



**Kent Downs AONB**  
**Landscape Character Assessment**  
**Update 2020**  
**Revised and Published 2023**





### Acknowledgements

The author of this updated Landscape Character Assessment would like to acknowledge the work of the writers and artists of the 1995 publication *The Kent Downs Landscape*. Many of their informative and evocative descriptions of the Kent Downs have been re-used in this update. Thanks are also due to the Kent Downs AONB Team (and members of other organisations) for their assistance with the fieldwork and their generous sharing of specialist local knowledge. Particular thanks are due to Pippa Palmar for her detective work to find the locations of the 1995 photos, and to Tim Owen for producing the maps. A final thank you is due to the many people who attended the consultation workshops and shared their knowledge, concerns and visions for the Kent Downs AONB.

All photos in this document were taken by Fiona Fyfe unless acknowledged otherwise.

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### List of acronyms used in this report:

AONB	Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
CAMS	Cobham Ashenbank Management Scheme
ELMS	Environmental Land Management Scheme
GIS	Geographic Information System
KDAONB	Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
LCA	Landscape Character Area
LCT	Landscape Character Type
SSSI	Site of Special Scientific Interest

## 1.0 Introduction

### 1.1 Purposes of the Landscape Character Assessment Review

- 1.1.1 This updated Landscape Character Assessment is a component part of the statutory Kent Downs AONB Management Plan and was consulted on at the same time as the 2021-2026 revision of the Plan.
- 1.1.2 The original Kent Downs Landscape Assessment *The Kent Downs Landscape* was published by the Countryside Commission in 1995, and was accompanied by the *Kent Downs Landscape Guidelines*. It remains a highly-regarded document, but both the landscape and the accepted methodology for landscape assessment have changed since it was written. *The Landscape Assessment of Kent* was published by Babbie in 2004. This County-wide document drew on *The Kent Downs Landscape* as well as providing additional material on landscape sensitivity and condition, and recommended landscape actions.
- 1.1.3 The project brief states the following purposes of the Landscape Character Assessment Review:
- To bring the Landscape Character Assessment of the Kent Downs up to date in line with current best practice.
  - To assess changes in condition of the landscape character areas, identifying trends, key issues and reporting these particularly in relation to the character and qualities of the landscape which underpin the AONB designation.
  - To identify actions, investments and priorities to conserve and enhance the landscapes of the Kent Downs AONB.
  - To provide an opportunity for members of the AONB team and partnership to improve their skills, practice and understanding of landscape character assessment.

### 1.2 Approach and Methodology

- 1.2.1 This updated Landscape Character Assessment was prepared by Fiona Fyfe, Director of Fiona Fyfe Associates Ltd. Fiona is a Chartered Member of the Landscape Institute with 20 years' experience in landscape assessment. This document is in line with the current best practice guidance for Landscape Character Assessment, as set out in *An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment* (Natural England, 2014). This document defines 'landscape' as

*An area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/ or human factors<sup>1</sup>.*

- 1.2.2 The following diagram, taken from the Natural England guidance, shows how landscape is influenced by a combination of natural, cultural and perceptual qualities. These qualities can then be used to identify distinctive types and areas of landscape (described more fully below).

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<sup>1</sup> Council of Europe (2000) European Landscape Convention, Council of Europe, Florence, October 2000



*The 'Landscape Wheel' showing component parts of the landscape  
From: 'An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment' (Natural England, 2014 p.9)*

1.2.3 The following stages of work were undertaken to review the *Kent Downs Landscape Character Assessment* and prepare this Consultation Draft:

#### ***Stage 1: Desk Studies***

1.2.4 The desk study stage required the drawing-together of many different sources of information. All the existing Landscape Character Assessments were carefully read (i.e. the 1995 and 2004 Assessments, along with those produced by Local Authorities and Landscape Partnerships). A range of other publications providing background information on the Kent Downs landscape and its history were also consulted.

1.2.5 Mapped information was collated by KDAONB to be read in a Geographic Information System (GIS) which enables different datasets to be viewed simultaneously on screen. Mapped information included cultural heritage designations (e.g. locations of Scheduled Monuments, Conservation Areas, Listed Buildings, Registered Historic Parks and Gardens etc.); natural heritage designations (e.g. SSSIs, ancient woodland, geological sites etc.); information on the condition of SSSIs, Scheduled Monuments etc., and existing LCA boundaries.

1.2.6 Other sources of information such as historic and contemporary maps, aerial photographs, articles and guidebooks were also consulted.

#### ***Stage 2: Stakeholder Workshops***

1.2.7 Three workshops took place during the course of the project, covering the eastern, central and western parts of the AONB. This was necessary given the large geographic spread of the Kent Downs AONB, and the wish to gain specialist and local knowledge.

1.2.8 The stakeholders who attended the workshops included AONB staff, Local Authority staff, parish representatives, local landowners, the National Trust, the Environment Agency, Historic England, Affinity Water and Kent Wildlife Trust. Together they represent a wide range of stakeholders, and have extensive local knowledge and professional expertise.

- 1.2.9 The workshops started with an introduction to the concept of landscape character assessment, and the Kent Downs Landscape Character Areas. Attendees were then invited to form groups around tables (one table per Landscape Character Area) and to discuss the key features of Landscape Character Areas, the forces for change acting on the landscape, and the vision for the Landscape Character Area. KDAONB staff facilitated the discussions, and recorded the findings. The exercise was repeated, enabling each attendee to contribute to three Landscape Character Area discussions per workshop.

***Stage 3: Fieldwork***

- 1.2.10 Three sessions of fieldwork were held during the course of the project to enable full geographical coverage of the AONB area. During the fieldwork, the landscape architect was accompanied by KDAONB staff, Local Authority staff or staff from other organisations. This enabled local knowledge to be shared effectively, covering a range of specialist topics including archaeology, ecology, orchards, farming and planning. It also provided an opportunity for staff to learn first-hand about the landscape character assessment processes.
- 1.2.11 During the fieldwork (which took place in three blocks between June and September 2017) as much as possible of the AONB was visited, in order to verify or update the descriptions from existing Landscape Character Assessments. Forces for change and issues affecting landscape condition were also noted during this process.
- 1.2.12 Photos were taken to show 'typical' scenes, items of interest and forces for change. In addition, the photo locations from the 1995 Assessment were re-visited and a comparative photo taken. These are valuable in showing the landscape changes which have occurred in the intervening 22 years.

***Stage 4: Writing up***

- 1.2.13 This stage brought together all the findings from the desk studies, stakeholder workshops and fieldwork. A series of profiles (one for each Landscape Character Area) were produced, illustrated with photographs. The starting point for the profiles was the text of the 1995 Assessment, but this was updated and extended where necessary. New sections were added on landscape condition and landscape management recommendations.

***Stage 5: Stakeholder Consultation***

- 1.2.14 The draft profiles were sent to all attendees of the stakeholder workshops, and their comments fed in to the draft final Assessment. The draft final assessment was then included in the full consultation for the statutory Kent Downs AONB Management Plan; any further comments received at this time have been taken into account in this final version.

### 1.3 Landscape Character Types and Areas within the Kent Downs AONB

#### 1.3.1 Landscape Character Types (LCTs) are defined as

*Distinct types of landscape that are relatively homogenous in character. They are generic in nature in that they may occur in different areas...but wherever they occur, they share broadly similar combinations of geology, topography, drainage patterns, vegetation, historical land use and settlement pattern.<sup>2</sup>*

There are six key LCTs within the Kent Downs AONB, reflecting the area's underlying geology and its topography. These are listed below and shown on Map 1.

LCT 1: Chalk Downs

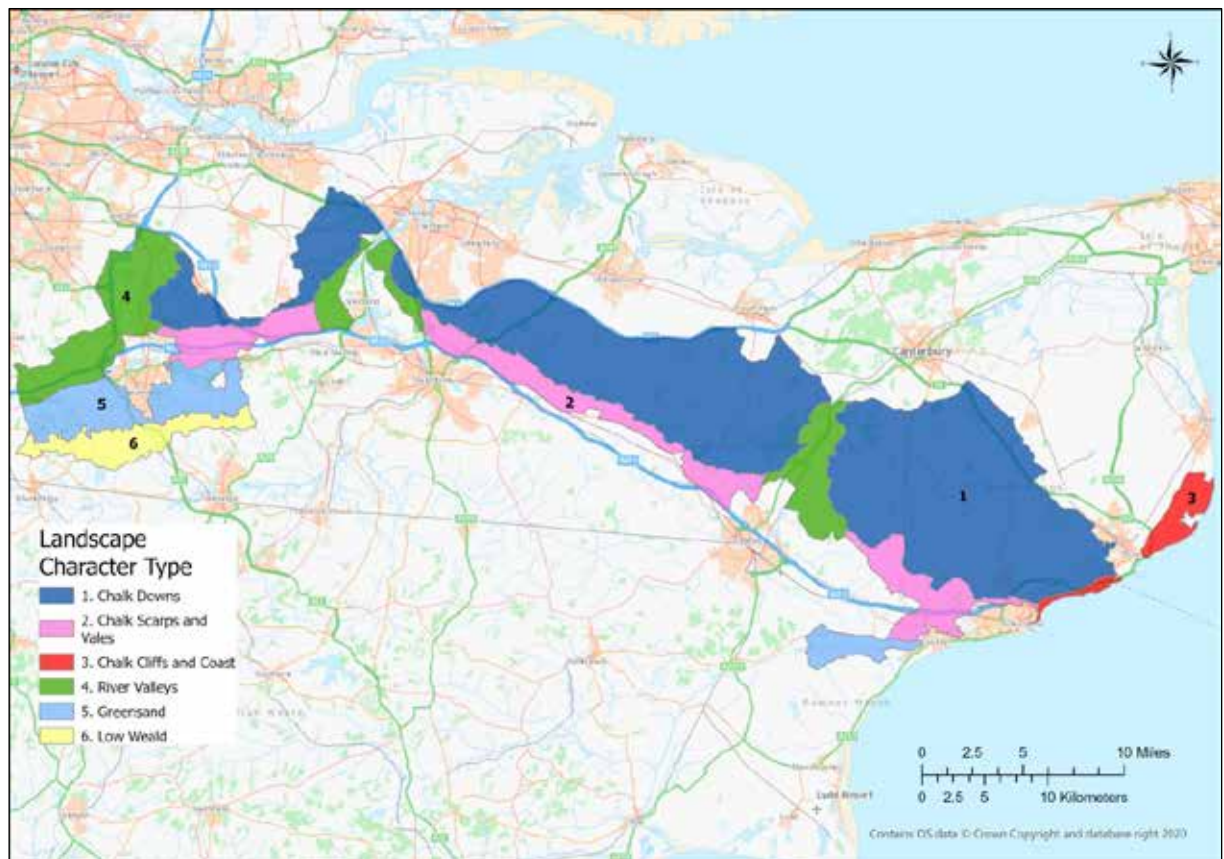
LCT 2: Chalk Scarps and Vales

LCT 3: Chalk Cliffs and Coast

LCT 4: River Valleys

LCT 5: Greensand

LCT 6: Low Weald



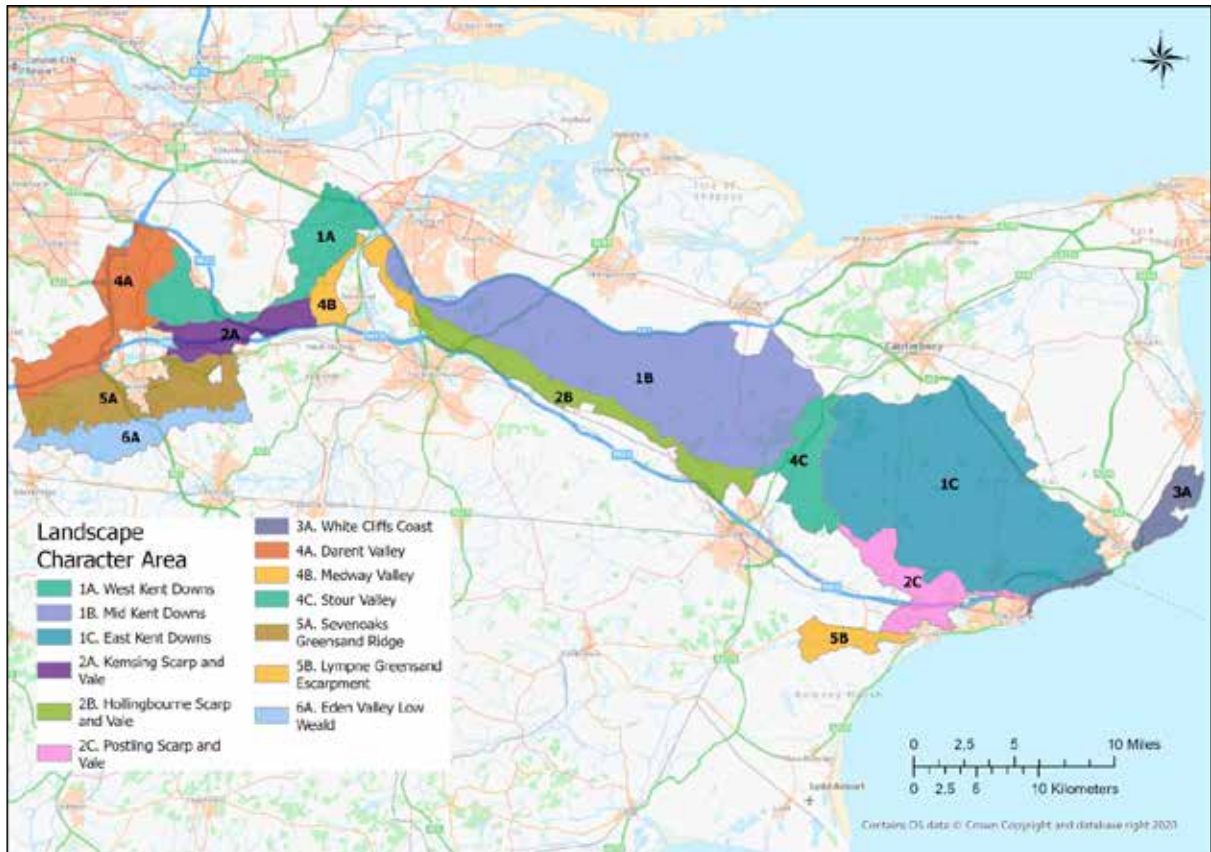
Map 1: Landscape Character Types within the Kent Downs AONB

<sup>2</sup> *An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment* (Natural England, 2014) p.54

1.3.2 Landscape Character Areas (LCAs) are defined as:

*Single unique areas which are the discrete geographical areas of a particular landscape type. Each area has its own individual character and identity, even though it shares the same generic characteristics with other areas of the same Type<sup>3</sup>.*

The 6 LCTs within the Kent Downs AONB are divided into 13 LCAs, as shown on Map 2 and the table overleaf.



Map 2: Landscape Character Areas within the Kent Downs AONB

Some LCAs are sub-divided into Local Character Areas to reflect their internal variation. There are a total of 32 Local Character Areas. 31 of these were used in the 2004 Babbie Landscape Assessment of Kent. The 32<sup>nd</sup> (Folkestone Cliffs and The Warren) was identified during this Landscape Character Assessment Review. The review and consultation process also suggested better names for some of the Local Character Areas.

The following table shows the relationship between Landscape Character Types, Landscape Character Areas and Local Character Areas.

<sup>3</sup> *An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment* (Natural England, 2014) p.54

Landscape Character Type	Landscape Character Area	Local Character Area
1 Chalk Downs	LCA 1A West Kent Downs	Kingsdown
		Luddesdown
		Cobham
		Shorne
	LCA 1B Mid Kent Downs	Nashenden Valley
		Bredhurst (formerly Chatham Outskirts)
		Bicknor
		Faversham Fruit Belt
		Challock
	LCA 1C East Kent Downs	Petham
		Elham
		Alkham
2 Chalk Scarps and Vales	LCA 2A Kemsing Scarp and Vale	None
		LCA 2B Hollingbourne Scarp and Vale
	LCA 2C Postling Scarp and Vale	Boxley Vale
		Detling to Eastwood
		Folkestone Outskirts
		Saltwood
3 Chalk Cliffs and Coast	LCA 3A White Cliffs Coast	Folkestone Cliffs and The Warren *
		South Foreland
4 River Valleys	LCA 4A Darent Valley	Chevening (formerly West Darent)
		Shoreham (formerly North Darent)
		Knockholt
	LCA 4B Medway Valley	Western Scarp
		Eastern Scarp
	LCA 4C Stour Valley	Wye
		Hampton
		Chilham
	5 Greensand	LCA 5A Sevenoaks Greensand Ridge
Ightham Greensand		
LCA 5B Lympne Greensand Escarpment		Hythe Escarpment
		Aldington
		Romney Marsh
6 Low Weald	LCA 6A Eden Valley Low Weald	None

\*This is a new Local Character Area, and was formerly the southern edge of the East Kent Downs LCA

## 1.4 A note on LCA boundaries

- 1.4.1 The review was not intended to be a full check of the Landscape Character Area boundaries. However, in a small number of locations, the Landscape Character Area or Local Character Area boundaries were adjusted in order to improve consistency (for example, if a small part of a scarp slope was included in a different LCA, the boundary was adjusted so that the whole scarp is now within the same LCA). It is possible that some of these inconsistencies in the boundaries may have occurred when they were digitised from the original hand-drawn boundary maps.
- 1.4.2 Occasionally, the workshops would flag anomalies in the boundaries, which would be checked in the field, and amended if appropriate. For example, the Saltwood Local Character Area was extended to include part of Stowting Local Character Area, because its landscape character was closer to that of Saltwood than that of Stowting. Another example is the Low Weald, which was formerly two Local Character Areas, but its character was felt to be sufficiently homogenous for the Local Character Areas to be merged.
- 1.4.3 The most major change to the boundaries was the removal of the coastal strip from the East Kent Downs LCA and its inclusion (together with the existing South Foreland Landscape Character Area) in a new 'White Cliffs Coast' Landscape Character Area.
- 1.4.4 It is important to note that the 13 Landscape Character Areas are at a strategic scale, reflecting the large size of the Kent Downs AONB. Hence subdivision into Local Character Areas is helpful in adding local nuance to the descriptions.
- 1.4.5 It is also important to note that many of the boundaries (particularly those between Local Character Areas) are transitional in nature. The boundary line as drawn represents a line within this zone of transition. Where a site is located towards the edge of an area, it is therefore necessary to look at the character of (and any implications of change on) the adjacent character area(s).

## 1.5 Summary of landscape condition and trends

- 1.5.1 A range of data sources were used to establish landscape condition throughout all stages of the project methodology described above. Data was gathered consistently across all Landscape Character Areas relating to the following themes:
- SSSI condition (Natural England dataset)
  - Presence of invasive species (SSSI condition, workshops, fieldwork, local knowledge)
  - Field boundaries condition (previous studies, fieldwork, workshops)
  - Scheduled Monuments condition (Historic England dataset)
  - Listed building condition, including 'at risk' (Historic England dataset)
  - Conservation Area Appraisal findings (where available)
  - Presence or absence of intrusive development, including in setting (workshops, fieldwork, previous studies)
  - Changes in landscape management (comparison with previous studies, then and now photographs, fieldwork, workshops, local knowledge)
  - Condition-related issues raised in 1995 and 2004 Assessments
  - Condition-related issues raised in Local Authority and/ or Landscape Partnership Assessments
  - Condition-related issues raised in workshops

- 1.5.2 The findings of this condition assessment informed the write-up of the Landscape Character Area profiles. Although there is local complexity and variation (as recorded in the Landscape Character Area profiles) there are some general landscape trends across the AONB, which are summarised below. A particularly valuable exercise whilst undertaking the Landscape Character Assessment Review was to re-visit the viewpoints from the 1995 Assessment and to compare the photos.
- 1.5.3 Overall, within the AONB, it is generally a positive story with regard to landscape management. In recent decades there have been a number of landscape enhancement initiatives, including Higher Level Stewardship schemes, projects to revert arable to grassland, extensive woodland management projects, community orchard projects, and landscape enhancement schemes (such as hedgerow and woodland planting) as mitigation/ compensation for the Channel Tunnel Rail Link (CTRL – now called High Speed 1). The trends for removing hedgerows and ploughing grassland and scrub (at their peak in the 1970s and 1980s) have now been reversed. However, the majority of landscape management is still driven by agri-environment scheme funding, including the new Environmental Land Management Scheme (ELMS) which is currently being developed.
- 1.5.4 A major landscape change within the AONB in recent years has been the decline in commercial orchards and hop gardens (traditional Kent land uses) and the increase in viticulture (linked to warming temperatures). Extensive polytunnels are also now a more frequent feature in the Kent agricultural landscape.
- 1.5.5 Another noticeable trend is the increased pressure for development outside the AONB and on its margins. Such development inevitably impacts on the AONB itself, through its visibility in views, impacts on tranquillity, increased light pollution, increased traffic, recreation pressure etc. Development also increases demand for groundwater extraction, which is a concern as the chalk aquifers are already low. Examples of development on the periphery of the AONB include the expansion of towns such as Ashford and Sevenoaks, and the redevelopment of former industrial sites in the Medway Valley. Road and rail corridors (within and outside the AONB) face particular pressure to accommodate new development. Upgrading of transport, energy and infrastructure networks (from increasing road capacity, to additional pylon lines, to enhancing mobile phone signal coverage) add further pressures. However, the UK Power Networks/ Kent Downs AONB initiative to underground low-voltage power cables has had a very positive impact on local landscapes.
- 1.5.6 Wider environmental factors are also having a major impact on the landscapes of the Kent Downs AONB. Sadly, one of the most obvious changes visible during the review is the spread of Ash Dieback disease, with the consequent loss of woodland, roadside and in-field ash trees. It is already impacting on landscape character, and will continue to do so.
- 1.5.7 Climate change is already affecting the Kent Downs AONB landscape in a variety of ways, including increased intensity and frequency of storms (with subsequent coastal erosion), changing precipitation patterns and milder temperatures. These changes will affect many different aspects of the Kent Downs landscape. For example, cliff-top habitats are at risk from coastal erosion; beech trees are relatively intolerant to hot dry summers; many trees and plants are vulnerable to damage by pests which thrive in warmer conditions, and some traditional apple varieties cannot thrive without a sufficiently cold winter. Other environmental concerns are the reduction (noticed across Europe) of flying insects, and increased levels of air, water and soil pollution.

- 1.5.8 It is important to remember, however, that landscapes can be resilient to change. In the photographs from the 1995 Assessment, damage from the 1987 hurricane is noticeable, particularly on wooded ridges. In the intervening years, woodland has re-established and the storm damage is no longer immediately apparent.
- 1.5.9 Naturally-occurring and man-made changes affecting the various Landscape Character Areas are recorded in the Landscape Character Area profiles. The profiles also contain landscape management recommendations (under the headings of 'protect' 'manage' and 'plan') to try and mitigate negative impacts, and to promote and enable positive landscape change.



*Orchids in chalk grassland at Castle Hill near Folkestone*

## 2.0 West Kent Downs

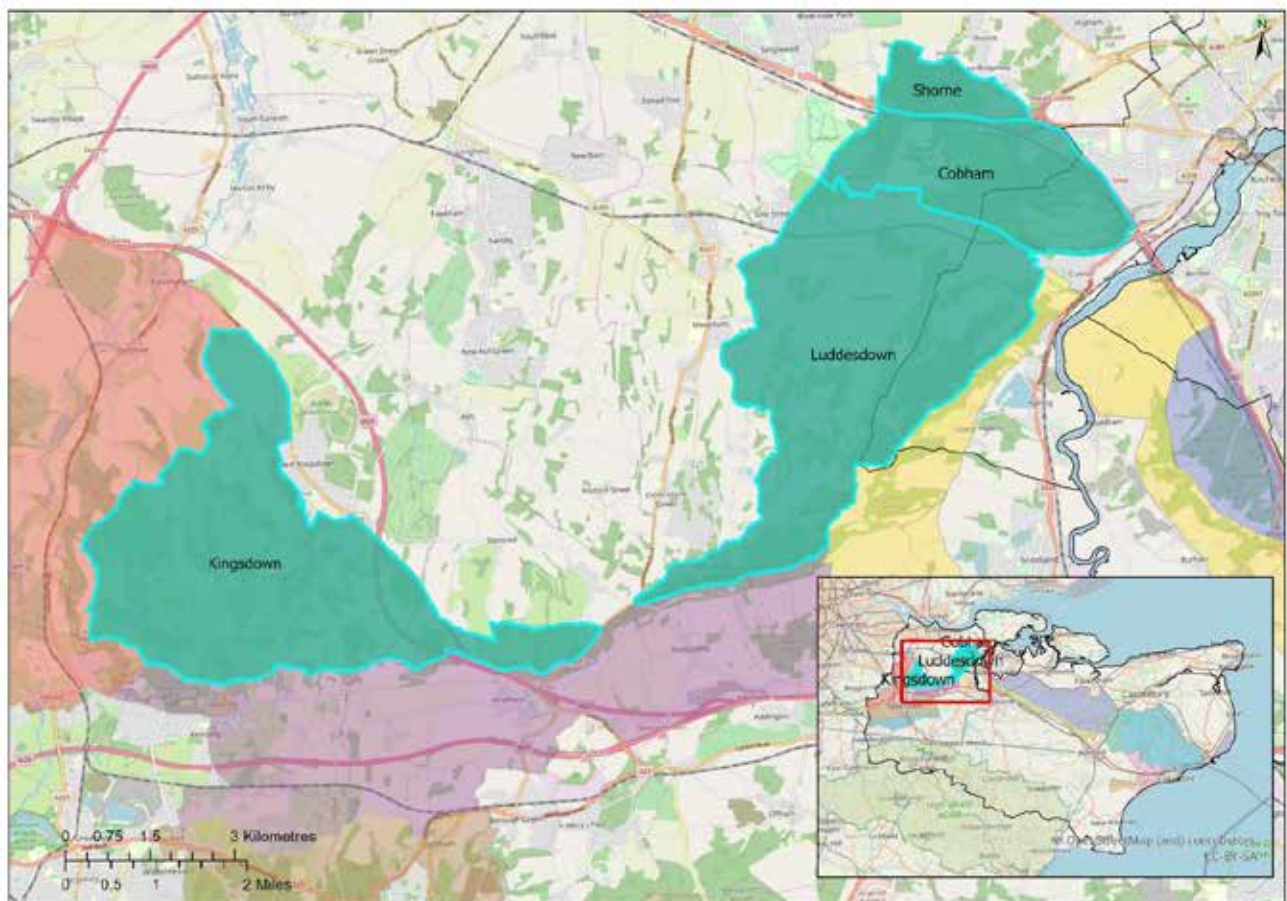
### Landscape Character Area 1A

**Landscape Character Type 1:** Chalk Downs

**Districts/ Boroughs:** Sevenoaks; Tonbridge and Malling; Gravesham

**Landscape/Countryside Partnerships:** Medway Valley Countryside Partnership; Small part of Darent Valley

**Location and Context:** The West Kent Downs LCA is located in the west of the Kent Downs AONB, between the Darent Valley LCA (to the west) and the Medway Valley LCA (to the east). To the south is the Kemsing Scarp and Vale LCA. The northern boundary follows the AONB boundary, and includes Cobham Park and Shorne Wood.



*Location map for West Kent Downs LCA, also showing Local Character Areas of Kingsdown, Luddesdown, Cobham and Shorne*

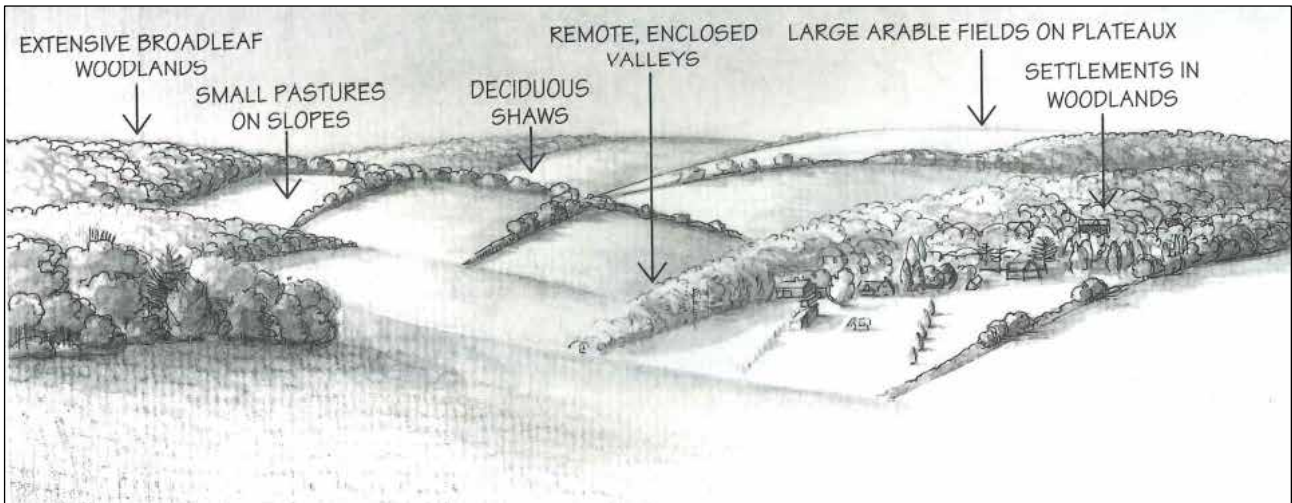


*A typical view within the West Kent Downs Landscape Character Area. It is a strongly rural and well-treed landscape with extensive woodlands, thick hedgerows and little settlement. A series of steep, enclosed, dry valleys are separated by rolling chalk ridges.*

## Summary Characteristics

- Underlying geology of Cretaceous chalk, overlain with clay-with-flints, and occasional pockets of sand and gravel.
- A dip-slope landform of dry valleys running roughly north-south, interspersed with broad undulating ridges and plateaux.
- Very little surface water, limited to occasional pools where clay impedes drainage.
- Extensive blocks of woodland, as well as strips of woodland on valley sides. Luxuriant hedgerows and (in places) parkland trees add to the sense of enclosure and of a well-treed landscape.
- Arable agriculture is the predominant land use, with some pasture. Fields vary in shape and size, but are generally hedged.
- Semi-natural habitats include ancient woodland, chalk grassland, scrub and occasional small quarry sites. Veteran trees occur in parkland and woodland.
- A strongly historic landscape, much of which has seen relatively little landscape change. Historic settlements and churches are linked by a network of ancient lanes, within a setting of fields, woodland and historic parkland.
- Main roads are limited to the periphery, and the lanes which run through it are generally narrow, quiet and lined with trees or hedges. Some are sunken, particularly where they cut through valley sides.
- In much of the area, the topography and/or woodland restrict views, creating an insular and intimate feel, but with occasional long views along valleys.
- A peaceful, rural feel and a sense of isolation contrasts with the nearby urban areas and busy roads.
- Deciduous woodlands and trees create strong seasonal changes in the landscape, particularly in spring and autumn.
- Cobham Park, Ranscombe Farm Reserve, Ashenbank Woods and Shorne Woods

Country park are popular places for local people to visit and enjoy the countryside.



*Sketch of the West Kent Downs from 'The Kent Downs Landscape' (1995)*

## 2.1 Description

- 2.1.1 This Landscape Character Area comprises the dip slope of the chalk between the Darent Valley in the west, the Medway Valley in the east, and the Kemsing Scarp and Vale to the south. The Mid Kent Downs and Kemsing Scarp are separated by both extensive tracts of woodland. The West Kent Downs contains a series of deep dry valleys running roughly north-south, separated by ridges and areas of broader plateaux.
- 2.1.2 It is a well-wooded area, which creates an enclosed and often intimate landscape. Where it opens out there are occasional long views, including striking views along valleys. With the exception of high land around Ranscombe and above the Darent Valley, there are few views out of the area, giving it quite an insular quality. The deeply rural and historic character of much of the area is particularly remarkable given its close proximity to urban centres.
- 2.1.3 Woodland is very significant in this landscape, providing an important backdrop for the rolling landform, the network of small country lanes, the scattered settlements and the extensive valley pastures. In the east, around Luddesdown, the fields are contained by thick 'walls' of woodland, and strips of remnant coppice, or shaws, occur frequently along the steeper valley sides. There are also areas of coppice woodland, including sweet chestnut and hornbeam. Much of the woodland is ancient, and the luxuriant, species-rich hedgerows add to the well-treed character of the landscape. There are also significant areas of chalk grassland, particularly on steeper slopes, although scrub encroachment and fragmentation of grassland habitats is a concern. Many of the woodland and grassland sites are designated Sites of Special Scientific Interest.
- 2.1.4 Hidden away among the trees are several medieval buildings, such as Luddesdown Court and Upper Bush, constructed from the local Kentish ragstone or timber-framed using local oak. The villages of Vigo and West Kingsdown are set deep in the woodlands themselves. A network of narrow, winding lanes connects the villages and farms. Local features related to the underlying geology are the chalk

quarries, ponds (some in old gravel pits) marl pits and ditches. Many attract wildlife and have their own ecosystems. Some are also threatened by fly tipping and other antisocial behaviour.

- 2.1.5 Historically, the heavy clay-with-flints soil on the higher land meant these areas were used for woodland or pasture. Arable cultivation generally took place on finer silt soils in the valley bottoms. From the mid twentieth century, increased mechanisation and intensification of farming resulted in the ploughing of some higher pastures, particularly in the north of the area. The downland therefore becomes increasingly open in the north, where the intimate character of the scarp top gives way to a larger-scale landscape of intensively farmed, rolling valleys and large blocks of deciduous woodland. Analysis of historic maps shows some loss of field boundaries, particularly in areas of intensive arable agriculture, but survival of most of the woodland which was present in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century.
- 2.1.6 Although the topography and the presence of woodland remains fairly consistent across the West Kent Downs, there are four Local Character Areas which reflect the variations in historic land ownership, settlement patterns and transport corridors.

## 2.2 Local Character Areas

### Kingsdown

- 2.2.1 The name 'Kingsdown' comes from being part of a large pre-Norman Conquest royal estate, centred on the Darent Valley. In Kent, '-down' or '-*dun*' implied thickly forested hills, indicating that at this time the area was heavily wooded. Today, the southern part of this area has a smaller scale field pattern, tiny sunken lanes and still contains a considerable amount of formerly coppiced, mixed woodland and Scots pine, interspersed by small, irregular pastures and thick hedges. Ash Dieback is increasingly affecting the mixed woodlands; only skeletal dead and dying ash trees are present in many places and the effect is expected to intensify. Sweet chestnut coppice (traditionally used for fencing) is typical. This woodland has a strong ecological value and also results in an enclosed, intimate landscape, which successfully absorbs much of the residential development that has spread through parts of the area. In the north, however, the landscape is slightly more open, revealing rolling sweeps of downland and the chalky white soils of intensive arable cultivation.
- 2.2.2 The area is under considerable pressure from suburbanisation, and its local character is influenced by the presence of low-density late 20<sup>th</sup> Century residential ribbon development along lanes, particularly around Knatts Valley and East Hill. This has introduced a wide and disparate range of fences, gateways, sheds and ornamental conifers into the landscape, giving an inappropriate urban-edge feel to the area, reinforced by recreation developments, such as golf courses and caravan parks. Many properties have long back gardens which extend up the valley sides or into the surrounding trees, resulting in a landscape of tiny smallholdings, subdivided horse paddocks and 'gardened' woodland.
- 2.2.3 Nevertheless, historic and ancient landscape patterns remain dominant elements in the wider countryside, and the sense of place remains strong with attractive, secluded chalk valleys, grazed downland rich in wildflowers, and species-rich hedgerows. The historic settlement pattern can still be identified through isolated farm buildings of a traditional flint, weatherboard and brick vernacular, accessed by narrow, winding lanes. This network of tiny lanes is supplemented by a good Public Rights of Way network, including the North Downs way along the southern boundary.



*Species-rich hedges and pasture at Magpie Bottom, with glimpsed views of higher chalk downs.*

## Luddesdown

2.2.4 This is a rich agricultural patchwork of rolling, valley-side pastures and undulating arable fields. The field pattern is irregular, with fields of various shapes and sizes, generally divided with native hedgerows. Large areas of native mixed woodland dominate the skyline, and form thick ‘walls’ around the fields, giving a strong definition to the fields and providing valuable ecological habitat. Late twentieth century hedgerow removal in areas of arable cultivation, has increased the importance of woodland in giving structure to the landscape. Recent vineyard planting is generating a notable change to the agricultural patterns of the landscape.

Settlement is limited to occasional hamlets and isolated farms within valleys, reflecting the fact that the soils were difficult to work and could only support a small population. The lack of settlement is one of the area’s characteristic features. The settlements of Luddesdown and Lower Luddesdown comprise clusters of traditional buildings, including Luddesdown Court (Grade 1 listed) and the thirteenth century church of St Peter and St Paul. A church was recorded here in the Domesday Book, and the adjacent house and farm are late eleventh century in origin. There are good examples of traditional timber-framed buildings and Kent peg tiles, including the Upper Bush Conservation Area. The farms and hamlets are linked by a network of narrow and winding lanes which follow the contours of the rolling downland landscape, and Buckland Road runs through a valley known as ‘bowling alley’. The Wealdway Long Distance footpath runs north-south through the area.

2.2.5 The village of Vigo, set within coppice woodland at the top of the scarp was built in the mid-late twentieth century on the site of a former army barracks. It is contained by trees and does not impact on the wider landscape character.

2.2.6 This is a tranquil, complex and distinctive landscape, with a peaceful remote feel, strong sense of place and few detracting features. It has a strong sense of time-depth, and the structure of the landscape has remained largely unchanged since the late nineteenth century, although there has been some field boundary loss. The thick belt of woodland along the eastern and southern scarp top plays an important role in preserving this atmosphere, by sheltering the area from the surrounding settlements and transport corridors.



*A typical valley view near Luddesdown*

## **Cobham**

- 2.2.7 In the north around Cobham, the character of the landscape begins to change. The dominance of farmland gives way to parkland and extensive mixed woodlands associated with Cobham Hall. The topography is slightly undulating, with occasional non-natural features.
- 2.2.8 The cultural integrity of the landscape is strong, with the estate parkland and management creating a distinctive character and sense of time depth. Cobham Hall (which is on the site of a Roman villa) is an Elizabethan Manor House set in a parkland landscape designed by Humphrey Repton. A dramatic lime avenue extends from Cobham Village towards the house, although the main vehicular approach is along a sweeping driveway. Cobham Park has its origins as a medieval deer park, and contains several veteran trees. There are also extensive dense Ancient Woodlands (containing exceptionally tall ash trees), parklands and wood pasture. Part of the park is now used as a golf course. There are a number of estate features, including lodges and the recently-restored Darnley Mausoleum. Boundaries include native hedgerows, wrought iron estate railings and timber fencing. Cobham Village is a traditional village centre, typical of the north Kent landscape, and contains a rich diversity of historic buildings constructed in timber, brick and flint. Elsewhere small pockets of orchard and pony paddocks occur in the area.
- 2.2.9 Ashenbank Wood (to the west of Cobham Park) is also extensive and dense Ancient Woodland, and contains a range of archaeological sites including a Bronze Age burial ground and WW2 bunkers. It is an accessible area of woodland popular for recreation. To the east of Cobham Park, Ranscombe Farm is managed as a wildflower reserve. From high points here there are views across the Medway Valley and glimpses of the urban edge of Strood. A further 'country park' at Jeskyns Farm extends from the western portion of the area. In combination with Shorne, there is an extensive collection of sites in protective ownership managed primarily for landscape, nature and public access.



*Parkland trees and woodland in Cobham Park*



*Ranscombe Wildflower Reserve, with the woodlands of Luddesdown visible beyond.*

## Shorne

2.2.10 The local character area of Shorne has been severed from the more extensive landscape of similar character to the south by the A2 road corridor. The wooded ridge forms a discrete tract of steeply undulating landscape lying between the extensive built-up areas of Rochester and Gravesend. It is bounded to the north by the open farmland of the Hoo Peninsula. The extent of woodland is the key distinguishing feature, in combination with the ridge landform. This significant landform feature provides an attractive backdrop in views from the north.

2.2.11 The area contains Ancient Woodland, much of which is actively worked chestnut coppice, and more recent woodland established on former clay workings. The Ancient Woodlands contain several notable and veteran trees. They also generate a strong sense of enclosure. The heathy vegetation, reflecting a local change in the underlying geology, adds to the area's ecological value. Shorne Wood is important for recreation, containing a country park, historic remains (including Randall Manor) and visitor centre. There are few roads within the area, although the busy A2 runs along its southern boundary.



*Shorne Country Park*



*Ashenbank Wood, near Cobham*



*Veteran tree at Cobham Park*



*Valley-side farm, near Luddesdown*



*Timber-framed buildings in Upper Bush Conservation Area*



*Dog walkers on the North Downs Way enjoy the long views from Ranscombe Reserve*



*The quiet lanes and peaceful countryside of the West Kent Downs are only a few miles from busy urban areas*

## 2.3 Landscape Condition, Sensitivities and Forces for Change

- 2.3.1 Much of the West Kent Downs appears to be relatively unchanging on the surface, but like all landscapes, in reality it is subject to various forces for change. The 1995 Assessment notes threats from suburbanisation (particularly in the Kingsdown Local Character Area), intensive arable agriculture, and loss of character at Cobham Park. The 2004 Assessments considers the West Kent Downs to be in good/ very good condition. It too notes the linear development of some hamlets, and amenity uses of land such as golf courses and caravan parks. Agricultural intensification, with associated loss of hedgerows and ecological connectivity, is recorded, particularly in the north of the area. The main visual detractors are pylons, as several high voltage transmission lines cross the area. Major roads are recorded as having local landscape impacts at the periphery of the area, particularly around Cobham and Shorne.
- 2.3.2 These issues are still apparent in today's landscape (see following table), and are recorded in Landscape Character Assessments by Local Authorities and by Landscape Partnerships. In addition, anti-social behaviour such as fly tipping seems to have become a bigger problem in recent years, and there is concern over the already apparent impacts of Ash Dieback and other tree diseases on this very wooded landscape.
- 2.3.3 Positive landscape changes are also taking place, including woodland management, and grassland management. Over the last 25 years agri-environment schemes have delivered landscape enhancement projects throughout the West Kent Downs, including some large scale scrub/ secondary woodland removal on escarpment and dry valley grasslands, projects to revert arable land to species-rich grassland, field margin networks and hedge planting schemes. The Cobham-Ashenbank Management Scheme (CAMS) enabled a major landscape restoration project in this area, including restoration of the Darnley Mausoleum which had been vandalised and was 'At Risk'. Park railings have been replaced, estate buildings are in good repair, and Highland cattle have been introduced to graze wood pasture areas.
- 2.3.4 In addition, Ranscombe Farm is now a Nature Reserve. It is managed jointly by Medway Council, Plantlife and landowners to enhance its biodiversity, particularly with regard to wildflowers. The Ranscombe area is now characterised by wildflower-rich arable fields, neutral grasslands and actively managed woodlands. The new visitor centre at Shorne Country Park is increasing visitor numbers to the northernmost part of the West Kent Downs, and recent archaeology and woodland management projects in the vicinity are increasing understanding of woodland sites as well as their conservation value.



*The West Kent Downs as seen from near the railway bridge over Cobhambury Road in 1995 (above) and 2017 (below). The main change is in the growth of trees in the middle ground, meaning that longer views are now obscured.*

<i>Issue</i>	<i>Landscape sensitivities and potential landscape impacts</i>
Anti-social behaviour	Fly tipping can be a major issue in this area, with numerous examples of trade and domestic waste dumped along roadsides. It appears to be a particular problem on quiet lanes with little passing traffic, and can also occur in old quarries and ponds. The dumping of rubbish is a reminder of the proximity of this area to large settlements and main roads, despite its peaceful and rural character. Illegal access by 4x4 vehicles is damaging woodlands and tracks, although the Valley of Visions 'Securing the Landscape' project is helping to address this issue in the eastern part of the Landscape Character Area. Perceptions of anti-social behaviour deter visitors, and the lack of people and signage in some areas can make it feel more intimidating, particularly in the Cobham Local Character Area which is close to large settlements.
Suburbanisation leading to an 'urban fringe character'	This is a particular issue in the Kingsdown Local Character Area around Knatts Valley and East Hill but present elsewhere. Past sub-division of woodland into small plots has led to construction of residential properties along lanes. Many of these have suburban-style property boundaries such as close-boarded fences, brick walls, elaborate gateways and ornamental planting. These introduce urban-fringe features into the rural landscape. Also, some twentieth century development does not respect the local vernacular of the area. The urban fringe feel is increased by the presence of golf courses, caravan parks etc.

<i>Issue</i>	<i>Landscape sensitivities and potential landscape impacts</i>
Land management	<p>Changes in land management in the mid-late twentieth century have resulted in the loss or fragmentation of a number of habitats, although post-1994 agri-environment grants have helped to reverse this trend in parts of the Landscape Character Area.</p> <p>Whilst some woodland remains in active management, much is currently unmanaged, including former coppice. Woodland, including Ancient Woodland, is also threatened by tree disease, particularly Ash Dieback. Many parkland trees are in poor condition with some having received heavy surgery.</p> <p>Chalk grassland traditionally occurred on steep pastures. However, the decline in sheep and dairy farming within the area means that most grassland is no longer grazed, and is being lost to scrub unless it is actively managed through cutting. Grassland habitats are particularly vulnerable to fragmentation. This is currently being addressed through the 'Old Chalk New Downs' project which aims to bring grassland sites back into active management. In addition over the past 25 years agri-environment schemes have also focussed on scrub clearance and reconnection of chalk habitats. Agricultural intensification in the late twentieth century led to a loss of hedgerows and decline in landscape structure, particularly in arable areas. This also reduces the ecological connectivity of woodland, shaw and hedgerow habitats. Extensive areas of mown grass have relatively low ecological value. The new Environmental Land Management Scheme (ELMS) offers opportunities to restore and reinforce valued characteristics of the landscape.</p>
Roads and infrastructure	<p>There are localised impacts from main roads in the north-east corner of the West Kent Downs, and concerns that traffic and infrastructure (including lighting) could be increased following construction of the proposed new Thames crossing, and the proposed theme park at Swanscombe Peninsula. The proposed road upgrade could also result in loss of existing planting which screens both the highways infrastructure and the HS1 line.</p> <p>Several pylon lines cross the area, and are particularly noticeable where they cross open areas or are viewed against the skyline. There are also lines of poles and wires along roads.</p>
Climate change, pests and diseases	<p>Climate change is also likely to affect species composition of woodlands, for example through the loss of beech which is relatively intolerant of drought. Woodlands are likely to be vulnerable to high-intensity storm events, which are becoming more frequent as a result of climate change.</p> <p>Warmer temperatures provide conditions for a range of pests and diseases to thrive and attack native species.</p>



*Piles of dumped rubbish are a fairly frequent sight alongside rural lanes in the West Kent Downs*



*Kerbs, driveways, walls and gateways create a suburban feel to lanes around Knatts Valley and East Hill*



*Magnificent mature ash trees in Cobham Park woodland are vulnerable to Ash Dieback*



*Scrub growth on a chalk grassland bank which is no longer being grazed near Luddesdown*



*Intensive arable agriculture (found particularly in the north of the West Kent Downs) has a more open feel and fewer wildlife habitats.*



*The Darnley Mausoleum in Cobham Park has been rescued from dereliction and restored. It is now occasionally open to the public.*

## 2.4 Landscape Management Recommendations

### Aspirational Landscape Strategy

The West Kent Downs retain their rural character despite their close proximity to urban areas, and the suburbanisation which affects parts of the area is reduced. The historic features of the landscape, including woodlands, hedgerows, farms, villages and historic parks become an enhanced part of the landscape fabric.

