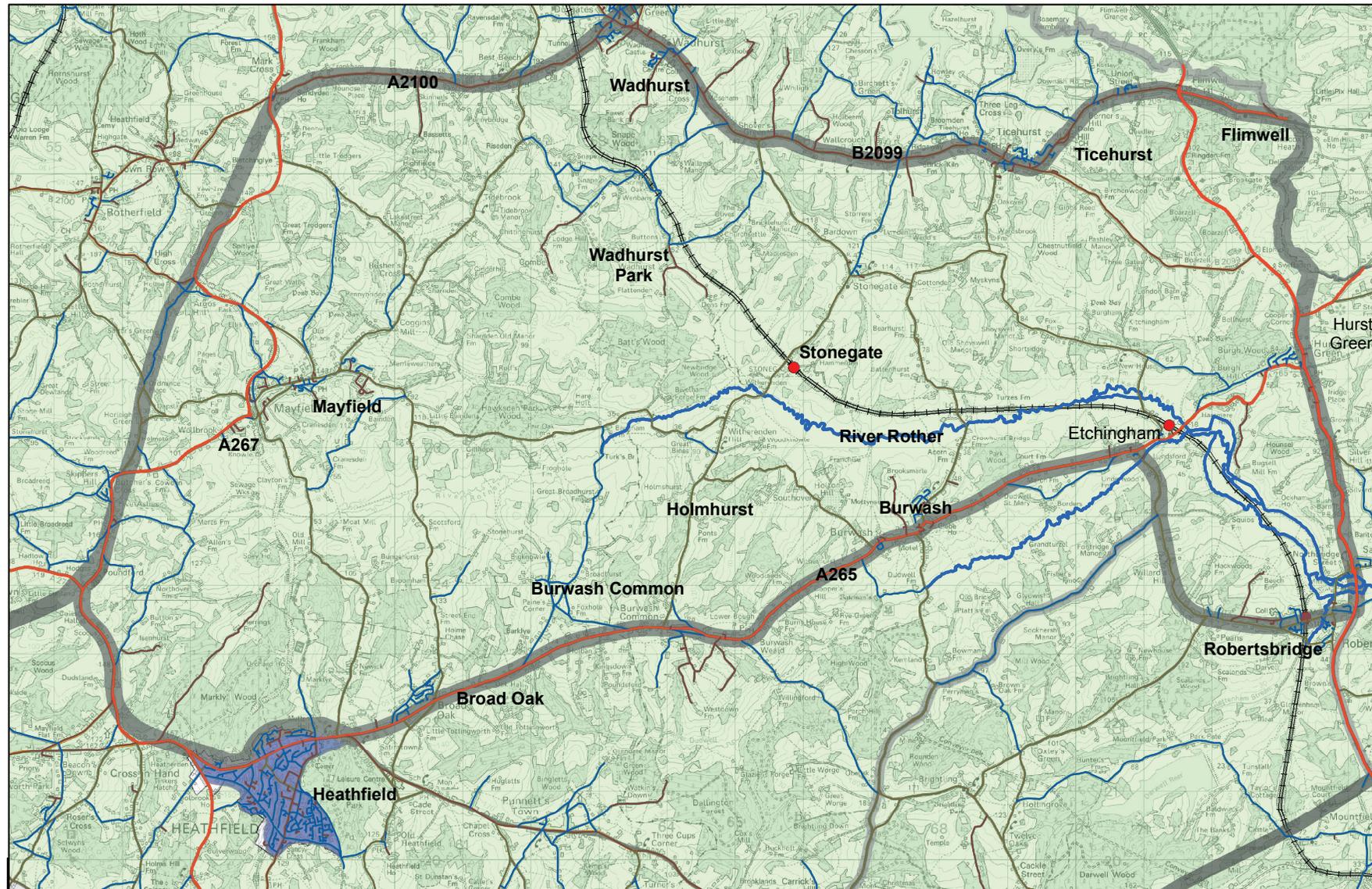


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