A LANDSCAPE STUDY OF NINFIELD

February 2023

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The Parish of Ninfield and its Setting within the Wider Landscape

The parish of Ninfield is on the southern slopes of the eastern part of the High Weald on the eastern side of the river valley of Wallers Haven. The floodplain of this river forms a narrow northward extension of Pevensey Levels. It is on the edge of one of the least populated areas of South East England, with resultant dark night skies.

Settlement is concentrated in the village, which is situated on the high ground in the northern part of the parish, at the intersection of several roads with the main A269. There is also a much smaller settlement at Lunsford Cross to the southeast, adjoining the Bexhill boundary. In 2011, the parish had a population of 1,562 in 665 dwellings. The village built-up area comprises 470 of these dwellings, indicating a Ninfield village population of approximately 1,100 (N.B. 'dwellings' include flats and 'village built-up area' includes the ribbons of dwellings in Bexhill Road and Marlpits Lane). The population of Lunsford Cross is only about 120. Outside these settlements, dwellings include many former farmhouses and cottages. They are mainly dispersed in the surroundings of the village and, particularly, in the vicinity of the roads leading to Bexhill and Hooe including the area called Russell's Green.

Historically, the size of the medieval parish church of St Mary the Virgin indicates that Ninfield (*Nerewelle, Nymenfeld, Nemefeld, Nenfield*) was very small and impoverished (as described in the Domesday Survey 1086) although it did give its name to the small ancient administrative area called the Ninfield Hundred. In the c19th, with continued dependence on agriculture, settlement was still relatively scattered. The village comprised 2 hamlets, Lower Street and Ninfield Green, with the medieval church and the school located midway between and surrounded by open fields. In the second half of the c19th the number of dwellings in the parish was only about 160 but, owing to large family sizes, the parish population (including the part transferred in 1882 from Ashburnham) was about 750. 50% of the working population were employed in agriculture as late as 1901. From the 1920s, with the increase in car travel, new housebuilding was taking place in the village, no doubt attracted by the elevated location with its long views. By 1931, the parish population had grown to 1,000 and a short length of new road was constructed to 'by-pass' Lower Street. The development in the 1930s and later took place as a mixture of low density houses and bungalows built along the existing main roads and side lanes within the village area, creating a linear form without any central nucleus. In the period from the 1950s to the 1980s, a number of small housing estates were constructed as cul-de-sacs behind the frontage development, consolidating the built-up area to its present form. Currently, two larger housing estates are under construction on the periphery of the village, outside the development boundary.

Ninfield village occupies a ridge extending eastwards from Standard Hill, the highest point in the local area. Consequently, although much of the landscape is comprised of small fields enclosed by woodland, trees and tall hedges, there are significant views of the Ninfield ridge from the wider landscape, from well beyond the parish boundary. Standard Hill is discernible in the far distance across Pevensey Levels.

View of Standard Hill and Ninfield ridge from Pevensey Levels to the southwest (telephoto lens)

There are closer, clearer views of Standard Hill and the village ridge from a significant number of places in the immediately surrounding parishes. The most notable ones are from viewpoints along the A271 to the west at Boreham Street/Hill (see photographs in later section) and also from the A271 to the north in Ashburnham parish.

There are also closer views from the southwest across the Moor Hall stream valley from a number of places along the B2095 Hooe road (see photographs in subsequent section) and a longer distance view over the levels of Waller's Haven from the public footpath east of Wartling parish church.

View of Ninfield ridge (between Moor Hall and Bexhill Road) from footpath at Wartling to southwest

From the east, there are some views of the Ninfield village ridge over the woods in the Catsfield Stream valley from the Crowhurst road near Catsfield parish church.

Ninfield ridge from east on edge of AONB at Crowhurst road, Catsfield

High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)

The north part of Ninfield parish is within the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty which was designated in 1983.

Five defining components of character have been identified in the AONB Management Plan that have made the High Weald a recognisably distinct and homogenous area for at least the last 700 years:

1. ***Geology**, landform and water systems – a deeply incised, ridged and faulted landform of clays and sandstone with numerous gill streams*
2. ***Settlement** – dispersed historic settlement including high densities of isolated farmsteads and late Medieval villages founded on trade and non-agricultural rural industries*
3. ***Routeways** – a dense network of historic routeways (now roads, tracks and paths)*
4. ***Woodland** – abundance of ancient woodland, highly interconnected and in smallholdings*
5. ***Field and Heath** – small, irregular and productive fields, bounded by hedgerows and woods, and typically used for livestock grazing; with distinctive zones of lowland heaths, and inned river valleys*

The High Weald Design Guide 2019 gives a brief history of settlement character formation. It states that the settlement form and structure, siting in the landscape, relationship of buildings to streets, and building form and massing are all highly important to the natural beauty of the High Weald and that new development should reinforce this settlement character.

The Guide states that, at first glance, it may appear that the settlements are typical of those found across England but, in fact, the High Weald is quite different. Its landscape was created by historic and locally-distinctive agricultural practices. Clearings called assarts were created by early farmers for mixed pastoral farming. This resulted in a complex patchwork of small, irregularly-shaped fields among the abundant ancient woodlands. Such woodland and dense mature hedgerows still demarcate these fields today. In addition, the movement of livestock gave rise to an extensive network of routeways, often sunken, linking grazing areas and these are still visible today in numerous lanes, tracks and paths. This has led to the High Weald having a high concentration of dispersed settlements. Numerous small scattered farmsteads and hamlets interspersed among the small fields and woodland were followed by larger hamlets and villages. Later medieval villages were often located at historic focal points and along ridge-top roads. The Guide states that design of development within or adjacent to High Weald settlements needs to be based on a thorough understanding of this landscape context and settlement pattern and ***"Towns and villages outside but adjacent to the AONB often share many of the origins and landscape components described above and development adjacent to them would also benefit from the landscape-led approach."*** Ninfield is clearly one such village.

The Wider High Weald

The parish of Ninfield exhibits similar characteristics to the more central High Weald but on a smaller scale and does not include any heaths or sandstone outcrops. Most of the parish including the village is shown as 'Low Weald' in both the 'saved' Wealden Local Plan 1998 and the Wealden Core Strategy Local Plan 2013. However, this is wholly inconsistent with the District Council's own Wealden Design Guide 2008 and with the findings of East Sussex County Council and Natural England which all show Ninfield within the 'High Weald'. The Low Weald comprises the lowland area west (not east) of Pevensey Levels, historically termed the Vale of Sussex.

Natural England National Character Area Profiles 2013: These show Ninfield parish within ***NCA 122 'High Weald'*** apart from the small strip on the western edge which falls under ***NCA 124 'Pevensey Levels'***.

The High Weald NCA is summarised by Natural England as *an area of ancient countryside and one of the best surviving medieval landscapes in northern Europe characterised by prominent medieval patterns of small pasture fields enclosed by thick hedgerows and shaws (narrow woodlands)*.

East Sussex Landscape Character Assessment 2016: This also recognises Ninfield as being in the High Weald. As shown on the following map extract, Ninfield parish comes under 3 smaller character areas. These 3 areas are described as having the following key characteristics (excluding specific place references irrelevant to Ninfield):-

South Slopes of the High Weald (Area 5)

- *An intricate small-scale landscape with a strong pattern of hedgerows.*
- *Wide views to the Downs from many areas.*
- *Many scattered small farm ponds and hammer ponds as relics of the iron industry which thrived in this area.*
- *A sense of tranquillity and relative remoteness away from the main settlements and roads.*
- *Frequent scattered small woods and shaws, many of which are Semi-Natural Ancient deciduous woodland.*
- *Ghyll woodlands in the many steep sided valleys which are a key characteristic of the High Weald.*
- *Scattered small historic villages, hamlets and large farmsteads centred around a church or a pub.*

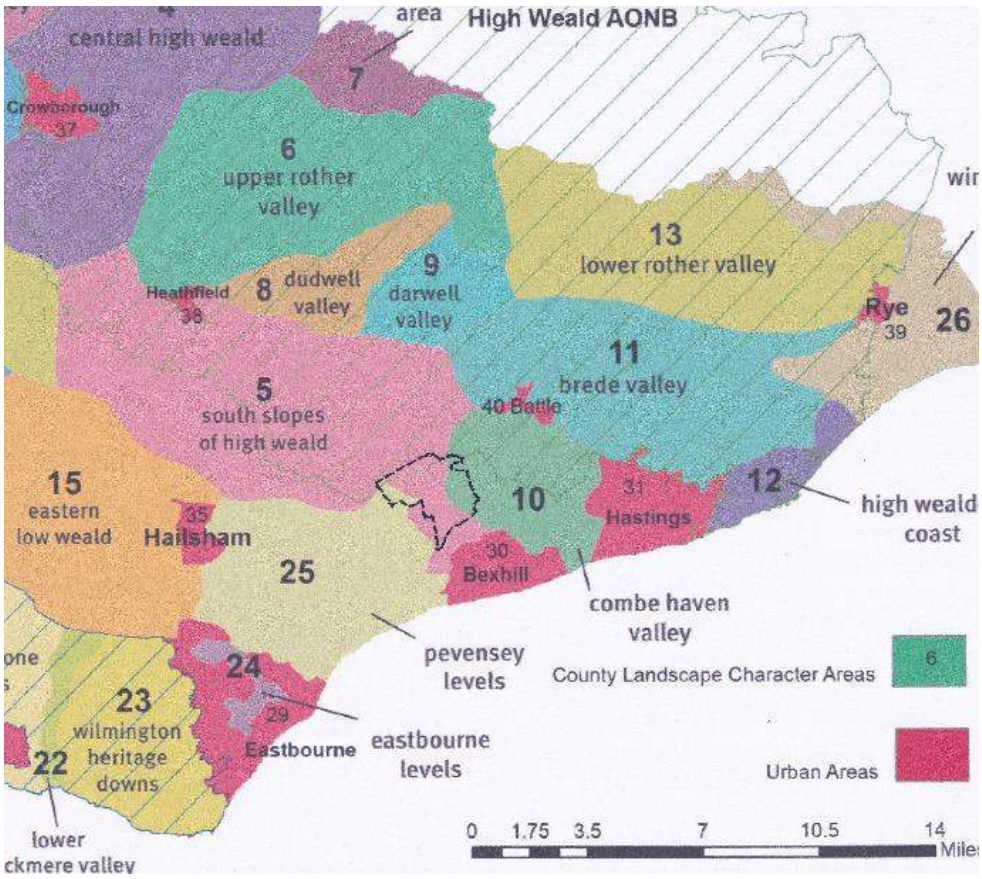
Combe Haven Valley (Area 10)

- *A series of small winding High Wealden stream valleys.*
- *Rolling well wooded countryside with typical High Wealden character of rolling landscape and historic field patterns.*
- *Ghyll woodlands on the steeper slopes.*
- *Intricate terrain of small, winding valleys and ridges around levels, with abundant woods and gills.*
- *Extensive areas of ancient woodland.*

- *A sense of tranquillity away from the main settlements and roads.*
- *Indigenous characteristic tree species are oak, ash and field maple, with wild cherry and sweet chestnut coppice in woodland on the drier slopes.*
- *Scattered historic farmsteads typical of the High Weald.*

Pevensey Levels (Area 25)

- *Extensive flat open grazing marsh as one of the largest wet grazing systems in south east England.*
- *A sense of remoteness and tranquillity in the heart of the area with big skies and cries of wetland birds.*
- *Reed fringed winding river channels in open wetland pasture.*
- *An intricate pattern of manmade ditches as historic field enclosures and drainage systems.*



Extract from E.Sussex Landscape Character Areas Map showing AONB cross-hatched in green and Ninfield parish in broken black line

At District level, the **Wealden Landscape and Settlement Character Assessment 2014** (by Chris Blandford Associates for Wealden District Council) identifies Local Landscape Character Types (LLCT) and Areas (LLCA). It shows Ninfield parish mainly under the part of the High Weald it calls "*B. Ridges and Slopes*" (sub-area "*B4 Ninfield and Hooe*") (section 4.5 pages 23-24 and section 4.31 pages 83-84) with a small part under "F. Open Levels" (sub-area "F2 Wallers Haven") (section 6.4 pages 146-147).

The **Ridges and Slopes LLCT** is described as a small-scale landscape with a strong pattern of predominantly pastoral fields, which forms the southern slopes of the High Weald. The topography slopes from north to south, with the landscape falling away towards the lower Open Levels LLCT (F) to the south. The falling land is incised by a number of wooded ghylls. A series of linear villages in a chain stretching from Cowbeech to Ninfield are situated on the higher, drier ground of an east-west orientated ridge along the northern edge of this LLCT, bisected by Wallers Haven. In addition, there are a number of small hamlets and farmsteads dotted throughout the landscape. Panoramic, open views southwards across the Levels are characteristic of the southern part of this LLCT, contributing to recognisable sense of place. Views northwards from the ridge comprise a foreground of small-scale fields and woodlands which form part of the High Weald AONB. Patches of small to medium-sized woodlands provide an intermittent sense of enclosure within this predominantly rural landscape. The landscape is crossed by a network of rural, sometimes sunken lanes, which are lined with mature trees and hedgerows. There is a strong sense of remoteness and tranquillity throughout most of the landscape.

Overall, the ***Ridges and Slopes LLCT*** is assessed in the Wealden Landscape and Settlement Character Assessment (2014) as having "***High Landscape Sensitivity and Very High Landscape Value****."*

As regards LLCA *B4 Ninfield and Hooe*, it states:-

"*This relatively large LLCA is situated at the eastern edge of Wealden District and is separated from other LLCAs within the same Landscape Character Type, by a valley of Open Levels (LLCA: F2, Waller's Haven). The northern part of the LLCA is strongly rural and encompasses the small linear village of Ninfield. Ninfield church is a key landmark feature, contributing to recognisable sense of place. To the north of the village, large patches of woodland provide a strong sense of enclosure, linking this area to the strong wooded landscapes of the High Weald to the north. Ninfield is connected to the small hamlet of Hooe Common to the south by the minor rural road corridor of the B2095. Whilst this is a relatively busy north/south road corridor, at a distance from the road, there is a very strong sense of remoteness and tranquillity throughout. The small hamlet of Hooe is further to the south. Hooe church, to the east of the settlement, is situated at the end of a narrow, tree-lined rural lane, which results in a strong rural setting. The field pattern throughout most of the area is small-scale and intimate, with mature trees and hedgerows at field boundaries and along road corridors. The topography of the area falls quite sharply from north to south, resulting in lower lying undulating fields in the southern part of the area which facilitate panoramic open views south and westwards across the Open Levels LLCT and its constituent LLCAs."*

The ***Open Levels LLCT*** is assessed in the Wealden Landscape and Settlement Character Assessment (2014) as having *"**Very High Landscape Sensitivity and Very High Landscape Value**.".* As regards sub-area *F2 Wallers Haven*, it states:-

"This LLCA encompasses a relatively long river which is fed by the numerous small stream corridors within the slopes of the Low Weald (sic) to the north and stretches to the sea in the south. The banks of the river have been modified in places, resulting in a straight channel; however, to the north there are gentle meanders in the river corridor. The river channel is lined by reeds and there is a strong sense of openness throughout the area, resulting in strong inter-visibility with surrounding LLCAs within the Open Levels LLCT. Occasional small trees line the river banks, but there is an overall absence of tree cover or hedgerows. Long

distance, panoramic open views across the Levels contribute to recognisable sense of place and there is a strong sense of remoteness and tranquillity throughout."

The later Wealden Green Infrastructure Study 2017 (by the same consultants) includes the non-AONB part of Ninfield within "*Zone 6 - High Weald Fringes*" (section 3.7 page 127). All these studies adopt a very broadbrush approach to describing the Ninfield landscape. Unlike some other villages, the section on the setting of Ninfield contains no assessment of the contribution made by the different areas around the village, only distinguishing between the AONB area and the non-AONB area.

By contrast, the same consultants provided a very detailed assessment of a number of individual sites around the village (put forward by landowners under the SHELAA process) in their **Wealden Local Plan Sites – Landscape and Ecological Assessment Study 2017**. It includes detailed matrices based on various defined key criteria (*Strength of Place; Distinctiveness; Continuity; Visibility; Landform; Landscape Sensitivity; Landscape Value; Landscape Capacity).* It avoids references to scenic quality or natural beauty. Under the methodology, the Landscape Value of any site located directly adjacent to the settlement edge is rated as either low or moderate. The consultant's report forms background evidence for the subsequent **Wealden Strategic Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment 2019** (SHELAA). The latter contains informed judgements about the contributions made by the various sites to the setting of the village of Ninfield (on pages 249-252 and 439-441). The majority of the sites concerned were judged unsuitable for housing or economic development because of its impact on the landscape setting of the village. In some cases, where located on the edge of the ridge, this was because, although read against the existing urban edge, the sites concerned were on ground that was open and exposed for some considerable distance. Two large sites (one behind Sparke Gardens, Manchester Road and the other in Bexhill Road) were, however, considered suitable and both subsequently came forward as applications. The former site was granted planning permission for 80 houses (now under construction) and the other was the subject of an application in 2021 for up to 65 dwellings which the Council has resolved to permit.

A new Wealden Landscape Assessment by consultants LUC for WDC was published in April 2022. Apart from Pevensey Levels, they describe the character type of this southern part of the High Weald as 'Wooded Slopes (High Weald)', rather than the previous consultants 'Ridges and Slopes'. Within this, they distinguish local character areas, Ninfield falling within '6E. High Weald – Cuckmere/ Pevensey Catchments LCA' (on pages 174-186). It is described as "*a rolling landscape of ridges and valleys containing the River Cuckmere and its tributaries that drain south from the Central High Weald into the Low Weald, and the tributaries of Waller's Haven that drain east into the Pevensey Levels. A wooded landscape with a pattern of small-scale irregular fields, streams and historic ridge-top villages. The LCA is separated into two sections by LCA 1A Pevensey Levels at Waller's Haven (and the District boundary). The north of the LCA, north of Horam, Windmill Hill and Ninfield, lies within the High Weald AONB."*

Under Landscape Qualities of this LCA, the consultants state: *"The following features and characteristics are particularly valued for their contribution to character and for the ecosystem services they provide:*

- *The landform of ridges and valleys associated with the River Cuckmere and Waller's Haven provide topographical interest to the landscape, creating a sense of place.*
- *Hammer ponds and gill streams, support wetland habitats, increasing biodiversity.*
- *The woodland, riparian vegetation and wetland habitat of the Cuckmere and Waller's Haven catchments provide nutrient and sediment filtration that enhances water quality, help to regulate water flow and assist in reducing flooding during heavy rainfall.*
- *The numerous woodlands (with a high proportion of ancient woodlands), trees and mature hedgerows, provide a sense of place as well as habitat connectivity to support biodiversity, carbon sequestration and the regulation of temperatures.*
- *Coppicing of woodland offers opportunities for timber provision and a potential source of local fuel and building materials.*
- *Semi-natural habitats including deciduous woodland, grassland and wet meadows, some designated as SSSI, support a range of important flora, insects and breeding birds. They allow soil stabilisation/retention, have a higher soil carbon content than cultivated habitats and provide nutrient filtration, enhancing water quality.*
- *The small-scale medieval field patterns, with sinuous hedgerow boundaries provide a sense of place and history.*
- *Hammer ponds, coppiced woodlands and historic forges provide a link to the Wealden iron industry and a sense of time depth*
- *The pattern of historic ridgetop villages (whose value is recognised through designation as Conservation Areas), linked by winding rural lanes, provide a connection to history, cultural identity and aesthetic value.*
- *The vernacular of red brick, oak timber, sandstone and flint which reflects the locally available materials, provides a sense of place and accords with a distinctive architectural colour palette. Herstmonceux Castle, Observatory and parkland contribute to the time depth of the landscape and are distinctive landmarks in the landscape.*
- *The extensive network of public rights of way contributes to people's physical health and mental well-being.*
- *Contrasts between the enclosed character around woodlands and sunken lanes, and open views to the Pevensey Levels and the South Downs provides visual interest and a sense of place.*
- *The harmonious small-scale landscape pattern of mixed farms, dense woodland and open views across the Pevensey Levels contribute to the strong scenic quality of the area, reflected in its partial designation as an AONB.*
- *The low density of settlement provides a sense of rural tranquillity and experience of dark skies."*

LUC's definition of LCA 1A 'Pevensey Levels' differs in that it includes the narrow area of levels along the East Stream, on the south side of Hooe including the southernmost tip of Ninfield parish, and also the narrow area upstream of Boreham Bridge (outside the SSSI).

