Wealden District Council

Landscape and Visual Appraisal

Potential Development Sites in the High Weald AONB

Final report
Prepared by LUC
August 2026



Wealden District Council

Landscape and Visual Appraisal
Potential Development Sites in the High Weald AONB

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Chapter 1
Introduction

This section introduces the study and presents the generic guidance for accommodating built development into the landscape of the High Weald AONB[1]

1.1 LUC was originally commissioned by Wealden District Council in 2021 to prepare a number of evidence base studies to inform the Local Plan making process. This included a Landscape Character Assessment, a Landscape Sensitivity Assessment for Residential and Employment Development, and a Landscape and Visual Appraisal of potential New Settlements and Large Urban Extensions.

1.2 In tandem with this, LUC was also commissioned to undertake a Landscape and Visual Appraisal of potential development sites located within the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) that had been submitted for the Council's Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHELAA). The aim of the appraisal was to ascertain the potential for the sites to accommodate development (in landscape and visual terms), as well as determine any site specific constraints and design considerations, with reference to their designation within the High Weald AONB.

1.3 Since the aforementioned landscape evidence base was last undertaken and published, the planning context for Wealden has changed. This includes an increase in the housing need figure required to be delivered across the district as well as updates to relevant planning policy (explained further in **Chapter 2**) and the publication of the latest High Weald AONB Management Plan 2024-2029[2].

1.4 LUC was further commissioned in 2025 to review and update parts of the evidence base accordingly, including the Landscape and Visual Appraisal of potential development sites located within the High Weald AONB to support the

[1] All AONBs are now known as National Landscapes. The High Weald National Landscape remains designated an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and is referred to as such in policy, legislation, guidance and the High Weald AONB Management Plan 2024-2029. For this reason, this report continus to refer to the High Weald National Landscape as the High Weald AONB.

[2] https://www.highweald.org/high-weald-aonb-management-plan.html

development of the emerging Wealden Local Plan. This involved the assessment of additional sites and greater detail in understanding the impacts on the High Weald AONB.

1.5 46 potential development sites, located on the fringes of eleven settlements (and within assessment units identified within the 2023 Landscape Sensitivity Assessment for Residential and Employment Development), have been appraised, in addition to nine potential development sites located within the wider landscape.

1.6 The overall findings of the Landscape and Visual Appraisal for each of the potential development sites is set out in **Appendix A**.

1.7 Specific guidance for each site is set out within the Landscape and Visual Appraisals. This includes measures to avoid/minimise any potential landscape and visual effects that could arise from the introduction of development, as well as potential landscape enhancement measures. This should be read in conjunction with the vision, objectives and proposed actions within the High Weald AONB Management Plan[3].

1.8 The following summarises guidance that is more generic across all potential development sites, including:

- Set development back from the edge of ancient woodland to the required minimum buffer zone; the buffer zone could provide a valuable habitat for woodland wildlife and should consist of semi-natural habitat (e.g. a mix of woodland edge and semi-improved grassland to provide structural complexity and species diversity).
- Retain, protect, and enhance all mature vegetation within and surrounding a site, including woodlands, trees, and hedgerows.
- Improve the connectivity of woodlands and hedgerows through new tree planting and hedgerow corridors that are in character with the locality, using native species where possible / suitable.
- Enhance the connectivity of the local habitat network through tree planting and hedgerow corridors, in line with any relevant Biodiversity Opportunity Areas.
- Conserve, protect and enhance priority habitat; development should avoid such areas and retain areas of open space to provide a buffer to development.
- Retain areas of historic field pattern (e.g. assarts) where practicable, particularly where they are a defining component of character.
- Consider the character and setting of any heritage assets (e.g. listed buildings or registered parks and gardens).
- Screen development with additional planting, using local native species where possible /suitable, to maintain the rural character of the wider assessment unit and landscape.
- Avoid development in the more open and elevated areas of the site.
- Consider intervisibility with the wider High Weald AONB in the siting and design of development; include corridors to retain and frame any existing views.
- Retain and enhance public access across the site and provide opportunities to experience the surrounding countryside and woodlands.
- Locate development to fit with the existing settlement pattern and respect any features that define the existing settlement edge nearby (e.g. river valleys, crests of higher ground etc.).
- Development should be sited to minimise the perception of coalescence between distinct settlements/areas of a settlement.
- The height of development should integrate with the adjacent surrounding settlement edges, both existing and consented.
- Consider opportunities to integrate development with recent development in the vicinity, to ensure a cohesive character to the expanded settlement.
- For larger sites, intersperse green open space and tree planting within the development to help soften and break up the perceived mass of built forms, strengthen green infrastructure, and enhance the integration of built forms within the landscape.
- For smaller sites, reduce the density of buildings to encompass more space between/around buildings, interspersed with soft landscaping and tree planting, to soften visual impact and enhance integration of built form within the landscape.
- Design new buildings to respond appropriately to the character and appearance of the surroundings by using high quality materials in keeping with the local vernacular.
- Development to draw on the principles contained within the High Weald AONB 'High Weald Housing Design Guide'[4], 'Guidance on the selection and use of colour in

[3] https://www.highweald.org/high-weald-aonb-management-plan.html

[4] https://www.highweald.org/look-after/planning/design-guide.html

development'[5] and objectives of the High Weald AONB Management Plan[6].

- Minimise the influence of lighting associated with new development and only install outdoor lighting where necessary. Follow the Institute of Lighting Professionals guidance[7] and use dark sky-friendly lighting.

1.9 It should be acknowledged that this Landscape and Visual Appraisal is undertaken at a strategic level. If any of the sites are taken forwards to the application stage, further detailed studies will be required which may include a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, to inform final development in terms of layout and developable area.

Structure of the report

1.10 This report is structured as follows:

Chapter 1 provides a non-technical summary (this chapter).

Chapter 2 presents an introduction and policy context.

Chapter 3 sets out the methodology for the landscape and visual appraisal.

Appendix A contains the landscape and visual appraisals.

Appendix B contains relevant extracts from the High Weald AONB Management Plan 2024-2029, in relation ot the core character components of natural beauty.

Appendix C contains the sources of information used in the appraisal.

Appendix D contains a glossary of terms.

[5] https://www.highweald.org/look-after/planning/colour-study.html
[6] https://www.highweald.org/high-weald-aonb-management-plan.html

[7] See the Institute of Lighting Professionals guidance for further information: https://theilp.org.uk/publication/guidance-note-1-for-the-reduction-of-obtrusive-light-2021/

Chapter 2
Background and purpose of the study

This section sets out the background and purpose of the study and presents the national planning policy context

Background and purpose

2.1 Wealden's rural landscapes have a distinctive character and are a valuable resource for the district. A large proportion (60%) of the district is located within nationally protected landscapes, including the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) in the north and the South Downs National Park to the south[8].

2.2 At the same time the district is facing the need to accommodate substantial housing and employment growth and will be required to allocate growth in its Local Plan which will set out a growth strategy for the Plan period to 2042. It will be important to deliver future growth in a way that protects and enhances valued landscapes and their defining components of character, as well as contributing to and enhancing the natural local environment.

2.3 To help inform the Local Plan making process, LUC was commissioned by Wealden District Council in 2021 and again in 2025 to prepare a Landscape and Visual Appraisal of potential development sites located within the High Weald AONB that had been submitted for the Council's Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHELAA).

2.4 The aim of the study was to produce a landscape and visual appraisal of the potential development sites within the High Weald AONB in relation to accommodating growth, as well as to determine any site-specific constraints, opportunities and design considerations.

National planning policy context

High Weald AONB

2.5 AONBs exist within a legal framework based on the 1949 National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act, which provided AONBs with protection under planning law against

[8] South Downs National Park is the Planning Authority for the area of the National Park that sits within Wealden District.

inappropriate development, and gave local authorities permissive powers to take action for 'preserving and enhancing natural beauty'.

2.6 This was subsumed and strengthened under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, which provides a firm legislative basis for the protection and management of AONBs. Relevant sections are:

- **Section 82** reaffirms the primary purpose of AONBs: to conserve and enhance natural beauty.
- **Section 84** confirms the powers of local authorities to take 'all such action as appears to them expedient' to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of an AONB.
- **Section 92** makes clear that the conservation of natural beauty includes the conservation of 'flora, fauna and geological and physiographical features.'

The CRoW Act 2000 (as amended by the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023)

2.7 The Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023 amended **section 85** of the CRoW Act 2000, to create a new duty on relevant authorities to 'seek to further the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the area' when discharging their functions in AONBs. The new duty replaces the previous requirement for relevant authorities to 'have regard' to the purpose of AONBs and is intended as a more proactive and strengthened requirement.

National Planning Policy Framework

2.8 The UK Government published an updated and revised National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) in February 2025, which sets out the environmental, social and economic planning policies for England. Central to NPPF policies is a presumption in favour of sustainable development; that development should be planned for positively and individual proposals should be approved wherever possible.

2.9 However, one of the overarching objectives that underpins the NPPF is set out in **Paragraph 8**: *"*an environmental objective – to protect and enhance our natural, built and historic environment…*"*

2.10 Paragraph 187 states that *"*planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by **protecting and enhancing valued landscapes***"* and *"***recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside***"*.

2.11 Paragraph 20 states 'Strategic policies should set out an overall strategy for the pattern, scale and design quality of places, and make sufficient provision for:

a) homes (including affordable housing), employment, retail, leisure and other commercial development;

b) infrastructure for transport, telecommunications, security, waste management, water supply, wastewater, flood risk and coastal change management, and the provision of minerals and energy (including heat);

c) community facilities (such as health, education and cultural infrastructure); and

d) conservation and enhancement of the natural, built and historic environment, including landscapes and green infrastructure, and planning measures to address climate change mitigation and adaptation'.

2.12 Paragraph 135 states 'Planning policies and decisions should ensure that developments:

a) will function well and add to the overall quality of the area, not just for the short term but over the lifetime of the development;

b) are visually attractive as a result of good architecture, layout and appropriate and effective landscaping;

c) are sympathetic to local character and history, including the surrounding built environment and landscape setting, while not preventing or discouraging appropriate innovation or change (such as increased densities);

d) establish or maintain a strong sense of place, using the arrangement of streets, spaces, building types and materials to create attractive, welcoming and distinctive places to live, work and visit.

e) optimise the potential of the site to accommodate and sustain an appropriate amount and mix of development (including green and other public space) and support local facilities and transport networks; and

f) create places that are safe, inclusive and accessible and which promote health and well-being, with a high standard of amenity for existing and future users; and where crime and disorder, and the fear of crime, do not undermine the quality of life or community cohesion and resilience'.

2.13 Paragraph 188 states 'Plans should: distinguish between the hierarchy of international, national and locally designated sites; allocate land with the least environmental or amenity value, where consistent with other policies in this Framework; take a strategic approach to maintaining and enhancing networks of habitats and green infrastructure; and plan for the enhancement of natural capital at a catchment or landscape scale across local authority boundaries'.

2.14 Paragraph 189 states 'Great weight should be given to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty in National Parks, the Broads and Areas of Outstanding Natural

Beauty which have the highest status of protection in relation to these issues. The conservation and enhancement of wildlife and cultural heritage are also important considerations in these areas and should be given great weight in National Parks and the Broads. The scale and extent of development within all these designated areas should be limited, while development within their setting should be sensitively located and designed to avoid or minimise adverse impacts on the designated areas'.

2.15 Paragraph 190 states **'**When considering applications for development within National Parks, the Broads and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, permission should be refused for major development[9] other than in exceptional circumstances, and where it can be demonstrated that the development is in the public interest. Consideration of such applications should include an assessment of:

(a) the need for the development, including in terms of any national considerations, and the impact of permitting it, or refusing it, upon the local economy;

(b) the cost of, and scope for, developing outside the designated area, or meeting the need for it in some other way; and

(c) any detrimental effect on the environment, the landscape and recreational opportunities, and the extent to which that could be moderated.

2.16 Paragraph 198 contains one reference to sensitivity as follows:

'Planning policies and decisions should also ensure that new development is appropriate for its location taking into account the likely effects (including cumulative effects) of pollution on health, living conditions and the natural environment, **as well as the potential sensitivity of the site or the wider area to impacts that could arise from the development**…'

National Planning Policy Guidance (NPPG)

2.17 Further guidance is provided in the NPPG. Paragraph 037[10] which notes the following under the heading of 'How can the character of the landscape be assessed?'

"*…Landscape sensitivity can inform policy development and appropriate locations for development and can also be one of the considerations to be taken into account when making decisions on planning applications.*

To help assess the type and scale of development that might be able to be accommodated without compromising landscape character, a Landscape Sensitivity and Capacity Assessment can be completed. To demonstrate the likely effects of a proposed development on the landscape, a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment can be used.

[9] Whether a proposal is 'major development' is a matter for the decision maker, taking into account its nature, scale and setting, and whether it could have a significant adverse impact on the purposes for which the area has been designated or defined, as set out in https://www.gov.uk/guidance/national-planning-policy-framework/15-conserving-and-enhancing-the-natural-environment - footnote60

[10] Reference ID: 8-037-20190721 Revision date: 21 07 2019

Chapter 3
Methodology and summary

-

This section presents the scope of the study and the approach to landscape and visual appraisal

Approach to landscape and visual appraisal

3.1 The approach to this study was informed by the above planning policy context and current good practice guidance in the Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, 3rd Edition (GLVIA3)[11] and Natural England's 'An approach to landscape sensitivity assessment – to inform spatial planning and land management'[12]. The approach also draws on best practice in recent assessments completed by LUC and others.

The 'core character components of natural beauty' of the High Weald AONB

3.2 The appraisal assesses sites located in and around settlements within, or within the setting, of the High Weald AONB, and therefore also includes a consideration of the eight 'core character components of natural beauty', as set out in the High Weald AONB Management Plan 2024-2029. The eight defining components of character are as follows:

1. ***Natural systems (geology, soils, water and climate)*** *– a deeply incised, ridged and faulted landform of clays and sandstone with highly variable, relatively undisturbed soils and numerous headwaters (gill streams) functioning under an oceanic climate.*
2. ***Settlement*** *– dispersed historic settlement including high densities of isolated farmsteads, hamlets 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*** *– an abundance of ancient woodland mostly in small holdings, highly interconnected with hedges and shaws.*

[11] Landscape Institute and the Institute of Environmental Management, Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, 3rd Edition

[12] Natural England, An approach to landscape sensitivity assessment – to inform spatial planning and land management, 2019

5. ***Fieldscapes and heath*** *– small, irregular and productive fields, bound by hedgerows and woods, and typically used for livestock grazing; with distinctive zones of lowland heaths and inned river valleys (reclaimed marshland).*
6. ***Dark night skies*** *– intrinsically dark at night with our own galaxy (the Milky Way) visible.*
7. ***Aesthetic and perceptual qualities*** *– arising from the interaction of people with the landscape, including the notion of a quintessential English pastoral landscape, intimacy of scale, a sense of history and timelessness; rurality and tranquillity; glimpsed long views; freedom to explore and make connections with the natural world, and a rich legacy of features and ideas left by writers, poets and gardeners inspired by the landscape.*
8. ***Land-based economy and rural living*** *– with roots extending deep into history, and which has visibly and culturally shaped the landscape.*

3.3 The High Weald AONB Management Plan provides a list of supporting key characteristics, and associated objectives and actions for each core character component of natural beauty. Relevant extracts are provided in **Appendix B.**

3.4 Based on professional judgement, the appraisal considers how strongly the core components of character are expressed on the site as follows:

- **Strong expression** – several character components are present and are clearly expressed, i.e. sense of being within the AONB with an absence of human intervention that detracts from natural beauty.
- **Moderate expression** – some character components are present and are evident within the landscape, but could be considered to form part of an ordinary rural landscape (without a strong sense of being within the AONB).
- **Weak expression** – core character components are absent or are present but their expression is masked by human intervention that detracts from natural beauty.

3.5 Spatial data relating to the 'defining components of character' was provided by the High Weald AONB and has informed this appraisal. The dataset includes information relating to:

- Water systems data (watercourses, ponds, reservoirs and openwater);
- Geology data (bedrock geology and sandstone outcrops);
- Settlement data (historic settlement pattern and historic farmsteads);
- Historic routeways data;
- Woodland data (ancient semi-natural woodlands and plantations on ancient woodland site); and
- Field and heath data (historic field boundaries, heathland, and wildflower grassland).

The process of appraisal

3.6 The process for undertaking the study involved the following main stages:

Part 1: Desk based assessment

3.7 The initial stage of the study involved a desk-based assessment drawing on descriptions and evaluations in the Landscape Character Assessment for Wealden[13] and Landscape Sensitivity Assessment for Residential and Employment Development[14].

3.8 The five-point scale from 'low' to 'high' landscape sensitivity used for the judgements is as follows:

Table 3.1: Landscape sensitivity

Sensitivity judgement	Definition
High	Landscape and visual constraints mean the site is unlikely to be suitable for development.
Moderate-high	Great care is required with design, and substantial mitigation likely to be needed, to avoid landscape and visual constraints and sensitivities.
Moderate	Site (or part of the site) has landscape and visual constraints and sensitivities – care with design and mitigation required.
Low-moderate	Site has some landscape and visual constraints and sensitivities, careful design and awareness needed.