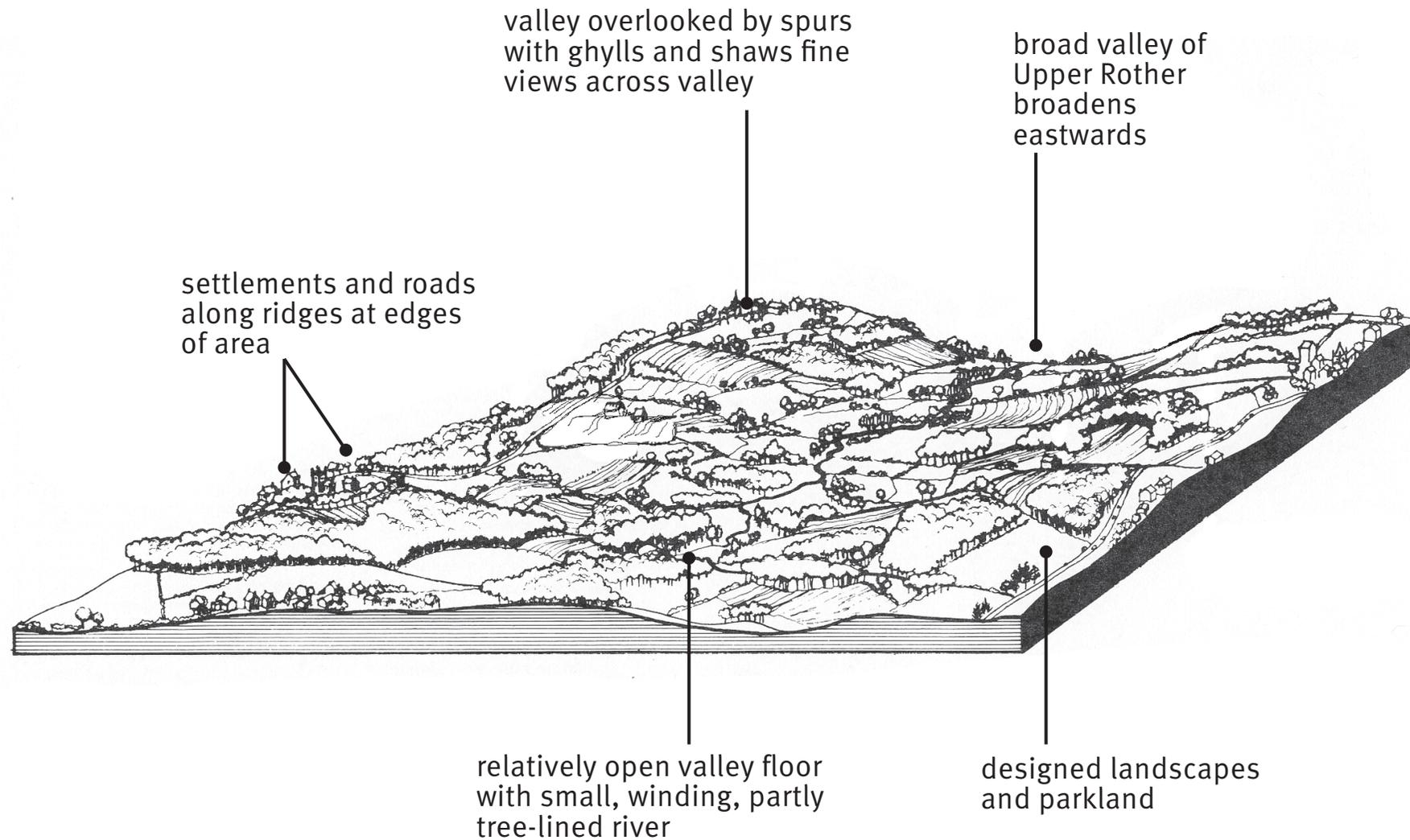


