River Basin Management Plan[91] set targets to improve water resources. GI planning and catchment management have many complementary aims. Development of GI networks can deliver multiple benefits for water environments including reducing water pollution and helping to meet water quality targets. As a result of their overall status, there is both a need and the potential opportunity to use GI to help to address water quality, particularly in terms of ecology to improve the water environment and assist in meeting the EU Water Framework Directive targets.

2.6.18 There are considerable opportunities to work with the two Rivers Trusts in the study area (the Ouse and Adur Rivers Trust[92] and the South East Rivers Trust[93]) and local communities to deliver some of the WFD water quality objectives by making improvements to riparian habitats and fisheries.

[89] Green Infrastructure Background Paper, Wealden District Council (2011)
[90] Water for Life and Livelihoods, Part 1: South East RBD River Basin Management Plan (2015)
[91] Water for Life and Livelihoods, Part 1: Thames RBD River Basin Management Plan (2015)
[92] http://www.oart.org.uk/
[93] http://www.southeastriverstrust.org/

Flood Risk

2.6.19 East Sussex County Council is a Lead Local Flood Authority with a role to provide a strategic overview of local flooding and to work in partnership to manage local flood risk. As part of this role, ESCC have produced a Local Flood Risk Management Strategy[94], providing a 10 year framework for the management of local flood risk.

2.6.20 Community-scale SuDS, rain gardens, green roofs, public wetlands and ponds are all examples of GI assets that have a role to play in local flood risk management. Provisions are made to increase the uptake of new and retrofitted systems in the Flood Water Management Act (2010), providing a framework for their management and maintenance. Well-designed SuDS can increase habitats for biodiversity, provide urban greenspaces and increase community resilience to flood risk.

2.6.21 The study area contains three key upper reaches of rivers prone to flooding, where flooding occurs outside of the Wealden District. These include the Medway, Teise (Medway) and Uck (Ouse). In these areas, partnership landscape-scale approaches to minimising flood risk are likely to be needed.

2.6.22 The NPPF calls for new development to be located away from areas of highest flood risk. Within the study area, flood risk is experienced from three main sources; fluvial, surface and groundwater and tidal flooding. Fluvial flood risk is the main source of flooding in the study area, focused primarily around the River Cuckmere and River Uck. Alongside the physical damage to property and infrastructure caused by flooding, health related impacts (both physical and psychological) and environmental impacts such as pollution of watercourses can also be keenly felt.

2.6.23 GI has the potential to help build local resilience to flood risk within communities. Improving resilience to flood risk can lead to more sustainable communities and help to address likely future changes such as the effects of climate change. The government provides guidance[95] for integrating climate change adaptation and mitigation measures into the Local Planning process. This guidance recommends the use of multifunctional GI to amongst other things, help to manage flooding and enable species to adapt to climate change through the provision of a permeable environment.

[94] East Sussex Local Flood Risk Management Strategy, ESCC (2016-2026)
[95] http://planningguidance.communities.gov.uk/blog/guidance/climate-change/how-can-adaptation-and-mitigation-approaches-be-integrated/

2.6.24 GI forms an important element of flood risk management. Through the enhancement and/or re-creation of functional floodplains, water meadows, floodplain woodland and the provision of integrated Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS), GI can deliver multiple benefits for wildlife, and landscape character whilst reducing flood risk. The combination of water management with GI provision can provide space for flood storage, slowing conveyance which in turn can reduce the causes and impacts of flooding. Water People Places is a guide for masterplanning SuDS into developments[96], which offers guidance to planners, developers and landscape architects in the south east and is promoted by East Sussex County Council alongside their own guidance[97].

Summary

2.6.25 In summary, working with partners, developers, local communities, landowners and other relevant bodies, the key strategic opportunities for GI to help address identified needs for the sustainable management of water quality and flood risk across the study area are considered to be:

High Weald

- Increase water retention and reduce run-off to increase percolation of water and thereby increase availability in periods of low rainfall.
- Work across sectors and in a coordinated and strategic way to protect water resources including through the promotion of efficient and sustainable use of water resources.
- Ensure green and blue infrastructure measures are embedded into new developments to help safeguard water resources, harvest and store water and promote water efficiency.
- Encourage adoption of integrated water and land management strategies for the High Weald river catchments in accordance with the Water Framework Directive.
- Encourage the integration of environmentally sensitive water policy objectives through land management practices such as agri-environment schemes, water resource and land use planning to ensure an appropriate balance is maintained between water supply and demand.
- Encourage the use of winter water storage reservoirs on farms and restore and expand the network of ponds.
- Protect the water resources of the High Weald by promoting good agricultural and land management practices.
- Promote sustainable use of water resources, protecting the aquifer, reservoirs and surface waters from over abstraction and safeguarding water supply.

[96] https://www.eastsussex.gov.uk/environment/flooding/sustainabledrainagesystems
[97] https://www.eastsussex.gov.uk/media/1995/guide-to-sustainable-drainage-systems-in-east-sussex2.pdf

- Promote the sustainable recreational use of reservoirs within the High Weald.
- Work at the catchment scale to reduce surface and groundwater pollution, while simultaneously improving aquifer recharge, sharing best practice and adopting a collaborative approach to sustainable water management.
- Identify the potential of naturally functioning rivers and flood plains in the High Weald to regulate water quality, reduce flood risk and enhance wildlife and fisheries.
- Promote the sustainable water principles of the Environment Agency's River Basin Management Plans, Catchment Flood Management Plans and Water Companies' Water Resource Management.
- Explore opportunities to buffer watercourses and reservoirs and restore natural river geomorphology to improve water quality and reduce flood risk in settlements by regulating water flow.
- Work with land owners, farmers and domestic property owners with private waste water systems to address issues arising from point source pollution (such as improving farm infrastructure and finding innovative solutions to the treatment of domestic waste water).
- Promote river restoration policies that encourage use of natural processes to reduce flooding, improve aquatic systems, increase amenity value, provide ecosystem services and reduce costs of maintaining current flood management systems.
- Seek opportunities for integrated water and land management strategies for river catchments to reduce flood risk and increase water retention within catchments, learning from best practice examples.
- Maximise opportunities for natural processes to take place by restoring and expanding the functional flood plains along the rivers to bring about a reduction in flooding and increases in biodiversity, water quality and amenity value.
- Explore opportunities in the valley bottoms for pushing flood flows out of eroded water courses onto grassland and woodland to slow down flood flows.

Low Weald

- Encourage sustainable water use by homes and businesses supplied from the catchments in the Low Weald.
- Investigate opportunities for increasing water provision through additional storage for seasonal flood waters in the Low Weald.
- Ensure future development addresses water resource planning and encompasses the highest standards for water efficiency and flood resilience measures, such as incorporation of sustainable drainage systems (SuDS), green roofs, and rain gardens for example into the design of new buildings and other infrastructure.

