

## **APPENDICES**

**Appendix 10.9** – Copy of the Kent AONB Management Plans 2004 to 2026

# A Management Plan for the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty 2004-2009



© Countryside Agency/Mike McGowan

*Focusing on the future of this nationally important landscape*

Consultation Draft – April 2003



ESSEX

GREATER LONDON

SURREY



**Key**

- Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
- Heritage Coast
- Road
- Rail
- Channel Tunnel Rail Link
- Urban Areas

N  
 Not to scale

# Contents

Foreword	4
<b>1 Setting the Scene</b>	
Introduction to the Management Plan	5
A new Vision for the Kent Downs AONB	8
Conserving what is Special, Reducing the Threats	9
The Management Plan in Context	15
<b>2 Taking the Long View</b>	
<b>Components of Natural Beauty</b>	21
Landscape and Natural Heritage	23
Farmed Land	28
Woodland and Trees	32
Historic and Built Heritage	35
The Physical Environment and Environmental Quality	37
The White Cliffs Heritage Coast	40
<b>Quality of Life Components</b>	42
People, Jobs, Services and Tourism	43
Land Use and Transport Planning and Design	47
Access, Recreation, Enjoyment and Understanding	50
<b>Partnerships and Co-ordination</b>	55
<b>3 Implementation, Monitoring and Review</b>	
Implementation	57
<b>4 Appendices and Figures</b>	
Appendix 1. References and Background Information	
Appendix 2. AONB Unit Core Functions	
Appendix 3. Kent Downs AONB Governance Review	
Abbreviations	
Landscape Character Areas Map with District Council Boundaries	

# Foreword

**“Nowhere in the world will you find a landscape more ravishing than this. It’s ours, to look at and to cherish for the rest of our lives. I would die for it.”**

**S**o spoke Sir Winston Churchill, as acted by Albert Finney in the BBC drama *The Gathering Storm*, from his balcony at Chartwell House on the Kent Downs Greensand ridge. The script captures the deep love that Churchill felt for the beauty of the countryside around his home, and the inspiration he derived from this fine English landscape. This countryside – the Kent Downs – has been designated for 35 years as a nationally important landscape, an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). Within it is some of the finest landscape that England has to offer.

The Kent Downs are an unique ‘gateway landscape’ lying between London, the South East and the heart of Europe. Since its designation, we have seen the construction of four motorways, the expansion of the Port of Dover, the Channel Tunnel and now the high-speed rail link along or within the AONB. The impact of this infrastructure has been considerable. Nonetheless, the special character and unique landscape quality of the AONB largely remains undiminished. New pressures now face us in the form of planned urban expansion along parts of the northern and southern AONB boundaries, and the future of farming, the main AONB land use, being very uncertain.

Thankfully, these continuing pressures have come at a time of enormous opportunity. For the first time since their designation, the AONBs of England and Wales now have legal means – through the Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act 2000 – to set in place

clear policies and action for the conservation, positive management and enhancement of these protected landscapes over the next five years and beyond. This is the purpose of this Management Plan.

The ultimate aim of the Management Plan is to ensure that the natural beauty, special character and vitality of communities within the Kent Downs AONB are recognised, maintained and strengthened well into the future. It is a task for everyone to embrace. The success of this Management Plan lies in the commitment and support given to it by all those who have a role to play – local authorities, government agencies, statutory undertakers and public bodies, who all have new statutory duties to safeguard the AONB. However, the future of the Kent Downs ultimately lies in the hands of the people who know the Kent Downs best – the farmers, landowners, local residents and businesses, voluntary groups and all those who enjoy visiting the Kent Downs. We hope you will join us at this exciting and important time to secure a positive future for the Kent Downs AONB.



**Chris Reynolds**  
Chairman Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty  
Joint Advisory Committee

# Setting the scene

1

## Introduction to the Management Plan



# Introduction to the Management Plan

## What is the Management Plan?

This draft Management Plan has been prepared by the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Unit, on behalf of the Kent Downs AONB Joint Advisory Committee (JAC). Once finalised, it will fulfil new statutory requirements under the Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act 2000. All local authorities with AONBs in their area are required jointly to produce an AONB Management Plan, by April 1 2004. This will formulate their policies for the management of the AONB and for carrying out their functions in relation to it. The Management Plan covers a wide range of issues and opportunities for the AONB. It has been developed to drive integrated action in the Kent Downs AONB and to provide co-ordination for the management of this nationally important landscape based on a shared strategic vision of the area.

The current non-statutory Management Strategy for the Kent Downs AONB (1999) will be superseded by this new Management Plan once it is published in March 2004. The current Strategy has been the starting point for the preparation of this Plan, and some of its key successes and achievements are outlined in this Plan.

## Who is the Plan for?

First and foremost, the management plan is for the local authorities of the AONB – this is the policy and action framework which will influence and determine decision-making, advice and resource allocation for all their relevant functions in, and affecting, the AONB. The local authorities are Ashford, Bromley, Canterbury, Dover, Gravesham, Kent, Maidstone, Medway, Sevenoaks, Shepway, Swale, and Tonbridge & Malling (see map on inside back cover).

Secondly, this Management Plans is for all the government agencies, statutory undertakers, utilities and public bodies who have a new 'duty of regard' for the purposes of the AONB designation in their functions and operations. All public bodies and relevant authorities have to demonstrate that they have taken into account the purposes

of the AONB designation in all their functions within the area. This Management Plan will inform, guide and influence that process.

Finally, and importantly, this is a Plan for everyone who cares for the AONB, for those who live, work or play in the Kent Downs. The impact and difference that can be made by individuals, community and voluntary organisations, when viewed as a whole can be significant. We intend that this Management Plan is practical and relevant, and that it will help to advise and influence the activities within it, the decisions taken and the perception people have of the Kent Downs.

## How has this Management Plan been prepared?

Following the *Management Plan Guidance* from the Countryside Agency (CA23, November 2001), and supplementary guidance (July and December 2002) we have set out the preparation of the Management Plan in four stages:

**1. A participation process** has been carried out from September 2002 to February 2003, involving many hundreds of people and organisations who have an interest and role to take in the Kent Downs AONB. These include:

- Meetings with officers and elected members from the 12 local authorities within the AONB, with discussion and debate about the key issues and opportunities they wish to see addressed in this Plan, and the way that policies need to be presented.
- A questionnaire in *The Orchid* – the Kent Downs AONB newspaper, and on our web-site, collecting information from 400 readers on what they value most about the AONB, how they use the Kent Downs and which issues and problems most urgently need addressing.
- Six public meetings and working groups throughout the AONB with a wide range of other key stakeholders including public bodies and voluntary organisations, parish councils and farmers, to identify key issues and potential solutions that the Management Plan can take forward.

The participation process has been a vital first stage in preparing the draft Plan. The views, ideas, concerns and aspirations of all those who took part have been taken into careful consideration and incorporated in the Management Plan.

**2. Where we are now. Consultation on the draft management Plan will run between April 30 and June 30 2003.** Over this period copies of the draft Plan will be sent to officers and members in the AONB local authorities, to our statutory consultees Countryside Agency and English Nature and to the Department of Environment, Food, and Rural Affairs (DEFRA). Copies will be sent to all 137 parishes, as well as to the many organisations and individuals who have so far responded or contributed views. The draft Plan will also be available on the Kent Downs web site – [www.kentdowns.org.uk](http://www.kentdowns.org.uk)

**This draft document is not written as a completed work, and is very much open to change and comment. You views count and we need to hear from you to complete the Management Plan, by filling in the attached Consultation response form.**

**3. From July to September 2003 there will be a period of revision of the text and content of the Management Plan. The final text will be presented for agreement to the Joint Advisory Committee in October 2003. The text will then be sent to the Kent Downs local authorities, Countryside Agency, English and DEFRA for approval and adoption by January 2004.** We will also be seeking the commitment and approval of the Plan by many other public bodies and statutory agencies also. The published Management Plan will be ready to send to The Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs by April 1 2004.

**4. From that point onwards, the management plan 'goes live' and the work to start implementing the policies and action begins, following the accompanying Action Plan. This will be achieved by setting annual work programmes for the AONB partnership, and setting up monitoring programmes. From the date of its publication, the Management Plan will be reviewed on a five year cycle. The accompanying Action Plan will be reviewed and rolled-forward annually.**

## Introduction to the Management Plan



© Countryside Agency/Mike McGoran

# he scene

# A new vision for the Kent Downs AONB – for the next 20 years

The starting point for plotting new directions of policy and action is to ask where do we want to get to, and by when?

Throughout the participation process, we have asked people what is particularly special to them about the Kent Downs AONB, what they

cherish most, and how they would like to view it in twenty years time. From this, we have been able to prepare a joint strategic vision for the Kent Downs AONB. This weaves together all the intricate elements of the Kent Downs special qualities – which fulfil the purposes of AONB designation.

## The place

At its best, the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty is a landscape of great beauty and complexity; of prominent and extensive ridges of Chalk, Greensand and Ragstone, with dramatic cliffs, south-facing escarpments, rolling dipslopes, broad river valleys and secluded dry valleys. This distinctive landform is overlain with complex and delightful detail; field patterns that reflect local conditions, enclosed by ancient hedgerows and shaws, that are cultivated for arable and horticultural crops or grazed by livestock; numerous, and in some places extensive areas of ancient woodland that frame the plateaux and upper slopes; smaller areas of chalk downland and scrub that typically follow the steepest upper slopes of the escarpment and dipslope valleys; a network of ancient lanes, paths and tracks; scattered downland and spring line villages and farmsteads, and a wealth of historic buildings and sites. It is a landscape with inspirational, far-reaching views across surrounding countryside, towns, estuaries and sea.

The essential elements of natural beauty, which make up this nationally important landscape, have evolved over thousands of years through a close and ongoing relationship between people and the land. It is a place well deserving of its national designation. In recent years, some of the qualities and features that make up the natural beauty of the Kent Downs have been destroyed, eroded and threatened by development, damaging activities and land uses. Some of these changes are permanent, and every effort is needed to reduce their impact, others are open to improvement although this will take resources and commitment of effort.

## The Vision

*The Kent Downs AONB is:*

- Recognised, understood and conserved for its biodiversity, historic and cultural significance, that form this beautiful and rich landscape. These key features are valued in their own right and for their contribution to people's social and economic quality of life;
- A 'gateway' landscape that thrives from the benefit of the many passing visitors yet provides a rural and tranquil retreat for those who seek it;
- A place where the use of the land provides continuous and positive landscape renewal and gain, where eroded and lost landscape features are replaced and restored as an integral part of all land use activities;
- A working, changing landscape that is shaped and stewarded by sustainable economic and social activity, that provide rewarding employment for local people;
- A place of living, dynamic communities, where people enjoy a high quality of life, equality of opportunity, and a safe, clean and quiet environment;
- A landscape where there is opportunity and access for all, for quiet recreation, for relaxation, enjoyment and understanding;
- A place where the relationship between Downs and towns is strong, positive and mutually beneficial;
- A landscape recognised, valued, celebrated and enjoyed by those who do not live there but may visit; those who may have been excluded from the inspiration landscape can bring; or those who can simply delight in the fact that it is there.

# Conserving What is Special, Reducing the Threats

## Protected Landscapes

Areas of Outstanding National Beauty are part of a family of protected areas recognised and classified by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN) throughout the world. AONBs, National Parks and Heritage Coasts in England and Wales fall into Category V – Protected Landscapes. These are areas that have been moulded by centuries of human activity, where there is a diversity of land use with a “sense of place”. Equivalent areas in other countries include the French Parcs Naturels Régionaux. The Kent Downs AONB has a special partnership with le Parc Naturel Régional des Caps et Marais d’Opale. The IUCN definition of Protected Landscape aims to maintain the harmonious balance between people, landscapes and nature for now and for future generations.

The UK Government under the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 has designated the thirty-eight Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) in England. They vary greatly in landscape character and size ranging from the Isles of Scilly (16km<sup>2</sup>) to the Cotswolds (2,038 km<sup>2</sup>). AONBs cover over 15% of the land area of the country, and despite the great differences between them, they have one thing in common: they are all nationally important landscapes designated solely on account of their natural beauty and with the aim of conserving and enhancing them.

The criteria for designation of AONBs are:

- Quality of landscape, natural beauty, unspoilt or special quality of national significance;
- Extent and continuity;
- Unusual or unique characteristics.

Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and National Parks are recognised in England to be on a par legally because of their

## Purpose of AONB Designation

“...Is primarily to conserve and enhance natural beauty.

In pursuing the primary purpose of designation, account should be taken of the needs of agriculture, forestry, and other rural industries and of the economic and social needs of local communities. Particular regard should be paid to promoting sustainable forms of social and economic development that in themselves conserve and enhance the environment.

Recreation is not an objective of designation but the demand for recreation should be met so far as this is consistent with the conservation of natural beauty and the needs of agriculture, forestry and other uses.”

*Countryside Commission Policy Statement (1991)*

nationally important landscapes. In June 2000, the Rt. Hon. Nick Raynsford MP (Planning Minister) made a statement in the House of Commons that confirmed that AONBs are equivalent to National Parks in terms of their landscape quality, scenic beauty and their planning status. Subsequently, paragraph 4.8 of *Planning Policy Guidance 7: The Countryside – Environmental Quality and Economic and Social Development* was amended to reflect this new status.

However, there remain a number of differences between the AONBs and National Parks:

- AONBs are largely managed by local authority advisory committees, whereas National Parks require a special authority of their own.
- National Parks are largely located in upland areas and AONBs are mostly lowland landscapes, and as a result

Conserving  
What is  
Special,  
Reducing  
the Threats

he scene

- AONB landscapes tend to be more gentle and rolling in character, and not as rugged as National Parks
- National Parks are legally obliged to provide for public recreational opportunities, whereas AONBs are not.

### **The Kent Downs AONB**

The Kent Downs AONB was designated in 1968, and covers some 878sq.km. stretching from the Surrey/Greater London border to the Strait of Dover. Aside from a small area within the London Borough of Bromley, the AONB lies wholly within the county of Kent and covers some 23% of the total land area of the county. It rises to an altitude of 250m above ordnance datum at its highest point at Toy's Hill south of Sevenoaks, and is crossed in three places by the river valleys of the Darent, the Medway and the Stour, all flowing northwards.

The Kent Downs are the eastern half of the North Downs ridge of chalk stretching from Farnham in Surrey to the English Channel. The western half of the chalk ridge lies within the Surrey Hills AONB, which adjoins the Kent Downs AONB. The same ridge of chalk reappears on the French side of the Channel, where it is designated le Parc Naturel Régional des Caps et Marais d'Opale. In Kent, the North Downs, along with part of the Greensand ridge and Romney Marsh, form the Kent Downs AONB.

### **Landscape Character**

In 1995, the Countryside Commission published a *Landscape Assessment of the Kent Downs AONB* (CCP479) which identified, described and classified the components of landscape character. This Landscape Assessment represents an important basis upon which to consider the conservation and enhancement of the Kent Downs. The Kent Downs AONB has been classified into 13 distinct character areas. Several of these character areas have themselves been subdivided into local character areas, to examine distinct features and pressures in more detail. For example, the Darent Valley has three specific landscape objectives, which relate to the West Darent landscape, the North Darent landscape and the Knockholt landscape. Table 1 on the following page provides a

summary of the landscape character components of each Landscape Character Area (see Landscape Character map on inside back cover).

The Landscape Assessment is accompanied by Landscape Guidelines, which provide objectives for each landscape character area. An example of one landscape objective for the Sevenoaks Ridge landscape character area is:

“To maintain the existing overall wooded character of the Sevenoaks Ridge, encouraging deciduous woodlands and a mosaic of open heathy spaces within the scarp-top woods, and opening-up views across the Low Weald.”

In the last three years, a number of more local Landscape Character Assessments have been produced for certain areas of the AONB, including Sevenoaks, Maidstone, Medway and parts of Canterbury. These are district level assessments that set out the condition and sensitivity of local landscape areas. Primarily for use within the statutory planning process, they provide useful guidance in land use management work.



**Table 1. Landscape Character Areas**

The following summary of key characters have been identified for each Landscape Character Area. Each Landscape Character Area has been identified by parishes or villages at either end of the area (see map on inside back cover).

<p><b>Darent Valley: Brasted to Farningham</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• scarp-top woodlands</li> <li>• strong hedgerow patterns</li> <li>• riverside trees and pasture</li> <li>• large open arable fields</li> <li>• flint &amp; brick buildings</li> </ul>	<p><b>Kemsing Vale: Kemsing to Ryarsh</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• woodland and chalk grassland mosaics</li> <li>• magnificent views</li> <li>• thick hedges along Pilgrim’s Way</li> <li>• large scarp-foot arable fields</li> <li>• strong pattern of trimmed hedges and hedgerow trees</li> <li>• flint and brick buildings</li> </ul>	<p><b>Stour: Brook to Chartham</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• scarp top woodlands</li> <li>• hedgerow trees</li> <li>• lines of trees between fields</li> <li>• alders and willows by the river</li> <li>• riverside pastures</li> </ul>
<p><b>Sevenoaks Greensand Ridge: Westerham to Ightham</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• extensive mixed woodlands</li> <li>• heathy commons</li> <li>• small orchards</li> <li>• magnificent views across Low Weald`</li> <li>• lines of mature trees</li> <li>• ragstone buildings</li> </ul>	<p><b>Medway: Birling to Cuxton; Wouldham to Aylesford</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wooded upper scarps and wide views</li> <li>• large arable fields on scarp foot</li> <li>• trimmed remnant hedges</li> <li>• brick and flint buildings</li> </ul>	<p><b>East Kent Downs: Crundale, Bridge, Capel-le-Ferne to Lyminge</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• wooded upper slopes</li> <li>• open valley bottoms</li> <li>• extensive conifer and coppice woods</li> <li>• over grown hedges</li> <li>• uncultivated banks or ‘shaves’</li> <li>• remote settlements</li> <li>• single track lanes</li> <li>• white cliffs with frequent views to France</li> </ul>
<p><b>Low Weald: Crockam Hill to Shipbourne</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• wooded scarp</li> <li>• strong pattern of trimmed hedges</li> <li>• deciduous shaws</li> <li>• hedgerow trees</li> <li>• isolated trees</li> <li>• paddock fencing</li> <li>• buildings with hanging tiles</li> </ul>	<p><b>Hollingbourne Vale: Boxley to Westwell</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• yew dominated woodlands</li> <li>• large arable scarp-foot fields</li> <li>• thick hedges along Pilgrims Way</li> <li>• historic spring-line settlements</li> <li>• extensive views from scarp</li> <li>• hedgerow trees</li> </ul>	<p><b>Postling Vale: Brabourne to Newington</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• rough grassland on scarp slope</li> <li>• belt of scrub along scarp foot</li> <li>• remnant hedges</li> <li>• scattered large woodlands</li> <li>• magnificent views from scarp</li> </ul>
<p><b>West Kent Downs: West Kingsdown to Shorne</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• extensive deciduous woodland</li> <li>• large arable plateaux fields</li> <li>• thick shaws</li> <li>• remote dry valleys</li> <li>• small pastures on lower slopes</li> <li>• village settlement in woodlands</li> </ul>	<p><b>Mid Kent Downs: Boxley to Selling</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• tiny scattered villages</li> <li>• network of single track lanes</li> <li>• extensive coppice woodlands</li> <li>• expanses of conifer woodland</li> <li>• large arable fields</li> <li>• hedgerow trees</li> <li>• orchards and shelter hedges</li> <li>• Views across Medway and Swale Estuaries</li> </ul>	<p><b>Lympne: Bonnington to Hythe</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• rough grassland on the scarp</li> <li>• fences and ditches</li> <li>• sporadic willows and thorns</li> <li>• magnificent views over the Marsh</li> </ul>
		<p><b>South Foreland: Dover to Kingsdown</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• white cliffs with frequent views of France</li> <li>• settlements fringed by trees</li> <li>• remnant hedges</li> <li>• unimproved chalk grassland</li> </ul>

Conserving  
What is  
Special,  
Reducing  
the Threats

### **What is special and why is it designated an AONB?**

There is no doubt but the landscape of the Kent Downs is special. There is drama and intimacy; there is remoteness, ancient places as well as the bright white of a new cliff fall. This is a landscape of outstanding quality and value.

The drama comes from the south facing scarp slope and its fantastic views, and from the cliffs at Dover and Folkestone. The ancient landscapes of the secluded dry valleys give a remote feel, the intimacy is to be found amongst the network of tiny, ancient lanes and historic hedgerows, amongst this nestle distinctive downland villages, isolated farmsteads and churches. This is an area of chestnut coppice and ancient woodland, farmed landscapes and chalk pasture, scattered oasts and orchards. Amidst the beauty is a rich tapestry of wildlife habitats of international and national importance and a legacy of historic and cultural sites. The ancient trackway of the Pilgrims' Way and the North Downs Way National Trail wind their way along the downs to Canterbury and Dover.

The Kent Downs were confirmed in 1968 as an AONB. A summary of the overall remarks of the designation committee states that:

“The scarp slope and dry valleys of the Kent Downs were the main target for designation, particularly where they retained a downland character, that woodlands were highly valued throughout the designated area and particularly on the scarp slope and dry valley sides, and that other qualities of note were views from the escarpment, pastoral scenery, parklands, villages, churches and castles”

*The Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty*  
Land Use Consultants 1984

The essential components of natural beauty that are identified in the summary statement above are those for which the Kent Downs are still most valued.

A recent questionnaire to households and stakeholders throughout

the AONB and surrounding area have demonstrated that the following elements of natural beauty are those that are most important to the people that responded.

- 59% chalk grassland
- 52% woodland
- 45% landform and geology including cliffs and coast
- 33% ancient lanes and paths
- 21% orchards
- 20% river valleys
- 20% hedges
- 17% historic settlements and buildings
- 14% mixed farmland
- 7% dry valleys
- 6% historic parklands

The features that are most valued by the same respondents are:

- 86% scenery and views
- 49% wildlife
- 46% peace and quiet
- 33% opportunities for outdoor recreation
- 32% villages and village life
- 24% historic buildings and features
- 11% not too crowded
- 10% country pubs
- 7% accessible local produce
- 1% visitor attractions

### **What are the threats?**

Since the designation of the Kent Downs AONB was first confirmed an unprecedented amount of change has occurred. All aspects of environmental, social and economic circumstances have transformed, and the resulting changes have brought new practices and pressures on the landscape.

The Kent Downs AONB, perhaps more than any other of Britain's protected landscapes- AONB, Heritage Coast or National Park – has faced severe pressure from the development of transportation

infrastructure, communications and housing, as well as the pressures of intensive agriculture and forestry. The AONB we now champion and celebrate has largely withstood this onslaught. The natural beauty, special character and sense of place for which its original designation was made, generally remains intact, inspirational in part, and exceptional as a whole. However there are big problems to contend with too.

### **'Gateway' infrastructure**

There are places and areas of the AONB that need very special attention. Where major infrastructure has cut through the landscape, particularly motorways and the Channel Tunnel and its high-speed rail link, new and large-scale measures are still needed to lessen the impact such as better or more extensive landscaping, screening and bold measures to reduce noise and light pollution.

But some benefits outweigh the costs of the strategic location. The proximity of the motorways and railways to the Kent Downs means that tens of millions of people every year pass through or along the AONB boundary. The opportunity to raise people's awareness of the beauty of Kent Downs is enormous, and so is the possibility to generate income that supports local jobs and provides landscape gain.

### **Urban growth**

The growth of towns and cities around the edge of the Kent Downs has been rapid in the period since AONB designation. This is now set to increase, with Ashford and Kent Thameside identified as areas of national development growth, having to accommodate over 100,000 more houses and associated infrastructure in the next 20 years. The boundaries between the Kent Downs and its ten main neighbouring towns and cities provide enormous problems and enormous opportunities in equal measure. Fly tipping and rubbish, abandoned cars, illegal motorbiking, vandalism, theft of farm machinery and gates – they all contribute to a threatening and uninviting place. Urban housing, industrial and retail development that sit on the very boundary of the AONB destroy the setting, the approach to and the views from the Kent Downs. Unfortunately,

these features are all too common around parts of the boundary.

The corollary is that some of the Kent Downs most beautiful and dramatic sites and places are within easy walking or cycling distance from the over 1 million people around its boundary – the Folkestone escarpment and Folkestone Warren, Langdon Cliffs at Dover, Blue Bell Hill between Maidstone and Medway, and the Darent valley between Sevenoaks and Greater London to name but a few. There are important benefits to be gained by bringing people, particularly young people and children, closer to the countryside, so that they enjoy themselves whilst becoming aware of the what is important about farming and the countryside.

### **Intensive farming and forestry**

Not all the threats and negative changes come from the towns. Indeed, some of the erosion of landscape quality has been at the hands of the people who are primarily responsible for the beauty of the landscape – the farmers and landowners. Farming practices and attitudes have gone through enormous periods of change. The intensive agricultural period from the 1960s to the 1990s, driven by politics and financial incentives, resulted in massive food production and enormous profits to the agricultural sector, but at great cost. At its worst, in the Kent Downs, ancient woodlands and hedgerows were removed, and even marginal grassland ploughed up, leaving permanent scars on the landscape in places.

Intensive agriculture is still carried out across most of the AONB, although great progress has been made over the last decade with the benefit of agri-environment payments such as the Countryside Stewardship Scheme bringing landscape and wildlife restoration into agricultural practice. Farming is now going through a period of decline and change. The effect of BSE, Foot and Mouth Disease, global markets and the strength of sterling have been felt strongly in the AONB. In the wake of Government reports and advice – the Curry Commission report on *Sustainable Food and Farming* (2002), and the mid-term review of the Common Agricultural Policy, a greater shift is anticipated away from crop and livestock subsidies. Over the timeframe of the Management Plan, new measures will be

Conserving  
What is  
Special,  
Reducing  
the Threats

the scene

introduced to extend and broaden environmental incentives into mainstream farming. The role of the Management Plan is to ensure that a situation of balance is arrived at – for farmers and landowners to earn a fair income from viable and environmentally sustainable farming, whilst ensuring that features and elements of special landscape character are conserved and enhanced as an integral part of every day, mainstream farming. There is great opportunity for landscape gain in this time of change.

A recent questionnaire to households and stakeholders throughout the AONB and surrounding area have demonstrated that the greatest landscape pressures and threats as perceived by local people are as follows:

56% impact of illegal/undesirable activities e.g. fly-tipping, burnt-out cars etc.

- 54% loss of wild plants and animals because of habitat destruction, lack of appropriate management or intensive agriculture
- 50% loss of views and scenic beauty because of changes to landscape features (unmanaged woodlands, loss of hedgerows, impact of development, etc).
- 44% erosion of natural beauty because of unsightly structures and buildings (e.g. pylons, telecommunication masts, infrastructure, poorly designed or sited new development, etc)
- 43% reduction in village services (schools, post offices, pubs, etc) and loss of community life
- 38% erosion of tranquillity through increased noise and light pollution
- 8% inappropriate conversions or loss of historic buildings
- 6% overcrowding/overuse at beauty spots and other key sites
- 2% lack of information about access to the AONB countryside

## Introduction to the Management Plan



© Countryside Agency/Tina Stallard



# The Management Plan in Context

## **Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000**

Over the last decade, it has been recognised that the management arrangements for AONBs were not adequate in the face of the modern day pressures on these valuable landscapes. The existing powers through the planning system were not enough to conserve these areas. Active and positive management is identified as being an urgent requirement. The impetus for Part IV of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 came from *Protecting Finest Countryside Advice to Government CCP 532*, (Countryside Agency 1998), which was produced following extensive consultation on the management and funding arrangements with AONBs nationally. This report highlighted the need for improvements in the positive management and enhancement of AONBs.

The response from Central Government came in the form of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act (CRoW) Act 2000. The enactment of the CRoW Act in April 2000 has brought with it a 'new tide in the affairs of AONBs'. It brings a new approach to the conservation and protection of AONBs through a number of new legal requirements and measures that have now taken effect. The purpose of this draft Management Plan for the Kent Downs AONB lies at the heart of these new provisions.

In brief, the important new provisions of Part IV of the CRoW Act 2000 are to

- Require the preparation and publication of a Management Plan by 1 April 2004 and for its periodic review (within a 5-year period), for every AONB by the appropriate local authorities. Local authorities should act jointly to produce a management plan, and joint arrangements need to be established for local authorities to do so. In the case of the Kent Downs AONB, each relevant local authority confirmed in December 2001 that the Kent Downs AONB Joint Advisory Committee (JAC) – see Appendices for details – and the AONB Unit should produce the management plan jointly on behalf of the local authorities. The management

plan has to formulate their policies for the management of the AONB and for carrying out their functions in relation to it (Section 89)

- Place a new duty of regard on 'relevant authorities', namely all statutory undertakers, government departments and public bodies. These bodies need to demonstrate that they have taken account of the AONB in their actions and decision making.(Section 85)
- Provide for the creation of conservation boards for selected individual AONBs by means of an establishment order made by the Secretary of State. The Kent Downs AONB partnership undertook a governance review in 2002 and felt that this management model was not appropriate for its current needs, although this option has not been ruled out in the longer-term. (Sections 86 and 87).

The CRoW Act brings with it exciting new opportunities for the better management and enhancement of all AONBs. To support this process Central Government has given the Countryside Agency significant new funding of £6 million per annum for the years 2001-2003, to fund core staff and functions in all AONBs like the Kent Downs.

All AONBs have the opportunity to apply for up to 75% funding from the Countryside Agency for the delivery of core functions (see Appendices for a list of Core Functions of AONBs). To qualify for this higher level of funding and to meet the new expectations from Central Government, on the back of the new legislation, a couple of other conditions have had to be satisfied:

- All AONB core funding partners (all local authorities and the Countryside Agency) signing a six-year memorandum of agreement for in-principle funding of the AONB Unit and partnership support costs

- Staffing and Governance review for the AONB partnership and AONB Unit.

The aim of these conditions is to make AONB partnerships better able to deliver the new CRoW Act (2000), and to deliver the primary purposes of AONB designation.

### **What is the role of the Kent Downs AONB Joint Advisory Committee?**

Within an area as large and varied as the Kent Downs, there are many hundreds of 'players' that have a role in managing the landscape, supporting local business and communities and enabling quiet recreation. One body, above all others has a pivotal role to play to realise the Strategic Vision for the Kent Downs AONB, and to deliver and achieve the Management Plan. A Joint Advisory Committee (JAC) for the Kent Downs AONB was established in July 1997. Having recently undergone a Governance Review, the membership of the JAC has been adjusted, and new Governance arrangements have been established to support the work of the JAC. (See Appendices for details). The membership of the JAC is made up of the twelve local authorities within the AONB area, as well as the Countryside Agency.

A new, smaller Executive of representatives from local authorities, Countryside Agency, English Nature, land-owning/farming interests, parish councils and the voluntary sector – steers and oversees the work of the Kent Downs AONB Unit currently made up of six full time equivalent posts. Working groups will also be established to steer the development of time-limited work. At a much larger scale, a Kent Downs Forum will be held once a year – for a wide audience, to discuss current issues and themes and inform the agenda for the forthcoming year.

Over the last three years, funding has been provided from a variety of sources, particularly from the Countryside Agency, local authorities, European Regional Development Fund (Interreg), English Nature, Heritage Lottery Fund and the Rail Link Countryside Initiative to take forward a number of activities under

the core functions, and deliver a number of project programmes.

### **The current Management Strategy**

The JAC published its first Management Strategy in 1999. This has proved an effective document. Many of its management objectives have been met and significant progress has been made towards meeting the remainder.

Political support and funding has enabled an increase in the AONB management capacity in terms of staff and financial resources. In 1997, the Kent Downs AONB had one officer, a minimal budget and no AONB projects in place except for local authority countryside management. There is now a well-established AONB Unit co-ordinating a number of AONB-wide initiatives. Inevitably, as capacity has expanded, so have ambitions and expectations and a new management plan is needed to provide a new focus for an enhanced level of activity.

The Management Plan is therefore being written in a period of development for the Kent Downs AONB. Many aspects of this Plan draw on the objectives and actions of our previous non-statutory Strategy – taking forward work that is currently being carried out, developing areas of work that have not been started in the period of the Strategy and initiating new action to address issues that have recently come to prominence. Once the new CRoW Act Management Plan has been finalised and adopted, the current Management Strategy will be superseded.

### **The Purpose of the Management Plan**

The purpose of the Plan is to achieve real improvements and landscape gain for the Kent Downs AONB in the next five years. It sets policies and actions to be jointly delivered by local authorities, other public bodies, their private and voluntary sector partners and the wider community. By providing a shared framework within which future management is carried out the Management Plan can provide a valuable co-ordinating function, making the best use of resources and fostering an identity of purpose and collective responsibility for management of the AONB. It should enable all

those involved in land management issues to understand how and why decisions are taken.

It is not intended that the Management Plan will be implemented solely by local authorities and the JAC. Effective implementation of the Management Plan and positive landscape change will only occur if there is a genuine spirit of collective goodwill and vision amongst all those who in some way have an influence on the management of land in the AONB. There also needs to be a commitment of resources to back up the policies of the Plan.

The Management Plan directly relates only to the statutorily designated AONB (and to any developments outside it, which may impact inside this area). However, most of the policies and recommendations for action are generally applicable to the wider countryside surrounding the AONB. Importantly, the wider area includes a number of large towns that have significant impacts on the AONB.

### **Commitment and Support from other Relevant Authorities**

The strengthening status of AONBs through the provisions of the CRoW Act, has brought new commitments from other organisations too – including those who are not necessarily core funding partners of AONB partnerships. The ‘duty of regard’ placed upon all public bodies and relevant authorities by Sec 85, Part IV of the CRoW Act has been met positively by a number of organisations.

Leading the way is the Forestry Commission, with the signing of a national Joint Accord in July 2001 with the Association of AONBs. The Forestry Commission has recognised the important role that woodland plays in defining the natural beauty of many of England’s AONBs. Indeed, a number of AONBs, particularly those in south east England support some of the most wooded areas, with the highest concentrations of ancient woodland nationally. The Joint Accord recognises the opportunity to work co-operatively to manage the woodlands of our finest landscapes in more integrated ways. Shared

priorities and objectives are clearly defined to achieve this aim.

The Forestry Commission has demonstrated its further commitment by jointly funding with the Countryside Agency five AONB woodland officers nationally. The Kent Downs AONB successfully secured one such post, shared with the High Weald and Surrey Hills AONBs (also Sussex Downs and East Hampshire). This officer will be delivering a wide range of activities over three years to bring about improved environmental and economic benefits to the woodlands of these AONBs.

In the South East, a Statement of Intent was agreed in November 2002 between the Countryside Agency, DEFRA, Government Office for the South East (GoSE), South East England Development Agency (SEEDA), South East England Regional Assembly (SEERA) and the ten ‘nationally protected landscapes’ wholly within the South East Region. Each of these organisations has a critical role to play in the development and protection of our protected landscapes. The Statement of Intent recognises that the South East’s finest landscapes as one of the key assets underpinning the economic success of the region and sets out shared objectives and actions for all partners.

In addition, a joint initiative to promote sustainable tourism in South East AONBs is underway between the Countryside Agency, SEEDA and the South East England Tourist Board (SEETB). A regional and local co-ordinator have been appointed to obtain external funding and implement action on the ground for tourism businesses and visitors, and to develop sustainable tourism in the AONBs.

Further Statements of Intent with Action Plans will be agreed in the near future with other statutory agencies including English Nature, English Heritage and the Environment Agency.

The Association of AONBs (AAONB) was established in 1998, and represents all the AONBs in England and Wales. It provides a national Forum for all elected members, officers and AONB staff involved in AONBs to exchange information, knowledge and best

## The Management Plan in Context

practice. It also provides a collective national voice campaigning and lobbying on behalf of AONBs, working with its equivalent the Association of National Parks. An annual AONB conference is held, organised by the AAONB, to debate and take forward the work of the AONBs nationally and provide networking and exchange opportunities.

## **National policy context**

There have been important developments in national policy since the 1999 management Strategy. A brief summary is provided below of the new policy documents and legislation, that have an influence or bearing on the Management Plan, that has been produced since 1999.

Rural White Paper November 2000 – *Our Countryside; the Future – A Fair deal for Rural England*.

This presents a comprehensive range of measures under four themes:

- A living countryside, with thriving rural communities and access to high quality public services;
- A working countryside, with a diverse economy giving high and stable levels of employment;
- A protected countryside in which the environment is sustained and enhanced, and which all can enjoy; a vibrant countryside which can shape its own future and with its voice heard by Government at all levels.
- There is much in the Rural White Paper and its Implementation Plan to support the Policies and Actions in this Management Plan.

In March 2003, the Countryside Agency published a new Strategy: *Quality of Life for Tomorrow's Countryside*. This sets out eight major work programmes, delivering many initiatives outlined in the Rural White Paper. Almost all these programmes have some relevance to the Kent Downs. Of particular importance is 'Living Landscapes' which highlights the following: first-class management is fostered in all National Parks and AONBs; local authorities are encouraged to farm partnerships; and; the Countryside Agency's role is to influence, provide advice and grant-aid to ensure that the finest

countryside, including AONBs are managed sustainably, to the highest possible standards and that lessons learnt there are applied widely throughout the countryside.

The formation of DEFRA from the merger of the former Ministry of Farming, Fisheries and Food (MAFF) and parts of the Department of Environment, Transport and the Regions (DETR). The objectives of DEFRA are all relevant in some context to this management Plan. DEFRA is responsible for the delivery of the England Rural Development Programme (ERDP) 2000-2006. This funds a broad range of rural development measures under three schemes:

- The Processing and Marketing Grant supporting processing and marketing primary agricultural products;
- The Vocational Training Scheme supporting vocational training in agriculture and forestry;
- The Rural Enterprise Scheme supporting rural development projects including farm diversification, rural tourism, quality food product marketing, environmental protection and water management, village facilities and rural heritage.

Regional goals are set for the South East Region under each scheme, and these are relevant to the policies and outputs of this Plan.

The impact of BSE, which partly hastened the formation of DEFRA, and the subsequent epidemic of Foot and Mouth Disease in 2001 led to the formation of a Commission on Farming and Food, chaired by Sir Don Curry (the Curry Commission). Its subsequent report – *Food and Farming: A Sustainable Future* (January 2002) recognises the multipurpose nature of food and agriculture policy – to produce good food, environmental stewardship and farm livelihoods simultaneously. It produced a wide range of recommendations to bring about greater connectivity between farms, markets, food chain supply, healthy food, healthy people and healthy countryside. It is an ambitious and far-reaching report with implications for all in farming and the countryside.

The Curry Report has subsequently been followed up by the *Review of Rural Delivery Arrangements*, led by Lord Haskins (the Haskins Review – started November 2002). This will take the

recommendations of the Curry Commission, as well as review the organisational and delivery arrangements of DEFRA, and its relationship with other Rural Delivery organisations. AONBs are being examined and reviewed explicitly as part of this work. Consultation runs until 23 May 2003 and the Kent Downs AONB JAC will respond to this. Early results may be known in time for the finalisation of the Management Plan.

### **Regional Assemblies (Preparations) Bill – November 2002**

Following the White Paper on regional governance *Your Region, Your Choice: Revitalising the English Regions* by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (DTLR), May 2002, this Bill is now passing through Parliament. The Bill will enable English regions to choose whether to elect Regional Assemblies.

### **Regional Guidance**

The South East England Regional Assembly (SEERA) is the planning body for the region, which means it advises Government on strategic planning and transport issues. It took on this role from 1 April 2001 when SERPLAN ceased to function.

The Assembly was set up in January 1999 to provide a voice for the region's eight million people, both in the UK and Europe. The Assembly covers Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, East and West Sussex, Hampshire and the Isle of Wight, Kent, Oxfordshire and Surrey. It has 111 members, including elected councillors nominated by the region's local authorities, and 37 members from other sectors of the community including social, environmental and economic partners.

Regional Planning Guidance for Kent is covered by the Approved Regional Planning Guidance for the South East (RPG 9). This recognises that the South East's countryside is one of its major assets and should be protected from inappropriate development. It states that planning authorities should maintain policies to safeguard the landscape of the region and AONBs in particular. Government has issued the *Sustainable Development Strategy for the South East* that was

submitted by SEERA.

Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) were established in 1998. SEEDA, the South East RDA now assumes a very influential role in the economic development of the region, set out in its ambitious plan for future economic growth – the *Regional Economic Strategy* (2002), as well as Regional Planning Guidance. The commitment to a Statement of Intent between the South East AONBs, GOSE, SEEDA, The Countryside Agency and SEERA strengthens the partnership role to be played between these different organisations to delivery substantial targets for the Kent Downs for environmental, social and economic well-being.

Local Government Act 2000 requires all local authorities to prepare Community Strategies. Local authorities are responsible 'for promoting the economic, environmental and social well-being of their areas and contributing to the achievement of sustainable development in the UK'. The local authorities of the Kent Downs are at different stages of developing their Strategies. Within each local authority area Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) have been established, bringing together all the main representatives of the community, including businesses, voluntary and community organisations and public bodies. These LSPs take responsibility for forming a vision and developing the strategy for action that forms the Community Strategies. The relationship between the AONB Management Plan and Community Plans is two-way. Community Plans are generally very broad in nature with overarching remits. Many of the key issues within them are not directly relevant to the purposes of the AONB. However, wherever possible, the AONB Management Plan and Community Plan should support and complement each other.

### **Land Use Planning**

The land use planning system is designed to reconcile the need for environmental protection and land use change in the public interest. This is achieved through the preparation of a development plan, which covers Structure Plans at a county level, Local Plans at a district level, Unitary Development Plans and subject plan such as

## Introduction to the Management Plan

for Minerals and Waste – statutory function of local planning authorities. Currently, the Kent Downs AONB Development Plans have well-established planning policies relating to the protection and conservation of the Kent Downs, preventing inappropriate development, and ensuring high levels of design public benefit and integration with the AONB's special character where development is acceptable.

Guidance on the preparation of policy relating to the AONB is provided by the Planning Policy Guidance notes (PPGs) produced by the Department of Environment, Transport and Regions. Many of these are relevant to the conservation of the landscape, the most important being PPG 7, *The Countryside and Rural Economy* (February 1997).

Part of the guidance on AONBs states:

“In general, policies and development control decisions affecting AONBs should favour conservation of the natural beauty of the landscape. In all cases the environmental effects of new proposals will be a major consideration, though it will also be appropriate to have regard to the economic and social well-being of the areas”.

### **Planning and Compulsory Purchase Bill 2003**

The Government is proposing to make significant changes to the planning system and the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Bill (2003) is passing through Parliament and is expected to be on the statute book by early 2004. This Bill sets out new measures and changes that are to be made to the statutory planning process. These include:

- Planning Policy statements, are to replace Planning Policy Guidance notes (PPGs), and are intended to be more focused than PPG.
- Regional Spatial Strategy for the SE will replace RPG and structure plans and include sub regional detail.
- Local Development Frameworks will replace local development plans and include a core strategy, proposal sections with proposal

map, Area Action Plans, Statement of Community Involvement and 3-year project plan.

- Development Control changes include a statement of development principles, agreed principles for site development (but not consent), reduction in the validity of planning permission to 3 years and time limits for consultation with statutory consultees

This Management Plan does not impose an extra layer of statutory control on land use within the AONB. It is intended to supplement and complement the Development Plan and other documents prepared by local planning authorities, and does not replace policies within these plans.



© Countryside Agency/Mike McGoran

# Taking the long view **2**

Objectives and policies for future focus



# Components of Natural Beauty

**T**he following section examines the main issues, threats, challenges and opportunities for each of the main landscape components that make up the natural beauty of the AONB. This information has arisen from various sources, principally from the participation exercises conducted with a wide-range of stakeholders including local authorities, parish councils, farmers and landowners, and local people generally.

The participation process has also sought information on what stakeholders and people generally hold to be the most important and highly valued features of the Kent Downs. From this information, individual vision statements have been drafted for each theme, which set out our aspirations for each of these key components of natural beauty in the long-term – beyond the life of this Management Plan, and up to twenty years into the future.

Policies have then been drawn up to address the key issues under each theme. These policies will influence and drive the key areas of work in the short-term, through the implementation of this plan, and help us move closer to our overall vision (described on page 6).



## Components of Natural Beauty

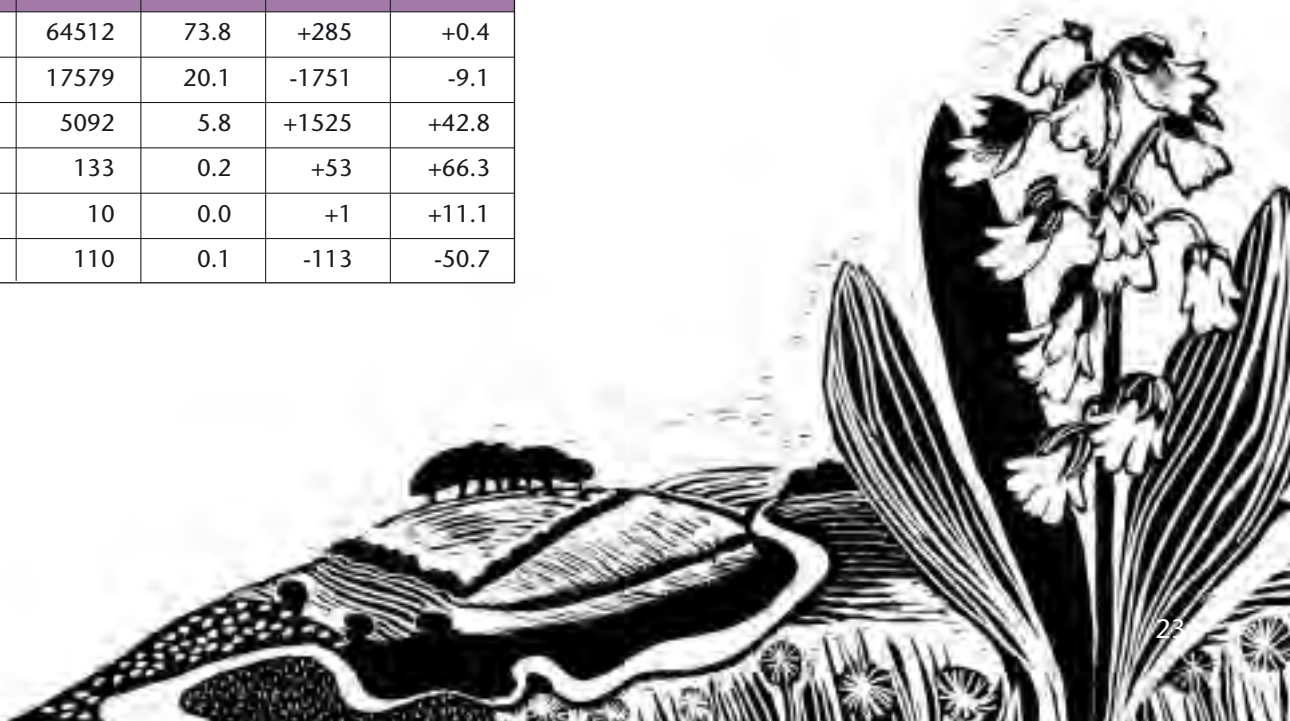
# Landscape and Natural Heritage

**T**he special characteristics of the Kent Downs landscape that define its natural beauty and sense of place have been described in some detail earlier in this Plan (see page 10). The threats that are currently important in influencing the quality of the landscape have also been examined (pages 10 to 12).

The recent Kent Land Cover Change survey, conducted by aerial

photography interpretation (2002), has provided new information on the overall land cover categories in the AONB. These provide detailed information in the changes in broad land cover classes that have occurred between 1961 and 1999. A summary of these data below show there have been subtle changes in land cover classes. However, the overall picture, from pre-designation in 1961 to 30 years post-designation in 1999 is broadly the same.

Landcover	1961		1999		Change	
	Extent (Ha)	% AONB	Extent (Ha)	% AONB	Area change from 1961 to 1999	% Change of 1961 resource
Agriculture	64227	73.5	64512	73.8	+285	+0.4
Woodland	19330	22.1	17579	20.1	-1751	-9.1
Development	3567	4.1	5092	5.8	+1525	+42.8
Wetland	80	0.1	133	0.2	+53	+66.3
Coastal	9	0.0	10	0.0	+1	+11.1
Misc	223	0.3	110	0.1	-113	-50.7



## Components of natural beauty

What these data do not reveal are the changes that have occurred in the detailed quality of the landscape components over this period of time. These detailed considerations are examined over the following 15 pages, as well as how these changes have been brought about and what needs to be done to address deterioration in landscape quality.

The defining components and features that make up the special character and quality of the Kent Downs landscape has been recognised and described at a broad level in the Kent Downs Landscape Assessment (1995, CCP 479). At a more detailed level, local landscape character assessments have been produced for Sevenoaks, Maidstone, Medway and areas of Canterbury. These provide practical local guidance on the condition of local landscape areas, their robustness or capacity to withstand or absorb change, and recommendations on how to conserve and restore landscape character. Landscape Character Assessments are useful tools to influence and guide landscape conservation work across the AONB.

The Kent Downs are valued most for their views and scenery. The passion that Churchill felt for this countryside continues to inspire

and invigorate people of all ages and backgrounds. The views are an essential part of the story of the Kent Downs – iron age people chose prominent places in the landscape in which to build their forts and bury their dead, the castles and fortifications that have been a cornerstone of England's defences were constructed to benefit from the best vantage points, the views that are now enjoyed by thousands along the North Downs Way once provided the stimulus for pilgrims walking their way from Winchester to Canterbury.

The Kent Downs have been designated an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty in recognition of their exceptional landscape qualities. However, the term 'natural beauty' is all-embracing and refers not only to the aesthetic and scenic qualities of the Kent Downs landscape, but also its wildlife, archaeological and cultural heritage which contribute immeasurably to its special character and sense of place.

The 'natural heritage' of the AONB, its flora, fauna, geological and physiographic features, is a key element in creating a sense of place in the Kent Downs. The Kent Downs AONB supports a great



© Countryside Agency/Tina Stallard

diversity of wildlife habitats and communities, which vary from east to west across the AONB reflecting changes in the local climate, geology, soils and topography. Semi-natural habitats of particular importance in the Kent Downs are:

- Unimproved chalk grassland – an internationally rare habitat. The UK is thought to hold half the world's extent of chalk grassland, and the Kent Downs contains some 6% of the UK resource;
- River corridors, chalk streams and springlines, together with ponds and small areas of wetlands;
- Scrub and woodlands, particularly internationally important beech-yew woodland;
- Acid grassland and heaths on the Greensand and clay plateau, typically surviving in parkland, common land and wood pasture;
- Chalk cliffs and seabed platform of the Heritage Coast;
- Farmed hedgerows, headlands and road verges.

The Kent and Bromley Biodiversity Action Plans (1997) have supporting habitat and species action plans that are relevant and important to the Kent Downs. These include:

- a) Unimproved chalk grassland: early gentian, late spider orchid, silver spotted skipper and Adonis blue butterfly;
- b) Woodlands, hedges and scrub: dormouse, nightingale and pearl-bordered fritillary;
- c) Chalk rivers and ponds: white-clawed crayfish and great-crested newt.

The Kent Downs AONB contains the following statutory nature conservation sites:

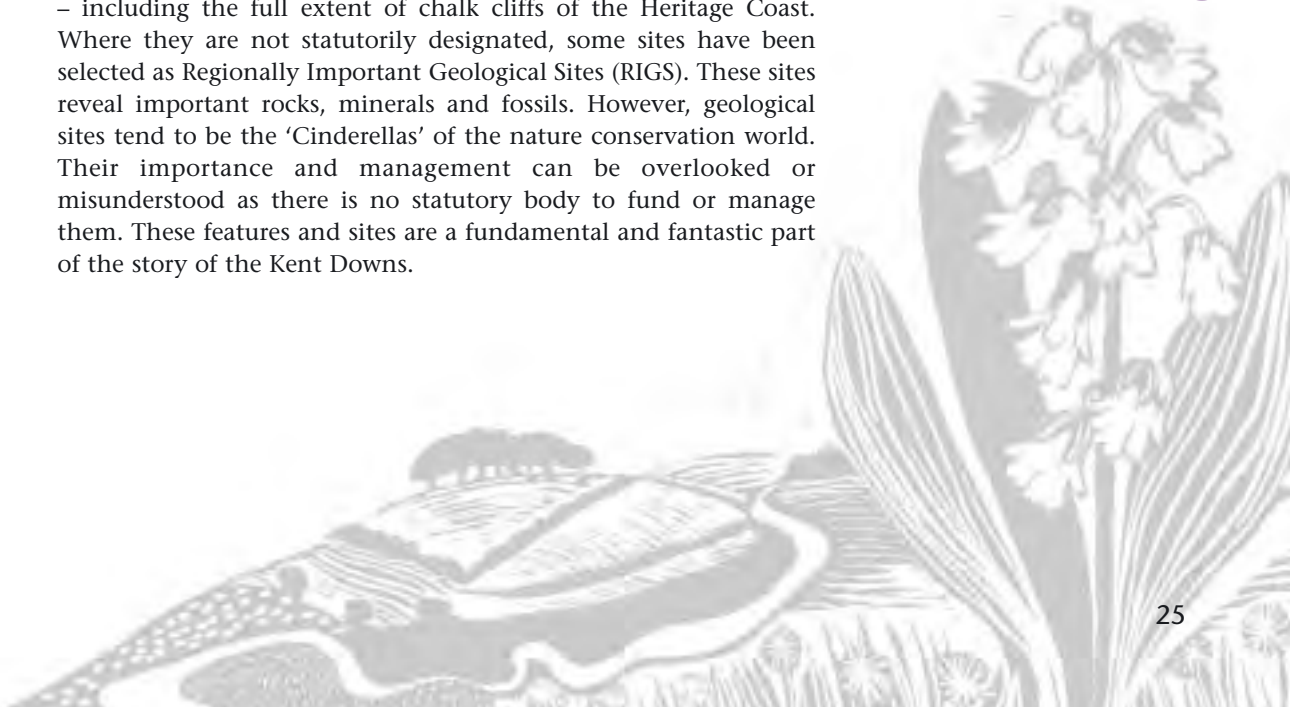
- a) Four candidate Special Areas of Conservation (cSAC) under the European Habitats Directive, namely Folkestone to Etchingill Escarpment, Wye and Crundale Downs, Queendown Warren (all designated for orchid rich chalk grassland) and the North Downs woodlands (designated for beech-yew woodland communities). Two possible SACs are Parkgate Down (orchid rich chalk grassland) and Dover to Kingsdown Cliffs (primarily designated for maritime chalk cliff communities with chalk grassland as a secondary feature. It is the only pSAC for the chalk cliff feature in the country).

- b) Wye Down National Nature Reserve (NNR). Lydden and Temple Ewell NNR and cSAC lies on the AONB boundary.
- c) Forty Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) are designated within the AONB, which cover 4,393 ha. They represent 27% of Kent's land-based SSSIs.

Despite the extent of recognised and recorded nature conservation sites in the AONB, most plant and animal species depend upon suitable long-term management of appropriate habitats in the wider countryside. The potential value of cultivated land is increasingly being recognised, and the Kent Downs supports a nationally important site for arable weed communities – supporting some of the UK's most threatened native plant species. The farmland and woodland bird populations in the mixed farmed/woodland landscape of the AONB are also important although these too are severely under threat because of rapid declines in populations due to intensive farming practices and lack of appropriate woodland management.

The basic relief and geology on which the AONB landscape resides are part of its natural heritage. The AONB contains a number of nationally and regionally important geological or physiographical features, the most important of which have been designated as SSSIs – including the full extent of chalk cliffs of the Heritage Coast. Where they are not statutorily designated, some sites have been selected as Regionally Important Geological Sites (RIGS). These sites reveal important rocks, minerals and fossils. However, geological sites tend to be the 'Cinderellas' of the nature conservation world. Their importance and management can be overlooked or misunderstood as there is no statutory body to fund or manage them. These features and sites are a fundamental and fantastic part of the story of the Kent Downs.

## Landscape and natural heritage



# Issues, challenges and stakeholder views

- In the eyes of 86% of our Orchid questionnaire respondents, the most valued features of the Kent Downs are its scenery and views.
- The highest category, 56% of respondents, considered chalk grassland to be the most important landscape features of natural beauty, with 52% and 45% selecting woodland and land form.
- 56% of respondents, the highest category, revealed that illegal activities within the urban fringe including fly tipping and rubbish dumping, abandoned cars and off-road biking are the single biggest landscape issue that should be addressed in the next five years
- 54% respondents considered loss of wild plants and animals, and 50% considered the loss of views and scenic beauty, the second and third highest categories of landscape issue that needed urgent action.
- The continuing and cumulative loss of landscape features and character due to agricultural practices, increased development and suburbanisation and road pressure.
- Opportunity now exists to bring about real landscape gain, at a targeted local level, through forthcoming changes to Countryside Stewardship Scheme and other agri-environment measures, following the Curry Commission.
- The apparent increase in livery premises and horse keeping generally and the changes it can make to landscape quality.
- Fragmentation and loss of habitats due infrastructure and housing developments;
- Lack of suitable habitat management, i.e. grazing, particularly for small, inaccessible or unprotected sites – scrub encroachment is a significant issue on chalk grassland.
- Continuing impact of intensive agriculture, horticulture, and forestry and country pursuits on 'common' and once-widespread animal and plant species.
- Finding a balance between the use and enjoyment of the AONB for access, recreation and countryside leisure pursuits whilst conserving and management the wildlife and habitats that make the AONB so special.
- The need to develop accessible and comprehensive landscape and natural heritage base information

## Components of natural beauty

## Vision and long term objectives

### *A place in which*

- The special character, local distinctiveness and natural beauty is maintained and conserved throughout.
- Damaged landscape features are repaired, faded beauty is restored, and the 'ordinary' is enhanced, to conserve the beauty, charm and rural character of the area.
- Landscape and biodiversity gain is integral to all land uses, particularly agriculture and forestry.
- The rich diversity of natural features, wild animals, plants and habitats is recognised, protected, positively managed and enhanced.
- A network of well-managed nature conservation sites covers the Kent Downs, providing semi-natural habitats for locally typical and rare species and community.
- More common and widespread wildlife species and populations flourish because of the connecting and contiguous corridors and sites that are integral part of the farmed and wooded landscape.
- Comprehensive and easily accessible local data inform and influence land management and development decisions.
- Local people and visitors alike enjoy and appreciate the Kent Downs as a landscape of rich natural heritage, fostered by imaginative and well-planned information and interpretative media.
- The natural heritage and wildlife is recognised for its inherent value for contributing to quality of life and the economic value of the Kent Downs.

# Policies

- LNH1** Recognise, protect and conserve those landscape and nature conservation elements that contribute to the overall identity and character of the Kent Downs AONB, notably the characteristic elements of the chalk downland, the woodland, the mixed farmland, ancient hedgerows and routeways, river corridors and the traditional buildings and settlements.
- LNH2** Prevent, reduce and manage positively the various impacts of 'urban fringe' pressures on landscape character.
- LNH3** Prevent deterioration or loss of landscape character, and encourage measures to restore and enhance lost landscape character or nature conservation features.
- LNH4** Ensure that all nationally and internationally designated nature conservation sites are brought into and maintained in favourable management.
- LNH5** Implement local, regional and national biodiversity action plan targets for key habitats and species relevant to the Kent Downs;
- LNH6** Expand the area of chalk grassland in appropriate management in accordance with national and local BAP targets, and target the restoration and re-creation of new areas of chalk grassland.
- LNH7** Increase the management and area of beech yew habitat in accordance with national and local biodiversity action plan targets

- LNH8** Promote the conservation of wetland and riverine habitats and species associated with chalk rivers and ponds.
- LNH9** Bring in new efforts to conserve farmland and woodland bird populations and 'arable weed' species.
- LNH10** Promote co-ordinated and high quality conservation and funding advice to farmers and landowners and raise awareness and uptake of agri-environment schemes.
- LNH11** Seek locally targeted Countryside Stewardship and other ERDP funding that pay for more extensive and widespread environmentally sensitive farming.
- LNH12** Promote increased awareness of local landscape character to guide the maintenance of local distinctiveness in development plans and landscape management or enhancement schemes, through the development and use of local landscape character assessments.
- LNH13** Identify and implement methods to monitor landscape and biodiversity change.
- LNH14** Ensure the effective sharing of standardised digital base information on land cover, landscape character, designated sites, BAP species and habitats with all relevant organisations to assist in effective landscape and wildlife management and monitoring.

## Landscape and Natural Heritage



# Components of Natural Beauty

## Farmed Land

**T**he Kent Downs AONB is a farmed landscape, with 74% of its land classed as agricultural. Centuries of changing farming practices have hewn and shaped the landscape to create what exists today. Farming practices never stand still, they constantly evolve to meet new demands and challenges – farming has changed rapidly over the last fifty years and that rate of change will continue. The challenge now is to ensure that farming into the 21st century can

adapt to meet the economic needs of those that derive their income from it, whilst meeting the changing expectations of the consumers and the public at large.

The recent Land Cover Change survey (2002) reveals the changes to the type of farming activities within the Kent Downs over the last 40 years.

Landcover	1961 Ha	1999 Ha	Change Ha of 1961	Change Ha % of 1961
Arable	33828	35600	1772	+5.2
Grassland	23856	19535	-4321	-18.1
Grassland with scrub	308 (in 1972)	5715	5407	+94.6
Orchard and hops	4568	2287	-2281	-49.9
Parkland	1975	1409	-566	-28.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>64227</b>	<b>64546</b>	<b>319</b>	<b>+0.9</b>

A brief analysis of the data above reveals that the total extent of agricultural land in the AONB has changed little in the last 40 years. However, big changes have occurred within the types of farming carried out, and at a detailed level there are many factors at play, that are shaping the influence that farming is having on AONB landscape character.

The area of arable has increased to a small degree between 1961 and 1999, although the methods and types of arable farming will have

changed considerably within this period. For many centuries, arable has been an important part of the Kent Downs landscape and continues to be important in determining the character of the AONB. Arable farming will continue to adapt and change, responding to new technologies, changes in markets and demand and changes being driven by international political and economic agendas.

The greatest changes in the overall agricultural land cover classes

between 1961 and 1999 have been the loss of grassland, the bulk of which is now apparently classified as grassland with scrub. These new data support a fundamental change that has been discussed and raised anecdotally by many stakeholders.

Traditionally, the Kent Downs AONB have been an area of mixed farming, where livestock farming has always been an important part of the agricultural picture. Sheep and beef cattle continue to play their part in the AONB farming economy but, now at reduced levels. The effects of BSE, the 2001 Foot and Mouth Disease outbreak, as well as other factors such as the lack of local abattoirs and cheap imports, have put increasing pressure on the livestock industry. The effect of this in landscape terms is that there are fewer grazing animals across the AONB, most notably in the West Kent Downs. Much of the farmed livestock is not grazed extensively (animals being overwintered in barns, and being grazed more intensively). The loss of grazing livestock and skilled graziers has led to many areas of grassland that may have been grazed by sheep or cattle over 20 years ago now falling out of use and scrubbing over as a consequence. This is having a significant impact on the landscape character and quality, particularly with the loss of biodiversity rich areas of chalk downland.

About half of the 1961 extent of orchards and hops has now been lost, with the dramatic decline in income for these crops, and changes in horticulture methods. Orchards and hop gardens were an important part of the cultural landscape of the Kent Downs. There are still parts that support extensive areas of horticulture such as the area between Sittingbourne and Canterbury in the Mid Kent Downs. Traditional top-fruit orchards of widely-spaced mature trees and grazed grassland have largely been replaced by smaller and more densely-planted trees. Small orchard areas on the Greensand ridge around Plaxtol and Platt (notable for its cobnut platts).

All elements of farming will be subject to further changes over the lifetime of this Management Plan, adding an element of unpredictability to the future of farming generally. Of particular importance is the mid-term review of the European Union's

Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). It aims to ensure that aside from supporting farming incomes, other public benefits will be delivered through agricultural payments including the conservation of the environment and animal welfare, landscapes, cultural heritage, or enhancing social balance and equity. The intention is to free farmers of red tape, encouraging them to produce at high standards for the highest market return, rather than for the sake of the maximum possible subsidy.

The Government's Strategy for Sustainable Farming and Food (the Curry Commission report) as well as the ongoing Rural Delivery Review (the Haskins Review) will also deliver change. Linking into the whole process of change is the Agri-environment Schemes Review which started early in January 2002. It is intended that the new and revised schemes will be rolled out by 2005. Between now and then it will:

- Review the existing English agri-environment schemes, concentrating on the Countryside Stewardship Scheme (CSS) and Environmentally Sensitive Areas (ESAs).
- Follow up the recommendations of the Policy Commission on Farming and Food, including the proposed 'broad and shallow' scheme.
- Develop a revised structure for agri-environment schemes in England that will enable the scheme to contribute effectively to solving current and future environmental problems.
- Develop a pilot 'entry-level' agri-environment scheme.

## Farmed Land



# Issues, challenges and stakeholder views

- 45% of respondents to the Orchid questionnaire, the highest category, stated that the provision of more environmentally-sensitive farming would improve their use and enjoyment of the Kent Downs countryside.
- Decline in grazing livestock industries, and loss of skilled graziers, have led to losses of pasture and grassland. An apparent 18% decline (4321 Ha) in grassland in the last four decades, much of the former grassland now classified as scrub. Pasture and chalk downland are essential landscape elements that need well-managed and appropriate grazing to conserve them.
- Ongoing review of the Common Agricultural Policy, with a general move away from production support mechanisms to providing enhanced environmental benefits. Uptake of existing agri-environment measures in Kent Downs, particularly Countryside Stewardship Scheme (CSS) for chalk grassland, has been relatively good. With the update and revision of the ERDP and Countryside Stewardship bringing 'broad and shallow' scheme, as well as enhanced higher-level entry payments, a strong case for a locally tailored scheme with enhanced payment rates, should be made.
- Farm diversification activities- such as alternative crops (eg. lavender) and non-agricultural enterprises (eg. self-catering cottages) have potentially important consequences for the landscape, biodiversity and rural economy of the Kent Downs.
- Changes in landholdings. Loss of medium-sized mixed farms – polarisation to very large/block units with 'share' or 'contract' farming, and very small farming units/residential owners, where farming is not the main source of income.
- Resultant selling off of farmhouse and buildings/cottages from the farmland estate, separating land and accommodation and putting pressure for cheaper/purpose build accommodation.
- Continued increase in the keeping of horses, and the need to balance its positive benefits to rural employment, income, recreation and leisure, with its often negative impacts on landscape character.
- Lack of public awareness of the links between farming, food, environmental issues and landscape management.

## Components of Natural Beauty



© Countryside Agency/Tina Stallard



# Vision and long term objectives

*A landscape in which:*

- The fundamental farming heritage is retained and strengthened;
- The viability of farming will be promoted, and skilled farmers, land managers and workers will maintain a living and working landscape;
- High-quality food is produced and bought by people and businesses from local shops, farmers markets and is available in neighbouring supermarkets;
- The conservation of the landscape, the restoration and enhancement

of habitats for wildlife, and the welcoming of people to enjoy the landscape, are all integrated and complementary activities to mainstream farming;

- There is heightened awareness and understanding by local residents and visitors in the AONB to the importance and fundamental role played by farming, where the connections between landscape, farming and food are appreciated by all people.

## Policies

- F1** Secure and promote the uptake of current and future agri-environment scheme, including ERDP incentives tailored for the Kent Downs landscape, that conserve and enhance important landscape, archaeological and ecological features.
- F2** Support farming practices that contribute to, or mitigate damaging impacts on, the environment, e.g. integrated crop management, extensive grazing and organic production.
- F3** Promote targeted habitat re-creation and management, and encourage the use of whole farm management planning to promote larger scale and integrated conservation management.
- F4** Encourage farm diversification and new business ventures that

will support the viability of farming, whilst contributing to the conservation, and enhancement of the AONB.

- F5** Stimulate and enhance markets for local produce derived from environmentally sensitive farming.
- F6** Promote a wider public understanding of farming, and the benefits that the farmed landscape brings for recreation and leisure, health and well being, nature conservation, archaeology and landscape. Develop methods by which these benefits can be recognised by the market.
- F7** Promote advice and support for horse pasture management that is conserving of the landscape and biodiversity of the Kent Downs.

Farmed  
Land



# Components of Natural Beauty

## Woodland and Trees

**W**oodland covers 20% of the Kent Downs AONB, and is the second largest land-use type, after farming, in the AONB. Woodlands are a vital component of the natural beauty of the Kent Downs, providing a green mantle to the upper slopes of the escarpments and valleys. Woodland emphasises the undulating nature of the dip slopes and scarp, and frames the agricultural lower slopes and settlements.

Over half of the Kent Downs woodland is recognised as ancient (woodland continuously present on the site since at least AD1600) with a further 11% being replanted woodland on ancient woodland sites (EN Ancient Woodland Inventory). Ancient woodland is greatly valuable for its landscape and biodiversity importance. It represents our only link with the original 'wildwood' and contains vulnerable animal and plant species that are confined to ancient woodland habitats. Most of these are associated with old trees, deadwood or open ground within ancient woods.

In the AONB, highest woodland concentrations are found on the Greensand ridge south of Sevenoaks, along the chalk escarpment in west Kent, and in large blocks above the Stour Valley, and in areas of the East Kent Downs plateaux.

New data, collated from aerial photograph interpretation by the Kent Land Cover Change survey (2002), shed fresh light on the broad changes that have occurred to the woodland component of the Kent Downs AONB from 1961 (pre-AONB designation) to 1999 (the most recent aerial photography coverage for the whole area). This reveals that there has been a net decrease of some 1751 ha or

The Forestry Commission produced an Inventory Report for the Kent Downs in 2001, based on the National Inventory of Woodland and trees. These presented the following information for woodlands of 2ha and over, which gives an overall picture of the types of AONB woodland:

Woodland type	Area (Ha)	% of AONB woodland resource
<b>Broadleaved woodland</b>	6,740	45.6
<b>Coppice</b>	2,455	16.6
<b>Mixed</b>	2,355	15.9
<b>Conifer</b>	1,290	8.7
<b>Open space</b>	778	5.3
<b>Coppice-with-Standards</b>	569	3.9
<b>Felled</b>	436	3.0
<b>Windblow</b>	149	1.0
<b>Total</b>	14,772	100

9% of woodland cover recorded since the original 1961 survey. Some 81% of this woodland loss has been to agriculture (conversion to arable and grassland) while 17% has been to development.

In 1998, the Forestry Commission published the English Forestry

Strategy which describes how the Government will deliver its forestry policies in England and sets out the Government's priorities and programmes for forestry for the next five to ten years. In 2001, this was followed up with the signing of the Joint National Accord with the Association of AONBs demonstrating their commitment to deliver their Strategy within protected landscapes. In January 2003, the Forestry Commission subsequently announced that Regional Forestry Frameworks will be produced for each region of England, which will provide a policy framework for

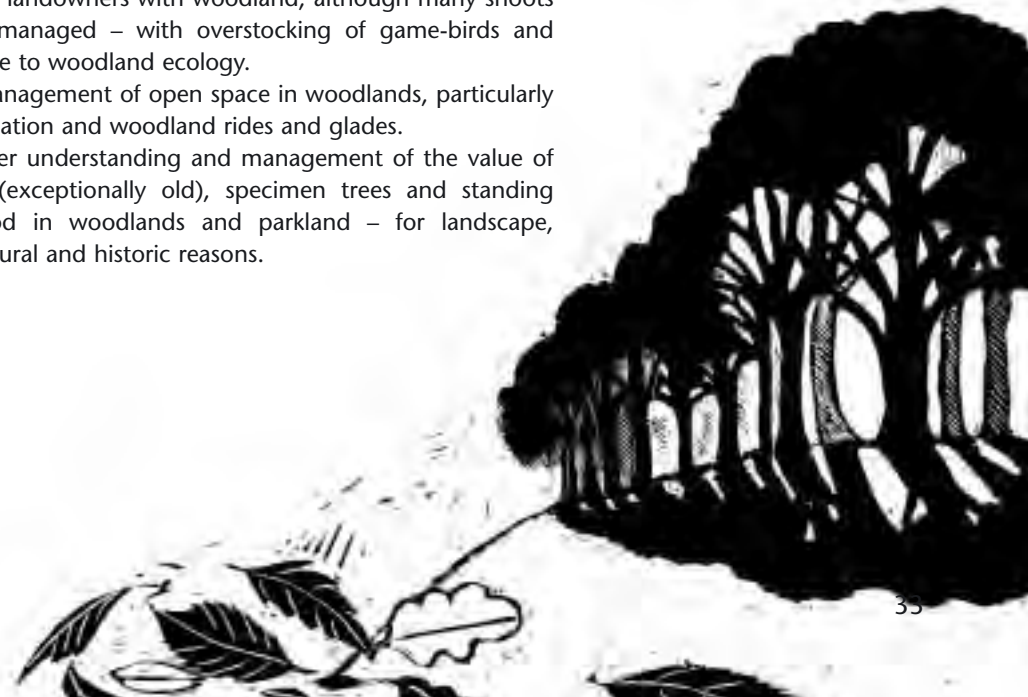
forestry and woodlands to be incorporated into wider regional environmental, social and economic agendas.

The recent appointment (2003) of a joint AONB woodland officer for the Kent Downs, High Weald and Surrey Hills AONBs, funded by the Forestry Commission and the Countryside Agency, will help the AONBs to feed in to the regional agendas, as well as delivering joint action on shared strategic woodland issues.

## Issues, challenges and stakeholder views

- 52% of Orchid questionnaire respondents, the second highest category, viewed woodland as the feature that contributes most to the natural beauty of the Kent Downs.
- Ownership is fragmented or not known for many woodlands, particularly of small woodlands. Little is also known about the aims of woodland owners, and what they are managing woodlands for.
- Little is also known about the current management status of AONB woodlands. The previous focus of woodland management on timber and wood products has now changed in the last few decades. The economic returns associated with woodlands in the AONB are now more likely to result from a range of activities.
- Need to establish new markets and supply chains for woodland produce as previous markets for small round wood products and paper pulp are not available.
- Need to address fragmentation between woodland areas as fewer large woods remain, and many smaller woodlands are more isolated. Fragmentation of woodland plant and animal populations leads to gradual impoverishment of these wild species.
- Intensive agriculture and urban expansion has led to loss of transitional habitats around woods.
- Continuity of habitats has been broken due to a decline in traditional management of coppice and pasture woodland.
- Replanting on ancient woodland sites – if carried out, it needs to use appropriate species of local provenance if available. In many situations, natural regeneration should be encouraged.
- Greater multipurpose use of woodlands, to bring viable income sources to woodland owners – for timber and small wood products, for landscape, biodiversity and recreation
- Pheasant and other game-bird shooting is an important income source for many landowners with woodland, although many shoots are intensively managed – with overstocking of game-birds and resulting damage to woodland ecology.
- Need for the management of open space in woodlands, particularly heathland re-creation and woodland rides and glades.
- Need for a better understanding and management of the value of 'veteran' trees (exceptionally old), specimen trees and standing /lying deadwood in woodlands and parkland – for landscape, biodiversity, cultural and historic reasons.

Woodland  
and  
Trees



# Vision and long term objectives

*A landscape in which:*

- The vital woodland component is maintained, restored and managed to integrate multipurpose use;
- Isolated woodlands will become strongly unified to more extensive landscape and habitat network, through appropriate woodland planting and management;
- Woodland ecology and archaeology is conserved and recognised for its value;
- There is promotion of public understanding and the sensitive use of woodlands for recreation and leisure;
- The production of high quality timber and valuable underwood is stimulated to supply the local market, and;
- In the long term, assistance is given to species; adaptation to climate change by developing well-managed woodland biological corridors.

Components  
of natural  
beauty

## Policies

**WT1** Establish a greater understanding of woodland ownership in the AONB, and the motivation of woodland owners for woodland management.

**WT2** Secure and promote the uptake of current and future incentives and support measures that are linked to the widespread adoption of environmentally sensitive woodland practices that conserve and enhance important landscape, archaeological and ecological features.

**WT3** Provide practical assistance, advice and training to encourage sustainable multipurpose management of woodland, particularly for increased access and recreation, biodiversity, landscape and archaeological conservation, in accordance with approved management plans and good practice guidance.

**WT4** Support the viability of sustainable woodland management by enhancing the marketing of local timber and other woodland products, including the development of significant wood fuel initiatives that offer sustainable environmental and economic benefits to Kent Down's woodlands.

**WT5** Promote a wider understanding of woodland management to woodland owners, to local people and to visitors, and the benefits that woodlands bring for recreation and leisure, health and well being, nature conservation, archaeology and landscape. Develop methods by which these benefits can be recognised by the market.

**WT6** Provide best practice advice to woodland owners to support income generating activities in woodland that conserve and enhance the landscape, biodiversity and historic value of woodlands.

**WT7** Develop targeted woodland and tree planting which links isolated or fragmented woodlands, where these meets local landscape character guidelines, using locally appropriate species.

**WT8** Encourage the planting and management of fine specimen trees at prominent locations where this is in accordance with landscape character guidelines, and the identification and protection of 'veteran' trees.

# Components of Natural Beauty

## Historic and Built Heritage

**T**he statutorily protected and registered sites which span 5000 years, from the prehistoric Megaliths to the defensive structures of the Second World War include; the most important group of Megalithic monuments (standing stones) in the South East and iron-age and bronze-age forts and burial chambers; nationally important Roman sites and remains including mosaic villas, and the Dover pharos (lighthouse); several motte and bailey Norman castles and settlements; manors and deer parks dating back to the Middle Ages; village buildings of brick, Kentish peg tiles and weatherboarding clustered around medieval flint and brick churches, and coastal and military defences dating back over many centuries.

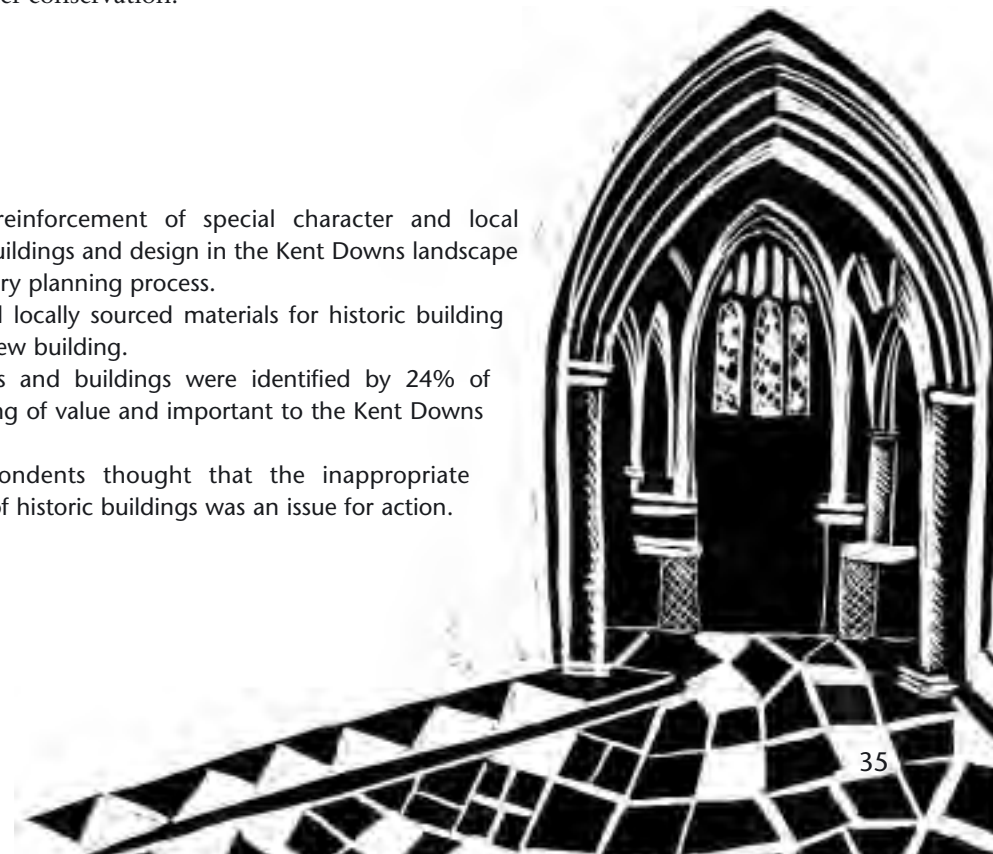
Many other non-statutory historic features are in the wider

countryside including ancient hedgerows and wood banks, hollow ways and routeways, dene holes (deep excavations into the chalk) and borrow pits.

There is a legacy of locally distinctive architecture from locally derived building materials such as Kentish ragstone, flint, clay for bricks and Kentish peg tiles, chalk and timber framed and cladded buildings. New development, particularly where it occurs within or around historic buildings and settlements need to be able enhance and reinforce special local character – but reflecting appropriate design and use of local materials, whilst incorporating the best that modern technologies can provide in alternative power, energy conservation and water conservation.

### Issues, challenges and stakeholder views

- Need to increase people's greater understanding and awareness of the historic heritage resource, including greater opportunities for access and interpretation.
- Develop the use of holistic views to the historic environment, referring to the Sites and Monuments Record, to inform research projects, development decisions and landscape management.
- Need to provide sensitive advice and promote positive conservation and protection of important sites and features, ranging from the English Heritage's Monuments at Risk register, to the effect of deep ploughing and the introduction of deep rooting crops on buried remains.
- Recognition and reinforcement of special character and local distinctiveness of buildings and design in the Kent Downs landscape through the statutory planning process.
- Dearth of skills and locally sourced materials for historic building conservation and new building.
- Historic settlements and buildings were identified by 24% of respondents as being of value and important to the Kent Downs natural beauty
- Only 8% of respondents thought that the inappropriate conversion or loss of historic buildings was an issue for action.



# Vision and long term objectives

*A landscape in which:*

- The historic and built heritage is conserved, so that all people can appreciate, enjoy and delight in it.
- The rich legacy of sites and features are positively managed understood and cherished by local people and visitors alike.
- Positive development will be encouraged that respects the traditions of the past, whilst providing for tomorrow's needs.
- The distinctive and historic pattern of settlement is protected and maintained in a way that does not damage the natural environment or reduce the quality of life of those who live and work in the AONB.
- Restoration, conversion and new building will reflect local character, and be valued as such. It will meet high environmental standards, using locally derived materials and skilled local workers.

Components  
of natural  
beauty

## Policies

- HB1** Ensure the conservation, management and restoration of the statutory designated sites, other important archaeological sites and of the historic landscape.
- HB2** Promote best practice guidance and advice on landscape design in the historic environment to support development planning and control powers to Local Authorities, and to other statutory undertakers, public bodies and utilities whose activities fall outside of planning controls.
- HB3** Support the development of a widespread awareness, appreciation and understanding of the historic heritage of the

AONB, through sustainable access to all. Promote social inclusion through community involvement in the conservation and interpretation of the historic environment.

- HB4** Promote best practice guidance to community groups, landowners and managers on sustainable integrated management practices of the historic environment, and seek local knowledge and local statements of value.
- HB5** Highlight the economic potential of the historic environment, and promote sustainable tourism to realise this potential by enhancing visitor awareness and enjoyment.

## Components of Natural Beauty

# The Physical Environment and Environmental Quality

**T**he geology and landform of the Kent Downs provide the foundation for the natural beauty of the AONB- in more than one sense. The folded and undulating chalk, greensand, gault and ragstone, with intricate overlying layers of clay with flints, sand, river gravels and alluvium determine the nature of the land and soil. Climate and weather patterns add to this picture and together they influence the natural features and vegetation that are supported. The natural and cultural features that create the Kent Downs' sense of place and special character have been and continue to be governed primarily by the physical nature of the environment.

The physical environment is constantly changing, and manmade critical changes are occurring, perhaps faster than recorded for many generations. The impact of global warming and climate change is leading to warmer, drier summers and milder, wetter winters. Similarly, short-lived but more extreme weather events are occurring more frequently. The root causes of climate change can only be addressed at an international level, and over a long timescale. However, the effects are felt locally, and within the timeframe of this Management Plan. Policies and action at a local level can influence the scale of impact of climate change at a local level, and help to manage adverse effects or promote positive effects when they occur.



© Countryside Agency/Mike McGoran



long view

# Issues, challenges and stakeholder views

## Climate change

- Mean sea level rises are increasing. Projections for Kent suggest an average rise of 13.25mm/year at Dover between now and 2060. Chalk cliff erosion needs to be monitored, and new ways to adapt to rising sea levels need to be considered.
- Need to enhance awareness among farmers and land managers of the implications of climate change for land use and land management.
- Provide biological corridors, to assist some species to adapt to climate change by moving north and west.
- Increased low flows in some of the AONBs rivers, particularly the Darent and Little Stour, and opportunities to cultivate different crops (such as lavender and sunflowers), potential to generate more solar and wind electricity, lower energy and heating bills and extend the peak tourism season.

## Water quality and quantity

- In the Kent area, three-quarters of tap water supplies are derived from the groundwater of the Chalk and Greensand, largely beneath the AONB. The quality and quantity of the ground water aquifer is strongly influenced by sensitive land management practices.
- Flooding events are predicted to increase and become more extreme as an effect of climate change. Rivers flooding in the Kent Downs

affect only localised areas. Soil erosion is one impact of short-lived but more intense rainfall, which can exacerbate flooding. Changes to land use and land management practices can help reduce soil erosion.

**Tranquillity** – reducing noise and light pollution, and visual intrusion  
29% of Orchard respondents identified the opportunity to enjoy peace and quiet as something that would improve their use of the Kent Downs.

- Tranquillity is a feature of vital importance for our protected landscape, and in the south east of England tranquillity is an increasingly rare resource, Research by the Campaign for the Protection of Rural England has shown that since the 1960s England has lost over 20% of its tranquil areas to urban sprawl, traffic and light pollution. The average size of our tranquil areas has been reduced by 73%.
- In the Kent Downs AONB, tranquillity is particularly at threat from roads. Areas of the Kent Downs can still provide tranquil havens away from noise and light pollution of towns and motorways. The ability to be able to retreat from the noise and sight of modern urban life can enhance well being and bring greater quality of life to those who benefit from it. As Kent becomes increasingly crowded, this resource will become more important and more under threat.

Components  
of natural  
beauty

# Vision and long term objectives

*A landscape in which:*

- Sustainable development is a guiding principle and focus for all land use and landscape management practices;
- The Kent Downs AONB will provide safe, clean and comparatively tranquil environment, where residents and visitors alike will benefit through increased well being and quality of life;

- Great care will be taken of the natural resources of geology, soil, landform and water systems;
- Local sources of pollution indigenous to the AONB, including noise, light, soil and water, will be reduced or controlled;
- The implications of climate change and rising sea levels will be considered in all land use practices.

## Policies

- PE1** Monitor and positively manage the impacts of coastal erosion through rising sea levels on the White Cliffs Heritage Coast (see Heritage Coast theme).
- PE2** Provide advice and support for farmers and land managers for integrated land management in the Kent Downs, which enshrines best practice guidance for environmental management – to prevent soil erosion, to reduce surface and groundwater pollution and overuse, and to assist with local flood prevention and control.
- PE3** Identify main sources of visual intrusion, noise and light

pollution, and investigate innovative methods to reduce the impact of these sources.

- PE4** Ensure that the impact of visual intrusion, noise and light pollution are considered in the assessment of all planning applications affecting the AONB, and that any new erosion of tranquillity is prevented through the statutory planning process and good design solutions.
- PE5** Establish ‘tranquil zones’ within the AONB, and protect and promote these in a sensitive and sustainable way for people’s quiet enjoyment and reflection.

The Physical  
Environment  
and  
Environmental  
Quality

long view



## Components of Natural Beauty

# The White Cliffs Heritage Coast

**T**he Kent Downs meet the sea at Dover and Folkestone where dramatic chalk cliffs form a landscape of exceptional drama and beauty. The White Cliffs of Dover and Folkestone hold a special place in the hearts and minds of many millions of people – almost becoming a synonym for the nation itself. Associations include happy reminders of holidays journeys and more grim remembrances of wartime.

In England and Wales, 45 stretches of our finest, undeveloped coastline have been defined as ‘Heritage Coast’ covering just one third of the coastline. The only stretches of Heritage Coast recognised within Kent fall wholly within the Kent Downs AONB. These are: the coastline between Dover and Folkestone comprising 7.2km (4.5 miles), and; South Foreland covering 6.9 km (4.3 miles) of coast between Dover and Kingsdown near Deal.