6 Upper Rother Valley Landscape Character Area

High Weald AONB

0 0.5 1 2 3 4 Kilometers

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A Landscape Description

Key Landscape characteristics

- The larger settlements on high ground of Mayfield in the west, Wadhurst and Ticehurst in the north, Hurst Green in the east and Burwash to the south.
- Mayfield, Robertsbridge and Wadhurst are nucleated villages which have grown around a historic core.
- Other settlements have grown as ribbon developments strung along the main roads which follow the ridges on the boundaries of the area.
- The village of Robertsbridge on lower ground adjacent to the river was vulnerable to flooding until recent major flood protection measures were constructed.
- The broad valley of the River Rother dominates the landscape and is overlooked by bold ridges and spurs.
- Stunning views across the valley from the enclosing ridges, some of the finest views in the High Weald.
- The upper half of the largest valley system in the High Weald and the catchment and source of the western river Rother.
- Rolling, richly wooded landscape centred on the flat main valley which broadens in the east.

- Relatively open valley floor with small, winding, partly tree-lined river.
- Large intensively grazed or cropped fields on the lower valley slopes and patterns of smaller medieval fields on the steeper slopes.
- The Rother regularly floods turning the whole valley bottom into a huge sheet of water.
- A strong pattern of linear ghyll woods as well as many larger woods on the valley slopes.
- Extensive areas of remote countryside and exceptional remoteness especially in the valleys and larger woods.
- The villages have great character and variety often with landmark churches and other historic buildings.
- ‘Picturesque’ farms and cottages and scattered historic farmsteads which are a key characteristic of the High Weald.
- Many of the woods are ancient semi-natural woodland with extensive areas replanted with chestnut coppice mixed with conifers.
- Characteristic tree species are of chestnut, larches and pines on the sandy soils of the Ashdown beds.
- Oak, hornbeam and ash predominate in the larger woodlands with hazel understorey.
- Ancient coppice stools of chestnut and hornbeam which have not been managed for many years.
- Other characteristic species are field maple, wild cherry and alder and willow in the river and stream valleys.
- Many scattered farm ponds and larger hammer ponds as relics of the iron industry which thrived in this area e.g. Wadhurst Park Lake and Lakedown trout lake at Holmhurst Manor.

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- A close network of winding, sunken lanes with scattered settlements and individual dwellings often strung out along them.
- Traditional building materials for the area are red brick, often laid as Flemish bond with blued brick ends, red tiled roofs and tile hung upper stories are typical.
- Oak timber framed and sandstone houses reflect the abundance of locally sourced timber and quarried stone.
- There are no main roads crossing the area but the A265 forms the southern boundary and the A267 and A21 cross the west and east edges respectively.
- The Hastings to Tunbridge Wells railway follows the valley from Robertsbridge to Wadhurst.

Cultural Interests

The area was the centre of the Wealden iron industry which thrived due to the abundance of available timber and water and good transport routes to the sea.

This is reflected in local place names and the many forges and mills. Many of the fine houses and large estates in the area also grew from the wealth generated by the industry. The fine houses which line the streets of the larger villages date from the time of the iron industry boom.

In the 18th century the area was known for smuggling of wool, silk and brandy particularly around the village of Mayfield. This was facilitated by good road access to the coastal ports of Hastings and Rye. The remote and wooded character of the area provided hiding places for smugglers and their contraband.

The main toll road from Heathfield to Burwash, now the A265 was a notorious haunt for highwaymen.

Before the Beeching cuts Mayfield was served by the railway from Eastbourne to London, the track was used as the line for the village by pass which was constructed in the early 1990s.

There are many historic buildings scattered across the area and some of the more notable ones are Abbots House (1250) which is the only remaining part of Robertsbridge Abbey. Haremere Hall at Etchingham dates to the early 1600s.

The area has attracted many famous and wealthy residents probably due to the relative remoteness and beauty of the area and ease of access to London. Wadhurst Park is home to the Tetra Pac businessman Hans Rausing and his large collections of rare deer. Holmhurst Manor has been home to Roger Daltry of the Who since the 1970s. Robert Smith, lead singer of the Cure, lives in Burwash and Jeff Beck the guitarist lives in Wadhurst.

Other notable residents were the cricketer Albert Relf (1874-1937) who was born in Burwash. Andrew Young the writer and poet was vicar of Stonegate from 1941-1959.