The present Study of Ninfield Parish, based on local knowledge, attempts to fill the gaps between these other studies (which can be viewed on the Wealden District Council website under 'Planning Policy Evidence Base') by looking in more detail at the landscape specifically within Ninfield parish.

The Landscape of the Parish of Ninfield

The Topographical Dictionary of England 1848 provided the following description of Ninfield:- ***"…. the surface is varied and the scenery beautifully picturesque – the village is situated on the road from Lewes to Battle and Hastings and from its elevated site commands extensive views."*** The various 19th and early 20th century Directories gave similar descriptions. In 1937, the Victoria County History of Sussex also stated "*The village stands picturesquely on top of a hill and commands wide views."* The saved Wealden Local Plan 1998 (para 19.28.3) states that "*Ninfield lies in an elevated position along the crest of a ridge. The surrounding countryside is gently undulating and of high scenic quality."*

Distant view of Ninfield in the wider landscape from A271 on north side of Boreham Street (Standard Hill in centre distance is mainly outside the AONB but the foreground and Ashburnham to left are within it)

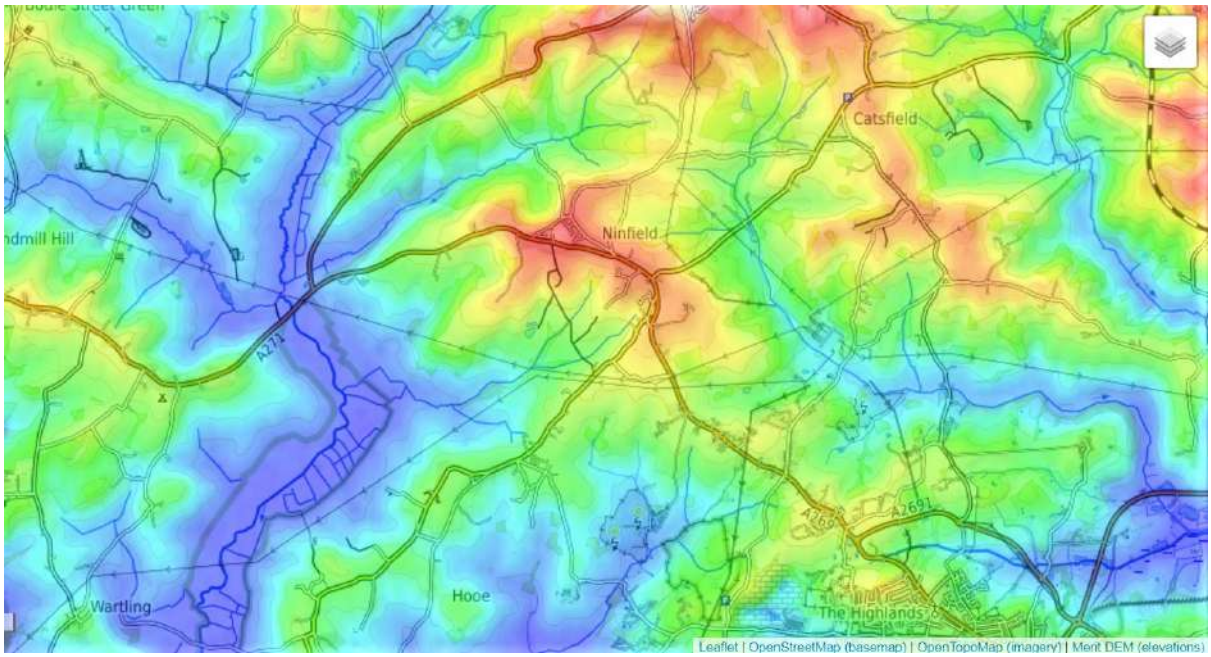
Topography

The landscape setting is probably the most important factor giving Ninfield its 'sense of place' and the most fundamental elements of the landscape are the topography and underlying geology. Historically, these have largely determined the other interconnected elements of the landscape, namely landcover (trees, vegetation, etc) and settlement (land use, buildings, roads, etc). Landform has given various areas of the parish each their own identifiable character. This Study deals with all these interrelated elements.

The parish high point of Standard Hill is 83m above sea level (AODN) and forms the western end of the almost flat-topped village ridge. Consultants Chris Blandford Assocs state that it is part of the east-west ridge stretching westwards through

Boreham Street (44m) and Windmill Hill (57m) to Herstmonceux (48m) and Cowbeech Hill (81m). It is severed from the rest of the ridge by the river valley of Wallers Haven/Ash Bourne. The river valley floodplain is only 3m above sea level and is a narrow northward extension of the east side of Pevensey Levels. The A271/ A269 runs along this ridge and follows the route of the historic turnpike road linking Lewes to Battle and Hastings. The Ninfield ridge can equally be seen as a protrusion from the higher ground of the much larger Heathfield-Battle-Hastings ridge which comes close to the northeast side of the parish. Marlpits Lane runs along a small ridge linking via Frickley Hollow to this larger ridge at Steven's Crouch (111m) in Catsfield parish.

The topography and landscape within the Parish of Ninfield are more complex than the areas identified in the above studies. The wider landscape in distant views appears gently undulating but at local level it contains much steeper slopes, notably on the edge of the high ground close to the village. It is significant that the ridge on which Ninfield village stands slopes markedly downhill into several distinct valleys, except to the south-east and south where it broadens out into a 'low plateau'. The majority of the parish boundary is formed by watercourses of varying size. The village ridge forms a watershed between the catchments of two main watercourses, Wallers Haven (historic *River Ashbourne*) to the west and Combe Haven (ancient *Asten Stream*) to the east.

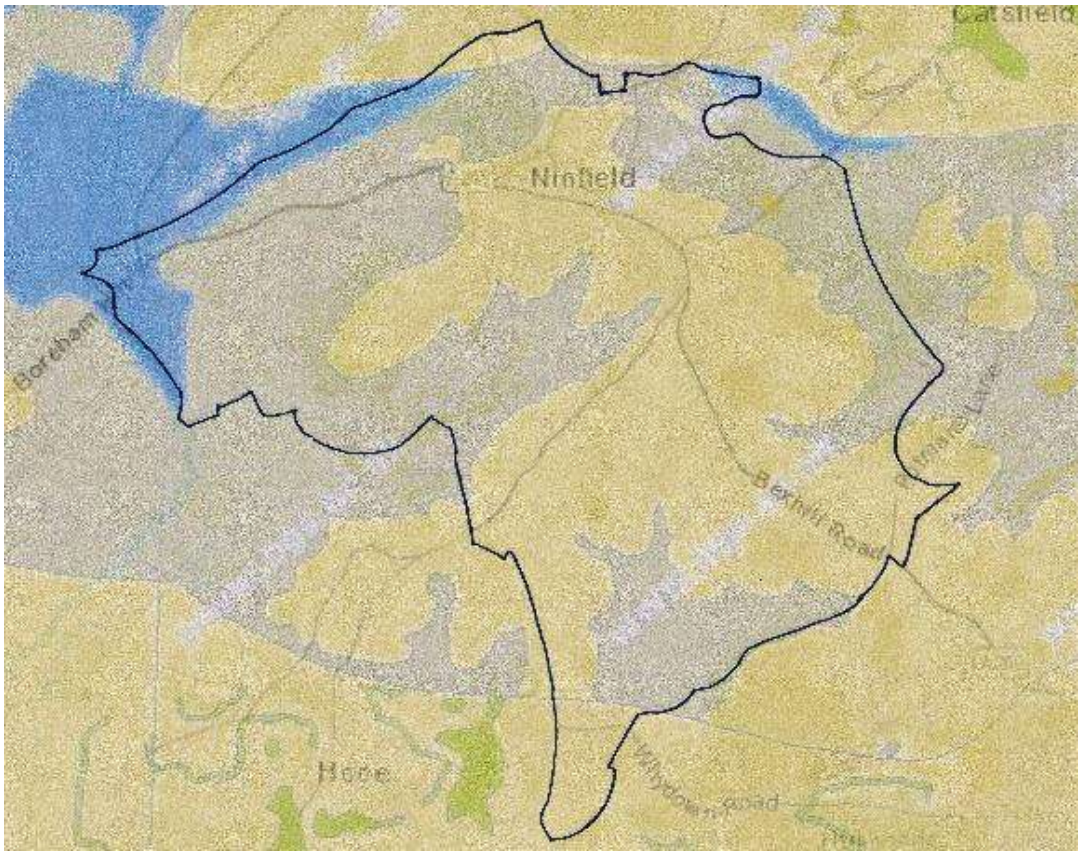


The distinctive landform is clearly shown by this extract from en-gb topographic-map.com

Geology

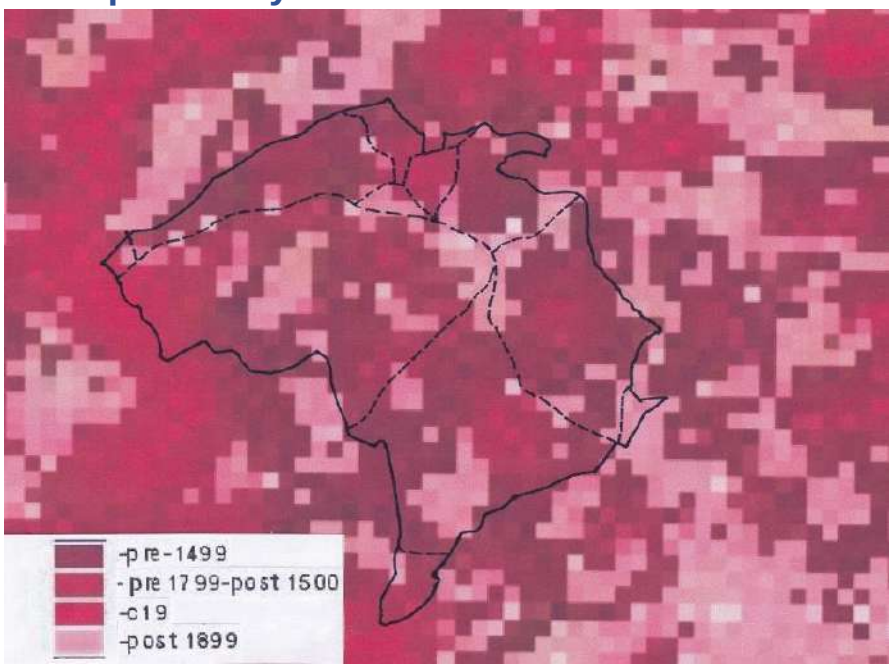
In common with neighbouring areas of the High Weald, Ninfield is composed of complex sedimentary layers of clay, mudstone, siltstone and sandstone, often termed the Hastings Beds. There are a number of fault lines and Ninfield parish lies between fault lines on the north and south sides, the ground having been displaced upwards and then eroded by the watercourses. As a result, the valleys mainly comprise of the older Wadhurst Clay with the overlying Tunbridge Wells Sand

formation on the higher parts of the parish including the ridge and low plateau. The Wadhurst Clay is dense and has very impeded drainage, leading to many ponds. Springs frequently emerge at its junction with the Tunbridge Wells Sands with the ground becoming saturated and sometimes unstable especially where there are steep slopes. The problem of saturated clay on the lower levels of the valleys explains the historic location of both settlement and routeways on the more open higher ground, avoiding the valleys where much ancient woodland survives on the lower and the steeper slopes. Ground conditions are variable, however, and even on the higher parts, drainage is still often impeded. Historically, the Wadhurst Clay provided the raw material for brickmaking by hand with a number of very small brickfields in Ninfield parish, none of which survive (although the Tarmac Topblock works occupies a former 1930s brickfield site).



Bedrock Geology: Tunbridge Wells Sand (yellow) overlays Wadhurst Clay (grey) which overlays Ashdown Sand (blue). Whydown Fault is on S side and Catsfield Stream Fault on N (extract from British Geological Survey) Parish boundary shown by solid black line

Landscape History

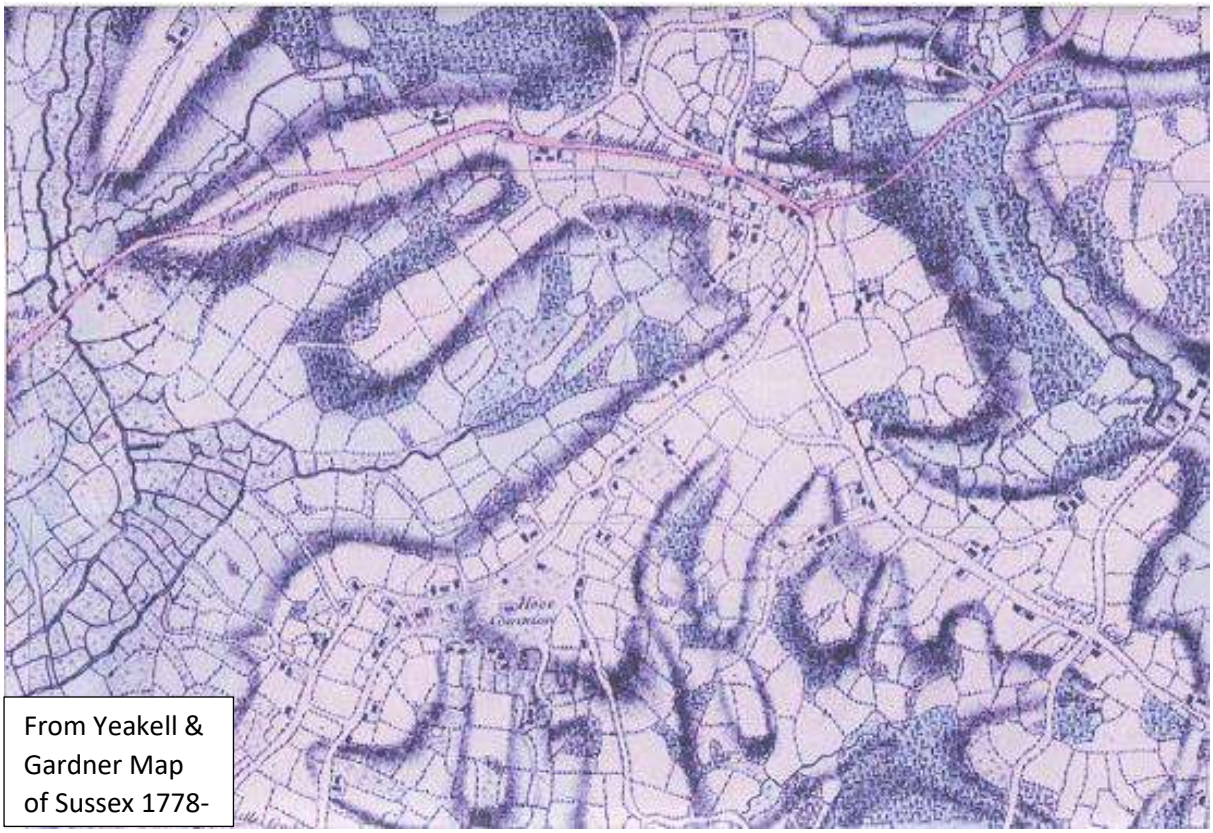


Landscape Time-Depth (from SHLC) Parish boundary shown by solid black line and roads by broken black lines

Major research is contained in the 5 volumes of the Sussex Historic Landscape Categorisation (SHLC) 2010 by Dr N Bannister for ESCC, WSCC and Historic England. As shown on the extract above, Ninfield parish, except for the part within Pevensey Levels, comprises of a particularly large amount of medieval (pre-1499) landscape but also with a mixture of post medieval (1500-1799), c19th and modern.

The Wealden Landscape and Settlement Character Assessment 2014 (by Chris Blandford Associates for Wealden District Council) includes a description of the setting of Ninfield village (under Section 4.31 and Figure 4.25 illustrational map, pages 83-5), referring to it as 'Remnant Historic Landscape'. It states that ancient fieldscapes (pre-1600) abut the majority of the settlement, with the principal type being regular piecemeal enclosure; with the remaining landscape predominantly a patchwork of historic (1600-1800) cohesive and aggregate assarts (ie. fields for cultivation formed by woodland clearance) and planned private enclosure. It also states that ancient woodland contributes to the historic setting, bounding the NW edge of the settlement. It identifies Standard Hill as a culturally-important landmark because of its association with William the Conqueror and the Battle of Hastings 1066.

The Yeakell & Gardner Map of Sussex (1778-1783), which clearly illustrates the basic topography, shows the intricate pattern of fields and the widely scattered buildings, as well as woodlands and routes. The Tithe Map and Apportionment Schedule (1841-44) provide a more precise and very detailed record of all individual fields and buildings. Apart from the development of the village, most of this historic pattern is still recognisable today.



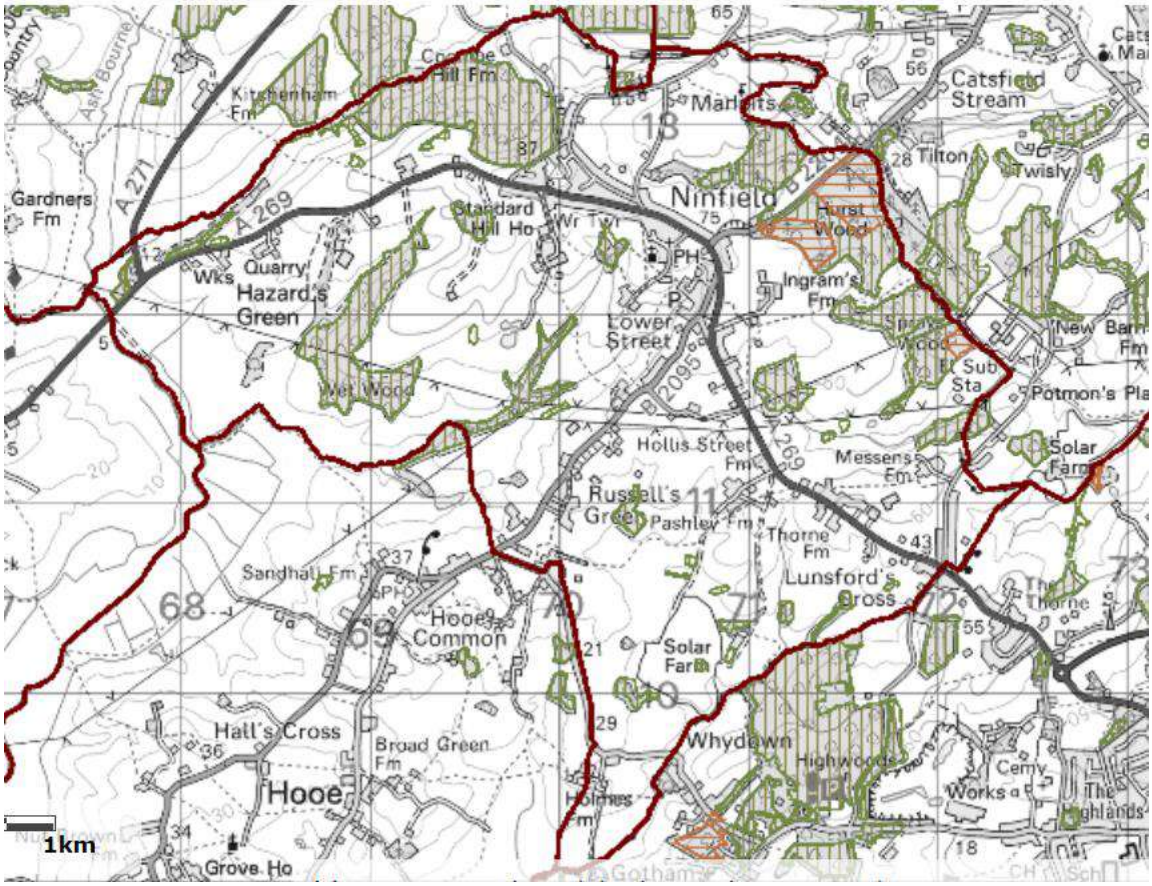
From Yeakell & Gardner Map of Sussex 1778-

Extracted from http://www.envf.port.ac.uk

Woods and Trees

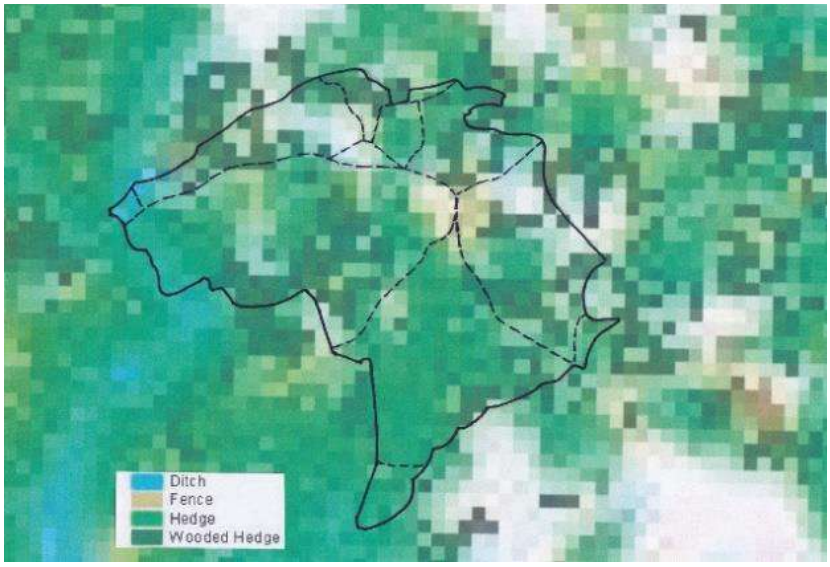
There is a large amount of woodland, most of it semi-natural ancient woodland (pre-1600), within Ninfield parish. The total area of ancient woodland in the parish is 152 hectares (375 acres) which is 14.3% of the total parish area of 10.6 sq km (2,619 acres). However, there is a marked difference between the various areas of Ninfield parish. In the north (30%) and east (27%), the proportion is very close to the AONB average of 28% whereas in the southwest it is about 12%, and in the south/southeast it is only about 4% (albeit with extensive ancient High Woods over the Bexhill boundary). The ancient woodland is concentrated in the valleys to the east, north and west of the village, with relatively little in the southern 'low plateau' area. This largely reflects the geology and topography with much of the woodland on the steeper and wetter slopes of Wadhurst Clay, not the Tunbridge Wells Sands of the higher areas.

