

EDEN VALLEY

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Flat, open, mixed farmland. Seasonally flooded and crossed by many small streams. Scarce settlement apart from historic farmsteads. Views and enclosure provided by the High Weald.

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

This area is coherent as a fluvial wetland - streams and wetland are apparent in many views - although there are detracting features such as unsympathetic highway and water management details, industrial-type farm buildings, senescent oaks and denuded hedgerows. Former infrequent settlement patterns have been superseded by some industrial development on the open land and there is now a confusion of landscape elements although the wetland, streams and ditches provide strong ecological corridors.

Sensitivity

There are infrequent farms and mills located adjacent to the wetland and streams. These are not a strong feature of the present landscape. The lack of dense riparian vegetation contributes to the loss of distinctiveness, although there is some intermittent vegetation and this does reduce the views. The landscape is noticeably flat within this small character area.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

Create a strong river corridor by the management of water levels and wetlands, and by the planting and management of riparian vegetation along water courses.
 Create wetland/riparian edges to existing industrial developments.
 Create appropriate and distinctive engineering details for water management systems, highways and bridges.
 Reinforce the historic elements such as the settlement pattern which adheres to the wetland edge, restricting development within the fluvial zone.

CONTEXT

Regional: Low Weald

Condition

good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE
moderate	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
poor	CREATE	RESTORE & CREATE	RESTORE
	low	moderate	high

Sensitivity

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition Moderate.

Pattern of elements: Coherent.
 Detracting features: Some.
 Visual Unity: Coherent.
 Cultural integrity: Poor.
 Ecological integrity: Coherent.
 Functional Integrity: Coherent.

Sensitivity Low.

Distinctiveness: Indistinct.
 Continuity: Historic.
 Sense of Place: Weak.
 Landform: Apparent.
 Extent of tree cover: Intermittent.
 Visibility: Moderate.

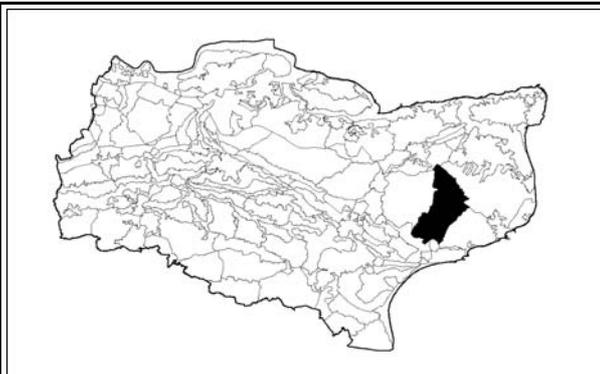
SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

CREATE AND REINFORCE.

Create a vegetated riparian corridor
 Create natural wetlands
 Ensure that appropriate and locally distinctive details are created in response to water management and highway design, bridges or other such necessary engineering works
 Reinforce the historic settlement pattern

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ELHAM: EAST KENT DOWNS



ELHAM

This area is transitional landscape between the remote, enclosed countryside east of the Stour Valley and the exposed, severe ridge and valleys between Folkestone and Dover. The Elham Valley carves its way through the centre of this area, in a wide attractive sweep, up to Barham and Patricbourne. To the west lies a heavily wooded plateau, where expanses of conifer plantations are interspersed with remnants of deciduous, ancient woodland, still concealing the ancient double banks, which once formed the boundary of Elham Park. This is one of the most densely wooded ridges of the AONB.

To the east, the landscape is predominantly large, intensively cultivated arable plateau. Woodlands are fewer and much smaller, frequently on the steep valley sides. Although there has been extensive loss of hedgerows, this area still has a high proportion of hedgerow trees and botanically rich hedges, usually near the village. The less exposed, northern slopes around Denton are still dotted with pockets of historic parkland and orchards, while the scattered dwellings and straight road at Swingfield Minnis and Rhodes Minnis are indications of former commons, now farmland.

EAST KENT DOWNS

Elham lies within the larger character area of the East Kent Downs.

This is a remote, peaceful area of downland, which ends in the dramatic white cliffs of Dover. Above the southern scarp, the broad back of the chalk hills is furrowed by a series of long narrow, parallel valleys running north east. In these dry valleys, the valley bottom streams or nailbournes are underground, only flowing at the surface occasionally, during very wet winters.

The western valley systems are branching and intricate. The steep, rounded slopes are crossed by thick shaws or overgrown hedges, often swathed in the white seed-heads of wild clematis. Large arable fields on the ridge-top plateau are visually contained by long strips of deciduous, ancient woodland along the valley sides or ridge-top conifer forests, west of Elham. Towards the coast, however, the landscape becomes more exposed. There is less woodland and the strongly linear pattern of parallel ridges and valleys is more distinct.

The countryside here is criss-crossed by a maze of tiny, sunken, one-track lanes. Houses are widely scattered and many villages, traditionally built of local flint, brick and tile, are still little more than a church, a manor and a pair of farm cottages - an important characteristic of this landscape. However, this area is best known, not for its beautiful dry valleys or remote churches, but for its long association with the defence of the realm. The "White Cliffs of Dover" and the widely scattered military remains, such as pill-boxes and gun-emplacements, still exert a strong cultural influence on the landscape.

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ELHAM: EAST KENT DOWNS

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

A transitional, large-scale landscape. Densely wooded ridges to the west with conifer plantations and ancient woodland. Intensively cultivated plateau to east with small woodlands on the valley sides. Hedgerow trees and scattered dwellings

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

This is a large-scale, coherent landscape with few visual detractors. Woodland cover is modified to include some large areas of conifer plantation and some woodland edges have been eroded adjacent to arable fields. Built form includes vernacular detail, e.g. flint churches, and recent farmsteads; it has a moderate positive impact. This is not generally a hedged landscape, although there are some areas where there are remnant hedges, some of them single species. Chalk grasslands, pasture and broadleaf woodland provide a moderate base for semi-natural habitats within the arable fields. This area is considered to be in good condition.

Sensitivity

The rolling downland is the dominant visual element. Views are intermittent between wooded areas. Visibility is therefore high. Narrow roads linking ridgeline farmsteads evoke the greatest time depth. Settlements, buildings and hedgerows are more historic in influence. Woodland areas are ancient but have a high proportion of recent plantation species.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

Conserve woodland areas and extend these to enhance woodland edges, shaws and to define arable fields and pastures. Conserve areas of broadleaf woodland and encourage the planting of broadleaf edges to new and existing plantation areas. Existing open grasslands should be conserved and managed in order to conserve a diversity of chalk grassland species. The potential of the area to support new diverse grassland sites should be explored. Conserve the isolation of farmsteads, resisting additional development. Encourage the continuation and development of vernacular building styles and materials. Conserve locally distinct buildings and their settings
Conserve open views.

CONTEXT

Regional: Kent Downs AONB

Condition

good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE
	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
moderate			
poor	CREATE	RESTORE & CREATE	RESTORE
	low	moderate	high

Sensitivity

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition

Good.

Pattern of elements:	Coherent.
Detracting features:	Few.
Visual Unity:	Unified.
Cultural integrity:	Variable.
Ecological integrity:	Moderate.
Functional Integrity:	Coherent.

Sensitivity

High.

Distinctiveness:	Characteristic.
Continuity:	Historic.
Sense of Place:	Moderate.
Landform:	Dominant.
Extent of tree cover:	Intermittent.
Visibility:	High.

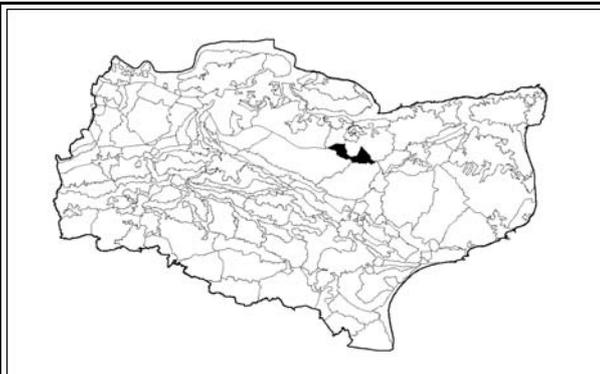
SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

CONSERVE.

Conserve broadleaf woodland
Encourage the planting of broadleaf edges to plantation areas
Conserve woodland edges which follow natural contours and define fields
Conserve the influence of vernacular building styles
Conserve and manage chalk grasslands
Conserve open views

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FAVERSHAM FRUIT BELT: MID KENT DOWNS



FAVERSHAM FRUIT BELT

The character of the fruit belt is strongly evident along the northern edge of the Downs in this area. There are frequent hop gardens and orchards here, sheltered from wind by lines of tall, regular alder or poplar trees, which create an unusual and highly distinctive landscape of small, square, outdoor 'rooms'. It is these distinctive landscapes that give Kent its reputation as the Garden of England. In contrast, the intensively cultivated arable fields which surround the orchards are rolling and open, with few hedges and only infrequent blocks of woodland. In the south an outcrop of acidic sandstone has given rise to the steep pine and bracken-clad slopes of Perry Hill, which stands out from the gently undulating farmland.

MID KENT DOWNS

The Faversham Fruit Belt lies within the larger character area of the Mid Kent Downs.

The long spine of the Kent Downs in this area from Chatham in the west to the Stour Valley in the east. Although there are local variations in the appearance of the landscape, there is a strong underlying pattern to the landform, which imparts an overall character to the region. Throughout the length of the chalk ridge a series of narrow, steep-sided dry valleys carve their way down the gentle northern dip-slope of the Downs to the flatter land of the North Kent Fruit Belt, around Sittingbourne and Faversham.

The historical poverty of this area resulted largely from the stiff clay-with-flints soils, which overlie the solid chalk. Despite their striking, rich-red colour, these soils are relatively poor and difficult to cultivate, especially as they occur on the exposed upper plateau of the Downs. Edward Hasted, writing in 1798, consistently describes the area in terms such as "an unpleasant dreary country, the soil of which is very poor, being chalky, and much covered with flint-stones". In his day the land was used widely for sheep grazing, interspersed by arable on the lower slopes and large blocks of woodland. Today appreciation of the landscape has changed and the remote, undeveloped ridges and valleys, which resulted from the historical poverty of the soils, are considered one of the most beautiful features of the AONB. Although mechanised farming over the last hundred years has seen an increase in the area of arable land, much of the original ancient woodland survives, walling in the arable plateau and enclosing the rounded, valley bottoms

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FAVERSHAM FRUIT BELT: MID KENT DOWNS

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Gentle slopes and undulating farmland.
Hop gardens, orchards and tall shelterbelts.
Rolling, open arable fields, little woodland.
Pine-clad feature of Perry Hill.