The area retains its extensive woodland cover, and woodland, shaws, grassland, and hedgerows are managed and connected. Historic parkland, and the features within it, are positively managed.

The recent projects to enhance the landscape in this area are taken forward and their positive legacy continues to be felt. The area feels welcoming, and local people and visitors are able to access the countryside without feeling intimidated by anti-social behaviour or uncertainty about where they can go.

### Protect

- Protect the deeply rural character of the area, resisting development which gives it a more urbanised character. This includes retaining the character of rural lanes.
- Protect the extent of woodland and shaws, and the small-scale pastures and enclosures. In particular, important woodland and trees within the landscape, especially ancient semi-natural woodland should be protected. Veteran trees should be protected. Conserve the unity between landform and land cover.
- Protect historic features of the landscape- these include Listed Buildings, Conservation Areas etc. (and their settings and views), but also the historic hedgerows, farms and lanes which have formed the fabric of the landscape for centuries.
- Protect the enclosed landscapes of the dry valleys formed by the steep valley sides and numerous woodland blocks.

### Manage

- Continue to manage historic parkland, grazing wood pasture and planting replacement parkland trees so that they remain a presence in the landscape in the future. Veteran trees should be appropriately managed. Conserve and restore features associated with historic parklands, including estate structures such as lodges, memorials, follies and fencing.
- Manage arable areas to encourage a diversity of pollen and seed rich habitats, hedgerow replanting and field margins to enhance the structure of the landscape and improve habitat connectivity. Encourage continued management and support for long term farm-based arable reversion projects to allow species richness of the grasslands to develop further. Promote new hedgerows and roadside trees from existing hedge stock.
- Manage the extensive new vineyard areas to maximise the potential to enhance landscape and biodiversity
- Manage chalk grassland through cutting or grazing, and encourage linking of grassland habitats through field margins. Continue to manage and develop Ranscombe Farm Reserve.
- Manage woodlands and shaws, including traditional techniques such as coppicing, to achieve age and species diversity, and to retain locally-distinctive mixes of species. In particular ancient semi-natural woodland should be appropriately managed, and where possible expanded and enhanced to create ecological habitat networks. Investigate new uses/ markets for harvested timber and

where appropriate replace coniferous plantation with native deciduous trees. At planted ancient woodland sites, explore opportunities to plant appropriate native trees and shrubs as continuous cover to enable pockets of ancient woodland species to spread and flourish. Enhance woodland edges where they abut arable areas.

- Promote access and sensitive recreation in this area, including signage, interpretation, path restoration etc. where needed and generate a coherent shared plan between individual sites. This should be balanced with enabling a viable agricultural landscape. Work with local communities to raise awareness of the countryside on their doorstep. Conserve dramatic views where they occur (for example over the Medway Valley) and encourage people to visit and appreciate these views.
- Work with golf clubs to promote positive environmental management of golf courses.
- Work with equine owners to enhance the landscape and wildlife value of facilities
- Manage hedgerows, including alongside roads, encouraging replanting rather than repair where they have become gappy.

#### Plan

- Continue to work with outside agencies to address fly-tipping and other anti-social behaviour issues.
- Ensure that any new development around historic villages respects the scale, layout, massing and materials of existing buildings, and also their relationship with the landform. Landscape proposals should reflect local character, using appropriate form, structure and species.
- Restrict further suburbanisation of rural lanes resulting from linear or ad-hoc development. Prepare design guidance for property boundaries, gateways and driveways, and encourage Local Planning Authorities to apply it.
- Work with Highways authorities to increase the biodiversity value of verges and hedgerows without compromising safety.
- Investigate opportunities for undergrounding wires and poles along lanes and tracks.
- Secure financial support for local projects from any funding resulting from the Thames Crossing. Work with appropriate agencies to ensure that there is no loss of screen planting associated with upgraded roads serving the proposed Lower Thames Crossing or the proposed new theme park at Swanscombe Peninsula. Landscape and visual impacts from the proposed Lower Thames Crossing should be minimised.
- Encourage partnership working between different Local Authorities, agencies and community groups to enable seamless working across the AONB. Consider environmental/ landscape limits in planning and plan making.
- Within the setting of the LCA, work with Local Planning Authorities and designers to achieve the best possible landscape and ecological integration and minimal impact on views, with compensation achieved for any lost qualities.
- Use the existing and valued landscape characteristics and qualities to design new tree establishment as part of climate change mitigation

## 3.0 Mid Kent Downs

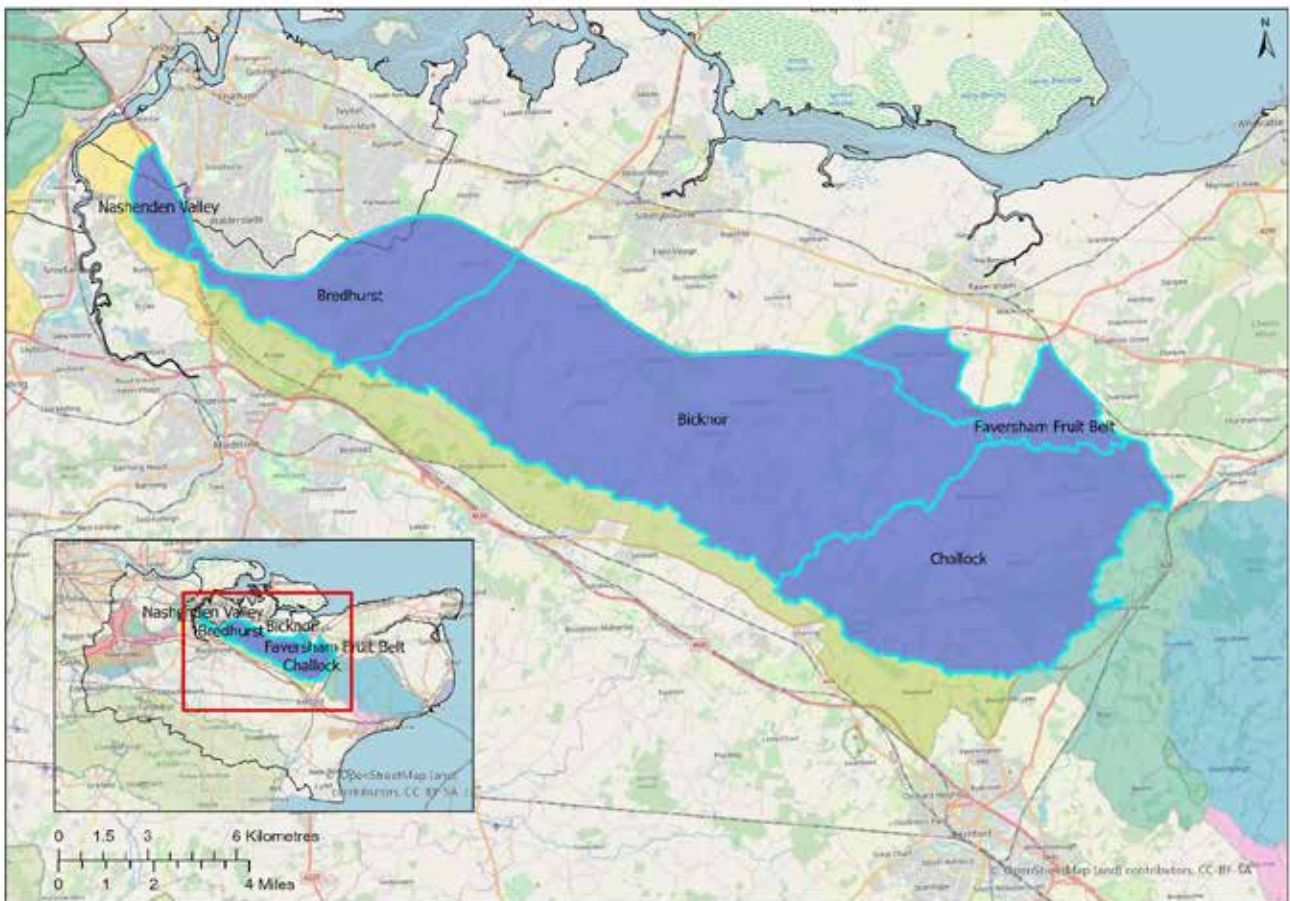
### Landscape Character Area 1B

Landscape Character Type 1: Chalk Downs

Districts/ Boroughs: Ashford; Maidstone; Medway; Swale; Tonbridge and Malling

Landscape/Countryside Partnerships: Kentish Stour Countryside Partnership

**Location and Context:** This relatively large LCA is located in the central part of the Kent Downs AONB, between the Medway Valley LCA (to the west) and the Stour Valley LCA (to the east). The northern edge of the LCA follows the AONB boundary, and to the south is the Hollingbourne Scarp and Vale LCA. It includes several villages, the largest of which is Challock.



*Location map for West Kent Downs LCA, also showing Local Character Areas of Bredhurst, Bicknor, Challock and Faversham Fruit Belt*

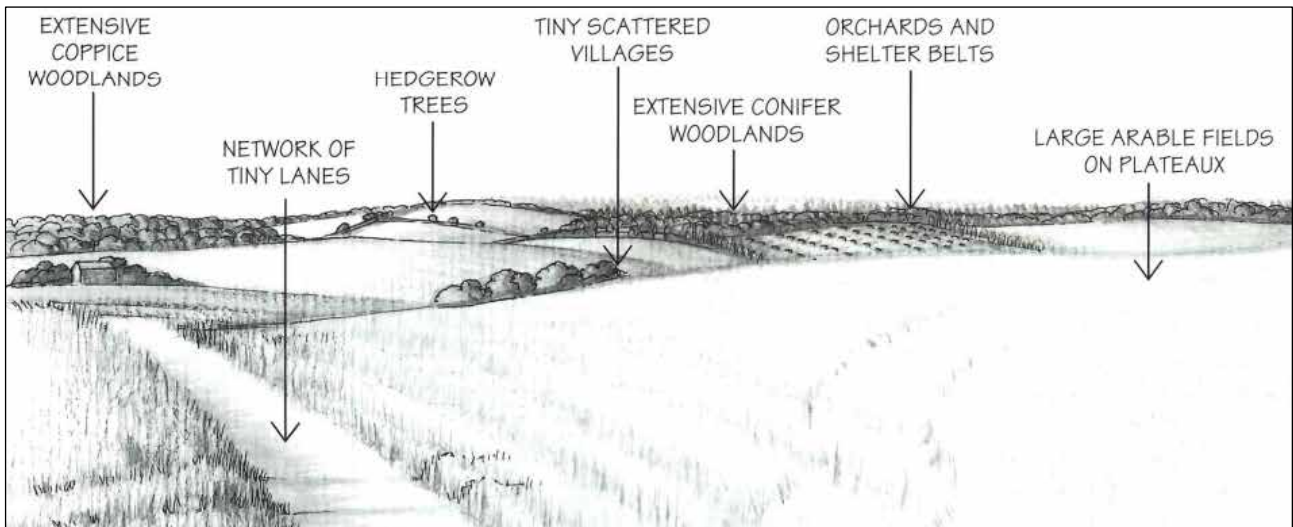


*A typical view in the Mid Kent Downs, near Bredhurst. The landscape comprises a series of plateaux and valleys, with fields interspersed with large blocks of woodland.*

## Summary Characteristics

- Underlying geology of Cretaceous upper chalk, with occasional exposures of middle chalk in valleys. Above the chalk is a thin sticky clay soil derived from weathered chalk, which contains many flints.
- Landform of gently rolling chalk plateaux forming dip slope. Interspersed with relatively steep dry valleys mostly running SW-NE. Surface water mostly confined to dew ponds, but important aquifers held within chalk.
- Large blocks of woodland, particularly on higher land and ridge tops. Mostly deciduous (including extensive areas of chestnut coppice) plus some conifer planting.
- Land uses are predominantly arable farmland and woodland, with significant pockets of parkland and orchards.
- Fields are often large, reflecting late enclosure and historic use for sheepwalks. Smaller enclosure pattern around settlements, and a distinctive regular pattern with high hedges in orchard areas.
- Semi-natural habitats include woodland, shaws and chalk grassland.
- Landscape features including lanes, tracks, churches, villages and farms date back to the medieval period or earlier. Place names and road names tell part of the landscape story.
- Relatively sparsely settled, with a scattering of villages and hamlets, and isolated farms. Brick and flint buildings are common.
- A network of enclosed narrow lanes, often following dry valleys, with occasional main roads. M2 follows northern edge.
- A relatively large-scale landscape, with a sense of openness, particularly on the plateaux and ridge tops. In orchard areas the landscape has a clear, regular patchwork pattern, and seasonal changes in vegetation are very apparent.
- Despite its proximity to urban areas, much of the LCA has a strongly rural and peaceful feel, and a sense of isolation from the settlements nearby.
- The wooded slopes and summit of Perry Wood form a local landmark. From the edges of the area there are long views over the surrounding landscapes: the river

valleys, the Medway/Swale Estuary, and the chalk scarp and vale.



Sketch of the Mid Kent Downs from 'The Kent Downs Landscape' (1995)

### 3.1 Description

- 3.1.1 This large Landscape Character Area comprises the dip slope of the Kent Downs running in a long spine between the Medway Valley in the west and the Stour Valley in the east. Although there are local variations in the appearance of the landscape, there is a strong underlying pattern to the landform which imparts an overall character to the region. Throughout the length of the chalk ridge a series of narrow, steep-sided dry valleys carve their way down the gentle northern dip-slope of the downs to the flatter land of the north Kent fruit belt, around Sittingbourne and Faversham.
- 3.1.2 Historically, this was a sparsely-settled and impoverished area, largely due to the stiff clay-with-flints soils, which overlie the solid chalk. Despite their striking, rich-red colour, these soils are relatively poor and difficult to cultivate, especially as they occur on the exposed upper plateaux of the downs. Edward Hasted, writing in 1798, consistently describes the area in terms such as "*an unpleasant dreary country, the soil of which is very poor, being chalky, and much covered with flint-stones*". In his day the land was used widely for sheep grazing, interspersed by arable on the lower slopes and large blocks of woodland. Today appreciation of the landscape has changed, and the remote, undeveloped ridges and valleys are considered one of the most beautiful features of the AONB. Although mechanised farming over the last hundred years has seen an increase in the extent of arable land, much of the original ancient woodland survives, walling-in the arable plateaux and enclosing the rounded valley bottoms. Extensive areas of woodland are managed as chestnut coppice, providing posts and rails for traditional fencing. Traditional country sports have also shaped (and continue to shape) the landscape. For example, the shaws on the steep upper slopes of the dry valleys have sometimes been retained as ideal cover for game birds, which can be flushed from this cover to provide challenging 'high birds' for the guns below. Similarly, several of the large estates (e.g. Doddington, Belmont, Torry Hill) retained woodland specifically for hunting.
- 3.1.3 Although the area has been sparsely settled in the past, it still contains a rich landscape history. The network of lanes, villages, isolated churches and scattered farms has largely been in place since the medieval period, and there is a sense of timelessness about much of the landscape. Extensive coppice woodlands stretch along the upper slopes of the valleys and there are several large expanses of

conifer woodland. The evocative road names tell the story of the landscape: Coldblow Lane, Scragged Oak Road, Hogbarn Lane, Plumford Road. The narrow lanes often have a confined feel, either because they are sunken, or because of the seasonal growth of verges (which are often valuable wildlife habitats). Many traditional buildings reflect local building materials, such as St James' Church at Bicknor built of clunch (hard chalk) dressed with flints. The area contains several isolated churches, for example Stalisfield, with churchyards offering valuable habitats for wildlife. Traditional houses and farm buildings are often constructed of flint, weatherboard or red or grey brick, often with small white-framed casement windows and long clay-tiled roofs known as 'cat slide roofs'. Settlements are generally small, reflecting the historic lack of settlement in this area. Old Chalk pits and deneholes (underground chalk workings radiating out from a central shaft) dot the landscape. There are localised detracting influences from main roads, including local small industry, leisure use of land, and surrounding settlement, but much of the area feels extraordinarily remote and peaceful, particularly given its proximity to large conurbations. Occasional and sometimes dramatic views north over the industry of the Medway/Swale Estuary add to the sense of detachment, and the contrast heightens the rural feel of the Mid Kent Downs.

- 3.1.4 Within the broad pattern of fields and woodland there are pockets of other land uses, such as orchards (particularly in the north and east of the area), estate parklands. Local variation in landscape character is reflected in the five Local Character Areas. There are seasonal and annual variations in crops which create changing colours, textures and patterns in the landscape. These can sometimes be quite dramatic, for example the bright yellow of oil seed rape.



*Sheep graze in historic cherry orchard near Stockbury, with distant views of the Medway/ Swale Estuary beyond*



*Chalk caves at Fisher Street (photo Pippa Palmar)*



*Inside a denehole, Badlesmere (Pippa Palmar)*

## 3.2 Local Character Areas

### Nashenden Valley

- 3.2.1 This Local Character Area is located to the west of Walderslade, between the M2 and the top of the eastern scarp of the Medway Valley. The main body of the area comprises a gently-sloping plateau containing a series of tiny, steep valleys which run north-east into the Nashenden Valley. The M2 motorway, which cuts along the north side of the valley, forms the boundary between the AONB and Rochester. Together with the adjacent HS1 railway line, it has some influence on the landscape, but this influence is lessened to the south. This is an open, sweeping landscape of large fields and large blocks of dense, deciduous woodland. Much of the woodland is ancient, although some has been replanted, and there are some small pastures and clearings along wooded edges. In recent years the area has seen extensive grassland restoration through arable reversion. The dominant landform and continuity of woodland create a strong sense of place. From the top of the ridge at the western edge of the area there are long views over the Medway Valley.
- 3.2.2 Despite the proximity of the motorway and Rochester, this area still retains a strong rural character. Nevertheless, the long views within the valley make it vulnerable to development as there are few hedges or shaws to provide screening. The lack of roads within this area make it particularly inaccessible except on foot or cycle/ horseback.



*A typical scene within the Nashenden Valley Local Character Area, showing large fields framed by blocks of deciduous woodland.*

## Bredhurst (formerly known as Chatham Outskirts)

- 3.2.3 This landscape is a mosaic of deciduous woodland (much of it ancient), large arable plateaux and steep, rolling valleys. There are also pockets of grassland (including Queen Down Warren Nature Reserve) and some surviving orchards including distinctive old cherry orchards, although many have been lost in recent years. Much of the arable plateaux are intensively farmed, with few hedges, and visually contained in the distance by belts of woodland. Traditionally woodland has been located on ridges. Roadside hedgerow species include blackthorn, field maple, hawthorn, hazel, holly and sycamore, but some field boundary hedgerows have been lost and replaced with fences.
- 3.2.4 The influence of the urban edge is stronger in this part of the Mid Kent Downs than elsewhere, but its influence is still localised, and much of the Bredhurst Local Character Area is of high landscape quality. Examples of localised issues include dereliction, dumping, security fencing, urbanised road frontages and boundary treatments and horse pastures divided by white tape and electric fencing. Small-scale industry, pylons and low-level motorway noise also have localised effects. The historic airfield at Detling is now an industrial estate, and the Kent County Showground is close by. Large-scale agricultural buildings are visible in the landscape in some areas.
- 3.2.5 Woodlands perform an important function in screening urban edges, and provide a buffer between the M2 and adjacent built-up-area. Other sections of the motorway are unscreened. In sharp contrast to the motorway, a network of steep and narrow lanes connects the farms and villages within the AONB. Other historic features include ancient trackways, Medieval castles at Binbury and Stockbury, and several deneholes dug to extract chalk. There are some distinctive vernacular buildings, particularly in villages. Yellow stock brick, red brick, flint, Kent brick tiles and weatherboarding are characteristic building materials, and traditional buildings add to the sense of place.



*A typical view in the Bredhurst Local Character Area, looking towards the ancient woodland of Bredhurst Hurst*

## Bicknor

- 3.2.6 The large-scale landscape has a pattern of wide, arable fields contained by dense belts of woodland, which run along the upper slopes of the dry valleys. Ancient woodland is a characteristic feature, although it varies from broadleaf to plantation to chestnut coppice. There are occasional pockets of chalk grassland, such as around the Hucking estate. A network of small, often sunken, single-track lanes connects tiny, scattered villages, giving a timeless, settled feel to the landscape. Hedgerows (often rich in hazel) follow the lanes. Tile-hung oast-houses are a common feature and there are a number of fine examples of historic parkland. There are pockets of orchards, particularly significant around Bicknor, where apple and cherry orchards grow within a distinctive grid pattern of shelterbelts and create a strong sense of place. Orchards and occasional hop gardens along the northern edge of the area mark the gradual transition from the Downs to the fruit belt.
- 3.2.7 This is a coherent, sparsely-settled area with arable farmland and woodland which reflect the chalk and clay soils of the plateau. Urban fringe influences are less here than in the Bredhurst Local Character Area. Villages are small, but often contain fine flint churches and historic buildings displaying vernacular features such as brickwork in Flemish bond with dark headers. Dry valleys are a particular feature of the landform. Views from the plateau are often restricted by topography or woodland, but glimpsed views out do occur, including long views across to the Medway/Swale Estuary.



*A typical view in the Bicknor Local Character Area, looking north from the Hucking Estate towards the Medway/Swale Estuary.*

## Faversham Fruit Belt

- 3.2.8 The character of the fruit belt is strongly evident along the northern edge of the Downs in this area. There are some remnant hop gardens and many orchards here (mostly modern, but some traditional), sheltered from the wind by lines of tall, regular alder or poplar trees, which create an unusual and highly distinctive landscape of small, square, outdoor 'rooms'. It is these distinctive landscapes that, in part, give Kent its reputation as the 'Garden of England'. In contrast, the intensively cultivated arable fields which surround the orchards are rolling and open, with few hedges and only infrequent blocks of woodland. Much of the area was part of an open field system which never has been enclosed, so there has not been loss of hedgerows. There are some surviving examples of 'hopper huts' where seasonal workers lived whilst hop picking. Many of these workers were families from the East End of London, who came to Kent for a 'hop picking holiday'.
- 3.2.9 Seasonal changes are particularly apparent in the orchard landscapes, with spring blossom and the autumn fruiting especially noticeable in the 'traditional' crops such as hops, cherries, apples, pears and plums. The distinguishing features of the orchards, shelterbelts and large farmsteads are relatively recent additions to the landscape. Although settlement patterns and highways are historic in location (including some roads and tracks that would have originated as drovers' roads), there is not a particularly strong sense of time-depth to the landscape, and this is enhanced by the fact that orchard landscapes change on a regular basis depending on the crops planted. For example, over several years, a compartment may contain apple trees, then polytunnels for soft fruit, then apples again. An exception is traditional orchards, where widely-spaced trees reach maturity and are under grazed by sheep. However, traditional orchards are now relatively rare and are facing new diseases as well as an uncertain economic future.



*A typical view in the Faversham Fruit Belt Local Character Area, with piles of apple boxes, and apple and pear trees divided by shelterbelts into a series of compartments.*

## Challock

- 3.2.10 To the east of Doddington, the open arable plateaux take on an increasingly important role in shaping the character of the landscape. Many of the fields have no clear boundaries between them, forming instead great sweeps of cultivation, through which the tiny lanes pass almost unnoticed. This sense of exposure, however, produces an airy, invigorating landscape. Topography and woodland limit views beyond the area except from the highest points, which are often panoramic. In the south-east, the huge expanse of Challock Forest, still managed largely as coppice, blankets the slopes above the Stour Valley.
- 3.2.11 In the north of the Local Character Area, the acidic sand and gravel deposits of the Thanet Beds have given rise to the steep, heathy pine and bracken-clad slopes of Perry Wood, which stands out from the gently undulating farmland and contains a significant iron-age earthwork. Perry Wood is a local landmark with fine views and provides a sense of orientation in the surrounding countryside. It has been used for centuries as an observation post, and was part of a shutter semaphore line which could relay messages from London to Deal within minutes.
- 3.2.12 Between Challock and Perrywood there is a distinctive and contrasting pattern of trimmed hedged and hedgerow trees, interspersed by small orchards. This area can be described as traditional Kentish countryside, with a rolling landscape enclosed by an abundance of orchards and associated shelterbelts, and scattered traditional buildings. It has a strong, rectilinear character formed by a mosaic of orchards framed by shelterbelts, mixed hedgerows and beech hedges close to existing settlements. Vernacular buildings contain local details such as patterned flint and brick, and several settlements contain village greens. The area remains well wooded, and there are also pockets of historic parkland and avenues of trees associated with country estates. As in other parts of the Kent Downs, vineyards are becoming an important part of the landscape.



*A typical view in the Challock Local Character Area, showing Perrywood on the horizon, and a mosaic of fields, woodland, orchards and vineyards.*



*A typical example of a narrow dry valley (near Huckling) with valley-side woodland, and valley-floor grassland.*



*A typical plateau scene (near Wormshill), with arable fields and undulating topography. Woodland blocks are visible on the horizon.*



*Managed coppice woodland, King's Wood near Challock*



*Surviving 'hopper huts' (now part of a private residence) near Selling.*



*Sheep graze in a traditional cherry orchard (now a community orchard) near Stockbury*



*Perrywood has a history of occupation from prehistoric times, and is a prominent local landmark with excellent views. (See also view on previous page)*

### 3.3 Landscape Condition, Sensitivities and Forces for Change

- 3.3.1 This is a relatively large Landscape Character Area, with a number of different influences and variations within it. It is therefore not surprising that the condition of the landscape varies across the Landscape Character Area. This variation was noted in the 1995 and 2004 Assessments, as well as more recent landscape assessments by Local Authorities. The Assessments note that in general, landscape condition is poorer in the west of the Mid Kent Downs (due to the influence of nearby urban areas and associated traffic, fly tipping, horse grazing, small-scale industry, etc.) and in the north (due to the decline in orchards). This pattern is still broadly true today, although the negative influences are localised, and the landscape character and sense of place remain strong throughout the entire Landscape Character Area.
- 3.3.2 Since 1995 there have been a number of positive landscape management initiatives in the Mid Kent Downs, including community orchard projects; reversion of arable land to grassland; grassland and woodland creation at White Horse Wood Country Park; Woodland Trust management at the Hucking Estate; active coppicing at Kings Wood, and improved accessibility and interpretation at the viewpoint at Perrywood. It is unlikely that there has been any further loss of hedgerows or shaws since 1995, but there has been some ploughing of land previously used as pasture. There has also been extensive replacement of modern orchards with arable, particularly around Bicknor. The number of hop gardens has declined (they are described as 'frequent' in the 1995 Assessment) and orchards are also declining although replanting is now more active. Vineyards are becoming more common, continuing to provide regular patterns of poles and trellises in the landscape, albeit with coloured tree-guards temporarily creating an impact. In orchard areas, the landscape is so directly related to its land use that the area is particularly sensitive to changes in farming practice. There are pockets of often poorly managed equestrian land use (especially around settlements) but the rate of increase appears to have slowed in recent years. Wood lotting has been and to some extent continues to be an often-detracting feature of the mid Kent Downs woodland ownership structure. this can make management of woodlands as a whole difficult and has made the inclusion of woodlands in grant schemes difficult.
- 3.3.3 Incremental changes are taking place in terms of development and infrastructure such as pylons, and larger farm buildings (including fruit stores). Some recent smaller-scale building fits into the landscape fairly well, but there are some examples of poorly-sited developments, new ribbon development and large suburban-style gates and boundary treatments which look particularly out of place. Historically, this area has not been densely settled, so villages are small in size and well-spaced. Development on the plateaux is particularly noticeable because the elevation increases visibility, and because, traditionally, settlements have been in more sheltered locations. Development outside the AONB also impacts on views from within it.
- 3.3.4 The following photos show a Mid-Kent Downs scene near Stockbury in 1995 (above) and 2017 (below). In the intervening 22 years, the hedgerow planting along the A249 has matured, as has the orchard on the far valley side. There is new infrastructure on the valley side, which has replaced the farm storage on the valley floor. Several fields which were under grass in 1995 are now ploughed, currently growing maize, and there appear to be some new/ replanted hedgerows in the upper valley. As the Landscape Character Assessment is being updated, substantial proposals to change J5 of the M2 could have major detracting impacts on this area.



*Mid-Kent Downs scene near Stockbury in 1995 (above) and 2017 (below).*

<i>Issue</i>	<i>Landscape sensitivities and potential landscape impacts</i>
Development	<p>There is considerable development pressure within and around the AONB (including a large proposed substantial development on open land within the AONB and junction 5 modifications on the M2. The Kent County Showground contains several large permanent buildings, as well as temporary structures such as marquees, but these are fairly well-contained visually by landform and vegetation. There are occasional examples of buildings on plateau areas, which appear particularly prominent, and an increasing trend for larger agricultural buildings. Vertical features such as pylons, poles and masts are noticeable, especially in plateau areas, where they appear against the skyline. Occasional new ribbon development, incongruous property boundary treatments, particularly ostentatious gates and gateways are noticeable and at odds with the built character of the landscape.</p> <p>There is considerable development pressure in the setting of the AONB (particularly around existing settlements to the north, and along road corridors). Should development occur its likely to impact on views from within the AONB. Examples of sensitive setting areas on the periphery of settlements include the prominent ridgeline to the north of the M2 at Nashenden scarp, and the Capstone Valley north-west of Bredhurst.</p>

<i>Issue</i>	<i>Landscape sensitivities and potential landscape impacts</i>
Urban-fringe influences	These tend to occur around larger settlements and along road corridors, and include increased traffic speed and frequency; fly tipping (including illegal dumping of trade waste); occasional industrial land uses; informal signage and hoardings; the presence of motorway and main roads; security fencing and poor-quality equine management. The combined effect is that parts of the landscape appear less cared-about. Urban fringe influences are particularly noticeable on open plateau areas in the western part of the area near urban areas and around settlements.
Access and transport	There are a variety of transport-related issues within the area. Motorways and main roads have localised visual, noise and light pollution impacts, especially on the peripheries of the area. These may be increased by future road infrastructure projects such as improvements to M2 J7 at Brenley Corner and substantial changes to M2 J5. The new Lower Thames Crossing is likely to put increased pressure on local roads. Management of highways corridors is also a concern, including poor management of verges and hedges, which leads to reduced biodiversity and loss of character. Increasing traffic volumes and speeds are a concern throughout the Mid Kent Downs, but particularly in the west and closest to large settlements. There is also pressure to widen lanes to accommodate larger and faster vehicles, resulting in loss of character. Cold store and fruit-packing developments can exacerbate traffic issues on narrow lanes. Off-road vehicles can create localised problems in fields and on the public rights of way network, and in some areas a lack of bridleways means that horses must be ridden on roads.
Woodland and trees	<p>Secondary woodland is continuing to emerge following widespread loss of woodland and trees in the 1987 storm. Woodland condition is variable within this Landscape Character Area. Some woodlands are in poor condition due to lack of management and decline in coppicing. Elsewhere, woodland is in active management. Extensive areas of new woodland have been planted, especially around the Hucking Estate. Ash Dieback is having an impact across the LCA and other tree disease is a concern particularly in coppice monocultures.</p> <p>Trees outside woodland are important but occasional parts of the landscape, hedgerow trees are often ash and are often impacted by Ash Dieback.</p>

<i>Issue</i>	<i>Landscape sensitivities and potential landscape impacts</i>
Farming and land management	<p>20<sup>th</sup> Century intensification of farming has led to ploughing of grassland, the loss of hedgerows, shaws and in-field trees in some areas, and the fragmentation of grassland and woodland habitats. However, whilst there have been recent further losses of permanent grassland in recent years, there have also been some grassland restoration projects, such as Nashenden Farm Reserve.</p> <p>The decline in soft fruit, orchards and hop gardens (especially in the east and north) can result in loss of landscape structure, particularly where shelter belts are lost. Recent years have seen an increase in new land uses, particularly vineyards and polytunnels, which change the pattern, texture and colour of the landscape. Poorly located or screened large farm buildings can be detractors in otherwise open landscapes. Some new horticultural practices no longer rely on the local soils, removing the link between produce and soil type. Viticulture is likely to continue to expand in the future, given the soil conditions and warming temperatures associated with climate change. Agricultural intensification and land-use change also impacts on wider ecosystems, for example through soil loss, impacts of pesticides and herbicides on species diversity, and the nutrient-enrichment of groundwater and watercourses.</p> <p>The new Environmental Land Management Scheme (ELMS) offers opportunities to restore and reinforce valued characteristics of the landscape.</p>
Recreation	<p>Use of land for horse-pasturing is noticeable in some parts of the area, especially around settlements. There are wide variations in how well it's done, with white tape and electric fencing, subdivision of pastures, new lighting and buildings particularly noticeable. Some orchards are being damaged through use as horse pasture, and ménages with artificial surfacing and flood lights appear particularly out of place, as well as contributing to light pollution. Recreation in woodlands can be damaging, particularly activities such as quad biking, mountain biking (for instance at Perry Wood) paintballing, etc.</p>
Climate change and tree disease	<p>Climate change brings a risk of increased drought during hot spells, but also increased risk of surface-water flooding during intense storms. These impacts on the types of trees and crops which can thrive within the Landscape Character Area. Warmer temperatures provide conditions for pests and diseases to thrive, which may affect crops, orchards and woodlands. Ash Dieback is a particular concern at the moment, with an increasingly dramatic impact on woodlands and hedgerow trees throughout the Landscape Character Area.</p>
Water resources	<p>The aquifers within the chalk are a vital resource for water supply. They are threatened by over-abstraction, and pollution from agricultural run-off. As well as impacting on water supplies, changes to aquifers affect water flows in rivers and springs (which may be outside this Landscape Character Area) and also water quality, which in turn affects the health of river ecosystems. Loss of surface water features such as dew ponds is a further concern.</p>



*Arable crops in a compartment formerly occupied by an orchard, near Selling*



*The M2 and HS1 pass close to Nashenden Down Nature Reserve*



*Fly tipping is not an uncommon sight, particularly in the western part of the area*



*Damage to orchard trees caused by grazing ponies*



*Some forms of recreation can damage woodlands and other sensitive habitats.*



*Vineyards are replacing arable crops and orchards in some parts of the Mid Kent Downs. The arable fields in this picture were grassland in the 1980s.*

### 3.4 Landscape Management Recommendations

#### Aspirational Landscape Strategy

The landscape is in good condition across the entire Character Area, including in the vicinity of larger settlements and road corridors. Communities from settlements north of the M2 are engaged with the AONB and encouraged to visit. The area retains its traditional rural character and sense of peacefulness, despite its proximity to urban areas. Local communities are thriving and there is a network of well-served villages. Any new development respects the special character and qualities of the area, and is of a scale, form and character which enhances its rural feel and traditional settlement patterns. This includes built development, but also associated roads and boundary treatments. The open skylines, particularly in plateau areas and along scarp tops, are particularly sensitive and treated accordingly.

Woodlands and trees (large and small) are well managed, and connected by a network of hedgerows and shaws. Woodland trees are diverse, and include oak, beech, yew and coppiced chestnut. The landscape mosaic includes areas of arable land, grassland, woodland, orchards and parkland, with the balance of the mosaic reflecting local variations in landscape character. Agricultural land is well managed, and offers integrated corridors for wildlife. Watercourses and aquifers are in good health. Where farm diversification occurs, it takes place within the existing landscape framework of hedges, woodlands and shelter belts.

#### Protect

- Protect the remote, rural quality of the landscape which typifies the Mid Kent Downs, for example through retaining the traditional, quiet narrow lanes, and the small-scale nature of settlement.
- Protect undeveloped skylines, particularly in plateau areas, and along the top of the scarp above Hollingbourne Vale.
- Protect historic buildings and structures and their settings, and seek alternative uses for redundant traditional farm buildings.

#### Manage

- Manage farmland with a 'catchment wide' approach to land uses, encouraging local production of food, but without detriment to water supplies or the wider environment. Where land use change is taking place (for example establishment of vineyards) refer to best practice guidance to facilitate integration into the landscape.
- Manage surviving hedgerows, hedgerow trees and shaws, retaining them as features within the landscape. Encourage planting of new hedgerows and shaws, linking them with woodland to create wildlife habitats and corridors. Standard trees in hedgerows should be encouraged, with ash standards affected by Ash Dieback replaced with appropriately chosen native species as necessary.
- Manage woodland to promote age and species diversity, particularly where trees have been lost to Ash Dieback. Encourage planting of locally-distinctive species within the woodland mix where appropriate, such as beech and yew within the Bredhurst Local Character Area. When conifer plantations reach maturity, encourage replanting/ reversion to a diverse and resilient deciduous woodland, especially at woodland margins. Continue to keep coppice sites in active management, and actively seek new/ alternative uses for products. Work with managers of woodland recreation sites to minimise or remove damage from quad bikes, paintballing etc. Encourage the sustainable, coherent management of woodlands where there has been a history of lotting. Restore woodland on ridges, which is particularly apparent in the Bredhurst Local Character Area, and conserve the distinctive small pastures/ clearings along wooded edges in the Nashenden Valley.

- Manage grassland sites through appropriate cutting and/ or grazing, encouraging reversion of arable land to species-rich grassland where appropriate. Promote wildlife corridors through arable areas, for example using field margins to connect grassland sites and the re-establishment of in field trees. Promote new hedgerows/ roadside trees from existing hedge stock.
- Encourage the retention of existing 'compartment' shelter-belts from orchards and hop gardens and their incorporation into future-appropriate land uses in order to retain the landscape structure and character.
- Manage historic parkland, making sure that parkland management plans are in place, and that specimen trees and avenues are replaced or re-planted if necessary to ensure their continued presence in the landscape.
- Manage trees and verges along road corridors, removing hoardings, informal signing and other detractors, encouraging appropriate screening and other mitigation measures. Use cutting techniques and timing to maximise verges' biodiversity value, and to create healthy, robust hedges, whilst still considering the safety of pedestrians, cyclists and horse riders.
- Promote and encourage the adoption of best practice equine land management guidance and restrain further development.
- Manage recreational routes to minimise conflicts between off-road vehicles and legitimate users.

## Plan

- The size, scale, location of new development must fit with landscape character and with existing settlement patterns. Avoid development in prominent locations, particularly on plateau-tops and further ribbon development. Use carefully-designed planting to help integrate new development into its landscape surroundings, and to provide recreational opportunities and wildlife habitat.
- New development should consider any impact on the setting of historic buildings and settlements.
- Encourage and, where covered by planning control, enforce sympathetic boundary treatments to residential properties, particularly avoiding large suburban-style gates and gateways. Simple, rural boundary treatments should be promoted.
- Work with communities to the north of the M2, promoting awareness of the AONB, and creating a positive and inclusive relationship. Encourage schools and other community groups to engage with and visit the AONB.
- Explore opportunities to retain and enhance local community facilities such as pubs, schools and shops to support rural communities and reduce the need for car travel. Ensure that communities within the area are not 'left behind' when compared to those outside it.
- Explore opportunities to extend, connect and enhance the Public Rights of Way network, particularly in areas where it is currently sparse, and where there are opportunities to provide connections from adjacent settlements into the countryside.
- Work with water companies and farmers to minimise water abstraction and pollution from agricultural chemicals.
- Work with highways authorities to minimise the impacts of road projects on views, and mitigate current impacts to landscape character, tranquillity and light pollution levels. Look at opportunities to reduce traffic volumes on rural lanes (for example discouraging use by non-local traffic).
- Encourage partnership working between different Local Authorities, agencies and community groups to enable seamless working across the AONB. Consider environmental/ landscape limits in planning and plan making.

- Within the setting of the Landscape Character Area, work with Local Planning Authorities and designers to achieve the best possible landscape integration, and minimal impact on views, with compensation achieved for any lost qualities.
- Consider addressing future climate change through significant new woodland planting on plateaux and ridge tops informed by landscape character and qualities.

## 4.0 East Kent Downs

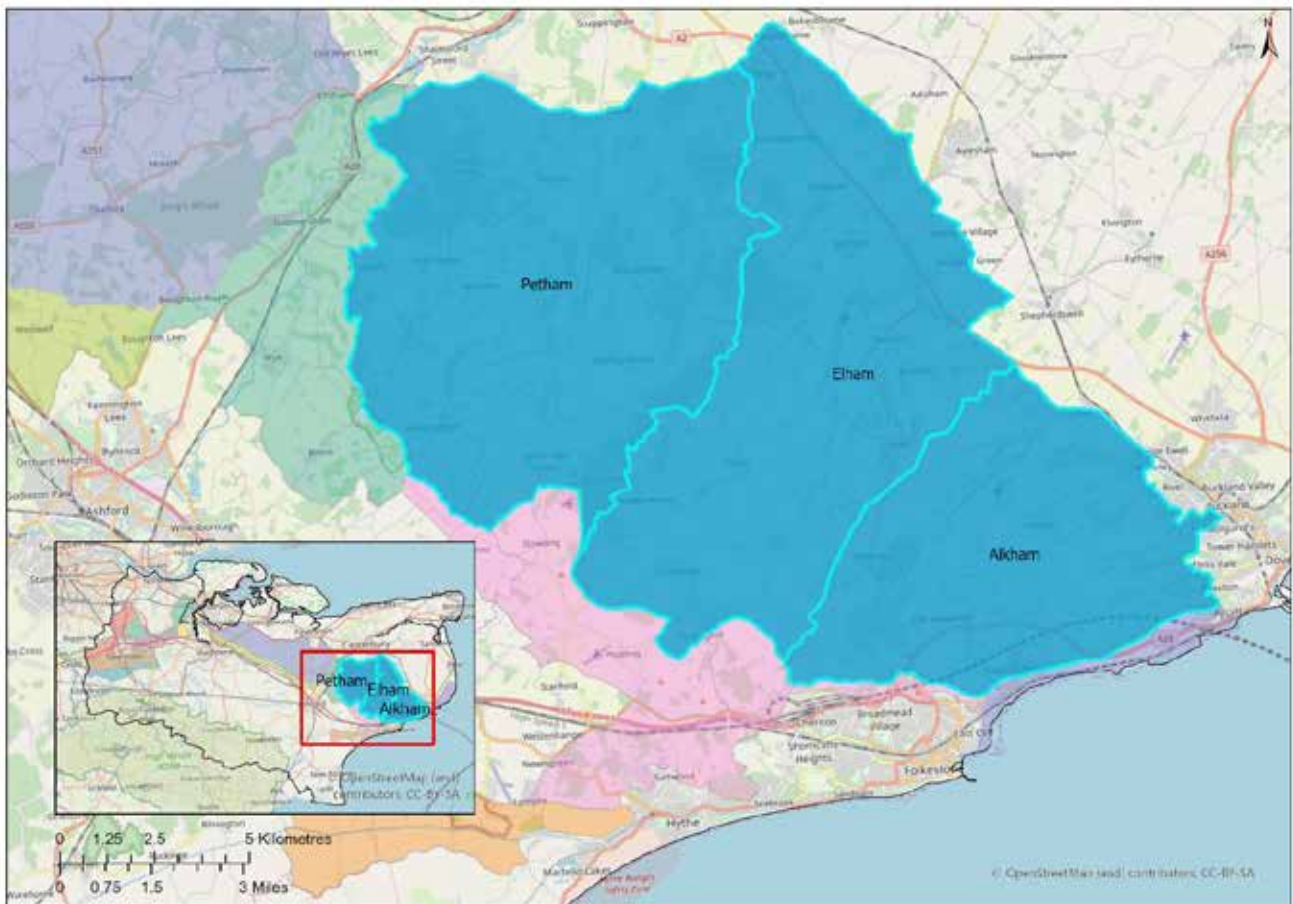
### Landscape Character Area 1C

**Landscape Character Type:** Chalk Downland

**Districts/ Boroughs:** Ashford; Canterbury; Dover; Shepway

**Landscape/Countryside Partnerships:** Kentish Stour Countryside Partnership

**Location and Context:** This large LCA is located in the east of the Kent Downs AONB, to the east of the Stour Valley LCA, and north of the Postling Scarp and Vale and the White Cliffs Coast LCAs. It includes several settlements, the largest of which are Lyminge, Hawkinge, Elham and Barham.