- Manage farmland in line with the principles established under the England Catchment Sensitive Farming Delivery Initiative, such as improved drainage, hard bases for livestock feeders and gateways, roofing of manure stores, better pesticide treatment and providing alternative drinking sources to keep livestock away from watercourses.
- Buffer watercourses and reservoirs by building up vegetation, including woodland on banks to slow run-off and improve water quality, regulate soil erosion and reduce subsequent sedimentation.
- Promote responsible use of water by domestic and business users and ensure new development includes sustainable urban drainage systems.
- Control spread of non-native invasive species along riverbanks.
- Identify where there is scope for mitigating existing flood risk through a combination of measures, including expanding and managing areas of semi-natural habitats that help to reduce cross-land water flows and have increased water infiltration properties.
- Avoid inappropriate development in flood risk areas, and minimise runoff from new development, by integrating water storage features in the form of semi-natural habitats into new developments.

Pevensey Levels

- Manage the drainage network on the Pevensey Levels to control water levels for the benefit of wildlife and to ensure community resilience from both fluvial and coastal flood risks.
- Maintain and enhance water levels and quality in new development such as the provision of buffer areas to development and limits to discharge rates to protect the integrity of the Pevensey Levels.
- Reduce the demand for water abstraction through promoting public awareness of water conservation and creating more on-farm water storage.
- Promote water conservation measures in new and existing development to support existing water resources and help manage demand.
- Safeguard natural water supplies, such as springs.
- Create extensive wet grassland to contribute to resource protection under the Catchment Sensitive Farming initiative.
- Encourage reduced fertiliser inputs on cultivated soils by ensuring Nitrate Vulnerable Zone guidelines are followed by farmers and land managers in Pevensey Levels and also in adjacent areas which supply much of the area's fresh water.
- Eradicate non-native invasive species, particularly along riverbanks and promote awareness of the importance of biosecurity, particularly in areas of heavy public usage, to prevent their spread.
- Support initiatives to reduce pollutants such as improvements to water treatment systems.

- Explore greater utilisation of the Pevensey Levels floodplain as a flood storage area in line with the Catchment Flood Management Plan.
- Encourage sustainable land use practices to reduce run-off rates from agricultural land.
- Develop a plan for river restoration and naturalisation, with the objectives of reducing run-off and contributing to wider catchment benefits.
- Manage water bodies, including ditches, to increase structural diversity and help retain winter floodwater for longer and provide refuges for species vulnerable to inundation events.
- Encourage agricultural practices that build up organic matter, reduce the risk of soil compaction and improve water infiltration.
- Ensure that sustainable urban drainage systems are incorporated into new and existing development.
- Reflect the priorities of the Shoreline Management Plan and promote the natural adaptation and regeneration of coastal habitats as sea levels rise.
- Explore ways of assimilating new or reinforced flood defences into local landscapes with minimum visual impact and disruption to existing habitat or species movement.
- Prevent aggregate extraction which would reduce the effectiveness of the sea defences, and discourage activities that may compromise the flood protection abilities of wetland behind the coastal defences.

2.7 Accessible Natural Greenspace & Access Links

2.7.1 There is growing evidence that access to and enjoyment of natural and semi-natural greenspaces enhances people's health and well-being, particularly in areas of social deprivation. Providing access to natural greenspace and a network of green access routes within and surrounding the study area, particularly for communities in areas of social deprivation, is a key priority of the Wealden Community Strategy and Wealden Corporate Strategy.

Audit

Accessible Natural Greenspace

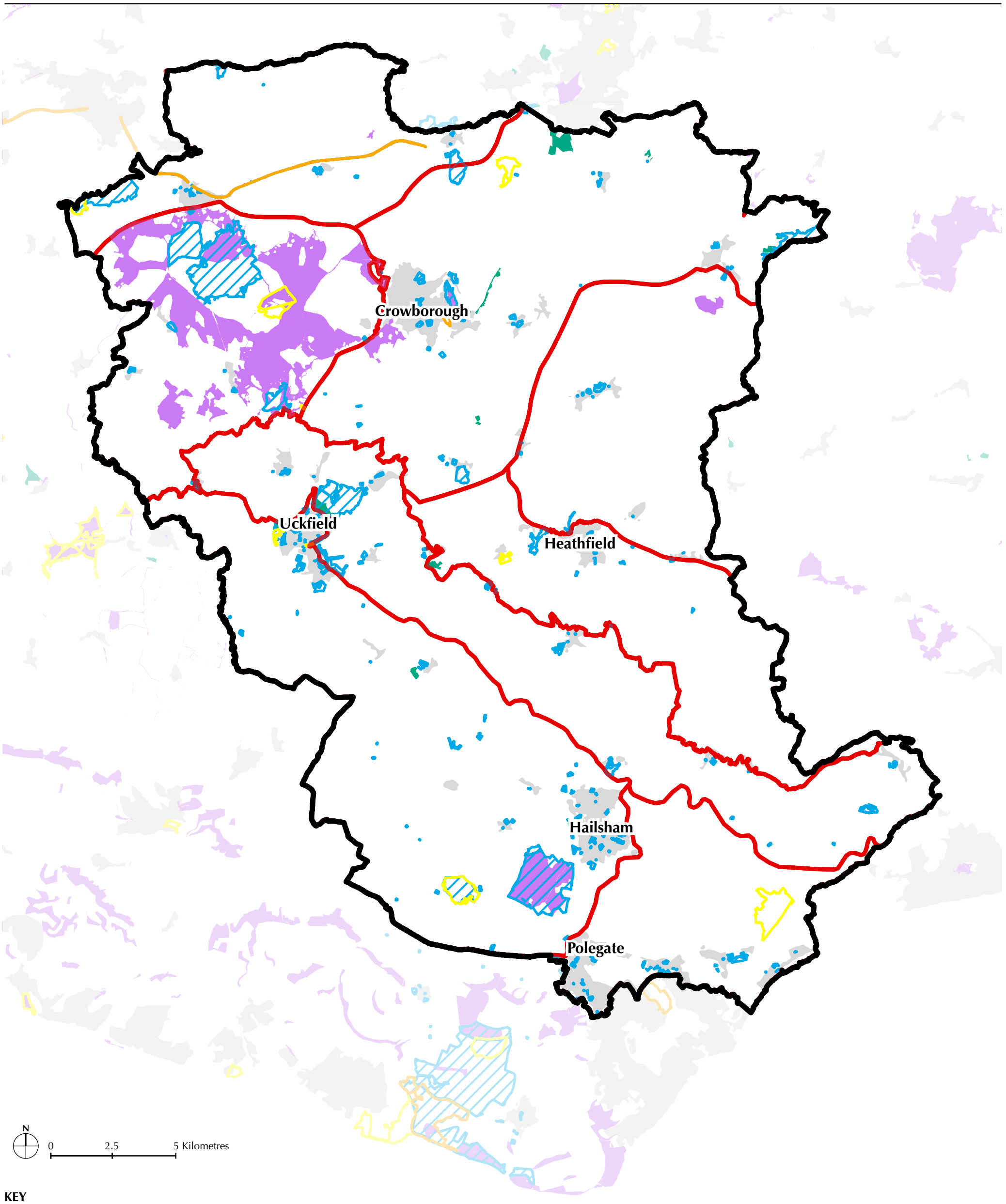
2.7.2 For the purpose of this GI Study, Accessible Natural Greenspace (ANG) refers to natural greenspace (largely outside urban areas) that is normally available for public access on foot, providing opportunities for open access for informal recreational activities[98]. Open access may be provided to the public either under statutory provision (e.g. under the Countryside and Rights of Ways Act), dedication by public landowners (e.g. by local authorities) or via voluntary access agreements with private landowners (e.g. under Environmental Stewardship agreements). The permanence of these access arrangements varies from permanent rights of access secured through legislation, to temporary access secured through voluntary arrangements.