[13] LUC, 2022 Wealden Landscape Character Assessment

[14] LUC, 2023 Landscape Sensitivity Assessment for Residential and Employment Development

Sensitivity judgement	Definition
Low	In landscape and visual terms the site has few constraints.

3.9 Information from relevant documents and available GIS data were reviewed to understand the wider landscape context for the potential development sites. Key sources of information used to inform the appraisal are listed in **Appendix C**.

Part 2: Field verification

3.10 A structured process of field survey verification was originally undertaken in summer 2022, supplemented by further visits during spring and summer 2026 by landscape professionals from LUC in order to verify and refine the outputs from the desk study. Each potential development site was visited to record information and take photographs.

Part 3: Analysis

Potential effects of developing the site, including on the core character components of natural beauty

3.11 For each potential development site (or groups of sites where sites are located adjacent to one another) an analysis of the potential effects of development was undertaken. This included identification of the potential effects of development on:

- Landscape character and features – how potential development could affect key landscape qualities/ sensitivities or conflict with relevant guidance (as identified in the Wealden Landscape Character Assessment or the Wealden Landscape Sensitivity Assessment)
- Existing settlement form and setting – how potential development could affect settlement pattern (including potential for coalescence between settlements and existing separation between them).
- Visual amenity – how potential development could affect sensitive visual receptors (including important views from or across the High Weald AONB)

3.12 For each potential effect identified, the relevant core character component(s) of natural beauty of the High Weald AONB and supporting key characteristic(s) likely to be affected were also identified.

Potential mitigation and enhancement opportunities

3.13 For each development site, advice is provided on potential mitigation measures to avoid or minimise adverse effects and opportunities to enhance the landscape. Reference to the relevant objective in the High Weald AONB Management Plan is also provided.

Overall impact on the core character components of natural beauty of the High Weald AONB

3.14 A judgement of the overall impact on the core character components of natural beauty of the High Weald AONB is provided. A RAG[15] rating system was used for the judgement as follows:

Table 3.2: RAG rating system for overall impact on the core character components of natural beauty of the High Weald AONB

RAG rating	Definition
High impact	Development of the site will have a high impact on the landscape and visual qualities/features that define the AONB, therefore affecting / impacting the ability of the Council to fulfil its statutory duty to further the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the AONB.
Moderate impact	Development of the site will have a moderate impact on the landscape and visual qualities/features that define the AONB, therefore somewhat affecting / impacting the ability of the Council to fulfil its statutory duty to further the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the AONB.
Low impact	Development of the site will have a low impact on the landscape and visual qualities/features that define the AONB, and is therefore unlikely to affect / impact the ability of the Council to fulfil its statutory duty to further the purpose of

[15] (R)ed, (A)mber, and (G)reen, commonly referred to as RAG reporting, is a method of assessment that uses colour categorisation to indicate potential issues and their severity.

RAG rating	Definition
	conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the AONB.

Summary and recommendations

3.15 The key recommendations for accommodating development are set out in the summary.

3.16 Sites, or groups of sites, with potential development of 20 residential dwellings or more are illustrated with a constraints / opportunities plan, as agreed with Wealden District Council. These provide further guidance on locations within the site(s) where development could best be accommodated in landscape and visual terms.

Part 4: Reporting

3.17 The findings of the assessment were updated following field survey, and a draft and final report submitted.

3.18 The assessment profiles for each site are organised by the assessment units considered within the Landscape Sensitivity Assessment for Residential and Employment Development[16], and each assessment unit has its own report. These are collectively contained in **Appendix A**. Each report is structured in a common format as follows:

Assessment unit overview

3.19 For each assessment unit the following is provided:

- **a list of the potential development sites** located within the assessment unit (which is also illustrated on a map);
- **the settlement location, evolution and pattern**;
- **mapped information for the 'core character components of natural beauty' of the High Weald AONB** within the assessment unit;
- **the landscape sensitivity context** of the relevant assessment unit including the overall landscape sensitivity rating, key sensitivities, guidance for the assessment unit (as described in the 2023 Wealden Landscape Sensitivity Assessment: Residential and Employment Development).

Baseline analysis of potential development site(s)

3.20 For each potential development site, the following is provided:

- **Site details and constraints** including the type and amount of potential development proposed, whether the site (or part of) is a draft Allocation or Option in the draft Focused Local Plan 2026, and the site location. A map showing the location of the site in relation to the settlement and constraints is provided.
- **Representative site photos;**
- **Baseline landscape character** for each potential development site, including key landscape features and qualities of the site and how these relate to the character of the wider assessment unit; and the relation of the site to the existing settlement form and edge;
- **Baseline visual character** identifying potential visual receptors, and considering the extent of visibility from or across the High Weald AONB;
- **Expression of the 'core character components of natural beauty' of the High Weald AONB on the site** – identifying if any of the features/qualities of the site are representative of the 'core character components' of the AONB.

  [NB in this section text that is underlined and italicised comes directly from the AONB Management Plan].
- **Baseline summary:**
  - **how the site relates to the sensitivity of the wider assessment unit** - this is provided using the same levels of landscape sensitivity as for the wider assessment unit, as set out in **Table 3.1**; and
  - **how strongly the core components of character are expressed on the site.**

Potential effects of developing the site, including on the core character components of natural beauty, and potential mitigation/ enhancement opportunities

3.21 An analysis of the potential effects of development in landscape and visual terms, including effects on:

- landscape character and features (and the corresponding 'core character component(s) of natural beauty of the High Weald AONB') on the site;
- settlement form edge and setting (and the corresponding 'core character component(s) of natural beauty of the High Weald AONB'); and
- visual amenity (and the corresponding 'core character component(s) of natural beauty of the High Weald AONB').

[16] LUC, 2023 Landscape Sensitivity Assessment for Residential and Employment Development

3.22 The potential mitigation and enhancement opportunities are also provided against each potential effect (with reference to the relevant objective in the High Weald AONB Management Plan).

Overall impact on the core character components of natural beauty of the High Weald AONB

3.23 The analysis is concluded with an indication of the overall impact on the core character components of natural beauty of the High Weald AONB (using the RAG rating system in **Table 3.2**).

Summary and recommendations

3.24 A summary of the key issues and recommendations is provided, along with a constraints/ opportunities plan for the larger sites (with the potential for 20 or more residential dwellings).

Cumulative effects of development sites proposed in each assessment unit

3.25 The cumulative effects of all the potential development sites within each assessment unit are analysed.

The potential development sites

3.26 This study assessed the landscape and visual sensitivity of 55 sites identified by Wealden District Council for potential development within Wealden District and the AONB. A number of individual sites are located either adjacent to other sites or are in close proximity to each other and have therefore been considered together. These potential development sites are mapped on **Figure 3.1**

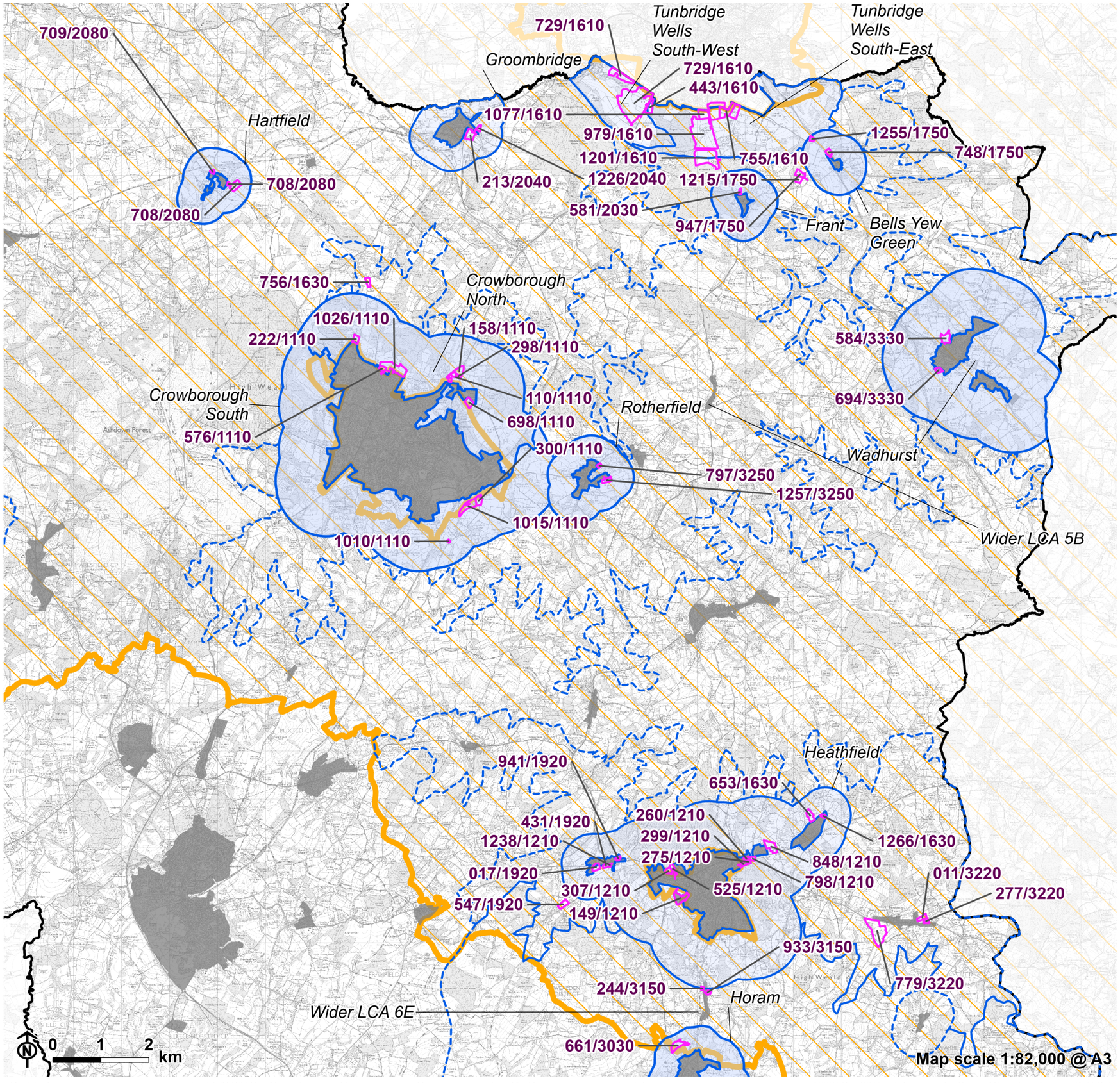
3.27 The Council provided an indication of the quantum of potential development on each site for the purposes of testing through the assessment process. The numbers do not amount to the Council's agreement or determination that the sites are suitable for housing or indeed the level of housing indicated. The suitability of sites for development will be determined through the local plan process taking into account all relevant information and local plan evidence.

3.28 Each potential development site was assessed in relation to the type of development (housing or employment) proposed within the Wealden Strategic Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment (SHELAA). These sites vary in size and most are proposed to accommodate between 5-300 residential dwellings. Six of the sites are proposed for accommodating employment (i.e. small business parks / industrial estates).

Wealden DC: Landscape Evidence Base Studies
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Figure 3.1: Potential Development Site



- SHELAA site
- Sensitivity assessment unit
- Wider LCA assessment unit
- Wealden district
- High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
- Settlement

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Summary

3.29 The full assessment of each site or groups of sites is found in **Appendix A.** A summary of the overall sensitivity ratings; level of expression of the core character components of natural beauty of the High Weald AONB; and overall impact on the core character components of natural beauty of the High Weald AONB, for each site is shown in **Table 3.3.**

Table 3.3: Summary of assessment ratings of SHELAA sites in/ adjacent to the High Weald AONB

SHELAA number	Site name	Overall landscape sensitivity	Variations in sensitivity	Level of expression of the core character components of natural beauty of the High Weald AONB	Overall impact on the core character components of natural beauty of the High Weald AONB	Variation to overall impact
LCA 5B Bells Yew Green assessment unit – see Appendix A.1						
748/1750	Land between Court Lodge and Bells Yew Industrial Estate	Moderate	None	Moderate	Moderate	None
1255/1750	Buckhurst Works	Moderate	The priority habitat deciduous woodland within the western half of the site is more sensitive than the existing industrial/ commercial development within the eastern half.	Moderate	Moderate	The moderate impact primarily relates to the woodland within the western half of the site. The overall impact is lower for the eastern half of the site given its existing industrial/ commercial use.
LCA 5B Crowborough North assessment unit – see Appendix A.2						
110/1110	Land at Hodes, Steel Cross Road	Low - Moderate	None	Weak	Low	None
158/1110	Land at junction of Eridge Road and A26, Steel Cross	Moderate	Site 158/1110 (particularly its northern half) is considered to be more sensitive than site	Moderate	Moderate	Development on the northern half of site 158/1110 is considered to have a greater impact on the core

SHELAA number	Site name	Overall landscape sensitivity	Variations in sensitivity	Level of expression of the core character components of natural beauty of the High Weald AONB	Overall impact on the core character components of natural beauty of the High Weald AONB	Variation to overall impact
298/1110	Spring Cottage, Eridge Road		298/1110 as it demonstrates more of the characteristics that increase sensitivity across the assessment unit, with the latter mostly in existing residential use (comprising buildings and a large lawned garden). The southern half of site 158/1110 is also influenced by existing residential properties making it less sensitive than the northern half, although not to the extent that there would be a change to the moderate sensitivity rating.			character components than the southern half and on site 298/1110 given the existing residential development within these parts; although not to the extent that there would be a change to the moderate impact.
698/1110	Land at Byeways, Palesgate Lane	Moderate	None	Moderate	Moderate	None
576/1110	Land to the rear of Cooks Corner Farm and to the north of London Road	Moderate	None	Moderate	Moderate	None
1026/1110	Land at Beechenwood Farm	Moderate	The eastern half of the site is considered to be less sensitive than the western half, although not to the extent that there would be a change to the moderate sensitivity rating. This is due to the loss of internal field boundaries (having been replaced by post	Moderate	Moderate	Development within the western half of the site is considered to have a slightly greater impact on the core character components than the eastern half due to the historic field pattern being more intact than the eastern half, and proximity to Cooks Corner Farm historic farmstead; although not to

SHELAA number	Site name	Overall landscape sensitivity	Variations in sensitivity	Level of expression of the core character components of natural beauty of the High Weald AONB	Overall impact on the core character components of natural beauty of the High Weald AONB	Variation to overall impact
			and rail fencing), the weaker settlement edge between the properties along Pleasant View Road and fields within the site, and the influence of the existing sheds and storage areas along the eastern edge of the site.			the extent that there would be a change to the moderate impact
222/1110	Adds Farm, Hoadleys Lane	Moderate	None	Moderate	Moderate	None
LCA 5B Crowborough South assessment unit – see Appendix A.3						
1015/1110	**Error! Reference s ource not found.**	Moderate - High	Site 300/1110 (particularly its northern half) is considered to be slightly less sensitive than site 1015/1110 where the sloping landform is more gentle and influenced by the adjacent residential properties to the north-east, although not to the extent that there would be a change to the moderate-high sensitivity rating.	Strong	High	None
300/1110	Oaks Field, Tubwell Lane					
1010/1110	Owlsbury Depot, Hadlow Down Road	Low - Moderate	None	Weak	Low	None
LCA 5B Frant assessment unit - see Appendix A.4						
581/2030	The Glebe Land, Church Lane	Low - Moderate	None	Weak	Low	None

SHELAA number	Site name	Overall landscape sensitivity	Variations in sensitivity	Level of expression of the core character components of natural beauty of the High Weald AONB	Overall impact on the core character components of natural beauty of the High Weald AONB	Variation to overall impact
LCA 5B Heathfield assessment unit – see Appendix A.5						
653/1630	Land adjacent Street End Lane, Broad Oak	Moderate - High	None	Strong	High	None
1266/1630	Former Broad Oak Primary School, Scotsford Road, Broad Oak	Low - Moderate	None	Weak	Low	None
848/1210	Collins Field, Burwash Road	Moderate - High	The south of the site is slightly more sensitive along Burwash Road as it has an important role in the perception of separation of Heathfield and Broad Oak, although not to the extent that there would be a change to the moderate-high sensitivity rating.	Moderate	Moderate	None
260/1210	Land south of Burwash Road and east of Tower Street	Moderate	The west of the site is less sensitive than the east due to its relationship with the existing settlement edge of Heathfield. The eastern part of the site is more rural in character with grassland and infield trees.	Moderate	Moderate	None
275/1210	Land at Parklands, Burwash Road	Moderate - High	None	Strong	High	The greatest impacts on the core character components would