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

This is an intensive arable and fruit-growing area on gently undulating land, which reflects the structure of a formerly important fruit-farming landscape. It retains a rural and managed appearance, but is losing structure and scale as the emphasis on fruit disappears. Flint churches and large oast complexes are distinguishing features but the effect of these features is becoming diminished by the visibility of the urban edge. The networks of managed hedgerows and shelterbelts are decreasing and therefore the opportunity for ecological interest is currently slight.

Sensitivity

Distinguishing features are comparatively recent, such as alder and poplar shelterbelts and large farmsteads. Although settlement patterns and highways are historic in location, the time-depth element of the landscape has become weak. Tree cover is generally sparse, and visibility is moderate in the undulating landscape.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

Create a network of small woodlands to enclose existing land parcels and to create a basis of natural habitats.
Create an urban edge using the new woodland network and regenerated shelterbelts - also extended to highways leading from the urban edge.
Create edges to highways.
Create pockets of enclosed farming landscape (fruit stock or diversified land use) with shelterbelts and review the trend towards arable cultivation, containing the effects of this within small-scale fruit growing or wooded corridors.
Remove gappy and redundant hedgerows.

CONTEXT

Regional: Kent Downs AONB

Condition

good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE
	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
moderate			
poor	<u>CREATE</u>	RESTORE & CREATE	RESTORE
	low	moderate	high

Sensitivity

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition Poor.

Pattern of elements:	Coherent.
Detracting features:	Some.
Visual Unity:	Coherent.
Cultural integrity:	Variable.
Ecological integrity:	Weak.
Functional Integrity:	Weak.

Sensitivity Low.

Distinctiveness:	Characteristic.
Continuity:	Recent.
Sense of Place:	Weak.
Landform:	Insignificant.
Extent of tree cover:	Open.
Visibility:	Moderate.

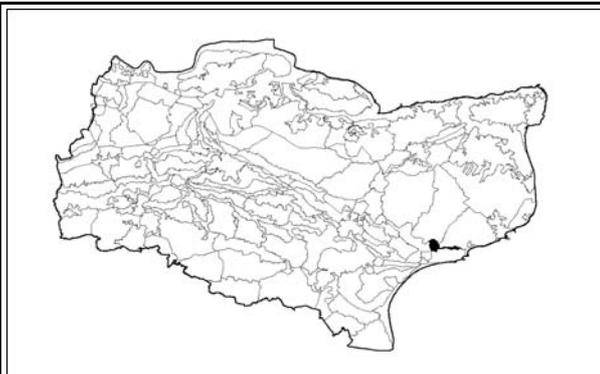
SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

CREATE.

Create simple, managed farming areas which are enclosed by other land uses such as woodland
Create a new woodland network to reduce the scale of the landscape in the view
Encourage the creation of foci of managed farmed landscapes which are suitable for a diverse and changing agricultural use
Create distinctive and recognisable boundaries to the junction of arable and urban areas, creating new and sustainable features which provide resources for the urban population

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FOLKESTONE OUTSKIRTS: POSTLING VALE



FOLKESTONE OUTSKIRTS

The downland here is folded into a series of steep, enclosed coombes and prominent hills, dominating the outskirts of the town. The extraordinary conical shapes of Sugarloaf Hill and Summerhouse Hill and the skyline earthworks of Castle Hill are key local landmarks. The new Channel Tunnel Terminal and the M20/A20 motorway lie along the boundary of the AONB, at the foot of the scarp and have a major impact on the landscape. Views from the scarp are now dominated by these developments and Folkestone has been severed from the AONB and its villages by the transport corridor. Although there is gradual decline in the traditional structure of hedges and shaws, there is scope to reverse this trend.

POSTLING VALE

The area described as Folkestone Outskirts lies within the larger character area of the Postling Vale.

Folkestone lies at the most easterly end of the Greensand Belt, on a narrow tongue of land contained by the Downs in the north and the flat expanse of Romney Marsh in the south. These physical constraints have resulted in a considerable amount of activity and development being confined within a small area, on the very edge of the Kent Downs AONB.

The landscape here is dominated by major roads and by the new Channel Tunnel Terminal, all of which are situated on the edge of the AONB between north Folkestone and the Downs. These landscape developments are set against the dramatic backdrop of the steep scarp, which supports botanically rich chalk grassland. A series of remote coombes in the scarp towards Etchinghill overlook the now rare coppiced ash woodland of Asholt Wood. Scrub extends up some of the lower slopes and thick hedges draw attention to the route of the Pilgrim's Way along the scarp foot. Beyond this, the landscape is gently undulating, with large fields and substantial blocks of woodland.

Further south, around the outskirts of Hythe, this open, large-scale landscape gives way to a more intimate countryside of steep stream valleys, small woodlands and pasture. In the west, around Pedlinge, tracts of mixed woodland enclose flat arable fields, which form the edge of a larger area of intensively cultivated farmland, extending beyond the AONB.

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FOLKESTONE OUTSKIRTS: POSTLING VALE

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Steep coombes and prominent hills.
M20 and Channel Tunnel terminal dominate the southern boundary.

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

The agricultural land use of this area is relatively intense. Small blocks of woodland and downland form minor clusters of semi-natural habitats and the ecological interest of the area is considered to be moderate. Rural heritage features such as field boundaries and woodland are in variable condition. Field boundaries in particular are vulnerable and in decline. Recent settlements are limited, but have a moderate negative impact on the view. The functional integrity of this landscape is very weak as the inherent ecological potential and cultural heritage have become obscured. Visually, the landscape pattern is coherent; visual detractors are mainly inappropriate fencing and overhead cabling.

Sensitivity

The steep coombes and prominent hills are the dominant element in the landscape. Views are generally open and the visibility is very high. Of the ancient landscape features of open grassland and woodland, the open grassland no longer contributes to local distinctiveness. Other characteristics have less time depth and are historic (hedgerows) or more recent (built form). In general, the local sense of place is weak and the sensitivity of the area is considered to be moderate.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

Restore areas of ecologically rich grasslands.
Restore woodland cover in existing steep coombes, using these to link existing woodland into a wider network.
Create landscape settings for the recent form of settlements using woodland and shaws.
Create open fields where hedgerows are gappy and redundant, creating a clear definition within the landscape.
Create design codes for built form and highway details to promote local distinctiveness.

CONTEXT

Regional: Kent Downs AONB

Condition

good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE
moderate	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
poor	CREATE	RESTORE & CREATE	RESTORE
	low	moderate	high

Sensitivity

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition

Poor.

Pattern of elements: Coherent.
Detracting features: Some.
Visual Unity: Coherent.
Cultural integrity: Poor.
Ecological integrity: Moderate.
Functional Integrity: Weak.

Sensitivity

Moderate.

Distinctiveness: Indistinct.
Continuity: Historic.
Sense of Place: Weak.
Landform: Dominant.
Extent of tree cover: Open.
Visibility: Very High.

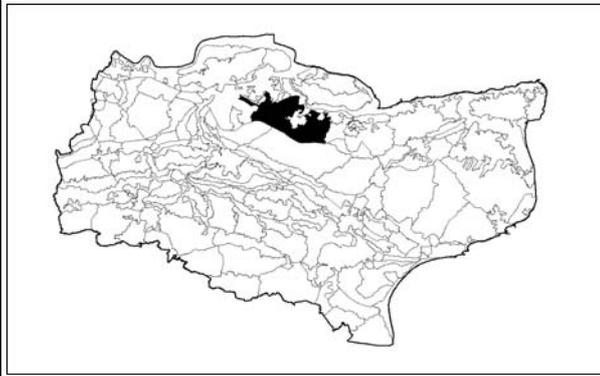
SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

RESTORE AND CREATE.

Restore ecologically-rich grassland habitats
Restore woodland links on steep contours
Create settlement edges and distinctive features to new and recent settlement
Create new areas of more open landscape where hedgerows are in decline, encouraging the creation of small areas of woodland to reduce the scale of the open areas.

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FRUIT BELT



This is predominantly a rural, agricultural landscape characterised by a complex landscape pattern of orchards, shelterbelts, fields of arable and pasture and horticultural crops, and divided by small blocks of woodland. Apart from the large urban area of Sittingbourne, the area contains only small, scattered villages and farm complexes which contribute to its rural character and landscape diversity. The A2 and A249 route corridors, and associated ribbon development, run through the area and have a localised urbanising effect. To the south of the A2 the gently rolling landform is punctuated by two valley systems running north south through the landscape. These main valleys are reflected by minor valley forms to the north-west and south-east creating distinct features in the landscape. To the north of the A2 the landform becomes flatter as it approaches the Swale and Medway Marshes and loses some of its distinctiveness.

In general terms geology can be divided into two distinct types. To the north of the A2, London Clay and Head Brick Earth predominate with pockets of Thanet Beds and River Gravel creating a consistently flatter landform. To the south of the A2, linear pockets of chalk divide areas of clay with flint, Thanet Beds, Head Brick Earth and Head Deposits. This more complex geology is reflected in the more varied relief.

Land cover is dominated by a richly varied pattern of agricultural land uses. Orchards are the most distinctive feature of the landscape and are still widespread across this area. Mixed in amongst them are fields of pasture, arable and horticultural crops, all of which are typically defined by strong hedgerows or shelterbelts, mainly of poplar. The complexity of this land use mix varies across the area, however, and some areas (notably to the north-west and south-west of Sittingbourne) are now more typically open arable farmland. In contrast to areas further south, woodlands are not a significant landcover element, but small blocks occur in a scattered distribution across the area. Small settlements and farm complexes add to the varied landcover. The extensive urban area of Sittingbourne, transport corridors and associated ribbon development and suburban land uses have a distinctly localised influence on the generally rural character of the area.

Woodlands, often with a coppice understorey, are the main natural ecological resource within this intensively managed landscape. Hawes Wood, Rook Wood, Yaugher Woods and Fox Burrow Woods are listed in the Ancient Woodland Inventory. Other elements potentially of ecological and wildlife value are the shelterbelts, which are a more consistent framework of wildlife corridors than the often patchy hedgerow cover, and regenerating woodland and wetland habitats in the disused quarries to the south-east and north-east of Sittingbourne.

A notable feature in this landscape is the Roman Road Watling Street, now the A2. This transportation corridor has attracted development to it over the course of history. The fruit orchards have been a distinctive feature of this landscape since the 18th century.