2.7.3 Whether a natural greenspace is accessible or not was considered against Natural England's definition of accessible greenspace, which states that *'accessible greenspace are places that are available for the general public to use free of charge and without time restrictions (although some sites may be closed to the public overnight and there may be fees for parking a vehicle)'*[99].

2.7.4 For the purpose of this Study, natural greenspace is defined as *'places where human control and activities are not intensive so that a feeling of naturalness is allowed to predominate'*[100].

2.7.5 Existing ANG in Wealden District was identified and mapped by CBA using a Geographic Information System to build an inventory of ANG using available digital datasets. Only sites with open access to the general public have been included. **Figure 2.6a** shows the distribution

[98] Nature Nearby: Accessible Natural Greenspace Guidance (Natural England, 2010)
[99] Nature Nearby: Accessible Natural Greenspace Guidance (Natural England, 2010)
[100] Nature Nearby: Accessible Natural Greenspace Guidance (Natural England, 2010)



KEY

Wealden Local Plan Area

GI Zones

Accessible Natural Greenspace:

Open Spaces

CRoW Act 2000 Open Access Land

Country Parks

Local Nature Reserves and Sussex Wildlife Trust Reserves

Accessible Woodland Trust Sites

*From the Wealden Open Space, Sport and Recreation Study (2016) - Includes: Accessible Natural Greenspace, Allotments, Amentity Greenspace, Churchyards and Cemeteries, Parks and Recreation Grounds

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FIGURE 2.6a
EXISTING ACCESSIBLE NATURAL GREENSPACE

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of existing ANG within the study area. These include the following accessible natural greenspace types:

- Open Spaces (allotments; amenity greenspace; churchyards and cemeteries; parks and recreation grounds[101])
- Open Access Land (designated under the Countryside & Rights of Way Act 2000)
- Country Parks
- Local Nature Reserves and Sussex Wildlife Trust Reserves
- Accessible Woodland Trust Sites

2.7.6 Approximately 5,283ha (6.8%) of land within the study area (77,542ha) is ANG[102]. The distribution of existing ANG within the study area by parish is shown in **Table 2.11**. Overall, this shows that distribution of ANG is not consistent across the District, with much of the ANG concentrated in parishes in the northeast and south.

Table 2.11: Existing Accessible Natural Greenspace within the Study Area by Parish

Parish	Accessible Natural Greenspace (Ha)
Alciston*	46.7ha
Arlington	301.4ha
Berwick*	1.0ha
Buxted	221.2ha
Chalvington with Ripe	0.5ha
Chiddingly	7.4ha
Crowborough	167.8ha
Danehill	600.4ha
East Hoathly with Halland	14.7ha
Fletching	129.2ha
Forest Row	717.3ha
Framfield	44.8ha
Frant	100.2ha
Hadlow Down	35.1ha
Hailsham	29.5ha
Hartfield	1017.5ha
Heathfield and Waldron	48.6ha
Hellingly	22.2ha
Herstmonceux	3.4ha
Hooe	13.1ha
Horam	10.0ha
Isfield	2.4ha
Laughton	0.7ha
Little Horsted	0.3ha
Long Man*	365.7ha
Maresfield	825.4ha
Mayfield and Five Ashes	14.4ha
Ninfield	3.0ha
Pevensey	164.4ha

[101] As identified and mapped for the Wealden Open Space, Sport and Recreation Study (Ethos for Wealden DC, forthcoming)
[102] Includes all ANG, not just sites >2ha

Parish	Accessible Natural Greenspace (Ha)
Polegate*	21.1ha
Rotherfield	47.9ha
Selmeston	0.3ha
Uckfield	76.6ha
Wadhurst	141.2ha
Warbleton	0.8ha
Wartling	0.8ha
Westham	10.7ha
Willingdon and Levington*	59.2ha
Withyham	250.4ha

* These include areas of the parish that fall outside the study area.

Access Links

2.7.7 As shown on **Figure 2.7**, both the study area and its surroundings within East Sussex are well-connected by an extensive network of Public Rights of Way (PRoW). There is approximately 1395km of rights of way within the study area, which includes bridleways and long-distance promoted routes. Overall East Sussex County has 3,558km of PRoW[103]. The study area is broadly covered by a fairly uniform spatial distribution of rights of way; however the network is more fragmented in places.

2.7.8 The urban areas within the study area are generally well-connected to the countryside via the network of rights of way and National Cycle Network (NCN) Routes. Uckfield and Crowborough both lack a green route running through the town centre. Town-scale access links are discussed further in **Section 4.0**.

2.7.9 Two long-distance green corridors provide shared-use access through the study area linking together a number of settlements. These routes provide connectivity for wildlife, particularly through settlements alongside access and recreation links for people. The Cuckoo Trail links Heathfield to Eastbourne and the Forest Way runs from Groombridge to East Grinstead along the north of the study area. **Table 2.12** identifies the promoted routes and National Cycling Network (NCN) Routes within the study area.

Table 2.12: Long Distance Promoted Routes within the Study Area

Route	Description
Promoted Routes and Trails	
1066 Country Walk	50km walk running from Rye to Pevensey; exploring sites linked with the Battle of Hastings and includes Pevensey, Westham, Willingdon and Wartling. This route links through to Rother District.