The National Planning Policy Framework places great importance on ancient woodland and the habitat it provides by requiring no loss or deterioration unless there are very exceptional circumstances. The trees most commonly found are oak and hornbeam but many others are also found including sweet chestnut, aspen, alder, beech and ash. Traditionally, these were coppiced and still are in some of the woods, notably those of the Ashburnham Estate. Several of these ancient woods are also designated as Local Wildlife Sites (LWS).

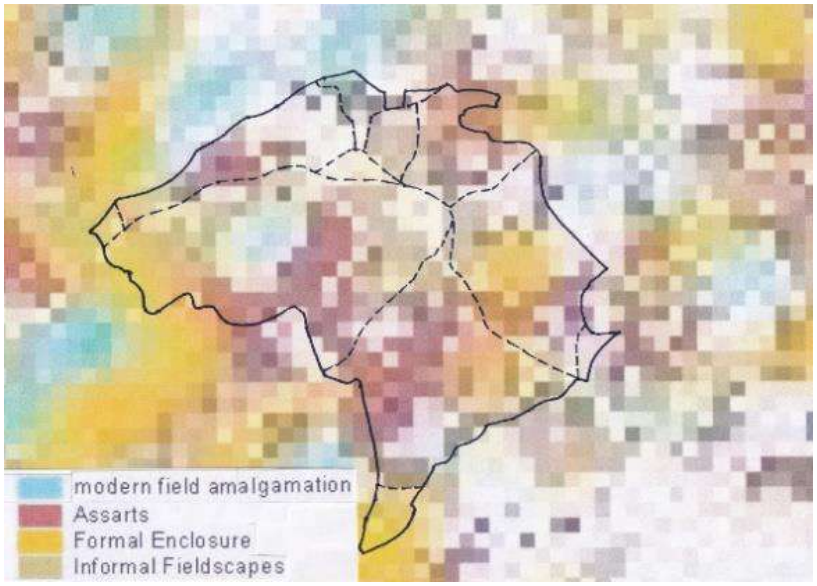


Ancient Woodland shown by vertical lines and ancient replanted woodland by horizontal lines (from Defra MAGIC)

There are also large numbers of trees along ancient field boundaries and watercourses often as shaws rather than just a line of trees. Many of these small fields were created from woodland clearance (assarts). Overall, these combine to give a wooded appearance to much of the Ninfield landscape particularly in the Moor Hall valley where the Wadhurst Clay results in seasonally poor drainage. This is particularly noticeable in the very wooded view of Standard Hill looking east across the Wallers Haven valley from the A271 at both Boreham Hill and the more impressive panorama from the A271 on the north side of Boreham Street which is partially across the southern edge of the AONB (see photograph).



Field boundary types (from SHLC)



Field types (from SHLC)

Agriculture

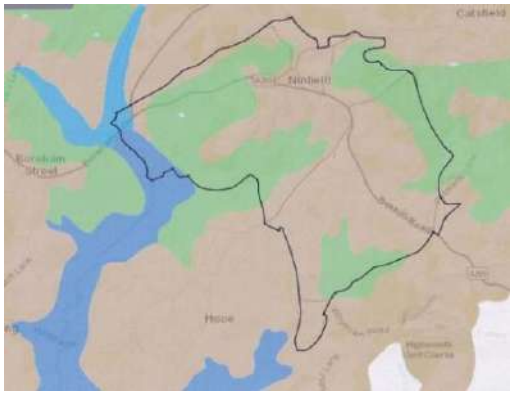
Clearly also has a major effect on the character and appearance of the landscape. There is nowadays much more pasture than arable land, whereas in the mid-19th century (from Tithe Map field descriptions) there was much more arable (mainly wheat and oats). The use of pasture has also changed in that in the early c20th it was mainly for dairy farming but nowadays on those areas farmed sheep grazing predominates except for cattle grazing on the Levels. Most of the arable fields are now on the higher ground of the ridges and low plateau, not the lower land within the valleys which is prone to wintertime waterlogging. However, arable farming on all but the east side of the parish is being discouraged by South East Water because of pollution from pesticides (within the drinking water catchment area of its Hazard Green waterworks).

Almost all the land in the parish is grade 3 (moderate to good fertility) with only a small area of grade 4 close to the Bexhill boundary. The surface soils are slightly

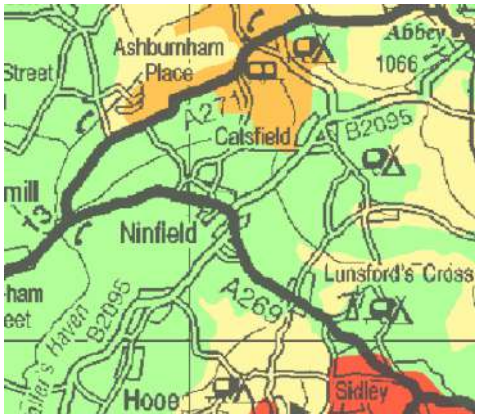
acid loamy and clayey soils (according to Cranfield University's soilscape) but the underlying geology affects their agricultural value within grade 3. The lower land within the valleys is more likely to be grade 3b as the impeded drainage caused by the dense Wadhurst Clay makes it less versatile. The higher ground of the ridges and plateau is more likely to be 3a as the underlying Tunbridge Wells Sands cause it to have less impeded drainage and moderate to high fertility, making it more versatile.

Farm diversification has taken place in recent times and some farms have benefitted from Countryside Stewardship Schemes and Woodland Grant Schemes which aim to target certain priority species (for birds, lapwing in the west half of the parish and turtle dove in the east half).

Over the last 50 years agriculture has declined and there is a considerable amount of farmland that no longer forms part of commercial farming operations. There has been increasing subdivision of ownership into small parcels whereas, by contrast, prior to the 1920s, almost all the land in the parish was owned by the vast estates of Ashburnham Place and Normanhurst Court (Catsfield), and to a very much lesser extent Moor Hall. Such subdivision has occurred especially where farm buildings have been converted to dwellings (sometimes initially as holiday cottages) or in a few recent cases replaced by new dwellings. This includes some oasthouses and granaries. These are the only surviving evidence of hop-growing, in small fields scattered over Ninfield parish, which was so important in the c19th reaching a peak in the 1870s but almost non-existent by 1900. A number of fields, especially around the village, are now no longer used for agriculture and are instead used for keeping horses and other animals such as alpacas, with resultant stables, shelters and other minor structures as well as sub-dividing fences, which, in some instances, have caused a deterioration in the appearance of those fields.



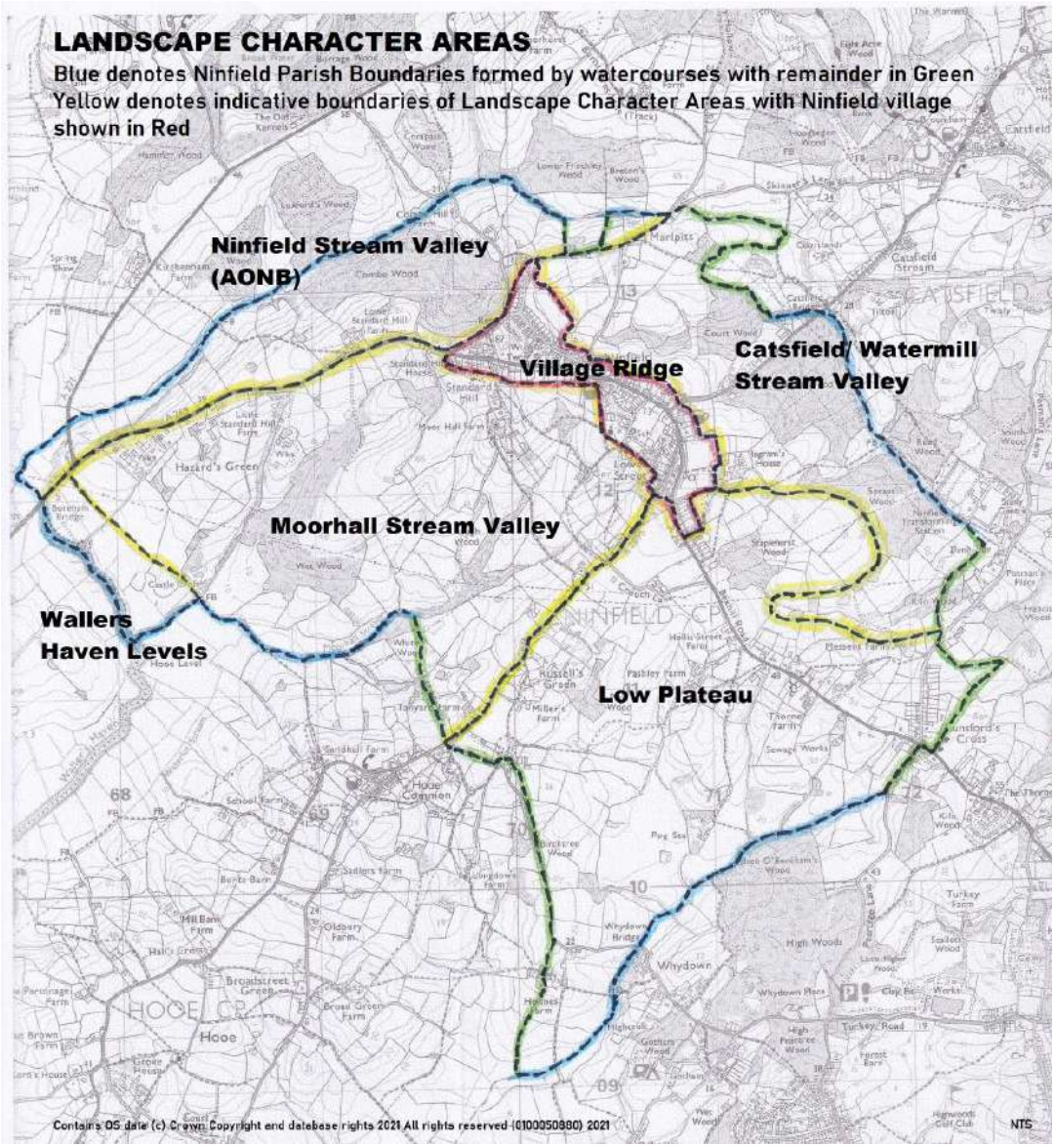
Soilscape correlates to geology and topography (cream)



Agricultural Land: Grade 3 (green) & 4

Landscape Character Areas within the Parish of Ninfield

The topography of Ninfield Parish is more complicated than described in the preceding sections. Tributaries of Wallers Haven (former River Ashbourne) and Combe Haven have tributaries which, although now insignificant in size, have also formed distinct valleys, each with their own recognisable character. The Moorhall Stream and the Ninfield Stream both drain to Wallers Haven whereas the Catsfield/Watermill Stream drains to Combe Haven. Thus, a number of recognisable Landscape Character Areas can be identified within Ninfield Parish, comprising each of these 3 valleys as well as the ridge-top village, low plateau and riverside levels.



Landscape Character Areas

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF CHARACTER AREAS

Ridge-top Village

Ninfield village is situated in the north part of the parish on a ridge of high ground which extends eastwards from Standard Hill. With a height above sea level of 82.7m or 271ft (AOD), it is the highest part of the parish (NB. the 87m high point on the Ordnance Survey refers to a pillar on the manmade covered reservoir). The ridge is virtually flat-topped, in effect a narrow plateau, but it slopes down very gradually south-eastwards. In the middle of the village (height 75m) it becomes very narrow owing to the small valleys which impinge on either side to create a 'pinch point' between Moons Hill on the northeast side and Church Wood on the southwest side. The ridge then widens and turns southwards where it slopes down further (to about 60-65m at Lower Street) and broadens out into a more extensive 'low plateau'. The latter is generally at about 50m or 150ft above sea level but slopes down to 40m in the direction of Lunsford Cross/Bexhill and Russell's Green/Hooe and lower in between these.

Ninfield from Hooe – looking across the valley of the Moorhall Stream, the numerous trees disguise most of the ridge-top village and church which are on the horizon but more open grassed slopes are also visible

Historically, as a very small, mainly agricultural settlement, Ninfield was scattered with only two recognisable clusters of buildings, one at what is now the middle of the village (known as Ninfield Green in the c19th, reflected in the modern street name 'The Green') and the other at Lower Street in the hollow at the south-eastern end of the ridge. In common with many other High Weald settlements, there is no evidence of any 'Green'. It appears to derive from the Anglo-Saxon 'grene' meaning 'grassy' and probably indicates location of the settlement in an area of pastures as opposed to woodland. In the 20th century, the village developed gradually by a process of infilling between the widely scattered buildings but it has never developed a central nucleus. By the 1980s, most of the flat-topped ridge above 70mAOD had become built-up apart from the Recreation Ground, Allotments and Reservoir sites and the fields northeast of The Green. In respect of the part below 70mAOD, where the ridge broadens and becomes less prominent as a feature, the most notable undeveloped part was the flat area at Ingrams Green which lies east of the wider stretch of the A269 (constructed as a by-pass to Lower Street in 1931). However, a development of 55 houses is under construction on this land.

The form of Ninfield as a settlement is unusual in that it is not only linear but, owing to the topography described above, has the loose shape of a ‘bow-tie’, with the middle at the narrowest point, thus dividing it into an eastern half where most of the facilities are located and a western half. This follows the shape of the ridge of high ground, with very little development of the surrounding slopes other than to a limited extent at Lower Street (and adjacent Smith Close). The High Weald Housing Design Guide 2019 identifies this type of ridge-top settlement pattern as characteristic of the High Weald.

Landscape Setting of village showing open high ground and/or exposed slopes (yellow); distinctive uphill roads with wooded banks (brown dashes); ancient woodland (solid green); public footpaths (dark green lines) and viewpoints (red arrows)

The development that has taken place, mainly in the 1930s and 1950-1980, particularly along the south side of the A269 (High Street/Standard Hill), has obstructed the panoramic view southwards from this road. Views northwards towards the AONB have also been obstructed by houses and bungalows along the north side of The Green (A269), Manchester Road and the northwest side of Marlpits Lane. Apart from views from the western slope of Standard Hill (A269), public views from the vicinity of the village over the wider countryside are now obtained almost entirely from the network of footpaths on the southwestern side of the village (see Moorhall Stream valley).

Despite the ridge-top location and the increase in size of the village, however, it does not have a great effect on the wider landscape. This is due not only to the relatively low density, with few large buildings, but also to the large number of trees, including many on garden boundaries, that have grown in recent years and created a mainly ‘soft’ edge to the village. In fact, old photographs tend to indicate that buildings (including the former windmill demolished in 1937) were historically much more visible in the wider landscape. The ancient Church, which once had a small broach spire, although adjacent to open fields on the southwestern slope of the ridge, is now

hidden by the group of churchyard trees, including pines, which are prominent in the landscape. Even the mid-c20th water tower (with its telecomms antennae) on the reservoir site is shielded by the surrounding conifers so that it does not affect views of the village from most directions other than the north where it is just discernible.

View from Church Lane (in front of churchyard) down FP3A/B towards Church Barn Farm with the South Downs in distance

A particularly notable feature of the uphill approaches to the village ridge from the north and northeast along the B2204 Catsfield Road and the minor roads (Moons Hill and Combe Hill) is the abrupt change in character from unspoilt wooded banks with a very natural appearance to the built-up village. The approach up Standard Hill from the west is similar but has a more gradual transition, as does the footpath up Church Lane from the southwest..

A separate **Village Character Assessment** has been undertaken. This describes in detail 8 character areas within the village built-up area, plus the small built-up area at Potmans Lane (Lunsford Cross). This assessment identifies a number of built-environment character types which can be summarised as follows:-

> ***Lower Street and The Green/High Street (east)/Manchester Road (southeast) –*** Comprises the 2 main historic parts of the village with many of the historic buildings (some Grade II listed) dating from the 17th, 18th and early 19th centuries. These are interspersed with buildings of all subsequent periods from Victorian to late c20th. Most buildings are detached and of individual design but there are some terraces of 3 cottages and some semi-detached houses. Generally, the area has an informal layout of medium density but Lower Street has a greater density owing to a row of closely positioned Victorian cottages on its western side, north of the more historic listed cottages. In High Street, west of the listed and other historic buildings at the junction with The Green, a line of Edwardian villa-type houses and some

of Arts & Crafts influence are noteworthy features of the street scene. Trees, including Scots pines (mainly associated with the historic buildings including at the junction with Church Lane where the listed stocks/whipping post is located) are notable features, including a line of pollarded limes in front of Church Farmhouse in Manchester Road. Hedges are also a common feature of the street scene but there are also some picket and other fences and some older buildings have brick front boundary walls. Building materials in these areas vary but are predominantly brick (either red or dark multi-stock, some with grey headers) often with tile hanging above (traditionally clay peg tiles but also modern concrete imitations). Roof tiles are predominantly plain clay or concrete tiles, with a number of barn-hip roofs both historic and modern. There are a couple of white-painted weatherboarded cottages. These 2 areas contain community facilities comprising the Blacksmiths Inn, which acts as a focal point, doctor's surgery and the small Village Stores/ PO. These 2 areas have heritage value and their character needs to be conserved and enhanced, with careful attention given to development affecting the setting of the historic buildings (listed and unlisted).