SHELAA number	Site name	Overall landscape sensitivity	Variations in sensitivity	Level of expression of the core character components of natural beauty of the High Weald AONB	Overall impact on the core character components of natural beauty of the High Weald AONB	Variation to overall impact
299/1210	15 Tower Street					likely arise if development occurred within site 299/1210 (due to the presence of mature woodland across this site) and on the southern half of site 275/1210 (as the valley landform contributes strongly to the pattern of faults and folds, and its proximity to the Registered Park and Garden and ancient woodland). The potential impacts would be slightly less within the northern part of site 798/1210 given its proximity to the road and settlement edge and the visual enclosure provided by the mature vegetation along all of its boundaries; although not to the extent that there would be a change to the high impact.
798/1210	The Old Half Moon, Burwash Road					
149/1210	Land south-west of Ghyll Road, Tilsmore	Moderate - High	The trees and young woodland in the west of the site are of a higher sensitivity than the field in the east.	Strong	High	Development within the western half of the site is considered to have a greater impact on the core character components than the eastern half, primarily due to the presence of trees and young woodland across this part of the site. If the potential mitigation and enhancement opportunities set out are applied, which includes locating development within the east and along Ghyll Road, then potential impacts as a result of the

SHELAA number	Site name	Overall landscape sensitivity	Variations in sensitivity	Level of expression of the core character components of natural beauty of the High Weald AONB	Overall impact on the core character components of natural beauty of the High Weald AONB	Variation to overall impact
						development on the site would likely be reduced. However, there would still be inevitable adverse impacts on the grazed pastures which would be lost.
525/1210	Land to the rear of Rothershaw, High Street	Moderate - High	None	Strong	High	The greatest impacts on the core character components would likely arise if development occurred within site 307/1210 as it expresses the parkland character slightly more strongly than site 525/1210. The potential impacts would be slightly less within site 525/1210 which is well contained and visually enclosed by its wooded boundaries; although not to the extent that there would be a change to the high impact. If the potential mitigation and enhancement opportunities are applied, which includes locating development within the south-east of site 525/1210 and avoiding the loss of woodland, then potential impacts as a result of the development on the sites would likely be reduced. However, there would still be inevitable adverse impacts on the grassland and parkland character of this site, which would be lost
307/1210	Land at Tilsmore Nurseries, off Nursery Way					

SHELAA number	Site name	Overall landscape sensitivity	Variations in sensitivity	Level of expression of the core character components of natural beauty of the High Weald AONB	Overall impact on the core character components of natural beauty of the High Weald AONB	Variation to overall impact
941/1920	Land at Sunnyside, A267, Cross in Hand	Moderate	None	Moderate	Moderate	None
431/1920	Land to rear of Brenton House (north) B2102 Cross in Hand	Moderate - High	Site 017/1920 has an enclosed character and is less sensitive than site 431/1920 which is open and affords long-distance views south.	Strong	High	Site 431/1920 contributes mostly to the overall high level of impact above. The potential impacts as a result of development on solely site 017/1920 are judged to have a moderate level of impact.
017/1920	Field to the east of Burnetts Farm, Firgrove Road, Cross in Hand					
1238/1210	Land at 5 Farthing Cottage, Back Lane, Cross in Hand	Low - Moderate	None	Weak	Low	None
LCA 5B Rotherfield assessment unit – see Appendix A.6						
797/3250	Land at Station Road	High	None	Strong	High	None
1257/3250	Highfields Farm	Moderate	None	Moderate	Moderate	None
LCA 5B Tunbridge Wells South East assessment unit – see Appendix A.7						
755/1610 651/1610	Land off Bayham Road Land at Bayham Road	Moderate	None	Moderate	Moderate	None

SHELAA number	Site name	Overall landscape sensitivity	Variations in sensitivity	Level of expression of the core character components of natural beauty of the High Weald AONB	Overall impact on the core character components of natural beauty of the High Weald AONB	Variation to overall impact
1077/1610	Land lying to the west side of Frant Road	Moderate - High	Site 979/1610 (particularly its southern half) is considered to be more sensitive than site 1077/1610 as it demonstrates more of the characteristics that increase sensitivity across the assessment unit, with the latter comprising a relatively flat field enclose by mature vegetation. The moderate-high sensitivity rating reflects an overall balance across both of the sites.	Strong	High	Development on the southern half of site 979/1610 is considered to have a greater impact on the core character components than the northern half, and on site 1077/1610. If the potential mitigation and enhancement opportunities are applied, which includes locating development within site 1077/1610 and the north of 979/1610, then potential impacts as a result of the development on the sites would likely be reduced. However, there would still be inevitable adverse impacts on the grazed pastures which would be lost.
979/1610	Pinewood Farm, Frant Road					
1201/1610	Land at Tunbridge Wells Rugby Club and Chase Farm, Frant Road	Moderate	None	Moderate	Moderate	None
LCA 5B Wadhurst assessment unit – see Appendix A.8						
584/3330	Land adjacent to Jonas Drive	High	None	Strong	High	None
694/3330	Land at Windmill House, Windmill Lane	Moderate	None	Moderate	Moderate	None
Wider LCA 5B assessment unit – see Appendix A.9						

SHELAA number	Site name	Overall landscape sensitivity	Variations in sensitivity	Level of expression of the core character components of natural beauty of the High Weald AONB	Overall impact on the core character components of natural beauty of the High Weald AONB	Variation to overall impact
756/1630	Land at Royal Mires Nursery, London Road, Lye Green	Moderate	None	Weak	Low	None
947/1750	Land at Stubby Grove Business Park, Bells Yew Green Road	Moderate - High	The moderate-high sensitivity score applies predominantly to the small field in the north and the surrounding woodland and shaws to the north and west. Sensitivity is lower for the area of the site containing the existing industrial/ commercial development.	Moderate	Moderate	There would be a greater impact on the field in the north than the area containing the existing industrial development in the south, which is reflected by the overall moderate impact.
1215/1750	Land adjacent to Reflex Buildings, Bells Yew Green Road, Bells Yew Green	Moderate	None	Moderate	Moderate	None
547/1920	Land to the north-west side of Fir Grove Road Cross in Hand	Moderate - High	None	Moderate	Moderate	None
779/3220	Land adjoining Owlsbury, Chapel Cross Lane, Chapel Cross	High	There is slightly lower sensitivity in the north along the edge of the B2096 Battle Road due to the influence of the existing settlement edge.	Strong	High	None
011/3120	Land adjacent to Little Home Farm, Forest Lane, Punnetts Town	Moderate - High	There is slightly lower sensitivity in the south of site 277/3220 along the edge of	Strong	High	Development within site 011/3220 is considered to have a slightly greater impact on the core

SHELAA number	Site name	Overall landscape sensitivity	Variations in sensitivity	Level of expression of the core character components of natural beauty of the High Weald AONB	Overall impact on the core character components of natural beauty of the High Weald AONB	Variation to overall impact
277/3220	Scots Paddock, Forest Lane, Punnetts Town		the B2096 Battle Road due to the influence of the existing settlement edge, the enclosure provided by the woodland. The intact historic field pattern within site 011/3220 is a key sensitive feature.			character components than on site 277/3220 given the strong intact historic field pattern (defined by mature shaws) and with access having to be form the Forest Lane (historic routeway).
LCA 6A Groombridge assessment unit – see Appendix A.10						
213/2040	Land south of Back Lane and to the west of railway line	Moderate - High	None	Moderate	Moderate	None
1226/2040	The Paddock, Lealands Farm, Station Road	Moderate - High	None	Moderate	Moderate	None
LCA 6A Hartfield assessment unit – see Appendix A.11						
708/2080	Land at Castle Farm, Withyham Road, Hartfield	High	The western parcel of the site is considered to be of slightly lower sensitivity (moderate-high) to development than the eastern parcel, given the presence of residential development to the east and west of this parcel and the lower-lying topography, which makes it slightly less visible in the wider landscape. However, it provides a gap between the settlement edge and sporadic dwellings along the B2110	Strong	High	Development on the eastern parcel of the site is considered to have a greater impact on the core character components than the western parcel; although not to the extent that there would be a full reduction to a moderate level of impact due to the potential alteration of settlement pattern and gap if development was to occur on the western parcel

SHELAA number	Site name	Overall landscape sensitivity	Variations in sensitivity	Level of expression of the core character components of natural beauty of the High Weald AONB	Overall impact on the core character components of natural beauty of the High Weald AONB	Variation to overall impact
			(forming the rural context for these properties) and its western boundary is defined by a wooded stream that forms a legible boundary to the existing settlement edge.			
709/2080	Land at Old Crown Farm, Edenbridge Road, Hartfield	Moderate - High	None	Moderate	Moderate	None
LCA 5B Tunbridge Wells South West assessment unit – see Appendix A.12						
729/1610	Land at Ramslye Farm (Spratsbrook Farm)	Moderate - High	None	Moderate	Moderate	The greatest impacts on the core character components would likely arise if development occurred on the northern parcel of site 729/1610 (as its elevated landform contributes strongly to the expression of the principle ridge, its proximity to a Scheduled Monument and forming part of a historic assart field pattern), and within the south of site 443/1610 (given its rural pastoral character from the grazed pastures and surrounding woodland, its role in providing separation between the settlement edge and Spratsbrook historic farmstead and the long views afforded south across the wider AONB). The potential impacts would be less within the
443/1610	Strawberry Hill Farm, Eridge Road					

SHELAA number	Site name	Overall landscape sensitivity	Variations in sensitivity	Level of expression of the core character components of natural beauty of the High Weald AONB	Overall impact on the core character components of natural beauty of the High Weald AONB	Variation to overall impact
						northern parts of the main parcel of site 729/1610 and site 443/1610 given their proximity to the settlement edge and the visual enclosure provided by wooded field boundaries.
LCA 6E Herstmonceaux and Windmill Hill assessment unit – see Appendix A.13						
081/2090	Land to north of James Avenue	Moderate	None	Moderate	Moderate	None
553/2090	Higham Farm, Gardner Street	Moderate - High	None	Strong	High	None
582/2090	Land at Gardner Street	Moderate - High	None	Strong	High	None
LCA 6E Horam assessment unit – see Appendix A.14						
661/3030	Land at Linda House, Little London Road	Moderate - High	None	Strong	High	None
Wider LCA 6E assessment unit – see Appendix A.15						
933/3150	Land at Oast Lodge, Maynards Green Road, Maynards Green	Moderate - High	None	Moderate	Moderate	None
244/3320	Land adjacent to Funnell's Farm, Maynards Green Road, Maynards Green	Moderate	None	Moderate	Moderate	None

Appendix A

Landscape and visual appraisals

A.1 The landscape and visual appraisals are presented as separate reports based on assessment units, as follows:

Appendix A.1: LCA 5B - Bells Yew Green assessment unit

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

Appendix A.2: LCA 5B - Crowborough North assessment unit

- Land at Hodes, Steel Cross Road (110/1110)
- Land at junction of Eridge Road and A26, Steel Cross (158/1110)
- Spring Cottage, Eridge Road (298/1110)
- Land at Byeways, Palesgate Lane (698/1110)
- Land to the rear of Cooks Corner Farm and to the north of London Road (576/1110)
- Land at Beechenwood Farm (1026/1110)
- Adds Farm, Hoadleys Lane (222/1110)

Appendix A.3: LCA 5B - Crowborough South assessment unit

- **Error! Reference source not found.**(1015/1110)
- Oaks Field, Tubwell Lane (300/1110)
- Owlsbury Depot, Hadlow Down Road (1010/1110)

Appendix A.4: LCA 5B - Frant assessment unit

- The Glebe Land, Church Lane (581/2030)

Appendix A.5: LCA 5B - Heathfield assessment unit

- Land adjacent Street End Lane, Broad Oak (653/1630)
- Former Broad Oak Primary School, Scotsford Road, Broad Oak (1266/1630)
- Collins Field, Burwash Road (848/1210)

- Land south of Burwash Road and east of Tower Street (260/1210)
- Land at Parklands, Burwash Road (275/1210)
- 15 Tower Street (299/1210)
- The Old Half Moon, Burwash Road (798/1210)
- Land south-west of Ghyll Road, Tilsmore (149/1210)
- Land to the rear of Rothershaw, High Street (525/1210)
- Land at Tilsmore Nurseries, off Nursery Way (307/1210)
- Land at Sunnyside, A267, Cross in Hand (941/1920)
- Land to rear of Brenton House (north) B2102 Cross in Hand (431/1920)
- Field to the east of Burnetts Farm, Firgrove Road, Cross in Hand (017/1920)
- Land at 5 Farthing Cottage, Back Lane, Cross in Hand (1238/1210)

Appendix A.6: LCA 5B - Rotherfield assessment unit

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

Appendix A.7: LCA 5B - Tunbridge Wells South-East assessment unit

- Land off Bayham Road (755/1610)
- Land at Bayham Road (651/1610)
- Land lying to the west side of Frant Road (1077/1610)
- Pinewood Farm, Frant Road (979/1610)
- Land at Tunbridge Wells Rugby Club and Chase Farm, Frant Road (1201/1610)

Appendix A.8: LCA 5B - Wadhurst assessment unit

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

Appendix A.9: Wider LCA 5B assessment unit

- Land at Royal Mires Nursery, London Road, Lye Green (756/1630)
- Land at Stubby Frove Business Park, Bells Yew Green Road (947/1750)
- Land adjacent to Reflex Buildings, Bells Yew Green Road, Bells Yew Green (1215/1750)
- Land to the north-west side of Fir Grove Road Cross in Hand (547/1920)
- Land adjoining Owlsbury, Chapel Cross Lane, Chapel Cross (779/3220)
- Land adjacent to Little Home Farm, Forest Lane, Punnetts Town (011/3120)
- Scots Paddock, Forest Lane, Punnetts Town (277/3220)

Appendix A.10: LCA 6A - Groombridge assessment unit

- Land south of Back Lane and to the west of railway line (213/2040)
- The Paddock, Lealands Farm, Station Road (1226/2040)

Appendix A.11: LCA 6A - Hartfield assessment unit

- Land at Castle Farm, Withyham Road (708/2080)
- Land at Old Crown Farm, Edenbridge Road (709/2080)

Appendix A.12: LCA 5B Tunbridge Wells South West assessment unit

- Land at Ramslye Farm (Spratsbrook Farm) (729/1610)
- Strawberry Hill Farm, Eridge Road (443/1610)

Appendix A.13: LCA 6E Herstmonceaux and Windmill Hill assessment unit

- Land to north of James Avenue (081/2090)
- Higham Farm, Gardner Street (553/2090)
- Land at Gardner Street (582/2090)

Appendix A.14: LCA 6E - Horam assessment unit

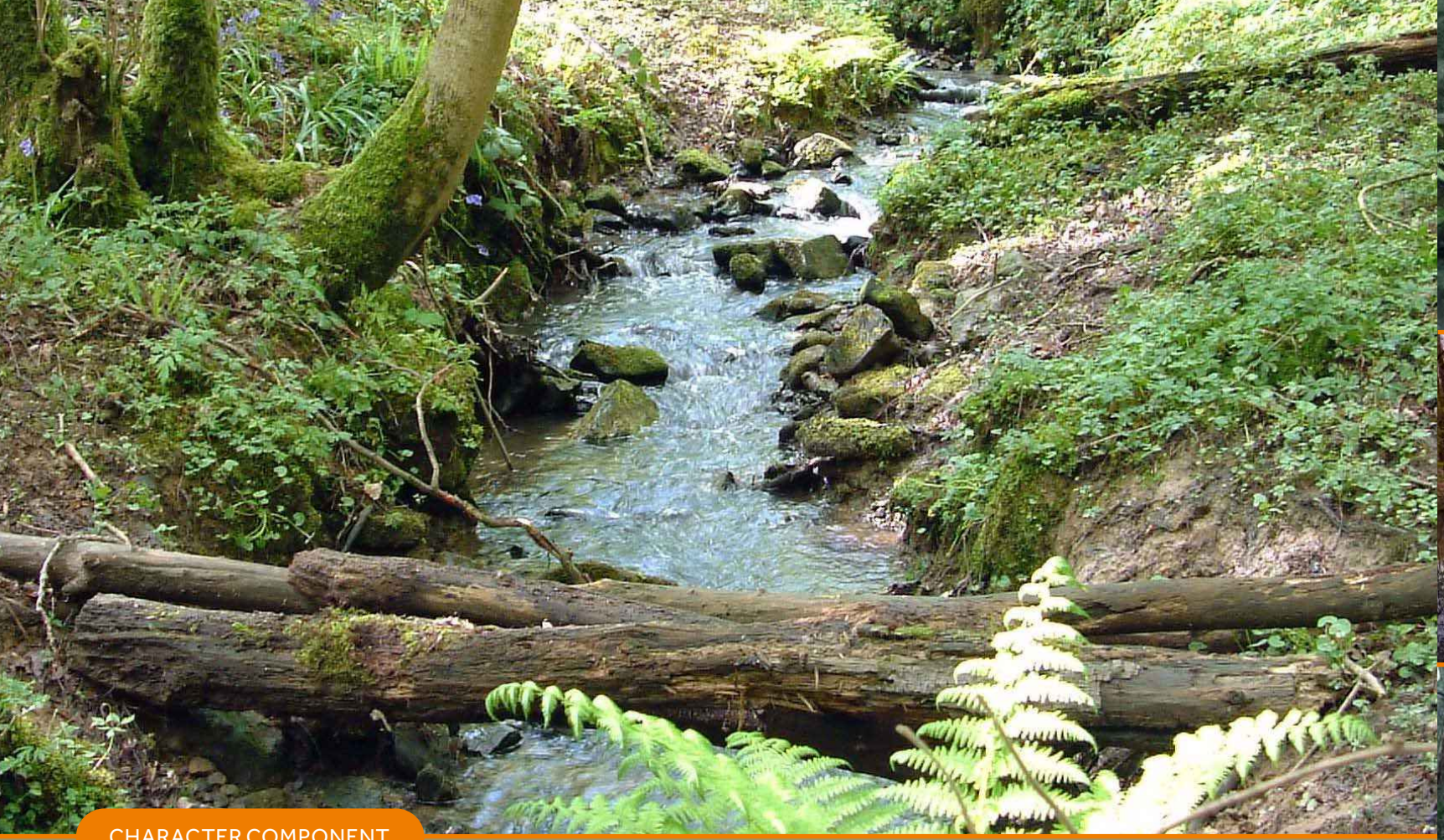
- Land at Linda House, Little London Road (661/3030)

Appendix A.15: Wider LCA 6E assessment unit

- Land at Oast Lodge, Maynards Green Road, Maynards Green (933/3150)
- Land adjacent to Funnell's Farm, Maynards Green Road, Maynards Green (244/3320)

Appendix B

Core Character Components of Natural Beauty – Extract from the High Weald AONB Management Plan (Pages 20-51)











CHARACTER COMPONENT

Natural Systems
(Geology, Soils, Water and Climate)

The High Weald AONB is characterised by a deeply incised, ridged and faulted landform of clays and sandstone creating soils which are highly variable over short distances. The ridges tend east-west, and from them spring numerous gill streams that form the headwaters of rivers. Wide river valleys dominate the eastern part of the AONB. The landform and water systems are subject to, and influence, a local variant of the British sub oceanic climate.

KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- Impressive coastal cliffs of interbedded sandstones and clays (Hastings Cliffs to Pett Beach SSSI and Hastings Cliffs Special Area of Conservation); natural, dynamic, evolving and rich in Lower Cretaceous fossils.
- A principal ridge (Forest Ridge) running east – west from Horsham to Cranbrook with an attached ridge (Battle Ridge) extending to the sea at Fairlight.
- A pattern of faults and folds that distinguishes the High Weald from the rest of the south and east of England, with a high concentration of springs associated with fault lines.
- Numerous small streams descending the main ridges in narrow steep-sided valleys (gills), historically often dammed to power industry with many 'pond bays' and 'hammer ponds' surviving.
- Distinctive outcrops of sandstone in the form of crags (popular with climbers) and inland sea cliffs, gill stream bed and banks, old quarries, and along road edges associated with the survival of rare cryptogam communities (ferns, lichens, liverworts and mosses).
- A high density of pits, quarries and ponds resulting from a long history of stone quarrying, surface mining and marl extraction.
- Locally-distinctive geological materials – sandstone, clay bricks and tiles, and Horsham stone – contributing to high-quality vernacular architecture.
- Carbon-rich soils, often undisturbed, that are distinguished by their variability over short distances – characterised as slowly permeable, seasonally wet, slightly acidic clayey soils, with pockets of sandy acidic soils.
- Heavily channelised and intensively managed river valleys in the eastern High Weald (Rother, Brede and Tillingham) originating in the medieval period, with natural floodplain wetlands rare.
- A high density of ponds, five times higher than the national average, with a wide range of pond types supporting significant species such as great crested newts and emerald dragonflies.
- An oceanic climate featuring cool temperatures relative to the latitude, a narrow annual temperature range with few extremes, and rain throughout the year.



Natural and cultural capital – fact and figures

● 7.6km of eroding sea cliffs designated an SSSI in recognition of the considerable biological, palaeontological and geological interest. ● A unique Lower Cretaceous mammal fauna at Fairlight, one of a handful of localities in the world to have yielded early Cretaceous mammal remains. ● 671 inland sandstone outcrops. ● >315sq km of undisturbed soils. ● 18.6 million tonnes of carbon stored in High Weald soils (to 150cm depth). ● Crowborough Beacon, the highest point at 242m above sea level. ● Headwaters of seven river catchments – Medway (Beult, Eden and Teise), Rother (Brede and Tillingham), Thames (Mole), Arun, Adur, Ouse and Cuckmere. ● 253km of main river channel supporting nationally rare species such as otter and water vole; and coarse and salmonid fisheries. ● A European hotspot for gills. ● 4,613km of water courses in total, including tributaries and streams. ● 13,401 ponds (9/sq. km compared with a national average of 1.8/sq. km) with an estimated 1600 supporting great crested newts. ● 769 springs. ● Five reservoirs including Bewl Water, the largest body of inland water in the South East. ● 20 sq. km of wetlands including reedbeds, lowland fens, coastal and floodplain grazing marsh, purple moor grass and rush pastures. Home to a rich array of birds, including reed warbler and marsh harrier.

TOP 5 ISSUES

1. Climate crisis – the impact of rising temperatures and extreme weather events such as flooding, drought, inundation, tidal surges and storms.
2. Pressure on sensitive geological features from invasive species and recreation.
3. Soil health, the need to improve soil conservation and prevent detrimental soil erosion.
4. Pollution (and diffuse pollution) affecting biodiversity – including from public and private sewage treatment facilities; artificial fertilisers, pesticide and fine sediment run-off into ponds, streams and rivers.
5. Invasive species in rivers, water bodies, wetlands and bankside vegetation.

OBJECTIVE **G1**

To restore the natural function of rivers, water courses and water bodies.

Rationale

To improve water quality, water resource and structural habitats associated with water; to enhance the role of rivers, water courses and water bodies in supporting and increasing biodiversity, cooling the environment, protecting people and communities from flooding, and promoting enjoyment of wetlands.

OBJECTIVE **G2**

To protect landform and geological features including sandstone outcrops.

Rationale

To conserve landform and topography on which the High Weald's character depends, and maintain nationally important geological exposures, allowing for erosion where appropriate, conserving the fern, moss and liverwort communities they support, and protecting their value as significant sites of prehistoric archaeology in the AONB.

OBJECTIVE **G3**

To pursue net zero across the High Weald without compromising its characteristic landscape beauty.

Rationale

To ensure that transformative mitigation and adaption policies are tailored to the High Weald's defining landscape character.

OBJECTIVE **G4**

To restore soil health across the High Weald.

Rationale

To increase carbon sequestration and storage potential of soils, as well as water holding capacity to reduce flooding following high rainfall. Improve the soil ecosystem which supports above-ground and below-ground biodiversity and habitats across the High Weald. Healthy soil has higher nutrients for plants, which reduces the need for artificial fertilizer use in the long-term.

Ambitions for 2029

Harnessing the regenerative power of natural systems and restoring their health will need to be the focus of land-use policy to prevent climate and ecological collapse. Monitoring of pollutants and operations damaging to water, air and soil will need to be improved, enforcement strengthened, and government support targeted at best practice. Climate mitigation and adaption policies at a local level will need to be guided by the Management Plan in order that solutions are tailored to protect natural beauty.

Further information on maintaining the natural systems of the High Weald landscape, including best practice guidance and practical advice, can be found at **www.highweald.org**.

ACTIONS

The Partnership will ...

a. Produce a climate cooling and net-zero plan for their own operations utilising near-term science-based targets, with the intention of achieving net zero for its own operations by spring 2029.

b. Work with partners to develop a climate cooling and net-zero vision for the High Weald landscape, taking into account the particular character components of the natural beauty of the High Weald, to inform and guide partner decision-making (refer to Cross-cutting theme: Climate Crisis Priorities for detail).

c. Promote regenerative land management (including maintaining woodland cover) focusing on soil health.

Public bodies should ...

d. Ensure developments seek to avoid substantive alterations to landform.

e. Ensure new developments and land use changes protect undisturbed soils, minimise use of permanent impermeable surfaces, and ensure best practice is complied with to protect soils during construction from compaction, pollution and erosion.

f. Design for new development to maintain and improve natural geomorphological processes (i.e. natural bank erosion) and natural flood capacity.

g. Ensure water is retained / slowed e.g., by sustainable drainage systems (SuDS), being aware of possible impacts on vulnerable heritage assets, and supporting grey water recycling schemes.

h. Seek solutions (such as clear-span bridges) for crossing water courses that minimise adverse impacts on river and stream habitats; avoiding new culverts and remove existing culverts where possible.

i. Work with landowners and other organisations to agree an invasive species control plan for water systems and geological sites.

j. Resist the use of carbon credit offsetting where the technologies exist to reduce carbon emissions on-site.

k. Promote ambitious climate cooling scenarios that lead to the earliest reductions in emissions and urban temperatures (refer to Cross-cutting theme: Climate Crisis Priorities for detail).

l. Support the recovery of High Weald watercourses, including headwaters, by restoring natural processes in order to benefit a range of aquatic and riparian habitats and associated wildlife.

m. Support fossil fuel-free and public transport initiatives, encouraging walking, cycling and other travel alternatives where possible.

Others can assist conservation and enhancement of natural systems by...

n. Leaving buffer zones of minimum 5m (10m on slopes) along streams, rivers and ponds.

o. Encouraging rivers, streams and ponds to develop naturally, with targeted support for vulnerable species such as water vole and rare habitats such as floodplain woodland.

p. Allowing natural processes and adopt approaches that allow nature to express its capacity to sequester carbon e.g., natural regeneration.

q. Producing protection plans for ferns, mosses and liverworts at vulnerable sandrock sites.

r. Adopting soil regeneration approaches to the management of farmland, public spaces and gardens, to prioritise soil health, including minimal soil disturbance practices e.g., no ploughing.

s. Avoiding run-off of sediment, inorganic fertilizers, pesticides and pollutants into streams, rivers and ponds.

t. Pursuing appropriate management of ditches and ponds for wildlife and farming.

u. Allowing targeted riparian woodland creation in appropriate locations primarily through natural regeneration.











CHARACTER COMPONENT

Settlement

The High Weald AONB is characterised by dispersed historic settlements of farmsteads, hamlets, and late medieval villages and market towns founded on trade and non-agricultural rural industries. The landscape setting of these settlements underpins the distinct and picturesque small-scale landscape character, with rolling pastures and small ancient woodlands of the countryside interspersed with the rich clay-tiled roofscapes of historic buildings.

KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- High density of historic farmsteads surrounded by their own fields, with a long continuity of settlement in the same place; their position strongly influenced by topography and routeways.
- Villages and towns mostly of medieval origin located at historic focal points or along ridge top roads, typically centred around open areas used for meeting places and trade, with markets' charters granted in the 13th and 14th centuries.
- Hamlets occurring around the junction of routeways or small commons (which became greens or forstals), or as clusters of cottages serving a particular industry.
- No significant nucleation prior to the 13th century (apart from Battle).
- Large-scale settlement extensions after AONB designation in 1983 are uncharacteristic.
- Pockets of small wayside cottages (peasant settlement enclosing roadside commons or later worker cottages) interspaced with fields.
- Distinctive settlement types and pattern in the eastern High Weald relating to history of the Rother Estuary and river trade.
- Separation between settlements formed by fields associated with individual historic farmsteads, and historic field systems abutting and containing historic settlement.
- Frequent interconnected green spaces within villages linking to the countryside and offering glimpse views to countryside beyond.
- Verdant character of settlements, with substantial soft landscaping; grass verges, lush hedgerows edging front curtilages, and full tree canopies breaking up the built form.
- Frequent –den and –fold place names echoing the area's history of pasturing cattle and pigs.
- Farmsteads typically arranged around routeways, with loose courtyard plan-types common and dispersed plan-types particularly characteristic. Tend to be relatively modest, typically comprising a farmhouse and a barn, often aisled to at least one side with small-scale ancillary structures, mostly for cattle, which face into their own, generally small, yards.
- High numbers of pre-1750 timber-framed farm buildings with typologies representing locally-distinctive historic agricultural practices, including oast houses and other structures associated with the hop industry (hop-pickers' huts); where a complete range exists, these are rare and particularly significant.
- High concentrations of historic buildings in all settlement types, many listed, whose form and appearance reflects historic and socio-cultural functions (such as the prevalence of craft industries), with locally distinctive typologies, including medieval Wealden Hall Houses (found either as rural farmhouses, or incorporated into the fabric of villages and towns, and often much disguised through later alterations), and features such as catslide roofs.
- Villages and hamlets typically unlit contributing to intrinsically dark skies landscapes.
- A limited palette of local materials intrinsically linked to geology and landscape character, reinforcing local distinctiveness: clay as tiles and brick, timber as weatherboard and framing, and some localised instances of stone.



Natural and cultural capital – fact and figures

● 17 market towns and villages with populations >2,000, the largest being Battle with a population >6,000. ● 11% households classified as isolated farms (compared with an average of 8% across all protected landscapes). ● 98.3% households in areas classified as rural. ● >3,500 historic farmsteads. ● 5,274 listed buildings. ● 57 medieval parish churches. ● 50 registered parks and gardens on Historic England register. ● 64 village conservation areas. ● 91 scheduled ancient monuments.

TOP 5 ISSUES

1. Increase in greenfield development pressure for housing, threatening the character of the AONB.
2. Generic layout and design of new housing developments failing to reinforce AONB character.
3. Erosion of AONB character through the cumulative effects of suburbanisation, including the residential fragmentation of farmsteads; the extension of residential curtilage boundaries, additional annexes and outbuildings, inappropriate boundary treatments, hard surfacing and kerbing, and large intrusive replacement buildings.
4. Declining housing affordability, including lack of social housing and key worker housing suitable for land-based workers.
5. Infill development eroding the greenness and open space of villages, threatening the character of settlement and reducing green connectivity and opportunities for community enjoyment.

OBJECTIVE **S1**

To protect the historic pattern and character of settlements.

Rationale

To protect the distinctive character and landscape settings of towns, villages, hamlets and farmsteads, remove despoiling influences, and maintain the hinterlands and other relationships (including separation and green infrastructure) between settlements that contribute to local identity.

OBJECTIVE **S3**

To conserve the distinct built heritage of the High Weald.

Rationale

To protect and preserve the character and setting of heritage assets (designated and non-designated); historic traditional buildings and built features distinct to the High Weald area, including the historic public realm (e.g., traditional signs, railings, milestones and paving treatments).

OBJECTIVE **S2**

To enhance the architectural quality of the High Weald and ensure new development reflects the character of the High Weald in its siting, scale, layout and design.

Rationale

To enhance the beauty and quality of buildings in the High Weald, and ensure new development reflects intrinsic High Weald character and place-making, embedded with a true sense of place, along with re-establishing the use of local materials and rich colour palette as a means of protecting the environment and adding to local distinctiveness.

> *'[development should be] fully sympathetic to, and in scale with, the land use and local building style'.*
>
> **Lord Strang, Chairman of the National Parks Commission, speaking about designated landscapes in 1959.**

> *'Places and buildings... tend to be enriching elements in the sum of scenic beauty'.*
>
> **Report on National Parks 1945**

Ambitions for 2029

Conserving the dispersed historic settlement pattern, which arose before the advent of the private car, will require positive planning and innovative sustainable transport strategies. New housing development will be small-scale and in keeping with the character of the area. Its location and design will be based on meeting local needs (including affordability and housing mix) through high quality and landscape-led place-making and design principles that reflect intrinsic High Weald character, embedded with a true sense of place, without stifling innovation and creativity in the use of local materials and net zero technologies. The energy performance of existing housing stock will be upgraded, whilst still preserving the special character and local distinctiveness of the historic built environment and heritage assets.

Further information on maintaining the settlement pattern of the High Weald landscape, including best practice guidance and practical advice, can be found at **www.highweald.org**

ACTIONS

The Partnership will ...

a. Develop technical appendices to support the High Weald Housing Design Guide, on topics such as sustainable and net zero design, soft landscaping, and the public realm.

b. Develop and deliver training and capacity-building programmes for LPAs and other partners regarding the Housing Design Guide, to improve design scrutiny in planning decision-making.

c. Seek to support LPAs in developing landscape-led planning policies that contribute to net zero regarding settlement in the AONB, including location of development and sustainable transport strategies (refer to Cross-cutting theme: Climate Crisis Priorities for detail).

d. Support neighbourhood planning groups to utilise the AONB Management Plan, data and guidance.

e. Promote the desirability of the reduction of housing pressure and pressure for greenfield development in the AONB.