[103] Rights of Way Improvement Plan, ESCC (2007-17)

Route	Description
Sussex Border Path	256km route exploring the inland border of Sussex from Thorney Island in West Sussex to Rye including Forest Row, Hartfield and Withyham. This includes part of the Bewl Water Circular - a 20km multi-user trail around Bewl Water reservoir.
Sussex Ouse Valley Way	42km continuous path starting at the river Ouse at Lower Beeding in West Sussex to Seaford Bay in East Sussex. It runs along the study area's western boundary and passes close to Fletching and Isfield.
Tunbridge Wells Circular	44km circular walk. Within the study area it passes through Frant, Withyham and Eridge Green.
Vanguard Way	This 107km runs from Croydon to Newhaven running through Wealden District.
Wealdway	130km walk from Gravesend, Kent to Eastbourne. The walk passes north to south through the study area, and runs through the Ashdown Forest.
High Weald Landscape Trail	A 145km route that meanders through the AONB from east to west linking key ridge-top villages and historic gardens. This route passes through Eridge Green, Groombridge and Hartfield.
Cycle Routes	
South Coast National Cycle Network Route 2	The route runs from Brighton to Camber including the Cuckmere Valley, Alfriston, Berwick, Arlington and Polegate.
London to Eastbourne National Cycle Network Route 21	The route runs from London to Eastbourne running north to south through the district including Eridge, Heathfield, Hailsham and Polegate. The route also includes the Forest Way, which runs from East Grinstead to Groombridge and the Cuckoo Trail.

2.7.10 Across the study area, there are numerous shorter self-guided walks, circular routes and cycling routes developed and promoted by different organisations. Examples include Welly Walks produced for local schools, promoting family friendly local walks which provide local landscape interpretation, and are used by schools to teach key parts of the curriculum. These routes are produced and interpreted by the High Weald AONB Unit. The long-distance multi-user route around Bewl Water lies partly within the study area. East Sussex County Council's 'Paths to Prosperity' initiative promotes attractive, short, circular walks aimed at boosting the rural economy. The Wealden Walks[104] publication promotes walking routes within each of the parishes, providing interpretation in the free guidebook.

[104] http://www.wealden.gov.uk/Wealden/Leisure/Walking_in_Wealden/PHCS_Wealden_Walks.aspx

2.7.11 In 2009/10, a baseline condition survey was undertaken of the condition of Public Rights of Way within East Sussex. According to this survey, 99% of the network is available to path users, and results from the 2010/11 survey shows that within the 'High Priority' heavily used routes, 90% of assets (bridges, signposts, gates and stiles) are in good condition. This highlights the rights of way network for East Sussex is broadly in 'good' condition.

Needs and Opportunities

Health and Well-being

2.7.12 Accessible natural greenspace provision and access links within the study area are key GI assets that make a significant contribution to Wealden's GI network by providing important health and well-being benefits. In addition to the provision of recreation services, these assets also contribute to a number of other important ecosystems services including sense of place/inspiration; sense of history; tranquillity; biodiversity; and geodiversity.

2.7.13 The health and well-being benefits of access to greenspace are increasingly recognised. There is a growing body of evidence that greenspace in urban and rural areas enhances child development and improves physical and mental health outcomes[105]. The evidence suggests that good access to greenspaces can assist with the delivery of national and local government priorities for increasing life expectancy and reducing health inequality through increased levels of physical activity and mental health and well-being improvements. Investment in the provision of accessible and well-managed greenspace can provide multiple benefits and has the potential to provide cost savings across multiple sectors, particularly in health care. A recent study by the Land Trust[106] has demonstrated that every £1 invested in greenspace contributed £30 in health and well-being benefits.

2.7.14 The Marmot Review[107] builds a strategic review of health inequalities in England post 2010. It concludes that focusing solely on the most disadvantaged will not sufficiently reduce health inequalities. Action must be universal, but proportionate to the level of disadvantage. The Marmot Review promotes a number of objectives to address health inequalities. Environmental conditions are significant in achieving sustainable communities and reducing health inequalities, and many relate to GI such as access to greenspaces, air and water quality, flood risk and biodiversity. The Review encourages local authorities to tackle these objectives through policy development and integrated decision-making.

[105] UK National Ecosystem Assessment (UNEP-WCMC, 2011)
[106] http://thelandtrust.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/The-Value-of-our-Green-Spaces-January-2016.pdf
[107] Fair Society, Healthy Lives, The Marmot Review Executive Summary (2010)

2.7.15 Within the study area, areas of deprivation are mostly concentrated in the south around Hailsham where some areas are recognised as the most deprived 20% of areas in England[108]. Parts of the coast and areas within Polegate and Uckfield are also deprived. The Index of Multiple Deprivation shows a summary of deprivation based upon seven domains covering indicators such as health deprivation and living environment deprivation. People exposed to poor quality environments are more likely to experience poorer health outcomes than people who enjoy good quality environments[109]. Pevensey and Westham have significantly higher than expected elective admissions for mental and behavioural disorders compared to East Sussex as a whole.

2.7.16 Within the District as a whole, 85.2% of adults (aged 16 or over) walk for at least 10 minutes once a week and 23% of adults (aged 16 or over) walk for at least 30 minutes at least five times per week[110]. In addition, 7.4% of adults cycle at least once a week[111].

Accessible Natural Greenspace

2.7.17 In order to understand how well the population of Wealden is provided for in terms of ANG and help plan for better provision, an analysis of ANG was undertaken by CBA based on the latest available open space study data[112] and projected population data for Wealden District[113]. The analysis was undertaken using the accessibility and quantity standard provided by the 'Access to Natural Greenspace Standard' (ANGSt) promoted by Natural England[114]. This analysis does not consider the quality of ANG provision[115]. The ANGSt model is based on distance thresholds and defines the maximum distance that any resident should have to travel from their home to reach accessible natural greenspace.

2.7.18 The ANG Standard provides a national benchmark against which local ANG provision can be assessed, areas of deficiency identified and, where necessary, rectified. The ANG Standard emphasises the importance for people of being able to have easy access to natural (and semi-natural) greenspace close to where they live. The Standard states that *'everyone, wherever they live, should have an accessible natural greenspace:*

- *of at least 2 hectares in size, no more than 300 metres (5 minute walk) from home;*
- *at least one accessible 20 hectare site within two kilometres of home;*
- *one accessible 100 hectare site within five kilometres of home; and*

[108] Wealden District Local Needs Profile (2014)
[109] Local Action on Health Inequalities: Improving Access to Green Spaces, Public Health England/UCL Institute of Health Equity (2014)
[110] East Sussex in Figures (Accessed October 2016)
[111] East Sussex in Figures (Accessed October 2016)
[112] Wealden Open Space, Sport and Recreation Study, Ethos Environmental Planning for Wealden DC (2017)
[113] Supplied by Wealden District Council, email dated 9th May 2017.
[114] See the Wealden Open Space, Sport and Recreation Study (2017) for assessment of open space quality.