Church Lane – Comprises the small medieval Church (listed Grade I) with its graveyard, the large original Rectory, the extended C of E Primary School, allotments, Recreation Ground with its replacement Sports Pavilion, Reading Room, extended Methodist Church and a number of houses dating from late Victorian to modern. Characterised by the large grassed open space and by wooded grounds with numerous hedges and trees including Scots pine and churchyard yew trees (one believed to be over 700 years old). Building materials are mainly red or dark multi-stock brick and plain clay roof tiles. The row of 1928 semi-detached houses overlooking the Recreation Ground has traditional clay tile-hanging. This is also an area of heritage value needing to be conserved and enhanced. Additionally, it forms a green wedge which is specifically excluded from the village Development Area in the Wealden Local Plan 1998 because its open and loose-knit character links the village to the countryside.

Listed Grade I medieval Church of St Mary the Virgin, in wooded churchyard

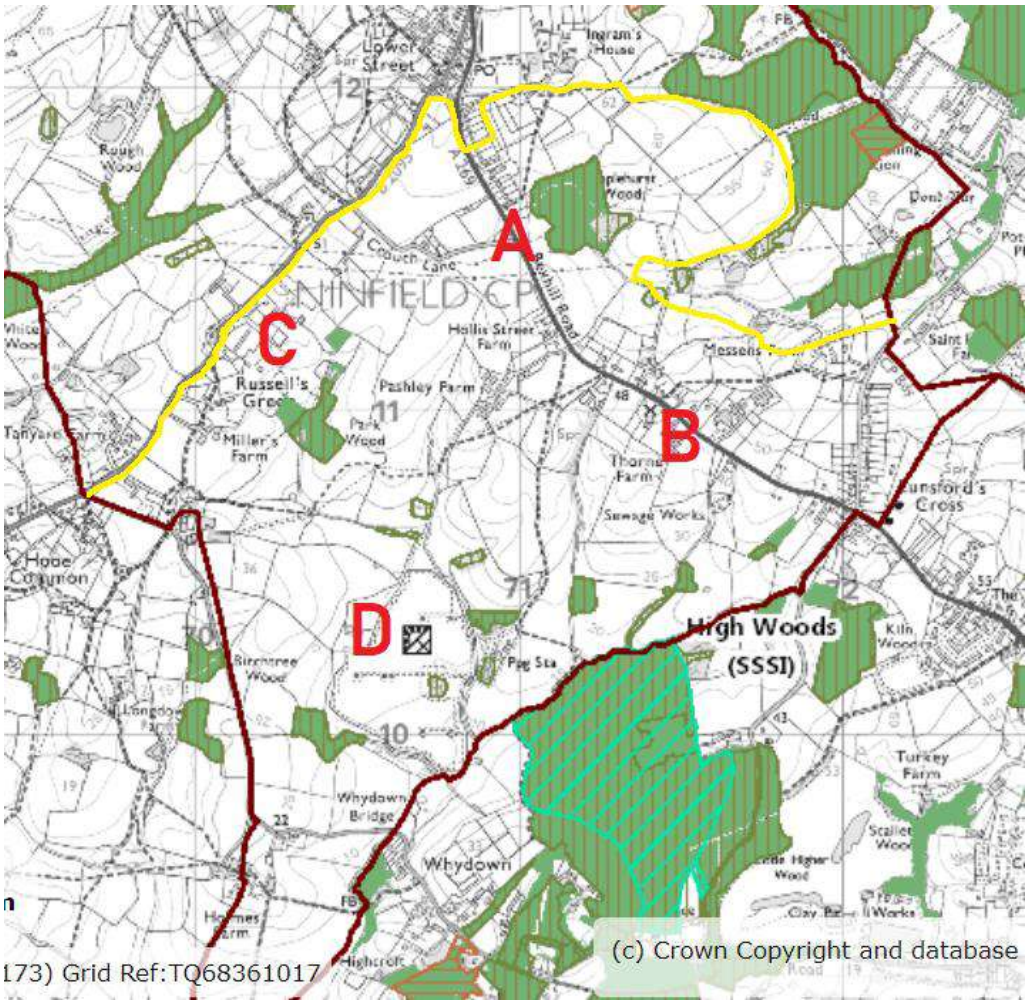
Manchester Road (northwest), Coombe Shaw, Millfield, Downs View, Stocks Meadow and Smith Close – These areas (in different parts of the village) include 4 small estates and are characterised by repetition of standard or similar house types typical of the style of the period, mainly 1960-70s. Their design and layout lack any local character, with concrete roof and tile hanging except for Stocks Meadow which has clay tile-hanging. Boarding is tongued and grooved, not traditional shiplap weatherboarding. Densities are medium but with some higher densities owing to the inclusion of terraced houses and flats. Downs View and Coombe Shaw have open-plan layouts and include parking/garages within individual curtilages. The others include front gardens enclosed by hedges, and in the case of Millfield a communal parking/garage compound which, possibly owing to lack of surveillance, is under-used and has resulted in on-street parking with damage to verges.

Standard Hill, High Street (west), Standard Hill Close, Coombe Lane, Marlpits Lane (south), Bexhill Road – Comprises low density areas, mainly ribbon development, with mostly detached houses and bungalows of individual design and periods but mainly 1930s-1960s. Some in High Street are distinctive architect-designed, most are typical of their period. They are predominantly set well back on large plots with numerous trees, shrubs and hedges, screening the buildings to varying degrees and creating a semi-rural appearance, with a 'soft' edge to the countryside. Grass verges, including wildflower verges, of varying width are notable. Grade II* Standard Hill House, the largest listed building in Ninfield, is a particularly important feature standing at the western extremity of this area, next to a copse.
The area at the mini-roundabout junction of A269 Bexhill Road with B2204 Catsfield Road and The Green differs in that it has several commercial/business premises with parking areas, including the Kings Arms restaurant/public house which forms a visual feature at the approach to the village from Catsfield Road, and the Ninfield Service Station with convenience store and adjacent tyre-fitting depot. There is also a former garage site now called 5 Oak Business Park on A269 Bexhill Road towards the village edge with a carwash and some small businesses in generally poor quality buildings.

Within close proximity of the village but only affecting its setting to a very limited degree are some areas containing sporadically-sited dwellings. These areas are at **Ingrams Farm, Moor Hall Drive, Standard Hill (west slope), Church Lane (southwest), Lower Street (south edge), Combe Hill (southeast edge), Moons Hill and Marlpits Lane.** These do not form part of the village built-up area and do not constitute recognisable settlements in their own right. They are dispersed in character and separated from the village by small gaps of countryside of varying size. Many of these dwellings are set in secluded positions, some in relatively large grounds. With few exceptions, they are predominantly concealed by numerous trees and tall hedges thereby making their character essentially rural and part of the countryside rather than the village. They range from historic buildings (some

listed), weatherboarded cottages and converted farm buildings to modern houses built in a Wealden Hall style on the site of former Moor Hall. These areas are consequently described under the following Countryside character areas.

Low Plateau (including Lunsford Cross and Russell's Green)



Low Plateau showing Parish boundary (red line), indicative Character Area boundary (yellow line) and sub-areas by red letters. Also, deciduous Woodland in green (with Ancient & semi-natural woodland shown with vertical lines) (extract from DEFRA Magic website)

This Character Area extends from the A269 area on the east side to the B2095 on the west side and includes the area known as Russell's Green and the small settlement of Lunsford Cross. This area is predominantly gently undulating countryside with some almost flat areas but has slopes on the upper edge of the steeper valleys to either side (NW and NE) and to the shallower valley to the south. The latter lies between the Bexhill Road ridge on the east side and the Hooe ridge on the west side. Within Ninfield parish, it is the most significant agricultural area,

both historically and currently, with many arable fields, some replanned as larger and more regular fields. There are relatively few woods, several wooded areas having been cleared probably as recently as the 1940s. The total extent of ancient semi-natural woodland within this area is only 13 hectares, predominantly in Staplehurst Wood (5.5 hectares) and Park Wood (2.3 hectares). Although there is generally a less intricate pattern of small fields than elsewhere, a medieval field pattern still exists in much of the area. There are a considerable number of historic farmsteads, with a significant number of listed farmhouses and barns, albeit most converted to dwellings and no longer tied to the farms. To the southeast, over the Bexhill boundary, are the extensive High Woods (35mAOD) which are visible over a wide area.

A. Bexhill Road and Ingrams Green area: This refers to the area alongside the busy A269 from Crouch Lane northwards. There is a ribbon of mainly 1930s houses along the east side together with a former garage and petrol station (now called 5 Oak business site). The character of this southern approach to the village, whilst pleasantly attractive, is much less distinctive and markedly different from the other approaches. It is on a much more gradual slope and includes a wider stretch of road built as a by-pass to Lower Street in 1931 with a wide grass verge on the west side and a belt of trees planted on the east side. The area on the east side, behind the trees, is called Ingrams Green and the large flat field (allotments until about 1930) has planning permission for 55 houses (now being implemented). The outline application was accompanied by a very detailed landscape impact assessment which concluded most of the site, enclosed by trees, to have low-medium sensitivity to change. SW of this is a smaller disused field also surrounded by trees, formerly occupied by a poultry shed, on which another 9 houses have been permitted. These fields are crossed by footpath FP14A. Ingrams Farm (ancient *Ingeram* or *Yngrames*) to the east is an historic former farmstead on ESCC HER, its name derived from holders of the land going back to the c13th. It comprises the Grade II listed Ingrams Farmhouse, partly c17th red brick/stucco, and the Grade II listed c18th red brick/weatherboarded Oak Barn, now a separate dwelling. There are also other dwellings including Lily Pond Dairy. An unspoilt rural area of ancient irregular flat fields used for grazing lie further east, surrounded by hedges with prominent oak trees, and including ponds. Further eastwards the land slopes down to the woods in the Catsfield Stream valley where there was a c19th rifle range (connected with the former Drill Hall). Southeast of these, the fields are larger and rectangular, no longer medieval in layout.

Fields east of Ingrams Farmhouse from FP14B looking east, past a pond

Directly south of Ingrams Green, behind the Memorial Hall (former Drill Hall) and a belt of trees behind houses fronting Bexhill Road, are two flat fields spoilt by numerous subdividing fences and other paraphernalia associated with keeping horses. South of these is another grassed field sloping down to the ancient woodland of Staplehurst Wood (historic Mapplehurst Wood), which lies in a small tributary valley. Footpath FP15 runs across this field lying directly to the rear of the ribbon of houses and spoilt by the rear view of the former garage site. This is on a raised area and unscreened (now a car wash plus equestrian shop and other businesses which the owners have called 5 Oak Business Park).

Field behind Bexhill Road from FP15 looking southwest towards 5 Oak Business Site

On the opposite (west) side of the A269 is Crouch Field (also called 20 acre field), a very large almost flat arable field about 2m above road level and surrounded by hedges and grassed margins. It has a long, neat hedge and

grassed bank facing the A269, opposite the ribbon of houses. The power lines on large pylons are dominant in some views south, including from this field, and the South Downs can be seen in the far distance. The half of this field nearest the A269, despite its relative prominence, had been previously identified as a development site for 45 houses by the planning authority in their withdrawn Wealden Local Plan 2019 mainly because of its good accessibility and flat surface. As part of the Strategic Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment (SHELAA) process, it was assessed for Wealden District Council by Chris Blandford Associates as:-

Continuity: Ancient
Visibility: High
Tree Cover: Open
Landscape Sensitivity: High
Landscape Value: Moderate
Landscape Capacity: Moderate.

In 2021, Wealden District Council resolved to permit (subject to legal agreement) an outline planning application for up to 65 dwellings on the east half of Crouch Field. The indicative layout showed the houses on the centre-northern part of the site and the southern part as open area with extensive tree planting.

Crouch Field (wheat field with grass margins) from Bexhill Road access looking southwest

B. Ninfield Road and Lunsford Cross area: This refers to the area alongside the A269 continuing south-eastwards to the Bexhill boundary (NB. It has a postal address as Ninfield Road, Bexhill, even though it is in Ninfield parish). With the most heavily-trafficked route and a very gently undulating landform, it gives the countryside a much less distinctive character than elsewhere in the parish. The A269 has narrow grass verges. With some exceptions, roadside hedges with trees prevent views over the countryside from the road. Westwards, however, away from the main road, it is more undulating with a general downward southerly slope and a more remote feel

as there are no dwellings other than at Pashley Farm. The open landscape enables wide views to the South Downs and High Woods from footpaths in the Pashley Farm area. Eastwards, it is also undulating away from the road. There are a number of sporadic dwellings along the A269, forming a very loose group in the vicinity of Thorne Farm. Their visual impact is limited because they are largely concealed behind hedges and trees and they are too dispersed to form what could be recognised as a settlement. These range from typical 1930s chalet bungalows and a more substantial mock Tudor house to historic cottages and farmsteads including a former windmill and oasthouses.

The most significant historic buildings are Grade II* listed Hollis Street Farmhouse, an impressive c17th house refaced with red brick in the c18th. On its southern side is Grade II listed c18th Hollis Street Barn which has been converted to a house.
The private access road serving these properties continues about 250m further south-westwards to Grade II listed Pashley Farmhouse, which is a c17th or earlier timber-framed house. It has been partly refaced with red brick, tile and slate hanging. There are a few small businesses here that are located in former farm buildings. Some of the farm buildings are historic and include an oasthouse with granary. Pashley Farm (ancient *Passeleye*) was a medieval farmstead and this together with Hollis Street Farm (ancient *Holestrete*) is an ESCC archaeological notification area.

Pashley Farm

Thorne Farm on the A269 is also a medieval farmstead recorded in the c13th but was redeveloped in the c19th. It has the surviving walls of a smock windmill and an oasthouse, both now within separate residential properties. Opposite are early 19th (possibly earlier) Chimney Cottage and Blackthorne (Thorn House on 1844 Tithe Map). Just southeast of this is Down Barn Farm, a prominent industrial site on rising ground with little roadside screening

except on the north side. It was originally a poultry farm and is now occupied by Skinners Sheds and a reclamation yard. Nearby there are some sporadic houses and a short roadway leading down to the small Lunsford Cross Wastewater works.

Further south-eastwards, the A269 has 40mph road speed limit signs bearing the name **Lunsford Cross**. The place name Lunsford's Cross is shown on the 1724 Richard Budgen map of Sussex and the 1783 Yeakell & Gardner map and the earliest record appears to be 1579 in a document referring to the King's highway from Ninfield Stocks to Lunsforde Cross (in the ESCC archives). The place name seems to refer to the crossroads as there was no recognisable settlement until the 1930s.
On the south side of the A269 is early-mid c19th Lunsford Cross Farm, with its largely unaltered house and barn plus semi-derelict later buildings with a generally ramshackle appearance, and there is a former market garden site opposite. Next to the farm, on the corner of the road junction, are historic white weatherboarded No's 1 & 2 Lunsford Cross Cottages. Just over the boundary in Bexhill, behind a historic brick wall, is c19th Lunsford House (now called Lunsford Manor and subdivided). South-eastwards along the A269, beyond Lunsford Cross, there is a tiny gap of countryside before reaching the Bexhill boundary with another ribbon of houses and more extensive development beyond in the vicinity of The Thorne and Mount Pleasant Garage.
At the crossroads, the northerly road Potmans Lane has a ribbon on both sides of 50 interwar houses and bungalows (described separately as a built-up Character Area). These are on a relatively flat ground at a height of about 45mAOD. There is a recent permission for 13 more houses opposite the part where the ribbon is only on one side of the road. Permission was granted because, although outside any defined development area, the site was considered by the planning authority to be in a settlement and sustainably located on the edge of Bexhill. Under the NPPF requirement for a 5 year land supply, there were concluded to be no sound reasons to outweigh the tilted balance in favour of new housing. An application for a further 6 houses was refused and dismissed on appeal in 2019.
Messens Farmhouse, set back to the W, is a distinctive c19th house with attached single-storey cottage, and is associated with land and buildings now used for keeping horses. It is adjoined to the W by a barn converted to a dwelling. Archaeological investigation reveals Messens (ancient *Mewesyn*) to have been a medieval farmstead. A public footpath (FP16) from here cuts across fields (called High Knows on the 1844 Tithe Map), close to the southern edge of a small valley, to the A269 next to Blackthorne Cottages.

The southerly road, Peartree Lane, is very narrow, hemmed in between high banks with hedges. It passes Little Cottage and Brook Cottage, two c19th dwellings, before descending further, over the Bexhill boundary, past an

unsightly former brickworks site, into High Woods (a designated SSSI) which occupies rising ground.

The area over the parish boundary, to the south and west of The Thorne, has been assessed in the past by Rother District Council as a possible area for the expansion of Bexhill. However, other sites were chosen in preference on the south side of the new North Bexhill Access Road. The area adjacent to Peartree Lane, about 250m from the Ninfield boundary, was described as "*Two grazing fields in remote countryside on the north side of a ridge – there are long open views to the NW which makes it very exposed to open countryside. Quality: Good; Value and Sensitivity: High*". In the Rother 'Development and Site Allocations Local Plan – Options and Preferred Options 2017', Rother DC concluded that residential development on the south side of the ridge would "*result in coalescence with The Thorne and Lunsford Cross, and inappropriate urban creep into the more rural approach to the town."*

C. Hooe Road and Russell's Green Area: The B2095 Hooe Road has a totally different character from the A269 being relatively narrow and winding, with a number of blind bends hemmed in by tall hedges. Grass verges are very narrow on the straighter stretches and non-existent on the bends. Although there is significant traffic, it has a very rural character with the feeling of a remote backwater.
On the edge of Ninfield village, it runs along the upper edge of the SE side slope of the Moorhall valley, giving a scenic view northwest which is described under that section. This part has grass verges and, as it curves into the village, there are silver birch trees presenting an attractive scene. Three footpaths (FP2, 3C and 8B) emerge from the valley onto the B2095 but it is far from conducive to use by pedestrians owing to the absence of continuous verges. On the opposite side, close to the village edge, is early c20th Red House above road level and concealed behind a dense hedge and trees. Southwards, a short distance along Crouch Lane, is Headstart School (for up to 30 children with learning difficulties) in modern buildings on a site enclosed by security fencing, with a small market garden/nursery called Crouch Farm on the corner. Major power lines on pylons cross this area.

Further south is **Russell's Green**. It occupies relatively flat ground at a height of about 45mAOD. It is described on ESCC HER as a medieval hamlet. There is no green as such and it probably indicates pastoral surroundings. The name is not shown on c18th maps but appears in regular use from the early c19th. It can be traced back to a large medieval farmstead called *Russelleslond* in the c13th. In the mid-late c19th, Russell's Green had a significant number of entries in the various Directories of the time. Unlike Ninfield Green and Lower Street, however, the number of buildings at Russell's Green has hardly increased, although some have been replaced. Nowadays, particularly because the buildings are so dispersed and concealed

behind tall hedges and numerous trees, it is only recognisable as an area rather than a settlement notwithstanding the road name signs. Market gardening and fruit growing used to be significant, with orchards and some nurseries, but this is no longer the case.