Public bodies should ...

f. Promote use of the High Weald Housing Design Guide and historic landscape characterisation to guide settlement planning and to help avoid generic approaches to layout and design of new development.

g. Ensure there is reference to the AONB Management Plan and to the AONB Housing Design Guide in local plans, neighbourhood plans and other public documents, and ensure its use as material consideration in planning decisions; planning policy, site allocations and development management.

h. Pursue landscape-led positive planning approaches to settlement planning and housing delivery in the AONB, seeking to prioritise the delivery of new housing primarily through small-scale development consistent with AONB character, recognising the potential for harm through the cumulative effects of separate developments on the designated landscape.

i. Seek to deliver a mix of housing sizes and types that respond to local needs, including the specific requirements of land-based workers and affordable housing.

j. Identify and protect areas of separation between settlements and green/blue infrastructure connections across settlements, for both landscape setting and ecological values.

k. Seek to minimise erosion of AONB character through suburbanisation in rural areas, including landscape-intrusive replacement dwellings, extensions to residential curtilages, annexes, and smaller interventions such as new accesses and solid fences, which have a cumulative effect.

l. Ensure the design and maintenance of highways and the public realm, including street furniture, has regard to local distinctive character and avoids suburbanisation or generic approaches.

m. Protect and preserve the character and setting of historic traditional buildings and features distinct to the High Weald area, including medieval hall houses, catslide roofs, oast houses and other traditional agricultural buildings, structures such as cattle sheds and hoppers' huts, and the compositional qualities of farmsteads.

n. Pursue a listed building review to tackle the under-listing of historic farm buildings, along with seeking to increase local listing.

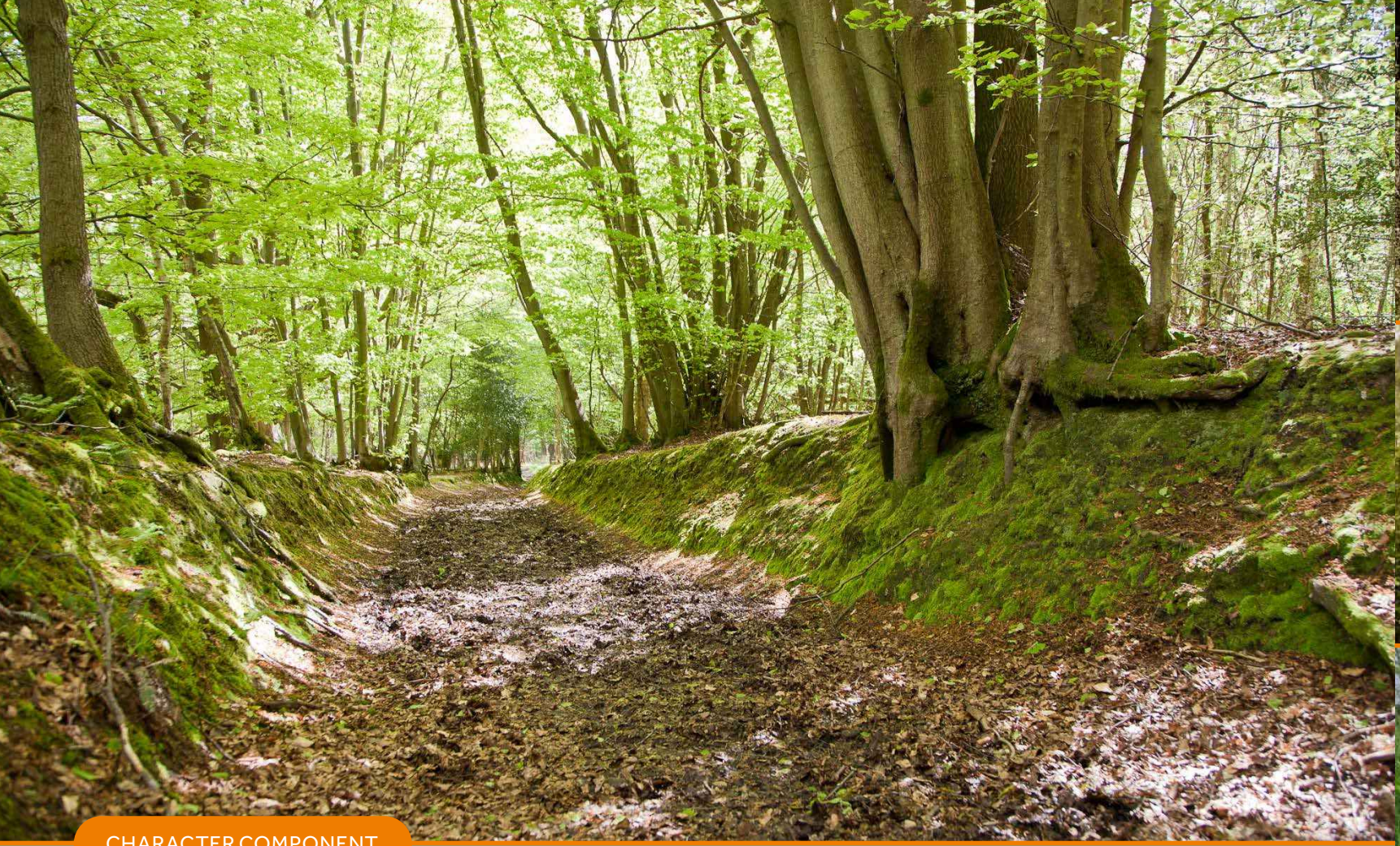
Others can assist conservation and enhancement of High Weald settlement by ...

o. Using the High Weald Housing Design Guide in the earliest stages of the process of developing proposals to inform High Weald specific, landscape-led approaches to layout.

p. Adopting a local and renewable materials first procurement policy, and supporting activities which celebrate and promote local products and services.

q. Making space for wildlife to thrive around buildings, gardens and urban spaces and the public realm, and encouraging planting for nature with native species of local provenance and pollinator-friendly plants.

r. Avoiding operations which sterilise soil or cover it with impermeable materials or plastic grass.











CHARACTER COMPONENT

Routeways

The High Weald AONB is characterised by historic routeways (now roads, tracks, bridleways and paths), the oldest being in the form of ridge-top roads and a dense system of radiating droveways. These are often narrow, deeply sunken and edged with trees, hedges, wildflower-rich verges and boundary banks. These locally distinctive lanes and rights of way often display quietness and rurality in their visual and perceptual character, and they are valuable green infrastructure, creating high public accessibility within the AONB and good connections between settlements.

KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- A dense, radiating network with a variety of origins including:
  - Droveways, used for moving livestock, radiating out to pre-historic sites on the edge of the Weald.
  - Ridgeways on high ground and often running east-west, closely associated with pre-historic sites and medieval trading settlements.
  - Roman roads cutting across these patterns and strongly associated with iron-working sites.
- Typically present by the 14th century, with many extending back into pre-history and pre-dating settlements.
- Sunken routeways ('holloways') found on sloping land as a result of long use and erosion combined with water run-off.
- 'Braiding' common resulting from people, animals and vehicles finding alternative routes through impassable areas.
- Earth banks, lynchets and ditches typically indicating the former width of the routeway or to separate users from farmland or woodland.
- Wide grass verges common, indicating the historic width of routeways and their function as linear common grazing.
- Species-rich verges as well-preserved relics of their woodland or grassland habitat.
- Small-scale variations in habitat associated with a complex mixture of substrates, aspects and moisture levels supporting a rich biodiversity, especially invertebrates.
- Frequent sandstone exposures, adding diverse assemblages of specialist plants and animals.
- Linear nature facilitating foraging and dispersal and contributing significantly to the ecological interconnectedness of the High Weald.
- Veteran trees and ancient roadside coppice (often showing evidence of laying) frequent, providing niches for lichens and deadwood-dependent beetles.
- Many lost, stopped or diverted routeways evidenced by holloways, earth banks and depressions in the ground.
- Associated heritage public realm features – pre-1964 fingerposts, 'black and white' road signs, roadside milestones.
- Archaeology and cultural associations in the eastern High Weald from trade and the practice of exporting heavy goods (e.g., timber and iron) by floating them at high tide on waterways navigable until the late 13th century.



Natural and cultural capital – fact and figures

● 2,570km of public rights of way. ● More than 75% of public rights of way are historic (i.e., present on Ordnance Survey maps from at least 1860). ● 1,873km roads. ● More than 80% of roads are historic (i.e., in existence since at least 1800). ● The High Weald is crossed by one the most famous routeways in English history – the one that took King Harold's army from victory at Stamford Bridge to defeat at Hastings in 1066. ● Two main Roman roads (London-Lewes and London-Hassocks/Brighton). ● Droveways dating to the Anglo-Saxon period and earlier for moving livestock (pigs and cattle). ● More than 4,400km of highly interconnected green infrastructure bounded by flower-rich verges, hedges and woods.

TOP 5 ISSUES

1. Extinguishments of public rights of way (PRoWs) and diversions away from the historic route.
2. Loss of historic roadside character through development and erosion from motor vehicles and wide agricultural machinery, particularly in wet conditions
3. Damage to paths, tracks and Byways Open to All Traffic from the erection of fences; erosion from off-road vehicles, inappropriate surfacing and planting, fly-tipping, and ploughing up of lost routeways.
4. Insensitive management of veteran trees/roadside coppice and poorly planned verge cutting regimes and ditch clearance, resulting in the smothering of woodland flora on shady banks with wood chip, and of wildflowers on relic grassland verges with grass cuttings/spoil.
5. Insensitive highway engineering including passing bays, deep visibility splays to entrances, and urbanising features such as roundabouts, signage and lighting.

OBJECTIVE **R1**

To maintain the historic pattern, morphology and features of routeways.

Rationale

To maintain and restore a routeway network that has a symbiotic relationship with settlement location, hinterlands and identity, and is a rare UK survival of an essentially medieval landscape; to protect the individual archaeological features of historic routeways such as sunken lanes; and to avoid harming character of routeways with urbanising features.

OBJECTIVE **R2**

To protect and enhance the ecological function of routeways.

Rationale

To protect, and improve the condition of, the complex mix of small-scale habitats along routeways, including verges, for wildlife and nature recovery, and maintain routeway boundaries as part of a highly interconnected habitat mosaic.



Ambitions for 2029

Routeways walked for hundreds of years will need protection from unnecessary diversions, alterations, or suburbanisation, while the historic and ecological importance of associated routeway features such as verges, hedges, ditch and bank systems, and roadside coppice, to connect and restore nature will need to be recognised, protected and appropriately managed. A re-prioritised hierarchy of routes, with functional routes for pedestrians, cyclists, public transport, and other active travel, connecting homes, schools, services and businesses may be needed to meet the net zero challenge, along with improved public access to the countryside for leisure.

ACTIONS

The Partnership will ...

a. Provide training for highway management engineers and contractors to ensure all roadside verges are managed sensitively for landscape character, including biodiversity and archaeology.

b. Provide guidance to PRoW teams in local highway authorities for considering historic routeways in the High Weald in diversion/ extinguishment applications.

Public bodies should ...

c. Identify historic routeways in highway improvement plans (including Rights of Way Improvement Plans (ROWIPs)) and consider management tailored to enhance their historic character, including early intervention to protect banks.

d. Ensure there is reference to the AONB Management Plan in Local Transport Plans (LTPs), and ensure its use to inform highways works and to support funding bids

e. Avoid diversion of historic routeways and have regard in decision-making and in the planning process, to the historic alignment of roads, tracks and paths, .

f. Assess, and where appropriate recognise, historic routeways as non-designated heritage assets in the planning process.

g. Resist new access points that would damage the character of sunken routeways.

h. Discourage lane widening, the introduction of lay-bys, or casual parking that erodes or dilutes the pattern of routeways.

i. Identify ecologically rich historic routeways in biodiversity and green infrastructure planning.

j. Prioritise the specialist management of ecologically rich road verges in highway management, including following best practice advice[12]; implementing appropriate cutting regimes, avoiding smothering with chip piles or grass cuttings and ditch dredging, and refraining from planting non-native species.

k. Support the identification, retention and restoration of traditional fingerposts, railings, boundary stones and turnpike features (e.g., milestone and toll houses), adding to the relevant Historic Environment Record where appropriate.

l. Adopt careful approaches to any upgrading proposals to historic routeways as part of access enhancement, and seek to take enforcement action against unauthorised works, to ensure proposals do not adversely affect the natural beauty of the High Weald (refer to Cross-cutting theme: People & Access Principles for detail).

Others can assist conservation and enhancement of High Weald routeways by

m. Avoiding fencing and other activity such as the use of machinery which damages routeway archaeology (including ditches and banks) or that alters its historic alignment.

n. Encouraging the identification and protection of ecologically rich roadside verges and alerting the relevant Highways Authority to their presence or damage.

12. Managing-grassland-road-verges-2020.pdf (plantlife.org.uk)

Further information on maintaining the historic routeways of the High Weald landscape, including best practice guidance and practical advice, can be found at **www.highweald.org**.











CHARACTER COMPONENT

Woodland

The High Weald AONB is characterised by the great extent of woodland including ancient woods, gills and shaws, the product of traditional long-term management. The nationally important assemblage of ancient woodland in the High Weald has immense wildlife, landscape and historical value, while the wider cumulative visual character of trees and hedgerows dividing small irregular fields is fundamental to the verdant nature and appearance of the landscape.

KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- Highly interconnected and structurally varied mosaic of many small woods, larger forests and numerous linear gill woodlands, shaws, wooded routeways and outgrown hedges, and isolated trees.
- High proportion of woodland is categorised as ancient woodland (46%), typically broadleaved coppice with a rich ground flora, with many more woodlands equivalent in conservation interest. A further fifth of woodland is protected 'plantations on ancient woodlands' (PAWS), much of which is under restoration.
- Many irregularly shaped small woodlands interlinked with shaws, isolated trees, thick hedges and wooded sunken lanes, forming an intimate part of the farmed landscape.
- A number of very large woods lying mostly along the high sandy ridges, such as Dallington and Bedgebury; and remnants of the area's medieval hunting forests, including at Worth Forest and Ashdown Forest.
- Visible evidence of historic use and exploitation (including coppice stools, stubs, pollards, boundary bank and ditch systems, routes and tracks; remains of Roman and medieval iron-working such as slag heaps and ponds, and large earthworks relating to the harnessing of waterpower to fuel furnaces, forges and mills).
- High density of gill woodlands (deeply incised ravines with particularly humid and relatively stable microclimates) – the oldest and least disturbed woodland in the south east supporting a community of plants, vascular and non-vascular, not found together anywhere else in Europe, and important for rare plant species such as small-leaved lime, hay-scented buckler fern, Tunbridge filmy-fern, and rare invertebrates including beetles and molluscs.
- Frequent patches of wet woodland associated with surface water in the form of steep sided streams, springs, wet flushes and water-filled extraction pits, important for regionally distinctive species such as smooth-stalked sedge.
- Large numbers of isolated trees (often remnants from lost woodlands or hedges), such as in-field trees that provide additional connectivity to the wider landscape, as well as shelter and food source to a wide range of species.
- A stronghold for characteristic species such as dormice, and remnant populations of rare species such as pearl-bordered fritillary butterfly.
- Open woodland mosaics of wooded heath, which support both heath plants such as heathers and trees, and act as a transitional habitat.
- Considerable variability in woodland types and tree forms over short distances reflecting the variety of soils, micro-climates and drainage conditions (Principle National Vegetation Classification communities are W10 and W8 with some W15 and W16 on sandier ridges).
- Wood-pasture and parkland, mostly originating from once extensive historic deer parks; an archaeological and cultural feature, open habitats or open heath supporting veteran/ancient trees and their associated wildlife.
- Nationally significant resource of epiphytic (plants that grow on other plants rather than the soil) and dead-wood dependent species supported by a wealth of veteran trees.
- A traditionally strong commercial woodland industry focused on coppice and locally grown hardwoods.
- A culture of small-scale management by people using hand tools to produce a wide variety of products mostly for local use.
- Trees used for boundary markers (including outgrown old laid hedges, stubs and pollards), many of which are accessible on public rights of way.



Natural and cultural capital – fact and figures

● 28% woodland cover (nearly 3x English average). ● 83% broadleaved woodland, the majority as coppice. ● Highest coverage of ancient woodland in any protected landscape (3/4 all woodland or 19% land cover) covering 273sq km of undisturbed woodland soil. ● >2,800 parcels of ancient woodland under 2ha. ● Nationally significant: 8% of England's ancient woodland resource. ● <22% ancient woodland classified as Plantations on Ancient Woodlands (PAWS). ● 191sq km gill woodland in > 1,800 sites supporting internationally rare cryptogams. ● 56sq km UK BAP priority habitat: wood pasture and parkland. ● More than 7.5m tonnes of carbon stored in woodlands and their soils with an additional > 0.75m tonnes sequestered every year. ● 3sq km traditional orchards containing 34 apple varieties.

TOP 5 ISSUES

1. Predicted increase in tree diseases such as ash dieback and spruce bark beetle, partly through imported stock or soil, and continued damage from invasive species including rhododendron, grey squirrel and deer damage from over-population of deer across the High Weald.

2. Procurement practices and lack of investment restricting market growth for higher value locally sourced wood products.

3. Lack of management where needed, particularly cessation of traditional coppicing affecting ground flora, and fauna species such as fritillaries.

4. Impact of increasing mechanisation and machinery size on soils, the variation and structural complexity of woodlands, and archaeology.

5. Impact of development close to ancient woodland resulting in increased noise and disturbance, and pressure to fell trees and hedgerows as part of development, (including post-development) with a cumulative impact on ecology and reduction in tree cover.

OBJECTIVE **W1**

To maintain and restore the existing extent and pattern of woodland cover and particularly ancient woodland.