Robertsbridge is known for the production of cricket bats founded by Gray-Nicholls in 1876 and using locally sourced willow wood.

HMS Etchingham was named after the village as all of the 93 minesweepers built between 1954 and '59 of the *ham* class which were designed for the shallow waters around our coasts were named after places ending in *ham*.

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Table 1 Key positive Landscape Attributes

- The broad valley of the River Rother dominates the landscape and is overlooked by bold ridges and spurs.
 - Stunning views across the valley from the enclosing ridges, some of the finest views in the High Weald.
 - The upper half of the largest valley system in the High Weald and the catchment and source of the western river Rother.
 - Relatively open valley floor with small, winding, partly tree-lined river.
 - Extensive areas of remote countryside and exceptional remoteness especially in the valleys and larger woods.
 - The villages have great character and variety often with landmark churches and other historic buildings.
 - 'Picturesque' farms and cottages and scattered historic farmsteads which are a key characteristic of the High Weald.
 - A strong pattern of linear ghyll woods as well as many larger woods on the valley slopes.
 - Many of the woods are ancient semi-natural woodland with ancient coppice stools of chestnut and hornbeam.
 - Many scattered farm ponds and larger hammer ponds as relics of the iron industry which thrived in this area e.g. Wadhurst Park Lake and Lakedown trout lake at Holmhurst Manor.
- A close network of winding, sunken lanes with scattered settlements and individual dwellings often strung out along them.
 - Traditional building materials for the area are red brick, often laid as Flemish bond with blued brick ends, red tiled roofs and tile hung upper stories are typical.
 - Oak timber framed and sandstone houses reflect the abundance of locally sourced timber and quarried stone.

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B Landscape Evaluation

Table 2 Current Condition

This is a largely unspoilt and tranquil rural landscape with few intrusive features. The landscape is in generally good condition and well managed as farmland with a strong historic structure. The lack of main roads and large settlements in the heart of the area means that it retains a relative remoteness. Agricultural change and diversification has led to some fragmentation of farm steads. There is evidence of creeping suburbanisation around the villages and on country estates which detracts from local distinctiveness. As with most of the wealden landscape the historic field patterns of small fields and significant hedgerows remain intact, apart from in the wider more fertile river valleys where farming is more intensive. Woodlands have been affected by lack of traditional coppice management, rhododendron invasion and coniferisation.

Forces for Change impacting on positive attributes

Past / Current forces for change

- Ribbon development and modern housing developments on the Heathfield to Burwash ridge.
- Creeping suburbanisation and cumulative changes in the rural landscape, roads and villages which are not in sympathy with local distinctiveness or vernacular architecture.
- Development pressures in the larger villages.
- Erosion of public rights of way where users avoid the muddy areas making tracks increasingly wider.
- Agricultural diversification to hobby farms and horsiculture.
- Changes in the types and frequency of grazing animals in the countryside impacts on character as they are a characteristic feature. Lack of grazing can give an unmanaged appearance to the landscape and reduce the biodiversity value.
- Loss of unimproved species rich pastures and hay meadows.
- The positive land management initiatives associated with the High Weald AONB.
- Areas of large scale intensive arable farming with loss of hedge structure, especially on the wider valley floors.

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- Farm Environment Plans, many farms are under Entry Level Stewardship including extensive areas in the Rother Valley to the east of Mayfield and south of Wadhurst including Wadhurst Park and Holmhurst Farm. Some farms are farmed organically, notably Clayton Farm south of Mayfield.
 - Intrusive modern farm buildings.
 - Loss of riverside trees due to agriculture and flood management engineering works.
 - Coniferisation of larger woods.
 - Loss of traditional coppicing in woodlands and increase in game shooting.
 - Woodland Grant schemes are scattered across the area, notably Hawksden Park and Newbridge woods, reversing the trend of poor woodland management.
 - Increasing traffic on the main roads which cross the north and south of the area and rat running on rural lanes.
- Future Forces for Change**
- The need to provide local housing in the villages, especially the larger service centres.
 - The associated infrastructure required for new development such as waste water treatment works.
- Traffic and rat running on narrow rural roads. Erosion of the edges of sunken lanes by increasingly larger agricultural and other vehicles.
 - Demands for traffic calming and road improvements which could introduce increasing urban clutter to rural roads, villages and lanes.
 - Continued agricultural change due to changing markets, economic pressures and response to climate change.
 - The spread of small agricultural holdings, hobby farming, paddocks, farm shops and allotments for local food production.
 - Pressure for locating renewable energy facilities for solar, wind and bio energy.
 - Pests and diseases of trees which could impact significantly on the mature tree stock. E.g. phytophthora of alder and Ash dieback.
 - Failure to control invasive species of plants and animals in water courses, such as New Zealand Pigmy Weed (*Crassula helmsii*), Parrots Feather (*Myriophyllum aquaticum*), Mink and European Marsh Frog (*Pelophylax ridibundus*). All of these impact on the native flora and fauna which are characteristic of the area.
 - Water quality in the River Rother catchment.