At the north end, Little Park is a distinctive listed Grade II early c19th country house with a converted coach house. It is hidden from public view, apart from its former late c19th Lodge adjoining the road. The now wooded grounds at the front were referred to as Pleasure Grounds on the 1844 Tithe Map (and were once used as the cricket pitch before the village recreation ground in Church Lane was constructed in the 1920s).
South of this is a modern house with grounds known as Little Park Farm. The Defra Magic website shows this property to have some traditional orchards, regarded as a priority habitat, but these no longer exist. Permission was granted in 1989 to use part of what was then called Little Park Fruit Farm as a burial site for domestic pets and a subsequent permission in 2000 was granted for an extension to the pet cemetery and a chapel of rest (Happy Hunting Grounds Pet Cemetery).
Southwards is late c19th Park Cottage, then a c19th dwelling (converted from the Sunday School and including the site of the 1832 Weslyan Chapel destroyed in WW2), followed by The Laurels, an extended early c19th cottage.
Opposite, downhill behind an open area with a wide access, is a site called Martins Farm/Woodland View (former Paul's nursery) with modern agricultural buildings, one now used by a shopfitting business, and a mobile home with permission for replacement with a new single-storey dwelling.
On the bend to the south, there is a single-storey weatherboarded dwelling, then a modern house. This is followed by a pair of attached late c18th cottages one of which is Grade II listed (South Cottage now called Samburu) and the other a postwar rebuild after bomb damage (North Cottage).
Opposite there is a modern house on the former Lime Tree Nursery site and, on the corner, an early c19th white weatherboarded slate-roofed cottage called the Clock House. Between these, a very narrow lane (now footpath FP20A but shown on the 1783 map as a road) branches off to the SW serving a couple of other houses, behind a house and a single-storey dwelling on the main road. An application for 3 houses here, adjoining Mountfield Lodge, was refused and dismissed on appeal in 2019 on grounds of being outside a settlement and detrimental to the character and appearance of this rural area.
South of these, well back from the road, is a substantial but unlisted early c19th country house called Drayton Lodge (formerly The Mellands and once called Villa Ucelli) with former outbuildings now a separate dwelling called Little Drayton. A tall round-headed pine tree is a prominent landmark. Very close to these is Millers Farmhouse, listed Grade II as probably c17th and therefore likely to be the oldest surviving most unaltered building in the area. It is partly weatherboarded. The adjacent corrugated tin farm buildings are ruinous.

Park Wood, just to the east, is the only significant remaining ancient woodland in this area although it is adjoined by smaller areas of other deciduous woodland merging with trees on the properties at Russell's Green.

Drayton Lodge with prominent pine tree and listed Millers Farmhouse to right

The character of the area changes markedly southwards between here and nearby Hooe. The B2095 becomes straighter and has grass verges. It becomes much more open with maintained hedges and far fewer trees, enabling some long views across to the north side of the Moorhall valley and Standard Hill. To some extent, the views are marred by pylons.

The most significant building is Grade II* listed Tanyard House, a fine c18th house with an impressive frontage bounded by a low front wall with c18th iron railings (separately listed). Set further back on the south side is Grade II listed Tanyard Barn, now a separate dwelling, partially c16th but re-roofed and clad in the c18th and altered in the c19th. It was associated with a tannery here until 1886, with a series of tanning pits at the head of the tiny Tanyard Stream flowing down a little valley with ponds and over the Hooe boundary to the Moorhall Stream. There are now neighbouring farm buildings and 3 dwellings including a new contemporary house on the site of an asbestos cement building (formerly Tanyard Fruit Farm). Tanyard Farm is an ESCC archaeological notification area and was called Stollards Farm on the 1844 Tithe Map.

Tanyard House Grade II*

Opposite is Hope Cottage, an early c19th dwelling unsympathetically altered and hemmed in by poor quality buildings. This site has a number of businesses including a farmshop with café, a stone merchants, and a specialist garden centre with polytunnels (Athelas Plants) which now has its own access off Straight Lane.

D. Southern area: This is accessed off the B2095 from Straight Lane/ Whydown Road, a narrow country lane with banks and hedges, which runs southeast, then southwards along a ridge. It has an undulating surface and slopes down south-eastwards to watercourses draining to the Barnhorne/East Stream. Over the western boundary into Hooe, there are other watercourses (where the Hooe Wastewater Treatment Works serving Ninfield and Hooe is situated). The fields are surrounded mainly by lower, well-maintained hedges, giving it an almost downland character (probably hence the name of nearby Whydown over the boundary in Bexhill). There are a few small, scattered areas of ancient woodland and the field pattern is partially ancient.

A short distance along Straight Lane, straddling the Hooe parish boundary, is Akehurst Farmhouse (formerly called Dunks Farm, later Outside Farm), listed Grade II as probably c17th. The c18th Oasthouse and granary to the rear are separately listed Grade II and now converted to a dwelling. The complex of modern farm buildings on the east side is called Birchington Farm. Public footpath FP20B links to Russell's Green across the edge of the flat fields plus a connecting longer-distance path FP19A/B across the undulating fields to Pashley Farm and the A269.

Looking east from FP20 N of Akehurst Farm towards High Woods with Park Wood on left

The mainly undulating farmland of Pashley Farm extends southwards down some more pronounced slopes into this area, almost concealing a virtually flat part of it (about 15 hectares) of grade 4 quality. With just a gentle southerly slope, it has been used to construct the 11.5MW **Pashley Solar Farm**. This is on the west side of the very small remnant of Sweet Willow Wood, formerly much more extensive. The South East Water borehole and pumping station adjoin to the northeast. The neighbouring part of Bexhill has extensive ancient woodlands on rising ground (to 35mAOD), which are the dominant natural landscape feature of the area, the main one being High Woods (designated as an SSSI). It has public access to a network of footpaths and serves as a recreation area. FP18A/B runs from these woods northwards across the undulating fields to Pashley and Hollis Street Farms on the A269.

Looking S from FP18 near Pashley Farm over southern part of low plateau to High Woods with solar farm in hollow and South Downs in distance

Where Whydown Road turns eastwards, a geological fault line called the Whydown Fault runs E-W across the southernmost part of the parish and beyond. A small ridge, with watercourses either side, becomes narrower southwards, finishing at the southern tip of the parish where a number of watercourses converge in an area of levels. These continue westwards to Pevensey Levels, separating Hooe from Bexhill. In the centre of the ridge end, Holmes Farm is a mid c19th farmstead (on ESCC HER) with a house and large, modern buildings, served by a private access road. It straddles the N-S parish boundary with Hooe. There are former farm cottages on Whydown Road which continues downhill eastwards and crosses a tiny stream (the parish boundary with Bexhill). Beyond this is the loosely built-up area on higher ground known as Whydown, with Whydown hill (33mAOD) on the northeast side.

The relatively low-lying area known as Picknill Green/Gotham, to the southeast of Holmes Farm, outside but adjoining the parish boundary, was assessed in 2008 by Rother District Council as a possible area for the residential expansion of Bexhill. However, other sites were chosen in preference. It was described as transitional between enclosed fields to the east and open levels to the west, with more sense of remoteness westwards. The retention of the open character and views from the area were concluded as most important.

Listed Buildings

Ingrams Farmhouse, Ingrams Green – Grade II

The Oak Barn, Ingrams Green – Grade II

Hollis Street Farmhouse, Ninfield Road – Grade II*

Hollis Street Barn – Grade II

Pashley Farmhouse, Ninfield Road – Grade II

Tanyard House, Hooe Road – Grade II*

Tanyard Barn, Hooe Road – Grade II

Little Park, Hooe Road – Grade II

South Cottage (Samburu), Hooe Road – Grade II

Millers Farmhouse, Hooe Road – Grade II

Akehurst Farmhouse, Straight Lane – Grade II

Akehurst Oast, Straight Lane – Grade II

Other buildings worthy of consideration for inclusion on a Local Heritage List

Thorne Oast, Ninfield Road – mid-c19th converted oasthouse and building – on ESCC HER as c19th redevelopment of medieval farmstead

Thorne Mill, Ninfield Road – c1870 smock mill base converted to dwelling with former granary, millhouse and bakery on ESCC HER

Blackthorne, Ninfield Road – early c19th formerly called Thorn House

Lunsford Cross Farm, Ninfield Road – early-mid c19th house and barn on ESCC HER

Lunsford Cross Cottages, Ninfield Road – pair of early c19th white weatherboarded cottages

Messens Farmhouse, Potmans Lane – on ESCC HER as mid-c19th redevelopment of medieval farmstead

The Old Sunday School, Hooe Road – converted to a dwelling (with the site of the 1832 Weslyan chapel within its curtilage)

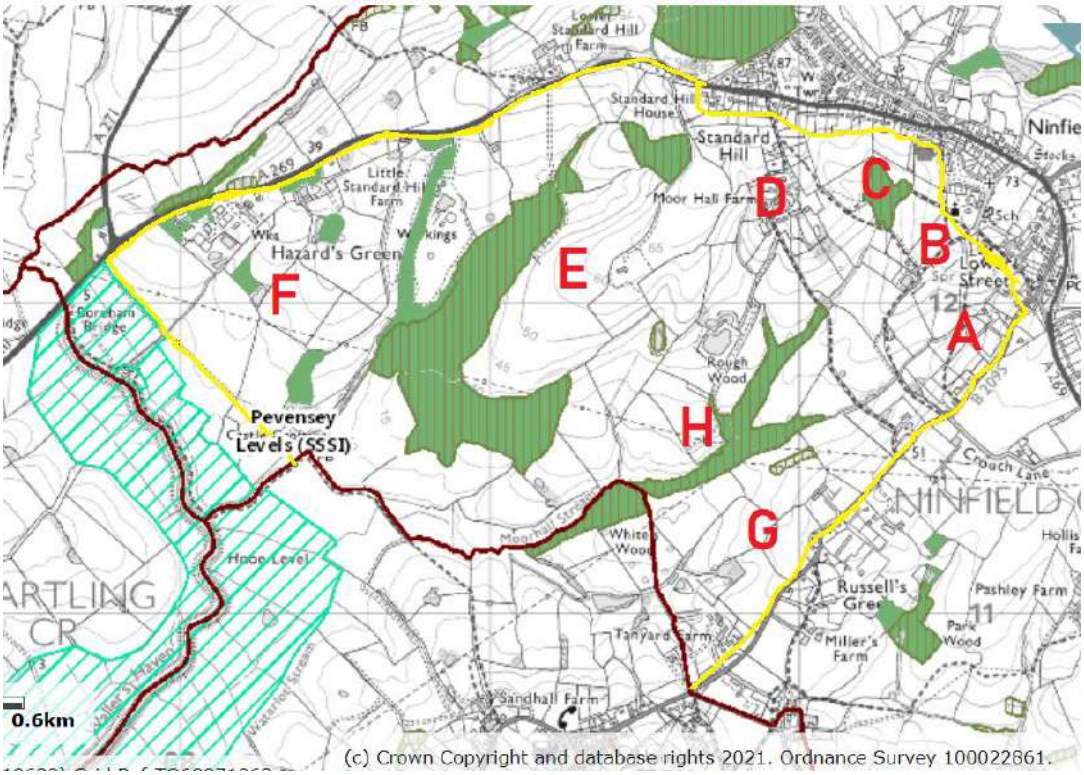
The Laurels, Hooe Road – early c19th (possibly older) cottage extended

Clock House, Hooe Road – mid-c19th white weatherboarded and slate cottage

Drayton Lodge (formerly The Mellands), Hooe Road – early c19th country house – on ESCC HER as c19th redevelopment of medieval farmstead

Little Drayton, Hooe Road – early c19th part of courtyard farmbuilding converted to dwelling (formerly part of Drayton Lodge above)

Valley of Moorhall Stream



Moorhall Stream Valley showing Parish boundary (red line), indicative Character Area boundary (yellow line) and sub-areas by red letters. Also, deciduous Woodland in green (with Ancient & semi-natural woodland shown with vertical lines) (extract from DEFRA Magic website)

The village partly encloses the head of this valley where there is a network of public footpaths providing open vistas across the valley and well beyond to the South Downs (10 miles away) and sea (4 miles away), as well as more intimate localised views. Consequently, it has greater recreational value to the community in comparison to the other areas of countryside. It is also an area of heritage value because it retains the close relationship of the small historic areas of the village to the open countryside with its ancient fields. Church Path, shown on the 1844 Tithe Map, links the 3 historic areas of the village, namely Lower Street, the church/school, and Ninfield Green. This path also now acts, for the most part, as a demarcating line between village and countryside. The scenic topography combined with the other factors above indicate that this is an area of local landscape value worthy of protection and designation of the most accessible part as Local Green Space.

The valley lies mainly between the A269 on its north side and the B2095 Hooe Road on its southeast side. It is almost entirely within Ninfield parish except for the SW corner in Hooe parish. It includes most of Standard Hill, other than the northern part within the AONB (and its easterly continuation into the village). To the west, it adjoins the Levels along Wallers Haven which are part of the Pevensey Levels Ramsar site, SCA and SSSI.

The valley appears broader than the Ninfield Stream valley and contains a variety of scenery. Much of it presents a mainly wooded appearance owing to several ancient

woodlands and the large number of mature trees on field boundaries and in wooded shaws. The areas of semi-natural ancient woodland total 37 hectares and there are also additional areas of other deciduous woodland. There is an intricate pattern of irregular ancient fields both small and large but those on the upper slopes, with some exceptions, are more open and provide panoramic views including to the Downs and sea, over the 'low plateau' and Hooe on the south side of the valley. There are numerous ponds and springs. Two overhead power lines, the major one crossing the valley diagonally, the other running along the southeast side, are detracting features but the trees and woodland limit the impact from many of the viewpoints.

The south-east side slope of the valley forms the north-west edge of the low plateau which extends southwards from the village. This slope is relatively straight except at its western end where it projects northwest as a short spur of high ground and becomes the Hooe ridge (beyond the parish boundary). Where it is closest to Ninfield village, the B2095 Hooe Road runs along the upper edge of this south-eastern side of the valley but, from Russell's Green to Hooe, it moves slightly away from the edge. Consequently, that part is described under the section entitled 'Low Plateau'.

In contrast, the significantly higher north side of the valley (ie. Standard Hill) comprises of a series of ridges and tributary valleys of widely varying scale. The slopes are complex. The ridges mainly follow a NE-SW alignment but not entirely. Their side slopes are mainly short and steep whereas their slopes down into the main valley are longer and more gradual.

Where the head of the valley meets the high ground on which the village sits, it splits into two smaller valleys. The southernmost continues in a straight line to Lower Street where it extends into the built-up area. The northernmost one, the source of the Moorhall Stream, originates on the higher ground close to the village centre and is occupied by Church Wood. Dividing these two minor valleys is a ridge of high ground running southwest from Church Path and the churchyard downhill to Church Barn Farm.

This area close to the village, including parts of areas B, C and D described below, is under pressure for residential development. The north part of the ridge including part of the adjacent valley was the subject of a planning application in 2020 for 70 houses. It gave rise to over 200 objections from local residents, indicating the degree to which the area is valued by the community, and was subsequently refused on grounds of unacceptable harm to the landscape setting of the village and to the habitat of breeding farmland birds.

The 2 fields forming the subject of the above application, plus others adjoining to the south and west, had previously been put forward for development by the landowners as part of the Wealden Local Plan preparation process entitled Strategic Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment 2017 (SHELAA). These were assessed by Chris Blandford Associates and were identified as:-

Strength of Place: strong/very strong
Distinctiveness: distinct/unique/rare

Continuity: ancient
Visibility: high
Landform: dominant
Tree Cover: intermittent
Landscape sensitivity: high/very high
Landscape Value: moderate/high
Landscape capacity: low/moderate
These sites were all subsequently concluded by Wealden DC as unacceptable on grounds that they were "*unsuitable for housing because of its impact on the landscape setting of the village*" and "*although read against the existing urban edge of the High Street to the north and Church Path (and Downsview behind) to the east, this land is open and exposed for some considerable distance to the south and southwest*". They were consequently not included in the then proposed Wealden Local Plan 2019 (since withdrawn primarily because of insufficient consultation with neighbouring Councils).

Within the valley, owing to the complex landform, the following features can be recognised:-

A. Lower Street valley: This distinctive little valley is narrow and increasingly V-shaped north-eastwards. It is crossed by the southern lower end of Church Path (FP1A/1B), where there is a spring at the source of the tiny watercourse, and also by diagonal paths (FP2 and FP3C). Although Church Path forms a general line of demarcation between the main built-up area and the countryside, there are a number of dwellings beyond this line, including some historic cottages (one pair Grade II listed c17th weatherboarded). Some of these sit picturesquely amongst trees on the southern valley side at varying levels, including the former Lower Street Nursery where there is a very old glasshouse (c1900) remaining. This part of the valley is an ESCC archaeological notification area. The village edge presents a soft and attractively rural appearance, with the B2095 curving round with grass verges and silver birch trees.

View from B2095 across Lower Street valley to Church Barn Farm and ridge SW of Standard Hill

A short distance southwest along the B2095 there is a wide gap in the roadside hedge next to which there is a modern house with no trees to mitigate its impact unlike the converted barn, forge and house beyond at neighbouring c19th Newhouse Farm. This gap, however, does enable public views northwards from the B2095 across the small valley and also westwards along the main valley. There are also views across the valley from the southern ends of footpaths FP2 and 3C. There is no visible trace of the small c19th brickworks on the valley floor. A small plantation of trees on the north slope reduces the view of the houses on high ground to the north, opposite the churchyard entrance. However, there are also remains of some polytunnels associated with a fruit farm enterprise and a prominent mobile home. Other negative features, resulting from subdivision of farmland, are timber stables and numerous wire fences subdividing the grassed fields (used for grazing horses and alpacas). These structures are of a semi-permanent type and, overall, the distinctive landform remains dominant.

B. Ridge from Church Path to Church Barn Farm: Church Path (FP4A) affords the most important views in the village as they are the most panoramic. Moreover, it is tarmac-surfaced and is the most well-used non-roadside path, serving both functional and recreational purposes. It consequently enables enjoyment of the view by the greatest number of village residents and there are seats provided for public use.

The path runs along the edge of the built-up area from the A269 in the middle of the village, past old cottages, southwards to the churchyard (and continues beyond as FP5/1A/1B to Lower Street). It has a bank with an ancient hedge and mature trees (subject to TPO) on its eastern side, partially screening the adjacent Downs View dwellings. On its western side, the sloping fields are open in character. The path is separated from Upper Church Field (named on Tithe Map) only by a broken wire fence. There are panoramic views over the valley and well beyond to the South Downs and the sea, with Beachy Head visible 12 miles away. The views encompass the western part of the tourist area called ‘1066 Country’. Upper Church Field slopes down from Church Path to the edge of Church Wood in its valley. This field is no longer used for agriculture and public access takes place as indicated by paths worn over it notwithstanding the sign stating no public right of way on the field gate opposite the end of Downs View. Upper and Lower Church fields are separated by public footpath FP6 leading to Church Wood but not by any significant landscape feature, just wire fencing, thus maintaining the open character and sweeping view.

View past E side of Church Wood to old cottages at N end of Church Path from FP7B

Running southwest down the ridge, Church Lane (designated as footpath FP3A/3B) continues downhill beyond the pair of houses and bungalows opposite the churchyard entrance. Long-distance views can be enjoyed. It is very narrow, running between high banks with hedges and has a distinctly unspoilt rural character. On its north side, is Lower Church Field which slopes down to both south and west. It comprises semi-improved grazing apart from the upper part which has been fenced off to provide a Caravan & Motorhome Club camping site. This is crossed by a footpath (FP4B) running N-S along its east side, adjoining the churchyard. The numerous trees in the churchyard are a feature in the wider landscape but they have grown to the extent that they conceal the medieval Church from view from the west. Historically, the small church would have been a prominent feature not only because its hill-top location was more open but it had a small broach spire, not the low pyramidal roof which replaced it sometime in the early c19th (spire shown in an artist's view dated 1800 in Sharpe Collection of watercolours of Sussex churches held by Sussex Archaeological Society).

FP6 runs along the north side of Lower Church Field and FP7B along its west side, both connecting to Church Wood. At the bottom end of Church Lane is a courtyard of c19th farm buildings converted to a single-storey dwelling called The Old Stables.

Churchyard trees viewed up Church Lane (FP3B) from converted Old Stables at Church Barn Farm

Church Barn Farmhouse to the rear (north) is a relatively modern house in a traditional Wealden style with clay tile-hanging. FP3C continues westwards, past redundant cement fibre farm buildings (used for caravan storage) and Modern Barn Farm, a new contemporary industrial-style dwelling of black corrugated sheeting and extensive glazing. It is on the site of a demolished redundant agricultural building, facing along the length of the valley, and is prominently sited on a slight eminence without tree screening. The ridge is much lower here, gradually merging with the valley floor, but FP3C has relatively unrestricted views in several directions.