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FRUIT BELT

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Rural/agricultural landscape. Complex fruit, hops, pastoral and arable divided by small woodlands.
 Small scattered villages and farms. Rolling landscape with distinct valleys.
 Large pockets of flat, open farmland, especially in coastal areas. The M2 & A2-ribbon development and urban features.

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

The inherent richness and complexity of this rolling landscape has developed a new emphasis towards a larger scale more open, landscape. Some blocks of intensive fruit growing also contribute to the larger scale. Isolated shelterbelts typify the incoherent landscape pattern which has many detracting suburban and industrial influences, and main transport corridors. Isolated remnants of old orchard can be found within the character area. The woodland cover is limited, and where there are shelterbelts, these are often single species; the ecological integrity of the area is considered to be weak. The stunted form of coastal woodland is distinctive due to the climatic conditions. Overall, the condition is poor.

Sensitivity

This is landscape of varied continuity, influenced by historic settlement and communication routes but with strong influences from the recent past to the current day. Highways retain historic characteristics such as narrow hedgeline roads, following ancient routes (e.g. Watling Street). The historic fruit growing patterns are characteristic in some areas, but dwarf root stock and single species shelterbelts have a more recent form. The area's hedgerow and mature tree stock has suffered greatly from the demise of the elm. Settlement too has many influences. Apart from occasional flint churches, landscape features are not thought to be highly distinctive in the locality. Visibility is moderate as the rolling landform is apparent, but views are contained by intermittent tree cover. The overall sensitivity is considered to be low.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

The creation of semi-natural habitats would enhance the ecological bases. These may also be used to enhance the relief of the natural landform and to create a more distinctive land pattern. Use the developing suburban edges of settlement to create new frameworks and enhance the definition of the change in land use with woodland blocks, and shelterbelts where appropriate. Identify unmanaged areas of coastal ridge for woodland replanting. The cultural heritage of the area may be enhanced by the creation of new settings for heritage buildings in the landscape. The creation of traditional orchards may be used as cosmetic or suburban features in this way.

CONTEXT

Regional: Thames Gateway

Condition

good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE
moderate	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
poor	<u>CREATE</u>	RESTORE & CREATE	RESTORE
	low	moderate	high

Sensitivity

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition

Very Poor.

Pattern of elements:	Incoherent.
Detracting features:	Some.
Visual Unity:	Interrupted.
Cultural integrity:	Variable.
Ecological integrity:	Weak.
Functional Integrity:	Weak.

Sensitivity

Low.

Distinctiveness:	Indistinct.
Continuity:	Historic.
Sense of Place:	Weak.
Landform:	Apparent.
Extent of tree cover:	Intermittent.
Visibility:	Moderate.

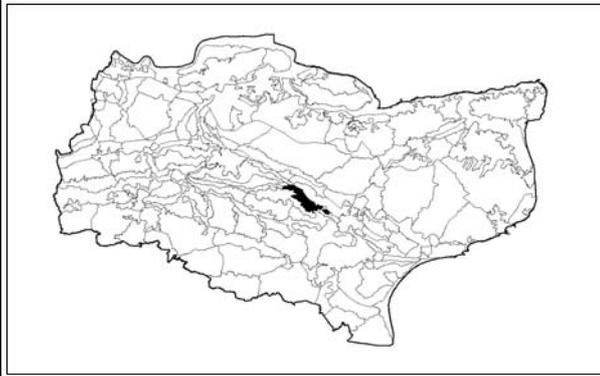
SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

CREATE.

Create ecological interest by planting broadleaf woodland on steeper valley sides and on ridges overlooking the coastal plain
 Create an urban edge, using woodland blocks and the retention of shelterbelts where appropriate.
 Create small scale enclosure to the coastal ridge with diverse species broadleaf woodland
 Create significant rural cultural features by the enhancement of the setting of large oasts
 Create mature standard tree cover at nodes such as road junctions, in hedgerow and at settlement edges

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GREENSAND FRUIT BELT - EGERTON



This small character area begins near the headwaters of the River Great Stour close to Chilston Park and extends south east to Little Chart Forstal close to where the river emerges briefly into the Low Weald before cutting back at right angles into the Greensand Belt on its journey to the sea.

Similar to the other fruit belt areas, the hard sandy limestones and soft sands of the Hythe Beds produce fine well-drained loams on the gently undulating Greensand dip-slope. The landscape is one of mixed orchards and shelterbelts, arable and parklands with pockets of pasture and woodlands such as the acid broadleaves of Little Chart Woods with its chestnut coppice and birch. The alluvial valley of the Great Stour gives rise to poorer quality soils.

The south-west boundary of the character area is formed by the scarp face of the Greensand ridge. West of Pluckley dramatic views can be gained from the ridge over the Weald below, notably near Egerton House, where the sense of leafy openness is enormous. The 'Greensand Way' long distance footpath follows the ridge, passing through hilltop villages.

Buildings of ragstone and brick including vernacular farmsteads, oasts and villages are linked by narrow, winding, often enclosed lanes.

In the past small scale development has spread along the Greensand ridge, particularly at Pluckley, impacting on the view from the Low Weald below. The confines of the village are now contained. Egerton continues to expand to the south-east, however, beyond its vernacular centre.

The M20 impinges on the north-east boundary of the character area, at the edge of Chilston Park, Lenham and Charing Heaths. Here some large open arable fields allow extensive, bland views of the motorway and full impact to its sound. These views are contained to the north by the dramatic scarp of the Downs.

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GREENSAND FRUIT BELT - EGERTON

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Gentle undulating landform and well-drained loams.
 Mixed farmland including orchards and residual shelterbelts.
 Steeply sloping Greensand scarp with expansive views over the Low Weald. Vernacular buildings of ragstone and brick.

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

This landscape is generally intact with few visual detractors. Vernacular buildings have a positive impact on the area. Heritage landscape features such as tree cover and hedgerow are frequent and varied, although they are mature and becoming redundant in some arable areas. Agricultural use of the land is small-scale but some of this is under more intensive arable cultivation, thus reducing the ecological interest.

Sensitivity

This is an historic landscape which has distinctively characteristic features. It is felt that some of the ragstone farms and vernacular buildings are unique in their local distinctiveness. Visibility is moderate due to the intermittent enclosure of the apparent landform. The sensitivity of the area is therefore high.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

- Conserve the small scale of the landscape pattern.
- Conserve woodland cover and its diversity by appropriate management.
- Encourage the diversity of land use between woodland, fruit and arable.
- Conserve the hedged boundaries and narrow, winding routes of narrow roads.

CONTEXT

Regional: Greensand Belt

Condition

good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE
moderate	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
poor	CREATE	RESTORE & CREATE	RESTORE
	low	moderate	high

Sensitivity

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition **Very Good.**

Pattern of elements:	Unified.
Detracting features:	Few.
Visual Unity:	Strongly Unified.
Cultural integrity:	Good.
Ecological integrity:	Moderate.
Functional Integrity:	Strong.

Sensitivity **High.**

Distinctiveness:	Unique/Rare.
Continuity:	Historic.
Sense of Place:	Strong.
Landform:	Apparent.
Extent of tree cover:	Intermittent.
Visibility:	Moderate.

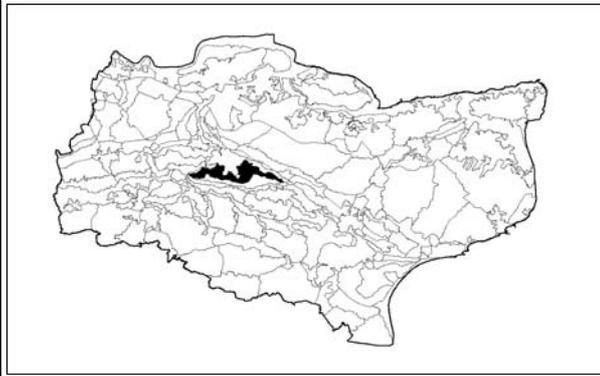
SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

CONSERVE.

- Conserve the diversity and small scale of agricultural use
- Conserve woodland cover and the diversity of broadleaf species
- Conserve hedgerows
- Conserve the narrow, winding routes of narrow roads

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GREENSAND FRUIT BELT - MAIDSTONE



This is a continuation of the Fruit Belt landscape but south and east of Maidstone where most of the orchards are concentrated. The land is generally flat but descends into the steep valleys of the Medway and its tributaries the Len and the Loose. If anything distinguishes this character area from the others in the Fruit Belt it is this dissection of the landscape by these two streams. The resultant valleys form contained, rural landscapes outside the urban boundary. This is important because, perhaps more than the other fruit-growing areas, the encroaching suburbs of Maidstone continue to have an impact eastwards particularly at Park Wood.

The landscape is generally a varied and pleasant mix of winding lanes and mixed farmlands with a high percentage of fruit, scattered small woodlands and grasslands interspersed with larger arable fields. Orchards and hops used to be more frequent but now the landholdings are fragmented and much of the land use converted to arable. The architecture is distinguished by the many ragstone buildings and walls, the varied construction of the many oasts and attractive village centres such as West and East Farleigh, Dean Street, Otham and Leeds. Timber spile cross-driven fencing is a typical detail, as it is in other fruit belt regions.

Between and around these settlements a scattering of 20th century hamlets and isolated development has sprung up that adds an element of disorder in the landscape but the overall effect remains balanced and peaceful.

A feature of the landscape are the long views, either across the Medway to the farmlands on the north-west bank or north-east to the Downs. The Medway views are damaged by the suburban impact of Barming. From the Leeds area, the M20 earthworks stand out starkly behind Leeds Castle. Whilst planting may screen the vehicles in due course, the noise will still penetrate. The countryside in this area is also under pressure from the proposed Leeds-Langley bypass.

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GREENSAND FRUIT BELT - MAIDSTONE

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Mixed farmland deeply dissected by the Medway and its tributaries. Residual orchards and shelterbelts. Ragstone buildings and walls in villages, farmsteads and oasts.

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

Elements in this landscape are strongly unified, appear well managed and have a function in the current cultural use of the land. Arable fields are relatively limited and the area benefits from the varied relief caused by the Medway tributaries. The intensity of fruit-growing reduces the ecological interest within the fields. Shelterbelts are often single species and narrow in form, and the extent of the coppice woodland is limited. Historic farming settlements are frequent and have a positive impact on the view; there is much evidence of vernacular style including oasts and the use of ragstone. The urban edge is the most frequent detracting element but is considered to be a minor detractor in the well-settled view. The overall condition of this area is good.