- *one accessible 500 hectare site within ten kilometres of home; plus*
- *a minimum of 1 hectare of statutory Local Nature Reserves per thousand population.'*

2.7.19 The four distance thresholds in the ANGSt model were applied to the different sizes of ANG sites and scale of provision across the study area (see **Table 2.13)**, and also in relation to the main towns of Crowborough, Uckfield, Heathfield and Hailsham & Polegate.

Table 2.13:

Scale of provision	ANG Size	Distance
Sub-Regional	Sites over 500ha	Within 10km
County	Sites over 100ha	Within 5km
District	Sites over 20ha	Within 2km
Neighbourhood	Sites over 2ha	Within 300m

2.7.20 It should be noted that ANG sites smaller than 2ha in size have been excluded from the analysis. Whilst some natural greenspaces are private or semi-private and may not be accessible by the public, they often can be visually appreciated from a distance and therefore contribute to visual amenity. In addition, it is important to note that the Public Rights of Way network and other countryside access links are not included in the ANGSt model. It is therefore necessary to consider the ANGSt analysis in conjunction with an analysis of Access Links to build a complete picture of the accessibility of the countryside within the study area.

2.7.21 The following figures show the analysis of ANG against the Standard:

- **Figure 2.6b** shows the analysis of ANG at the neighbourhood scale (sites over 2ha within 300m of residents)
- **Figure 2.6c** shows the analysis of ANG at the district scale (sites over 20ha within 2km of residents)
- **Figure 2.6d** shows the analysis of ANG at the county scale (sites over 100ha within 5km of residents)
- **Figure 2.6e** shows the analysis of ANG at the sub-regional scale (sites over 500ha within 10km of residents)

2.7.22 Deficiencies of ANG at the neighbourhood, district, county and sub-regional scales are summarised in **Table 2.14**. Overall, these show the central and north-eastern parts of the study area have deficiencies in ANG at all scales. 19.7% of the study area (by area) has no provision that contributes to meeting the ANG standard, whilst just 14.5% of the study area (by area) meets all parts of the standard. It should be noted that parts of Crowborough, much of Uckfield and smaller parts of both Hailsham and Polegate meet all components of the standard.

N

0 2.5 5 Kilometres

KEY

- Wealden Local Plan Area
- GI Zones
- 300m catchment - all accessible natural greenspace >2ha
- Accessible Natural Greenspace >2ha

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FIGURE 2.6b
ACCESSIBLE NATURAL GREENSPACE - ANALYSIS:
NEIGHBOURHOOD SCALE
(>2HA - 300M CATCHMENT)

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N

0 2.5 5 Kilometres

KEY

Wealden Local Plan Area

GI Zones

2km catchment - all accessible natural greenspace >20ha

Accessible Natural Greenspace >2ha

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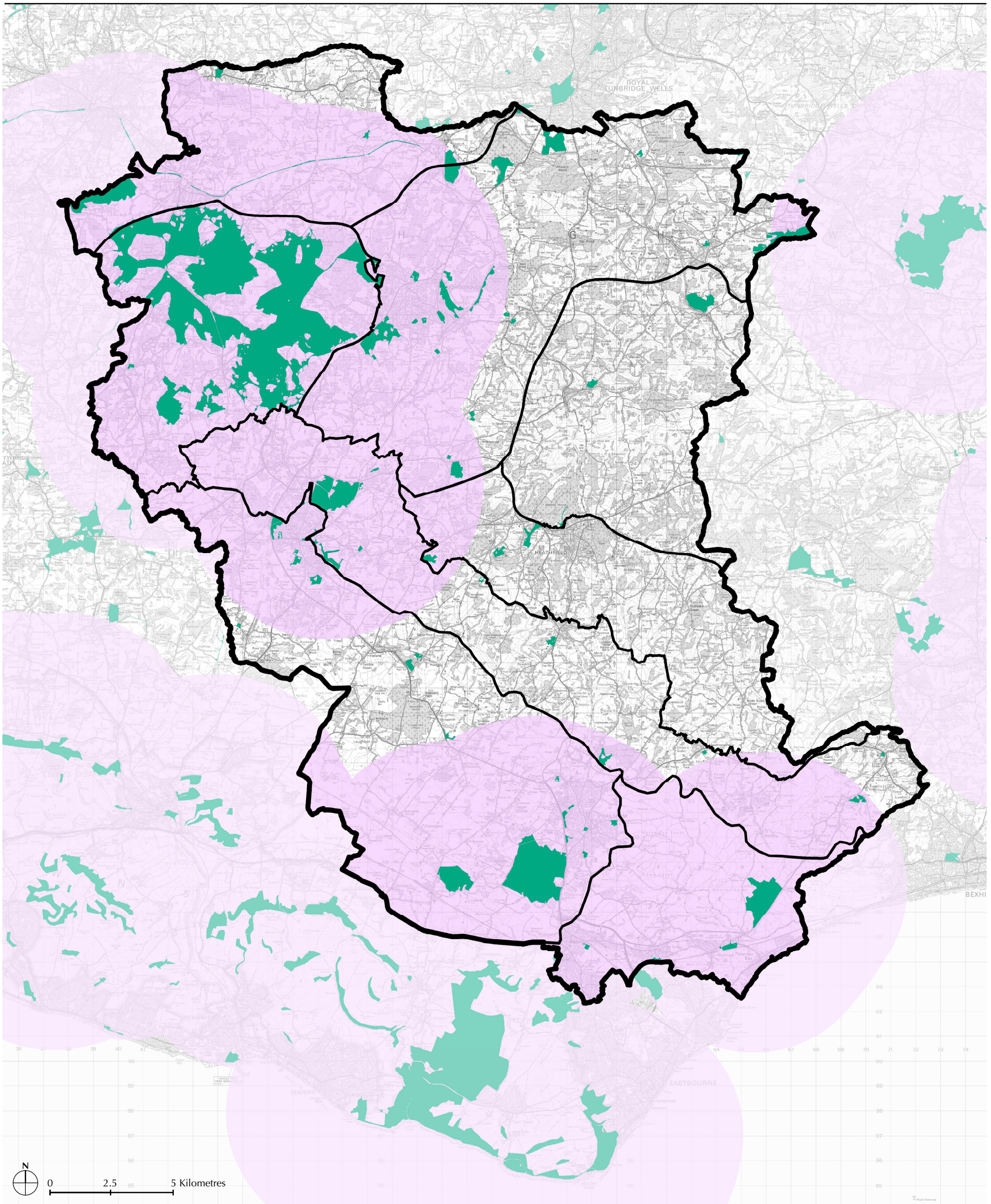
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FIGURE 2.6c
ACCESSIBLE NATURAL GREENSPACE - ANALYSIS:
DISTRICT SCALE
(>20HA - 2KM CATCHMENT)