View north from FP3C over valley to Moor Hall ridge with its pine trees and west end of High Street (A269)

C. Church Wood valley: This small steep-sided valley starts at the rear of houses on the south side of the A269 High Street, sloping downhill from the village from both the north and from the east and west. Church Wood is community-owned Ancient Woodland nestling in this valley. It is a wet wood

with some of the characteristics of gill woodland. It has recently been designated as a Local Nature Reserve owing to its ecological value and a management plan has been prepared. Maintenance is carried out by the Village Society.

The wood has an area of only 1.7 hectare but it appears larger owing to the mature trees on the neighbouring field boundaries to the north, south and west, the line of trees linking it alongside the stream to ancient Rough Wood. It has several springs and three ponds and is the source of the Moorhall stream. Within the wood, there are a number of minor paths, some provided with wooden seats. Attractive rustic wooden bridges have been constructed across the small watercourses It is also important for its educational and recreational value, lying at the centre of a network of largely well-used public footpaths. FP6 runs through the wood E-W and FP7B from the south, both connecting to other paths referred to above. They enable the wood to be readily accessible to residents of most parts of the village, including children at the nearby primary school. As stated under B above, the fields to the north, east and west of Church Wood are under threat from housing development. This poses a significant risk to the future of the ancient woodland because of its fragility.

This small valley includes the lower slope of Upper and Lower Church Fields, between the wood and Church Path (FP4A) plus the field to the north where scrub and small trees are growing south of the rear gardens of the dwellings fronting High Street. Also included are the fields to the west of the wood which are semi-improved grassland used for grazing horses and sheep. All these surrounding fields slope increasingly steeply downhill to the watercourses in the wood, their upper slopes are more gradual.

West side of Church Wood from FP6 looking north to village (west end of High Street)

D. Moor Hall ridge and valley: Moor Hall Drive is a private tarmac-surfaced road, probably dating from the early c19th, which is also a public

footpath (FP8A). It runs N-S along the top of this ridge past the former mid c19th lodge (now Moorhall Cottages) and a former agricultural bungalow. It is largely enclosed by a line of trees, bushes and shrubs which create a tunnel-like effect. These include large pine trees which are a prominent feature in the wider landscape (but the TPO relating to the Moor Hall site does not include them). Public footpath FP7A branches off on the eastern side across an open field towards Church Wood, providing views E and S including the churchyard trees and the mainly 'soft' village edge. This field was one of those assessed by Chris Blandford Assocs as part of the SHELAA process as being of high landscape value and sensitivity and found to be unsuitable for development (referred to above). There are longer-distance views to the South Downs from field gateways on the west side of the drive. Lower down the ridge, past a 1930s Wealden-style house hidden by trees, is the site of the former Moor Hall, historically recorded as a Manor (*Morehale*) back as far as c13th. It was one of the most significant buildings in Ninfield. After being greatly extended in the late c19th/ early c20th, taking advantage of the attractive location, it was used as a country house hotel and country club from the 1920s but became redundant in the 1990s. In its much altered and incohesive form, it was not considered to have sufficient historic fabric or architectural quality to warrant listing. A flat-conversion scheme was permitted but not implemented and subsequently redevelopment was permitted. In 1998, it was demolished and 6 new houses were built on the site in a Wealden hall house style, including half-timbered and tile-hung walls. The numerous trees and large shrubs on the former hotel grounds and on adjoining land largely conceal the new houses from view, giving a generally wooded appearance.

View from Moor Hall site across valley to Hooe and South Downs

The adjacent farm buildings are more noticeable in the landscape as viewed across the valley from Hooe. These c19th unlisted mainly brick and slate farm buildings, including a courtyard and barn, at the adjacent Moorhall Farm have been converted to dwellings (some originally as holiday cottages).

Immediately to the west of the farm access road (public footpath FP8B) is a steep and narrow little V-shaped valley with a spring. This has a particularly scenic appearance and, because of the high ground level and open character, the footpath also provides a long-distance view SW to the South Downs. The steeply sloping irregular small fields here are used for grazing and there are hedgerows with trees at the lower levels and on the opposite western side. This valley has a particular distinctiveness. The farm track forming FP8B leading down to the stream and beyond to Hooe Road appears to have been the access to Moor Hall prior to the c19th.

E. Ridge Southwest from Standard Hill: This is by far the largest ridge and extends SW from Standard Hill for over half a mile. The name *Staundard* dates back at least 700 years (first referenced 1327) and stems from the traditional belief that it is the place William the Conqueror raised his standard prior to the battle of Hastings in 1066. The important Standard Hill House (Grade II* dated 1659 and formerly called Upper Standard Hill Farm) with its historic maltings stand on the top of the hill. They are now within the western extremity of the village built-up area but the ESCC archaeological notification area extends a short distance into the countryside. The NW and SE sides of this ridge are much steeper than its gentle SW end slope into the valley. The side slopes have a very distinctive landform. The NW side forms a hollow (being named Hollow Field and Hilly Field on the 1844 Tithe Map) with ancient Long Wood along the edge of the ridge. The SE side is V-shaped in profile as described under D. above. The A269 enters the village uphill through a gentle S-bend at the head of the NW hollow, past some old cottages largely hidden amongst the trees (including a pair of c18th white weatherboarded cottages Ivy Cottage and Maycroft), before emerging at the top where there is a very wide grass verge on the south side. This triangular area of grass backs onto a copse of trees next to Standard Hill House.

On the west side of this grass is a new dwelling (The View) and a gateway giving a panoramic view past the woods over fields to Boreham Street with the South Downs in the distance (see photograph under F below). This gate serves a long track leading past the ancient Kiln Wood (with pond) to the isolated Lower Barn (an unlisted c17th formerly thatched barn converted to a dwelling). The arable fields on this gently rounded upper part of the ridge have been amalgamated into one large field. Two small woods to the east (Malthouse Wood and Quailpond Wood) have been removed, probably in WW2, although the pond with a remnant of ancient woodland survives. The removal of these woods, creating pastures on the hillside, has opened up attractive views of the valley landscape and well beyond from FP8.

Lower down the slopes, however, the medieval pattern survives with the extensive ancient woodland of **Long Wood and Wet Wood** (LWS) curving around the steeper western and southern slopes of Standard Hill. The LWS citation summary states "*Ancient woodland of hornbeam coppice and wet wood and hornbeam coppice, alder and willow with sedge ground flora".* This woodland (totalling 26 hectares) is by far the most notable feature of the

valley landscape as seen in the panoramic view from the A271 Boreham Hill to the west. However, some detraction is caused by pylons supporting the overhead power lines that cut a swathe through it before crossing Boreham Bridge and entering the AONB. There are no public footpaths within this area but FP13 adjoining Wallers Haven provides views from the W and there are also some views from the S across the valley from the B2095 near Hooe.

Distant view of Standard Hill from N side of Boreham Street with Long Wood/Wet Wood right of centre (Hazards Green Waterworks and Tarmac silo are also just visible among trees)

F. Hazards Green: Westwards from the above ridge the hillside is much more gently sloping with arable fields and a shallow side valley with a long belt of trees. This area constitutes most of the very long westerly downward slope of Standard Hill to the river. The A 269 runs down this slope with, on many stretches, uncharacteristically wide grass verges (including wildflower verges) and some lengths with relatively low hedges enabling views over the hill slopes on each side.

View from gateway (Lower Barn) at top of Standard Hill looking west over blockworks site and Wallers Haven valley to Boreham Hill with South Downs in distance

There is a woodyard adjoining the A269 but a much larger lower-lying area is occupied by the **Tarmac Topblock works.** This originally started in the 1930s

as the NInfield Brick and Tile Company, utilising Wadhurst clay excavated on this site. The adjacent fields to the west, beyond the tree belt, had permission in 1988 from ESCC for excavation of clay in strips not for the blockworks but for use at the Ashdown brickworks at Turkey Road, Bexhill (formerly the Lunsford Brick and Pottery Works). The blockworks have 2 silos but, apart from these and the site entrance from the A269, the buildings and extensive open storage (materials and finished blocks) are largely hidden from public view by the numerous trees and bushes along the very wide roadside verge. These include the wooded area that has developed on the very wide verge area called **Hazards Green** (recorded as Fishers Green in the c17th and c18th). During the winter, during working hours, lighting of the site is visible from Boreham Street. There are no public footpaths within this area but the top of the silos are visible in long distance views. Westwards, the downhill slope is gentle with a single house and some farm buildings (former Little Standard Hill Farm) concealed from the A269 behind the trees and hedges.

Lower down, the slope of the hill is more pronounced. On this lower slope is the extensive **Hazards Green Waterworks** (**South East Water)** with numerous water treatment buildings and installations, plus a pair of waterworks cottages. These are dispersed over the site and the numerous trees help mitigate its visual impact.
The waterworks were first established by Bexhill Corporation in 1903, treating water extracted from the on-site borehole (and water piped from another borehole at Sweet Willow Wood in the 'low plateau' area). Some of the treated water is pumped uphill to the small Standard Hill grass-covered reservoir in the village (where a water tower was added in 1970). The installations have been expanded since with additional water extracted from Wallers Haven and further augmented by water piped from Darwell Reservoir. The valley catchment areas of the Moorhall stream and Ninfield stream are drinking water protection areas/zones. In 1980 numerous boreholes were sunk in order to assess the possible creation of reservoirs by flooding these two valleys with a possible Moorhall Dam or Kitchenham Dam.

Hazards Green Waterworks viewed from Wallers Haven levels to SW

G. South-East Side Slope: This slope for the most part has a relatively straight NE-SW alignment until it crosses into Hooe where a short spur of high ground turns north-westwards. This spur with its irregular pattern of small medieval fields enclosed by hedges and trees is a scenic feature of the view down the valley from Ninfield. It effectively closes off the view of the end of the valley, preventing any direct view of Pevensey Levels, but is low enough not to obstruct the long-distance view of the South Downs. The south-east slope within Ninfield has numerous trees and hedges on the boundaries of the small fields which are also likely to be medieval in origin. The B2095 along the upper edge of the valley slope, although busy with traffic at some periods of the day, nevertheless has a relatively remote rural feel as it is narrow and tightly enclosed by tall hedges without verges, with many blind bends. Although there are dispersed dwellings and old farms along this route, forming a loose group at Russell's Green (described separately under 'Low Plateau'), they are generally very well concealed by the trees and high hedges. Most of these dwellings are old-established or replacements thereof and include the former parish workhouse next to Whitehouse Farm. Further southwest, close to the Hooe boundary, the hedges are noticeably lower giving a more open character.

From field gate on B2095 at Russell's Green towards village ridge

From SW of Tanyard Farm (on parish boundary) towards Standard Hill and Moor Hall Farm

H. Valley Floor: The middle part of the valley narrows where the lower slopes impinge on either side and the stream flows through an almost 'ravine-like' channel called the Moorhall Gill. There is little ground that is truly flat except where it joins Pevensey Levels. Consequently, although the clay ground

becomes heavily saturated in winter, significant flooding does not appear to be an issue. A major flooding event was recorded as long ago as 1341 when it appears that inundation of what is now the Levels extended up the valley so as to "*submerge the greater part of the cultivated land called Morhale"* (Moor Hall). The eastern end, southwest of Church Barn Farm/Modern Barn, is fairly wide and open, due largely to the felling of Workhouse Wood (probably in the 1940s), leaving a line of mature oaks, some surrounding a pond, and a wooded shaw along the watercourse. The main feature of the valley floor is **Rough Wood** (called *The Gill Wood* on the Tithe Map schedule) (7 hectares) and its continuation into Hooe as Whites Wood, both semi-natural Ancient Woodland designated as an LWS. The citation states "*Woodland complex on steep-sided stream valley with ancient woodland ground flora*". They stretch for three-quarters of a mile in length but are narrow, following the Moorhall stream with 'fingers' along its tributaries. Downstream from FP8B (near Moorhall Farm) where there is a culvert, the tiny stream is deeply incised. It runs along a channel that is about 5m deep and 10m wide next to FP8B and filled with trees and dense undergrowth. Rough Wood thus has elements of both gill woodland and a shaw although it is not typical of these types of woodland. In newspaper reports on foxhunting in the period 1880-1930, it is referred to as the Moor Hall Gill. The woods were historically much more extensive on the northern side of the stream. The 1783 map of Sussex indicating it extended as scrub with trees as far as Malthouse Wood and Quailpond Wood but by 1844 it was described as Rough Fields.

SE valley slope from Whitehouse Farm (FP8B) over Rough Wood (along Moorhall Gill) to ridge SW of Standard Hill

There are now two artificially-created fishing lakes on one of these fields, plus two large new agricultural buildings. There is also a line of touring caravans stored on the edge of the private access track leading to these buildings and lakes. These cause some visual detraction viewed from FP8B on higher ground to the east. Mature trees on the field boundaries ameliorate the impact of the smaller new building but the larger building, particularly owing to the light colour of its roof sheeting and the absence of additional tree planting, is intrusive in the landscape unless and until it weathers to a darker colour.

Listed Buildings

None within the boundary of this area but it includes areas providing the setting for the following adjacent listed buildings:-

Church of St Mary the Virgin – Grade I

Standard Hill House – Grade II*

Fig Tree Cottage & Wisteria Cottage, Lower Street – Grade II

Tanyard House, Hooe Road – Grade II*

Tanyard Barn, Hooe Road – Grade II

Other buildings worthy of consideration for inclusion on a Local Heritage List:-

Ivy Cottage & Maycroft, Standard Hill – probably c18th pair of white weatherboarded cottages with tiled roofs

Lower Barn, off Standard Hill – c17th barn converted to dwelling on ESCC HER

Newhouse Farmhouse, Hooe Road – early c19th (possibly earlier) red brick and tile farmhouse on ESCC HER as c19th farmstead (with other buildings listed below)

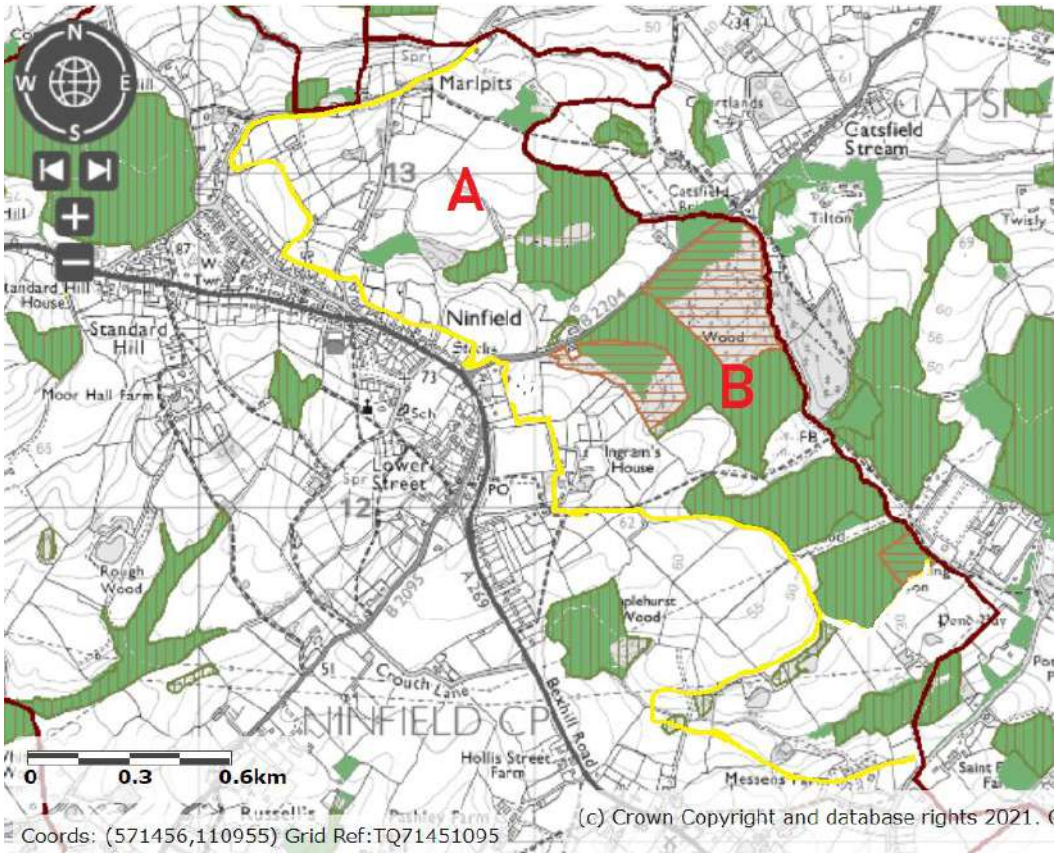
The Forge, Hooe Road – early c19th brick building formerly part of Newhouse Farm (now within curtilage of modern house)

Newhouse Barn, Hooe Road – early c19th black weatherboarded barn converted to dwelling

Whitehaven, Hooe Road – c1820 former Parish Workhouse converted to dwelling built of brick and slate (with some elevations altered with rendering and mock half-timber)

Moorhall Farmhouse with barn and farm buildings converted to dwellings, mainly brick and slate. Partially extant mid-c19th courtyard farmstead on ESCC HER

Valley of Catsfield/Watermill Stream



Valley of Catsfield/ Watermill Stream showing Parish boundary (red line), indicative Character Area boundary (yellow line) and sub-areas by red letters. Also, deciduous Woodland in green (with Ancient & semi-natural woodland shown with vertical lines and and Plantations on Ancient Woodland Sites (including conifers) with horizontal lines (extract from DEFRA Magic website)

Only the west side of this wooded valley lies within Ninfield, the east side is in Catsfield parish. It stretches from Marlpits Lane in the north to Potmans Lane in the south which adjoins the boundary with Bexhill. A public footpath runs the length of this area but much of it is on the Catsfield side. Both sides of the greater part of this valley are heavily wooded. There is an almost forested character in places and nature appears to have taken over as evident from the B2204 Catsfield Road from Ninfield village to the parish boundary. The area of ancient woodland totals 60 hectares.

Much of the valley has no clearly defined edge and merges gradually with the Low Plateau. The northern end, closest to the AONB, differs in that it is mainly undulating pastureland. The valley includes several tributary side valleys, including one from Staplehurst Wood south of the ribbon of houses in Bexhill Road; one from the foot of Moons Hill downwards through Court Wood; and a less pronounced one from near the Catsfield Road junction on the village edge down through Hurst Wood. Where the B2204 Catsfield Road enters the village uphill, it has a distinctive character with an S-bend enclosed by high banks with trees, as is also the case with Moons Hill. This is a characteristic High Weald feature of the ridge-top village.

A. Moons Hill/Marlpits Lane Area: Adjoining the village, the ground drops markedly at Moons Hill and to the east of this, downwards into Court Wood. To the northwest, the slope is more gradual and 80 houses have been permitted here, to the rear of houses at Sparke Gardens, and these include planting a belt of trees which, in time, should help mitigate the landscape impact. Marlpits Lane runs along the small ridge on the north edge of this area, with a panoramic view over the AONB to the north when the roadside hedge has been cut (see photograph under Ninfield Stream valley).

SW from FP21 towards village with Moons Hill left of centre and site of proposed 80 houses to right

Moons Hill itself is a distinctive feature directly abutting but in total contrast to the village street, being very narrow and deeply sunken between high banks with a canopy of trees.

Moons Hill (left -looking south, right-looking north)

It has a surprisingly remote and tranquil quality so close to the village and busy A269. Beyond this, the lane called Moons Hill passes old cottages and crosses a small area of fairly level poorly-drained ground before rising to

Marlpits Lane where there are several cottages, both historic and modern replacements. This area has numerous sunken ponds surrounded by trees, most of which were probably former marl pits (given the field names on the 1844 tithe map schedule). There is also a particularly intricate pattern of irregularly-shaped fields of varying sizes with boundary hedges including intermittent trees. The planning authority has made Article 4 Directions removing 'permitted development' rights on two sites in this area.
On the east side of Moons Hill, behind the roadside trees and on the village edge, 3 houses are under construction on raised ground (former storage yard) behind Moons Hill Farmhouse. They abut the edge of a very steep slope and tower above the field to the rear, looking over the lower area towards the AONB in the distance. They block public view over the countryside from the village. South-east of these, immediately behind the road frontage houses facing The Green (A269), there is an elevated mainly open area of gently sloping small fields with a modern storage building. Behind this, the ground falls away NE steeply into a narrow tributary valley which is wooded and which broadens out into the ancient woodland of Court Wood before joining the Catsfield Stream. The roads called Moons Hill and Marlpits Lane are both very narrow and enclosed by dense hedges and trees. This area has a remote and unspoilt rural character. Owing to the few public footpaths and lack of bridleways, these relatively lightly-trafficked roads are popular with dog-walkers and to a lesser extent horse riders as they provide a circular route.