Sensitivity

There is a strong sense of historic continuity in the landscape. However, recent features such as poplar and alder shelterbelts are not incongruous as they reinforce the current well-managed aspect of the area. Estate planting is the exception to this and is a minor feature, becoming an indistinct part of the historic pattern. Views are intermittent over the incised landscape; the visibility and sensitivity of the area are considered to be moderate.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

One of the strongest positive elements in the landscape is the built form and its relationship within the landscape - this should be reinforced by ensuring the use and development of localised detail and materials in all types of built form, including agricultural buildings and by conserving the settings and scale of existing groups of buildings. The well-managed and compartmentalised aspect of the agricultural land should be conserved, and these elements used to define the urban edge.

Reinforce ecological bases within existing woodland and in the river valleys by the encouragement of diverse species and replanting.

Encourage the continuation of pockets of fruit-growing.

CONTEXT

Regional: Greensand Belt

Condition

good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE
	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
moderate			
poor	CREATE	RESTORE & CREATE	RESTORE
	low	moderate	high

Sensitivity

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition	Good.
Pattern of elements:	Unified.
Detracting features:	Few.
Visual Unity:	Strongly Unified.
Cultural integrity:	Good.
Ecological integrity:	Weak.
Functional Integrity:	Coherent.

Sensitivity	Moderate.
Distinctiveness:	Characteristic.
Continuity:	Historic.
Sense of Place:	Moderate.
Landform:	Apparent.
Extent of tree cover:	Intermittent.
Visibility:	Moderate.

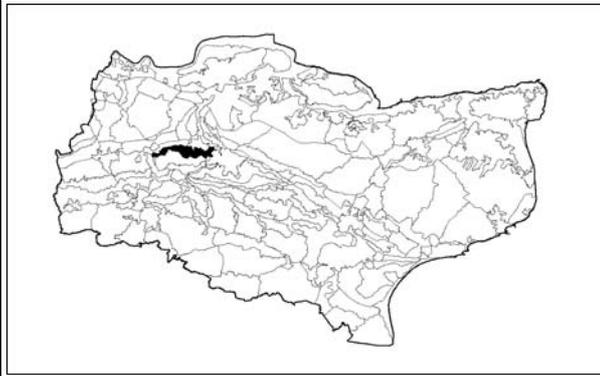
SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

CONSERVE AND REINFORCE.

Reinforce the positive impact of vernacular built form in scale and detail. Encourage the use of local detail in agricultural buildings. Reinforce ecological bases within the existing woodland by sensitive management, and in particular in the valleys of the Medway tributaries. Conserve vernacular built form, well-managed orchard enclosures. Encourage the continuation of fruit-growing.

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GREENSAND FRUIT BELT - MALLING



This flat to gently undulating landscape of mixed farmland is dominated by orchards, of mainly dwarf stock, with their characteristic shelterbelts, replaced in places with horticultural crops such as runner beans and mixed with arable. It extends from Crouch, high above the secluded Bourne Valley, between the wooded flanks of the Wrotham Heath Gap and the expanses of the Mereworth Woodlands to the western outskirts of Maidstone. Its extent is determined by the good quality soils of the sandy limestones of the Hythe Beds.

Occasional traditional orchards survive intact or remain but abandoned to scrub, a reminder of the changes that have occurred to this land use in the past thirty years. In places these decaying older orchards have been sub-divided by post and wire, as at Mill Street, to allow the grazing of ponies, an increasing demand at the urban fringes. Evidence of orchard removal can be seen close to East Malling and Ditton where the tall shelterbelts are still intact but the trees have been replaced with arable crops. A third or more of the orchards may have been lost in this area over the past thirty years.

The landscape is interspersed with small broadleaf copses and larger clumps particularly on the fringes of the Mereworth Wood complex which frames the landscape to the south. It is generally a medium scale landscape, enclosed at a local level by the shelterbelts and remaining hedges. Long views can be glimpsed in places, however, to the Downs and the Vale of Holmesdale to the north.

The adjacent villages of Offham, with its medieval quintain, West Malling, much of which is a Conservation Area, and the greatly expanded East Malling are distributed evenly in the landscape. The mainly 20th century settlements of Leybourne, Larkfield and Ditton, however, press on the northern boundary. To the south, pressure on its rural nature comes from the proposed dualling of the West Malling by-pass, the A228, and the new settlement at Kings Hill. The remaining Fruit Belt is being squeezed between these two pincers of built-up land. The landscape is affected by mineral extraction at Hermitage Farm Quarry.

At quarries which have ceased to work the stone, such as Offham Quarry, activities continue with domestic refuse infill.

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GREENSAND FRUIT BELT - MALLING

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Flat to gentle undulating landscape on good quality loams. Mixed farmlands including orchards. Residual tall hedgerows and shelterbelts associated with the fruit. Long views to the Kent Downs.

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

A coherent pattern of elements with shelterbelts and tall hedges. Vernacular materials are in evidence in buildings in the landscape. Some detracting features interrupt views; the intrusive urban edge of new developments, many on the edge of existing villages, and the associated suburbanisation of rural lanes. Land use around settlements is fragmented. Many fruit farms are now converted to intensive fruit and arable, and pony paddocks occur regularly. Industrial farm buildings are in evidence. There is some loss of shelterbelts/hedges where there are paddocks and arable crops, also many hedges are poorly maintained and appear to be redundant.

Sensitivity

An historic, rural fruit farming landscape with historic village cores, ragstone churches, cottages, farmsteads, walls and oasts. Some minor estate landscape. The unremarkable landform is gently undulating with frequent patches of tree cover which contain the immediate views although the Downs form a backdrop to views to the north.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

Contain the suburban influence by reinforcing the urban edge with characteristic landscape elements; such as small-scale areas of tree-cover or a network of shelterbelts. Explore the diversification of fruit growing to encourage the retention and replanting of the shelterbelt framework.

Maintain the hedgerows and create heathland for the purpose of extending the ecological bases.

Ensure that farm buildings and new development respect the (small) scale of the existing built form. The visual influence of new road junctions and new housing access should not extend into the rural landscape

CONTEXT

Regional: Greensand Belt

Condition

good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE
moderate	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
poor	<u>CREATE</u>	RESTORE & CREATE	RESTORE
	low	moderate	high

Sensitivity

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition

Poor.

Pattern of elements:	Coherent.
Detracting features:	Some.
Visual Unity:	Coherent.
Cultural integrity:	Variable.
Ecological integrity:	Weak.
Functional Integrity:	Weak.

Sensitivity

Very Low.

Distinctiveness:	Characteristic.
Continuity:	Historic.
Sense of Place:	Moderate.
Landform:	Insignificant.
Extent of tree cover:	Intermittent.
Visibility:	Low.

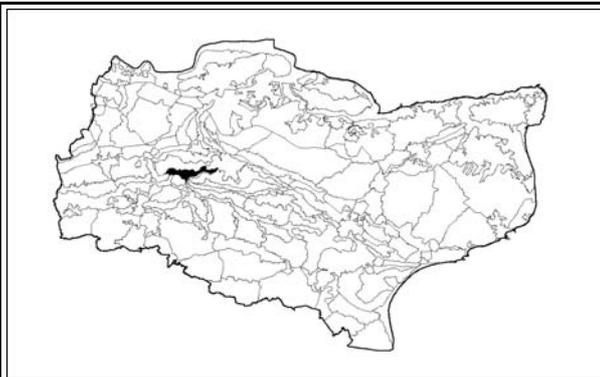
SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

CREATE.

Create a new urban edge to contain developments
Create ecological and wildlife interest
Strengthen boundaries within the rural landscape
Create highway design which reflects the rural nature of the area

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GREENSAND FRUIT BELT - WATERINGBURY



This pleasant landscape to the south of Mereworth Woods is similar in its character to the Malling Belt to the north, but includes the steep north-western bank of the River Medway. As with the Malling area, the landscape is distinguished by the varied presence of orchards and hops. These crops are again planted to take advantage of the good quality loams of the Hythe dipslope.

The orchards are concentrated more locally here and are found in particular on the slopes around East Barming and Wateringbury. In the recent past this distribution was much more widespread, with up to forty percent of the area under orchards or hops. Much of the rest of the area is now under arable crops which has led to a much more open landscape. Abandoned traditional orchards can be found among the well-managed new ones, or their ghosts be glimpsed among the remnant shelterbelts. Despite this, most of the area remains a pleasant patchwork of farmland.

Much of the character area is framed to the north by the extensive woodlands of Mereworth and Oaken Wood. To the south the remnants of the ancient deer park of Mereworth Castle provide a dramatic setting to the 18th century classical building. A number of large houses were sited on these prosperous, mainly south-facing slopes near the Medway.

Vernacular buildings of ragstone, plain or patterned brickwork are features of this landscape. The centre of Wateringbury, in particular, is composed of these local materials, but many individual farmsteads and oasts are a pleasant meld of fabrics too. This continuity of materials helps to unify the landscape but the more recent use of modern products, such as sand-lime bricks at Barming, is diluting this individuality. Further suburbanisation along the A26 occurs in the form of the use of conifer hedges, car sales units, scruffy lay-bys and farm shops between Wateringbury and Barming.

Pressure is still being exerted at the fringes of Maidstone, notably in the suburbs such as Barming, at Oakwood Park and Hospital, for further residential development. Increasing traffic levels, along the A26 in particular, are affecting the character of the village centres, such as Wateringbury and Mereworth.

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GREENSAND FRUIT BELT - WATERINGBURY

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Gently undulating landscape deeply incised by the river Medway. Good quality loam soils. Residual shelterbelts, hops and shelterbelts. Ragstone buildings. Large houses.

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

The enclosure and regular down-slope patchwork of fruit and hop-growing is extant in patches. The south-facing slope of the area is defined by woodland at the top. There is a varied and irregular land use pattern over other areas which have lost an intensity of agricultural use, possibly due to the influence of residential land use. Vernacular buildings are of interest and include large oasts and much use of ragstone. Estate farm buildings are also significant, but 20th century linear development has obscured the definition of villages and the rural nature of the landscape.