Location map for East Kent Downs LCA, also showing Local Character Areas of Petham, Elham and Alkham

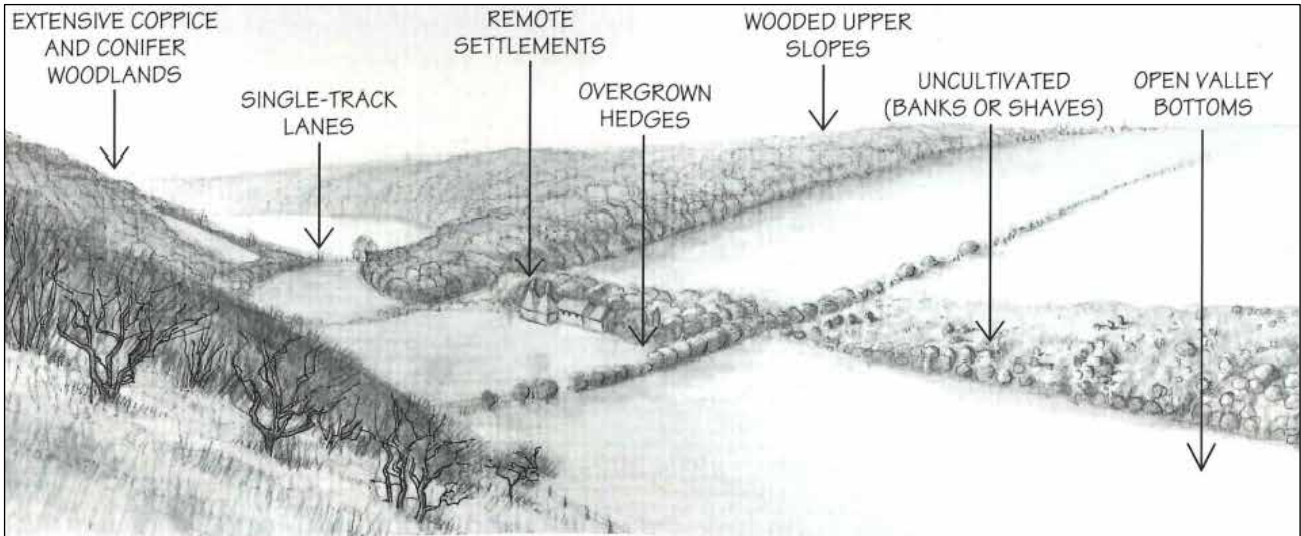


*A typical scene in the East Kent Downs- the Nailbourne Valley looking north towards Barham*

## Summary Characteristics

- Underlying geology of Cretaceous chalk. In places the surface has weathered to create a layer of clay-with-flints, forming heavy, sticky soils.
- Rounded chalk plateau dissected by a series of parallel narrow dry valleys, becoming increasingly pronounced towards the south.
- Little surface water, but seasonal streams appearing only in winter (Nailbournes) are a distinctive feature.
- Extensive woodland blocks, particularly on ridge tops, and strips of woodland on steep valley sides. Extensive coppice and conifer woodlands. Shaves, copses and hedgerow trees throughout.
- Dominant land use is arable agriculture, but there are also areas of parkland, orchards, vines, woodland and pasture. Field patterns are variable, but are generally larger on ridges than in valleys, reflecting historic processes of enclosure.
- Scattered historic buildings including churches, manors, country houses, farms and cottages.
- Relatively sparse settlement of scattered farms and occasional nucleated villages, often of brick and flint construction. Concentration of settlement in the Nail Bourne Valley, and notable common-edge settlement of Stelling Minnis.
- Dense network of historic roads and tracks, including Prehistoric routeways, Roman roads medieval drove roads and Turnpikes. Sunken single-track lanes are also characteristic.
- A relatively tranquil part of the Kent Downs AONB, with a strongly rural feel. The pattern of ridges and dry valleys gives the landscape a rhythmic feel, particularly in the south of the LCA.
- Views are often linear and channelled by landform. There are long views from high ground, overlooking adjacent valleys.

- Semi-natural habitats include woodland, chalk grassland and parkland.



Sketch of the East Kent Downs from 'The Kent Downs Landscape' (1995)

## 4.1 Description

- 4.1.1 This is a remote, peaceful area of downland, towards the eastern end of the AONB. Its character is strongly influenced by the underlying chalk geology. Above the southern scarp, the broad back of the chalk hills is furrowed by a series of long, narrow, parallel valleys, running north-east. In these dry valleys, the valley bottom streams or *nailbournes* are underground, only flowing at the surface occasionally, during very wet winters. Water management has always been a challenge in this landscape because of the lack of surface water. Between the valleys are expansive plateaux, often covered with heavy, sticky clay-with-flint soils.
- 4.1.2 The western valley systems are branching and intricate. The steep rounded slopes are crossed by thick shaws or overgrown hedges, often seasonally swathed in the white seed-heads of wild clematis. Although much of the area has been cultivated, there are still important grassland habitats, particularly at the tops of the valley sides which are too steep to plough. Large arable fields on the ridge top plateaux are visually contained by long strips of deciduous, ancient woodland along the valley sides, or ridge-top conifer forests west of Elham. Towards the coast, however, the landscape becomes more exposed. There is less woodland and the strongly linear pattern of parallel ridges and valleys is more distinct.
- 4.1.3 The countryside of the East Kent Downs is criss-crossed by a maze of tiny, sunken one-track lanes. Many of these tracks have ancient origins, and some may have been routeways from prehistoric times. The Roman road of Stone Street (B2068) cuts through the landscape, one of several Roman Roads in the area connecting Canterbury to the coast. These ancient routes are still in use today, with many as roads, or incorporated into routes such as the Pilgrims' Way and North Downs Way. Some lanes and tracks are relics of land divisions which can date back centuries. Houses are widely scattered and many villages, traditionally built of local flint, brick and tile, are still little more than a church, a manor and farm cottages. The place name 'Minnis' refers to common land. Although most common has now been enclosed for farmland, Stelling Minnis remains the last unenclosed downland common in the Kent Downs, representing an unaltered relic of the medieval manors. .



*Plateau scene near Elmsted*

- 4.1.4 This is still a strongly rural landscape with a sense of timelessness. Much of the land is agricultural, but there are also pockets of orchards, hop gardens, an increasing number of vineyards, extensive historic parklands, and woodlands. Together they contribute to variations in its character. The larger villages have a range of origins, including the coaching village of Bridge and the railway town of Lyminge. Hawkinge is a substantial recent settlement built on open farmland which was a former Second World War grass airfield. Several villages and historic parks are designated as Conservation Areas.
- 4.1.5 The presence of the coast nearby influences the weather, with sea mist filling valleys and hovering over plateaux. Views within this Landscape Character Area are often enclosed and channelled by the linear dry valley landforms. These views contrast with the wider, panoramic views experienced from the plateaux. Dover Castle is a significant landmark to the east, and in the far south of the area, views are dominated by the presence of the sea. Although there are some localised influences from main roads and larger settlements, in general this is a peaceful landscape which feels relatively tranquil and detached from urban life. With the exception of Hawkinge, it is one of the least developed parts of the Kent Downs AONB. The area is associated with the artist Henry Moore, who lived and worked at 'Burcroft' in Kingston in the Nail Bourne Valley. He later wrote 'living at Burcroft was what probably clinched my interest in trying to make sculpture and nature enhance each other.'



*Ancient trackway over Crundale Downs*

## 4.2 Local Character Areas

4.2.1 There are three Local Character Areas within the East Kent Downs LCA. **Petham** in the west contains a network of valleys and is the least settled part of the LCA. **Elham** in the centre contains several large villages and is more strongly influenced by parkland and estate landscapes. **Alkham** in the east comprises a series of steep parallel valleys running towards the Dour, interspersed by plateaux.

### Petham

4.2.2 To the east of the Stour Valley is an intimate, sparsely populated, and remote landscape of long, rolling valleys and widely scattered farms. Blocks of deciduous woodland (including extensive areas of Ancient Woodland) crown the narrower ridges or sweep along the upper valley slopes, providing a sense of enclosure and emphasising the curving landform. There are also occasional huge uninterrupted open fields on the high plateaux between the ridges. There are frequent tantalising views into secluded coombes and extensive areas of traditional chalk grassland, such as Winchcombe Downs, supporting colonies of rare orchids and butterflies.

4.2.3 Although the hedgerow network is more fragmented and generally less diverse than around Elham, many hedges are overgrown or contain significant numbers of hedgerow trees, producing strong lines of vegetation across the otherwise smooth folds of the valleys. Where they occur, infield trees are important landscape features. Many of the valley sides have a narrow strip of woodland along their steepest slopes, where cultivation has never been possible. Known locally as *shaves*, they are often rich wildlife havens and provide a valuable contrast with the otherwise intensively farmed valley landscapes. This was once an area of widespread hop cultivation, but although redundant oast-houses dot the landscape, there are almost no hop gardens still in production. The largest settlements are generally found in the river valleys and on valley sides, but there are also several villages (often with origins associated with routeways or common-edges, such as Stelling Minnis) which are on high ground. Large farms are scattered across the plateaux as well as nestled in valleys. The distinct built form includes some minor estate houses.



*Dry Valley near Crundale, in the Petham Local Character Area*

### Elham

- 4.2.4 This area is a transitional landscape between the remote, enclosed countryside east of the Stour Valley and the exposed, ridges and valleys between Folkestone and Dover. It has a more settled feel, with more frequent villages, and open views from the narrow ridge-top roads. The rolling downland is the dominant visual element, and its character is also influenced by the presence of parkland and large estates. There are several Conservation Areas in the northern part of the area, comprising villages and historic parkland. The Elham Way (between Canterbury and Hythe) runs through this area.
- 4.2.5 The Elham Valley carves its way through the centre of this area, in a wide attractive sweep, up to Barham and Patricbourne. It contains a line of large villages, including Lyminge, Elham, Barham and Bridge. To the west is one of the most densely-wooded ridges of the AONB, where expanses of conifer plantations are interspersed with remnants of deciduous, ancient woodland, still concealing the ancient double banks which once formed the boundary of Elham Park. It includes more recent woodland associated with Denton Court and Wootton Park, as well as sweet chestnut coppice around Lyminge.
- 4.2.6 To the east of the Elham Valley, the landscape is predominantly large, intensively cultivated arable plateaux interspersed by dry valleys. Woodlands are fewer and much smaller, frequently on the steep valley sides. Although there has been extensive loss of hedgerows, this area still has a high proportion of hedgerow trees and botanically-rich hedges, usually near the villages. The less exposed, northern slopes around Denton are still dotted with pockets of historic parkland and orchards, and there are larger parkland estates including Acrise Park, Broome Park, Bourne Park, Bifron Park and Charlton Park. Extensive areas of grassland, parkland and woodland are managed by the Ministry of Defence. Narrow roads linking farmsteads evoke a great sense of time-depth, with settlements, estates, buildings and hedgerows also contributing a historic influence. The Norman church at Paddlesworth is the highest church in the North Downs, and is one of many isolated churches in the East Kent Downs.



*The Elham Valley near Barham, with Charlton Park in the middle of the photo*

## Alkham

- 4.2.7 This area is dominated by the long parallel ridges and sometimes isolated valleys which feed into the Dour valley. Near the coast, the ridges become increasingly narrower and the valleys closer. There are long views to Dover Castle, which are often framed by valley landforms. There are fewer woodlands here than in the west, and most occur on the steep valley slopes, where cultivation has been uneconomic. Many, therefore, are very old and of high nature conservation value, but few are actively managed. Of particular note is surviving Elm woods and hedges near Elms Vale, Dover. There are also areas of scrub on valley sides, often occurring where grassland has been left ungrazed. Much of the hedgerow network on the plateaux, which was largely a 19<sup>th</sup> Century creation, was replaced by post and wire fence in the late 20<sup>th</sup> Century, so that gradually the former unenclosed landscape was unintentionally re-created. In recent years the trend has reversed, with hedges planted on fenced and unfenced boundaries as part of landscape enhancement projects. There are extensive MoD training grounds near Lydden which tend to be cattle-grazed and include bands of conifers used in training exercises.
- 4.2.8 There are a number of surviving medieval buildings within this landscape. These include St John's chapel near Swingfield Street (associated with the Knights of St John) and the remains of St Radigund's Abbey east of Alkham, dating from 1191. There are also several medieval village churches still in use, and numerous historic houses. Steep sunken lanes and tracks wind up valley sides, connecting the dry valleys with the open downland above.
- 4.2.9 The former airfield at Hawkinge, effectively a new urban settlement, is now housing, with associated new buildings and roads visible within the landscape. The apparently undifferentiated design has little reference to its location in the Kent Downs AONB, and contrasts with the surrounding historic field patterns and ancient woodland. Management of land for equine use is a further concern in this area, particularly within the Alkham Valley.



*The Farthingloe Valley looking towards Dover Castle*



*Chestnut coppice (and chestnut pale fencing) at Pillars Wood near Paddlesworth*



*Some of the steepest land has never been cultivated and supports strips of woodland known locally as 'shaves'.*



*Elham Village*



*Elmsted Church with its unusual shingled tower and ancient churchyard yew tree*



*Soft fruit-growing near Bridge*



*Acrise Park*

## 4.3 Landscape Condition, Sensitivities and Forces for Change

- 4.3.1 This is a landscape with a sense of timelessness, and for much of the area, large-scale or modern development is not apparent. The landscape appears well managed, and its condition is generally good. This area has been the focus of many habitat restoration schemes. However, the landscape is not static, and it is affected by changing practices in land management as well as development pressure. Some of the changes, such as the change in crop choice from orchards to vines, the increasing use of land for equine management, and the introduction of suburban-style gates, boundaries and road junctions are incremental, but can add up to considerable landscape change across the area.
- 4.3.2 The 1995 Assessment noted *the decaying hedges, derelict buildings and abandoned farm machinery which also occur in this area are further signs of a landscape under economic stress*. Today, although there are very occasional untidy farms, there is not a sense of abandonment or economic stress. Comparison of the 1995 and 2017 photographs below shows that there has been some loss of parkland/ hedgerow trees, and that the foreground hedgerow has grown up, but otherwise the landscape looks very similar.
- 4.3.3 The dominance of the landform within this LCA means that skylines can be particularly prominent and therefore sensitive to change. The woodlands provide some screening function, but with tree disease becoming an increasing issue such screening cannot be relied on in the long term.



View west from Elmsted, GR 114449 in 1995 (above) and 2017 (below)

<i>Issue</i>	<i>Landscape sensitivities and potential landscape impacts</i>
Changing farming practices	<p>The trend for vine growing reflects changes in the Kent climate, as well as changing fashions. The French champagne maker Tattinger has recently started planting vines in this part of Kent, so this change is likely to continue – significant parts of the LCA are thought suitable for vine growing.</p> <p>The use of polytunnels for soft fruit growing is also having an impact on the landscape in the north of this LCA, although it is not currently prevalent. The light colour and reflective nature of the plastic covers mean that they stand out within the wider landscape, especially where they cover an extensive area.</p> <p>Intensification of farming has occurred over recent decades, and can be seen in the larger farm buildings and structures, and in the large open arable fields from which hedgerows have been removed. There has also been some diversification, particularly letting of land or change of use for horse grazing.</p> <p>This can result in the use of high visibility fencing, heavy grazing pressure and subdivision of fields which have a locally-significant detrimental landscape impact. The new Environmental Land Management Scheme (ELMS) offers opportunities to restore and reinforce valued characteristics of the landscape.</p>
Condition of habitats	<p>Some areas of particular wildlife value, such as chalk grassland and woodland exist simply because the land is too steep or difficult to plough. They are not intentional, and therefore often may not be in active management. Growth of scrub on grassland is noticeable around the LCA, due to reduction in grazing pressure.</p> <p>Woodland is also often under-managed, although there are areas of coppice. Past decades have seen planting of extensive conifer plantations, particularly in the central part of the LCA. Some (e.g. Park Wood) are owned by the Forestry Commission and have some recreational function. The trend for ‘woodlotting’ when woodlands are broken up into multiple ownership makes co-ordinated management of woodlands much more difficult and can have direct landscape impact through subdivision of woods and the introduction of fences, sheds and hard-standing areas.</p> <p>Ash Dieback is affecting hedges, woodlands and in-field and roadside trees, and is currently particularly noticeable in the south of the LCA. There are also localised impacts from increasing deer populations.</p> <p>Intensification of agriculture over past decades has resulted in loss of hedgerows and field margins. Recent years have seen a focussed effort on improving habitats locally, including bringing contiguous areas of farmland and grassland (across multiple farm holdings) into positive management. Schemes include field margins, hedgerow restoration/ planting and some of the largest areas of wildflower-seeded arable reversion in the county. Nevertheless, there are still further opportunities for restoration of habitats and wildlife corridors.</p>
Recreation	<p>There are a small number of recreation sites such as Lydden Race Circuit, caravan sites, and golf courses, which do not currently sit comfortably within the surrounding landscape, affecting landscape quality and in the case of Lydden having significant temporal noise effects, harming the tranquillity of the landscape</p> <p>There is also some recreation pressure, particularly on popular footpaths and bridleways near larger settlements which is resulting in path erosion and dog</p>

	waste. Off-road vehicles damage paths and track surfaces in some areas, particularly during the winter months.
<b>Issue</b>	<b><i>Landscape sensitivities and potential landscape impacts</i></b>
Management and maintenance of historic buildings, structures and designed landscapes	<p>There are a small number of Listed Buildings and Scheduled Monuments 'at risk' within this LCA, including barrows, estate buildings, churches and St Radigund's Abbey. The settings to historic buildings are also vulnerable to changes, particularly new development and highways measures.</p> <p>Maritime defence heritage is particularly vulnerable due to its coastal location and lack of public awareness of its existence.</p> <p>There are a number of historic parklands within this LCA, and without proactive management, such as the planting of young parkland trees, the parklands will gradually disappear from the landscape as trees become over-mature and die or become damaged in high winds or affected by tree pests and disease. At the moment, some historic parkland is in MOD ownership, and is well managed, but should land ownership change, its future management is not guaranteed.</p>
Development	<p>Development which is of a scale or type that does not sit comfortably within the AONB landscape is largely confined to the peripheries of this LCA, particularly around Hawkinge and on the edge of Dover, although there have been large-scale development proposals elsewhere, such as at Bridge. Such developments risk undermining the area's rural nature, and the distinctive character of its buildings.</p> <p>Linear expansion of valley-floor settlements up the valley sides has occurred in several villages, and is noticeable within the landscape.</p> <p>Urbanising and urban-fringe influences are most prevalent along the main roads within the area, particularly around larger settlements. These can reduce the rural character, and also introduce elements which are not designed to be locally-distinctive.</p>
Highways and transport	<p>The location of the proposed new Lower Thames Crossing is likely to increase traffic levels on the A2, which may in turn lead to more traffic management features and further erode its rural character. Potential widening of the A2 and pressure for lorry parks along its routes are also concerns.</p> <p>Loss of character of rural lanes and impacts on the tranquillity of the small lane and rural road network is a further concern, particularly given increased traffic levels and numbers of delivery vehicles and inappropriate highway treatments.</p> <p>This LCA is generally quite tranquil but tranquillity can be interrupted by overflying airplanes following principle designated international flight paths for Heathrow and Gatwick.</p>
Water management and coastal change	The LCA's underlying chalk geology means that is vulnerable to both drought and occasional flooding, when the nailbourne streams run.
Climate change and natural forces	The gradual warming of temperatures is reflected in the land use changes which are already occurring within the LCA, particularly the growing of vines. Hotter, drier summers are likely to result in drought conditions and water shortages. These may also affect the types of trees, plants and animals which

	can thrive. Wetter winters and more frequent storm events are likely to result in flooding.
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*Newly-planted vines near Barham*



*Polytunnels near Bridge*



*Scrub growth on valley side, Farthingloe Valley*



*Ash Dieback in woodland edge near Hemsted*



*New development on former airfield at Hawkinge*



*Increased traffic levels are affecting the tranquillity of rural lanes*

## 4.4 Landscape Management Recommendations

### Aspirational Landscape Strategy

The LCA retains its strongly rural character, which is conserved and enhanced. Any visual and landscape impacts from surrounding urban areas, main roads and new developments are kept to a minimum through high quality design and careful land management. Development within the LCA is at a scale and of a quality that does not detract from, and seeks to conserve and enhance, the character and qualities of the area. Local communities, Planning Authorities and other agencies work together to achieve this. Rural lanes retain their historic character and are not unduly influenced by signage, kerbs or other urbanising features.

Local farms are thriving, and where farms are diversifying (for example into or vine growing) this is being done in a way which conserves and enhances the landscape. Farmland management promotes wildlife and landscape enhancements through the provision and linking of habitats, and the positive management of landscape features. Woodland, forestry and grassland areas are in active sustainable management, and are interconnected.

The area's rich heritage is celebrated and looked after, and local people are aware of the history and importance of their local landscape.

#### Protect

- Protect historic/ archaeological sites and their settings, particularly those identified as 'at risk'.
- Protect non-designated historic landscape features such as lanes and field patterns, particularly where they are threatened with highways works or other development.
- Protect the small scale, isolated pattern and rural character of settlements within this LCA. Avoid ribbon development along roads and large scale development.
- Protect the isolated nature of farmsteads.
- Protect skylines and consider the impacts of new developments (including communications masts) on open skylines.
- Protect trees and woodlands, particularly where they have a screening function.
- Protect open views and long views along valleys, avoiding the introduction of new developed elements into these views.
- Protect tranquillity, resisting developments which increase levels of noise and movement in the landscape, and maintain the remote, undeveloped qualities of the valleys.

#### Manage

- Manage tree and woodland cover, promoting a characteristic and resilient species mix (using The Ash Project species recovery mixes) and hazel and chestnut coppice where appropriate. Replace dead ash trees with alternative species as necessary, and increase the proportion of deciduous woodlands. Promote deciduous planting at the edges of plantations. Extend woodland edges and create shaws to define arable fields and pastures.
- Manage hedgerows and shaws and try to link them with woodlands to enhance the habitat network. Reinststate hedgerows lost through intensive agricultural practices. Manage in-field trees and replace and replant to increase their number across the LCA. Promote in-field and roadside trees using existing hedge stock.
- Enhance ecological connectivity in arable areas, for example through provision of field margin strips and re-connecting hedgerows.

- Manage common land around Stelling Minnis to improve biodiversity and retain distinctive character. Use considered reintroduction of grazing if feasible.
- Conserve treed avenues alongside roads where they are a feature of the landscape.
- Conserve and enhance chalk grasslands, particularly where invasive scrub is taking hold, through appropriate grazing, and connecting and expanding them where possible. Consider reversion of arable land to grassland.
- Continue to promote best practice with regard to equine management, work with Local Authorities to require and condition best practice, where planning permission is granted for a change of use from agricultural to equine management
- Manage public rights of way, ensuring that popular routes are robust enough to cope with the level of use. Provide new paths where required (e.g. dog-walking circuits near new developments) and work with landowners to address issues of illegal off-road vehicles and to minimise conflicts between off-road vehicles and legitimate users.
- Manage the impact of highways and highway schemes through the use of the Rural streets and lanes design guidance.

#### Plan

- Promote high design standards for rural developments to ensure that they make a positive contribution to landscape character, for example through careful choice of materials, and an appropriate scale and massing of building. Seek the sympathetic use of local materials – brick, tile and flint.
- Ensure that high quality design of settlement edges is integrated into any plans for development within the LCA or on its periphery.
- Promote landscape enhancements and the mitigation of effects in and around recreational facilities (e.g. golf courses, caravan sites and Lydden motor circuit) to aid their integration into the landscape.
- Provide guidance on best-practice for planting vines with regard to the local landscape. This could include (for example) considering the alignment of vines, working within (or restoring) the surrounding hedgerow network, avoiding vines being seen against the horizon from key viewpoints, and the introduction of wildlife friendly habitats.
- Work with local communities to raise awareness of the landscape's value.
- Work with Highways Authorities to minimise the visual and landscape impacts of gantries, signage and other highways measures and ensure the application of the Kent Downs AONB Rural Streets and Lanes Design guidance.
- Work with Highways Authorities to increase the biodiversity value of verges and hedgerows without compromising safety.
- Develop guidance to ensure that impacts on views from the LCA are taken into account when considering development in the vicinity of the AONB.
- Encourage partnership working between different Local Authorities, agencies and community groups to enable seamless working across the AONB. Consider environmental/ landscape limits in planning and plan making.
- Within the setting of the LCA, work with Local Planning Authorities and designers to achieve the best possible landscape and ecological integration and minimal impact on views, with compensation achieved for lost qualities.
- Use the existing and valued landscape characteristics and qualities to design new tree establishment as part of climate change mitigation.

## 5.0 Kemsing Scarp and Vale

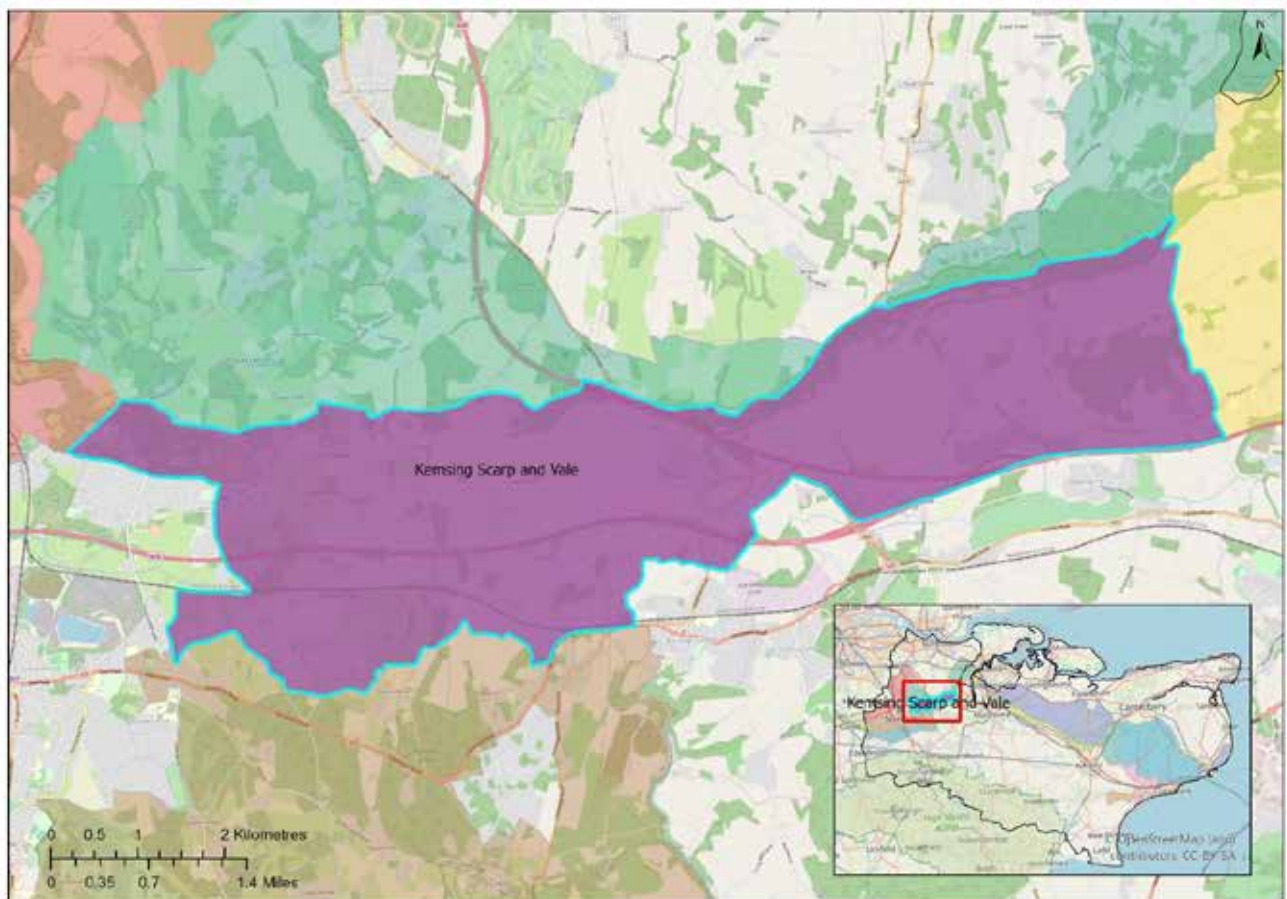
### Landscape Character Area 2A

**Landscape Character Type 2:** Chalk Scarps and Vales

**Districts/ Boroughs:** Sevenoaks; Tonbridge and Malling

**Landscape/Countryside Partnerships:** Darent Valley Landscape Partnership, Medway Valley Countryside Partnership and West Kent Countryside Partnership

**Location and Context:** This LCA is located towards the west of the Kent Downs AONB, in the valley between the West Kent Downs LCA, and the Sevenoaks Greensand Ridge LCA. It extends from Kemsing in the west to Ryarsh in the east, and includes the villages of Wrotham and Trottiscliffe.



*Location map for Kemsing Scarp and Vale LCA*

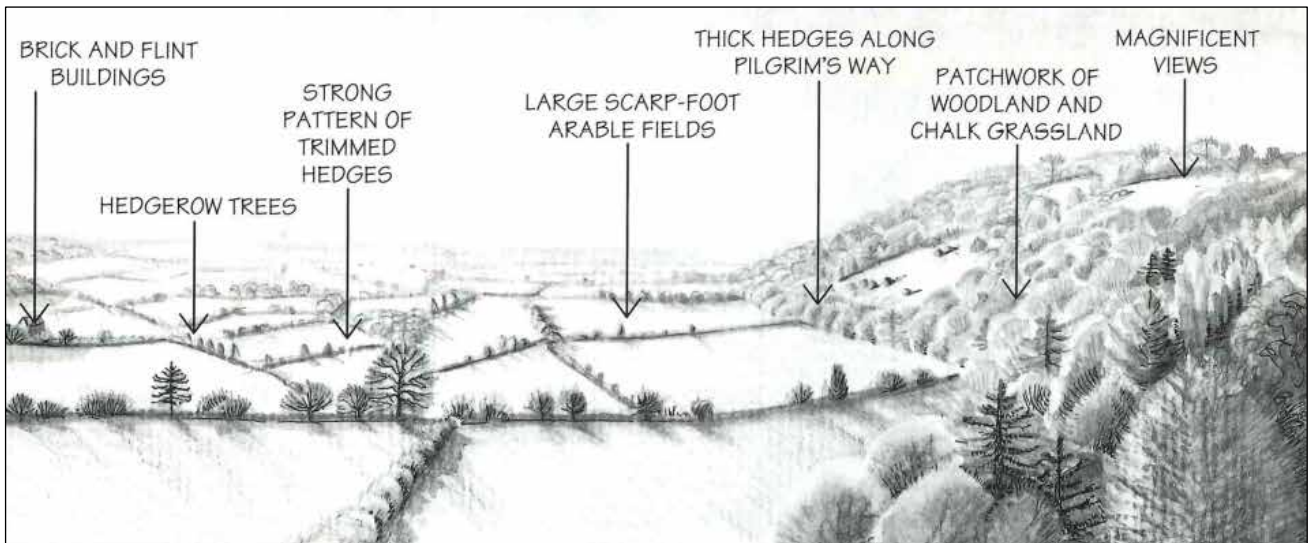


*A typical view in Kemsing Vale. A narrow lane (the route of the Pilgrims' Way) runs along the foot of the scarp, and marks the boundary between the rough-textured woodland and grassland of the chalk scarp, and the open, regular fields on the fertile ground at the scarp foot. A mature ash tree overhangs the lane.*

## Summary Characteristics

- Underlying geology of Cretaceous chalk on the scarp, and mudstone in the vale. Head deposits of clay, sand and gravel on the valley floor include alluvial deposits and material derived from chalk weathering.
- Landform comprises a steep south-facing chalk scarp rising to 235m and running broadly east-west, with a gently undulating vale to the south.
- Springs, pools and streams in vale. Central watershed, with streams in the west flowing into the Darent, and in the east into the Medway.
- Woodland blocks and shaws on scarp, including ancient yew woodland, secondary woodland, and scrub. Wet woodland in vale, and linear planting associated with transport corridor.
- Land use predominantly arable in vale, and grassland/ woodland on scarp. Large regular fields at base of scarp, becoming more irregular in valley floor, and more open on the scarp.
- Extensive and valuable chalk grassland and ancient woodland semi-natural habitats. Also patches of scrub, parkland and wet woodland.
- A long-settled landscape, with prehistoric features including barrows and trackways. Later estates comprising large houses in parkland grounds (some with distinctive estate buildings) have a strong influence on the landscape.
- Historic settlement comprises large houses/ farms at base of slope, and a line of springline villages, generally nucleated in form and containing many historic buildings.
- Historic pattern of roads/ tracks running east-west along base and top of scarp, and occasional roads crossing the vale north-south. East-West motorway and rail corridor superimposed on older landscape.
- Contrasting textures and patterns between the irregular outlines of woodland and grassland on the scarp, and the hedged fields of the vale. Seasonal changes in colour, particularly in woodlands.
- Lanes, tracks and remote historic villages and houses have a strong sense of tranquillity, despite the nearby transport corridors.
- Outstanding views southwards from the scarp across the vale and beyond. The

scarp forms a distinctive backdrop to views within the vale.



Sketch of the Kemsing Vale and Scarp from 'The Kent Downs Landscape' (1995)

## 5.1 Description

- 5.1.1 The Kemsing Scarp and Vale Landscape Character Area comprises the chalk scarp and scarp-foot vale between the villages of Kemsing in the west and Ryarsh in the east. It includes the villages of Wrotham, Trottscliffe and Heaversham, and parts of Kemsing and Ryarsh.
- 5.1.2 The character of this area is shaped by the strong, linear features of the chalk scarp and scarp foot, and by the open patchwork of the vale below. The chalk scarp visually dominates the area, but there are also views along the vale, and across to the Greensand Ridge to the south. Historic routes are now followed by the North Downs Way and the Pilgrims' Way. The Wealdway crosses the Vale running north-south.
- 5.1.3 The scarp in this area is steep and narrow, with an almost continuous blanket of woodland along the top. These woodlands are dominated by beech, yew and whitebeam but ash is also a component. The woodlands are interspersed in places by tracts of rough, unimproved chalk grassland. Following damage in the 1987 storm, younger trees have become established in gaps in the woodland, including ash trees which are now exhibiting ash dieback. Much of the woodland and grassland is of national nature conservation importance (SSSI), supporting a wide variety of scarce flora and fauna including orchids and rare butterflies. This pattern of wood, scrub and rough grass gives the slopes a strong 'untamed' and natural quality. Their rough textures, irregular outlines and varied colours contrast with the tidy, square fields of the vale.
- 5.1.4 The large, regularly-shaped and intensively-cultivated arable fields of the fertile scarp foot are surrounded by narrow, trimmed hedges interspersed with hedgerow trees. Along the northern boundary of these fields, the thick overgrown hedges of the Pilgrims' Way stand out, seasonally festooned with swathes of white Old Man's Beard (*Clematis vitalba*).
- 5.1.5 The gault clay of the valley bottom is relatively difficult to access, but supports a patchwork of mixed farmland and a network of ditches, streams and pools. Individual mature trees and woodlands are very important in this low-lying landscape, giving scale and interest to the otherwise flat countryside. Other valley floor land uses include sand extraction (both active and former sites) and small industrial

estates. The M20-M26 runs east-west along the valley floor, with the M20 climbing the valley side as it heads north near Wrotham.



*Valley floor scene near Kemsing, showing irregular fields, wet pastures & mature vegetation*

- 5.1.6 This is a landscape with a long history of occupation, and it contains one of the oldest archaeological sites in the Kent Downs. Coldrum Long Barrow is a Neolithic burial chamber and is the easternmost of the Medway Megalithic Monuments. Today, settlement within Kemsing Scarp and Vale comprises a series of historic spring-line villages. The largest villages are Trottiscliffe and Wrotham, but there are also smaller hamlets and isolated farms such as Trosley Court. There are some notable ragstone buildings – including churches- and distinctive stone walls laid in a diamond pattern which may be associated with the Birling Estate. Buildings are constructed of varied materials, including flint, brick, timber framing, hung tiles and weatherboarding. Most roofs are of clay tiles, and there are also several oast houses and historic farmsteads. Estate houses, set within parkland, are also characteristic of Kemsing Scarp and Vale. They are generally located where the chalk scarp/ Greensand Ridge start to flatten out. The St Clere and Birling Estates are still significant landowners within the Vale, and influence how land is managed.
- 5.1.7 From the top of the Kemsing Scarp there are spectacular views south across the vale to the Greensand Ridge. The elevated slopes have a sense of tranquillity, and the panoramic views and relative height add to the sense of detachment from the settlements and roads below.
- 5.1.8 Landscape character is relatively consistent throughout Kemsing Scarp and Vale, so it has not been divided into Local Character Areas.



*The Kemsing Scarp as seen looking north from the Greensand Ridge. The white chalk of the scarp is a feature of views within the vale.*



*Chalk grassland, Kemsing Down Nature Reserve*



*Ancient woodland containing beech and yew, Kemsing Down*



*Coldrum Long Barrow, near Trottiscliffe*



*Heaverham – one of the historic springline settlements within Kemsing Vale*



*St Clere, set within gardens and parkland at the foot of the scarp*



*Contrasting textures and colours between the open, smooth scarp foot fields and the woodland and rough grassland of the scarp*

## 5.2 Landscape Condition, Sensitivities and Forces for Change

- 5.2.1 The 1995 Assessment raises a number of issues affecting the Kemsing Scarp and Vale landscape. These include the impact of the M20 and M26 motorways, which break up the sweep of the landscape and the field pattern. Field corners cut off by main roads, motorways, and highways fences, increase the sense of disowned, urban-edge landscape. The impacts of the 1987 storm are also noted, as many trees on the scarp were lost. Other forces for change recorded in 1995 include loss of hedgerows and hedgerow trees (threatening the pattern of the landscape and its ability to absorb the motorways) and quarrying. The 2004 Assessment records the Kemsing Vale landscape as being in good condition, but notes some causes for concern, including urban development, transport routes, intensive arable cultivation, parkland becoming indistinct, and vulnerable mature vegetation.
- 5.2.2 Many of these forces for change remain true today. The exceptional visibility of both valley sides and valley bottom in long views mean that any new features, or loss of existing landscape features such as hedgerows or grassland, are visible over a wide area. This includes features which are outside the AONB to the south, and the landscape is therefore vulnerable to development within the setting of the AONB, particularly around motorway corridors and nearby settlements. Polytunnel development in the setting is particularly visible. The landscape of Kemsing Scarp and Vale is also vulnerable to small but incremental changes which may have a large cumulative effect across the area.
- 5.2.3 In the intervening years since the 1995 Assessment was undertaken, the motorway planting has matured, and the scars where the M20 cuts through the chalk have greened-over. The motorways are still apparent in today's landscape, but less so than they were in 1995. It is important to note however that many of the screening trees may be susceptible to disease and/or climate change impacts. The landscape still exhibits a clear landscape pattern and has a strong sense of place. Landscape management projects are in place (particularly on the chalk scarp) such as the 'Old Chalk New Downs' and Darent Valley Landscape Partnership projects to clear scrub and promote and connect chalk grassland.
- 5.2.4 Comparing photos of the view from Kemsing Down from 1995 and 2017 shows the extent of tree growth in the vale, both along transport routes, and along the boundaries of Kemsing Down. There are also some new larger farm buildings on the far valley side, but field patterns appear to be largely unchanged.





*The view looking south from Kemsing Down in 1995 (above) and in 2017 (below).*

<b>Issue</b>	<b>Landscape sensitivities and potential landscape impacts</b>
Large scale development in the setting of the AONB	There are several proposed developments in the vicinity of the AONB, including a garden village near Borough Green. Such developments could impact on the area's rural character and views, and may also affect habitat links across the valley.
Ad-hoc residential development	There are isolated examples of incongruous development within Kemsing Vale, such as the linear development which extends towards the scarp near Trottiscliffe. Such development should not be seen as a precedent for further similar development. There are also examples of the redevelopment of former farms or small estates into gated residential complexes which sit uncomfortably and alter the character of the area. New housing on village edges can appear stark, so it is important that any new development in villages is well-integrated into the surrounding landscape and enhances the settlement edge.
Industrial influences	There are extensive historic and ongoing sand extraction sites both within and outside the AONB, with further sites proposed. Most are currently fairly well hidden in wider views, but nevertheless can have an impact on landscape character, tranquillity and accessibility. There are also several small industrial estates within and outside the AONB which create a more urbanised character, particularly if they are of standard design or poorly screened. The existing solar farm is well-contained visually, but there is potential for any future solar schemes to be more intrusive in views, especially if sited where they can be seen from above.
Motorways and transport infrastructure	The M20, M26 and railway line form linear features in the landscape, which split the valley visually and restrict access. The visibility of motorways is lessening as planting matures and scars mellow, but they are still visible and may become more visible again with the advent of tree disease. In addition, gantries, lighting and vehicle noise are apparent in the landscape, detracting from the tranquillity. Wrotham village is on an 'island' between two motorways. It is likely that new development will focus on motorway

	corridors, particularly around junctions. Rural lanes are at risk of becoming urbanised and heavily used, especially around junctions with main roads.
Recreation pressures and anti-social behaviour	Visitor pressure (including potential increase in visitors from proposed new residential developments) may impact on fragile habitats and tranquillity. Management of Public Rights of Way is not always good, and there are particular issues with traffic on the Pilgrims' Way which is used by walkers. There is occasional roadside fly-tipping and illegal use of 4x4 vehicles within Kemsing Vale. There is also an issue with fly-grazing.
Loss of chalk scarp habitats	A lack of co-ordinated management of chalk grassland and woodland habitats along with poor economic returns means that they are vulnerable to decline and fragmentation. Scrub growth on chalk grassland sites has increased in recent years following a decline in sheep grazing and lack of grassland management. Woodland is also vulnerable through lack of traditional management, which affects the composition of tree and understorey species. Some native species such as yew are exceptionally slow growing and therefore take a long time to recover after loss.
Intensification of agriculture and changing land uses	Past removal of hedgerows, and lack of management of existing hedgerows and hedgerow trees in arable areas, risks a decline in landscape pattern, and in ecological corridors. Valley floor streams and wetland areas may also be lost. Existing alternative land uses include horse paddocks, polytunnels and game shooting, which affect the character and composition of the landscape if they are not carefully sited and managed. It is also likely that viticulture will expand into this area in coming years, particularly as global warming continues. The new Environmental Land Management Scheme (ELMS) offers opportunities to restore and reinforce valued characteristics of the landscape.
Maturity of parkland vegetation	There are many mature parkland and in-field trees within Kemsing Vale, which risk being lost from the landscape through over-maturity, disease or storm damage.
Climate change and natural forces	Climate change is likely to result in longer, hotter summers (potentially affecting beech trees, which are not tolerant to drought) and an increase in the intensity and frequency of storm events, which may also affect trees and woodlands. Tree disease, particularly Ash Dieback, is already affecting woodland and hedgerow trees.



*New industrial estate on the edge of the AONB near the M20/ A20 junction*



*New gated residential development on a former farm site*

*Sand quarry within the AONB south of Trottiscliffe. Motorway planting (and gantries) can be seen beyond.*



*Poster warning against fly-grazing*



*An example of a gappy hedgerow, resulting in loss of the regular landscape pattern*



*Ash Dieback in scarp woodland*

## 5.3 Landscape Management Recommendations

### Aspirational Landscape Strategy

The strong and distinctive pattern of the landscape is protected and enhanced. The mosaic of nationally-rare chalk habitats including grassland and ancient woodland are well managed and connected, and support a diversity of native species.

Historic settlements and farmsteads retain their distinctive character and are within attractive landscape settings. Consideration of development within and outside the AONB takes account of its impacts in views, and there is a wider awareness of the importance of the setting of the AONB. Major roads are integrated into the wider landscape, and their impact is lessened.

Farmland and parkland within the vale is positively managed to enhance the structure of the landscape (for example through hedgerow reinstatement, woodland management and tree planting) and also for its ecological value.

Quiet recreation is encouraged within the landscape. Users of long-distance paths and lanes are safe from speeding traffic, and visitors can continue to enjoy the wildlife and views on the scarp at Trosley Country Park and Kemsing Down Nature Reserve.

#### Protect

- Protect and enhance the contrasting, undeveloped landscape patterns between the chalk scarp, regular scarp-foot fields and irregular valley-bottom fields.
- Protect skylines, particularly along the top of the scarp and keep ridgelines free from development and other structures.
- Protect the open, large scale of the landscape and views.
- Protect archaeological sites and their settings, and non-designated historic features such as ancient trackways.
- Protect the distinctive character of historic villages and farmsteads, and enhance their landscape settings.
- Protect the rural character of lanes, resisting urbanisation in the form of (for example) hard kerbs, metal fencing, unnecessary signage and other clutter.

#### Manage

- Actively manage chalk grassland, using appropriate grazing where possible, or cutting to prevent scrub growth. Aim to manage sites on a landscape scale, and reduce fragmentation of habitats.
- Actively manage woodland and shaws, using traditional techniques such as coppicing where appropriate. Promote locally-distinctive woodland species including beech, yew and whitebeam.
- Work with landowners, including estates, to promote good management and reinstatement of hedgerows and hedgerow trees. Promote new hedgerow and roadside trees from existing hedge stock. Encourage fallow fields to be used for wildflower habitats, and connect grassland habitats using field margins.
- Support production of parkland management plans and planting of replacement parkland trees so that they can remain a feature of the landscape. Encourage retention of estate features such as driveways, avenues, boundaries, and distinctive estate architecture, and retain/ enhance the settings of estate houses.

- Encourage recreation on sites with appropriate infrastructure, such as Trosley Country Park and Kemsing Down Nature Reserve. Manage vegetation to enable long views to be retained.
- Manage Public Rights of Way, including long distance routes, and provide imaginative interpretation, possibly as part of a wider project relating to the Pilgrims' Way. Discourage large vehicles on narrow lanes which are followed by long distance routes.