The Dover-Folkestone and South Foreland Heritage Coast is defined as including the inter-tidal strand and adjacent inshore waters. The purpose of Heritage Coast definition is not simply to identify them for protection purposes but rather to focus attention on the management needs of the coast and the relationship between different, and sometimes conflicting, issues.

PPG 20 on *Coastal Development Planning* provides advice for local planning authorities on the protection of Heritage Coasts through policies in the Development Plan. In the Kent Downs AONB, both

Dover and Shepway District Councils have strong policies for the Heritage Coast in their area within their Local Plans. There is also a national organisation – Coastnet – which campaigns for Heritage Coasts nationally.

Much of the Heritage Coast also has nature and geological conservation protective designations.

### **The Chalk Coast Communities Project**

The Chalk Coast Communities Project was run as one of ten pilot projects to develop and understand the ‘Environmental Capital’ approach to establishing what is valued in the landscape by local communities. The project was set up in 1999 and consulted with parishes, local groups, individuals schools and professional groups to establish the key benefits and services offered by the chalk coast, how they were valued and what management issues were raised. Key findings include; Natural beauty (open space, views, relative wilderness and wildlife) and heritage were consistently the most valued aspects of the Heritage Coast and that this contributed considerably to the local quality of life. Key issues included the need to conserve and enhance the scenery and wildlife and improve access to it particularly through the public rights of way network. Other issues included the loss of sections of the natural coastline through ‘coastal squeeze’ and erosion and the impacts of sea level rise.

# Issues, challenges and stakeholder views

- 45% of Orchid respondents recognised the cliffs and coast to contribute most to the natural beauty of the Kent Downs.
- The management, restoration and reinforcement of the special landscape character, and of heritage and nature conservation sites and other important features.
- Disparate ownership leading to fragmented landscape management approaches.
- The control and positive management of visitor 'honey pot' areas, and other recreational and tourist pressures.
- Cliff erosion and the squeeze of semi-natural habitats.
- Improving access management and enjoyment building on and integrating existing projects.
- The impact and management of man made visual intrusions, particularly the military legacy.
- Light, sound and air pollution brought about by the proximity to major travel corridors.
- Seaborne litter detracting from the natural beauty.
- Infrastructure development and management that does not take into account the natural beauty.

## Vision and long term objective

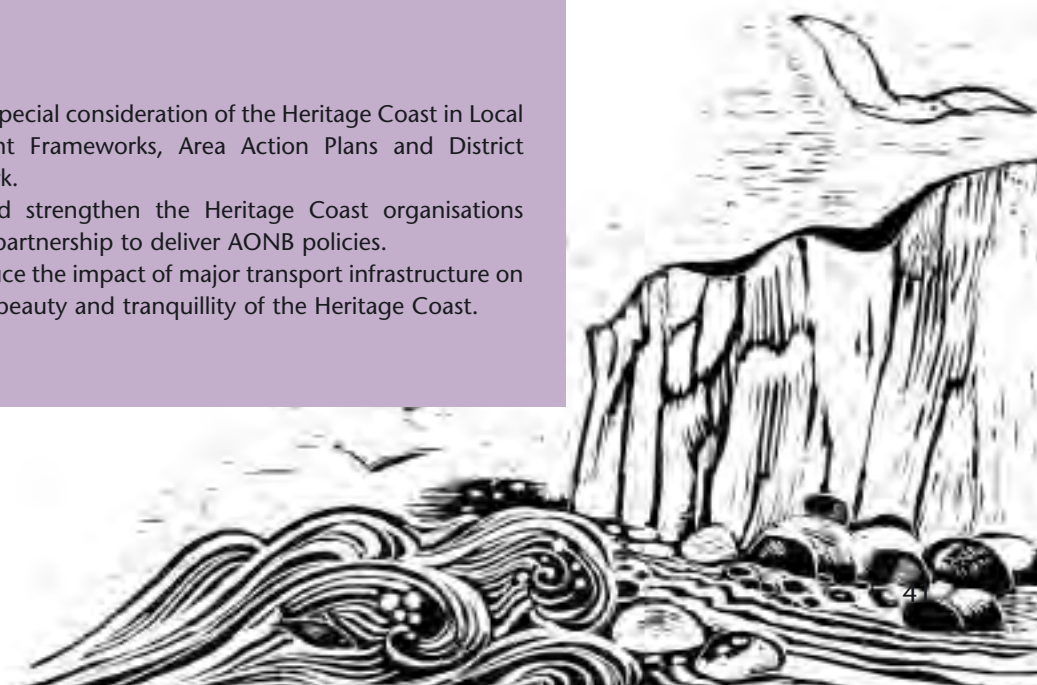
The Heritage Coast becomes landscape wholly managed in an integrated way, which conserves and enhances landscape quality, increases and improves access, enjoyment and understanding and respects the cultural heritage.

## The White Cliffs Heritage Coast

### Policies

- HC1** Stimulate the production and adoption of an integrated land management master plan for the Kent heritage.
- HC2** Support the strategic protective acquisition and positive management of land within the Heritage Coast.
- HC3** Support and promote the use and targeting of landscape management grant schemes to conserve and enhance landscape features.
- HC4** Seek alternative ways of interpreting and celebrating the Heritage Coast landscapes.
- HC5** Encourage special consideration of the Heritage Coast in Local Development Frameworks, Area Action Plans and District Council work.
- HC6** Support and strengthen the Heritage Coast organisations working in partnership to deliver AONB policies.
- HC7** Seek to reduce the impact of major transport infrastructure on the natural beauty and tranquillity of the Heritage Coast.

long view



## Secondary Purposes of AONB designation

# Quality of Life Components

**T**he primary purpose of AONB designation is to ‘conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the landscape’, and this purpose is the primary focus of the Management Plan .

The secondary purpose of AONB designation is to take account of the needs of land-based and “rural industries and of the economic and social needs of local communities. Particular regard should be paid to promoting sustainable forms of social and economic development that in themselves conserve and enhance the environment’

In addition, “recreation is not an objective of designation but the demand for recreation should be met so far as this is consistent with the conservation of natural beauty and the needs of agriculture, forestry and other uses”. In essence, the secondary AONB purposes relate to the quality of life enjoyed by people in the AONB.

The following three themes set out how the secondary purposes of AONB designation will be addressed by the Management Plan. A principle consideration in preparing the themes is the ways in which they relate back to the primary purpose of designation. The challenge for this Management Plan is to find ways in which social and economic well-being and public understanding and enjoyment, can be complementary to, and can further support the primary purpose of conserving and enhancing natural beauty.

# Quality of Life Components

## People, Jobs and Services, including Tourism

**T**he Kent Downs AONB is a living and working landscape. It has been shaped, worked upon and enjoyed by people throughout history, and as much now as it ever has been. People, roads and buildings are all part of the landscape, and the aim of this Management Plan must be to find ways of balancing the need for a sustainable and prosperous local economy that conserves and enhances this nationally important area.

An AONB Management Plan is not the primary means for tackling social and economic needs. That is the role of a range of different organisations and funding streams. Various policy documents have also been produced. Community Strategies are being prepared by local authorities; Rural and Economic development strategies developed by a number of agencies including local authorities, the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies of the South East England Development Agency (SEEDA), and the Countryside Agency Strategy: *Quality of Life in Tomorrow's Countryside* (2003). Other key players in this large and complex area include Kent Rural Community Council, the Parish Councils and the European Union.

The total population in 1991 of the Kent Downs AONB was 70,000. The number of parishes covered by the AONB is 137, although over 60 % of these parishes have only part of the parish land within the AONB. There are also parts of the AONB outside of parish council boundaries within the Medway Council and London Borough of Bromley. (A map showing all AONB parishes will be available in the final Management Plan).

New data on the Kent Downs AONB people and communities will

be available from May 2003 from the 2001 National Census survey. Analysis of these data will be inserted into the revised draft Management Plan from July 2003. For the first time, detailed data sets will be available at a sub-electoral ward level, at a so-called Output Area level. The AONB boundary crosses over 50% of its electoral ward boundaries, and previous data analysis has been subject to errors. It is anticipated that more accurate and specific data will now be available.

Data to be provided will include:

- Basic population information (gender and age ranges) and changes since 1991.
- Numbers of households, household types and changes since 1991.
- Changes in car ownership/household.
- Changes in employment rates and types of employment.
- Changes in journeys to work.
- Changes in income and income distribution.

This information will help to shape our understanding of population lifestyle and dynamics within the Kent Downs AONB, compared to the whole of Kent and nationally. It will also include information for selected electoral wards that are adjacent to the AONB, where there are recognised high levels of deprivation, particularly around Dover, Folkestone and Medway Towns.

A wide range of initiatives, projects and grant funding are available, carried out by many organisations including local authorities, the Kent Rural Community Council, and parishes councils and amenity groups through the AONB. Kent County Council's Rural Revival



## Secondary Purposes of AONB designation

website provides signposting and information to all available information and grants across the county.

The European Union funded Mid Kent Leader+ project started in 2002. The project includes about one third of the AONB. It is providing an extensive range of grant-aid for the following objectives:

- Promote and develop the use of new technology and ICT
- Improve local skills
- Develop business and marketing skills for rural businesses
- Utilise rural resources more effectively
- Develop aspects of renewable energy and energy efficiency
- Promote sustainable environmental land management practices which enhance the landscape character and bio-diversity
- Promote the production and enjoyment of local produce
- Improve provision and use of multipurpose facilities in rural communities
- Improve provision and access to local services for people living and working in rural communities
- Develop a more inclusive society where all ages participate and contribute

### **Sustainable Rural Leisure and Tourism**

There is an increasing recognition that the development of a sustainable leisure and tourism industry is essential to the economic well being of rural areas. The Foot and Mouth disease crisis in 2001 and the subsequent spotlight on rural tourism as a key component of the rural economy has added further to this view. This is reflected in The Countryside Agency/English Tourism Council joint strategy 2001 – 2005, “Working for the Countryside” and in SEEDA’s draft rural tourism strategy 2003, “Rural Tourism in the South East”.

In protected landscapes in particular the potential to develop a sustainable tourism product is an untapped opportunity. A sustainable approach can:

- conserve rural landscape and character – the primary motivating force behind visits to the countryside
- maximise the benefit to the local economy

- identify and promote the local distinctiveness of the AONB area
- raise public awareness about the wildlife, culture and history of the AONB
- ensure the local tourism industry is at an appropriate scale and in harmony with the local community

Work undertaken by the South East AONB Sustainable Tourism Project has collected new and informative data relating to this subject area. For instance, we now know there are over 500 rural tourism and leisure businesses operating within or immediately adjacent to the Kent Downs AONB. In addition there are many more businesses in the urban areas around the AONB that use the Downs as part of their offer to visitors. Currently, there is very little information available about tourism and leisure facilities and visitor movement in the Kent Downs.

A small-scale survey of accommodation businesses in the AONB in December 2002 showed average room occupancy rates of 55 – 60 %. This is a low figure and suggests that there is capacity for encouraging more staying visitors in the AONB area to fill the empty beds and generate more income for the local economy. Not surprisingly the Kent Downs receives a greater ratio of overseas visitors than other AONB’s in the South East.

A partnership for developing and delivering sustainable leisure and tourism objectives in the Kent Downs will need to include the Regional Tourist Board, the Kent Tourism Alliance, and local authority tourism officers. Preliminary work is already underway. The Kent Downs is one of two AONB’s in the SE working with the SE AONB Sustainable Tourism Project to deliver specific initiatives and link them to wider tourism and leisure programmes.

# Issues, challenges and stakeholder views

- **Retaining and improving access to, and provision of, local services and facilities.** There has been a decline and loss of commercial services in some parishes including post offices, village shops, public houses and garages. This has been exacerbated by the effects of urban-based supermarkets and retail estates. Other community facilities, such as schools, libraries and doctors surgeries, are unevenly available and accessible. Access to health and social care an issue in some parishes, especially for the elderly. The general lack of leisure facilities including sports fields, play areas and suitable places for young people to meet.
- **The availability of affordable housing, to rent or buy.** Housing prices have continued to rise, in some parts, well above the national average. At the same time, stock to rent has declined both within the local authority and private sectors. These two factors coupled with the lack of affordable housing for local people in need, particularly young families and the elderly, places considerable demand for affordable housing in many parishes in the AONB.
- **Maintaining and diversifying the employment base.** The local economy within the AONB is variable, although unemployment is not thought to be high compared to county averages (figures to be confirmed with new Census data). There has been a decline in farming and forestry employment, although both industries are still important economically and in terms of maintaining the character of the Kent Downs. There are difficulties for small and medium-sized farm enterprises, and the need for sustainable farm diversification should be recognised and supported more widely. There is also a skills gap for some local employers, such as locally based skilled forestry contractors.
- **Sustainable Leisure and Tourism.** The Kent Downs AONB is not currently marketed in any coherent way as a rural visitor destination because it is divided amongst a number of local authority areas. Within the increasingly important rural tourism sector, there is capacity to increase the numbers and income from day and staying visitors, in a sustainable way that bring benefit back to local people and to support the AONB landscape.

People, Jobs  
and Services,  
including  
Tourism



© Countryside Agency/Tina Stallard



© Countryside Agency/Tina Stallard



# Vision and longer term objectives

*A landscape in which:*

- Thriving rural communities play an active role in the conservation and enhancement of the AONB;
- A strong rural economy is supported by residents and visitors, who buy local, produce, and enjoy local services and facilities;
- There is well-designed, affordable housing;
- There is freedom from fear of crime;
- There is accessible and well-used public transport and easy access to local services;
- Local businesses contribute to the conservation of the landscape through the use of local sustainable goods and labour, and through sustainable rural tourism, and see benefit to their business of doing so.

## Secondary Purposes of AONB designation

### Policies

- PJ1** Promote an appreciation and understanding of the special character, real and potential benefits of the Kent Downs to those living and working in the AONB.
- PJ2** Promote and support community-led initiatives that encourage and maintain the vitality and diversity of rural community life, and which contribute to the conservation and enhancement of natural beauty
- PJ3** Develop initiatives that strengthen the links between the AONB and people who live on its doorstep, particularly people from neighbouring deprived areas where opportunities for activities that benefit the AONB and the neighbourhood communities are promoted.
- PJ4** Encourage the retention and development of local services, facilities and employment opportunities in order to reduce the need to travel by car and maintain viable rural communities.
- PJ5** Promote action, which stimulates investment within the rural economy, encourages additional and appropriate employment opportunities, and is in keeping with the AONB designation.
- PJ6** Develop and target support for businesses that conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the Kent Downs AONB, and that contribute to people's understanding and enjoyment of the AONB.
- PJ7** Build a robust and inclusive sustainable leisure and tourism management structure for the Kent Downs based on partnership with the regional tourist board, local authorities and tourism consortia, and local communities.
- PJ8** Engender within leisure and tourism businesses in the Kent Downs a wholehearted acceptance of the principles and requirements of a sustainable approach.
- PJ9** Ensure leisure and tourism brings maximum benefit to the local economy, with no adverse impacts on the natural environment.
- PJ10** Raise public awareness of the Kent Downs as a sustainable visitor destination.
- PJ11** Develop clear guidelines protecting the environment against inappropriate or poor quality tourism development.

# Quality of Life Components

## Land Use and Transport Planning and Design

Planning issues have a fundamental impact on the statutory purposes of AONB designation. Indeed, until the enactment of the CRoW Act 2000, the statutory land use planning system was the main legal mechanism by which AONBs have been protected. However, new data from the Kent Land Cover Change survey (2002) indicates that in the nine year period from 1990 to 1999, over 2% of the AONB became developed land, rising from 5426ha (6.2% of the AONB) in 1990 to 7274ha (8.3% of the AONB) in 1999, a 33% increase in developed land or 1848ha. This scale of development, derived largely from agricultural land, is mainly due to the construction of the Channel Tunnel Rail Link and the M2/A2 widening, which have occurred in this time period. Other development areas, significant at a more local level, include Hawkinge in Shepway District.

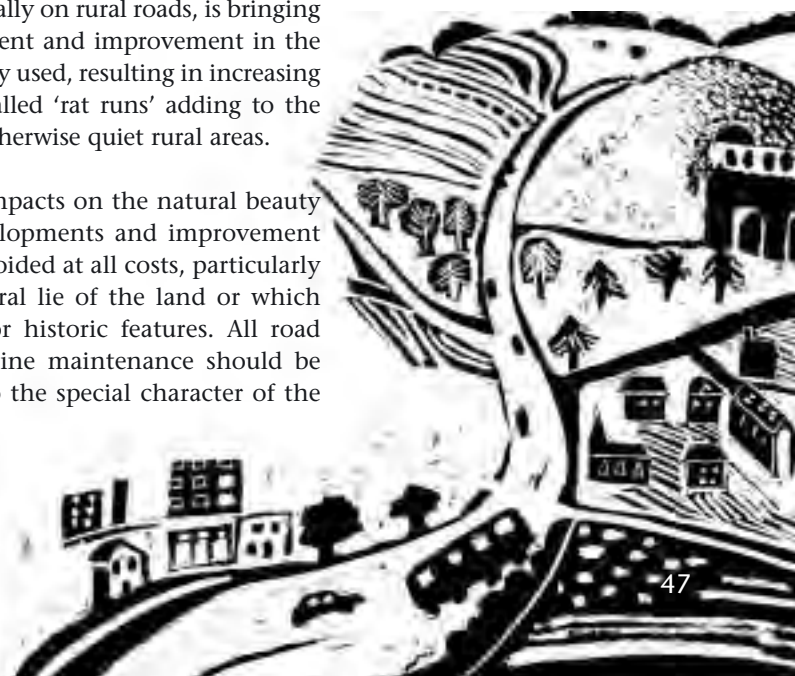
There is no doubt that the Kent Downs AONB is under severe development pressure from housing and transportation infrastructure in particular. Significant urban areas immediately adjoin the AONB boundary, or lie within very close proximity, and most of these areas are set to increase in the coming ten years. Foremost are Ashford and the Kent Thameside including Gravesham and Medway. As these areas expand, the challenge for the Kent Downs AONB will be to retain its special character and landscape quality whilst large urban and suburban areas stretch out along its northern and southern boundaries. There will be increased traffic pressure along and through the AONB, increased visitor use of the AONB, and indeed increased demand for housing in AONB rural villages. The approaches to and the views from the AONB are also set to deteriorate unless extreme care is taken to safeguard against this.

Against this backdrop of large-scale development, there is continual pressure for small-scale development and change. Telecommunication masts are a case in point. Incremental land use change can result in cumulative impacts which are seemingly insignificant but over time can bring about a considerable change in character.

Across the AONB, over fifteen village or parish design statements have been adopted as Supplementary Planning Guidance, or are nearing completion, giving local people a positive role to influence development change at a local level. At county level, the Kent Design Initiative provides best practice guidance for the design of all development including that relating to highways.

The growth in road traffic over recent years and further rapid increase anticipated in the next few years, especially on rural roads, is bringing continuing pressure for road development and improvement in the Kent Downs. The main routes are heavily used, resulting in increasing use of unsuitable minor roads as so called 'rat runs' adding to the congestion, noise and disturbance in otherwise quiet rural areas.

The Kent Downs has suffered major impacts on the natural beauty of the landscape from new road developments and improvement schemes. Further damage should be avoided at all costs, particularly where routes do not respect the natural lie of the land or which affect important landscape, wildlife or historic features. All road construction, improvements and routine maintenance should be carried out with extreme sensitivity to the special character of the landscape.



## Secondary Purposes of AONB designation

The cumulative effect of smallscale development or change – be it in buildings or roads needs to avoid unnecessary ‘urbanisation’ and reduce the amount of roadside clutter – signs, bollards, kerbs, lights and fences.

The greater reliance on the car is partly because people perceive roads to be dangerous to walk or cycle along, particularly because of the volumes and speed of traffic. Congestion from school runs is one example. In order to bring about a shift in modal use from private car to public transport, bike or foot, there needs to be a better provision of frequent, reliable and affordable public transport or, an emphasis on car sharing and changing driving behaviour to make routes safer.

The Kent Downs are fortunate to have a number of railway lines and numerous bus routes crossing or running alongside the AONB boundary. These networks could be used to much greater benefit for the AONB.

The Kent Downs has had a number of successful programmes which have aimed to address some of the issues of traffic and the rural network. The West Kent Rural Transport Initiative has successfully set up a national demonstration project for Quiet Lanes, to bring about changes in driving behaviour particularly of local people and to encourage greater use of the Quiet Lanes network for walking, cycling and horse riding; the Darent Valley Visitor Management project which has brought a range of schemes, following detailed local consultation, to address a variety of traffic and visitor management issues; the Chartwell explorer bus with the National Trust as a means to explore the National Trust properties of the Greensand Ridge; funding from the Aggregates Levy Sustainability Fund for work to reduce the impact of sand and gravel extraction on the lanes and landscapes between Trottiscliffe and Birling. The successes and experience of all this work can be rolled out elsewhere in the AONB.

## Issues, challenges and stakeholder views

- General development pressure, particularly as a knock-on from the expansion of Ashford and the Kent Thameside.
- Identity, scale, design and setting of rural settlements and buildings is under threat from development generally, generating a need for good practice design guidance.
- Inappropriate conversion of old farm buildings and loss of landscape setting.
- The impact of telecommunication towers, pylons, cabling and other unsightly structures on the landscape.
- A greater need to influence route, volume and speed of traffic, and parking provision.
- Mitigation for the impact of roads and railways, particularly noise, air pollution, light and physical intrusion.
- A need to address provision of rural public transport – particularly in the evenings and Sundays.
- A need to promote good design principles to overcome urbanisation and visual intrusion, including ‘over-engineering’ of the rural road network, and maintaining traditional road features, such as cast iron signs.
- A need to foster awareness of traffic issues amongst local communities.
- Promote the availability and use of non-car based countryside recreation and seek integrated public transport initiatives.
- The need for greater local involvement in planning decision making, and greater consultation on planning and significant road maintenance matter

# Vision and longer term objectives

*A landscape where:*

- The character and distinctiveness of villages, farmsteads and individual buildings are conserved and strengthened using the best traditions of the past incorporated with the best technologies of the present and future in all new development, to create sustainable, environmentally friendly, and locally enhancing development;
- Local building materials – flints, bricks, Kentish peg tiles, timber and chestnut weather boarding are available and are used for restoring existing and constructing new buildings;
- Eyesores are removed, development impact is minimised and prevented, and appropriate enhancement and landscape gain is sought within every development;
- The impact of roads and traffic on the lives of local people is minimised;
- Traffic speeds are reduced;
- Unsuitable traffic is steered away from country lanes;
- Where children and adults walk, cycle or take a bus to school or work.

## Policies

- LUT1** Ensure that a consistent and coherent framework of planning policies relating to the protection, conservation and management of the AONB is in place within the new Regional Guidance, Local Development Frameworks, Area Action Plans and supplementary planning guidance .
- LUT2** Promote the recognition and reinforcement of local character and distinctiveness in the design, scale, setting and materials used in all development in the AONB, using local landscape character assessments.
- LUT3** Work to reduce the long-term impact of major transportation infrastructure on the natural beauty, amenity and tranquillity of the AONB.
- LUT4** Enhance landscape character and natural beauty through the removal or amelioration of unsightly structures and sites.
- LUT5** Seek a strategic approach to the use of road signage,

- furniture, design and maintenance that will promote or enhance the local character and distinctiveness of the AONB.
- LUT6** Encourage a reduction in the need to travel by car and support new and improved measures to provide integrated and attractive transport opportunities for local people and visitors that improve access, social equity and economic opportunity in the Kent Downs.
- LUT7** Seek sustainable and effective solutions to identified problems of rural traffic density, speed and type of traffic particularly in rural settlements or where there is a conflict with walkers, cyclists and horse riders.a
- LUT8** Promote awareness and consideration of the setting of the AONB, and views to and from it, when considering development and land use change proposals on sites adjacent to the AONB.

## Land Use and Transport Planning and Design



# Quality of Life Components

## Access, Recreation, Enjoyment and Understanding

**T**he Kent Downs AONB offers some of south east England's most beautiful and, in parts, accessible countryside. It has a resident population of 70,000, with a further 800,000 living within 5 miles of the boundary. Beyond this, up to eight million people live within an hour's drive away, including populations in north east France (via the Channel Tunnel). The area is crossed or adjacent to 4 motorways, at least 15 trunk and 'A' roads, and hundreds of smaller roads.

It is served by five railway lines with 27 railway stations in, adjacent to, or within very easy reach of the AONB, and numerous bus routes and services. Sitting immediately adjacent to the Kent Downs is the Port of Dover, the UK's busiest ferry terminal, as well as the Channel Tunnel. Ashford International station is in very easy reach, as will be the new international station at Ebbsfleet (Kent Thameside), when it is completed. The Channel Tunnel Rail Link, one third of which passes through or along side the Kent Downs AONB, is on target to be completed and operational by 2007. This extraordinary 'wealth' of transportation infrastructure makes the Kent Downs one of the UK's most accessible protected landscapes.

**Visitor numbers.** Unfortunately no reliable visitor information is available for the AONB as a whole. A 1997 countryside recreation report by Kent County Council estimated that the Kent Downs AONB received at least 10,000,000 day visits a year. This was

calculated as 23% of a total figure for the whole of Kent (the AONB covering 23% land area of the county), which was an estimated 43,000,000 total. There are inherent problems in the basic assumption made – the figures calculated for the whole county were based upon information mainly from countryside sites (country parks, picnic sites, etc.) and coastal sites in Kent. The Kent Downs AONB supports 48 of the 93 (52%) countryside and coastal sites included in the survey. On this basis alone, it is probably safer to estimate a minimum of 22,360,000 day visits to the Kent Downs AONB per year in 1997. This figure still does not include visitors specifically using the North Downs Way and the Rights of Way network, visits to permissive access sites managed by voluntary groups such as Kent Wildlife Trust and Woodland Trust reserves, or paying day visitors to attractions such as Dover Castle, Chartwell, Ightham Mote, etc. Including these latter three categories will increase the figures significantly.

The responses to our Orchid management plan questionnaire provided some useful information on the types of activities commonly undertaken by readers. The most popular activity, undertaken by 89% of respondents on a frequent or occasional basis (once/month or more) in the AONB was walking. Visiting villages was second at 82%, and going to visitor attractions (National Trust and English Heritage properties etc.) was popular with 80%.

**Walking.** Public rights of way provide the main opportunity for people to walk in the countryside, and the AONB supports an extensive rights of way network, comprising: 1518 km (949 miles) Public Footpaths; 275 km (172 miles) Bridleways, 117 km (73 miles) Byways (available for use by motor vehicles, as well as walkers, horseriders and cyclists). At 2.2 km per sq.km., the density of Rights of Way is four times higher than the national average. This is an invaluable asset to the Kent Downs, and enables virtually all parts of the AONB to be accessible and provides strong links between Downs and towns.

Of national importance is the North Downs Way National Trail from Farnham in Surrey to Canterbury and Dover, with 112km (70 miles) of its route passing through the AONB. National Trails are promoted as long distance trails, although the majority of use tends to be for shorter day walks. With this in mind, several circular link routes are have been developed and promoted from the North Downs Way National Trail. Two Regional routes, the Saxon Shore Way and Greensand Way also pass through the Kent Downs, and there are a number of county recreational routes.

The North Downs Way team has embarked on a new programme – the DIAMOND Way Initiative (Delivery of Interpretation, Access and Mobility On the North Downs Way). The overall aim of the DIAMOND Way is for the strategic ongoing development of the Trail from the following perspectives:

- Access. To improve physical access to sites and intellectual access to information.
- Interpretation. To devise a uniform approach and implement in an appropriate manner
- Tourism. To encourage sustainable tourism in partnership with many.
- Marketing. To promote the product as a whole and in sympathetic manner.
- Sustainability. To ensure that by working in partnership strong

foundations are laid to support the initiative in years to come.

- Partnership.

The Kent Downs AONB Unit is one of a number of partners working to develop this Initiative. There is an ambitious range of outputs envisaged, which will bring great benefits to the AONB within the corridor of the North Downs Way and beyond.

**The Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act 2000** has many implications for the Kent Downs AONB. Kent has been one of the first areas of the country to be mapped for open access land. 0.6% of the land area of Kent has been mapped as open access land and the majority of this land is chalk downland, registered common land and parkland within the AONB. It is anticipated that an order will be made by the Secretary of State that will allow open access to these sites in the summer of 2004. Under the provisions of the CROW Act, a Local Access Forum has been established, and the Kent Downs AONB has representation on this. Their role is to advise on the improvement of public access to land within their area for the purpose of open-air recreation and enjoyment. Forums are expected to give practical advice about physical access as well as comment on more strategic issues.

**Cycling** is an environmentally sustainable means of transport, and as a countryside activity, is generally quiet with a low impact on the countryside. Its popularity nationally, although small at around 3% of all countryside visits, is increasing. At a local level, 36% of Orchid questionnaire respondents go cycling in the AONB at least once a month or more. Opportunities for off-road cycling in the AONB are being developed by Sustrans, the cycling charity, with two National Cycle routes passing through the AONB, namely Route 1 from Dover to Aberdeen, and Route 2 from Dover to Portsmouth. Regional link routes are also proposed, at least four of which will cross the Kent Downs. There are also a number of locally promoted cycle routes across parts of the AONB.

Access,  
Recreation,  
Enjoyment and  
Understanding



**Horse riding.** It is estimated that around 5% of Kent's population participate in horse riding and equestrian activities, and the equine industry makes an important contribution to Kent's rural economy (source, Kent Countryside Strategy, 1998). At a local level, 12% of Orchid questionnaire respondents go horse riding in the AONB at least once a month or more. The keeping of horses and horse riding generally is growing in importance, and has been recognised by local authorities and farmers as an issue to address and opportunity to develop. Horse riding, like cycling and walking is increasingly difficult and dangerous on the main highways, because of the volume and speed of traffic. This places greater emphasis on the use of the off-road bridleway network, which in the AONB as across the whole of Kent, is limited in extent and frequently fragmented. There is also a need to improve the links between equestrian facilities and the bridleway network generally, and provide more information about the availability of facilities and infrastructure.

Other opportunities for informal countryside recreation activities are generally provided on the many open access sites, picnic sites and facilities across the AONB. These include 12 Country Parks and Picnic sites, 44 Village Greens (44.9 ha) and 48 Registered Common Land (442.7ha). Access for informal recreation is also available on a number of National Trust properties concentrated on the Greensand ridge south of Sevenoaks, and parts of the White Cliffs Heritage Coast, and Forestry Commission-owned woodland which is particularly extensive at the Challock Forests (Kings Wood) and parts of the Lyminge Forests in the east Kent Downs, and sites owned and managed by Kent Wildlife Trust and Woodland Trust.

**Formal countryside recreation.** Some 'organised' countryside recreation activities are also popular across the AONB. Field sports, in particular pheasant/game bird shooting, occur throughout. The Kent Downs landscape lends itself to pheasant shooting with extensive areas of woodland and tree cover running along the slopes of the dry valleys, and arable and mixed farm uses in the valley bottoms. It is estimated that game bird shooting generates £10 millions per annum into the local economy and is proposed to be the most economically viable use for Kent Downs woodlands

currently. However, apparent conflicts arise because of overstocking with pheasants, the woodland management carried out for game birds, and the impact of the stocked bird populations on wild plant and animal communities. 5% of Orchid questionnaire respondents took part in shooting in the AONB on a frequent or occasional basis.

Fishing is also popular although the Kent Downs AONB offers only limited scope for coarse and freshwater fishing, such as along the river and gravel pits of the Great Stour valley. Sea fishing is also popular off parts of the Heritage Coast, such as from Samphire Hoe and St Margaret's Bay. 7% of Orchid questionnaire respondents took part in fishing/angling in the AONB on a frequent or occasional basis.

Country motor sports are growing in popularity. The use of byways and unmetalled roads by 4x4 vehicles and motorbikes, although legal, can lead to conflicts in particular areas with other users because of disturbance, safety issues and damage to the surface of Rights of Way.

**Access for Disabled People.** The greater recognition of the needs of 'socially excluded groups', and new legislation including the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, are leading to enhanced efforts to meet the needs of these groups including people with disabilities, people on local incomes and people without access to private transport. For people with mobility impairments there are a growing number of promoted routes and sites that are fully or partial accessible in the AONB, at places as far apart as Shorne Country Park and Samphire Hoe. An on-going pilot project, National Route Evaluation and Classification System (NatRecs), is aiming to make internet-based information available on the condition, terrain, slope and barriers involved in Rights of Way. The Kent Downs is one of the pilot areas for this project.

**Information and Interpretation.** At the heart of well-managed and enjoyable countryside recreation is high quality information that helps visitors plan their use of the Kent Downs, and increases the understanding and satisfaction of their experience as a

consequence. There are numerous forms of information currently available including:

- The Kent Downs AONB newspaper – The Orchid, produced twice a year and distributed widely across the AONB and its surrounding areas – containing a broad range of articles specifically about many aspects of the AONB landscape heritage and communities. Included is a seasonal programme of events and activities from a broad range of organisations.
- The AONB web-site, linked to those of many different partners and organisations, again with current programmes of events and activities available.
- Programmes of farmer-led walks, themed guided walks, cycle rides, talks, conservation activities aimed at different age groups provided by countryside management services, local authorities and other organisations.
- Numerous leaflets and booklets with details of recreational walking, cycling and horse riding routes and village centre maps of Rights of Way network, developed by the Parish Paths Partnership.
- A wealth of site based information in the form of interpretation boards, leaflets and maps.
- A number of visitor centres with static displays and interactive interpretation, which provide important or potential welcome

points to the wider AONB including: Shorne (with exciting proposals as an AONB gateway site in development), Trosley, Brockhill and Lullingstone Country Parks provided by local authorities, Eurotunnel's Samphire Hoe centre, Kent Wildlife Trust's centres at Tyland Barn and Bough Beech reservoir, the National Trust's visitor centre at Langdon Cliffs Dover, as well as extremely popular visitor centres at Chartwell and Ightham Mote.

- Local centres provided by parish councils or community groups such as the Otford Heritage Centre and the Environmental Education centre at Shoreham Railway Station.

Added to this is an extensive provision of countryside management projects covering the whole AONB, site-based wardens employed by the local authorities (notably Kent County Council) and conservation charities. Although not providing a 'unified service', these people, services and places are an enormous, and to some extent, underused asset to the AONB as a whole. The opportunities coming from this Management Plan are to develop the co-ordination and links between all these services, to benefit the access and recreation to the AONB as a whole, bringing additional support, resources and promotion to the services available, and benefiting local communities by improved facilities and increasing local income through co-ordinated, positive visitor management.

Access,  
Recreation,  
Enjoyment and  
Understanding



# Issues, challenges and stakeholder views

- A comprehensive visitor survey needs to be carried out for the whole AONB, focused primarily on quiet countryside recreation particularly walking, cycling and horse-riding.
  - Part II of the CROW Act has implications for the management of the public rights of way (PROW) network and makes it a requirement of the local authority to produce PROW Improvement Plans. This presents opportunities and challenges for the AONB.
  - Managing CROW Act open access sites, links to them and education and information provision will be a challenge, as well as opportunity for the future.
  - Disability Discrimination Act 2004 – need to be proactively aware when managing access, and extend different forms of accessible provision.
  - Need to ensure that the PROW network is signposted, waymarked and maintained to enable access and enjoyment across the AONB.
  - Managing traffic pressures to provide quiet lane links to benefit horseriders, walkers, cyclists and local people.
  - Only 14% of the total PROW network within the AONB is bridleway. Need to seek opportunities to extend, connect up and improve fragmented bridleway links.
  - Need to develop and promote the sustainable rural tourism industry in Kent Downs, in a manner that protects and enhances natural beauty, but brings benefit to rural communities and economy.
- In addition, Orchid questionnaire respondents suggested the following measures that would improve their use and enjoyment of the AONB:
- 29% Improved opportunities to appreciate peace and quiet
  - 23% Fewer stiles and improved maintenance of public rights of way.
  - 16% Improved or more facilities e.g. car parking, toilets.

# Vision and long term objectives

*A landscape that provides:*

- A well maintained rights of way network that provides safe and satisfying routes for walkers, cyclists and horse riders;
- Special places, events and media available throughout the year for people of all ages and backgrounds to learn about their environment, enjoy the landscape and celebrate its diversity and richness;
- Innovative and stimulating opportunities for people to exercise and improve their health, in tranquil and inspiring surroundings.

## Policies

- AR1** Promote enjoyment of the AONB in such a way as to be consistent with the conservation and enhancement of the area's special qualities.
- AR2** Communicate with a wide range of key partners to ensure all opportunities for the AONB are maximised to provide valuable input to key gateway routes and sites into the AONB.
- AR3** Provide co-ordinated information about recreation and access in the AONB, which is accurate, well presented, and readily available and which will help to foster a greater understanding and respect for the countryside.
- AR4** Increase opportunities for learning through a programme of events, farm walks and gateway routes and sites.
- AR5** Attain a high standard of landscape and recreational management, visitor facilities and access opportunities at some of the more heavily used sites that can accommodate such recreational pressures.
- AR6** Encourage quiet enjoyment of the AONB in less well used areas where this might increase understanding of AONB objectives and where it might bring new opportunities to the rural economy.
- AR7** Ensure local communities understand and accept sustainable tourism as a valuable part of the fabric of rural life.
- AR8** Improve the overall quality of the visitor-experience and at the same time engage visitors in the aims and objectives of the protected area.

# Partnership and Co-ordination

**A** fundamental purpose of this Management Plan is to encourage co-ordinated action by all organisations, agencies and individuals that have an interest in the Kent Downs. This Plan offers a blueprint for action to conserve the area's natural beauty for future generations to enjoy, and to maintain thriving local communities.

The AONB local authorities have a primary role to assume through their new duties under the CRoW Act 2000 to produce this joint Management Plan. Each local authority, together with the Countryside Agency, is represented on the Joint Advisory Committee (JAC). The JAC, with the new AONB Executive, have pivotal roles in the co-ordination, promotion, advising on, and delivery of the conservation and enhancement of the AONB's natural beauty. Each local authority, acting on its own and jointly with other Executive partners and the Countryside Agency can make a world of difference to achieve the policies and actions of this Management Plan. The importance and ultimately, the success of the JAC will be judged by the success of this Management Plan.

The new AONB Forum will also assume a vital role, bringing together the many different organisations, bodies and individuals that contribute in some way to the AONB. From the start, we intend that the Forum will be practical and relevant to all participants. It will be an opportunity of genuine exchange of knowledge, ideas and information, on which to debate issues and policies, and to develop and carry forward new actions. The Forum will be a vital means to engage and involve the large number of public bodies with a new legal duty of regard.

Since 1999, the relationship between the AONB Unit and the many different 'delivery' organisations has grown and developed. The AONB Unit, working closely with the Countryside Agency, now has

a key role in influencing the allocation of Countryside Agency Finest Countryside funding for AONB strategic objectives. Money is the key to this partnership, but the AONB as a whole benefits from the genuine exchange of ideas and working practices that take place with other individuals and organisations.

Finally, and most importantly, the ultimate success of this Plan will be judged by local people, and the degree of awareness, improvement and change they experience over the coming years. The involvement and support of individuals, whether residents or visitors, will be a key component for a partnership-approach to the conservation and enhancement of the Kent Downs AONB. This will be developed at different levels, from the AONB Forum and Executive, to close working relationships with local people and visitors at the project delivery level.

Partnership will need to:

- Set high standards and establish and promote good practice in all areas of work;
- Ensure efficient and cost effective use of staff and financial resources;
- Avoid duplicated effort;
- Share experiences and knowledge;
- Promote consistent messages to all stakeholders, including landowners and funding bodies;
- Establish a networking culture to enable cross-fertilisation of ideas
- Promote and co-ordinate action to address strategic issues;
- Develop a suitably strong and diverse identity promoted by all parties;
- Help to develop initiatives that are led by other partners.



# Vision and long term objectives

*A landscape in which:*

Policies and actions of all relevant organisations and individuals, are delivered through strong and practical partnerships that work towards the overall and individual visions enshrined within this Management Plan.

## Partnership and Co-ordination

### Policies

- CP1** Maintain and support the Joint Advisory Committee and the Kent Downs AONB partnership as the primary means to develop and promote new opportunities, implement actions and as a first point of contact for major strategic issues relating to the AONB.
- CP2** Develop strong working partnerships, through the development and implementation of Statements of Intent, with those organisations with a new 'duty of regard' for AONB purposes particularly statutory agencies, public bodies and utilities.
- CP3** Ensure that input is given, and the voice of the Kent Downs AONB is heard, in all national, regional and local policy and practice documents and consultations, where relevant and applicable to the purposes of the Kent Downs AONB.
- CP4** Support and develop the role of the Kent Downs AONB as the means to initiate, develop, co-ordinate and implement ongoing and new partnership delivery mechanisms that meet the strategic visions, policies and actions of the Management Plan.
- CP5** Continue to strengthen the close working partnerships and initiatives with neighbouring Protected Landscapes particularly the Surrey Hills, High Weald and Sussex Downs AONBs, and le Parc Naturel Régional des Caps et Marais d'Opale, and with the family of AONBs and protected landscape generally through the South East AONB Forum and Association of AONBs.
- CP6** Involve relevant interest groups, especially local communities, in decisions on the future of the Kent Downs AONB, at a strategic level through the Management Plan and AONB Forum, and at a local level through local consultations and project development.
- CP7** Promote the co-ordination of policies and actions for all organisations and individuals working in the AONB to ensure a consistent approach towards the conservation and enhancement of the Kent Downs' natural beauty.
- CP8** Ensure the effective use of existing resources, and seek additional resources to support partnership projects that conserve and enhance the character of the AONB in accordance with the Management Plan.
- CP9** Continue to promote the importance and sensitivity of the Kent Downs AONB and highlight issues affecting it.
- CP10** Support the development of strategic master planning for areas of the AONB which are most at threat or where greatest opportunity lie.
- CP11** Encourage those organisations active in the Kent Downs AONB to consider developing and/or promoting plans and work programmes to support the AONB Management Plan.

# Implementation, Monitoring and Review



© Countryside Agency/Mike McCoran

# Implementation, monitoring and review

**T**he overall vision, individual visions and policies need to be translated into action, to achieve the implementation and delivery of the Management Plan. A broad range of actions to protect, conserve and enhance the Kent Downs AONB has been prepared on the basis of the policies, and are presented in the Action Plan attached to this document.

The Action Plan defines the actions required to achieve the policies, setting out the intended timescale for implementing each of the action points. It also suggests key organisations involved in each action point whether they are members of the JAC or not. It is a legal requirement that the Plan is reviewed up to five years after its initial publication. The Action Plan will be monitored on an annual basis by the AONB partnership, and key achievements will be published in an annual review.

There are 84 policies within the Management Plan, and the Action Plan is correspondingly ambitious. Prioritising the list of policies and actions will need to be carried out through the consultation process on the draft plan. It is necessary to select a short list of priority action points. Some of the high priority actions are those for which the Kent Downs AONB partnership has a lead role to implement. However, where appropriate, and when suitable opportunity arises, implementation of other policies and action points will also be carried out.

However, the AONB partnership cannot act alone in its role to conserve and enhance the Kent Downs' natural beauty. In this respect, the JAC is calling on partners to join them in the implementation of the Management Plan and Action Plan. It is asking all those organisations—particularly those with a new duty of regard for the AONB, to consider the policies and action points advocated and incorporate them into work programmes where appropriate.

It is essential that all projects affecting the character or management of the local landscape have both the understanding and support of local communities. Therefore, the AONB partnership will seek and welcome the support and involvement of local communities and individuals in delivering this Management Plan and Action Plan.

## Resources and the Action Plan

Although the Action Plan is ambitious, many of the proposals do not require large amounts of new money and many can be achieved within existing budgets and work programmes. The Kent Downs AONB Unit has a limited amount of financial and staff resources at its disposal, by which it will enable, facilitate, support and organise action. Its role will also be to influence the action of others, particularly its partner organisations, to encourage the allocation of resources and time to achieve the aims of the Plan.

In 2003 the Countryside Agency and local authorities signed a 6-year in-principle memorandum of agreement for the core funding of the AONB Unit. Included in this are activity costs to meet AONB core functions, and a number of these will help to deliver outputs within the Action Plan. In addition, the Kent Downs AONB Unit bids for project funding to the Countryside Agency annually, with the specific aim of matching this money with funding from partners, to carry out and achieve agreed policies and actions with the Management Plan.

Where more substantial amounts of investment are required for projects and implementation, a number of external funding options have been harnessed. In March 2003, the Kent Downs AONB Unit secured substantial European Union funding for £750,000 until 2005 under the Interreg IIIa project Transmanche Integrated Landscape Management programme. Working in partnership with the Kentish Stour Countryside Project, the White Cliffs Countryside Project and our joint French partner le Parc Naturel Regional des Caps et Marais d'Opale, this programme will deliver a wide range of integrated landscape conservation and management projects fulfilling some of the actions and policies of the Plan.

The AONB Unit has also had confirmation of Heritage Lottery Fund grant-aid for a project planning officer post to develop a Kent Downs chalk downland restoration and access programme. This work will also include specialist research on community involvement and cultural heritage in the AONB. Many other potential sources of external funding are available, and every

suitable option will be explored over the course of the five years to deliver the Action Plan.

There are a range of other resources, including staff time, commitment, expertise, advice and equipment which will play a valuable role in achieving the aims of the Strategy. However, probably the most important resource is commitment. A huge amount can be achieved by co-operation between various specialist staff and individuals across the AONB who pool resources, and work together to achieve the visions and policies of the Management Plan.

## Monitoring and Review

It will be important to monitor the state of the AONB and to track how this changes over time. We can then see if the AONB Management Plan and designation are proving effective. However, there is a danger of monitoring process driving the action plan. Many of the policies and action areas do not lend themselves to quantitative monitoring.

The monitoring and review process will consist of one of three elements.

- i) A review of the Action Plan at the end of each financial year with an assessment of the progress and the successes of that year, and a roll-forward of further work or new areas of action.
- ii) A review statement of the Management Plan after three-years. The review statement will be accompanied by a report on the State of the Kent Downs. Environmental, social and economic indicators will be used in this report selecting those that are already collected by different organisations, or are readily available to collate and analyse. In a few cases, new research may be needed to form a baseline, and repeat monitoring should be built in from the start.
- iii) This review process will inform the five-yearly update and renewal process of the Management Plan, as enacted by the CRoW Act 2000.

Indicator		Source
<b>Landscape and Natural Heritage</b>		
1	Randomly select areas for monitoring of landscape and habitat change	Research needed, based on earlier data sources
2	Area of chalk grassland with less than 25% scrub cover	Research needed, based on earlier data sources
3	Area of beech-yew woodland in favourable (BAP target) management	Research needed, based on earlier data sources
4	Relevant data relating to selected BAP plant and animal species	Kent BAP partnership, EN, KWT
<b>Farmed landscape</b>		
4	Annual take-up and extent of ERDP programmes, particularly agri-environment schemes	DEFRA
5	Number of whole farm plans completed and implemented	FWAG, CMS, DEFRA
6	No. people employed in agriculture	DEFRA
7	Average size of farms	DEFRA
8	Area of grassland/arable	DEFRA
9	Extent of orchards/horticulture	DEFRA
10	Nos. of livestock	DEFRA
<b>Woodland and trees</b>		
6	Number of AONB woodlands entered into national certification schemes	UKWAS and FSC
7	Annual take-up and extent of WGS in AONB	FC
8	No. people employed in forestry	Research needed

Indicator		Source
<b>Historic Environment</b>		
9	No. of SAMs in positive management	EH, LAs
10	No. of 'buildings at risk'	LAs, EH
<b>Physical Environment and Environmental Quality</b>		
11	River water quality:	EA
12	Soil erosion, any research being done?	
13	How to measure tranquillity?	
<b>People, Jobs and Services, incl. Tourism</b>		
14	No. of parish plans produced	KRCC, KAPC, CoAg
15	% of villages with selected services/facilities	KRCC, KAPC
16	Unemployment	LAs
<b>Land use and Transport Planning &amp; Design</b>		
17	Number of telecom masts	LAs
18	Areas of greenfield sites developed	LAs
19	No of departure from local plan	LAs
20	Traffic volumes on selected roads	LAs
21	Passenger nos. on selected public transport	Service providers
<b>Access, Recreation, Enjoyment and Understanding</b>		
22	No of people on guided walks, events and activities	AONB partners
23	% PRoW classifies as 'easy to use'	LAs
24	% public awareness of AONB designation	Research needed

# Appendices

# 4



# Appendix 1

## References and Background Information

<b>Author/Publisher</b>	<b>Document Title</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Relevant website</b>
Cabinet Office	Farming and Food – A Sustainable Future	2002	<a href="http://www.cabinet-office.gov.uk/farming">www.cabinet-office.gov.uk/farming</a>
Countryside Agency	AONBs: A guide for AONB partnership members.	2000	<a href="http://www.countryside.gov.uk">www.countryside.gov.uk</a>
Countryside Agency	Increasing Access to the Wider Countryside for Disabled People	2001	<a href="http://www.countryside.gov.uk">www.countryside.gov.uk</a>
Countryside Agency	Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plans – a guide	2001	<a href="http://www.countryside.gov.uk">www.countryside.gov.uk</a>
Countryside Agency	Connecting Town and Country	2001	<a href="http://www.countryside.gov.uk">www.countryside.gov.uk</a>
Countryside Agency	The State of the Countryside – South East & London	2003	<a href="http://www.countryside.gov.uk">www.countryside.gov.uk</a>
Countryside Agency	Quality of Life in tomorrow's countryside – Implementing the Countryside Agency's strategy	2003	<a href="http://www.countryside.gov.uk">www.countryside.gov.uk</a>
Countryside Agency & SEEDA	Rural Tourism in the South East (draft)	2002	<a href="http://www.seeda.co.uk">www.seeda.co.uk</a>
Countryside Agency and Scottish Natural Heritage	Landscape Character Assessment Guidance	2001	<a href="http://www.countryside.gov.uk">www.countryside.gov.uk</a>
Countryside Commission	Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty- a policy statement	1991	<a href="http://www.countryside.gov.uk">www.countryside.gov.uk</a>
Countryside Commission	The Kent Downs Landscape, Landscape Assessment and Guidelines	1995	<a href="http://www.countryside.gov.uk">www.countryside.gov.uk</a>
Countryside Commission	Protecting our Finest Countryside	1998	<a href="http://www.countryside.gov.uk">www.countryside.gov.uk</a>
Countryside Commission/Land Use Consultants	The Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty	1984	<a href="http://www.countryside.gov.uk">www.countryside.gov.uk</a>
DEFRA	Countryside Rights of Way Act 2000	2000	<a href="http://www.defra.gov.uk">www.defra.gov.uk</a>
DEFRA	Food and Farming: A Sustainable Future	2002	<a href="http://www.defra.gov.uk">www.defra.gov.uk</a>
DEFRA	England Rural Development Programme	2000	<a href="http://www.defra.gov.uk">www.defra.gov.uk</a>
Department of Culture, Media and Sport	Historic Environment: A Force for our Future	2001	<a href="http://www.culture.gov.uk">www.culture.gov.uk</a>
Department of Environment	Biodiversity: the UK Action Plan	1994	<a href="http://www.ukbap.org.uk">www.ukbap.org.uk</a>
DETR	Planning Policy Guidance Note 7: The Countryside: Environmental Quality and Economic and Social Development	1997	<a href="http://www.dtlr.gov.uk">www.dtlr.gov.uk</a>
DETR/MAFF	Our Countryside, the future; a fair deal for Rural England	2000	<a href="http://www.defra.gov.uk">www.defra.gov.uk</a>
Edward Holdaway & Gerald Smart. E & FN Spon	Landscapes at Risk: The Future of Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty	2001	
English Heritage	Power of Place: the Future of the historic environment	2000	<a href="http://www.english-heritage.gov.uk">www.english-heritage.gov.uk</a>
English Heritage & Kent County Council	Kent Historic Landscape Characterisation	2001	<a href="http://www.english-heritage.gov.uk">www.english-heritage.gov.uk</a>
English Heritage and CABE	Building in Context: new development in historic areas	2001	
Environment Agency	Catchment Management Plans	Various	<a href="http://www.environment-agency.gov.uk">www.environment-agency.gov.uk</a>
Forestry Commission	National Inventory of Woodland and Trees – Kent Downs AONB	1995	<a href="http://www.forestry.gov.uk">www.forestry.gov.uk</a>
Forestry Commission	England Forestry Strategy	1998	<a href="http://www.forestry.gov.uk">www.forestry.gov.uk</a>
HMSO	Local Government Act 2000	2000	<a href="http://www.hmso.gov.uk">www.hmso.gov.uk</a>
Kent Association of Local Authorities	Kent Design – a guide to sustainable development	2000	<a href="http://www.kent.gov.uk/kent_design">www.kent.gov.uk/kent_design</a>
Kent Biodiversity Action Plan Steering Group	Kent Biodiversity Action Plan	1997	<a href="http://www.kent.gov.uk/biodiversity">www.kent.gov.uk/biodiversity</a>

Kent County Council	A Cycling Strategy for Kent	2001	<a href="http://www.kent.gov.uk">www.kent.gov.uk</a>
Kent County Council	A Walking Strategy for Kent	2000	<a href="http://www.kent.gov.uk">www.kent.gov.uk</a>
Kent County Council	Kent Countryside 2000 – Understanding Rural Change	2000	<a href="http://www.kent.gov.uk">www.kent.gov.uk</a>
Kent County Council	Rural Revival Action Plan	1999	<a href="http://www.kent.gov.uk">www.kent.gov.uk</a>
Kent County Council & Medway Council	Kent and Medway Structure Plan consultation draft	2002	<a href="http://www.kmsp.org.uk">www.kmsp.org.uk</a>
Kent County Council with partners	The Land-Based Economy of Kent	2002	<a href="http://www.kent.gov.uk">www.kent.gov.uk</a>
Kent Downs AONB Joint Advisory Committee	Kent Downs AONB Management Strategy	1999	<a href="http://www.kentdowns.org">www.kentdowns.org</a>
Kent Downs AONB Unit	State of Kent Downs Woodlands	2002	<a href="http://www.kentdowns.org">www.kentdowns.org</a>
Kent Partnership	Vision for Kent – Kent people in partnership for a better tomorrow	2002	<a href="http://www.ekent.info/vision">www.ekent.info/vision</a>
Kent Partnership	Kent Environment Strategy	2003	<a href="http://www.kent.gov.uk">www.kent.gov.uk</a>
Local Authorities	District, Borough Council , Bromley & Medway Council Local Plans	various	<a href="http://www.ukonline.gov.uk">www.ukonline.gov.uk</a>
Local Authorities	Community Strategies	Various	<a href="http://www.ukonline.gov.uk">www.ukonline.gov.uk</a>
North Downs Way project	North Downs Way Strategy	2000	<a href="http://www.nationaltrails.gov.uk">www.nationaltrails.gov.uk</a>
SEERA	A Better Quality of Life in the South East	2001	
SEERA	Destination South East Regional Spatial Planning Strategy for Tourism (Consultation Draft)	2002	<a href="http://www.southeast-ra.gov.uk">www.southeast-ra.gov.uk</a>
SEERA	Sustainable Development Strategy for the South East		<a href="http://www.southeast-ra.gov.uk">www.southeast-ra.gov.uk</a>
South East Climate Change Partnership	Rising to the Challenge: Impacts of Climate Change in the South East in the 21st Century	1999	<a href="http://www.seeda.co.uk">www.seeda.co.uk</a>

## Appendix 2

### Core Functions

#### AONB Unit core functions as defined by the Countryside Agency

- i) developing a vision and strategy for AONB management
- ii) preparing, with constituent local authorities, a AONB management plan as required by the CROW Act
- iii) promoting the vision and strategy to help distinguish the AONB from adjacent countryside
- iv) implementing and co-ordinating implementation by others, the management plans
- v) co-ordinating or advising on local authority services in the AONB, to go beyond the normal level of service in countryside management
- vi) monitoring and reporting on progress against management plan targets
- vii) accessing resources for undertaking management activities, including external financing, project development and proposals, and providing matching funding for special projects
- viii) tapping into advice, and liaison with AONBs at a national level
- ix) providing an internal management role to co-ordinate AONB protection
- x) promoting the value of the AONB to the community
- xi) developing an involvement by the community in the management of the AONB
- xii) providing planning advice and related activities
- xiii) seeking additional funds to assistance with the delivery of management activity (plus any locally agreed extras)

# Appendix 3

## Governance Review Kent Downs AONB governance structure –

### THE AONB FORUM

#### Purpose

The Forum would be a place to report and celebrate the work undertaken in the previous year and help to set the agenda for the coming year. The Forum would be open to many groups, organisations and individuals with an interest in the AONB and would broaden ownership and influence in the work of the JAC, Executive and Unit.

The Forum would be a good publicity and promotional tool but would also make the work of the AONB more vested in the AONB communities.

#### Format and timing

Each year the Forum would be held within the AONB and would be a whole day event. There would be attractive presentations, site visits and workshop sessions covering a range of current topics.

Workshop sessions are seen as important as they are a good way to get input from a wide variety of people and organisations.

It is expected that the forum would meet in late June or early July – this would be when the Downs are at their best but would also be suitable because last year's projects will have just been completed, and next year's about to start. The Forum meeting would also be early enough to inform the budget setting JAC meeting (probably October).

The Forum will have to be demonstrably effective in influencing the work of the AONB in order to maintain momentum and attendance – careful planning, write up and monitoring of outcomes as well as proper funding will be required. The Forum would be planned and organised by the Unit and Executive.

#### Attendees

Attendance would be very broad including many organisations currently excluded from the JAC such as the National Trust and Woodland Trust, the Countryside Management Projects and businesses. Relevant organisations will receive a formal invitation but the event would be open to all with an interest. The Unit may consider a small charge to cover costs for non-funding organisations.

## A JOINT ADVISORY COMMITTEE OF STATUTORY AUTHORITIES

### Purpose

The Joint Advisory Committee will retain the formal management of the AONB. It will set budgets, agree the management plan and formally delegate the delivery of the management plan to the Executive Group. The JAC will continue to work to formal terms of reference which are set out in draft below.

### Chairman:

Chris Reynolds

### Vice-Chairman:

Sarah Hohler, County Councillor

### Funding partners:

Countryside Agency	Medway Council
Ashford Borough Council	Maidstone Borough Council
Canterbury City Council	Sevenoaks District Council
Dover District Council	Shepway District Council
Gravesham Borough Council	Swale Borough Council
Kent County Council	Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council
London Borough of Bromley	

### Other member organisations:

English Nature  
DEFRA

## Terms of Reference

### 1. Remit

- To agree and keep under review objectives for the Kent Downs AONB and to promote liaison and best practice to achieve them.
  - To oversee the preparation and implementation of the AONB Management Plan.
  - To keep under review the Terms of Reference and membership of the JAC.
  - To oversee and agree membership of the Executive Group.
  - To agree annual budgets and approve final accounts.
- The JAC delegates to an Executive Group the following roles;
- To manage the preparation, adoption, implementation and review of the AONB management plan.
  - To consider the key issues facing the Kent Downs AONB and initiate appropriate action, including seeking funding and sponsorship from external sources.
  - To liaise and consult with appropriate external bodies.
  - To oversee the staff work programme and monitoring of budget expenditure for the AONB Unit and advise KCC, as employing authority, on personnel matters as appropriate.
  - To agree an annual report for member organisations and wider dissemination.

## **2. Membership**

Membership of the JAC is restricted to organisations with a formal statutory role with regard to the AONB

Countryside Agency

English Nature

Kent County Council

Kent District Councils involved in the Kent Downs AONB

London Borough of Bromley.

The County Council, District Councils and London Borough would be represented by an elected member with accompanying officer adviser. Local authorities may send substitute members.

## **3. Power to co-opt**

The JAC has the power to co-opt as and when necessary.

## **4. Voting rights**

Should a vote be required, voting rights would be limited to funding partners. In the event of a tied vote, the Chair shall have the casting vote.

## **5. Election of Chairman**

The JAC shall elect a Chairman from either a funding partner member or independent member if thought desirable. A Vice-Chairman is also to be elected. The terms of office for both the Chairman and Vice-Chairman will be three years. The Chairman and Vice-Chairman may be elected for further terms.

## **6. Frequency of meetings**

The JAC will initially meet once a year, to consider the budget and annual report of the JAC. The Chairman may convene further meetings of the JAC according to the strategic needs of the AONB Partnership.

## **7. Secretariat**

The Secretariat for the JAC will be provided by the AONB Unit.

## **8. Agenda**

The agenda for the JAC will be co-ordinated by the Executive Group and Unit.

## **THE EXECUTIVE GROUP**

A small Executive Group would meet on a formal basis as required by the chairman but at least four times a year including a meeting before the JAC. The Executive Group will be empowered by the JAC to implement the management plan, and be more responsive to opportunities as they arise. The Executive Group would be accountable to the JAC and have specific terms of reference delegated to it by the JAC –see above.

## **Membership**

The Executive Group membership should be small with a maximum size of 12 people. The chairing of the Executive Group can be interchangeable between the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the JAC – this will ensure accountability to the JAC, but will ease potential problems of time-commitment. Other members will include the AONB Unit, the Countryside Agency as the major funding partner and Kent County Council as the employing authority. It is proposed that there are four members from the other Local Authorities, either members or officers, one for each Area Strategic Partnership, and four members from other organisations according to the skills and influence they can offer, for instance the parish councils, business interests, NGOs – for instance National Trust or Wildlife Trust. At least one member should represent landowners or land managers.

Nominations and volunteers for membership will be invited by the Chairman of the JAC and membership shall be agreed by the JAC.

If voting is necessary, each member of the Executive will be able to cast one vote and the Chairman will have the casting vote if needed. A quorum of seven members will be needed at a meeting, if voting is required.

The membership of the Executive Group will be reviewed annually with the possibility of rotating membership for Local authorities to ensure representation. (If the Executive functions well this should not be an issue as representation and even coverage of effort should be one thing that the exec monitors).

The Executive Group will be significantly more demanding of time for its membership than the existing JAC/OSG and the turn around for decisions will need to be rapid, sometimes without a formal meeting so email or other rapid communication may be necessary.

Brief notes from the Executive Group meetings will be forwarded to the JAC and will be summarised in the bulletin and available on the Unit Web Site.

## **WORKING GROUPS AND TASK GROUPS**

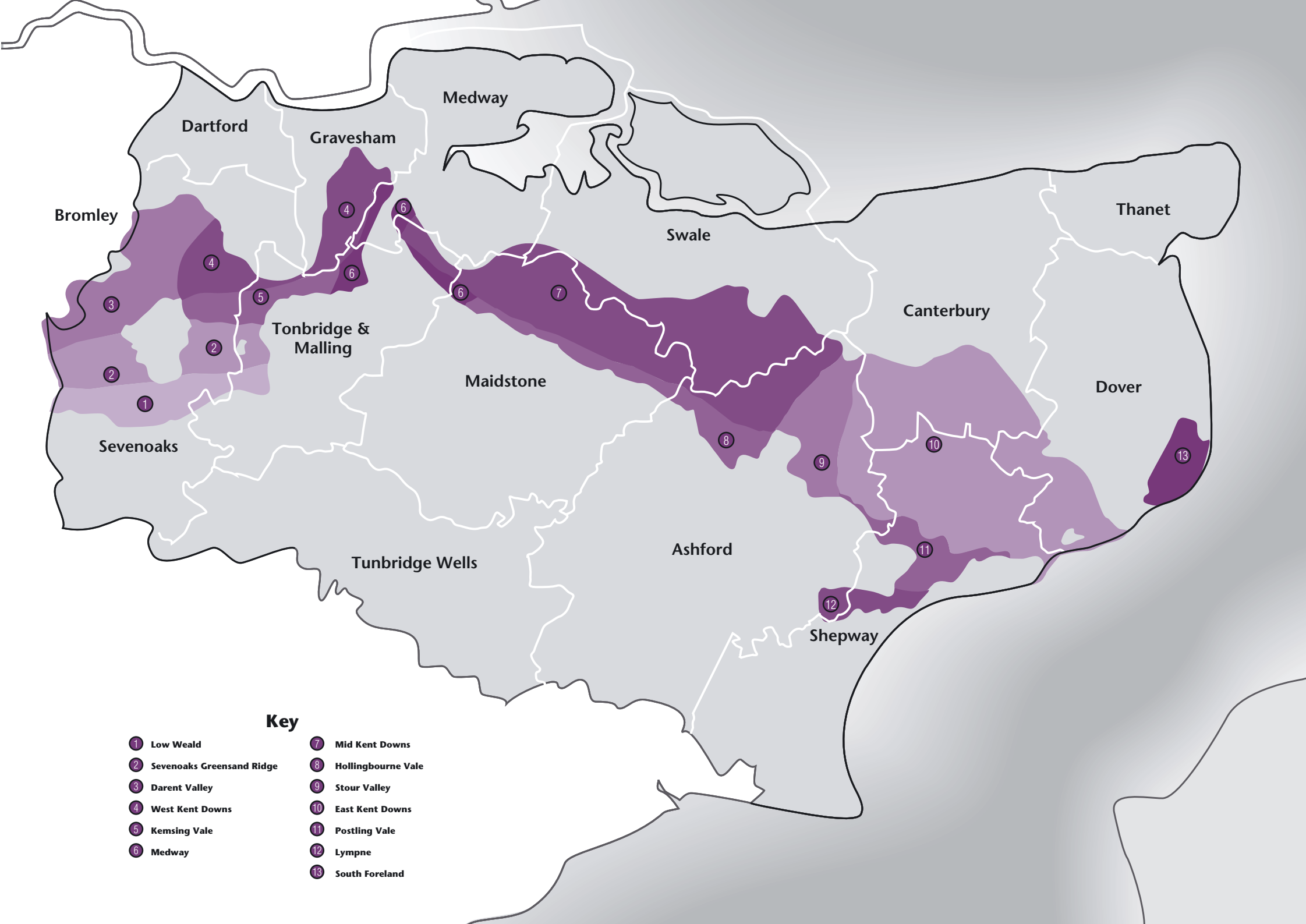
Both the JAC and Executive Group will have the power to set up Working Groups, and Task Groups the membership and role of which will be decided on a needs basis. Task Groups will be time limited and will have a specific outcome they are expected to deliver, membership of each Working Group or Task Group shall be agreed by the JAC or Executive Group and will be on a 'portfolio' or skills basis. Examples of work areas for Task Groups could be; tourism, HLF application, the management plan review, communications and promotion. Working Groups may have a longer term role, for instance overseeing the a planning role.

## **THE AONB UNIT**

- The staffing arrangements for the Unit are being discussed separately. There will be a separate report to the OSG and JAC.

# Abbreviations used throughout the Management Plan and Action Plan

<b>AAONB</b>	Association of AONBs	<b>JAC</b>	Joint Advisory Committee
<b>AIF</b>	Area Investment Framework	<b>KAPC</b>	Kent Association of Parish Councils
<b>AONB</b>	Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty	<b>KCC</b>	Kent County Council
<b>BAP</b>	Biodiversity Action Plan	<b>KDU</b>	Kent Downs Unit
<b>BHS</b>	British Horse Society	<b>KFWAG</b>	Kent Farming, Wildlife Advisory Group
<b>BSE</b>	Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy	<b>Km</b>	kilometre
<b>BTCV</b>	British Trust for Conservation Volunteers	<b>KRCC</b>	Kent Rural Community Councils
<b>CAP</b>	Common Agricultural Policy	<b>KTA</b>	Kent Tourism Alliance
<b>CLBA</b>	Country Landowner and Business Association	<b>KWT</b>	Kent Wildlife Trust
<b>CMS</b>	Countryside Management Services	<b>LAF</b>	Local Access Forum
<b>CoAg</b>	Countryside Agency	<b>LNR</b>	Local Nature Reserve
<b>CRoW Act</b>	Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000	<b>LSP</b>	Local Strategic Partnership
<b>cSAC</b>	Candidate Special Conservation Area	<b>LTP</b>	Local Transport Plan
<b>CSS</b>	Countryside Stewardship Scheme	<b>MoD</b>	Ministry of Defence
<b>DC</b>	District Council (also includes Borough Councils)	<b>NatRECS</b>	National Route Evaluation and Classification System
<b>DEFRA</b>	Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs	<b>NDW</b>	North Downs Way
<b>DIAMOND Way</b>	Delivery of Interpretation, Access and Mobility on the North Downs Way	<b>NFU</b>	National Farmers Union
<b>DTLR</b>	Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions	<b>NNR</b>	National Nature Reserve
<b>EA</b>	Environment Agency	<b>NT</b>	National Trust
<b>EH</b>	English Heritage	<b>ODPM</b>	Office of Deputy Prime Minister
<b>EN</b>	English Nature	<b>PCs</b>	Parish Councils
<b>ERDF</b>	European Regional Development Fund (Interreg)	<b>PROW</b>	Public Rights of Way
<b>ERDP</b>	England Rural Development Programme	<b>RIG</b>	Regionally Important Geological/Geomorphological Site
<b>ET</b>	Eurotunnel	<b>RLCI</b>	Rail Link Countryside Initiative
<b>EU</b>	European Union	<b>RSPB</b>	Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
<b>FC</b>	Forestry Commission	<b>SAC</b>	Special Area for Conservation
<b>GIS</b>	Geographical Information System	<b>SEEDA</b>	South East England Development Agency
<b>GOSE</b>	Government Office for the South East	<b>SEERA</b>	South East England Regional Assembly
<b>Ha</b>	hectare	<b>SEETB</b>	South East of England Tourist Board
<b>HA</b>	Highways Agency	<b>SSSI</b>	Site of Special Scientific Interest
<b>HLF</b>	Heritage Lottery Fund	<b>WT</b>	Woodland Trust



**Key**

- |                             |                      |
|-----------------------------|----------------------|
| 1 Low Weald                 | 7 Mid Kent Downs     |
| 2 Sevenoaks Greensand Ridge | 8 Hollingbourne Vale |
| 3 Darent Valley             | 9 Stour Valley       |
| 4 West Kent Downs           | 10 East Kent Downs   |
| 5 Kemsing Vale              | 11 Postling Vale     |
| 6 Medway                    | 12 Lympne            |
|                             | 13 South Foreland    |



Published by the Kent Downs AONB Joint Advisory Committee, April 2003.

For further copies of this document and Consultation Form or general information, please contact:

Kent Downs AONB Unit  
Invicta House, Sessions Square  
Maidstone, Kent ME14 1XX

01622 221522

[kentdowns@kent.gov.uk](mailto:kentdowns@kent.gov.uk)  
[www.kentdowns.org.uk](http://www.kentdowns.org.uk)



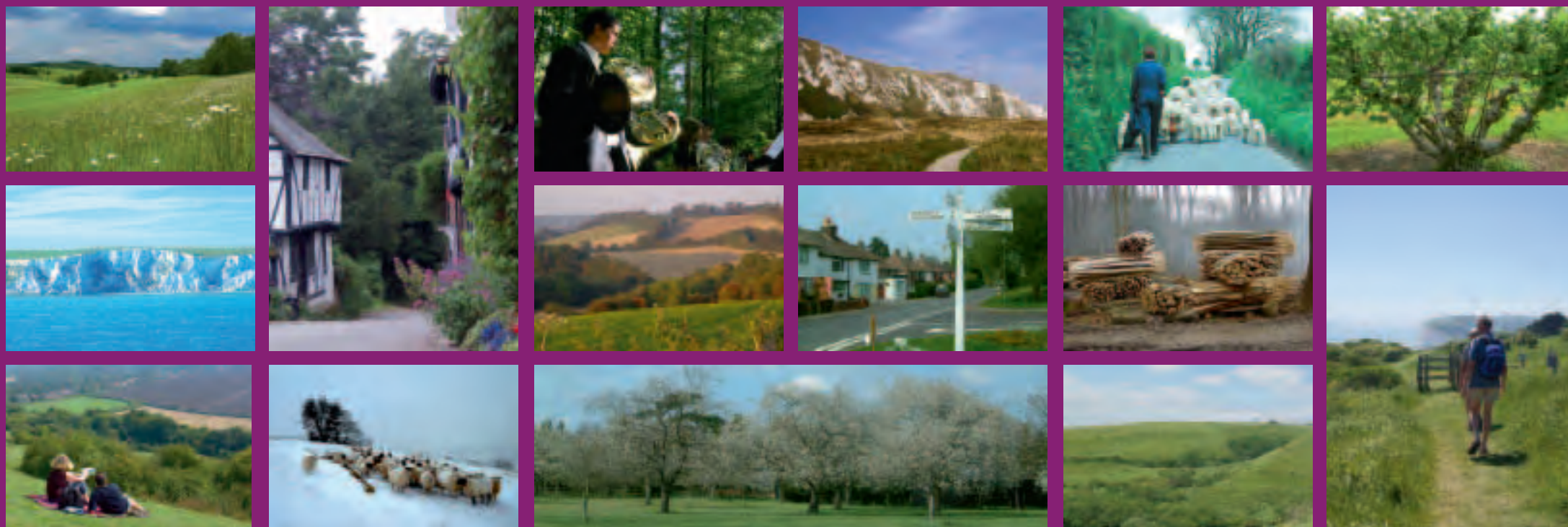
This project is part  
funded by the  
European Regional  
Development Fund  
(ERDF)



**The  
Countryside  
Agency**

# Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

# MANAGEMENT PLAN 2009-2014



First revision April 2009



The lady orchid (*Orchis purpurea*) which we have chosen as the emblem of the Kent Downs is beautiful, scarce and special to Kent, just like the downs and woodland it inhabits. Like our countryside, it is vulnerable to the pressures of change, but survives by continual renewal.

We want the lady orchid and its downland home to remain alive, not remembered only in books and museums. It must thrive for future generations to enjoy.



The purpose of this Management Plan is primarily to secure the conservation and enhancement of the Kent Downs while supporting the social and economic wellbeing of its communities. This is the first review of the Kent Downs AONB Management Plan, prepared as required, by Section IV of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000.

We are grateful for the contribution that many individuals and organisations have made in the preparation of this revision.

We hope that you will find this plan useful and informative, but more importantly that you will reflect the vision, aims and policies in your life and work. It is only with your input that we can ensure that this plan achieves its ambitious 20 year vision.

The preparation of this Management Plan was supported by all of the local authorities of the Kent Downs AONB, Natural England and the European Regional Development Fund.

This Management Plan has been formally adopted by all of the Local Authorities of the Kent Downs AONB.





# CONTENTS

	<b>page</b>		
<b>Foreword</b>	<b>3</b>		
<b>Structure</b>	<b>4</b>		
<b>1 Setting the scene</b>	<b>5</b>		
<b>1.1 The background to the vision for the AONB</b>	<b>6</b>		
1.1.1 AONB designation	7		
1.1.2 Definition of natural beauty and landscape	8		
1.1.3 The need for management planning	9		
1.1.4 The Kent Downs	9		
<b>1.2 Special components of the Kent Downs AONB</b>	<b>13</b>		
1.2.1 The components of natural beauty	13		
1.2.2 Quality of life components	15		
<b>2 A Vision for the Kent Downs AONB in 2029</b>	<b>19</b>		
<b>2.1 The Kent Downs in 2029</b>	<b>20</b>		
2.1.1 The vision for 2029	21		
<b>3 The management of the Kent Downs AONB</b>	<b>25</b>		
<b>3.1 The management of the Kent Downs AONB</b>	<b>26</b>		
3.1.1 The role of the Kent Downs AONB Partnership	26		
3.1.2 The role of this Management Plan revision	28		
3.1.3 The role of Management Plan policies	28		
3.1.4 Who is the plan for?	31		
3.1.5 What will the Management Plan achieve?	31		
3.1.6 How has this Management Plan revision been prepared?	32		
3.1.7 Commitment and support from other relevant authorities	33		
3.1.8 Maintaining productive partnerships	34		
3.1.9 Management of the AONB – aims	34		
3.1.10 Management of the AONB – policies	35		
<b>4 Components of natural beauty</b>	<b>36</b>		
<b>4.1 Landform and landscape character</b>	<b>37</b>		
4.1.1 Landform of the Kent Downs	38		
4.1.2 The Kent Downs landscape character areas	41		
4.1.3 Summary descriptions of Kent Downs landscape character areas	44		
4.1.4 Main issues and threats identified	58		
4.1.5 Landform and landscape character – aims	59		
4.1.6 Landform and landscape character – policies	60		

*continued*

<b>4.2 Biodiversity</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>4.7 Quality of life components</b>	<b>111</b>
4.2.1 A duty of regard for biodiversity	<b>61</b>	4.7.1 Secondary purposes of AONB designation	<b>111</b>
4.2.2 Special characteristics	<b>62</b>	<b>4.8 Vibrant communities</b>	<b>112</b>
4.2.3 Designated nature conservation sites	<b>65</b>	4.8.1 Special characteristics	<b>113</b>
4.2.4 Main issues and threats identified	<b>69</b>	4.8.2 Main issues and threats identified	<b>117</b>
4.2.5 Biodiversity – aims	<b>70</b>	4.8.3 Vibrant communities – aims	<b>118</b>
4.2.6 Biodiversity – policies	<b>71</b>	4.8.4 Vibrant communities – policies	<b>119</b>
<b>4.3 Farmed landscape</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>4.9 Sustainable development and travel</b>	<b>120</b>
4.3.1 Special characteristics	<b>73</b>	4.9.1 Special characteristics	<b>121</b>
4.3.2 Main issues and threats identified	<b>81</b>	4.9.2 Main issues and threats identified	<b>125</b>
4.3.3 Farmed landscape – aims	<b>82</b>	4.9.3 Sustainable development and travel – aims	<b>126</b>
4.3.4 Farmed landscape – policies	<b>83</b>	4.9.4 Sustainable development and travel – policies	<b>127</b>
<b>4.4 Woodland and trees</b>	<b>84</b>	<b>4.10 Access, enjoyment and understanding</b>	<b>128</b>
4.4.1 Special characteristics	<b>85</b>	4.10.1 Countryside access in the Kent Downs	<b>129</b>
4.4.2 Main issues and threats identified	<b>88</b>	4.10.2 Special characteristics	<b>130</b>
4.4.3 Woodland and trees – aims	<b>89</b>	4.10.3 Main issues and threats identified	<b>136</b>
4.4.4 Woodland and trees – policies	<b>90</b>	4.10.4 Access, enjoyment and understanding – aims	<b>137</b>
<b>4.5 Historic and cultural heritage</b>	<b>91</b>	4.10.5 Access, enjoyment and understanding – policies	<b>138</b>
4.5.1 Special characteristics	<b>92</b>	<b>5 Implementation, monitoring and review</b>	<b>139</b>
4.5.2 Main issues and threats identified	<b>97</b>	<b>5.1 Implementation</b>	<b>140</b>
4.5.3 Historic and Cultural Heritage – aims	<b>98</b>	<b>5.2 Resourcing the Management Plan</b>	<b>141</b>
4.5.4 Historic and Cultural Heritage – policies	<b>99</b>	<b>5.3 Monitoring condition</b>	<b>142</b>
<b>4.6 Geology and natural resources</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>Abbreviations</b>	<b>143</b>
4.6.1 Special characteristics	<b>101</b>		
4.6.2 Main issues and threats identified	<b>108</b>		
4.6.3 Geology and natural resources – aims	<b>109</b>		
4.6.4 Geology and natural resources – policies	<b>110</b>		

*back*



## FOREWORD

An Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) is exactly what it says it is: a precious landscape whose distinctive character and natural beauty are so outstanding that it is in the nation's interest to safeguard them.

AONBs represent only 18% of the land area of England and Wales. In this small proportion of the country it is the landscape that should come first.

**The Kent Downs are home to some of the most enchanting landscapes of southern Britain.**

In 2004 the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty partnership worked closely together to prepare and produce the first management plan for this special place.

The management plan provided energy, direction and commitment and in the time since it was published much has been achieved to conserve and enhance the Kent Downs. At the same time the pressures on this landscape have been greater than we anticipated. What is clear now is that this pressure will

continue to grow and we need to redouble our efforts to secure this fine landscape into the future.

With the help and support of many hundreds of individuals and organisations we have reviewed the original Kent Downs AONB Management Plan. This first revision builds fundamentally on the original plan adopted in April 2004.

The ultimate goal of the Management Plan remains to ensure that the natural beauty, special character of the landscape and vitality of the communities within the Kent Downs AONB are recognised, maintained and strengthened well into the future. To achieve this we need your help.

A blue ink handwritten signature that reads "Chris Reynolds".

**Chris Reynolds**

Chairman, Kent Downs AONB Joint Advisory Committee



## STRUCTURE

This is the first revision of the Kent Downs AONB Management Plan.

In response to consultation the structure of the plan has changed from the original in an attempt to make it more logical and easier to navigate.

This plan is set out in the following sections:

- 1 Setting the scene** An introduction to the AONB, the need for management planning and a statement of the special components of natural beauty of the AONB and the main issues and threats relating to them.
- 2 The 20 Year Vision for the AONB** An aspirational and inspirational portrayal of the Kent Downs AONB in 2029. Developed from the understanding of the special characteristics and threats. The Management Plan then sets out how the vision can become reality.
- 3 The Management of the AONB** A description of the main management arrangements for stakeholders and partners and provides a description of the formulation of AONB Policies.
- 4 Components of Natural Beauty** A separate description for each component of the vision the plan sets out; the special

characteristics, the main issues and threats identified through consultation and intelligence gathering, the aims and policies are defined.

- Landform and landscape character
- Biodiversity
- Farmed landscape
- Woodland and trees
- Historic and cultural heritage
- Geology and natural resources
- Vibrant communities
- Sustainable development and travel
- Access, enjoyment and understanding

- 5 Finally the plan considers implementation, monitoring and review** To be reported in AONB annual reviews publicising achievements and rolling forward actions. Indicators will establish if our policies are achieving the aims and visions.
- 6 Action Plan** A separate Action Plan has been prepared in partnership with the local authorities and other key stakeholders involved in the development of the plan. The Action Plan sets out what will be done, by whom and when. To achieve policies and to be reactive to change the Action Plan will be reviewed annually.

# SETTING THE SCENE



- **Background to the vision for the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty**
  - AONB designation
  - Definition of natural beauty and landscape
  - The need for management planning
  - The Kent Downs
- **Special components of the Kent Downs AONB**
  - The components of natural beauty
  - Quality of life components

# 1

## SETTING THE SCENE



## 1.1 THE BACKGROUND TO THE VISION FOR THE AONB

**There is no doubt that the landscape of the Kent Downs is special. There is drama and intimacy; there is diversity and contrast within the AONB; there are ancient places as well as the bright white of a new cliff fall. This is a distinctive, national landscape of outstanding quality and value.**



**Photo:**  
Trosley

**The Kent Downs AONB is a nationally important landscape and one of the most enchanting parts of southern England.** The AONB was designated in July 1968 under the [National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949](#). It covers 878sq.km (326 sq.miles) stretching from the Surrey/Greater London border to the Strait of Dover. Aside from a small area within the London Borough of Bromley, the AONB lies wholly within the county of Kent and covers some 23% of the total land area of the county. It rises to an altitude of 250m above sea level at its highest point at Toy's Hill south of Sevenoaks, and is crossed in three places by the river valleys of the Darent, the Medway and the Stour, all flowing northwards.

The Kent Downs are the eastern half of the North Downs ridge of chalk stretching from Farnham in Surrey to the English Channel. The western half of the chalk ridge lies within the Surrey Hills AONB, which adjoins the Kent Downs. The same ridge of chalk reappears on the French side of the Channel, where it is designated [le Parc Naturel Régional des Caps et Marais d'Opale](#). In Kent, the North Downs, along with part of the Greensand Ridge and Romney Marsh, form the Kent Downs AONB.

The Kent Downs is the eighth largest AONB in England and Wales, and administratively is one of the more complex falling within twelve local authorities and lying partly or wholly within 137 parish council boundaries.

Areas of Outstanding National Beauty are part of a family of protected areas recognised and classified by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN) throughout the world. AONBs, National Parks and Heritage Coasts in England and Wales fall into Category V – Protected Landscapes. These are areas that have been moulded by centuries of human activity, where there is a diversity of land use with a “sense of place”. Equivalent areas in other countries include the French Parcs Naturels Régionaux. The Kent Downs AONB has a strong partnership with [le Parc Naturel Régional des Caps et Marais d’Opale](#). The IUCN definition of Protected Landscape aims to maintain the harmonious balance between people, landscapes and nature for now and for future generations.

The [National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949](#) legislated for the designation of AONBs and National Parks. Their purpose was to be similar – **to conserve and enhance natural beauty**. The Countryside Commission further defined the purpose of AONB designation in a statement of 1991.



**Photo:**  
valley north of  
Ide Hill

#### Purpose of AONB designation...

**“...is primarily to conserve and enhance natural beauty.**

**“In pursuing the primary purpose of designation, account should be taken of the needs of agriculture, forestry, and other rural industries and of the economic and social needs of local communities. Particular regard should be paid to promoting sustainable forms of social and economic development that in themselves conserve and enhance the environment.**

**“Recreation is not an objective of designation but the demand for recreation should be met so far as this is consistent with the conservation of natural beauty and the needs of agriculture, forestry and other uses.”**

*Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty: A policy statement  
(Countryside Commission, CCP 356, 1991), page 5*

In the time span of this reviewed management plan, Natural England, the successor to the Countryside Agency, will develop a policy position for the English Protected Landscapes.

AONBs and National Parks are recognised in England to be on a par legally because of their nationally important landscapes. **In June 2000 the Government confirmed that AONBs are equivalent to National Parks in terms of their landscape quality, scenic beauty and planning status.** Subsequently, paragraph 4.8 of [Planning Policy Guidance 7](#): The Countryside – Environmental Quality and Economic and Social Development was amended to reflect this status.

The thirty-six AONBs in England amount to over 15% of the total land area. They vary greatly in landscape character and size ranging from the smallest – Isles of Scilly (16sq. km) to the largest – the Cotswolds (2,038 sq. km). In Kent, the High Weald and Kent Downs AONB cover 33% of the county’s land area. In the south east England region AONBs cover over 33% of the total land area.





The term 'natural beauty' remains at the heart of the purpose of AONB designation. The 1949 Act provides a definition of natural beauty as such:

"References in this Act to the preservation or conservation of the natural beauty of an area shall be construed as including references to the preservation or, as the case may be, the conservation of its flora, fauna and geological or physiographical features."

[National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949](#), section 114.

The term 'natural beauty' was always intended to embrace more than just the visual or scenic elements of the landscape. However, over the course of the last fifty years, this definition has been updated and broadened to include historic and cultural heritage. Recent government guidance specifically on AONBs provides a useful non-technical definition:



**Photo:**  
Hollingbourne

"Natural beauty is not just the look of the landscape, but includes landform and geology, plants and animals, landscape features and the rich history of human settlement over the centuries." <sup>1</sup>

At the core of the secondary purpose of AONB designation is the understanding that the landscape is not just scenery, but it is the result of the historic and ongoing interaction between people and place. Social and economic activity that contributes to the landscape and natural beauty is fundamental to shaping the future of the AONB.

The important link between people and place is emphasised in the [European Landscape Convention](#) (Council of Europe) where landscape is defined as "an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors". The convention, ratified by the UK in 2006, also recognises that "the landscape is an important part of the quality of life for people everywhere; in urban areas and in the countryside, in degraded areas as well as in areas of high quality, in areas recognised as being of outstanding beauty as well as everyday areas".

The term 'natural beauty' was  
always intended to embrace more  
than just the visual or scenic  
elements of the landscape

<sup>1</sup> Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty: A guide for AONB partnership members (Countryside Agency, CA24, November 2001) page 6.

### 1.1.3 THE NEED FOR MANAGEMENT PLANNING

In recognition of the national importance of AONB landscapes the [Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000](#) required relevant local authorities to prepare, publish and subsequently review a plan which formulates their policies for the management of the area and for carrying out their functions in relation to it. The management plan is essentially about conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the AONB, the statutory purpose of the designation. The [first Kent Downs AONB management plan](#) was published and adopted in April 2004, this is the first review.

The relationship between this management plan and the planning system is set out in section [3.1.3](#).