Sensitivity

Views are intermittently enclosed by shelterbelts and small copses on the sloping land. Visibility is therefore considered to be moderate. Towards the east of the character area, the historic characteristics of the fruit-belt and estate farmsteads are becoming indistinct as the emphasis on the land use changes. Well-used roads have also lost distinctively close, tall hedged boundaries and are more likely to have more recent treatment of wide verges and ornamental hedges. The sensitivity of this area is considered to be low.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

- Reinforce the physical extents of rural areas between historic settlements by creating shelterbelts and hedgerow to emphasize the boundaries of built areas.
- Reinforce the existing, regular down-slope field pattern by encouraging the replanting of hedges in the down-slope pattern.
- Encourage the maintenance of the clipped, well managed field boundaries
- Create pockets of traditional orchards on unmanaged land around residential development.
- Create broadleaf woodland linked to the wooded ridge and define existing open farmland with wooded edges.
- Create and maintain occasional visual openings into the rural landscape from the highway.

CONTEXT

Regional: Greensand Belt

Condition

good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE
moderate	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
poor	CREATE	RESTORE & CREATE	RESTORE
	low	moderate	high

Sensitivity

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition Moderate.

- Pattern of elements: Coherent.
- Detracting features: Some.
- Visual Unity: Coherent.
- Cultural integrity: Variable.
- Ecological integrity: Moderate.
- Functional Integrity: Coherent.

Sensitivity Low.

- Distinctiveness: Indistinct.
- Continuity: Historic.
- Sense of Place: Weak.
- Landform: Apparent.
- Extent of tree cover: Intermittent.
- Visibility: Moderate.

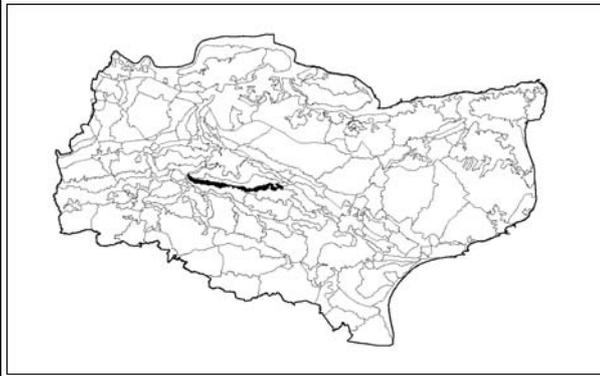
SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

CREATE AND REINFORCE.

- Create woodland linked with existing wooded ridge
- Create traditional orchard features in suburban land
- Encourage the appropriate maintenance and replanting of hedges
- Define the rural areas with strong shelterbelt or woodland

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GREENSAND RIDGE - MAIDSTONE



Forming a longer and narrower, and in places steeper ridgeline, the scarp face south of Maidstone starts gently at the Medway Valley at Wateringbury, and rises up above Yalding, Hunton, and Linton, forming the setting for Sutton Valence and ending south of Platt's Heath in the east.

Generally the Maidstone Ridge is both a more wooded slope and one still characterised by orchards particularly north of Yalding, Hunton, Linton and around Sutton Valence. The woodlands are usually coppiced chestnut forming a continuation of the fragmented belt that marks the drift deposits of the Coxheath Plateau Farmlands on the dip slope of the Greensand.

The ridgeline is marked strikingly by a most regular network of narrow winding lanes that runs at right angles between the B2163 on the Plateau Farmlands, down the steepest, shortest route of the scarp face. This is very indicative of old 'drove' roads, the roads used for moving stock from the higher, drier lands to the wet Wealden vale in the summer months. Unlike wheeled carts, stock could follow a much steeper route.

Again the ridge is marked by large parklands, such as Linton and Boughton Monchelsea that cross-over the boundary between the Low Weald and the Greensand Belt, gaining both hunting and grazing land in the clay vale and drier pasture and good views from the ridge.

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GREENSAND RIDGE - MAIDSTONE

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Steep south-facing slopes. Residual orchards and nut plats. Scattered historic settlement. Extensive views overlooking the Low Weald. Historic parklands. Narrow winding lanes.

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

The fruit-growing around which much of this landscape has developed is not currently a strong use, with the exception of an intensive fruit area to the west of Linton. The uniformity of landscape features is therefore occasionally interrupted although there are few visual detractors and the landscape remains coherent. Ecological bases tend to be weak - woodland cover is very limited and there is little opportunity for other semi-natural habitats. The eye is often drawn towards estate houses which crest the ridge and overlook the Low Weald - these and the ridgeline hamlets which display distinctive vernacular materials augment the positive impact of built development. Rural heritage features of parkland and enclosed fields are in a variable condition. The overall condition is moderate.

Sensitivity

The steep slope of the Greensand Ridge is the dominant aspect of the landscape view, despite the enclosure by intermittent tree cover and some shelterbelts. It is also highly visible from the Low Weald. The sense of place is moderate; there is a loss of distinction of wooded areas and hedged field boundaries in the more open, parkland areas, but the characteristic ancient form of the cross-contour roads, small settlements of historic origin, and influences of ancient and historic parkland, remain a strong feature.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

Due to the high visibility and sensitivity of the ridge landform, the conservation and restoration of a uniform landscape pattern is the most appropriate strategy for the management of the landscape.

Within the estate parkland and farmland, the restoration of woodland shaws and estate boundaries would contribute to the restoration of some distinctiveness.

It would be desirable to restore a variety of fruit growing within tall/hedged or shelterbelt enclosed fields, dependent on farming trends. The restoration of cross-contour hedges down the steep ridge is perhaps the most important feature - hedges along cross-contour roads fulfill this to some extent.

The characteristics of cross-contour roads; narrow and hedge-lined with occasional long views from the top of the ridge, should be conserved.

The conservation of small historic hamlets (with much ragstone in evidence) is also desirable.

CONTEXT

Regional: Greensand Belt

Condition

good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE
moderate	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
poor	CREATE	RESTORE & CREATE	RESTORE
	low	moderate	high

Sensitivity

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition

Moderate.

Pattern of elements:	Coherent.
Detracting features:	Few.
Visual Unity:	Unified.
Cultural integrity:	Variable.
Ecological integrity:	Weak.
Functional Integrity:	Weak.

Sensitivity

High.

Distinctiveness:	Characteristic.
Continuity:	Historic.
Sense of Place:	Moderate.
Landform:	Dominant.
Extent of tree cover:	Intermittent.
Visibility:	High.

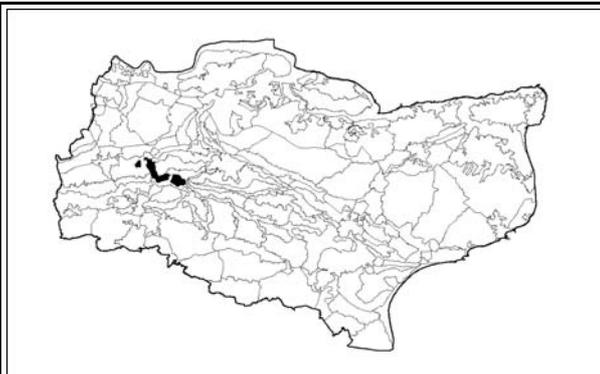
SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

CONSERVE AND RESTORE.

Restore the uniformity to the landscape pattern
 Restore shaws to enclose open fields.
 Restore estate parkland and farmland woods and boundaries
 Restore some cross-contour hedged/shelterbelt enclosure to farmland
 Conserve historic hamlets
 Conserve the characteristics of cross-contour roads

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GREENSAND RIDGE - PLAXTOL



Generally, this landscape is composed of the steeply sloping scarp face of the Hythe Beds, extending from the deeply etched valley of the Bourne and the hamlet of Claygate Cross in the west to the orchard-covered slopes above Grafty Green in the east. Geographically it can be divided into two areas; the Maidstone Ridge and the Plaxtol Ridge, the latter incorporating a separate area around the village of Ightham. Each area has slightly varying characteristics.

Both Plaxtol and the Maidstone Ridge are a pleasant mix of open arable fields, intensively managed orchards with a patchwork of sheep-grazed pastures, hops and woodland adding variety to the scene. Perhaps the most striking landscape characteristic of the ridgeline over most of its extent are the many recognised Historic Parks and Gardens. These are situated to take advantage of the dramatic and extensive views over the Low Weald, which appears far below the ridgeline. These parks often extended into the Low Weald itself, to take advantage of the grazing and woodlands there.

A substantial part of this character area has been recognised as a Special Landscape Area. At a detailed level the two sub-areas exhibit some differences in character relating notably in relation to land use.

The Plaxtol Ridge lies between the Bourne Valley, west of Mereworth Woods and the more urbanised setting of Nettlestead above the Medway. The picturesque village of Ightham lies on undulating ground to the north side of the ridge, surrounded with woodland and fruit-growing farms. The historic moated house of Ightham Mote is situated to the south of the village at the head of the Bourne stream.

The land use has changed in thirty years with a reduction in the amount of grazing land and a decrease in the area under orchard. Unique to the ridge outside the Kent Downs AONB the Plaxtol Ridge has some very distinctive nut platts that add interest and variety to the overall scene, but these are limited in extent. There is little industrialisation or suburbanisation, however, apart from that around Nettlestead and isolated, now redundant buildings such as those in Basted and Plaxtol Spoute. The road links of the A26 and Seven Mile Lane do intrude on the area's tranquillity to the east.

The few settlements are generally scattered and small, such as those at Claygate Cross, Crouch and West Peckham, composed of old vernacular farmsteads, oasts and houses of ragstone or brick, with a few 20th century additions clustered at their edges. Many of the settlements are designated as Conservation Areas, such as parts of West Peckham and Roughways, which, with the Ancient Monuments such as Old Soar Manor, are indicative of the historic settlement of this area.

Of the historic parks in this area, Mereworth Castle and Oxonhoath, two old deer parks, stand out. Roydon's Hall extends from the Greensand into the Low Weald. Above Oxonhoath, the most striking views can be had from Swanton and Gover Hill giving long views to the south. The effect is accentuated by the dark masses of Mereworth Woods which form an enclosing backdrop to much of the character area to the north.

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GREENSAND RIDGE - PLAXTOL

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Steep south-facing slopes. Residual orchards and nut plats. Scattered historic settlement. Extensive views overlooking the Low Weald. Historic parklands. Narrow winding lanes.

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

There is a strong, managed hedgerow and shelterbelt pattern which is very evident on the south-facing scarp slope. Tall hedges and shelterbelts enclose narrow roads and small, regular fields. It is a unified landscape, currently with a diversity of crops and shelterbelt species, but still with many orchards and soft fruit. Parkland and ragstone hamlets are regular elements in the landscape.

The hedge network covers much of the area, but the use of coniferous species within the hedges, and the intensity of cultivation - some shifting to arable on the lower slopes - means that the ecological value is reduced.