#### Plan

- Investigate opportunities for sustainable chalk grassland restoration, working with delivery partners such as the 'Old Chalk New Downs' project. Also seek opportunities to extend and connect areas of chalk grassland, which may involve clearance of secondary woodland.
- Within the setting of the LCA work with Local Planning Authorities and designers to avoid detracting developments and achieve the best possible landscape and ecological integration and minimal impact on views, with compensation achieved for lost qualities.
- New development should incorporate open space to reduce recreation pressure on the wider landscape, but access between new development and the surrounding countryside should also be provided.
- Continue to reduce the impact of motorways and integrate transport corridors into the landscape through landscape management and woodland, shaw and hedgerow planting, whilst respecting the scale and pattern of the landscape.
- Work with Highways Authorities to increase the biodiversity value of verges and hedgerows without compromising safety.
- Ensure that any new development on the edges of existing settlements fits with the traditional settlement form and is carefully integrated into the landscape (for example through planting native hedgerows, trees and copses, and creating/ enhancing other characteristic landscape features such as ponds and ditches). It should respect the scale, design and materials of existing buildings, which include red brick, hung tiles, flint, weatherboarding and ragstone. Resist new development which does not conform with the valued character and qualities.
- Encourage the adoption of equine management good practice and contain the extent of pony paddock development to retain a rural, farmed landscape.
- Encourage partnership working between different Local Authorities, agencies and community groups to enable seamless working across the AONB. Consider environmental/ landscape limits in planning and placemaking.
- Use the existing and valued landscape characteristics and qualities to design new tree establishment as part of climate change mitigation

## 6.0 Hollingbourne Scarp and Vale

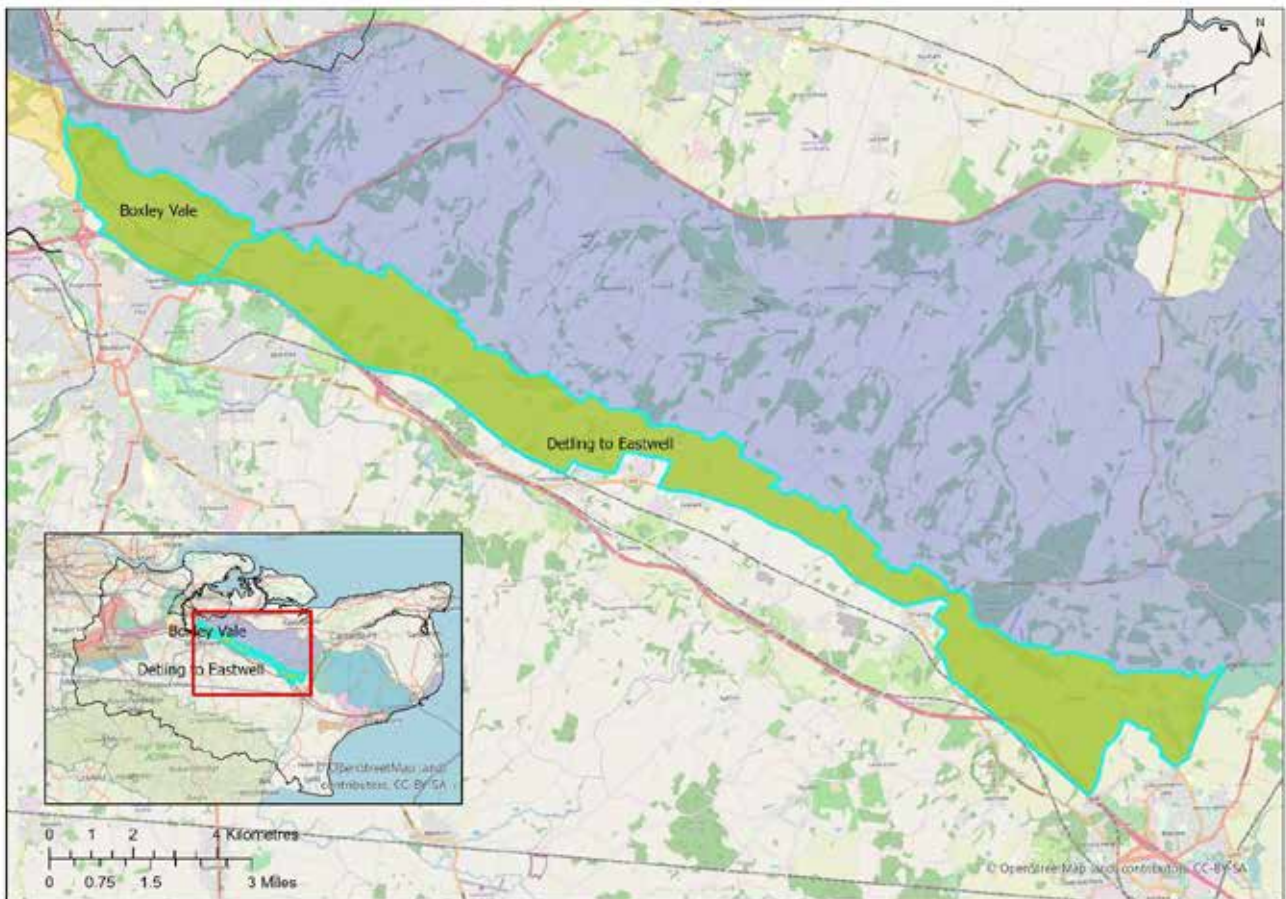
### Landscape Character Area 2B

Landscape Character Type 2: Chalk Scarp and Vale

Districts/ Boroughs: Ashford; Maidstone

Landscape/Countryside Partnerships: None

**Location and Context:** This LCA comprises the chalk scarp and vale which runs between the Medway Valley (to the west) and the Stour Valley (to the east). The AONB boundary follows the southern edge of the LCA, whilst to the north is the Mid Kent Downs LCA, which forms the dip slope to this scarp.



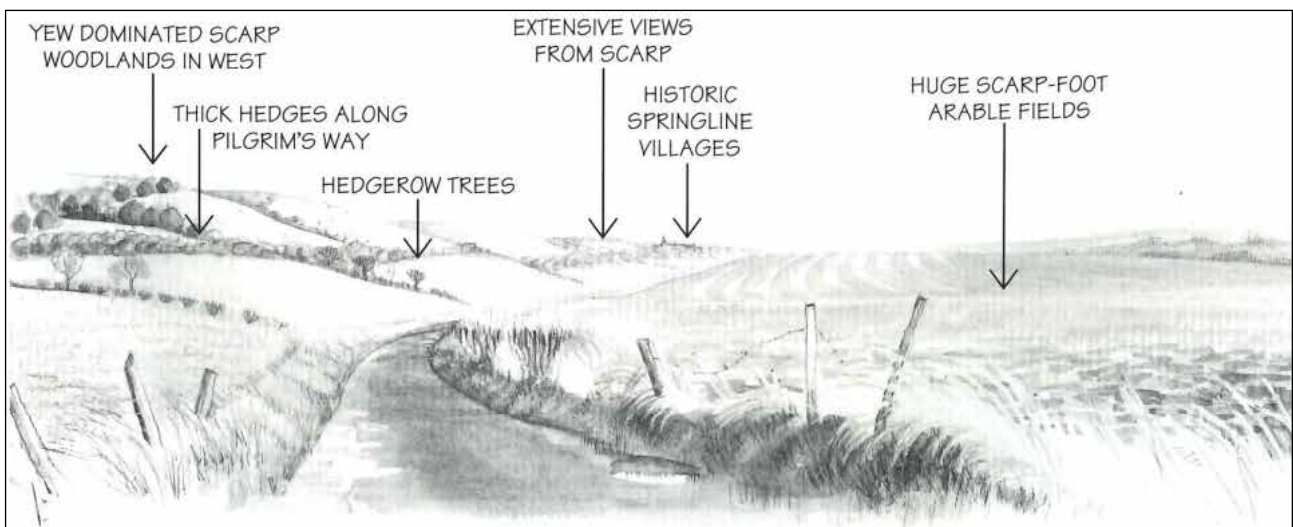
*Location map for Hollingbourne Scarp and Vale LCA, also showing Local Character Areas of Boxley Vale and Detling to Eastwell*



*View of Hollingbourne Scarp and Vale near Thurnham*

## Summary Characteristics

- Underlying geology of Cretaceous chalk on the scarp, and gault clay in the vale. Also pockets of sand and gravel within superficial deposits.
- Landform comprises steep south-facing chalk scarp, often concave in profile, with lower-lying vale to the south. A series of dry valleys give the scarp a smooth, rolling profile.
- Springs emerge at the base of the scarp, at the junction of chalk and clay, feeding streams, ponds and wetland areas.
- Distinctive scarp woodlands with a high proportion of evergreen species. Rare box and yew woodlands in the west. Roadside and hedgerow trees add to the treed appearance of the Vale, particularly around villages.
- Distinctive field pattern of large regular fields within the most fertile agricultural land at the base of the scarp. Smaller and less regular field patterns around villages.
- Semi-natural habitats include chalk grassland, woodland and scrub on scarp, and ponds, streams and wetlands in vale.
- Historic network of lanes and tracks, including the Pilgrims' Way which follows the scarp. Norman castle at Thurnham occupies a commanding position overlooking the vale.
- Distinctive settlement pattern of attractive springline villages within the Vale, some of which have expanded into larger settlements. Numerous examples of vernacular buildings including houses, pubs, manor houses and churches.
- A dense network of historic narrow lanes within the vale and running up the scarp. More recent transport routes include the M20 and HS1.
- A distinctive landscape composition formed by the contrasting patterns and visual interrelationship of scarp slopes, scarp foot and vale. Evergreen woodland looks particularly dramatic in winter.
- The scarp forms a key backdrop and skyline in views from the vale and from land to the south. From the scarp there are expansive views across Hollingbourne Vale towards the Weald and the Greensand Ridge.



Sketch of Hollingbourne Scarp and Vale from 'The Kent Downs Landscape' (1995)

## 6.1 Description

- 6.1.1 This Landscape Character Area comprises the south-west facing scarp slope and the clay vale below, between the Medway and Stour valleys. The underlying geology is fundamental to the character of the area, and consists of the dramatic chalk scarp, with clay and sand deposits in the lower vale. The steep scarp of the downs overlooks a wide, rolling landscape of mixed farmland. There are a series of splendid sweeping views from the scarp over Hollingbourne Vale towards Maidstone, the Weald and the Greensand Ridge. The presence of the scarp provides a strong sense of place and orientation both within the Landscape Character Area and in views towards it.
- 6.1.2 The steeper parts of the scarp are predominantly grassland or woodland, although some parts have been ploughed in the late 20<sup>th</sup> Century. This has exposed the highly visible white chalk below the shallow, unstable soils. The scarp is particularly steep and undulating in the west, becoming gentler towards the east. The long history of exploitation of the chalk and sand is shown in the former quarries and deneholes which are dotted over the area. The chalk pits often form wildlife habitats, with some designated SSSI. Uncommon scrub species such as wild box and purging buckthorn may be found on the grassland of the scarp, for example around Thurnham. Woodlands are varied, with yew dominating on the steep scarp at the western end. Woodland, plantations and hedgerow trees in the lower parts of the vale give much of the landscape a well-treed appearance. Springs occur at the boundary of the chalk and clay which feed surface ponds, streams and wetlands at the base of the scarp. Historically, these springs have been used to power mills, and also to supply water for osier beds on the valley floor.
- 6.1.3 The southern boundary of the AONB extends across the fertile strip of land along the scarp foot. The continual down-wash of soil from the scarp, combined with the sheltered aspect of the resulting fields, produces a belt of very productive agricultural land. For most of its length, the extent of this fertile strip is clearly evidence from the single-width and uniformity of the large, intensively cultivated fields which divide it up. Beyond this strip, the fields are often smaller and more irregular, with more trees and woodland scattered between them. Pockets of historic smaller fields and occasional orchards occur around settlements, along with some more recent subdivisions of land for horse-grazing.

- 6.1.4 The agricultural value of the scarp foot has long been recognised and exploited. The Ordnance Survey maps of the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century show a pattern of large, regular fields similar to that of today, which are often divided by luxuriant hedgerows containing a range of native species. The mid-late 20<sup>th</sup> Century saw some parts of the scarp foot denuded of the few trees and hedges which formerly occurred there. This has produced vast arable fields that in places sweep up over the scarp onto the downland plateaux.
- 6.1.5 The natural fertility of the soils mean that this area has been settled for a long time. Prehistoric standing stones occur in the western part of the area, and evidence of a Neolithic long house was found during construction of a cutting for HS1 near Boxley. Archaeological excavations associated with HS1 also revealed a Roman villa and medieval settlement on the valley floor east of Detling. The Norman castle at Thurnham was constructed in a commanding position high on the scarp, with excellent views over the Hollingbourne Vale.
- 6.1.6 The scarp foot is characterised by the string of old-established villages, such as Hollingbourne, Boxley and Detling which have grown up along the line of springs that seep out from the lower levels of the chalk. Hollingbourne Manor is a good example of Elizabethan brickwork, and there are many other attractive houses and farms in and between the villages, often with chequered red and grey brick and clay-tile roofs. There are also several splendid churches, some isolated or standing on village edges. Substantial vineyard planting is increasingly apparent along the foot of the scarp.
- 6.1.7 The scarp contains a distinctive pattern of roads and tracks. Throughout much of the Landscape Character Area, the ancient track of the North Downs Way runs east-west along the top of the scarp, and the Pilgrims' Way runs parallel, halfway down. Both are lined with thick hedges for much of their length and evoke a timeless quality. Parts of the Pilgrims' Way may have ancient origins as an alternative summer route to the higher path along the top of the scarp. The sticky clay underfoot would have made it difficult to use in winter. Running perpendicular, up the scarp face, are a series of sunken lanes and tracks which are likely to have had their origins as drove roads for moving animals between the high land and the vale. Many of the historic springline villages have developed along these routes. More recent transport additions to the Hollingbourne Vale include the M20 and HS1 railway line with their associated tunnels, bridges and wires are often brutal interventions in the landscape.

## 6.2 Local Character Areas

6.2.1 There are two Local Character Areas within Hollingbourne Vale, largely distinguished by the extent of woodland on the scarp.

### Boxley Scarp and Vale

6.2.2 Boxley Scarp and Vale Local Character Area lies to the north of Maidstone and is almost encircled by major roads. Nevertheless, this is an attractive and anciently settled area of countryside. The scarp woodlands have a significant amount of yew and some box, whose dark, evergreen foliage is particularly prominent in winter. Rose is present on woodland edges. The chalk grassland at Boxley Warren Nature Reserve contains many different species and the rabbit-grazed turf is springy underfoot and scented by the wild thyme and other herbs. However, the area is currently seeing declines in biomass and biodiversity. The place name Boxley ('clearing in the box') suggests box has been a dominant species in this area since Saxon times. To the west, the traditional large fields of the scarp foot are in evidence, but east of Boxley a series of small, hedge-lined fields are interspersed by attractive parkland. The striking stone walls around the site of the medieval abbey at Boxley in the west add to the strong, historic feel of the landscape.

6.2.3 Boxley is a springline village with many traditional buildings including a medieval manor complex adjacent to the church, a maltings and traditional cottages. Similar vernacular brick and timber-framed buildings are also found in the farmsteads scattered across the area. The poet Alfred, Lord Tennyson frequently visited Park House, and was inspired by this landscape when he wrote his poem 'The Brook'.

6.2.4 HS1 and main roads are prominent in some views, along with urban development outside the AONB. The noise and movement associated with the transport corridors also reduce the sense of tranquillity.



*View looking towards the wooded scarp at Boxley Warren*

## Detling to Eastwell

- 6.2.5 This long, narrow Local Character Area runs from Detling in the west to Eastwell in the east, and includes the springline villages of Detling, Thurnham, Hollingbourne and Westwell. Further springline villages (Lenham, Harrietsham, Charing and Eythorne Street) are close to its southern boundary. Although these villages themselves are outside the AONB, much of their parishes lie within it.
- 6.2.6 In contrast to the dense woodlands above Boxley, much of this area has only an intermittent fringe of yew woodland along the scarp top and some scattered trees along field boundaries. Nevertheless, the scarp-top woodland and trees play an important role in creating a treed backdrop. Where hedges and trees extend down the scarp slope they reinforce the rolling pattern of the downs. Further east, there are larger blocks of woodland including Westwell Downs, and woodland and plantation associated with Eastwell Park. Ash Dieback is increasingly evident in these woodlands. The estate of Eastwell Park also contains a number of historic parkland features, including veteran trees and the ornamental Eastwell Lake - one of the largest waterbodies in this part of the AONB.
- 6.2.7 A strip of chalk grassland follows the top of the scarp for much of its length, and this has been extended through reversion of arable land, although some arable gaps remain. The lower slopes of the scarp, and the vale below, are mostly in arable use, and the line of the historic trackways which run east-west along the scarp are marked by horizontal lines of trees and hedgerows. A chalk cross carved into the scarp above Lenham as a memorial to those who fell in WW1 is a local landmark.



*View looking east from below Thurnham Castle. The narrow belt of woodland along the top of the scarp can be seen on the left, with grassland below. The grassy fields, including the one in the foreground, have recently been reverted from arable.*



*Chalk grassland growing on an old chalk and sand quarry above Lenham*



*Clear chalk stream at Goddington near Harrietsham*



*Woodland with a high proportion of evergreen species, including yew and box, Boxley Warren Nature Reserve*



*Traditional buildings in the typical springline village of Hollingbourne*



*The Pilgrims' Way forms a hedged track between fields, and has a strong sense of timelessness.*



*Sweeping view from Boxley Warren across Maidstone towards the Greensand Ridge.*

## 6.3 Landscape Condition, Sensitivities and Forces for Change

- 6.3.1 Parts of the Hollingbourne Vale suffered from the removal of hedgerows and shaws in the 1970s and 1980s, a fact which was noted in the 1995 and 2004 Assessments, along with the impacts of pylons, HS1 and the M20. The 2004 Assessment described Hollingbourne Vale as being in poor condition with weak ecological integrity and 'prairie' fields.
- 6.3.2 In the intervening years there have been several projects aimed at enhancing the structure and management of the landscape. Some have been funded through Higher Level Stewardship, and others through landscape schemes associated with the Channel Tunnel Rail link. These have included replanting and/ or gapping-up hedgerows, reverting arable land on the scarp slope to grassland, and linking patches of grassland along the scarp. However, some areas of large scale arable fields still remain, and the grassland along the chalk scarp is not continuous, being broken by busy roads and arable fields. Planting along the transport corridors has matured and therefore forms a more effective screen. Nevertheless, the local impacts of HS1 and the M20 are sometimes significant and noticeable in terms of noise, lights, structures and movement
- 6.3.3 Comparison of the photos from 1995 and 2017 shows considerable tree growth on the valley floor and sides. The sheds on the right of the 1995 image are now larger (although screened by a tree in the 2017 photo).
- 6.3.4 The location of the Hollingbourne Scarp and Vale on the edge of the AONB, and within a transport corridor, means that there is significant pressure for development in the immediate vicinity of the AONB and in its wider setting. Were this to go ahead it would impact on views from within the AONB looking out, and also threatens its tranquillity and rural character.
- 6.3.5 The prominence of the scarp landform makes it particularly sensitive to development, and the narrow shape of the Landscape Character Area means that it is vulnerable to fragmentation.
- 6.3.6 The numerous springs found within this Landscape Character Area feed a series of chalk streams which eventually run into the Medway or Stour. The springs and headwaters of these streams are vulnerable to pollution and variations in flow, which in turn impact on water quality downstream.



*View towards the scarp with Chegworth Court Farm in the foreground in 1995 (above) and 2017 (below). The exact location of the original view is no longer on a public right of way.*

<b>Issue</b>	<b><i>Landscape sensitivities and potential landscape impacts</i></b>
Transport infrastructure	<p>The transport corridor containing the A20, M20, Maidstone-Ashford railway line and HS1 runs along the southern edge of Hollingbourne Vale. The A249 also climbs the scarp west of Detling, and the A252 climbs it west of Charing. These transport routes have localised visual and noise impacts and can be detrimental to the tranquillity of the area. They also function as a catalyst for development (see below).</p> <p>Most other roads within Hollingbourne Vale are narrow lanes or tracks and are often sunken and not suitable for heavy traffic, but can become rat runs, particularly when major roads are congested. Banks and hedgerows can be damaged by wide or passing vehicles.</p>

<i>Issue</i>	<i>Landscape sensitivities and potential landscape impacts</i>
Development	<p>Within the AONB, main road corridors tend to be a focus for more urban fringe-style development such as garages and garden centres. These (together with suburban-style residential gates and curtilages) can have localised impact on the rural character of the area. Development pressure may lead to developments which do not reflect the form or style of older buildings, and therefore do not sit comfortably within the landscape.</p> <p>However, the greatest pressure is for development outside the AONB, but visible from it, or within the setting of the AONB when viewed from the south. This includes commercial development along the A20/ M20 corridor. There is also currently rapid expansion of settlements just outside the AONB (for example at Lenham, Charing and Harrietsham) which impact on the landscape and also on traffic levels. Other structures which may have a detracting impact on views include solar farms, polytunnels and quarrying infrastructure.</p>
Land management	<p>The landscape has suffered from intensive farming in the past, particularly loss of hedgerows and shaws, and ploughing of grassland. Whilst efforts have been made to restore the landscape in recent years, there are still areas where large arable fields dominate. These large fields lack character and visual interest, and are also less beneficial to wildlife. They can also lead to fragmentation of wildlife habitats such as woodland and chalk grassland. Soil compaction (leading to water run-off and flooding) can also be an issue. Lack of woodland management is a problem in some areas, and there are localised problems with predation from unsustainably large reared pheasant populations. Some woodland sites (including Boxley Warren and The Larches) are seeing declines in biomass and biodiversity.</p> <p>Future agricultural practices, cropping patterns etc. will depend in part on agricultural grant schemes, which are currently unknown. However, the new Environmental Land Management Scheme (ELMS) offers opportunities to restore and reinforce valued characteristics of the landscape.</p> <p>There is a need to remove or find positive, sensitive new uses for agricultural buildings which can no longer serve their original purpose. New agricultural buildings tend to be larger, bland in design and constructed of reflective materials which make them more intrusive.</p> <p>Viticulture is an increasing land use in the Vale. There are opportunities to enhance the wildlife benefits of vineyards and mitigate the infrastructure associated with them.</p>
Water management	<p>Abstraction of groundwater affects surface water flows, which in turn affects water quality and habitats through drying out of streams, springs, ponds, seepages and marshy areas. Pollution levels are a concern, and agricultural chemicals, including nitrates, also affect water quality, although attempts are being made to reduce this. In addition, springs and the headwaters of chalk streams are particularly vulnerable to pollution from run-off from roads and development, and discharge from sewage treatment works. Ploughing of steep land, particularly where there are no hedgerows, can lead to soil erosion and run-off into rivers, particularly after heavy rain.</p>

<i>Issue</i>	<i>Landscape sensitivities and potential landscape impacts</i>
Recreation	<p>Illegal use of off-road vehicles on tracks (particularly the Pilgrims' Way) is a problem in parts of the area (especially around Boxley). Such use can lead to intimidation of legitimate users, and also damage the surface of the track and nearby land.</p> <p>Sub-division of land for horse-grazing is noticeable in some parts of Hollingbourne Scarp and Vale, particularly around villages.</p> <p>Increased use of 'keep out' signage and security measures can discourage legitimate countryside recreation.</p>
Loss of tranquillity	<p>The presence of traffic (both on main roads, and on lanes) is a particular concern within this Landscape Character Area. Places without traffic noise are relatively few. The wider impacts of loss of tranquillity on nature (for example reduction in bird and bat numbers) cause further detriment to the soundscape. Light pollution from surrounding roads and settlements is a further concern.</p>
Climate change, pests and diseases	<p>Climate change is likely to have a range of impacts on the area, including exacerbating the frequency and intensity of storms, and also longer drier periods. These will affect flooding, water quality, and the ability of various tree and plant species to survive. Warmer temperatures also enable new pests and diseases to thrive. Ash Dieback is already a concern, and will continue to affect woodlands and hedgerow trees over the coming years. There is further concern about other tree diseases in the area. Invasive species such as Japanese knotweed also threaten native vegetation on riverbanks.</p>

## 6.4 Landscape Management Recommendations

### Aspirational Landscape Strategy

The strongly rural character of the area is retained, despite the pressure for development in the vicinity. Views from the scarp, and towards the scarp, remain free from large-scale development which has an adverse effect on the setting of the AONB.

Progress continues to be made on repair and enhancement of the landscape structure, including hedgerows, shaws and woodlands, particularly in areas of large arable fields where hedgerows have been lost, or where semi-natural habitats are fragmented. Habitat networks of grassland and woodlands are robust and well-managed. The distinctive woodland and grassland vegetation along the top of the scarp is thriving, and the skyline is clear of development. The water quality of chalk rivers and streams is high, and flows are as close as possible to their natural state.

Historic buildings and villages are well-maintained, and any new development is sensitive to traditional settlement character. The network of lanes and tracks- particularly the long distance footpaths- are enjoyed by legitimate users, and retain their timeless quality and magnificent views. The landscape and visual impacts of road and rail networks continue to be reduced.

### Protect

- Protect the rural character of roads and tracks, and avoid the spread of linear development along road corridors.
- Protect skylines at the top of the scarp, avoiding structures which disrupt the undeveloped horizon formed by grassland and woodland.
- Protect the rural character of the scarp. The landform is prominent and particularly sensitive to development.
- Protect the settings of historic buildings and settlements, including farms. These include the wooded settings of many villages. Make sure that new farm buildings are sited and designed to blend into their surroundings, for example using recessive colours, stepped ridgelines and avoiding skylines.

### Manage

- Manage farmland, particularly arable areas, to promote a network of hedgerows, hedgerow and in field trees and grassland strips. Promote good soil management to reduce surface water run-off.
- Continue to develop and link the grassland and woodland strips along the top of the scarp, including promoting the return of cultivated areas of scarp to species-rich chalk grassland.
- Manage woodland to promote age and appropriate species diversity, and also to encourage locally-distinctive woodland species such as box, yew and whitebeam. Promote new hedgerow/ roadside trees from existing hedge stock.
- Manage historic parkland and ensure that all parklands have a conservation management plan. Plant replacement parkland trees where necessary to ensure that they remain features of the landscape.
- Manage recreational routes to minimise conflicts between off-road vehicles and legitimate users.
- Continue to promote best practice with regard to management of land for equine use and enforce planning conditions and limit further development of equine management where a change of use is proposed

- Manage watercourses and ponds to improve water quality, enhance their biodiversity and (where appropriate) amenity value.
- Promote best practice in vineyard management encouraging wildlife rich grasslands in the vineyards, species rich hedgerows and carefully designed infrastructure where essential

## Plan

- When considering new development in the vicinity of the AONB, take into account the impacts on views from within the AONB, and how new development will appear in the context of the AONB (particularly in views from the south looking towards the AONB, and in views along Hollingbourne Vale). Use carefully-designed planting schemes and sensitive building design/ choice of colour to help integrate development into the landscape.
- Promote use of sympathetic local building materials, including red brick, tile hanging, weatherboarding, flint and ragstone.
- Work with water companies and the Environment Agency to monitor pollution levels and water flows and to try and retain the natural conditions of chalk streams. Reduce abstraction from drought-stressed aquifers. Continue to encourage farmers, land managers, water companies, Highways Authorities and developers to reduce levels of water pollution, promoting a partnership approach. Consider increasing meadow 'buffers' alongside streams to help improve water quality and regulate flow.
- Work with Highways Authorities to reduce noise levels from traffic on main roads, and enhance the wildlife value of road verges without compromising safety.
- Promote retention of the area's narrow lanes, ideally keeping them to a single lane plus a footpath/ cycle lane.
- Work with utility companies to promote undergrounding of cables and removal of poles and pylons.
- Encourage partnership working between different Local Authorities, agencies and community groups to enable seamless working across the AONB.
- Within the setting of the LCA, work with Local Planning Authorities and designers to achieve the best possible landscape and ecological integration and minimal impact on views, with compensation achieved for any lost qualities.

## 7.0 Postling Scarp and Vale

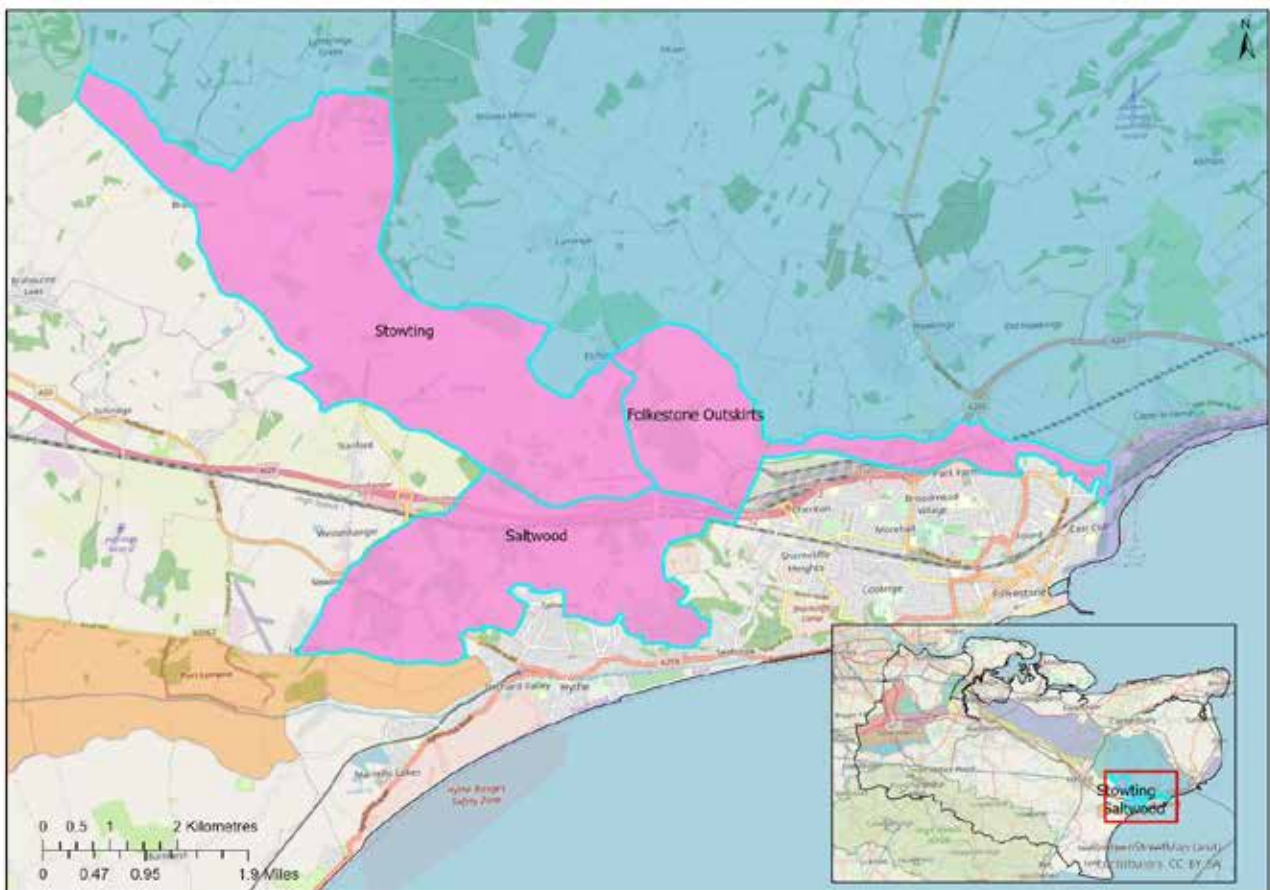
### Landscape Character Area 2C

Landscape Character Type 2: Chalk Scarps and Vales

Districts/ Boroughs: Ashford; Shepway

Landscape/Countryside Partnerships: White Cliffs Countryside Partnership

**Location and Context:** This LCA is located in the east of the Kent Downs AONB, south of the East Kent Downs LCA, and north of the Lympe Escarpment LCA. It extends from the village of Lympe in the west, to the scarp north of Folkestone in the east. Villages within the LCA include Stowting, Postling and parts of Etchinghill.



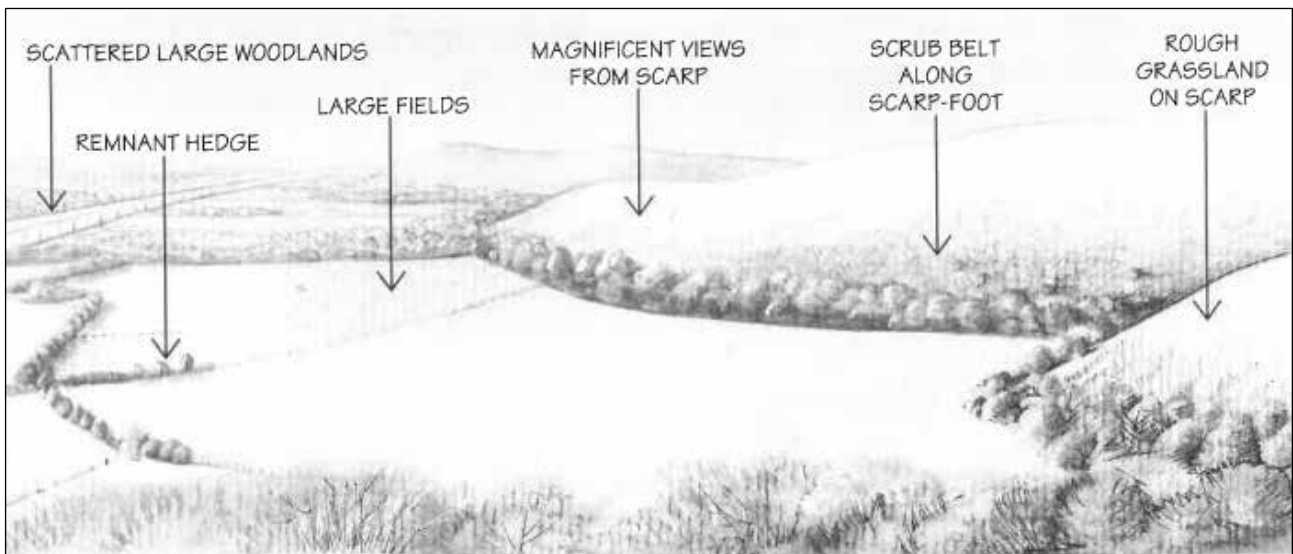
Location map for Postling Scarp and Vale LCA, also showing Local Character Areas of Stowting, Saltwood and Folkestone Outskirts



*A typical view near Etchinghill, showing steep grassland combes and smooth skylines of the scarp, with lower land of the clay vale in the foreground. In the middle of the photo is Asholt Wood.*

## Summary Characteristics

- Underlying geology comprises layers of Cretaceous chalk forming the scarp, with mudstone in the vale, and sandstone in the south around Sandling. Vale has areas of deposited sand, gravel, clay and alluvial material.
- Soils on the chalk scarp are thin and dry. Those in the vale are more fertile and often sticky.
- Landform comprises a strongly-crenellated and steep south-facing scarp, with an undulating landscape to the south. Isolated conical hills are distinctive features. Springs and ponds occur at the base of the scarp.
- Woodland blocks and shaws throughout the vale, and a distinctive band of trees and shrubs at the base of the scarp slope. Large numbers of ash trees.
- Land use predominantly agricultural, with arable and pastoral fields. Also pockets of woodland, parkland, recreation and transport uses.
- Extensive semi-natural habitats including chalk grassland, scrub and woodland.
- Archaeological sites concentrated on scarp and hill tops. Strong estate influences in the south of the LCA.
- LCA is adjacent to urban areas, but within the LCA, settlement limited to scattered farms, and small historic springline villages with a dispersed pattern. Vernacular buildings constructed of red brick, tile, ragstone and flint.
- Network of historic lanes and tracks, with east-west motorway and rail corridor superimposed.
- Contrasting textures between the smooth outlines of the scarp and the wooded farmland at the base. Distinctive landforms of hills add to sense of place.
- Outstanding views from the scarp and hill tops across the patchwork of fields and woodlands in the vale to the south.
- Popular for recreation and walking, with the North Downs Way, Saxon Shore Way and Elham Valley Way crossing the LCA.
- Sense of tranquillity away from large settlements and transport infrastructure.



Sketch of Postling Scarp and Vale from 'The Kent Downs Landscape' (1995)

## 7.1 Description

- 7.1.1 This LCA comprises the crenellated south-facing chalk scarp between the Stour Valley and Folkestone, and the lower-lying land at its foot. Around Folkestone, the landscape is dominated by major roads and the Channel Tunnel Terminal, situated on the edge of the AONB between north Folkestone and the Downs. Folkestone lies at the most easterly end of the greensand belt, on a narrow tongue of land contained by the Downs in the north, the coast to the south and the flat expanse of Romney Marsh to the south-west. These physical constraints have resulted in a considerable amount of activity and development being confined within a small area, on the very edge of the AONB.
- 7.1.2 These developments are set against the dramatic backdrop of the steep scarp, which supports botanically rich chalk grassland (designated SAC) and creates distinctive landforms of steep slopes, coombes and outlying hills, becoming more gently rounded in the west. A band of trees and scrub follows the base of the scarp for much of its length. The scarp is rich in history, with archaeological sites dating from the Mesolithic period through to WW2, and the more recent Folkestone White Horse a particularly visible feature on the hillside. Tolsford Hill BT tower was constructed in 1957, and its reinforced concrete design means that it is a prominent feature over a wide area.
- 7.1.3 A series of remote coombes in the scarp towards Etchinghill overlook the coppiced ash woodlands of Asholt Wood, one of the best examples of ash *Fraxinus excelsior* coppice in Kent (part of the SAC), although now significantly affected by Ash Dieback. Scrub extends up some of the lower scarp slopes and thick hedges draw attention to the route of the Pilgrims' Way along the scarp foot. At the base of the scarp, springs emerge between the chalk and Gault clay, and feed streams which then cut through the underlying Greensand as they flow towards the coast. Fields below the escarpment tend to be either arable or cattle-grazed, and the landscape is gently undulating, with large fields and substantial blocks of woodland. A series of attractive spring-line villages lie at the foot of the scarp, and give the landscape a settled feel. These villages have strong physical, cultural and perceptual links with the scarp.

- 7.1.4 Further south, around the outskirts of Hythe, this open, large-scale landscape gives way to a more intimate countryside of steep stream valleys, small woodlands and pasture. In the west, around Pedlinge, estate landscapes include tracts of mixed woodland enclosing flat arable fields, which form the edge of a larger area of intensively cultivated farmland, extending beyond the AONB.
- 7.1.5 The landscape contains a network of public rights of way, including ancient trackways along the ridge. Today these are part of the North Downs Way and the Saxon Shore Way, which both run through this Landscape Character Area. The Elham Valley Way, which incorporates part of the old railway line from Folkestone up the Elham Valley, is also within this LCA. There are modern transport links cutting through the LCA (High Speed Rail, motorway and main roads) but also a network of narrow, winding lanes, which over centuries of use have hollowed-out the hillsides where they descend and climb the scarp.
- 7.1.6 A characteristic of this Landscape Character Area is its long, panoramic views. These can be experienced from the scarp, looking over the patchwork patterns of the surrounding vale area, and also looking north towards the dramatic scarp landform. Some of the best views of the eastern part of the scarp can be experienced from within Folkestone, from parks, streets, homes and buildings. One of the best views is from the multi-storey ASDA carpark, and everyday views such as this mean that the scarp is an important component of local identity.



*View from the scarp above Brabourne across Postling Vale towards Lympne*



*The White Horse on the scarp behind houses in Folkestone*

## 7.2 Local Character Areas

7.2.1 There are three Local Character Areas within Postling Scarp and Vale. **Folkestone Outskirts** includes the steep scarp and adjacent land which form the backdrop to Folkestone, and are most influenced by the surrounding development. **Saltwood** (to the south of the A20) includes the estate-dominated landscapes and to the east and west of Saltwood, furthest from the scarp. **Stowting** includes the western part of the scarp and adjoining slopes, and is a strongly rural but settled vale landscape with small springline villages at the scarp foot.

### Folkestone Outskirts

7.2.2 The downland here is folded into a series of steep, enclosed coombes and prominent hills, dominating the landscape and the outskirts of the town. The extraordinary conical shapes of Sugarloaf Hill and Summerhouse Hill and the skyline earthworks of Castle Hill are key local landmarks. Caesar's Camp on Castle Hill is of particular landscape interest, changing over the years from Bronze Age barrow to Norman Ringwork and Bailey (of which it is an excellent example). Along the scarp slope are a series of exceptional views, and its generally well-managed grassland contains a wide variety of flowers, including rare orchids and insects. Barrows occur along the ridge, and Holywell Combe with its spring was an important Beaker settlement. 20<sup>th</sup> Century archaeology includes a wide v-shaped 'tank trap' which runs along the escarpment from Peene to Dover Hill, and is particularly noticeable at Castle Hill.

7.2.3 North of Asholt the scarp is managed by the MoD. Here, it becomes wider, and the landscape is less affected by proximity to urban areas and transport networks. The landscape has a more deeply rural feel, and is easily accessed by the North Downs Way and the Elham Valley Way.

7.2.4 The Channel Tunnel Terminal and the M20/A20 motorway extend into the AONB, at the foot of the scarp, and have a major impact on the landscape. Views southwards from the scarp are now dominated by these developments and Folkestone has been severed from the AONB and its villages by the transport corridor. Nevertheless, the scale of the landscape is such that the scarp is still the dominant feature in views.

7.2.5 Parts of the landscape are well-wooded, particularly around Asholt Wood at the base of the scarp, but Ash Dieback is a major concern within this LCA, having major landscape impacts in woods, along hedgerows and damaging in-field and roadside trees.



*View of Sugarloaf Hill and Castle Hill from Wingate Hill, above Folkestone.*

## Saltwood

- 7.2.6 Around Saltwood, the landscape takes on a more intimate and enclosed character. There is a significant amount of deciduous woodland, especially along the valley sides, and the small pastures are surrounded by dense hedges and hedgerow trees. There are also occasional orchards. The mixed arable and pastoral landscape is strongly influenced by estate planting, with blocks of deciduous woodland. The historic landscape has some unique elements which contribute to a strong sense of place. For example, Saltwood Castle, with its distinctive towered gatehouse, built in ragstone from former quarries at Hythe, stands in a tiny area of ornamental parkland on the edge of a typical unspoilt valley.
- 7.2.7 These little valleys bring valuable pockets of rural landscape up the very edge of the town. The high, open land above the Sene Valley offers long views across the town and out to sea. To the west of Saltwood, the historic landscape of Sandling Park (a registered historic park and garden) comprises parkland, woodland and agricultural land, as well as estate buildings. Further designed landscape has been incorporated into Brockhill Country Park. The landscape remains well-treed, but is affected by Ash Dieback. There has been some localised loss of field boundaries. .



*View near Saltwood. The towers of Saltwood castle can be seen on the left of the picture, and the lower part of the scarp slope is visible on the right-hand edge. In the distance are the woodlands of Sandling Park.*

## Stowting

- 7.2.8 West of Tolsford Hill and Summerhouse Hill the scarp and adjacent vale form a more open, intensively farmed agricultural landscape, which extends out of the AONB towards Ashford. Large arable fields are surrounded by small shaws or overgrown hedges, or by trimmed remnant hedges. Ecologically-rich grasslands and small woodlands on the scarp combine with open arable fields at the scarp foot to give a moderate ecological value to the area. Although the scarp is largely grassland, there are occasional blocks of deciduous woodland on the top, such as Postling Wood, and Brockman's Bushes on Tolsford Hill. The rounded chalk hills contribute to the sense of place, which is also influenced by characteristic woodland, beech stands and cross-contour roads. These distinctive features draw the eye away from scarp-foot developments such as the motorways, and provide a means of orientation in the landscape. In the west, towards Brabourne, the scarp becomes shallower and some parts of its sweeping curves have been cultivated. Recently, vines have been planted on some lower, south-facing slopes.
- 7.2.9 The landform is a dominant element in the view, and visibility is very high over the open landscape. From the scarp there are magnificent views over the surrounding vale. There is an historic time-depth to the landscape elements and pattern, although field boundaries are becoming less distinct in places. Linear or dispersed villages are nestled at the foot of the scarp; their mellow-coloured houses blending into the landscape, and their distinctive churches forming landmarks. New houses and extensions have generally been integrated successfully and, away from the main transport corridor, the landscape has a timeless feel.



*Stowting village nestles at the foot of the scarp, with its church tower forming a landmark.*



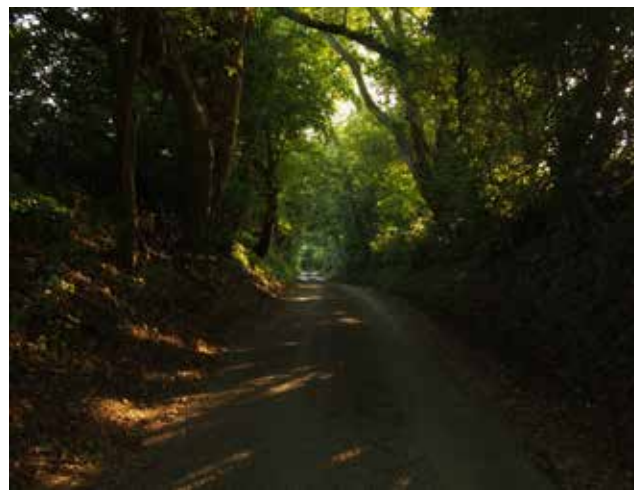
*Orchids, Castle Hill*



*Deciduous woodland in Sandling Park*



*Ridge-top trackway, part of the North Downs Way, above Brabourne*



*Sunken, tree-lined Lane, Stowting*



*Earthworks, Castle Hill*



*Postling village*

## 7.3 Landscape Condition, Sensitivities and Forces for Change

- 7.3.1 The landscape has a coherent pattern of elements with very few detracting features within the AONB. Ecologically-rich grasslands and woodlands contribute to the area's ecological value. Within the past 10 years a positive change has taken place on parts of the scarp around Stowting, Brabourne and Postling, where arable land has been reverted to grassland under Higher Level Stewardship.
- 7.3.2 This LCA is particularly sensitive because of the strong intervisibility between the scarp and the vale below. Views from the scarp mean that development and land management changes taking place below are visible from above. Similarly, any changes affecting the face or skyline of the scarp are visible from below.
- 7.3.3 Parts of this LCA are much more affected by nearby development than others. In the eastern part, around Folkestone, views from the scarp are affected by developments around Folkestone and associated with the Channel Tunnel Rail Link. The transport corridor which contains the railway line and motorway has a localised influence on views from the central part of the LCA. Away from the development areas and transport corridors, the LCA has a setting of fields and farms which feels rural but is not static. Unsurprisingly, the 1995 and 2004 Assessments both note the impacts of the adjacent infrastructure. It appears that the visual impact of the Channel Tunnel Rail Link, whilst still dominating, is gradually lessening, as screen planting grows and concrete mellows (see 'then and now' photos below). However, the sounds of traffic and night-time impacts from the lighting remain an issue. Light and air pollution, and localised litter/ fly tipping, are also a cause for concern within this LCA.
- 7.3.4 The photos below show a slight increase in the amount of scrub on the scarp slopes, but field patterns and woodland appear unchanged. Also the overhead gantries associated with construction of the Channel Tunnel Rail Link are no longer visible on the right of the image.