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KEY

- Wealden Local Plan Area
- GI Zones
- 5km catchment - all accessible natural greenspace >100ha
- Accessible Natural Greenspace >2ha

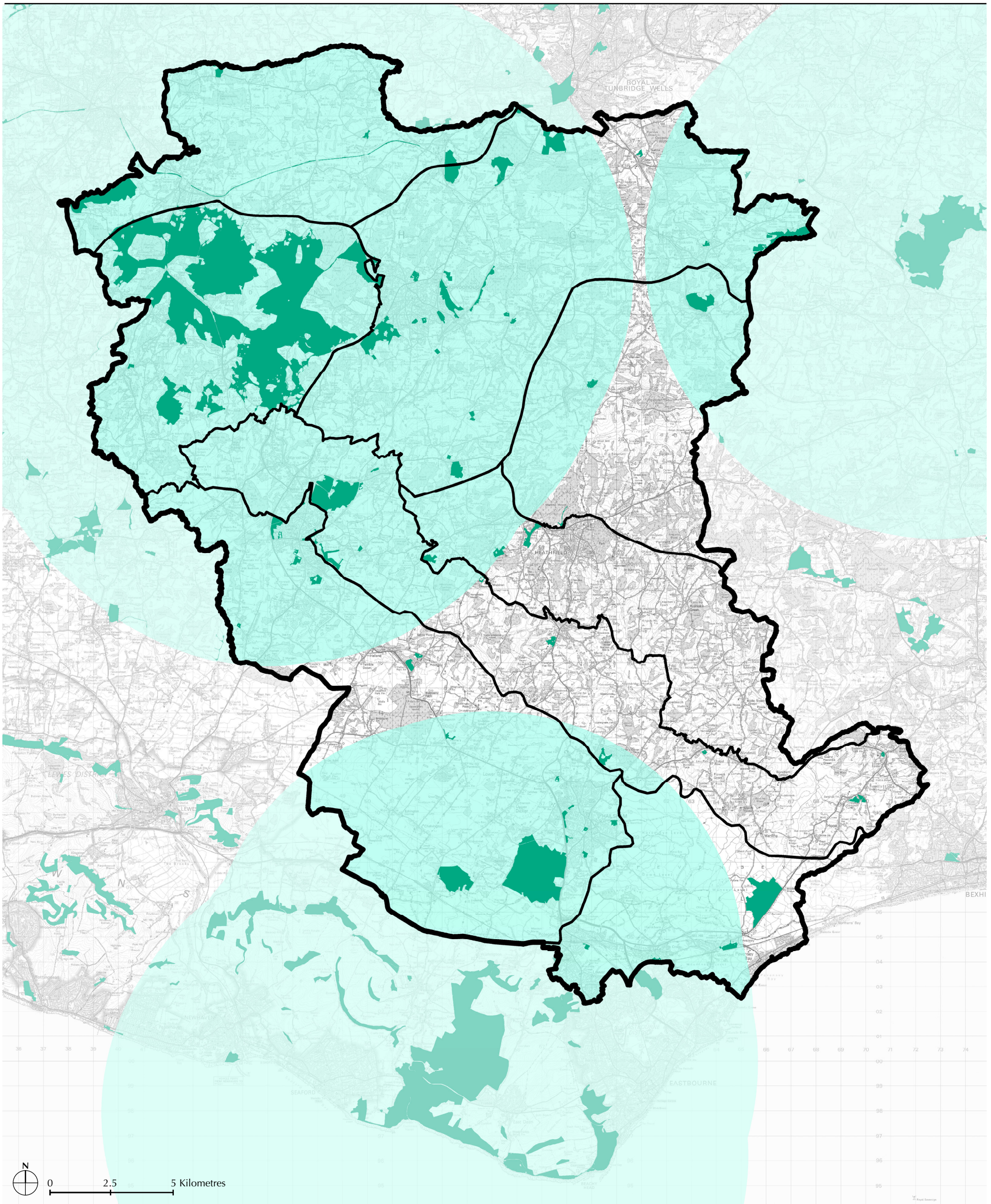
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FIGURE 2.6d
ACCESSIBLE NATURAL GREENSPACE - ANALYSIS:
COUNTY SCALE
(>100HA - 5KM CATCHMENT)



KEY

- Wealden Local Plan Area
- GI Zones
- 10km catchment - all accessible natural greenspace >500ha
- Accessible Natural Greenspace >2ha

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FIGURE 2.6e
ACCESSIBLE NATURAL GREENSPACE - ANALYSIS:
SUB-REGIONAL SCALE
(>500HA - 10KM CATCHMENT)

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Table 2.14: Accessible Natural Greenspace Deficiencies within the Study Area

Scale of Provision	Deficiency
Sub-regional provision	**Deficient in the east and centre of the study area.** Adequate provision elsewhere from the Ashdown Forest in the northwest; Bedgebury Forest (outside the study area) in the north east; and Abbot's Wood and the Seven Sister's Country Park/Friston Forest (outside the district) in the south. **c.27% of the study area (by area) has no provision at this scale. Heathfield is the only main town significantly affected by this deficiency.**
County provision	**Deficient in the east and centre of the study area.** Adequate provision elsewhere from the Ashdown Forest, Buxted Park and Sheffield Forest in the northwest; and Abbot's Wood and Pevensey Marshes in the south. **c.41% of the study area (by area) has no provision at this scale. Heathfield is the only main town significantly affected by this deficiency.**
District provision	**Scattered areas of deficiency across the study area, particularly in the centre and east. c.53% of the district (by area) has no provision at this scale. Heathfield, Hailsham and Polegate are the main towns significantly affected by this deficiency.**
Neighbourhood provision	Much of the study area is deficient in this scale of provision. c.**81%** of the study area (by area) has no provision at this scale. Parts of all the five main towns are affected by this deficiency.

2.7.23 The study area is most deficient in the neighbourhood scale provision of ANG, with a large proportion of the population having no access to these smaller sites which meet the standard within walking distance. However, the study area is better served by large-scale greenspace such as Ashdown Forest and Wilmington Wood. Beyond the study area, surrounding greenspaces offer important contributions to some communities within the study area. These include Bedgebury Forest (in Tunbridge Wells Borough) and the Lullington Heath NNR/SSSI (in the South Downs National Park).