Sensitivity

This landscape has a strong historic - and in parts ancient - time depth with small scale enclosed fields and frequent parkland. There are areas with a long history of woodland cover suggesting an ancient quality. Ridge-line roads follow ancient trackways and steep, well-enclosed cross-contour roads follow former drove roads. Vernacular details and materials are a strong feature in built forms, such as ragstone churches, cottages and walls. The tall hedgerows and shelterbelts give intermittent enclosure on the dominant scarp slope, and this means that visibility is fairly high. There are many viewpoints giving long views over the Low Weald.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

Conserve the hedgerow pattern and scale of the enclosed landscape, encouraging the use of non-coniferous species in replanting works.
 Ensure that the land use within the landscape pattern is conducive to the maintenance of the hedgerows. Conserve and manage areas of ancient woodland.
 Conserve the parkland by managing existing mature trees and features such as avenues and boundary structures or boundary planting.
 Formulate long-term management plans to include the replanting and maintenance of characteristic tree groups and other features.
 Maintain strong boundaries to the parkland.
 Conserve the narrow, enclosed nature of the roads with managed, native hedgerow species.
 Conserve the small scale nature of settlements, located at the base of slopes and within gentle undulations.

CONTEXT

Regional: Greensand Belt

Condition

good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE
moderate	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
poor	CREATE	RESTORE & CREATE	RESTORE
	low	moderate	high

Sensitivity

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition

Good.

Pattern of elements: Unified.

Detracting features: Few.

Visual Unity: Strongly Unified.

Cultural integrity: Variable.

Ecological integrity: Moderate.

Functional Integrity: Coherent.

Sensitivity

Very High.

Distinctiveness: Characteristic.

Continuity: Ancient.

Sense of Place: Strong.

Landform: Dominant.

Extent of tree cover: Intermittent.

Visibility: High.

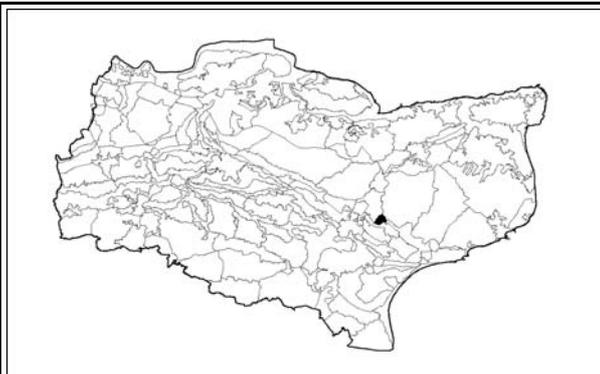
SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

CONSERVE.

Conserve the hedgerow pattern and range of native hedgerow species
 Conserve the scale and vernacular detail of settlements
 Conserve parkland
 Conserve ancient woodland
 Conserve narrow, enclosed roads

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HAMPTON: STOUR VALLEY



HAMPTON

This small corner of the Stour Valley reflects a change in the soils. Brook, with its 13th century church and barn, is one of very few villages built on the sticky gault clay. The land here is gently undulating, irrigated by several scarp-foot spring and there is a considerable amount of woodland, much of it of high nature conservation value. In the north east, the wooded scarp encloses the rich chalk grasslands of the Devil's Kneading Trough Coomb and forms a dramatic backdrop to the gentle farmland below.

Although the field pattern is more irregular and the fields generally smaller than around Wye, most of the land is still intensively cultivated or given over to set-aside. Many former hedges are now only straggling lines of overgrown thorn to have been removed altogether and pockets of damp pasture are ungrazed and neglected.

STOUR VALLEY

Hampton lies within the larger Stour Valley character area of the Kent Downs AONB.

The Great Stour is the most easterly of the three rivers cutting through the Downs. Like the Darent and the Medway, it too provided an early access route into the heart of Kent and formed an ancient focus for settlement. Today the Stour Valley is highly valued for the quality of its landscape, especially by the considerable numbers of walkers who follow the Stour Valley Walk or the North Downs Way National Trail.

Despite its proximity to both Canterbury and Ashford, the Stour Valley retains a strong rural identity. Enclosed by steep scarps on both sides, with dense woodlands on the upper slopes, the valley is dominated by intensively farmed arable fields interspersed by broad sweeps of mature parkland. Unusually, there are no electricity pylons cluttering the views across the valley. North of Bilting, the river flows through narrow, pastoral floodplain, dotted with trees such as willow and alder and drained by small ditches. To the south around Wye, however, the floodplain widens out and the pastures along the immediate riverside are surrounded by intensively cultivated arable fields on the rich, well-drained brick-earth soils. The field pattern is picked out by a network of narrow, trimmed hedges and lines of mature trees, such as poplars.

On the valley sides, many of the arable fields are surrounded by thick shaws or dense, overgrown hedges which extend down from the woodlands on the upper slopes. Hedgerow trees, in particular oak and ash, are frequent and much of the woodland along the east side of the valley is of national importance for its plant, insect and other animal communities.

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HAMPTON: STOUR VALLEY

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Backdrop of wooded scarp and rich chalk grassland. Gently undulating gault clay, considerable woodland. Irregular fields, intensively cultivated, former hedgerows largely removed.

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

This is a unified landscape with a coherent pattern of irregular fields and woodland on the gault clay. There are few visual detractors. There is a strong ecological network of small woodlands, shaws and some pastures, now opening out for arable use in some areas. The rural features of historic settlement and farming settlements are in good condition. However, the important hedgerow network is becoming gappy.

Sensitivity

The high sensitivity of the area is due to a strong sense of place, influenced by the woodland characteristics and the small scale of the historic farmland and the characteristic diversity of hedge and woodland species. Visibility is moderate as views are intermittent over the apparent landform.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

Conserve the remote quality of the landscape. Maintain the existing hedgerow network by applying long term management plans including the replanting of characteristic species (clematis, viburnums, etc.) and encouraging appropriate maintenance techniques within the countryside.
Conserve the frequency and broadleaf characteristics of woodland, ensuring that areas of ancient woodland are recognised and conserved with appropriate management techniques.
Conserve the setting of historic hamlets and farmsteads.

CONTEXT

Regional: Kent Downs AONB

Condition

good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE
moderate	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
poor	CREATE	RESTORE & CREATE	RESTORE
	low	moderate	high

Sensitivity

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition

Good.

Pattern of elements:	Coherent.
Detracting features:	Few.
Visual Unity:	Unified.
Cultural integrity:	Variable.
Ecological integrity:	Moderate.
Functional Integrity:	Coherent.

Sensitivity

High.

Distinctiveness:	Characteristic.
Continuity:	Ancient.
Sense of Place:	Strong.
Landform:	Apparent.
Extent of tree cover:	Intermittent.
Visibility:	Moderate.

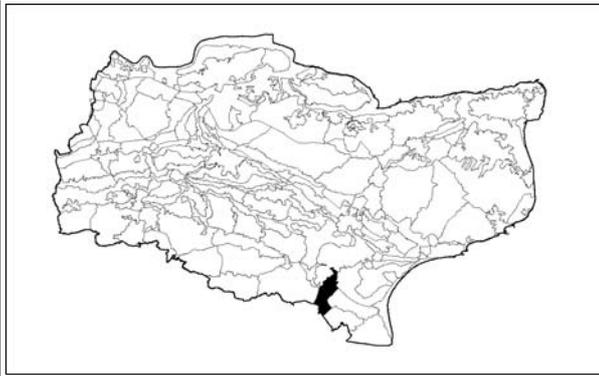
SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

CONSERVE.

Conserve and manage broadleaf woodland and ancient woodland
Conserve and manage hedgerows
Conserve the remote setting of historic settlements

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HIGHKNOCK CHANNEL AND DOWELS



To the south and east of Appledore are two areas which are the most recently reclaimed farmlands and which exhibit the most strong wetland characteristics of the whole region.

The Highknock Channel is a meandering natural watercourse which runs through a low-lying fluvial plain with the parallel courses of the Royal Military Canal and the Five Watering Sewer. It is the tamed and rationalised floodplain of the Rother with wide, embanked drainage channels and farmland in depressions between. Despite this, it has a very marshy quality due to the reedy nature of the grasslands.

The Dowels is a neighbouring area between Fairfield and Kenardington, underlain with peat which occurs very near the surface and which is known to be shrinking. It is visibly very low lying and often waterlogged, with pools of standing water in the fields. In times of high rainfall, regular patches of pasture appear like pillows floating in watery margins. Sheep fencing is angled down at the edges to meet the water. Most views of the area look down from the embanked roads which surround the area.

Both character areas are mainly unsettled with few roads. A few large farm buildings are located on the flood defence wall between Fairfield and Appledore, and on the Rhee Wall between Appledore and Snargate. The main Ashford to Hastings Railway runs across on its own grassy embankment and is often unnoticeable in the general melee of earth banks and grasses, except when a train is in view.

The largest areas of permanent pasture within the Marsh are to be found on the Dowels, which is characterised by acid soils and is subject to too much waterlogging to be cultivated for arable use. The Highknock Channel too is pastoral, especially near Guldeford Lane Corner, with close cropped grassland and ragged clumps of rushy grasses in small depressions. These pastures are very open, fenced by the watercourses and by a dilapidated mix of timber, wire, steel and plastic. Amorphous hawthorn scrub is dotted along the embankments. Corrugated sheds in the middle of pastures serve as contemporary shepherds' huts.

The main water channels are generally flanked by cultivated farmland where turf growing is becoming a major land use. The strict uniformity of turf fields is at variance with the characteristic pastoral grassland, and may contribute in the long term to the depletion of the rich soils.

Arguably, the most evocative view of the Marsh is that of Fairfield Church, standing completely alone, both pasture and sheep immediately around its walls. There is no woody vegetation and the views are open. It is a very distinctive landscape with a strong cultural identity and is highly sensitive to any change.

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HIGHKNOCK CHANNEL AND DOWELS

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Unenclosed, wide views, open landscape. Reedy floodplain, raised water channels and grassy embankments, wide drainage ditches. Monotone of grasses, little seasonal variation. Pastoral, ragged grasses and untidy agricultural furniture. Sheep and cattle. A very few large farms with historical locations, no other settlement.

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

The flat, open landscape has a unified pattern of elements with some visual detractors associated with agricultural storage buildings and transmission towers. The extent of wetland and grassland habitats is modified by some intensive arable use of the land. This is not a settled area, although recent farm structures have a moderate negative impact on the view. The heritage features of the drainage ditches and the tree-lined canal are generally good. There are pieces of remnant timber sheep fencing scattered over the area.