*Chalk scarp and Summerhouse Hill as seen in 1995 (above) and 2017 (below). Note- it is not currently possible to access the exact location of the 1995 viewpoint.*

<i>Issue</i>	<i>Landscape sensitivities and potential landscape impacts</i>
<p>Infrastructure and new development</p>	<p>The landscape is sensitive to the impacts of development and infrastructure within and beyond the AONB boundary. Current proposals within the setting of the AONB and which will be visible from it include Otterpool Park new town.</p> <p>A transport corridor containing High Speed Rail Line, the Channel Tunnel Rail Link, M20 and A20 crosses the LCA east-west. As well as visual impacts on the landscape, the corridor also reduces tranquillity and increases light pollution and air pollution.</p> <p>The Channel Tunnel Rail Link is very visible below the scarp north of Folkestone both day and night. From some viewpoints, the track and gantries are becoming less obvious as screen planting matures, but from other viewpoints (such as Castle Hill) it is very prominent.</p> <p>Pylons and wires run along the face of the scarp near Stowting and Postling, and march across the vale landscape. There are several communications masts in prominent positions on the top of the scarp, with Tolsford Hill the most impactful. Lighting means that these structures are also noticeable at night.</p>

	The provision of security fencing and corridor management, particularly of HS1, is locally very impactful with little attempt to mitigate through planting.
<b>Issue</b>	<b><i>Landscape sensitivities and potential landscape impacts</i></b>
Land Management	<p>In recent decades, ploughing has taken place on shallower scarp slopes (as recorded in the 1995 Assessment) but in the last 10 years there has been some reversion from arable to grassland. A small number of south-facing arable fields within the LCA have recently been replanted with vines. In recent years there has also been an increase in equestrian land uses, which is particularly noticeable in the winter months. Changes in land use affect the appearance and character of the landscape, and are often apparent over a wide area.</p> <p>The management of grassland is variable within the LCA. Some areas are well managed and contain a range of wildflower species. Other areas (such as Creteway Down) are currently undergrazed, with rank grasses and scrub becoming dominant. If this continues, it will result in a much more vegetated scarp slope, and loss of botanically-rich chalk grassland.</p> <p>The 1995 and 2004 Assessments note hedgerow loss in the southern part of the LCA, resulting in a loss of landscape structure and gaps in the habitat network. Hedgerow loss has now largely stopped, and some areas such as Sandling Park have seen planting of hedgerows and successional parkland trees.</p> <p>The new Environmental Land Management Scheme (ELMS) offers opportunities to restore and reinforce valued characteristics of the landscape. At present, a considerable amount of land (including chalk grassland on the scarp) in this LCA is owned and well-managed by the Ministry of Defence. Although estate grounds and parklands appear to be well-managed, estate buildings have been abandoned. It will not be long before they are lost as features within the landscape.</p>
Recreation pressure and anti-social behaviour	<p>The proximity of parts of the LCA to urban areas means that it is vulnerable to anti-social behaviour such as fly tipping and littering. . These reduce the visual quality of the landscape and create an impression that the area is not valued. The presence of a large and growing local population can also put pressure on recreation facilities within the landscape, such as public footpaths, which can result in erosion and damage. Brockhill Country Park is currently a popular recreation resource.</p>
Natural forces and climate change	<p>Ash Dieback is a concern across the LCA and a particular concern at Asholt Wood, an SSSI and one of the best examples of ash coppice, but now with a large proportion of trees affected by Ash Dieback. The disease has affected trees in other woodlands, hedgerows, along lanes and in fields – the replacement of such trees should be seen as a priority.</p> <p>Climate change is likely to lead to hotter drier summers, and warmer, wetter winters. This will affect soil conditions (both drought and flooding) and the types of trees, crops and habitats which can be supported.</p>



*Large-scale arable fields and pylons on the scarp near Stowting*



*Channel Tunnel Rail Terminal as seen from Castle Hill*



*Ungrazed grassland and scrub on Creteway Down, above Folkestone*



*Asholt Wood, showing evidence of Ash Dieback*



*Newly-planted vines on the scarp foot at Brabourne*



*Abandoned estate lodge, Sandling Park*

## 7.4 Landscape Management Recommendations

### Aspirational Landscape Strategy

The landscape and the habitats within it are managed in a co-ordinated way to promote wildlife value and enable access for recreation where appropriate. Infrastructure is a minimal barrier to enjoyment of the countryside and the ability of people and wildlife to move around it. The distinctive landforms and skylines of the scarp remain an integral part of the local landscape, and are appreciated by both residents and visitors.

The built and planted features associated with historic designed landscapes are well managed and looked after. There is good local awareness of the historic features of the landscape.

The impacts of Ash Dieback are minimised through careful woodland management, and through replacement tree planting, to ensure that trees and woodlands remain a key feature of this landscape.

#### Protect

- Protect the open and rural character of the northern part of the LCA.
- Protect skylines, particularly where the scarp forms the backdrop to views.
- Protect archaeological sites, keeping scrub and tree growth to a minimum, and raise awareness of defence heritage.
- Protect sensitive views from the scarp, including those towards the distinctive rounded chalk hills.
- Protect the distinctive local character of built form and seek the use of sympathetic local materials including brick, tile and ragstone, and also flint around Folkstone.

#### Manage

- Maintain open sweeps of species-rich chalk grassland on the scarp, allowing landform to dominate. Manage grassland, aiming for consistently good and co-ordinated management along the scarp, and the connection and expansion of grassland sites. Seek opportunities to extend areas of chalk grassland on scarp slopes, including reversion of arable land to grassland.
- Manage woodland, aiming for a linked network of woodland, shaws and hedgerows, and replace dead ash with alternative species as appropriate. Restore landscape features such as hedgerows and shaws at the scarp foot, and beech stands on the hill tops (around Stowting) which emphasise the bold scale of the surrounding landform.
- Continue to encourage restoration of the small-scale field pattern in Saltwood, using dense hedgerows, and encouraging new areas of woodland.
- Manage the loss of hedgerow and infield trees resulting from Ash Dieback by conducting a programme of replacement and promotion of trees from hedgerows and natural regeneration.
- Manage recreation, aiming to direct visitors away from vulnerable 'honeypot' areas and to disperse recreational pressure, providing high quality, well managed alternatives particularly where new development is planned.
- Work with landowners to retain/ reinstate field boundaries, and to enhance habitat links.
- Manage streams and watercourses to enhance biodiversity and native species, and to promote integrated flood management.

- Manage historic landscapes, including estate buildings and roads. Historic parkland management plans should make detailed recommendations for parkland management and ensuring that the parkland remains a feature of the landscape in the future.
- Involve local people and partnerships in the management and maintenance of landscapes, particularly around urban areas, to foster a sense of care and ownership, and hopefully a reduction in anti-social behaviour.

#### Plan

- Develop a strategic approach for the identification and management of Green Infrastructure corridors, linking habitat networks and encouraging recreational provision.
- Promote access links where the landscape is currently bisected by road and rail infrastructure.
- Improve the settings of existing settlements, particularly around Folkestone, for example through new woodland and shaw planting.
- Work with interest groups (e.g. including Parish Councils, the MOD, local history groups and national organisations such as the National Trust) to develop co-ordinated plans for landscape management and planning purposes, and to raise local awareness of history, archaeology and wildlife.
- Within the setting of the LCA, work with Local Planning Authorities and designers to achieve the best possible landscape and ecological integration and minimal impact on views, with compensation achieved for lost qualities.
- Work with Local Planning Authorities and transport agencies to reduce and minimise light pollution and other tranquillity impacts from transport and infrastructure.
- Work with Highways Authorities to increase the biodiversity value of verges and hedgerows without compromising safety.
- Continue to reduce the impact of motorways and integrate transport corridors into the landscape through landscape management and tree/ hedgerow planting.
- Encourage partnership working between different Local Authorities, agencies and community groups to enable seamless working across the LCA. Consider environmental/ landscape impacts of planning and placemaking.
- Use the existing and valued landscape characteristics and qualities to design new tree establishment as part of climate change mitigation

## 8.0 White Cliffs Coast

### Landscape Character Area 3A

**Landscape Character Type:** Chalk Cliffs and Coast

**Districts/ Boroughs:** Dover

**Landscape/Countryside Partnerships:** White Cliffs Countryside Partnership

**Location and Context:** This LCA is located in the far east of the Kent Downs AONB, to the south and east of the East Kent Downs LCA. It encompasses the coastal area between Folkestone and Kingsdown. It includes the settlement of St Margaret's at Cliffe, and forms the setting to Dover and to Folkestone.



*Location map for White Cliffs Coast LCA, also showing Local Character Areas of Folkestone Cliffs and The Warren, and South Foreland*

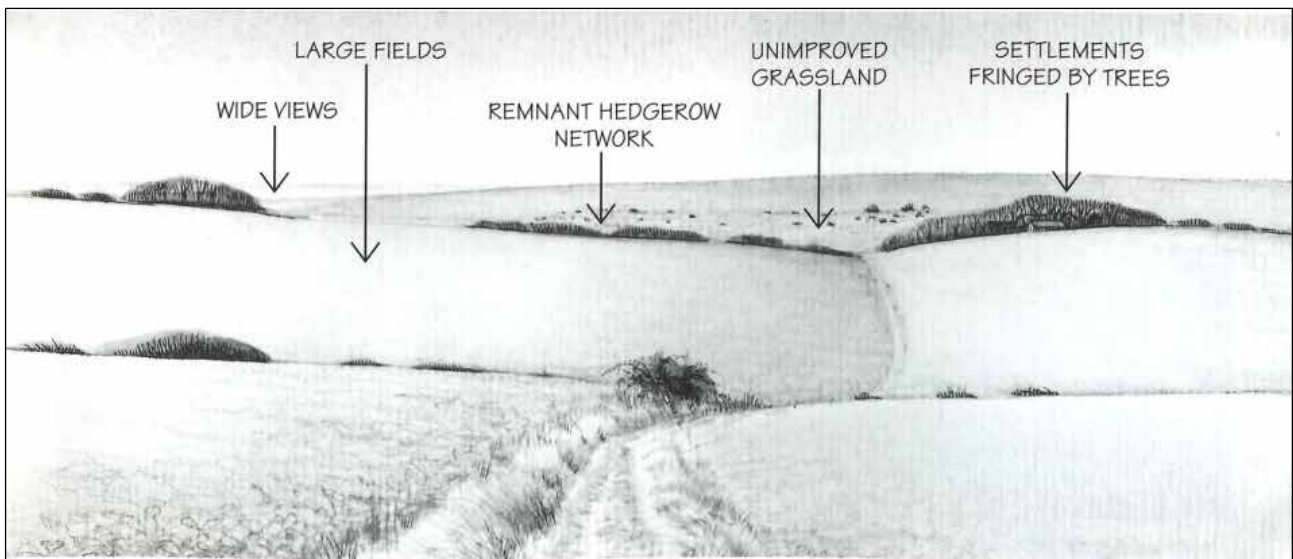


*White Cliffs of Dover viewpoint, chalk grassland, cliffs, foreshore and open horizons*

## Summary Characteristics

- Underlying chalk geology, spectacularly revealed in high white cliffs at the coast.
- Dramatic coastal landforms include cliffs, landslips and pebble beaches. Above the cliffs, the land forms a gently undulating coastal plateau punctuated by dry valleys.
- Relatively few trees, creating an open landscape, although there is secondary woodland in sheltered valleys and on landslips.
- Dominant land use is arable agriculture within large, open fields. Also extensive areas managed for recreation and/or nature conservation.
- Important semi-natural habitats include coastal chalk grassland, secondary woodland and scrub, cliffs, landslip and shoreline habitats.
- Extensive archaeological and heritage sites, particularly relating to defence and communication over two millennia.
- Limited settlement within the LCA, although Folkestone, Dover and smaller 20<sup>th</sup> Century coastal settlements are adjacent. Scattered farms in the east of the LCA.
- Relatively few roads, but A20 has an impact where it runs close to the coast.
- An exceptionally open and exposed landscape, with a strong awareness of the presence of the sea in sights, sounds and smells.
- Popular for recreation, with coastal path, Country Parks, visitor centre and golf courses.
- Prominent landmarks include White Cliffs, Dover Castle, Port of Dover and South Foreland lighthouse.





*Sketch of the White Cliffs Coast (looking inland) from 'The Kent Downs Landscape' (1995)*

## 8.1 Description

- 8.1.1 Rearing straight up out of the English Channel, the 'White Cliffs of Dover' form one of the country's most famous landmarks, lodged in the hearts and minds of millions of people. As such, this coastal LCA, stretching between Folkestone and Kingsdown, is possibly one of the best-known parts of the Kent Downs AONB. It contains a series of distinctive coastal landforms, including Shakespeare Cliff, Abbot's Cliff, the Warren coastal landslip, and the Dover Cliffs. It is extremely popular for recreation, with a well-used coastal path, National Trust visitor centre at the White Cliffs, and Country Parks at The Warren and Samphire Hoe.
- 8.1.2 This stretch of coastline is also well known for its long association with the defence of the realm. It has a long and rich military and maritime history spanning many centuries, including the Roman Lighthouse, Dover Castle, numerous Napoleonic sites, sound mirrors, WW2 sites and the Battle of Britain Memorial. Some of these sites (such as the coastal gun emplacements) are undesignated or underground and not immediately apparent in the landscape. Others, such as Dover Castle are highly prominent and symbolise constancy in the landscape.
- 8.1.3 The area has long played an important role in communications, and continues to do so. The pilot Bleriot landed here following his first cross-channel flight, and in 1899 Marconi made the first cross-Channel broadcast from near Boulogne to South Foreland Lighthouse. Communications masts remain prominent features. The Port of Dover continues to dominate seaward views in the western part of the area, and cross-channel ferries and other shipping are part of the seascape.
- 8.1.4 Although the area is in close proximity to the towns of Folkestone and Dover, its exposed coast and military uses mean that it contains little settlement. The coastal village of Kingsdown in the north-east was a Cinque Port in medieval times, and expanded as a fishing village. On the coast between Kingsdown and Dover is the village of St Margaret's at Cliffe, a planned settlement dating from the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century with large houses in grounds planted with numerous trees. This gives the settlement (a Conservation Area) a distinctive character, and examples of high-quality architecture continue today. Further inland, straight streets of houses are the result of speculative development in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century.

- 8.1.5 Weather, light and sea conditions have a profound effect on this coastline. In sunshine the cliffs are dazzling white, but when shrouded in mist they become much less distinct. Sea mist hovering over the landscape can create an ethereal quality.
- 8.1.6 The presence of the sea and the sheerness of the cliffs create a sense of vulnerability and danger in the view, but the sense of powerful nature is both uplifting and a reminder of our own insignificance. Set against this is an awareness of impermanence from the eroding coast and lost valleys. Views along the coast, over the harbour and across the channel to France are panoramic. The coastal paths and visitor hubs are very popular, and at times there is a strong awareness of the presence of people and cars. However, a short walk can enable a greater sense of remoteness and tranquillity. Sounds, including seagulls, skylarks and ferry sirens contribute to the sense of place.
- 8.1.7 Edward Hasted, writing in the 1790s, described the area around West Cliffe thus:  
*“The height and continuance of the hills and the depth and spacious width of the valleys, added to a wildness of nature, which is a leading feature throughout this part of the country, contribute altogether to its pleasantness; and the variety of prospects, as well as over the adjoining country, as the sea, and the coast of France beyond it, are very beautiful”.*

Shakespeare Cliff is named after a reference King Lear (Act 4 Scene. 6).

Scene VI: The Country Near Dover

*Edgar: Come on sir; here's the place: stand still – how fearful*

*And dizzy 't is to cast one's eyes so low!*

*The crows, and choughs, that wing the midway air.*

*Show scare so gross as beetles: Halfway down*

*Hangs one that gathers samphire; dreadful trade!*

*Methinks, he seems no bigger than his head.*

*The fishermen, that walk upon the beach,*

*Appear like mice; and yond tall anchoring bark,*

*Diminish'd to her cock; her cock, a buoy*

*Almost too small for sight. The murmuring surge,*

*That on the unnumber'd idle pebbles chafes,*

*Cannot be heard so high. - I'll look no more;*

*Lest my brain turn, and the deficient sight*

*Topple down headlong*



*The Warren Country Park and the White Cliffs as seen from Folkestone*



*Beach vegetation on shingle at the base of the chalk cliffs, Kingsdown*



*Flowers in cliff-top chalk grassland*



*Battle of Britain Memorial on the cliff top near Capel-Le-Ferne*



*Telecommunications masts above Broadlees Bottom*



*Houses in treed grounds in St Margaret's at Cliffe Conservation Area*



*Dover Castle from Fox Hill Down*

## 8.2 Local Character Areas

8.2.1 There are two Local Character Areas within the White Cliffs Coast LCA. **Folkestone Cliffs and The Warren** comprises the coastal strip between Folkestone and Dover, and lies to the south of the East Kent Downs LCA. **South Foreland** is a detached area of the AONB between Dover and Kingsdown.

### Folkestone Cliffs and The Warren

8.2.2 The coastal downs of the Dover-Folkestone Heritage Coast form a dramatic landscape of open, cliff-top fields, exposed chalk cliffs and tumbled, scrub-covered rock-falls along the undercliff at The Warren. The austerity of the cliff-top landscape is emphasised by the scarcity of trees and hedges. Only small pockets of scrub or tattered strips of remnant hedge fleck the smooth sweep of the landform. The beauty of this landscape lies in its scale and drama, and the sense of 'wilderness' which it offers. There are vivid contrasts in colours between the bright white chalk cliffs and the surrounding sea and vegetation. As well as chalk cliffs, this area contains dramatic coastal landslips at The Warren, and fine examples of clay and greensand cliffs at Copt Point. Samphire Hoe is an interesting artificial construction, forming an apron at the base of Shakespeare Cliff. It was created in the 1990s using spoil from creation of the Channel Tunnel, and was designed to emulate the undercliff of the Folkestone Warren. It contains a lagoon and coastal grassland. All of the cliffs, The Warren, Samphire Hoe and Copt Point are designated SSSI for their geological importance. The Warren is an international geological reference site for Cretaceous period stratigraphy and fossils. Its landslips, which include both chalk and clay, have been very extensively studied. Dinosaur footprints have recently been found in Lower Greensand rocks on the foreshore at Wear Bay.

8.2.3 This is also a rich cultural landscape, particularly with regard to defence heritage. Scattered along the coast are relics of WW2 observation posts, an early acoustic mirror at Abbot's Cliff, Lydden Spout rifle range, occasional Napoleonic remains (including a Martello Tower in Folkestone) and the Battle of Britain Memorial.

8.2.4 The Warren Coast is a popular landscape for recreation. In addition to the clifftop path, there are Country Parks at The Warren and Samphire Hoe, and a campsite at the foot of the cliffs. Views of the White Cliffs are enjoyed from Folkestone and Capel-Le-Ferne. There are also spectacular views from the railway between Folkestone and Dover, which runs along the foot of the cliffs. The railway line is vulnerable to damage during storms, and exposed sections are therefore protected by artificial sea defences. These structures influence the character of the shoreline.



*Abbots Cliff and The Warren as seen from Capel-Le-Ferne*

## South Foreland Chalk Coast

- 8.2.5 The gentle valleys which furrow the landscape between Dover and Kingsdown still show the pattern of enclosure, much of which was imposed upon the landscape in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Before then, the landscape was largely one of unenclosed downland or arable fields. Modern farming, with its lack of need for hedges and trees, is beginning to return this character to the landscape, leaving only occasional overgrown hedges to contain and emphasise the openness. Scattered clumps of scrub often mark the locations of military positions.
- 8.2.6 Behind and beyond the chalk cliffs, the landscape and seascape of this coastal section of the AONB epitomises the windswept Channel coastline of the imagination – tufts of windblown thorn and scrub cling to the edges of the huge, rolling fields and the landscape is dominated by the vast horizons of sea and sky. This unique area is one of the most open and wild landscapes in Kent, and is literally and metaphorically ‘on the edge’. The sparse tree cover and the rolling, open countryside allow coastal landmarks such as Dover Castle, South Foreland Lighthouse and the Dover Patrol Memorial to stand out. It also results in an open landscape of uncluttered skylines which is very vulnerable to any form of development. The radio masts, which tower above Broadlees Bottom, dominate the locality. However, they are also relatively rare surviving communications structures from the Battle of Britain, and as such are important elements in the cultural landscape which are now Listed Buildings.
- 8.2.7 The South Foreland Heritage Coast lies between Kingsdown and Dover, and despite the intensive agriculture, still contains some strips of ecologically rich chalk grassland and scrub along the cliff tops, which have in places been expanded inland in recent years. These areas are not only important for their scientific interest but also form a major contribution to the sense of naturalness of this small undeveloped stretch of coastline. The Landscape Character Area contains and abuts important coastal and marine habitats associated with the chalk coast, including intertidal rock and shingle habitats at the cliff base.



*South Foreland Lighthouse seen across open arable fields. The patches of scrub mark the locations of WW2 gun emplacements*

## 8.3 Landscape Condition, Sensitivities and Forces for Change

- 8.3.1 The 2004 Assessment identified this landscape as being in poor condition, as well as being of high sensitivity. In the intervening years a number of projects have taken place to enhance the landscape and improve its accessibility and management of visitors, including The Warren and Samphire Hoe Country Parks, and the White Cliffs of Dover National Trust visitor centre.
- 8.3.2 Projects to manage and restore habitats and heritage features include the reclamation of cliff top grassland from arable land, extension of land in National Trust ownership, and the opening of Fan Bay WW2 shelter to the public. Today, the condition of this landscape is improving, but it still faces a number of different challenges.



*The White Cliffs of Dover Visitor Centre (with green roof) and associated car park above Dover Harbour and ferry terminal*



*Cliff-top grassland (shown here above Abbot's Cliff) is vulnerable to coastal squeeze*

<i>Issue</i>	<i>Landscape sensitivities and potential landscape impacts</i>
Coastal processes, climate change and natural forces	<p>This is a dynamic coastal environment which is strongly influenced by a range of coastal processes including erosion by the sea, frost shattering of rock, longshore drift and beach deposition. The white colour of the cliffs is because constant erosion allows previously-unexposed white chalk to be revealed on the surface.</p> <p>As the cliffs gradually become eroded and retreat inland, cliff top grassland habitats become vulnerable to coastal squeeze.</p> <p>Natural coastal processes can cause problems where they impact on man-made structures. At Kingsdown, coastal defences have been toppled and breached. At The Warren, coastal erosion and landslips have required the shoring-up of the railway line at the foot of the cliffs, and additional sea defences.</p> <p>Climate change is likely to exacerbate the risk and rate of loss due to higher sea levels and an increase in the frequency and intensity of storms.</p>
Air and water	<p>Lack of groundwater in the chalk is a major concern, particularly given that demands for abstraction are likely to increase with population growth. There is also concern about air quality, and haze caused by air pollution caused by marine and road transport, on both sides of the Channel.</p>
Coastal habitats	<p>The cliff face and cliff top grassland is ecologically internationally important, and also provides the setting for several coastal landmarks. Some sections of coastal grassland are currently in 'unfavourable recovering' condition, reflecting improved management. The undercliff habitats of The Warren are also currently in an 'unfavourable recovering' condition. There is concern regarding 'coastal squeeze' of the belt of grassland running along the cliff top sandwiched between the edge of the cliff and the arable land behind, particularly as this strip of land is also occupied by the coastal footpath. In high use areas the quality of the protected cliff top grassland is being damaged by over use from recreational visitors and disturbance is likely to affect other vulnerable species and habitats.</p> <p>During the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, coastal grassland has been lost to arable agriculture and to woodland growth (such as around the Bleriot Memorial). The extent of coastal grassland is currently being increased by moving the boundary of arable fields further inland, and reverting former arable land back to grassland.</p>
Land management changes	<p>Recent decades have seen an intensification of agricultural land use, resulting in loss of hedgerows and wildlife corridors, which reduces connectivity of wildlife habitat. However, hedgerow loss also recreates the open feel of the unenclosed downland which previously covered this area. Crop choices affect the seasonal patterns and appearance of the landscape. Around Kingsdown there is a noticeable use of land for horse grazing, resulting in subdivision of fields with white tape and electric fencing. The new Environmental Land Management Scheme (ELMS) offers opportunities to restore and reinforce valued characteristics of the landscape.</p>

<i>Issue</i>	<i>Landscape sensitivities and potential landscape impacts</i>
Recreation	The continuing popularity of this landscape for recreation brings its own challenges, and can also result in impacts on the very things which people come to seek, such as tranquillity, solitude and closeness to nature. Concentrations of visitors at the White Cliffs visitor centre can result in path erosion, littering and the presence of cars. These problems could be exacerbated if visitor numbers continue to increase.
Military archaeology	Many military structures were abandoned, demolished or ploughed-over in the second half of the 20 <sup>th</sup> Century. Some were covered through 'Operation Eyesore' in the 1970s but are now being revealed. Other archaeological sites are being damaged by ploughing or vegetation growth, including Connaught Barracks which are a Scheduled Monument 'at risk'. There is still a general lack of awareness and appreciation with regard to the area's military archaeology.
Development	The open, expansive character of this landscape means that it is particularly vulnerable to development which affects its skylines and/ or its open character, sense of naturalness and remoteness. This is true of development within or outside the AONB. The landscape is vulnerable to many different types of development, including housing, traffic management, port-related development and recreation. Offshore developments such as wind farms would affect the seascapes visible from the area. Highways are also a detractor within the landscape, and their future sensitive management is an important priority.



*Seawall toppled by storm, Kingsdown*



*Path erosion around viewpoint near White Cliffs visitor centre*



*Landslips are not uncommon at The Warren, and the coastal railway line requires sea defences.*



*Subdivision of land for equestrian use, with electric fencing and white tape*



*Reclaimed chalk grassland from arable land behind the cliff top, near St Margaret's lighthouse*



*New wheelchair-accessible path at the White Cliffs Visitor Centre, with the ferry terminal beyond.*

## 8.4 Landscape Management Recommendations

### Aspirational Landscape Strategy

The landscape characteristics of expansiveness, relative lack of settlement and generally open horizons are retained. The area's rich military archaeology is understood, celebrated and managed. Landmarks such as Dover Castle, South Foreland Lighthouse, the Dover Patrol Memorial, the Battle of Britain Memorial and the radio masts remain focal points in the landscape and seascape, and St Margaret's at Cliffe village retains its special character.

The ecological value of the landscape is enhanced, with an extensive and linked network of chalk grassland in good condition. Cliff and shoreline habitats are also considered, recognising the constantly-changing nature of these environments. Recreation is well-managed so that people are able to enjoy and experience the landscape without damaging it.

#### Protect

- Protect archaeology, including 20<sup>th</sup> Century military sites. Encourage further research and management of these sites, and promote public access where possible.
- Protect open horizons, the sense of expansiveness and the relative lack of development within the landscape.
- Protect and enhance views from viewpoints and the coastal path towards landmark features and out to sea.
- Protect and enhance the distinctive character of St Margaret's at Cliffe Conservation Area, maintaining the relationship between houses and gardens.
- Protect the naturalness, drama and relative remoteness of the coastal landscapes.

#### Manage

- Manage agricultural land to enhance its biodiversity value and connectivity, for example through the creation of linked grassland strips on field margins or the conversion to permanent grassland.
- Maintain the existing hedgerow network, particularly those running along the contours.
- Continue to manage and expand cliff-top grassland and the grassland components of the Warren undercliff.
- Conserve pockets of scrub and trees.
- Work with landowners to reduce the impacts of equestrian land uses.
- Manage the existing Public Rights of Way network and look at extending it, particularly where this can tie-in with wider initiatives to promote and enable sustainable transport.

#### Plan

- Develop long-term strategies to disperse visitor pressure in a manner which is sensitive to both the landscape and ecology.
- Consider future strategies to retain coastal access following possible loss of cliffs to coastal erosion.
- Promote partnership working with other organisations working on coastal and maritime heritage in the vicinity.
- Develop Heritage Coast Management Plans.
- Given the importance of this area of coast to the nation, consider a land assembly approach to protective ownership and management to enable integrated management and dispersal of impacts.

- Work with Highways authorities to increase the biodiversity value of verges and hedgerows without compromising safety.
- Within the setting of the LCA, work with Local Planning Authorities and designers to achieve the best possible landscape and ecological integration and minimal impact on views, with compensation achieved for lost qualities.
- Encourage partnership working between different Local Authorities, agencies and community groups to enable seamless working across the AONB. Consider environmental/ landscape limits in planning and placemaking.

## 9.0 Darent Valley

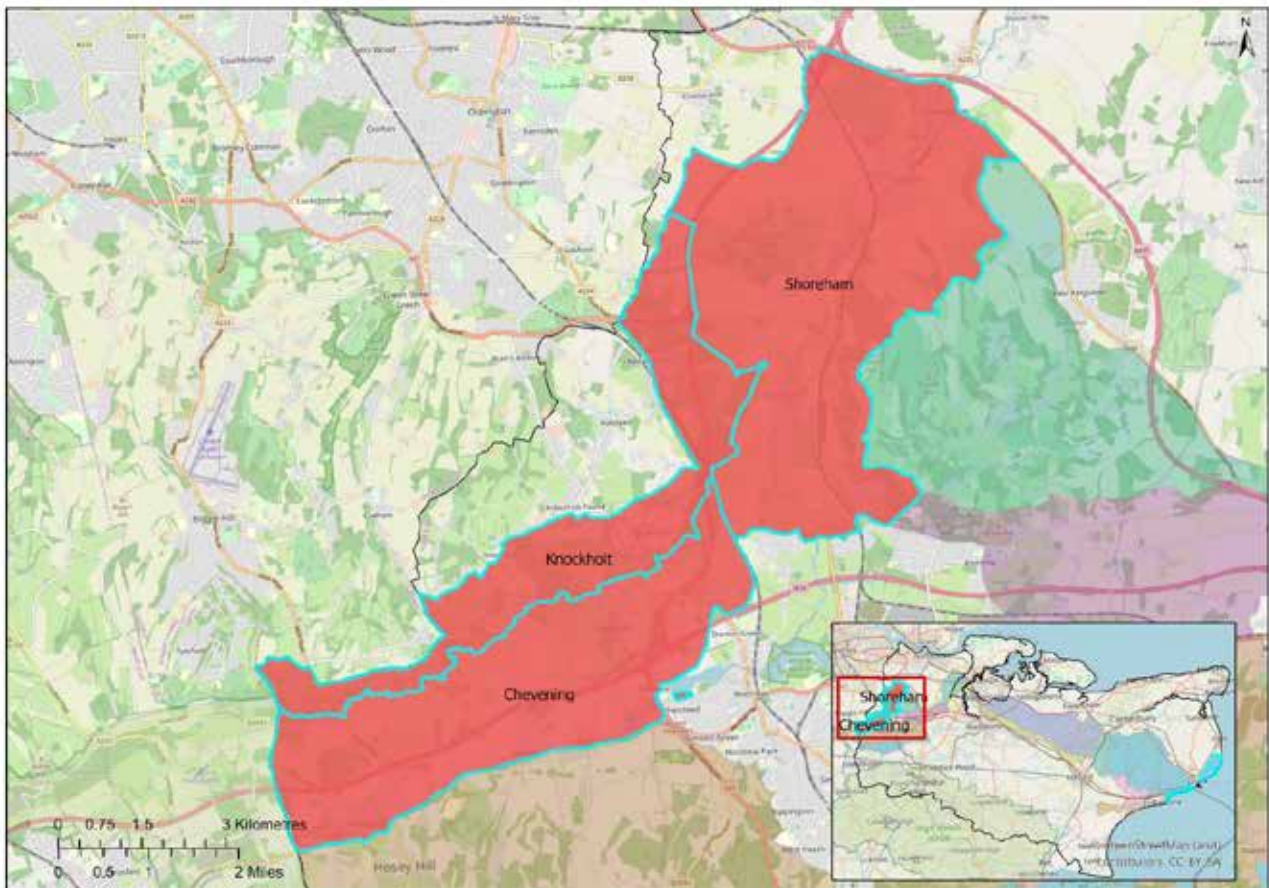
### Landscape Character Area 4A

**Landscape Character Type:** River Valley

**Districts/ Boroughs:** Sevenoaks; Bromley

**Landscape/Countryside Partnerships:** Darent Valley Landscape Partnership; North West Kent Countryside Partnership

**Location and Context:** This LCA is at the far western end of the Kent Downs AONB, and follows the river Darent from the AONB boundary at Westerham to the AONB boundary at Farningham. It includes the villages of Eynsford, Shoreham and Westerham. The Sevenoaks Greensand Ridge LCA is to the south, and the East Kent Downs LCA is to the east.



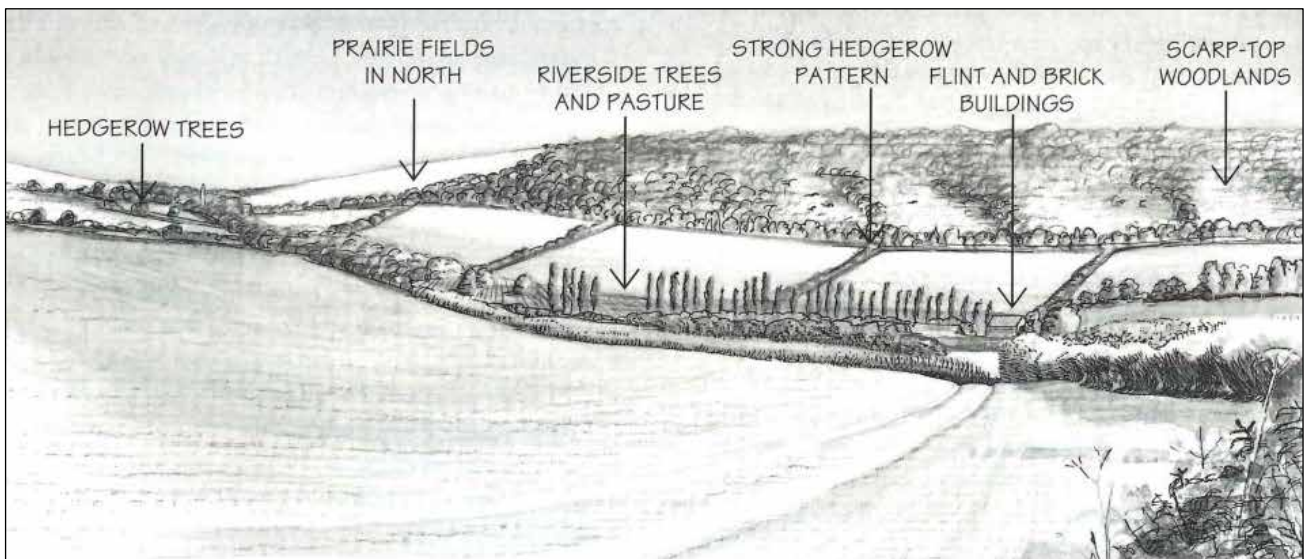
*Location map for Darent Valley LCA, also showing Local Character Areas of Knockholt, Chevening and Shoreham*



*Darent Valley scene at Castle Farm near Eynsford, with lavender fields in the foreground. A line of poplars marks the River Darent. The Knockholt wooded ridge can be seen on the left of the picture.*

## Summary Characteristics

- Underlying cretaceous chalk geology, with Greensand in the river valley in the south of the LCA.
- Overlying clay-with-flints from weathered chalk, and some alluvial deposits of sand, gravel and clay alongside river.
- Spring-fed River Darent starts flowing east through LCA then turns north. Valley floor generally wide and flat, with convex valley sides getting steeper towards the top. Dramatic chalk scarps above Westerham and Chevening, and east of Otford.
- Blocks of woodland on valley sides, and parkland, riverside and hedgerow trees, create a well-treed landscape.
- Mosaic of land uses, including arable farmland, pasture, woodland and parkland.
- Field patterns variable, but generally largest and most regular in shape at base of valley sides. Most fields divided by low hedgerows.
- Semi-natural habitats include woodland (yew/ whitebeam/ oak/ ash/ beech and oak/ beech/ chestnut coppice), chalk grassland, parkland, wood pasture, veteran trees and riparian habitats.
- Long history of settlement going back to Roman times. Rich archaeology including Roman villa, medieval castle and Bishop's Palace and several country estates.
- A series of nucleated riverside villages with concentrations of attractive historic buildings including houses, churches, bridges and fords. Materials include brick, flint, ragstone and weatherboarding.
- Network of older roads and lanes along valley floors and up valley sides. M25 follows valley side in north of LCA, and valley floor in south.
- Historic villages, parklands, bridges and archaeological sites give the landscape a strong sense of time-depth.
- Strong cultural associations with the 19<sup>th</sup> Century painter Samuel Palmer.
- Woodland, grassland, arable crops, trees and distinctive lavender fields create a diverse and colourful landscape mosaic.
- Spectacular views across the valley from valley sides, with the Greensand Ridge forming the backdrop to the south. Sweeping chalk scarps frame views from within the valley.



*Sketch of Darent Valley from 'The Kent Downs Landscape' (1995)*

## 9.1 Description

- 9.1.1 This Landscape Character Area comprises the valley of the River Darent, and the chalk scarp slopes to the north, west and east of the river. It includes several riverside settlements, including Westerham, parts of Brasted, Chevening, Shoreham and Eynsford. The chalk stream of the Darent is the most westerly of the three rivers cutting through the Kent Downs and is strongly contained throughout its extent in the AONB by steep and often wood-topped scarps, and by the greensand ridge to the south. From Westerham, the Darent flows east through the wide, clay vale between the chalk and the greensand, before swinging north at Sevenoaks to cut through the Downs. North of Shoreham the chalk scarps widen out, supporting large, undivided arable fields which reveal the open, curving back of the chalk downs.
- 9.1.2 There is a considerable variation in soils within the Landscape Character Area, which in turn has affected land use and landscape patterns. The highest areas, on the tops of the valley sides, comprise heavy clay with flints soils, which are difficult to work and therefore were historically often left as woodland. The scarp slopes on the valley sides contain thin chalk soils which support chalk grassland. The gault clay found in the valley floor is sticky but fertile, and improved by alluvial deposits from the river. The valley floor and lower sides have therefore been used primarily for arable agriculture, with floodplain pastures alongside the river. Some valley-floor fields are still demarcated by ditches, known as 'wet fencing', but there is a strong pattern of hedged fields on the lower valley sides. The name 'Darent' comes from the Celtic for 'oak river' and the river still meanders for much of its length through a narrow, tree-lined corridor. However, the river itself is not a prominent feature in the landscape.
- 9.1.3 The Darent valley has been called "one of the earliest cradles of English settlement in Kent" and its long history of habitation and passage has clearly shaped its present character. There is a rich legacy of Roman remains, including Lullingstone Roman Villa, and several significant medieval buildings, including the Bishop's Palace at Otford and castles at Lullingstone and Eynsford. The peaceful, rural character of the river valley today belies a busier and more industrial past. By the time of the Norman Conquest, the natural course of the river had already been diverted to power watermills, a tradition

which continued until the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century and manufactured a range of goods including paper. Today only converted mill-houses and occasional ditches remain to indicate the former industrial nature of the valley.

- 9.1.4 The Darent Valley has been used as a transport route for millennia. River transport aside, the oldest routes are likely to be the tracks along the ridge and base of the scarp now followed by the North Downs Way and the Pilgrims' Way. Historic droveways with names such as 'Hogtrough Hill' link the valley floor with the higher pastures. Many of these lanes are sunken, and lined with trees and hedgerows. The A25, which runs east-west through Sevenoaks was originally a turnpike, and a tollhouse can still be seen in Brasted village. The valley floor contains various railway lines, and most recently the valley has been used as a road and motorway route. There are viewpoints on A roads (such as south of Eynsford) where the valley can be appreciated.
- 9.1.5 Long views can be experienced within the valley, and there are also panoramic views across the valleys from the adjacent scarps. Despite its proximity to London, it is possible to experience a sense of tranquillity and isolation away from major roads. One of its most valued features is the sense of changelessness which can be experienced in parts of the area, particularly close to the River Darent. The unusual colours and textures in this landscape (such as the purple lavender fields and bright green hop gardens) contribute to its distinctive character. Large trees are also a distinctive feature, in parks, fields and hedgerows, and alongside watercourses. There is a cultural association with early-19<sup>th</sup> Century artist Samuel Palmer, who lived and worked around Shoreham. His paintings evoke the ethereal qualities of the landscape (which he described as an 'earthly paradise'), and some of their locations remain identifiable today.
- 9.1.6 The Darent Valley is popular for recreation, and contains several visitor attractions including Lullingstone Roman Villa, Lullingstone Country Park, Lullingstone Castle and Gardens, Eynsford Castle, and attractive villages such as Westerham and Eynsford. It is one of the closest and most accessible rural areas to London, being only 17 miles from Westminster Bridge. It is easily accessible by road and rail, and also on foot via the Darent Valley Path, North Downs Way and Pilgrims' Way. These paths enable the views to be appreciated both from the valley floor, and from the valley sides.

## 9.2 Local Character Areas

- 9.2.1 There are three Local Character Areas: *Knockholt* comprises the wooded scarp on the western side of the valley; *Shoreham* comprises the northern valley floor and eastern scarp, and *Chevening* comprises the western valley floor between the chalk scarp to the north and the Greensand Ridge to the south.

## Chevening (formerly West Darent)

- 9.2.2 The Chevening Local Character Area conforms to the typical scarp-dominated landscape pattern which characterises the Kent Downs. The woodlands of the upper scarp (within the Knockholt Local Character Area) are bordered by pastures on the slopes below them. These are contained by a band of intensively-cultivated arable fields on the fertile strip of soil along the scarp foot. Below this strip the heavy gault clay of the valley bottom supports a more mixed agricultural landscape. A series of springs rise where the chalk meets the impervious clay, and feed small streams and pools. The intensive arable cultivation on the scarp foot has resulted in a sparse network of narrow hedges, which contrasts with the smaller, more irregular pastures, surrounded by thick hedges and hedgerow trees, which characterise the clay valley. The river itself is not a dominant feature in the landscape.
- 9.2.3 The village cores retain a distinctive character in which vernacular building styles and materials are very evident. Set along the route of what is now the A25, they would historically have functioned as coaching stops, and several coaching inns still survive. There are a series of country houses surrounded by parkland, reflecting its attractive countryside, and its location a comfortable carriage-ride from London. Parkland and estate architecture is a local characteristic, and is particularly noticeable around the Chevening Estate - official home of the British Foreign Secretary. Combe Bank (now a school) was designed by Robert Adam and is also set within ornamental grounds. The ancient trackway now known as the Pilgrims' Way enters Kent along the scarp foot above Westerham, and follows lanes and tracks along the valley side. It is a strong visual and cultural feature in the landscape.
- 9.2.4 In recent years, the building of the M25 and M26 motorways through the middle of this vale, while continuing the tradition of this area as a transport corridor, has damaged the visual integrity and tranquillity of the landscape, and altered the focus of the valley away from the river and its historic villages.



*View south-west across the Darent Valley with Chevening Estate parkland in the foreground*

## Shoreham (formerly North Darent)

- 9.2.5 At Sevenoaks, as the River Darent turns north, it passes from a flat arable flood plain, where a string of new lakes indicates the presence of former gravel quarries, into the seclusion of the rural, northern valley. Here the character derives from the cohesion between the steep wood-topped scarps, the lower, intensively farmed scarp foot with its strong pattern of hedges and shaws (thick strips of mature broadleaf trees and small blocks of once-coppiced woodland), and the thick belts of trees along the river, road and railway in the valley bottom. The wide curve of the valley is a dominant element and features in the long views. Although the river is largely hidden from view, thin Lombardy poplars along the banks indicate its line, and create a focal point. In the north, the ordered pattern of hedgerows gives way to the ancient, unenclosed wood-pastures of Lullingstone Park, one of the best surviving examples of wood pasture with veteran trees in Kent, and a Registered Historic Park. The vast chalky expanses of the open arable fields above Eynsford are broken by occasional thick, overgrown hedges or small shaws, which cast striking lines across the landscape. Avenues of beech trees line some roads up the valley sides. The southern part of the eastern valley side supports a band of ancient woodland on the steeper slopes, and an important area of chalk grassland survives below the woodland at Fackenden Down Nature Reserve.
- 9.2.6 The rural landscape has many historic elements, including a prominently-sited prehistoric barrow at Otford Mount from where there are panoramic views. Exceptionally attractive and distinctive mill villages such as Eynsford and Shoreham are clustered around bridges or fords on the river. Farms scattered throughout the valley frequently display vernacular building styles and materials, including timber framing, weatherboarding, flint and brick, and there are some surviving oast houses. Other structures such as Eynsford railway viaduct add to the character of the area, and the purple lavender fields around Castle Farm catch the eye. Fort Farningham was constructed in the 1890s as part of the defence of London, and was used in WW2 as a decoy to divert enemy bombers away from nearby Biggin Hill airfield.
- 9.2.7 The appeal of the built form and settlements in this area tends to mask the loss of some historical landscape features such as water meadows and field boundaries. Buildings in village extensions are not always sympathetically designed and are often far more prominent in the landscape.



*Darent Valley scene near Eynsford. The chalk slopes of the valley side can be seen between the arches of Eynsford Viaduct. In the foreground, the River Darent winds between water meadows*

## Knockholt

- 9.2.8 The dense woodlands along the top of the western escarpment conceal a small-scale landscape of mixed farming and deciduous coppice woodlands (including sweet chestnut coppice), which stretches north towards Bromley. Several dry valleys extending out of the AONB are the dominant landform and give the countryside a gently rolling character. There are occasional white scars of former quarry faces.
- 9.2.9 Much of the woodland is recognised as ancient woodland, and the incidence of mature standards, including those within coppice-managed woodlands, affirms the historical nature of the natural features. Woodland species include beech and yew, as well as oak and ash. Small details such as woodbanks are important. In addition the small, isolated farms indicate a strong time-depth and add to the distinctiveness of the landscape. The tree cover restricts views, creating a stronger sense of enclosure, although there are spectacular views across the Darent Valley from the scarp itself.
- 9.2.10 Behind the scarp it is an area of scattered settlement, where overgrown hedges and hedgerow trees are interspersed by ornamental conifers, along with an increasing amount of pony paddock fencing and suburbanisation. The M25 motorway, although hidden in a cutting for much of its length, exerts considerable influence on the landscape through the background roar of traffic, the urbanising characteristics of the infrastructure and the physical barrier it forms between the Knockholt area and the Darent Valley itself. The proximity of Bromley and outer London imposes an urbanising pressure on the agricultural nature of the area, and there is a major ongoing redevelopment of the MOD site at Fort Halstead for housing, although it is partly contained within woodland.