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Table 3 Potential Impacts of Climate Change

- Potential changes in woodland / tree species composition and accelerated growth of species such as birch and rhododendron.
- Changes in ground flora which produce distinctive seasonal displays.
- Increased prevalence of pests and diseases due to warmer weather e.g. Phytophthora of Alder.
- Changes in precipitation and temperatures will change the types of crops that farmers grow.
- More frequent and serious flood events in the valley bottoms.
- Potential impact on the viability of grazing sheep, dairy and beef.
- Increased temperatures and a decline in precipitation levels may dry out wetland habitats and ponds and alter stream flows.
- Changes in water levels in ditches, ponds and streams

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C Vision and Strategy

Table 4 Vision

A remote, tranquil and predominately rural landscape of rolling typical high wealden countryside. Secluded valleys with ghyll woodlands and winding natural river channels. A landscape with a scattered settlement pattern of historic farmsteads and a strong pattern of woods, trees and hedges. The character of existing settlements retained and new development controlled with the highest quality vernacular design and spatial planning.

As noted in the current Landscape Character Guidance – A Landscape Strategy identifies *“what change if any is desirable for any landscape character area as a whole?”*

Landscape change and adaptation to meet the strategy requires:

1. Planning for the enhancement of the Rother, Brede and Tillingham Woods Biodiversity Opportunity Area (BOA). This aims to restore wetlands in the River Rother floodzone. The focus in the upper tributary valleys is woodland management through the Rother Woods Project.
2. Protection and management of existing wetland habitats and planning for restoration of ditches, riverside vegetation and tree cover to restore habitat linkages and continuity.
3. Protection and enhancement of the remote qualities of the river valleys.
4. Planning for the creation of multifunctional green infrastructure to maximise the opportunities for biodiversity and recreation offered by the rural lanes, rights of way network and extensive woodland.
5. Consider the potential to plan for recreational access in this character area identifying areas where public access can be encouraged whilst protecting other areas where wildlife conservation is the priority.
6. Integrate proposed and existing development into the landscape through planting of tree features and woodland to define the town and village boundaries with the countryside.
7. Ensure that the design and layout of new developments respect the character and form of the landscape and existing settlements.
8. Control the spread of suburbanisation by minimising clutter of signage and other urban features in lanes and villages.
9. Conserve the setting of historic buildings and landscape features.
10. Protect and enhance historic designed landscapes and features of archaeological significance.
11. Consider appropriate species for new plantings to maintain landscape character and biodiversity having regard to adaptation to climate change influences.
12. Restore and strengthen tree and woodland structure, encouraging woodland grant and farm conservation schemes and positive woodland management.
13. Encourage screening of farm groups as a component of these schemes.

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D Guidelines for Managing Change

Development considerations for housing and other development

Proposals within the High Weald AONB need to have regard for the current High Weald Management Plan:

<http://www.highweald.org/downloads/publications/high-weald-aonb-management-plan-documents/1141-high-weald-management-plan-3rd-edition-2014-2019.html>.

The main pressures for development in this character area will be to accommodate housing for the populations in the rural settlements of Mayfield, Wadhurst and Burwash. There will inevitably be a demand for local housing in the smaller villages.