The north-easterly continuation of Marlpits Lane towards Frickley Hollow and Catsfield passes a pit excavated into the hill slope which may have been for marl or clay but is now a storage yard for a roofing business (and the subject of a planning application for a pair of houses). The land falls away to the northeast corner of the parish where there is the site of a former brickworks in use here 1866-1914 in connection with the construction by Lord Brassey of nearby Normanhurst Court

View of former brickfield and cottages in NE corner of parish (looking N from FP21)

(demolished 1951). There is now no trace other than 4 former brickyard cottages with distinctive brick and tile detailing (3 now re-named). An overhead line on pylons running from the south along the valley terminates here. The only public footpath in this area (FP21) runs from beside the pit to Catsfield Stream along the edge of a field which provides a wide view towards the northern edge of Ninfield village, where the 3 houses under construction at Moons Hill Farm can be seen in a gap between the trees as well as the site of the proposed 80 houses now under construction. The part of this area closest to the village edge is under pressure for development. Apart from the site of the proposed 80 houses at the rear of Sparke Gardens, two other sites, one on the W side of Moons Hill and the other at the rear of The Green adjoining Catsfield Road were put forward under the SHELAA process. They were all assessed by Chris Blandford Assocs as:-
Strength of Place: Strong
Distinctiveness: Distinct
Continuity: Ancient
Visibility: Moderate
Landform: Apparent
Tree Cover: Intermittent
Landscape Sensitivity: High
Landscape Value: Moderate
Landscape Capacity: Moderate.

In rejecting the site at the rear of The Green from inclusion in the Local Plan, the Wealden Strategic Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment stated that the site occupies an exposed ridge top location open to long-range views from the N and NE. Also, that it was unclear whether suitable access could be achieved, as the logical position off the B2204 would entail major and significant excavations to get into the site and significant erosion of the tree bank here would have damaging visual consequences. The contours of the site are such that it would not be readily possible to mitigate development on the higher parts of the site.

The field on the opposite (south) side of the B2204 Catsfield Road has been the subject of an application for up to 40 houses with access from the B2204. An appeal regarding non-determination of this application was dismissed mainly on landscape grounds. The field is appropriately called Hollow Field on the 1844 Tithe Map as its landform comprises a hollow and slope up to the adjacent village edge. This field is very close to the wooded area described below.

B. Wooded Area: The landscape is dominated by the extensive woodlands stretching for over a mile from **Court Wood** on the north side of the B2204 through **Hurst Wood, Sprays Wood** and **Pipe Wood** to **Kiln Wood** in the south, close to the Bexhill boundary. They are contiguous with Reed Wood and South Wood over the boundary in Catsfield. The woods occupy ground on both sides of the valley, sloping fairly steeply down to the stream. The stream itself is narrow but occupies a deep channel. They are mainly ancient

semi-natural woodlands of deciduous trees. However, about half of Hurst Wood has been re-planted to include conifers making it within the category termed ‘plantations on ancient woodland sites’ (PAWS). Over the boundary is Catsfield Christmas Tree Farm. The central part of the woods can be accessed from Ninfield village by FP14 which links to the footpath running along the length of the valley on the Catsfield side and thence via FP21 to Marlpits Lane, providing a long circular
route.
On the N side of the B2204 there is an area of scrubland which has been sold off together with the ancient woodland of Court Wood as about 200 mainly tiny ‘investment’ plots (termed ‘Gladwish Farm’). A tarmac area has recently been laid near the site access and a mobile home placed (subject to an enforcement notice). Court Wood is subject to a TPO. Also on the N side of the B2204 is a former ESCC Highways depot used as a warehouse by GJ Flooring and by an automobile restoration business. Close to this, in total contrast, is an extended but distinctive old white weatherboarded cottage, Glendale Cottage, dating from the early c19th. Opposite, on the south side of the B2204, the trees have been recently coppiced on the roadside part of the extensive Hurst Wood.

Sprays Wood from west (FP14B)

A major feature lying south-east of the ancient woodland of Sprays/Pipe Wood and largely surrounded by other woods and trees, is the large **Ninfield Transforming Station** (within Catsfield parish and accessed from Potmans Lane). Much of the site is shown on the 1783 map of Sussex as a lake. This is the first such substation on the major 400kV long-distance overhead power lines which run west from Dungeness nuclear power station, the next being at Bolney near Haywards Heath. A smaller 275kV overhead line on smaller pylons runs parallel to it on its south side and another short length of 132kV line northwards along the Catsfield stream valley. The two larger overhead lines cross the A269 Bexhill Road and run along the south side of Crouch Lane (in the Low Plateau character area), then into the Moorhall valley, the smaller line running along the south side to Hooe/Pevensey Levels and the larger line running diagonally across the valley to Boreham Bridge before entering the AONB.

The existence of this primary substation provides the opportunity for connection to the National Grid for electricity generated by other sources. Consequently, the surrounding area within about a 2.5km radius has been subject to detailed search by various private companies for potential solar farm sites. 2 such solar farms have been constructed, at Pashley Farm in Ninfield (in the Low Plateau character area) and SE of Potmans Lane at Saint Francis Farm (in Catsfield parish). However, a proposal for a solar farm on fields adjoining the eastern side of the wooded valley (in Catsfield parish) was twice refused and dismissed on appeal in 2016. The first application was dismissed because it "*does not lie within a designated landscape area but nevertheless deserves protection for its intrinsic character and beauty*" and because it was partly on grade 3a agricultural land. The second application was smaller and was dismissed solely because of potential adverse effect on ancient woodland.

The southern end of this area becomes more open and pastoral between Sprays Wood and Kiln Wood which extends into a tributary valley continuing westwards towards Staplehurst Wood (included in the Low Plateau area).

Looking NE towards southern end of Sprays Wood from FP16 east of A269 Ninfield Road with pylons near transforming station

Listed Buildings

None within the boundary of this area but it includes areas providing the setting for the following adjacent listed buildings within the village (all Grade II):-

Church Farmhouse & Lime Tree Cottage, Manchester Road

Church Farm Barn, Manchester Road

Church Farm Oast, Manchester Road

High Knoll, Manchester Road

Cross Farmhouse, The Green

1-3 Fir Tree Cottages, The Green

Other buildings worthy of consideration for inclusion on a Local Heritage List

Glendale Cottage, Catsfield Road – early c19th (possibly late c18th) white weatherboarded

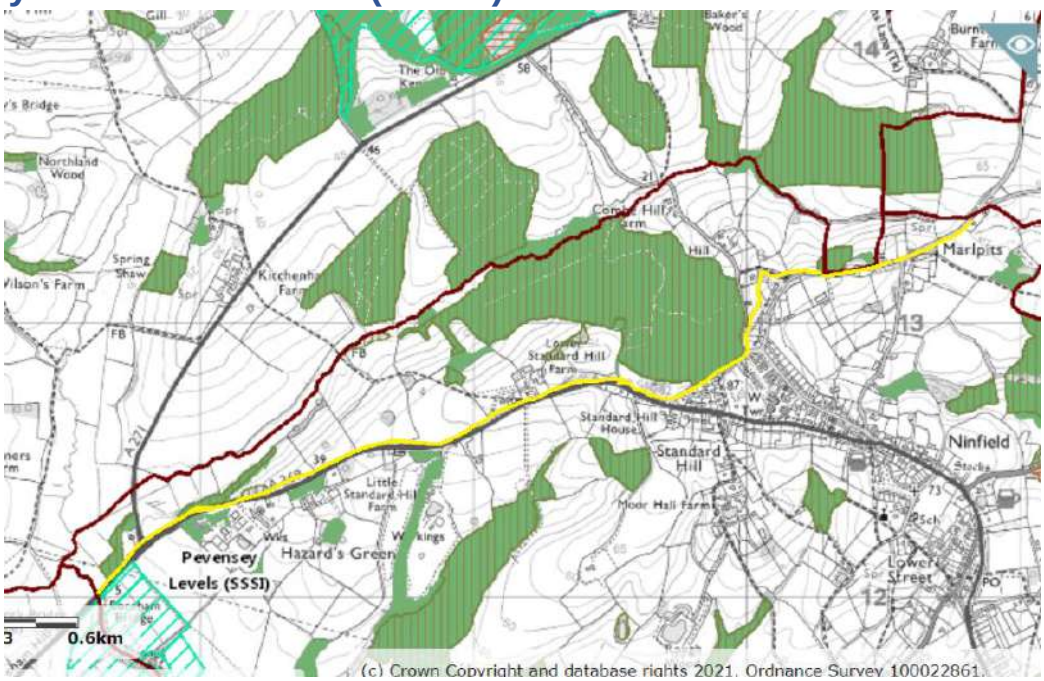
Yew Tree Cottage, Moons Hill – early c19th single-storey cottage rendered with tiled roof

Burtonswood, Marlpits Lane – early c19th cottage extended

Normandy Cottage/ Moons Hill Cottage – mid c19th pair of brick cottages

1-4 Brickyard Cottages (now re-named Pinecroft, Little Orchard, Brickyard Cottage and Threeways), Marlpits Lane – c1870 cottages built with intricate brick and tile detailing to serve adjacent brickworks (1866-1914) of which no trace remains – on ESCC HER.

Valley of Ninfield Stream (AONB)



Ninfield Stream Valley (AONB) showing Parish boundary (red line) and Character Area boundary (yellow line). Also, deciduous Woodland in green (with Ancient & semi-natural woodland shown with vertical lines) (extract from DEFRA Magic website)

This Character Area corresponds to the part of the High Weald AONB that lies within Ninfield parish. The north side of this valley is in Ashburnham parish with the A271 running NE-SW along the top of the Ashburnham ridge with the parklands of Ashburnham Place beyond to the north. This gives road users views southwards across the valley to the Ninfield ridge but the village cannot be readily discerned because of the numerous trees which are silhouetted on the horizon. Ashburnham parish includes a small projection extending across part of the south side of the

valley to Marlpits Lane (this is a small remnant of a larger area that once extended further south as far as Ninfield High Street until a boundary change in 1882). Travelling eastwards, from Boreham Bridge (over Wallers Haven), the south boundary of the AONB follows the A269 up Standard Hill as far as the west end of the village where it turns north-eastwards along Coombe Lane and then along Marlpits Lane (excluding the built-up part) as far as the boundary with Catsfield parish.

This narrow valley has a distinct V-shape with the western half of the south side comprising of the north slope of Standard Hill. Most of the valley floor is flat but very narrow. The slope on the Ninfield side is steep, with an abrupt drop on the north edge of Marlpits Lane which extends westwards through a small wooded belt (with a short public footpath FP22) across Combe Hill and through Combe Wood, along the north side of Coombe Lane. According to the British Geological Survey there is a geological fault line running E-W along this valley and beyond (known as the Catsfield Stream Fault). On the Ninfield side, the geology of the valley is mainly Wadhurst Clay, with the lowest part of the valley floor eroded down to underlying Ashdown Sand, but the Ashburnham side (which is north of the fault line) is Tunbridge Wells Sand. The landscape on the Ninfield side largely retains a pattern of irregular fields and woods likely to be medieval but on the opposite side, in Ashburnham, it has been reorganised with larger fields, mostly arable, but retaining areas of ancient woodland used for coppicing. The areas of semi-natural ancient woodland on the Ninfield side of the valley total 41 hectares.

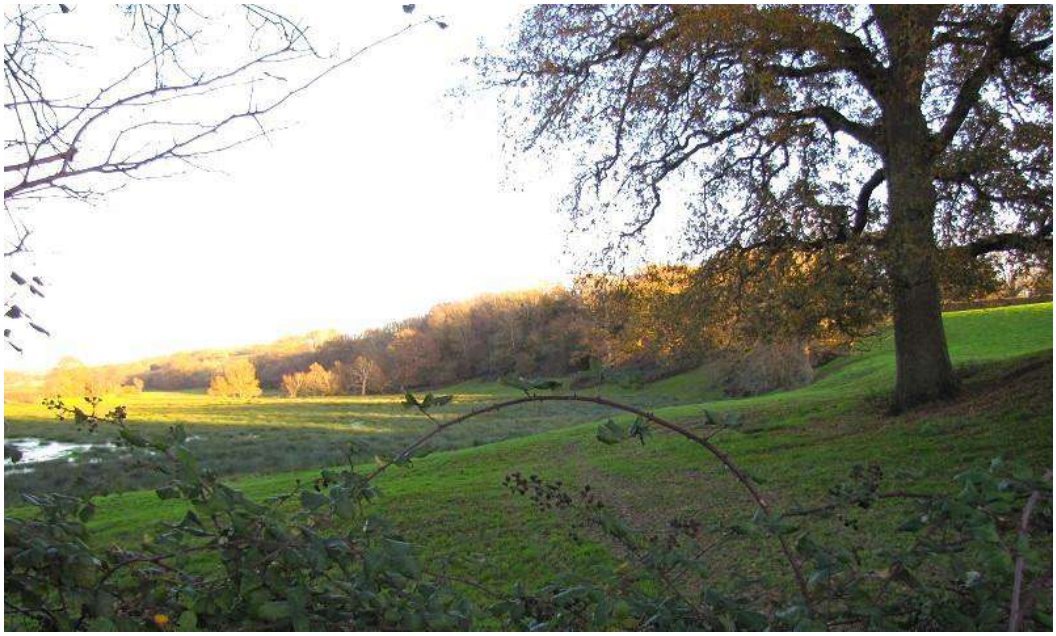
Combe Wood (36 hectares) is the largest feature within this area and is ancient and semi-natural woodland. It is a designated Local Wildlife Site (LWS), with the citation summary *“Ancient woodland of sweet chestnut coppice with marshy grassland and reed bed area with willow carr and standing water on northern boundary”.* Coppiced sweet chestnut was used for hop poles in the c19th. The wood has a very irregular landform with a small winding valley within it. There are a number of tracks used for coppicing work within the wood as well as numerous paths worn by public use. Ashburnham Estate have a sign stating no public right of way and the owners of the estate, Tent Hill Trust, made a deposition to ESCC in 2015 under section 31(6) the Highways Act 1980 and section 15A of the Commons Act 2006 to prevent any new public rights from becoming established in law on their property. However, public access is tolerated from the adjoining roads, some on the village edge. There is extensive native woodland flora such as bluebells and wood anemones within this wood.

West of the wood is the farmland of **Lower Standard Hill Farm**, much of it arable. A public footpath crosses this area diagonally to Kitchenham Farm in Ashburnham (and well beyond

Luxford House (former Lower Standard Hill Farmhouse) Grade II* from A269

to the 1066 Country Walk) but has no link to Ninfield village other than along the A269. The original farmhouse itself (dating from 1702 and listed as Grade II*) is separated from the farm and named Luxford House. It can be seen from the rear (north) across the valley from the A271.

The narrow area alongside the Ninfield Stream is notable for being good quality semi-improved grassland (non-priority habitat) and wildflower meadow. At the western extremity, the stream joins the river just upstream of Boreham Bridge across a marshy area of levels. This is next to an abrupt slope with ancient wooded shaws called Cinder Bank and Shaw on the Tithe Map, thought to possibly indicate iron working. The A271 joins the A269 here with several dwellings just to the west, in a small wooded area (mainly ancient woodland). These include Boreham Bridge Bungalow, which appears to be the much-altered c1810 former entrance lodge to Ashburnham Place (serving a private driveway before the public highway now the A271 was constructed in the mid-c19th).



Marshy area and wooded shaw at west end of Ninfield Stream from A271 N of junction with A269

East of Combe Wood is **Combe Hill**, a narrow road directly linking Ninfield village to Ashburnham. This road runs steeply downhill from Ninfield village through an S-bend with high banks overhung by large trees on both sides, giving a remote feel. It is a particularly distinctive feature on the village edge. Further downhill it has fairly wide grass verges on its middle section with picturesque Grade II listed historic buildings, c17th or earlier Combe Hill Farmhouse and c18th Combe Hill Cottage. The former is red brick and weatherboarded with a hipped plain-tiled roof and separate holiday cottages (the Dairy and Byre) within its grounds. The Cottage is red brick and tile-hung and has a converted weatherboarded barn. There are also 2 modern dwellings largely concealed by trees and hedges on the steep upper section, backing onto Marlpits Lane. The appearance of the historic buildings in the hilly landscape gives an especially unspoilt and scenic rural character. The road descends sharply to a narrow bridge with red brick abutment walls crossing the small stream on a bend before rising uphill where the road becomes named Compass Lane (in Ashburnham parish). It joins the A271 at its northern top end, opposite the extensive wooded grounds of Ashburnham Place.

View down Combe Hill towards Combe Hill Cottages and Farm with Ashburnham parish beyond

View (when hedge cut) from Marlpits Lane over Ninfield Stream valley to Ashburnham parish with Brightling Down on horizon 5 miles away

Further east, through the wooded belt with FP22, there is an abrupt drop on the north side of **Marlpits Lane**, the landform steepening with a mixture of small fields with ponds and some ancient woodland. It then becomes more open towards the Catsfield boundary. Opposite the junction with Moons Hill are two new agricultural buildings on a small hill with a wide concrete access apron (Marlpits Farm). They cause visual detraction within an otherwise unspoilt landscape in both localised views and a more distant view from the north.