...other qualities of note are views from the escarpment, pastoral scenery, parklands, villages, churches and castles

### 1.1.4 THE KENT DOWNS

The Kent Downs were confirmed in 1968 as an AONB. The overall remarks of the designation committee are summarised that:

“The scarp slope and dry valleys of the Kent Downs are the main target for designation, particularly where they retain a downland character, that woodlands are highly valued throughout the designated area and particularly on the scarp slope and dry valley sides, and that other qualities of note are views from the escarpment, pastoral scenery, parklands, villages, churches and castles.”<sup>2</sup>

#### Landscape character

Landscape character is described as the pattern that arises from particular combinations of the different landscape components and can provide a sense of place to our surroundings.<sup>3</sup> This revised management plan considers both the important components of the natural beauty of the Kent Downs and its landscape character. The components of the landscape of the Kent Downs are described below and landscape character areas are described in chapter [4.1 Landform and Landscape Character](#).



**Photo:**  
Kemsing Down



<sup>2</sup> Woolmore, R. 2002. Kent Downs AONB. Designation History series.

<sup>3</sup> [Landscape character assessment guidance for England and Scotland](#) Countryside Agency/ SNH 2002.

# 1

## SETTING THE SCENE

### The public perception of the Kent Downs

In the preparation of the 2004 Management Plan and this first review, views and engagement have been sought from many participants, including local authorities, stakeholders, local residents and visitors to the AONB. A key issue was to reconfirm which components of the AONB were most valued and the issues and priorities most important relating to them.

The main consultation method used for the 2004 plan was through a written questionnaire within the Kent Downs newspaper, *The Orchid*, in autumn/winter 2002/03. Respondents could also fill in an online questionnaire. For the Management Plan Review (2008) consultation was widened following the preparation of a Statement of Community and Stakeholder Involvement (SCI). Consultation included a questionnaire in Kent on Sunday and Saturday Observer free newspapers and promoted on their web site and internet TV, gaining county wide coverage. The questionnaire was also available on the [Kent Downs website](#) and an A4 printed version with background information was sent to [the Orchid](#) subscribers database and parish councils. The

2002/03 consultation included mainly individuals and groups living in or based in the Kent Downs. For the review, 52% of respondents were from outside the AONB, but the features valued and priorities for action are remarkably similar.

Each time people were asked to select the components of natural beauty most important to them, they confirmed that the fundamental and special characteristics that formed the basis of the original AONB designation are still those most valued by people today.

A key issue was to reconfirm which components of the AONB were most valued and the issues and priorities most important relating to them



**Photo:**  
Cobham Wood



**Photo:**  
cattle gate,  
Farningham

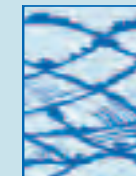
# 1

## SETTING THE SCENE

**Table 1**

Kent Downs AONB 'Have your say' survey and participation responses (2003 and 2008)  
(participants asked to select the three most important components or features)

Most important components of natural beauty in the Kent Downs AONB	2003	2008	Most valued features of the Kent Downs AONB	2003	2008
Chalk grassland (wildflower grassland)	59%	74%	Scenery and views	86%	83%
Woodland	52%	43%	Wildlife	49%	48%
Landform and geology, cliffs and coast	45%	41%	Peace and quiet	46%	49%
Ancient lanes and paths	33%	47%	Opportunities for outdoor recreation	33%	10%
Orchards/cobnut platts	21%	17%	Villages and village life	32%	32%
River valleys	20%	21%	Historic buildings and features	24%	17%
Hedgerows	20%	19%	Dark skies	N/A	6%
Historic settlement and buildings	17%	25%	Amenities	10%	8%
Mixed farmland	14%	17%	Available local produce	7%	8%
Dry valleys	7%	7%	Public rights of way network	N/A	41%
Historic parkland	6%	9%	Locally distinct highways	N/A	1%



THE  
BACKGROUND  
TO THE VISION



**Photo:**  
Creteway Down,  
Folkestone



**Photo:**  
horseriding in  
the Downs

**Table 2**

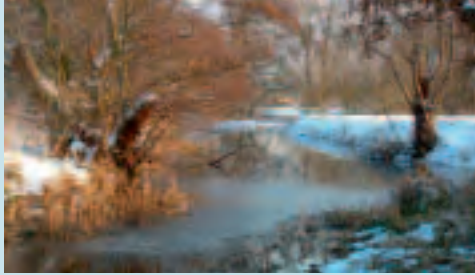
Kent Downs AONB 'Have your say' survey and participation responses (2003 and 2008)  
(participants asked to select the three most important priorities for action or actions to improve use)

Priorities for action in next five years	2003	2008	Action needed to improve use of the AONB	2003	2008
Prevention of illegal or damaging activities	56%	77%	Encourage farmers to adopt more environmentally sensitive farming techniques	45%	39%
Conserving wildlife	54%	63%	Improve sustainable transport , bus links, cycle routes and racks, walkers shelters etc	23%	39%
Conserving and enhancing views and scenic beauty	50%	55%	Ensure peace and quiet – traffic management, control of illegal off road use in the countryside etc	29%	64%
Conserving tranquillity	38%	36%	Greater emphasis on development control	27%	34%
Preventing inappropriate conversion or loss of historic buildings	8%	22%	Getting out and about – removal of stiles, better marking of access routes	23%	14%
Management of equine land use	N/A	8%	Better information on wildlife in the AONB	22%	9%
Availability of information about access to the AONB countryside	2%	10%	More information on where to go in the AONB	20%	17%
More information on features of AONB landscape	12%	8%	Improve or increase number of visitor facilities	16%	17%
More organised events	9%	6%	More information on what local produce is produced in the AONB and where to get it	11%	11%
Research and response to climate change	N/A	12%	Highways management that respects the sensitivity of the AONB landscape	N/A	23%
			Control of light pollution to protect dark night skies	N/A	19%



# 1

SETTING  
THE SCENE



## 1.2

## SPECIAL COMPONENTS OF THE KENT DOWNS AONB

### 1.2.1 THE COMPONENTS OF NATURAL BEAUTY

#### Dramatic landform and views

The Kent Downs' dramatic and diverse topography is based on the underlying geology. These features comprise: impressive south-facing scarps of chalk and greensand; scalloped and hidden dry valleys; expansive open plateaux; broad, steep-sided river valleys, and dramatic white cliffs and foreshore. Breathtaking, long-distance panoramas are offered across open countryside, estuaries, towns and the sea from the scarp, cliffs and plateaux; the dip slope dry valleys and river valleys provide more intimate and enclosed vistas. Overlying this landform are diverse natural and man-made features creating distinctiveness at a local level. Key landscape features in some areas have been lost or eroded through lack of support mechanisms, through intensive land management, development or neglect. Illegal or antisocial activities, such as fly tipping, have led to further erosion of landscape beauty in certain places.

#### Biodiversity-rich habitats

Rich mosaics of habitats, plant and animal communities of national and local importance are sustained, although many are isolated or fragmented in a modern agricultural landscape. These include: semi-natural chalk grassland and chalk scrub; ancient



**Photo:**  
marbled white

# 1

## SETTING THE SCENE

semi-natural woodland; traditional orchards, including cobnut platts; chalk cliffs, foreshore and sea platform; chalk rivers and wet pasture; ponds and spring lines; heath and acid grassland; woodland pasture and ancient trees and networks of linear features of species-rich hedgerows, flower-rich field margins and road verges. Sensitive management and conservation of all these features as well as the creation of functional ecological networks is essential to the survival of the AONB's important biodiversity heritage and landscape quality.

### Farmed landscape

A long-established tradition of mixed farming (of arable, livestock and horticulture) has helped create the natural beauty of the Kent Downs. Farming covers over 74% of the AONB. Expansive arable fields are generally on the lower slopes, valley bottoms and plateau tops. Disconnected 'ribbons' of permanent grassland (shaves) are found along the steep scarp, valley sides, and on less-productive land, grazed by sheep, cattle and increasingly by horses. Locally concentrated areas of orchards, cobnut platts (nut orchards), hop gardens and other horticultural production are also present, their regular striate form can enhance the rise and fall of



**Photo:**  
Filston Farm,  
Shoreham

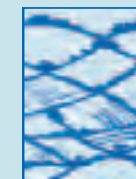
the land. At a national level, uncertainty hangs over the future policy and funding regimes for agricultural production, agri-environment schemes, and the decisions of farmers generally. At a local level, more farms are being managed together in large contracts where rotations can be at whole farm rather than field level. Elsewhere farm owners with non-agricultural incomes are becoming more common. Provision for leisure including equine activities and shooting are replacing traditional farming practices.

### Woodland and trees

Broadleaf and mixed woodland, covering over 20% of the Kent Downs frame the upper slopes and plateau tops. A number of large woodland blocks are present, but many woodlands are small, fragmented and in disparate land ownership and management. Over half of the woodland sites are ancient (continuously wooded for at least 400 years), supporting nationally important woodland plant and animal species. Large areas of sweet chestnut coppice are present throughout, although active coppicing has declined considerably and timber production is very localised. Markets for local woodland products are currently at a low ebb.



**Photo:**  
Medway Gap



SPECIAL  
COMPONENTS  
OF THE AONB

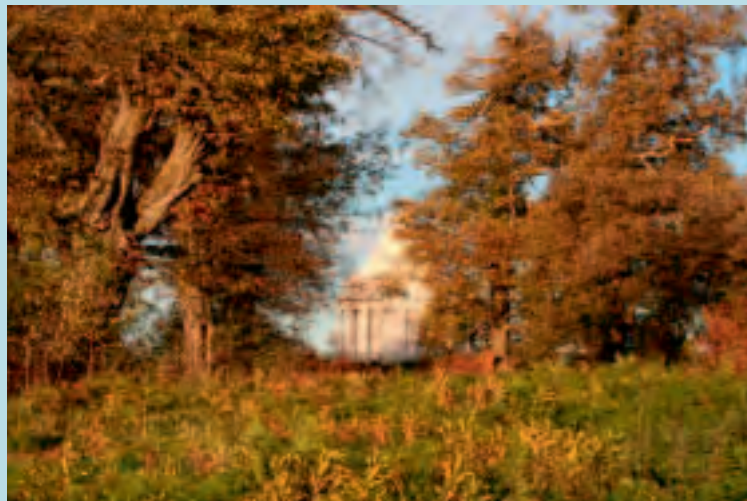
# 1

## SETTING THE SCENE

### A rich legacy of historic and cultural heritage

Millennia of human activity have created an outstanding cultural inheritance and strong 'time depth' to the Kent Downs. There are the remains of Neolithic megalithic monuments, Bronze Age barrows, Iron Age hill-forts, Roman villas and towns, medieval villages focused on their churches, post-medieval stately homes with their parks and gardens and historic defence structures from Norman times to the twentieth century.

Fields of varying shapes and sizes and ancient wood-banks and hedges, set within networks of droeways and sunken lanes have produced a rich historic mosaic, which is the rural landscape of today. Architectural distinctiveness is ever present in the scattered farmsteads and oasthouses, barns and other agricultural buildings, churches and country houses. The diverse range of local materials used, which includes Flint, Chalk, Ragstone, timber and tile, contributes to the character and texture of the countryside.



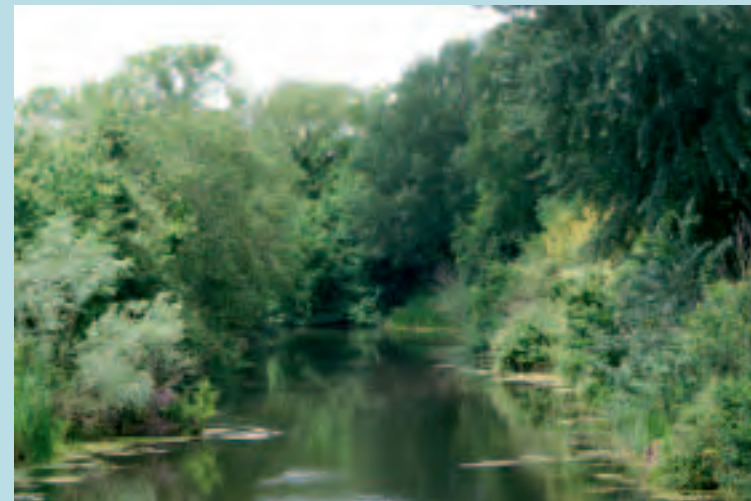
**Photo:**  
Cobham Wood

The AONB landscape has been an inspiration to artists, scientists and leaders, from Shakespeare to Samuel Palmer and Darwin to Churchill.

The biggest threats to the AONB's historic and cultural heritage are from a general lack of awareness and understanding of the importance of these many sites and features. Other issues include the lack of sensitive management, and loss or erosion of features, character and settings through development.

### Tranquillity and remoteness

The imposing landform of the Kent Downs has confined the main transport links to its edges and the river valleys throughout history. This has largely remained true through to modern days, and much of the AONB provides surprisingly tranquil and remote countryside – offering dark night skies and peace away from road traffic. These much valued perceptual qualities are particularly vulnerable to the further spread of inappropriate development and continual pressure on the AONB's transport networks.



**Photo:**  
Royal Military Canal,  
West Hythe



# 1

## SETTING THE SCENE

### 1.2.2 QUALITY OF LIFE COMPONENTS

#### Vibrant local local communities

The Kent Downs is a living, working landscape shaped and managed by people. Currently there is a population of 66,000 and, while changing in nature, many of the Kent Downs communities are strong and vibrant, assertively seeking to conserve and enhance the place that they are fortunate to live in. At the same time it is increasingly difficult for those involved in the practical management and enhancement of the landscape to afford to live locally.

#### Sustainable development and travel

The position of the Kent Downs, close to London, mainland Europe, major urban centres and growth areas means that the Kent Downs AONB, perhaps more than any other of Britain's protected landscapes – AONB, Heritage Coast or National Park, has faced severe pressure from development. The development of transportation infrastructure including strategic trans European highways, communications and housing, as well as the pressures

of intensive agriculture and forestry, increased recreational use and illegal activities such as fly tipping and off road driving can detract from this important landscape. This is both an opportunity and threat and an important role of the management plan is to seek a positive exchange of goods and services between the Kent Downs and the surrounding urban areas. Despite the intense pressure experienced in the Kent Downs, it is still true that the AONB has largely withstood the onslaught and small but important community based projects have shown the real benefit of sustainable development approaches.

#### Access, enjoyment and understanding

The Kent Downs is an easily accessible and enchanting landscape; over 1 million people live within a kilometre of the AONB boundary. There is considerable demand for access and recreation in the Kent Downs and providing this in a way which supports the special characteristics of the AONB is an important but challenging task. The AONB provides a public rights of way network four times as dense as the national average and there is



SPECIAL  
COMPONENTS  
OF THE AONB



**Photo:**  
Sugarloaf from  
Creteway Down



**Photo:**  
railway line below  
the White Clifs

# 1

## SETTING THE SCENE

a high relative density of bridleways and byways. Active user groups help to promote the sustainable management and use of the AONB for quiet countryside recreation.

Access to the Kent Downs AONB particularly through walking, cycling and riding can provide benefits to health and well-being as well as supporting the local community.

Improving the understanding of the AONB is a critical task, without this the landscape will not be recognised, valued or enjoyed and its future conservation and enhancement may not be assured.

Since the designation of the Kent Downs AONB was first confirmed, an enormous amount of change has occurred. All aspects of environmental, social and economic circumstances have been transformed and the resulting changes have brought new practices and pressures on the landscape.

In the period since the first AONB Management Plan was published the pressures experienced have become more intense. Each chapter describes the issues and threats identified and, while in most cases those identified for the first plan remain, there have been more added to the list or the pressures are felt more intensely.

### Countryside Quality Counts analysis

The [Countryside Quality Counts](#) (CQC) project provides an indicative assessment of how the countryside is changing, working at a national scale. It is intended to help to understand where change is occurring and whether change matters to people in terms of the way it affects the things about landscape that people value. This information, when considered with the other locally derived evidence, has been used to inform the priorities and policies of the Management Plan review.

Despite the pressure of development, the character of the farmed and wooded landscape has probably been maintained, although it is likely that opportunities to further strengthen character remain.



**Photo:**  
fringed water lillies on the Royal Military Canal

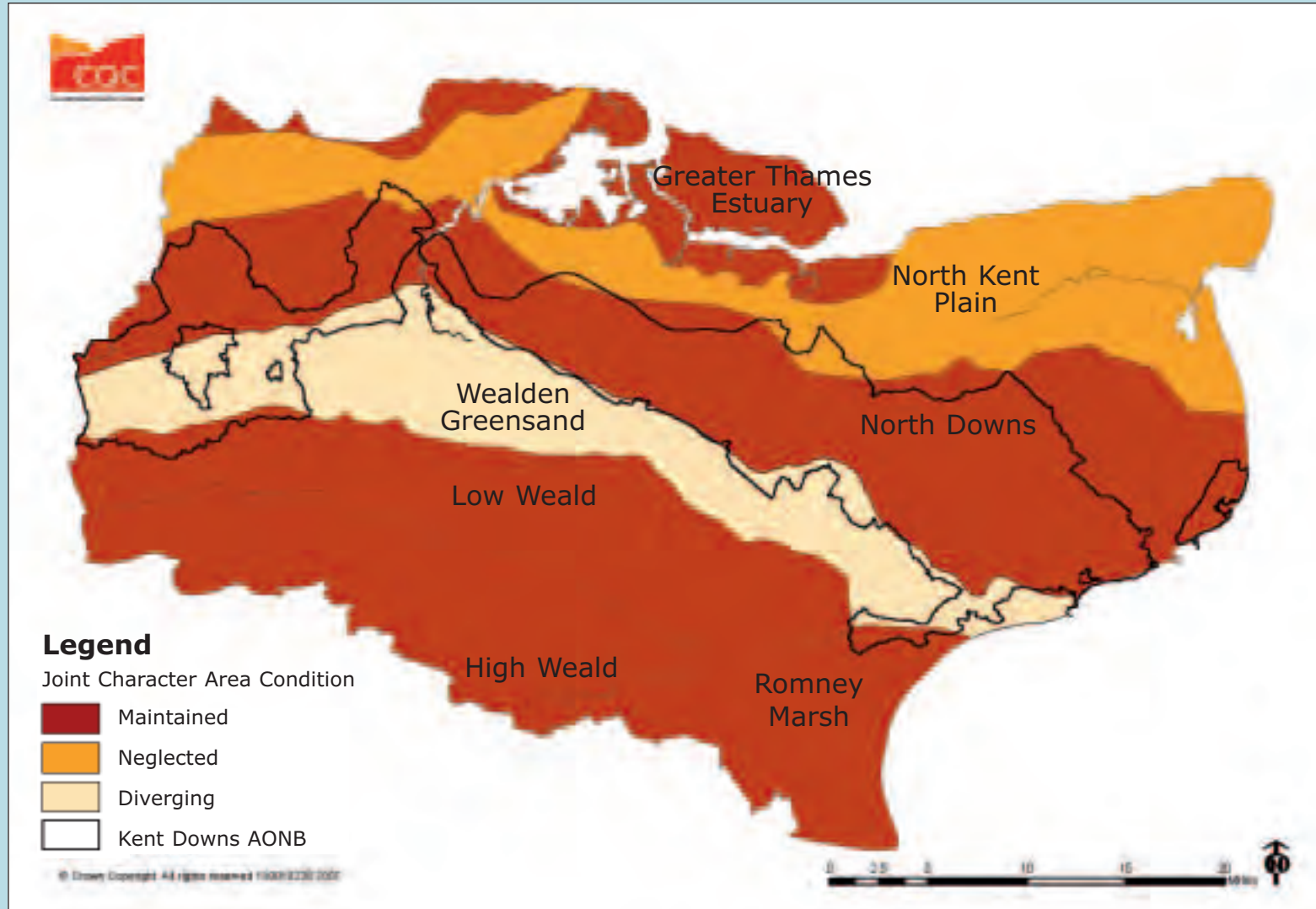
## Access to the Kent Downs AONB ... can provide benefits to health and well-being as well as supporting the local community

	Consistent with vision	Inconsistent with vis
Stable	<b>Maintained</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Trees and woodland</li> <li>• Agriculture</li> <li>• Semi-natural habitats</li> <li>• Historic features</li> <li>• River and coastal</li> </ul>	<b>Neglected</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Boundary features</li> </ul>
Changing	<b>Enhancing</b>	<b>Diverging</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Settlement and development</li> </ul>

**Table 3**  
CQC Assessment of Key Components of North Downs Joint Cluster Area

# 1

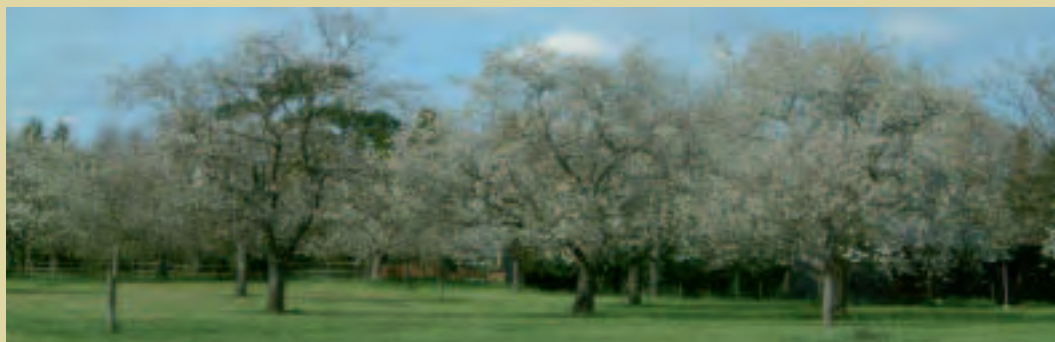
## SETTING THE SCENE



**Figure 1** Joint Character Area Condition

# A VISION FOR THE KENT DOWNS AONB IN 2029

# 2



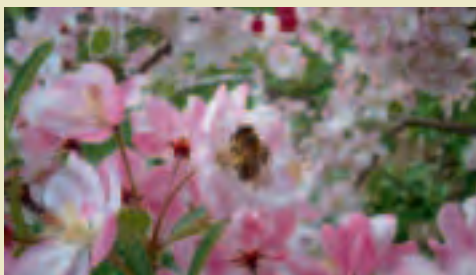
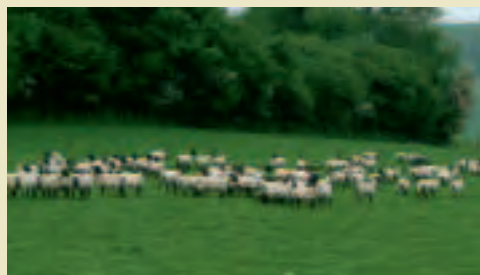
## ■ The Kent Downs in 2029

### ■ The overall vision for 2029

- The management of the Kent Downs AONB
- Landform and landscape character
- Biodiversity-rich habitats
- Farmed landscape
- Woodland and trees
- Historic and cultural heritage
- Natural resources, tranquillity and remoteness
- Vibrant communities
- Sustainable development and travel
- Access, enjoyment and understanding
- Climate change

# 2

A VISION FOR THE  
KENT DOWNS AONB



THE  
KENT DOWNS  
IN 2029

## 2.1

## THE KENT DOWNS IN 2029

**In the first AONB Management Plan we set an agreed 20 year vision. The 2004 vision remains fundamentally unchanged but has been reviewed to reflect the changes we have seen since it was set.**

The Vision for 2029 describes the Kent Downs AONB that we wish to be passed on to future generations. It takes a positive but realistic approach, by facing up to changes that are inevitable: pressure from development and traffic, land use and lifestyle changes, as well as technological advances and trends at a national or international level such as climate change. The Vision includes things that people would wish to remain much as they are now, as well as enhancements that should be made. It provides a future view of the AONB for all people involved in decision-making and actions that affect the landscape and life of the Kent Downs.



**Photo:**  
cliff between Kingsdown  
and St Margarets

## 2.1.1 THE OVERALL VISION FOR 2029

**The qualities and distinctive features of the Kent Downs AONB, the dramatic south-facing scarp, secluded dry valleys, network of tiny lanes, isolated farmsteads, churches and oasts, orchards, dramatic cliffs, the ancient woodlands and delicate chalk grassland along with the ancient, remote and tranquil qualities, remain valued, secure and strengthened.**

The Kent Downs has become a landscape where change supports the distinctive features of the AONB and responses to pressure for development and climate change have enhanced landscape character. The Kent Downs landscape is enjoyed and cherished and its future conservation and enhancement is a certainty.

Positive partnerships, local people and land managers act together to conserve, enhance and promote a nationally recognised and valued landscape.



**Photo:**  
chalk grassland

### The management of the Kent Downs AONB

**In 2029... the Kent Downs AONB is recognised and valued.**

It is a landscape that is cherished and held in the highest esteem as a national and local asset by those who have influence in its future and those who live, work and visit it. Residents and visitors know where the AONB is and they understand and support the purpose of its designation. The Kent Downs AONB partnership is acknowledged and supported as the main advocate and champion for the AONB; organisations delivering positive action on the ground are strongly engaged in the partnership and management planning and operate in a coordinated way through the management plan. The partnership is open to all opinions about the conservation and management of the AONB and is adaptive to the consequences of short and long-term changes such as climate change.

### Landform and landscape character

**In 2029... the rich diversity of landscape character and qualities distinctive to the Kent Downs are protected, enhanced and managed to the highest standards in a coordinated and continual programme.** The essential components of natural beauty, including the underlying geology, landform and views, as well as its special characteristics, are recognised and strengthened and landscape character is at the heart of decisions on land use, responses to climate change and development.

The qualities and distinctive features of the Kent Downs AONB...remain valued, secure and strengthened



# 2

A VISION FOR THE  
KENT DOWNS AONB

## Biodiversity-rich habitats

**In 2029... the rich tapestry of distinctive wildlife habitats are in favourable, resilient condition and individual species flourish.** A matrix of wildlife habitats span the AONB with functional connectivity as well as interconnecting field margins and ponds, hedgerows, headlands, road verges and ditches across the farmed and wooded landscape. These allow both rare and common and widespread animals and plants to expand, prosper and support resilience to the impacts of climate change. The extent and quality of chalk grassland in favourable management has significantly increased, forming corridors along the escarpment and the main dry valleys, grazed by a range of livestock. Policy and funding regimes recognise and support the distinctive and special characteristics of the AONB landscape.

## Farmed landscape

**In 2029... the Kent Downs AONB is a place where agriculture is appreciated for its pivotal role in the conservation of natural beauty and landscape character.** Sustainable farming is the predominant land-use of the AONB and the heritage of mixed farming (of arable, livestock and

horticulture) is retained. There is a greater understanding of the role of farming and more opportunities to visit and understand farming systems. Despite the volatility of agricultural markets and production a broad range of crops are produced that are suited to the increasing extremes of climate, local conditions and market forces. Pasture is well managed by grazing and orchards and hop gardens retain a vital role in the landscape. The high quality products of the Kent Downs are available locally and high environmental quality is a market advantage.

## Woodland and trees

**In 2029... the network of ancient and new woodland is conserved and enhanced for its landscape, wildlife and historic value and its extent is intact.** Sustainably managed woodlands supply buoyant local markets for timber, coppice products and wood fuel, and woodlands, managed in an integrated way also provide well-used and well-managed places for leisure, country pursuits and recreation.



THE  
KENT DOWNS  
IN 2029



**Photo:**  
Thurnham



**Photo:**  
coppice

# 2

A VISION FOR THE  
KENT DOWNS AONB

## Historic and cultural heritage

**In 2029... the rich heritage of historic buildings, settlements and sites that characterise the Kent Downs' historic and cultural fabric are maintained in favourable condition and are enhanced to reflect their local character.**

The environmental performance of historic buildings is enhanced in a way that is sensitive to their character. They are understood and cherished by local people and visitors alike for their intrinsic value and for their important contribution to quality of life and rural economy. Vibrant and exciting cultural interpretation and celebration of the Kent Downs is strongly supported.

## Natural resources, tranquillity and remoteness

**In 2029... great care is taken by farmers, landowners and managers to conserve and manage the natural resources of the environment particularly soil, ground and river water.** Many communities, both inside and outside the AONB have reduced their ecological footprint and have energy fuelled by products from the Kent Downs, particularly wood fuels and other renewable energy sources appropriate to the landscape. Important areas of tranquillity have been identified, protected and expanded and provide 'oases of calm' away from increased traffic volumes. Worked out quarry sites have been restored to enhance local landscape character.

## Vibrant communities

**In 2029... local people are involved and are central to the important processes that care for the Kent Downs, and have a clear sense of ownership and belonging within the AONB.** They have a strong and influential say in development within their communities through pro-active consultation and engagement processes and are involved through their work and voluntary activity in the conservation and enhancement of the Kent Downs. People choose to buy goods and services locally because of their quality, value and benefit to the environment and local economy.

## Sustainable development and travel

**In 2029... new development within the AONB and restoration and conversion work to existing buildings, reinforce and enhance the character and distinctiveness of the settlements and landscape of their settings.** High quality, carbon neutral modern design fits neatly and complements the traditions of the past.

As the surrounding urban areas have expanded considerably, innovative management techniques successfully address the increasing pressure on the AONB as a place for outdoor recreation and leisure, as a rural place in which to live and from which to commute. There is now greater awareness, celebration and involvement in the Kent Downs by people from the surrounding towns and a positive and sustainable exchange of goods and services between the town and countryside.

Residents and visitors to the AONB actively choose to travel using effective, good value high quality public transport networks, as well as by walking and cycling because it is safe and enjoyable to do so.



THE  
KENT DOWNS  
IN 2029

**Photo:**  
Lenham

# 2

## A VISION FOR THE KENT DOWNS AONB

Development adjacent to the AONB minimises its impact on views in and out of the AONB and its setting. Opportunities have been taken to reduce and remove the impact of unsightly development and infrastructure on the beauty and tranquil qualities of the landscape. The net result of development has been to enhance the special and distinctive characteristics of the Kent Downs.

### Access, enjoyment and understanding

**In 2029... the Kent Downs AONB is a place where there is opportunity and access for all people and they feel welcome to participate in quiet recreation for relaxation, enjoyment, understanding, and for cultural and artistic expression which does not detract from the natural beauty.**

Improved management ensures that the Public Rights of Way and much of the highway network is safe, quiet and convenient for walkers, cyclists and horse riders. Maintenance of the Public Rights of Way and highway network will be sympathetic to biodiversity and landscape character.



**Photo:**  
Stour Valley Arts,  
Kings Wood

The landscapes of the Kent Downs are places of increasing tranquillity because the importance of this vital element of natural beauty is recognised and decisions and actions have improved rather than detracted from this valuable resource. The Kent Downs AONB is recognised, valued and celebrated by residents, and by those who do not live there but may visit or those who can simply delight in the fact that it is there.

### Climate change

**In 2029... the impacts of Climate Change are being felt but the mitigation and adaptive responses taken to this major challenge are intelligent, effective, measure up to the challenge and are carefully chosen to enhance the qualities and distinctiveness of the landscape rather than detracting from it.** The functions and services that the Kent Downs landscape provides to people, the recreational opportunities, solace, food and fuel remain intact and important to a larger population.



**Photos:**  
story telling event;  
the North Downs Way





## ■ The management of the Kent Downs AONB

- The role of the Kent Downs AONB Partnership
- The role of this Management Plan revision
- The role of Management Plan policies
- Who is the plan for?
- What will the Management Plan achieve?
- How has this Management Plan revision been prepared?
- Commitment and support from other relevant authorities
- Maintaining productive partnerships
- Management of the AONB – aims
- Management of the AONB – policies

# 3

THE MANAGEMENT  
OF THE AONB



THE  
MANAGEMENT  
OF THE AONB

## 3.1

# THE MANAGEMENT OF THE KENT DOWNS AONB

### 3.1.1

## THE ROLE OF THE KENT DOWNS AONB PARTNERSHIP



**Within an area as large and varied as the Kent Downs, there are many hundreds of stakeholders who have a role in managing the landscape, supporting local business and communities and enabling quiet recreation. The Joint Advisory Committee, above all others, has a pivotal role to play to help realise the strategic vision for the Kent Downs AONB, and to oversee the Management Plan.**

The **Joint Advisory Committee (JAC)** for the Kent Downs AONB was established in July 1997 and is at the heart of the partnership. The membership of the JAC is made up of the twelve local authorities who have the responsibility jointly to prepare and review the Management Plan namely: Ashford, Bromley, Canterbury, Dover, Gravesham, Kent, Maidstone, Medway, Sevenoaks, Shepway, Swale and Tonbridge & Malling; as well as Natural England. Additional advisory members are the Environment Agency, Country Land and Business Association (CLA), the National Farmers Union (NFU), Kent Association of Parish Councils (KAPC) and Action with Communities in Rural Kent.

**Photo:**  
WCCP volunteers

# 3

## THE MANAGEMENT OF THE AONB

An Executive of representatives from the JAC, with some outside advisors, advises the work of the Kent Downs AONB Unit. At a much larger scale, a Kent Downs Forum is held once a year at a 'Countryside Day' for a wide audience, to discuss current issues and themes and inform the agenda for the forthcoming year.

The AONB Unit is employed by the County Council and works on behalf of the JAC to carry out the preparation and review of the Management Plan, to advocate its policies and work in partnership to deliver a range of actions described in the Action Plan.

In 1997, the Kent Downs AONB had one officer, a minimal budget and there were no projects in place except for local authority countryside management. Increased political support and funding have enabled the AONB Unit to expand its staffing and capacity. There are now (2008) 5 'core staff' and 11 project staff co-ordinating a number of AONB initiatives. Inevitably, as capacity has expanded, so have the ambitions and expectations of our partners.

Much that has been achieved since the publication of the first Kent Downs Management Plan has been through the many delivery partners who work on the ground in the AONB. The Countryside Projects and Partnerships, the Country Parks teams and Public Rights of Way Officers, the charitable sector of wildlife groups, the Kent Wildlife Trust, Woodland Trust, Farmers Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG), The National Trust, Plantlife and Butterfly Conservation and, of course, the many private farmers and land owners carrying out positive action all have a vital role. All work hard to secure both their individual aims but in support of the aims and policies of this Management Plan. Without the consistent support and energy of these groups, and the strategic support given to them by host authorities and funding partners, then much significant achievement of the first plan would simply not have happened.

Funding has been provided for core and project work from a variety of sources, particularly from Natural England, the Local Authorities, European Regional Development Fund (Interreg), Heritage Lottery Fund and the Rail Link Countryside Initiative. These have taken forward a number of activities under the core functions, and deliver a wide range of project programmes.



THE  
MANAGEMENT  
OF THE AONB



**Photo:**  
gate at  
Magpie Bottom



**Photo:**  
JAC meeting

### 3.1.2 THE ROLE OF THIS MANAGEMENT PLAN REVISION

The first statutory Management Plan was adopted in April 2004 and runs until April 2009. In their formal observations the Countryside Agency recognised the first Kent Downs AONB Management Plan as representing 'exemplary practice'.

This revised Management Plan is based fundamentally on the original plan. It justifies and details the policies and actions for guiding the conservation and enhancement of the Kent Downs

AONB. It has been prepared by the Kent Downs AONB Unit and Joint Advisory Committee (JAC) for, and on behalf of, the twelve local authorities that have land within the Kent Downs.

**It therefore fulfils the statutory requirements under the Countryside and Rights of Way (CRoW) Act 2000 that all local authorities with AONBs in their area are required, jointly, to produce and revise an AONB Management Plan.**

### 3.1.3 THE STATUS AND ROLE OF MANAGEMENT PLAN POLICIES

In relation to the town and country planning system it is clear that this plan **formulates local authority policies for the management of the AONB and for carrying out their functions in relation to it** (as required by the CRoW Act). The Management Plan does not formulate land use planning policies. The AONB management plan policies are therefore only a component of the decision making process in planning applications. The Management Plan takes forward relevant policies of the Kent and Medway Structure Plan, the South East Plan and furthers the aims of Government's Planning Policy 7.

In relation to supplementary guidance, Government's Planning Policy Statement 12 states that:

Supplementary guidance to assist the delivery of development may be prepared by a government agency, Regional Planning Body or a County Council or other body (e.g. AONB committee) where this would provide economies in production and the avoidance of duplication e.g. where the information in it would apply to areas greater than single districts. Such guidance would not be a supplementary planning document. However, if the same disciplines of consultation and sustainability appraisal (where necessary) are applied, such information might, subject to the circumstances of a particular case, be afforded a weight commensurate with that of SPDs in decision making.

The preparation of the review of this management plan was subject to extensive public engagement and consultation as defined by an agreed Statement of Community and Stakeholder Involvement (SCI). It was also subject to a Strategic Environmental Appraisal (SEA), Sustainability Appraisal (SA) and Appropriate Assessment (AA) under the Habitat Regulations.



**Photo:**  
Chilham Village Design  
Statement workshop

### The Role of Policies

The overarching aim of the policies of this Management Plan is to achieve the purpose of the AONB designation.

The Guidance for the review of AONB Management Plans (CA 221 September 2006) describes a policy as the means by which to achieve the objective 'this is how we will get things done'. Primarily policies are there as plans of action which help define what will be encouraged, promoted, supported and pursued; policies are also needed to help stop negative impacts on Kent Downs.

The policies of the AONB Management Plan will be reflected and in part implemented through policies in each Local Development Framework and in development control decisions.

An action is what the AONB partnership wants to do and should be grounded in policy e.g. investment in on the ground delivery, guidance, engagement in a process or research etc. An action



plan has been developed in partnership with the Joint Advisory Committee and other important partners in the management of the AONB.

In this review the policy wording and structure of the plan has been reconsidered. This is because the review process identified a need to be clearer about what the aims and objectives of the policy are and what the policy wording actually means. Policies have been divided into intent and control policies, both of which being critical to ensure the conservation and enhancement of the AONB.

*An action plan has been developed  
in partnership with the Joint  
Advisory Committee and other  
important partners*



**Key policy words and levels of intervention proposed:**

<b>Intent policies</b>		<b>Control policies</b>	
<b>Policy wording</b>	<b>Intervention proposed</b>	<b>Policy wording</b>	<b>Intervention proposed</b>
<b>Pursue</b>	The AONB Local Authorities, wider partnership and Unit will actively seek to ensure that the policy intention is achieved through leading a series of their own interventions, developing policies, actions and development control decisions. This will include seeking resources and support from other agencies	<b>Oppose</b>	The AONB Unit and partnership will engage in the active opposition (for instance to development proposals) through responses to development control consultations or attending public inquiries
<b>Support</b>	The AONB Local Authorities, wider partnership and Unit will provide support through policy and development control decisions, influence others, seek resources and occasionally intervene to seek to achieve the policy intention	<b>Resist</b>	The AONB Unit and partnership will provide evidence and support to seek to overcome risks to the qualities and special characteristics of the AONB
<b>Encourage</b>	The AONB Local Authorities, wider partnership and Unit will endorse the actions of others, develop policies and development control decisions and occasionally seek resources and influence to achieve the policy intention	<b>Will and shall</b>	A strong intention for the AONB Unit, partnership and others to achieve the aim/s and objective/s stated in the policy
<b>Maintain</b>	Little or no intervention expected from Local Authorities, Partnership or Unit but policies and actions required to prevent negative change will be expected	<b>Expect/ed</b>	The AONB Unit, partnership and others will be required to comply with the level of quality and action inferred by the policy and no support or encouragement would be given by the partnership to actions challenging the spirit of the policy
<b>Monitor</b>	To seek to understand change in condition of issue		



### 3.1.4 WHO IS THE PLAN FOR?

**First and foremost, the Management Plan and its policies are for the local authorities of the AONB – this is the policy and action framework which will influence and determine decision-making, advice and resource allocation for all their relevant functions in, and affecting, the AONB.**

Second, this Management Plan is for all the government agencies, statutory undertakers, utilities and public bodies which have a 'duty of regard' for the purposes of the AONB designation in their functions and operations. All public bodies and relevant authorities have to demonstrate that they have taken into account the purposes of the AONB designation in all their functions within the area. This Management Plan will inform, guide and influence that process.

Finally, and importantly, this is a plan for everyone who cares for and manages the AONB, for those who live, work or play in the Kent Downs. The impact and difference that can be made by farmers and land managers, individuals, countryside management organisations, community and voluntary organisations, when viewed as a whole is critical to the future of the Kent Downs. We intend that this Management Plan is practical and relevant, and that it will help to advise and influence the activities within, the decisions taken and the perception people have of the Kent Downs.



### 3.1.5 WHAT WILL THE MANAGEMENT PLAN ACHIEVE?

- An **integrated** approach and direction for the conservation and enhancement of the natural beauty of the AONB as a whole, as well as the specific needs of different areas and different interest groups that use it.
- **Clarity** about the current state of the Kent Downs AONB and a clear vision of how we would like it to be in future.
- **Raised awareness** of the complex and changing nature of issues affecting the AONB.
- **Linkage** of policies and action, and a common commitment to deliver them, between the broad range of statutory, advisory, business and voluntary partners and individuals.
- A **shared approach** to ensure efficient use of financial and staff resources, time and effort to deliver high-quality, cost effective, appropriate, practical and realistic actions.
- A **process for monitoring** and evaluating progress and achievements, as well as a parallel monitoring programme to assess the condition of the Kent Downs AONB.



**Photo:**  
Cowslips

### 3.1.6 HOW HAS THIS MANAGEMENT PLAN REVISION BEEN PREPARED?

Preparation of the original Management Plan followed Management Plan Guidance and supplementary guidance from the Countryside Agency (CA23, November 2001), and consisted of seven stages: public participation and drafting, public consultation, amendments, agreement, adoption, publication and implementation.

The revision of the plan has had an even more rigorous process which follows the Guidance for the review of AONB Management Plans (CA 221, 2006) and has included:

- Statement of Community and Stakeholder involvement – establishing how individuals and organisations wish to be involved in the review process.
- Strategic Environmental Assessment and Sustainability Scoping study.
- Review of the existing plan – a consultation on the content and priorities of the existing Management Plan.



**Photo:**  
Shakespeare Cliff  
and Samphire Hoe

- Landscape Character Assessment review – a field review of the AONB Landscape Character Areas to help set spatial priorities and to understand areas of opportunity and threat.
- Report and agreement to proceed, following the early consultation agreement from the JAC that it is expedient to review the plan.
- Public and stakeholder engagement in the issues and options – updating the priorities established for the original plan.
- Expert opinion debates – a series of debates with specialist audience to consider the existing plan and to look at where the changes in priority have occurred, reconfirm the special characteristics of the Kent Downs, consider the issues and threats, the aims and the policies which should be included in the revised plan and to consider alternatives and justify, with evidence, their conclusions.
- Updating the evidence base of the original plan – considering new information, policies and strategies as well as the trends. Reviewing the monitoring indicators set in the original Management Plan.
- Draft review – A draft reviewed management plan was prepared and consulted on widely – consultation was actively promoted. Consultation responses were logged and the Management Plan amended to reflect the comments made.
- Final Draft – a final draft plan was circulated only to the JAC partners for final comments and to ensure that previous comments have been properly taken into account.
- Adoption – following the advice of the JAC this plan has been adopted by the Kent Downs Local Authorities as formulating their policies for the management of the AONB and for carrying out their functions in relation to it.



### 3.1.7 COMMITMENT AND SUPPORT FROM OTHER RELEVANT AUTHORITIES

The strengthened status of AONBs through the provisions of the CRoW Act has brought commitments from a wide range of organisations – including those who are not directly involved in the AONB partnership. Sec 85, Part IV of the CRoW Act requires all public bodies and relevant authorities to demonstrate that they have taken account of the purposes of the AONB in their decision making. This new duty has already been met positively by a number of organisations.

Leading the way is the **Forestry Commission**, with the signing of a National Joint Accord in July 2001 with the National Association of AONBs. The Forestry Commission has recognised the important role that woodland plays in defining the natural beauty of many of England's AONBs.

In the South East, a Statement of Intent was agreed in November 2002 between the Countryside Agency, Defra, Government Office for the South East (GoSE), South East England Development Agency (SEEDA), South East England Regional Assembly (SEERA) and the ten 'nationally protected landscapes' wholly within the South East Region.



**Photo:**  
Parish Design  
Statement

In December 2004 **English Heritage** agreed an accord with the National Association of AONBs which recognised the key role AONBs can have in the sustainable management of the historic environment.

The **South East England Protected Landscapes Partnership** is also working to demonstrate the growing importance of the regional agenda and profile of AONBs. AONBs cover 33% of the South East Region, and are therefore important in the delivery of environmental, economic and social strategies. This partnership is also striving to develop further partnerships to deliver the primary and secondary purposes of AONB designation.

The **National Association of AONBs** (NAAONB) was established in 1998 and represents all the AONBs in England and Wales. It provides a national forum for all elected members, officers and AONB staff involved in AONBs to exchange information, knowledge and best practice. It also provides a collective national voice, campaigning and lobbying on behalf of AONBs, working with its equivalent, the Association of National Parks.

At an international level, the **Europarc Federation** is the umbrella organisation of Europe's protected areas. It champions the remit and work of nationally protected landscapes – AONBs, National Parks, regional parks, nature parks and biosphere reserves in 37 countries, with the common aim of protecting Europe's unique variety of wildlife, habitats and landscapes.

**It is clear that positive, responsive and effective partnerships are the key to the successful delivery of the Management Plan** and to the assured future for the Kent Downs AONB as a nationally important and valued landscape.



### 3.1.8 MAINTAINING PRODUCTIVE PARTNERSHIPS

#### Principles for a successful AONB partnership:

- Set high standards and establish and promote good practice in all areas of work.
- Ensure efficient and cost effective use of staff and financial resources.
- Avoid duplicated effort.
- Share experiences and knowledge.
- Promote consistent messages to all stakeholders, including landowners and funding bodies.
- Establish a networking culture to enable cross-fertilisation of ideas.
- Promote and co-ordinate action to address strategic issues.
- Develop a suitably strong and diverse identity promoted by all parties.
- Help to develop initiatives that are led by other partners.



### 3.1.9 MANAGEMENT OF THE AONB – AIMS

#### A landscape in which:

- 1 The vision, policies and actions of the AONB Management Plan are delivered through strong and coordinated partnerships and individual actions as well as development policy and development control decisions.
- 2 The AONB partnership provides leadership and direction for the future of the AONB but is open and receptive to the views of all people, and is adaptive and flexible to changing circumstances and events.



**Photos:**  
cherries



**Photo:**  
beach at Kingsdown

## 3.1.10 MANAGEMENT OF THE AONB – POLICIES

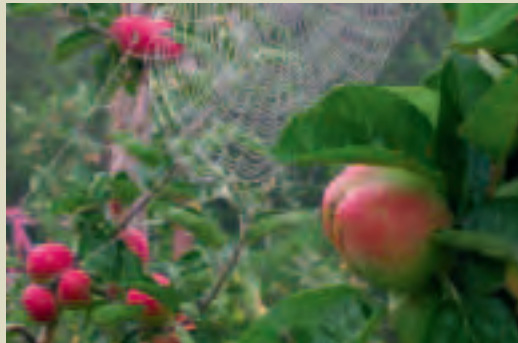
- MPP1** The Kent Downs AONB partnership and Management Plan will be the first point of reference and supported as the primary means to develop, co-ordinate and promote policies and new opportunities for the management, conservation and enhancement of the AONB.
- MPP2** Individual local authorities will give high priority to the AONB Management Plan vision and policies in Local Development Framework policies, Area Action Plans, development control decisions and planning enforcement cases.
- MPP3** The development of strong working partnerships to implement the vision policies and actions of the AONB management plan with those organisations with a statutory duty of regard for AONB purposes, particularly public bodies and statutory undertakers will be pursued.
- MPP4** The assertion of the Kent Downs AONB vision, policies and aims in all national, regional and local policy and practice documents, and with statutory undertakers where relevant and applicable will be pursued.
- MPP5** Collaborative working partnerships and initiatives with partnerships for neighbouring Protected Landscapes particularly the Surrey Hills, High Weald and Sussex Downs AONBs, and le Parc Naturel Régional des Caps et Marais d’Opale, and with the family of AONBs and protected landscape generally through the South East Protected Landscapes Forum, National Association of AONBs and the Europarc Federation will be pursued.
- MPP6** The involvement of relevant interest groups, especially local communities, in decisions on the future of the Kent Downs AONB, at a strategic level through the Management Plan and AONB Forum, and at a local level through local consultations and project development will be pursued.
- MPP7** The effective use of existing resources and seeking additional resources to support partnerships and projects that conserve and enhance the character of the AONB in accordance with the Management Plan will be pursued.
- MPP8** The promotion of the importance, qualities and sensitivity of the Kent Downs AONB and highlighting of issues affecting it will be pursued.
- MPP9** Cooperative working with organisations active in the Kent Downs AONB to develop and/or promote projects and work programmes to support the AONB Management Plan vision, policies and actions will be pursued.



**Photo:**  
River Darent at  
Shoreham

# COMPONENTS OF NATURAL BEAUTY

# 4



Landform and landscape character

Biodiversity

Farmed landscape

Woodlands and trees

Historic and cultural heritage

Geology and natural resources

**Quality of life components:**

Vibrant communities

Sustainable development and travel

Access, enjoyment and understanding

# 4

COMPONENTS OF  
NATURAL BEAUTY



LANDFORM  
AND  
LANDSCAPE  
CHARACTER

## 4.1

## LANDFORM AND LANDSCAPE CHARACTER



**Photo:**  
Hollingbourne Vale

### OVERVIEW

**The landform and landscape characteristics that directly relate to the natural beauty of the Kent Downs landscape were identified when the Kent Downs AONB was designated in 1968. This was reconfirmed in the 1995 AONB Landscape Assessment and again in the views of the public and stakeholders, expressed through the public participation and consultation process for the original AONB Management Plan and this review.**

# 4

## COMPONENTS OF NATURAL BEAUTY

### 4.1.1 LANDFORM OF THE KENT DOWNS

**The landform of the AONB underlies the Natural Beauty of the area. It is complex and varied, but is characterised by six basic components:**

#### **The Chalk Ridge**

The long arc of the North Downs chalk ridge is the most dominant element of the AONB, consisting of the steep, south-facing scarp slope rising above the Gault clay vale below, the open expansive plateau tops and gentle dip slopes traversed by many hidden, dry valleys. Spectacular views are offered along the chalk escarpment across the low Weald, the river valleys and the towns below. Perhaps more surprising and intriguing are the views from the highest and most open parts of the plateau and dip-slopes looking towards London and the Thames and Swale estuaries.



**Photo:**  
between Kingsdown  
and St Margaret's

#### **The White Cliffs Heritage Coasts**

The ridge of chalk ends at the English Channel forming the Dover White Cliffs, at their highest point reaching 150 metres above sea level. The scale of the Kent Downs landscape is at its greatest here. The high vertical cliffs and the white chalk contrast starkly with the foreshore and constantly changing sea below, providing an awe-inspiring panorama. The expansiveness and drama is increased further by the bustle of the ferries and shipping seen from many parts of the White Cliffs and enticing glimpses of the French coast on the horizon.



**Photo:**  
White Cliffs  
Heritage Coast



# 4

## COMPONENTS OF NATURAL BEAUTY

### The Greensand Ridge and Lympne escarpment

The undulating Greensand Ridge rises to one of the highest points in southeast England at 250 metres at Toy's Hill. The views from along the length of the Greensand Ridge are some of the best in southern England, and on a clear day, the High Weald and the South Downs beyond can be seen.

In the east Kent Downs, the Lympne escarpment of calcareous sandstone and Ragstone provides a spur of higher ground affording dramatic views across the near-level Romney Marsh and Hythe Bay.



**Photo:**  
Lenham

### The river valleys

Further diversity is provided at the points where the three main rivers, the Darent, Medway and the Great Stour cut through the chalk. Each river flows in a northerly direction and they form broad, steep-sided valleys with open vistas along the river corridors. The River Medway does not lie in the AONB itself, although parts of its tidal flood plain are within the boundary.

The landform and landscape characteristics that directly relate to the natural beauty of the Kent Downs landscape were identified when the Kent Downs AONB was designated in 1968



**Photo:**  
River Stour near  
Chilham Mill



# 4

## COMPONENTS OF NATURAL BEAUTY

### Scalloped and hidden dry valleys

Dry valleys are a beautiful and intimate feature of much of the Kent Downs landscape and they are often criss-crossed by a maze of tiny, sunken one track lanes. The valleys often have a narrow strip of rough grassland, scrub or woodland along their steepest slopes, locally known as shaves, which are important for wildlife. The larger dry valleys such as Elham and Alkham have the sporadic winterbournes such as the Nailbourne in Elham, flowing occasionally during the very wettest winters.

### Expansive open plateaux

North of the chalk scarp the plateaux offer huge open landscapes with a simple structure and sometimes surprising and dramatic views to the Thames Valley. Often dominated by stiff clay with flint soils overlying the solid chalk, the soils were historically difficult to cultivate and were used extensively for sheep grazing. Much of the ancient woodland remains framing the plateaux and enclosing the dry valleys.



**Photo:**  
Alkham Valley,  
hidden dry valley

### Landcover

The Kent Land Cover Change survey (2002) provides information on the extent and change in land cover categories in the AONB from 1961 to 1999. Table 3 shows that there has been a degree of change in land cover type during this 30 year period at an AONB scale in percentage terms.

Landcover	1961		1999		Change	
	Extent (Ha)	% AONB	Extent (Ha)	% AONB	Area change from 1961 to 1999	Change of 1961 resource
Agriculture	64227	73.5	64512	73.8	+285	+0.4
Woodland	19330	22.1	17579	20.1	-1751	-9.1
Development	3567	4.1	5092	5.8	+1525	+42.8
Wetland	80	0.1	133	0.2	+53	+66.3
Coastal	9	0.01	10	0.01	+1	+11.1
Other inc. sand, rock & landfill	223	0.2	110	0.1	-113	-50.7



**Photo:**  
Hollingbourne,  
expansive open  
plateau



**Table 3**  
Broad land cover  
change in the AONB  
between 1961 and  
1999

## 4.1.2 THE KENT DOWNS LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREAS

The **Kent Downs AONB Landscape Assessment** prepared by the Countryside Commission (1995 CCP 479) defined key landscape components and how they combine to give a sense of place, special character and quality to the AONB. The human dimension in the development of landscapes is inextricably linked with the landscape character which is valued today. The assessment identified 13 distinctive Landscape Character Areas in the AONB. Many of the Character areas have been divided into local character areas which look in more detail at the specific characteristics of localities and identify some of the pressures facing them. Summary descriptions of the Landscape Character areas with summary condition assessments of the local character areas are included in this section of the plan.

The 2004 Landscape Assessment of Kent<sup>1</sup> and local level landscape character assessments for Sevenoaks, Maidstone, Medway and areas of Canterbury drew on the Countryside Commission work and provide more detail on landscape characteristics, the condition of local landscape areas and their robustness and capacity to withstand or absorb change. Importantly this work also makes recommendations on how to conserve and restore landscape character. Further local landscape character assessments for each local authority district covered by the Kent Downs are expected to be produced over the period covered by this Management Plan.

During the review of the Management Plan the Kent Downs AONB Unit visited the landscape character areas to carry out a field review and consider the relevance of the existing management plan policies for each landscape character area. This analysis considered both opportunities and the threats in each area. This work has influenced the spatial prioritisation and summary actions proposed and is available through the AONB Unit.

<sup>1</sup> (Babtie for Kent County Council 2004)

<sup>2</sup> Planning Policy Statement 7 Communities and Local Government

National policy guidance in Planning Policy Statement 7 (PPS 7)<sup>2</sup> promotes the use of a landscape character approach and an important change in this revised AONB Management Plan is to place more emphasis on landscape character and spatial priority setting on the basis of landscape character area condition and sensitivity analysis. The Guidance for the Review of AONB management plans (CA221 2006) suggests a stronger spatial dimension in the review.

In the section below each Landscape Character Area in the Kent Downs AONB is described. For each local character area an outline summary of its **condition** and **sensitivity** is described – this is taken from the Landscape Assessment of Kent. In addition summary and example actions are proposed.

**Landscape condition** is strongly influenced by the impact of external factors. The assessment of condition evaluates the pattern of the landscape and the presence of incongruous features on the unity of the landscape. It also evaluates how well the landscape functions as a habitat for wildlife and the condition of cultural or 'man-made' elements such as enclosure, built elements and roads. Urban fringe areas are often under pressure which often means that these areas are described as being in a poor condition whilst other more remote areas may still have the same basic features but be in a better condition. It is therefore practical to assume that condition may vary throughout a character area so that any conclusions should be regarded as a summary of the overall situation.

**Visual Unity** is the result of an analysis of the Pattern of Elements, for example the pattern of vegetation, enclosure, settlement, and the relationship of these to the landform etc., weighed against the number of Detracting Features in the landscape.

**Functional Integrity** is an assessment of how the landscape functions and considers both the influence of man (Cultural Integrity) and nature (Ecological Integrity).



# 4

## COMPONENTS OF NATURAL BEAUTY

<b>Condition</b>	good	<b>Reinforce</b>	<b>Conserve &amp; reinforce</b>	<b>Conserve</b>
	moderate	<b>Create &amp; reinforce</b>	<b>Conserve &amp; create</b>	<b>Conserve &amp; restore</b>
	poor	<b>Create</b>	<b>Restore &amp; create</b>	<b>Restore</b>
		low	moderate	high
		<b>Sensitivity</b>		

**Table 4**  
Condition and sensitivity matrix

### Summary actions

- Reinforce** – actions that strengthen or reinforce distinctive features and patterns in the landscape.
- Conserve and reinforce** – actions that conserve distinctive features and features in good condition, and strengthen and reinforce those features that may be vulnerable.
- Conserve** – actions that encourage the conservation of distinctive features and features in good condition.
- Conserve and restore** – actions that encourage the conservation of distinctive features and features in good condition, whilst restoring elements or areas in poorer condition and removing or mitigating detracting features.
- Conserve and create** – actions that conserve distinctive features and features in good condition, whilst creating new features or areas where they have been lost or are in poor condition.
- Restore** – actions that encourage the restoration of distinctive landscape features and the removal or mitigation of detracting features.
- Restore and create** – actions that restore distinctive features and the removal or mitigation of detracting features, whilst creating new features or areas where they have been lost or are in poor condition.
- Reinforce and create** – actions that strengthen or reinforce distinctive features and patterns in the landscape, whilst creating new features or areas where they have been lost or are in poor condition.
- Create** – actions that create new features or areas where existing elements are lost or in poor condition.

**Condition** is defined by an analysis of Visual Unity and Functional Integrity and is classified as, poor, moderate, and good.

**Sensitivity** is a measure of the ability of a landscape to accept change without causing irreparable damage to the essential fabric and distinctiveness of that landscape. The term change refers to both beneficial changes such as a new woodland as well as

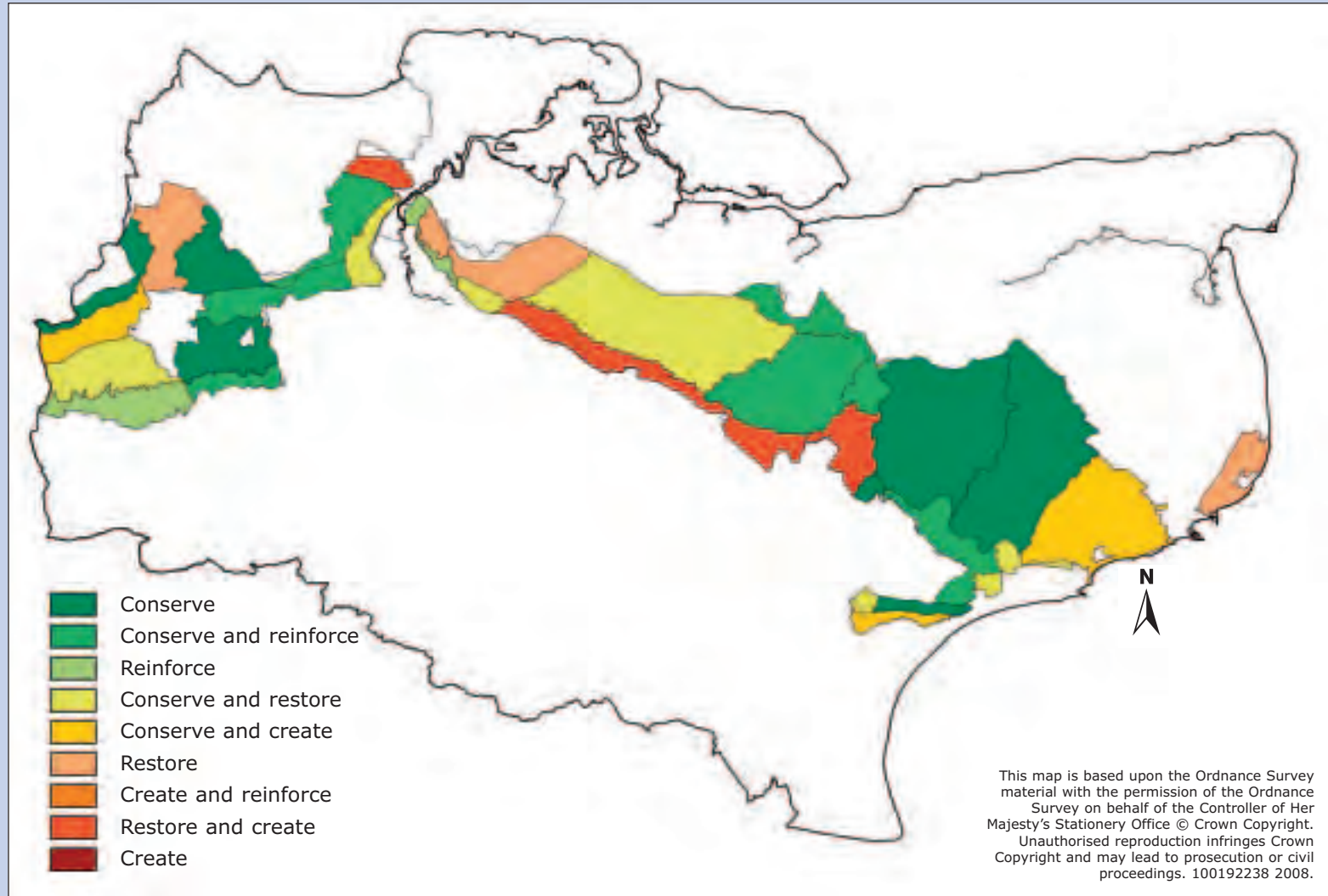
change that may be brought about by new land uses.

**Sensitivity** is defined by an analysis of Sense of Place and Visibility and ranges from low, moderate to high.

The table above shows how condition and sensitivity are compared to propose summary actions.

# 4

## COMPONENTS OF NATURAL BEAUTY



**Figure 2** Landscape character area condition

# 4

## COMPONENTS OF NATURAL BEAUTY

### 4.1.3 SUMMARY DESCRIPTIONS OF KENT DOWNS LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREAS

#### 1 Low Weald – Crockham Hill to Shipbourne

The Low Weald is an open pastoral landscape of gentle, undulating farmland, which stretches away south from the dominant wooded scarp of the greensand ridge. The fields are predominantly pasture, surrounded by a strong pattern of trimmed hedges of thick deciduous shaws. Hedgerow trees, especially oak, are particularly characteristic of this area, thriving on the heavy clay soils. Where hedgerow removal has taken place, some of these oaks have been left as isolated trees in the fields. Elsewhere, fences have been widely used to create new paddocks for livestock, in particular for horses.



LANDFORM  
AND  
LANDSCAPE  
CHARACTER

	Western Low Weald	Eastern Low Weald
<b>Condition</b>	Good	Good
<b>Sensitivity</b>	Moderate	Moderate
<b>Summary Action</b>	Conserve and Reinforce	Conserve and Reinforce
<b>Example Actions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reinforce patterns of hedgerow, woodlands, shaws and water courses</li> <li>• Reinforce historic character</li> <li>• Reinforce rural land use</li> <li>• Reinforce landscape pattern by long-term management</li> <li>• Conserve existing and establish new field and hedgerow oak trees</li> <li>• Improve horse pasture management to reinforce landscape character</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conserve broadleaf woodland</li> <li>• Conserve heathy woodland</li> <li>• Conserve and reinforce estate parkland – including tree cover and boundary features</li> <li>• Reinforce mature standards within farmland and along roads</li> <li>• Conserve the rural setting of settlements, and the setting of greens and commons</li> </ul>

**Low Weald  
local character  
areas**

# 4

## COMPONENTS OF NATURAL BEAUTY

### 2 Sevenoaks Ridge – Westerham to Ightham

The greensand ridge around Sevenoaks is characterised by extensive coniferous and deciduous woodlands which conceal a network of narrow lanes, producing an intimate, secretive landscape. A number of heathy commons occur along the top of the southern scarp from where magnificent views extend across the Low Weald. Between the woodlands, small pastures are divided by overgrown hedges or lines of mature trees. The local greensand has been used in a number of sandstone buildings and walls. In the east around Ightham, woodlands give way to orchards surrounded by tall shelterbelt hedges and occasional cobnut platts producing a highly distinctive and attractive landscape. Historic Parks, for instance Knowle in the ownership of the National Trust, are a feature of this area.



LANDFORM  
AND  
LANDSCAPE  
CHARACTER

	Westerham Greensand	Ightham Greensand
<b>Condition</b>	Moderate	Good
<b>Sensitivity</b>	High	High
<b>Summary Action</b>	Conserve and Restore	Conserve
<b>Example Action</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Replace conifer plantations with native species</li> <li>• Encourage appropriate boundary enhancements and woodland enclosure</li> <li>• Conserve highway characteristics</li> <li>• Conserve area and characteristics of the woodland</li> <li>• Restore and manage heaths and acid grassland</li> <li>• Seek to integrate new development</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conserve acid grasslands</li> <li>• Conserve heathy woodland</li> <li>• Conserve parkland and ancient landmarks</li> <li>• Conserve visual isolation of hamlets and settlements</li> <li>• Reinforce the enclosure of roads with dense hedgerow and no verges</li> <li>• Encourage use of vernacular materials</li> <li>• Support retention of characteristic cobnut platts and apple and pear orchards</li> </ul>

**Sevenoaks Ridge  
local character  
areas**

# 4

## COMPONENTS OF NATURAL BEAUTY

### 3 Darent Valley – Brasted to Farningham

The River Darent rises in Westerham and runs between the greensand ridge and the chalk downs in a wide valley enclosed by deciduous scarp-top woodlands above cultivated lower slopes. These valley-side fields still have a strong hedgerow pattern and support many hedgerow trees. The river flows through a corridor of pasture and riverside trees, such as willow, alder and poplar. In the north, the valley sides wind out into intensively farmed arable fields with few remaining hedges. To the south, intensive cultivation takes place on the scarp foot where there has been significant hedgerow loss. Throughout the valley scattered flint and brick buildings reflect the local underlying geology. The Darent Valley is noted for its distribution of a series of Roman villas, many with Iron Age predecessors demonstrating the long use of this area for human habitation and agriculture, being described as 'one of the earliest cradles of English settlement in Kent'.



LANDFORM  
AND  
LANDSCAPE  
CHARACTER

### Darent Valley local character areas

	West Darent	North Darent	Knockholt
<b>Condition</b>	Moderate	Moderate	Good
<b>Sensitivity</b>	Moderate	High	High
<b>Summary Action</b>	Conserve and Create	Conserve and Restore	Conserve
<b>Example Action</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conserve the form and features of the historic</li> <li>• Parklands and pattern of wet pasture</li> <li>• Create wooded links to the base of the scarp from the wooded ridge</li> <li>• Conserve the features of the Pilgrim's Way</li> <li>• Create wooded links to incorporate the motorway corridor</li> <li>• Conserve and create small copses on the clay vale</li> <li>• Resist suburbanisation of characteristic landscape</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conserve and restore hedges on lower slopes and valley bottom trees</li> <li>• Strengthen pattern of hedgerows and shaws</li> <li>• Conserve wood pasture</li> <li>• Resist suburbanisation of characteristic landscape</li> <li>• Conserve, enhance and seek to connect chalk Downland features</li> <li>• Resist and seek to remove non native species</li> <li>• Conserve and restore water meadows</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conserve the dense woodland cover</li> <li>• Conserve narrow roads and small enclosed pastures</li> <li>• Conserve isolation of farming settlements</li> <li>• Resist and seek to remove non native species</li> <li>• Resist suburbanisation of characteristic landscape</li> </ul>

# 4

## COMPONENTS OF NATURAL BEAUTY

### 4 West Kent Downs – West Kingsdown to Shorne

The West Kent Downs lie between the Darent and the Medway. This is an area of ridges and deep dry valleys, where extensive deciduous woodlands surround large arable fields on the plateaux often separated by thick shaws. Between these plateaux, a series of remote, enclosed dry valleys support small pastures on the lower slopes. Woodland is very significant in this landscape, providing an important backdrop for the rolling landform, the network of small lanes and the settlements and valley pastures. The landscape becomes more open to the north. A certain amount of bungalow development and horticulture extends into some areas and there are several village settlements in the woodlands. Although most of these woodlands are now unmanaged, many were once coppiced and this practice is still carried out at Shorne Wood in the north. Despite pockets of suburbanisation, this area provides an important and high quality rural buffer between the Medway towns and the villages south of Gravesend, such as Meopham.



LANDFORM  
AND  
LANDSCAPE  
CHARACTER

	Luddesdown	Cobham	Kingsdown
<b>Condition</b>	Good	Moderate	Moderate
<b>Sensitivity</b>	Moderate	Moderate	High
<b>Summary Action</b>	Conserve and Reinforce	Conserve and Create	Conserve and Restore
<b>Example Action</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conserve woodland on ridges</li> <li>• Enhance woodland and consider extending woodland shaws into lower slopes</li> <li>• Conserve mix of hedgerow species and management of tall hedgerow</li> <li>• Seek enhancements in areas of equine management.</li> <li>• Conserve, manage and reinforce hedgerow pattern</li> <li>• Resist suburbanisation of characteristic landscape</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conserve and restore the parkland features</li> <li>• Conserve and manage the parkland trees and woodland cover</li> <li>• Restore hedgerow enclosure of agricultural land</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conserve woodland</li> <li>• Promote removal of non native trees and shrubs</li> <li>• Conserve and enhance the management of linear developments and recreational areas</li> <li>• Conserve historic isolated settlement</li> <li>• Conserve pastures and irregular field patterns and hedgerows</li> </ul>

**West Kent Downs  
local character  
areas**

# 4

## COMPONENTS OF NATURAL BEAUTY

### 5 Kemsing Vale – Kemsing to Ryarsh

The Kemsing Vale runs along the foot of the Kent Downs, between Sevenoaks and Ryarsh. The steep scarp which rises up to the north is a patchwork of woodland and chalk grassland and offers magnificent views south. Thick hedges along the Pilgrim’s Way separate the scarp from the large scarp-foot arable fields. Beyond these fields, the strong pattern of trimmed hedges which characterise the vale, is emphasised by frequent hedgerow trees. Several traditional brick and flint buildings occur in this area.



LANDFORM  
AND  
LANDSCAPE  
CHARACTER

	Kemsing Vale
<b>Condition</b>	Good
<b>Sensitivity</b>	Moderate
<b>Summary Action</b>	Conserve and Reinforce
<b>Example Action</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conserve existing woodland and shaws</li> <li>• Replanting of hedgerow and In-field trees</li> <li>• Conserve characteristics of narrow highways with trimmed hedges</li> <li>• Conserve isolated nature of Estate Houses.</li> <li>• Conserve the historic nature of the settlement pattern</li> <li>• Seek to reduce impact of quarrying</li> </ul>

**Kemsing Vale  
local character  
areas**



# 4

## COMPONENTS OF NATURAL BEAUTY

### 6 Medway – Birling to Cuxton; Wouldham to Aylesford

The AONB covers only the scarp slopes of the Medway Valley, excluding the industrialised valley bottom. This area is characterised by wooded upper scarps and wide views across the river and south towards the greensand ridge. The typical pattern of large scale rolling arable fields on the scarp foot, surrounded by trimmed remnant hedges, occurs on both sides of the valley. The ‘carvings of industry’ from the cement industry are visible throughout the valley and traditional brick and flint buildings are found here, although there are few buildings on the scarp foot itself. The long history of human activity in this area is illustrated by the prehistoric sites, the most important megalithic monuments east of the Berkshire Downs.

A strategic rural buffer between the Kent Thames Gateway and Maidstone growth areas.



### Medway local character areas

	The Eastern Scarp	The Western Scarp	Boxley Vale
<b>Condition</b>	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate
<b>Sensitivity</b>	Moderate	High	High
<b>Summary Action</b>	Conserve and Create	Conserve and restore	Conserve and restore
<b>Example Action</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Arable – conversion and field margins</li> <li>• Enhance access – access and biodiversity opportunities</li> <li>• Seek enhancements in areas of horse management</li> <li>• Conserve and manage woodlands and shaws</li> <li>• Limit impact of industrial development outside AONB</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conserve the large-scale of open arable fields, restore hedges and consider grassland creation</li> <li>• Restore ecological interest to arable areas</li> <li>• Restore some wooded shaws to the arable land</li> <li>• Conserve and restore the characteristics and enclosure of ancient highways</li> <li>• Restore hedgerows and shaws, and hedged enclosure to roads</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conserve and strengthen hedgerows and hedge pattern</li> <li>• Seek enhancements in areas of horse management</li> <li>• Remove conifers</li> <li>• Conserve wooded setting of settlements</li> </ul>

# 4

## COMPONENTS OF NATURAL BEAUTY

### 7 Mid Kent Downs – Boxley to Selling

The Mid Kent Downs stretch between Chatham and the Stour Valley in a series of wide ridges and dry valleys. Within this area, tiny scattered villages are linked by a network of single track lanes. Extensive coppice woodlands, many of which are no longer managed, stretch along the upper slopes of the valleys and there are several large expanses of conifer woodland. The ridge-top plateaux are dominated by large arable fields, many of which are undivided by hedge or fence. Elsewhere, hedges and hedgerow trees are more prominent. Around Chatham, Bicknor and Faversham a considerable number of orchards and shelterbelt hedges impose a strong geometric pattern in the landscape. The farm buildings which survive from hop and fruit growing are a characteristic feature of this area. Portions of the Mid Kent Downs are subject to severe urban fringe pressures.



# 4

## COMPONENTS OF NATURAL BEAUTY

### Mid Kent Downs local character areas

	Challock	Faversham Fruit Belt	Bicknor	Chatham Outskirts	Nashenden Valley
<b>Condition</b>	Good	Moderate	Moderate	Poor	Moderate
<b>Sensitivity</b>	Moderate	Moderate	High	High	High
<b>Summary Action</b>	Conserve and Reinforce	Conserve and Create	Conserve and Restore	Restore	Conserve and Restore
<b>Example Action</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improve character of main highway corridors</li> <li>• Opportunities for arable reversion in dry valleys</li> <li>• Reinforce shaws and beech stands</li> <li>• Reinforce the localised and characteristic design and pattern of settlements</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Keep open where historically relevant</li> <li>• Encourage In-field and hedgerow trees</li> <li>• Seek to stimulate return to cherry, apple/pear trees and hops</li> <li>• Resist urban fringe pressure</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reinforce the broadleaf woodland and permanent cover</li> <li>• Create broadleaf woodland to ridge tops where these are open</li> <li>• Create wooded edges to settlements</li> <li>• Reinforce the ancient characteristics of highways of narrow carriageways and hedged boundaries</li> <li>• Encourage retention of orchards and hop gardens</li> <li>• Promote good practice for equines and boundary treatments</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Restore woodland links from the ridge into the large arable areas</li> <li>• Restore hedgerow along selected highways and around settlements.</li> <li>• Restore areas of broadleaf woodland.</li> <li>• Restore management to areas of dereliction and resist urban fringe pressures</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conserve the historic form of open common land</li> <li>• Conserve wooded edges by sensitive management</li> <li>• Conserve broadleaf woodland and woodland cover generally</li> <li>• Conserve the sparseness of settlement</li> <li>• Resist urban fringe pressure</li> </ul>



LANDFORM  
AND  
LANDSCAPE  
CHARACTER

# 4

## COMPONENTS OF NATURAL BEAUTY

### 8 Hollingbourne Vale – Boxley to Westwell

The Hollingbourne Vale runs between Boxley and the Stour Valley in a narrow strip including the scarp and the scarp foot. The character varies from the yew-dominated woodlands in the west to grassland and open cultivated fields which extend up the scarp in the east. Large arable scarp-foot fields dominate the fertile flatter landscape of the vale, bordered to the north by thick hedges along the Pilgrim’s Way. A series of historic spring line villages, such as Hollingbourne, occur in this area above which extensive views from the scarp are available. The scarp is a very sensitive landscape feature. A significant number of hedgerow trees dot the shallower slopes of the scarp, although many were battered by 1987 storm damage.



LANDFORM  
AND  
LANDSCAPE  
CHARACTER

	Hollingbourne Vale
<b>Condition</b>	Poor
<b>Sensitivity</b>	Moderate
<b>Summary Actions</b>	Restore and create
<b>Example Action</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Re-enforce existing field patterns and encourage sensitive management of arable and pasture land</li> <li>• Opportunity for strengthening field boundaries</li> <li>• Opportunity for downland creation on scarp</li> <li>• Conserve and manage existing woodlands</li> <li>• Conserve and manage existing chalk grassland and encourage restoration of chalk grassland</li> <li>• Conserve setting of spring line settlements</li> </ul>



**Hollingbourne Vale  
local character  
areas**

# 4

## COMPONENTS OF NATURAL BEAUTY

### 9 Stour – Brook to Chartham

The Stour Valley cuts through the AONB between Ashford and Canterbury and retains a strongly rural, highly valued, visual identity. Deciduous scarp-top woodlands occur on both sides of the valley, below which is a strong pattern of mixed farmland. Hedgerow trees are frequent both on the slopes and on the flood plain, which is further broken up by thin lines of deciduous trees between the fields. A series of rough grassland dominated enclosed coombes add an intimacy to the landscape which often offers long views. Mature parkland extends across considerable areas of the lower valley slopes. Alders and willows enhance some sections of the river, but cultivation stretches to the very edge of the riverbanks in other areas, decreasing the visual and ecological quality of the waterside.



LANDFORM  
AND  
LANDSCAPE  
CHARACTER

**Stour  
local character  
areas**

	Wye	Hampton	Chilham
<b>Condition</b>	Good	Moderate	Good
<b>Sensitivity</b>	Moderate	High	Moderate
<b>Summary Action</b>	Conserve and Reinforce.	Conserve and restore	Conserve and Reinforce
<b>Example Action</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Re-establish field patterns</li> <li>• Return to broadleaf in plantation woodland</li> <li>• Retain existing shaws and hedgerows</li> <li>• Conserve and reinforce riverside trees by pollarding and new planting</li> <li>• Conserve and manage chalk grassland</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conserve and manage broadleaf woodland and ancient woodland</li> <li>• Conserve, gap up and manage hedgerows</li> <li>• Conserve the remote setting of historic settlements</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conserve and reinforce small scale woodland plantation and riparian vegetation on the valley floor, create new flood meadow pasture</li> <li>• Conserve historic parkland</li> <li>• Reinforce hedgerows and field patterns in the upper valley</li> </ul>

# 4

## COMPONENTS OF NATURAL BEAUTY

### 10 East Kent Downs – Crundale, Bridge, Capel-le-Ferne to Lyminge

The East Kent Downs includes the wide expanse of downland between the Stour Valley and the Folkestone to Dover Heritage Coast. This is a remote and peaceful area of typical downland landform including long ridges and narrow, dry valleys, emphasised by the wooded upper slopes, which divide the open valley bottoms from the arable ridge-top plateaux. Between the Petham and Elham valley systems there are extensive conifer and coppice woodlands and throughout the area thick overgrown hedges often extend down the valley sides. On the steepest valley slopes, there are long, narrow uncultivated banks or 'shaves' where ploughing is impractical. These have left 'islands' of semi-natural grassland or woodland. The church spires of sometimes tiny, remote settlements are often glimpsed on the ridges, connected by a network of winding, single track lanes. Towards the coast the landscape becomes more exposed where scattered military remains still exert strong cultural influences on the landscape.



	Petham	Elham	Alkham
<b>Condition</b>	Good	Good	Moderate
<b>Sensitivity</b>	High	High	Moderate
<b>Summary Action</b>	Conserve	Conserve	Conserve and Create
<b>Example Action</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conserve settlement patterns, avoiding ridgeline development</li> <li>• Conserve and enhance species rich grasslands</li> <li>• Conserve and manage hedgerows, shaws and shaves</li> <li>• Conserve highway characteristics of narrow cross contour lanes and ridgeline roads</li> <li>• Promote forest design plan in important woodland areas</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conserve broadleaf woodland and parkland</li> <li>• Encourage the planting of broadleaf edges to plantation areas and restoration of broadleaves and heathland.</li> <li>• Conserve woodland edges which follow natural contours and define fields</li> <li>• Conserve and manage chalk grasslands</li> <li>• Promote good practice of equine pasture</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conserve unimproved grasslands and pastures</li> <li>• Conserve and create open grazed grassland areas</li> <li>• Conserve and manage existing woodlands</li> <li>• Conserve and reinstate hedgerows</li> <li>• Support enhanced landscape management of Heritage Coasts</li> </ul>

### East Kent Downs local character areas

# 4

## COMPONENTS OF NATURAL BEAUTY

### 11 Postling Vale – Brabourne to Newington

The Postling Vale covers the undulating countryside between the dramatic chalk scarp above Folkestone and the Hythe escarpment above Romney Marsh. The species-rich rough grassland on the scarp highlights the strong, sweeping landform of the downland and is fringed by a thick belt of scrub along the scarp foot. Urban Folkestone and the Channel Tunnel Terminal immediately abut the AONB boundary where the chalk scarp forms a dramatic backdrop to the town. At the base of the scarp thick hedges draw attention to the ancient Pilgrim’s Way. Beyond this, arable fields are edged by remnant hedges and several blocks of scattered large woodlands match the bold scale of the surrounding hills. Magnificent views from the scarp overlook this area, extending out to Romney Marsh and the sea. Around the outskirts of Hythe, several small valleys conceal a more intimate landscape of thick hedges, woodland and hedgerow trees.



LANDFORM  
AND  
LANDSCAPE  
CHARACTER

### Postling Vale local character areas

	Saltwood	Folkestone Outskirts	Stowting
<b>Condition</b>	Moderate	Poor	Good
<b>Sensitivity</b>	High	High	Moderate
<b>Summary Action</b>	Conserve and Restore	Restore and Create	Conserve and Reinforce
<b>Example Action</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conserve and manage woodland cover</li> <li>• Restore areas of dense hedgerow and hedgerow pattern in vale</li> <li>• Restore characteristics of estate roads, remove exotic species</li> <li>• Conserve views of dominant rounded chalk hills</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Linking and re-introducing grazing to grassland</li> <li>• Implementation of woodland management.</li> <li>• Consider boundary issues and seek to reduce impact of urban edge and highway infrastructure</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strengthen hedge pattern in vale</li> <li>• Link chalk grassland and seek reversion to chalk grassland of arable on scarp</li> <li>• Enhance viewpoints</li> </ul>

# 4

## COMPONENTS OF NATURAL BEAUTY

### 12 Lympne – Bonnington to Hythe

The Lympne character area covers the Hythe escarpment and the extreme northern edge of Romney Marsh. The scrub and species-rich rough grassland on the uneven scarp gives these slopes a 'wild', undisturbed character which is highly sensitive and visible from the flat marsh. The very large fields on the Marsh are surrounded by fences or ditches, rather than hedges, although sporadic willows and thorn frequently grow alongside, especially at the scarp foot. Some areas of deciduous woodland occur on the scarp, typically below Aldington and magnificent views extend over the Marsh. The Royal Military Canal is an important historical feature and linear defensive structure which now provides a recreational route and an important component of the drainage of the Romney Marsh.



LANDFORM  
AND  
LANDSCAPE  
CHARACTER

**Lympne  
local character  
areas**

	<b>Aldington</b>	<b>Hythe Escarpment</b>	<b>Romney Marsh</b>
<b>Condition</b>	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate
<b>Sensitivity</b>	High	High	Moderate
<b>Summary Action</b>	Conserve and Restore	Conserve and Restore	Conserve and Create
<b>Example Actions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conserve and restore small woodlands</li> <li>• Restore open areas of farmland</li> <li>• Conserve the infrequency and scale of built form</li> <li>• Restore the ecological interest of pastoral land</li> <li>• Avoid introduction of further suburbanisation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conserve wooded top to the scarp</li> <li>• Conserve rough and pastoral grasslands</li> <li>• Conserve the canal, wetlands and drainage courses</li> <li>• Conserve open views to/from sites and monuments</li> <li>• Seek to retain 'wild' nature of escarpment avoiding further intrusion</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conserve the ecological and historical interest of Royal Military Canal and ditches within the farmland</li> <li>• Create a design code for built form and its surroundings</li> <li>• Conserve the visual significance of the ditches and maintain water levels</li> <li>• Establish arable field margins and re-establish pollards</li> </ul>

# 4

## COMPONENTS OF NATURAL BEAUTY

### 13 South Foreland – Dover to Kingsdown

The South Foreland includes the White Cliffs of the Dover to Kingsdown Heritage Coast and the downland behind, rearing straight up from the English Channel. This is one of the country’s most famous and valued landmarks. Beyond the cliffs is an open, exposed landscape dotted by farms and small settlements fringed by trees, a landscape highly vulnerable to any form of development. The large rolling arable fields are surrounded by a thin network of remnant hedges and there are wide views across the gentle valleys and out to sea. Along the cliff tops, important areas of unimproved chalk grassland and scrub contribute to the natural beauty of the area and are of great ecological value.



	South Foreland
<b>Condition</b>	Moderate
<b>Sensitivity</b>	High
<b>Summary Action</b>	Conserve and Restore
<b>Example Actions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conserve spacious and wild aspect of the landscape</li> <li>• Restore hedgerows only where appropriate</li> <li>• Encourage species-rich grassland and the reversion of arable land as key priority</li> <li>• Conserve and create pockets of scrubby vegetation to screen intrusions</li> <li>• Maintain open views</li> </ul>

### South Foreland local character areas

# 4

## COMPONENTS OF NATURAL BEAUTY

### 4.1.4 LANDFORM AND LANDSCAPE CHARACTER – MAIN ISSUES AND THREATS IDENTIFIED



- a** Loss of views in and out of the AONB through development, obstructing tree growth and vegetation.
- b** Degradation of the setting and urban fringe impacts in certain landscape character areas of the AONB through inappropriate development, urbanisation, recreational pressure and illegal activities.
- c** Cumulative loss of landscape features, tranquillity and character due to the impact of climate change (and adaptation and mitigation responses), intensive agricultural and forestry practices, pressure from traffic and significant levels of urban growth and development.
- d** Potential deterioration of the special characteristics of the landscape due to inappropriate or lack of management of existing features and habitats.
- e** The erosion of natural beauty and special character of many areas within the AONB through illegal activities particularly fly tipping, abandoned cars and illegal off-road vehicles.
- f** Uncertainty over the future of agri-environment schemes and subsequent effects on landscape and biodiversity and the essentially farmed nature of the Kent Downs landscape.
- g** The increase in leisure activities such as shooting, golf courses, livery premises, horse keeping and fenced horse paddocks and the changes brought to landscape character through poor or inappropriate landscape management.
- h** General lack of awareness of the landscape value of the Kent Downs AONB, its characteristic features and the social and economic benefits it brings.
- i** Landscape character approach not used sufficiently in land-use, land management and development control decisions.



**Photo:**  
fly-tipping



**Photo:**  
Chilham Square

# 4

## COMPONENTS OF NATURAL BEAUTY

### 4.1.5 LANDFORM AND LANDSCAPE CHARACTER – AIMS



#### **A landscape in which:**

- 1** The fundamental diversity in the landscape character across the Kent Downs is maintained and enhanced, and the strong sense of place of individual localities is recognised, reinforced and celebrated;
- 2** A landscape character approach is used to inform decision making in the AONB and areas of opportunity and threat are identified and become the focus for action;
- 3** The highest standards of landscape conservation, restoration and enhancement are encouraged, and are integrated into all land uses, particularly agriculture, forestry, leisure and development;
- 4** There is better understanding of what local people and visitors value in the landscape and all people are encouraged to play a part in retaining and enhancing these features.



**Photo:**  
Elmstead



**Photo:**  
Postling

# 4

## COMPONENTS OF NATURAL BEAUTY

### 4.1.6 LANDFORM AND LANDSCAPE CHARACTER – POLICIES



- LLC1** The protection, conservation and enhancement of the components of natural beauty, landscape character and historic landscape character of the Kent Downs AONB will be supported and pursued.
- LLC2** The promotion, retention or restoration of prominent views and viewpoints will be supported.
- LLC3** The provision of co-ordinated and high quality landscape conservation guidance and funding advice to all AONB farmers and landowners, including the equestrian sector, woodland owners and field sports, will be pursued, focusing on the components of natural beauty and the character of AONB landscape.
- LLC4** The prevention, detection, prosecution and change of behaviour to control illegal and overtly damaging activities such as fly tipping, dumping of abandoned cars and non-permitted off-road vehicular use will be supported.