2.7.24 The ANG deficiencies in relation to the main towns within the study area are shown in **Table 2.15**. Many of the existing ANG sites are also designated for their nature conservation value and therefore have carefully managed public access. These sites are likely to be sensitive to additional recreational pressures, which needs to be recognised in relation to meeting current and future needs, particularly for the main towns of Crowborough, Uckfield, Heathfield, Hailsham and Polegate. Whilst planned growth is likely to create further pressure on existing sites it also offers opportunities for new greenspaces. It should be noted that Crowborough, Uckfield, Heathfield, Hailsham and Polegate all currently have some deficiencies in the various scales of ANG, particularly neighbourhood scale sites. Heathfield has significant deficiencies in all scales of ANG, though there is some intermittent level of provision at the district and

neighbourhood scales. New and enhanced accessible natural greenspace sites will need to be provided to meet current and future needs, particularly in the east and south of the district.

Table 2.15: Deficiencies of Accessible Natural Greenspace in relation to the Main Towns

Scale of Provision	Crowborough	Uckfield	Heathfield	Hailsham/ Polegate
Sub-Regional	No deficiencies	No deficiencies	**Deficiency of sub-regional scale sites for all of Heathfield.**	No deficiencies in or around Hailsham and Polegate. **To the far east and north-east of the settlements there is a deficiency of sub-regional scale ANG for small villages and also at Pevensey Bay.**
County	No deficiencies around Crowborough itself. **Deficiency of county scale sites approx. 1.5km to the east of the town (including Rotherfield).**	No deficiencies	**Deficiency of county scale sites for all of Heathfield.**	No deficiencies in or around Hailsham and Polegate. **Approx. 2km to the north-east of Hailsham, there are smaller settlements deficient in this scale of provision, including Herstmonceux.**
District	No deficiencies around the Crowborough itself. **Deficiency of county scale sites approx. 1.5km to the east of the town (including the eastern edge of Rotherfield).**	No deficiencies around Uckfield itself. **Deficiency of district scale sites to the west of the A22, including for Shortbridge and Buckham Hill.**	**Deficiency of district scale sites for the south-eastern corner of Heathfield, and the north-eastern edge along the A265 to Broad Oak.**	**Deficiency of district scale sites for the northern half and eastern edge of Hailsham, and a small area of deficiency in central Polegate**.
Neighbour-hood	**Deficiency of neighbourhood sites for central and parts of northern Crowborough, as well as at Alderbrook in the south.** Many of the residents in the south and east of Crowborough have access to more than one of the larger sites at the neighbourhood scale. The areas in the town that meet this part of the standard also meet the standard for other scales of provision.	**Areas of deficiency in the centre and parts of the northern edge of Uckfield, as well as parts in the south (at New Town and Ridgewood). Small settlements to the west, south and east also lack provision,** with the exception of Framfield in the east. Most of the areas in Uckfield that meet this part of the standard also meet the standard for other scales of provision.	**Deficiency of neighbourhood scale sites for most of Heathfield.** Small areas in the north and west have some provision.	**Deficiency of neighbourhood scale sites for most of northern, parts of central and much of the area south of Hailsham. Deficiency in this scale of provision across most of Polegate,** with the exception of small areas in the central south and south west of the town.

2.7.25 The fifth tier of the ANG Standard states that there should be *'a minimum of one hectare of statutory Local Nature Reserves (LNRs) per thousand population'*. The study area as a whole currently includes c.225.7ha of statutory LNRs and a population of c.157,710[116] which means that there is a current provision of 1.6ha/1000 population of statutory Local Nature Reserves, which meets the standard. With a projected population of 176,511 by 2028[117] (or 184,675 by 2028[118]), there is enough provision to meet the need of future populations. However, it should be noted that whilst there is currently no deficiency of statutory LNRs for the study area's population, provision is afforded by only six sites, two of which (Arlington Reservoir and Old Lodge, Nutley) provide more than 203ha of the total 255.7ha provision, and these are both more than 6km from the nearest main settlements. Much of Wealden's population therefore does not have a statutory LNR close to where they live.

2.7.26 As noted in **Section 2.4**, parts of the landscape that are ANG within the study area suffer from recreational pressures, for example the erosion of sandstone outcrops through walking and rock climbing, and the increasing demand for recreational activities on Ashdown Forest. Notwithstanding this, the study area also has a large amount of countryside, which has good recreational potential. It is important to maximise recreation where it is most needed and can be best absorbed and to ensure that sensitive landscapes and features are protected and managed effectively.

Access Links

2.7.27 The East Sussex Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP)[119], East Sussex Local Transport Plan[120] and the East Sussex Countryside Access Strategy[121] set out aspirations for ensuring that public rights of way and countryside sites in Wealden are maintained, enhanced and promoted to meet the needs of residents and visitors.

2.7.28 The study area is well served by public rights of way as shown in **Figure 2.7** and there are opportunities to strengthen and enhance the connectivity between potential development and the surrounding landscape through the creation or enhancement of rights of way. This can benefit health and well-being as well as strengthening people's appreciation of the natural environment.

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[116] Population taken from ONS 2014 based subnational population projections
[117] Population taken from ONS 2014 based subnational population projections
[118] Population estimate calculated on the basis of 2014 based subnational population projections (ONS) for Wealden (predicted population by 2016 of 157,710) and projected additional 11,724 new dwellings (which, based on the average number of people living in a household being 2.3, equates to 184,675) - based on email correspondence from Wealden District Council 09/05/2017.
[119] https://www.eastsussex.gov.uk/leisureandtourism/countryside/rightsofway/rights-of-way-in-east-sussex/local-access-forum/rights-of-way-improvement-plan/
[120] https://www.eastsussex.gov.uk/roadsandtransport/localtransportplan/ltp3/downloadltp3
[121] https://consultation.eastsussex.gov.uk/economy-transport-environment/shaping-the-future-of-our-countryside-access/supporting_documents/Countryside%20Access%20Strategy.pdf

Crowborough

Uckfield

Heathfield

Hailsham

Polegate

N

0 2.5 5 Kilometres

KEY

- Wealden Local Plan Area
- GI Zones
- Roads
- Railways
- Main Settlements
- National Trails
- Promoted Routes
- National Cycle Network Routes
- Bridleways/Byways
- Public Footpaths

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FIGURE 2.7
ACCESS LINKS

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2.7.29 There is a strategic gap in the rights of way network within Ashdown Forest itself; however this large area of open access land contains its own network of way-marked routes and trails. Other areas of deficiency at this scale include; the area south of Tunbridge Wells, south of the Ashdown Forest and within the Pevensey Levels. There is also a deficiency in access through the study area, between the Low Weald and South Downs National Park.