Rationale

To ensure irreplaceable habitats and biodiversity loss are repaired for the benefit of nature and future generations. To maintain a key component of the cultural landscape, and to preserve the high levels of carbon storage in woodland soils and biomass.

OBJECTIVE **W3**

To protect the archaeology and historic assets of AONB woodlands.

Rationale

To protect the historic environment of the AONB woodlands.

OBJECTIVE **W2**

To protect and restore the ecological quality and functioning of woodland at a landscape scale.

Rationale

To increase the viability of the woodland habitat for wildlife, by identifying and extending the area of appropriately managed woodland (including restoring plantations on ancient woodland) to link and enhance isolated habitats and species populations, providing greater connectivity between woodlands and other important wildlife areas, and helping to facilitate species' response to climate change.

OBJECTIVE **W4**

To increase the output of sustainably produced high-quality timber and underwood for local markets.

Rationale

To achieve the most effective management that will deliver the other objectives for woodland, to contribute to sustainable domestic timber production, and to support a working countryside.

Ambitions for 2029

With the beauty and biodiversity of woodlands in the High Weald already under threat from a combination of pests and diseases, disturbance, a warming climate and invasive species, protection will need to focus on fostering healthy and resilient woodlands and buffering through natural regeneration to allow nature to thrive. Tackling invasive species and deer will be a priority. Non-intervention approaches will become more common unless traditional coppice regimes are being maintained or woodlands are being managed for high-quality timber. In these cases, management will be predominantly small-scale with industrialised mechanical harvesting avoided to protect archaeology and soils. Local timber and underwood will once again be essential materials for buildings, fencing and other uses.

ACTIONS

The Partnership will ...

a. Support landscape scale initiatives and nature recovery projects to reverse the decline in key woodland species and protect and enhance vulnerable habitats such as gill woodlands and wet woodland.

b. Seek to ensure agri-environmental schemes and similar grant schemes are tailored to the specific needs of the High Weald woodland.

Public bodies should...

c. Resist development that risks the loss or deterioration of ancient woodland or veteran trees, including ASNW and PAWS, through direct and indirect impacts as set out in the Natural England and Forestry Commission 'standing advice' **Ancient woodland, ancient trees and veteran trees: advice for making planning decisions**

d. Ensure appropriate buffer zones to woodland, (minimum 15m zones, when justified by survey, otherwise 25m) to protect from the detrimental direct and indirect impacts of nearby developments, including activity and light spill.

e. Recognise the ecological and landscape value of non-designated woodland and trees, and ensure design of new housing development retains existing woodlands, shaws and other trees in and adjacent to schemes, for ecological and landscape character benefits.

f. Require woodland archaeology assessments for woodland which would be affected by development, and provide data to county Historic Environment Records, ensuring this is used in the planning process.

g. Protect ancient woodland soil and ground flora from inappropriate management practices such as heavy machinery damage and chipping-to-mulch, and to consider such practices as part of assessments of felling licence applications and in highways management / statutory undertakers' protocols.

h. Enhance and restore shaws and gill woodlands.

i. Support appropriate commercial woodland management, in particular tailored support for a vibrant timber economy in the High Weald woodland landscape.

j. Promote the use of small dimension roundwood timber in construction and use of untreated local timber for traditional purposes such as fencing, public realm seating, signs and weatherboard.

k. Adopt UK tree and plant health biosecurity policies and support local provenance tree nurseries.

l. Tailor environmental land management support to control invasive species, including landscape-scale deer management; grey squirrel eradication; and removal of rhododendron and other damaging invasive plants from ancient woodland, particularly gill woodland.

Others can assist conservation and enhancement of woodlands by:

m. Controlling invasive species such as rhododendron, grey squirrels and deer.

n. Avoiding activities, such as fencing or use of heavy machinery, which damage archaeological features (e.g., ditch and bank systems, holloways and saw pits).

o. Maintaining stock-proof fences and hedgerows around ancient woodland to avoid livestock damage.

p. Avoiding use of large-scale machinery and instead using traditional techniques such as hand cutting, horses or small-scale machinery for woodland management to avoid damage to High Weald woodland.

q. Allowing natural regeneration in and around woodland where appropriate.

r. Keeping woodlands, including buffer zones, free of litter, garden waste and ornamental plants.

s. Demonstrate responsible woodland access; avoiding disturbance to breeding birds or trampling damage to ground flora.

Further information on maintaining woodland in the High Weald landscape, including best practice guidance and practical advice, can be found at **www.highweald.org**.











CHARACTER COMPONENT

Fieldscape and Heath

The High Weald AONB is characterised by an intricate and scenic mosaic of small, irregularly shaped and productive fields often bounded by hedgerows, shaws and small woodlands and in-field trees, and typically used for livestock grazing and small-scale horticulture; within which can be found distinctive zones of lowland heath and inned / reclaimed river valleys. Predominantly undisturbed and highly productive Grade 3 good agricultural grazing land, reflecting the typical and historic agricultural practices of the area, and as such is intrinsically valuable to the landscape character.

KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- A generally irregular field pattern with individual fields relatively small (less than three hectares).
- Fieldscape characterised by historic farmsteads surrounded by their own fields resulting from medieval farming in severalty i.e., land held by individuals rather than in common.
- Strong influence exerted by topography with many field systems aligned to or 'hanging' from (at right angles to) linear features such as watercourses or ridge-top roads.
- Predominantly pastoral mixed farming with an absence of industrial scale livestock farming, and undisturbed soils contributing to carbon sequestration.
- Fields, mostly permanent pasture, used for grazing livestock with some small-scale horticulture and cropping.
- Medieval fieldscape character dominant, with a high proportion of field systems created by assarting (woodland clearance) with sinuous mixed woody boundaries and shaws, and thick hedges common.
- Boundary ditch and bank features typical, along woodland edges or topped with hedges and veteran trees.
- A rich, extensive network of ancient mixed species hedgerows of high ecological and landscape character value.
- Wide, verdant historic hedgerows traditionally managed by laying.
- Unmanaged fields quickly succeed back towards woodland because of abundant tree seeds from the pattern of small woodlands bounding many fields.
- Nationally important fragments of species-rich grassland (such as NVC MG5), supporting an incredibly rich variety of plants, animals, and grassland fungi.
- High proportion of fragmented species-rich grassland scattered within a landscape containing a high proportion of good quality semi-improved grasslands.
- Traditional orchards and hop gardens scattered across the landscape forming part of the visual fieldscape and also providing dead and decaying wood for invertebrates, and a mosaic of other habitats.
- A frequency of deer parks and later 18th-century estates.
- Ashdown Forest (an extensive area of common land and one of the largest continuous blocks of lowland heath, semi-natural woodland and valley bog in the south east) supporting internationally important populations of nightjar and Dartford warbler.
- Distinctive areas of wooded heath and lowland heath scattered along the sandy ridges supporting a complex mosaic of plant communities, rare species such as marsh clubmoss, and more than half of UK's dragonfly species.
- Fragmented grass and ericaceous heath is found particularly on old forest ride systems and along woodland ridges and old hedge banks throughout the High Weald.

> *'The existence of a flourishing and progressive agriculture is fundamental to...the preservation and enhancement of the characteristic landscape.'*
>
> **Report of the National Parks Committee, Sir Arthur Hobhouse, 1947**



Natural and cultural capital – fact and figures

● >1,500 farm holdings (2nd highest number of holdings in an AONB) with >750 livestock holdings. ● 17,000 RPA registered parcels of land <1.5ha. ● Average farm size is less than half the national average. ● 70% of fields remain unaffected by reorganisation in the late 20th century. ● >12,500km of hedgerows and field boundaries providing homes for pollinating insects and a source of wild food. ● 220sq km land owned by conservation organisations or designated under international or UK law to protect wildlife, including 64sq km internationally important sites and 51 SSSI's covering 55sq km. ● <3% land cover known wildflower meadows with estimated <40% fields semi-improved grassland with potential for enhancement. ● Nearly 50% of AONB supported by government-funded schemes to encourage environmentally sensitive land management . ● 85% of land is Grade 3 and 4 under the Agricultural Land Classification. ● <5% agricultural holders under 35 years old. ● Steep decline in livestock numbers, with sheep and cattle numbers down by one-third since 2000.

TOP 5 ISSUES

1. Fragmentation of farm holdings due to an increase in non-farming land ownership and loss of farm infrastructure e.g., barns at a holding level
2. Declining agricultural workforce and consequential reduction in sustainable food production
3. Increasing costs of maintaining grazing infrastructure (including reducing supporting agricultural infrastructure such as livestock markets and abattoirs) and costs of managing significant levels of associated habitats such as hedgerows.
4. Loss of green fields to development and infrastructure, or conversion to other land uses such as woodland.
5. Loss of high value grasslands (unimproved and semi-improved) and hedgerows through land use change, inappropriate management and lack of management, leading to fragmentation of habitats, affecting biodiversity and species resilience.

OBJECTIVE **FH1**

To secure agriculturally productive use for the fields of the High Weald, especially for local markets, as part of sustainable land management.

Rationale

To contribute to sustainable domestic food and non-food agricultural production, to support a working countryside, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and to reduce the dependency of the UK on non-sustainably managed agricultural land and the need for long-distance transport that produces air pollutants, causing harm to health and the environment.

OBJECTIVE **FH3**

To protect and enhance the ecological function of field and heath as part of the complex mosaic of High Weald habitats.

Rationale

To improve the condition, landscape permeability and connectivity of fields and heaths and their associated and interrelated habitats (such as hedges, trees, woodlands, ditches, ponds and water systems) for wildlife.

OBJECTIVE **FH2**

To maintain the pattern of small irregularly shaped fields bounded by hedgerows and woodlands.

Rationale

To maintain fields and field boundaries that form a part of the habitat mosaic of the High Weald; and to maintain this key component of what is a rare UK survival of an essentially medieval landscape.

OBJECTIVE **FH4**

To protect individual archaeological features as well as historic assets and pattern of fields and heath.

Rationale

To protect the historic environment of the AONB that includes the pattern of fields, and individual archaeological features.

Ambitions for 2029

The management of fieldscapes will need to change substantially over the next five years, with regenerative approaches to food production and nature recovery becoming the norm. The comprehensive decline in biodiversity will not be reversed by focusing on nature reserves only. Fieldscapes will need to be restored so wildlife can thrive there. The small-scale nature of the High Weald's fields are ideally suited for productive farming using regenerative agricultural practices.

The smaller, permanent grass fields suiting holistic planned livestock grazing with the grass and surrounding trees and hedges providing nutrient-rich forage for cows, sheep and other livestock. These will need to be interspersed with wilder areas providing reservoirs for pollinators and other wildlife. New and innovative approaches, such as agroforestry, will need to be trialled with layered production of nuts, soft and top fruit becoming more common, taking advantage of the High Weald's ability to grow trees and grass well. Small-scale vegetable production using regenerative agriculture practices to supply local markets will need to increase, drawing on the High Weald's mixed farming history. Chemical input from pesticides and artificial fertilizers will need to be drastically cut. There may be a small increase in tree cover and scrub, but most of the fieldscape and heathy areas will remain as open habitats.

ACTIONS

The Partnership will ...

a. Seek to ensure agri-environment schemes and other farming support schemes are tailored to the specific needs of the High Weald landscape.

b. Prepare best practice guidance for sustainable land management of the High Weald.

c. Facilitate landscape scale initiatives aimed at reversing biodiversity loss associated with field and heath management.

d. Continue to provide a High Weald specific land management advisory service (specialising in regenerative approaches) to landowners and managers, including providing support to farmers entering agri-environment schemes.

e. Support and facilitate scientific research in collaboration with academic institutions to further knowledge and understanding of the semi-improved grassland spectrum, and support dissemination of best practice management to advisors and site managers.

f. Provide specialist advice to support the management of boundary features including hedgerows, coppice and veteran trees.

Public bodies should...

g. Require development to protect and enhance existing field patterns, including hedges, ditches or other boundary features, and where possible to restore them when lost, and in particular avoid harm to medieval field systems in planning and decision-making, especially where there is a high degree of intactness or relationship with other notable landscape and heritage features.

h. Develop and deliver tailored support for pasture-fed livestock farming utilising regenerative grazing and soil conservation management techniques.

i. Recognise in decision-making the food productivity value and quality of grade 3a and 3b soils as being of greater importance to the High Weald's pastoral agriculture economy and landscape character than simply the ALC grade.

j. Promote and enforce the Hedgerow Regulations 1997, in recognition of the importance of hedgerows in the High Weald.

k. Foster small-scale horticulture (soft and top fruit, nuts and vegetables) and associated necessary infrastructure.

l. Support development of an audit of unimproved and semi-improved meadows.

Others can assist conservation and enhancement of fieldscape and heath by...

m. Developing veteran tree replacement plans for hedges and shaws.

n. Utilising local provenance wildflower seeds and plant plugs to create or enhance grassland.

o. Restoring, protecting and managing hedgerows as part of a diverse hedgerow mosaic, reinstating lost hedgerows, and ensuring hedges are cut only between September and March to avoid damage to wildlife

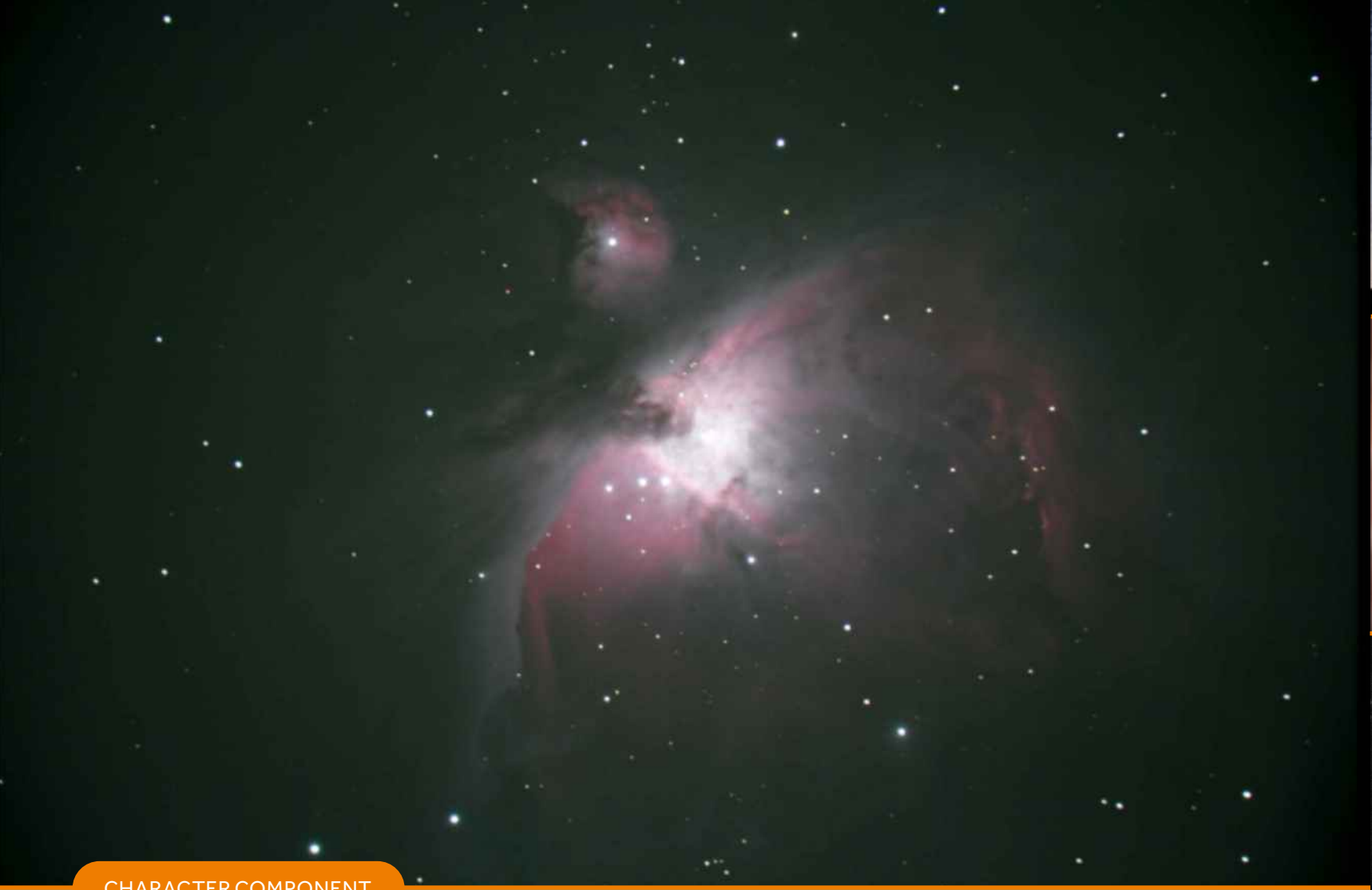
p. Avoiding new woodland planting on medieval fieldscapes and heath, and on species-rich grassland, to protect grassland and heathland biodiversity.

q. Protecting local and heritage breeds and crop varieties to preserve genetic diversity.

r. Proactively encourage management and monitoring of local wildlife sites and review the designation of new sites.

s. Sensitively managing and restoring lowland heathland as a key habitat.