- LLC5** The development and use of landscape character assessments for the Kent Downs AONB will be supported to guide the maintenance of local distinctiveness in Local Development Frameworks and landscape management or enhancement schemes.
- LLC6** The improved awareness and appreciation of all the special qualities and components of natural beauty of the AONB landscape and its conservation to people who influence the future of, live, work in or visit the AONB will be pursued.
- LLC7** The development of strategic landscape action plans for Landscape Character Areas or Local Character Areas of the AONB which are most at threat or where greatest opportunity lie will be supported and pursued.
- LLC8** Proposals which negatively impact on the distinctive landform, landscape character and identified special components of natural beauty, the setting and views to and from the AONB will be opposed and resisted.



**Photo:**  
Devil's Kneading  
Trough



**Photo:**  
view towards France

# 4

## COMPONENTS OF NATURAL BEAUTY



Dave Green/Butterfly Conservation



## 4.2

# BIODIVERSITY



**Photo:**  
Adder  
[www.brettlewisphotography.co.uk](http://www.brettlewisphotography.co.uk)

### OVERVIEW

**The rich biodiversity of the Kent Downs contributes greatly to the natural beauty of this exceptional landscape adding much of the detail which makes the Kent Downs special and distinct.**

The natural post-glacial vegetation of the Kent Downs is believed to have been broadleaved woodland. This would have been varied in structure and composition, with open glades and patches of grassland and heath created by fallen trees and grazing animals, and chalk grassland refugia found on the exposed cliff tops. Wet woodland would have covered the river valleys. The 'wildwood' has been cleared and managed over the last 6000 years as human use and settlement of the area has extended and contracted. The woodland clearance gave way to grasslands, scrub and arable. Hence farming and cultivation have been a significant influence on the biodiversity of the AONB.

### 4.2.1

## A DUTY OF REGARD FOR BIODIVERSITY

The Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act came into force in October 2006 and introduced a **duty that requires public authorities to have regard to the conservation of biodiversity in all their activities**. With such a wide remit public authorities, by implementing this duty, can

make a significant contribution towards the 2010 target to halt biodiversity loss. The implementation of the Biodiversity Duty will be achieved by biodiversity enhancement and through reducing adverse impacts on biodiversity.

# 4

## COMPONENTS OF NATURAL BEAUTY

### 4.2.2 SPECIAL CHARACTERISTICS

The wildlife of the Kent Downs is particularly rich and distinctive. It is also varied, reflecting changes in the local climate, geology, soils and topography and the proximity to the continent. There are several **species** which are largely or wholly confined to the Kent Downs in Britain. This is true of several beautiful rarities, such as the lady, monkey and late spider orchids, black veined and straw belle moths as well as rare arable field wild flowers. Other rare and threatened species occur in particularly good numbers here, dormouse, the edible or Roman snail, the adder and rare arable field wildflowers along with several of the butterflies associated with downland are good examples.

The mix of species found in a Kent Downs woodland, hedgerow, road verge or downland is distinct and different from other parts of the country adding quality to the character of the Kent Downs landscape.

Semi-natural **habitats** of particular importance in the Kent Downs are also recognised in the UK and locally the Kent and Medway and London and Bromley Biodiversity Action Plans (BAPs) they are:



**Photo:**

Black-veined moth

*Mark Parsons/Butterfly Conservation*

#### Unimproved chalk downland

Unimproved chalk downland is for many the essence of natural beauty in the Kent Downs landscape with its flower-rich, scented springy turf and profusion of insect life. Orchids and butterflies of chalk downland are symbolic of this habitat and the AONB supports populations of some of the country's rarest chalk species. Chalk grassland is an internationally important habitat, with over half the world's resource being found in England with up to 32,000ha remaining nationally. Although this habitat is one of the most valued features of the Kent Downs (most important feature for 72% of respondents to an AONB questionnaire), the remaining extent of unimproved chalk grassland amounts to less than 2% of the land area of the AONB (about 1500 ha or 6% of the UK resource). For many rare species in the Kent Downs it is the warm, sunny south facing chalk slopes which are important (Kent Habitat Survey 2003).

#### Ancient woodland

Ancient woodland (continuous woodland cover for at least 400 years), is an irreplaceable habitat, and the Kent Downs supports over 3% of the ancient woodland resource of England and Wales. (Forestry Commission ancient woodland inventory 2003) This is the second highest concentration of ancient woodland of all AONBs (the High Weald AONB having the highest). Beech-yew communities on chalk and limestone are recognised as internationally important through the European Habitats Directive, and the Kent Downs has important areas (in total about 140Ha) of this habitat.

#### Chalk cliffs, foreshore and seabed platform

Chalk cliffs, foreshore and seabed platform of the two Heritage Coasts are a dramatic and wild element of the Kent Downs, home to a distinctive wildlife influenced by the sea and exposure. Globally coastal chalk is a scarce resource, the UK holds 57% of



BIODIVERSITY

# 4

## COMPONENTS OF NATURAL BEAUTY

Europe's resource, Kent holds 35% of the UK resource. The chalk cliffs from Dover to St Margaret's are home to the largest breeding colony of kittiwakes in Southern England. The chalk cliffs support rare plants such as hoary and sea stock, rock sea-lavender, sea heath and wild cabbage.

### Chalk streams

Chalk streams, river corridors, flood plains and spring lines, together with ponds and dew ponds are the principal kind of wetland in the Kent Downs. Chalk streams and ponds are frequently seasonal in their nature and often hold characteristic species.

### Acid grassland and heaths

Acid grassland and heaths on the greensand and clay plateau, typically surviving in parkland, common land and Chart Woods. Acid grassland can occur on clay caps near downland adding an interesting diversity to the landscape.



**Photo:**  
acid grassland, Stelling  
Minnis Common

### Species-rich hedgerows

Species-rich hedgerows, headlands, ditches and road verges and the sunken lanes of the Downs are a special feature. Often the road verges and hedges are rich in plant and animal diversity.

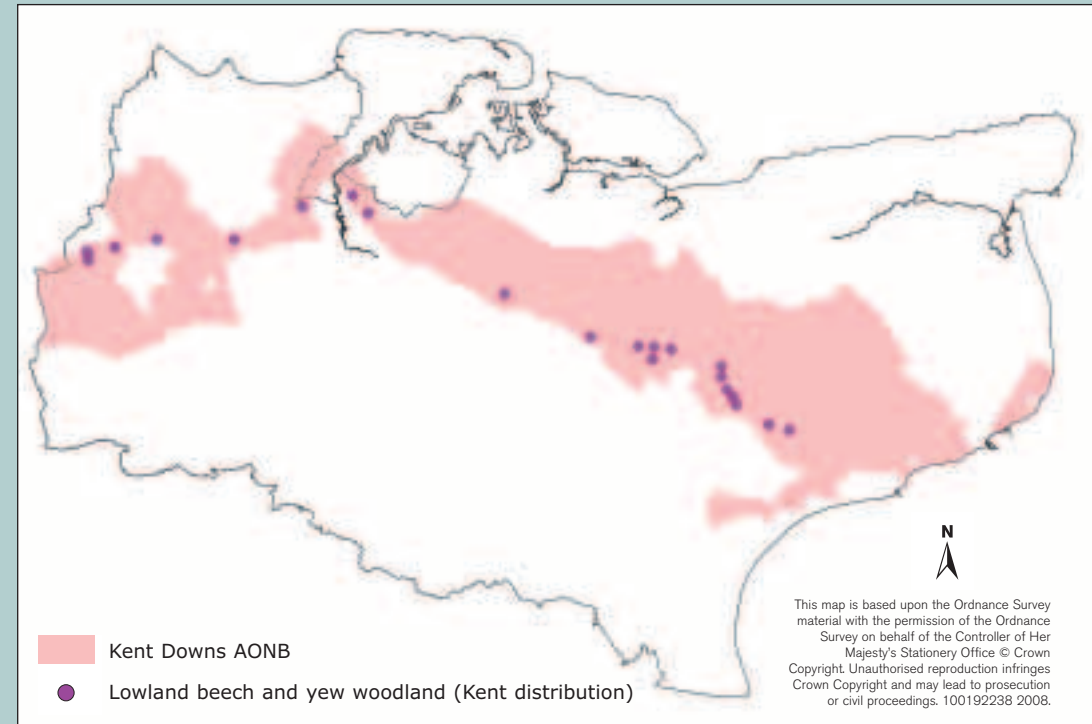
### Farmland habitats

Farmland habitats and species adapted to traditional mixed farming practices; in particular the Kent Downs supports a nationally important site for arable weed communities – supporting some of the UK's most threatened native plant species (such as ground pine, pheasants eye, corn cockle and rough mallow) and farmland birds (such as skylark, corn bunting and yellowhammer) the conservation of which supports Governments



BIODIVERSITY

**Figure 3** Beech and yew woodland



# 4

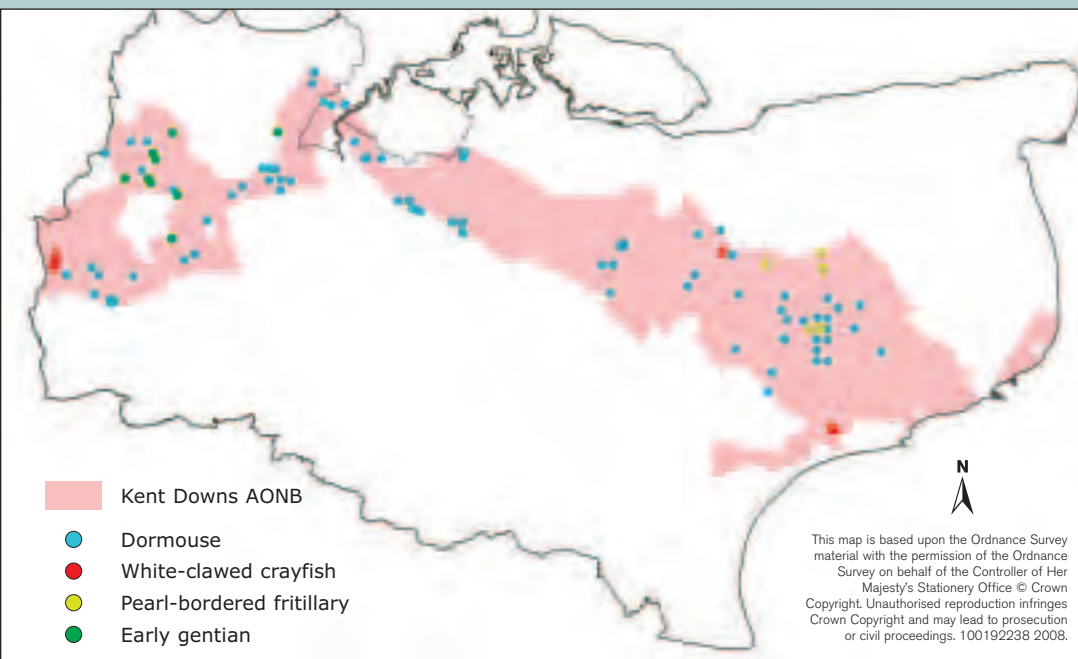
## COMPONENTS OF NATURAL BEAUTY

PSA target 3, which is to: "Care for our natural heritage, make the countryside attractive and enjoyable for all, preserve biological diversity (in part) by reversing the long-term decline in the number of farmland birds by 2020, as measured annually against underlying trends."

### Old orchards

The Kent Downs landscape is strongly associated with fruit growing, with orchards making a significant contribution to local distinctiveness. The terms 'traditional' or 'old' orchard, usually refer to those orchards of apples, pears, plums and in the Downs particularly cherries with large more widely spaced trees; traditional Kentish Cobnut platts are important particularly in the western portion of the AONB.

**Figure 4** Distribution of some rare species



### Wood pasture and parkland

There is a strong legacy of parkland and wood pasture in the AONB where there are often large, open-grown or veteran trees – special features in their own right.

The Kent Biodiversity Action Plans (BAP) have supporting habitat and species action plans that are relevant and important to the Kent Downs. The UK BAP priorities were revised in 2007 and there is a requirement to suggest spatial priorities for habitat and species action.

The UK BAP species list has recently been lengthened; of the list of principal importance for the conservation of biodiversity in England (which are UKBAP Priority species) the AONB supports, among others, skylark, corn bunting, nightjar, linnet, grey partridge, bullfinch, turtle dove, brown hare, dormouse, pipistrelle, silver-spotted skipper, wart-biter, white-clawed crayfish, early gentian and juniper.



BIODIVERSITY



**Photo:**  
cherry orchard

# 4

## COMPONENTS OF NATURAL BEAUTY

### 4.2.3 DESIGNATED NATURE CONSERVATION SITES

The most important nature conservation sites in the Kent Downs are legally protected and managed primarily for their biodiversity value. The following Sites of Scientific Interest (SSSIs) are all of international importance and have been given special protection under the European Union's Habitats Directive, as Special Areas of Conservation (SAC):

- Folkestone to Etchinghill Escarpment
- Wye and Crundale Downs
- Queendown Warren
- Lydden and Temple Ewell (on the AONB boundary)
- Parkgate Down
- Dover to Kingsdown Cliffs (The only SAC for the maritime chalk cliff features in the country)
- North Downs woodlands. The scarp slopes of the Medway valley are designated for internationally important beech-yew woodland communities

Wye and Crundale Downs, and Lydden and Temple Ewell are also designated National Nature Reserves (NNR), while Queendown Warren, Boxley Warren and Folkestone Warren are designated Local Nature Reserves (LNR).

Management of these important sites rests largely with government and public bodies, and specialist conservation organisations, particularly Natural England, Kent Wildlife Trust, the National Trust and Kent County Council. However a number of key sites are in private ownership, such as parts of the Folkestone and Etchinghill escarpment owned by Eurotunnel, and the Medway Valley escarpment by Lafarge or Trenport Holdings.

The network of internationally protected chalk grassland sites is fragmented and dispersed – with greatest concentration in the east Kent Downs beyond the Great Stour Valley. However, there are also a considerable number of other chalk grassland SSSIs



BIODIVERSITY



**Photo:**  
Queendown Warren



**Photo:**  
the Law Day oak,  
Bonnington

# 4

## COMPONENTS OF NATURAL BEAUTY

and non-statutory Local Wildlife Sites (LWSs) across the AONB. Work by Natural England, the Kent Wildlife Trust and other members of the Kent BAP Partnership provides advice and support to site owners and managers to manage these vital sites in favourable condition. In total the SACs, SSSIs and LWSs cover some 16% of the AONB.

The condition of SSSIs in the Kent Downs AONB has been assessed in recent years and the Natural England target is that 95% of SSSIs are in favourable condition by 2010. The condition of the LWSs is being assessed as part of the work to fulfil the Kent Local Area Agreement improvement target for biodiversity.

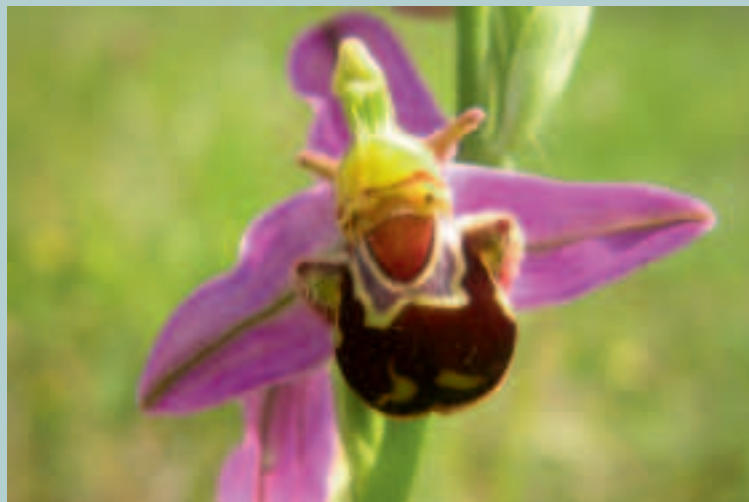
Despite the extent of recognised and recorded nature conservation sites in the AONB some are losing species and condition and most plant and animal species depend upon

suitable long-term management of appropriate habitats in the wider countryside. At the same time it is recognised that the first priority when considering the impact of climate change on biodiversity is to conserve and enhance existing protected sites in order to give species and habitats strongholds of resilience. The next stage is to add buffering areas and functional connectivity of habitats set within a more permeable, wildlife friendly landscape. Conserving Biodiversity in a Changing Climate: Guidance on Building Capacity to Adapt. Defra 2007  
[www.ukbap.org.uk/Library/BRIG/CBCCGuidance.pdf](http://www.ukbap.org.uk/Library/BRIG/CBCCGuidance.pdf)

In Kent both the work of the Habitat Opportunity Mapping, the Branch Project ([www.branchproject.org](http://www.branchproject.org)) and the Wildlife Trusts 'Living Landscapes' programme give a firm basis from which the AONB partnership can help build a response to the major potential impacts on biodiversity in the future.



BIODIVERSITY



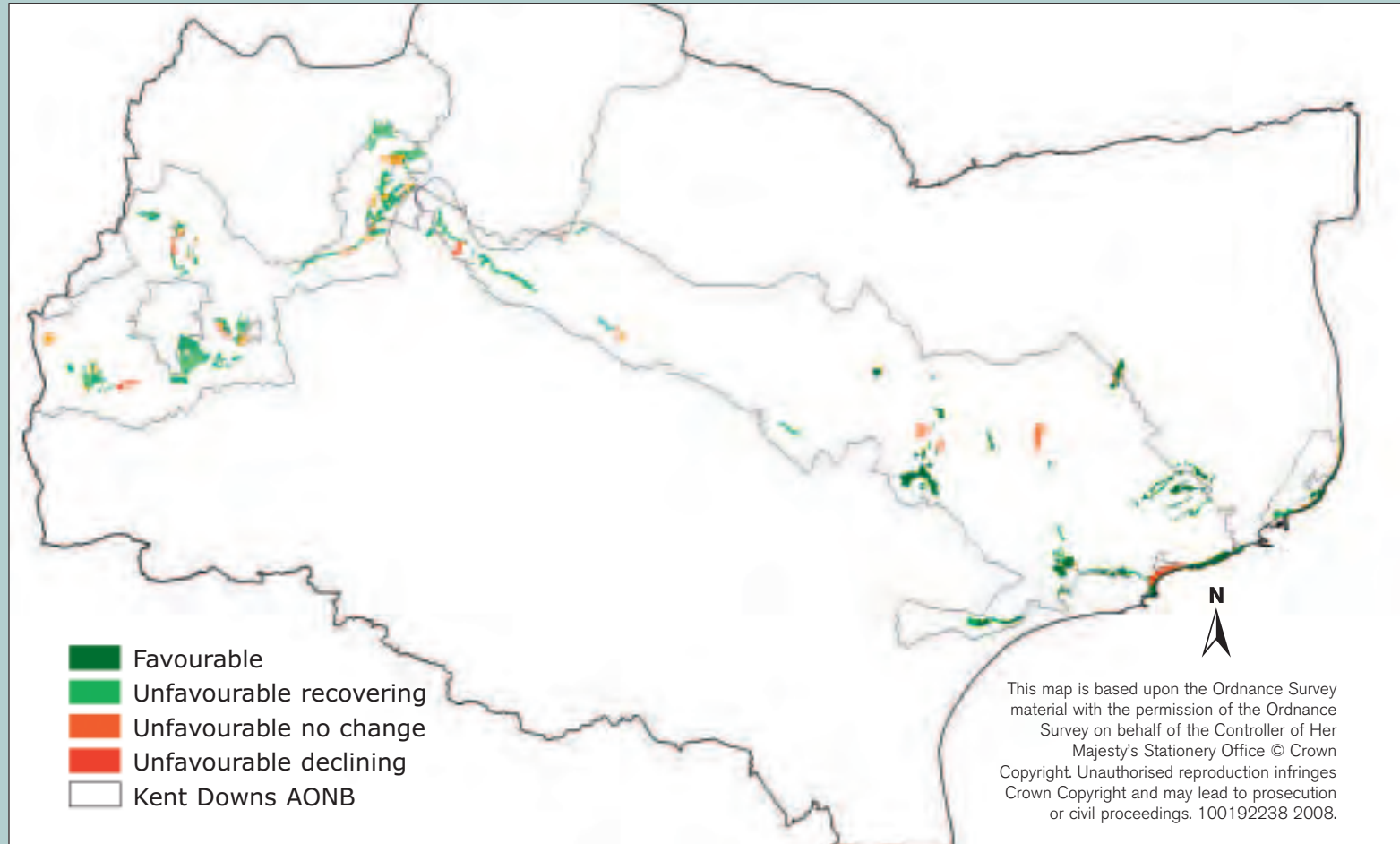
**Photo:**  
bee orchid



**Photo:**  
Knole Park near  
Sevenoaks

# 4

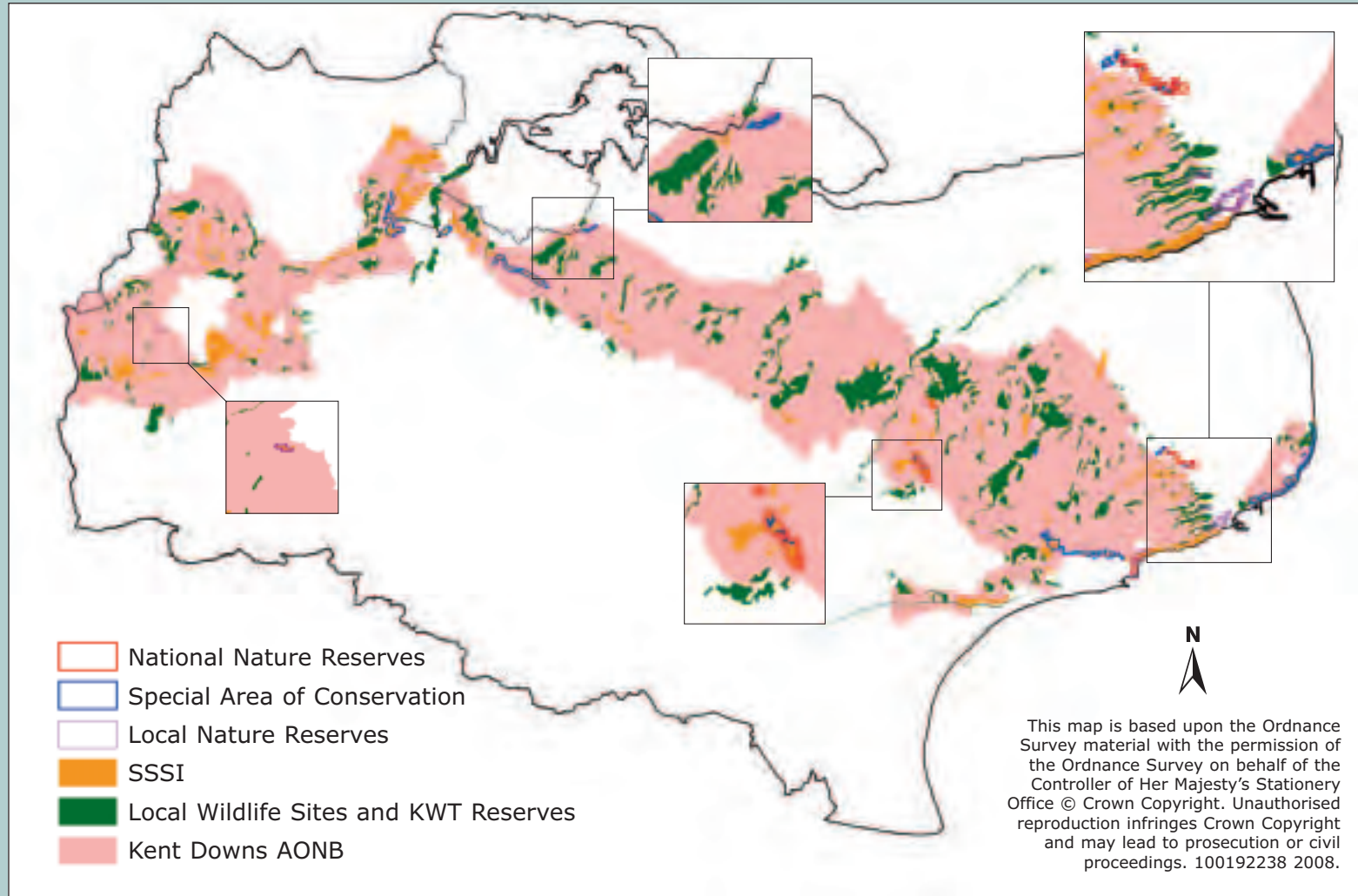
## COMPONENTS OF NATURAL BEAUTY



**Figure 5** Condition of SSSIs

# 4

## COMPONENTS OF NATURAL BEAUTY



**Figure 6** Nature conservation sites

# 4

## COMPONENTS OF NATURAL BEAUTY

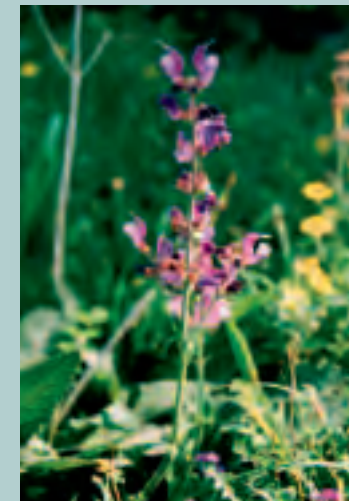
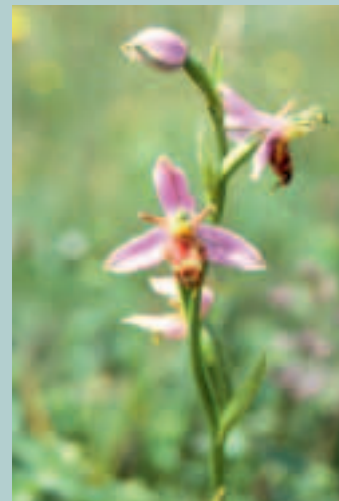
### 4.2.4 BIODIVERSITY – MAIN ISSUES AND THREATS IDENTIFIED



- a** Fragmentation and loss of habitats due to intensive agriculture, agricultural and land ownership changes, horticulture, forestry, country pursuits, infrastructure, poor and inappropriate management and general development.
- b** Need to manage, extend and connect the existing priority protected sites and habitats as a critical first step for conserving and enhancing existing biodiversity and responding to the challenges of climate change for which the Kent Downs could play a focal role.
- c** Lack of grazing livestock or poor returns from managing remaining areas of semi-natural grassland, particularly small, inaccessible or unprotected sites.
- d** Finding a way to support the growing use and enjoyment of the AONB for access, recreation and countryside leisure pursuits whilst conserving and managing the wildlife and habitats that make the AONB so attractive.
- e** General lack of awareness and understanding about the biodiversity value of the Kent Downs and the value it contributes to quality of life, health and wellbeing as well as the county economy with an associated lack of funding available for management.
- f** Need to provide accessible and well-managed nature conservation sites in close proximity to urban areas to provide a contact with nature particularly through the designation of Local Nature Reserves.
- g** The need to address the impacts of climate change, particularly to achieve functional connectivity for all habitats and species in the Kent Downs and beyond to the areas surrounding.
- h** The need to find sustainable economic futures for the products of key habitats in the AONB to ensure their continued management.



**Photo:**  
cowslips and early  
purple orchid, near  
Spuckles Wood



**Photos:**  
wasp orchid;  
meadow clary

# 4

## COMPONENTS OF NATURAL BEAUTY

### 4.2.5 BIODIVERSITY – AIMS

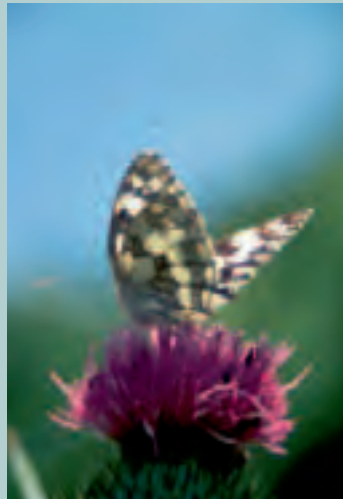
#### A landscape in which:

- 1 The rich diversity of natural features, wild animals, plants and habitats are recognised, conserved and positively managed so that the extent and condition of key habitats is enhanced and the population of key species is secured and expanded.
- 2 A network of well-managed designated and non-designated nature conservation sites covers the Kent Downs, providing semi-natural habitats for locally typical and rare species and communities and the essential building block to achieve functional ecological networks and to assist with the adaptation to climate change.
- 3 More common and widespread wildlife species and populations of the wider farmed and wooded landscape flourish because of careful and sensitive management.

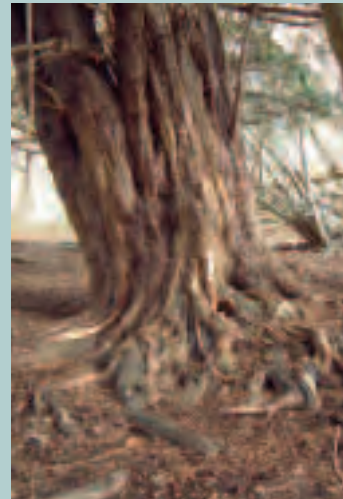
- 4 Comprehensive and easily accessible data informs and influences land management and development decisions and monitors changes to biodiversity.
- 5 Local people and visitors alike enjoy and appreciate the Kent Downs as a landscape of rich wildlife heritage, fostered by imaginative and well-planned information and interpretative media.
- 6 Recreation and countryside pursuits support the conservation of the rich biodiversity of the AONB.
- 7 The natural heritage and wildlife is recognised for its inherent value for contributing to quality of life and the economic value of the Kent Downs.
- 8 Spatial priorities are agreed for biodiversity management in the Kent Downs.



BIODIVERSITY



**Photos:**  
marbled white;  
ancient yew



**Photo:**  
chalkhill blue

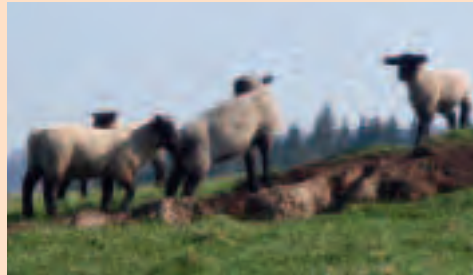
## 4.2.6 BIODIVERSITY – POLICIES



- BD1** The maintenance and enhancement of existing designated sites, and their extension through the reduction in fragmentation and the restoration and creation of landscape and habitat clusters and corridors will be supported and pursued to establish functional ecological networks, help achieve the government's target for SSSIs in favourable condition, and to meet the Local Area Agreement for the management of Local Wildlife Sites.
- BD2** Local, regional and national biodiversity action plan targets and spatial priorities for key habitats and species distinctive to the Kent Downs will be supported notably:
- a) The sustainable management and extension of the area of chalk grassland, particularly through conservation grazing, grazing schemes and targeting the restoration and the creation of new areas of chalk grassland.
  - b) Increasing the managed area of ancient, semi-natural and coppiced woodland including restoration of Plantation on Ancient Woodlands Sites (PAWS).
  - c) The conservation of riparian and in-stream habitats and species associated with chalk streams, rivers, springs and ponds.
  - d) New efforts to conserve and restore farmland and woodland bird populations and distinctive arable wild plant species.
  - e) The management of existing old orchards and creation of new traditional orchards and platts.
  - f) The conservation and enhancement of chalk cliffs and foreshore.
- BD3** The conservation and enhancement of other characteristic and important habitats and species including neutral and acid grassland; heathland and wooded heath; parkland; wood pasture and veteran trees; ancient or species rich hedgerows; cereal margins; headlands and road verges will be supported.
- BD4** Targeting of advice, grants and planning agreements to reduce fragmentation and enhance the distinctive biodiversity of the Kent Downs will be supported.
- BD5** The collection and sharing of information on land cover, designated wildlife sites and species to assist in effective biodiversity and landscape character management and monitoring will be encouraged.
- BD6** The conservation and extension of Kent Downs priority habitats will be encouraged and supported through the Local Development Framework process and the promotion of the Biodiversity Duty of Regard.
- BD7** Proposals which generate markets for the products of sensitively managed habitats will be supported where they do not conflict with other AONB policy aims.
- BD8** Proposals to increase recreational use will be supported where they protect and where possible enhance the biodiversity and landscape qualities of the AONB and do not conflict with Local Authority policies.
- BD9** Coastal defence policies, allowing, where possible, a naturally functioning coastline to maintain the chalk cliffs, foreshores and platforms will be supported.
- BD10** The conservation and extension of distinctive common and widespread species and habitats will be supported.

# 4

COMPONENTS OF  
NATURAL BEAUTY



FARMED  
LANDSCAPE

## 4.3 FARMED LANDSCAPE



**Photo:**  
across the Stour valley

**Table 5**  
Changes in patterns of  
agricultural land use in  
Kent Downs AONB  
*Source: Kent Land  
Cover Change  
surveys (1995 &  
2002)*

% of farmed landcover	1961	1972	1990	1999
Arable	53	64	58	55
Grassland	37	27	35	30
Grassland with scrub	0	0	1	9
Orchard and hops	7	6	4	4
Parkland	3	3	2	2
Area of farmed land (Ha)	64,227	64,925	64,141	64,546

### OVERVIEW

**The Kent Downs AONB is principally a farmed landscape, with 74% of its land classed as agricultural. Centuries of changing farming practices have shaped the landscape to create an important part of the natural beauty for which it is celebrated today.**

Historically, the Kent Downs has supported mixed farming practices where arable crop production has co-existed with livestock grazing and horticulture. The complex seasonal colours and textures of cultivated land contrast with the constancy of permanent grassland. The close-cropped texture of grass and arable accentuate the undulation of the land. The patchwork of land-use created by mixed farming is also vital for many plant and animal species associated with farmland.

Table 5 indicates that the Kent Downs AONB continues to be a landscape of mixed agricultural use. While there has been relatively little change in overall agricultural land cover in the last forty years, there has been a rationalisation of farming practice.

# 4

## COMPONENTS OF NATURAL BEAUTY

### 4.3.1 SPECIAL CHARACTERISTICS

#### Arable

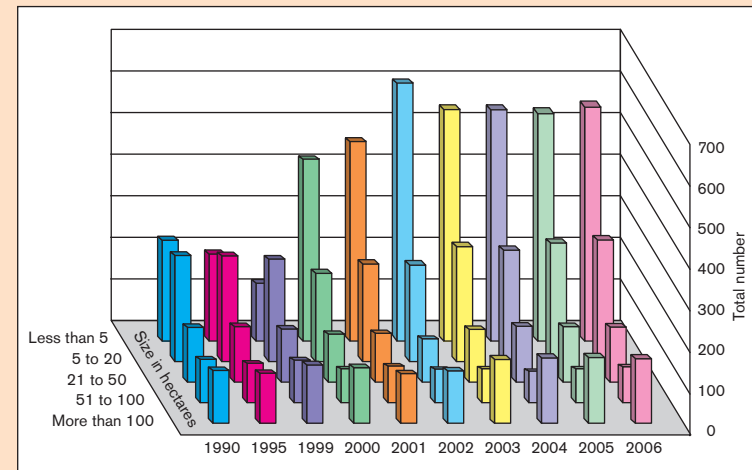
The Kent Downs AONB has an unusually high proportion of grade 2 and grade 3 agricultural land for a protected landscape (see figure 7). Arable agriculture has always been an important part of the character of this valued landscape. The area of arable land has fluctuated slightly over forty years, although the methods of arable farming have changed considerably within this period. Post World War II, and since Britain joined the European Common Market in 1972, Government policy and incentives have encouraged increased food production. Modern arable farming responded by adopting new crops, technologies and practices, which have seen a marked increase in crop production and efficiency of scale. In some cases, the cost has been the loss of landscape quality, biodiversity and historic features that have been part of the mixed farming landscape for centuries, elsewhere farmers have chosen to conserve and enhance the landscape at the same time as increasing productivity. Where there has been removal of hedgerows and field margins, deep ploughing of grassland and drainage of wetlands, as well as the



**Photo:**  
wheat above  
St Margaret's



FARMED  
LANDSCAPE



**Table 6**  
Farm size data

use of pesticides and inorganic fertilisers the result is sometimes sterile farmscapes with little wildlife or reduced landscape interest.

More recently the agricultural economy has been subject both to the removal of production based subsidy and to increasing volatility driven by global markets affecting both the value of produce and the costs of production. These pressures require farmers to make increasingly market led decisions and to use up to date methods to retain competitive advantage. At the same time public opinion and Government policy has strengthened in favour of environmentally sensitive farming that produces high-quality food, with less cost on the public purse. Climate change adds a further powerful influence with agriculture having an important role both in adapting to the changes already in train and mitigating further impacts.

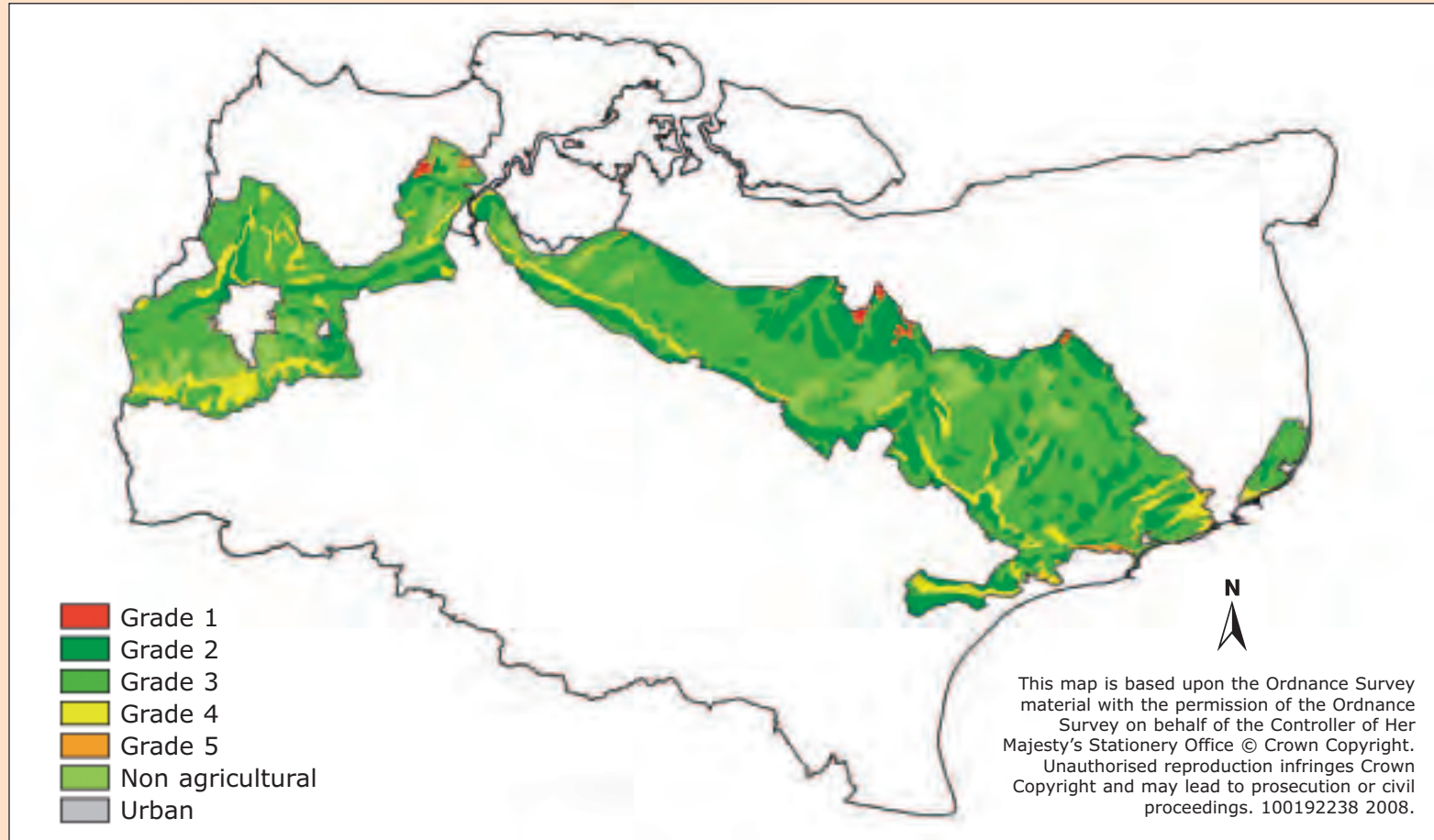
Table 6 shows a tendency for an increase in both large and small holdings in the Kent Downs, at the loss of the more traditional medium sized farms. Additionally there is a move to larger 'contract' farmers or co-operative farming ventures, especially on

# 4

## COMPONENTS OF NATURAL BEAUTY



FARMED  
LANDSCAPE



**Figure 7** Agricultural land classification

# 4

## COMPONENTS OF NATURAL BEAUTY

the most productive land in order to achieve economies of scale for food production leading to rotations on a whole farm rather than field scale.

When medium sized farms are not absorbed into larger holdings, farmhouses and buildings are sold off with small holdings or to 'amenity' farmers and landowners who are not reliant on agriculture as a main income. This trend can bring with it landscape change and a loss of community and other intangibles such as 'attachment to place'. The setting, relationship between buildings in farmsteads and immediate landscape around farm buildings is becoming more 'suburbanised' with amenity hedging and fencing, driveways and garages being constructed. The separation of farmhouses and cottages and the price of remaining farm-housing stock effectively prices the agricultural labour force out of the rural housing market.

Currently Single Farm Payment cross compliance requirements and the roll out of 'Entry Level' and 'Higher Level' Environmental Stewardship are examples of measures aimed at retaining and enhancing some of the environmental and historical qualities of the farmed landscape.



**Photo:**  
grazing sheep,  
Summerhouse Hill

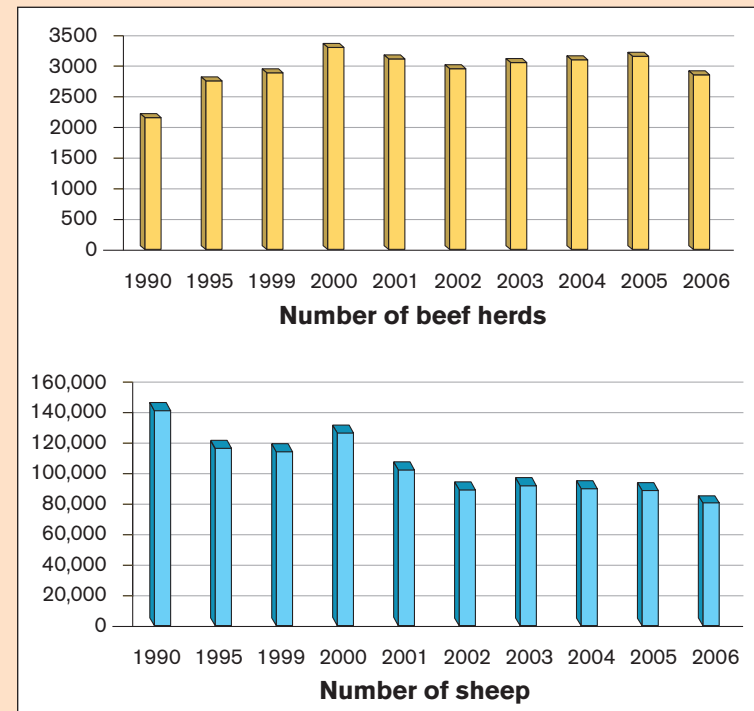
## Grazing pasture

Sheep and beef cattle continue to play an important part in the AONB land-based economy. Table 7 indicates stock types and herd numbers in the Kent Downs AONB. There has been a **significant decline** in livestock farming, particularly numbers of sheep, which is crucial to retain the special character of the AONB.

The effects of BSE, the 2001 and 2007 Foot and Mouth Disease outbreaks and the arrival of Bluetongue in 2007, as well as other factors such as cheap imports and the lack of adequate infrastructure such as local abattoirs and markets have put increasing pressure on the livestock industry. The loss of grazing livestock and skilled graziers due to the poor economics of grazing, has led to areas of grassland that were grazed agriculturally over 20 years ago falling out of use, being ploughed



FARMED  
LANDSCAPE



**Table 7**  
Stock types and herd numbers in the Kent Downs AONB

# 4

## COMPONENTS OF NATURAL BEAUTY

up for crops, planted with trees, converted to leisure use or scrubbed over through abandonment.

Horses are becoming an increasingly common grazing animal in the AONB. The continued growth in horse riding and equine activities is playing an increasingly important role in the future of the land-based economy of the AONB. If managed in a sustainable and sympathetic manner, horse grazing can make a positive contribution to the management of grassland in the Kent Downs, helping to maintain the important pastoral component of the AONB's natural beauty. However examples of good practice can be difficult to find and the impacts of growth in the equine industry have tended to harm the landscape character of the Kent Downs.

**Table 8**

Total Economic Contribution of the Land-based Economy (estimated for 2002).\*  
Estimates for the whole of Kent demonstrate economic contribution for the following land-based activities (figures not available for the AONB).

*\*Farming and food – a sustainable future. Report of the Policy Commission on the Future of Farming and Food, January 2002*

Activity	% farmed area in Kent	Total contribution	% of total land-based value
Horticulture (inc. glasshouses)	6%	£220.4 million	43%
Arable	58%	£114.5 million	23%
Equestrian	n/a	£100 million	19%
Livestock (inc. poultry)	18%	£68.6 million	13%
Woodland	11%	£10.6 million	2%
Field sports	n/a	£67 million	n/a

## Orchards and horticulture

Historically, orchards and horticulture have played an important part in the special character of the AONB landscape, the regular striate form enhancing the rise and fall of the land. Teynham (just north of the AONB) became the site of the first 'mother' nursery for the commercial fruit orchards in England in the days of Henry VIII, and there is still a concentration of top and stone fruit (tree fruit) and hop growing along the northern fringes of the Mid Kent Downs, including the National Fruit Collection at Brogdale. In the Kent Downs it is the traditional cherry orchards which are particularly distinctive.

Traditional orchards of large trees with understorey grazing are difficult and uneconomic to manage and are being grubbed or replaced by labour-efficient, safer, smaller fruit trees grown in closely spaced, parallel rows. Their greater uniformity and more intensive management have reduced the associated wildlife and landscape value of these orchards. They do, however provide a modern and important link to a historic landscape component. Other horticultural activities add variety and interest to the AONB landscape. For example, lavender as a crop for essential oils has replaced a number of hop gardens, and a number of vineyards



FARMED  
LANDSCAPE



**Photo:**  
cobnut platt

# 4

## COMPONENTS OF NATURAL BEAUTY

have been planted adding a new hue into the AONB scenery. Another locally distinct landscape feature is the production of cobnuts in the southeast corner of the Greensand Ridge, centred on Platt and Plaxtol (a cobnut orchard being called a platt).

The area of orchards and hop gardens in the AONB has decreased by nearly 50% since 1961. There has however been a recent upturn in orchard planting including walnuts and fruits such as apricots as well as wine growing which could increase significantly if the predicted climate changes take place. Additionally the use of polytunnels has increased slightly, while currently covering a small area of the AONB the use of polytunnels is anticipated to increase (together with the associated transport and storage infrastructure), in order to meet quality standards and a longer season as required by customers. The horticultural sector is a small but important component of the landscape and the rural economy of the AONB.

### Uncertainty in the future of farming policy and support mechanisms

All agricultural sectors are likely to be subject to considerable changes over the lifetime of this Management Plan, adding an element of unpredictability to the future of the farmed landscape.

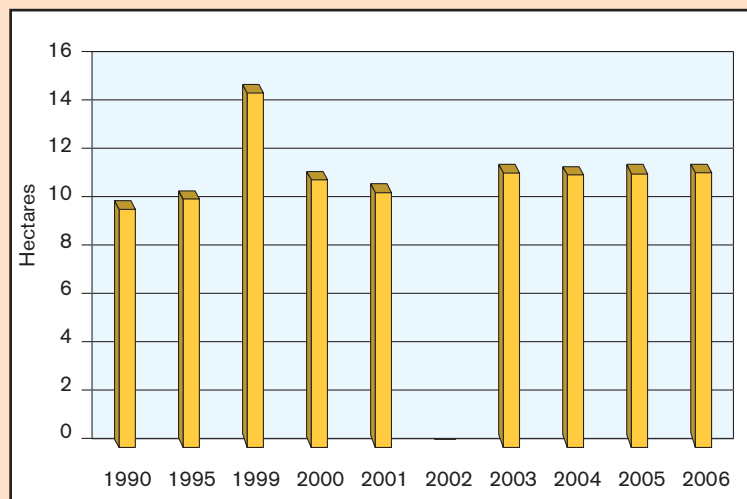
The full implications of new agricultural support based on area rather than production linked payments and the modulation of agricultural funding away from production to support the environment and diversification have yet to be seen. A further review or 'health check' of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) will be completed in 2008, full CAP reform is expected in 2013. Equally the withdrawal of set-aside could have impacts for landscape and wildlife.

The Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE) is now managed at a regional level by SEEDA and will deliver the priorities set in the South East Implementation Plan (for the RDPE), itself influenced by a series of regional responses to strategic work including the Government's Strategy for Sustainable Farming and Food as well as the Rural Delivery Review (the Haskins Review). A South East Rural Board will take forward, oversee and review these strategies.



FARMED LANDSCAPE

**Table 9**  
Area under glass or plastic in the Kent Downs AONB



**Photo:**  
polytunnels

# 4

## COMPONENTS OF NATURAL BEAUTY

### Agri-environment Schemes

Since its inception in 1991, the Countryside Stewardship Scheme (CSS) and subsequently the Environmental Stewardship Scheme (ESS) has brought positive changes to the landscape, wildlife and historic features of the AONB. The ESS operates at two levels:

**Entry Level Stewardship** (ELS) aims to encourage a large number of farmers across a wide area of farmland to deliver simple yet effective environmental management. This requires a basic level of environmental management for which there is a payment of £30 per hectare, per year across the whole farm.

**Higher Level Stewardship** (HLS) aims to deliver significant environmental benefits in high priority situations and will be targeted at very specific areas. HLS requires more complex environmental management with input from Natural England officers.

Up to 2008, the following have been achieved under CSS targeting in the AONB:

- 2042ha (3.16%) of AONB agricultural land is managed under CSS agreements, with 120 agreements in place (excluding arable field margins and rotational arable options).
- A total 1350ha of managed grassland with 390ha with public access payments.
  - 600ha of unimproved chalk grassland and 250ha of semi improved chalk grassland in agreements.

In 2008 the targeting statements for the Higher Level Scheme of Environmental Stewardship underwent a revision. During this process Natural England have further refined target areas in order to focus resources in those geographic areas where environmental outcomes are likely to be greatest. Two areas have been identified in the Kent Downs AONB:

- The East Kent Downs target area encompasses the east Kent Downs; South Foreland; Stour and eastern part of the Hollingbourne landscape character areas.
- The North Downs target area encompasses: Medway; Kemsing Vale; Sevenoaks Ridge; Darent Valley and parts of the West Kent Downs landscape character areas.



FARMED LANDSCAPE



**Photo:**  
harvested field,  
Bockhill Farm



**Photo:**  
Lower Hardres

# 4

## COMPONENTS OF NATURAL BEAUTY

### Nitrate Vulnerable Zones and Catchment Sensitive Farming

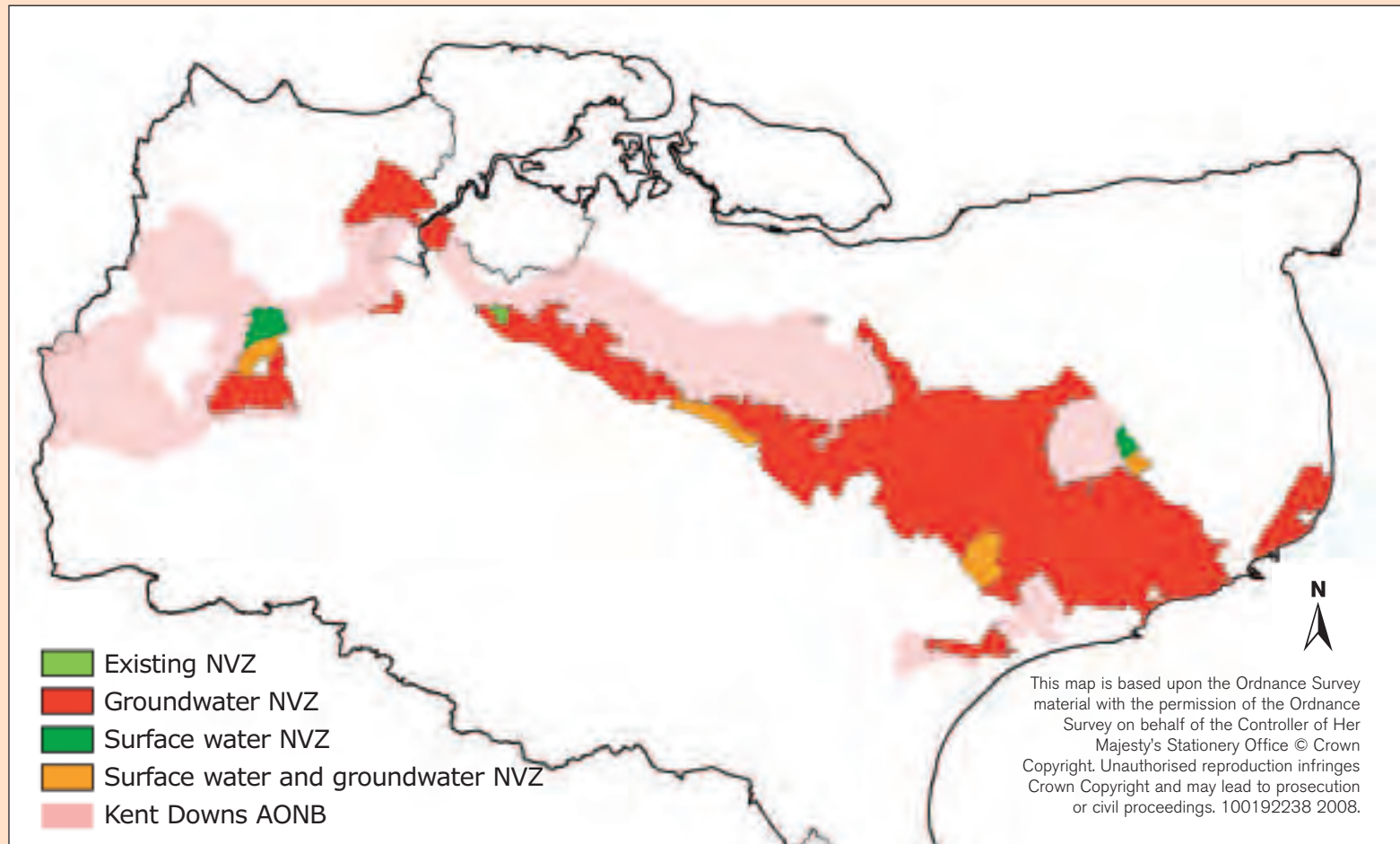
A series of new Nitrate Vulnerable Zones (NVZ) were defined in early 2009 which increased the area of AONB covered by an NVZ by a small amount (slightly more than half of the AONB is covered). The NVZ programme aims to reduce nitrate pollution in water through regulation of how and when nitrogen is applied to land, the management and storage of manure and the use of cover crops. The expansion of the area covered could have relatively minor implications on cropping patterns in the AONB.

A Catchment Sensitive Farming programme operates in the Kentish Stour Catchment within the AONB. The programme offers advice to farmers and landowners on best practice methods to reduce diffuse pollution within the catchment. The programme has been confirmed to continue during the period of operation of this plan and there is an opportunity to influence guidance to include landscape character enhancement.



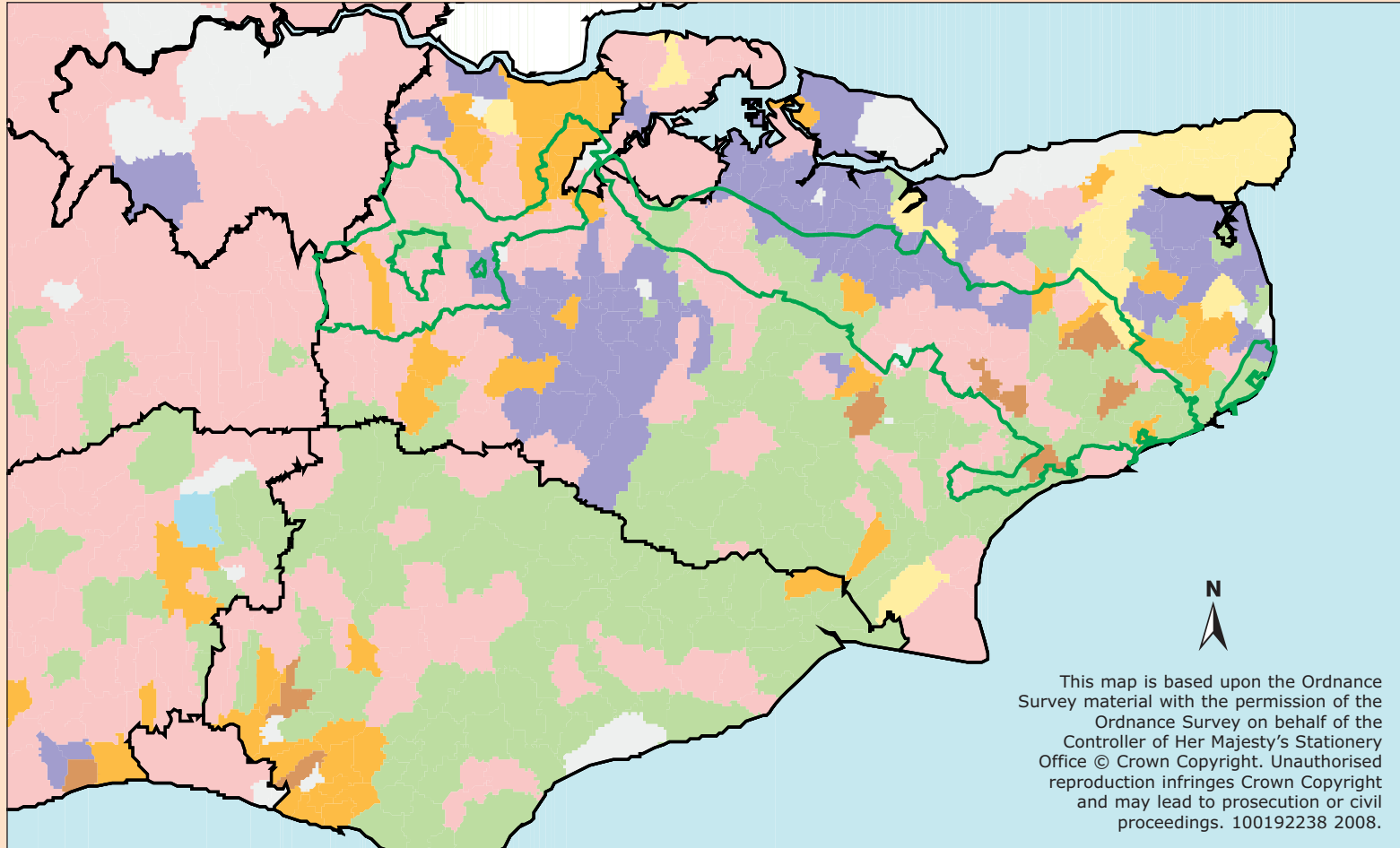
FARMED  
LANDSCAPE

**Figure 8** Nitrate vulnerable zones

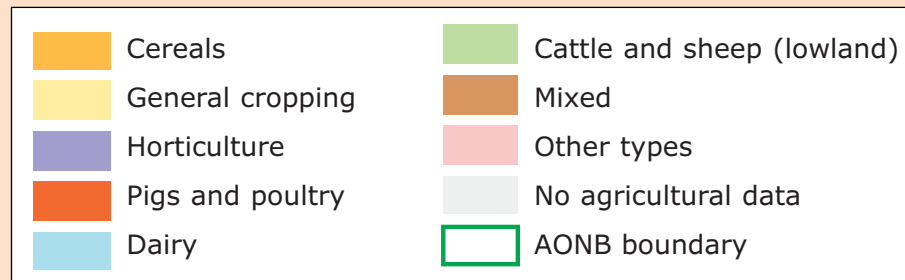


# 4

## COMPONENTS OF NATURAL BEAUTY



**Figure 9** Dominant farm types in the AONB (from Defra Census 2003 and KCC Land-based economy data 2003)



# 4

## COMPONENTS OF NATURAL BEAUTY

### 4.3.2

### FARMED LANDSCAPE – MAIN ISSUES AND THREATS IDENTIFIED



#### FARMED LANDSCAPE

- a** Need to balance a viable and competitive farming industry with the need for sensitive environmental management in a landscape of national importance.
- b** Greater volatility in agricultural commodity prices (both scale and speed) driven by increasing exposure to global markets, the impacts of climatic changes, shortages, the need for food and energy security and falling Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) subsidies, leading to uncertainty about the future direction of agriculture in the Kent Downs.
- c** Uncertainty and limited funding for agri-environment schemes and the incentives they offer, particularly in the face of rising farm gate prices. Along with the possible ending of long run Countryside Stewardship Scheme (CSS) schemes with no certainty of inclusion in Higher Level Stewardship (HLS).
- d** Set aside has, in some circumstances, created areas of biodiversity or landscape interest. It is important to secure these, where appropriate, through the use of agri-environment schemes.
- e** Changes in landholdings and land management practice. Loss or amalgamation of medium-sized mixed farms – polarisation to very large/block units with 'share' or 'contract' farming, and very small farming units/residential or leisure owners, where farming is not the main source of income and experience and continuity of land management are not guaranteed.
- f** Rationalisation of the farming system and loss of landscape diversity and distinctiveness and selling off of farmhouse and buildings/cottages from the farmland estate; separating land and accommodation changing the character and landscape setting of former farmhouses; estate cottages and farm buildings.
- g** Given the relatively high proportion of grade 2 and 3 land there is a need to manage the potential opportunity for economic revival in the arable sector to encourage investment in landscape character management.
- h** Decline in grazing livestock industries, and loss of skilled graziers, replacement with poorly managed leisure plots or abandonment.
- i** Farm diversification activities such as increased livery and equine facilities, shooting and field sports, alternative crops (e.g. lavender, biomass energy crops, vineyards) and non-agricultural enterprises (e.g. self-catering cottages and new uses for more recent rather than traditional farm buildings) can have potentially important impacts as well as benefits for the landscape character, biodiversity and rural economy of the Kent Downs.
- j** Increasing use of polytunnels to provide high quality, low 'food mile' soft and stone fruit. Polytunnels are potentially harmful to the landscape character of the Kent Downs AONB.
- k** The need to manage adaptation and mitigation strategies for climate change, for instance water storage, new housing for livestock or bio energy crops, to create a positive impact on the farmed landscape.
- l** Lack of public awareness of the links between farming and land-based activities, environmental issues, landscape conservation and management.

# 4

## COMPONENTS OF NATURAL BEAUTY

### 4.3.3 FARMED LANDSCAPE – AIMS

**The Kent Downs remains principally a farmed landscape with a strong and viable farming industry where:**

- 1** Regionally targeted public subsidies support farmers who meet environmental, as well as economic and social objectives of the AONB. The conservation of landscape character and diversity, the restoration and enhancement of habitats for wildlife, the conservation of historic and cultural features, responses to climate change and the welcoming of people to enjoy the landscape, are all integrated and complementary activities to contemporary, competitive mainstream farming.
- 2** The landscape heritage of mixed farming is promoted in a modern context, the benefits of agri-environment and former set aside schemes are retained and good land management practice is encouraged to all agricultural businesses and farm owners.
- 3** Farm diversification activities conserve and strengthen landscape character and local distinctiveness, as well as provide benefits to the farm and local economy and rural communities.
- 4** Locally produced, high-quality and sustainably produced food is bought by people and businesses from local shops, farmers markets and in regional supermarkets with environmental quality being a market advantage.
- 5** There is heightened awareness and understanding by local residents and visitors to the AONB of the importance and fundamental role played by farming, and where the connections between landscape conservation, environmentally responsible farming and high quality food are appreciated by all people.



FARMED  
LANDSCAPE



**Photo:**  
Castle Farm  
diversification



**Photos:**  
Castle Farm  
diversification;  
highland cattle,  
Stelling Minnis

# 4

## COMPONENTS OF NATURAL BEAUTY

### 4.3.4 FARMED LANDSCAPE – POLICIES

- FL1** The AONB will retain the principally farmed character for which it is valued.
  - FL2** The targeting of public subsidy for agriculture to make a positive contribution to conserving and enhancing the components of natural beauty and landscape character of the Kent Downs AONB will be pursued.
  - FL3** Farming practices that contribute to improving the landscape character of the AONB, or mitigate damaging impacts will be supported.
  - FL4** The use of integrated whole farm planning which includes a business plan, landscape, heritage, biodiversity and habitat assessments and shows how the farm business will support the wider rural economy and the objectives of the AONB will be pursued.
  - FL5** Farm diversification activities and land-based businesses will be supported if they help to achieve the aims of the AONB Management Plan.
  - FL6** The production, supply and marketing of AONB local produce derived from environmentally sensitive management will be encouraged and supported particularly where it supports landscape character.
  - FL7** Conversion from agricultural to leisure use and the creation of non agricultural structures will only be supported where there is not a cumulative loss to the principally farmed landscape of the AONB and published best practice or design guidance is adopted and conditioned.
  - FL8** Best practice guidance for the use and landscaping of polytunnels will be pursued. Permanent polytunnels should be resisted where they will have a detrimental impact upon landscape character. Proposals for polytunnels should be justified by and integrated whole farm approach \*.
- \*The Integrated whole farm approach as defined in the Kent Downs Rural Advisory Service (KDRAS) Toolkit.
- FL9** Where farming practices challenge the components of natural beauty and landscape character of the AONB they should be resisted where these are subject to control.
  - FL10** Activities will be supported that increase wider public understanding of farming and the benefits that the farmed landscape bring for high quality food production, recreation and leisure, health and well being, nature conservation, archaeology, landscape and a buoyant rural economy.



FARMED  
LANDSCAPE



**Photo:**  
School Farm,  
Homestall

# 4

COMPONENTS OF  
NATURAL BEAUTY



WOODLAND  
AND TREES

## 4.4

## WOODLAND AND TREES

### OVERVIEW

**The Kent Downs is one of Britain's most wooded AONBs. Woodland covers over 20% of the AONB (17,579ha) and is the second largest land-use, after farming. Woodlands are a vital component of the natural beauty of the Kent Downs, providing a green mantle to the upper slopes of the escarpments and valleys. They emphasise the undulating nature of the dip slopes and scarp, and frame the agricultural lower slopes and settlements.**



**Photo:**  
Beech trees,  
Perry Wood

# 4

## COMPONENTS OF NATURAL BEAUTY

### 4.4.1 SPECIAL CHARACTERISTICS

Almost 70% (12,197 ha) of the Kent Downs woodland resource is ancient woodland (continuously present since at least 1600 AD). The Kent Downs supports the second highest concentration of ancient woodland in an English AONB at 10.5% (the High Weald AONB supporting the highest at 21%). The Kent Downs' ancient woodland is nationally important representing 3.4% of the total resource of England and Wales 7. It is thought that this figure is an underestimate as the information base does not include woodlands below 2ha.

Ancient woodland is irreplaceable and is greatly valued for its landscape and biodiversity importance. Some ancient woodland may represent our only link with the original post glacial 'wildwood' and is more likely to contain vulnerable animal and plant species than any other habitat. Ancient woodlands can also include physical evidence of former landscape management practices. The rich ground flora of ancient woodlands – of bluebells, wood anemones, ramsons and yellow archangel – and the bird song of warblers, nightingale and nightjar are part of the natural beauty of the AONB ancient woods. Much of the valued woodland wildlife – the

invertebrates, lichens and fungi, are associated with old trees, deadwood or open ground and are restricted to ancient woods and wood pasture. The ancient woodlands of the Kent Downs also preserve the evidence of thousands of years of human activity in earthworks, monuments and place names.

The highest woodland concentrations in the AONB are found on the Greensand Ridge between Sevenoaks and Tonbridge; along the chalk escarpment in West Kent; in large blocks in the mid Kent Downs; above the Stour Valley and in areas of the East Kent Downs plateaux. However, much of the AONB's woodland is made up of small, fragmented sites in disparate ownership, a situation exacerbated by the rapid increase of wood lotting (breaking up woods into multiple small ownerships). A recent study into woodlotting in Kent has found negative impacts in some cases. More often there is no woodland management and the ability to manage woodlands as a whole can be compromised. There is, however, often a motivation from the new owners to improve and understand the wildlife and heritage of the wood and this should be harnessed.



**Photo:**  
Hollows –  
Woodland Trust

Woodland size (ha)	1980 Census woodland area		1995 Census woodland area		Change (%)
	(ha)	(%)	(ha)	(%)	
<b>2.0 or more</b>	40,063	93.9	37,121	94.6	-7
<b>0.23 to &lt;2.0</b>	2,601	6.1	2,137	5.4	-18
<b>Total</b>	42,664		39,258		-8
<b>% woodland cover</b>	11.4		10.5		

The latest figures (taken from the National Inventory of Woodland and Trees 2002, Forestry Commission): Total area 39 487ha, 10.6% woodland land cover.



## WOODLAND AND TREES

**Table 10**  
Woodland land cover

# 4

## COMPONENTS OF NATURAL BEAUTY

The diversity of woodland types broadly follows the different soil types within the AONB, including clay (with ash, hornbeam and oak); chalk (with ash, beech and yew) and free draining sands (with oak, birch and beech). Beech yew woodland is particularly distinctive in the Kent Downs and is of European significance. Significant blocks of conifer plantation date back to the early 1900s; planting continued into the 1990s and is now largely being phased out and the conifers are beginning to be harvested.

A significant feature of woodland throughout the AONB is a predominance of coppiced sweet chestnut planted into much of the ancient woodland over the last two centuries. Historically, sweet chestnut coppice was used for pit props in the East Kent coalfields and for hop poles. Latterly, as these industries collapsed, chestnut coppice went for hardwood pulp at the nearby paper mills at Sittingbourne and the Medway valley. These industries no longer use hardwood pulp and the closest paper mills are now in North Wales or Northern France. Chestnut is still coppiced for paling fencing and post and rail stock fencing in places.

The continuation of coppicing is vital for landscape and biodiversity conservation. Much of the AONB's woodland landscape was once characterised by blocks (cants) of coppice stools cut on regular cycles. Most animal and plants species of ancient woodlands require coppice management which cyclically opens up the woodland floor to light. Coppice creates mosaics and edges of high canopy with taller and shorter coppice stands, providing a diversity of ecosystems within the woodland habitat. Where deer populations are high establishing coppicing is difficult because the regrowth can be browsed off. It has been noted that the deer populations in Kent woodlands is growing. It is important that the deer population of Kent Downs AONB woodlands be retained at a level where the reestablishment of coppicing is not prejudiced.

In Kent, Sussex and Surrey there remains a coppice industry which, although small and threatened, could provide the resource required to return the coppice woodland of the Kent Downs to rotational management and continue a management tradition with its origins in the Neolithic period.

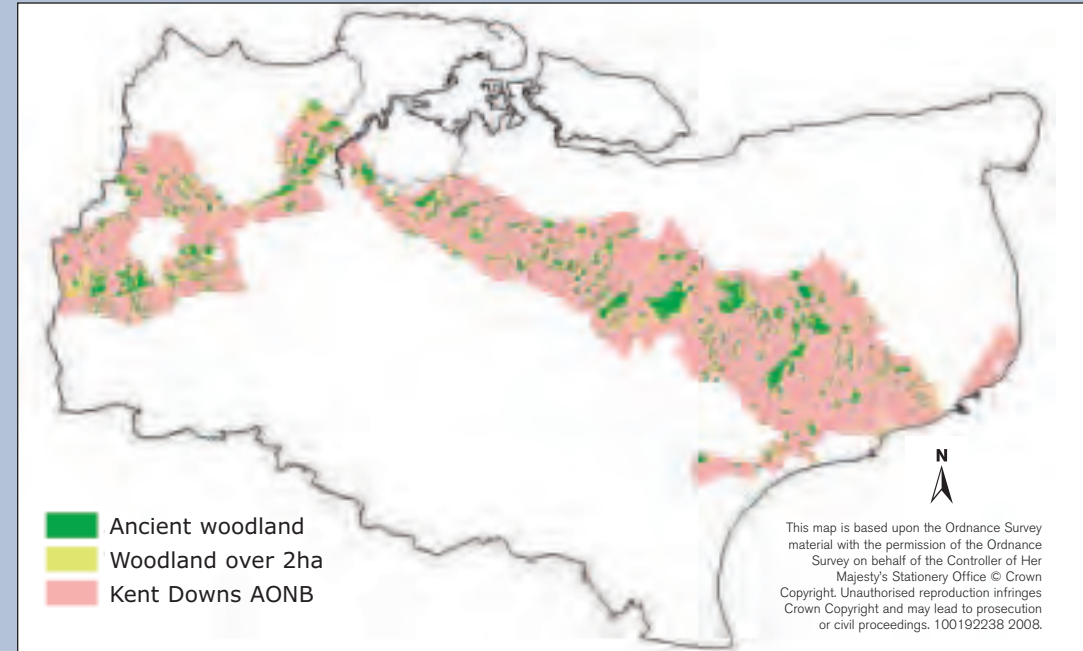
**Table 11**

Woodland type	Area (Ha)	% of AONB woodland resource
Broadleaved woodland	7,320	49.6
Coppice	1,760	11.9
Mixed	2,701	18.3
Conifer	814	5.5
Ground prepared for planting	114	0.8
Coppice-with-standards	112	0.8
Felled	908	6.2
Shrub	453	3.1
Young trees	563	3.8
Total	14,745	100



**Table 11**  
Woodlands over 2 hectares  
*Data taken from National Inventory of Woodland and Trees, Forestry Commission March 2002*

**Figure 10** Woodland cover map



# 4

## COMPONENTS OF NATURAL BEAUTY

It should be noted that Kent was one of the few areas of England which has shown a reduction in woodland cover between the inventories in 1980 and 1995

Climate change puts a special focus on the woodlands of the Kent Downs. It is believed that the Kent Downs will be a refuge for lowland woodland types as climatic conditions change. Additionally sweet chestnut, being a species of Southern Europe, is likely to be well adapted to the predicted conditions and coppicing is thought to be a way to make the woodland ecosystem more resilient to the predicted changes. At the same time wood chips from coppice woodland could provide a significant resource of low carbon energy for heating and potentially power, especially and in a significant way in the new developments of the growth areas but also for individual households. A feasibility study carried out for developments in Ashford demonstrated a strong economic case, ample supply and capacity to provide for seven development projects, saving 5,500 tons of CO2 annually, although none have yet adopted wood fuel. (Ashford biomass study 2005)



**Photo:**  
hedges at  
Magpie Bottom

In 1998, the Forestry Commission published the English Forestry Strategy which describes Government policies, priorities and programmes for forestry. At the same time the UK Forestry Standards were published which set out the criteria and standards for the sustainable management of all forests.

In 2001, this was followed up with the signing of the Joint National Accord with the National Association of AONBs demonstrating their commitment to deliver their strategy within protected landscapes. Seeing the Wood for the Trees, the South East Regional Forestry Framework, sets out a vision and plan for the South East and identifies the need to make more of its woodlands, as they can have a fundamental impact on sustainable development in the region. The strategy emphasises the many social, environmental and economic benefits of woodlands including the potential for many uses such as recreation; providing sustainable construction materials; as a source of renewable energy; a wildlife habitat and to offset carbon dioxide emissions. These ambitions strongly support the aims for the woodlands in the Kent Downs.



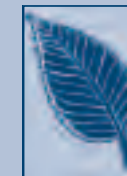
**Photo:**  
Shorne Woods



WOODLAND  
AND TREES

## 4.4.2 WOODLAND AND TREES – MAIN ISSUES AND THREATS IDENTIFIED

- a** Need to establish significant new markets to re-generate management in coppice woodland to support the landscape character, wildlife and the local economy.
- b** Need to build a robust and appropriately trained work force with the capacity to take advantage of new markets as they arise.
- c** Replanting on ancient woodland sites – if carried out, needs to use appropriate species of local provenance if available. In many situations, natural regeneration should be encouraged. (it should be noted that the use of appropriate non native stock is being considered as a response to the impacts of climate change but this is not conclusive and there is a need to be open to new policy on this matter)
- d** The implications of climate change (for instance drought and new tree pests and diseases, as well as the low carbon fuel offered by coppicing) put a special focus on the woodlands of the Kent Downs in both adaptation and mitigation responses.
- e** The owners of many woodlands, particularly small woodlands often cannot be traced. The motivation for woodland ownership and management is varied and more needs to be done to sustain good woodland management.
- f** The need to make the most of the potential positive and manage the negative aspects of wood lotting.
- g** The emphasis on multi-purpose use for woodlands brings with it new challenges for woodland owners and managers where recreation, biodiversity and landscape management are unlikely to bring commercial returns.
- h** Need to establish new high value markets for woodland products – for example for construction materials.
- i** Intensive agriculture, infrastructure and building developments have led to the loss of woodland and transitional habitats around woods.
- j** Pheasant and other game bird shooting is an important income source for many landowners with woodland, although many shoots are intensively managed, causing loss to biodiversity and landscape value. There is a need to promote positive advice to encourage good practice management of shoots that integrates sound landscape, heritage and biodiversity management.
- k** Need to limit potential harm to biodiversity and the regeneration of woodlands from the long term impact of the growth of the deer population on Kent Downs woodlands and to propose and implement long term management solutions.
- l** Need to restore ancient woodland sites planted with conifers to a semi-natural woodland in a managed way.
- m** Need to consider and monitor the potential re-emergence of commercial conifer plantation in the AONB following market improvements.
- n** Need to support the use of the UK forestry standard and certification for woodland products in a way which does not limit the opportunity for the expansion of sustainable woodland management.
- o** Need for the restoration and management of open space in woodlands, particularly woodland rides and glades.
- p** Insufficient understanding of the value, condition and location of 'veteran' trees (exceptionally old), specimen trees and standing/lying deadwood in woodlands and parkland – for landscape, biodiversity, cultural and historic reasons.
- q** Need to review the extent of ancient woodlands and their archaeological and wildlife value and to resurvey the resource using the methodology established in the Wealden survey.



# 4

## COMPONENTS OF NATURAL BEAUTY

### 4.4.3 WOODLAND AND TREES – AIMS



#### A landscape in which:

- 1 The irreplaceable ancient woodland component of natural beauty, cultural heritage and landscape character is conserved, restored and managed.
- 2 The sustainable management of woodlands provides recreation, construction materials, a source of renewable energy, a wildlife habitat, and acts to offset carbon dioxide emissions.
- 3 Woodlands form functional ecological networks alongside other key habitats of the AONB in order to encourage resilience to the impacts of climate change.
- 4 Woodland ecology and archaeology is well understood, conserved, enhanced and recognised for its value.
- 5 There is promotion of public understanding and the sensitive use of woodlands for recreation and leisure.
- 6 The production of high quality timber and valuable underwood is stimulated through significant new local markets.

Ancient woodland is irreplaceable and is greatly valued for its landscape and biodiversity importance



**Photo:**  
Sunken lane



**Photo:**  
Fanscombe Down

## 4.4.4 WOODLAND AND TREES – POLICIES

- WT1** The existing extent of woodland, transitional habitats around woodland and particularly ancient woodland will be protected and threats to the extent of woodland cover opposed.
- WT2** Support will be given to ensure that schemes for promoting woodland management and planting make a positive contribution to conserving and enhancing the landscape character and components of natural beauty of the Kent Downs AONB.
- WT3** The managed conversion of plantations to semi-natural ancient woodland will be supported especially where locally distinct woodland types and tree species and local provenance tree stock or natural regeneration is used\*.
- WT4** The promotion of training, accreditation and wider understanding of woodland management to woodland owners and workers, local people and visitors will be encouraged and supported.
- WT5** The sustainable multipurpose management of woodland, where conforming to other AONB policies and best practice, will be encouraged, particularly for the adaptation to and mitigation of climate change, increased access, country pursuits and recreation, and for biodiversity, landscape and archaeological conservation.
- WT6** The restoration and management of open habitats and spaces, such as rides and glades, in woodland and wood pasture for landscape, biodiversity and archaeology conservation purposes will be supported.
- WT7** The planting of new woodlands and fine specimen trees will be encouraged where it is in keeping with landscape character, resilient to climate change, locally distinct woodland types and tree species are used and where local provenance tree stock or natural regeneration is used\*.
- WT8** The identification, protection and management of fine specimen and 'veteran' trees will be encouraged.
- WT9** Activities and developments causing damage to woodlands, such as illegal and harmful recreation, an expanding deer population, poorly managed use for game rearing and development associated with wood lotting, will be resisted and/or opposed.
- WT10** In response to pressures on woodlands and the positive motivations of many new woodland owners co-ordinated actions and the development of guidance and support which integrates sound landscape, heritage and biodiversity management will be pursued.
- WT11** New markets for sustainably produced, appropriately certified woodland products, particularly wood fuels and construction materials will be pursued.
- WT12** Research to understand the ownership patterns and motivations of woodland owners will be encouraged.
- WT13** The identification and review of ancient woodlands using up to date methodology will be supported.

\* Policies WT3 and WT7 may be amended to reflect the possibility that non native tree stock could be better placed to be resilient to climate change impacts.



# 4

COMPONENTS OF  
NATURAL BEAUTY



## 4.5

## HISTORIC AND CULTURAL HERITAGE

### OVERVIEW

**Virtually every facet of the Kent Downs has been shaped by thousands of years of human activity – in the fields and woods, tracks and lanes and villages and hamlets, an indelible memory of past times have been left to us. While the landform and geology underlies its beauty, the Kent Downs AONB is very much a human landscape.**



**Photo:**  
Charing

# 4

## COMPONENTS OF NATURAL BEAUTY

### 4.5.1 SPECIAL CHARACTERISTICS

There is a strong 'time depth' to the Kent Downs landscape which adds to its distinctive, ancient feel. Glimpses of prehistory can be caught at various places across the AONB. Numerous Palaeolithic flints have been discovered in the AONB taking human activity back to the lower Palaeolithic period. Artefacts found on the higher land of the Kent Downs indicate the, probably occasional, presence of Mesolithic man. Notable traces of Neolithic culture are present in the lower Medway Valley in the form of megalithic burial monuments and standing stones which include the Kit's Coty, Little Kit's Coty and the Coldrum Stones. There are also long barrows, particularly in the Medway and Stour Valleys. Bronze Age round barrows are dotted across the landscape and the Iron Age saw massive hill-forts like that at Oldbury Hill near Ightham as well as widespread farmsteads and rural settlements.

Kent was probably the scene of the Roman invasion of Britain in AD43 and almost 400 years of Roman occupation have left their mark. The Roman road network, stretching in straight lines across the landscape is still represented by, for example, Stone Street

which connected Canterbury with the port at Lympne and sections of Watling Street linking Dover, Canterbury, Rochester and London. Other remains include the lighthouse, or pharos, at Dover and the villa at Lullingstone. The increasing sophistication and landscape impact of agriculture is recorded in the lynchets found throughout the Kent Downs. There is evidence that the Roman and Iron Age field patterns and settlement patterns have strongly influenced the landscape we see today.

Estate centres like Wye and Charing were established in the Anglo-Saxon period. From this time on the carving out of fields from woodland, known as assarting, and unenclosed wood pasture commons appeared in the Kent Downs landscape. Churches were also erected which formed the beginnings of the parochial structure that has continued to the present day. Drove ways, connecting estate centres with summer pastures in the Weald have left their mark in the particularly distinctive north-east to south-west orientation of the road network across much of the Downs which provides a 'grain' to the landscape.



**Photo:**  
Kit's Coty



**Photo:**  
thatching

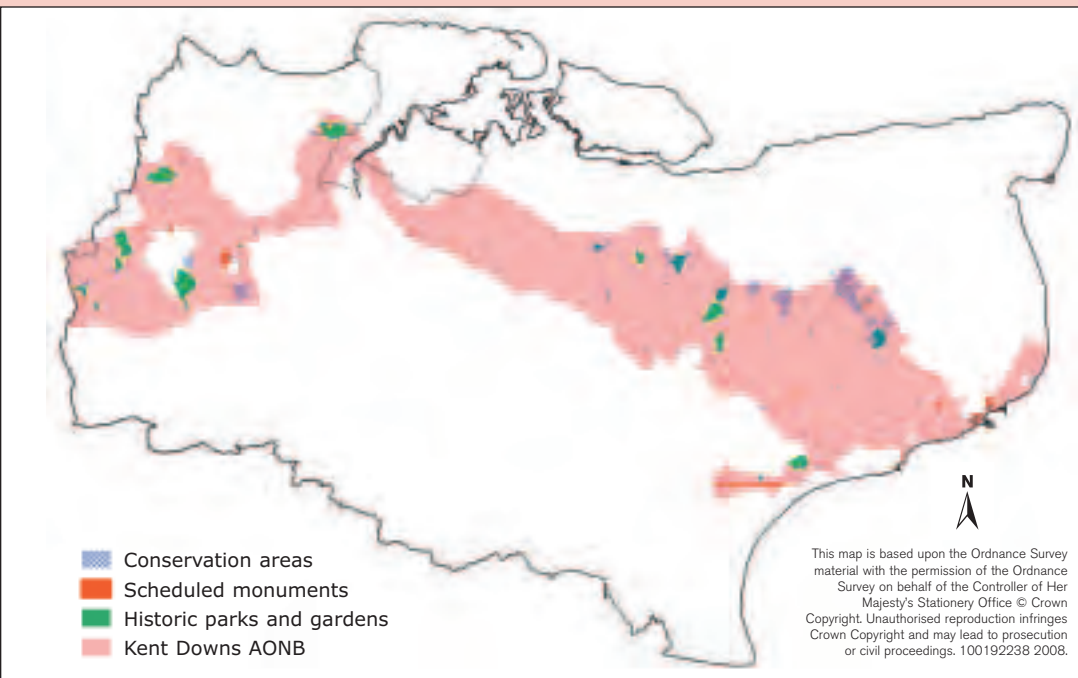
# 4

## COMPONENTS OF NATURAL BEAUTY

The Norman invasion saw the coming of the castle, varying in scale from that at Dover, the 'key' to England, to smaller structures of local lords, such as the ring-work and bailey at Thurnham. Villages grew into towns and churches were rebuilt in stone. Ecclesiastical interest in the countryside is witnessed by monastic houses and the palaces of the Archbishop of Canterbury at Otford and Charing, both of which are located on the 'Pilgrim's Way' or old road, itself an ancient route linking England to the continent. Local man John Kempe established the medieval college at Wye, in 1447 when he was Archbishop of York.

The commons or 'minnises' of the high clay caps of the Kent Downs are believed to have been established by the Saxon or early medieval period and form distinctive open areas or rough grass, bracken and gorse. Many have now been enclosed but open minnises most notably Ewell Minnis near Dover and Stelling

**Figure 11** Designated historic sites



Minnis remain as important remnants of once more widespread landscape features.

The character of the Kent Downs landscape was well established by the Tudor period. There were many nucleated villages clustered around flint and brick churches and greens, as well as linear settlements along river valleys and routeways and spring line settlements at the base of the escarpment. The predominance of local materials help to establish the distinctive character of the built environment. Land was cultivated and grazed throughout the AONB and the many isolated farmsteads bear testimony to this agricultural history. It is believed that complex patterns of enclosure, particularly in the more fertile areas have been created in part by the influence of the Kentish custom of 'Gavelkind' inheritance where property was divided equally rather than being allotted to the oldest heir, producing a multiplicity of holdings.

The selling off of church lands following the Reformation led to the growth of country estates with their parks and gardens which cover an important part of the AONB. Designed landscapes in the Kent Downs include Godmersham and Chilham in the Stour Valley, Doddington and Belmont Parks in the mid Kent Downs and Bourne Park and Higham Park on the River Nailbourne.