Sensitivity

The dominant landform and open views combine with a moderate sense of place, resulting in a sensitive landscape. 'The Dowels' is mainly made up of older marshland areas, the 'Highknock Channel' of more recent enclosures, but with some older smaller and regular enclosures. This is an historic reclaimed landscape with unique and rare features and is therefore of very high sensitivity.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

Conserve open views and reduce the impact of structures in the landscape.
 Conserve the grassland and wetland habitats by the sensitive management of water levels, distribution and quality of water and agricultural management.
 Encourage the conservation and adaptation of traditional sheep fencing details.
 Conserve and enhance the impact of historic sea defences, embankments such as the Rhee Wall, water courses and the canal.

CONTEXT

Regional: Romney Marsh

Condition

good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE
moderate	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
poor	CREATE	RESTORE & CREATE	RESTORE
	low	moderate	high

Sensitivity

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition

Good.

Pattern of elements: Unified.

Detracting features: Some.

Visual Unity: Unified.

Cultural integrity: Variable.

Ecological integrity: Moderate.

Functional Integrity: Coherent.

Sensitivity

Very High.

Distinctiveness: Unique/Rare.

Continuity: Historic.

Sense of Place: Strong.

Landform: Dominant.

Extent of tree cover: Open.

Visibility: Very High.

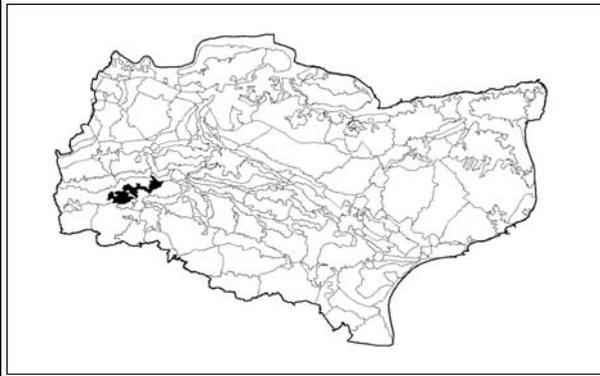
SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

CONSERVE.

Conserve saltmarsh and unimproved grasslands
 Conserve the impact of historic features such as the Rhee Wall and the canal, and other water courses
 Conserve open views
 Conserve wetlands by the sensitive management of water

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HILDENBOROUGH-LEIGH FARMLANDS



A flat or gently undulating mixed, farmed landscape between 30 and 50 metres above sea level, developed in part on the valley alluviums and head deposits. This area differs from the Western Woodland Farmlands in its flatter topography and the reduced frequency of woodlands, although locally they do occur.

Although much of the area around the Hilden Brook is still secluded and pleasant pasture, near Leigh many of the internal field boundaries have been removed to allow enlargement for arable use. This and the lower woodland cover results in a more open landscape with few isolated field trees and broadleaf shaws remaining. Enclosure remains through the mixed woodlands at the edge of the Hall Place estate. Leigh and Hall Place provide an attractive and historic feature in the landscape on the boundary with the High Weald character area.

The new pattern of cultivation does not respect the tradition of small-scale pastoral farming on these poorly drained soils, a tradition surviving at the Old Barn Pastures Site of Nature Conservation (SNCI), north-east of Leigh. The arable fields give a monochromatic but bright green carpet to the landscape in early spring that contrasts with the muted colours of the traditional pastures. Visual unity is still provided, however, by shaws and hedgerows where they remain, but where they have been lost the landscape is open and can appear bleak, especially in winter.

Shaws and ponds were once much more frequent in the landscape.

The transport routes of the A21 and the railway line from Sevenoaks to Tonbridge cut through this landscape, both being visible on embankments as they cross the traditionally wet landscapes north of the Medway. The well-established suburb of Hildenborough also fragments the character area leaving the pastures of the Hilden Valley as an important green wedge.

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HILDENBOROUGH-LEIGH FARMLANDS

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Flat or undulating mixed farmland.
Open landscape with residual hedgerows, shaws, and frequent woodlands.
Urban influences from the suburbs of Tonbridge and Hildenborough, and the A21 and Sevenoaks to Tonbridge railway.

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

An unremarkable landform supports a mixed farming landscape with weak elements of wetland, small-medium scale field pattern and infrequent patches of woodland. It is a fragmented landscape, barely coherent, with visual detractors evident in the open landscape. The stronger elements in the view are those associated with urban land-cover such as residential fringe, amenity golf courses and transport routes. Semi-natural habitats of woodland and streams are also fragmented and not clearly defined. The rural management of hedgerows and enclosures is in decline. This area is considered to be in poor condition.

Sensitivity

The rural and natural features of this historic landscape are becoming indistinct. Scattered, small farmsteads are often dwarfed by unsympathetic buildings, urban land uses and urban growth. Hedgerow enclosure of the field system has declined into fragmented lines of trees and large, open fields, with the exception of roadside hedges. The historic pattern of assarts and medieval fields is currently being opened out to create larger agricultural parcels. Visibility is low due to the intermittent vegetation and unremarkable landform.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

A new landscape framework should aim to address the current weak ecological value of the area by creating new habitats. Identify marginal land in and around water courses and create riparian landscape and wetlands around natural drainage within the lower contours. Create a new landscape pattern to the urban edge, including new woodland blocks. This may be centered on new settlement edges and the minor road network. Create new vegetative corridors and enclosures along existing roads, adapting their design to an agreed management approach for the area.

CONTEXT

Regional: Low Weald

Condition

good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE
moderate	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
poor	<u>CREATE</u>	RESTORE & CREATE	RESTORE
	low	moderate	high

Sensitivity

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition

Poor.

Pattern of elements:	Coherent.
Detracting features:	Some.
Visual Unity:	Coherent.
Cultural integrity:	Variable.
Ecological integrity:	Weak.
Functional Integrity:	Weak.

Sensitivity

Very Low.

Distinctiveness:	Indistinct.
Continuity:	Historic.
Sense of Place:	Weak.
Landform:	Insignificant.
Extent of tree cover:	Intermittent.
Visibility:	Low.

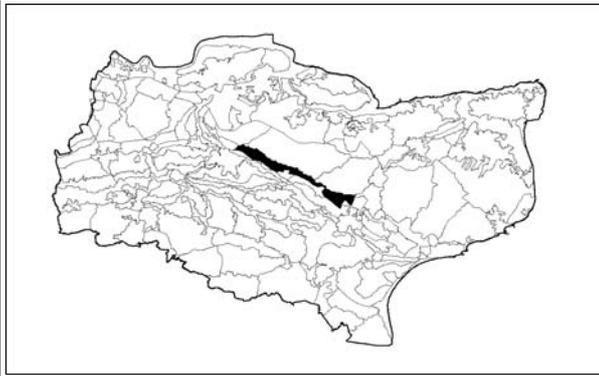
SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

CREATE.

Create riparian landscape around natural drainage channels
Create a consistent feature of standard trees throughout the landscape, using these as elements in new edges to urban areas and along highways
Create an edge to urban areas

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HOLLINGBOURNE VALE



The steep scarp of the Downs, between Boxley and the Stour Valley, overlooks a wide, rolling landscape of mixed farmland. The Greensand Ridge to the south, although less prominent here than near Sevenoaks, forms a gentle rise before the flat, low-lying countryside associated with the River Beult and the Low Weald.

The scarp in this area of the AONB is predominantly grassland, although some parts around Thurnham have been ploughed as a result of arable cultivation in the recent past. This has exposed the highly visible white chalk beneath the shallow, unstable soils. In contrast to the dense woodlands above Boxley, there is only an intermittent fringe of woodland along the scarp top and some scattered trees along field boundaries.

The southern boundary of the AONB extends across the fertile strip of land along the scarp foot. The continual down-wash of soil from the scarp, combined with the sheltered aspect of the resulting fields, produces a belt of very productive agricultural land. For most of its length, the extent of this fertile strip is clearly evident from the single width and uniformity of the large intensively cultivated fields which divide it up. Beyond this strip, the fields are often smaller and more irregular, with more trees and woodland scattered between them.

The agricultural value of the scarp foot has long been recognised and exploited. The Ordnance Survey maps of the late 19th century show a pattern of large, regular fields similar to that of today. In recent years, however, some parts of the scarp foot have been denuded even of the few trees and hedges which formerly occurred there. This has produced vast arable 'prairies', that in places sweep up over the scarp onto the downland plateaux. The scale of these 'prairies' is inappropriate to the character of the surrounding landscape.

The scarp foot is also characterised by the string of old-established villages, such as Hollingbourne, which have grown up along the line of springs that seep out from the lower levels of the chalk. Hollingbourne Manor is a good example of Elizabethan brickwork. A number of historic parks adjoin the Pilgrim's Way and the Greenway ancient roads which pass through the area, usually marked out by thick hedges along each side.

The scarp is crossed by a considerable number of roads and footpaths, while for most of its length the North Downs Way runs along the top of the scarp and the Pilgrim's Way runs along the bottom. Its open nature, and the wide views it offers, mean that this stretch of landscape is particularly sensitive to development. The existing road and railway network, along the southern boundary, already has a considerable impact on the views and quiet enjoyment of this part of the AONB.

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HOLLINGBOURNE VALE

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Rolling landscape of mixed farmland overlooked by yew-dominated scarp.
Thick hedges along Pilgrim's Way. Large, scarp-foot arable fields.
Historic springline villages.

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

The pattern of elements on the chalk scarp is coherent, but the usual unity is interrupted by the denudation of the plateau and the intense decline of shaws and cross-contour hedges. Fragments of hedgerows add to the visual detractors within the landscape which include quarries and some ridgeline buildings. Small clusters of scrub and trees provide the only opportunity for semi-natural habitats within the arable landscape, and therefore the ecological integrity of the area is weak. Built development is generally unremarkable and there are few notable heritage features with the exception of the Pilgrim's Way. This area is considered to be in poor condition.