Further information on maintaining the fieldscapes of the High Weald landscape, including best practice guidance and practical advice, can be found at **www.highweald.org**.











CHARACTER COMPONENT

Dark Skies

The High Weald AONB is characterised by having some of the darkest skies in the south-east of England. This gives the AONB a sense of remoteness and peacefulness and connects the natural environment to the cultural and historic landscape.

KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- Intrinsically dark landscapes with a sense of naturalness.
- Some of the intrinsically darkest skies in Southern England, with the least skyglow.
- Our own galaxy, the Milky Way, is observable, as well as the planetary bodies.
- Key constellations such as Orion, Ursa Major and Cassiopeia are visible to the naked eye.
- Deep sky objects are visible to the naked eye, such as the Andromeda Galaxy and Orion Nebula.
- Many rural villages with few street lamps or no street lighting.
- Numerous unlit roads, including A-roads, throughout the High Weald.
- A range of nocturnal species which are dependent on dark skies for feeding, including Natterer's bat, serotine bat, brown long-eared bat, common pipistrelle, noctule bat, Bechstein's bat, dormice, hedgehog, the heart and marsh mallow moths, and glow-worms.



CLICK FOR MAPS

Natural and cultural capital – fact and figures

● 41 of the 99 parishes within the AONB have wholly dark or intrinsically dark skies. ● A further 15 having 95% coverage of intrinsically dark skies. ● 20 parishes in the AONB have collected light meter readings. ● 15 of the 17 UK bat species are found in the High Weald, all of which are protected.

TOP 5 ISSUES

1. Lack of minimum standards for external lighting that can be enforced. Standards are needed to set out basic principles of dark skies lighting and signpost to guidance and advice where needed.

2. Increased light pollution in rural areas from a variety of buildings and structures including new developments (street lighting and domestic light spill); housing designed with extensive glazing, such as wrap-around or floor-to-ceiling windows; external security lighting; rural out-buildings; public buildings and spaces such as railway stations; camping and glamping sites, and domestic lighting used to light-up homes and gardens at night.

3. Sky glow from adjacent built-up areas (including areas adjacent to the AONB), which reduces views of celestial bodies such as the Milky Way and Orion, leading to a loss of public connection and enjoyment of night skies.

4. Impacts on local wildlife, with light pollution disrupting circadian rhythms, migration, feeding and breeding across all animal groups including invertebrates, mammals, birds and amphibians.

5. Lack of education on the importance of dark skies to human health and wellbeing, as well as their significance to the natural environment.

OBJECTIVE **DS1**

To preserve the dark skies of the High Weald AONB by minimising light pollution, obtrusive external lighting and internal light spill from domestic, commercial and public premises in both existing and new developments within the High Weald, and from highways lighting.

Rationale

To protect and maintain the existing dark skies within the High Weald for the benefit of all, including future generations, for our health, wellbeing and enjoyment, to increase our understanding and sense of place in the universe; and for the benefit of wildlife and to reduce energy consumption.

OBJECTIVE **DS2**

To protect wildlife and habitats from light pollution across the High Weald.

Rationale

Light pollution affects a wide range of nocturnal species and those out during the day, from feeding to finding a mate and the ability to safely migrate. Light pollution is an additional stress to habitat loss for already declining populations of many species across the High Weald.

> *'Artificial light at night has revolutionized the way we live and work outdoors, but it has come at a price. When used thoughtlessly, lighting disrupts wildlife, damages human health, wastes money and energy, contributing to climate change, and it blocks our view of the starry sky'.*
>
> **International Dark-Sky Association**

Ambitions for 2029

Protection of the night-time environment of the High Weald, for nature, and to ensure astronomical dark sky objects such as the Milky Way remain visible to the naked eye, will require the level of artificial light at night to stay at its present low level, with everyone (individuals, communities, businesses including developers and public bodies such as Highways Authorities) committed to environmentally responsible approaches to outdoor lighting, and adopting new technologies.

ACTIONS

The Partnership will ...

a. Promote dark skies awareness and education, including walks and talks aimed at a diverse range of people and organisations, across different geographical areas of the High Weald, and the promotion of International Dark Skies Week.

Public bodies should ...

b. Include 'Dark Skies' policies in Local Plans and support their inclusion in neighbourhood plans, which seek to maintain dark skies in rural areas and reduce dark skies light pollution in urban areas in the AONB, and ensure the use of such policies in the decision-making process.

c. Follow the Institute of Lighting Professionals (ILP) guidance on reducing obtrusive lighting, and other relevant guidance to aid protecting dark skies, including ensuring that lighting designers use exterior light control environmental zone E1 to inform any proposed lighting in, or affecting the setting of, the AONB.

d. Protect wildlife-rich habitats such as ancient semi-natural woodland from external lighting, and where lighting is needed, require minimised and ecologically informed lighting schemes regarding location, direction, lux levels, colour temperature and light fitting design.

e. Seek to reduce light pollution by ensuring that flood-lit facilities such as sports pitches and car parks are turned off when not in use, through agreements and planning conditions.

f. Work with organisers of light festivals to reduce impacts, including avoiding light and illumination shows in or near to wildlife sensitive areas.

g. Avoid new street lighting where possible and ensure any street lighting required for junctions on adopted roads is kept to the minimum necessary and adheres to best practice in terms of location, illuminance and equipment design and light temperature, to avoid unnecessary skyglow and light spill.

h. Resist large areas of glazing in new building designs, especially wrap-around glazing and floor-to-ceiling windows, to minimise light spill, especially in rural areas with intrinsically dark skies.

Others can assist conservation and enhancement of dark skies by ...

i. Following best practice for external lighting on domestic premises including gardens and garages, to minimise light pollution.

j. Ensuring new external lighting is installed at the lowest height possible to achieve lighting levels, and is angled downwards (including roof lighting), and using dark sky friendly fixtures.

k. By using sensors to switch off lighting when not needed, to reduce light pollution and save energy.

l. Collecting local light meter readings and using satellite data to inform policies at a parish level and highlight light pollution hot spots.

Further information on maintaining the dark skies of the High Weald landscape, including best practice guidance and practical advice, can be found at **www.highweald.org**.











CHARACTER COMPONENT

Aesthetic and Perceptual Qualities

Aesthetic and perceptual qualities are sense based, and are experienced as a result of people's interaction with natural beauty and their immersion in it, within the High Weald's landscape.

KEY CHARACTERISTICS[13]

History-related qualities such as ...

a. a sense of history and timelessness arising from an ancient countryside with a human-scale agricultural tapestry; veteran and ancient trees; medieval forests, heaths and commons; churches, historic buildings

b. tangible legacies from the iron and wood industries (such as hammer ponds and place names) and major historic events such as the Battle of Hastings in 1066.

Qualities associated with emotion and imagination such as ...

c. a sense of intimacy, enclosure and remoteness owing to the heavily treed landscape.

d. a sense of wonder, renewal and connection with the natural world arising from the proximity of wildlife and opportunities for immersion in nature.

e. a sense of freedom arising from access to a dense network of public rights of way and quiet roads suitable for walking, cycling and horse riding, and opportunities to discover many accessible green spaces (including sandrock areas and rivers, reservoirs and coast) and unexpected features such as the 'mini-landscapes' of gill streams.

f. a deep sense of rurality unusual in South East England.

Character and gestalt qualities such as ...

g. the homely, pastoral feel to the whole landscape arising from its human-scale pattern and productivity.

h. colour palette of greens (vegetation) and browns (clay, timber and iron) representing the materials from which the landscape is constructed.

i. a rich and varied biodiversity.

j. a recognisable and unifying mosaic of open field and wooded habitats.

Sensory qualities such as ...

k. unexpected panoramic and long views, often uninterrupted, extending out along the valleys beyond the High Weald with natural skylines and forested ridges occasionally punctuated by church spires, and often framed by field gates and wooded holloways.

l. quietude and tranquillity, with large areas of natural rural soundscape and perceived distance from urban noise.

m. natural soundscapes including the ability to enjoy varied birdsong.

n. exposure to seasonal sensations such as wind and warmth, and diurnal fluctuations in light and dark.

o. Vivid seasonal changes including the whites and blues of ancient woodland ground flora in the spring and the oranges and browns of autumnal trees and woodlands.

Symbolic and inspiration qualities such as ...

p. the idea of the High Weald as a 'quintessential English pastoral landscape'

q. the association of dark autumnal nights and local tradition of High Weald village bonfire societies.

r. the legacy of physical features and ideas left by writers, artists, poets, gardeners and craftspeople inspired by the landscape such as Kipling's house at Batemans, Christopher Lloyd's house and garden at Great Dixter, the Cranbrook Colony of artists, and A.A. Milne.

s. traditions illustrating the close relationship between nature and place including skills and crafts, agricultural shows, traditional breeds, and locally produced food and drink.

t. distinctive public realm features such as fingerposts and milestones.

13. Quality categories based on Brady 2003



Natural and cultural capital – fact and figures

● >120,000 residents in the AONB and >700,000 people living within 5km of the National Landscape boundary. ● 2,126km footpaths, 383km bridleway, 61km byway (density 1.8km per sq.km). ● 83% population within 5km of a ≤100ha natural greenspace site. ● 4 disused railway lines – Cuckoo Trail, Forest Way, Worth Way and The Hop Pickers Line. ● 87.3km of mainline railway and 41km of heritage railway line. ● 30 manor houses, castles and gardens open to the public, including Battle Abbey (the most visited English Heritage site after Stonehenge). ● 2km of climbable sandrock.

TOP 5 ISSUES

1. Declining knowledge, connection and involvement with the countryside and its role in producing food and materials.

2. Increasing visitor numbers leading to urbanising infrastructure around villages and popular sites, and lack of awareness of the countryside code by new users, creating tension between different user groups.

3. Difficult accessibility for many, particularly those from urban areas, with declining or expensive public transport services and lack of travel routes for pedestrians, cyclists and riders, declining rights of way maintenance, and lack of signage.

4. Erosion of rurality and tranquillity through 'urbanising' development including new housing, camping/ glamping accommodation and activity, telecoms equipment, traffic and noise (including aircraft), including cumulative impacts.

5. Degradation of nature, including biodiversity decline, erosion of habitats and damage to natural systems reducing people's rich experience of nature.

OBJECTIVE **PQ1**

To increase opportunities for learning about and celebrating the High Weald's character and aesthetic qualities, and to promote and facilitate contributions by communities and individuals to the conservation and enhancement of the High Weald.

Rationale

To help develop emotional connection to the landscape, encouraging and enabling people to care for the High Weald and support its conservation.

OBJECTIVE **PQ2**

To protect the unspoilt rural landscape with its intrinsic sense of naturalness, valued views, and the extent of green space which foster experiences of rurality and tranquillity.

Rationale

To prevent the loss of contained green space, glimpsed and long views, and tree-canopied skylines, especially regarding developments that fringe existing settlements in the High Weald, which would impinge on people's perception of greenness and rurality.

OBJECTIVE **PQ3**

To foster and promote equitable access and informal enjoyment of the High Weald landscape and the integrated management of its resources for the enjoyment of natural beauty by all.

Rationale

To meet the demand for informal recreation from residents and those living close to the AONB, whilst ensuring infrastructure, services and activities are consistent with conserving and enhancing natural beauty and its quiet enjoyment for this and future generations.

N.B. For clarity, the pursuance of the above objectives or actions set out in this section should not harm the other character components or be at the expense of their contribution to the natural beauty of the High Weald AONB.

Ambitions for 2029

Policy and actions will need to protect the physical features that experiencing natural beauty relies on, as well as enabling fair access to it. Conserving and enhancing the High Weald will increase its contribution to a 'Natural Health Service' for people now and in the future, drawing on the area's aesthetic qualities to foster enjoyment and wellbeing, and encourage access for everyone to so that everyone feels welcome and included, while ensuring that nature and beauty are not harmed. Improved and fair access will not just relate to opportunities for recreation but to everything that a naturally functioning healthy countryside can provide including clean air, clean water, healthy food, and the opportunity to learn new skills and interact with nature.

ACTIONS

The Partnership will ...

a. Convene relevant stakeholders to develop best practice and collaborative approaches to managing High Weald greenspaces, including an access strategy that sets out areas for strategic investment to meet increasing population needs and increase access for all users in the High Weald AONB

b. Coordinate and deliver the primary school education programme to encourage children to enjoy and understand the landscape, including its history and wildlife.

c. Promote health walks, celebratory landscape-inspired outdoor events, self-guided trails and other outdoor activities encouraging the wider community into the landscape (refer to Cross-cutting theme: People & Access Principles for detail).

d. Develop and manage the High Weald website and produce information and interpretation promoting the High Weald and its special qualities.

Public bodies should...

e. Include information about the High Weald AONB on websites and help to promote the purpose and objectives of the AONB Management Plan and the High Weald Charter for Residents and Visitors, encouraging care for the countryside and community engagement.

f. Recognise and seek to address the potential harm to landscape character, including tranquillity and wildlife, from intensified recreational and tourism related activity (refer to Cross-cutting theme: People & Access Principles for detail).

g. Ensure that planning decisions (site allocations and development management decisions) consider the impact of development on the intrinsic rural character of the landscape and seek to avoid intrusive development.

h. Use the High Weald Housing Design Guide for best practice on incorporating green-ness into new developments, by including grass verges, trees and shrubs, and greenspaces, to ensure a strong sense of place and help minimise noise intrusion.

i. Ensure that installations of infrastructure and equipment for telecoms and utilities services are located and designed so as to avoid introducing urbanising features (such as security fencing, lighting etc) into the rural landscape.

Others can assist conservation and enhancement of aesthetic and perceptual qualities by...

j. Promoting, sustaining and expanding volunteer heritage and conservation groups.

k. Sharing best practice in visitor management, and producing visitor management plans for sensitive sites and areas.

l. Promoting the rich cultural, artistic and historical associations with the landscape, and highlighting local distinctiveness in the visitor 'offer', including those associated with farming and forestry.

m. Maintaining rights of way, particularly promoted routes, and enable responsible and fair access for all to the landscape.

n. Seeking to retain and enhance panoramic long-distance public viewpoints to enable people to connect with the High Weald and its natural beauty.

o. Choosing native hedges, shrubs and trees for boundaries for domestic curtilages.

p. Supporting conservation measures that protect a wide variety of bird species.

Further information on maintaining the aesthetic and perceptual qualities of the High Weald landscape, including best practice guidance and practical advice, can be found at **www.highweald.org**.











CHARACTER COMPONENT

Land-based Economy and Rural Living

The High Weald AONB is characterised by a broad-based economy but with a significant land-based sector and related community life focused on mixed farming (particularly family farms and smaller holdings), woodland management and rural crafts.

KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- Land-based workers at a proportion higher than the rural average.
- Strong historic relationship with London and other employment areas on social character and commuting patterns.
- Tendency for greater self-sufficiency in smaller communities to the east of the area, away from major population centres.
- Retention of woodland workers and their families who have a multi-generational relationship with, and whose livelihoods rely on, the area's coppice woodlands.
- A landscape that suits traditional management owing to its small-scale nature and hedged bank and ditch boundaries.
- Strong rural community life based around small towns and villages supported by a network of valued and accessible local services and amenities, such as village halls, shops and post offices, clubs and societies, and infrastructure including bus services.
- Predominantly pastoral mixed farming with an absence of industrial scale farming.
- Other traditional mixed and well-integrated land-uses including orchards, hops, vineyards and soft fruit, and land-based crafts and processing.



Lord Strang, Chairman of the National Parks Commission in 1959 called on the government to

'Secure modern standards of living in the countryside with improved rural housing and new small rural industries to provide employment' but observed that these must be 'fully sympathetic to, and in scale with, the landscape and local style of building'.

CLICK FOR MAPS

Natural and cultural capital – fact and figures

● Agriculture, forestry and fishing account for 13% of businesses (employing 8% of the workforce) compared with 3% in the south east (employing 1% of the workforce). ● 38% of employment is in micro businesses compared with 17% in the south east. ● 29% of the working age population are retired compared with 21% in the south east. ● Rural incomes are slightly lower than those in the south east but average house prices are 42% higher. ● Self-sufficient in cereals, fruit and lamb but an under-supply of potatoes, beef, fresh vegetables and salads.

TOP 5 ISSUES

1. Low wages and lack of affordable housing and well-designed workspace affecting recruitment and retention of workers and constraining ability of land-based businesses to thrive.

2. Holdings which are typically small (by national standards) struggling to remain economic in the current market under traditional livestock management regimes and uncertainty over future agri-environmental schemes; compounded by reducing agricultural infrastructure, such as livestock markets and abattoirs, while high cost of land and decline in affordable farm tenancies are a barrier to new entrants to agriculture.

3. Changing land use away from traditional agricultural enterprises, which cumulatively threatens long-term food production.

4. Loss of traditional skills owing to ageing workforce and contracting farm and woodland economies, and lack of economic value in land-based products constraining innovation.

5. Closures and cuts to rural services and amenities, including bus services, Post Offices, village shops, pubs and banks.