**Photo:**  
Castle Hill, Folkestone

# 4

## COMPONENTS OF NATURAL BEAUTY

Along the White Cliffs Heritage Coast, facing as it did potential attack from mainland Europe, there is a rich heritage of defence structures, including Dover Castle and the Western Heights, 19th-century Martello towers and the concrete and brick remains of anti-invasion structures of the two World Wars.

Aside from these grand and dominant historic sites and structures, it is the multitude of smaller cultural and historic features that help to characterise the landscape of the AONB. These are the traces of ordinary people who have worked the land for centuries and have shaped its special character. Networks of ancient hedgerows which still provide enclosure for livestock; wood and field banks which marked boundaries between different manors or estates, picked out with pollarded or 'stubbed' ancient trees; field patterns and lynchets revealing ploughing patterns from centuries ago; hollow ways and sunken lanes carved into the land by millennia of passing feet and hooves; and dene holes (deep excavations into the chalk) and borrow pits where rock and minerals were excavated.

The Kent Downs has a rich tradition of half-timbered and weather-boarded buildings. There is also a legacy of locally distinctive



**Photo:**  
Chartwell

architecture in locally derived building materials such as ragstone, flint and chalk. Soft red bricks and peg-tiles lend colour and here and there long-straw thatching can be seen. The conservation and enhancement of these diverse buildings requires local sources of building materials, as well as skilled craftsmen who understand and respect the building traditions of the past and the architectural vernacular.

The important role that the landscapes of AONBs have in the conservation and sustainable management of the historic environment is recognised in a Joint Statement made between English Heritage and the National Association of AONBs.

*...the traces of ordinary people  
who have worked the land for  
centuries and have shaped its  
special character*



**Photo:**  
icehouse



# 4

## COMPONENTS OF NATURAL BEAUTY

### Historic Landscape Characterisation

Historic Landscape Characterisation describes landscape character based on historical attributes surviving in the present landscape. Kent was one of the first counties to prepare a historic landscape character map on a county wide basis. The mapping is intended to provide broad scale and overall assessment of historic character.

The Kent Downs AONB is made up mainly of a 'field pattern' historic landscape type, covering approximately 63% of the area. Whilst this historic landscape type is further defined into subcategories, there is no predominant field type. Woodland landscape types also feature heavily with some large tracts being present in the east of the AONB. Also notable are the presence of a large number of areas of parkland, indicating the importance of the managed estates within the landscape.



**Photo:**  
parkland at  
Belmont

### Artistic, cultural and scientific importance

The landscape of the Kent Downs has been very influential on many people, places and events of great artistic and cultural importance. These include the ancient Pilgrim's Way from Winchester to Canterbury, paintings by Samuel Palmer in the Darent Valley and the writing and paintings of Winston Churchill at home in Chartwell. The Dover and Folkestone white cliffs and coastline have left an indelible mark on British culture and psyche, particularly through Shakespeare's play *King Lear*, Turner's paintings, Matthew Arnold's poem *Dover Beach* and Vera Lynne's famous wartime song.

Jane Austen frequently visited her brother at Godmersham Park, and Charles Dickens had many connections with the Downs, including the village of Cobham which featured in *The Pickwick Papers*. Bishopsbourne was sometime home to novelist Joseph Conrad, as was the village of Kingston to world renowned sculptor Henry Moore between 1935 and 1940.

Charles Darwin's family home, Down House, and surrounding countryside in the western Kent Downs, is a proposed World Heritage Site. It is recognised for its international significance as



**Photo:**  
Godmersham Park



# 4

## COMPONENTS OF NATURAL BEAUTY

Darwin's home-base from which he developed his scientific theories and the writing of *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection*. The North Downs was the landscape laboratory for Darwin's theory on evolution by natural selection.

There is strong contemporary interpretation and artistic celebration of the Kent Downs AONB. In Kings Wood Stour Valley Arts are a long standing company which has commissioned artists to make sculptures within the forest and also other kinds of artworks. Artists who are particularly responsive to the history and character of this working forest are invited to spend long periods here. As a consequence of their close and sympathetic involvement with the forest, they use natural materials found in the immediate area, and engage with seasonal and growing cycles. Work in Kings Wood includes commissioning sculpture, photography performance and film, guided walks and creative workshops for school and community groups, placements and training. Along the National Cycle Route 2 a series of commissions for Sustrans and local partners forms the Chalk and Channel Way, from sculpture to poetry artists have been inspired by the dramatic coastline between Folkestone and Dover.



**Photo:**  
Chalk and Channel  
sculptures

The Kent Downs landscape continues to be influential and inspirational to contemporary artists and cultural life, and this quality needs to be celebrated, linked to regeneration activities and promoted more widely.

A detailed report of the history, culture and traditions of the Kent Downs AONB was prepared to inform the Valley of Visions Landscape Partnership Scheme (Kent Downs AONB March 2004).

There is strong contemporary interpretation and artistic celebration of the Kent Downs AONB



**Photo:**  
Down House



# 4

## COMPONENTS OF NATURAL BEAUTY

### 4.5.2 HISTORIC AND CULTURAL HERITAGE – MAIN ISSUES AND THREATS IDENTIFIED

- a** Lack of general understanding of historic influences on the components of the landscape of the Kent Downs.
- b** The need to increase people’s understanding, engagement, awareness of, and inspiration from, the historic, artistic, built and cultural heritage, to encourage greater opportunities for the historic heritage to inform contemporary decisions and place making.
- c** The need to develop the use of a holistic approach to the historic environment, referring to the Historic Environment Record, to inform research projects, development decisions and landscape management.
- d** The need to conserve and protect the historic environment, both above and below ground. Issues include the effect of deep ploughing, the introduction of new (deep rooting) energy crops and arable conversion on sites containing buried archaeological remains and development affecting or in proximity to historic buildings. Protection and conservation may take place in the development control system or through schemes such as Higher Level Stewardship.
- e** There is a need to establish where the conservation of buried archaeological remains and biodiversity (particularly management and restoration of chalk downland) can be managed in parallel to secure wider heritage conservation objectives.
- f** Recognition and reinforcement of special character and the local distinctiveness of settlements, farmsteads, buildings and design in the Kent Downs landscape through the statutory planning process as well as in Village Design Statements and Conservation Area Appraisals.
- g** Dearth of skills and local sustainably sourced materials for historic building conservation and new developments.
- h** Responses to climate change provides both risks (for instance planting of deep rooted new crops on sites of buried archaeology) and opportunities (sensitive adaptation of historic buildings) for the historic environment.



**Photo:**  
Reclining figure, 1938,  
Henry Moore



**Photo:**  
Ightham Mote

# 4

## COMPONENTS OF NATURAL BEAUTY

### 4.5.3 HISTORIC AND CULTURAL HERITAGE – AIMS

#### A landscape in which:

- 1 The principal components of the historic character of the Kent Downs landscape, the field patterns, hedgerows, droveways, woodlands and parklands are recognised, conserved and enhanced.
- 2 The rich legacy of sites and features are conserved, positively managed, understood and cherished by people who live, work in and visit the AONB.
- 3 The economic and 'quality of life' benefit of living and working in an historically-rich, artistically and culturally inspiring environment is recognised and supported.
- 4 New developments respect and reinforce the traditions of the past, whilst integrating sustainable technologies and sensitive new design.



**Photo:**

Lucky Moyo leads a percussion workshop

- 5 The distinctive and historic pattern of settlement is protected and maintained for its own sake and for the greater benefit it brings to landscape quality, natural beauty and the quality of life of those who live and work in the AONB.
- 6 The landscape context and setting of all historic buildings, features and settlements is respected, conserved and enhanced.
- 7 Restoration, conversion and new build reflect local character in form, scale and texture and will meet high environmental standards, using sustainably sourced, locally derived materials and skilled workers.
- 8 Responses to climate change will support and strengthen the historic character of the Kent Downs
- 9 Communities are engaged and involved in the historic environment of the Kent Downs through methods such as conservation area management planning, village design, place making and interpretation.
- 10 The cultural influences of the past contribute to vibrant and contemporary artistic interpretations and celebrations of the landscape of the Kent Downs.



There is a strong 'time depth' to the Kent Downs landscape which adds to its distinctive, ancient feel

# 4

## COMPONENTS OF NATURAL BEAUTY

### 4.5.4 HISTORIC AND CULTURAL HERITAGE – POLICIES

- HCH1** The conservation and enhancement of the historic character of the Kent Downs landscape will be supported and pursued.
- HCH2** The protection, restoration and enhancement and ongoing management of sites and features of historic interest will be supported.
- HCH3** A wider understanding of how the Kent Downs landscape has evolved and its historic character will be encouraged.
- HCH4** A wider understanding of cultural, scientific and artistic inspiration from the Kent Downs landscape will be supported in part to inform the interpretation and management of the AONB.
- HCH5** Activities which respond to the economic potential of the historic and cultural environment, for instance rural tourism, and the reuse of buildings will be encouraged where they also support the conservation and



**Photo:**  
Kent Wind Soloists  
in Kings Wood

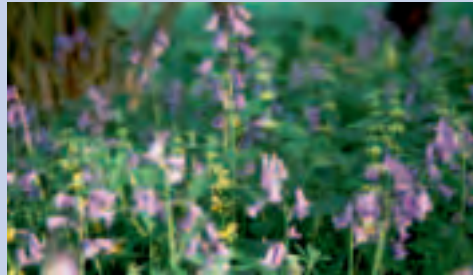
enhancement of the landscape character and components of natural beauty of the Kent Downs and resisted where they conflict with them.

- HCH6** The particular historic and locally distinctive character of rural settlements and buildings of the Kent Downs AONB will be identified, maintained and strengthened. New developments will be encouraged to use appropriate design guidance and:
- demonstrate high quality in design which respects local character and distinctiveness of the AONB,
  - are complementary in form, setting, scale and use of materials.
- HCH7** The provision and use of locally-derived materials for construction, restoration and conversion work will be encouraged where the source of material meets the requirements of development control policies, is in conformity with AONB Management Plan policies, and helps to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the AONB.
- HCH8** Activities to secure the conservation of areas of historic or archaeological interest will be supported especially where they also support permanent chalk downland and/or other biodiversity rich habitats.
- HCH9** The preparation of best practice guidance for adapting the historic and cultural environment to climate change will be supported; adaptation and mitigation schemes will be supported where they are also sensitive to the historic landscape character and distinctiveness of the Kent Downs.
- HCH10** Opportunities to develop contemporary artistic, cultural and scientific interpretation and celebration of the landscape of the Kent Downs will be supported and pursued.



# 4

COMPONENTS OF  
NATURAL BEAUTY



## 4.6

## GEOLOGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES

### OVERVIEW

**The natural and cultural features that create the Kent Downs' sense of place and special character have in large part been governed by the physical nature of the environment. With significant changes predicted in the natural environment a special focus on positive action is an important priority for the future conservation and enhancement of the Kent Downs.**



**Photo:**  
Devil's Kneading Trough

# 4

## COMPONENTS OF NATURAL BEAUTY

### 4.6.1 SPECIAL CHARACTERISTICS

#### Geology

The Kent Downs are valued most as a place of spectacular views, changing scenery and diversity of landscape. The underlying geology is quite literally the foundation of this natural beauty.

The AONB encompasses a complex band of geological layers, each following the broad east-west sweep of Kent. The folded and undulating chalk, greensand, Gault Clay and ragstone, with intricate overlying layers of clay with flint, sand, river gravels and alluvium determine the nature of the land and soil, and the plants and animals that are supported.

The AONB contains a number of nationally and regionally important geological or physiographical features, eight of which have been designated as geological Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) – including the full extent of the chalk cliffs of the Heritage Coasts. Where they are not statutorily designated, some sites have been selected as Regionally Important Geological Sites (RIGS).



**Photo:**  
ploughed field, Olantigh

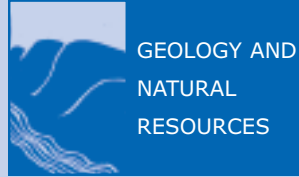
Many of these are exposures created during mineral workings or cuttings for transport infrastructure, which have been left uncovered and reveal strata of important rocks, minerals and fossils.

The importance, management and awareness of geological sites and features tend to be overlooked or misunderstood because of the lack of information and interpretation. These features and sites are an important part of the natural beauty of the Kent Downs.

The geology of the Kent Downs means that mineral winning has been a long run activity, particularly on the northern edge of the Greensand. Spent mineral workings are at risk from new development proposals but should be carefully operated and sensitively restored.

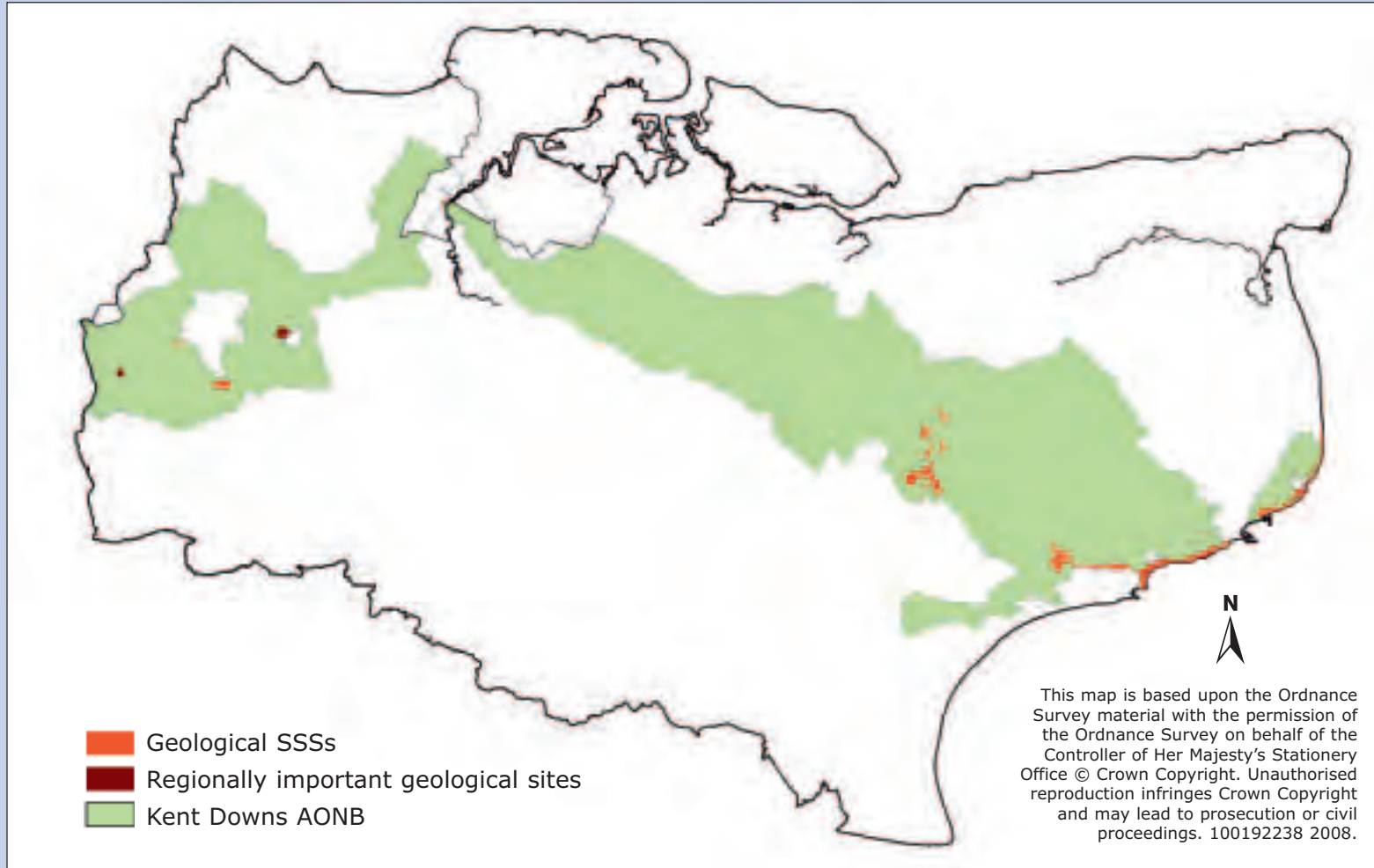
#### Soil

Soil is an irreplaceable and often overlooked natural resource, which forms naturally over hundreds of years. It is a key determinant of the natural vegetation of the AONB and is fundamental to all land uses. In semi-natural habitats, an undisturbed soil structure is a vital component of the ecosystem. On cultivated land, the careful management of soil is a necessary primary principle of good farming. Soil erosion can occur on ploughed steeper slopes of the AONB, the soil eventually being washed through into adjacent watercourses – adding to the risk of flooding. Pollution or contamination of soil can occur through the misuse of pesticides and other chemicals, which can accumulate over time, and can leach into surface and groundwater supplies. Soil husbandry is an essential element of environmentally sustainable farming and land management and is increasingly being understood as being important in the management of carbon.



# 4

## COMPONENTS OF NATURAL BEAUTY



**Figure 12** Geological SSSIs and regionally important geological sites

# 4

## COMPONENTS OF NATURAL BEAUTY

### Water

The Kent Downs AONB is a comparatively dry landscape – rain water permeates easily through the porous chalk and greensand bedrock with generally few areas of standing water – except where clay-lined dew ponds are present. Where the permeable chalk and greensand layers meet impermeable Gault clay, water seeps out in spring lines – the lower scarp slopes are characterised by historic settlements that have developed around these water sources (Postling, Hollingbourne and Underriver to name three). These springs flow into the main river catchments, flowing out and sometimes through the AONB. Within the chalk and greensand domes, clean percolated water forms the groundwater aquifer, which provides 75% of drinking water in Kent. This is clearly an important resource and should not be underestimated. The quality of the ground water aquifer and the surface river water is determined in no small part by land and landscape management and other activities. The quantity of groundwater and surface water is becoming a more critical issue as Kent is set to accommodate over 137,000 (figure taken from South East Plan Companion Report 2008) more households in the next twenty years. Abstraction already occurs throughout the AONB and has been linked to low summer river flows particularly of the Rivers Darent and Little Stour. This situation will be exacerbated by the predicted effects of climate change. Not only will these factors have a profound affect on potable water supply in Kent, but also may impact on the physical and ecological character in the AONB over time.

### Climate

The physical environment is constantly changing, and man-made changes are occurring now, faster than recorded for many generations. The impact of climate change is leading to warmer, drier summers and milder, wetter winters. Similarly, short-lived but more extreme weather events are occurring more frequently. It is anticipated that extreme weather events, such as summer drought, are most likely to trigger the most significant changes in land management and landscape. Sea levels are also rising which will have localised effects on the Heritage Coast and on the

reaches of the tidal Medway. Sea cliff erosion will occur at an accelerated rate, and brackish water already reaches the flood meadows in the Medway valley, affecting the quality of grazing pastures and influencing local flora and fauna.

The likely headline impacts of climate change for the South East Protected Landscapes have been studied at a regional level; it was found that climate change will have a major effect on some important aspects that make up Protected Landscapes (ADAS headline indicators of climate change 2006). It will affect the existing biodiversity (both terrestrial and freshwater), the potential and use of land for agriculture, the morphology of the coastline and the cultural features within the landscape. In the Kent Downs key impacts were likely in the rivers and streams, along the coast, as well as for biodiversity and agriculture. In the short term landscape impacts are most likely from mitigation responses; in the longer term it is the climatic changes themselves which are likely to have important impacts on natural beauty.

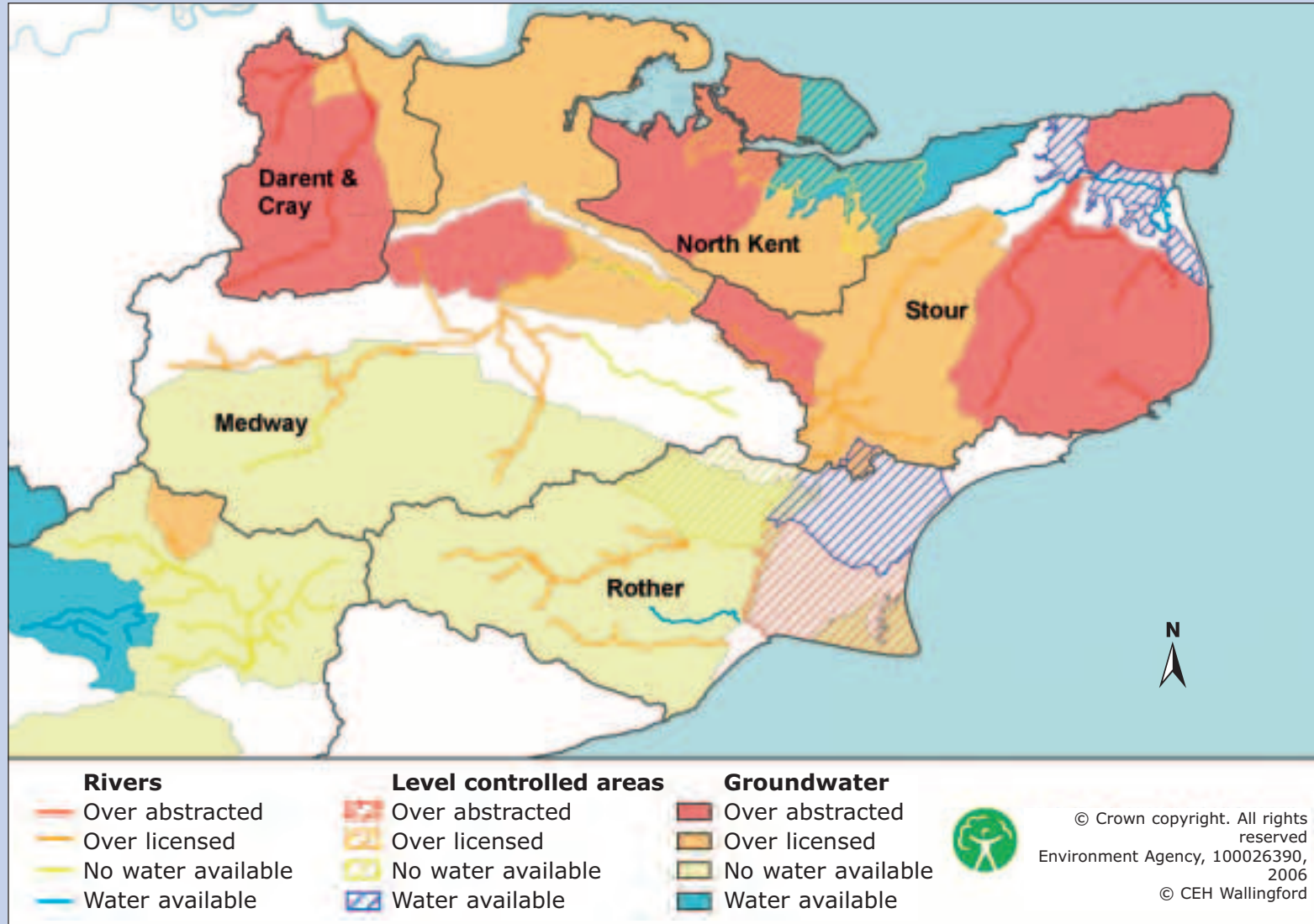


**Photo:**  
Wouldham from the  
River Medway



# 4

## COMPONENTS OF NATURAL BEAUTY



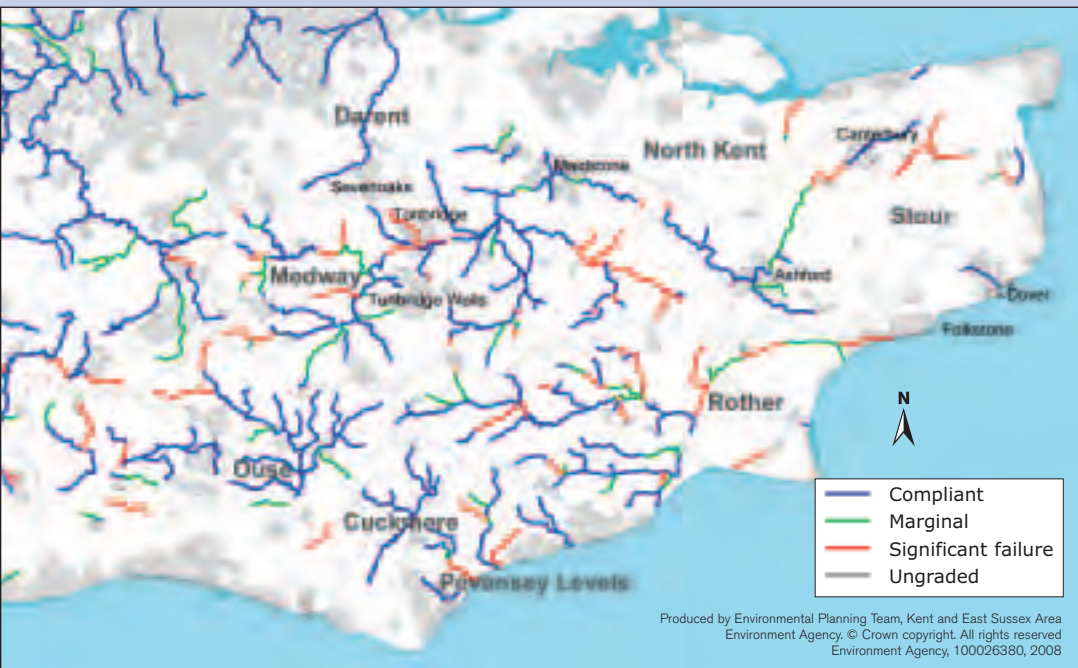
**Figure 13** 1998, Kent Local Environment Agency Plan

# 4

## COMPONENTS OF NATURAL BEAUTY

The Kent Downs AONB is vulnerable to changes in the physical and natural environment being a dry and free-draining landscape, located in the driest part of the country where climate changes will be most strongly felt. A drop in summer rainfall levels and increase in temperature will affect many of the wild animal and plant species. Beech trees and bluebells, to name two, suffer from heat stress in hot dry summers, and are predicted to contract their ranges northwards. Similarly, other species will become established from the European mainland. At the same time modelling carried out by the Branch project (Alterra 2007) shows that, for instance the Kent Downs has a key role in providing a network for chalk grassland species and work by the Forestry Commission (Forestry commission 2007) shows that woodlands may be less effected in Kent Downs than surrounding areas making the landscape potentially an important refuge for lowland woodland communities.

**Figure 14** Water quality



It is clear that policies and action have to be adopted at all levels in response to climate change and that AONBs must contribute positively. The preparation of an adopted renewables position statement for the AONB is an important step in showing how a protected landscape can contribute to government’s mitigation efforts target of reducing carbon emissions by 80 per cent by 2050. At the same time a methodology has been developed to consider adaptation responses for the protected landscapes using the ‘UK Climate Impact Programme (UKCIP) climate risk and adaptation wizard’.

The benefits of climate change need to be harnessed to best effect for the benefit of the AONB, such as promoting new sources of renewable energy from our woodlands, wind and sun; and the increased opportunity for tourism by providing lengthened holiday periods in this dry, warm and attractive part of the country.

The UKCIP will publish UK 21st Century Climate Scenarios in 2009 (UKCIP09). These are expected to provide more confidence and detail than the scenarios on which current modelling is developed (UKCIP02).



**Photo:**  
dew pond at Elham

# 4

## COMPONENTS OF NATURAL BEAUTY

### Tranquillity and remoteness

The perception of being away from the noise, sight and smells of modern life is a much valued feature of many parts of the AONB as a place where people can refresh body and soul. In the south east of England tranquillity is an increasingly rare resource, Research by the Campaign for the Protection of Rural England (CPRE) has shown that since the 1960s England has lost over 20% of its tranquil areas to urban sprawl, traffic and light pollution. The average size of our tranquil areas has been reduced by 73%. As Kent becomes increasingly populated, this resource will become more important and increasingly under threat. Recent national tranquillity mapping carried out by the CPRE has confirmed that the Kent Downs offers important areas of relative tranquillity in Kent.

A CPRE survey (2003) has focused on the loss of dark night skies over the last 20 years by badly designed and sited night lighting. An accepted part of country living has always been the pitch dark at night, and star-filled skies. These qualities are increasingly difficult to enjoy in the AONB. A questionnaire carried out through the Orchid Newspaper showed that Tranquillity was a vital and much valued feature of many parts of the AONB with 49% of respondents rating it as the feature most valued to them.



**Photo:**  
Darent Valley  
water meadow

### Ecological footprinting

Ecological footprinting compares individual human consumption of natural resources with the Earth's ability to regenerate them. The first analysis of the Ecological Footprint has taken place at a regional level in 2004 and was reported in 'Taking Stock: An Ecological Footprint of the South East region'. Taking Stock identified the South East as the region with the highest Ecological Footprint within the UK. This was followed by 'Stabilising the Ecological Footprint in the South East Plan: A report to SEERA' published in 2005 which sets out how the South East can move towards stabilising and eventually reducing the Ecological Footprint of the regions residents. The Regional Economic Strategy (RES) contains a headline target to reduce the rate of increase in the Ecological Footprint (currently rising at 1.1% per year), stabilise the Footprint and then generate a reduction by 2016.

In 2008 Kent County Council analysed the Ecological Footprint of Kent. At an AONB level taking a community based approach to achieving the Ecological Footprint Targets set in the RES is an appropriate approach for the management of natural resources. At a community level, the Kent Downs could be an appropriate place to pilot such an approach.

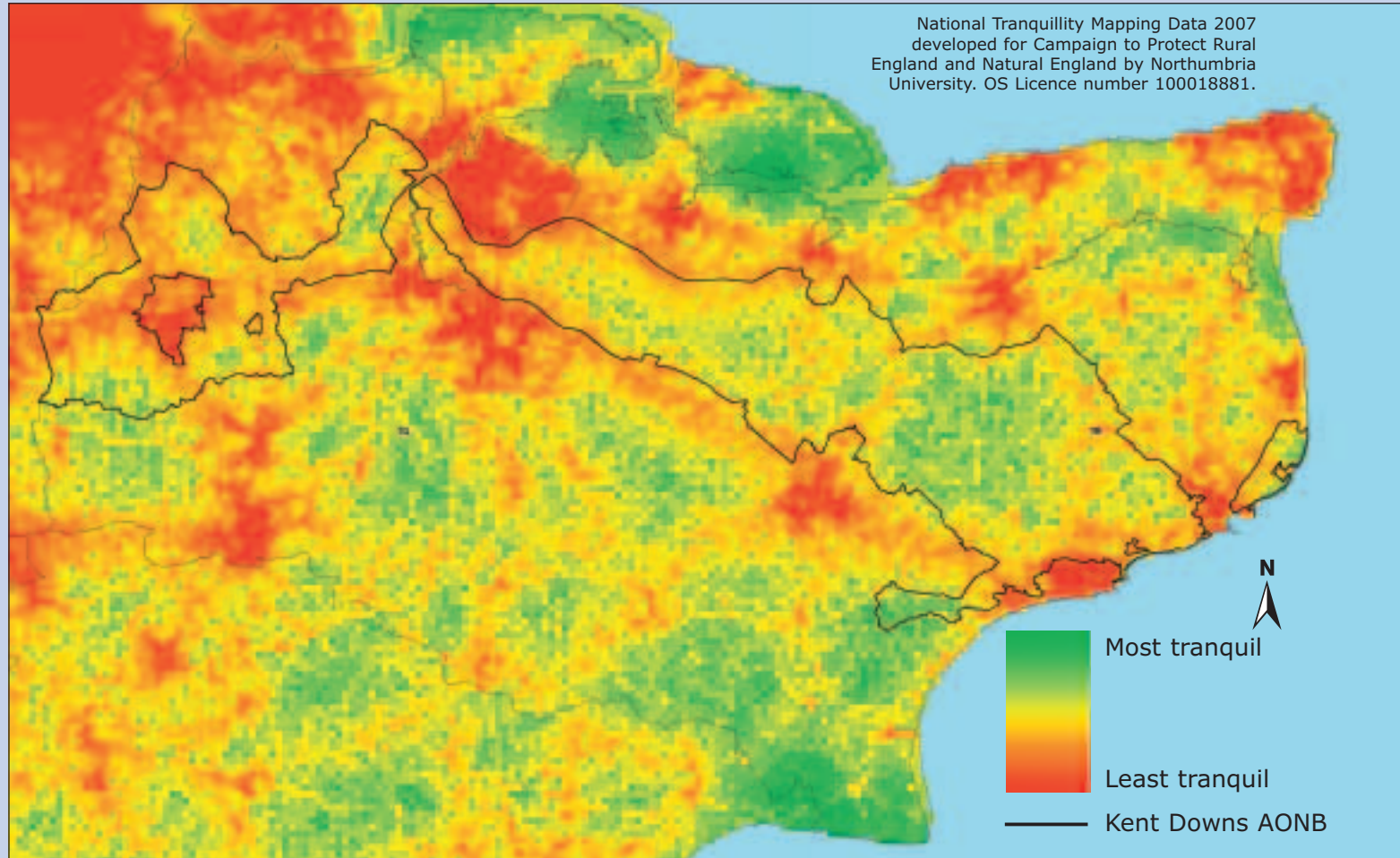


**Photo:**  
cowslips and early  
purple orchids



# 4

## COMPONENTS OF NATURAL BEAUTY



**Figure 15** Tranquillity



### Geology

- a** Loss of geological exposures and sites through lack of management of scrub and trees; top soiling and grass seeding; development, landfill and dumping.
- b** Lack of information and awareness about the underlying geological importance and land form of the AONB.
- c** Mineral workings can have a serious impact on landscape quality and are highly sensitive, the loss of a single hedge can expose the scar of a quarry over a long distance and they are also susceptible to development proposals.

### Soils

- d** Soil erosion, especially on the steeper slopes and under 'open' arable crops, such as maize and potentially some biomass crops.
- e** Maintaining and improving agricultural soil quality and understanding the relationship between soil management and climate change mitigation.

### Water – Groundwater and rivers

- f** Pollution of rivers and springs from point sources, including public and private sewerage systems, agriculture and fish farms.
- g** Diffuse pollution from agricultural sources leading to nutrient enrichment, reduced water and elevated levels of silt and pesticides.
- h** Abstraction and low river flows, particularly in the Darent and Great Stour catchments – the compound effect of water abstraction for public water supply, and unpredictable river flow through reduced groundwater aquifer levels and changes in rainfall patterns.
- i** Predicted increase and volume in flooding events. Rivers flooding in the Kent Downs affects localised areas.
- j** Need to understand the relationship between landscape management and aquifer recharge.

### Climate

- j** Rising sea levels and the accelerated erosion of the Heritage Coasts and areas adjacent to the tidal Medway.
- k** Continuing general lack of appreciation of the likely trends and speed in global warming and methods of addressing these.
- l** The need to adopt renewable energy technologies which are effective at reducing green house gasses and which support the special qualities of the AONB.
- m** Potential for bio fuel planting in locations that are unsympathetic to landscape character.
- n** Change in land uses e.g. new crops, and management practices.
- o** Vulnerability of species and fragmented habitats at the south-eastern edge of their range, and establishment of other species both detrimental and benign.
- p** Potential increase in summer water demand and reduction in supply.

### Minimising noise and light pollution – for tranquillity and remoteness

- q** Since the 1960s, the average size of tranquil areas (away from traffic and urban noise) has been reduced by 73% but the Kent Downs still provides important relatively tranquil areas.
- r** Fewer places have dark night skies because of the increasingly ubiquitous lighting columns and floodlighting.

### Ecological footprint

- s** High ecological footprint for communities in the Kent Downs and the opportunity to pilot innovative community level approaches to this.

# 4

## COMPONENTS OF NATURAL BEAUTY

### 4.6.3 GEOLOGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES – AIMS



#### **A landscape in which:**

- 1** A safe, clean and comparatively tranquil environment is protected, conserved and enhanced, where residents and visitors alike will benefit through increased well being and quality of life;
- 2** The important geological sites and exposures of the Kent Downs are recognised conserved and enhanced;
- 3** The natural resources of soil, water and air will be conserved and enhanced;
- 4** Local sources of pollution indigenous to the AONB, including noise, light, soil and water, are minimised, reduced or controlled;
- 5** A positive, proactive and urgent approach is taken to the implications of climate change and intelligent and effective mitigation and adaptation responses are chosen which support landscape character and natural resources;
- 6** Priority is given to the production of effective sustainable energy from traditional land uses (such as woodland produce), and renewable energy initiatives that serve the needs of local communities and meet the purposes of the AONB designation.
- 7** The ecological footprint on AONB communities is stabilised and reduced to meet or exceed the South East Economic Strategy targets.



**Photo:**  
view to Kingsdown



**Photo:**  
Samphire Hoe

- GNR1** Advice to farmers and land managers which seeks integrated environmental land management in the Kent Downs will be encouraged – to retain and enhance soil quality, to prevent soil erosion, to reduce surface and groundwater pollution and overuse, improve aquifer recharge, mitigate climate change and to assist with local flood prevention and control.
- GNR2** Threats to the conservation of the natural resources of soil, water and air will be resisted.
- GNR3** Activities designed to protect, conserve and enhance the important geological exposures of the Kent Downs will be encouraged.
- GNR4** The careful management and sensitive restoration of existing minerals and waste sites within, visible from or adjoining the Kent Downs will be pursued and resisted if they do not conform with AONB policies and conserve and enhance landscape character.
- GNR5** Activities to increase the understanding of the importance and extent of tranquillity, remoteness and 'dark night skies' within the Kent Downs and the factors that impact on them, with special reference to intrusive developments, noise and light pollution, and methods to abate damaging impact will be supported and pursued.
- GNR6** New developments and highways infrastructure will seek to achieve a net improvement in tranquillity and dark skies through careful design and the use of new technologies.
- GNR7** Local renewable and sustainable energy initiatives will be pursued and supported where they help to conserve and enhance the natural beauty and landscape character of the AONB and bring environmental, social and economic benefits to local people. Proposals will be expected to conform with the approved Kent Downs AONB Renewable Energy Position Statement and not conflict with other policy aims.
- GNR8** Community based initiatives to reduce ecological foot print and conserve and enhance natural beauty will be pursued.
- GNR9** The causes and effects of climate change on the Kent Downs AONB will be taken into account in landscape management decisions.
- GNR10** Additional water abstraction particularly in the Darent and Great Stour river catchments will be resisted unless it can be demonstrated that there will not be any harmful impacts upon the character of the Kent Downs.



**Photo:**  
South Hill Quarry

# 4

## QUALITY OF LIFE COMPONENTS



## 4.7 QUALITY OF LIFE COMPONENTS

### 4.7.1 SECONDARY PURPOSES OF AONB DESIGNATION

**The landscape comes first.** The primary purpose of AONB designation is to 'conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the landscape', and this purpose is the primary focus of the Management Plan.

The secondary purposes of AONB designation are to take account of the needs of land-based and rural industries and of the economic and social needs of local communities. In addition, recreation demand should be met in a way that is consistent with the conservation of natural beauty and the needs of agriculture, forestry and other uses.

The following three chapters set out how the secondary purposes of AONB designation will be addressed by the Management Plan. A principal consideration in preparing these sections is the way in which they relate back to the primary purpose of designation. The challenge for this Management Plan is to find ways in which social and economic well-being and public understanding and enjoyment, can be complementary to, and can further support the primary purpose of conserving and enhancing natural beauty.



**Photo:**  
Trosley

# 4

QUALITY OF LIFE COMPONENTS



## 4.8 VIBRANT COMMUNITIES

### OVERVIEW

**The Kent Downs AONB is a living and working landscape. One aim of this Management Plan must be to find ways of achieving a sustainable and prosperous local economy that conserves and enhances this nationally important area.**

An AONB management plan is not the primary means for tackling social and economic needs. That is the role of a range of other organisations, funding streams, and strategic policy documents. Sustainable Community Strategies prepared through Local Strategic Partnerships, regional and sub-regional policy documents (e.g. the South East Plan, South East Regional Economic Strategy, Kent Rural Delivery Framework, Medway Rural Action Plan etc.) and national programmes such as the new Rural Development Programme for England 2007-12 are designed to form a context for socio-economic activity. Other key players in this large and complex area include Action With Communities in Rural Kent, South East England Development Agency (SEEDA), Business Link, the County Council's Rural Regeneration team and the Kent Rural Board and the Parish Councils. Many of these organisations are public bodies and therefore, under the CRoW Act have a statutory duty of regard towards the purposes of the AONB when developing their strategic and funding plans.

Without the right social and economic conditions it will be difficult to conserve and enhance the special qualities of the AONB. This plan focuses on those areas that have a significant and direct impact on the primary purpose of AONB designation.



**Photo:**  
Charing WI

## 4.8.1 SPECIAL CHARACTERISTICS

**The people and rural economy of the AONB**

The population of the Kent Downs AONB in 2001 is estimated to be just over 66,000 or 4.2% of Kent's population (of 1,570,000).

The 2001 National Census survey provides the most up to date information about the residents of the AONB. This, and other data was examined by Terra Consulting to provide a social and economic profile of the Kent Downs AONB.

The AONB population is generally older, with fewer ethnic minority groups than the rest of the county. The population has more people in white-collar and professional work than for the county as a whole, with higher owner-occupancy and car ownership/household than for Kent as a whole. A higher percentage of people are self-employed, probably resulting in more home-working and indicative of an increasing knowledge-based economy within the AONB. The ease of access to main urban areas, particularly Greater London, and the attractiveness of the villages and countryside places great demand on most parts of the AONB as a place to live and work and from which to commute. House prices are high and the percentage increase has been higher than the regional average. Second homes are felt to be a threat to the communities of the AONB; second home ownership in the Kent Downs is 263 homes (Socio-economic profiles for PLAs in South East England, Terra Consult 2005).

The lack of affordable or rented housing within or adjacent to the AONB exacerbates the situation particularly for young people and families, and people on lower incomes (including public sector workers and those employed in the land-based industries). This situation creates 'hidden households' where young adults continue to live with parents rather than establishing themselves independently.

On the whole incomes are higher than the regional average and are around the average for people living in a protected landscape.

Not surprisingly, the percentage of people employed in land-based economic activities is double that for the county as a whole, although this figure is a small part of the overall AONB workforce (3.8%). AONB residents from other industry sectors are in similar proportion to the county as a whole; hotels and restaurants are important employers in the Kent Downs AONB. The Kent Rural Delivery Framework evidence base has described the rural communities of Kent as active and entrepreneurial; they are a considerable asset which can be harnessed to secure the future of the AONB.

Against this background of apparent higher standard of living, 3% of the work force is unemployed. Rural poverty and exclusion is regarded as a hidden but real issue in a number of communities particularly for isolated elderly people, people with disabilities, migrant workers and some young families. While lower than the

	AONB	% of AONB total	Kent	% of Kent total
Residents of ethnic minority groups	1,130	1.7	54,957	3.5
Owner-occupier	51,861	78	478,022	74
Rented	14,627	22	168,286	26
Households with 2 or more cars	32,579	49	219,745	34
Unemployed	1,995	3	32,867	4.3
Retired	31,950	48	160,336	44
Self employed	13,297	20	102,341	13
Employed in agriculture, forestry, hunting	2,194	3.3	11,978	1.6
Occupation: professional, management & senior officer level	21,941	33	183,484	25



**Table 12**  
Significant population/demographic data for the AONB compared to the county of Kent.  
*Sources: 2001 Census, Key Statistics KS02, Office for National Statistics, Countryside Agency/ Terra Consulting 2004 Socio-economic Profiles for Protected Areas in the South East.*

# 4

## QUALITY OF LIFE COMPONENTS

regional average the Index of Multiple Deprivation is higher than for other South East Protected Landscapes. Added to this, there are at least five wards on or immediately adjacent to the AONB boundary with very high social and economic needs.

The importance of traditional land-based economic activities to the AONB's rural income is small and declining. However, a number of other employment sectors and industries (such as transportation, distribution, tourism and retail) depend on the land-based activities and landscape to some extent. The diversification of the employment base in a way which supports the landscape character and special characteristics of the AONB needs to be encouraged and developed.

The impact of a high speed rail link to London in 2009 is anticipated to only have a minor effect on the social and economic conditions in Ashford and it is assumed that this will be true for the AONB too; however it could be expected to exacerbate the trends seen so far and provide a real opportunity to promote sustainable rural tourism based on high speed train travel. (The Impact of High Speed Trains on Socio-Economic Activity: The Case of Ashford (Kent), Transportation Research Group, University of Southampton.)



**Photo:**  
farm visit

### Initiatives to support rural development, regeneration and communities

A rapidly changing plethora of initiatives, projects and grant funding are available and carried out by many organisations. These include:

- Rural Development Programme for England 2007-12
- Kent Downs & Marshes LEADER Programme
- West Kent LEADER Programme
- SEEDA Rural Access to Services Programme
- Kent Rural Towns Programme – applicable in Wye, Chilham, Lenham etc.
- East Kent Community Fund
- East Kent Parish Plans Fund

### Community and Parish Planning

A programme of support for parishes wishing to undertake a parish plan (i.e. a community strategy at individual parish level) has been in place since 2001. In the first instance, support, including officer time and grants, was financed through the Countryside Agency. From 2005 this support was financed by



**Photo:**  
Wye farmers' market



VIBRANT  
COMMUNITIES

# 4

## QUALITY OF LIFE COMPONENTS

Defra and, in 2006-08, delivered through the Defra Rural Social & Community Programme. Central government funding for this activity ceased in April 2008 but is to be replaced with private trust funding in East Kent (including the AONB between Charing/Challock/Molash and St Margaret's at Cliffe.) Within Kent a structure to incorporate actions from Parish Plans into Sustainable Community Strategies was agreed by the Kent Partnership, Action with Communities in Rural Kent, Kent Association of Local Councils and Kent Downs AONB in 2007.

Demand to prepare Village Design Statements is still high within the AONB and research carried out for the Kent Downs AONB has shown that Village Design Statements are an effective, although not infallible tool at influencing planning and development control decisions at a village level, they also serve to bring communities together around the issue of good design.

Community responses to climate change are being piloted in Elham and St Margaret's at Cliffe in the Kent Low Carbon Communities project. The lessons from these projects will be useful to develop and widen community and parish planning initiatives so that they include ecological footprint measures and enhanced sustainability.

### Sustainable rural leisure and tourism

Expressed simply, sustainable tourism can be said to be: tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, and the environment and host communities.

Making Tourism More Sustainable – A Guide for Policy Makers (p2), UNEP World Tourism Organization, 2005

There is an increasing recognition that the development of a sustainable leisure and tourism industry is essential to the economic well being of rural areas. The Foot and Mouth disease crisis in 2001 and the subsequent spotlight on rural tourism as a key component of the rural economy have added further to this view. This is reflected in The Countryside Agency/English Tourism Council joint strategy 2001–2005, and more recently in the South

East Regional Economic Strategy (RES) which identifies a priority to 'Invest in and promote the area's cultural, heritage and landscape assets, and develop the visitor economy linked to the conservation of a high quality environment'. SEEDA RES

Work undertaken by Kent Downs AONB Sustainable Tourism Project has established that there are over 650 rural tourism and leisure businesses operating within or immediately adjacent to the Kent Downs AONB. In addition there are many more businesses in the urban areas around the AONB that promote and use the Downs as part of their attraction to visitors.

A visitor survey conducted by the AONB Unit in 2005 confirmed that the main motivations for visiting the Kent Downs are its beauty and tranquillity, whilst the main activity undertaken is walking. Its main strengths were identified as its walking and cycling opportunities and its proximity to other popular attractions in Kent. In spite of its strengths, the development of some carefully selected new products and services were identified that could potentially enhance the appeal of the Kent Downs, in particular improved public transport linking railway stations, attractions and accommodation, and improving the food product.



**Photo:**  
breakfast in the orchard



# 4

## QUALITY OF LIFE COMPONENTS

A small-scale survey of AONB accommodation businesses in 2002 showed average room occupancy rates of 55 – 60%. This reflects Kent Tourism’s own research which shows average room occupancy of 57% for the whole county, higher than the national average of 46%.

Not surprisingly the Kent Downs receives a greater ratio of overseas visitors than other AONBs in the south east.

There is an important opportunity to encourage more visitors to stay in the AONB area to fill empty beds and generate more income for the local economy provided this is done in a carefully managed way.

Sustainable tourism is not a discrete or special form of tourism. Rather, all forms of tourism should strive to be more sustainable.

Making tourism more sustainable is not just about controlling and managing the negative impacts of the industry. Tourism is in a very special position to benefit local communities, economically and socially, and to raise awareness and support for conservation of the environment. Within the tourism sector, economic development and environmental protection should not be seen as



**Photo:**  
walk in the Kent Downs

opposing forces—they should be pursued hand in hand as aspirations that can and should be mutually reinforcing. Policies and actions must aim to strengthen the benefits and reduce the costs of tourism.

Making Tourism More Sustainable – A Guide for Policy Makers (p2), UNEP World Tourism Organization, 2005

### **Principles of Sustainable Tourism in the Kent Downs AONB**

- Conserve rural landscape and character – the primary motivating force behind visits to the countryside
- Maximise benefits to the local economy whilst minimising environmental impact
- Identify, promote and support the local distinctiveness of the AONB area
- Raise public awareness about the wildlife, culture and history of the AONB
- Ensure the local tourism industry is at an appropriate scale and in harmony with the local community and environment
- Support the improvement and development of the local public transport offering
- Support AONB tourism businesses in developing sustainable business practice



**Photo:**  
Festival of Fruit  
cookery demonstration





#### Social exclusion and deprivation

- a** A number of areas and wards around and within the AONB are recognised to have high levels of social deprivation.
- b** Within a number of rural communities, rural poverty and social exclusion is 'hidden' but is believed to be an issue such as for some elderly people, ethnic minority groups, migrant workers, people with disabilities and families on low incomes.

#### Retaining and improving access to, and provision of, local services and facilities

- c** Decline and loss of commercial services in some parishes including post offices, village shops, public houses and garages.
- d** Community facilities, such as schools, libraries and doctors surgeries, are unevenly available and accessible.
- e** Access to health and social care is an issue in some parishes, especially for the elderly.
- f** Village school closure threats.
- g** Rapidly changing and lack of consistency in support structures for community development in rural areas.

#### The availability of affordable housing, to rent or buy

- h** Housing prices, until recently have continued to rise, in some parts, well above and faster than the national average.
- i** Considerable demand for affordable housing in many parishes in the AONB.
- j** Creation of 'hidden' households
- k** Establishment of second homes is perceived to be a threat to the vibrancy and life of communities.
- l** Impact of high speed link is uncertain.

#### Maintaining and diversifying the employment base

- m** Decline in farming and forestry employment, although both industries are still important economically in terms of maintaining the character of the Kent Downs.
- n** Skills gap for some local employers, such as locally based skilled forestry contractors and business marketing.

#### Sense of community and belonging

- o** The need to attach people to place where an increasing proportion of the population are not directly involved in the management of landscape.
- p** The fundamental need to improve community recognition and value of the special characteristics of the AONB to secure its future conservation and enhancement

#### Sustainable leisure and tourism

- q** There is an important opportunity to increase the numbers and income from day and staying visitors in a sustainable way that brings benefit back to local people and supports the AONB landscape.
- r** A number of areas within the AONB suffer either from over capacity or over use, leading to a detrimental impact on both the landscape and host communities.



**Photo:**  
maypole dancing, Wye

# 4

## QUALITY OF LIFE COMPONENTS

### 4.8.3 VIBRANT COMMUNITIES – AIMS

#### A landscape in which:

- 1 Thriving rural communities understand, recognise and value the special qualities of the AONB and play an active role in its conservation and enhancement while reducing their ecological foot print;
- 2 A strong and sustainable rural economy supports the special characteristics of the AONB and is supported by residents and visitors, who value and use local produce and services;
- 3 There is well designed, sustainable and affordable housing, particularly for key workers employed in the land-based economy and conservation of the AONB's landscape and its social and economic vitality;
- 4 Accessible local services and facilities are available and are well-used throughout the AONB;
- 5 The high quality environment and landscape of the AONB is seen as an asset to local businesses, which in turn contribute to the conservation of the landscape through the use of local sustainable goods and labour;
- 6 The area is recognised by both local communities and visitors as a 'green' or 'sustainable tourism' destination through achieving Europarc Sustainable Tourism Charter status.

Tourism is in a very special position to benefit local communities, economically and socially



**Photo:**  
giftshop,  
Chilham Square



**Photo:**  
Elham

# 4

## QUALITY OF LIFE COMPONENTS

### 4.8.4 VIBRANT COMMUNITIES – POLICIES

- VC1** Community initiatives that improve the recognition and value of the AONB, encourage and maintain the vitality and diversity of rural community life and which contribute to the conservation and enhancement of natural beauty while reducing ecological footprint will be pursued.
- VC2** Positive and sustainable links between the AONB (landscape, communities and partnership) and people who live nearby, particularly people from excluded groups and from neighbouring deprived areas will be pursued, where they are developed and maintained in accordance with AONB policies.
- VC3** Initiatives which are in line with existing policies of the local planning authority that increase and improve the supply of housing for
- i. those with proven local needs, and
  - ii. affordable housing for key workers whose activities directly contribute to the purposes of the AONB designation, will be supported where it is demonstrated that the proposals are: of high quality design, limited quantity and scale and which respects local landscape and built character; complementary to the particular area in form, setting, scale and use of materials, use sustainably sourced local materials and are built to the best current environmental standards.
- VC4** The retention and development of local services, facilities and employment opportunities in order to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the Kent Downs AONB or reduce the need to travel by car and maintain viable rural communities will be supported where they do not conflict with AONB policies.
- VC5** Encouragement will be given to businesses and services which contribute to the vibrancy of communities, conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the Kent Downs AONB and contribute to people's understanding and enjoyment of the AONB designation.

- VC6** Provision of skills training and assistance with business development will be encouraged where these activities contribute to the viability of communities and meet the purposes of the AONB.
- VC7** The development of sustainable visitor and tourism facilities will be pursued where they lead to a contribution to the local economy, meet the purposes and policies of the AONB and enhance people's enjoyment and understanding of the AONB.
- VC8** Tourism and leisure businesses in the AONB will be encouraged to sign up to the Principles of Sustainable Tourism and to demonstrate their commitment to sustainability through achieving nationally recognised green accreditation.



**Photo:**  
The Flying Horse,  
Boughton Lees



# 4

QUALITY OF LIFE  
COMPONENTS



## 4.9

# SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND TRAVEL

### OVERVIEW

**Planning issues have a fundamental impact on the statutory purposes of AONB designation. Indeed, until the enactment of the CRoW Act 2000, the statutory land use planning system was the main legal mechanism by which AONBs have been protected, conserved and enhanced. However, data from the Kent Land Cover Change survey (2002), which is the latest information available, indicated that in the nine year period from 1990 to 1999 developed land in the AONB rose from 5426ha (6.2% of the AONB) in 1990 to 7274ha (8.3% of the AONB) in 1999, a 34% increase in developed land or 1848ha. This scale of development, derived largely from agricultural land, is mainly due to the construction of the Channel Tunnel Rail Link and the M2/A2 widening. Other development areas, significant at a more local level, include Hawkinge in Shepway District.**

The Kent Downs AONB, probably more than any other protected landscape, is under pressure from growth, development and major infrastructure. The policy framework provided by the management plan needs to reflect these local circumstances so

that planning decisions (both within and outside the Kent Downs) have regard to the AONB. This includes securing mitigation measures to take advantage of the opportunities generated by this growth and to prevent a harmful impact on the AONB.

Since the adoption of the original management plan the South East Regional Assembly, SEERA, has prepared a Regional Spatial Strategy which will supersede the County Structure Plan. At the same time the Local Authorities are preparing Local Development Frameworks to replace the Local Plans. Each Local Development Framework provides an important opportunity to secure the future conservation and enhancement of the Kent Downs AONB and to reinforce the policies of the Management Plan locally. The Local Development Framework also offers the opportunity to develop Area Action Plans which could respond to the spatial priorities of this plan and deliver community benefits.

## 4.9.1 SPECIAL CHARACTERISTICS

### Development pressure

There is no doubt that the Kent Downs AONB is under severe development pressure from housing and transportation infrastructure in particular. Significant urban areas immediately adjoin the AONB boundary, or lie within very close proximity, and most of these areas will expand in the coming twenty years. Foremost are Ashford, the Thames Gateway growth areas (including Gravesham, Swale and Medway), Maidstone, which became a 'growth point' in 2006, and Dover, where growth point status was confirmed in 2008. For Dover growth is seen as a mechanism to overcome social and economic disadvantage. Over 15% of the AONB boundary coincides with the boundary for the Greater London Metropolitan Green Belt.

In the period since the first AONB Management Plan was adopted there have been five major development proposals within or immediately adjacent to the AONB although none have yet emerged as formal applications. Government guidance, in Planning Policy Statement 7 (PPS7), is clear that major development should not occur in AONBs except in exceptional



**Photo:**  
Cuxton

circumstances and when national need and a lack of suitable alternative sites is demonstrated; site ownership in the AONB does not amount to a lack of alternative site.

As the nearby urban areas expand, the challenge for the Kent Downs AONB will be to retain its special character and landscape quality but also to function as a key component of the 'green infrastructure' of Kent. There will be increased traffic pressure along and through the AONB, increased visitor use of the AONB, and indeed increased demand for housing in AONB villages. The approaches to and the views from the AONB are also set to deteriorate unless efforts are made to protect them. At the same time growth provides opportunities for the sustainable management of the AONB landscape, for instance in the supply of wood fuel, high quality building materials, food and sustainable low impact visiting and recreation opportunities.

Against this backdrop of large-scale development, there is continual pressure for small-scale development and change. Incremental change can result in cumulative impacts which are seemingly insignificant individually but over time can bring about a considerable change in character from developments such as telecommunication masts, infrastructure for utilities and services, small scale changes to the housing stock and small developments, change of use away from agriculture, leisure development, farm and business developments.

It is the stated intention of the Joint Advisory Committee (JAC) that this Management Plan becomes a Supplementary Planning Document and therefore material in development control decisions.

### The AONB Partnership's role in planning decisions.

The Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty partnership has agreed to take on a limited land use planning role. In summary this is to:



# 4

## QUALITY OF LIFE COMPONENTS

- Provide design guidance in partnership with the Local Authorities represented in the AONB.
- Comment on forward/strategic planning issues-for instance local plans/Local Development Frameworks.
- Involvement in development control (planning applications) only in exceptional circumstances. For example in terms of scale and precedence.
- Provide informal planning advice/comments on development control (planning applications) at the request of a Kent Downs AONB Joint Advisory member and /or Local Authority Planning Officers.

### Community and parish planning

The Kent Downs AONB partnership has sought to support planning engagement at a local level, in part as a response to the extent of development pressure. Across the AONB, 23 village or parish design statements have been adopted as Supplementary Planning Guidance, or are nearing completion, giving local people a positive role to influence building design at a local level. 74% of respondents in the Management Plan Review questionnaire suggested that traffic, development and visitor pressure were key issues for the future management of the AONB.



**Photo:**  
Seal, high street

### The importance of sensitive design

"There should be no space for mediocre architecture. It is too important for that." CABE 2006. The design of buildings and places in a nationally important landscape is critical to its future conservation and enhancement. This is as true for the aesthetics as it is for environmental performance. The AONB Landscape Design Handbook provides practical advice to conserve and enhance locally distinctive landscape features, and a buildings design handbook is planned.

### Traffic and transport

The growth in road traffic over recent years and further rapid increase anticipated in the next few years, will bring pressure to both rural roads and the strategic transport links with mainland Europe. Traffic growth is bringing continuing pressure for road construction and improvement in and around the Kent Downs. Figures from the Kent Travel Report 2006 (KCC) indicate an average 3.0% increase in traffic on selected rural roads in the AONB during 2005 and 2006, Dover Harbour Board predicts a rise from 1.9m units a year in 2004 to 2.2-2.5m units in 2014 (there was a 530% increase in freight traffic between 1974 and 2004).



**Photo:**  
near Postling



# 4

## QUALITY OF LIFE COMPONENTS

Where main routes are heavily used this can result in increasing use of unsuitable minor roads as so called 'rat runs' adding to the congestion, noise and disturbance in otherwise quiet rural areas.

The Kent Downs has suffered major impact on the natural beauty of the landscape from new road developments and improvement schemes. Further damage should be avoided and resisted, particularly where routes do not respect the natural lie of the land or which affect important landscape, wildlife or historic features. All road construction, improvements and routine maintenance should be carried out with extreme sensitivity to the special character of the landscape and where permitted should have detailed mitigation strategies.

The cumulative effect of small scale development or change, be it in buildings or roads, needs to avoid unnecessary 'urbanisation' and reduce the amount of roadside clutter – of redundant and unnecessary boundary treatments, signs, bollards, kerbs, lights and fences.

The greater reliance on the car is partly because people perceive roads to be dangerous to walk or cycle and have withdrawn, as demonstrated by car dominated 'school runs'. In order to bring



**Photo:**  
signposts in the Downs

about a shift in modal use from private car to public transport, bike or foot, there needs to be a better provision of frequent, reliable and affordable public transport in remote rural areas and an emphasis on car sharing and changing driving behaviour and streetscape and highways design to make routes safer for all users.

Both the Local Transport Plan for Kent (2006-2011), and the Medway Local Transport Plan (2006-2011) have similar aims to provide good accessibility, to improve safety and to improve the environment and health by reducing congestion and pollution, widening the choice of transport available and by developing public transport, walking and cycling. These aims support those of the AONB for sustainable approaches to travel although the targets and performance indicators of the plans are less closely aligned.

The Kent Downs AONB Highways Design Handbook (awaiting adoption) takes a contextual approach for the Kent Downs AONB highways and streetscapes, seeking to remove the visual clutter and confusion and support locally distinctive qualities of the landscape. A key result of this approach should be that a modal shift away from cars is achieved through an approach where space is shared between different road users.



**Photo:**  
removing overhead cables



# 4

## QUALITY OF LIFE COMPONENTS

### Rail network

The Kent Downs are fortunate to have a number of railway lines crossing or running alongside the AONB boundary. This rail network could be used to much greater extent to access the AONB.

### The opportunity for sustainable development

The introduction of a Sustainable Development fund in the AONB in 2005 gave a chance to demonstrate how a sustainable approach can both support landscape quality and benefit communities, businesses and individuals in the Kent Downs.

Over three years many successful smaller scale projects have been delivered which demonstrates how a positive approach can deliver multiple benefits. Examples of funded projects include:

- The installation of a reed bed filter at the Pines Calyx, to treat the grey and black water;
- Through Creative Environmental Networks, a project to provide support and guidance to communities within the Kent Downs AONB to facilitate the development of alternative, sustainable fuel sources;



**Photo:**  
oak clad boiler housing

- A wood chip fuelled boiler system has been installed to the environmental education centre at Bore Place; a project to enable Commonwork to reduce their need for fossil energy fuels and attempt to become a Zero (Fossil) Energy Site;
- On a smaller scale Elmsted Parish Council have carried out vital clearance and coppicing work at Shrubs Wood Barrow. One of only four surviving long barrows in Kent.

### Under grounding of overhead cables

The Kent Downs AONB Unit has been working in partnership with EDF Energy to remove overhead cabling where it intrudes visually onto the landscape. OFGEM (the electricity regulator) has allocated an allowance from EDF Energy customer payments towards the cost of under grounding overhead cabling in National Parks and AONBs. £10.6 million has been allocated. Since the scheme started in 2006 there are now 6 schemes in the Kent Downs.



**Photo:**  
Pines reed bed





- a** General development pressures, from major transport and infrastructure development proposals; small incremental change, as well as a knock-on pressure from the Greater London area and expansion of Maidstone, Dover and the Ashford and Thames Gateway growth areas, and the need to provide positive relationship as well as effective mitigation strategies.
- b** The need to establish and secure the Kent Downs as a vital component in the green infrastructure provision for Kent.
- c** Identity, scale, design and setting of rural settlements and buildings is under threat from development generally, generating the need for good practice design guidance design principles.
- d** Inappropriate conversion of old farm buildings and change from agriculture to recreational management.
- e** The impact of telecommunication towers, pylons, cabling and other unsightly structures on the landscape.
- f** The impact of increasing numbers of livery and equine facilities, with land management out of keeping with the character of the AONB including, overgrazing, excessive subdivision of fields and inappropriate fencing, flood lit and poorly sited stabling and arenas and field shelters, poor waste management.
- g** Anticipated pressure for wind turbines and wind farms particularly suited to the AONB's high ground.
- h** A greater need to influence route, volume and speed of traffic, and parking provision.
- i** Mitigation for the impact of roads and railways, particularly noise, air pollution, light and physical intrusion.
- j** A need to address provision of rural public transport – particularly in the evenings and Sundays.
- k** A need to promote good design principles focusing through the adoption of the AONB Highways Design Handbook, to overcome urbanisation and visual intrusion, including 'over-engineering' of the rural road network, and maintaining traditional road features, such as cast signs.
- l** Promote the availability and use of non-car based countryside transport and recreation and seek integrated public transport initiatives.
- m** The need for greater local involvement in planning decision-making, place making and greater consultation on planning and significant road maintenance matters.
- n** The need to provide support for sustainable development initiatives in the AONB and to increase the scale and impact of funding.
- o** The need to ensure that the conservation and enhancement of natural beauty, the primary purpose of the AONB designation, is at the heart of development and transport proposals and to resist proposals which challenge this basic tenet.

The Kent Downs AONB, probably more than any other protected landscape, is under pressure from growth, development and major infrastructure

## 4.9.3 SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND TRAVEL – AIMS

**A landscape where:**

- 1** The conservation and enhancement of the AONB is at the heart of and is the starting point of development and transport plans, policies and proposals and the landscape of the Kent Downs AONB provide vital services and green infrastructure for Kent and the south east.
- 2** The setting and views in and out of the AONB are conserved and enhanced.
- 3** The character and distinctiveness of villages, farmsteads and individual buildings are conserved and enhanced using the best traditions of the past incorporated with the best technologies of the present, to create environmentally sustainable and locally enhancing development.
- 4** Local building materials – flints, bricks, Kentish peg tiles, timber and weather boarding are available and are used for constructing new buildings.
- 5** Eyesores are removed, development impact is minimised and appropriate enhancement and landscape conservation and mitigation is delivered by every development.
- 6** Frequent, affordable, high quality, accessible and innovative public transport is well-used by local residents, businesses and visitors.
- 7** The impact of road traffic on the lives of local people is minimised and traffic speeds are reduced.
- 8** Unsuitable traffic is steered away from country lanes.
- 9** Children and adults walk, cycle or take public transport for recreation or to get to school or work.
- 10** Residents, businesses and visitors are encouraged to walk, cycle and use public transport services. Support for car reduction initiatives such as car free/car share/car discount schemes is offered by tourism providers.



**Photo:**  
hen house



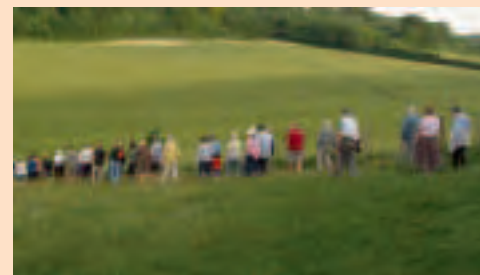
**Photo:**  
Wealden Wheels



- SDT1** The need to conserve and enhance the characteristic components of natural beauty of the Kent Downs AONB is recognised as the primary purpose of the designation and given the highest level of protection within the Regional Spatial Strategy, Local Development Frameworks, Area Action Plans, Supplementary Planning Guidance, Local Transport Plans and development control decisions.
- SDT2** The local character and distinctiveness of the Kent Downs AONB and high environmental sustainability will be reflected and required in the design, scale, setting and materials of new development and will be pursued through landscape and buildings design guidance.
- SDT3** New development or changes to the use of land will be resisted where it disregards or challenges the primary purpose of the Kent Downs AONB or weakens its fundamental components of natural beauty and landscape character.
- SDT4** The greater involvement of local people and communities in influencing and informing development planning will be supported, particularly through the development and use of Parish Design Statements and other community planning initiatives.
- SDT5** Proposals that have a negative impact upon the setting and views to and from the AONB will be resisted unless they can be satisfactorily mitigated.
- SDT6** Measures to reduce the long-term negative impact of major transportation infrastructure and transport growth on the natural beauty, amenity and tranquillity of the AONB will be encouraged where they do not conflict with AONB policies.
- SDT7** A strategic approach to the use of road signage, furniture, design and maintenance that conserves and enhances the local character and distinctiveness of the AONB, and promotes better route management will be pursued through the adoption and implementation of the AONB Highways Design Handbook.
- SDT8** A reduction in the need to travel by car will be supported through new and improved measures to provide integrated and attractive and affordable transport economic opportunity in the Kent Downs.
- SDT9** Sustainable and effective solutions to identified problems of rural traffic density, speed and type of traffic particularly in rural settlements or where there is a conflict with landscape quality, walkers, cyclists and horse riders will be supported.
- SDT10** Highway improvement schemes will be expected to conserve and enhance landscape character and use new technologies to achieve a net reduction in impact on the components of natural beauty of the AONB.
- SDT11** Measures to guide developments and activities including those exempt from planning control will be pursued in order to reduce their impact upon the character of the Kent Downs.
- SDT12** Where it is decided that development will take place mitigation measures appropriate to the national importance of the Kent Downs landscape will be identified, pursued, implemented and maintained.

# 4

QUALITY OF LIFE COMPONENTS



ACCESS,  
ENJOYMENT  
AND  
UNDERSTANDING

## 4.10 ACCESS, ENJOYMENT AND UNDERSTANDING

### OVERVIEW

**The Kent Downs AONB offers some of south east England's most enchanting and, in parts, accessible countryside. The AONB has a resident population of over 66,000 people, however a further 1 million live within 1 kilometre of the boundary. Beyond this, up to eight million people live within an hour, including populations in northeast France (via the Channel Tunnel).**

The area is crossed or adjacent to four motorways, 15 trunk and 'A' roads, and hundreds of smaller roads. It is served by five railway lines with 27 railway stations in or adjacent to the AONB and numerous bus routes and services. The Port of Dover, the UK's busiest ferry terminal, as well as the Channel Tunnel terminal are both immediately adjacent to the AONB. Ashford and Ebbsfleet International stations are in easy reach. The AONB has a Public Rights of Way network which is four times the density of the national average and, although the network is limited, the Kent Downs accommodates 40% of Kent's bridleways and 50% of Kent's byways on 23% of the land area of the county. The network is managed by Kent County Council as the Highway Authority.

While there is often concern about the impact of recreation, carefully managed access to attractive countryside, particularly walking, cycling and horse riding can bring physical and mental health benefits, enable people to enjoy and appreciate a great landscape and provide support to the local economy.



**Photo:**  
Meopham farm walk

# 4

## QUALITY OF LIFE COMPONENTS

### 4.10.1 COUNTRYSIDE ACCESS IN THE KENT DOWNS

Under the provisions of the Countryside and Rights of Way (CRoW) Act (2000), a Countryside Access Forum for Kent has been established. The role of the Forum is to advise on the improvement of public access to land within Kent for the purpose of open-air recreation and enjoyment. The **Kent Countryside Access Forum** also responds to Government consultations, contributes to the Kent Countryside Access Improvement Plan and steers and monitors access and recreation policy in Kent.

#### The Kent Countryside Access Improvement Plan

Under the CRoW Act, Kent County Council was charged with a duty to develop a Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP). Known as the Countryside Access Improvement Plan (CAIP), Kent's ROWIP was adopted as county policy in February 2008.

The plan heralds an important change in the way public rights of way and access will be managed in Kent enabling a more proactive and targeted approach. The Kent plan strongly supports and makes special reference to many policy objectives set out in the first AONB Management Plan.

The CAIP is the principal document for the Rights of Way network and countryside access in Kent and its close relationship with this Management Plan is essential for enhancing recreational access and green space within the AONB. **Priorities, policies and actions of this plan will support and add value to the priorities and actions of the CAIP and where appropriate seek a special focus for action within the AONB.**

The Kent Downs AONB offers some of south east England's most enchanting and, in parts, accessible countryside



ACCESS,  
ENJOYMENT  
AND  
UNDERSTANDING



**Photo:**  
Orchard Walk



**Photo:**  
Chalk and Channel Way

## 4.10.2 SPECIAL CHARACTERISTICS

**Open access land**

Under the CRoW Act, Kent was one of the first areas to be mapped for open access land. 0.6% of the land area of Kent has been mapped and the majority of this is chalk downland, along with registered common land and parkland within the AONB. 46% of the open access land in Kent is within the Kent Downs AONB. Open access land is managed by Kent County Council as the Access Authority. Additionally the Forestry Commission had dedicated its land for open access. In many cases new access land was already available through time limited access agreements. However, where large tracts of land have been mapped, for instance around Dover, there are significant new access opportunities.

**Coastal access**

In 2007 the government consulted on proposals to create continuous coastal access for walkers within a 'landscape corridor that offers enjoyment, understanding of the natural heritage and a high quality experience; and that is managed sustainably'. While the Heritage Coasts of the AONB currently offer continuous and dramatic access on foot, the AONB Executive considered the enhanced management of the landscape corridor and access for all, where appropriate, were critical components of the government's objectives.

The implementation of coastal access is expected to be achieved through a Marine Bill which is likely to be enacted during the life of the revised plan.

**Visitors to the Kent Downs**

Unfortunately no reliable visitor information is available for the AONB as a whole. Estimated visitor numbers to the AONB vary considerably, however a figure of approximately 20 million day visits a year is considered a best estimate. Research conducted in 2003 offers a conservative estimate ranging from 10 – > 20 million

day visits a year to the Kent Downs<sup>1</sup>, whilst Kent Tourism research, based on 2003 figures, estimates just over 44 million visits a year to the county as a whole<sup>2</sup>. It must be remembered that local residents also use the Downs extensively for leisure purposes.

<b>Walk</b>	88%
<b>Visit villages</b>	82%
<b>Visitor attractions</b>	80%
<b>Wildlife watch</b>	69%
<b>Car tours</b>	60%
<b>Cycle</b>	36%
<b>Go on guided walks</b>	27%
<b>Horse riding</b>	12%
<b>Fishing</b>	6%
<b>Shooting</b>	5%
<b>Use AONB for work purposes</b>	7%
<b>Other activities</b>	16%

<b>Public Rights of Way network</b>	<b>Kent</b>	<b>AONB</b>	<b>%</b>
Footpath	5633	1518	27%
Bridleway	701	275	39%
Restricted byways	149	42	28%
Byways open to all traffic	222	118	53%

<sup>1</sup> Page 27 – Kent Downs AONB South East Sustainable Tourism Project – Appraisal of Sustainable Visits Projects Stage 1 & 2 Report – Transport for Leisure Ltd – July 2003)

<sup>2</sup> Page 1 – The Economic Impact of Tourism on Kent in 2003 County and District Results – Prepared by Tourism South East Research Unit – June 2005)

**Table 13**

Activities undertaken by people in the Kent Downs AONB on a monthly basis or more. Orchid questionnaire (2002).

**Table 14**

The extent of Public Rights of Way in the Kent Downs AONB (source Kent County Council).

# 4

## QUALITY OF LIFE COMPONENTS

### Walking

The density of Rights of Way in the Kent Downs is four times higher than the national average. This is an invaluable asset to the Kent Downs and enables virtually all parts of the AONB to be accessible and in places can provide strong links between the Downs and local towns and villages. The Ramblers Association has identified that there is uneven distribution in the use of footpaths in the AONB with much greater pressure faced in the west, and many remaining areas still little used apart from near 'honey pot' attractions.

Of national importance is the North Downs Way National Trail which starts at Farnham in Surrey and follows the North Downs through Surrey and Kent to Dover with a loop via Canterbury. Of the 153 mile (246km) trail 70 miles (112km) lies within the AONB. Research conducted by the North Downs Way National Trail Team shows an estimated 250,000 visitors use the trail each year between May and October. National Trails are promoted as long distance trails, although user surveys show that the majority of use on the North Downs Way tends to be for shorter walks. With this in mind, several circular walks taking in the more scenic parts of the trail have been developed and promoted by the North



**Photo:**  
Blossom Walk

Downs Way. The opportunity to upgrade appropriate sections of the North Downs Way to include cyclist and horse riders is being considered and is supported. Two Regional routes, the Saxon Shore Way and Greensand Way also pass through the Kent Downs, and there are a number of county recreational routes.

### Cycling

Cycling is an environmentally sustainable means of transport and is generally a quiet activity with a low impact on the countryside. Opportunities for off-road cycling in the AONB have been developed by Sustrans, the cycling charity. Sections of two National Cycle Routes pass through the AONB, namely Route 1 from Dover to Aberdeen and Route 2 from Dover to Portsmouth. Regional Routes 16 and 17 also pass through the Downs from Dover to Canterbury taking in the North Downs Way and Elham Valley respectively. There are also a number of locally promoted cycle routes across parts of the AONB. Dedicated cycling routes to the AONB are proposed to be an effective and low impact way to link the Kent Downs with the nearby urban and growth areas.



**Photo:**  
footpath to  
St Margarets



# 4

## QUALITY OF LIFE COMPONENTS

### Horse riding

40% of the bridleways in Kent are in the AONB, making the Kent Downs one of the most significant areas for horse riding in Kent. It is estimated that there are 100,000 riders in Kent, 50,000 ride regularly, the number of horses is thought to be between 30 and 40,000 (source Land Use Consultants/KCC). 12% of respondents to the AONB questionnaire (KD AONB 2002) listed horse riding as an activity they undertook in the AONB. Evidence from horse riders and the Public Rights of Way teams (from maintenance spend) indicate that the increasing use of bridleways is creating damage to the routes fabric.

The keeping of horses and horse riding generally is increasing, and the equine industry is recognised as making an important contribution to Kent's rural economy (estimated at £100m pa in 2002). While well managed horse pasture can contribute positively to landscape character, the impact of horse keeping on the landscape can be of concern, principally through the excessive subdivision of fields, built development, waste management, overgrazing and night lighting adversely effecting dark night skies. This has been recognised by local authorities and farmers as both an issue to address and opportunity to develop. Horse riding, like

cycling and walking is increasingly difficult and dangerous on the rural roads because of the volume and speed of traffic and the bridleway network in Kent is limited; the increase in damage to the fabric indicates too limited a network.

Other opportunities for informal countryside recreation activities are generally provided on the many open access sites, picnic sites and facilities across the AONB. These include 12 Country Parks and Picnic sites, 44 Village Greens (44.9 ha) and 48 areas of Registered Common Land (442.7 ha). Access for informal recreation is also available at a number of National Trust properties concentrated on the Greensand Ridge south of Sevenoaks, parts of the White Cliffs Heritage Coast, Forestry Commission-owned woodland and sites owned and managed by Kent Wildlife Trust and Woodland Trust.

### Formal countryside recreation

Field sports, in particular pheasant/game bird shooting and hunting take place throughout. The Kent Downs landscape lends itself to pheasant shooting and hunting with extensive areas of woodland and tree cover running along the slopes of the dry valleys and arable and mixed farm use in the valley bottoms. It is



**Photo:**  
branching out



**Photo:**  
Dunn Street  
Farm walk

# 4

## QUALITY OF LIFE COMPONENTS

estimated that game bird shooting generates at least £10 million per annum<sup>11</sup> into the local economy and is thought currently to be the most economically important use for Kent Downs woodlands. However, conflicts arise because of overstocking with pheasants; the woodland management carried out for game birds; the impact of the stocked bird populations on wild plant and animal communities and the landscape impact of game bird cover crops. Through a collaborative project with the Game Conservancy Trust, best practice guidance has been prepared for pheasant shooting in the Kent Downs.

Fishing is also popular although the Kent Downs AONB offers only limited scope for course and freshwater fishing, such as along the river and gravel pits of the Great Stour valley. Sea fishing is also popular off parts of the Heritage Coast, such as Samphire Hoe, where national competitions are held, and St Margaret's Bay.

Country motor sports are growing in popularity and are of special relevance in the AONB given that the Kent Downs (23% of Kent's land area) accommodates 53% of the Byways. The use of byways and unmetalled roads by 4x4 vehicles and motorbikes, although legal, can lead to conflicts in particular areas with other users because of disturbance, safety issues and damage to the surface



**Photo:**  
pheasants

of Rights of Way. There is also an increasing threat from illegal use of footpaths and bridleways by motorised vehicles. These and other recreational activities can negatively affect the tranquillity of the AONB which is a much valued component of natural beauty.

### Access for people with restricted mobility and socially excluded groups

The greater recognition of the needs of socially excluded groups, and legislation including the Disability Discrimination Acts 1995 and 2005, are leading to enhanced efforts to meet the needs of all, including people with disabilities, people on low incomes and people without access to private transport. For people with mobility restrictions there are a growing number of promoted routes and sites and user groups are taking active and welcome steps to support wider access for all.

There are a number of sites which are fully or partially accessible in the AONB, at places as far apart as Lullingstone, Shorne Country Park and Samphire Hoe. Explore Kent, a County Council based website, provides detailed information on the public rights of way network including terrain, slope and barriers involved in Rights of Way as well as 'easy access' information.

### Education and children

In the twenty year lifetime of the vision for this Management Plan today's children will become the decision makers. If we are to secure a future for this precious landscape, and enjoy it today, we should be active in encouraging understanding and education especially with young people. The close proximity of substantial urban areas to the Kent Downs AONB gives a special opportunity to promote exciting and engaging activities for schools and families. Exciting projects such as the 'Sounds of the Downs' have taken an innovative approach to engaging young people.

There are many opportunities to link education activities to the national curriculum but also to strengthen the understanding, enjoyment and celebration of the AONB landscape.



# 4

## QUALITY OF LIFE COMPONENTS

### Information and Interpretation

At the heart of well-managed and enjoyable countryside recreation is high quality information that helps visitors plan their use of the Kent Downs, and increase the understanding and satisfaction of their experience. There are numerous forms of information currently available including:

- The Kent Downs AONB newspaper, The Orchid, which is distributed widely across the AONB and its surrounding areas, contains a broad range of articles specifically about many aspects of the AONB landscape, heritage and communities. Included is a seasonal programme of events and activities from a broad range of organisations.
- The AONB web-site, linked to those of many different partners and organisations, including Explore Kent and the North Downs Way, with current programmes of events and activities available.
- Programmes of farmer-led walks, themed guided walks, cycle rides, talks and conservation activities aimed at different age groups provided by countryside management partnerships, local authorities and other organisations.
- Numerous leaflets and booklets with details of recreational walking, cycling and horse riding routes and village centre maps of Rights of Way network, developed by Kent County Council.
- A wealth of site based information in the form of interpretation boards, leaflets and maps.
- A number of visitor centres with static displays and interactive interpretation, which provide important or potential welcome points to the wider AONB including: Shorne, Trosley, Brockhill and Lullingstone Country Parks provided by local authorities, Eurotunnel's Samphire Hoe centre, Kent Wildlife Trust's centres at Tyland Barn and Bough Beech reservoir, the National Trust's visitor centre at Langdon Cliffs, Dover, as well as extremely popular visitor centres at Chartwell and Ightham Mote.
- Local information such as 'Walks in Lenham' and 'Walks around Belmont' and Perry Wood provided by parish councils, local businesses or community groups, in many cases part funded by the AONB Unit.

No specific AONB visitor centres exist, although many of the existing centres do provide information about the Kent Downs.

Added to this is an extensive system of countryside management partnerships covering the whole AONB, site-based with volunteer wardens employed by the local authorities and conservation charities. Although much of their work remains uncoordinated across the AONB, a pilot project operating in the Mid Kent Downs has demonstrated how coordination can bring wider benefits to visitors, local groups, communities and businesses. The opportunity remains to develop co-ordination and links between all these services based on the successful Mid Kent Downs sustainable rural tourism pilot.



The AONB has a Public Rights of Way network which is four times the density of the national average

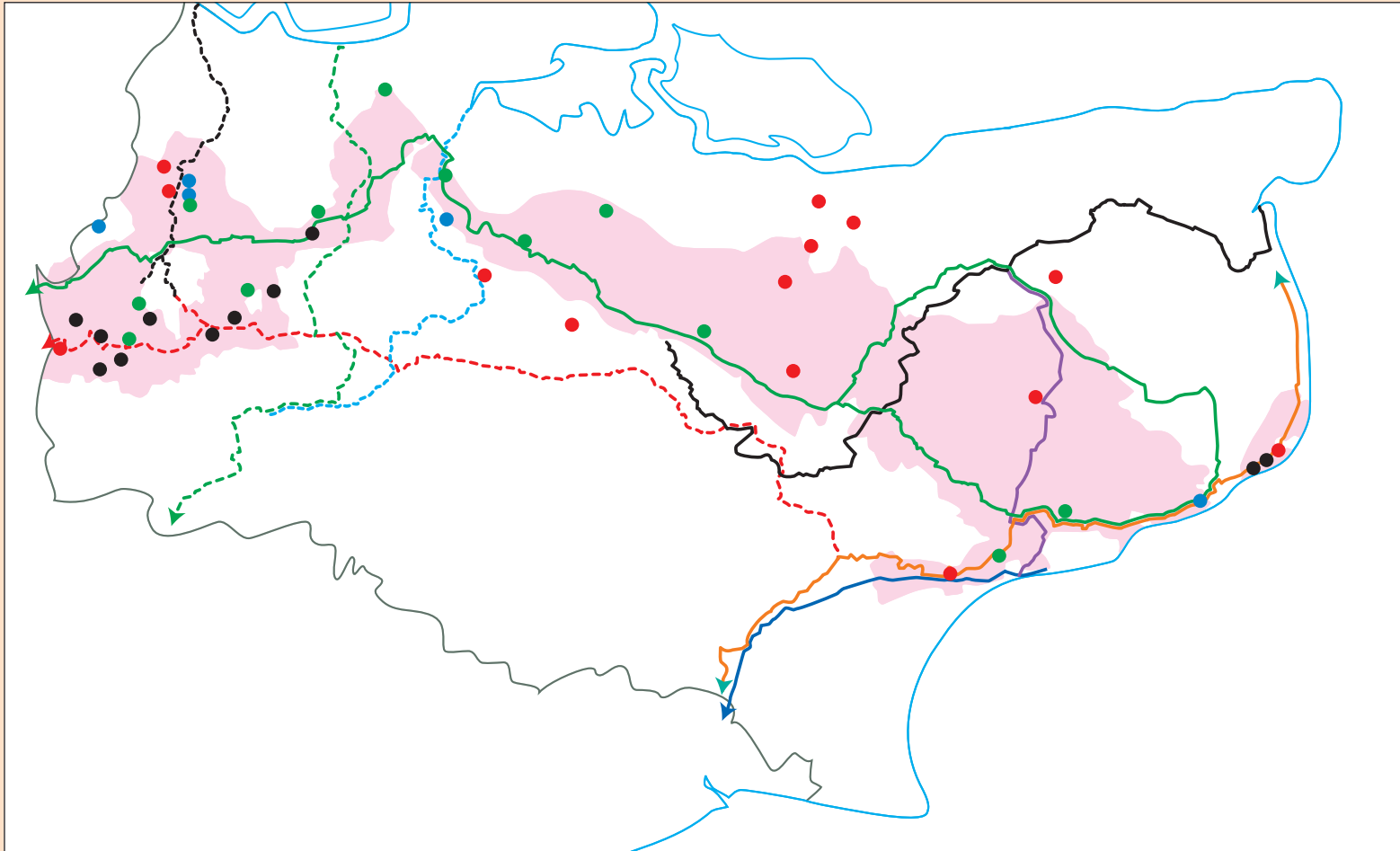


**Photo:**  
Brockhill  
Country Park

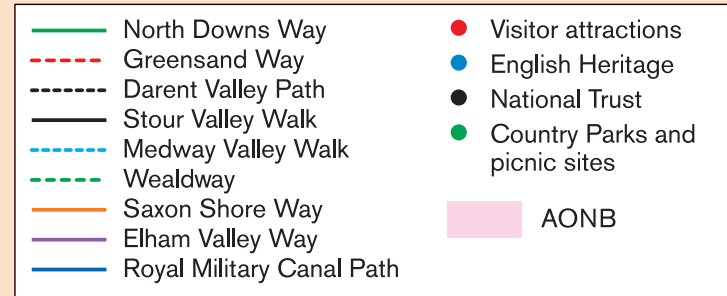
# 4

## QUALITY OF LIFE COMPONENTS

ACCESS,  
ENJOYMENT  
AND  
UNDERSTANDING



**Figure 16** Main recreation sites and facilities and main promoted routes



# 4

## QUALITY OF LIFE COMPONENTS

### 4.10.3 ACCESS, ENJOYMENT AND UNDERSTANDING – MAIN ISSUES AND THREATS IDENTIFIED



- a** Estimated day visitor numbers are high and probably increasing although precise figures are uncertain. Pressure on the components of natural beauty of the AONB as well as particular countryside routes, sites and areas can be very high but this is unevenly distributed.
- b** Urban and growth areas in very close proximity to the AONB will generate new pressure for access and ways to manage this, without damaging the qualities of the AONB need to be found.
- c** The Countryside Access Improvement Plan provides opportunities to focus on the AONB, given the special pressures for access and the national importance of the landscape.
- d** There is a need to identify how CRoW Act open access sites can bring wider benefits and links to education and information provision.
- e** Differences in requirements and uses between rightful PRoW users (horse riders, cyclists, motorbikes, 4x4s and walkers), can result in conflicts.
- f** Conflicts between rightful PRoW users and illegal users, fly tipping, dumping and path obstruction.
- g** The growth in the popularity of horse riding and off road cycling which is focused particularly on the AONB, putting pressure on the bridleway network. Need to seek opportunities to enhance, extend, connect and improve fragmented bridleway links and to secure management which does not harm the natural beauty of the AONB.
- h** Disability Discrimination Acts 1995 and 2005 prompt the need to be proactively aware when managing access and extend different forms of accessible provision.
- i** Need to support other excluded groups and non users to ensure that sustainable access to the landscapes of the Kent Downs AONB is available to all.
- j** Need to ensure that the PROW network is well signposted, waymarked and maintained to enable access and enjoyment across the AONB using materials and equipment appropriate in design and sustainably sourced.
- k** Making more of the rural road network for quiet countryside recreation by managing traffic pressures to provide quiet lane links to benefit horse riders, walkers, cyclists and local people.
- l** Need to increase and enhance people's understanding of the AONB, its landscape and countryside practices and to provide information in a number of formats appropriate to their setting to increase accessibility.
- m** Need to make the most of the opportunities for coastal access through the Marine Bill, and in particular support the enhanced management of the coastal corridor.
- n** Need to promote exciting and engaging education and interpretation schemes for children and young people.