*A typical scene within the Knockholt Local Character Area, with narrow lanes, woodland and scattered farms and houses.*



*Valley side and wooded ridge as seen looking north across the Darent Valley from above Westerham (within the Greensand Ridge Landscape Character Area)*



*Valley-side chalk grassland at Fackenden Down Nature Reserve*



*Westerham Village*



*Historic bridge, ford and church at Eynsford*



*Chevening, with the chalk scarp behind*



*Open fields on fertile land at the foot of the scarp. The lane on the left is part of the Pilgrims' Way*

## 9.3 Landscape Condition, Sensitivities and Forces for Change

- 9.3.1 The 1995 Assessment raised a number of concerns about forces for change affecting the Darent Valley landscape, including the negative impacts of motorways (visual - including insensitive woodland infill / screen planting; audible, and physical - the isolation of small sections of AONB). It also highlighted fragmentation of farm holdings; the gradual introduction of urban-edge land uses such as horse pasture and golf courses into the rural landscape; loss of open sweeping horizons at the northern end of the valley due to development and infrastructure; fragmentation of historic land use patterns around villages; loss of watermeadows, and over-abstraction water resulting in reduced river flows.
- 9.3.2 The 2004 Assessment also noted the presence of the motorway, road and rail corridors; the localised fragmentation of the landscape pattern through hedgerow loss; increase in amenity land uses, and residential development of poor or indistinct design. However, these were considered to be intrusions within a landscape which still retained a coherent landscape pattern, flowing from the wooded ridge to the valley bottom. In 2004, the majority of the area was considered to be in moderate condition, with the Knockholt Local Character Area in very good condition.
- 9.3.3 More recent Assessments by the Darent Valley Landscape Partnership and Local Authorities have identified a number of areas of concern which are still ongoing and are described in the following table. As in 2004, these issues are set within a wider landscape which manages to retain its integrity despite the significant pressures and which is an attractive and popular place for visitors and for local people. It is also important to note that this LCA has supported (and continues to support) some of the longest running and comprehensive networks of Stewardship schemes since 1994 covering contiguous farms. This has included 17km of new hedgerows, pollarding 140 riverside trees and over 200ha of arable reversion to grassland. There have also been a number of enhancements regarding improvements to water flow in the River Darent itself. Further landscape enhancements and projects have been achieved through the Darent Valley Landscape Partnership, such as securing a coherent approach to habitat management (including chalk grasslands and woodlands), with further plans to increase accessibility by extending the Darent Valley Path.
- 9.3.4 Despite the forces for change acting on the Darent Valley over many years, the appearance of the landscape remains remarkably consistent, as shown in the photographs below. Field patterns and tree lines remain almost identical, although there does appear to be an increase in woodland/ scrub at the base of the scarp.



*Looking west across the Darent Valley from Fackenden Lane in 1995 (above) and 2017 (below)*

<i>Issue</i>	<i>Landscape sensitivities and potential landscape impacts</i>
The River Darent	<p>Water flow within the River Darent is gradually improving following reductions in abstraction rates, but there are still opportunities to improve its ecological value. However the river remains heavily modified for much of its length, limiting its ecology. Non-native species occur in the river, including Himalayan Balsam, and exotic fish. Japanese Knotweed is also a problem within the LCA.</p> <p>Many of the riparian alder trees are reaching maturity and may soon be lost from the landscape.</p> <p>Past changes to the floodplain, including loss of water-meadows, have impacted on the character of the valley floor and made it feel more open. They have also impacted on the extent and range of riverside and valley floor habitats.</p> <p>Access to the upper parts of the Darent Valley is currently limited, but there are plans to extend the Darent Valley Path which would enhance the potential for sustainable access and recreation close to the river.</p>

<i>Issue</i>	<i>Landscape sensitivities and potential landscape impacts</i>
Transport and infrastructure	<p>The M25 follows the Darent Valley for the length of this Landscape Character Area, and the M20 forms its northern boundary. In the Chevening Local Character Area the M25 follows the valley floor, but in the Shoreham Local Character Area it runs through woodlands on the valley side, and is in a cutting for much of its length. Highway infrastructure and depots are detractors from the character and qualities of the landscape. The motorways act as physical barriers to access across and within the valley, and isolate small fragments of the AONB. The road and its associated linear planting forms a clear line in the landscape, and is particularly noticeable in elevated sections and where there are bridges. The sound of traffic is often noticeable, and can resound off the valley sides in certain conditions. Air pollution is also a concern. The older roads and the railway line are also visible, but as they generally follow the contours they are less visually intrusive. Smaller lanes are vulnerable to heavy traffic and highways engineering, especially in proximity to main roads. Insensitive traffic calming and other highway schemes can also be detrimental to traditional village character. Traffic is an issue throughout the Landscape Character Area, with problems exacerbated by vehicles using rural lanes to avoid busy main roads. There is concern that future expansion/ upgrading of the motorway and road network along with increasing traffic numbers will have further impacts on the valley. A line of pylons crosses the valley between Shoreham and Eynsford which are particularly noticeable on horizons.</p>
Development	<p>Creeping, cumulative suburbanisation of rural areas (for example through brick property boundary walls and elaborate gates) is an ongoing issue within this Landscape Character Area, as is linear development between villages. The area is also under pressure to provide additional housing, particularly around Sevenoaks. Large-scale development would be out of keeping with the rural character of the Landscape Character Area, and is likely to contribute to other issues such as light pollution, increased traffic and recreational pressure.</p>
Recreation pressures	<p>The Darent Valley contains 'honeypot' sites where visitors are concentrated, leading to issues including litter, traffic, parking, and path erosion if sites are not properly managed and/ or there is insufficient infrastructure to cope with visitor numbers. In addition to amenity uses such as country parks and golf clubs, there are also new forms of recreation in the area (such as paintballing) which can impact on the landscape and habitats (particularly woodland). The Darent Valley is popular with cyclists and there are occasional conflicts between cycling clubs and other road users.</p>

<i>Issue</i>	<i>Landscape sensitivities and potential landscape impacts</i>
Land management	<p>In parts of the LCA there is a lack of co-ordinated management of habitats within the Darent Valley (grassland, wetlands, woodlands etc.) which will hopefully be addressed through the Darent Valley Landscape Partnership. Elsewhere, Stewardship schemes to enhance the ecological value of contiguous farm holdings have been highly co-ordinated. They have included reversion of riverside arable land, and restoration of chalk grassland and parkland formerly used for arable. They have also enhanced the management of archaeological features, and helped to address the past loss of field boundaries. This loss, particularly in the valley floor and on lower valley sides, created a more open feel to the landscape. In some parts of the LCA, where arable land use has replaced pasture, hedgerows are no longer required to be stockproof and are therefore poorly managed or patched with other materials. Dairy farming has largely ceased in this area in recent years, but there are some non-dairy livestock. The new Environmental Land Management Scheme (ELMS) offers opportunities to restore and reinforce valued characteristics of the landscape.</p> <p>Management of trees and woodlands is a concern in the Darent Valley. There are a number of parkland trees which are unmanaged, and the grounds of Combe Bank are considered to be 'at risk'. Management of veteran trees at Lullingstone Country Park is minimal, and much of the woodland appears to be unmanaged. However, there are exceptions such as Chevening Park, which has seen an extensive restoration and tree planting programme (completed by 2013). Hedgerow and infield trees as well as the treed component of the villages are important features of the landscape and at risk from neglect, inappropriate management, lack of replacement planting and tree disease.</p>
Anti-social behaviour	<p>Flytipping (of both trade and domestic waste) is an issue within this Landscape Character Area, particularly in secluded wooded areas. Vandalism is also a problem. There is also some illegal use of 4x4 vehicles on tracks and public rights of way.</p>
Climate change and natural factors	<p>Climate change is likely to have an impact on the River Darent by raising water temperatures, thereby affecting the composition of fish and plant species. The chalk stretch of the River Darent is dependent on winter rainfall for recharge, so changes in weather patterns will affect water flows. Climate change is also likely to affect trees and woodlands (for example beech can be badly affected by drought) and to impact on crop/ land use choices. It is likely that vines will become a more dominant land use in coming years. Trees and woodlands are also vulnerable to a range of pests and diseases, with Ash Dieback currently a major cause for concern.</p>



*M25 running through the Darent Valley LCA near Westerham*



*Anti fly-tipping notice, Chelsfield Lane*



*Over-mature parkland trees*



*Positive management of woodland- coppice with public access*



*Hedgerow loss in the Darent Valley near Shoreham*

## 9.4 Landscape Management Recommendations

### Aspirational Landscape Strategy

The River Darent is a thriving, healthy watercourse which is accessible in sustainable ways and appreciated. Local people and visitors are welcomed to nationally-significant archaeological sites and attractive villages within an intact historic landscape setting. Historic villages retain their special character and the impacts of traffic are reduced.

Habitats such as chalk grassland, woodland, rivers, streams and wetlands benefit from active and co-ordinated management at the landscape scale, and support a variety of species as well as sustainable recreation. Historic parkland and woodpasture is managed and enhanced for future generations to enjoy. Landscape patterns are strengthened, with a distinction between valley-floor pastures, regular-shaped larger fields on the lower valley sides, and chalk grassland and woodland on the scarp itself. Motorways and other infrastructure are integrated into the landscape and their impact is reduced through careful management and the application of technology. The suburbanising effects of development on the landscape are reduced.

#### Protect

- Keep scarp slopes and ridgelines free of development. This is particularly important where horizons are open.
- Protect the distinctive character of villages through use of locally-distinctive materials (e.g. brick, tile, ragstone, flint and weatherboarding) and careful designs. Highways and traffic calming measures should be as sympathetic as possible to the rural character and context of settlements.
- Protect surviving pockets of rural/ historic landscape such as irregular riverside pastures between villages to retain rural character and prevent merging of settlements along road corridors.
- Protect historic/ archaeological features and veteran trees – including well-known sites such as Lullingstone Roman Villa, but also less well known or designated features such as the historic lanes, the Pilgrims' Way and sites of riverside mills.
- Protect the settings of historic sites, particularly where they are potentially affected by development or infrastructure.

#### Manage

- Manage the River Darent, encouraging in-stream river enhancement and river restoration. Work with the Environment Agency to enhance water quality. Manage riparian habitats, removing invasive species and promoting planting of native species such as willow, alder, hornbeam and poplar along the course of the river. Encourage recreational access to the river banks.
- Restore farm ponds and ditches.
- Manage visitor attractions, particularly where numbers of visitors are causing detriment to the landscape. Improve sustainable access into the wider landscape through enhancements to the public rights of way network (including riverside paths) and enable visitors to spread out over a larger area without detracting from it. Work with recreation providers such as golf clubs to promote good environmental management.
- Manage woodlands, shaws and trees outside woodlands, including woodland planted as motorway screening, to achieve a diversity of age and species of trees which includes locally-characteristic species such as yew, holly, beech and oak. Continue to integrate motorways into the landscape using sensitive, non-linear tree planting. Maintain coppice management in areas where this is

already taking place, and look to extend active woodland management. Take forward careful planting schemes to retain the trees outside of woodlands component of the land and streetscapes. Be mindful of the need to retain noise masking of traffic.

- Continue/ improve the co-ordination of habitat management throughout the LCA, including the grazing/ cutting of chalk grasslands. Aim to build upon and continue the long-standing arable reversion projects throughout this area as a means of improving the connectivity of habitats and increasing resilience to climate change.
- Manage parkland, woodpasture and veteran trees, promoting Parkland Management Plans where appropriate. Encourage replanting of replacement trees which will become the parkland and veteran trees of the future.
- Manage farmland, encouraging management of hedgerows and planting of hedgerow trees, particularly on lower slopes. Promote new hedgerow and roadside trees from existing hedge stock.
- Promote grassland wildlife habitats on field margins and fallow fields, and relate land management to the underlying geology.

#### Plan

- Improve the urban edge of existing settlements along the valley, using new planting and existing hedgerows to contain built form, and to provide links between settlements and the wider countryside. These could include parkland-style planting where appropriate. Avoid suburban-style property boundary and entrance treatments, and avoid the use of non-native conifer species.
- Restore field boundaries where they have been lost in order to break up large fields, to minimise soil erosion, and to slow water runoff.
- Develop plans to restore water meadows and create additional floodplain and riparian habitats to increase the visibility of the river and restore distinctive habitats which are now largely absent.
- Develop Village Design Statements to retain and promote local distinctiveness in built form.
- Consider developing the visitor infrastructure, in order to increase the area's visitor capacity, but without detriment to the rural landscape character. Promote awareness of the cultural heritage of the area, including links to the artist Samuel Palmer.
- Extend the Darent Valley Path to Westerham (an aspiration for many communities), whilst remembering that placement of paths adjacent to rivers needs to balance the needs of all river users, land managers, wildlife and walkers.
- Work with Highways authorities to increase the biodiversity value of verges and hedgerows without compromising safety.
- Ensure that new agricultural buildings, and conversions of agricultural buildings to other uses, are of an appropriate scale and design, and do not undermine the distinctive built character.
- Within the setting of the LCA, work with Local Planning Authorities and designers to achieve the best possible landscape and ecological integration and minimal impact on views, with compensation achieved for lost qualities.
- Encourage partnership working with between different Local Authorities, agencies and community groups to enable seamless working across the AONB. Consider environmental/ landscape limits in planning and placemaking.
- Use the valued character and qualities of the LCA to frame responses to climate change including new tree establishment.

## 10.0 Medway Valley

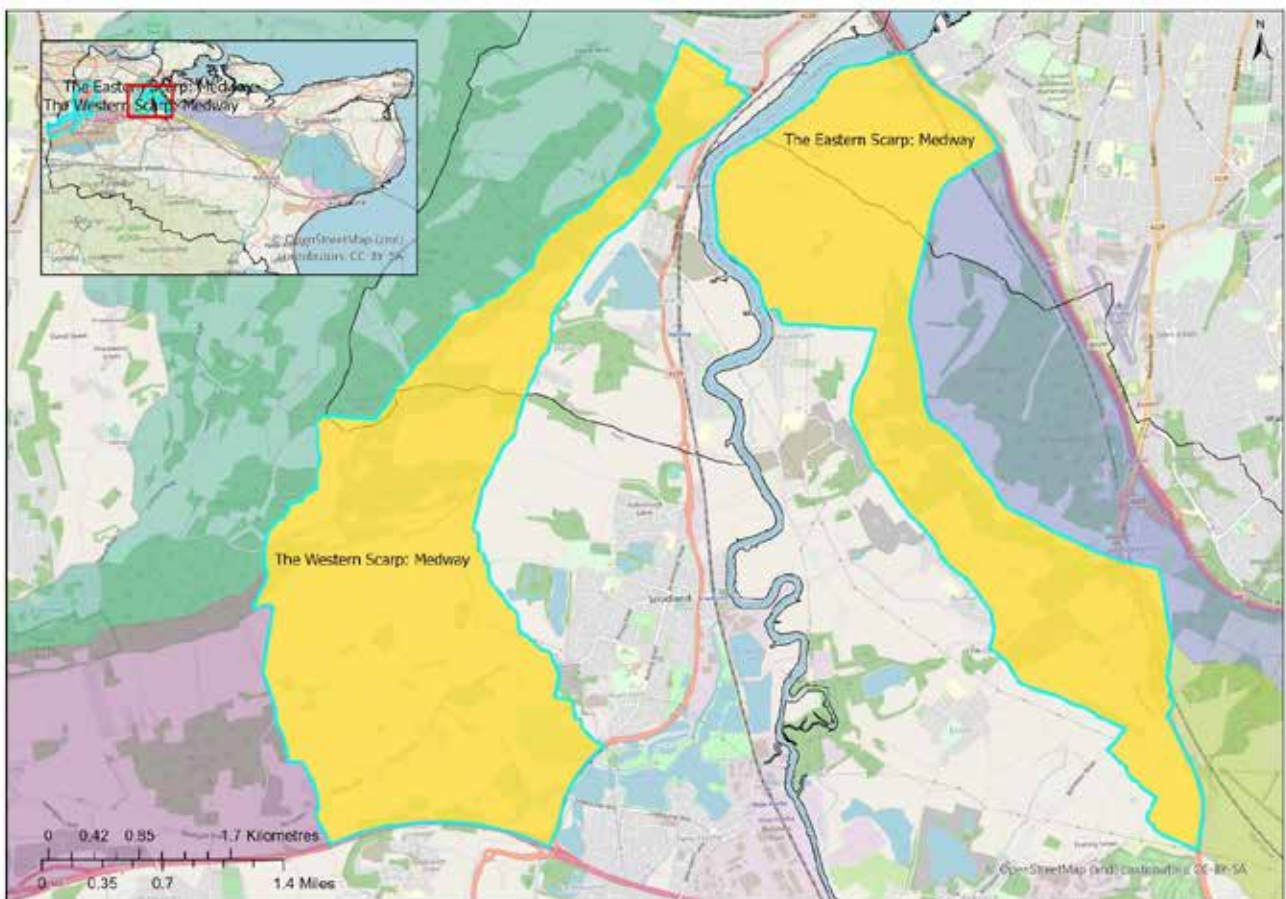
### Landscape Character Area 4B

**Landscape Character Type:** River Valley

**Districts/ Boroughs:** Maidstone; Medway; Tonbridge and Malling

**Landscape/Countryside Partnerships:** Medway Valley Countryside Partnership

**Location and Context:** This LCA is located towards the west of the Kent Downs AONB, and includes land on both sides of the Medway Valley, between the Medway Bridges and the northern edges of Maidstone and Ditton. It includes the villages of Birling and Ryarsh. To the east are the Mid Kent Downs and Hollingbourne Vale LCAs; to the west are the West Kent Downs and Kemsing Vale LCAs.



*Location map for Medway Valley LCA, also showing Local Character Areas of Western Scarp and Eastern Scarp*



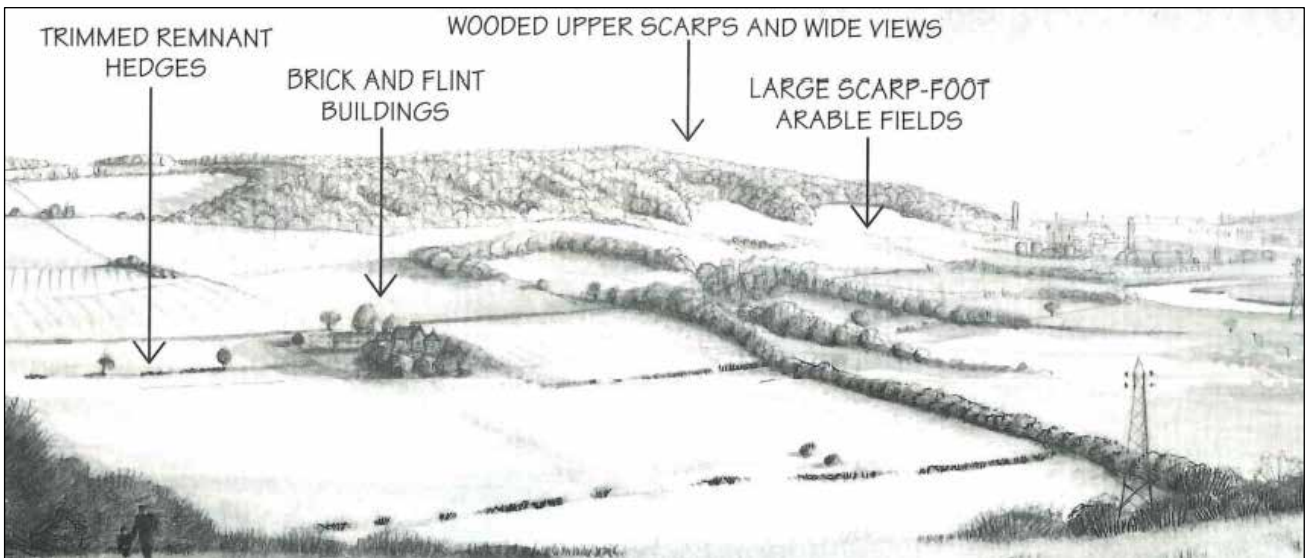
*View south along the Medway Valley, as seen from HS1. The Landscape Character Area includes land on both sides of the River Medway.*

## Summary Characteristics

- Underlying geology of layers of cretaceous chalk, cut through by the Medway Valley., and containing numerous chalk quarry sites.
- Overlying alluvial deposits on the valley floor, and head deposits (mostly clay derived from chalk) on the lower slopes of the valley sides, creating fertile soils.
- Symmetrical and dramatic landform of valley sides (becoming steeper towards the tops) are strong landscape features.
- Drainage dominated by the River Medway, which flows south-north. Marshes and ditches are found adjacent to the river. Concentration of springs, streams and ponds around Birling.
- Extensive scarp woodlands with irregular boundaries including shaws. Some copses, infield, hedgerow and parkland trees.
- Land uses are primarily agricultural (mostly arable), with parkland around Birling, and former chalk quarry sites throughout.
- Field pattern largely unchanged since the 1880s, comprising large fields on lower slopes, and smaller, more irregular fields above. Many hedgerows lost or denuded on lower slopes, but higher fields are
- Semi-natural habitats include woodland, scrub, grassland (much restored in recent years) and wetland.
- Rich prehistoric archaeology includes some of Kent's earliest sites, including Kit's Coty burial chamber, and a Neolithic cursus monument. Also a legacy of later industrial archaeology from the cement industry.
- Within the AONB settlement is limited to small rural villages and farms, but several larger villages, and urban areas of Rochester and Maidstone are nearby.
- Main transport corridors are adjacent but outside AONB. AONB contains a network of lanes and tracks, including North Downs Way along the top of valley sides.
- Strong and contrasting patterns in colour and texture between irregular woodland blocks on upper slopes, and regular large arable fields on lower slopes.
- Outstanding views across the valley in both directions, and to the south, due to the height and curve of the valley sides. The Medway Bridges dominate views to the north.

bounded by woodland, shaws or thicker hedgerows.

- Sense of peacefulness and detachment away from settlements and transport infrastructure, particularly on valley sides.



*Sketch of Medway Valley from 'The Kent Downs Landscape' (1995)*

## 10.1 Description

- 10.1.1 The tidal River Medway, running between Maidstone and Rochester, divides the AONB into two sections. This Landscape Character Area comprises the lower valley sides and scarp of the Medway Valley, and a small part of the valley floor. Despite the industrial/ post-industrial character of the valley floor outside the AONB, this Landscape Character Area still provides an important, attractive, rural buffer between the Medway Towns and Maidstone, and is a quiet and peaceful landscape in close proximity to large urban areas. It also forms the setting of the River Medway and its associated valley-floor settlements.
- 10.1.2 In common with the other river valleys crossing the Downs, this was one of the earliest areas of permanent settlement in Kent. The long history of human activity in this area is illustrated by the group of prehistoric sites, such as Kit's Coty standing stones, which form the most important group of Megalithic monuments east of the Berkshire Downs. Other prehistoric sites include a Neolithic Cursus monument, and a Bronze Age site associated with the production of shale bracelets. There are several Roman sites and the ancient routes of the North Downs Way and the Pilgrim's Way pass through the area. The symmetrical landform, and the height and 'loop' of the scarp means that interesting and unique views can be appreciated across the valley (in both directions) and to the south. The Medway Bridges (carrying HS1 and the M2) are imposing structures, high above the northern end of the valley.
- 10.1.3 The steep scarp slopes, which enclose the river valley, rise sharply up behind rolling, intensively cultivated fields. Historic maps shown that in the 1880s there was not a strong hedgerow network on the lower part of the scarp foot, and this remains the case today. However, the routes of paths across the fields shown on historic maps suggest that there may have been earlier enclosures which were already lost by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. The few hedges that do exist today are narrow and gappy. It is characteristic, however, to find thicker, overgrown hedges surrounding the fields on the

upper slopes, above which swathes of dense, mixed woodland dominate the skyline, separating the valley and the downs. These woodlands, and the mosaic of unimproved grassland and scrub associated with them, are of international nature conservation importance, both for their flora and fauna. The woodland boundaries remain largely unchanged between the 1880s and today.

- 10.1.4 The Medway Valley has a long association with cement production, and although this has now ceased, the valley contains a number of sites of cement works on the valley floor, chalk quarries on the valley sides, and lakes formed by mineral extraction. Some of the cement works are now being redeveloped as housing, whilst some of the former quarries and lakes are valuable wildlife habitats. Historically, the valley would have been white with cement dust.
- 10.1.5 The AONB landscape in this area provides a coherent backdrop of scarp woodlands and fields, which offsets the jumbled diversity of the industry and redevelopment in the valley below. Contained by the strong bones of the landscape in this way, the dominance of buildings on the valley floor is reduced, but they can still form detracting focal points within the wider countryside, especially where the built form, density and pattern becomes more imposing. Any development that threatens the integrity of the pastoral backdrop of the valley sides, therefore, can be particularly damaging to the whole valley. This applies in particular to activities which create scars in the chalk, such as quarries or scrambling tracks, but also to the loss of features such as hedges, trees and shaws. Such losses also reduce the capacity of the landscape to absorb the visual impact of development.

## 10.2 Local Character Areas

- 10.2.1 There are two Local Character Areas within the Medway Landscape Character Area – the Western Scarp and the Eastern Scarp – which are roughly symmetrical on either side of the valley.

NOTE- The 1995 and 2004 Landscape Assessments also included the Boxley Vale Local Character Area within Medway Valley LCA, but it has now been included in Hollingbourne Scarp and Vale LCA, as its physical, cultural and perceptual landscape characteristics have more in common with Hollingbourne Scarp LCA and Vale than Medway Valley LCA.

## The Western Scarp

- 10.2.2 The area is physically defined by the western chalk ridge that encloses the valley, with steep, treed scarp slopes rising up behind cultivated fields. The cultivated belt of arable land along the scarp foot is the result of the slow but constant washing of light chalky soils from the scarp. The resulting land is very fertile and many of the apparently modern, huge ploughed fields along this belt have, in reality, scarcely changed in appearance for over a century (although there may have been older field boundaries which were lost prior to the 1880s). Nevertheless there is a sense of 'prairie farming' here, which is increasingly accentuated by the gradual loss or decay of hedges, especially around Birling, and along the roadsides. The lower slopes of the scarp bear the scars of former chalk quarries, which are gradually 'greening-over'.
- 10.2.3 Ancient woodland (designated Special Area of Conservation) is a dominant feature in the north of the area, clothing the scarp and the tops of the steeper slopes. The woodlands form habitat mosaic with unimproved grassland (large areas of which have been reclaimed in recent years) and scrub, and include large areas of hazel coppice and beech-yew woodland. Dry valleys are a feature of the top of the Western Scarp around Holly Hill, but to the south, around Birling, the landscape has a gentler, agricultural feel with some estate and parkland influences.
- 10.2.4 There are many historic trackways and sunken lanes running along and up the scarp, and a number of other historic features including a Saxon church at Paddlesworth, and ancient yews in Birling churchyard. The sense of time-depth is enhanced by the scarp-foot settlements and farms which include many locally-distinctive ragstone buildings. Parkland provides a distinctive feature on the scarp top at Holly Hill.
- 10.2.5 There are long views looking east across the Medway Valley, which include the industry and settlements in the valley floor, and also south towards Maidstone and the Greensand Ridge.



*The Western Scarp, as seen looking across from the opposite valley side near Burham Court. This viewpoint was the location of a Neolithic cursus monument, and has a 360 degree view of the surrounding landform.*

## The Eastern Scarp

- 10.2.6 The pattern of intensively farmed scarp-foot fields and dense woodland above is continued on the eastern side of the valley. Woodland along the scarp comprises large areas of beech and yew woodland, with patches of calcareous grassland. The long history of human occupation within the Medway Valley is strongly in evidence here through the presence of Kit's Coty House, a unique Scheduled early Neolithic monument with a striking extant sarsen stone structure. A second (collapsed) burial chamber is located to the south. The Pilgrim's Way also runs north-south through the area along the line of the road, from which a series of ancient drovers' roads run up the scarp slopes. In a letter to a friend, Dickens describes Kit's Coty as a favourite spot of his to picnic and lay on the grass – "a splendid example of laziness".
- 10.2.7 The hedges on the lower valley slopes are generally lost or in poorer condition, but the woodlands on the upper slopes give weight and emphasis to the scarp, helping to contain the influence of the valley developments outside the AONB. There have been cement works on the river here since the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, but there are currently no active cement works within this part of the Medway Valley.
- 10.2.8 In the north, a small area of flat, riverside marshes is included within the AONB at Wouldham Marshes. Despite being dominated by overhead wires and pylons, narrow, scrub-flecked ditches and rough tussocky grass give the area a sense of wildness. Wouldham Marshes are characterised by drainage ditches, hedges, unimproved grassland and reed beds. The River Medway forms an important and distinctive feature in views, and there are long, open views towards Rochester Castle and Cathedral, with the motorway bridge forming a strong foreground feature. This area was a former military training ground for building bridges and pontoons, and in WW2 a bailey bridge was constructed over the River Medway in case Rochester Bridge was bombed or stormed.
- 10.2.9 Lines of pylons along the valley form detracting elements within the landscape. Industrial / post-industrial elements are visible in views across to the lower valley, and the new housing development at Peter's Pit is still under construction just outside the AONB boundary.



*The Eastern Scarp as seen from Kit's Coty. The field in the foreground contains a rich diversity of herbs and grasses, including orchids. The scarp woodland and shallower arable fields can be seen beyond. A former chalk quarry can be seen as a white scar on the right of the picture.*



*Beech/ Oak/ Yew woodland on the western scarp*



*Early purple orchids in a traditional meadow near Kit's Coty*



*Wouldham Marshes, on the northern part of the valley floor.*



*Kit's Coty Neolithic burial chamber, which would originally have been covered by an earth mound.*



*Hollow Lane climbing the western scarp, with 'cliffs' of chalk and yew tree roots forming the edges*



*View over Maidstone and the Medway Valley from Bluebell Hill viewpoint*

## 10.3 Landscape Condition, Sensitivities and Forces for Change

- 10.3.1 The 1995 and 2004 Assessments identify many detractors both within the AONB and outside it (including industrial sites, pylons, large-scale agricultural buildings, landfill sites, main roads, hedgerow loss and former quarries). As a result, the 2004 Assessment gives the condition of the Western Scarp as moderate, and the Eastern Scarp as very poor. Many of these negative features are also picked up in the 2012 *Medway Gap Strategic Landscape Enhancement Plan* (A Valley of Visions Landscape Partnership legacy document), which refers to a number of issues, including denuded hedgerows, visual detractors within the open landscape, fragmentation of habitats, the indistinct pattern of historic farmsteads and highways, and anti-social behaviour such as fly-tipping. The presence of large numbers of people living nearby can also result in increased footfall and habitat disturbance. Today there is still concern about the extent of damage to this landscape, including the impact of roads and the associated light, noise and air pollution. Centuries of human intervention, and the intensification of farming, have resulted in depleted biodiversity.
- 10.3.2 The floor of the Medway Valley (just outside the AONB boundary) is one of the most dynamic landscapes in the vicinity of the AONB, and changes here will inevitably affect views from within the AONB, as well as the overall character of the area. The main change (which has happened since the 1995 Assessment was undertaken) is the change from an industrial to a post-industrial landscape, with the old cement works replaced with modern housing. This process is ongoing, with the Peter's Pit development currently under construction on the east side of the valley. Movement patterns in the valley are also changing with the construction of a bridge between Halling and Wouldham (opened in 2017) and new access roads. Comparison of the 1995 and 2017 photos shows the replacement of industrial structures with housing, and how much the scars of the former chalk quarries have 'greened-over'. However, the overall pattern of fields and woodlands seems to have changed very little between 1995 and 2017.
- 10.3.3 Recent years have seen a number of projects to enhance the landscape and habitats within the Medway Valley, and to engage local people. Many of these projects have been undertaken through the Valley of Visions Landscape Partnership and/ or the Medway Valley Countryside Partnership, and have included paths, public art, interpretation projects, reversion of arable land on the scarp to grassland, and woodland and grassland management schemes along with management of antisocial activity in the landscape. These have had a very positive impact on improving the accessibility and structure of the landscape, including significant areas of chalk grassland restoration and hedge planting. However, there is more which can be done, particularly with regard to hedgerow restoration, reinstatement of lost field boundaries, and habitat connectivity.
- 10.3.4 As mentioned above, the open views and dominant landform of the Medway Landscape Character Area make it a highly sensitive landscape. Its sensitivity is increased by its role in the setting of the Medway Valley; its function as a gap between large settlements; the inherent value of its cultural and biodiversity sites, and its remarkable survival as a peaceful, rural landscape despite its proximity to settlements, industry and transport infrastructure.



View west across the Medway Valley from above Wouldham in 1995 (above) and 2017 (below)

<i>Issue</i>	<i>Landscape sensitivities and potential landscape impacts</i>
The River Medway	<p>Past industrialisation led to a lack of connection and access to the river. Within the AONB there is riverside access (Wouldham Marshes) but outside the AONB (to the north and south), the Medway Valley Walk has several sections where it does not follow the riverbank. This reduces the ease of access to the river and AONB by local people, although St Peter's Village provides new public access to the riverside.</p> <p>Water abstraction is a concern, leading to reduced flows in tributary springs and streams.</p>
Changing patterns of development	<p>The proximity of urban conurbations results in traffic impacts, light, air and noise pollution, and increased footfall which can damage habitats. This is an area of considerable development pressure. Re development of former industrial sites for housing is currently taking place just outside the AONB, affecting views across the valley and the character of the AONB's setting. These changes are not necessarily negative, as some industrial structures are now being removed. The river banks are also vulnerable to development, particularly downstream of the AONB.</p> <p>Some of the new development outside the AONB does not fit with local vernacular styles, patterns or densities - the reflective roofs of some developments are particularly noticeable when viewed from above.</p>

<b>Issue</b>	<b><i>Landscape sensitivities and potential landscape impacts</i></b>
Transport and infrastructure	<p>Transport infrastructure is particularly noticeable in the northern part of the valley, where the Medway Bridges carrying the M20 and HS1 cross high above the valley. There are also other major roads, including the A228 and A229 which all contribute to increased noise, air and light pollution. ‘Rat-running’ on rural lanes is a problem, particularly when main roads are closed/ busy. Changes to road volumes and junctions associated with the proposed Lower Thames Crossing may also impact on this area visually, as well as through increased noise, air and light pollution.</p> <p>There are several lines of pylons, both within and outside the AONB. These run along the valley, but also climb the scarps, and are noticeable in many views within and across the Medway valley. However, undergrounding of lower-voltage lines (e.g. around Halling and Birling) has reduced the local visual clutter in the landscape.</p>
Anti-social behaviour	<p>Anti-social behaviour remains a problem in the area, although much has been done to improve the situation through the Securing the Landscape partnership. Issues such as litter, flytipping and vandalism are a problem, particularly close to urban areas. Anti-social behaviour involving vehicles is also a concern, including informal routes through woodland, illegal use of off-road vehicles (which erode tracks and are intimidating for legitimate users) and illegal parking.</p>
Heritage	<p>There is a risk that the recent industrial heritage of the Medway Valley associated with the cement industry will be lost as former industrial sites are redeveloped for housing; it is important that this heritage is recorded. There is also concern about the setting of some historic sites.</p>
Land management and habitat fragmentation	<p>Fragmentation of habitats (woodlands, wetlands and grassland) is a particular concern in this area, especially given the rate of development, and the uncertainty over future agricultural grant schemes. Positive steps have been taken, particularly in terms of grassland restoration. However, there are many opportunities to further improve the connectivity of habitats. It is hoped that the new Environmental Land Management Scheme (ELMS) will aid habitat enhancements.</p> <p>Woodland management is variable, with some areas vulnerable to anti-social behaviour such as erosion of tracks by off-road vehicles, or becoming degraded due to lack of management. Ash Dieback is affecting woodlands and hedgerow trees. Past loss of hedgerows as a result of intensive farming has also damaged the landscape structure and reduced biodiversity, and fragmented the network of wildlife corridors between woodlands.</p> <p>Like many parts of the AONB the Medway LCA is a focus for equine activity and the pattern of subdivided fields, in-field structures, overgrazing and field jumps detracts from the otherwise farmed landscape.</p>
Climate change and natural factors	<p>Changing weather patterns associated with climate change are likely to impact on the river corridor, particularly an increase in the level and frequency of flooding due to increased intensity of rainfall. Warmer weather and changing seasonal patterns are likely to affect crop choice and farming regimes, for example an increase in viticulture. Trees in hedgerows and woodlands are threatened by new pests and diseases, and some species (such as beech) may decline as a result of prolonged drought.</p>



*Former cement works, currently being demolished and redeveloped for housing*



*The new bridge across the Medway at Halling has made travel within the valley much easier and re-connected communities on opposite sides of the river.*



*Pylons and substation near Wouldham*



*Open fields where hedgerows have been removed*



*Newly created wildflower meadow near Nashenden Farm, looking towards the Medway Crossing and M20*



*Grassland restoration of former arable land on the Western Scarp, looking towards Birling*

## 10.4 Landscape Management Recommendations

### Aspirational Landscape Strategy

The Medway Valley Character Area retains its rural character, despite the proximity of settlement and infrastructure, and continues to function as a strategic, attractive gap between urban areas. It is easily accessible on foot and cycle from surrounding urban areas and is a popular resource for quiet countryside recreation. Partnership working enables a continuous multi-user riverside path within and outside the AONB. Best practice extends outside the AONB to include adjacent areas of countryside.

The valley sides and wooded scarps above continue to provide a strong rural setting for the surrounding settlements. Woodland, grassland and wetland habitats are extensive and well-connected, and support a wide range of plants, animals, insects and birds. The landscape structure is strengthened, and lost hedgerows and trees outside woods are replaced.

New development within the valley is of the highest quality and sustainable design, incorporating sustainable access routes and enhancing wildlife habitats and networks. Careful design and planting mean that development is well-integrated into the surrounding landscape and has minimal impact in views.

The recent industrial heritage of the Medway Valley is recognised, recorded and marked, as well as its important prehistoric and medieval archaeology.

#### Protect

- Protect undeveloped skylines (horizons which are currently free from development) and scarps, avoiding development which breaks the horizon.
- Protect riverside habitats from development, and look at opportunities to enhance their biodiversity and accessibility where appropriate.
- Protect historic sites (including non-designated sites) and their settings, taking into account the full range of heritage in this area - from prehistoric burial sites to 19<sup>th</sup> Century industry. Enhance the settings of historic farmsteads and seek sympathetic restoration of derelict traditional farmsteads.
- Protect the attractive rural landscape of the area.

#### Manage

- Manage wetland habitats, working to connect wetlands inside and outside the AONB.
- Manage lanes and tracks, continuing to employ a Community Police Support Officer to monitor and discourage illegal use by 4x4 vehicles. Restore hedges alongside highways.
- Manage agricultural land, including hedgerow restoration, replacement and establishment of trees outside woodlands and promotion of grass strips along field margins, with the aim of creating a strong habitat network and reducing habitat fragmentation. Continue to promote reversion of arable land to grassland on steep scarp slopes and to reduce the intensive nature of arable farming to enhance wildlife and enable soil regeneration. Restore hedgerows which are becoming degraded (for example around Birling) and replace/ supplement infield and hedgerow trees where they have been lost. There are also opportunities to create new shaws on slopes, and to establish a network of hedgerows to act as habitat links
- Work with landowners and partner organisations to promote positive management of scarp woodlands. Encourage traditional management such as coppicing where appropriate, and aim to achieve a mix of ages and species of trees, including locally-distinctive woodland species such as

yew and beech. Where woodland biodiversity is particularly depleted, tree planting using local provenance species may be required.

- Manage historic parklands, ensuring that they have a Parkland Management Plan, and plant replacement parkland trees when necessary so that they continue to be a feature of the landscape.

#### Plan

- Promote partnership working between Local Authorities to improve footpath access to the River Medway, to provide a continuous path along the River Medway, and to improve footpath and cycle links to the urban areas.
- Develop an aspirational plan for a large-scale natural parkland with woodland, scrub, grassland and wetlands, to help mitigate and ameliorate climate change, enhance biodiversity, and provide recreational opportunities for the expanding local population.
- Consider setting empirical targets to monitor habitat increase for woodland, wetland, grassland and scrub.
- Work with water companies to reduce groundwater abstraction, and to keep water volumes in springs and streams as close as possible to their natural levels.
- Work with Local Authorities and developers to promote high standards of new development. It should respect local building styles and materials, and be designed to fit into its landscape setting (for example through enhancing the surrounding hedgerow structure). It should also incorporate connected habitat areas.
- Consider and reduce the visual impacts of new developments when viewed from above (i.e. from the top of the scarps) as well as when viewed from within the valley.
- Provide opportunities for local people to volunteer on landscape enhancement initiatives and for health and wellbeing; work with other organisations (e.g. community service co-ordinators) to address the results of anti-social behaviour.
- Build on the physical link created by the new bridge at Halling, and encourage partnership working on landscape and access projects between parishes on both sides of the river.
- Work with Highways Authorities to increase the biodiversity value of verges and hedgerows without compromising safety.
- Ensure that new agricultural buildings, and conversions of agricultural buildings to other uses, are of an appropriate scale and design, and do not undermine the distinctive built character.
- Within the setting of the LCA, work with Local Planning Authorities and designers to achieve the best possible landscape and ecological integration and minimal impact on views, with compensation achieved for lost qualities.
- Encourage partnership working with between different Local Authorities, agencies and community groups to enable seamless working across the AONB. Consider environmental/ landscape limits in planning and placemaking.
- Use the recognised and valued character and qualities of the LCA to inform climate adaptation and mitigation including new tree establishment.

## 11.0 Stour Valley

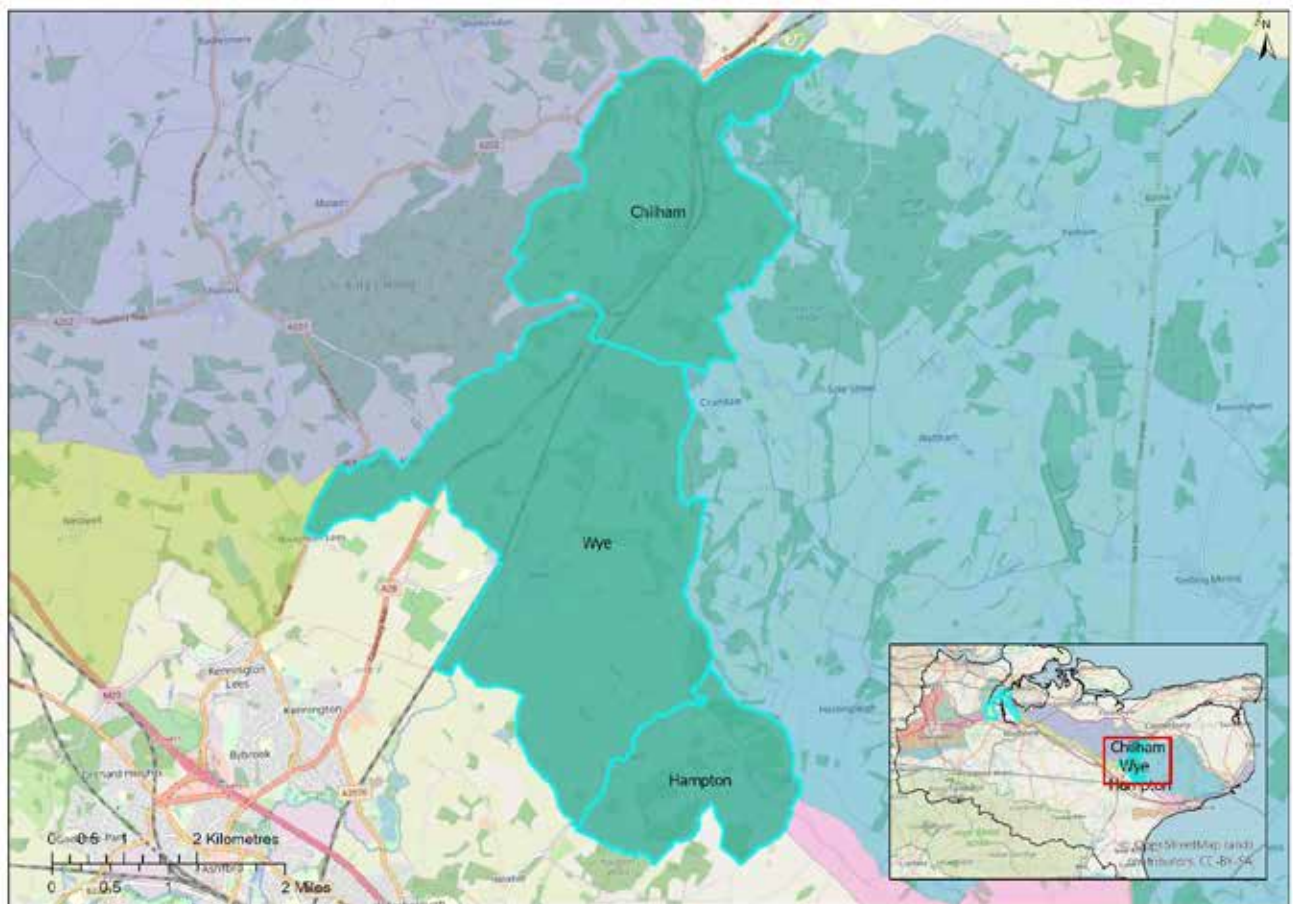
### Landscape Character Area 4C

**Landscape Character Type:** River Valley

**Districts/ Boroughs:** Ashford Borough Council

**Landscape/Countryside Partnerships:** Kentish Stour Countryside Partnership

**Location and Context:** The Stour Valley is located towards the east of the Kent Downs AONB, between the Mid Kent Downs LCA and the East Kent Downs LCA. It runs broadly north-south between Ashford and Chilham, and includes the settlements of Wye, Chilham and Brook.