Tourism is an important source of income to this area and there is likely to be increasing demand for accommodation in hotels, bed and breakfast, caravan and camp sites. The modern trend for luxury and exotic camping (glamping) is already appearing in the guise of teepees, tree houses and the like. There will be demand for new facilities and to improve or expand existing, some of these putting pressure on ancient woodland. Any new development should respect the key positive attributes in the landscape outlined in Table 1 above.

Proposed development should consider opportunities for proactively meeting the Landscape Change Strategy aims for this Landscape Character Area as set out in 1-13 above.

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Table 5

Current issues offering opportunities for protection and enhancement	Landscape Management Guidelines	Benefits delivered by Ecosystem Services for each area of interest
<p>Countryside and Farmland Farm environment plans relating to much of the farm land including organic farming.</p> <p>Pressure for farm diversification and development of hobby farms, solar arrays, wind farms, waste recycling operations etc.</p> <p>Expansion of camping and caravan sites as well as other holiday related development such as ‘Glamping’.</p> <p>Land falling out of positive management and dereliction of farm buildings.</p> <p>Loss of hedgerows and other traditional field boundaries.</p> <p>Loss of traditional orchards, pasture and species rich meadows.</p> <p>Localised flooding of farmland in the river valleys and floodplains.</p> <p>Low water levels and poor water quality in some rivers and streams.</p> <p>Deterioration of by ways and lanes due to erosion of un-surfaced routes by horses, bikes and 4 wheel drives.</p> <p>Damage to verges on narrow country lanes caused by increasing size of farm vehicles and passing traffic.</p> <p>Overstocking and arable production on some soils can result in soil erosion and reduce soil quality.</p>	<p>Countryside and Farmland Encourage establishment of more farm conservation schemes to conserve the landscape structure of hedges, shaws, ponds and streams.</p> <p>Conserve hedges, trees and ghyll woods. Maintain the mixed farmed character of the area.</p> <p>Protect and manage historic field patterns and conserve boundary features.</p> <p>Use tree and woodland planting to screen intrusive farm buildings and caravan sites.</p> <p>Plan for and manage changes which may occur in the landscape due to changes in farm management brought about by economic influences and climate change.</p> <p>Address existing flooding issues of farmland and properties through flood management and by identifying areas which can provide flood alleviation.</p> <p>Enhance the biodiversity value of wet meadows, drainage and stream channels.</p> <p>Conserve and enhance byways and rural lanes.</p> <p>Reduce the risk and incidence of soil erosion by encouraging the restoration of arable land to pasture.</p> <p>Apply best land management practices to prevent soil and fertiliser run off, thereby protecting surface and ground water.</p>	<p>Provisioning services Water availability Food production</p> <p>Regulating services (water purification, air quality maintenance and climate regulation) Water quality and protected aquifers. Regulating water flow and preventing flooding Soil conservation and erosion control Habitat and species resilience to climate change Carbon sequestration. Areas of peat in the river valleys, hedges, trees, reed beds and grassland regulate air quality by absorbing and retaining CO₂.</p> <p>Cultural Services Sense of Place and local distinctiveness. Source of Inspiration Sense of History Tranquillity Biodiversity</p>

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Current issues offering opportunities for protection and enhancement	Landscape Management Guidelines	Benefits delivered by Ecosystem Services for each area of interest
<p>Trees and Woodland Ancient woodland and tree belts are not in positive management.</p> <p>Ghyll woodlands are not in positive management and are difficult to manage due to the steep and inaccessible nature of these woods.</p> <p>Traditional management has stopped as it is not commercially viable e.g. pollarding of stream side willows.</p> <p>Tree diseases.</p> <p>Ancient parkland trees dying off and not being replaced.</p> <p>Extensive areas of woodland are already in woodland grant schemes.</p> <p>Pressure for glamping sites in woodland.</p> <p>Invasive species competing with native flora and fauna e.g. Spanish Bluebell, Himalayan balsam, Japanese knotweed, rhododendron.</p>	<p>Trees and Woodland Actively manage trees and woodland through coppicing, pollarding of willows and replanting to create a diverse age structure.</p> <p>Plant new small woods, wet woodland and tree belts to strengthen the landscape character and where this is appropriate habitat creation.</p> <p>Consider the need to adapt to changes enforced by climate change, such as specific tree diseases and possible adaptation in species selection.</p> <p>Replant parkland and individual hedgerow trees.</p> <p>Plant trees and woodland to contain existing and new built development.</p> <p>Encourage planting of trees along streams and ditches where appropriate for the habitat.</p>	<p>Provisioning Fuel (woodfuel for local communities from woodland management)</p> <p>Regulating Carbon sequestration, woodland absorbs and holds CO₂. Habitat and species resilience to climate change</p> <p>Cultural Tranquillity Sense of Place and local distinctiveness Cultural heritage (traditional woodland management) Biodiversity</p>