Under the CRoW Act, Kent was one of the first areas to be mapped for open access land

# 4

## QUALITY OF LIFE COMPONENTS

### 4.10.4 ACCESS, ENJOYMENT AND UNDERSTANDING – AIMS



#### A landscape that provides:

- 1 Sustainable opportunities and facilities to enable everyone to enjoy and understand the AONB countryside;
- 2 A legally defined, well maintained and promoted rights of way network that provides safe, well designed and satisfying routes for walkers, cyclists and horse riders where conflicts between rightful uses are minimised;
- 3 New routes and connections between public rights of way and a highway network which is increasingly available and safe for walkers, cyclists and horse riders;
- 4 Access where Illegal or damaging recreational activities are controlled;
- 5 Special places, events, media and appropriate support available throughout the year for people of all ages and backgrounds to learn about their environment, enjoy the AONB landscape, know they are there and celebrate its diversity and richness;
- 6 Innovative and stimulating opportunities for all people to be involved artistically and culturally and to exercise and improve their health and well being, in tranquil and inspiring surroundings.



**Photo:**  
Kent Goes Wild event



**Photo:**  
interpretation panel, Wye

# 4

## QUALITY OF LIFE COMPONENTS

### 4.10.5 ACCESS, ENJOYMENT AND UNDERSTANDING – POLICIES



- AEU1** Co-ordinated information, and interpretation for recreation, access, education and understanding across the AONB which is accurate, well presented and appropriate to its setting, readily available in a variety of formats and fosters a greater understanding, knowledge and respect for the AONB will be pursued.
- AEU2** Diversions and stopping up of PRoWs will be resisted unless it can be demonstrated that they will not have a detrimental impact on the opportunities for access and quiet enjoyment of the landscape and historic character of the AONB.
- AEU3** Investment to secure sustainable, high quality, low impact and easy access routes from the towns and growth areas to the AONB will be pursued.
- AEU4** The sustainable and enhanced management and promotion of open access sites will be encouraged where it conforms with AONB policies.
- AEU5** Mechanisms will be supported to resolve conflicts between rightful users of Public Rights of Way including the appropriate promotion of higher rights. Where there are irreconcilable conflicts from legal but damaging activities the use for non damaging quiet recreation will be supported above other legal activities.
- AEU6** Robust mechanisms to resist and overcome illegal use and poor maintenance which harm the opportunity to explore and enjoy the AONB will be pursued where design is in accordance with the Landscape Design Handbook.
- AEU7** Improvements to the Rights of Way Network to provide and improve countryside access, including waymarking, signposting and maintenance, which conforms with AONB policies and design guidance, will be supported through the Countryside Access Improvement Plan.
- AEU8** Opportunities for high quality, low impact enjoyment, education, celebration and understanding of the AONB for all people will be supported.
- AEU9** The establishment and management of new public rights of way, particularly for walkers, horse riders and cyclists, together with a safer and better connecting network will be supported, where they conform to policies to conserve and enhance the AONB.
- AEU10** High standards of landscape and recreational management, accessible visitor facilities and access opportunities, and increased opportunities for learning through a programme of training, events, guided walks and gateway routes and sites will be supported.
- AEU11** Provision of initiatives in schools and youth groups, especially those located in the Kent Downs AONB, which encourage interest in and learning about the AONB will be supported.
- AEU12** Support will be given to the management and implementation of the North Downs Way National Trail initiatives where they conform to policies to conserve and enhance the AONB.

At the heart of well-managed and enjoyable countryside recreation is high quality information that helps visitors plan their use of the Kent Downs



- **Implementation**
- **Resourcing the Management Plan**
- **Monitoring condition**



## 5

# IMPLEMENTATION, MONITORING AND REVIEW

## 5.1 IMPLEMENTATION

**The vision, aims and policies of this management plan need to be translated into action. Actions to protect, conserve and enhance the Kent Downs AONB have been agreed and described in an action plan.**

The Action Plan defines what is required to achieve the vision, aims and policies of the plan. Actions have a timescale, target and lead partner. An important finding from the implementation of the original plan is that the actions have not been shared; rather they have been assumed to be the sole responsibility of the AONB Unit – this was not the intention. It is therefore important that partners and stakeholders have been closely involved in the development of the action plan.

In addition the JAC is calling on all partners and stakeholders, particularly those with a duty of regard for the AONB, to incorporate the vision, aims and policies of the management plan into their work programmes.

Delivery of the Action Plan and key achievements of the AONB Unit will be published in an annual review.



**Photo:**  
training day

The management plan is ambitious and its achievement requires a variety of resources including new funding and the time and commitment of partners and stakeholders. The Kent Downs AONB Unit has a limited amount of financial and staff resources at its disposal, with which it will enable, facilitate, support and co-ordinate action. Its role will have increasingly to be to influence the action of others, particularly its partner organisations, to encourage the allocation of resources and time to achieve the aims of the plan.

In 2006 the Countryside Agency and local authorities signed a 6-year Memorandum of Agreement for the core funding of the AONB Unit. Included in this are activity costs to meet AONB core functions and a number of these will help to deliver ambitions of the management plan. In addition, the Kent Downs AONB Unit bids for project funding to Natural England annually, with the specific aim of matching this money with funding from partners, to carry out and achieve agreed policies and actions. Natural England project funding resources have however declined and part of the core work of the AONB Unit will be to seek to secure project funding elsewhere.

Where more substantial amounts of investment are required for projects and implementation, a number of external funding options have been harnessed. Substantial resources have been secured for the conservation and enhancement of the Kent Downs; including the £1m Interreg (EU funding), living landscapes project and a £2.5m Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) landscape partnership for the Medway Gap. The time required to develop, deliver and manage these projects is considerable and is an important part of the role of the AONB Unit. Many other potential sources of external funding are available, and every suitable option will be explored over the course of the five years to deliver the Management Plan.

There is a range of other resources, including staff time, commitment, expertise, advice and equipment which will play a valuable role in achieving the aims of the Management Plan. However, probably the most important resource is commitment. A huge amount can be achieved by co-operation between various specialist staff and individuals across the AONB, who pool resources and work together to achieve the visions and policies of the Management Plan.



**Photo:**  
Lullingstone



**Photo:**  
Ranscombe

It is an ambition that the partnership monitors the condition of the AONB. This plays an important role in identifying key issues and trends. The condition monitoring process also aims to contribute to an understanding of whether the policies and actions are achieving the aims and vision of the management plan. A set of proposed headline monitoring indicators were set when the first AONB plan was adopted and these have been reviewed as part of the review process. The Countryside Agency and now Natural England have been working to establish an agreed national set of indicators for the AONBs. The Kent Downs AONB has therefore not pursued condition indicators beyond those proposed at adoption of the plan but has used other relevant sources of information, recorded in the environment report, to inform the issues and threats identified, the aims and policies. The agreed set of national indicators will be reported in each annual review.

There is a range of other resources, including staff time, commitment, expertise, advice and equipment which will play a valuable role in achieving the aims of the Management Plan



**Photo:**  
Jumping Downs

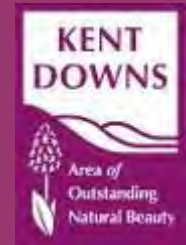


**Photo:**  
coppice woodland

ABBREVIATIONS

<b>AIF</b>	Area Investment Framework	<b>KFWAG</b>	Kent Farming, Wildlife Advisory Group
<b>AONB</b>	Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty	<b>Km</b>	kilometre
<b>BAP</b>	Biodiversity Action Plan	<b>KRCC</b>	Kent Rural Community Councils
<b>BHS</b>	British Horse Society	<b>KTA</b>	Kent Tourism Alliance
<b>BSE</b>	Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy	<b>KWT</b>	Kent Wildlife Trust
<b>BTCV</b>	British Trust for Conservation Volunteers	<b>LA</b>	Local Authority
<b>CAP</b>	Common Agricultural Policy	<b>LAF</b>	Local Access Forum
<b>CAIP</b>	Countryside Access Improvement Plan	<b>LNR</b>	Local Nature Reserve
<b>CLA</b>	Country Landowner and Business Association	<b>LSP</b>	Local Strategic Partnership
<b>CLG</b>	Communities and Local Government (Department of)	<b>LTP</b>	Local Transport Plan
<b>CMS</b>	Countryside Management Services	<b>LWS</b>	Local Wildlife Site
<b>CoAg</b>	Countryside Agency	<b>M</b>	Million
<b>CPRE</b>	Campaign to Protect Rural England	<b>MoD</b>	Ministry of Defence
<b>CroW Act</b>	Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000	<b>NAAONB</b>	National Association of AONBs
<b>CSS</b>	Countryside Stewardship Scheme	<b>NatRECS</b>	National Route Evaluation and Classification System
<b>DC</b>	District Council (also includes Borough Councils)	<b>NDW</b>	North Downs Way
<b>Defra</b>	Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs	<b>NE</b>	Natural England
<b>EA</b>	Environment Agency	<b>NFU</b>	National Farmers Union
<b>EH</b>	English Heritage	<b>NNR</b>	National Nature Reserve
<b>ELS</b>	Entry Level Sewardship	<b>NT</b>	National Trust
<b>ESS</b>	Environmental Stewardship Scheme	<b>PCs</b>	Parish Councils
<b>ER</b>	Environment Report	<b>PROW</b>	Public Rights of Way
<b>ERDF</b>	European Regional Development Fund (Interreg)	<b>RDF</b>	Rural Delivery Framework
<b>ET</b>	Eurotunnel	<b>RDPE</b>	Rural Development Programme for England
<b>EU</b>	European Union	<b>RIG</b>	Regionally Important Geological/Geomorphological Site
<b>FC</b>	Forestry Commission	<b>RLCI</b>	Rail Link Countryside Initiative
<b>GIS</b>	Geographical Information System	<b>ROWIP</b>	Rights of Way Improvement Plan
<b>GOSE</b>	Government Office for the South East	<b>RSPB</b>	Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
<b>Ha</b>	hectare	<b>SAC</b>	Special Area for Conservation
<b>HA</b>	Highways Agency	<b>SAM</b>	Scheduled Ancient Monument
<b>HLF</b>	Heritage Lottery Fund	<b>SEEDA</b>	South East England Development Agency
<b>HLS</b>	Higher Level Stewardship	<b>SEERA</b>	South East England Regional Assembly
<b>ICT</b>	Information and communication technology	<b>SPD</b>	Supplementary Planning Document
<b>JAC</b>	Joint Advisory Committee	<b>SSSI</b>	Site of Special Scientific Interest
<b>KDAONB</b>	Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty	<b>TSE</b>	Tourism South East
<b>KAPC</b>	Kent Association of Parish Councils	<b>WT</b>	Woodland Trust
<b>KCC</b>	Kent County Council		
<b>KDU</b>	Kent Downs Unit		

# Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plan 2014 - 2019



Second revision April 2014



# Ministerial Foreword



Department  
for Environment  
Food & Rural Affairs

Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) are some of our finest landscapes. They are cherished by residents and visitors alike and allow millions of people from all walks of life to understand and connect with nature.

I am pleased to see that this Management Plan demonstrates how AONB Partnerships can continue to protect these precious environments despite the significant challenges they face. With a changing climate, the increasing demands of a growing population and in difficult economic times, I believe AONBs represent just the sort of community driven, collaborative approach needed to ensure our natural environment is maintained for generations to come.

AONB Partnerships have been the architects of a landscape-scale approach to land management. This approach is a key feature of the Government's Natural Environment White Paper and emphasises the need to manage ecosystems in an integrated fashion, linking goals on wildlife, water, soil and landscape, and working at a scale that respects natural systems.

This Management Plan also makes the important connection between people and nature. I am pleased to hear that local communities have been central to the development of the plan, and will be at the heart of its delivery. From volunteers on nature conservation projects, to businesses working to promote sustainable tourism, it's great to hear of the enthusiasm and commitment of the local people who hold their AONBs so dear.

AONBs are, and will continue to be, landscapes of change. Management Plans such as this are vital in ensuring these changes are for the better. I would like to thank all those who were involved in bringing this plan together and I wish you every success in bringing it to fruition.

**Lord de Mauley**  
Minister for Natural Environment  
and Science



# Contents

Foreword	5	3.5 Sustainable development - aims	28
<b>1. The Kent Downs AONB</b>	<b>6</b>	3.6 Sustainable development - policies	29
Our vision		<b>4. Landform and landscape character</b>	<b>30</b>
1.1 Overview	6	Our vision	30
1.2 Special characteristics and qualities of the Kent Downs AONB	7	4.1 Overview	30
1.2.1 The special characteristics and qualities	7	4.2 Landform and landscape character - special characteristics and qualities	31
1.2.2 Quality of life characteristics and qualities	9	4.3 The Kent Downs landscape character areas	32
1.3 The public perception of the Kent Downs AONB	10	4.4 Landform and landscape character - main issues, opportunities and threats	35
<b>2. The management of the Kent Downs AONB</b>	<b>11</b>	4.5 Landform and landscape character - aims	36
Our vision	11	4.6 Landform and landscape character - policies	36
2.1 The Kent Downs in context	11	<b>5. Biodiversity</b>	<b>37</b>
2.1.1 Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty	11	Our vision	37
2.1.2 The Kent Downs AONB	12	5.1 Overview	37
2.1.3 Definition of natural beauty and landscape	13	5.2 Biodiversity - special characteristics and qualities	39
2.2 Management planning for AONBs	14	5.3 Biodiversity - main issues, opportunities and threats	46
2.2.1 The role of this management plan review	14	5.4 Biodiversity - aims	47
2.2.2 The status and role of management planning policies	14	5.5 Biodiversity - policies	47
2.2.3 Who is the plan for?	16	<b>6. Farmed landscape</b>	<b>48</b>
2.2.4 The role of the Kent Downs AONB Partnership	17	Our vision	48
2.3 The management of the Kent Downs AONB - aims	19	6.1 Overview	48
2.4 The management of the Kent Downs AONB - policies	19	6.2 Farmed landscape - special characteristics and qualities	49
<b>3. Sustainable development</b>	<b>20</b>	6.3 Farmed landscape - main issues, opportunities and threats	55
Our vision	20	6.4 Farmed landscape - aims	56
3.1 Overview	20	6.5 Farmed landscape - policies	57
3.2 Guiding themes	21		
3.3 Recurrent themes	22		
3.4 Sustainable development - main issues, opportunities and threats	27		

<b>7. Woodland and trees</b>	<b>58</b>		
Our vision	58		
7.1 Overview	58		
7.2 Woodland and trees - special characteristics and qualities	59		
7.3 Woodland and trees - main issues, opportunities and threats	64		
7.4 Woodland and trees - aims	65		
7.5 Woodland and trees - policies	66		
<b>8. Historic and cultural heritage</b>	<b>67</b>		
Our vision	67		
8.1 Overview	67		
8.2 Historic and cultural heritage - special characteristics and qualities	68		
8.3 Historic and cultural heritage - main issues, opportunities and threats	73		
8.4 Historic and cultural heritage - aims	74		
8.5 Historic and cultural heritage - policies	74		
<b>9. The Heritage Coasts</b>	<b>75</b>		
Our vision	75		
9.1 Overview	75		
9.2 The Heritage Coasts - special characteristics and qualities	77		
9.3 The Heritage Coasts - main issues, opportunities and threats	81		
9.4 The Heritage Coasts - aims	82		
9.5 The Heritage Coasts - policies	82		
<b>10. Geology and natural resources</b>	<b>83</b>		
Our vision	83		
10.1 Overview	83		
10.2 Geology and natural resources - special characteristics and qualities	83		
		10.3 Geology and natural resources - main issues, opportunities and threats	88
		10.4 Geology and natural resources - aims	89
		10.5 Geology and natural resources - policies	89
		Quality of life components	90
		<b>11. Vibrant communities</b>	<b>91</b>
		Our vision	91
		11.1 Overview	91
		11.2 Vibrant communities - special characteristics and qualities	91
		11.3 Vibrant communities - main issues, opportunities and threats	94
		11.4 Vibrant communities - aims	95
		11.5 Vibrant communities - policies	95
		<b>12. Access, enjoyment and understanding</b>	<b>96</b>
		Our vision	96
		12.1 Overview	96
		12.2 Access, enjoyment and understanding - special characteristics	98
		12.3 Access, enjoyment and understanding - main issues, opportunities and threats	103
		12.4 Access, enjoyment and understanding - aims	104
		12.5 Access, enjoyment and understanding - policies	105
		<b>13. Implementation, monitoring and review</b>	<b>106</b>
		13.1 Implementation	106
		13.2 The Kent Downs AONB design and land management guidance	106
		13.3 Resourcing and monitoring the Management Plan	107
		Annex 1 - Abbreviations	109

# Foreword

An Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) is exactly what it says it is: a precious landscape whose distinctive character and natural beauty are so outstanding that it is in the nation's interest to safeguard them.

AONBs represent only 18% of the land area of England and Wales. In this small proportion of the country it is the landscape that must come first.

**The Kent Downs is home to some of the most enchanting landscapes of southern Britain. Put simply, the purpose of this Management Plan is to set out the strategy to conserve and enhance them.**

The Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Partnership has worked closely to prepare and produce this revision of the Management Plan for this special place. We are grateful to the many people who have been involved in developing this Plan.

The Management Plan provides energy, direction and commitment for the future of the landscape and through the previous versions of the Plan, much has been achieved. Indeed the Kent Downs AONB Partnership is recognised nationally as one of the most effective at securing resources to support the management of this fine landscape.

At the same time the pressures on this particular landscape have grown once again. Our response to this greater pressure and to the difficult financial environment is not to retreat to seeking merely to protect the Kent Downs; instead, this Plan is more ambitious for the landscape and seeks wider, stronger and more collaborative partnerships to meet its positive objectives.

The ultimate goal of the Management Plan remains to ensure that the natural beauty of the landscape and vitality of the communities of the Kent Downs AONB are recognised, valued and strengthened well into the future. We seek to do this in a way which enhances health and well-being and supports much needed sustainable growth and development.



**Chris Reynolds**  
Chairman, Kent Downs AONB  
Joint Advisory Committee



**Nick Johannsen**  
Director, Kent Downs AONB Unit



# 1. The Kent Downs AONB

## Our vision

In the first AONB Management Plan we agreed a 20 year vision; this 2004 vision remains fundamentally unchanged:

In 2034... the qualities and distinctive features of the Kent Downs AONB, the dramatic south-facing scarp, secluded dry valleys, network of tiny lanes, isolated farmsteads, churches and oasts, orchards, dramatic cliffs, the ancient woodlands and delicate chalk grassland along with the ancient, remote and tranquil qualities, are valued, secured and strengthened.

The Kent Downs has become a landscape where change supports the AONB's distinctive features. Robust responses to development pressures and climate change have enhanced landscape character. The Kent Downs landscape is recognised and valued, enjoyed and cherished and its future conservation and enhancement is a certainty.

Positive partnerships, local people and land managers act together to conserve, enhance and promote a nationally and internationally recognised and valued landscape.

## 1.1 Overview

There is no doubt that the landscape of the Kent Downs is special. There is drama and intimacy; there is diversity and contrast within the AONB; there are ancient places as well as the bright white of a new cliff fall. This is a distinctive, national landscape of outstanding quality and value.



A traditional orchard



Wild flower meadow



Yellowhammer



Postling Downs

## 1.2 Special characteristics and qualities of the Kent Downs AONB

### 1.2.1 The special characteristics and qualities

The rich landscape of the Kent Downs AONB is made up of diverse special characteristics and qualities which together distinguish it as a landscape of national and international importance and which are consistently identified and valued by the public, individuals, institutions, organisations and experts alike. The special characteristics and qualities of the Kent Downs natural beauty have been identified as:

#### ◆ Dramatic landform and views

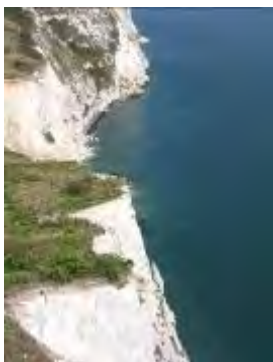
The Kent Downs dramatic and diverse topography is based on the underlying geology. These features comprise: impressive south-facing steep slopes (scarps) of chalk and greensand; scalloped and hidden dry valleys - these features are especially valued where they have a downland character; expansive open plateaux; broad, steep-sided river valleys, and the dramatic, iconic white cliffs and foreshore. Breathtaking, long-distance panoramas are offered across open countryside, estuaries, towns and the sea from the scarp, cliffs and plateaux; the dip slope dry valleys and river valleys provide more intimate and enclosed vistas. Overlying this landform are diverse natural and man-made features creating distinctiveness at a local level.

#### ◆ Biodiversity-rich habitats

Rich mosaics of habitats, plant and animal communities of national and local importance are sustained, although they may be isolated or fragmented in a modern agricultural landscape. These include: semi-natural chalk grassland and chalk scrub; ancient semi-natural woodland; traditional orchards, including cobnut plats; chalk cliffs, foreshore and sea platform; chalk rivers and wet pasture; ponds and spring lines; heath and acid grassland; woodland pasture and ancient trees and networks of linear features of species-rich hedgerows, flower-rich field margins and road verges. Sensitive management and conservation of all these features as well as the creation of functional ecological networks is essential to the survival of the AONB's important biodiversity heritage and landscape quality.

#### ◆ Farmed landscape

A long-established tradition of mixed farming has helped create the natural beauty of the Kent Downs. The pastoral scenery is a particularly valued part of the landscape. Farming covers around 64% of the AONB. Expansive arable fields are generally on the lower slopes, valley bottoms and plateaux tops. Disconnected 'ribbons' of permanent grassland (shaves) are found along the steep scarp,



Langdon Hole



Shepherds Hill, Sheldwich



Straw bale



Darent Valley



Man orchid

valley sides, and on less-productive land, grazed by sheep, cattle and increasingly by horses. Locally concentrated areas of orchards, cobnut plats (nut orchards), hop gardens and other horticultural production are also present, their regular striate form can enhance the rise and fall of the land. At a national level, uncertainty hangs over the future policy and funding regimes for agricultural production and agri-environment schemes. At a local level, more farms are being managed together in large contracts where rotations can be at whole farm rather than field level. Elsewhere farm owners with non-agricultural incomes are becoming more common. Provision for leisure including equine activities, shooting and increasingly renewable energies are replacing and augmenting traditional farming practices.

#### ◆ **Woodland and trees**

Broadleaf and mixed woodland cover 23% of the Kent Downs and frame the upper slopes of the scarp and dry valleys and plateaux tops. Some large woodland blocks are present but many woodlands are small, fragmented and in disparate land ownership and management. Over half of the woodland sites are ancient (continuously wooded since 1600), supporting nationally important woodland plant and animal species. Large areas of sweet chestnut coppice are present throughout. Woodland management is critical to secure this resource and efforts to secure new markets for woodland products are beginning to effect resurgence in management. Tree disease and deer are now probably the greatest threats to this vital resource.

#### ◆ **A rich legacy of historic and cultural heritage**

Millennia of human activity have created an outstanding cultural inheritance and strong 'time depth' to the Kent Downs. In the original designation the villages, churches and castles are particularly noted. There are the remains of Neolithic megalithic monuments, Bronze Age barrows, Iron Age hill-forts, Roman villas and towns, medieval villages focused on their churches, post-medieval stately homes with their parks and gardens and historic defence structures from Norman times to the twentieth century.

Fields of varying shapes and sizes and ancient wood-banks and hedges, set within networks of droveways and sunken lanes have produced a rich historic mosaic, which is the rural landscape of today. Architectural distinctiveness is ever present in the scattered villages and farmsteads and oasthouses, barns and other agricultural buildings, churches and country houses. The diverse range of local materials used, which includes flint, chalk, Ragstone, timber and tile, contributes to the character and texture of the countryside.

The AONB landscape has been an inspiration to artists, scientists and leaders, from Shakespeare to Samuel Palmer and Darwin to Churchill.

#### ◆ **Geology and natural resources**

The imposing landform and special characteristics of the Kent Downs is underpinned by its geology. This is also the basis for the considerable natural capital and natural resources which benefit society. These include the soils which support an important farming sector and the water resources which support rivers teeming with wildlife and offering enchanting landscapes. Hidden below the chalk is a significant aquifer providing 75% of Kent's drinking water. Much of the AONB provides surprisingly tranquil and remote countryside – offering dark night skies and peace. These are much valued perceptual qualities of the AONB.



Fog over Holly Hill Wood



The Kent Downs landscape

## 1.2.2 Quality of life characteristics and qualities

### ◆ Vibrant communities

The Kent Downs is a living, working landscape shaped and managed by people. Currently there is a population estimated as 93,000 and, while changing in nature, many of the Kent Downs communities are strong and vibrant, assertively seeking to conserve and enhance the place that they are fortunate to live in. At the same time it is increasingly difficult for those involved in the practical management and enhancement of the landscape to afford to live locally.

### ◆ Development pressures

The position of the Kent Downs, close to London, mainland Europe, major urban centres and growth areas means that the Kent Downs AONB, perhaps more than any other of Britain's protected landscapes – AONBs, Heritage Coasts or National Parks, has faced severe development pressure. New transportation infrastructure including strategic trans-European highways, communications and housing, as well as the pressures of intensive agriculture and forestry, increased recreational use and illegal activities such as fly-tipping and off road driving can detract from this important landscape. This is both an opportunity and a threat; an important role of the Management Plan is to seek a positive exchange of goods and services between the Kent Downs and the surrounding urban areas. Despite the intense pressure experienced in the Kent Downs, it is still true that the AONB has largely retained its character and community based projects have shown the real benefit of sustainable development approaches.



Walking in the Kent Downs



Horse riders in the Kent Downs



Cycling through the Kent Downs



Recording sounds from the landscape

### ◆ Access, enjoyment and understanding

The Kent Downs is an easily accessible and charming landscape; over one million people live within a kilometre of the AONB boundary. There is considerable demand for access and recreation in the Kent Downs and providing this in a way which supports the special characteristics of the AONB is an important but challenging task. The AONB provides a Public Rights of Way (PRoW) network four times as dense as the national average and there is a high relative density of bridleways and byways. Active user groups help to promote the sustainable management and use of the AONB for quiet countryside recreation.

Access to the Kent Downs AONB particularly through walking, cycling and riding can provide benefits to health and well-being as well as supporting the local community.

Improving the understanding of the AONB is a critical task, without this the landscape will not be recognised, valued or enjoyed and its future conservation and enhancement may not be assured.

Since the designation of the Kent Downs AONB was first confirmed, an enormous amount of change has occurred. All aspects of environmental, social and economic circumstances have been transformed and the resulting changes have brought new practices and pressures on the landscape.

## 1.3 The public perception of the Kent Downs

In the preparation of the 2004 Management Plan and its subsequent reviews, comments and engagement have been sought from many participants including local authorities, stakeholders, local residents and visitors to the AONB. A key issue was to confirm which of the special characteristics and qualities of the AONB are most valued and what are the most important related issues and priorities.

The main consultation method used for the 2004 Plan was a written questionnaire in the Kent Downs newspaper, The Orchid. Respondents could also complete an online questionnaire. For the Management Plan Reviews (2008 and 2013), consultation was widened following the preparation of a Statement of Community and Stakeholder Involvement (SCI). Consultation included a questionnaire

in the Kent on Sunday and Saturday Observer free newspapers and was promoted on their and the Kent Downs AONB websites gaining much wider coverage. The questionnaire was also sent to all Orchid subscribers and parish councils. The 2002/3 consultation included mainly individuals and groups based in the Kent Downs. For the recent review in 2013, more than half of the respondents were from outside the AONB but the features valued and priorities for action are remarkably consistent. Each time people have been asked to select the special characteristics and qualities of the AONB most important to them, they have confirmed that the special characteristics and qualities that formed the basis of the original AONB designation are still those most valued by people today.

Table 1 - Kent Downs AONB 'Have Your Say' survey and participation responses (2003, 2008 and 2013) (participants were asked to select the three most important components or features)

Most important components of natural beauty in the Kent Downs AONB	2003	2008	2013	Most valued features of the Kent Downs AONB	2003	2008	2013
Chalk downland	59%	74%	71%	Scenery and views	86%	83%	79%
Woodland	52%	43%	41%	Wildlife	49%	48%	39%
Landform and geology	45%	41%	34%	Peace and quiet	46%	49%	39%
Ancient lanes and paths	33%	47%	40%	Outdoor recreation	33%	10%	12%
Orchards/cobnut plats	21%	17%	14%	Villages and village life	32%	32%	29%
River valleys	20%	21%	19%	Historic buildings	24%	17%	14%
Hedgerows	20%	19%	18%	Dark skies	n/a	6%	7%
Historic settlements	17%	25%	24%	Amenities	10%	8%	7%
Mixed farmland	14%	17%	12%	Available local produce	7%	8%	5%
Dry valleys	7%	7%	8%	Visitor attractions	n/a	n/a	7%
Historic parkland	6%	9%	7%	Public rights of way network	n/a	41%	45%
				Locally distinct highways	n/a	1%	3%

## 2. The management of the Kent Downs AONB

### Our vision

In 2034... the Kent Downs AONB is recognised and valued. It is a landscape cherished and held in the highest esteem by those who visit, live and work there and by those who influence its future. Residents and visitors know where the AONB is and they understand and support the purpose of its designation. The Kent Downs AONB Partnership is acknowledged and supported as the main advocate and champion for the AONB; organisations delivering positive action on the ground are collaboratively engaged in the Partnership and management planning. The Partnership is open to all opinions about the conservation and management of the AONB and is adaptive to short and long-term change such as climate change.

### 2.1 The Kent Downs in context

#### 2.1.1 Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty

Areas of Outstanding National Beauty are part of a global family of protected areas recognised and classified by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). AONBs, National Parks and Heritage Coasts in England and Wales fall into Category V – Protected Landscapes. These are areas that have been moulded by centuries of human activity, where there is a diversity of land use with a ‘sense of place’. Equivalent areas in other countries include the French Parcs Naturels Régionaux. The Kent Downs AONB has a strong partnership with the Parc Naturel Régional des Caps et Marais d’Opale. The IUCN definition of Protected Landscape aims to maintain the harmonious balance between people, landscapes and nature for now and for future generations.

The National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 legislated for the designation of AONBs and National Parks. Their purpose was to be similar – to conserve and enhance natural beauty. The Countryside Commission further defined the purpose of AONB designation in a statement of 1991.

Purpose of AONB designation...

‘...is primarily to conserve and enhance natural beauty’.

‘In pursuing the primary purpose of designation, account should be taken of the needs of agriculture, forestry, and other rural industries and of the economic and social needs of local communities. Particular regard should be paid to promoting sustainable forms of social and economic development that in themselves conserve and enhance the environment’.

‘Recreation is not an objective of designation but the demand for recreation should be met so far as this is consistent with the conservation of natural beauty and the needs of agriculture, forestry and other uses.’

*Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty: A policy statement (Countryside Commission, CCP 356, 1991, p.5).*

The Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, (CRoW Act) revised and partially replaced the AONB provisions of the 1949 Act, including a requirement that a management plan be prepared for each AONB. In the case of the Kent Downs AONB (and others covered by more than one local authority), the management plan must be prepared by the local authorities acting jointly. It must also be reviewed every five years.

The 33 AONBs in England amount to 15% of the total land area. They vary greatly in landscape character and size ranging from the smallest, the Isles of Scilly (16sq. km) to the largest, the Cotswolds (2,038 sq. km). In Kent, the High Weald and Kent Downs AONB cover around a third of the county's land area.

## 2.1.2 The Kent Downs AONB

The Kent Downs AONB is a nationally important landscape and one of the most enchanting parts of southern England. The AONB was designated in July 1968; it covers 878sq.km (326 sq. miles) stretching from the Surrey/Greater London border to the Strait of Dover. Aside from a small area within the London Borough of Bromley, the AONB lies wholly within the county of Kent and covers around 23% of the total land area of the county. It rises to an altitude of 250m above sea level at its highest point at Toy's Hill south of Sevenoaks, and is crossed in three places by the river valleys of the Darent, the Medway and the Stour, all flowing northwards.



The Kent Downs in the snow



Elmsted Valley



River Stour



Eynsford viaduct

Adam Swaine

Four common aims unite AONB Partnerships and management plans:

- Conserve and enhance the natural and cultural heritage of the UK's AONBs ensuring they meet the challenges of the future.
- Support the economic and social well-being of local communities in ways which contribute to the conservation and enhancement of natural beauty.
- Promote public understanding and enjoyment of AONB landscapes and encourage people to conserve and enhance them.
- Value, sustain and promote the benefits that AONBs provide for society including clean air and water, food and carbon storage.

The Kent Downs are the eastern half of the North Downs ridge of chalk stretching from Farnham in Surrey to the English Channel. The western half of the chalk ridge lies within the Surrey Hills AONB, which adjoins the Kent Downs. The same ridge of chalk reappears on the French side of the Channel, where it is designated le Parc Naturel Régional des Caps et Marais d'Opale. In Kent, the North Downs, along with part of the Greensand Ridge and Lympe Escarpment form the Kent Downs AONB.

The Kent Downs is the eighth largest AONB in England and Wales, and administratively one of the most complex falling within twelve

local authorities and lying partly or wholly within 137 parish council boundaries.

When the Kent Downs were confirmed as an AONB, the overall remarks of the designation committee were summarised as:

“The scarp slope and dry valleys of the Kent Downs are the main target for designation, particularly where they retain a downland character, that woodlands are highly valued throughout the designated area and particularly on the scarp slope and dry valley sides, and that other qualities of note are views from the escarpment, pastoral scenery, parklands, villages, churches and castles.”

### 2.1.3 Definition of natural beauty and landscape

The term ‘natural beauty’ remains at the heart of the purpose of AONB designation. Part IV of the 2000 Act provides the following definition of natural beauty:

“Any reference in this Part to the conservation of the natural beauty of an area includes a reference to the conservation of its flora, fauna, geological and physiographical features”. *Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, section 92.*

The term ‘natural beauty’ was always intended to embrace more than just the visual or scenic elements of the landscape and the definition has been updated and broadened to include historic and cultural heritage. Government agency guidance specifically on AONBs provides a useful non-technical definition:

“Natural beauty is not just the look of the landscape, but includes landform and geology, plants and animals, landscape features and the rich history of human settlement over the centuries.”  
(*Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty: A guide for AONB Partnership members – Countryside Agency, CA24, November 2001*)

At the core of the secondary purpose of AONB designation is the understanding that the landscape is not just scenery, but it is the result of the historic and on-going interaction between people and place. Social and economic activity that contributes to the landscape and natural beauty is fundamental to shaping the future of the AONB.

The important link between people and place is emphasised in the European Landscape Convention (Council of Europe) where landscape is defined as “an area, as perceived by people, whose

character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors”. The convention, ratified by the UK in 2006, also recognises that “the landscape is an important part of the quality of life for people everywhere; in urban areas and in the countryside, in degraded areas as well as in areas of high quality, in areas recognised as being of outstanding beauty as well as everyday areas”.



Bluebells at Kings Wood

## 2.2 Management planning for AONBs

In recognition of the national and international importance of AONB landscapes the CRoW Act 2000 required relevant local authorities to jointly prepare, publish and subsequently review a management plan. It is required that the plan formulates their policies for the

management of the AONB and for carrying out their functions in relation to it. The Management Plan is essentially about conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the AONB, the statutory purpose of the designation.

### 2.2.1 The role of this Management Plan review

The first statutory Kent Downs AONB Management Plan was adopted in April 2004. This is the second review. In their formal observations the Countryside Agency and subsequently Natural England recognised the Kent Downs AONB Management Plan and its first review as representing 'exemplary practice'.

This revised Management Plan is based on the original Plan and its first review. It justifies and details policies and actions for the conservation and enhancement of the Kent Downs AONB. It has been prepared by the Kent Downs AONB Unit and Joint Advisory Committee (JAC) for, and on behalf of, the twelve local authorities that have land within the Kent Downs, thus fulfilling their statutory obligations.

### 2.2.2 The status and role of Management Plan policies

The overarching aim of this Management Plan is to achieve the purpose of AONB designation. The scope of the CRoW Act was wide for AONB Management Plans requiring policies both for the management of the AONB and for the local authorities to carry out their many functions. The Guidance for the review of AONB

Management Plans (CA 221 September 2006) describes a policy as the means by which to achieve the objective saying 'this is how we will get things done'. Primarily policies are there as plans of action which help define what will be encouraged, promoted, supported and pursued; policies are also needed to help stop or mitigate negative



Andy Vidler

Kestrel



Agrimony and greater knapweed



Cow pat fungus



Adam Swaine

Cattle grazing alongside the River Darent

impacts on Kent Downs. In this Plan policies have been divided into control and intent policies, both are critical to ensure the conservation and enhancement of the AONB.

An action is what the AONB Partnership wants to do and should be grounded in policy e.g. investment in on the ground delivery, guidance, engagement in a process or research etc. An Action Plan is developed in partnership with the Joint Advisory Committee and other partners once the Management Plan has been confirmed and adopted.

The Management Plan does not formulate land use planning policies but is a component of the decision making process in planning applications. The status of the Management Plan combined with the thorough process of plan making and review means that the AONB Management Plan and its policies are a material consideration in planning matters and should be afforded weight in decisions. The National Planning Practice Guidance confirms this, and supports the evidence and principles established in the Management Plan being taken into account in local planning authorities' Local Plans and in Neighbourhood Plans.

AONB Management Plan policies will be reflected and in part implemented through policies in each Local Plan and in development management decisions. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) states that local planning authorities should set criteria-based policies against which proposals for any development affecting landscape will be judged, reflecting the hierarchy of international, national and locally designated sites, so that protection is commensurate with their status. The principles and priorities set out in this Management Plan will assist the preparation of criteria-based policies for the Kent Downs AONB.



Adam Swaine

Lavender fields in the Darent Valley

Table 2 - Control policies

Policy wording	Intervention proposed
Oppose	The AONB Unit and Partnership will engage in the active opposition (for instance to development proposals) or through responses to development control consultations or attending public inquiries.
Resist	The AONB Unit and Partnership will provide evidence and support to seek to overcome risks to the qualities and special characteristics of the AONB.
Will and shall	A strong intention for the AONB Unit, Partnership and others to achieve the aim/s and objective/s stated in the policy.
Expect/ed	AONB Unit, Partnership and others to comply with the level of quality and action inferred by the policy and no support or encouragement would be given by the Partnership to actions that run counter to the spirit of the policy.

Table 3 - Intent policies

Policy wording	Intervention proposed
Pursue	The AONB Local Authorities, wider Partnership and Unit will actively seek to ensure that the policy intention is achieved through leading a series of their own interventions, developing policies, actions and development control decisions. This will include seeking resources and support from other agencies.
Support	The AONB Local Authorities, wider Partnership and Unit will provide support through policy and development control decisions, influence others, seek resources and occasionally intervene to seek to achieve the policy intention.
Encourage	The AONB Local Authorities, wider Partnership and Unit will endorse the actions of others, develop policies and development control decisions and occasionally seek resources and influence to achieve the policy intention.
Maintain	Little or no intervention expected from Local Authorities, Partnership or Unit but policies and actions required to prevent negative change will be expected.
Monitor	To seek to understand change in condition of issue.

### 2.2.3 Who is the plan for?

First and foremost, the Management Plan and its policies belong to the AONB local authorities – this is the policy and action framework which will influence and help determine decision-making, advice and resource allocation for all their relevant functions in, and affecting, the AONB.

Second, this Management Plan is for all the government agencies, statutory undertakers, utilities and public bodies which have a ‘duty of regard’ for the purposes of the AONB designation in their functions and operations. All public bodies and relevant authorities have to demonstrate that they have taken into account the purposes of the AONB designation in all their functions within the area. This Management Plan will inform, guide and influence that process.

Finally, and importantly, this is a plan for everyone who cares for and manages the AONB, for those who live, work or play in the Kent Downs. The impact and difference that can be made by farmers, land managers, individuals, countryside management organisations, and community and voluntary organisations, when viewed as a whole, is critical to the future of the Kent Downs. We intend that this Management Plan is practical and relevant, and that it will help advise and influence activities, decisions and the perception people have of the Kent Downs.

#### ◆ A Duty of Regard

The strengthened status of AONBs through the CRoW Act has brought commitments from a wide range of organisations – including those who are not directly involved in the AONB Partnerships. Section 85, Part IV of the CRoW Act requires all public bodies and relevant authorities to demonstrate that they have taken account of the purposes of the AONB in their decision making.

The Kent Downs AONB Partnership has prepared a series of guidance documents, which form part of the Management Plan and inform and provide practical ways for organisations and individuals to implement their Duty of Regard.

In support of the Duty several public bodies and statutory undertakers have either signed Joint Accords or have developed practical projects to deliver the conservation and enhancement of Natural Beauty on the ground. Notable amongst these are the Forestry Commission, Natural England, UK Power Networks and English Heritage.



Butcher's shop at Doddington



Children running at Bredhurst



Sheep in winter



Spuckles Cottage, Eastling

## 2.2.4 The role of the Kent Downs AONB Partnership

Within an area as large and varied as the Kent Downs, there are many hundreds of stakeholders who have a role in managing the landscape, supporting local business and communities and enabling quiet recreation. The Joint Advisory Committee (JAC), above all others, plays a pivotal role in realising the strategic vision for the Kent Downs AONB and overseeing the Management Plan.

The JAC for the Kent Downs AONB was established in July 1997 and is at the heart of the Partnership. JAC membership includes the twelve local authorities who have joint responsibility to prepare and review the Management Plan, namely: Ashford, Bromley, Canterbury, Dover, Gravesham, Kent, Maidstone, Medway, Sevenoaks, Shepway, Swale and Tonbridge & Malling; as well as Natural England. Additional advisory members are the Environment Agency, Country Land and Business Association (CLA), the National Farmers Union (NFU), Kent Association of Parish Councils (KAPC) and Action with Communities in Rural Kent (ACRK).

An Executive of JAC representatives and some outside advisors steer the work of the Kent Downs AONB Unit. At a much larger scale, a Kent Downs Forum is held at an annual 'Countryside Day' for a wider audience, to discuss current issues and to inform the agenda for the forthcoming year.

The AONB Unit is employed by Kent County Council and works on behalf of the JAC to carry out the preparation and review of the Management Plan, to advocate its policies and work in partnership to deliver a range of actions described in the Action Plan.

The objective of the JAC is to ensure that the AONB Unit is effective, efficient and authoritative, recognised and valued by partners and policy makers as a professional body delivering significant added value and enabling action on the ground. To achieve this the Unit:

- Builds knowledge in order to inform and realise the ambitions of the Management Plan.
- Provides great value to partners, providing helpful advocacy, advice and support and leading activity where appropriate.
- Carries out a timely, inclusive and authoritative review of the AONB Management Plan on behalf of local authorities.
- Leads on the delivery of the AONB Management Plan and generates partnerships and collaboration in support.
- Builds capacity, motivation and professionalism and retains expertise and high quality staff.
- Actively seeks finance and other resources to support the delivery of the Management Plan.



Countryside day event



JAC site visit



The AONB Unit office



A walk across the Downs

In doing this the Unit retains the highest standards of business management.

Together the JAC, its Executive and the Unit form the Kent Downs AONB Partnership.

### ◆ **The AONB Partnership's role in planning decisions**

Planning issues have a fundamental impact on the statutory purposes of AONB designation. Until the CRoW Act 2000 enactment, the statutory land use planning system was the main legal mechanism by which AONBs were protected, conserved and enhanced. The relationship between AONB Management Plan policies and land use planning policies is set out in 2.2.2.

The Kent Downs AONB Partnership has agreed to take on a limited land use planning role, in summary this is to:

- Provide design guidance in partnership with AONB local authorities.
- Comment on forward/strategic planning issues e.g. Local Plans.
- Involvement in development control only in exceptional circumstances, e.g. in terms of scale and precedence.
- Provide planning advice/comments on development control at the request of a Kent Downs AONB Joint Advisory member and /or Local Authority Planning Officers.

This Management Plan is required by the legislation to formulate the local authority policies for the management of the AONB and for carrying out their functions in relation to it. The planning function of local authorities is a critical way to conserve and enhance the Kent Downs.

### ◆ **Delivering in partnership and developing wider collaboration**

Much that has been achieved since the publication of the first Kent Downs Management Plan has been through the many delivery partners who work on the ground in the AONB. The Kent Downs AONB Partnership is recognised nationally as one of the most effective at securing activity and resources in support of the Management Plan and its policies; this revision recognises that even greater benefit could be generated through even larger scale collaborative partnerships working across sectors and at a landscape scale.

***The Joint Advisory Committee plays a pivotal role in realising the strategic vision for the Kent Downs AONB.***



The Kent Downs

John Miller

## 2.3 The management of the Kent Downs AONB - aims

A landscape in which:

1. The vision, policies and actions of the AONB Management Plan are supported, promoted and delivered through strong collaborative partnerships, individual actions, strategy and policy and development management decisions.
2. The AONB Partnership provides leadership and direction for the future of the AONB but is open to the views of all people, and is adaptive and flexible to change.

## 2.4 The management of the Kent Downs AONB - policies

- MPP1 The Kent Downs AONB partnership and Management Plan will be supported as the primary means to develop, coordinate and promote policies and new opportunities for the management, conservation and enhancement of the AONB.
- MPP2 Individual local authorities will give high priority to the AONB Management Plan vision, policies and actions in Local Plans, development management decisions, planning enforcement cases and in carrying out other relevant functions.
- MPP3 The development of strong working partnerships and landscape scale collaborations to implement the vision, policies and actions of the AONB Management Plan will be pursued.
- MPP4 Public bodies and statutory undertakers have a statutory Duty of Regard for the purposes of the AONB: this will be pursued.
- MPP5 Collaborative working partnerships and initiatives with other Protected Landscapes will be supported.
- MPP6 The involvement of relevant interest groups, especially local communities, in decisions about the Kent Downs AONB future will be supported at a strategic level through the Management Plan and AONB Forum and at a local level through local consultations and project development.
- MPP7 The preparation and review of the Management Plan, advocacy of its policies and work in partnership to deliver the actions described will be pursued through the AONB Unit.
- MPP8 The promotion of the importance, qualities and sensitivity of the Kent Downs AONB will be pursued.



Pastoral landscapes are an important characteristic of the Kent Downs

## 3. Sustainable development

### Our vision

In 2034 ... the principles of sustainable development are at the heart of the management of the Kent Downs. Change reinforces and enhances the characteristics, qualities and distinctiveness of the Kent Downs, its communities and economy. While the surrounding urban areas have expanded considerably, innovative management techniques and policy approaches successfully address the pressure and opportunities presented to the AONB and its Partnership.

The impacts of climate change are being felt but the mitigation and adaptive responses taken are intelligence-led, effective and carefully chosen to enhance the characteristics, qualities and distinctiveness of the landscape rather than detracting from them.

### 3.1 Overview

Achieving sustainable development is an overarching principle for much national and international policy. The UN General Assembly defined sustainable development as meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

The principles of sustainable development underpin the UK Sustainable Development Strategy and are reiterated in the National Planning Policy Framework. AONB management plans are an important way to help achieve sustainable development in the context of a Protected Landscape.

Sustainable development has economic, social and environmental dimensions. In the context of the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, sustainability should be judged primarily against the objective of AONB designation set out in the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000. This is "for the purposes of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the area".

Applying this to the local circumstances of the Kent Downs, particular attention should be given to the special characteristics and qualities of the area and the reasons for designation.

These in turn help to apply the National Planning Policy Framework, which advises setting criteria based policies in Local Plans, against

which proposals for any development on or affecting the AONB can be judged. The protection afforded should be commensurate with the national status of the area and give appropriate weight to the AONB's importance and the contribution it makes to wider ecological networks.

To assist this process, this Management Plan identifies key issues, threats, opportunities and aims, together with policies which respond to them. Strategic issues are identified in this section: over-arching 'guiding themes' arising from the purposes of designation and the need to respond to climate change, and 'recurrent themes' which arise frequently across the topics in this plan. These themes will be considered first when implementing the NPPF's criteria-based approach, before turning to specific policy areas later in the Management Plan. In the absence of local criteria-based policies, the intention is that this Management Plan's policies will provide a helpful basis for planning decisions (though the policies of the Plan are more widely cast than the town and country planning system alone).

***Change reinforces and enhances the characteristics, qualities and distinctiveness of the Kent Downs, its communities and economy.***

## 3.2 Guiding themes

Some of the sustainability issues to be addressed in the Kent Downs AONB are of a high-level, over-arching nature which should inform actions and decisions in the area generally. These are 'natural beauty' (outlined in section 1.2.1), 'local character' and 'climate change'.

### ◆ Local character

Local characteristics and qualities are the triumph of the distinctive and the diverse over the uniform. Each section in this Management Plan explains what that means in the Kent Downs. Many aspects of local characteristics and qualities are specific to the designated area, such as the landform and landscape of the scarp and dip slope, the woodland and biodiversity which thrive on the steep scarp slopes, and access routes and farming practices which respond to them all. Many more local characteristics are distinctive to individual places or small localities, from building materials to traditional events, fruit trees to dew ponds. These provide enormous variety around different parts of the AONB, in addition to the sense of place which comes from being within the designated area. These qualities, features and experiences should not be seen in isolation but as vital components of an approach to AONB management which reveres what is locally special.

### ◆ Climate change in the Kent Downs

Climate change will affect the ability of future generations to meet their needs. The UK Climate Impact Programme (UKCIP 09) identifies likely impacts of a series of emission scenarios and the UK Climate Risk Assessment assesses these for a number of key landscape characteristics and qualities. Headline changes include hotter, drier summers and warmer wetter winters with greater rainfall intensity. A key issue, which generally creates more change, is the impact of greater uncertainty and extremes such as drought and flood, which are predicted to become more frequent.

The Kent Downs is vulnerable to changes in the natural environment being generally a dry and free-draining landscape, and located in one of the driest parts of the country where predicted climate change will be most strongly felt.

A 2009 pilot study carried out by Natural England for the Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs AONB showed a likely 2080 climate similar to Lisbon today; if anything the impacts in the Kent Downs are predicted to be more severe. A changing climate will affect all characteristics and qualities of natural beauty in the Kent Downs and mitigation and adaptation responses can be chosen which support landscape qualities. The Cranborne Chase study provides some responses appropriate to the Kent Downs.



Kemsing Vale

John Miller

### 3.3 Recurrent themes

Some topics arise so frequently when seeking to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the Kent Downs that they should be understood for their strategic importance to the management of the AONB. These cross-cutting topics are usually one of a number relevant to any action or decision affecting the AONB. They are assembled here to highlight their overall importance, and should be viewed as matters to address first whenever this Management Plan is relevant, before turning to specific topics in each of the following sections. This does not mean that each one will necessarily be significant to every action or decision, but that their possible applicability should always be considered. On this basis, these recurrent themes are not referred to again in the policies in later sections. For instance, this means that, with the AONB setting as a recurrent theme, reference to development 'in the AONB' will also apply as appropriate 'in its setting' too.

#### ◆ Tranquillity and remoteness

The perception of being away from the noise, sights and smells of modern life is a much valued feature of many parts of the AONB where people can refresh body and soul. In the south east of England tranquillity is an increasingly rare resource. Research by the Campaign for the Protection of Rural England (CPRE) has shown that since the 1960s England has lost over 20% of its tranquil areas to urban sprawl, traffic and light pollution. The average size of our

tranquil areas has reduced by 73%. As Kent's population increase, this resource will become more important and increasingly under threat. National tranquillity mapping carried out by the CPRE has confirmed that the Kent Downs offers important areas of relative tranquillity.

A 2003 CPRE survey documents the loss of dark night skies over the last 20 years through badly designed and sited night lighting. An accepted and often valued part of country living has always been dark, star-filled skies. These qualities are increasingly difficult to enjoy in the AONB.

The importance of tranquillity has been noted in the NPPF which requires (paragraph 123) that planning policies and decisions should aim to 'identify and protect areas of tranquillity which have remained relatively undisturbed by noise and are prized for their recreational and amenity value for this reason'.

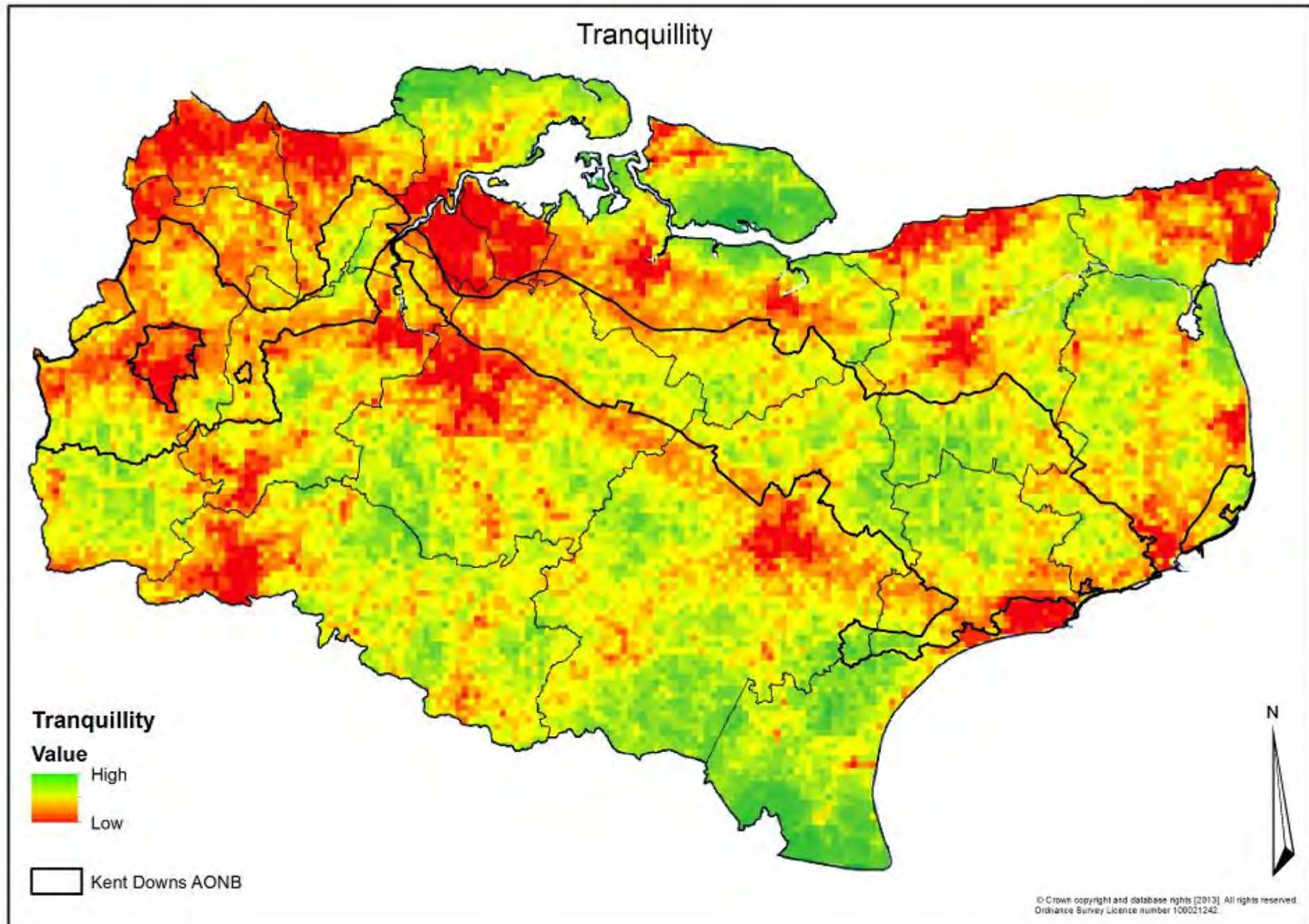
#### ◆ Setting

The setting of the Kent Downs AONB is broadly speaking the land outside the designated area which is visible from the AONB and from which the AONB can be seen, but may be wider when affected by intrusive features beyond that. It is not formally defined or indicated on a map. The setting of the AONB landscape should be



Otford Mount in the Darent Valley

Figure 1 - Tranquillity map



distinguished from the setting of listed buildings and other heritage assets (on which there is legislation and also policy in the NPPF and elsewhere).

Proposals which would affect the setting of the AONB are not subject to the same level of constraint as those which would affect the AONB itself. The weight to be afforded to setting issues will depend on the significance of the impact. Matters such as the size of proposals, their distance, incompatibility with their surroundings, movement, reflectivity and colour are likely to affect impact. Where the qualities of the AONB which were instrumental in reasons for its designation are affected, then the impacts should be given considerable weight in decisions. This particularly applies to views to and from the scarp of the North Downs.

The importance of the Kent Downs AONB setting has been recognised in the AONB Management Plan 2009-2014. This included policies to protect the AONB from inappropriate developments in its setting unless they could be satisfactorily mitigated. The Management Plan was adopted by all planning authorities with land in the AONB. National policy issued by DEFRA also explains that: "it may sometimes be the case that the activities of certain authorities operating outside the boundaries of these areas [nationally protected landscapes] may have an impact within them. In such cases, relevant authorities will also be expected to have regard to the purposes of these areas." Duties on relevant authorities to have regard to the purposes of National Parks, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) and the Norfolk and Suffolk Broads, DEFRA, March 2005.

Before it was abolished, the South East Regional Spatial Strategy had an AONB settings policy. The NPPF (2012) has no AONB settings policy. Nonetheless, partner Local Planning Authorities have been proposing, and the Secretary of State through his Inspectors accepting, that such policies remain appropriate in Local Plans. Likewise, the Secretary of State has been supporting local authority decisions to refuse damaging proposals in the setting of the AONB. In particular, following an inquiry, he refused a road-rail freight interchange in 2010 in the immediate setting of the Kent Downs scarp at Bearsted (the 'Kent International Gateway'), with a key reason being substantial harm to the AONB setting.

## ◆ Design and materials

The special characteristics and qualities of the Kent Downs include the quality of the built heritage and settlement patterns. To conserve and enhance the natural and scenic beauty of the Kent Downs, the scale and design of new development, re-development and restoration is critical. The NPPF focuses on the importance of design, stating that 'permission should be refused for development of poor design that fails to take the opportunities available for improving the character and quality of an area and the way it functions'.

To support the statutory Duty of Regard towards the conservation and enhancement of natural beauty placed on public bodies and statutory undertakers the Kent Downs AONB Partnership has produced a series of design guidance documents:

- The Kent Downs AONB Landscape Design Handbook.
- The Kent Downs AONB Rural Streets and Lanes: A Design Handbook.
- The Kent Downs AONB Farmsteads Design Guidance.
- Managing Land for Horses – a guide to good practice in the Kent Downs AONB.
- A Buildings and Settlement Design Guide is planned.

The Kent Downs has a rich tradition of half-timbered and weather-boarded buildings. There is also a legacy of locally



Woods Court Valley, Sheldwich

distinctive architecture in locally derived building materials such as Ragstone, flint and chalk. Soft red bricks and peg-tiles lend colour and here and there long-straw thatching can be seen. The predominance of local materials helps to establish the distinctive character of the built environment. The conservation and enhancement of these diverse buildings requires local sources of building materials, as well as skilled craftsmen who understand and respect the building traditions of the past and the architectural vernacular. High quality modern design can draw from the past. New development should use available, sustainably sourced traditional as well as appropriate new materials and a design approach which fits neatly with and complements the valued traditions, forms and patterns of the past, while securing environmental efficiency and affordability.

#### ◆ Pressure of growth and infrastructure

The Kent Downs AONB, probably more than any other protected landscape, is under pressure from growth, demographic change, development and infrastructure. The management plan policy framework needs to support the principles of sustainable development and reflect these challenges so that decisions (both within and outside the Kent Downs) have regard to the AONB and the benefits it offers. Significant urban areas adjoin the AONB boundary, or lie within close proximity, and most of these areas will expand in the coming twenty years.

Against this backdrop of large-scale development, there is continual pressure for small-scale development and change creating a cumulative impact on the special character and qualities of the AONB.

The Kent Downs landscape has been influenced by infrastructure development for many years. The AONB is bound by two major road routes, the M20 and M2/A2. In recent years the impact of traffic and transport infrastructure has become a significant detractor to the quality of the landscape; international traffic flows are predicted to increase. The rail network could be used to much greater extent to access the AONB, however the treatment of railway land can be out of character with AONB landscapes. Several main flight paths from London to mainland Europe pass over the Kent Downs, and the western part of the landscape is passed by aircraft descending to London Gatwick. The impact of overflying airplanes on landscape tranquillity can be significant.

Energy, water supply and fast communications are critical to the functioning of society, but their supply infrastructure can detract from landscape characteristics and qualities. In recognition of this UK Power Networks and the National Grid have joined forces with Protected Landscapes to underground power lines where there is strong environmental and public benefit and economic justification where it is technically possible without detracting from statutory duties.



Dan Tuson

Train passing through the Kent Downs



Oak clad woodfuel boiler



Removing overhead cables

The generation of renewable energy is an increasing priority and several technologies can have a detracting impact on the special qualities and characteristics of the Kent Downs. The JAC has supported a renewables position statement for the Kent Downs, which considers each significant renewable energy technology, judges its effectiveness at reducing greenhouse gasses and impact on the landscape.

Fast telecommunication is necessary to support social and economic activity and where it reduces the need to travel it can have significant environmental advantage. Enabling high speed rural broadband is an important priority for Kent and the Kent Downs AONB Partnership; delivery of these services should be met in a way that does not detract from landscape character and quality.

### ◆ Mitigation

The National Planning Policy Framework sets out a 'mitigation hierarchy' in the following terms: "Local planning authorities should seek opportunities to achieve each of the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development, and net gains across all three. Significant adverse impacts on any of these dimensions should be avoided and, wherever possible, alternative options which reduce or eliminate such impacts should be pursued. Where adverse impacts are unavoidable, measures to mitigate the impact should be considered. Where adequate mitigation measures are not possible, compensatory measures may be appropriate" (paragraph 152).

This Management Plan follows the priorities set out in the NPPF by focusing on the avoidance of damage to the characteristics and qualities of the Kent Downs AONB. However, mitigation is also important. Reducing the impacts of unavoidable change from infrastructure and growth and a growing population close to the AONB, changing land management, the needs of the AONB population and access and enjoyment, for instance, is an ongoing challenge. Likewise, infrastructure and growth in the setting of the AONB can challenge the qualities of the AONB itself. Mitigation will also be needed where schemes which have benefits for the AONB also themselves have adverse effects, for example where:

- affordable housing to sustain local AONB communities is needed but must be constructed in ways which minimise impacts on their surroundings;
- infrastructure to reintroduce woodland management (with benefits including biodiversity, wood products, renewable energy, and employment) may also need road access, harm local amenities or erode tranquillity; and
- improved recreational access to enjoy the qualities of the AONB could erode those very qualities.

In addition, the AONB must play its part in appropriately mitigating the impacts of climate change, which demands responses by all sectors of local life. This should be achieved in a way which supports rather than harms the character and qualities of the AONB.



Shorne Woods visitor centre



Wealden Wheels



Local road sign



National cycle route sign



Local produce

### 3.4 Sustainable development - main issues, opportunities and threats

- a. To conserve and enhance the natural and scenic beauty of the Kent Downs, the design of new development, redevelopment and restoration is critical.
- b. Cumulative loss of landscape features, tranquillity and character due to incremental development, climate change (and adaptation and mitigation responses), intensive agricultural and forestry practices, pressure from traffic and significant levels of urban growth and development.
- c. The potential for climate change mitigation and adaptation responses to detract from landscape character and the opportunity to adopt those which support it.
- d. The need to support project-based sustainable development initiatives and exemplars in the AONB and to increase the scale, integration and impact of activity and funding.
- e. Despite a significant loss and continuing pressure, the Kent Downs still provides important relatively tranquil areas; the National Planning Policy Framework places a requirement on Local Planning Authorities to identify and protect tranquil areas.
- f. Fewer places have dark night skies.
- g. The setting of the Kent Downs is recognised as important in the original designation of the Kent Downs and in the enjoyment of the landscape today.
- h. The choice of design and materials in restoration, new development and landscape management are recognised as critical when seeking to conserve and enhance the landscape of the Kent Downs AONB.
- i. General development pressures, including major transport and infrastructure proposals; knock-on pressure from the Greater London area and growth areas, and the opportunity to provide positive outcomes from growth as well as effective mitigation strategies.
- j. Estimated day visitor numbers are high and probably increasing. Pressure on the characteristics and qualities of the AONB as well as particular countryside routes, sites and areas can be very high but unevenly distributed.
- k. Urban and growth areas in close proximity to the AONB will generate new opportunities for enjoyment, health and well-being but also pressure for travel and access.



Sympathetic chestnut fencing



Post Office at Farningham



Rethatching



Medieval house at Plaxtol

## 3.5 Sustainable development - aims

### A landscape in which:

1. AONB conservation and enhancement and sustainable development principles are the starting point of development and infrastructure plans, local policies and proposals.
2. The character and distinctiveness of villages, farmsteads and individual buildings are conserved and enhanced by combining the best traditions of the past with the best technologies of the present to create environmentally sustainable and locally enhancing development.
3. A positive, proactive and urgent approach is taken to the implications of climate change and intelligent and effective mitigation and adaptation responses are chosen which support landscape character and ecosystem services.
4. All development achieves landscape enhancement; conservation and mitigation is delivered in every case.
5. A comparatively tranquil environment is protected, conserved and enhanced.
6. The setting and views in and out of the AONB are conserved and enhanced.
7. New developments respect and reinforce the traditions of the past, whilst integrating sustainable technologies and sensitive new design.
8. The impact of infrastructure on the qualities of the AONB is significantly reduced.



Shoreham village

### 3.6 Sustainable development - policies

- SD1 The need to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the Kent Downs AONB is recognised as the primary purpose of the designation and given the highest level of protection within statutory and other appropriate planning and development strategies and development control decisions.
- SD2 The local character, qualities and distinctiveness of the Kent Downs AONB will be conserved and enhanced in the design, scale, setting and materials of new development, redevelopment and infrastructure and will be pursued through the application of appropriate design guidance and position statements which are adopted as components of the AONB Management Plan.
- SD3 New development or changes to land use will be opposed where they disregard or run counter to the primary purpose of the Kent Downs AONB.
- SD4 A strategic, evidence led approach to both the adaptation to and mitigation of the impacts of climate change on the natural beauty and historic character of the Kent Downs, and its human consequences, will be pursued.
- SD5 Local renewable and sustainable energy initiatives will be pursued where they help to conserve and enhance the natural beauty and landscape character of the AONB and bring environmental, social and economic benefits to local people. Proposals will be opposed where they do not conform with the Kent Downs AONB Renewable Energy Position Statement.
- SD6 Activities to increase understanding of the importance and extent of tranquillity, remoteness and 'dark night skies' within the Kent Downs and the factors that affect them, will be supported and pursued.
- SD7 To retain and improve tranquillity, including the experience of dark skies at night, careful design and the use of new technologies should be used. New developments and highways infrastructure which negatively impact on the local tranquillity of the Kent Downs AONB will be opposed unless they can be satisfactorily mitigated.
- SD8 Proposals which negatively impact on the distinctive landform, landscape character, special characteristics and qualities, the setting and views to and from the AONB will be opposed unless they can be satisfactorily mitigated.
- SD9 The particular historic and locally distinctive character of rural settlements and buildings of the Kent Downs AONB will be maintained and strengthened. The use of locally-derived materials for restoration and conversion work will be encouraged. New developments will be expected to apply appropriate design guidance and to be complementary to local character in form, setting, scale, contribution to settlement pattern and choice of materials. This will apply to all development, including road design (pursued through the adoption and implementation of the AONB Rural Streets and Lanes Design Handbook), affordable housing, development on farm holdings (pursued through the farmstead design guidance), and rights of way signage.
- SD10 Positive measures to mitigate the negative impact of infrastructure and growth on the natural beauty and amenity of the AONB will be supported.
- SD11 Where it is decided that development will take place that will have a negative impact on the landscape character, characteristics and qualities of the Kent Downs AONB or its setting, mitigation measures appropriate to the national importance of the Kent Downs landscape will be identified, pursued, implemented and maintained. The removal or mitigation of identified landscape detractors will be pursued.
- SD 12 Transport and infrastructure schemes are expected to avoid the Kent Downs AONB as far as practicable. Essential developments will be expected to fit unobtrusively into the landscape, respect landscape character, be mitigated by sympathetic landscape and design measures and provide environmental compensation by benefits to natural beauty elsewhere in the AONB.

## Special characteristics and qualities of the Kent Downs AONB

### 4. Landform and landscape character

#### Our vision

In 2034... the rich diversity of landscape character and qualities distinctive to the Kent Downs are protected, enhanced and managed to the highest standards in a coordinated and continual programme. The special characteristics and qualities of the Kent Downs AONB are recognised, valued and strengthened and landscape character informs land management, responses to climate change and development decisions.

#### 4.1 Overview

The fundamental and special characteristics that distinguish the natural beauty of the Kent Downs landscape were identified when the Kent Downs AONB was designated in 1968. This was reconfirmed in the 1995 Kent Downs AONB Landscape Assessment and again in the views expressed in the public and stakeholder consultation for the original AONB Management Plan and its subsequent reviews.



Winchcombe Down

## 4.2 Landform and landscape character - special characteristics and qualities

The AONB landform underlies the area's natural beauty; it is complex and varied, but characterised by six key elements:

### ◆ The Chalk Ridge

The long arc of the North Downs chalk ridge is the most dominant element of the AONB, consisting of the steep, south-facing scarp slope rising above the Gault clay vale below, the open expansive plateau tops and gentle dip slopes traversed by many hidden, dry valleys. Spectacular views are offered along the chalk escarpment across the Vale of Holmesdale, Low Weald, the river valleys and the towns below making the setting important to the enjoyment and purposes of the AONB. Perhaps more surprising and intriguing are the views from the highest and most open parts of the plateau and dip-slopes looking towards London and the Medway, Thames and Swale estuaries.

### ◆ The White Cliffs Heritage Coasts

The chalk ridge ends at the English Channel forming the Dover White Cliffs, one of the most evocative and best known British landmarks. The scale of the Kent Downs landscape is at its greatest here. The high vertical cliffs and the white chalk contrast starkly with the foreshore and constantly changing sea below with the bustle of

ferries and shipping; overall the coast provides an awe-inspiring panorama. The expansiveness and drama is increased further by enticing glimpses of the French coast on the horizon.

### ◆ The Greensand Ridge and Lympne escarpment

The undulating Greensand Ridge rises to one of the highest points in southeast England at 250 metres at Toy's Hill. The views from along the length of the Greensand Ridge are some of the best in southern England, and on a clear day, the High Weald and the South Downs beyond can be seen. In the east Kent Downs, the Lympne escarpment of calcareous Sandstone and Ragstone provides a spur of higher ground affording dramatic views across the near-level Romney Marsh and Hythe Bay.

### ◆ The river valleys

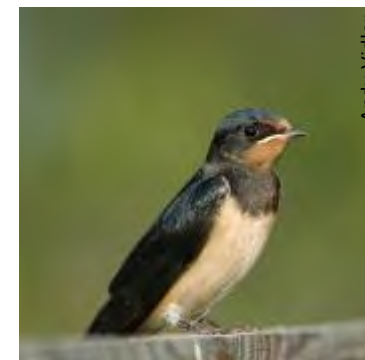
Further diversity is provided at the points where the three main rivers, the Darent, Medway and the Great Stour cut through the chalk. Each river flows in a northerly direction and they form broad, steep-sided valleys with open vistas along the river corridors. The River Medway does not lie in the AONB itself, although parts of its tidal flood plain are within the boundary.



The White Cliffs



Downland landscape



A swallow

◆ **Scalloped and hidden dry valleys**

Dry valleys are a beautiful, greatly valued and intimate feature of much of the Kent Downs landscape and they are often criss-crossed by a maze of tiny, sunken one track lanes. The valleys often have a narrow strip of rough grassland, scrub or woodland along their steepest slopes, locally known as shaves, which are important for wildlife. The larger dry valleys such as Elham and Alkham have the sporadic winterbournes such as the Nailbourne in Elham, flowing occasionally during the very wettest winters.

◆ **Expansive open plateaux**

North of the chalk scarp the plateaux offer huge open landscapes with a simple structure and sometimes surprising and dramatic views for instance to the Thames Valley. Often dominated by stiff clay with flint soils overlying the solid chalk, the soils were historically difficult to cultivate and were used extensively for sheep grazing. Much of the ancient woodland remains framing the plateaux and enclosing the dry valleys.

### 4.3 The Kent Downs landscape character areas

◆ **Landscape character**

Landscape character is described as the pattern that arises from particular combinations of different landscape components such as landform, land cover and settlement and can provide a helpful description and sense of place to our surroundings. A Landscape Character approach, supported by historic landscape character assessment, can assist in informing landscape management decisions and its use is supported by the National Planning Policy Guidance.

The Kent Downs AONB Landscape Assessment prepared by the Countryside Commission (1995 CCP 479) identified 13 Landscape Character Areas in the AONB. Many of these have been divided into local character areas which detail specific local characteristics and

identify some of the pressures facing them. Drawing from these descriptions, the 2004 Landscape Assessment of Kent described Landscape Character Area condition and sensitivity assessments. At a local level landscape character assessments have been prepared as part of the Local Plan Process for several Kent Downs Local Authorities.

Landscape Character Assessment is a helpful tool to inform the management of the Kent Downs AONB landscape. However the Kent Landscape Group (a group of landscape practitioners and managers established through the Kent Forum's Kent Environment Strategy) has identified that the County and Local Landscape Assessments do not necessarily align and that there is a need for a review of the 2004 Landscape Assessment for Kent.



Alkham Valley



Parkland

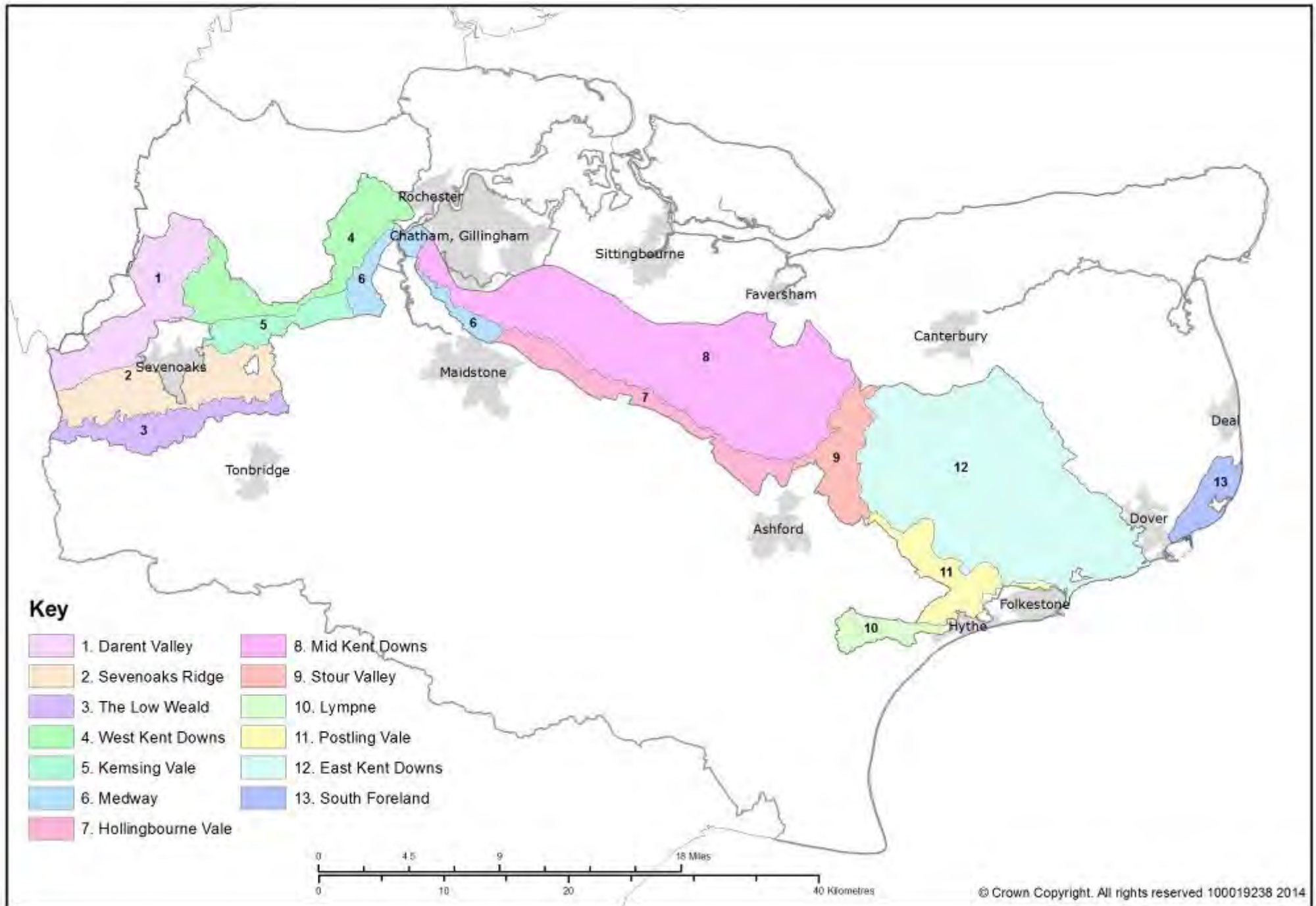


The Heritage Coast between Folkestone and Dover



River Stour

Figure 2 - Landscape character areas and local authority boundaries



\* for detailed landscape descriptions please refer to the Babbie landscape assessment. Search 'Kent landscape character assessment'.

During the Management Plan review the Kent Downs AONB Unit carried out a 'field review' of several landscape character areas and considered the relevance of the existing Management Plan policies at a landscape character area level. This approach considers both opportunities and threats in each area. This work is ongoing. Landscape Character Assessment has formed an important basis for the Landscape and Streets and Lanes Design Guides which form part of this Plan.

#### ◆ National Character Areas

Natural England has a programme to describe National Character Areas (NCAs) which divide England into 159 distinct natural areas. Each is defined by a unique combination of landscape, biodiversity, geodiversity and cultural and economic activity. Their boundaries follow natural lines in the landscape rather than administrative boundaries, making them a good decision making framework for the natural environment. The National Character Areas Profiles which cover the Kent Downs AONB include the North Downs (119), Wealden Greensand (120) and Romney Marshes (123).

#### ◆ Landscape condition

Landscape condition is strongly influenced by external factors which can contribute or detract from landscape character. The assessment of condition evaluates the landscape pattern and the presence of incongruous features (detractors). It also evaluates how well the landscape functions as a habitat for wildlife and the condition of cultural or 'man-made' elements such as enclosures, built elements and roads. Urban fringe areas are often under pressure and are therefore often described as being in poor condition whilst other more remote areas may still have the same basic features but be described as in a better condition. It is therefore practical to assume that condition may vary throughout a character area and any conclusions should be regarded as a summary of the overall situation.



Fackenden Down in the Darent Valley

## 4.4 Landform and landscape character - main issues, opportunities and threats

- a. Loss of and damage to the quality of views in and out of the AONB through development and occasionally obstructing tree growth and vegetation.
- b. Degradation of the setting and urban fringe impacts in certain Kent Downs landscape character areas through development, infrastructure, urbanisation and recreational pressure.
- c. The erosion of natural beauty and special character through illegal activities particularly fly-tipping, abandoned cars and illegal off-road vehicles.
- d. The importance of the setting of the Kent Downs has been emphasised in policy development management decisions which provides an opportunity to work with Local Planning Authorities to develop planning policy protection for the setting of the Kent Downs and to ensure that the setting is taken into account when Local Planning Authorities determine planning applications.
- e. The opportunity to promote landscape character conservation and enhancement specifically focusing on addressing and seeking to remove or mitigate identified detractors from it.
- f. General lack of awareness of the importance and value of the Kent Downs landscape, its characteristic features and the social and economic benefits it brings.
- g. Landscape character approach not used sufficiently or appropriately in land use, land management and development management decisions and landscape character assessments are not always consistent or up to date.

***Landscape Character Assessment is a helpful tool to inform the management of the Kent Downs AONB landscape.***



Parking issues at Chilham Square



Houses at Bessels Green



River Stour

## 4.5 Landform and landscape character - aims

A landscape in which:

1. The diversity of landscape character across the Kent Downs is properly described and understood, maintained and enhanced, and the strong sense of place of individual localities is recognised, reinforced and celebrated.
2. A landscape character approach is used to inform AONB management decisions and areas of opportunity and threat are identified and become the focus for action.
3. The highest standards of landscape conservation, restoration and enhancement are encouraged and integrated into all land uses in the Kent Downs and its setting.
4. There is better understanding of which landscape features local people and visitors value and all people are encouraged to play a part in retaining and enhancing these features.

## 4.6 Landform and landscape character - policies

The Sustainable Development section (3) identifies guiding and recurrent themes for the management of the Kent Downs AONB. These themes and the Management Plan policy responses should be considered before referring to specific policies set out below.

- LLC1 The protection, conservation and enhancement of special characteristics and qualities, natural beauty and landscape character of the Kent Downs AONB will be supported and pursued.
- LLC2 The promotion, management, restoration and appropriate creation of prominent views and viewpoints will be supported.
- LLC3 The provision of co-ordinated and high quality landscape conservation guidance and funding advice to all AONB farmers and landowners, including the equestrian sector, woodland owners and field sports, will be pursued, focusing on the special characteristics and qualities, natural beauty and the landscape character of the AONB.
- LLC4 The detection, prevention, and prosecution of illegal and overtly damaging activities such as fly-tipping, dumping of abandoned cars and non-permitted off-road vehicular use will be pursued.

LLC5 The revision, development and use of coordinated landscape character assessments for the Kent Downs AONB will be supported and pursued.

LLC6 The improved awareness and appreciation of all the special qualities of the AONB landscape and its conservation to people who influence the future of, live, work in or visit the AONB will be pursued.

LLC7 The development of strategic landscape action plans for Landscape Character Areas of the AONB with the greatest threats or opportunities will be supported and pursued.



View from Queendown Warren

Dan Tuson

## 5. Biodiversity

### Our vision

In 2034... the distinctive wildlife habitats of the Kent Downs are enjoyed and celebrated and are in favourable, resilient condition with individual characteristic species flourishing. There has been a net gain in biodiversity and habitats across the Kent Downs with a particular and significant increase in the extent and quality of chalk grassland in favourable management. Policy and funding regimes recognise and support the importance of biodiversity in the Kent Downs.

### 5.1 Overview

The unique landscapes of the Kent Downs create and contain a rich and distinctive biodiversity which contributes greatly to the natural beauty of this exceptional place, adding much of the detail which makes the Kent Downs special.

The natural vegetation of the Kent Downs is believed to have been broadleaved woodland. This would have been varied in structure and composition, with open glades and patches of grassland and heath created by fallen trees and grazing animals, and chalk grassland refugia found on the exposed cliff tops. The 'wildwood' has been cleared and managed over the last 6,000 years. The woodland clearance gave way to grasslands, scrub and arable. Hence farming and cultivation have been a significant influence on the biodiversity of the AONB.

Since the last AONB Management Plan review the context for biodiversity conservation and enhancement has changed substantively, partly due to the failure at a national and international level to meet the 2010 target to halt biodiversity loss. At the same time the potential impacts and risks of climate change are now better researched and understood, although significant uncertainty remains.

#### ◆ The Natural Environment White Paper

The White Paper shifts the emphasis from piecemeal conservation action towards a more integrated, large scale approach. It contains a commitment to move to a net biodiversity gain, by supporting healthy, well-functioning ecosystems and coherent ecological networks; this strongly aligns with the Kent Downs vision.



Adonis Blue butterfly



Oak tree



Corncockle



Lady's bedstraw

The White Paper stresses that natural capital, such as protected areas, should be properly valued. It highlights findings from The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity study and the UK National Ecosystem Assessment that the natural environment is significant beyond its intrinsic value and that protected natural areas can yield returns much higher than the cost of protection.

◆ **Biodiversity 2020 – The England Biodiversity Strategy**

Biodiversity 2020 builds on the White Paper and directs biodiversity policy for the next decade. The mission is: “To halt overall biodiversity loss, support healthy well-functioning ecosystems and establish coherent ecological networks, with more and better places for nature for the benefit of wildlife and people.”

Biodiversity 2020 identifies a series of priority outcomes for habitats, ecosystems, species and engaging people. In Kent these support the previous activity of the Kent Biodiversity Action Plan Partnership which developed priorities for intervention and a series of defined ‘Biodiversity Opportunity Areas (BOAs)’.

There is a clear role for AONB Partnerships to deliver appropriate parts of the strategy. In particular Natural England’s designation strategy challenges National Parks and AONBs to realise their potential to make a significant contribution to ecological networks and ecosystem service delivery through their management planning

process (in support of outcome 1 below). Key measurable outcomes relevant to this section of the Plan include:

**Outcome 1:** Sites, habitats and ecosystems in summary:  
Work carried out by Natural England in support of Outcome 1 identifies potential targets for new habitat creation in the North Downs National Character Area (broadly similar geography to the Kent Downs) which proposes; 110ha of new traditional orchard, 25km of new hedgerow; 25 new ponds; 1180ha field margin; 30ha new heathland; 400ha new chalk grassland.

**Outcome 2:** covers the marine environment

**Outcome 3:** Species - overall improvement and no human induced extinction

**Outcome 4:** People – this is discussed in the access, enjoyment and understanding section of the plan.

◆ **A Local Nature Partnership for Kent**

The Natural Environment White Paper created the opportunity to develop Local Nature Partnerships to further objectives for the Natural Environment. The Kent Local Nature Partnership has chosen to be an advocate for existing natural environment strategies such as the Kent Downs AONB Management Plan.



Chalk grassland wildflower meadow



Rabbit



A peacock butterfly



Woodlands at Ranscombe Farm

Underpinning this work, The Lawton Report 'Making Space for Nature' draws from a wide range of evidence to review England's wildlife and ecological network. The report reiterates that the natural world is fundamental to our well-being, health and economy and that action priorities at a landscape scale should be:

- 1st Manage existing sites better
- 2nd Make existing sites larger

- 3rd Create new sites
- 4th Enhance connectivity
- 5th Create new corridors

While much emphasis is now being placed on larger, landscape scale approaches to enhancing biodiversity, the contribution of many small-scale individual enhancements can help support this more overarching approach, indeed it is a critical component.