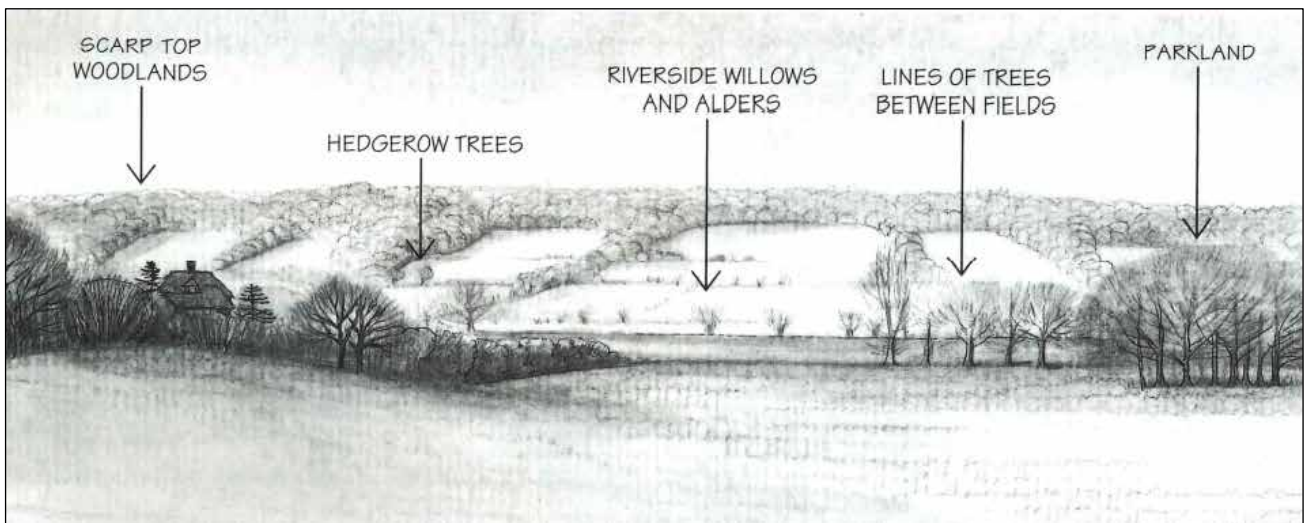
*Location map for Stour Valley LCA, also showing Local Character Areas of Hampton, Wye and Chilham*



*A typical scene within the Stour Valley, between Wye and Godmersham. The line of the river is marked by willow trees, and the floodplain contains arable land and parkland. The steep western valley side, with fields, woodland and grassland, forms the backdrop.*

## Summary Characteristics

- Underlying chalk geology, except in the far south of the LCA which is underlain by mudstone. Alluvial deposits alongside river, and patches of clay and clay-with-flints on valley floor and sides.
- Gentle slope on the west side, and steep, convoluted slope on the east. Flat valley floor broader in the south of the LCA, with narrower pinch points in the north.
- River Great Stour runs from south to north, meandering within floodplain. Fed by springs and tributary streams in southern part of the LCA.
- Blocks of plantation and estate woodland, particularly along the tops of the valley sides. Numerous parkland trees, riparian trees and hedgerow trees.
- Predominant land use is arable agriculture, with pasture locally dominant in clay area in the south, and parkland in the north.
- Valley floor is generally open, but valley sides are divided by hedged fields. Fields mostly regular/ semi-regular, but irregular in the far south.
- Semi-natural habitats include extensive chalk grassland on valley sides, as well as riparian habitats, woodland and scrub.
- Concentration of historic country houses and parks, as well as historic villages containing vernacular buildings of brick, tile and flint. Estate architecture locally dominant around Godmersham.
- Larger settlements generally nucleated in form, but historic linear settlement at Brook.
- A28 and railway between Canterbury and Ashford follow the valley floor. Relatively few roads on valley sides, but North Downs Way crosses valley at Wye, and runs along top of eastern valley side, parallel to Pilgrims' Way along the base.
- Parkland and woodland create distinctive patterns in the landscape, and riparian trees along the river pick out its sinuous course through the landscape.
- Valley sides form distinctive backdrops, particularly the steep and convoluted chalk slopes above Wye. Horizons are generally smooth and uninterrupted.
- Strong sense of tranquillity away from main roads and settlements.
- Long and dramatic views across valley from valley sides. Wye Crown is a distinctive landmark.



*Sketch of Stour Valley from 'The Kent Downs Landscape' (1995)*

## 11.1 Description

- 11.1.1 This Landscape Character Area comprises the valley floor and sides of the Stour Valley. It covers the full north-south extent of the AONB, with the east and west sides of the valley mirroring each other, and forming the backdrops to views across the valley. Its orientation means that the valley floor receives sunlight throughout the day, but in certain weather conditions, mists hang over the valley and are spectacular when viewed from above.
- 11.1.2 The Great Stour is the most easterly of the three rivers cutting through the Downs. It exhibits the characteristics of a chalk stream but is modified by water abstraction and treatment processes. It frequently floods, and has a wide floodplain. Like the Darent and the Medway, the River Stour provided an early access route into the heart of Kent and formed an ancient focus for settlement. It remains a sometimes busy transport route today, with layers of past land use and settlement still visible in the landscape. Today the Stour Valley is highly valued for the quality of its landscape, and the fact that it is peaceful, serene and relatively tranquil. It is accessible from nearby towns, and is popular for recreation, including walking, cycling and fishing. The North Downs Way and Stour Valley Walk pass through the area, with walkers appreciating the panoramic views of the valley. The attractive historic villages of Wye and Chilham receive large numbers of visitors, but there is also a strong sense of community within the valley.
- 11.1.3 Despite its proximity to both Canterbury and Ashford, the Stour Valley retains a strong rural identity. Enclosed by steep scarps on both sides, with dense woodlands and grassland on the upper slopes, the valley is dominated by intensively farmed arable fields interspersed by broad sweeps of mature parkland and woodland blocks. There are a number of historic houses within the area, including Chilham Castle, Godmersham Park and Olantigh. Their extensive parkland grounds and distinctive estate buildings and brick walls add to the character of the area. Unusually, there are no electricity pylons affecting the views across the valley but some railway infrastructure, albeit at a smaller scale, can have a similarly detracting impact. North of Bilting, the river flows through a narrow, pastoral flood plain dotted with trees such as willow and alder and drained by small ditches. To the south around Wye, however, the flood plain widens out and the pastures along the immediate riverside are surrounded by intensively cultivated arable fields on the rich, well-drained brick-earth soils. The

field pattern is picked out by a network of narrow, trimmed hedges and lines of mature trees, such as poplars.

- 11.1.4 On the valley sides, many of the arable fields are surrounded by thick hedges or dense, overgrown hedges which extend down from the woodlands on the upper slopes. Hedgerow trees, in particular oak and ash, are frequent and much of the woodland and grassland along the east side of the valley is of national importance for its plant, insect and other animal communities. Of particular note are the orchids and moths, including bee, pyramidal and spider orchids, the black veined moth and the Duke of Burgundy butterfly. Wye Downs National Nature Reserve includes several areas of chalk grassland and woodland on the steep scarp slopes on the eastern side of the valley. The 'Wye Crown' on the valley side east of Wye is a distinctive landmark feature.

## 11.2 Local Character Areas

- 11.2.1 There are three Local Character Areas within the Stour Valley, reflecting the diversity of underlying geology, and land use.

## Wye

- 11.2.2 Around the ancient town of Wye, whose Georgian facades reflect a period of 18<sup>th</sup> Century prosperity, the Stour passes through a wide, flat floodplain before cutting north into the downs. Wye has many historic buildings, and is well-known for its agricultural college (now closed). Settlement is generally sparse, but there are a number of hamlets and historic farms, often containing 'cat slide' roofs, which add to both time-depth and distinctiveness. There is little woodland here, but narrow lines of trees, some plantations or overgrown hedges around field boundaries, cast veils of wooded vegetation across the open landscape. Below the great expanse of Challock Forest in the west, the slopes are open, still bearing traces of ancient field systems. The upper slopes are often permanent grassland wrapped by the scarp top woodland. On the lower slopes, arable is more dominant, with regular closely-trimmed hedges bounding the large fields. On the eastern scarp, however, the slopes are much steeper and more convoluted, producing a series of enclosed coombs, dominated by the rough grassland, scrub and deciduous woodland of the Wye National Nature Reserve. These areas of 'semi-natural' vegetation are in sharp contrast with the ornamental tree planting at Eastwell Park and Olantigh.
- 11.2.3 On the eastern side of the valley, above Wye Village, is the landmark of the Wye Crown, cut into the white chalk. It was originally created by Wye Agricultural College in 1902 to celebrate the coronation of King Edward VII. From here, as from the rest of the scarp, there are splendid views across and along the valley, as well as out of the AONB to the south.
- 11.2.4 Recent village extensions have tended to have a higher density, taller buildings and greater massing than has previously been the case, which means they have a more direct immediate impact and can be more visible in the landscape in distant views.



*View looking west from the chalk scarp on the North Downs Way, above Wye Crown*

## Hampton

- 11.2.5 This small corner of the Stour Valley reflects a change in the soils and differences in historic land management. The linear settlement of Brook, with its 13<sup>th</sup> Century church and barn, is one of very few villages built on the sticky gault clay. The land here is gently undulating, irrigated by several scarp-foot springs, and there are pockets of damp pasture as well as a considerable amount of woodland, much of it of high nature conservation value. Between the woodland blocks are small, irregularly-shaped fields with large well treed hedgerows. In the north-east of the area, the steep, convoluted wooded scarp encloses the rich chalk grasslands of the Devil's Kneading Trough coombe and forms a dramatic backdrop to the gentle farmland below. The National Nature Reserve has wide, dramatic views and is a popular spot for visitors and walkers. This enhances its sense of place, and also increases visibility of the landform. At the base of the Downs runs the Pilgrims Way, often surrounded by thick species-rich hedges and woodland edges.
- 11.2.6 This Local Character Area has a strong sense of place, influenced by the woodland characteristics, the small scale of the historic farmland and the characteristic diversity of hedge and woodland species, which include clematis, viburnums, etc. Within the lower part of the area, views are often constrained or framed by woodland, but there are long views from the scarp across the area and over the surrounding countryside.



*The wooded character of the Hampton Local Character Area can be particularly well-appreciated from the scarp near Cold Blow Farm.*

## Chilham

- 11.2.5 North of Bilting, the Stour Valley becomes increasingly enclosed. The rolling sides of the valley support large arable fields in the east, while notable sweeps of parkland belonging to Godmersham Park and Chilham Castle cover most of the western slopes and contribute to a sense of historic time depth. Stretches of the river itself have also been incorporated into ornamental parkland and contribute to designed views, such as at Godmersham Park (see photos below). On either side of the valley, dense woodlands dominate the skyline and a number of substantial shaws and plantations on the lower slopes reflect the importance of game cover in this area. There are also pockets of wood pasture, where animals graze under mature trees.
- 11.2.6 The chalk scarp to the north-east provides a backdrop and sense of place. On the valley bottom, the river is picked out in places by waterside alders and occasional willows, and there are sinuous riverside pastures. The railway line is obscured for much of its length by trees. However, where it is apparent, the associated infrastructure is sometimes highly visible.
- 11.2.7 The area contains two large country estates, and the associated architecture contributes to the strong sense of place. The cottages of the Godmersham estate are particularly distinctive, built of red brick with arched doorways. Chilham Castle is a spectacular Jacobean country house dating to 1607, and built on the site of an earlier castle. Godmersham Park, also constructed in brick, dates from 1732 and has a neo-classical design. It was owned by Jane Austen's brother, and she is reputed to have written several of her books whilst staying there. Visitors to the estates enjoyed country pursuits such as shooting, equine eventing and hunting, and these activities continue to have an influence on the landscape.
- 11.2.8 The Stour Valley is a very popular area for recreation and attracts considerable numbers of visitors. Historic villages such as Chilham, with its wealth of timber-framed buildings and famous castle suffer from severe parking problems in the high season. The village, with its 'quintessential English' character, is used as a film-set on a regular basis. Churches are also a feature of the landscape, and are generally constructed of flint, sometimes with brick or stone detailing.



*View looking east across the Stour Valley from the gardens of Chilham Castle*



*The convoluted wooded scarp at Giddy Horn, in the Hampton Local Character area*



*The River Stour in its floodplain, looking south from near Chilham*



*Spectacular views across the Stour Valley can be seen from Broad Downs (part of the Wye National Nature Reserve)*



*Chilham Castle*



*Godmersham Estate cottage*



*Wye College was founded in 1447 as a theological college, and was an agricultural college from 1898 until 2005.*

## 11.3 Landscape Condition, Sensitivities and Forces for Change

- 11.3.1 This landscape has undergone a considerable amount of positive change in recent years. The 1995 Assessment noted a number of issues within the Stour Valley, including hedgerow loss, tree loss / damage following the 1987 hurricane, and traffic problems. The 2004 Assessment noted that the Chilham and Hampton Local Character Areas were in good condition, but the Wye Local Character Area was in very poor condition due to loss of landscape structure (e.g. hedgerows, and riverside trees) and some urbanisation.
- 11.3.2 Since the previous Assessments were carried out, positive landscape management (including through Environmental Stewardship schemes) has included replanting of hedgerows and riverside willow trees. Parkland trees have been planted, to provide eventual replacements for those lost through over-maturity or the 1987 storm. Natural England has a number of ongoing projects within the area, including the Crundale Grasslands project, which is creating a more balanced landscape of grassland and arable land uses through arable reversion; floodplain wetland habitat creation projects, and restoration of Godmersham Park. There is some localised linear development, and village extensions (particularly along the A28 corridor) which can erode local character, but the majority of the area feels rural and well cared-for.



*The River Stour at Godmersham Park in 1995 (above) and 2017 (below). The riverside trees and bankside vegetation have grown a lot in 23 years, so the scene feels less open.*

<b>Issue</b>	<b><i>Landscape sensitivities and potential landscape impacts</i></b>
The River Stour	Water flow and quality is affected by a number of factors, including abstraction, flooding, development in the river catchment, run-off from agriculture, discharge from storm drains/ water treatment works and litter. There are also invasive species along the river banks, such as Himalayan Balsam and Japanese Knotweed. Variations in water quality and bankside vegetation affect both the appearance and the ecology of the river. There are stretches around Wye where water meadows and riverside trees have been lost, and ploughing continues up to the riverbank.
Upgrading of transport infrastructure	The Stour Valley is an historic transport corridor, currently used by the A28 and the Ashford- Canterbury railway line. Upgrading the road and rail infrastructure would result in loss of rural character and tranquillity, and related issues such as light pollution from road lighting. Rural lanes are vulnerable to insensitive highways measures. Traffic volume and parking issues are a problem in popular visitor locations e.g. Chilham and Wye.
New development	The redevelopment of Wye College is likely to impact on the character of the village in terms of the design of new housing and increasing the size of the village. Telecoms masts are visible, particularly on valley sides. Development in the setting of the AONB (particularly around Ashford) impacts on views from the scarps, and also affects light pollution, traffic levels, wildlife, recreation and water quality. These issues are likely to increase if further development occurs.
Land management	The late 20 <sup>th</sup> Century saw a loss of landscape subtlety and detail as a result of intensification of agriculture. This included loss of hedgerows, ploughing of grassland areas; loss of riverside meadows, and removal of riverside trees. Recent years have seen a partial reversal of this process with a number of projects to restore and enhance the landscape. It is important that this positive change continues into the future, and that landscape restoration continues to enhance both its appearance and its ecological and recreational value. The new Environmental Land Management Scheme (ELMS) offers opportunities to restore and reinforce valued characteristics of the landscape. There are currently changes in land management within and outside the AONB (e.g. viticulture, polytunnels) which may expand in coming years.
Recreation	The popularity of villages such as Chilham can result in loss of the character which people come to enjoy, particularly when views of the village square are dominated by parked cars, and streets are clogged with traffic. Incidences of anti-social behaviour such as litter can also be an issue in areas popular for recreation. There is concern that further development in the vicinity of the AONB will increase recreational pressure for which management arrangements should be put in place.
Climate change and natural forces	Ash Dieback is a concern in this area and is already visible with hill tops punctuated by dying ash trees, Ash Dieback will continue to affect woodlands and hedgerow trees. Trees are also vulnerable to storms, which are likely to increase in intensity and frequency due to climate change.



*Telecommunications mast on valley side near Wye*



*Parked cars dominate the village square in Chilham*



*Vegetation choking the river at Godmersham. Invasive Himalyan Balsam is also present in this area, which outcompetes native river bank vegetation.*



*Game crops within extensive arable fields.*



*Positive management of parkland- a new avenue at Olantigh Park.*



*View of Ashford from the eastern valley side*

## 11.4 Landscape Management Recommendations

### Aspirational Landscape Strategy

The mosaic of land uses (woodland, arable, grassland and parkland) is preserved, conserved and enhanced, with local variations in its make-up reflecting the local character areas. All elements of the mosaic are in active, sustainable, management, and woodlands and grasslands are linked to maximise their biodiversity value. The landscape structure and character continues to be enhanced through carefully thought-out tree and hedgerow planting, such as willows alongside the river, and new parkland trees. The River Stour retains its chalk stream characteristics, and is as close to its natural state as possible with excellent water quality. River and bankside vegetation is healthy and dominated by native species. Pollarded riverside willows remain a distinctive feature of the water course, and watermeadows help to provide natural flood storage capacity.

The valley retains its rural character, with minimal impacts from new developments which seek to reflect, conserve and enhance the distinctive character of the area, or from upgrades to transport infrastructure. Light pollution and increased noise is avoided. Any new development respects and enhances local styles, materials and scales of building. The impacts of new developments outside the AONB but in its setting (particularly in views from high land) are taken into consideration.

#### Protect

- Protect historic buildings and their settings, and the special character of historic villages and farmsteads.
- Protect the distinctive built form associated with estate villages.
- Protect undeveloped skylines along the top of the valley sides, avoiding development which breaks the horizon in views across or from the valley.
- Protect the highly valued landscape heritage and quality, peace, serenity and relative tranquillity.

#### Manage

- Manage river banks, controlling invasive species such as Himalayan Balsam and encouraging watercourses to function as biodiversity corridors. Continue to replant riverside trees (particularly willow and alder), pollard existing willows and graze water meadows. Promote wetland habitats.
- Manage agricultural land to maximise biodiversity value and enable linking of habitats such as woodland and grassland through a network of hedgerows and field margins. Retain the surviving irregular historic field pattern around Hampton.
- Manage game shoots to minimise landscape impacts, for example planting game cover crops at the edges of fields, parallel to existing boundaries, and avoiding artificial straight lines. Consider the impacts on ground flora when locating pens in woodland. Apply the Kent Downs AONB game management guidance.
- Manage historic parklands and veteran trees, ensuring that all estates have a Parkland Management Plan in place. Have an active programme of tree establishment and promotion from hedgerow trees/ natural regeneration to replace trees lost through storm damage or over-maturity. Ensure that parkland trees remain a feature of the landscape.
- Continue to manage woodland, using traditional techniques such as coppicing to achieve a varied age and species structure.
- Promote new hedgerow and roadside trees from existing hedge stock.

- Manage chalk grasslands, and seek opportunities to revert arable land to grassland, and to link grasslands through field margins and road verges.
- Basic highways management techniques such as cutting verges and hedgerows at appropriate times will enhance their appearance and their ecological value.

#### Plan

- Design any new developments to retain the distinctive character of built form. What is appropriate design will depend on the location and context. For example, recently built cottages in Godmersham incorporated local estate cottage detailing, but this would not be appropriate for a larger development in another location. Use high quality and sensitive design and materials supported by planting to integrate new development into the landscape, and pay attention to boundary treatments, avoiding suburban features such as elaborate gates. Traditional local materials include brick, tile and flint.
- Work with rail companies and the Highways Agency to ensure that any upgrading projects have minimal impacts on the landscape and the rural character of the area and the existing infrastructure fits better in the landscape. Minimise use of lighting and retain the character of rural lanes, avoiding urbanising influences such as kerbs and unnecessary or overly large signage.
- Work with Highways authorities to increase the biodiversity value of verges and hedgerows without compromising safety.
- Work with water companies and the Environment Agency Catchment Partnership to enhance water quality, and to keep river flows as close as possible to their natural state. Introduce natural flood management/ water quality enhancement approaches.
- Within the setting of the LCA, work with Local Planning Authorities and designers to achieve the best possible landscape and ecological integration and minimal impacts on views, with compensation achieved for lost qualities.
- Encourage partnership working between different Local Authorities, agencies and community groups to enable seamless working across the AONB. Consider environmental and landscape limits on planning and place making.
- Look at opportunities for the creation of new waterbodies, wetlands and wet woodlands to enhance biodiversity, and to help counteract climate change and its effects.

## 12.0 Sevenoaks Greensand Ridge

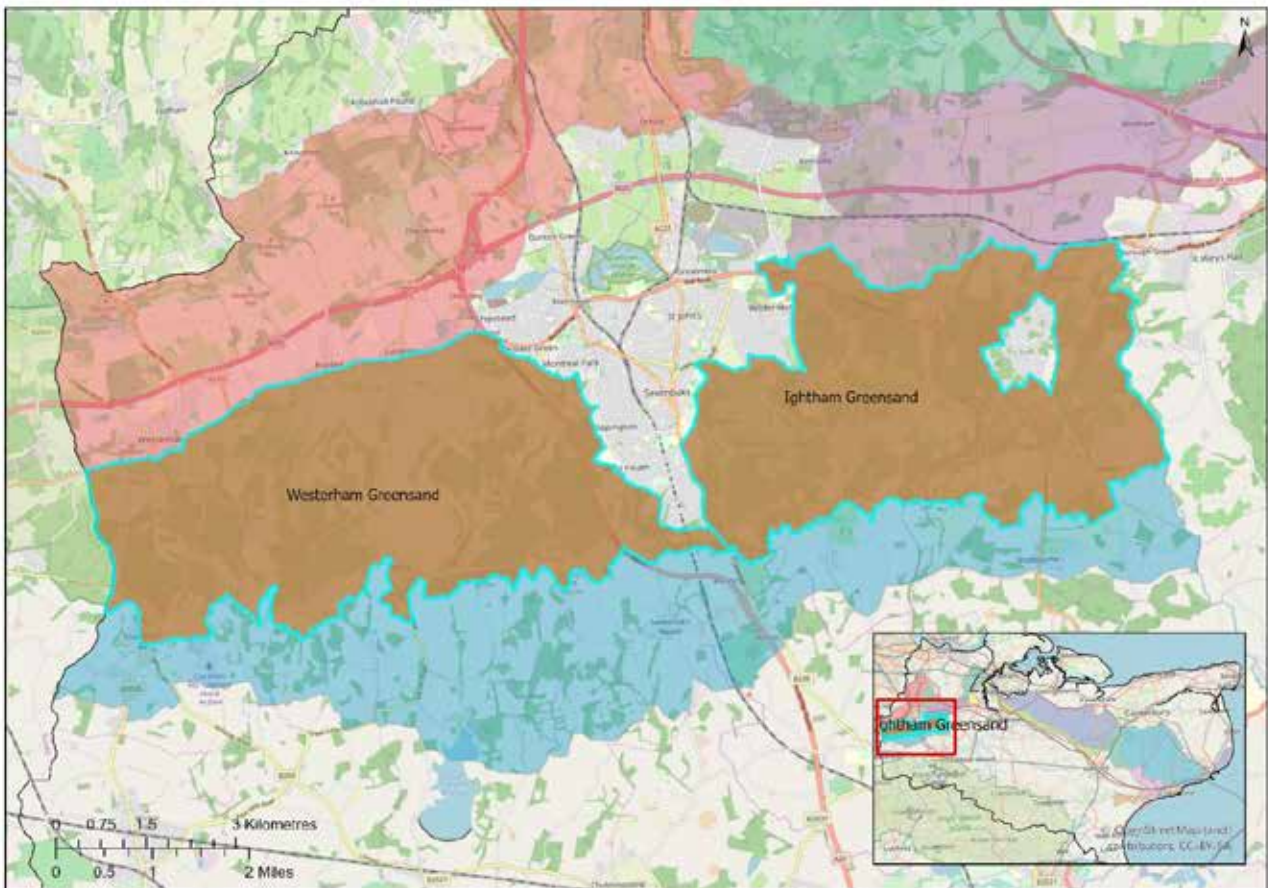
### Landscape Character Area 5A

**Landscape Character Type 5:** Greensand

**Districts/ Boroughs:** Sevenoaks; Tonbridge and Malling

**Landscape/Countryside Partnerships:** Darent Valley Landscape Partnership; North West Kent Countryside Partnership

**Location and Context:** This LCA is located at the western end of the Kent Downs AONB, between Westerham and Ightham, and extends to the east and west of Sevenoaks. It is to the south of the Darent Valley and Kemsing Vale LCAs, and to the north of the Eden Valley Low Weald LCA.



*Location map for Sevenoaks Greensand Ridge LCA, also showing Local Character Areas of Westerham Greensand and Ightham Greensand*

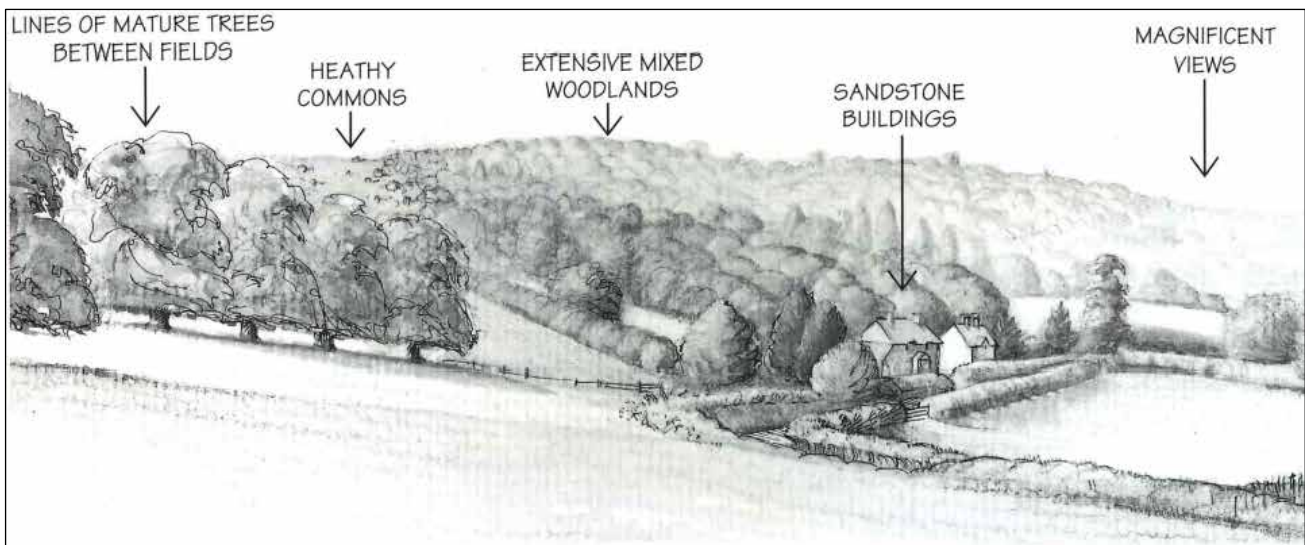


*A typical view within the Sevenoaks Greensand Ridge north-east of Ide Hill. A substantial house nestles in the valley, surrounded by mature trees and small fields. Wooded hills form the horizon and views are enclosed by the irregular landform and mature trees.*

## Summary Characteristics

- Underlying geology of Cretaceous Lower Greensand, known locally as Ragstone. Soils are acidic and sandy.
- The Greensand forms an elevated ridge which includes the highest land in the AONB. The ridge runs east-west, forming a steep scarp on the south side, and a gentler dip slope cut by streams on the north side.
- Springs occur where the Greensand meets layers of impermeable clay. They feed small ponds and streams running north into the Darent or south into the River Eden.
- Extensive woodland cover (deciduous and mixed) as well as wood pasture, common, parkland, hedgerows and in-field trees create a well-wooded landscape.
- Dominant land uses are woodland and pasture, with areas of parkland, grassland, common and orchard. An intricate pattern of irregular-shaped hedged fields has been carved out from surrounding woodland.
- A concentration of historic houses set in landscaped grounds, including Ightham Mote, Knowle and Chartwell (home of Sir Winston Churchill). Strong association with the National Trust.
- Low density of settlement, with dispersed villages set around village greens and commons, or in linear patterns along roads.
- Network of historic lanes and tracks running east-west along the ridge (including Greensand Way) and following north-south valleys. Many are narrow and sunken.
- Trees create a sense of intimacy and enclosure, and also seasonal change, with spectacular autumn woodland colours and spring blossom in orchards.
- Historic houses and parks are popular with visitors, and give the area a strong sense of history.
- Splendid panoramic views out across the lower land to the north and south, with official viewpoint at Toy's Hill.

- Extensive areas of semi-natural habitat, including woodland, heath, common, wood pasture, parkland and acid grassland.
- The Greensand Ridge forms the backdrop to surrounding lower land.



Sketch of Sevenoaks Greensand Ridge from 'The Kent Downs Landscape' (1995)

## 12.1 Description

- 12.1.1 The ridge around Sevenoaks is the product of the underlying acidic sandstone, which in the south rises up from the clay vale of the Low Weald in a steep, tree-covered south-facing scarp between Crockham Hill and Shipbourne. Offering spectacular panoramic views south towards the High Weald and Tonbridge, the greensand belt reaches over 245m at Toys Hill. Its gentler north-facing dip-slope is scored by a series of deeply cut valleys formed by spring-fed streams, and have long views across to the chalk scarp on the far side of the Darent Valley and Kemsing Vale. East of Sevenoaks, Seal Chart forms a parallel second ridge to the north, which is densely wooded.
- 12.1.2 Much of the Greensand Ridge is covered by dense, mixed woodland, producing an intimate, secretive landscape, shaded by swathes of beech, oak and conifer forest. There are also areas of coppice woodland formerly used for charcoal burning and hopping. The poor soils of the sandstone, however, discouraged early settlers and, while the river valleys and fertile vales of Kent had been settled for centuries, this area remained dense forest interspersed with occasional summer pastures until the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> Centuries. The use of the area for wood pasture is likely to have continued until around the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Today, the dominant characteristics of the landscape are still the thick woodland and heathy commons. The commons contain a range of semi-natural habitats, including woodland, remnant wood pasture, grassland and pockets of heath. There are numerous areas of common, each with a unique history and combination of habitats.
- 12.1.3 Between the woodland and commons are pockets of farmland. Some of the farmland areas are historic assarts (fields cleared from woodland in the medieval period) with irregular-shaped fields. The area is exceptional for its number of estates and commons, but their landscapes and management differ markedly. Estates include Knole Park (originally a medieval deer park), Ightham Mote (14<sup>th</sup> Century moated manor house), Chartwell (family home of Sir Winston Churchill, set in gardens), Fairlawne (a 17<sup>th</sup> Century house) and Squerryes Court (a William and Mary period house in an 18<sup>th</sup> Century landscaped park). Some estates are now owned by the National Trust, whilst others

are in private ownership. Estate features such as parkland trees, avenues, towers, lodges, estate cottages and farms are a key part of the landscape.

- 12.1.4 Several settlements have developed along the edges of the commons. These are characterised by their low density linear patterns along roads, village greens, and open land within villages. Many have an older core of vernacular buildings surrounded by more modern development which is generally of similar materials. There are numerous farms and oast houses throughout the area, as well as some isolated dwellings built before post-war planning control. The main town of Sevenoaks is located on the north-facing slope of the Greensand Ridge, but is outside the AONB. Lanes are narrow and winding, and are often sunken. The Greensand Way wends its way along paths and tracks following the east-west ridge, linking estates and commons, and providing excellent elevated views to the north and south.
- 12.1.5 The acid greensand provides a variety of sandstones, which have been quarried since pre-Roman times and are often referred-to as 'Greensand' or 'Ragstone'. This abundance of stone has given rise to an alternative name for the area - the Chartland. *Chart* derives from the Scandinavian *kartr* meaning stony ground and still occurs in several place names, such as Brasted Chart. Historically, the Greensand was widely used for construction and road surfacing, and can still be seen in buildings throughout and beyond the Landscape Character Area, including Knole House and Ightham Mote. Oldbury stone was used on a smaller scale, notably in the village of the same name west of Borough Green. There are several stone quarries (both active and redundant) including caves, and there are quarry scars on the south-facing scarp. One example of a former quarry is Westerham Mines SSSI at Hosey Common, a valuable roost for overwintering bats, and an autumn bat swarming area. Occasionally examples of dressed Greensand may be seen, but more frequently it is irregularly coursed and packed with smaller stones. Greensand is not the only locally-available construction material. There are excellent examples of timber-framed buildings utilising the magnificent oak trees, as well as warm red bricks, clay rooftiles and hung tiles made with local clay.



*Medieval oak-framed house with tiled roof near Plaxtol*

## 12.2 Local Character Areas

12.2.1 There are two Local Character Areas, reflecting the slightly different characteristics of the landscape to the east and west of Sevenoaks. The Westerham Greensand has a more densely wooded character, whereas the Ightham Greensand is more influenced by wood pasture and orchards. It also has a larger proportion of land in estate ownership.

### Westerham Greensand

12.2.2 The Westerham Greensand rises gently up from the Darent Valley in the north to its highest points along the southern scarp, such as Toys Hill and Goathurst Common. Many of these areas are owned by the National Trust or are Common Land open to public access. This is an area of dense woodland, where thickets of birch and gorse are interspersed by tall stands of beech, conifer plantations or old chestnut coppice. These woodlands enclose the landscape, concealing the small lanes which criss-cross the area and hiding the sinuous pastures which line the valley sides or bottoms. The woodland is a dominant and distinct element which runs down into wide shaws around managed pastures, accentuating the landform. The intensity of land use is relatively low, and there is much ecological value in the widespread acid woodland and grasslands. Larger fields are often edged by thick strips of mature trees or dark walls of woodland. In some cases their old internal hedges have been removed or replaced by fences, gradually opening-up small areas of the landscape. Scattered farms hug the sheltered valleys throughout this area and many substantial modern houses are often surrounded by pony paddocks.

12.2.3 The present A25 follows an old, important route along the northern edge of the greensand, skirting both the dense woodlands and the muddy river valley. Between Limpsfield and Sevenoaks, a number of estates developed along this route, including Squerryes Court and Valence Park (now a school) which was landscaped by Capability Brown. Their associated parklands, dotted with specimen oaks and sweet chestnut trees, still influence this area. There is a strong time-depth to the landscape with highway routes following ancient trackways, and the use of vernacular materials (ragstone, brick and hung tile) in historic common-edge settlements. A much older occupation site may be found at the Iron Age hillfort north of Crockham Hill Common. The area around Ide Hill is associated with Octavia Hill, the founder of the National Trust. Winston Churchill lived at Chartwell and is said to have 'bought Chartwell for that view'. Dramatic views from the Greensand ridge remain an important characteristic of the area

12.2.4 The southern boundary of this area is formed by the dramatic scarp, which drops down to the extensive pasturelands of the Low Weald. The woodlands which characteristically clothe these slopes are predominantly deciduous. They suffered extensive damage in the 1987 storm, in particular along the top of the slopes, and many of the trees are relatively young. There are examples of trees which have fallen, but with enough root intact to enable the trees to re-sprout, so horizontal branches become vertical trunks.

12.2.5 The eastern part of the area is affected by the urban edge of Sevenoaks, the A21 and occasional pockets of discordant development which create detracting features and elements in an otherwise coherent, tranquil and distinctive landscape.



*Hosey Hill, a typical example of a common-edge settlement, with houses spread along roads around a large open space. The village has a strong wooded setting, but there are glimpsed views of the chalk scarp on the far side of the Darent Valley.*

## Ightham Greensand

- 12.2.6 East of Sevenoaks, the Greensand Ridge retains its densely wooded appearance, but gradually descends from the heights of Toys Hill and Goathurst Common towards the lower land around Ightham. This is an historic landscape with notable ancient landmarks and characteristic historic settlements and routeways. It has a higher proportion of parkland, acid grassland, orchards and wood pasture than the Westerham Greensand, giving a strong sense of time-depth. Small irregular pastures nestle between the trees, and the narrow, sunken lanes wind between dense stands of conifers and birch. Sometimes the trees meet across the lanes, creating 'tunnel' effects with walls of fern-rich banks.
- 12.2.7 The steep, wooded scarp softens out into a series of gentle slopes in the east, opening up the landscape and signalling a change in land use. Traditionally, the eastern part of the LCA has been used for fruit growing, and there is still a richly patterned landscape of apple, cherry and pear orchards around Ightham and Plaxtol. Rows of poplars or alders provide shelter from wind and frost, and turn tiny country lanes into deep enclosed corridors. In a few remaining pockets, cobnut groves or *plats* still remain, their unpruned gnarled, twiggy trunks contrasting with the more managed appearance of apple and pear trees elsewhere. In recent years some orchards have been removed and replaced with arable fields. The character of the landscape is also locally influenced by the large estates of Fairlawne (private) and Ightham Mote (National Trust). Fairlawne has a particularly well-managed (sometimes almost manicured) appearance.
- 12.2.8 Along the eastern boundary of Sevenoaks, sweeps of pasture between heathy woodland in the historic parkland of Knole House form the largest and most important area of unimproved acid grassland in Kent. The mix of oak, beech and sweet chestnut woodlands continues beyond the park as far as Seal Chart. The variety of tree cover, hedgerow and parkland provides a strong ecological

base, and the woodland edge is a feature within most views. It visually reinforces the high proportion of woodland in the area.

- 12.2.9 At the centre of Knole Park is a Jacobean remodelling of a medieval archbishop's palace, which dates back to 1456. It later became a royal possession and Henry VIII hunted here. The sika deer inhabiting the park are direct descendants of Tudor deer. Knole House and park are owned by the National Trust and popular with visitors. Knole Park and Fawke Common is a SSSI and contains a number of rare plants, animal and insect species within grassland, parkland, woodland and wetland habitats. These include nationally scarce fungi, lichen, beetles and other insects. Impressive anthills created by Yellow Meadow Ants dot the grassland, and have been distinctive features of Knole Park for centuries. Nearby Bitchet Common, Seal Chart and Redhill Wood are also SSSIs.



*Deer graze in wood pasture at Knole Park, one of the largest acid grassland SSSI in Kent*



*Cave at Hosey Common, thought to have originated as a Greensand quarry. Now a nature reserve and designated SSSI as a bat habitat*



*Greensand used in building at Plaxtol Church*



*Traditional cobnut plat near Plaxtol*



*Ightham Mote, constructed of local greensand and oak.*



*A typical scene near Westerham, with woodland largely enclosing the view*



*View south over the Low Weald from the top of the Greensand Ridge near Crockham Hill Common*

## 12.3 Landscape Condition, Sensitivities and Forces for Change

- 12.3.1 The Sevenoaks Greensand Ridge was severely affected by the 1987 storm, with many trees lost, and this was still very apparent in the landscape when the 1995 Assessment was published. Other matters of concern mentioned in the 1995 Assessment include the threats to historic parkland, loss of hedges in areas of arable cultivation and the impacts of quarrying, especially if screening vegetation is lost. The 2004 Assessment identified the entire Landscape Character Area as being in very good condition, and a strongly unified landscape with few visual detractors. The main concerns at this time were enlargement of villages and ridge-top development – concerns which remain. There is strong pressure for residential development throughout the LCA, in part because of the proximity of good rail services to London.
- 12.3.2 Today, the relatively high proportion of the land in estate ownership (including extensive areas of National Trust land) means that much of the land is well-managed. However, there are localised issues of suburbanisation of the deeply rural character, and the threats identified in earlier Assessments remain active. There are also positive land management projects, including schemes to promote public access, awareness and habitat management of commons. It is notable that managed sites, open spaces and quiet rural roads are experiencing considerable and growing levels of visitor numbers. Increased numbers of visitors are creating pressure for new car parks and enlarged facilities, and raising concerns that the visitor experience may be diminished.



*View from the A25 towards Fuller's Hill in 1995 (above) and 2017 (below)*

<i>Issue</i>	<i>Landscape sensitivities and potential landscape impacts</i>
Loss/ neglect of historic parkland	The character of parkland is threatened by tree disease, storm damage, neglect, small-scale development and alternative land uses (such as golf courses). Although there has been extensive replanting since the storm of 1987, parkland trees reaching over-maturity are not always being replaced.
Management of woodland and commons	Woodland and common land is key to the character of this area, and contains a wide variety of semi-natural habitats. Habitats such as heather, grassland and wood pasture require active management through grazing or cutting, and will become woodland if they are not managed. Loss of heathland and wood pasture will result in loss of habitat for insects, butterflies and birds. Coppiced woodland also requires regular management, and is beneficial for woodland bird species. There are issues with invasive species such as rhododendron in some woodlands. Ongoing projects to manage commons are a positive force for change.
Climate change and natural forces	Trees are vulnerable to a range of tree diseases, with Ash Dieback currently a particular concern. Climate change is likely to impact on tree species in a variety of different ways. For example, beech is relatively intolerant to drought, so is likely to suffer if summers become hotter and drier. Trees are also vulnerable to storm damage, with storms predicted to become more frequent and intense as a result of climate change.
Quarrying	Scattered sandstone quarries, such as Stangate Quarry near Borough Green, dot the northern edge of the greensand. The rolling landform and the cumulative effect of dense woodlands and hedges help to screen such sites from the surrounding countryside, but the loss of a single hedge or strip of woodland can expose the scar of a quarry over a long distance. Some former quarries are now landfilled and others are being developed with housing. It is anticipated that there will be growing demands for minerals in the coming years with greater pressure exerted on the AONB.
New development	Development pressure is a concern across the area. Some village expansion is less well-concealed than older settlement growth, and is therefore more apparent in the landscape, particularly if it occurs on ridge tops, or is of unsympathetic materials. Gradual suburbanisation of rural lanes, particularly on the edge of villages, through (for example) suburban gateways and boundary treatments is changing the character of rural lanes in some parts of the area. There is also growing pressure to convert agricultural buildings to dwellings, and for extending/ replacing existing houses, which can impact on the character of the area.
Development within the setting of the AONB	The area around Sevenoaks (and the lower land to the north) is facing particular development pressure. Development taking place outside the AONB boundary but within the setting of the AONB may impact on the much valued long views from within the AONB.
Land use change	Grubbing-up of orchards changes the texture, appearance and seasonal cycles of the landscape. Past loss of hedgerows in arable areas has led to erosion of the landscape pattern. Use of farmland for horse grazing/ stabling is an additional change, as is encroachment of residential land uses onto former pasture land or woodland adjacent to dwellings. The new Environmental Land Management Scheme (ELMS) offers opportunities to restore and reinforce valued characteristics of the landscape.
Traffic and impacts on local lanes	Local roads and lanes are becoming more congested. In places the verges / banks are being damaged by large vehicles, causing a loss of their historic character.

<i>Issue</i>	<i>Landscape sensitivities and potential landscape impacts</i>
Damage to archaeological sites	Archaeological sites in woodland are particularly vulnerable to damage by tree roots, bracken and scrub growth as well as inappropriate woodland management practices. Large prehistoric sites at Crockham Hill and Oldbury are largely concealed by dense woodland.



*Recently grubbed-up and ploughed orchard. The dark stains are ash from the burning of orchard trees.*



*Lime tree blown over in the 1987 storm which has re-sprouted, with new trunks growing from former branches.*



*Invasive rhododendron on Hosey Common*



*Veteran tree, Knole Park*



*Active management on Crockham Hill Common has promoted heathland habitat*



*Well-managed grazed parkland in the Fairlawne estate near Plaxtol.*

## 12.4 Landscape Management Recommendations

### Aspirational Landscape Strategy

The distinctive character of the Greensand Ridge is recognised and valued by visitors and the local community. The woodlands, parklands and commons are well managed and popular with visitors, and support a diverse range of habitats and species. Visitor pressure is managed in such a way that the character and qualities of the area are not diminished. The range of historic buildings - from grand country houses to traditional farmsteads - are protected and enjoyed within their historic landscape settings. Orchards and cobnut plots continue to be a feature of the landscape and contribute to its pattern and sense of place. The settlements retain their distinctive character and form, and any new development is carefully integrated into the landscape, avoiding prominent locations. Lanes retain their rural character and are not suburbanised by highway works or incongruous property boundaries. The impact of main roads is reduced and highway treatments are more sympathetic to their context. There are opportunities to appreciate the views over the Darent Valley, Kemsing Vale and Low Weald. Any development outside the AONB has minimal impact on views. The tranquil characteristics of the area are conserved.

#### Protect

- Protect the undeveloped, tranquil and historic rural character of the area.
- Protect the distinctive horizons, particularly the top of the scarp, avoiding development and other structures which would impact on views from the surrounding area.
- Protect distinctive village forms and open character.
- Protect historic buildings and their settings, and the special character of villages and farmsteads.
- Protect archaeological sites, particularly those in woodland, to minimise damage from tree roots, bracken and scrub.

#### Manage

- Manage parkland and wood pasture, encouraging the production of Parkland Management Plans, and the planting of replacement parkland trees which will continue to be a feature in the landscape for future generations. Manage grassland areas through appropriate grazing/ cutting to enhance the diversity of flora and supported species. Conserve ancient and veteran trees.
- Manage woodland, including traditional management techniques such as coppicing, pollarding and if appropriate undergrazing, to achieve age and species diversity and a diversity of ground flora. Remove invasive species such as rhododendron. Reinforce wooded edges to existing settlements and farmed areas.
- Consider the diversification of woodlands using appropriate native species to provide resilience to climate change and tree disease.
- Promote new hedgerow / roadside trees from existing hedge stock. Also retain and manage hedgerows along narrow, vergeless lanes.
- Manage common land, maintaining and enhancing the diversity of habitats (including heath, woodland and acid grassland) which exist within the extensive common land in this Landscape Character Area. Promote sensitive public awareness and access to the commons, and encourage management through community projects for the benefit of future generations.
- Manage orchards and cobnut plots, identifying new commercial markets for local produce to keep growing viable.

- Manage agricultural land, encouraging the replanting of lost hedgerows and the planting or promotion of hedgerow and in-field trees and shaws to strengthen landscape structure and act as habitat links.
- Manage watercourses and work with landowners and the Environment Agency to promote healthy watercourses free from pollution and invasive species.
- Manage the highway infrastructure in a way which respects and reinforces the rural context. Maintain verges/ banks, passing places, drains and ditches. Conserve the routes and characteristics of the Greensand drove roads.

## Plan

- Develop planning guidance for gateways and property boundaries to encourage schemes which are in keeping with the rural character of the area and do not contribute to suburbanisation.
- Ensure any new development is well-integrated into the landscape (using tree, woodland and hedgerow planting) and on a suitable scale. Consider the wooded settings to settlements, and enhance them where possible. Avoid development on ridge tops or in prominent positions on the scarp and ensure that any new small-scale development does not intrude on long views. Encourage use of distinctive local materials including ragstone, brick, weatherboarding and tile.
- Raise awareness of the area and its character amongst local people and the wider public, and encourage those who visit and explore the area to do so in a way which minimises their impact. This could be done through outreach to people visiting popular National Trust sites (Ightham Mote, Knole, Chartwell etc.) and local commons.
- Investigate opportunities to enable views over the surrounding area. Where viewpoints already exist, manage vegetation to prevent views from becoming obscured.
- Work with Highways Authorities to increase the biodiversity value of verges and hedgerows without compromising safety.
- Within the setting of the LCA, work with Local Planning Authorities and designers to achieve the best possible landscape and ecological integration and minimal impact on views, with compensation achieved for lost qualities.
- Ensure the identified character of the LCA is used as a basis for future efforts to mitigate climate change, for instance through tree establishment.
- Ensure that quarry sites (existing and future) are directed away from the AONB and where they are approved they should be well-screened by topography and vegetation with careful restoration plans. Restoration plans must be followed.
- Encourage partnership working between different Local Authorities, agencies and community groups to enable seamless working across the AONB. Consider environmental/ landscape limits in planning and plan making.