2.7.30 There is a general lack of joined up bridleways and byways throughout the study area. Many bridleways and byways are isolated within the wider rights of way network, There is a lack of north-south orientated footpath access in the north of the study area.

2.7.31 The projected increase in the population of the District and the surrounding towns (Tunbridge Wells, East Grinstead, and Eastbourne) put significant pressures upon Wealden's rights of way network. This has been identified as an issue in the County ROWIP and Local Transport Plan.

2.7.32 The Local Transport Plan sets out key areas where sustainable access (via bus, rail, cycling and walking) is most needed. These are focused upon areas receiving growth, particularly in South Wealden and Eastbourne (outside of the study area). The Plan sets out the following high level objectives:

- Improve economic competiveness and growth
- Improve safety, health and security
- Tackle climate change
- Improve accessibility and enhance social inclusion
- Improve quality of life

2.7.33 The County-wide approach for the rights of way network identified in the Local Transport Plan is to:

- Ensure that the footpaths, bridleways and byways around the county are **safe** and **accessible** for public use.
- **Improve access for all** and make the network available to people with **differing abilities**, by taking the needs of disabled people into account and promoting a series of routes designed with disabled people in mind.
- Improve safety and convenience through **improved road crossings**, making verges safer for horse riders, and adjustments to the network.
- Provide **good quality information and education** on access to the countryside to the public through the internet, including making online access to the rights of way network more accessible and improving the 'on the ground' information.

- Improve **partnership working** by encouraging volunteers, working with land managers and liaising with town and parish councils, other authorities and organisations including the SDNP.
- Improve and promote key **long distance** and circular walking routes.
- Continue to take the actions needed to fulfil the objectives in the **Rights of Way Improvement Plan**.

2.7.34 Overall, the study area is well-served for public rights of way, particularly in terms of quantity of routes. According to the Rights of Way Improvement Plan, while East Sussex has a higher than average number of horse-riders the fragmented bridleway network is one of the key issues facing horse-riders (see **Figure 2.7)**. An improved network for both cyclists and horse-riders is a strategic need. The key strategic gaps in the access route network, and barriers to its use, are:

- Access from the Low Weald to the South Downs.
- Busy main roads and railways can frequently be a significant barrier.
- Gaps in the cycling network, particularly at key settlements (Uckfield and Crowborough).
- Accessibility difficulties.
- A fragmented bridleway network.
- Poor signage on some long-distance routes.

2.7.35 Access links and greenspace provision surrounding the study area play a significant role in provision of access and greenspace both for existing populations in Wealden and for visitors alike. Also pressures (deficits and surplus) within neighbouring authorities (shown on **Figure 2.1a**) have the potential to affect the study area both positively and negatively.

2.7.36 Strategically, in the central part of the study area there is a lack of any linked cycle routes between neighbouring authorities, particularly east-west, and links to the existing network outside the study area. Cycle routes to key destinations such as Bewl Water are also lacking. Significant areas of greenspace outside the study area and upon which some scales of the ANGSt relies, include; Bedgebury Forest (in Tunbridge Wells Borough), Lullington Heath NNR (in the South Downs National Park).

Summary

2.7.37 In summary, working with partners, developers, local communities, landowners and other relevant bodies, the key strategic opportunities for GI to help address identified needs for the provision of accessible natural greenspace and access links across the study area are considered to be:

- Retain and enhance existing accessible natural greenspace sites, particularly those serving rural and/or deprived populations where appropriate.
- Address deficiencies in access to neighbourhood scale natural greenspace by investigating opportunities for provision of new sites in areas of planned growth and areas experiencing higher levels of health deprivation.
- Address the need to enable better access to the countryside for local communities by improving existing access links from the main towns and larger villages into the countryside, without compromising the need to protect vulnerable landscapes and habitats.
- Use and promote historic routeways for non-vehicular users in order to join up key gaps in the network, specifically for cyclists and horse-riders.
- Explore opportunities to improve sustainable and affordable travel choices, particularly in areas of planned growth and areas experiencing higher levels of health deprivation.
- Deliver improved access to countryside sites for all, including less-abled people to help achieve objectives within the ROWIP and Local Transport Plan.
- Build on projects such as the High Weald Heroes Welly Walks project to develop sustainable walking and cycling access routes to schools.

2.7.38 Other area-specific opportunities are:

High Weald

- Maintain the current access network and create additional links, particularly those that relieve pressure on sensitive sites through a network of accessible natural greenspaces and linear access.
- Provide greater cycling links in the central and western part of the study area between towns (e.g. Crowborough, Uckfield) and existing routes (e.g. the Cuckoo Trail).
- Explore opportunities to improve rights of way in heavily utilised areas within the High Weald in line with the East Sussex Rights of Way Improvement Plan.
- Increase understanding and enjoyment of natural greenspaces through access, education and interpretation provision that helps highlight the sensitive features of designated sites, ensuring that access for recreational enjoyment is balanced with protection of biodiversity, geodiversity and historic features.

- Develop and improve the quality of greenspace and rights of way to meet the demands and needs of locals and visitors alike.
- Promote integrated management of accessible natural greenspaces for informal outdoor recreation and facilitate 'green' access and use by residents and visitors.
- Promote sustainable tourism initiatives that target a broad range of visitors and, where practical, reduce car dependency and contribute to conserving and enhancing the landscape's character, tranquillity and biodiversity.

Low Weald

- Ensure access balances recreational enjoyment, with the protection of geological and historical features as well as biodiversity.
- Promote sustainable tourism and recreational activities that minimise impacts on the environment, while helping to generate income and employment.
- Improve the physical and mental health and well-being of local communities through promoting use of the rights of way network, connecting green spaces, commons, parkland and accessible woodland.
- Develop outdoor recreation facilities in conjunction with creation of new GI assets, such as new wetland areas for flood management or the restoration of former transport infrastructure corridors.
- Enhance rights of way and open access throughout the area in line with the East Sussex Rights of Way Improvement Plan, particularly improving links to the Wealdway and South Downs National Trails.
- Support plans for extending cycle networks throughout the Low Weald.

Pevensey Levels

- Maximise the recreational benefits provided by the coastline, particularly the sense of tranquillity provided by the shoreline, while ensuring that coastal access is managed to minimise damage from excessive recreational pressure.
- Support well planned GI that provides sustainable access routes that enhance community safety, foster community cohesion and contribute to physical and mental health.
- Support measures to strengthen sustainable travel networks and improve access links to the nearby South Downs National Park, providing opportunities to enjoy the Park's natural beauty and experience its dark night skies.
- Link public footpaths, cycle paths, settlements and long distance paths, especially on higher ground to reduce impact of rising water levels.