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Current issues offering opportunities for protection and enhancement	Landscape Management Guidelines	Benefits delivered by Ecosystem Services for each area of interest
<p>Other Key Habitats Deterioration and loss of habitats :</p> <p>Water Loss of river and streamside vegetation. Deterioration of water quality in streams, ditches and ponds Invasive species of plants and animals which compete with native flora and fauna.</p> <p>Wet Meadows Financial and viable farming constraints affecting the continued management of wet meadows reducing the biodiversity value. Agricultural improvement to Grassland and meadows reducing species richness. Loss of wetland meadows to arable farming.</p>	<p>Other Key Habitats Encourage management of river and stream channels, especially conservation of riverside trees and vegetation. Conservation and re-creation of wet meadow/ pasture habitats. Agri-environment schemes to maximise biodiversity and encourage the retention of grazing. Opportunities to maximise reed bed creation. Encourage measures to improve water quality. Continue schemes to encourage farmers to minimise the use of chemicals and fertilizers.</p>	<p>Provisioning Nature’s larder of free berries and herbs. Conservation of insect pollinators for pollination of crops.</p> <p>Regulating Habitat and species resilience to climate change</p> <p>Cultural Appreciation of nature Educational value Biodiversity</p>

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Current issues offering opportunities for protection and enhancement	Landscape Management Guidelines	Benefits delivered by Ecosystem Services for each area of interest
<p>Recreation, Green Infrastructure (GI) and ANGS Pressure on bridleways and byways as multi use, including cycling and 4 wheel drives increasing erosion.</p> <p>Lack of funding to manage and enhance GI for improved access.</p> <p>Need for better recreational linkages and improved sustainable transport corridors.</p> <p>Extensive footpath and bridleway network</p> <p>Need for improved access to natural green space for all users both close to homes and in the wider countryside.</p> <p>Gentrification</p> <p>Loss of tranquillity due to more cars and access.</p>	<p>Recreation, Green Infrastructure and ANGS Where appropriate develop Green Infrastructure Strategies based on a county wide GI mapping.</p> <p>Plan for and manage recreational pressure on the countryside which could be affected by the increase in population as well as the seasonal holiday makers.</p> <p>Maximise opportunities for access away from sensitive habitats.</p> <p>Consider opportunities to create new green corridors and improve existing as safe ideally motorised traffic free recreational routes.</p> <p>Maximise opportunities for and manage water based recreational activities.</p> <p>Consider sensitive traffic management on rural lanes.</p>	<p>Provisioning Protected farmland.</p> <p>Regulating Habitat and species resilience to climate change Water quality and protected aquifers. Regulating water flow and preventing flooding Carbon sequestration</p> <p>Cultural Recreation Heritage assets and cultural heritage Inspirational Tranquility Biodiversity</p>