## 5.2 Biodiversity - special characteristics and qualities

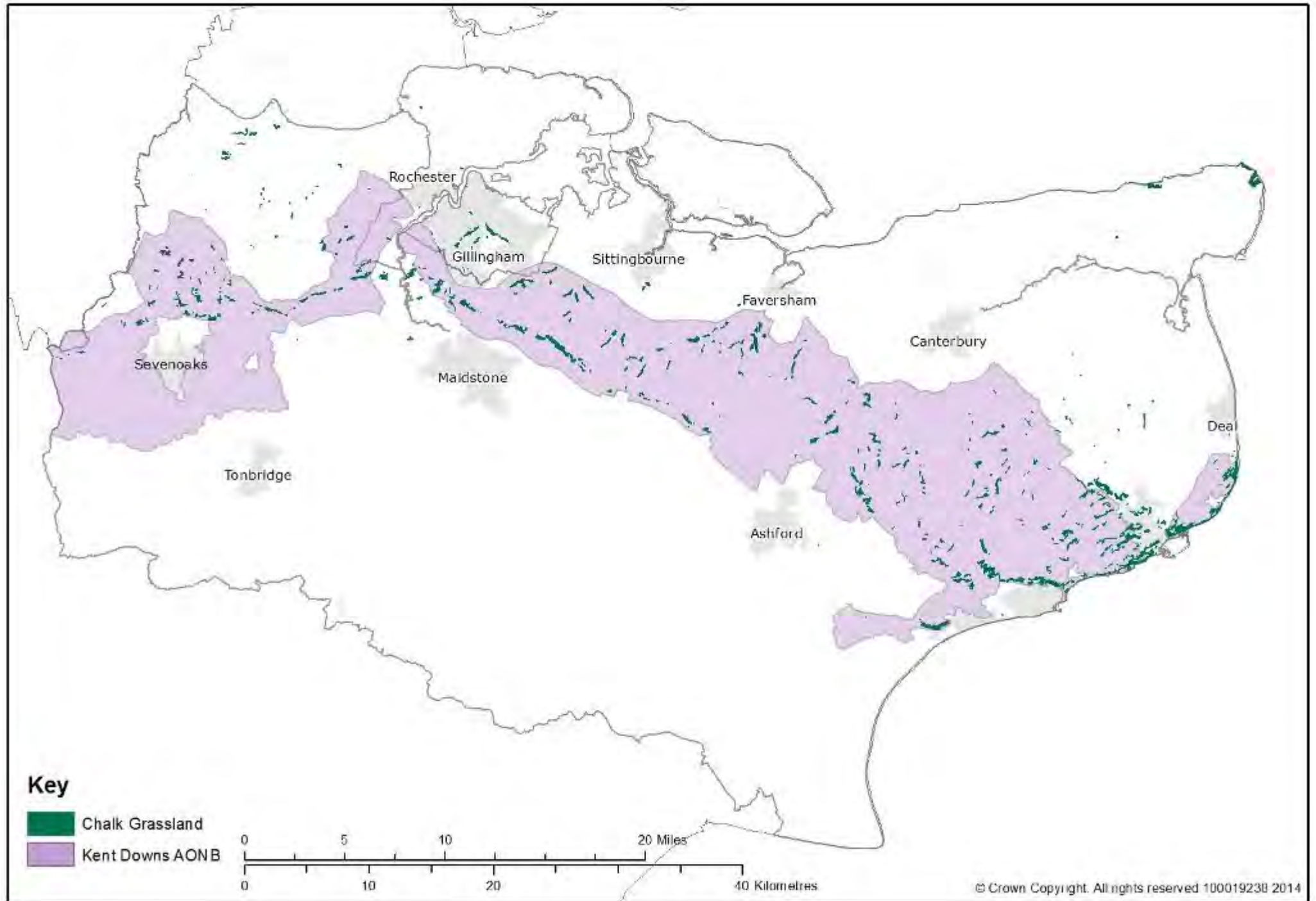
The wildlife of the Kent Downs is particularly rich and distinctive. It is also varied, reflecting changes in the local climate, geology, soils and topography and its proximity to the continent. In Britain, there are several species largely or wholly confined to the Kent Downs. This is true of several beautiful rarities, such as the lady, monkey and late spider orchids, black veined and straw belle moths as well as rare arable field wild flowers. Other rare and threatened species occur in

good numbers; for example the dormouse, the edible or Roman snail, the adder and rare arable field wild flowers along with several butterflies associated with downland. Many of these are recognised in Section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act as species of principle importance in England. Semi-natural habitats of particular importance in the Kent Downs are also recognised in the UK list of priority habitats targeted in Biodiversity 2020.



River Stour at Wye

Figure 3 - Chalk grassland; a key characteristic in the Kent Downs AONB



#### ◆ **Unimproved chalk downland**

Unimproved chalk downland is for many the essence of natural beauty in the Kent Downs landscape with its flower-rich, scented springy turf and profusion of insect life. Orchids and butterflies of chalk downland are symbolic of this habitat and the AONB supports populations of some of the country's rarest chalk species. Chalk grassland is an internationally important habitat, with over half the world's resource found in England. Although this habitat is one of the most valued features of the Kent Downs (the most important feature for 71% of respondents to an AONB questionnaire), the remaining extent of unimproved chalk grassland is less than 2% of the AONB land area (about 1500 ha or 80% of the Kent and 6% of the UK resource). For many rare species in the Kent Downs it is the warm, sunny south-facing chalk slopes which are important.

#### ◆ **Ancient woodland and chalk cliffs, foreshore and seabed platform**

These are significant special qualities and characteristics of the Kent Downs AONB which are covered in detail in separate sections of the plan.

#### ◆ **Chalk streams**

Chalk streams, river corridors, flood plains and spring lines, together with ponds, dew ponds and small wetland areas are the principle wetland types in the Kent Downs. Chalk streams and ponds are frequently seasonal in nature and often host characteristic species.

#### ◆ **Acid grassland and heaths**

Acid grassland and heaths on the greensand and clay plateau typically survive in parkland, common land and Chart Woods. Acid grassland can occur on clay caps near downland adding an interesting diversity to the landscape.

#### ◆ **Species-rich hedgerows and road verges**

Species-rich hedgerows, headlands, ditches and road verges and the sunken lanes of the Downs are a special and distinctive feature. Often the road verges and hedges are rich in plant and animal diversity, providing important habitats and connectivity.

#### ◆ **Farmland habitats**

Farmland habitats and species adapted to traditional mixed farming practices; in particular the Kent Downs supports a nationally important site for arable weed communities – supporting some of the UK's most threatened native plant species and farmland birds.

#### ◆ **Wood pasture and parkland**

There is a strong legacy of parkland and wood pasture in the AONB where there are often large, open-grown or veteran trees which are special features in their own right.

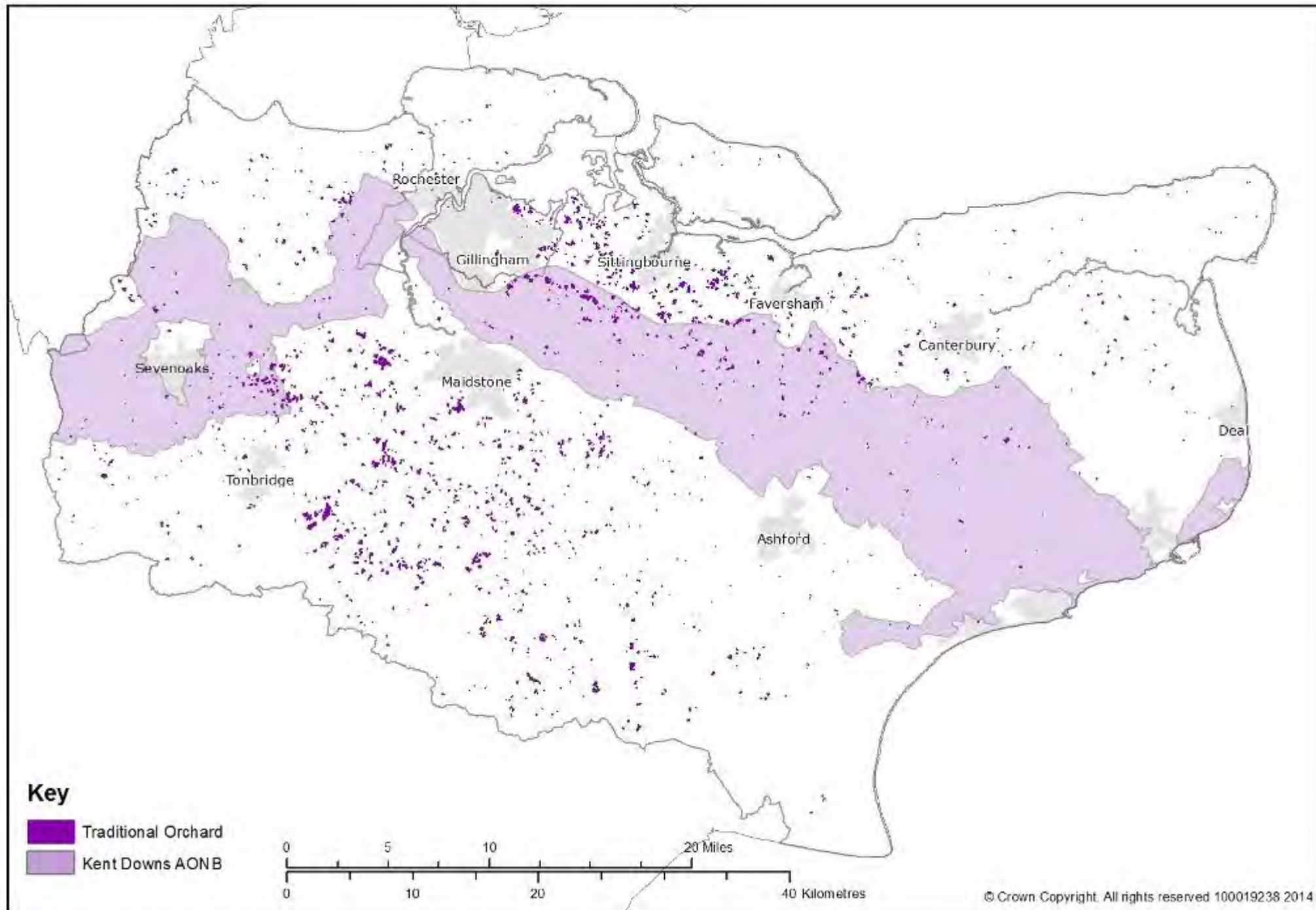
#### ◆ **Traditional orchards**

The Kent Downs landscape is strongly associated with fruit growing, with orchards making a significant contribution to local distinctiveness. The terms 'traditional' or 'old' orchard, usually refer to orchards of apples, pears, plums and, in the Downs, cherries with large, widely spaced trees; traditional Kentish Cobnut plots are important and distinctive, particularly in the western portion of the AONB.



Holly Hill parkland

Figure 4 - Traditional orchards in the Kent Downs AONB



◆ **Designated nature conservation sites**

The most important nature conservation sites in the Kent Downs are legally protected and managed primarily for their biodiversity value. There are 38 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) in the Kent Downs AONB covering some 4404ha, of these the following sites are of international importance and are protected under the European Union’s Habitats Directive as Special Areas of Conservation (SAC):

- Folkestone to Etchinghill Escarpment.
- Wye and Crundale Downs, National Nature Reserve.
- Queendown Warren, Local Nature Reserve.
- Lydden and Temple Ewell, National Nature Reserve (on the AONB boundary).
- Park Gate Down.
- Dover to Kingsdown Cliffs (the only SAC for the maritime chalk cliff features in the country).
- North Downs woodlands. The scarp slopes of the Medway Valley are designated for internationally important beech-yew woodland communities.

Management of these important sites rests largely with government and public bodies, and specialist conservation organisations. However a number of key sites are in private ownership, such as parts of the Folkestone and Etchinghill escarpment owned by Eurotunnel, and the Medway Valley escarpment by Lafarge Tarmac.

Of recognised county level importance the Local Wildlife Site network is also critical in conservation of the landscape and wildlife; the importance of these sites is recognised in the Natural Environment White Paper and Lawton review. In total Special Areas of Conservation (SACs), Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) and Local Wildlife Sites (LWSs) cover some 16% of the AONB. Despite the extent of recognised and recorded nature conservation sites in the AONB some are losing species and condition, elsewhere habitat loss and change, alien species, pests and disease are detracting from the biodiversity of the Kent Downs. Most plant and animal species depend on suitable long-term management of appropriate habitats in the wider countryside.

Table 5 - Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) size and condition in the Kent Downs AONB

Condition	Size (ha)
Favourable (ha)	2,491
Unfavourable recovering	1,714
Unfavourable no change	150
Unfavourable declining	49
Part destroyed	0
Destroyed	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>4,404</b>
<b>Percent area in favourable condition</b>	<b>57%</b>

*Natural England January 2012*



Cows in Wood Courts Valley, Sheldwich

Figure 5 - Condition of Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) in the Kent Downs AONB

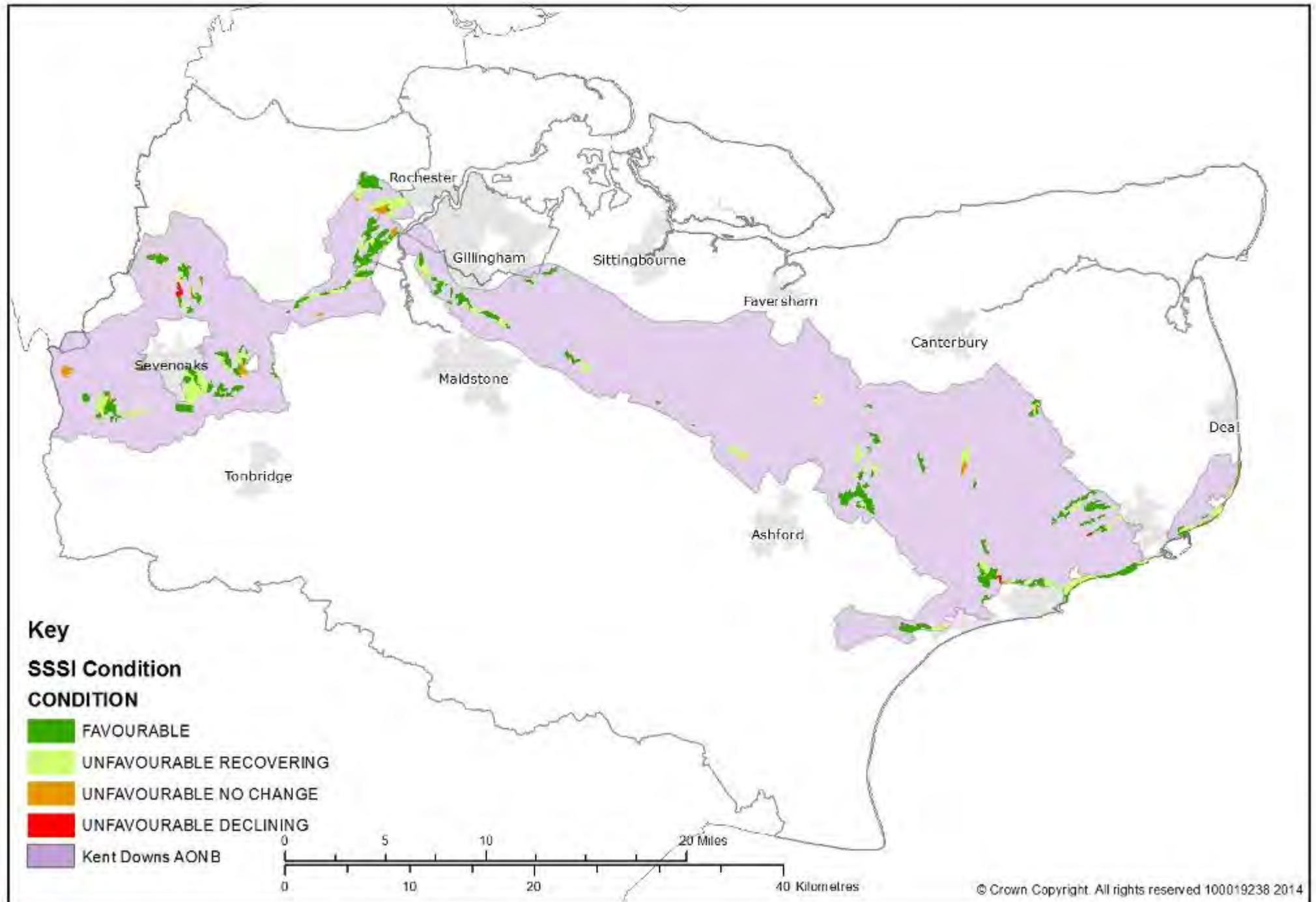
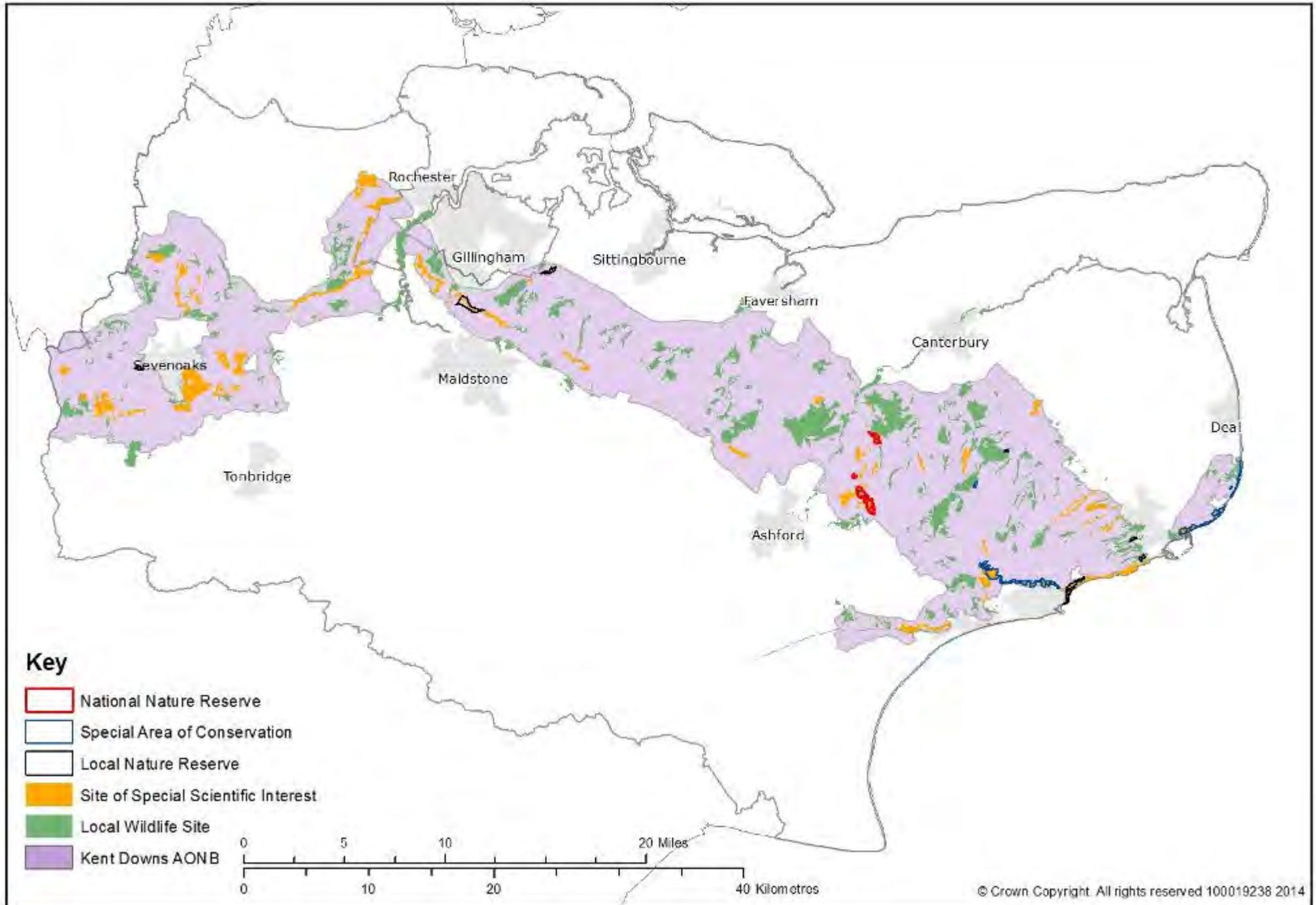


Figure 6 - Nature conservation sites in the Kent Downs AONB



## 5.3 Biodiversity - main issues, opportunities and threats

- a. Habitat fragmentation, damage and loss, the opportunity to manage, extend and connect existing priority protected sites and habitats as well as create new habitat as a critical step to conserve and enhance biodiversity and generating high quality Green Infrastructure in which the Kent Downs could play a focal role.
- b. Lack of grazing livestock or poor returns from managing remaining areas of semi-natural grassland, and other habitats important in the Kent Downs particularly small, inaccessible or unprotected sites.
- c. General lack of awareness and understanding of the biodiversity resource and value of the Kent Downs and how it contributes to landscape condition, the quality of life, health and well-being as well as the county economy with an associated lack of funding and support for management.
- d. Need to provide accessible and well-managed nature conservation sites in close proximity to urban areas to provide contact with nature particularly through the designation of Local Nature Reserves.
- e. Need to respond to the failure to meet Biodiversity 2010 targets and the opportunity for the Kent Downs AONB to make a significant local contribution to meet Biodiversity 2020 targets.
- f. Need to find sustainable economic futures for key habitat products in the AONB to ensure their continued management.
- g. Kent Downs landscape is sensitive to gradual changes in climate and to more abrupt changes caused by extreme weather events; both are predicted. The UK Climate Change Risk Assessment identifies key risks to Kent Downs biodiversity. At the same time the ability of each habitat to sequester carbon has been identified and could be an opportunity to link habitat creation to climate change mitigation.
- h. The opportunity to develop significant collaborative partnerships to secure the biodiversity objectives of the Plan.



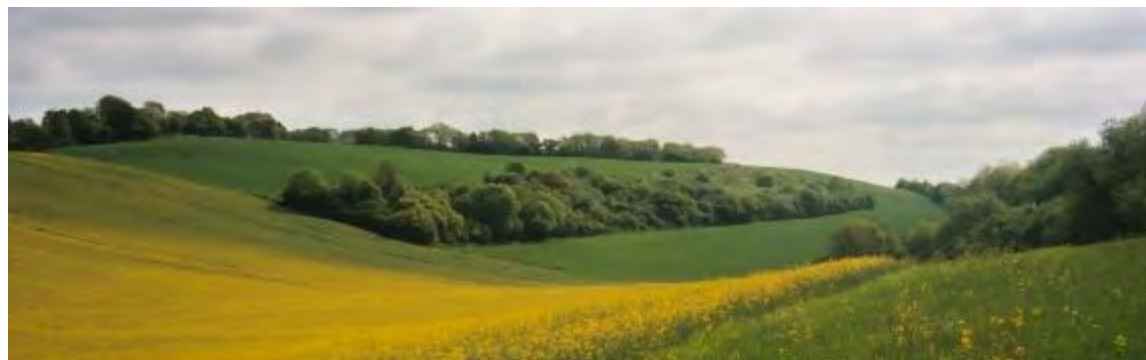
Azure dragonfly

Andy Vidler



Bee on a common spotted orchid

Andy Vidler



Upper Bush Valley

## 5.4 Biodiversity - aims

A landscape in which:

1. The rich diversity of natural features, wild animals, plants and habitats are recognised, conserved and positively managed so that the extent and condition of key habitats is enhanced in a way that allows characteristic species to flourish.
2. A network of well-managed, connected sites of biodiversity importance covers the Kent Downs, providing habitats for locally typical and rare species and communities and the essential building block to achieve functional ecological networks to assist with climate change adaptation.
3. More common and widespread wildlife species and populations of the wider farmed and wooded landscape flourish due to careful and sensitive management.
4. Comprehensive and easily accessible data informs and influences land management and development decisions and monitors changes to biodiversity.
5. The natural heritage and wildlife is recognised for its inherent value for contributing to quality of life and the economic value of the Kent Downs.
6. Collaborative management at a landscape scale secures significant enhancement to the characteristic habitats and species of the Kent Downs as a local response to the national and international challenges to biodiversity.

## 5.5 Biodiversity - policies

The Sustainable Development section (3) identifies guiding and recurrent themes for the management of the Kent Downs AONB. These themes and the Management Plan policy responses should be considered before referring to specific policies set out below.

- BD1 The maintenance and enhancement of existing designated sites and priority habitats, their extension and connection, will be pursued through sensitive management, fragmentation reduction and restoration. Creation of new habitats and habitat corridors will be pursued, informed by landscape character, through collaboration to establish functional ecological networks and high quality green infrastructure.
- BD2 Local, regional and national biodiversity targets and spatial priorities for habitats and species distinctive to the Kent Downs will be supported; a Kent Downs AONB response to Biodiversity 2020 targets will be pursued.
- BD3 Targeting of advice, grants and planning agreements to reduce fragmentation and enhance the distinctive biodiversity of the Kent Downs will be pursued.
- BD4 The collection, promotion and sharing of information on land cover, designated wildlife sites, habitats and species to assist in effective biodiversity and landscape character management and monitoring will be encouraged.
- BD5 The protection, conservation and extension of Kent Downs priority and distinctive habitats and species will be supported through the Local Plan process, development management decisions and the promotion of the Biodiversity Duty of Regard (NERC Act 2006).
- BD6 Proposals which generate markets for the products of sensitively managed UK Priority Habitats characteristic to the Kent Downs AONB will be supported.

## 6. Farmed landscape

### Our vision

In 2034... the Kent Downs AONB is a place where agriculture is appreciated for its pivotal role in the conservation of natural beauty and landscape character. Sustainable farming is the predominant land use of the AONB and the heritage of mixed farming is retained. There is a greater understanding of the role of farming and more opportunities to visit and understand farming systems. Despite the volatility of agricultural markets and production a broad range of crops are produced that are suited to the increasing extremes of climate, local conditions and market forces as well as the landscape. Pasture is well managed by grazing and orchards, plats and hop gardens retain a vital role in the landscape. The high quality products of the Kent Downs are available locally and high environmental quality is a market advantage.

### 6.1 Overview

The Kent Downs AONB is principally a farmed landscape, with around 64% of its land classed as agricultural. Centuries of changing farming practices have shaped the landscape to create an important part of the natural beauty which is celebrated today.

Historically, the Kent Downs has supported mixed farming practices where arable crop production has co-existed with livestock grazing and horticulture. The complex seasonal colours and textures of cultivated land contrast with the constancy of permanent grassland.

The close-cropped texture of grass and arable accentuate the undulation of the land. The patchwork of land use created by mixed farming is also vital for many plant and animal species associated with farmland. The farmed landscape is much valued for the access afforded along Public Rights of Way, permissive paths and open access land.

Table 6 indicates that the Kent Downs AONB continues to be a landscape of mixed agricultural use. There has been a reduction in overall farmland area as well as a rationalisation of farming practice.



Tractor at work

Table 6 - Changes in patterns of agricultural land use in the Kent Downs

% of Farmed Land cover	1961	1972	1990	1999	2007	2008	2009	2010
Arable	53	64	58	55	50	54	55	54
Grassland	37	27	35	30	34	35	34	34
Grassland with scrub	0	0	1	9	<i>data not available</i>			
Orchards and hops	7	6	4	4	2	3	2	2
Parkland	3	3	2	3	<i>data not available</i>			
Area of farmed land (ha)	64,227	64,925	64,141	64,546	60,836	57,833	57,213	55,797

## 6.2 Farmed landscape - special characteristics and qualities

### ◆ Arable

The Kent Downs AONB has an unusually high proportion of grade 2 and grade 3 agricultural land for a protected landscape. Arable agriculture has always been an important part of the character of this valued landscape. The area of arable land has fluctuated slightly over the 45 years since designation, although the methods of arable farming have changed considerably within this period.

Since WWII early government policy and incentives encouraged increased food production. Modern farming responded by adopting new crops, technologies and practices, which have seen a marked increase in crop production and efficiency of scale. In some cases, the cost has been the loss of landscape quality, biodiversity and historic features that have been part of the mixed farming landscape for centuries; elsewhere farmers have chosen to conserve and enhance the landscape at the same time as increasing productivity.

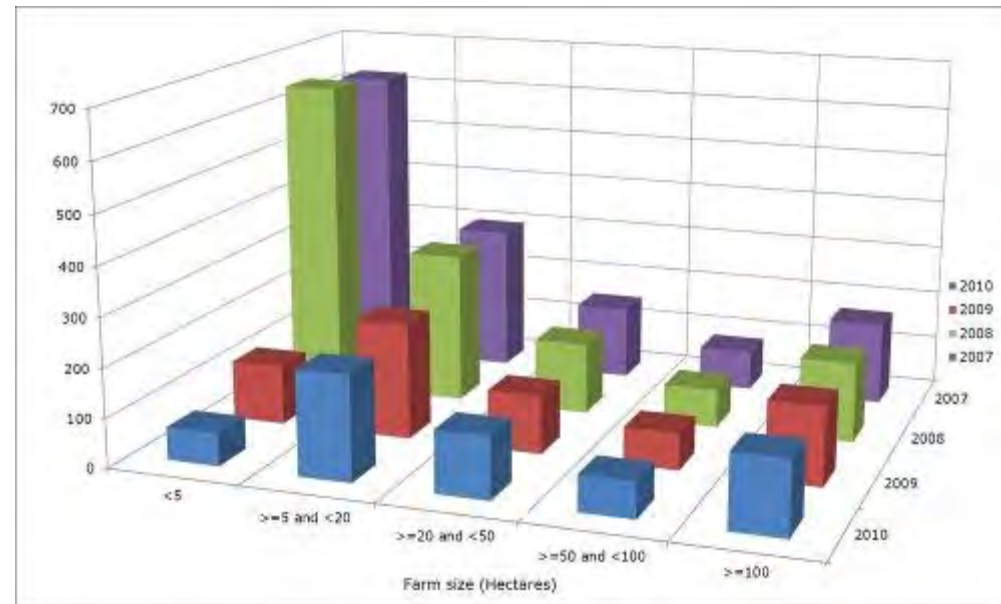
Where there has been removal of hedgerows and field margins, deep ploughing of grassland and drainage of wetlands, as well as the intensive use of pesticides and inorganic fertilisers the result is sometimes sterile farmscapes with little wildlife or reduced landscape interest.

More recently the agricultural economy has been subject both to the removal of production based subsidy and to increasing volatility driven by global markets and climatic fluctuations affecting both produce value and production costs. These pressures require farmers to make increasingly market led decisions and to use up to date methods to retain competitive advantage and resilience. At the same time public opinion and Government policy has strengthened in favour of environmentally sensitive farming that produces high-quality food, with less cost on the public purse. Climate change adds a further powerful influence with agriculture having an important role both in adapting to the changes already in train and mitigating further impacts.

Table 7 shows an increase in the changing nature of farm holdings in the Kent Downs. There is a move to larger 'contract' farming and cooperative farming ventures, especially on the most productive land in order to achieve economies of scale often leading to crop rotations on a whole farm rather than field scale.

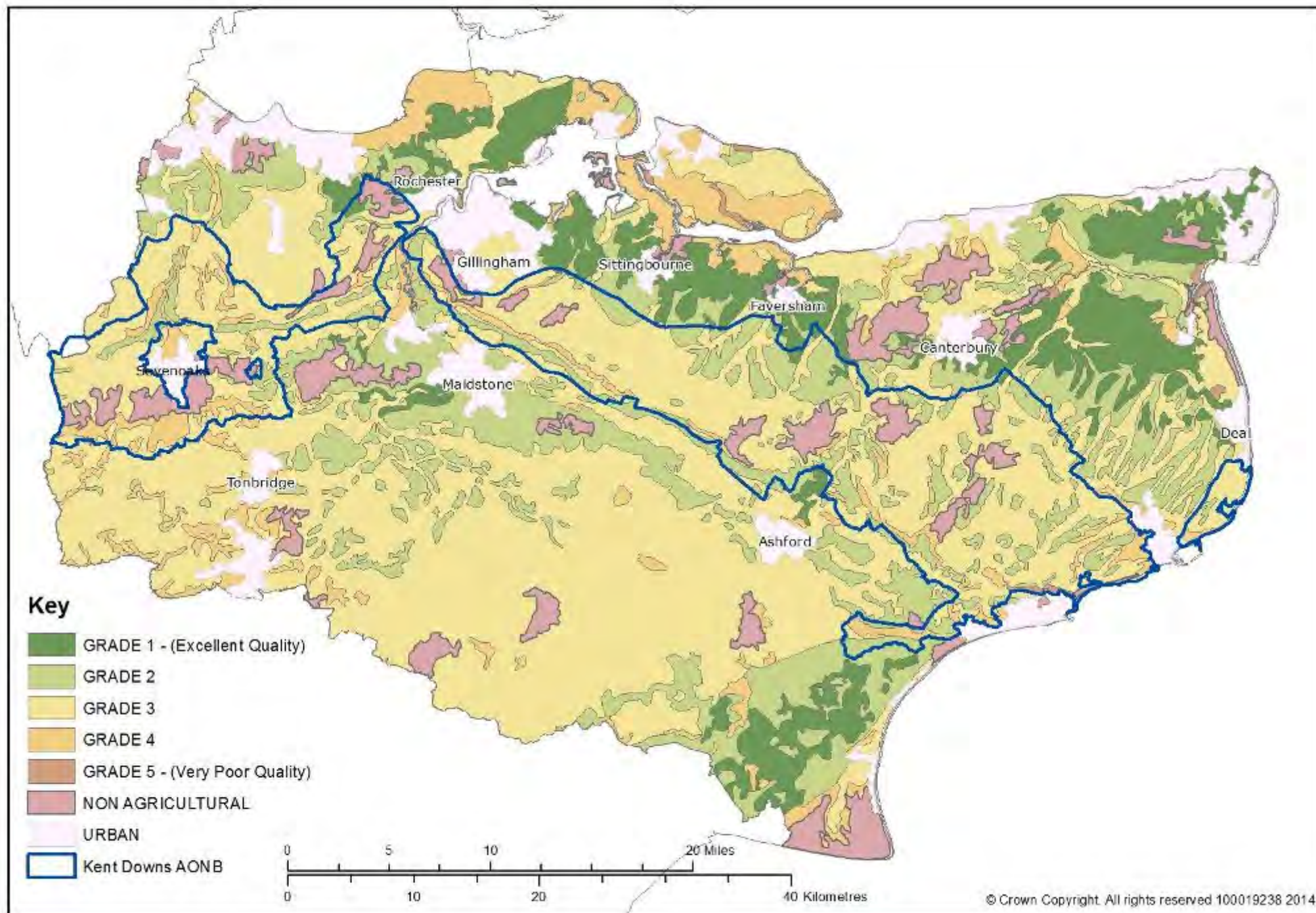
When medium sized farms are absorbed into larger holdings, farmhouses and buildings can be sold off with small holdings or to 'amenity' farmers and landowners who are not reliant on agriculture as a main income. This trend can bring with it landscape change and a loss of community and other intangibles such as 'attachment to place'. The setting and relationship between buildings in farmsteads and immediate landscape around farm buildings is becoming more 'suburbanised'. The separation of farm holdings and farm cottages and the increasing price of housing effectively prices the agricultural labour force out of the rural housing market.

Table 7 - Farm size in the Kent Downs AONB



DEFRA 2012

Figure 7 - Agricultural land classification



Historic farm buildings are an important cultural part of the landscape and are the category of historic building most at risk. Farmstead guidance prepared in partnership with English Heritage and Kent County Council seeks to secure this important special characteristic in the Kent Downs

The farm subsidy environment is critical to the management of the Kent Downs landscape with agri-environment and cross compliance schemes potentially making an important contribution to landscape conservation.

◆ **Grazing pasture**

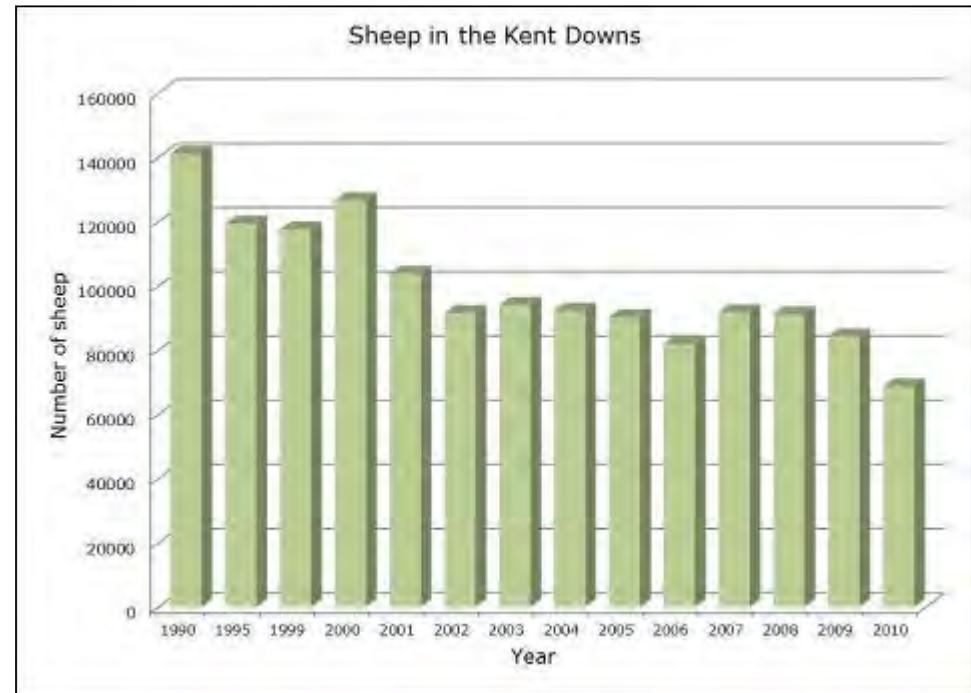
Sheep and beef cattle play an important part in the AONB land-based economy. Livestock farming is important to retain the special character of the AONB. Yet there has been a significant decline in livestock farming, particularly sheep, which have nearly halved in number since 1990. This decline has been experienced in other AONBs; the High Weald AONB has researched opportunities to redress the change (Restocking the High Weald report) – many of the proposals are applicable to the Kent Downs.

The effects of BSE, Foot and Mouth Disease and the arrival of Bluetongue in 2007 (although the UK was declared free in 2008), as well as other factors such as imports and the lack of adequate infrastructure such as local abattoirs and markets, have put increasing pressure on the livestock industry. The loss of grazing livestock and skilled graziers due to the poor economics of grazing,

has led to areas of grassland that were previously grazed, falling out of use only to be ploughed up for crops, planted with trees, converted to leisure use or scrubbed over through abandonment.

Horses are an increasingly common grazing animal in the AONB. The continued growth in equine activities play an important role in the future of the AONB land-based economy and can provide a market for local farm produce for feed and bedding for instance. If managed in a sustainable and sympathetic manner, horse grazing can make a positive contribution to the management of grassland in the Kent Downs, helping to maintain the important pastoral quality of the AONB’s natural beauty. However examples of good practice can be difficult to find and the impacts of growth in the equine industry have tended to harm Kent Downs landscape character – good practice guidance has been published for the management of land for horses in the Kent Downs AONB.

Table 8 - Number of sheep in the Kent Downs AONB



Hare



Wheat field

## ◆ Orchards and horticulture

Historically, orchards and horticulture have played an important part in the special character of the AONB landscape, the regular striate form enhancing the rise and fall of the land. Teynham (just north of the AONB) became the site of the first 'mother' nursery for commercial fruit orchards in England in the days of Henry VIII, and there is still a concentration of top and stone fruit (tree fruit) and hop growing along the northern fringes of the Mid Kent Downs, including the National Fruit Collection at Brogdale. In the Kent Downs it is the traditional cherry orchards which are particularly distinctive.

Traditional orchards of large trees with understorey grazing are difficult and uneconomic to manage and are being grubbed or replaced by more productive and labour-efficient, safer, smaller fruit trees grown in closely spaced rows. Their greater uniformity and more intensive management have reduced the associated wildlife and landscape value of these orchards. They do, however, provide a modern and important link to a valued historic landscape. Research by Natural England found orchards are important for biodiversity, carbon storage and the local economy.

Other horticultural activities add variety and interest to the AONB landscape. For example, lavender, as a crop for essential oils has replaced a number of hop gardens, and an increasing number of vineyards have been planted adding a new hue to the AONB scenery. A further locally distinct landscape feature is the production of



Kentish cherries

cobnuts in the southeast corner of the Greensand Ridge, centred around Platt and Plaxtol (a cobnut orchard being called a plat).

The area of orchards and hop gardens in the AONB has decreased by nearly 50% since 1961 (70% nationally). There has however been a recent upturn in orchard planting including walnuts and fruits such as apricots, as well as vineyards, which could increase significantly if the predicted climate changes take place. Additionally the use of polytunnels has increased slightly.

While currently covering a small area of the AONB the use of polytunnels is anticipated to increase (together with the associated transport and storage infrastructure) in order to meet quality standards and a longer season as required by customers. Polytunnels can be important detractors to landscape character. The horticultural sector is a small but important component of the AONB landscape and significant to the rural economy.

***In the Kent Downs it is the traditional cherry orchards which are particularly distinctive.***



Vineyard in the Kent Downs

#### ◆ Agri-environment schemes

Since its inception in 1991, the Countryside Stewardship Scheme (CSS) and subsequently the Environmental Stewardship Scheme (ESS) has brought positive changes to the landscape, wildlife and historic features of the AONB. Until 2013 such schemes have achieved significant enhancements to the landscapes of the Kent Downs.

39,699ha (45%) of the AONB (this equates to 74% of the utilisable agricultural area) is managed under agri-environment schemes, 262 agreements are in place. This includes 5,538ha of managed grassland with 487ha with public access payments. 734ha of unimproved chalk grassland and 250ha of semi improved chalk grassland.

#### ◆ New collaborative approaches to farming and the landscape

Research (Relu research note 38, Sept 2012) and pilots in the South Downs and Nature Improvement Areas, such as the Marlborough Downs, show the greater potential for landscape and biodiversity gain from wide collaborative management across farm holdings (clusters) rather than at a single farm holding level. This approach can address the issues of managing ecosystem services and seeking payment for them. Given future natural resource management issues and the importance of the farmed landscape to the natural beauty of the Kent Downs, a wide collaborative approach to farming and

landscape could form an innovative future approach to landscape management in the Kent Downs.

#### ◆ Nitrate Vulnerable Zones and catchment sensitive farming

Currently about half of the AONB is covered by a Nitrate Vulnerable Zone (NVZ). The NVZ programme aims to reduce nitrate pollution in water through regulation of how and when nitrogen is applied to land, the management and storage of manure and the use of cover crops. A Catchment Sensitive Farming programme operates in the Kentish Stour and Medway Catchment within the AONB. Catchment sensitive farming offers free, practical advice and training to farmers and land managers on how to reduce diffuse water pollution from agriculture.

#### ◆ Farm Diversification Activity

Farms have been diversifying their businesses for many years; this provides a way to increase returns for the enterprise, stabilise incomes and utilise farm resources effectively. Farm diversification can be carried out in a way which supports the wide objectives of the Kent Downs AONB Management Plan. Equally diversification, for instance to some renewable energy technologies or intrusive leisure activities can run counter to the characteristics and qualities which are valued. The Kent Downs Farm Diversification Tool Kit provides an integrated approach to farm diversification, balancing business, planning and environmental issues when considering diversification proposals.



Sheep

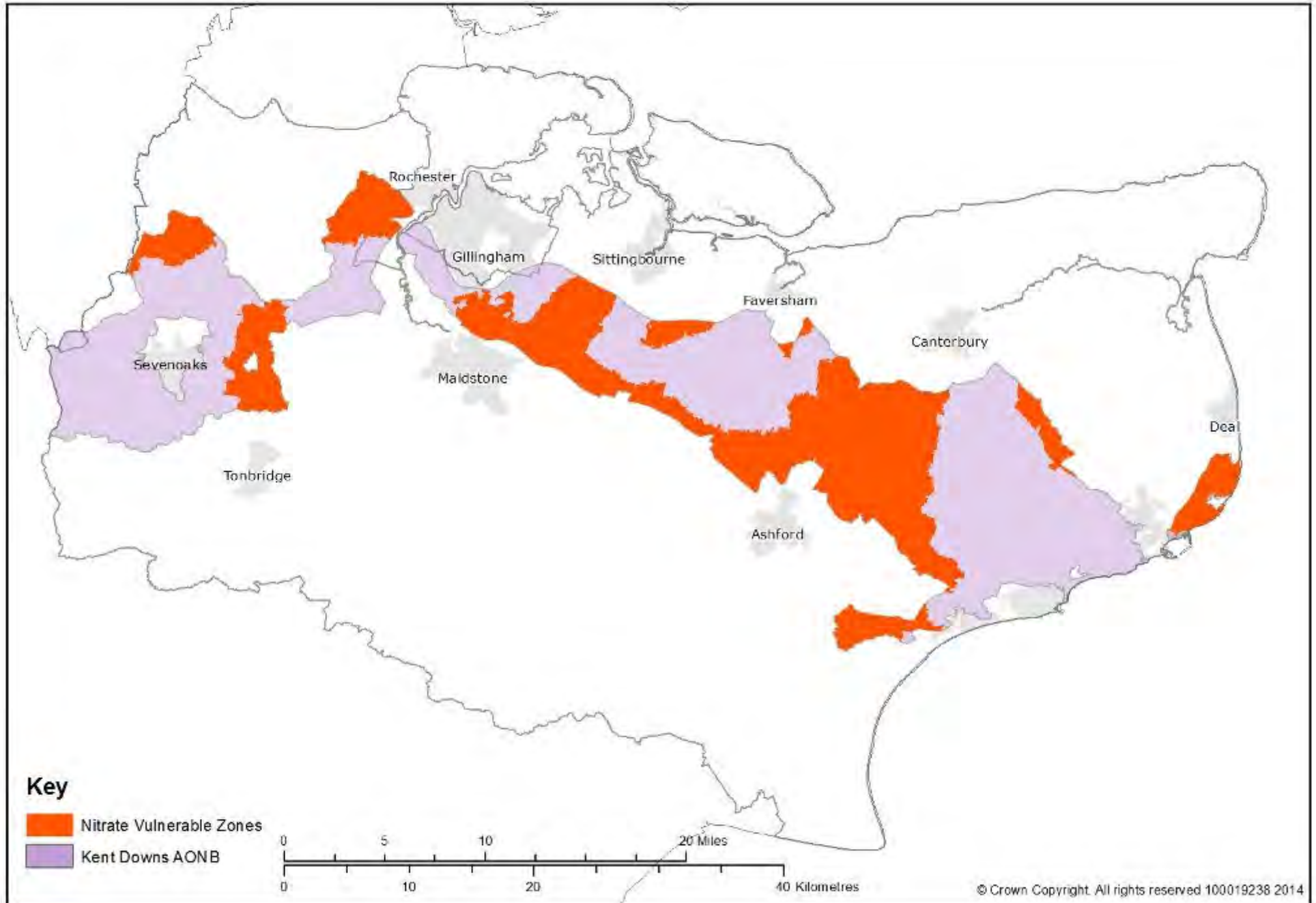


Straw bales



Pheasant

Figure 8 - Nitrate Vulnerable Zones in the Kent Downs AONB



## 6.3 Farmed landscape - main issues, opportunities and threats

- a. Need to balance a viable, resilient and competitive farming industry with the need for sensitive environmental management in a landscape of national importance.
- b. Decline in farmland area and grazing livestock industries and loss of skilled graziers.
- c. Greater volatility in agricultural commodity prices (both scale and speed) leading to uncertainty about the future direction of agriculture in the Kent Downs.
- d. Uncertainty and limited funding for agri-environment schemes and the incentives they offer, particularly in the face of rising farm gate prices, along with the ending of long run Stewardship schemes.
- e. In the short term the ploughing of permanent grassland as a response to uncertainty about the future subsidy environment.
- f. Changes in landholdings and land management practice. Loss or amalgamation of medium-sized mixed farms and growth of large units with 'share' or 'contract' farming, and establishment of small farming units/residential or leisure owners, where farming is not the main source of income and experience and continuity of land management are not guaranteed.
- g. Rationalisation of the farming system and loss of landscape diversity and distinctiveness and selling off of farmhouse and buildings/cottages from the farmland estate; separating land and accommodation changing the character and landscape setting of former farmhouses; estate cottages and farm buildings.
- h. Given the relatively high proportion of grade 2 and 3 land there is a need to encourage investment in landscape character management.
- i. Farm diversification and development activities such as increased equine facilities, permitted rights afforded to farm building conversions, shooting and field sports, alternative crops (e.g. lavender, biomass energy crops, vineyards) and non-agricultural enterprises (e.g. self-catering cottages and new uses for traditional farm buildings) can have important detracting impacts as well as benefits to the characteristics, qualities, and rural economy of the Kent Downs.
- j. Increasing use of polytunnels to provide high quality, low 'food mile' soft and stone fruit and other high value produce.
- k. The need to manage adaptation and mitigation strategies for climate change, promote low carbon farming, sensitive water storage, new livestock housing or bio energy crops, to create a positive impact on the farmed landscape.
- l. The opportunity to develop a wide collaborative approach to farmland management in the Kent Downs.
- m. Lack of public awareness of the links between farming and land-based activities, environmental issues, landscape conservation and management and the opportunity to develop local markets for products which conserve and enhance the landscape.
- n. Farm buildings are the category of historic building identified as being most at risk and the historic character of farmsteads is being lost.



Sheep grazing

## 6.4 Farmed landscape – aims

The Kent Downs remains principally a farmed landscape with a strong and viable farming industry where:

1. Public subsidies support farmers who meet the objectives of the AONB. The conservation of landscape character and diversity, the restoration and enhancement of wildlife habitats, the conservation of historic and cultural features, responses to climate change and the welcoming of people to enjoy the landscape, are all integrated and complementary activities to contemporary, competitive mainstream farming.
2. The mixed farming landscape is promoted in a modern collaborative context and at a landscape scale; the benefits of agri-environment and former set aside schemes are retained and good land management practice is encouraged to all agricultural businesses and farm owners.
3. Farm diversification and development activities conserve and strengthen landscape character and local distinctiveness, and provide benefits to the farm and local economy and rural communities.
4. Locally produced, high-quality and sustainably produced food is bought by people and businesses from local shops, farmers' markets and in regional supermarkets with environmental quality being a market advantage.
5. There is heightened awareness and understanding by residents and AONB visitors of the importance and fundamental role played by farming, and the connection between landscape conservation. Environmentally responsible farming and high quality food are appreciated by all people.



Cattle grazing



Cabbage harvesting

## 6.5 Farmed landscape - policies

The Sustainable Development section (3) identifies guiding and recurrent themes for the management of the Kent Downs AONB. These themes and the Management Plan policy responses should be considered before referring to specific policies set out below.

- FL1 The AONB will retain the principally farmed character for which it is valued.
- FL2 The targeting of public agricultural subsidy to make a positive, landscape scale contribution to conserving and enhancing the special characteristics, qualities and landscape character of the Kent Downs AONB will be pursued.
- FL3 Farming practices that improve AONB landscape character, or mitigate damaging impacts, will be supported.
- FL4 The use of integrated whole farm planning, as set out in the Kent Downs Farm Diversification Toolkit, which includes a business plan, landscape, heritage, biodiversity and habitat assessments and shows how the farm business will support the wider rural economy and AONB objectives will be pursued.
- FL5 Farm diversification activities will be supported if they help achieve the aims of the AONB Management Plan and resisted or opposed where they run counter to the purposes of the designation.
- FL6 The production, supply and marketing of AONB produce derived from environmentally sensitive management will be encouraged and supported, particularly where it supports landscape character.
- FL7 Conversion from agricultural to leisure use and the creation of non-agricultural structures will only be supported where there is not a cumulative loss to the principally farmed landscape of the AONB.

- FL8 Proposals for polytunnels will be assessed for their impact on the AONB landscape, including by reference to their siting and mitigation. Proposals for polytunnels should be justified by an integrated whole farm plan. Best practice guidance for the use and landscaping of polytunnels will be pursued.
- FL9 Where farming practices run counter to the special characteristics and qualities of natural beauty and landscape character of the AONB they will be resisted where these are subject to control.
- FL10 A collaborative, 'cluster farm' approach to achieving the farmed landscape objectives of the AONB will be pursued.
- FL11 Activities will be supported that increase wider public understanding of farming and the benefits that the farmed landscape bring for high quality food production, recreation, well-being, nature conservation, the historic environment, landscape and a buoyant rural economy.



A view across the landscape around Lenham

## 7. Woodland and trees

### Our vision

In 2034... the Kent Downs network of woodland and trees is greater in extent and is conserved and enhanced for its landscape, wildlife and historic value. Diverse and sustainably managed woodlands and trees are resilient to climate change and provide inherent mitigation to that change. The woodlands supply buoyant local markets for timber, coppice products and wood fuel, and high quality multi-functional management provides well-used places for leisure and recreation which are rich in characteristic wildlife.

### 7.1 Overview

The Kent Downs AONB is one of Britain's most wooded landscapes. Woodland covers around 23% of the AONB and is the second largest land use after farming.

Woodlands and trees are a vital part of the Kent Downs' natural beauty, providing a green mantle to the upper slopes of the escarpments and valleys. They emphasise the undulating nature of the dip slopes and scarp, and frame the agricultural lower slopes and settlements. Individual, fine and ancient field trees are an important, characteristic and sometimes dramatic element of the landscape.



Woodland in autumn

Table 9 - Woodlands over two hectares (2012)

Woodland type	Area (ha)	% of AONB woodland resource
Broadleaved woodland	15,479	81.6
Assumed Woodland	131	0.7
Low Density	11	0.1
Coppice	432	2.3
Mixed	197	1.0
Conifer	2,134	11.2
Ground prepared for planting	72	0.4
Coppice-with-standards	11	0.1
Felled	51	0.3
Shrub	46	0.2
Young trees	405	2.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>18,969</b>	<b>100</b>

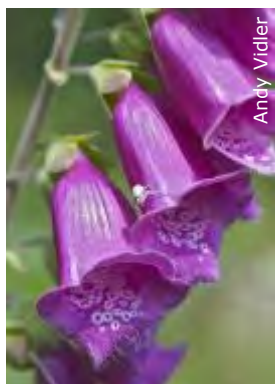
## 7.2 Woodland and trees - special characteristics and qualities

Almost 70% (12,129 ha) of the Kent Downs woodland resource is ancient woodland (continuously present since at least 1600). The Kent Downs' ancient woodland is nationally important representing (3.3%) of the total resource of England and Wales (Natural England, Ancient Woodland (England) Inventory 07/03/2013).

Ancient woodland is irreplaceable and is valued for its cultural, landscape and biodiversity importance and the products it supplies. Some ancient woodland may represent our only link with the original post glacial 'wildwood' and is more likely to contain vulnerable animal and plant species than any other habitat. Ancient woodlands can also include physical evidence of former landscape management practices. The rich ground flora of ancient woodlands – bluebells, wood anemones, ramsons and yellow archangel – and the bird song of warblers, nightingale and nightjar are part of the natural beauty of the AONB. Much of the valued woodland wildlife, invertebrates, lichens and fungi, are associated with old trees, deadwood or open ground and are restricted to ancient woods and wood pasture. The ancient woodlands of the Kent Downs also preserve the evidence of thousands of years of human activity in earthworks, monuments and place names.

The Kent Downs has a significant area of plantation on ancient woodland sites (PAWS) (3,606ha or 30% of the ancient woodland resource); areas of ancient woodland where non-native species have been planted, generally in the 20th century. The careful, gradual restoration of PAWS sites is a national priority for woodland management, and the National Planning Practice Guidance proposes that local planning authorities should pay more attention to development threats to it.

The highest woodland concentrations in the AONB are found on the Greensand Ridge between Sevenoaks and Tonbridge; along the chalk escarpment in West Kent; in large blocks in the mid Kent Downs; above the Stour Valley and in areas of the East Kent Downs plateaux. However, much of the AONB's woodland comprises small, fragmented sites in disparate ownership, a situation exacerbated by the increase of wood lotting (breaking up woods into multiple small ownerships). Wood lotting research in Kent has found some negative impacts. More often woodland management is absent and the ability to manage woodlands as a whole can be compromised. However, new owners are often motivated to improve and understand woodland wildlife and heritage.



Foxglove



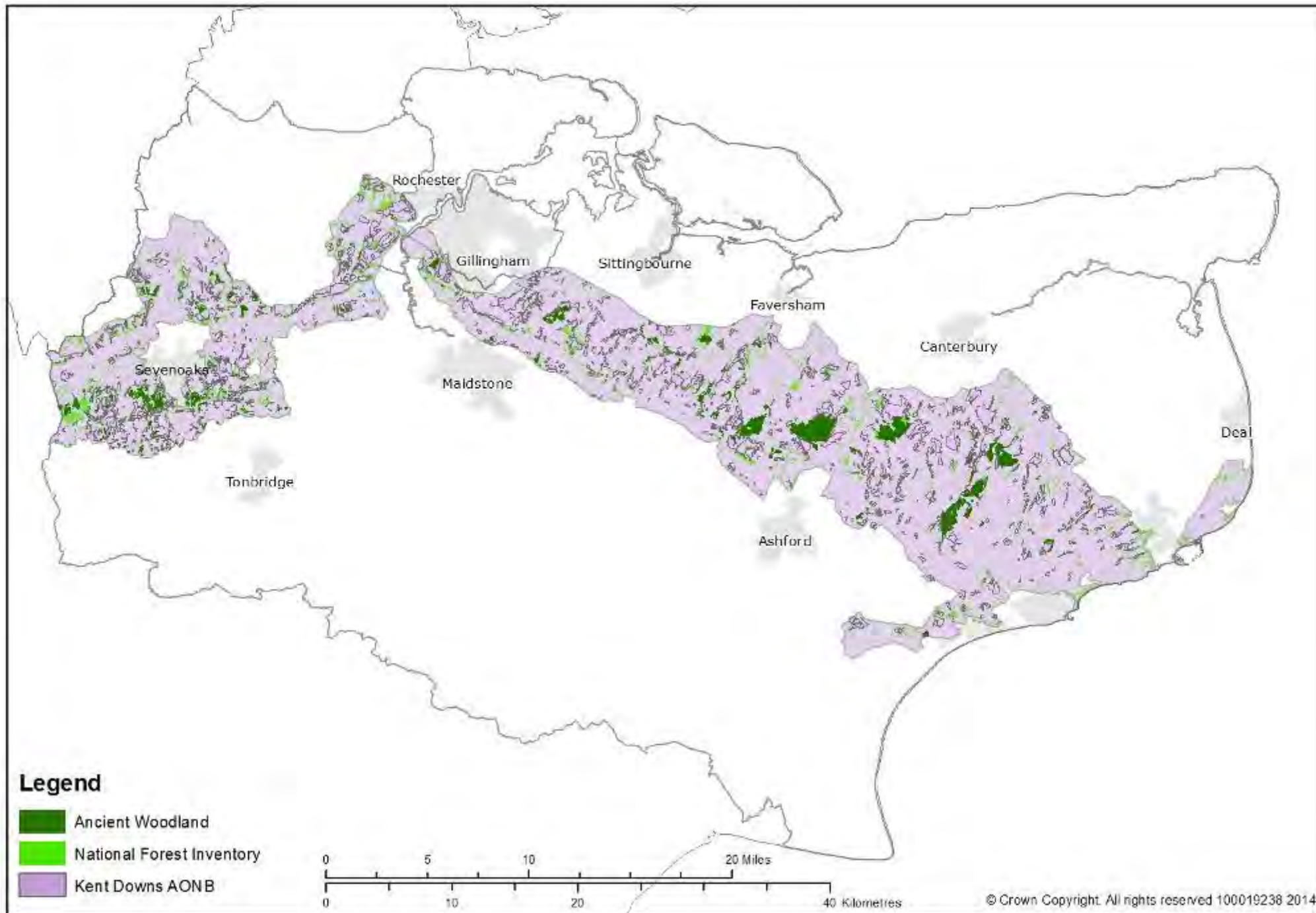
Wood anemone

Table 10 - English Woodland Grant Schemes in the Kent Downs AONB

Kent Downs AONB	Area (hectares)
English Woodland Grant Scheme (WGS) Agreements live between 2005 - 2011	4,437.8 ha (area of WGS within AONB)
English Woodland Grant Scheme (WGS) with Ancient Woodland live between 2005 - 2011	3,064.5 ha (area of AWI within WGS in AONB)

DEFRA 9th February 2012

Figure 9 - Woodland cover in the Kent Downs



The diversity of woodland types broadly follows the different soil types within the AONB, including clay (with ash, hornbeam and oak); chalk (with ash, beech and yew) and free draining sands (with oak, birch and beech). Lowland beech yew woodland is particularly distinctive in the Kent Downs and is of European importance. Significant blocks of conifer plantation date back to the early 1900s; planting continued into the 1990s and is now largely being phased out and the conifers are beginning to be harvested.

Ash is a particularly prominent tree in the Kent Downs AONB. Both in the woodlands and hedgerows ash forms a prominent and important part of the landscape. Kent Downs woodlands were one of the first areas in Britain to experience widespread infection from Ash Dieback (*Chalara fraxinea*) and the landscape implications are thought to be serious with the expected death and weakening of the ash population – the Kent Downs has been identified as an Important Ash Area by the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC). Ash Dieback is only one of many tree diseases and pests which are expected to affect the Kent Downs landscape.

A significant feature throughout the AONB is a predominance of coppiced sweet chestnut planted into much of the ancient woodland over the last two centuries. Historically sweet chestnut coppice was used for pit props in the east Kent coalfields and for fencing and hop poles. Latterly, as these industries declined, chestnut coppice went for hardwood pulp at the nearby paper mills in Sittingbourne and the Medway Valley. These industries no longer use hardwood pulp and the closest paper mills are now in North Wales or Northern France. Chestnut is still coppiced for high value fencing and more recently for the supply of wood chip for heat. Like ash, sweet chestnut is facing several diseases which may seriously affect its productivity and viability in the Kent Downs.

The continuation of coppicing is important for landscape and biodiversity conservation. Much of the AONB's woodland landscape was once characterised by blocks (cants) of coppice stools cut on regular cycles. Many ancient woodland animal and plant species require coppice management which cyclically opens up the woodland floor to light. Coppice creates edges and mosaics of high canopy with taller and shorter coppice stands, providing a diversity of ecosystems within the woodland habitat. Establishing coppicing is difficult where deer populations are high because re-growth can be browsed off. It

has been noted that deer populations in Kent woodlands are growing (The Deer Initiative); it is important to maintain deer numbers at a level that does not prejudice the re-establishment of coppicing. In Kent, Sussex and Surrey there remains a coppice industry which, although small and threatened, is showing signs of resurgence and could provide a basis from which to return the coppice woodland of the Kent Downs to rotational management and thus continue a management tradition with origins in the Neolithic period.

The Kent Downs landform and landscape character makes its woodlands particularly suitable for shooting, particularly pheasant shooting which is thought to be one of the most important economic drivers for woodland management.

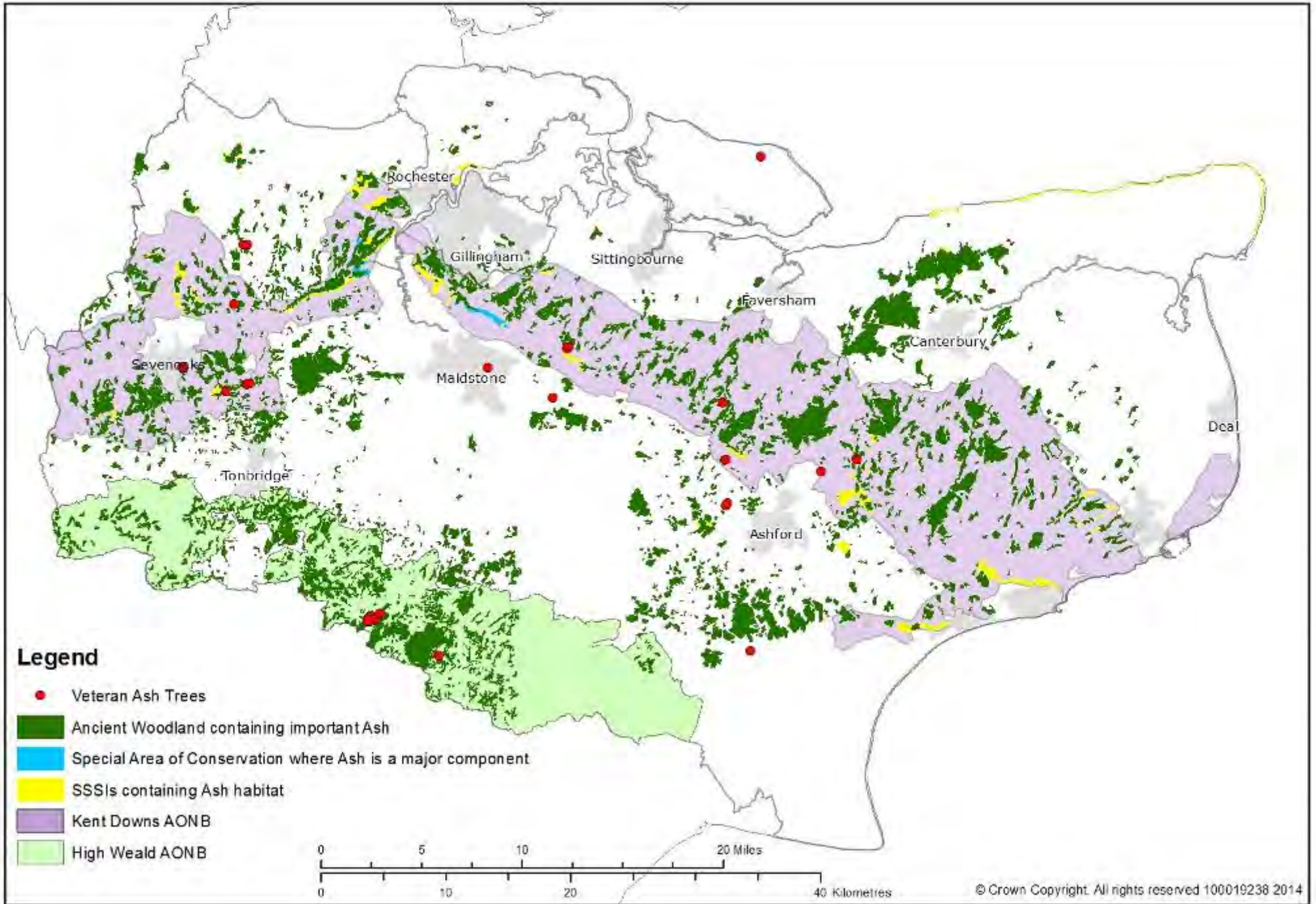
Climate change puts a special focus on the woodlands of the Kent Downs. The Forestry Commission has identified a series of key impacts which include declining tree health and limited mortality, changes to ground flora, loss of drought sensitive species particularly on shallow soils, damage from extreme events and the likelihood that forests and woodland are likely to be increasingly seen as a cool shady refuge for healthy exercise, whilst public access to forests may be interrupted by closures due to storm damage, and roads and paths being washed away.



Nashenden Wood

Andy Vidler

Figure 10 - Ash locations across Kent



The Woodland Trust report 'Adapt or Die' suggests that beech will no longer be viable in the Kent Downs by as soon as 2050 if the high carbon emissions scenario is followed. Forestry Commission research indicates that the Kent Downs will be a refuge for lowland woodland types as climatic conditions change. Additionally sweet chestnut, being a species of Southern Europe, is likely to be well adapted to the predicted conditions and coppicing is thought to be a way to make the woodland ecosystem more resilient to these changes. However the relatively single species nature of many chestnut woodlands makes them potentially less resilient to the predicted impacts of climate change and disease. At the same time wood chips from coppice woodland could provide a significant resource of low carbon energy for heating and power. The Kent Downs AONB Wood Fuel Pathfinder Project has identified the most appropriate routes to secure sustainable woodland management to supply wood chip for heat.

The woodlands of the Kent Downs AONB are much valued, for their landscape, wildlife and the recreation and access opportunities they afford; the public reaction to the proposed review of the Forestry Commission Estate showed more widely the general importance attached to woodland. The Kent Downs AONB contains large areas of Forestry Commission land (1,560ha) and public usage is high. There are several examples of community owned and managed woodlands in the Kent Downs and this enthusiasm is an important opportunity for the future sustainable management of the woodlands and trees of the AONB.



A grass snake



Ashenbank Wood welcome sign



A beech nut



Blackthorn blossom

### The strategic background

This Plan acknowledges and supports the English Forestry Strategy, the UK Forestry Standard which sets out criteria and standards for the sustainable management of all forests, and the Joint National Accord between the Forestry Commission and the National Association of AONBs which demonstrates the Forestry Commissions' commitment to deliver their strategy within protected landscapes. Forest Design Plans, produced by the Forestry Commission, set out management proposals for the next thirty years for the woodlands they look after. They aim to fulfil a number of objectives:

- Provide descriptions of the woods as they are now.
- Show the process the Forestry Commission goes through when deciding what is best for the woods in the long term.
- Show how the woods should develop over the 30 years.
- Show tree felling and re-establishment in detail for 10 years and in outline for the succeeding 20 years.

The West Wood and Clowes Wood Forest Design Plans have been approved by the Forestry Commission.

In July 2012 the Independent Panel on Forestry published a vision, aspirations and recommendations for the future of forestry. Much of these were accepted in the Government's response which particularly noted the need to protect trees, woods and forests, improve valuable woodland assets, expand the woodland resource and realise more value from our woodlands. These ambitions support the aims for woodlands and trees in the Kent Downs AONB.

## 7.3 Woodland and trees - main issues, opportunities and threats

- a. Need to establish new and retain existing markets to regenerate sustainable woodland management to support landscape character, wildlife and the local economy.
- b. Need to build a robust and appropriately trained work force with the capacity to take advantage of new markets as they arise.
- c. Restocking on woodland sites, woodland creation and tree planting – need to use a diverse range of appropriate species of local provenance if available. In many situations, natural regeneration should be encouraged and current best practice should be adhered to. (It should be noted that the use of appropriate non-native stock is being considered as a response to the impacts of climate change but this is not conclusive and there is a need to be open to new policy on this matter).
- d. The implications of climate change put a special focus on Kent Downs woodlands for both adaptation and mitigation responses; the resilience of woodlands and trees is a key consideration. The Renewable Heat Incentive provides an important financial stimulus for woodland management which is expected to gain momentum in the plan period.
- e. The diversity of type and motivation of wood owners and the rapidly changing woodland context means there is a need for consistent intervention and advice to sustain good woodland management.
- f. The emphasis on multi-purpose woodland use brings challenges for owners and managers where recreation, biodiversity and landscape management are unlikely to bring commercial returns.
- g. Intensive agriculture, infrastructure and building developments have led to the loss of woodland and transitional habitats around woods.
- h. Pheasant and other game bird shooting can cause a loss of biodiversity and landscape value but can also generate sustainable woodland management.
- i. Need to take a strategic approach and propose long term management solutions to minimise biodiversity loss, to promote woodland regeneration and to limit the long term impact of disease and deer population growth in Kent Downs woodlands.
- j. Need to consider and monitor the potential re-emergence of commercial conifer plantations in the AONB following market improvements.
- k. Need to support the use of the UK Forestry Standard and certification for woodland products in a way which does not limit opportunities to expand sustainable woodland management.
- l. Need for the restoration and management of open space in woodlands, particularly woodland rides and glades.
- m. Insufficient understanding of the value, condition and location of 'veteran' trees, specimen trees and standing /lying deadwood in woodlands and parkland – for landscape, biodiversity, cultural and historic reasons.
- n. The need to harness the popular value of woodlands to improve understanding, engage new management arrangements and wider community and individual involvement.
- o. The opportunity to act strategically and collaboratively to master plan woodland management and where appropriate creation in the Kent Downs to meet the multiple objectives of the AONB Management Plan.
- p. The historic features contained in woodlands can often be overlooked, there is a need to ensure that they are conserved and protected during woodland management operations.
- q. The need to continue to promote and secure the restoration of PAWS sites through guidance and management support.

## 7.4 Woodland and trees - aims

A landscape in which:

1. The irreplaceable fine tree and ancient woodland characteristics and qualities, cultural heritage and landscape character is conserved, restored and managed.
2. The sustainable management of woodlands provides recreation and education, timber, a source of renewable energy, a wildlife habitat and mitigates the impacts of climate change.
3. Woodlands form functional ecological networks alongside other key habitats of the AONB in order to encourage resilience to the impacts of climate change.
4. Woodland ecology and archaeology is well understood, conserved, enhanced and recognised for its value.
5. There is promotion of public understanding, engagement and the sensitive use of woodlands for recreation and leisure.
6. The production of high quality timber and valuable underwood is stimulated through significant new local markets.
7. A collaborative management approach to the woodlands of the Kent Downs seeks to achieve the objectives of the plan.

***The Kent Downs AONB is one of Britain's most wooded landscapes covering 23% of the AONB.***



Fungi



Autumnal trees



Snowy covered trees in the Kent Downs

## 7.4 Woodland and trees - policies

The Sustainable Development section (3) identifies guiding and recurrent themes for the management of the Kent Downs AONB. These themes and the Management Plan policy responses should be considered before referring to specific policies set out below.

- WT1 Threats to the existing extent of woodland and transitional habitats around woodland will be resisted. Extension of both habitat types will be supported where appropriate to landscape character. The loss of ancient woodland will be opposed.
- WT2 A strategic approach will be pursued to secure sustainable multipurpose woodland and tree management and planting that conserves and enhances the special qualities and character of the landscape and the resilience of woodlands and trees.
- WT3\* The managed, gradual conversion of plantations on semi-natural ancient woodland to deciduous woodland will be supported where locally distinct woodland types and tree species and local provenance tree stock or natural regeneration are used. New non-native plantations will be resisted.
- WT4 Training, accreditation and wider understanding of woodland management to woodland owners and workers, local people and visitors will be encouraged and supported.
- WT5 The restoration and management of woodland open habitats and spaces, such as rides, glades, and wood pasture, for landscape, biodiversity and archaeology conservation purposes will be supported.
- WT6 The identification, protection, management and planned replacement and reintroduction of fine specimen and 'veteran' trees will be pursued.
- WT7 Activities and developments causing damage to woodlands, such as disease, illegal and harmful recreation, an expanding deer population, poorly managed use for game rearing and development associated with wood lotting, will be addressed by appropriate means. Inappropriate developments subject to planning control will be opposed, other available regulatory mechanisms supported, and positive, strategic management interventions pursued.
- WT8 In response to pressures on woodlands and the positive motivations of many new woodland owners, coordinated actions and the development and promotion of guidance and support which integrates sound landscape, heritage and biodiversity management will be pursued.
- WT9 New markets for sustainably produced, appropriately certified woodland products, particularly wood fuels and construction materials, will be pursued and marketing initiatives supported.
- WT10 Research to understand the ownership patterns and motivations of woodland owners will be encouraged to support a master planning approach to the conservation and enhancement of the woodlands and trees of the Kent Downs.
- WT11 The identification and review of ancient woodlands using up to date methodology will be supported.

\* Policy WT3 may be amended only on the basis of sound evidence to reflect the possibility that non-native tree stock of native species could be more resilient to climate change impacts.

## 8. Historic and cultural heritage

### Our vision

In 2034... the rich heritage of historic landscape, buildings, settlements and sites that characterise the Kent Downs' historic and cultural fabric are maintained in favourable condition and are enhanced to reflect their local character and significance. The environmental performance of historic buildings is enhanced in a way that is sensitive to their character. They are understood and cherished by local people and visitors alike for their intrinsic value and for their important contribution to quality of life and rural economy. Vibrant and exciting cultural interpretation and celebration of the Kent Downs is strongly supported.

### 8.1 Overview

Virtually every facet of the Kent Downs has been shaped by thousands of years of human activity – in the fields and woods, tracks and lanes and villages and hamlets, an indelible memory of past times has been left to us. While the landform and geology underlies its beauty, the Kent Downs AONB is very much a human landscape.



Chartwell

Table 11 - Heritage assets in the Kent Downs AONB

<b>Kent Downs AONB</b>	<b>Number</b>
Total number of Listed Buildings	2747
Grade I and II Buildings	249
Buildings at Risk	6
Scheduled Monuments at Risk	104
Monuments at Risk	9
Registered Parks and Gardens	21
Registered Parks and Gardens at Risk	1
Total Number of Heritage Assets (excl. Grade II listed buildings)	374
<b>Total Number of Heritage Assets at Risk (excl. Grade II listed buildings)</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>% Heritage Assets at Risk (excl. Grade II listed buildings)</b>	<b>4.28%</b>

*English Heritage 2012*

## 8.2 Historic and cultural heritage - special characteristics and qualities

There is a strong 'time depth' to the Kent Downs landscape which adds to its distinctive, ancient feel. Glimpses of prehistory can be caught at various places across the AONB. Numerous Palaeolithic flints have been discovered in the AONB taking human activity back to the lower Palaeolithic period. Artefacts found on the higher land of the Kent Downs indicate the, probably occasional, presence of Mesolithic man. Notable traces of Neolithic culture are present in the lower Medway Valley in the form of megalithic burial monuments and structures which include Kit's Coty, Little Kit's Coty and the Coldrum Stones. There are also earthen long barrows, particularly in the Medway and Stour Valleys. Bronze Age round barrows are dotted across the landscape and the Iron Age saw the development of massive hill-forts like that at Oldbury Hill near Ightham as well as widespread farmsteads and rural settlements.

Kent was the scene of the Roman invasion of Britain in AD43 and almost 400 years of Roman occupation have left their mark. The Roman road network, stretching in straight lines across the landscape is still represented by, for example, Stone Street which connected Canterbury with the port at Lympne and sections of Watling Street linking Dover, Canterbury, Rochester and London. Indeed throughout history Kent has been a communications corridor with mainland Europe and this role has left an indelible print on the landscape expressed in routeways and castles.

The increasing sophistication and landscape impact of agriculture is recorded in the lynchets found throughout the Kent Downs. There is evidence that Roman and Iron Age field and settlement patterns have strongly influenced the landscape we see today.

Estate centres like Wye and Charing were established in the Anglo-Saxon period. From this time on the carving out of fields from woodland, known as assarting, and unenclosed wood pasture commons appeared in the Kent Downs landscape. Churches were also erected which formed the beginnings of the parochial structure that has continued to the present day. Drove ways, connecting estate centres with summer pastures in the Weald have left their mark in the particularly distinctive north-east to south-west orientation of the road network across much of the Downs which provides a 'grain' to the landscape.

The commons or 'minnises' of the high clay caps of the Kent Downs are believed to have been established by the Anglo-Saxon or early medieval period and form distinctive open areas of rough grass, bracken, or sometimes heather and gorse. Many have now been enclosed but open minnises most notably Ewell Minnis near Dover and Stelling Minnis remain as important remnants of previously more widespread landscape features.



Birling village



Lynchets at Lydden

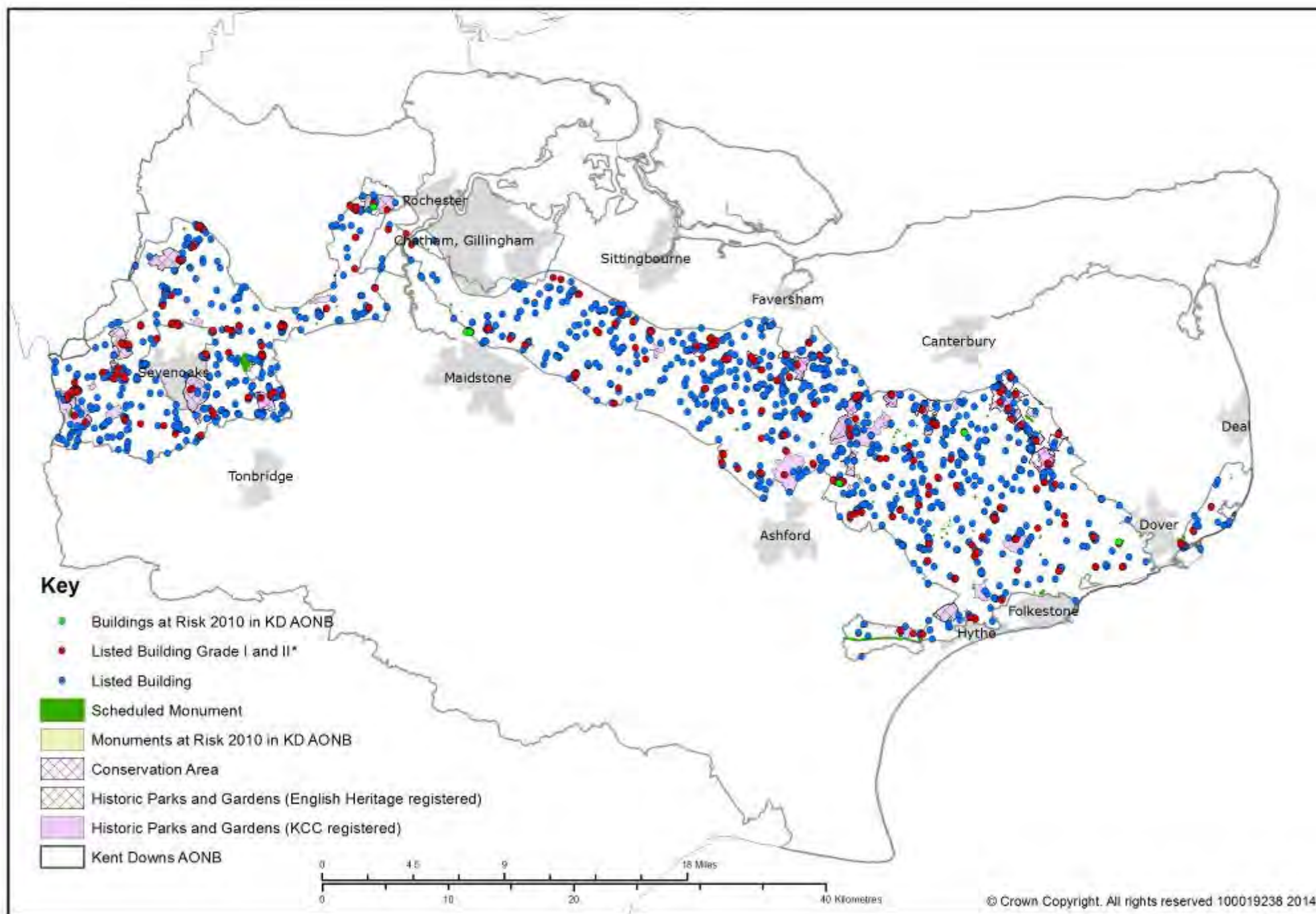


Belmont House



Castle Hill Folkestone motte and ditch

Figure 11 - Heritage features in the Kent Downs AONB



The Norman invasion saw the coming of the castle, varying in scale from that at Dover, the 'key' to England, to smaller structures of local lords, such as the ring-work and bailey at Thurnham. Villages grew into towns and churches were rebuilt in stone. Ecclesiastical interest in the countryside is witnessed by monastic houses and the palaces of the Archbishop of Canterbury for example at Otford and Charing, both of which are located on the 'Pilgrims Way' or old road, itself an ancient route linking England to the continent. Local man John Kempe established the medieval college at Wye, in 1447 when he was Archbishop of York.

The character of the Kent Downs landscape was well established by the Tudor period. There were many nucleated villages clustered around flint and brick churches and greens, as well as linear settlements along river valleys and routeways and spring line settlements at the base of the escarpment. Land was cultivated and grazed throughout the AONB and the many isolated farmsteads bear testimony to this agricultural history. It is believed that complex patterns of enclosure, particularly in the more fertile areas, have been created in part by the influence of the Kentish custom of 'Gavelkind' inheritance where property was divided equally rather than being allotted to the oldest heir, producing a multiplicity of holdings.



Godmersham Park

The selling off of church lands following the Reformation led to the growth of country estates with their parks and gardens which cover an important part of the AONB. Designed landscapes in the Kent Downs include Godmersham and Chilham in the Stour Valley, Doddington and Belmont Parks in the mid Kent Downs and Bourne Park and Higham Park on the River Nailbourne.

Along the White Cliffs Heritage Coast, facing as it did potential attack from mainland Europe, there is a rich heritage of defence structures, including Dover Castle and the Western Heights, 19th century Martello towers and the concrete and brick remains of anti-invasion structures of the two World Wars.

Aside from these grand and dominant historic sites and structures, the multitude of smaller cultural and historic features also help characterise the landscape of the AONB. These are the traces of ordinary people who have worked the land for centuries and have shaped its special character. Networks of ancient hedgerows which still provide enclosure for livestock; wood and field banks which marked boundaries between different manors or estates, picked out with pollarded or 'stubbed' ancient trees; field patterns and lynchets revealing ploughing patterns from centuries ago; hollow ways and sunken lanes, now often byways, carved into the land by millennia of



Little Kit's Coty Neolithic monument

passing feet and hooves; and dene holes (deep excavations into the chalk) and borrow pits where rock and minerals were excavated.

The Kent Downs has a rich tradition of half-timbered and weather-boarded buildings. There is also a legacy of locally distinctive architecture in locally derived building materials such as Ragstone, flint and chalk. Soft red bricks and peg-tiles lend colour and here and there long-straw thatching can be seen. The conservation and enhancement of these diverse buildings requires local sources of building materials, as well as skilled craftsmen who understand and respect the building traditions of the past and the architectural vernacular.

There is still much to discover, for example, the Kent Downs continually reveals archaeological surprises, often of national importance.

The important role that the landscapes of AONBs have in the conservation and sustainable management of the historic environment is recognised in a Joint Statement made between English Heritage and the National Association of AONBs.

#### ◆ Historic Landscape Characterisation

'Every place, like every person, has its distinctive character, in large measure determined by its inherited features such as streets, hedges, archaeological sites, buildings or place names. Understanding this character is one of the starting points for deciding a place's future, the first step in working out how places can be made better in the future' (English Heritage).

Historic Landscape Characterisation describes landscape character based on historical attributes surviving in the present landscape. Kent was one of the first counties to prepare a historic landscape character map on a county wide basis. The mapping is intended to provide broad scale and overall assessment of historic character.

The Kent Downs AONB is made up mainly of a 'field pattern' historic landscape type, covering approximately 63% of the area. Whilst this historic landscape type is further defined into subcategories, there is no predominant field type. Woodland landscape types also feature heavily with some large tracts being present in the east of the AONB. Also notable are the presence of a large number of areas of parkland, indicating the importance of the managed estates within the landscape.



John Miller

Coldrum Stones Neolithic long barrow

## ◆ Artistic, cultural and scientific importance

The Kent Downs have been influential to many people, places and events of great artistic and cultural importance. These include the ancient Pilgrims Way from Winchester to Canterbury, paintings by Samuel Palmer in the Darent Valley and the writing and paintings of Winston Churchill at home in Chartwell. The Dover and Folkestone white cliffs and coastline have left an indelible mark on British culture and psyche, particularly through Shakespeare's play King Lear, Turner's paintings, Matthew Arnold's poem Dover Beach and Vera Lynne's famous wartime song.

Jane Austen frequently visited her brother at Godmersham Park, and Charles Dickens had many connections with the Downs, including the village of Cobham which featured in the Pickwick Papers. Bishopsbourne was sometime home to novelist Joseph Conrad, as was the village of Kingston to world renowned sculptor Henry Moore between 1935 and 1940.

Charles Darwin's family home, Down House, and surrounding countryside in the western Kent Downs, is a proposed World Heritage Site. It is recognised for its international significance as Darwin's home-base from which he developed his scientific theories and the writing of On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection. The North Downs was the 'landscape laboratory' for Darwin's theory on evolution by natural selection.

There is strong contemporary interpretation and artistic celebration of the Kent Downs AONB. In Kings Wood, Stour Valley Arts are a long standing company which has commissioned artists to make sculptures within the forest and also other kinds of artworks. Along the National Cycle Route 2, a series of commissions for Sustrans and local partners forms the Chalk and Channel Way; from sculpture to poetry, artists have been inspired by the dramatic coastline between Folkestone and Dover. In urban centres just outside the Kent Downs the arts are at the heart of regeneration efforts; the Arts Council England's Strategy 'Achieving Great Art for Everyone' recognises the role for the arts as a 'focus of urban and rural regeneration, bringing renewed vitality to neighbourhoods, cities and regions across England' and seeks to balance focus for the arts between urban and rural areas.