## 13.0 Lympne Greensand Escarpment

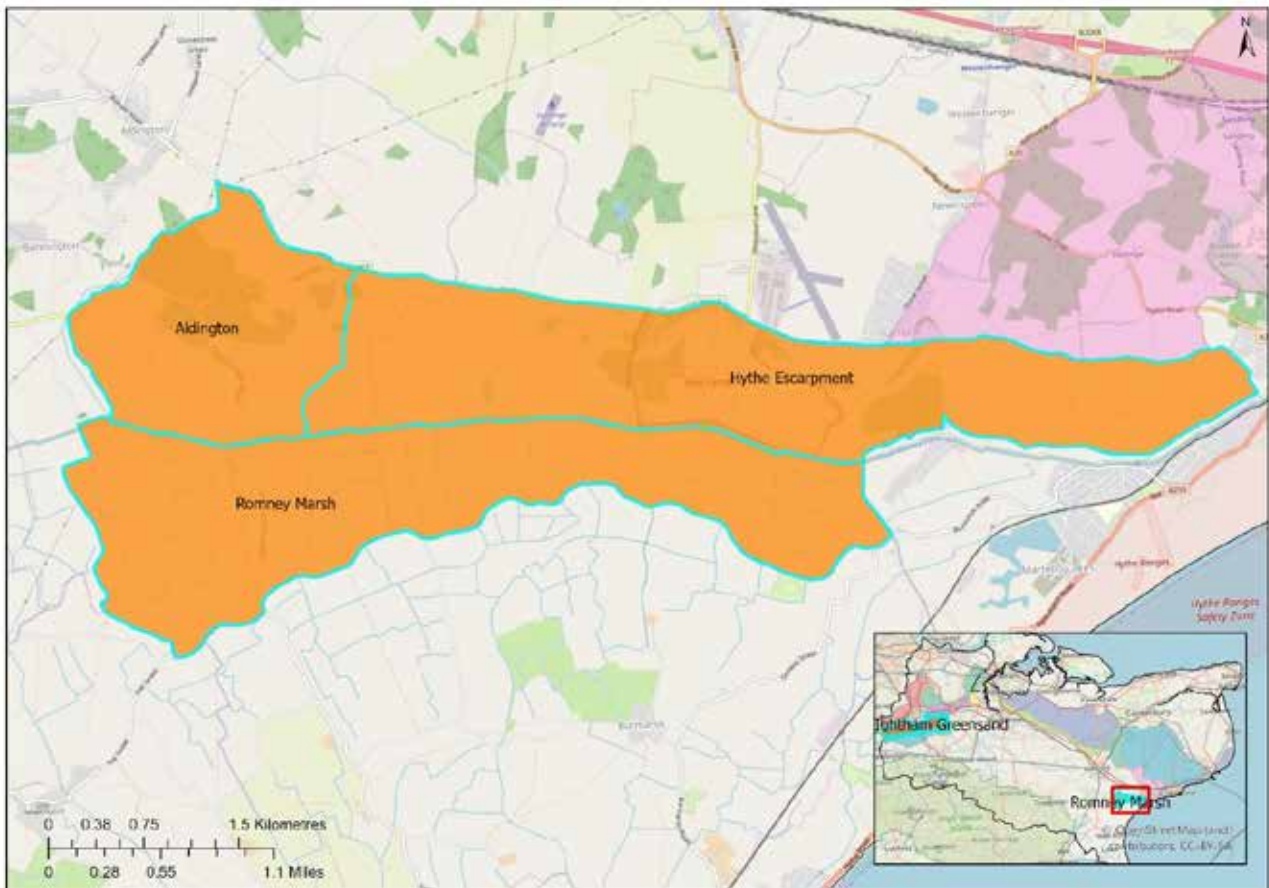
### Landscape Character Area 5B

Landscape Character Type 5: Greensand

Districts/ Boroughs: Ashford; Shepway

Landscape/Countryside Partnerships: Romney Marsh (the Fifth Continent) Landscape Partnership

**Location and Context:** This LCA forms a southern spur of the Kent Downs AONB. It comprises the Greensand Escarpment between Aldington and Hythe, as well as a small area of Romney Marsh below the escarpment, and some of the wooded land above it.



*Location map for Lympne Greensand Escarpment LCA, also showing Local Character Areas of Romney Marsh, Aldington and Hythe Escarpment*

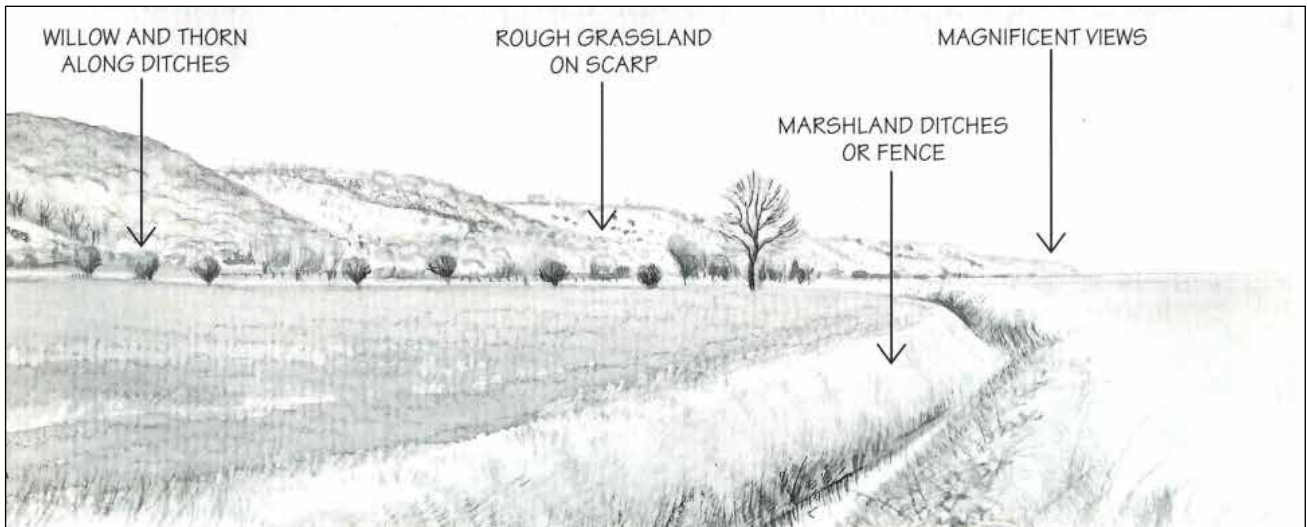


*Hythe escarpment as seen from Botolph's Bridge on Romney Marsh*

## Summary Characteristics

- Underlying geology of the escarpment is Greensand, with layers of clay causing it to slump. Soils on the escarpment are generally pitted and unstable.
- Landform dominated by a sloping south-facing escarpment (a former cliff line), with undulating land above, and the flat, artificially drained land of Romney Marsh below.
- Spring-fed streams flow down the escarpment into the Royal Military Canal at the base. This constructed watercourse and the associated Canal Cutting help to drain Romney Marsh.
- Woodland and scrub on the escarpment, with denser woodlands to the west, and strong lines of trees (including pollards) following the Royal Military Canal and other watercourses.
- A range of land uses, including pastoral and arable agriculture, nature conservation and recreation. Fields generally irregular in shape, and bounded by hedgerows on
- Semi-natural habitats include extensive grassland (The Roughs) and woodland blocks (mainly in the west). Also watercourses, scrub and hedgerows.
- Rich archaeological and cultural heritage, particularly related to coastal defence, including Lemanis Roman fort, Lympne Castle, Royal Military Canal and sound mirror.
- Roman road along top of escarpment, and winding lanes on Romney Marsh.
- A strongly patterned and textured landscape, showing variations in different parts of the LCA.
- Popular for recreation, with Royal Military Canal Path providing easy access from Hythe. Port Lympne is a popular visitor attraction.
- Spectacular views across Romney Marsh from the top of the escarpment. The escarpment forms the backdrop to views inland from Romney Marsh.

the scarp, and by ditches on Romney Marsh.



*Sketch of Lympne Greensand Escarpment from 'The Kent Downs Landscape' (1995)*

## 13.1 Description

- 13.1.1 The most southerly part of the AONB extends from Hythe west to Aldington. The character area includes part of the Hythe escarpment, and the section of Romney Marsh immediately below, which it overlooks. Until the early Middle Ages, this scarp formed the edge of a large, marshy lagoon. Gradually, however, the lagoon was reclaimed, through a combination of the natural accumulation of silt and shingle, the construction of sea defences and sustained drainage. The resulting land of Romney Marsh now forms one of the most fertile areas of Kent, with a particularly long growing season.
- 13.1.2 Most of the Hythe escarpment is the eroded face of the greensands and in particular of the calcareous Kentish Ragstone. Over the centuries the surface has gradually slipped to form a steep, uneven slope, enclosing the northern edge of the marsh. The vulnerability of the coast to attack has left a long legacy of old military defences scattered across the area, from the tumbled walls of the Roman fort of Lemanis, to the 19<sup>th</sup> Century Royal Military Canal at the foot of the escarpment and the last of the inter-war 'sound mirrors' behind Burmarsh, 'listening' for approaching aircraft. In addition to the grassland and scrub habitats of the escarpment, the lower parts of the character area contains an ecologically-rich network of drainage ditches (often lined with pollarded willows and reeds) and the Royal Military Canal which is a Scheduled Ancient Monument and Local Wildlife Site.
- 13.1.3 The scarp is highly visible from the flat marsh, forming a long hillside of rough grassland, dotted with scrub with arable fields on the lower slopes towards Aldington. Several large deciduous woodlands break up the sweep of the landform, being more characteristic in the west around Aldington. From the areas between these woodlands, there are spectacular views across Romney Marsh and the English Channel.
- 13.1.4 One of the key characteristics of this area is its historical sense of change and impermanence. These stem from the visible evidence of past change in the landscape - the ancient cliff line stranded miles

from the sea; the tumbled walls of the Roman fort; the landslips on The Roughs, and the flat reclaimed landscape of Romney Marsh.

- 13.1.5 Settlement is sparse throughout the area. It is largely limited to isolated properties along the top of the scarp, and scattered farms along the roads which snake through Romney Marsh. As a result, much of the area feels remote and isolated, and is sensitive to development and change.
- 13.1.6 The Royal Military Canal, which runs at the base of the scarp, acts as the 'backbone' of the area. Originally built in the early 19<sup>th</sup> Century as a combined defence and drainage project, it is still important to the drainage of Romney Marsh. It is also a key wildlife and recreational corridor. The Royal Military Canal Path, which extends from Hythe to Rye, follows the old military road alongside the canal and is part of the Saxon Shore Way long distance route. The Wild Animal Park at Port Lympne is also a popular tourism and recreation destination; new tourist accommodation on the site has interrupted the relatively undeveloped nature of the scarp.
- 13.1.7 The contrast in topography between the scarp and the marsh is key to the area's character, and also to the magnificent and uninterrupted views between them. From the top of the scarp the views encompass Romney Marsh to Dungeness and beyond, Fairlight cliffs and the Weald. In clear conditions, France is visible across the Channel.



*Landslip landform at The Roughts*



*Pollarded willows at the base of the Hythe Escarpment*



*Lympne Norman church and castle. The blockwork extension on the top of the castle dates from WW2.*



*Sinuous, reed-fringed road across Romney Marsh, originally a salt-marsh creek which was embanked as part of the drainage process in Saxon times*



*Panoramic view across Romney Marsh from Lympne churchyard. Dungeness power station is visible on the horizon*



*Tranquil scene on the Royal Military Canal, looking across to Romney Marsh*

## 13.2 Local Character Areas

### Hythe Escarpment

- 13.2.1 The Hythe Escarpment is an ancient cliff line, now stranded several miles from the sea following the reclamation of Romney Marsh. The scarp is topped by a wide band of open arable land which extends to the AONB boundary along the Roman Road. The Hythe Escarpment, unlike the chalk face of the Downs, is furrowed throughout its length by small streams, which emerge from the sandstone high up on the hillside, and run down into the Royal Military Canal. To the east of the Port Lympne Wild Animal Park, most of the scarp face is botanically rich rough grassland, with a considerable amount of scrub encroaching up the slopes. The sparse vegetation and the pitted, unstable soils produce a bleak, wild landscape, reflecting its exposed location. Landslips are evident in the uneven landform of The Roughts at the eastern end of the Local Character Area, which is designated SSSI for its grassland habitats. To the west, the scarp becomes shallower. Remnant hedgerows are still evident across the slopes, which, together with the woodlands and shaws, form a network of trees. To the west of Port Lympne, some of the woodland and unimproved pastures on the scarp are Local Wildlife Sites. Many of the buildings, including the spectacularly-sited Lympne Castle and Lympne church, are built in the local ragstone.
- 13.2.2 The simplicity and integrity of this landscape and its high visibility from much of Romney Marsh mean that any developments or changes which take place on its slopes will have major effects not only on the immediate landscape but also on the wider setting of Romney Marsh. There are notable and unique ancient and historic sites within this landscape, including Lemanis Roman Fort (originally built as a coastal fort to defend a long-gone harbour); Lympne Castle (its medieval successor at the top of the scarp); Lympne Church (parts of which date from the 11<sup>th</sup> Century); the chapel to the Holy Maid of Kent (a Henry VIII dissenter) and Burmarsh Sound Mirror. Historic farmsteads and more recent buildings also follow a distinct pattern towards the top of the escarpment, further contributing to the sense of place.
- 13.2.3 Trees and woodlands on the scarp are often dominated by ash, and Ash Dieback is therefore having a significant impact on the wooded appearance of the scarp. It is also having an impact on the more open landscape at the top of the scarp, as many of the limited roadside and hedgerow trees in this area are ash.



*Hythe Escarpment as seen from the Royal Military Canal, showing grassland and woodland habitats. The tumbled remains of Lemanis Roman Fort are in the centre of the picture, with Lympne castle on the horizon to the right.*

## Aldington

- 13.2.3 In the extreme west of this area, the underlying sandstones gradually give way to the heavy Weald Clay, resulting in softer, more rounded slopes. This change is also reflected in the high proportion of deciduous, ancient woodland which dominates the scarp at Aldington. Broadleaf and coppice woodland provide widespread semi-natural habitats, and there are some splendid isolated oak and ash trees. The gentle topography of the lower slopes, however, allows some arable cultivation and as a result the wild, bleak appearance of the eastern sections is lost. There are occasional isolated residential properties, usually set back from the road and surrounded by grounds and woodland. From the top of the scarp there are spectacular views across Romney Marsh and the English Channel.
- 13.2.4 Aldington knoll is reputedly a Roman burial mound site which may have later been used as a beacon, and as a gathering site for smugglers from the Romney Marsh. It is the subject of poem by Ford Madox Ford, entitled 'Aldington Knoll: The Old Sailor Speaks'

*Al'ington Knoll it stands up high  
Guidin' the sailors sailin' by  
Stands up high for all to see,  
Cater the marsh and crost the sea.*

*Al'ington Knoll, when we was cubs,  
Use 'ter mark where we'd sunk the tubs:  
Get it in line with Romney Church,  
They revenue chaps was left in the lurch.*

*Al'ington Knoll's a mound a-top,  
With a dyke all round – an' it's bound to stop:  
For them as made it in them ol' days  
Sees to it well that theer it stays...*



*View south from the scarp at Aldington, showing deciduous woodland and garden planting. There are spectacular views across Romney Marsh visible in the gaps between the trees.*

## Romney Marsh

- 13.2.5 The AONB includes a small part of the vast, flat expanse of Romney Marsh, which stretches down to Rye. This area forms the foreground and setting to views from the adjacent scarp, and is therefore strongly associated with it both physically and visually. The name 'marsh' is misleading, as this area is now highly productive arable land (although it was famous sheep pasture for many centuries, until the mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century). Nevertheless it still retains an extensive network of drainage ditches or 'sewers' which regulate the water table, and support characteristic fringes of feathery reeds between the fields. There are almost no hedges on the Marsh, and the occasional scrubby, windblown trees which dot the landscape are largely the result of 19<sup>th</sup> Century attempts to create shelter. This is an ancient landscape with a pattern of lanes, settlement and fields established in the Saxon period, and the long history of drainage of the Marsh can still be read in the landscape today. The winding, sinuous lanes raised above the surrounding fields reflect their origins as salt marsh creeks which were embanked to aid drainage in Saxon times. The name of the lane along the AONB boundary ('Wall Lane') is a typical example. The winding older creeks contrast with the straight watercourse, defensive ditches and road associated with the Royal Military Canal, which runs along the base of the scarp. It was constructed as both a defence and to aid drainage of the Marsh.
- 13.2.6 The flatness and remote qualities of the Marsh make it very vulnerable to the intrusive effects of development, which are often worsened by inappropriate measures to conceal the damage, such as conifer shelterbelts. Its position at the base of the scarp also means that any development here is visible from above.



*The Royal Military Canal and Romney Marsh as seen from Hythe Dam*

### 13.3 Landscape Condition, Sensitivities and Forces for Change

- 13.3.1 The landscape appears to be in good condition, and is generally well-managed. The 1995 Assessment raised suburbanisation as a concern within this landscape, but this seems to be less apparent today, possibly because of the screening effects of vegetation which has grown up in the intervening 22 years. However, the presence of pylons and power lines is noticeable around Aldington, and the Little Cheyne Court Windfarm on Romney Marsh (outside the AONB) is visible from many viewpoints on the scarp and the Marsh. Tourism accommodation at Port Lympe is visible from the Romney Marsh and encroachment of scrub remains a concern. Limited changes have taken place on the Hythe Escarpment, mostly in relation to the Port Lympe Wildlife Park where various new enclosures and other structures have been built, some of which are quite obvious in views from Romney Marsh. A caravan park within the AONB on Romney Marsh is also visible.
- 13.3.2 Comparison of photographs from 1995 and 2017 shows that the landscape is very similar, but that some changes have taken place. There are more structures associated with the Wildlife Park today, and the density of scrub growing on the scarp has increased. Buildings near the top of the scarp are less obvious as trees have grown up around them. In the 1995 photo the treeline on the ridge has gaps in, probably resulting from the 1987 storms. By 2017 new tree growth gives the impression of continuous tree cover on the ridge.



*'Then and now' photographs of the Lympe Escarpment. 1995 (above) and 2017 (below)*

<b>Issue</b>	<b>Landscape sensitivities and potential landscape impacts</b>
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<p>Intervisibility</p>	<p>The close visual relationships between the scarp and the marsh at its foot mean that changes in one will be visible from the other. Visible changes may result from new development (e.g. large buildings) but also from changes in land management (e.g. lack of grazing).</p> <p>There are a number of Scheduled Monuments and Listed Buildings on the scarp, and any changes to their settings will be visible from both the scarp and from Romney Marsh.</p>
<p>Recreation</p>	<p>There are two key recreation sites within this LCA - Port Lympne Wildlife Park, and the Royal Military Canal. In recent years, expansion of the Wildlife Park has seen more isolated and ad-hoc structures visible in the landscape, including enclosures, a holiday village and tree houses.</p> <p>Footpath condition is variable. Less popular routes can be overgrown, but there is a concentration of walkers and cyclists using the path alongside the Royal Military Canal.</p> <p>As the population of the local area increases following new development then there will be further recreational pressure on this landscape. This will require careful management to avoid detriment to its ecology, character and qualities.</p>
<p>New development and infrastructure</p>	<p>The potential new town site at Otterpool, and an industrial land use allocation are adjacent to this LCA, beyond the AONB boundary to the north. They are likely to impact on views from the AONB and its setting, as well as potentially affecting tranquillity, light pollution and recreational pressure.</p> <p>Developments on Romney Marsh (including for example large agricultural buildings, and solar farms) would impact on views from the scarp. In such a flat and distinctive landscape, it is important to note that poor attempts to screen new buildings (such as planting Leylandii hedges) can exacerbate the problem.</p> <p>Skylines on the summit of the scarp are particularly vulnerable, as changes here can have a dramatic impact on surrounding views.</p> <p>The existing wind farm at Little Cheyne Court, and the pylon lines emanating from Dungeness demonstrate how prominent vertical features can be in this flat and highly visible landscape.</p> <p>The character of rural lanes may be lost if traffic increases require widening, straightening or other insensitive highways measures.</p>
<p>Climate change and natural forces</p>	<p>The broadleaved woodlands and hedgerow trees on the scarp are very vulnerable to Ash Dieback.</p> <p>Romney Marsh is exceptionally low-lying and is therefore especially vulnerable to flooding. The risk of flooding from both the sea and from rivers is likely to be exacerbated by climate change and associated increase in frequency and intensity of storms. Climate change may also impact on crop choices and farming cycles.</p> <p>Natural processes of land slippage and soil movement are part of the character of the dynamic scarp. They affect the appearance of the landscape in this area, particularly following heavy rain, and can impact on archaeology, buildings and vegetation.</p>

<i>Issue</i>	<i>Landscape sensitivities and potential landscape impacts</i>
Land management changes	<p>Romney Marsh is currently intensively farmed arable land. Soil exhaustion is a problem, as is ground shrinkage following desiccation of peat soils. Lowering land surfaces means ditches must be dredged in order to function properly, and this reduces wildlife habitats associated with stream and wetlands. In addition, use of fertilizer on pasture changes the grass and wildflower species present, as many grasses only grow on nutrient-poor soils. This in turn reduces the number of insects and birds which they can support. Farms on Romney Marsh are currently coming out of Entry Level Stewardship schemes for positive land management. The new Environmental Land Management Scheme (ELMS) offers opportunities to restore and reinforce valued characteristics of the landscape. International trade arrangements are likely to also affect the landscape, for example the arrangements for lamb exports will impact on the viability of sheep farming, which will in turn affect grazing levels on grasslands.</p> <p>Continued scrub growth may impact on archaeology and wildlife value if unchecked. Larger agricultural machinery can result in damage to verges and historic bridge structures.</p> <p>Fragmentation of woodland ownership and management ('woodlotting') can result in loss of coherent and effective woodland management.</p>
Climate change and natural forces	<p>The broadleaved woodlands and hedgerow trees on the scarp are very vulnerable to Ash Dieback.</p> <p>Romney Marsh is exceptionally low-lying and is therefore especially vulnerable to flooding. The risk of flooding from both the sea and from rivers is likely to be exacerbated by climate change and associated increase in frequency and intensity of storms. Climate change may also impact on crop choices and farming cycles.</p> <p>Natural processes of land slippage and soil movement are part of the character of the dynamic scarp. They affect the appearance of the landscape in this area, particularly following heavy rain, and can impact on archaeology, buildings and vegetation.</p>



*Vertical poles stand out in the flat landscape of Romney Marsh, and the caravan park is visible from the scarp as well as across the Marsh. Deciduous woodlands and hedgerow trees on the scarp are vulnerable to Ash Dieback.*

## 13.4 Landscape Management Recommendations

### Aspirational Landscape Strategy

The landscape retains its unique character and strong sense of place. It still has a timeless quality, is well managed, and is able to cope with the demands for recreation within it.

A network of wildlife corridors runs throughout the landscape. On the scarp, well-managed woodlands are linked by hedgerow corridors, and grasslands are appropriately grazed and linked. On Romney Marsh, watercourses form a focus for wildlife corridors within the agricultural landscape.

The loss of trees from the landscape is mitigated by new planting and natural regeneration. both in woodlands and associated with trees outside woodlands.

Development within the landscape is minimal, and is carefully sited and designed so that it does not visually intrude. Roads retain their distinctive characters, and road corridors retain their rural feel. Views both towards and from the scarp are conserved and enhanced.

### Protect

- Protect historic sites and monuments, and their settings, taking account of the intervisibility between scarp and marsh.
- Protect skylines and the scarp slope (particularly the top of the scarp) from development, and look at removing and mitigating intrusive features such as poles, power cables and structures. Aim to retain the scarp's open grassland and scrub character.
- Protect historic landscape features which may not be otherwise designated, such as the ancient road and ditch networks on Romney Marsh.
- Protect long views across Romney Marsh from the scarp, considering how developments on the Marsh will appear when viewed from above and avoid or mitigate impacts, for instance with careful advance planting.
- Protect the historic features and distinctive vegetation along the Royal Military Canal.

### Manage

- Manage woodlands, encouraging coherent management plans to retain the scale and unity of broadleaf woodland coverage, including coppice woodland. Look at replacing trees affected by Ash Dieback with alternative species if this becomes necessary. Link woodlands, copses and hedgerows to create a robust network.
- Manage grasslands, promoting appropriate grazing to avoid scrub growth and encourage diversity of grasses and herbs.
- Manage farmland areas, encouraging wildlife corridors along ditches and field margins. Consider reintroducing grazing into the agricultural cycle to improve soil quality.
- Manage watercourses to combine effective drainage with wildlife habitats (e.g. through stepped-profile banks) in accordance with Internal Drainage Board bylaws. Establish new willows (future pollards) and field margins along ditches.
- Continue to manage pollarded willows, oak and ash. Plant new trees where old trees are becoming over-mature so that they remain a feature of the landscape. Promote new hedgerow / roadside trees from existing hedge stock.
- Manage recreation, including positive management of the rights of way network, to minimise damage from walking and cycling.

## Plan

- Develop strategies for partnership working, for example for woodland and farmland management.
- Utilise Green Infrastructure corridor opportunities, particularly along the Royal Military Canal.
- If proposed developments in the vicinity come to fruition, engage with their designers at an early stage to achieve the best possible edge treatments, landscape integration and building design, as well as investment in landscape management for recreation and landscape conservation.
- Use offsite contributions from developments where they are approved in the vicinity to sensitivity enhance recreation provision and improve wildlife habitat networks within and connecting to this LCA.
- Avoid further suburbanisation, for example through use of sympathetic building materials and styles, and ensure any new buildings (including farm buildings) are well integrated using trees and woodland. Seek the use of sympathetic local materials such as brick, tile and ragstone.
- Work with Highways Authorities to increase the biodiversity value of verges and hedgerows without compromising safety.
- Ensure new tree establishment associated with climate mitigation respects and enhances landscape character and qualities.
- Within the setting of the LCA, work with Local Planning Authorities and designers to achieve the best possible landscape and ecological integration and minimal impact on views, with compensation achieved for lost qualities.
- Encourage partnership working between different Local Authorities, agencies and community groups to enable seamless working across the AONB. Consider environmental/ landscape limits in planning and plan making.

## 14.0 Eden Valley Low Weald

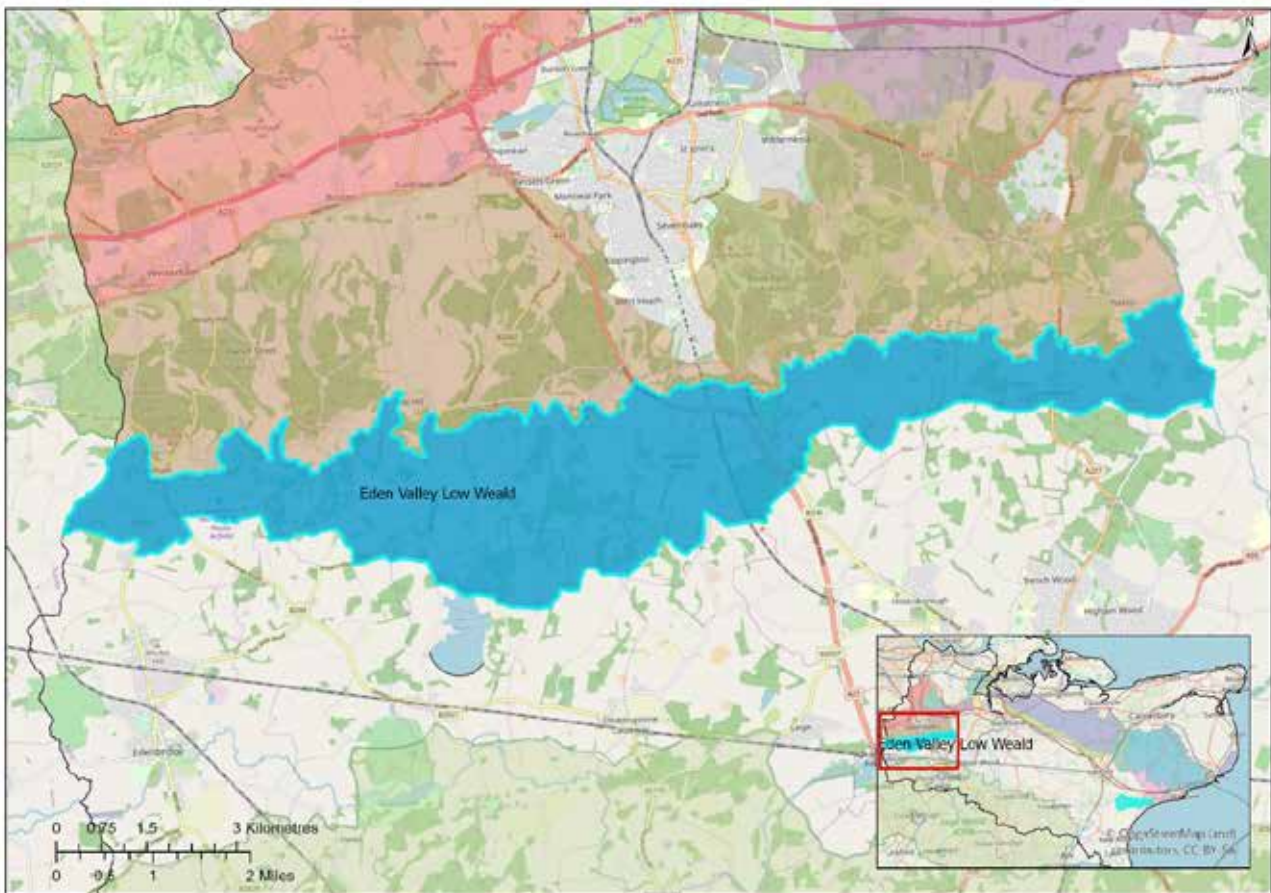
### Landscape Character Area 6A

**Landscape Character Type 6:** Low Weald

**Districts/ Boroughs:** Sevenoaks; Tonbridge and Malling

**Landscape/Countryside Partnerships:** North West Kent Countryside Partnership

**Location and Context:** This LCA is located in the far south-west of the Kent Downs AONB, to the south of the Sevenoaks Greensand Ridge LCA. It extends from Crockham Hill in the west to Dunk's Green in the east, and includes several settlements including Sevenoaks Weald and Shipbourne.



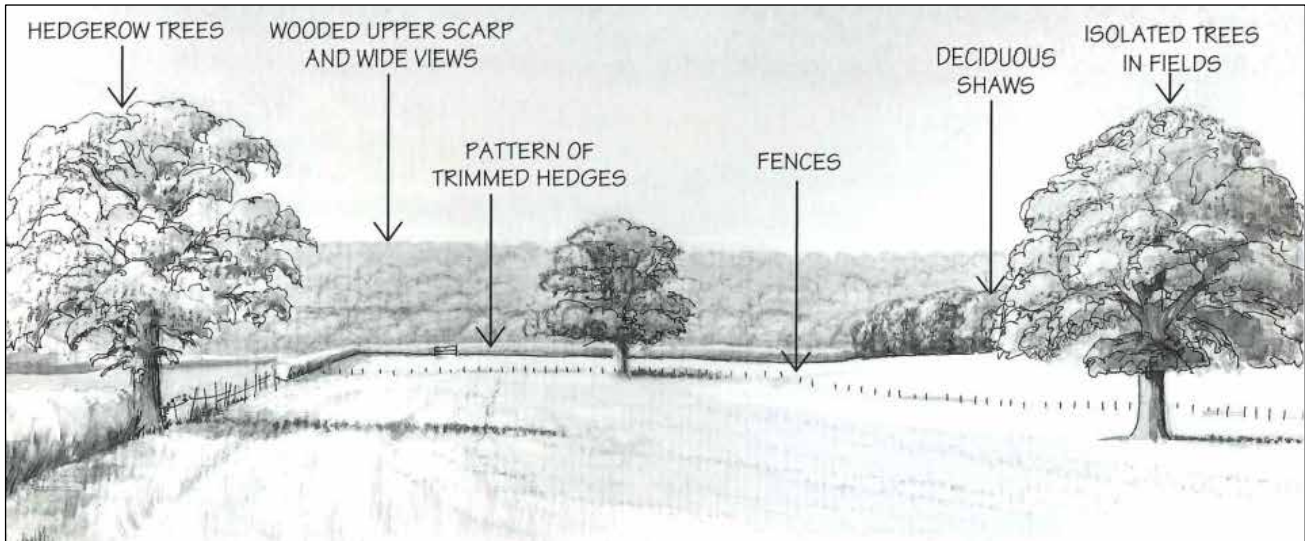
*Location map for Eden Valley Low Weald LCA*



*A typical view within the Eden Valley Low Weald, near the foot of the Greensand Scarp. The Greensand Scarp forms a backdrop to a patchwork of irregular fields divided by hedgerows and trees.*

## Summary Characteristics

- Underlying geology of Weald clay, creating sticky, damp clay soils.
- An undulating landform, which gradually slopes south from the Greensand Ridge in the north to the valley of the River Eden in the south.
- A series of streams flow south, forming tributaries of the River Eden. There are valley-floor wetlands, streams and ponds, and extensive open water at Bough Beech Reservoir.
- Deciduous woodland blocks, copses, hedgerows and infield trees create an impression of a densely-treed landscape. Oak trees are traditionally associated with this LCA.
- Land use is primarily pastoral agriculture, although there is some arable land use. Field patterns vary, but are generally small and irregular, divided by hedgerows.
- Semi-natural habitats include woodlands, wetlands, streams and mature oak trees.
- An ancient and long-settled landscape, with historic features such as lanes, farms, woodlands and field patterns unchanged in centuries.
- Lightly settled, with scattered farms and small villages. Villages are often arranged around commons or greens. Numerous historic buildings constructed from local timber, stone and clay.
- Lanes tend to run north-south, and often wind between high banks.
- Irregular fields divided by hedgerows create a patchwork pattern in the landscape.
- Much of the LCA has a strong sense of time-depth, and a feeling of tranquillity and detachment from modern life.
- The Greensand Ridge to the north forms a wooded backdrop to views from within the LCA. There are spectacular views across this LCA from the Greensand Ridge.



*Sketch of Eden Valley Low Weald from 'The Kent Downs Landscape' (1995)*

## 14.1 Description

- 14.1.1 The Eden Valley Low Weald Landscape Character Area comprises the undulating clay vale to the south of the Sevenoaks Greensand Ridge. It extends from Crockham Hill in the west to Plaxtol in the east, and has a sense of peacefulness and of being less visited than other parts of the Kent Downs AONB.
- 14.1.2 The Low Weald is more open and pastoral than the extensively-wooded Greensand Ridge. However, the landscape still contains numerous small woods, trees, copses, shaws and often well treed hedgerows which combine to give the landscape a deceptively densely-wooded appearance. Although there are pockets of arable cultivation, the heavy wet clay favours grassland, and the dominant land use is irregular grazed fields, separated by hedgerows. These produce distinctive patchwork field patterns across the gentle slopes. There are also areas of estate parkland, particularly towards the east.
- 14.1.3 Small springs, seeping out from between the upper layers of Greensand, have cut a series of deep furrows in the scarp, which continue through the Low Weald before draining eventually into the flat Eden Valley in the south. The Low Weald is unusual within the Kent Downs AONB in that it contains surface water in the form of numerous springs, ponds and streams, as well as Bough Beech Reservoir (constructed 1969-70).
- 14.1.4 The clays of the Low Weald traditionally produced good oak trees, which were extensively used to construct the timber-framed buildings so typical of this area. Nevertheless, the underlying ragstone was also widely used for building and combinations of these materials, along with brick and tile, are not unusual. Cottages often have low sloping roofs, and larger buildings sometimes exhibit eighteenth or nineteenth century frontages. Settlement is sparse. There are occasional scattered farms, hamlets and manor houses, but otherwise settlement is concentrated in the villages of Sevenoaks Weald, Shipbourne and Crockham Hill. With the exception of the more recently-constructed parts of Sevenoaks Weald, all three of these villages have a dispersed form, with Shipbourne's houses, church and pub scattered around its large central common. Roads are generally narrow and hedge-lined, but there are also some lanes with wide verges which would have been used for moving animals. There are numerous north-south routes, but fewer east-west.

14.1.5 The dramatic, wooded bulk of the Greensand Ridge dominates the northern horizon in many views from within the Low Weald. However, much of the area has a sense of enclosure due to the many small woodlands and hedgerows. There are spectacular views across the Low Weald from the top of the Greensand Ridge. These views stretch away to the High Weald AONB, south of Tonbridge, across a seemingly-unspoilt mosaic of small-scale farmland and trees.



*Hedgerow Oak with the Greensand Ridge visible behind, Ightham Estate (National Trust)*



*Bough Beech Reservoir, with low water levels*



*Traditional Oast House, formerly the Bough Beech Visitor Centre*



*Shipbourne: A common-edge village*

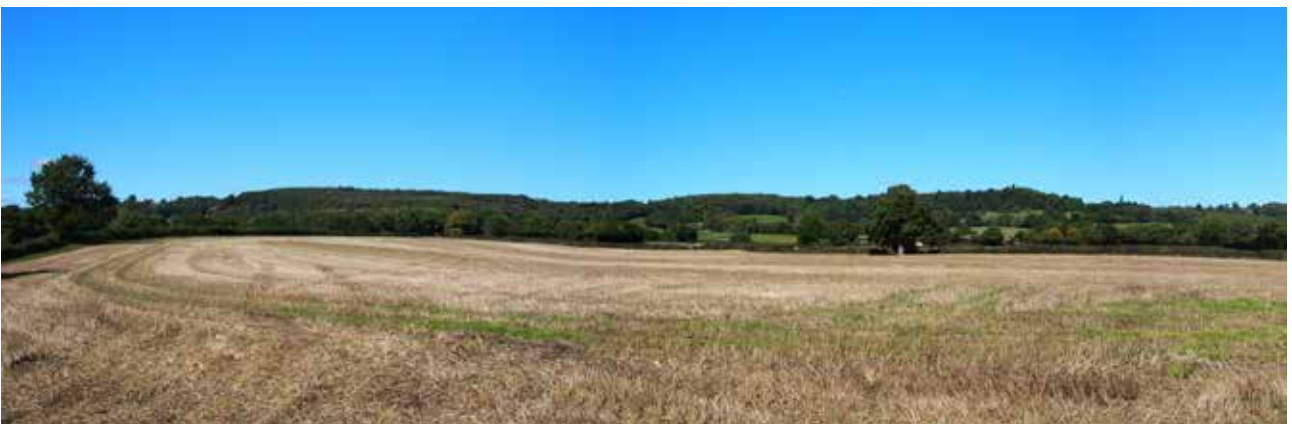


*View from Ide Hill looking south across the Low Weald towards the High Weald*

## 14.2 Landscape Condition, Sensitivities and Forces for Change

14.2.1 The 1995 Assessment notes that the condition of heritage features is generally good, and that the landscape retains its functional integrity. There are some concerns about vegetative heritage features (e.g. mature hedgerows) due to over-maturity and lack of long-term management objectives. Other issues mentioned are isolated trees resulting from hedgerow loss, and subdivision of fields into horse paddocks using temporary fencing. The vulnerability of trees and hedgerows is also raised in the 2004 and subsequent assessments, but overall the 2004 Assessment considers the landscape to be in very good condition across the Low Weald Landscape Character Area. The landscape is considered to be strongly unified, with a clear landscape pattern and a strong network of field boundaries and small woodlands linked with streams and pastures. The diversity of connected habitats provides a robust ecological network, and there are very few detracting features in the landscape.

14.2.2 This is still the case today. The landscape retains its unity and pattern, its strong sense of place and its ecological networks. There are a few poorly designed or sited farm buildings, but generally the landscape contains few detracting features. In the east of the area, a significant proportion of the farmland is in estate ownership (the National Trust and the Fairlawne estate) and has consistent management. However, as in all landscapes there are forces for change (outlined in the table below) and this small-scale, intensely rural landscape is likely to be particularly affected by future changes in agricultural practices, which are currently unknown, but are likely to be largely driven by economics. The mature trees and hedgerows remain vulnerable to over-maturity and loss, particularly if they are no longer required for stock management.



(previous page) View north from near Scollops Farm (north of Bough Beech Reservoir) in 1995 (above) and 2017 (below) The main change is the re-growth of woodland on the scarp slope and ridge, which was severely impacted by the great storm of 1987.

<i>Issue</i>	<i>Landscape sensitivities and potential landscape impacts</i>
<p>Changing land management practices</p>	<p>Recent years have seen conversion of some pasture to arable, as a consequence of the wider decline in mixed farming and dairy farming. This in turn reduces the need for stockproof hedgerows, and indeed for any hedgerows, as machines are generally easier to operate in larger fields. Redundant hedgerows and hedgerow trees are less likely to be managed or retained. Although hedgerow loss is noted as an issue in earlier assessments, it is unlikely that further hedgerows have been actively removed since then. Diversification of farmland is also a force for change. Again, subdivision of fields for horse paddocks was a concern in earlier assessments, but although there are still some examples of this, they are not frequent, and it may be that the peak demand for new paddocks has passed. Orchards and hop gardens have now largely disappeared from the landscape. Very few working oast houses remain, although many have been converted into residences. Changes to farming practices and land ownership towards fewer, larger, farms mean that there are likely to be changes in the buildings required. Already there are examples of large-scale farm buildings, and more of these are likely to be needed. The new Environmental Land Management Scheme (ELMS) offers opportunities to restore and reinforce valued characteristics of the landscape. The introduction of pony paddocks and other recreational land management, (such as golf) whilst not widespread, is occasionally a detractor where the management practice or siting of stables does not take into account landscape conservation.</p>
<p>Loss of trees and woodland</p>	<p>Tree disease is a major risk in this Area. As mentioned above, a move from livestock to arable farming reduces the need for hedgerows and hedgerow trees, making them vulnerable to neglect and loss. Field and parkland trees may also be lost from the landscape if they are not managed or replaced. Loss of trees, hedgerows and woodland also affect the ecological connectivity of the landscape. At the same time the introduction of non-native species in hedgerows and parklands can appear incongruous in a landscape which otherwise shows considerable unity.</p>
<p>Climate change and natural forces</p>	<p>The clay soils of the Low Weald are susceptible to both drought and flooding, and the risk of both is likely to increase as a result of climate change. These will both impact on the types of tree species able to flourish in the area, for example alder may decline if groundwater levels are reduced. Tree disease such as Ash Dieback, Processionary Moth and Phytophthora (which affect oak trees) are a major concern, as these trees are so key to the character of the Low Weald.</p>

<i>Issue</i>	<i>Landscape sensitivities and potential landscape impacts</i>
Changes to buildings and settlements	Conversion of redundant farm buildings to other uses risks undermining their character. There is a risk that the character of built form is lost through small-scale development and suburbanisation.
Infrastructure	The A21, access roundabouts and roads have localised impact on the landscape, and on tranquillity, but this is limited by the road being largely in a cutting. At certain times there is also an awareness of aircraft noise related to Gatwick Airport which significantly reduces the tranquillity of the area.



*The proportion of arable land in the Low Weald has increased in recent years due to the wider decline in dairy and mixed farming*



*Line of isolated field trees following hedgerow removal*



*A large farm building constructed of unsympathetic materials in a prominent elevated location*



*An example of positive management - a well maintained and locally-distinctive signpost, which contributes to the impression of a cared-about landscape.*

## 14.3 Landscape Management Recommendations

### Aspirational Landscape Strategy

The landscape retains its small-scale enclosure pattern, unified landscape structure and lack of incongruous features. The mosaic of fields, woodlands, hedgerows, trees and riverside vegetation are retained, renewed and continue to provide a strong network of habitats.

Farming continues within the existing field pattern, with farmers supported in their efforts to retain the traditional appearance of the landscape. Should new farm buildings be necessary, they are carefully sited and designed to have minimal impact on the wider landscape.

The sparse settlement pattern and distinctive built form of villages around greens and commons is retained. Locally-sourced materials are used in building construction where possible.

#### Protect

- Protect the appearance of the Low Weald as a unified and well-structured landscape with few incongruous features.
- Protect the historic features of the landscape, including buildings, farmsteads, lanes and field patterns.
- Protect the distinctive forms and settings of villages, including greens and commons, and the distinctive building materials of ragstone, brick, timber and hung-tile.
- Protect the character of rural lanes, resisting unnecessary signage and other clutter.

#### Manage

- Manage hedgerows and hedgerow trees (both between fields and along lanes) to retain their presence within the landscape, to provide ecological corridors between woodland areas, and to protect the landscape structure. Look to replant hedgerows where they have been lost and prepare landscape recovery plans where tree disease affects the landscape. Conserve existing, and plant new field and hedgerow oak trees.
- Manage wetland areas, streams and ponds to promote biodiversity and as a feature of the Low Weald landscape.
- Manage woodlands and copses and encourage a range of land uses within them (e.g. game cover, recreation, timber production) to promote diversity.
- Work with estate owners in the management of parklands, supporting parkland management plans and the planting of replacement parkland trees to ensure their continued presence in the landscape. Encourage retention and repair of characteristic estate boundary features such as ragstone walls, chestnut fencing and hedgerows with mature trees.

#### Plan

- Ensure that any development in the Low Weald Landscape Character Area is of a suitable scale, and enhances rather than dilutes the character of the area.
- Retain the sparse settlement pattern, and the integration of settlements into the landscape through sensitive tree, hedgerow and small woodland planting.
- Ensure any new development respects the rural setting and loose form of small settlements, conserving distinctive greens and commons.

- Promote best-practice in the design, siting and construction of new and converted farm buildings. Ensure that new farm buildings are integrated into the landform, and that they are constructed of visually-recessive materials, taking into account their backdrop.
- Conserve views to and from the Greensand Ridge, managing vegetation if necessary to avoid views becoming obscured.
- Work with schools and community groups to promote volunteering and the continuation of traditional Low Weald farmland skills such as hedge laying and woodland management.
- Consider raising the profile of Bough Beech Reservoir as a visitor destination (for example through a circular walk around the reservoir, and improved parking provision).
- Consider reinstating or reintroducing orchards into the landscape, perhaps as part of diversification schemes, or as planting to integrate new development.
- Promote and encourage the adoption of equine land management guidance and condition its use in planning.
- Engage in future flight path consultations to seek a reduction in over-flying.
- Work with Highways Authorities to increase the biodiversity value of verges and hedgerows without compromising safety.
- Encourage partnership working between different Local Authorities, agencies and community groups to enable seamless working across the AONB. Consider environmental/ landscape limits in planning and plan making.
- Carefully reflect the character and qualities of the LCA in mitigation responses to climate change in particular tree establishment.
- Within the setting of the LCA, work with Local Planning Authorities and designers to achieve the best possible landscape and ecological integration and minimal impact on views, with compensation achieved for any lost qualities.