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Current issues offering opportunities for protection and enhancement	Landscape Management Guidelines	Benefits delivered by Ecosystem Services for each area of interest
<p>Horse Keeping ('horsiculture') and small holdings</p> <p>Deterioration of the character and quality of the landscape and loss of local distinctiveness.</p> <p>Loss of historic field pattern where fences replace hedges.</p> <p>Intensive grazing can cause soil erosion.</p>	<p>Horse Keeping ('horsiculture') and small holdings</p> <p>Enhance the condition of areas of horsiculture and small holdings through the restoration of an intact, well managed hedgerow or ditch network and retaining a diverse grass sward by preventing overgrazing.</p> <p>Encourage local food production and allotment provision in areas where this will not detract from local landscape character.</p>	<p>Provisioning</p> <p>Grazing</p> <p>Food production</p> <p>Regulating</p> <p>Habitat and species resilience to climate change</p> <p>Cultural</p> <p>Recreation</p> <p>Heritage assets</p> <p>Sense of Place and local distinctiveness</p> <p>Biodiversity</p>

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Current issues offering opportunities for protection and enhancement	Landscape Management Guidelines	Benefits delivered by Ecosystem Services for each area of interest
<p>The character of the villages</p> <p>Gentrification</p> <p>Urbanisation</p> <p>Development pressures</p> <p>Gradual loss and deterioration of heritage features.</p> <p>Fast traffic on rural lanes</p> <p>Visitor pressure and cars detracting from local character and distinctiveness of the area in general.</p>	<p>Protect and Enhance the character of the villages</p> <p>Encourage the production of Neighbourhood Plans which incorporate village design guides.</p> <p>Plan for new development in the villages to ensure it is designed to a high standard to reflect local character and sense of place.</p> <p>Establish defined development edges to villages with new tree planting.</p> <p>Prepare village design guides and tree conservation plans.</p> <p>Consider traffic management on rural lanes.</p>	<p>Provisioning</p> <p>Local amenities and facilities.</p> <p>Regulating</p> <p>Use of sustainable materials</p> <p>Habitat and species resilience to climate change</p> <p>Water quality and protected aquifers.</p> <p>Regulating water flow and preventing flooding</p> <p>Cultural</p> <p>Sense of Place and local distinctiveness</p> <p>Heritage assets</p> <p>Biodiversity</p>

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Current issues offering opportunities for protection and enhancement	Landscape Management Guidelines	Benefits delivered by Ecosystem Services for each area of interest
<p>Flood management and SUDS schemes?</p> <p>Flash floods and run off.</p> <p>Flooding of properties in low lying areas by river and ground water.</p>	<p>Flood management and SUDS schemes?</p> <p>Plan for flood management by conserving and enhancing the flood plains and managing water levels in ditches and drains.</p> <p>Encourage the design of sensitive flood defence schemes which conserve and enhance the landscape and habitats including river channel restoration schemes</p> <p>Conserve and enhance existing man made and natural drainage features.</p> <p>Maximise opportunities for the creation of SUDs schemes which contribute to local amenity and habitat creation.</p>	<p>Provisioning</p> <p>Water conservation</p> <p>Regulating</p> <p>Flood control</p> <p>Protection of aquifers</p> <p>Cultural</p> <p>Heritage assets</p> <p>Sense of Place and local distinctiveness</p> <p>Tranquillity</p> <p>Amenity and recreation</p> <p>Biodiversity</p>

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Glossary

(also refer to the full version in the County Landscape Assessment).

ANGS: Accessible Natural Green Space Natural England – Accessible Natural Greenspace Standard (ANGSt)

Assart: Field created from the clearance of woodland

Clunch Barn: constructed of a building material composed of hardened clay or chalk marl.

Ecosystem Services: The services provided by nature which support living systems and can be evaluated.

Enclosure: The separation of land from the common by fence or private use.

GI or Green Infrastructure: Multifunctional green areas which provide areas for recreation, wildlife, water supply catchment, flood relief, food or timber production.

Glamping: New types of camp sites with permanent tent features in yurts, teepees, vintage caravans, timber pods etc. Woodlands are popular locations for these.

Local Nature Reserve: Local Nature Reserve (or LNR) is a statutory designation made under Section 21 of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949, and amended by Schedule 11 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006, by principal local authorities.

Ramsar sites are wetlands of international importance for biodiversity designated under the Ramsar Convention.

SNCI or Local Site: a Site of Nature Conservation Importance.

SSSI: A national designation for Site of Special Scientific Interest, these may be of biodiversity or geological significance or both.