The Kent Downs landscape continues to be influential and inspirational to contemporary artists and cultural life, and this quality needs to be celebrated, linked to regeneration activities and promoted more widely.



Cottage in Brasted



View towards Canterbury



Weather-boarded church tower



Interpretation along the Chalk and Channel Way

### 8.3 Historic and cultural heritage - main issues, opportunities and threats

- a. The need to increase understanding, engagement, awareness of, and inspiration from, the historic, artistic, built and cultural heritage; and to encourage greater opportunities for the historic heritage to inform contemporary decisions, landscape management, regeneration and place making.
- b. The need to conserve and protect the historic environment, both above and below ground. Issues include the effect of deep ploughing, the introduction of (deep rooting) energy crops and arable conversion on sites containing buried archaeological remains, heritage crime, and development affecting or in the setting of historic buildings.
- c. Recognition and reinforcement of special historic landscape character and the local distinctiveness of settlements, farmsteads, ancient routeways, buildings and design in the Kent Downs landscape through the statutory planning process as well as in, detailed historic characterisation, Neighbourhood Plans, Village Design Statements and Conservation Area Appraisals.
- d. Dearth of skills and local sustainably sourced materials for historic building conservation.
- e. The recognition that this plan period will witness both the commemoration of the centenary of the First World War and the passing of many of the generation involved in the Second World War, both of which have a particular resonance for the Kent Downs AONB.
- f. The opportunity to work collaboratively with the Arts Council, Heritage Lottery Fund and cultural regeneration programmes in Kent to secure new artistic and cultural activity to celebrate the landscape of the Kent Downs and support rural and urban regeneration.



Dover Castle

## 8.4 Historic and cultural heritage - aims

A landscape in which:

1. The principal special characteristics and qualities of the historic character of the Kent Downs landscape, the sites and features, field and settlement patterns, villages, hedgerows, routeways, woodlands and parklands are recognised, valued, conserved and enhanced.
2. The economic and 'quality of life' benefit of living and working in an historically-rich, artistically and culturally inspiring environment is recognised and actively supported.
3. New developments respect and reinforce the traditions of the past, whilst integrating sustainable technologies and sensitive new design.
4. The landscape context and setting of all historic buildings, features and settlements is protected, conserved and enhanced.
5. Restoration and conversion of the built heritage reflect local character and will meet high environmental standards, using sustainably sourced, locally derived materials and skilled workers.
6. Communities are engaged and involved in the historic environment of the Kent Downs through methods such as conservation area management planning, village design, neighbourhood planning, place making and interpretation.
7. Vibrant and contemporary artistic and cultural celebration of the Kent Downs supports the conservation, enjoyment, understanding and enhancement of the landscape.

## 8.5 Historic and cultural heritage - policies

The Sustainable Development section (3) identifies guiding and recurrent themes for the management of the Kent Downs AONB. These themes and the Management Plan policy responses should be considered before referring to specific policies set out below.

- HCH1 The protection, conservation and enhancement of the historic character and features of the Kent Downs landscape will be pursued and heritage-led economic activity encouraged.
- HCH2 A wider understanding of the cultural, scientific and artistic importance of the Kent Downs landscape and its historic character will be supported in part to inform the interpretation and management of the AONB.

HCH3 The preparation and use of best practice guidance for adapting the historic and cultural environment to climate change will be supported.

HCH4 Opportunities to develop contemporary artistic, historic, cultural and scientific interpretation and celebration of the landscape and people of the Kent Downs will be pursued.

HCH5 The application of high standards of design sympathetic to cultural heritage within the AONB, identified in guidance including the AONB Landscape Design Handbook, Kent Downs Farmstead Guidance and any relevant Village Design Statements and Neighbourhood Plans, will be pursued.

## 9. The Heritage Coasts

### Our vision

In 2034... the special place that the White Cliffs of Dover have in the hearts and minds of millions of people is justified by the reality experienced on the ground. A new focus and collaborative effort has transformed the management of the coasts which is now more integrated and effective, meeting the needs of the landscape and natural environment and communities, while supporting the sustainable regeneration of the coastal towns.

### 9.1 Overview

The magnificent chalk cliffs between Folkestone and Kingsdown form one of Britain's most evocative and best known landmarks. For many they are the first sight of Britain while views to France hold a special appeal; the Dover Strait is one of the world's most important, recognised and busiest seascapes.

Behind the rearing cliffs is a landscape of windswept coastal chalk downs, with areas of salt-wind sculpted scrub, open downland, and arable farming punctuated by the remnants of thousands of years of exchange and conflict. The Heritage Coasts are one of the few places in south east England which offer a feeling of wilderness. The ever changing chalk cliffs, foreshore and seabed platform are home to distinctive wildlife influenced by the sea and exposure.

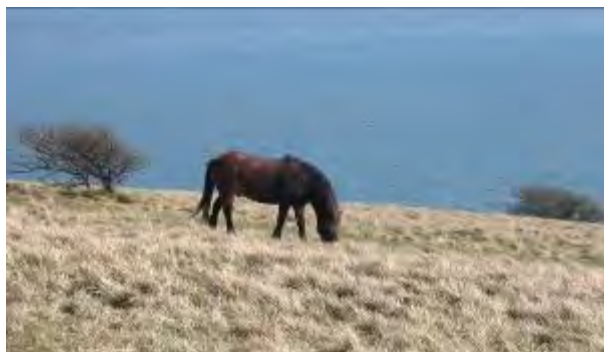
Globally coastal Chalk is a scarce resource, the UK holds 57% of Europe's resource, Kent holds 35% of the UK resource.

The geology and landform of the coast is internationally important with the cliffs being home to many rare birds, plants and invertebrates.

This extraordinary natural and cultural resource can strongly assist the regeneration of Dover and Folkestone, and has been identified as the basis to secure World Heritage Site status for the Dover Strait. Equally this part of the AONB is particularly sensitive and is facing continual challenge, from the impacts of climate change, discordant coastal development, general development and recreation pressure.



The White Cliffs coastline



Coastal grazing

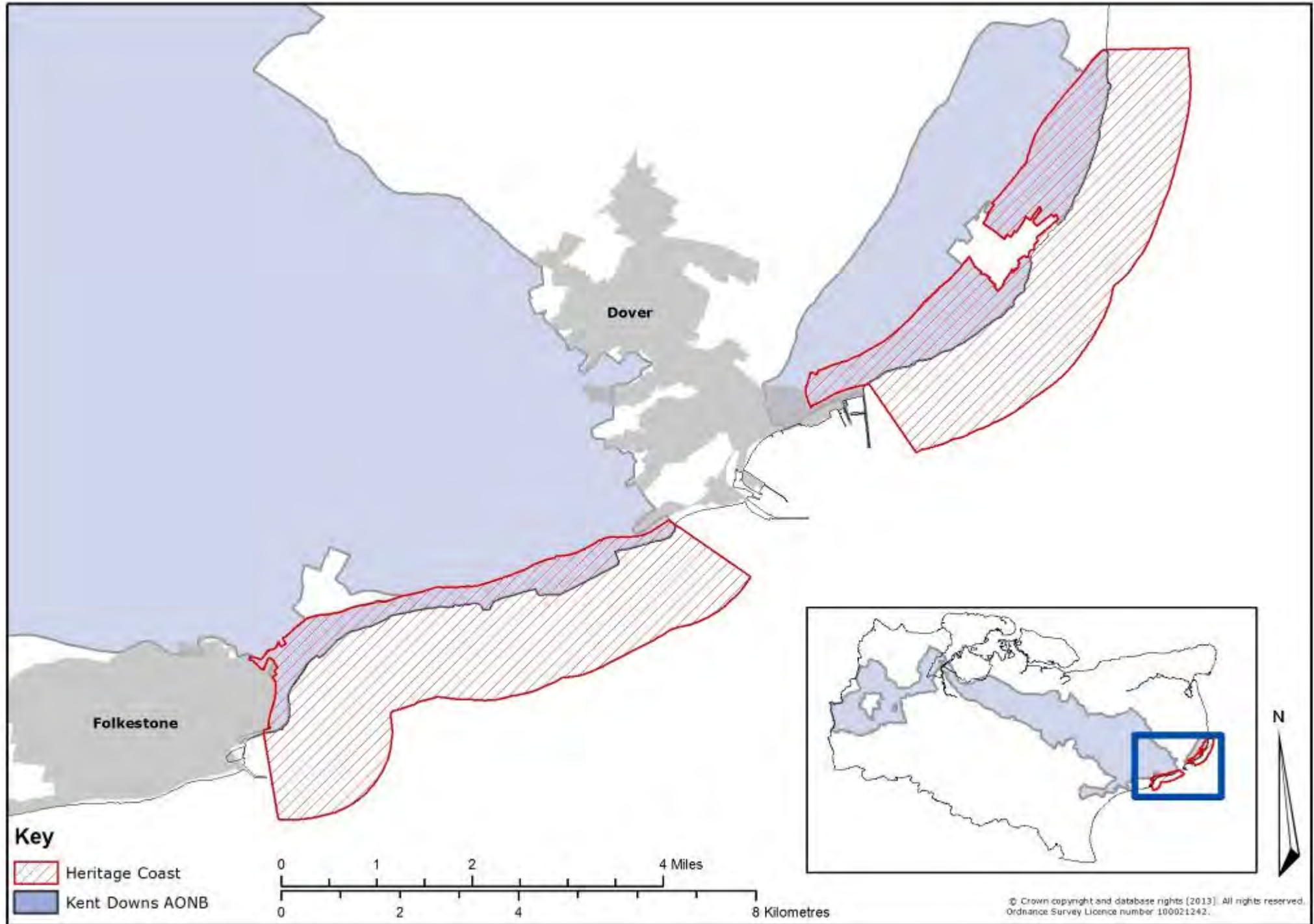


Habitat surveying at South Foreland

Josie Newman

Figure 12 - Heritage coasts and the Kent Downs AONB

9. The Heritage Coasts



### The Heritage Coasts

England's 32 Heritage Coasts have been identified for the conservation and enhancement of their natural beauty, their terrestrial and marine flora and fauna, and heritage features. They also have objectives to:

- facilitate and enhance the public's enjoyment.
- maintain and improve the quality of inshore waters and beaches.

In delivering these objectives account must be taken of the needs of land management activities and local communities.

Natural England's Designation Strategy promotes AONB management plans incorporating policies for the management of Heritage Coasts at a strategic level.

The White Cliffs Countryside Partnership (WCCP) has a Heritage Coast management function as part of its purpose and in this Plan's period of operation a Landscape Partnership "Up on the Downs", funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund and local partners will operate; both can be important vehicles for managing the Coast.

## 9.2 The Heritage Coasts - special characteristics and qualities

The Heritage Coasts either side of Dover, include the shoreline, cliffs and adjacent downland. The White Cliffs form part of our national identity; forming a soaring landscape with a seascape of vast horizons of sea and sky extending westwards to the subtle crumbling Greensand and Clay cliffs of Folkestone.

The Heritage Coast's wildlife is internationally important, the clifftops consisting of nationally important chalk grassland and scrub, the cliff-faces supporting important breeding sea bird colonies including Fulmars, Rock Pipits, Lesser-black backed Gulls and the only Kent population of Kittiwakes. Seabirds wheeling high in the sky connect the sea and sky.

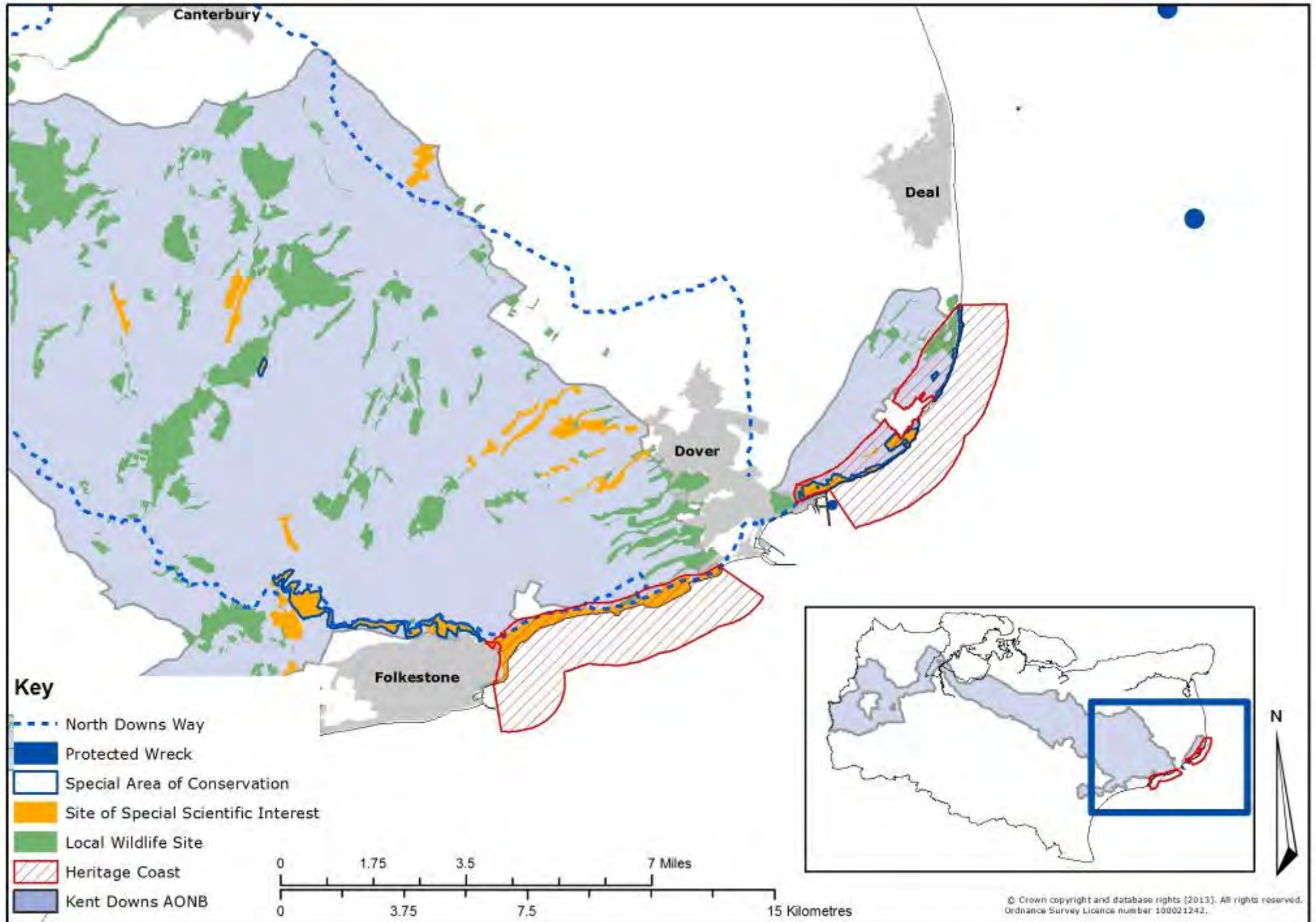
The cliffs and grassland contain rare plants such as Hoary and Sea Stock, Rock Sea-Lavender, Sea Heath and Wild Cabbage. Most of the area is notified as SSSI, not just for the rich communities of birds, wildflowers but also seaweeds and particularly for the invertebrates. Proposed Marine Conservation Zones (MCZs) have been identified off the Heritage Coasts. MCZs will protect areas of nationally rare, threatened or especially representative habitats and species. The Heritage Coasts are a vital landing point for migrating birds and insects and are home to many rare species. The proximity to mainland Europe places the Heritage Coasts in a key position as species migrate in response to climate change.



View from High Meadow to Dover Castle

Figure 13 - Heritage Coast designations in Kent

9. The Heritage Coasts



The predicted impacts of climate change, including sea level rise and the greater frequency and intensity of storms, is expected to have a significant effect on the Heritage Coast, making adaptation strategies, particularly, an important priority for the future management of the coast.

Defence and invasion is one of the themes of the Heritage Coast and forms an important reference in the cultural landscape. Features include the magnificent Dover Castle described as 'the key to England', Napoleonic Martello towers, the 'listening ears' built between the wars and superseded by radar installations some of which are now listed. World War II frontline fortifications, defences and anti-tank devices along the whole coast are exemplified again at Dover Castle. Following evacuation from Dunkirk the cliffs formed a welcoming sight for many thousands of troops.

Communication and cultural exchange are important themes. In 1899 the first international wireless transmission was sent from Wimereux, France to South Foreland lighthouse. Cross channel trade and cultural exchange continues apace – the Strait of Dover being one of the world's busiest shipping lanes. The close proximity of Dover Harbour and views of the Strait's central shipping channel means ferries and large cargo vessels are frequent features.

Arising both from conflict and seagoing transport there is an extraordinary and outstanding collection of wrecks comprising both air and water craft, including the Dover Boat, the oldest sea-going boat in the world. Another example is the protected wreck of the Langdon Bay (English Heritage), located on the edge of Dover Harbour. It is thought to be the remains of a Middle Bronze Age vessel carrying a scrap metal cargo from France to Britain, indicating early cross-channel trade.

Navigation marks are often conspicuous in the landscape for example the National Trust-managed South Foreland lighthouse, which stands 21 metres high on the headland, and a white windmill (near to the lighthouse).

The geological exposures of the cliffs form an internationally important stratigraphic reference site for extensive and near-continuous exposures of Lower, Middle and Upper Chalk, historically important for their contribution to the sciences of geology and coastal geomorphology and are all designated as SSSI. The Chalk cliffs and to the west Gault Clay are rich in fossils. On the seashore at Copt Point the exposed Greensand forms a series of rock pools with important seaweed colonies. The Greensand was also the home of an active quern stone (corn grinding) industry dating to the first century BC.



Andy Vidler

Common tern



Paul Sampson

Dexter cattle on St Martins



Josie Newman

Harebells



View towards France

The Heritage Coasts are a popular area for recreation; the cliff tops are crossed by the Saxon Shore Way Long Distance Path and North Downs Way National Trail. The route of the new National Coastal Path will soon be defined along this section of coast and there are several areas of open access land and visitor attractions such as the Battle of Britain Memorial at Capel le Ferne. Several areas offer panoramic views across to France and views of the bustling ferry port and shipping lanes. Access to the base of the cliffs can be dangerous but where available provides a real feeling of wildness. Both the Folkestone Warren and Samphire Hoe offer access below the cliffs in a more managed setting.

Where there is an absence of settlement or transport infrastructure there is a strong relative sense of tranquillity, with exposure to the elements being a key feature.

Much of the Dover-Kingsdown Heritage Coast is managed by the National Trust; this provides a strong framework for the landscape's conservation and enhancement. Ownership of the Dover-Folkestone Heritage Coast is more complex and, while the White Cliffs Countryside Partnership actively manages key sites at Samphire Hoe and Folkestone Warren, overall there is a less cohesive overarching approach or focus.

## ◆ Seascape assessment of the Strait of Dover

The description of seascape character, like landscape character describes what is distinctive, special and characteristic in an area of sea (and land in coastal areas). Seascape character assessment is a tool and spatial framework to help integrate management decisions. In a pilot seascape assessment carried out in 2012 the Dover Strait was described as 'a cohesive seascape unified by geology, socio-economic functions, biodiversity, history and culture, and indivisibility'. A full assessment of the Strait of Dover is expected to be prepared during the plan period; the pilot assessment is available from the Kent Downs AONB website.

## ◆ Marine Management Planning

The Marine Management Organisation describes marine planning as 'a new approach to the management of our seas'. The aim is to ensure a sustainable future for our coastal and offshore waters through managing and balancing the many activities, resources and assets in our marine environment.

Marine planning is following a similar approach to terrestrial planning – setting the direction for decision making at a local level to lead to efficient and sustainable use of our marine resources. The Marine Management Organisation is responsible for Marine Plan Making and will complete a Marine Plan for a section of the Dover Folkestone Heritage Coast area during the plan period.



Sheer cliff face of the White Cliffs of Dover

### 9.3 The Heritage Coasts - main issues, opportunities and threats

- a. Cultivation and coastal erosion have reduced the botanically-rich chalk grassland on the cliff tops to a narrow strip, making management difficult and placing the habitat at risk.
- b. High visitor pressure, particularly at the Dover to Kingsdown Heritage Coast and Folkestone Warren threatens to degrade important habitats and reduce the valued sense of tranquillity.
- c. Arable agriculture can sit uncomfortably with the natural beauty and wild scenery of the cliff tops, a significant opportunity remains further to expand the valued semi natural coastal grassland.
- d. Discordant development, for instance caravan parks, visitor resources, and unsympathetic screening attempts.
- e. The enthusiasm for the area brings an opportunity to act collaboratively to address the lack of coordinated management where this exists outside areas of 'protective ownership'.
- f. Major development pressures and previous developments now falling into disrepair or are prone to marine erosion.
- g. The need to increase understanding of the dynamic nature of the coast, accelerating coastal processes and the potential impacts of climate change.
- h. Widespread inappropriate, antisocial and illegal activities, such as off-roading vehicles, extensive wild camping, fly-tipping and vandalism in parts of the Heritage Coasts.
- i. The safety and interpretation of remaining military and historic structures, particularly from the Second World War.
- j. The very high quality, iconic natural environment can be an important component of a package to regenerate the coastal towns of Dover and Folkestone, but the Heritage Coasts are in themselves extremely sensitive to development and visitor pressure.
- k. Marine litter and air pollution are significant detractors from the qualities of the Heritage Coast.
- l. The opportunity identified and supported by Kent County Council and the Pas-de-Calais Department to achieve World Heritage Site status for the Strait of Dover.
- m. Proposed Marine Conservation Zones (yet to be designated), while primarily protecting wildlife could also be managed to have a positive impact on fisheries, thereby avoiding unnecessary disruption to livelihoods.
- n. The Heritage Coasts are much loved, iconic national landscapes with partnerships in place to support their management.



The White Cliffs

## 9.4 The Heritage Coasts - aims

A landscape in which:

1. A wide collaborative approach achieves management of, respect and international recognition, for the Heritage Coasts which reflects the extremely high national esteem in which they are held.
2. The extreme importance and sensitivity of the Heritage Coasts are recognised publicly, through appropriate international status and in policy and development management decisions.
3. The importance and value placed on these iconic landscapes delivers resources and partnerships to ensure their management supporting the regeneration of the nearby coastal towns.

## 9.5 The Heritage Coasts - policies

The Sustainable Development section (3) identifies guiding and recurrent themes for the management of the Kent Downs AONB. These themes and the Management Plan policy responses should be considered before referring to specific policies set out below.

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <p>HC1 Coastal defence policies, allowing, where practicable, a naturally functioning coastline will be supported.</p> <p>HC2 The opportunity to support economic regeneration through the sustainable and integrated management of the Heritage Coast in accordance with its defined purpose will be supported.</p> <p>HC3 Threats to the qualities and character of the Heritage Coast will be resisted and managed.</p> <p>HC4 A collaborative approach, such as that employed by the WCCP and the Up on the Downs Landscape Partnership, will be pursued to secure the objectives for Heritage Coast management and address the specific threats and opportunities identified.</p> | <p>HC5 Achieving World Heritage Site status or other appropriate international recognition for the Strait of Dover will be pursued.</p> <p>HC6 The conservation and enhancement of the special characteristics of the Heritage Coasts and Strait of Dover will be pursued through influencing the Marine Plan making process – and the development of new Heritage Coast Management Plans.</p> <p>HC7 The New National Coastal Trail will be managed in partnership to meet National Trail standards. The conservation and enhancement of the landscape of the corridor of the National Coastal Trail in the Heritage Coasts will be pursued.</p> |
|--|---|

***The Heritage Coasts are one of the few places in South East England which offer a feeling of wilderness.***

## 10. Geology and natural resources

### Our vision

In 2034... great care is taken to conserve and manage the natural resources of the environment particularly soil, ground and river water. New and innovative ways to reduce resource use have been adopted which support landscape character and the economy. Important areas of tranquillity have been identified, protected and expanded and provide 'oases of calm'. The need to conserve and enhance natural beauty means mineral resource winning occurs away from the AONB, except in exceptional circumstances, and worked out quarry sites have been restored to enhance local landscape character.

### 10.1 Overview

The natural and cultural features that create the Kent Downs' sense of place and special character have in large part been governed by the physical environment. Kent Downs natural resources provide vital ecosystem services to the population of Kent and beyond. With significant changes predicted in the natural environment along with

substantial new demands placed on our natural resources, positive action and management is an important priority for the conservation and enhancement of the Kent Downs.

### 10.2 Geology and natural resources - special characteristics and qualities

#### ◆ Geology

The Kent Downs are valued as a place of spectacular views, changing scenery and landscape diversity. The underlying geology is quite literally the foundation of this natural beauty.

The AONB encompasses a complex band of geological layers, each following the broad east-west sweep of Kent. The folded and undulating chalk, Greensand, Gault clay and Ragstone, with intricate intermittent overlying layers which include washed flint beds, boulder clay, wind-blown loess, sand, river gravel and alluvium. All are of glacial origin emanating from the northern ice sheets and outwash torrents, they determine the nature of the land and soil, and the plants and animals which are supported.

The AONB contains a number of nationally and regionally important geological or physiographical features, eight of which have been designated as geological Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) –

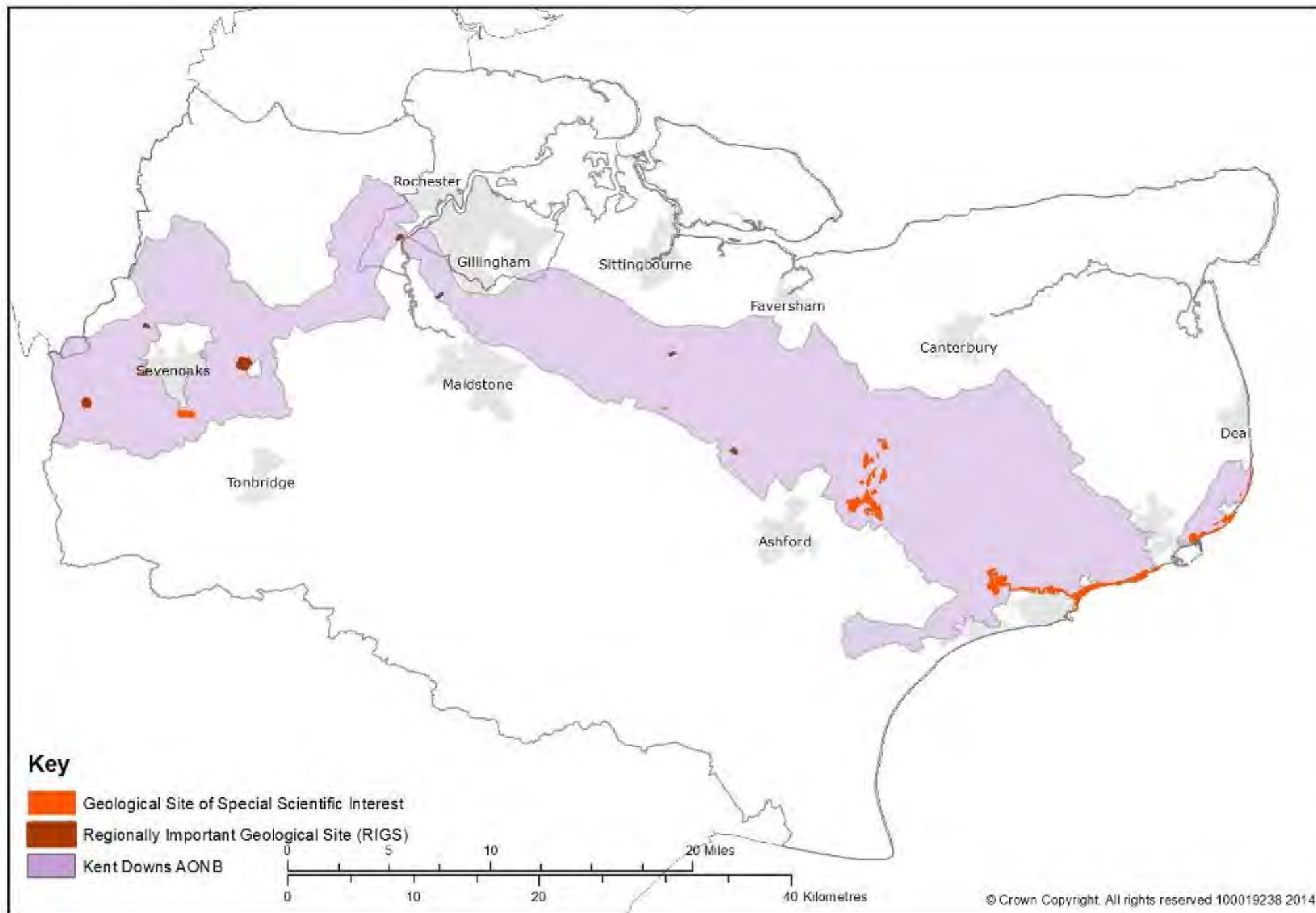
including the full extent of the Chalk cliffs of the Heritage Coasts, where the exposures are of international significance. Where they are not statutorily designated, some sites have been selected as Regionally Important Geological Sites (RIGS) which are sometimes referred to as Local Geological Sites.

Some of these are exposures created during mineral workings or cuttings for transport infrastructure, which have been left uncovered and reveal strata of important rocks, minerals and fossils.

The geology of the Kent Downs means that mineral winning has been a long run activity, particularly on the northern edge of the Greensand.

***The underlying geology is quite literally the foundation of the Kent Downs' natural beauty.***

Figure 14 - Geological Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) and Regionally Important Geological Sites (RIGS) in the Kent Downs



### ◆ Soil

Soil is an irreplaceable and often overlooked natural resource. It is a key determinant of the AONB's natural vegetation and is fundamental to all land uses. In semi-natural habitats, an undisturbed soil structure is a vital ecosystem component. On cultivated land, careful soil management is a primary principle of good farming but overall soil quality has been declining at a UK level. Soil erosion can occur on ploughed steeper slopes of the AONB, the soil eventually being washed into adjacent watercourses – adding to the flooding risk.

Pollution or contamination of soil can occur through pesticide and other chemical misuse, which can accumulate over time, and can leach into surface and groundwater supplies. Soil husbandry is increasingly understood to be important for carbon management. The UK Climate Risk Assessment has identified that drier summers leading to increased soil moisture deficits may result in the increased release of greenhouse gases such as carbon dioxide and methane. Heavy rainfall, especially following a dry period, may increase soil erosion.

### ◆ Water

The Kent Downs AONB is a comparatively dry landscape; rain water permeates easily through the porous Chalk and Greensand bedrock with generally few areas of standing water, except where Clay-lined dew ponds are present. Where the permeable Chalk and Greensand layers meet impermeable Gault Clay, water seeps out in spring lines. The lower scarp slopes are characterised by historic settlements that have developed around these water sources (e.g. Postling, Hollingbourne and Underriver). These springs flow into the main river catchments, flowing out of and sometimes through the AONB.

Within the Chalk and Greensand clean percolated water forms the groundwater aquifer, which provides 75% of Kent's drinking water. Water availability is one of the biggest issues facing the UK water sector with pressures on availability already evident, especially in southern and eastern England. The quality and quantity of the ground water aquifer and the surface river water is determined in no small part by landscape management and other activities. The quantity of groundwater and surface water is becoming a more

critical issue as Kent is set to accommodate significant population growth in the next twenty years. Abstraction already occurs throughout the AONB and has been linked to low summer river flows particularly of the Rivers Darent and Little Stour. This situation will be exacerbated by the predicted effects of climate change. Not only will these factors have a profound effect on Kent's potable water supply, but also may impact on the AONB's physical and ecological character over time.

Water supply is at the forefront of issues being addressed by water companies through Water Resource Management Planning. There is an emerging potential coherence of interests between the needs of sustainable landscape management and water resource management.

The Government is promoting locally focussed decision making and action at the heart of the debate about the future direction of improvements to the water environment. The Catchment Based Approach (CaBA) aims to generate more effective stakeholder engagement in order to tackle environmental problems at a more local scale. It is thought that this will particularly help tackle pollution from diffuse sources, by their diffuse nature, local. The collaborative ways of working to consider the needs of the water environment and acting to enhance it in a truly collaborative way fit comfortably with the AONB management approach.



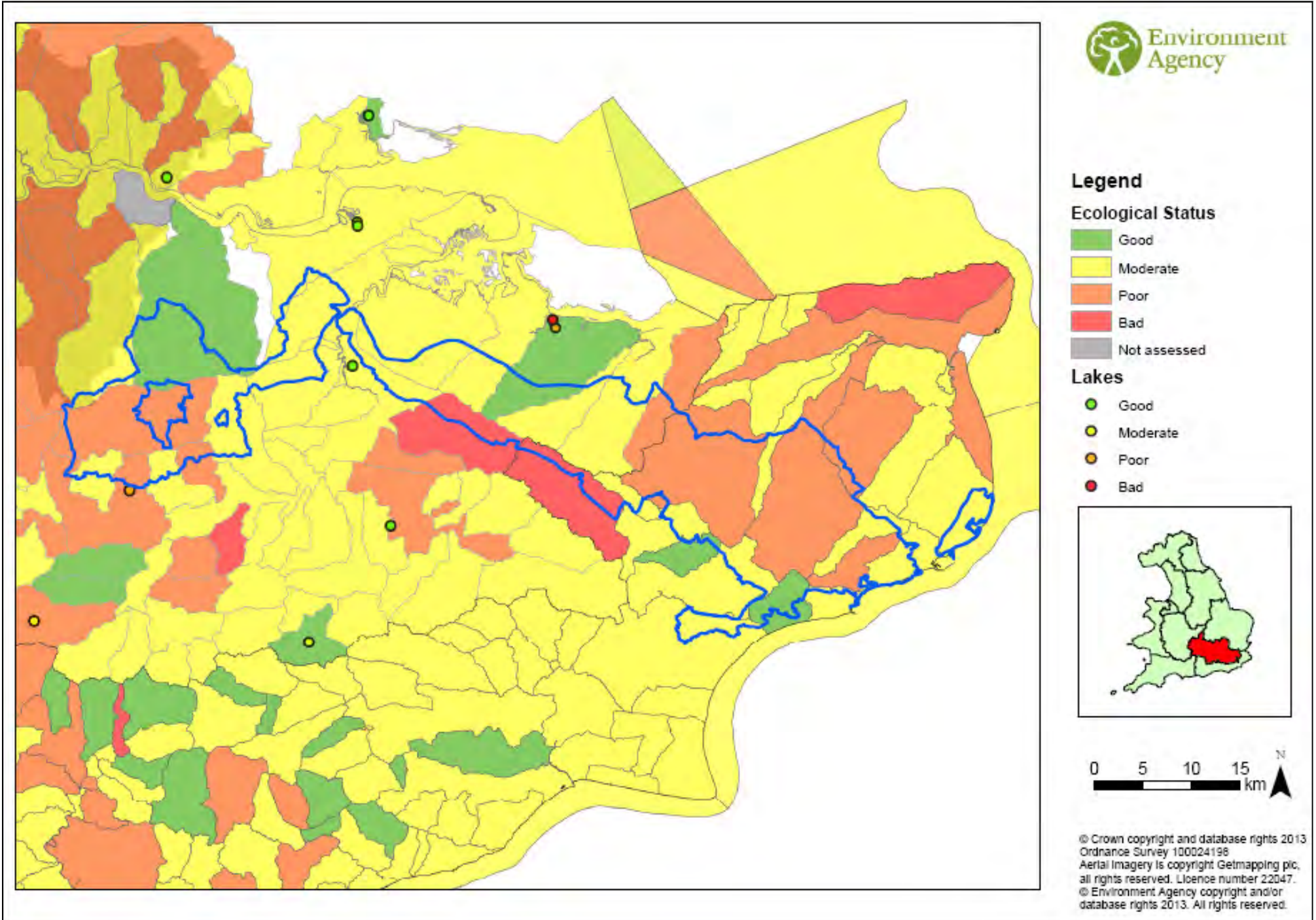
Dew pond



Stour Valley

Dan Tuson

Figure 15 - water quality in the Kent Downs



#### ◆ The Water Framework Directive and Catchment Abstraction Management Strategies

The Water Framework Directive's (WFD) main objectives are to protect and enhance the water environment and ensure sustainable water resource use for economic and social development.

The scope of the framework is wide, covering lakes, streams, rivers, groundwater, groundwater dependent ecosystems, estuaries and coastal waters out to one mile from the low-water mark. The Environment Agency is the lead authority for implementing the WFD. Whilst the Agency will focus on the appropriate application of regulations and using an evidence-based approach to ensure the most cost-effective actions are taken; improving the health of our natural water environment will require collaborative working across many sectors and making use of local knowledge.

Catchment Abstraction Management Strategies (CAMS) set out how catchment water resource management can contribute to WFD implementation.

#### ◆ The provision of ecosystem services

The UK government has recognised that 'people benefit from processes or structures within ecosystems that give rise to a range of goods and services called 'ecosystem services'. This is essentially a description of how natural resources and the ecosystems they create and support provide for the needs of society. The services described

range from the relatively simple, such as crop pollination to the highly complex, such as soil fertility maintenance, waste sinks or climate regulation. Ultimately all human life depends on ecosystem services for fundamental necessities such as clean air, clean water and food production. Services have been grouped into four categories:

- Supporting services, such as nutrient cycling, oxygen production and soil formation. These underpin the provision of the other 'service' categories.
- Provisioning services, such as food, fibre, fuel and water.
- Regulating services, such as climate regulation, water purification and flood protection.
- Cultural services, such as education, recreation, and aesthetic value.

Kent Downs ecosystem services are identified in detail in Natural England's National Character Assessment for the North Downs and Wealden Greensand and are therefore not repeated here.



A workee landscape in the Kent Downs

## 10.3 Geology and natural resources - main issues, opportunities and threats

### ◆ Geology

- a. Lack of awareness about the importance of AONB geology and landform.
- b. There are important mineral resources in the Kent Downs and its setting. Mineral workings can have a serious impact on landscape quality. Restoration plans may be affected by the deficit of inert materials which were once more easily obtainable.
- c. The importance of geological sites and features tends to be overlooked due to lack of information, interpretation, poor management, development, landfill and dumping.

### ◆ Soils

- d. Soil erosion, especially on the steeper slopes and under 'open' arable crops, such as maize and potentially some biomass crops; climate change enhances this risk.
- e. Maintaining and improving agricultural soil quality and promoting the relationship between good soil management and climate change mitigation.

### ◆ Water

- f. Pollution of rivers and springs from point sources, including public and private sewerage systems, agriculture and fish farms.
- g. Diffuse pollution from agricultural sources leading to nutrient enrichment, reduced water and elevated levels of silt and pesticides.
- h. The expected increase in water demand for public use and irrigation in already over abstracted catchments presents major challenges for water resource management and potentially the installation of significant new water infrastructure in the landscape.

- i. Predicted increase and volume of flooding events. Rivers flooding in the Kent Downs affects localised areas.
- j. Need to understand the relationship between landscape management and aquifer recharge.
- k. The water companies' Water Resources Management Plans process provides an opportunity for collaborative working to secure a more resilient water supply at the same time as landscape management which supports landscape character.
- l. The opportunity to collaborate with the Catchment Based Approach to secure the conservation and enhancement of landscape character as well as delivery of Water Framework Directive objectives – and also ensuring that AONB policies and projects support the WFD.
- m. The significant benefits of Kent Downs ecosystem services are insufficiently recognised and valued and the opportunities to secure payment for them is not yet developed.
- n. The need to establish and secure the Kent Downs as a vital component of Kent's green infrastructure provision.



The River Stour at sunset

## 10.4 Geology and natural resources - aims

A landscape in which:

1. A safe, clean environment is protected, conserved and enhanced, where residents and visitors alike benefit from essential ecosystem services and increased well-being and quality of life.
2. Important geological sites and exposures of the Kent Downs are recognised, conserved and enhanced.
3. The natural resources of soil, water and air will be conserved, enhanced and managed in a way which enhances landscape character.
4. Local sources of pollution indigenous to the AONB are minimised, reduced or controlled.
5. The Kent Downs AONB landscape provides vital services and green infrastructure for Kent and the south east.

## 10.5 Geology and natural resources - policies

The Sustainable Development section (3) identifies guiding and recurrent themes for the management of the Kent Downs AONB. These themes and the Management Plan policy responses should be considered before referring to specific policies set out below.

- GNR1 Activities designed to protect, conserve and enhance the important geological exposures of the Kent Downs will be encouraged.
- GNR2 Careful management and sensitive restoration of existing minerals and waste sites affecting the Kent Downs will be pursued.
- GNR3 Allocations and permission for new mineral extraction are likely to be major development proposals and within the AONB will be opposed, except in the exceptional circumstances identified in paragraph 116 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). Where permitted in accordance with the provisions of the NPPF, exceptional site management, working and restoration conditions which support landscape character will be expected, conditioned and enforced.
- GNR4 Advice to farmers and land managers which seeks integrated environmental land and natural resource management in the Kent Downs will be encouraged.
- GNR5 Threats to the conservation of the natural resources of soil, water and air will be opposed.
- GNR6 A strategic collaborative Catchment Based Approach will be taken to the management of the water environment in the Kent Downs AONB to secure a more resilient water supply, achieve good ecological status in the water bodies and the conservation and enhancement of the landscape.
- GNR7 Additional water abstraction particularly in the Darent and Great Stour river catchments will be resisted unless it can be demonstrated that there will not be any harmful impacts upon the special character and qualities of the Kent Downs. Support for Water Resource Management Planning which seeks to secure the conservation and enhancement of the Kent Downs AONB will be pursued.
- GNR8 A collaborative approach will be pursued to secure the provision of appropriate ecosystems services and green infrastructure, which supports the special character and qualities of the Kent Downs, for the benefit of the community and economy.

## Quality of life components

### Secondary purposes of AONB designation

The landscape comes first. The primary purpose of AONB designation is to 'conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the landscape', and this is the primary focus of the Management Plan.

The secondary purposes of AONB designation are to take account of the needs of land-based and rural industries and of the economic and social needs of local communities. The demand for recreation should be met in a way that is consistent with the conservation of natural beauty and the needs of agriculture, forestry and other uses.

The following sections set out how the secondary purposes of AONB designation will be addressed by the Management Plan. A principal consideration is how secondary purposes relate to the primary purpose of designation. The challenge for this Management Plan is to find ways in which social and economic well-being and public understanding and enjoyment, can be complementary to, and can further support, the primary purpose of conserving and enhancing natural beauty.



Wye farmers market



Countryside walking



Interpretive panel

## 11. Vibrant communities

### Our vision

In 2034... local people are central to the conservation of the Kent Downs; they have a clear sense of pride and belonging within the AONB. People from neighbouring urban communities feel welcome to enjoy the AONB and recognise and value the need for its conservation and enhancement. Kent Downs communities have a strong influence over development and change through proactive consultation and engagement. Communities' work and voluntary activity marries social and economic well-being with landscape conservation and enhancement. Individuals and organisations choose to buy goods and services that benefit the Kent Downs landscape and local economy.

### 11.1 Overview

The Kent Downs AONB is a landscape where people live and work. One aim of this Management Plan must be to find ways of achieving thriving, vibrant communities and a sustainable and prosperous local economy that conserves and enhances this nationally important area.

While an AONB Management Plan is not the primary means for tackling social and economic needs, without the right social and economic conditions, it is difficult to conserve and enhance the valued landscape.

### 11.2 Vibrant communities - special characteristics and qualities

The population of the Kent Downs AONB in 2011 is estimated to be approx 93,300 or around 5.5% of Kent's population, including Medway (approximately 1,730,000). The 2011 National Census provides the most up to date information about AONB residents.

The AONB population is generally older, with fewer ethnic minority groups than the rest of the county. The population has more white-collar and professional workers than the county as a whole, with higher owner-occupancy and car ownership per household. A higher percentage of people are self-employed, probably resulting in more home-working and indicative of an increasing knowledge-based economy within the AONB.

The ease of access to main urban areas, particularly Greater London, and the attractiveness of the villages and countryside places great demand on most parts of the AONB as a place to live and work and

from which to commute. House prices are high and the percentage increase has been higher than the regional average.



Community orchard meeting

There is a lack of affordable or rented housing within or adjacent to the AONB particularly for young people and families, and people on lower incomes (including public sector workers and those employed in the land-based industries). This creates 'hidden households' where young adults continue to live with parents rather than establishing themselves independently.

Incomes are higher than the regional average and are around the average for people living in a protected landscape.

Not surprisingly, the percentage of people employed in land-based economic activities is double that for the county as a whole, although this figure is a small part of the overall AONB workforce (3.8%). However AONB residents from other industry sectors are in similar proportion to the county as a whole; hotels and restaurants are important employers in the Kent Downs AONB.

The Kent Rural Delivery Framework evidence base describes Kent's rural communities as active and entrepreneurial; they are a considerable asset which can be harnessed to secure the future of the AONB. Against this background of apparent higher living standards, 3% of the work force is unemployed compared to 4% for Kent. Rural poverty and exclusion is regarded as a hidden but real issue in a number of communities particularly for isolated elderly people, people with disabilities, migrant workers and some young families. While lower than the regional average the Index of Multiple Deprivation is higher than for other South East Protected Landscapes. Added to this, there are five wards on or immediately adjacent to the AONB boundary with high social and economic needs.

The importance of traditional land-based economic activities to the AONB's rural income is small and declining. However, a number of other employment sectors and industries (such as transportation, distribution, tourism and retail) depend on land-based activities and landscape to some extent. The diversification of the employment base in a way which supports the landscape character and special characteristics of the AONB needs to be encouraged and developed. The community heritage knowledge which resides with older generations of residents is a valuable resource for the celebration of the landscape and community vibrancy.

Some of the challenges for communities of the Kent Downs are to maintain balance and diversity given limited housing availability and high house prices, an ageing population and sometimes difficult access to services. The provision of affordable local needs housing which is of sensitive design and location is a high priority identified by Action with Communities in Rural Kent (ACRK) through their community engagement.

Evidence from the Kent Downs Partnership and other Protected Landscapes shows that to be 'thriving and vibrant' communities need good access to services, social and community links, places to meet and interact, places for recreation and work, links beyond the immediate community, access to jobs, good digital connectivity and community activities and engagement. Rural deprivation issues also require close attention and support. In the context of a protected landscape these community needs should be met in ways which support the character, qualities and characteristics of the landscape. Indeed landscape and environmental conservation and design can be a good focus for community development.



Local fruit cookery demonstration

#### ◆ **Community and parish planning**

There has been long running support for community and parish planning in the Kent Downs AONB. Community engagement in understanding the built and cultural heritage can be important to community identity and activity.

There are a variety of community planning approaches including Village Design Statements, Parish Plans; neighbourhood planning (given weight under the Localism Act), and Conservation Plans.

Community responses to climate change have been piloted in Elham and St Margaret's at Cliffe in the Kent Low Carbon Communities project. The lessons from these projects are useful to develop and widen community and parish planning initiatives so that they include ecological footprint measures and enhanced sustainability.

#### ◆ **Community services and enterprises**

There has been long run concern about the decline in community and village services such as village shops, post offices, churches and pubs. Consequently the loss of such assets can trigger the creation of community run enterprises which in themselves are a community development catalyst and can be a vehicle to support a sustainable local economy which supports landscape character.

#### ◆ **Volunteering**

Already there is a strong voluntary ethic in the Kent Downs; Parish Councils, conservation volunteers, tree and river wardens, footpath volunteers, walks leaders, religious groups, village and community enterprises all rely on voluntary efforts and often this supports landscape conservation and the enhancement of communities.

#### ◆ **Our neighbours**

The Kent Downs AONB is in a unique position of being so close to major urban and growth areas and London. There are over one million people living within one kilometre of the Kent Downs AONB boundary; many are areas of high social and economic need. The AONB offers a place for recreation, health and well-being to these communities, but the relationship needs to be carefully developed so that all benefit and landscape qualities are not compromised.

#### ◆ **Sustainable rural leisure and tourism**

Sustainable rural leisure and tourism has been identified as a key way to supporting the socio-economic well-being of rural areas. Providing jobs and supporting community services, sustainable rural tourism of itself can be a catalyst for community development. Sustainable tourism can be defined as "tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, and the environment and host communities." Making Tourism More Sustainable – A Guide for Policy Makers, UNEP World Tourism Organization, 2005.

An AONB Unit visitor survey confirmed that the main motivations for visiting the Kent Downs are its beauty and tranquillity, whilst the main activity is walking. Its main strengths were identified as its walking and cycling opportunities and its proximity to other popular attractions in Kent. In spite of its strengths, the development of some carefully selected new products and services were identified that could enhance the appeal of the Kent Downs, in particular improved public transport linking railway stations, attractions and accommodation, and improving the food product.

Making tourism and recreation more sustainable is not just about controlling and managing the negative impacts. Tourism and recreation are in a special position to benefit local communities economically and socially, and to raise awareness and support for environmental conservation.

In recognising the importance of sustainable rural tourism, the Kent Downs AONB Unit has taken the lead on the Our Land Project, a national tourism project for Protected Landscapes. Our Land aims to provide a commercial advantage to businesses which recognise, celebrate, conserve and enhance the AONB.

***Local people are central to the conservation of the Kent Downs.***

## 11.3 Vibrant communities - main issues, opportunities and threats

### ◆ Social exclusion, deprivation and access to services

- a. A number of areas and wards around and within the AONB have high levels of social deprivation. Rural poverty and social exclusion can be 'hidden' and is an issue for some elderly people, ethnic minority groups, migrant workers, people with disabilities and those on low incomes.
- b. Retaining and improving access to, and provision of, local services and facilities including super-fast broadband, post offices, village shops, public houses and garages.
- c. Community facilities, such as schools, libraries, social care and doctors surgeries, are unevenly available and accessible.
- d. Rapidly changing and lack of consistency in support structures for community development in rural areas.

### ◆ The availability of affordable housing

- e. Housing prices have continued to rise, in some parts, well above and faster than the national average.
- f. Considerable demand for affordable housing in many parishes in the AONB.

### ◆ Maintaining and diversifying the employment base

- g. Decline in farming and forestry employment, although both industries are still important economically in terms of maintaining Kent Downs character.

- h. Skills gap for some local employers, such as locally based skilled forestry contractors and business marketing.

### ◆ Sense of community and belonging

- i. The need to attach people to place and landscape heritage where an increasing proportion of the population are not directly involved in landscape management.
- j. The need to improve community recognition and value of the special characteristics of the AONB to secure its future conservation and enhancement.
- k. The need for support to achieve greater local capacity and involvement in decisions affecting the AONB.

### ◆ Sustainable leisure and tourism

- l. There is an important opportunity to sustainably increase the numbers and income from visitors to benefit local people, local services and support the AONB landscape.
- m. Some areas within the AONB suffer either from over capacity or over use, leading to a detrimental impact on both the landscape and host communities.



Cycling along the Chalk and Channel Way between Dover and Folkestone

## 11.4 Vibrant communities - aims

A landscape in which:

1. Thriving, vibrant communities understand, recognise and value the special qualities of the AONB and play an active role in its conservation and enhancement while reducing their environmental impact.
2. A strong and sustainable rural economy supports the special characteristics and qualities of the AONB and is supported by residents and visitors, who value and use sustainable local produce and services.
3. There is well designed, sustainable and affordable housing, particularly for workers employed in the land-based economy and conservation of the AONB's landscape, social and economic vitality.
4. Accessible, affordable local services and facilities are available and are well-used throughout the AONB.
5. The high quality environment and landscape of the AONB is seen as an asset to local businesses, which in turn contribute to the conservation of the landscape through the use of local sustainable goods and labour.
6. The area is recognised by both local communities and visitors as a premier sustainable tourism destination.
7. The environmental impact of AONB communities is stabilised and reduced.

## 11.5 Vibrant communities - policies

The Sustainable Development section (3) identifies guiding and recurrent themes for the management of the Kent Downs AONB. These themes and the Management Plan policy responses should be considered before referring to specific policies set out below.

- VC1 Community and business initiatives that improve the recognition, engagement in and conservation of the AONB and encourage community life will be pursued.
- VC2 Positive and sustainable links between the AONB (landscape, communities and partnership) and nearby communities, particularly from excluded groups and from neighbouring deprived areas will be pursued.
- VC3 Initiatives which are in line with existing policies of the Local Planning Authority that increase and improve the supply of affordable housing for (i) those with proven local needs, and (ii) workers whose activities directly contribute to the purposes of the AONB designation, will be supported where it is demonstrated that the proposals are of high quality design, limited quantity and scale and are built to the best current environmental standards.
- VC4 The retention and development of local services, facilities and employment opportunities in order to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the Kent Downs AONB or reduce the need to travel by car and maintain viable rural communities will be supported.
- VC5 Skills training and business development assistance will be encouraged where they contribute to the viability of communities and meet the purposes of the AONB.
- VC6 The development of sustainable visitor and tourism facilities will be pursued where they enhance people's enjoyment and understanding of the AONB without detracting from the special characteristics and qualities.
- VC7 Tourism and leisure businesses in the AONB will be encouraged to adopt the principles of sustainable tourism and to demonstrate their commitment to sustainability through achieving nationally recognised green accreditation and/or becoming part of the Our Land project.
- VC8 Local communities will be encouraged to prepare and promote Village Design Statements, Parish Plans and Neighbourhood Plans as appropriate to assist in the conservation and enhancement of local distinctiveness as settlements evolve. These documents should address development requiring planning permission, automatically permitted development, and change outside the scope of the planning system.

## 12. Access, enjoyment and understanding

### Our vision

In 2034... the Kent Downs AONB is a place of natural beauty with opportunity and access for all people; they feel welcome to participate in quiet recreation for health, relaxation, enjoyment and for cultural and artistic expression.

Improved management ensures that the Public Rights of Way and much of the highway network is safe, quiet and convenient for walkers, cyclists and horse riders and public transport is an attractive option to reach and enjoy the landscape. Maintenance of the Public Rights of Way and highway network is sympathetic to biodiversity and landscape character.

### 12.1 Overview

The Kent Downs AONB offers some of south east England's most captivating and accessible countryside. The AONB has a resident population of over 93,000 people, however a further one million live within one kilometre of the boundary. Beyond this, up to eight million people live within an hour, including populations in northeast France.

The AONB has a Public Rights of Way network which is four times the density of the national average. The Kent Downs accommodates 40% of Kent's bridleways and 50% of Kent's byways on 23% of the county land area.

The AONB is crossed by or adjacent to four motorways, many trunk and 'A' roads, and hundreds of smaller roads. It is served by five railway lines with 27 railway stations and numerous bus routes and services. The Port of Dover, the UK's busiest ferry terminal, as well as the Channel Tunnel terminal are both immediately adjacent to the AONB. Ashford and Ebbsfleet International stations are in easy reach.

While there is often concern about the impact of recreation, carefully managed access to attractive countryside, particularly walking, cycling and horse riding can bring physical and mental health benefits, enable people to enjoy a great landscape, reconnect with nature and provide support to the local economy.



Children helping to plant new cherry trees



Sculptural interpretation - the Pilgrim



Walking across Ranscombe Farm



Interpretation panel

John Miller

### ◆ Managing access in the Kent Downs

Under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act (2000), a Countryside Access Forum for Kent has been established. The role of the Forum is to advise on the improvement of public access to land within Kent for the purpose of open-air recreation and enjoyment. The Kent Countryside Access Forum (KCAF) also responds to Government consultations, contributes to the Kent Countryside Access Improvement Plan and steers and monitors access and recreation policy in Kent. The Kent Countryside Access Forum has provided formal advice to the Joint Advisory Committee during the preparation of this revised Management Plan – this includes a focus on the access benefits of woodland and farmland, the impact of horses in the AONB, dogs in the AONB, country motor sports in the AONB and the importance of improving off road access in the AONB. An overriding issue is the importance of maintenance of Public Rights of Way – good maintenance is seen as a basic requirement which overcomes many other perceived problems.

### ◆ The Kent and Medway Countryside Access Improvement Plans

Under the CRoW Act, Highway Authorities have a duty to develop a Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP). Known in Kent as the Countryside Access Improvement Plan (CAIP) and in Medway as the Medway Rights of Way Improvement Plan. Kent's ROWIP was adopted as county policy in February 2008. Its revision was completed in 2013. Medway's ROWIP was adopted in 2011.

These plans must assess the extent to which local rights of way meet the present and likely future needs of the public for exercise and leisure. It must also assess the accessibility of Public Rights of Way to blind or partially-sighted people and others with mobility problems. The AONB Management Plan supports and adds value to the CAIP and where appropriate seeks a special focus for action within the AONB.

### ◆ Open access land

Under the CRoW Act around 0.6% of Kent and Medway has been mapped for open access and the majority of this is chalk downland, along with registered common land and parkland within the AONB. 46% of open access land in Kent is within the Kent Downs AONB.

Open access land is managed by Kent County Council as the Access Authority. Additionally the Forestry Commission had dedicated its land for open access. In many cases access land was already available through time limited agreements. However where large tracts of land have been mapped, for instance around Dover, there are significant access opportunities.

### ◆ Coastal access

The Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009 places a duty on Natural England to improve access to the English coast through the creation of a continuous long-distance walking route, the 'England Coast Path', effectively a new National Trail around England's open coast. The new path will provide a Coastal Access Margin on the seaward side of the new path, similar to open access land, potentially providing significantly more access than the path itself.



Horse riders

## 12.2 Access, enjoyment and understanding - special characteristics and qualities

### ◆ Visitors to the Kent Downs

Limited visitor information is available for the AONB as a whole. Visit Kent estimates a total number of visitors to the most favoured rural areas for tourism as nearly 19 million a year – the Kent Downs AONB is a key rural tourism destination. The expenditure incurred by visitors is estimated at £955m, sustaining over 20,000 jobs. Visit Kent has also researched the motivations for visiting Kent and found - 47.8% of visitors were motivated by Attractive Countryside (second only to Historic Aspects / Heritage) other key features of the Kent Downs include; country pubs - 36.7% of visitors (ranked 4<sup>th</sup>), walking - 32.3% of visitors (ranked 5<sup>th</sup>), local produce - 17.4% of visitors (ranked 14<sup>th</sup>). Source Visit Kent Rural Fact Sheet 2011.

### ◆ Road users

The rural road network of the Kent Downs is often of ancient origin and an important part of the special character and qualities of the landscape. While the general growth in Kent road traffic has recently abated the Kent Travel Report 2011 (KCC) shows traffic growth continues on main roads in the Kent Downs. The roads of the Kent Downs provide well used north south links through the county and are also used as an important way to access the landscape. Greater reliance on the car is partly thought to be because people perceive roads to be dangerous to walk or cycle. The KCC road safety (2012) campaign states that rural roads account for 2/3 of road fatalities, which are focused on roads to and from urban areas. Consultation responses to the Management Plan have consistently raised the issue of the impact of heavy lorries on the small roads of the Kent Downs.

### ◆ Walking

The density of Public Rights of Way in the Kent Downs is four times higher than the national average. This is an invaluable asset and enables access to and enjoyment of virtually all parts of the AONB and can provide good links between the Downs and local towns and villages. The use of footpaths in the AONB is unevenly distributed with much greater usage in the west and around 'honey pot' attractions.

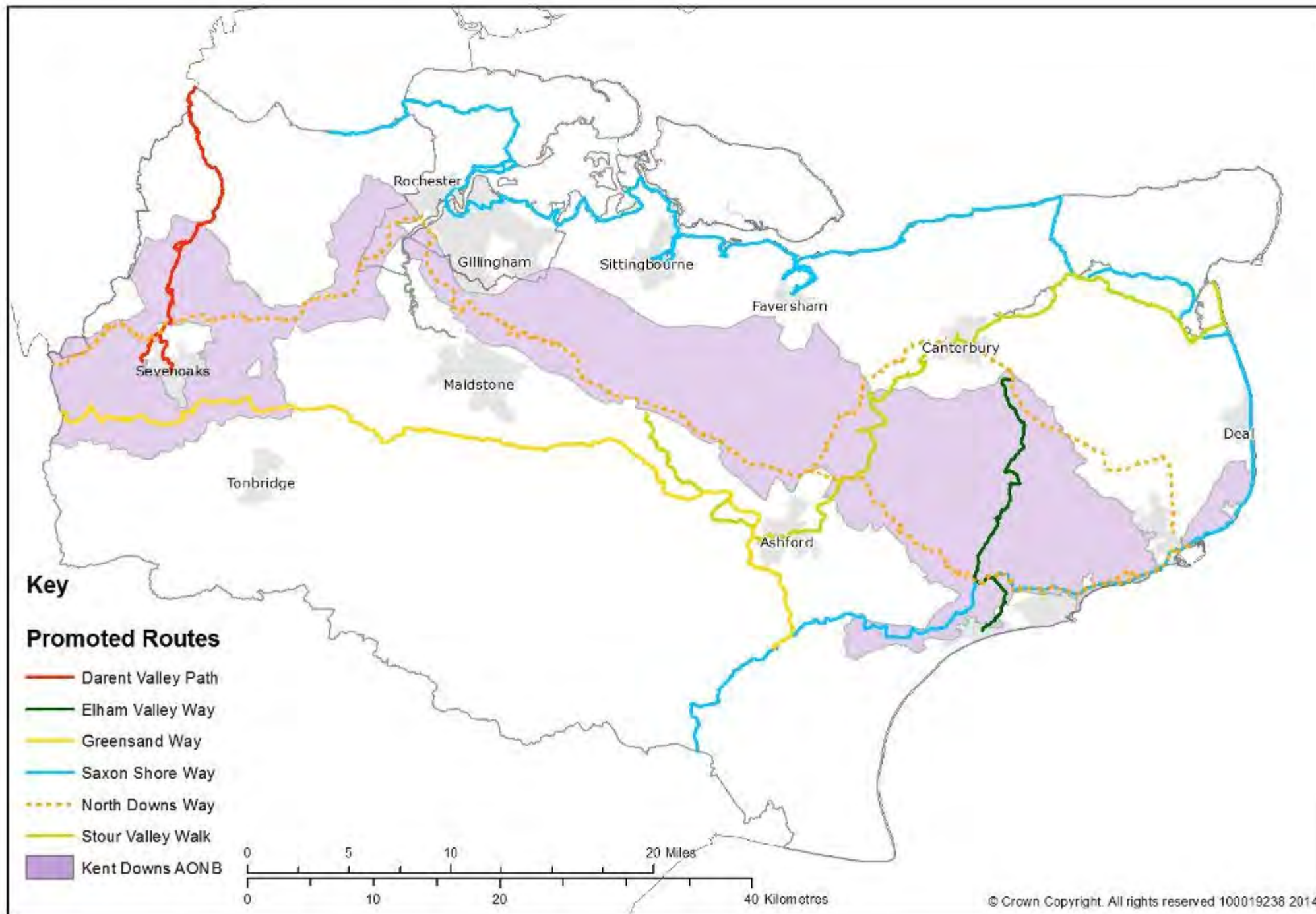
The Kent Countryside Access Forum cites that between 50% and 90% of walks in the countryside are accompanied by dogs. There are many benefits to walking with dogs, including and particularly for health and well-being. The KCAF has noted also the potential negative impacts such as chasing stock, damaging crops, lack of control. The KCAF is leading on promoting sensible access with dogs to the countryside.

Of national importance is the North Downs Way National Trail which starts at Farnham in Surrey and follows the North Downs through Surrey and Kent to Dover with a loop via Canterbury. Of the 153 mile trail, 70 miles lie within the AONB. Research by the North Downs Way National Trail Team shows an estimated 250,000 visitors use the trail each year between May and October. National Trails are promoted as long distance routes, although user surveys show that the majority of use on the North Downs Way tends to be for shorter walks. The opportunity to upgrade appropriate sections of the North Downs Way to include cyclists and horse riders is being considered and is supported. Two regional routes, the Saxon Shore Way and Greensand Way also pass through the Kent Downs, and there are a number of county recreational routes.

Table 12 - Public Rights of Way in the Kent Downs

Footpath	1,424,352
Bridleway	291,502
Restricted Byway	39,642
Byway Open to all Traffic (m)	118,222
Unknown (m)	85
Grand Total (m)	1,873,802
<i>Kent County Council 2013</i>	

Figure 16 - Long distance walking routes in Kent



### ◆ Cycling

Cycling is increasingly popular and can be a sustainable means of transport and recreation and is generally a quiet activity with low impact on the countryside. Opportunities for off-road cycling in the AONB have been developed by Sustrans. Sections of two National Cycle Routes and two regional routes pass through the AONB and the Pilgrims Cycle Trail, from Rochester to Canterbury, provides an arterial route through the Kent Downs. There are also a number of locally promoted on and off road cycle routes. Dedicated cycling routes are proposed as an effective and low impact link between the Kent Downs and nearby urban and growth areas.

### ◆ Horse riding and driving

Although the network is limited, 40% of Kent's bridleways are in the AONB, making the Kent Downs a significant area for horse riding. The latest information estimates 100,000 riders in Kent, 50,000 regular riders, and horse numbers between 30 and 40,000 (Land Use Consultants/KCC). Evidence from the British Horse Society (BHS) and the Public Rights of Way teams (from maintenance spend) indicates that the increasing use of bridleways is damaging the route

fabric. The BHS in Kent estimates a population of 90 horses per kilometre of bridleway, creating significant pressure on the network. Horse riding, driving and equine events provide important opportunities for access, exercise, health and well-being and can provide access opportunities for those with disabilities.

Horse riding, like cycling and walking is increasingly difficult and dangerous on rural roads because of the volume and speed of traffic and the bridleway network in Kent is limited.

Other opportunities for informal countryside recreation are generally provided on the many open access sites, picnic sites and facilities across the AONB. These include 12 Country Parks and picnic sites, 44 Village Greens (44.9ha) and 48 areas of Registered Common Land (442.7ha). Access for informal recreation is also available at a number of National Trust properties concentrated on the Greensand Ridge south of Sevenoaks, parts of the White Cliffs Heritage Coast, Forestry Commission-owned woodland and sites owned and managed by Kent Wildlife Trust and the Woodland Trust.



Breakfast in the orchard event

### ◆ Organised events

The last decade has seen strong growth in organised events for a range of outdoor activities including cycling sportives on-road and trail (cross-country), running, duathlons, triathlons, sponsored walks, orienteering and geocaching. Events are led by a range of organisations including charitable bodies, sports clubs, and increasingly local events companies specialising in running and cycling events, such as Nice Work based in East Sussex which operate several events in and around Kent. Local running clubs are also active in this area, such as Istead and Ifield Harriers (North Downs Run) and Centurion Running (North Downs 50 and 100).

### ◆ Field sports

The Kent Downs landscape lends itself to pheasant shooting and hunting with extensive areas of woodland and tree cover and arable and mixed farm use. It is estimated that game bird shooting generates at least £10 million per annum for the local economy and is one of the most economically important uses for Kent Downs woodlands. However, conflicts arise because of overstocking with pheasants; woodland management for game birds; the impact of the stocked bird populations on wild plant and animal communities and the landscape impact of game bird cover crops. A collaborative project with the Game Conservancy Trust has produced best practice guidance for game bird management in the Kent Downs.

Fishing is also popular although the Kent Downs offers limited scope for coarse and freshwater fishing, such as along the river and gravel pits of the Great Stour valley. Sea fishing is also popular off parts of the Heritage Coast, such as St Margaret's Bay and Samphire Hoe where national competitions are held.

### ◆ Country motor sports

Country motor sports are growing in popularity and are of special relevance in the AONB as the Kent Downs (23% of Kent's land area) accommodates 53% of the byways. Activities include events on public roads such as car tours, treasure hunts and road rallies along with greenlaning and trail riding on byways. While responsible users promote good practice and respect for others, the use of byways and unmetalled roads by 4x4 vehicles and motorbikes, although legal, can lead to conflicts with other users because of disturbance, safety issues and damage to the Rights of Way surface. There remains illegal use of footpaths and bridleways by motorised vehicles, and

the use of byways to access the wider landscape. These and other recreational activities can negatively affect the tranquillity of the AONB which is a much valued component of natural beauty.

### ◆ Access for people with restricted mobility and socially excluded groups

Greater recognition of the needs of socially excluded groups, and legislation including the Disability Discrimination Acts 1995 and 2005, are leading to enhanced efforts to meet the needs of all, including people with disabilities, on low incomes or without access to private transport.

Research from the Kent Countryside Access Improvement Plan has shown that 18% of people with a disability never visit the natural environment, compared with 8% of the non-disabled population. Research found that disabled people visited the countryside to enjoy views, the landscape and to relax and they perceived the countryside as inherently rewarding and beneficial to the same degree as the wider population, especially for the psychological benefits. In addition, accessing the natural environment gave people with disabilities a sense of continuity between their disabled and non-disabled selves, and a sense of achievement.



Access for all at Samphire Hoe

For people with mobility restrictions there are a growing number of promoted routes and sites and user groups are taking active and welcome steps to support wider access for all.

◆ **Health and well-being**

There is compelling evidence for the health and well-being benefits of contact with nature and access to the countryside. With a rapidly increasing urban population in Kent and London there is a special focus on the role of the Kent Downs landscape in providing these significant multiple benefits.

◆ **Education and children**

Over the next 20 years, today’s children will become tomorrow’s decision makers. If we are to secure a future for this precious landscape, we should actively encourage understanding and education for young people. The close proximity of substantial urban areas to the Kent Downs AONB offers a special opportunity to promote exciting and engaging activities for schools and families. The disconnection between children and the natural environment has been described as ‘Nature Deficit Disorder’ and its consequences and



Children learning how honey is made

the opportunities to address it have been documented in a National Trust report.

There are many opportunities to reconnect children with nature, link education activities to the national curriculum and to strengthen the understanding, enjoyment and celebration of the AONB landscape.

◆ **Information and interpretation**

At the heart of enjoyable countryside recreation is high quality information that helps visitors plan their use of the Kent Downs, and increases the understanding and satisfaction of their experience. Information is currently available in a variety of forms but tends not to be coordinated.

No specific AONB visitor centres exist, although many of the existing centres do provide information about the Kent Downs.

There is also an extensive system of countryside management partnerships covering the AONB; they are site-based with volunteer wardens employed by local authorities and conservation charities. Much of their work remains uncoordinated across the AONB.



Printed leaflets

## 12.3 Access, enjoyment and understanding - main issues, opportunities and threats

- a. Estimated day visitor numbers are high and probably increasing. Pressure on the special characteristics and qualities of the AONB as well as particular countryside routes, sites and areas can be very high but unevenly distributed.
- b. Urban and growth areas in close proximity to the AONB will generate new opportunities for enjoyment, health and well-being but also pressure for travel and access.
- c. The Countryside Access Improvement Plan provides opportunities to focus on the AONB, given the special access pressures and the landscapes national importance.
- d. There is a need to identify how the CRow Act open access sites can bring wider benefits and links to education and information provision.
- e. Differences in requirements and uses between rightful PRow users (horse riders, cyclists, motorbikes, 4x4s and walkers, those with dogs) can result in conflicts.
- f. Conflicts between rightful PRow users and illegal users, fly-tipping, dumping and path obstruction.
- g. The increasing popularity of horse riding and off road cycling which is focused particularly on the AONB, putting pressure on the rights of way network. The need to enhance, extend, connect and improve fragmented bridleway links and secure higher rights on PRow without harming the characteristics and qualities of the AONB.
- h. Special needs groups who experience barriers to enjoying the landscape require special attention and support.
- i. Need to ensure that the PRow network is well signposted, way-marked and maintained using materials and equipment appropriate in design and sustainably sourced.
- j. Improving the rural road network for its landscape quality and to promote quiet countryside recreation by managing traffic pressures to provide quiet and safe access.
- k. Need to increase and enhance people's understanding of and access to the AONB, its landscape and countryside practices and to provide coordinated information in a number of formats appropriate to their setting.
- l. Need to maximise coastal access opportunities through the newly defined Coast Path National Trail and support the enhanced management of the coastal corridor.
- m. Need to promote exciting and engaging education and interpretation schemes for children and young people.
- n. The opportunity to promote the availability and use of safe non-car based countryside transport and recreation opportunities and seek integrated public transport initiatives.



Footpath towards St Margaret's Bay

Sarah Loftus

## 12.4 Access, enjoyment and understanding - aims

A landscape that provides:

1. Sustainable opportunities and facilities to enable everyone to safely enjoy and understand the AONB countryside without detracting from it.
2. A legally defined, well maintained, connected and promoted Rights of Way network that provides safe, well designed and satisfying routes for walkers, cyclists and horse riders where conflicts between rightful uses are minimised.
3. New routes and connections between public rights of way and a highway network which is increasingly available and safe for walkers, cyclists and horse riders.
4. Access where illegal or damaging recreational activities are actively controlled.
5. Special places, events, media and appropriate support available throughout the year for people of all ages and backgrounds to learn about their environment, enjoy the AONB landscape, know they are there and celebrate its diversity and richness.
6. Innovative and stimulating opportunities for all people to be involved artistically and culturally and to exercise and improve their health and well-being, in tranquil and inspiring surroundings.



Interpretive car park sign at Perry Wood



Volunteers at work

## 12.5 Access, enjoyment and understanding - policies

The Sustainable Development section (3) identifies guiding and recurrent themes for the management of the Kent Downs AONB. These themes and the Management Plan policy responses should be considered before referring to specific policies set out below.

- AEU1 Coordinated information and interpretation for recreation, access, education, and health and well-being across the AONB which is accurate, well presented and appropriate to its setting, readily available in a variety of formats and fosters a greater understanding and respect for the AONB will be pursued.
- AEU2 Diversions and stopping up of PRoWs will be resisted unless it can be demonstrated that they will not have a detrimental impact on opportunities for access and quiet enjoyment of the AONB landscape and historic character.
- AEU3 Investment to secure sustainable, high quality, low impact and easy access, multiuser routes from towns and growth areas to the AONB will be pursued.
- AEU4 The sustainable and enhanced management and promotion of open access sites will be pursued.
- AEU5 Mechanisms will be supported to resolve conflicts between rightful users of Public Rights of Way. Where there are irreconcilable conflicts from legal but damaging activities, quiet recreation will be supported above other activities.
- AEU6 Robust mechanisms to resist and overcome illegal use and poor maintenance which harm the opportunity to explore and enjoy the AONB will be pursued where design is in accordance with the Landscape Design Handbook.
- AEU7 Improvements to the Rights of Way Network to provide and improve countryside access, health and well-being opportunities, including way-marking, signposting and maintenance, new routes and establishment of higher rights which conforms with AONB policies and design guidance, will be supported.
- AEU8 High standards of landscape and recreational management, accessible visitor facilities, access opportunities and increased opportunities for learning and health enhancement through a coordinated programme of training, events, guided walks and gateway routes and sites will be supported.
- AEU9 Initiatives for children, schools and youth groups which encourage interest in and learning about the AONB and reconnection with nature will be pursued.
- AEU10 Support will be given to the North Downs Way and England Coast Path National Trails as the main promoted route in the Kent Downs.
- AEU11 A reduction in the need to travel by car will be supported through new and improved measures to provide integrated, attractive and affordable public transport in the Kent Downs. New business, community and other initiatives in support of the vision, aims and policies of the Management Plan will seek to relate to existing public transport links.
- AEU12 Sustainable solutions to problems of rural traffic will be supported, particularly in rural settlements or where there is a conflict with landscape quality or walkers, cyclists and horse riders.
- AEU13 A strategic approach to the use of road signage, furniture, design and maintenance that conserves and enhances the local character and distinctiveness and encourages non-motorised access will be pursued through the adoption and implementation of the AONB Rural Streets and Lanes Design Handbook.
- AEU 14 Proposals which detract from the amenity and enjoyment of users of the Public Rights of Way network will be resisted.

## 13. Implementation, monitoring and review

### 13.1 Implementation

The vision, aims and policies of this Management Plan need to be translated into action. This revision is, if anything, more ambitious than previous plans, seeking wider positive impacts and greater collaboration to achieve the purposes of the AONB. Actions to protect, conserve and enhance the Kent Downs AONB are agreed once the Management Plan has been adopted by the Local Authorities.

The Action Plan defines what is required to achieve the vision, aims and policies of the plan. Actions have a timescale, targets and lead partner. Our ambition shall be to develop greater ownership of the actions by all of those with an interest or responsibility for the AONB.

In addition the Joint Advisory Committee is calling on all partners and stakeholders, particularly those with a Duty of Regard for the AONB, to incorporate the vision, aims and policies of the Management Plan into their work programmes.

### 13.2 The Kent Downs AONB design and land management guidance

The Kent Downs AONB Partnership has developed a series of design guides. The purpose of these is to provide practical, readily accessible design guidance to assist in the implementation of the Management Plan and contribute to the conservation and enhancement of the special characteristic and qualities of the AONB and the distinctiveness of individual character areas.

The guidance draws from Landscape Character descriptions across the AONB.

The use of the Kent Downs AONB Design Guidance is supported in overarching policies of the Management Plan and several Local Authorities have adopted the guidance as supplementary planning guidance.

- The Kent Downs AONB Landscape Design Handbook.
- The Kent Downs AONB Rural Streets and Lanes: A Design Handbook.
- The Kent Downs Farmsteads Design Guide.
- Managing Land for Horses – a guide to good practice in the Kent Downs AONB.

- Kent Downs AONB Land Management Pack (a web based resource).
- Kent Downs AONB Farm Diversification Tool Kit (a web based resource).
- A Buildings and Settlement Design Guide is planned.



Wye Downs escarpment

### 13.3 Resourcing and monitoring the Management Plan

This Management Plan is necessarily ambitious and its achievement requires a variety of resources including new funding and the time and commitment of partners and stakeholders. The Kent Downs AONB Unit has a limited amount of financial and staff resources at its disposal, with which it will enable, facilitate, support and coordinate action as well as leading where necessary. We shall need to seek that others, particularly partner organisations, allocate resources to achieve the aims of the plan.

Part of the work of the Unit and Partnership shall be to position the Kent Downs AONB so that national and international resources are available to achieve the objectives of the Plan.

There are a range of other resources, including staff time, commitment, expertise, advice and equipment which will play a valuable role in achieving the aims of the Management Plan. However, probably the most important resource is commitment.

A huge amount can be achieved by cooperation and collaboration between various specialist staff and individuals across the AONB, who pool resources and collaborate to achieve the visions and policies of the Management Plan.

It is an ambition that the Partnership monitors the condition of the AONB. This plays an important role in identifying key issues and trends. The condition monitoring process also aims to contribute to an understanding of whether the policies and actions are achieving the aims and vision of the management plan. A set of proposed headline monitoring indicators were set when the first AONB plan was adopted and these have been re-examined as part of the review process. The Countryside Agency and now Natural England has been working to establish an agreed national set of indicators for the Protected Landscapes. Allied to this the Kent Downs AONB has begun to establish a monitoring programme which will inform the delivery of this plan and future reviews.



Fixed point photography

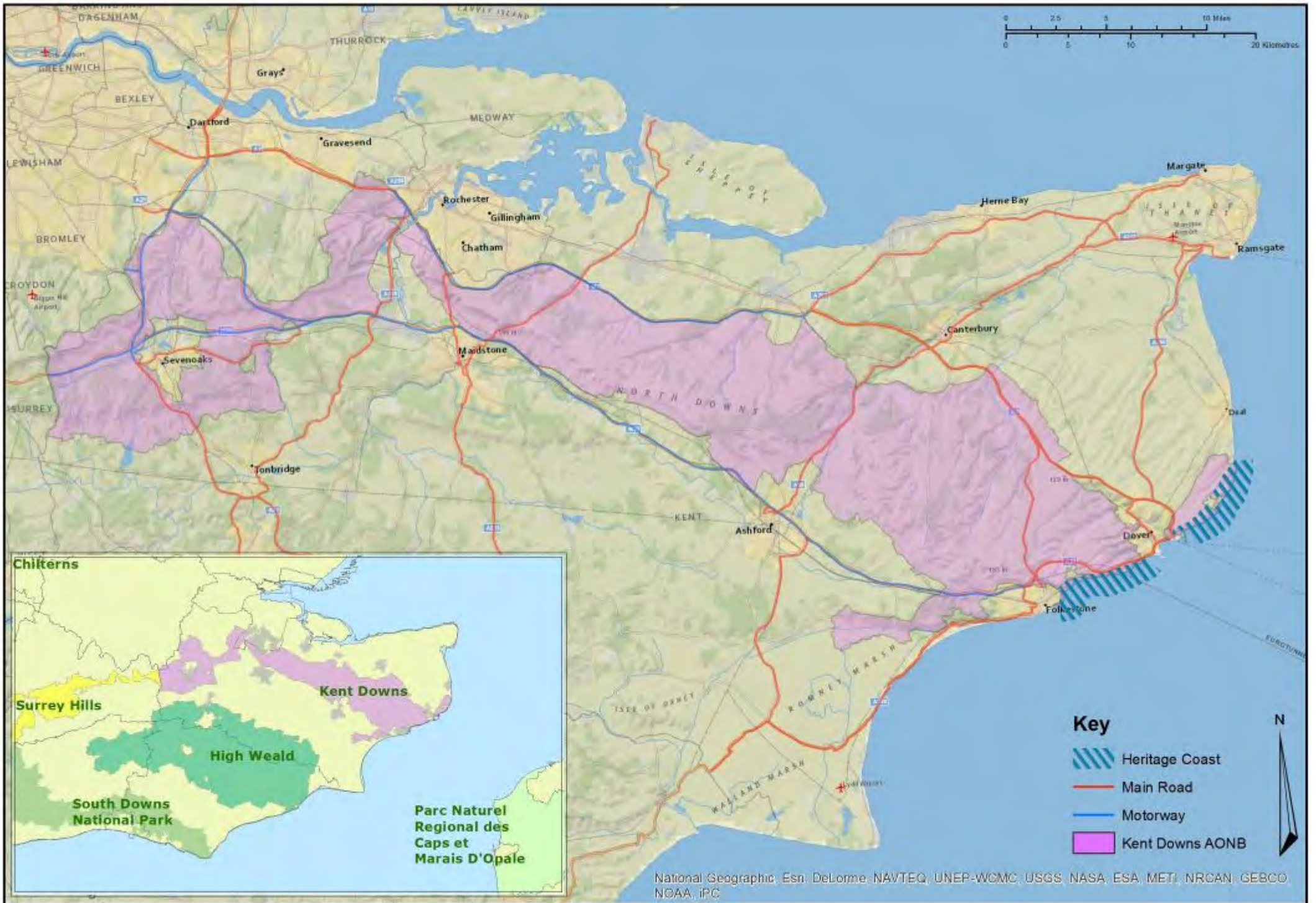
Table 13 - Headline monitoring indicators

Principal Indicator	Special quality	Source	Frequency of review	Availability	Justification
<b>1. Fixed Point Photography</b>	Landscape	AONB Team	Biennial rolling programme	In house (could contract out) each Spring	Best single source of landscape monitoring, tailor-made to the AONB and under the Team's control. Important to bed it within a rational wider framework, in this case LCA, rather than based on preconceptions and culturally-loaded ideas of 'good views'.
<b>2. Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) monitoring</b>	Landscape	AONB Team / Local authorities Partnership	5 yearly, to coincide with Management Plan review	In house	Methodology is already defined by Local authorities who are about to commence monitoring of LCAs. Represents an excellent wider context of change within which to interpret the fixed point photography.
<b>3. Agricultural Census</b>	Landscape	DEFRA	Annual	On-line, usually after Christmas	Data is cut to the AONB boundary by DEFRA from individual farm business returns. This is a ready-made data set and the best for gaining an overall picture of land use change in the absence of a farm survey.
<b>4. Regionally Important Geological Sites (RIGS) condition database</b>	Geology and Natural Resources	Kent RIGS	Annual	On request, irregular frequency due to cost and funding	Generally ignored in other work on indicators, but a good way to monitor geology, at least in terms of visibility and accessibility of rock exposures. There are seven RIGS in the AONB.
<b>5. Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) condition</b>	Biodiversity	Natural England	Annual	On-line, published each Spring	There are 39 SSSIs within the AONB, all of which are now monitored annually for condition (though not necessarily field surveyed each year). These are the best protected areas, so changes elsewhere can be assumed to be magnified. Further biodiversity information on specific species is available (at a cost) from the KMBRC.
<b>6. Scheduled Monuments (SMs)</b>	Historic and built environment	Kent County Council Heritage	Annual	On request from English Heritage	There are 104 SMs in the AONB which cover built structures and ground features. English Heritage maintains the most up-to-date records of any condition surveys undertaken. Further information on non-scheduled ancient sites is held by the county Services.
<b>7. Listed Buildings &amp; Buildings at Risk (BAR) Register</b>	Historic and built environment	BAR Register, Local authorities, English Heritage	Annual	On-line; LA Planning Depts.	The BAR Register effectively contains a representative sample of the range of built interest at risk in the AONB and can be monitored for improvements. Local authorities keep up-to-date information on listed buildings which can be compared with the benchmark for these data already contained in the current Management Plan.
<b>8. Best Value Performance Indicators (BVPI)</b>	Quiet enjoyment	AONB Team	5% Annual Target	In house or contract out, May to November	Follows the methodology established by the Institute of Public Rights of Way Officers (IPRWO) to determine the current condition of the rights of way network used for quiet enjoyment. A prescriptive set of indicators can be modified to meet specific needs or applied directly to afford comparison with LA areas.
<b>9. Visitor surveys</b>	Quiet enjoyment	AONB Team / Local authorities Partnership	5 yearly	In house / Annual report	Devising a standard questionnaire is an initial cost, but will provide customised and replicable data on visitors. Financial data relating to car-parking in the Annual Report can be considered as a surrogate for the minimum visitor numbers to the AONB.

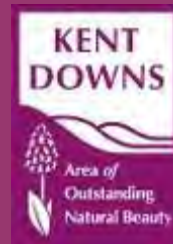
## Annex 1 - Abbreviations

ACRK	Action with Communities in Rural Kent	Km	kilometre
AONB	Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty	KRCC	Kent Rural Community Councils
BHS	British Horse Society	KWT	Kent Wildlife Trust
BOA	Biodiversity Opportunity Area	LA	Local Authority
BSE	Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy	LAF	Local Access Forum
CaBA	Catchment Based Approach	LBB	London Borough of Bromley
CAP	Common Agricultural Policy	LEP	Local Enterprise Partnership
CAIP	Countryside Access Improvement Plan	LNP	Local Nature Partnership
CLA	Country Landowner and Business Association	LNR	Local Nature Reserve
CLG	Communities and Local Government (Department of)	LTP	Local Transport Plan
CMS	Countryside Management Services	LWS	Local Wildlife Site
CPRE	Campaign to Protect Rural England	M	Million
CRoW Act	Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000	MCZ	Marine Conservation Zone
DC	District Council (also includes Borough Councils)	MoD	Ministry of Defence
DEFRA	Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs	NAAONB	National Association of AONBs
EA	Environment Agency	NatRECS	National Route Evaluation and Classification System
EH	English Heritage	NCA	National Character Area
ELC	European Landscape Convention	NDW	North Downs Way
ELS	Entry Level Stewardship	NE	Natural England
ESS	Environmental Stewardship Scheme	NFU	National Farmers Union
ER	Environment Report	NNR	National Nature Reserve
ERDF	European Regional Development Fund (Interreg)	NPPF	National Planning Policy Framework
ET	Eurotunnel	NT	National Trust
EU	European Union	PCs	Parish Councils
FC	Forestry Commission	PRoW	Public Rights of Way
GIS	Geographical Information System	RDPE	Rural Development Programme for England
Ha	hectare	RIG	Regionally Important Geological/Geomorphological Site
HA	Highways Agency	ROWIP	Rights of Way Improvement Plan
HLF	Heritage Lottery Fund	RSPB	Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
HLS	Higher Level Stewardship	SAC	Special Area for Conservation
ICT	Information and communication technology	SAM	Scheduled Ancient Monument
JAC	Joint Advisory Committee	SSSI	Site of Special Scientific Interest
KDAONB	Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty	WFD	Water Framework Directive
KAPC	Kent Association of Parish Councils	WHS	World Heritage Site
KCC	Kent County Council		

# Map of the Kent Downs AONB







**Kent Downs AONB Unit  
West Barn, Penstock Hall Farm  
Canterbury Road  
East Brabourne  
Ashford  
Kent  
TN25 5LL**

**01303 815170**

**[www.kentdowns.org.uk](http://www.kentdowns.org.uk)  
on Twitter - @kentdownsaonb**