OBJECTIVE **LBE1**

To improve returns from, and thereby increase entry and retention in, farming, forestry, horticulture and other land management activities that conserve and enhance natural beauty.

Rationale

To sustain an economically viable land management sector, with a particular emphasis on sustainable and small-scale farming and forestry.

OBJECTIVE **LBE2**

To reconnect settlements and residents with the surrounding countryside, and maintain and improve rural amenities and services that support communities within the context of the rural settlement pattern.

Rationale

To foster community life, and enhance the synergy of the local economy, society and environment, and the relationship with the surrounding countryside and wild species that defines sustainable rural settlement.

OBJECTIVE **LBE3**

To improve agricultural and forestry infrastructure (including the provision of appropriate affordable housing and workspaces for land-based workers), along with skills development for rural communities and related sectors that contribute positively to conserving and enhancing natural beauty.

Rationale

To foster land-based economic activities – including heritage conservation, sustainable tourism and outdoor education – that support conservation of the AONB. To provide opportunities for economic activity that supports appropriate land management objectives and AONB designation.

N.B. For clarity, the pursuance of the above objectives or actions set out in this section should not harm the other character components or be at the expense of their contribution to the natural beauty of the High Weald AONB.

Ambitions for 2029

A renaissance in land-based activity and rural living will be needed to meet the net-zero challenge. Support should be focused on reconnecting people with the land and driving innovation in carbon-neutral agricultural and timber infrastructure, small-scale food production, and forestry and rural skills development. Investment in land-based education, skills, and businesses will need to be significantly enhanced to ensure sufficient land management capacity is created alongside the resilient and flexible skills required to adapt to a warming, more unpredictable climate. Innovative mechanisms to deliver affordable housing for local people, including land-based workers, will need to be explored, such as developing local criteria for key workers, exploring local thresholds for First Homes, and supporting local community land trust ambitions (whilst still having regard to the other Management Plan objective, particularly those relating to Settlement). Increased working from home will continue to stimulate community activities, rural services, and demand for access to countryside resources creating opportunities for new relationships with nature.

ACTIONS

The Partnership will ...

a. Work collaboratively with local authorities to ensure rural business strategies and investments meet the requirements of the AONB management plan.

b. Work collaboratively with partners to support and promote apprenticeships and training in rural skills.

c. Promote the need for national policy and support to be tailored to maintain viable farming and forestry in the High Weald.

Public bodies should...

d. Plan for appropriate development to ensure continuing vitality of local communities and viability of community services, including seeking to deliver a mix of housing sizes that responds to local needs and key worker housing, including for land-based workers.

e. Engage positively with mechanisms capable of delivering affordable housing and housing tailored to the specific needs of land-based workers for rural housing needs.

f. Seek to retain and support rural services and amenities including bus services, village shops, pubs and Post Offices, and support investment in rural services such as improved rural broadband and digital connectivity across rural areas and community transport initiatives.

g. Ensure that proposals for farm diversification projects, (including camping /glamping sites), conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the High Weald, and would support, and not adversely impact on, the agricultural viability of a holding in terms of retention of sufficient productive land and compatible uses.

h. Support maintenance and development of agricultural infrastructure and food processing facilities e.g., abattoirs and livestock markets.

i. Promote, use, and resist removal of, agricultural occupancy conditions and seek to retain capacity for land management within farmsteads.

j. Ensure support for farming and associated rural development is tailored to the particular needs of the High Weald.

k. Support organisations offering career introductions to the land-based sector, and explore opportunities to work collaboratively with others to offer viable longer-term tenancies to young farmers and new entrants.

l. Collate and maintain AONB level data on farming and forestry.

Others can assist conservation and enhancement of the land-based economy by...

m. Supporting and investing in improved working conditions and manufacturing technology for land-based businesses.

n. Retaining affordable farm tenancies and seeking creating new affordable tenancies, jobs and accommodation for new entrants to land-based businesses.

o. Facilitating and encouraging collaborative farming, food processing, and marketing enterprises.

p. Supporting initiatives that develop skills in land management and rural crafts, and promoting and celebrating local crafts.

q. Establishing buy-local procurement policies and choosing locally produced food, fencing and furniture.

Further information on supporting the land-based economy in the High Weald landscape, including best practice guidance and practical advice, can be found at **www.highweald.org**.

Appendix C

Sources of information

Data	Data source
Background mapping	
■ Aerial Imagery	ESRI
■ OS MasterMap ■ OS 25k ■ OS 50k	Wealden District Council
Boundary	
■ Local Authority boundary	Ordnance Survey
Landscape Character Assessments	
■ Wealden Landscape Character Assessment (2022)	Wealden District Council / LUC
Cultural heritage	
■ Listed Buildings ■ Scheduled Monuments ■ Registered Parks and Gardens ■ Heritage at risk ■ WHS	Historic England
■ Conservation Areas ■ Conservation Area Appraisals (including draft Appraisals) ■ Locally listed buildings (including any interim date being prepared for the new Local Plan) ■ Historic Landscape Characterisation (HLC)	Wealden District Council
Natural Heritage	
■ Local Nature Reserves (LNR) ■ Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) ■ National Nature Reserves (NNR) ■ Ancient Woodland Index (AWI) ■ Priority habitats ■ Special Protection Areas (SPA)	Natural England

Data	Data source
■ Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) ■ Ramsar / Proposed Ramsar	
■ National Forestry Index (NFI)	Forestry Commission
■ Important Bird Areas (IBA)	RSPB
■ Regional Important Geological Sites (RIGS) / Local Geological Sites ■ Broad Habitat Types ■ Wildlife Verges ■ Green Infrastructure areas ■ Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs) ■ Biodiversity Opportunity Areas (BOA)	Wealden District Council
Landscape	
■ Light pollution ■ Tranquillity	CPRE
■ National Character Areas ■ High Weald AONB ■ South Downs National Park ■ Heritage Coasts	Natural England
■ Topography	Ordnance Survey
■ Flood zone 2/3 ■ Areas that benefit from flood defences ■ Flood storage areas (FSA) ■ Spatial flood defence (SFD) ■ Source protection zone (SPZ)	Environment Agency
■ Lakes	Ordnance Survey (meridian)
■ Flood Zones 3a and 3b ■ Land at risk from groundwater flooding ■ High Weald AONB components of character	Wealden District Council
■ High Weald AONB character component data, including: – Water systems data (watercourses, ponds, reservoirs and openwater) – Geology data (bedrock geology and sandstone outcrops)	High Weald AONB

Data	Data source
– Settlement data (historic settlement pattern and historic farmsteads) – Historic routeways data – Woodland data (ancient semi-natural woodlands and plantations on ancient woodland site) – Field and heath data (historic field boundaries, heathland, and wildflower grassland)	
Access and recreation	
■ National Cycle Network	Sustrans
■ National Trails ■ Common Land ■ Country Parks	Natural England
■ National Trails	National Trust
■ Green Space	Ordnance Survey
■ Accessible Natural Greenspace ■ Public rights of way/Promoted Routes ■ Brownfield land	Wealden District Council
Planning	
■ Settlement boundaries ■ Consented sites / committed sites / allocations ■ Strategic Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment (SHELAA) sites	Wealden District Council
Agriculture	
■ Agricultural Land Classification (ALC)	Natural England
■ CORINE landcover 2018	EEA

Appendix D
Glossary

Table D.1: Glossary of terms

Term	Definition
AOD	Above Ordnance Datum (sea level).
Aesthetic	Concerning the visual appeal of a feature or landscape.
Agricultural Land Classification	The classification of agricultural land in England in Wales
Alluvium	Loose soil or sediments, which have been eroded, reshaped by water in some form, and redeposited.
Analysis	The process of breaking the landscape down, usually in descriptive terms, into its component parts in order to understand how it is made up.
Ancient trees and veteran trees	Individual trees or groups of trees with wood pastures, historic parkland, hedgerows, orchards, park, and other areas. They are often found outside ancient woodlands. irreplaceable habitats with some or all of the following characteristics: *Ancient trees* An ancient tree is exceptionably valuable. Attributes can include its great age, size, condition, biodiversity value (as a result of significant wood decay and the habitat created from the ageing process), cultural and heritage value. *Veteran trees* A veteran tree may or may not be very old, but it has decay features, such as branch death and hollowing. These features contribute to its biodiversity, cultural and heritage value.
Ancient Woodland	Woodland which the evidence shows has had had continuous woodland cover since at least 1600 AD and has only been cleared for underwood or timber production. It is an extremely valuable ecological resource, with an exceptionally high diversity of flora and fauna.
AONB	Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty – a statutory national landscape designation.
Approach	The stepwise process by which a landscape assessment is undertaken.

Term	Definition
Arable	Land used for growing crops.
Assessment	An umbrella term used to encompass all the many different ways of looking at, describing, analysing, and evaluating landscape.
Assart	A piece of land converted from forest to agricultural use. Most such piecemeal enclosures date to the medieval or early post-medieval period and are bounded by species rich hedgerows, an indicator of land assarted from woodland.
Assarting	The act of clearing forested lands for use in agriculture or other purposes (in English land law, it was illegal to assart any part of a Royal Forest).
BAP	UK Biodiversity Action Plan priority species and habitats were identified as being the most threatened and requiring conservation action under the UK BAP. The original lists of UK BAP priority habitats were created between 1995 and 1999 and were subsequently updated in 2007. See http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/page-5155 for further information.
Biodiversity	The measure of the variety of organisms present in different ecosystems.
Brownfield site	A development site which is re-using previously developed land.
Built form	The characteristic nature of built development.
Characteristic	An element that contributes to local distinctiveness (e.g. narrow winding lanes, vernacular building style).
Classification	A process of sorting the landscape into different types, each with a distinct, consistent, and recognisable character.
Combe	A small dry valley, without a permanent watercourse.
Condition	A judgement on the intactness and condition of the elements of the landscape.
Coppicing	The traditional method of woodland management in which trees are cut down to near the ground to encourage the production of long, straight shoots, which can subsequently be harvested.
Description	Verbal description of what a landscape looks like. This is usually carried out in a systematic manner, but it may also include personal reactions to the landscape.

Term	Definition
Designated landscape	Areas of landscape identified as being of importance at international, national or local levels, either defined by statute or identified in development plans or other documents.
Dispersed settlement	A settlement where individual dwellings are scattered, in comparison to a linear or nucleated settlement.
Drift	The name for all material of glacial origin found anywhere on land or at sea, including sediment and large rocks.
EIA	Environmental Impact Assessment
Element	A component part of the landscape (e.g. hedges, roads, woods).
Enclosure (field pattern)	The placing in private hands of land to which there were previously common rights; the merging of commonly held strip fields to form a block surrounded by hedges.
Equine development	A term used to describe areas on the fringes of settlements which are dominated by horse paddocks, stable buildings, and associated paraphernalia.
Feature	A prominent, eye-catching element (e.g. wooded hilltop, church spire).
Floodplain	The area that would naturally be affected by flooding if a river rises above its banks, or if high tides and stormy seas cause flooding in coastal areas.
GIS	Geographic Information System
GPS	Global Positioning System
Grassland	Land used for grazing. Grassland can be improved (by management practices) semi-improved (modified by management practices and have a range of species less diverse than unimproved grasslands), or unimproved (not treated with fertiliser, herbicide or intensively grazed and consequently species diversity is high).
Greenfield site	A development site, usually on the fringes of a settlement, which has not previously been used for built development.
Habitat	The natural home or environment of an animal, plant, or other organism.
HLC	Historic Landscape Characterisation; a method of identification and interpretation of the varying historic character within an area that looks beyond individual heritage assets to help understand the whole landscape and townscape into repeating HLC Types.

Term	Definition
Hydrology	The science dealing with the occurrence, circulation, distribution, and properties of the waters of the earth and its atmosphere.
Innings	From verb 'to inn' meaning to reclaim (often from wetlands or floodplains).
Intact	Not changed or diminished.
Land cover	Combinations of land use and vegetation that cover the land surface.
Landmark	An object or feature of a landscape or town that is easily seen and recognized from a distance, especially one that enables someone to establish their location.
Landscape	The term refers primarily to the visual appearance of the land, including its shape, form, and colours. However, the landscape is not a purely visual phenomenon; its character relies on a whole range of other dimensions, including geology, topography, soils, ecology, archaeology, landscape history, land use, architecture, and cultural associations.
Landscape character	A distinct pattern or combination of elements that occurs consistently in a particular landscape.
Landscape character area (LCA)	A unique geographic area with a consistent character and identity, which forms part of a landscape character type.
Landscape character type (LCT)	A generic term for landscape with a consistent, homogeneous character. Landscape character types may occur in different parts of the county, but wherever they occur, they will share common combinations of geology, topography, vegetation, or human influences.
Landscape condition	Based on judgements about the physical state of the landscape, and about its intactness, from visual, functional, and ecological perspectives. It reflects the state of repair or intactness of individual features or elements (relating to that feature's primary condition or ultimate *desire*).
Landscape strategy	Principles to manage and direct landscape change for a particular landscape type or character area including identification of any particular management needs for specific elements.
Landscape value	The relative value that is attached to different landscapes. In a policy context the usual basis for recognising certain highly valued landscapes is through the application of a local or national landscape designation. Yet a landscape may be valued by different communities of interest for many different reasons without any formal designation, recognising, for

Term	Definition
	example, perceptual aspects such as scenic beauty, tranquillity or wildness; special cultural associations; the influence and presence of other conservation interests; or the existence of a consensus about importance, either nationally or locally.
Landscape and Visual Appraisal	An appraisal of the suitability of a site in landscape and visual terms to accommodate development, as well as to determine any site specific constraints and design considerations.
Linear settlement	A settlement that is built along a road, in comparison to a nuclear or dispersed settlement.
Listed Building	A building, object or structure that has been judged to be of national importance in terms of architectural or historic interest.
Local Plan	A development plan prepared by local planning authorities.
LWS	Local Wildlife Site
Martello towers	Small defensive forts that were built across the British Empire during the 19th century.
Natural character	Character as a result of natural or semi-natural features such as woodland, grassland, hedgerows etc.
National Character Areas (NCAs)	National Character Areas are defined within the *National Character Area Study, Natural England (2013).* NCAs divide England into 159 distinct natural areas. Each is defined by a unique combination of landscape, biodiversity, geodiversity, history, and cultural and economic activity.
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NNR	National Nature Reserve
Nucleated settlement	A settlement that is clustered around a centre, in comparison to a linear or dispersed settlement.
Open-field system	An area of arable land with common rights after harvest or while fallow. The fields date from the Medieval period and are usually without internal divisions (hedges, walls, or fences).
OS	Ordnance Survey
Parliamentary fields / enclosure	Fields formed by a legal process of enclosure (or inclosure), typically during the 18th and 19th centuries – by passing laws causing or forcing enclosure to produce fields for use by the owner (in place of common land for communal use).

Term	Definition
Pastoral	Land used for keeping or grazing sheep or cattle.
Pollarding	A traditional woodland management practice in which the branches of a tree are cut back every few years to encourage new long, straight shoots for harvesting. Differs from *coppicing* because the cuts are made at sufficient distance from the ground to prevent them from being eaten by animals.
Potential development sites	Potential growth areas that have been submitted for assessment in the Council's Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHELAA).
PRoW	Public right of way
Ramsar	Wetlands of international importance especially as Waterfowl Habitat
RPG	Registered Park and Garden; included in Historic England's 'Register of Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest in England'.
Remediation	Process by which a contaminated or damaged site is repaired and brought back intomore general use, or for a specific purpose (e.g. wildlife conservation).
Remnant	A part or quantity left after the greater part has been used, removed, or destroyed.
Riparian habitat	Riverbank habitat.
RNR	Roadside Nature Reserve
SAC	Special Area of Conservation (EC Directive 92/43/EEC Habitats Directive)
SANGS	Suitable Alternative Green Space
Scheduled Monument	Nationally important archaeological sites or historic buildings, given protection against unauthorised change.
Semi-natural vegetation	Any type of natural vegetation which has been influenced by human activities, either directly or indirectly.
Sense of place	A person's perception of a location's indigenous characteristics, based on the mix of uses, appearance and context that makes a place memorable.
Sensitive	The response to change or influence.
Skyline	The outline of a range of hills, ridge or group of buildings seen against the sky.

Term	Definition
SPA	Special Protection Area (EC Directive 2009/147/EC on the Conservation of Wild Birds)
SSSI	Site of Special Scientific Interest
Time depth	The time period expressed in the landscape, or the extent to which the landscape reflects a certain time period (a landscape with greater time depth will comprise older elements than a landscape with lesser time depth).
Topography	Combinations of slope and elevation that produce the shape and form of the land surface.
Transhumance	The seasonal movement of people and animals between grazing grounds, typically lowlands in the winter and highlands in the summer.
Valued landscape attributes	Positive features and characteristics that are important to landscape character and that, if lost, would result in adverse change to the landscape.
Vernacular	Buildings constructed in the local style, from local materials. Concerned with ordinary rather than monumental buildings.
Visual amenity	The overall pleasantness of the views people enjoy of their surroundings, which provides an attractive visual setting or backdrop for the enjoyment of activities of the people living, working, recreating, visiting or travelling through an area.