The Wealden Landscape and Settlement Character Assessment 2014 (by Chris Blandford Assocs for Wealden District Council) has the following concluding summary of this Character area:-

Strength of Place: Very Strong Distinctiveness: Rare Continuity: Ancient Visibility: Low Landform: Apparent Tree Cover: Enclosed Landscape Sensitivity: Moderate Landscape Value: High Landscape Capacity: Moderate

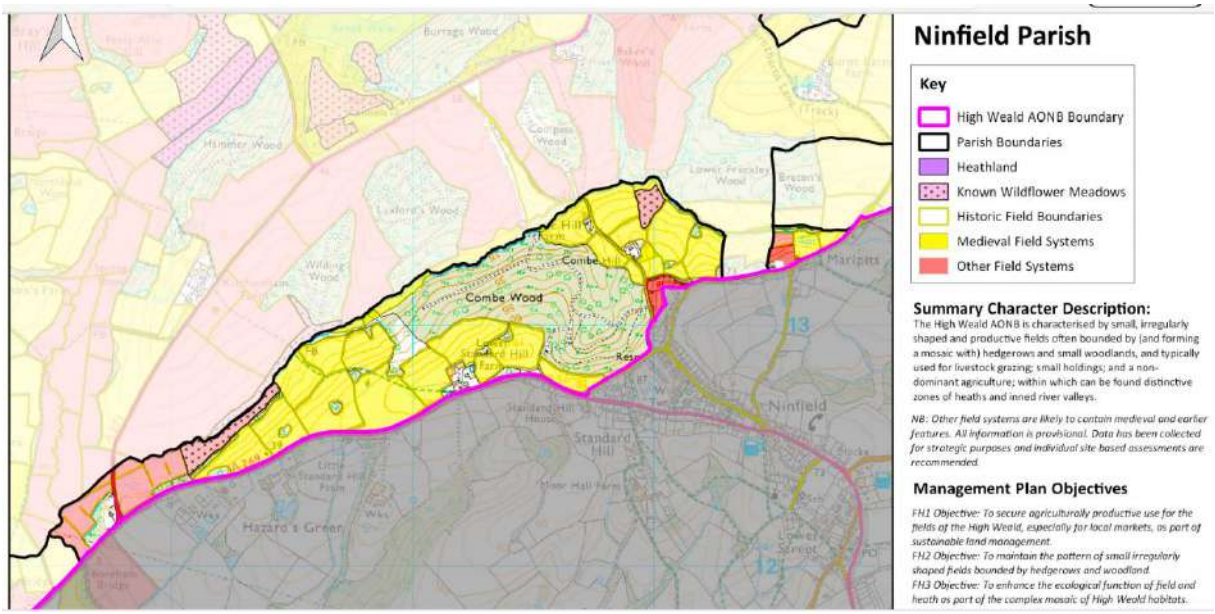
Listed Buildings

Luxford House (former Lower Standard Hill Farmhouse), Standard Hill – grade II*

Combe Hill Farmhouse, Combe Hill – Grade II

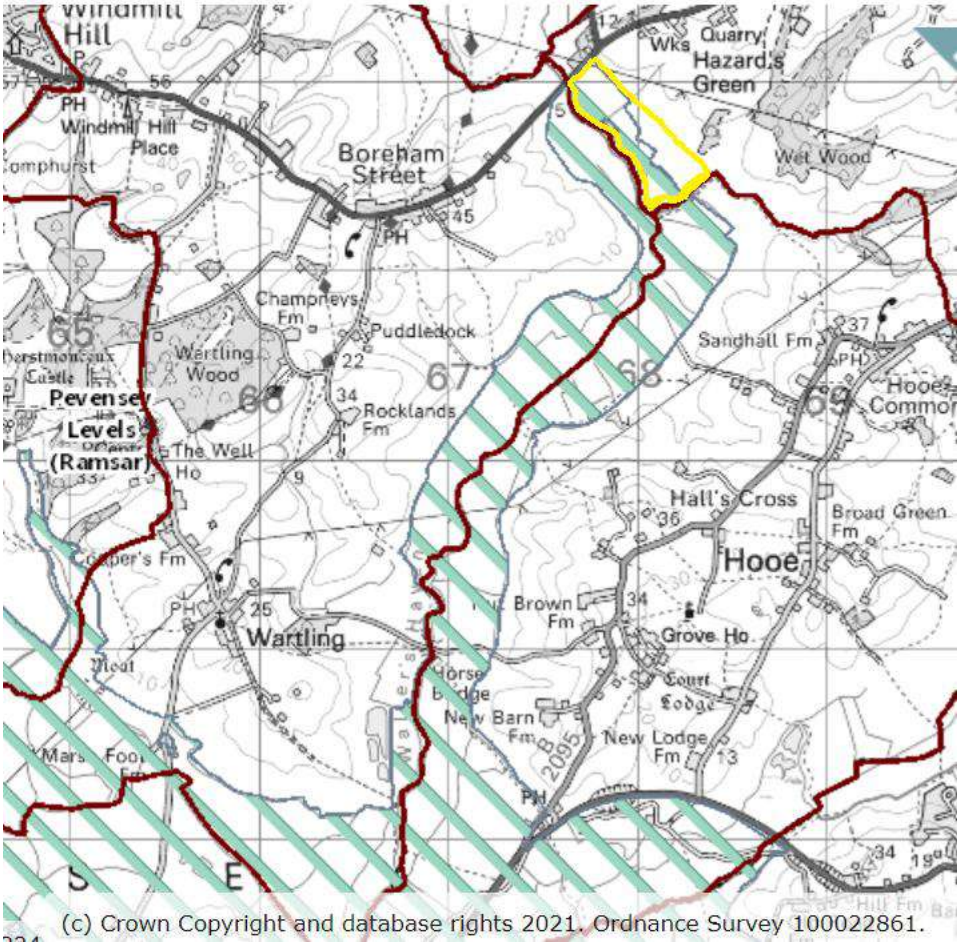
Combe Hill Cottage, Combe Hill – Grade II

Other buildings worthy of consideration for inclusion on a Local Heritage List:- none



Extracted from HighWeald.org website

Wallers Haven Levels (part of Pevensey Levels SSSI)



The yellow outline shows the part of Wallers Haven Levels within NInfield Parish superimposed on map of NE part of Pevensey Levels RAMSAR site with designated area shown by diagonal blue lines and parish boundaries by red lines (Extracted from DEFRA Magic website)

Only a very small part of Pevensey Levels at its north-eastern extremity lies within Ninfield. Its character differs totally from the rest of the parish. This part is a northward extension of Hooe Level and comprises the narrow floodplain on either side of Wallers Haven where it extends as a finger, northwards, separating the high ground of Hooe/Ninfield to the east from the high ground of Wartling/Boreham Street to the west. The continuation northwards beyond the A271 Boreham Bridge is within the High Weald AONB, with the river becoming the smaller stream called the Ash Bourne and a number of other streams converging from the northwest.

Pevensey Levels is a wetland recognised as being of international importance and hence designated as a Ramsar site as well as a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). As a floodplain grazing marsh, it is a priority habitat. Many species of aquatic invertebrates and plants that are rare in the UK are found here. Freshwater molluscs, dragonflies and the fen raft spider are notable. It is a significant habitat for overwintering wading birds although this has declined since water levels were controlled. Also, breeding reed and sedge warblers. The SAC designation relates to it being a habitat of the endangered Ramshorn snail.

The area now comprising Pevensey Levels was once a shallow inlet of the sea but by Roman times had become a tidal saltmarsh with small islands (‘eyes’). During the medieval period, reclamation began to take place encouraged by the high quality of pasture for cattle grazing compared to the Weald. Periodic tidal inundations occurred but by the 1600s the whole area had been reclaimed and laid out with numerous drainage channels (‘inns’) and cuts excavated through the coastal shingle bank that had formed. In recent times, the water levels have been artificially managed by pumps and sluices. The competing demands of farming, biodiversity, water extraction and wastewater disposal have posed management problems, as well as the more fundamental ‘tide-lock’ problem of being unable to discharge water to the sea at high tide.

The main landscape feature of the Levels within NInfield parish is the river with its raised embankments, together with the water meadows used for cattle grazing either side and the numerous drainage channels. There are reeds in the channels. There are hedges on the more peripheral areas with a few trees. The river is popular for fishing. There is a pumphouse, resembling a traditional agricultural barn, where drinking water is extracted from the river and pumped uphill to the nearby waterworks at Hazards Green.

Wallers Haven river and Pumping station looking north towards A271 and AONB

An ancient but not readily-apparent feature is Castle Croft (or Rats Castle), a raised rectangular area surrounded by hedges. It appears to be an ancient earthwork but is not a scheduled ancient monument. Its origin is unknown but thought to be Romano-British, either a portside settlement or a refuge for cattle during floods. Finds include Roman coins and also timbers (radiocarbon-dated between 660 and 830AD) thought to be associated with a Saxon jetty on the ancient marine inlet.

Where Boreham Bridge crosses the river, on each side there is a large lay-by for parking. The previous narrow bridge was replaced in 1938 with the present much wider structure which, for road users, is unnoticeable as a bridge. Public footpath FP13 runs along the riverside embankment before turning eastwards inland and running along the embankment beside Moorhall stream, then heading uphill south-eastwards to Hooe. It provides views of the woods on Standard Hill and the Moorhall valley, as well as across the open levels to Boreham Hill. The main detractors in this

area are the overhead electricity lines on large pylons and, in the vicinity of Boreham Bridge, the speeding traffic on the A271 and the parking of large HGVs on the lay-by attracted by a mobile snack bar.

This wetland is the only significant area within the parish identified by the Environment Agency as at risk of flooding (ie. category 3 risk) other than extremely narrow areas along the courses of the Ninfield Stream and the Catsfield Stream and its tributaries. Wallers Haven is classified by the Environment Agency as a main river together with the lower courses of the Ninfield Stream and the Moorhall Stream, with maintenance responsibility resting with the Agency.

The wider area of Pevensey Levels was assessed by Chris Blandford Associates in 2014 as Strength of Place: Very Strong; Visibility: Very High; Landscape Sensitivity: Very High; Landscape Value: Very High; Landscape Capacity: Low

Lower reach of Moorhall Stream with FP13 on embankment looking east towards Wet Wood

Looking E from FP13 on riverside embankment towards Long Wood and Wet Wood with Castle Croft behind straight hedge on right.

LISTED BUILDINGS

None

FEATURE FOR POTENTIAL INCLUSION ON A LOCAL HERITAGE LIST

Castle Croft (Romano-British earthwork)

CONCLUSIONS

As previously mentioned, the landscape of East Sussex and Wealden District has been the subject of a number of studies and assessments, most recently including those commissioned by Wealden District Council as part of the preparation of a replacement Local Plan. The present Study of Ninfield refers to these findings and applies more locally detailed knowledge of the topography, geology and other factors creating the landscape of the Parish.

The parish of Ninfield has attractive countryside with an intrinsic character justifying recognition in its own right. However, this report has identified that there are substantial differences in landscape between the various areas of the parish, very broadly between the northern/western and southern/eastern areas (the latter mainly comprising of the area described as a 'low plateau'). The former includes land within the AONB but there are also substantial areas outside the AONB boundary which have a particular significance in landscape terms because of their topography and special scenic or other quality, causing them to be highly valued by the community. These areas share many of the characteristics of the AONB and are seen to varying degrees in views both from and towards the AONB. There is no obvious change in landscape along most of the AONB boundary and these areas are, in effect, a transitional zone.

The NPPF states that "*Planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by:* (inter alia) *(a) protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, sites of biodiversity or geological value and soils (in a manner commensurate with their statutory status or identified quality in the development plan)*" (Para 170). *Plans should: distinguish between the hierarchy of international, national and locally designated sites* (Para 171). It also states that planning policies and decisions should identify and protect tranquil areas and intrinsically dark landscapes (para 180).

The Planning Practice Guidance 'Natural Environment' revised 2019 states that "*The National Planning Policy Framework is clear that plans should recognise the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, and that strategic policies should provide for the conservation and enhancement of landscapes. This can include nationally and locally-designated landscapes but also the wider countryside. Where landscapes have a particular local value, it is important for policies to identify their special characteristics and be supported by proportionate evidence. Policies may set out criteria against which proposals for development affecting these areas will be*

assessed. Plans can also include policies to avoid adverse impacts on landscapes and to set out necessary mitigation measures, such as appropriate design principles and visual screening, where necessary. The cumulative impacts of development on the landscape need to be considered carefully." Paragraph: 036 Reference ID: 8-036-20190721

Most old-style development plans identified Areas of Great Landscape Value but, following the designation of national parks and AONBs by central Government, the majority of subsequent Structure and Local Plans did not do so. More recently, however, with greater community involvement, an increasing number of Neighbourhood Plans have promoted the concept of 'Locally Valued Landscapes'. In the case of Wealden District, the Hellingly Neighbourhood Plan, which was 'made' in July 2021, includes an extensive area of countryside identified as an 'Area of Locally Valued Landscape'. Such local designation obviously carries less weight than the national statutory designations (and Local Green Space designation). It cannot prevent development per se but should ensure that the effect of development on the landscape is given more weight and therefore more careful attention than would otherwise be the case. There are some recent instances in Ninfield where it is felt that, in permitting new development, insufficient regard has been paid to the details of siting, design/external appearance and tree/hedge planting, with resultant harm to the landscape.

The NPPF does not define "valued landscapes". It is evident that it is more than simply popularity and must incorporate distinct physical attributes such as scenic beauty or tranquillity for example. Beauty is a largely subjective matter but distinctive topography, woodland, hedgerow and field patterns, especially if historic, are recognised as important contributory factors. The extent to which there are public views over the surroundings also needs to be taken into account. Conversely, substantial environmental detractors can obviously reduce or even negate landscape value.

The Hellingly Neighbourhood Plan has based its 'Area of Locally Valued Landscape' on the Local Landscape Character Types identified by Chris Blandford Assocs as 'Ridges and Slopes' and 'Ridges and Valleys' (within the wider 'South Slopes of the High Weald' identified by ESCC). These were both concluded by the consultants as having very high landscape value and high or very high landscape sensitivity. In the case of Ninfield, apart from the Levels, the whole parish is within the 'Ridges and Slopes' area. More detailed local analysis carried out in the present Study has identified that there are substantial differences between the local character areas within the consultants broad 'Ridges and Slopes' area.

Potential Areas of Locally Valued Landscape

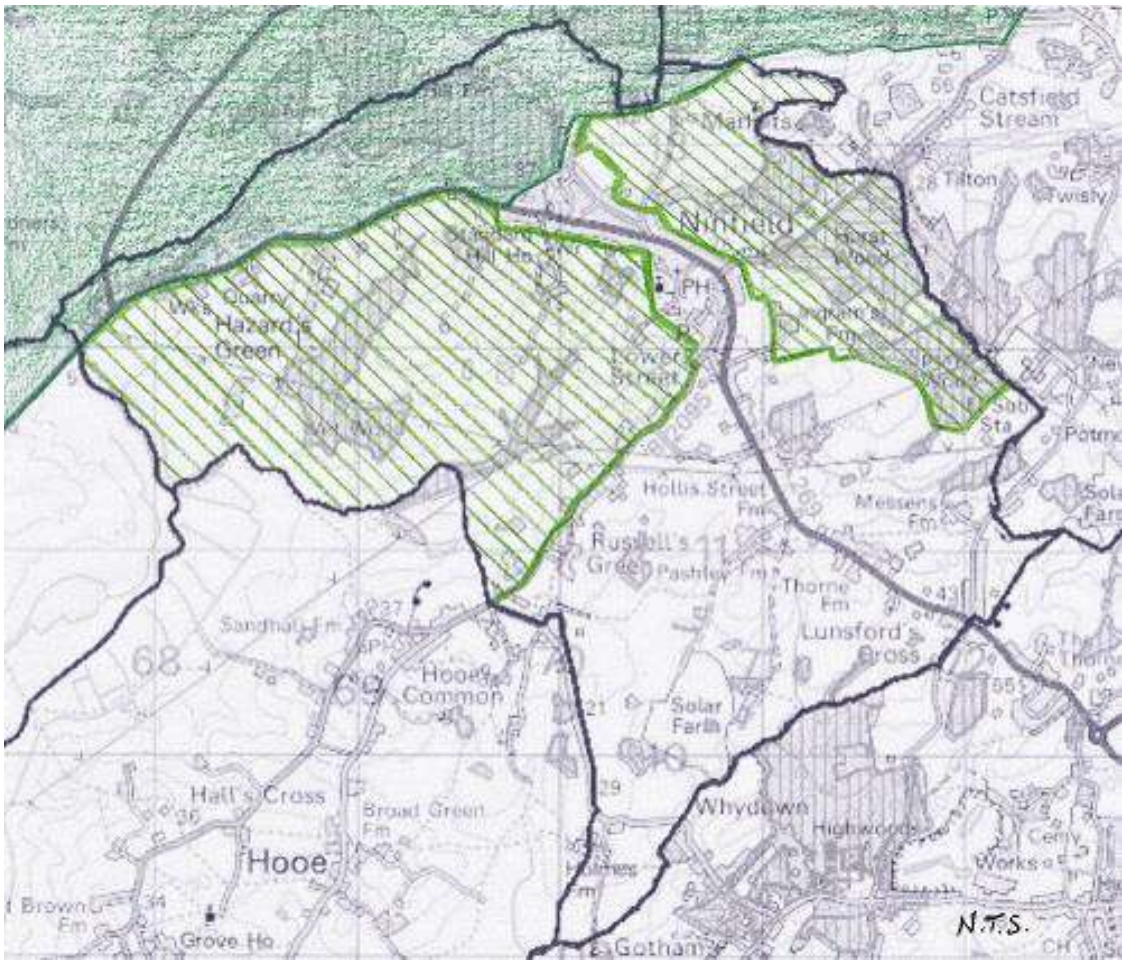
It is concluded that there is sound justification for giving consideration to the designation of the area described in this Study as the **Valley of the Moorhall Stream** as an Area of Locally Valued Landscape**.** It is an area of particularly attractive and predominantly unspoilt countryside with a distinctive ridges and slopes topography and an intricate pattern of ancient woods and fields. Significantly, it has a network of public footpaths (including tarmac Church Path) on the village edge. This

makes it easily accessible and, with its long-distance views from the relatively open high ground, greatly valued by many residents. There is no other area around the village which is comparable in terms of its combination of numerous viewpoints, distinctive landscape character, accessibility and public usage. In addition to this, it preserves the relationship of significant historic buildings in the village (including the Grade I church and 2* Standard Hill House) to the open countryside. As the public views extend over a very wide area, it is considered that the whole valley including the west side of Standard Hill and the adjacent Levels is a locally valued landscape. The juxtaposition of the Levels to the higher ground is distinctive. There are public views not only from the paths on the village edge but also from the A269 and B2095 plus a panoramic view from the A271 on the north side of Boreham Street where the AONB merges imperceptibly with this area. The fields forming the part of this area adjacent to Church Path and Wood on the village edge appear likely to satisfy the criteria for designation as Local Green Space but are limited by the requirement not to be an extensive tract of land. 125 respondents to the NDP Questionnaire stated that they valued Church Wood as local green space. 79 valued the land adjoining Church Path/rear of High Street and 12 valued the fields off Moor Hall Drive.

It is also suggested that the area of Moons Hill and Marlpits Lane and the rest of the **Valley of Catsfield/Watermill Stream** (excluding the southern end but including Ingrams Farm) should be considered for designation as an Area of Locally Valued Landscape. The northern part adjoining but contrasting with the village possesses the character of a remote backwater. It adjoins the boundary of the AONB and is partially seen in views from the AONB. It preserves an ancient field pattern with numerous ponds as well as more extensive and largely ancient woodland in the minor but relatively steep Court Wood side valley. It includes an open area of high ground on the village edge and also coincidentally provides the setting for a number of Grade II listed and other historic buildings (including Church Farmhouse, Barn and Oast, High Knoll, Cross Farmhouse, Fir Tree Cottages). Whilst it lacks any network of public footpaths and public views are limited (apart from FP21), the narrow country lanes Moons Hill and Marlpits Lane provide good accessibility and a circular route popular with walkers and horse riders. They are especially valued for their tranquil and remote environment so close to the village. 73 respondents to the NDP Questionnaire stated that they particularly valued the area of Moons Hill, Marlpits Lane and Coombe Lane as local green space and 10 particularly valued the fields behind Manchester Road. The site at the rear of Sparke Gardens on which 80 houses are being constructed would, apart from its proposed tree belt, need to be excluded. Catsfield Road (B2204) is not tranquil, owing to the traffic, but it nevertheless provides a distinctive wooded uphill approach to the ridge-top village that is worthy of protection on both sides for its natural scenic value. The remainder of the valley stretching south from the A2204 is predominantly ancient woodland but also includes some unspoilt areas of ancient fields, some providing the setting for listed buildings at Ingrams Farm. The Ninfield Transforming Station and associated overhead lines on pylons are a major detractor at the southern end although the impact is localised because of enclosure by woods. A public footpath provides a long circular route from the south-east side of the village through these woods and northwards (mainly on the Catsfield side) to Marlpits Lane. 11 NDP Questionnaire

respondents stated that they particularly value the surroundings of this path as green space. It is relevant to note that an appeal regarding a solar farm on the Catsfield side was dismissed because the landscape deserved protection for its intrinsic character and beauty.

It is suggested, therefore, that the Ninfield NDP should identify the above as Areas of Locally Valued Landscape (ALVL) with their boundaries shown on the Proposals Map and, most importantly, a specific Policy which identifies their inherent visual qualities and distinctive characteristics and safeguards these features. The suggested Areas of Locally Valued Landscape (and the AONB) are shown on the following plan. The policy would enable development to be permitted provided it is not detrimental to the identified rural character, scenic quality or visual amenities of the areas. It should require mitigation where necessary and require the details of siting, design and landscaping (including tree planting) to minimise any adverse effects. It is suggested that specific reference should be made in the policy to a requirement not to adversely impact on the rural setting of public footpaths or on views from public vantage points (main viewpoints to also be identified on the Proposals Map).



Ninfield Parish (solid black line) showing AONB (shaded dark green) and suggested Areas of Locally Valued Landscape (cross-hatched light green).