Sensitivity

The large arable pattern has an historic time depth. The more ancient qualities of a heavily wooded upper scarp have been eroded. Characteristic features include the hedges along some roads and the Pilgrim's Way, but there are few other features which contribute to local distinctiveness. The sense of place is weak. Recent built form is apparent in the landscape. The landform itself is the dominant feature in the unenclosed landscape, and visibility is therefore very high. The landscape is considered to be of moderate sensitivity.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

The restoration of heritage features and ecological interest is required to upgrade the condition of the landscape, at the same time respecting the fertility of the soil and its use for arable cultivation. Distinct features may be restored or created to augment the local sense of place. The characteristic feature of beech avenues may be restored to enhance the cross-contour road. Regenerative woody vegetation would be appropriate to mark the base of the steeper slopes. Species-rich chalk grassland is appropriate to the upper slopes. Existing open arable may then be defined by occasional shaws which link the limited area of woody scrub on the upper edge and the hedged Pilgrim's Way at the base. The emphasis on the spring line settlement should be restored and the effect of existing ridgeline development mitigated.

CONTEXT

Regional: Kent Downs AONB

Condition

good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE
moderate	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
poor	CREATE	RESTORE & CREATE	RESTORE
	low	moderate	high

Sensitivity

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition

Poor.

Pattern of elements:	Coherent.
Detracting features:	Some.
Visual Unity:	Coherent.
Cultural integrity:	Poor.
Ecological integrity:	Weak.
Functional Integrity:	Very Weak.

Sensitivity

Moderate.

Distinctiveness:	Indistinct.
Continuity:	Historic.
Sense of Place:	Weak.
Landform:	Dominant.
Extent of tree cover:	Open.
Visibility:	Very High.

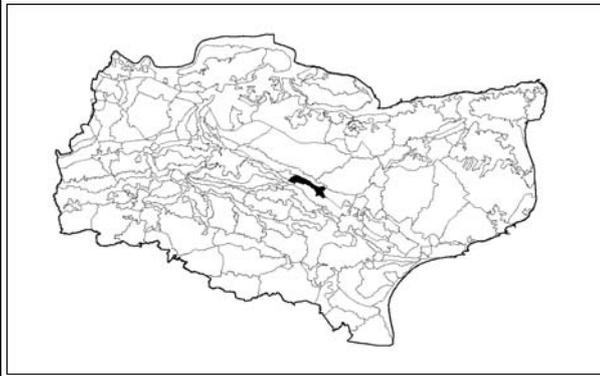
SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

RESTORE AND CREATE.

Restore thick, well managed hedgerows to highways.
Replant the characteristic features of beech avenues on cross-contour roads.
Restore occasional woodland shaws.
Create key areas of chalk grassland on the upper scarp.
Create scrub woodland to mark the transition from arable to grassland.
Reduce the visibility and impact of recent built form.

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HOLLINGBOURNE VALE EAST



Hollingbourne Vale East continues this distinctive rural character area from Hollingbourne Vale West on the Gault Clay of a gently undulating agricultural landscape punctuated by small woodlands and scattered settlement developed on the heavy clay soils. This eastern part of the vale forms part of the catchment of the Great Stour, which rises near Lenham and drains eastwards rather than west to the Len and the Medway.

Just east of Lenham the landscape is unusually open, this characteristic extending up into the grazing land of the chalk scarp face above East Lenham and New Shelve Farm. The land here straddles the difficult to work clay soils with the more easily cultivated soils of the scarp foot that have long been worked on a large scale. Further cultivation to improve pastures and the intensification of arable utilising huge machines, however, has encouraged a bleak pattern of few trees or hedgerows. The Downs remain enclosing the landscape to the north but the lack of trees and hedgerows allows sight of the M20 and Channel Tunnel Rail Link to the south. This enlarged transport corridor, exploiting the stable substrates beneath the clay, has a profound effect on the tranquillity of the vale on its northern boundary.

Mineral extraction is also locally a feature of this area, with Lenham Forstal pit an active mineral site and Brett Gravels extracting near Charing.

Towards Charing the landscape becomes more varied with a mix of sheep-grazed pasture and arable fields divided by gappy hedgerows with scattered trees. Small broadleaf copses become more frequent once again, and the enclosure of the Downs is emphasised by extensive scarp-face woodlands.

Charing and Lenham are both ancient villages that have developed at the scarp foot due to the line of springs that seep out from the junction of the chalk with the clay. The source of the Great Stour is found in this area at Tanyard Farm pond.

The outskirts of Lenham have now crept down the A20 towards Charing and need restraint on the eastern boundary to conserve the essentially rural character of the village. Elsewhere, on the clay, settlement is limited to scattered farmsteads, often vernacular in construction and of ancient origin.

South of Charing a pocket of this traditional character area remains between the motorway and the railway. Further eastwards the landscape becomes more remote with a rich and varied pattern of grassland, hay crops and arable fields.

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HOLLINGBOURNE VALE EAST

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Gently undulating landscape on heavy clay soils. Small streams draining east to Great Stour. Mixed farmland of small sheep-grazed pasture and larger arable fields. Locally extensive loss of hedgerows and woodland to allow exploitation of good quality soils at scarp foot. Scarp foot villages. Chalk scarp dominating views to north.

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

The extensive loss of hedgerow and shaws in this large-scale arable landscape has resulted in an incoherent landscape, void of features, which no longer reflects the landform. There are some visual detractors associated with the trunk road, and a few due to unsympathetic farm buildings. The ecological interest is weak - there are a few small patches of wetland, some generative vegetation on the railway embankment and fragments of hedgerow. The condition of the landscape is considered to be very poor.

Sensitivity

There are few distinguishing features in the landscape which contribute to a local sense of place. The gently undulating landform is unremarkable within the area, although bounded by the chalk scarp to the north. Visibility is therefore moderate over the open landscape. The sensitivity of the area is considered to be low.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

Create regenerative woodland to the scarp-side of large arable fields and, whilst maintaining the large scale of farmland, reintroduce cross-contour shaws to link with existing streams. Create new corridors of riparian vegetation. Create a design code to ensure that agricultural buildings contribute to the open view and respect the scale of historic farm buildings.

CONTEXT

Regional: Greensand Belt

Condition

good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE
moderate	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
poor	<u>CREATE</u>	RESTORE & CREATE	RESTORE
	low	moderate	high

Sensitivity

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition

Very Poor.

Pattern of elements:	Incoherent.
Detracting features:	Some.
Visual Unity:	Interrupted.
Cultural integrity:	Poor.
Ecological integrity:	Weak.
Functional Integrity:	Very Weak.

Sensitivity

Low.

Distinctiveness:	Indistinct.
Continuity:	Historic.
Sense of Place:	Weak.
Landform:	Insignificant.
Extent of tree cover:	Open.
Visibility:	Moderate.

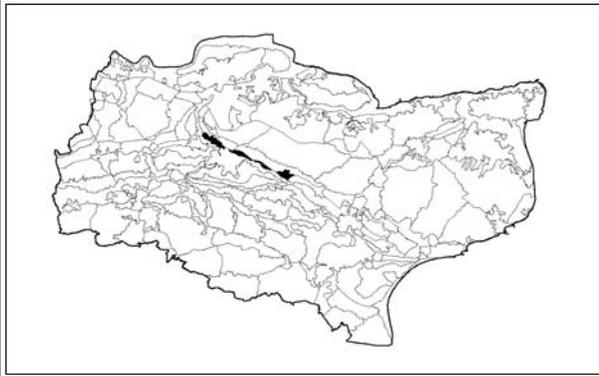
SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

CREATE.

Create ecological interest by the sensitive management of some arable and pastoral farmland
Reintroduce shaws and riparian vegetation around streams
Create regenerative woodlands
Create a local design code for agricultural buildings

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HOLLINGBOURNE VALE WEST



This character area is created essentially on the Gault Clay vale running beneath the Downs. It is generally sandwiched between the M20 and the railway east of Maidstone, from Newnham Court Farm to the watershed between the Medway and the Great Stour at Leadingcross Green. Also included is a small area on the chalk excluded from the AONB, north of the railway line, roughly from Harrietsham to Lenham. This area forms an extension to the character area described as 'Hollingbourne' in the AONB study, The Kent Downs Landscape.

The Gault is composed of stiff grey-blue clays which expand on wetting, these shrinkable qualities making settlement infrequent. The soils of this area are seasonally waterlogged clayey loams of mixed quality where traditionally winter cereals and short term grasslands were found. Since the 1960's more grassland has been grown, mainly improved pastures but the construction of the motorway has contributed to loss of agricultural land, woodland and tranquillity.

Small broadleaf woodlands and irregular fields are typical of this character area. The ancient mixed broad-leaved woodlands of Honeyhills Wood north of Bearsted are a well preserved, if unmanaged, example. Areas of hornbeam, oak, ash, field maple and hazel coppice, create a closed canopy on this damp clay soil with a rich shrub layer of woodland hawthorn, guelder rose and holly. Bluebells are locally abundant, clothing the ground with a blue mist in spring. Horish Wood to the west is similar but with damper species such as downy birch and willow. Warren Wood, part of the Leeds Castle Estate is a very rich relict ancient woodland of pedunculate oak with hornbeam, hazel and ash coppice and a varied ground flora.

All three woodlands have been bisected by the M20 and the Channel Tunnel Rail Link at the edge of this character area where it joins the more free-draining Folkestone Beds.

Eyhorne Street with its vernacular centre is one of the few villages in this character area, nestling at the foot of the Downs.

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HOLLINGBOURNE VALE WEST

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Undulating landscape on wet clay soils. Small broadleaf woodlands and irregular pastures. Infrequent settlement. Small streams (the head waters of the river Len) draining west to Maidstone. Chalk scarp dominating views to north

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

There is a sound basis for ecological interest in the frequent woodland and streams; however, the spread of semi-natural habitats and the visual unity of the landscape are interrupted by rail and road transport corridors. Other visual detractors include industrial and suburban development. The cultural integrity of rural features is variable - tree cover appears widespread and there are some strong wooded edges, but hedgerows are in decline. Farmhouses and historic buildings are mixed with more recent built form to give a moderate positive impact. The condition of the area is considered to be poor.

Sensitivity

There is an historic time depth to the landscape with woodlands, historic settlements and hedged field boundaries all contributing to the sense of place. This is modified in some areas by more recent development, such as the widening of roads. The landform is apparent in the view and occasionally has localised dramatic relief. Views are intermittently enclosed by woodland and therefore the visibility is moderate.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

Restore rural views by controlling the visibility of detracting features.
 Restore wooded edges where these have been eroded by development.
 Create a dense woodland framework for transport corridors.
 Create edges to settlements and new rural features to distinguish highways and the approaches to settlements.
 Restore enclosure to highways.

CONTEXT

Regional: Greensand Belt

Condition

good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE
moderate	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
poor	CREATE	RESTORE & CREATE	RESTORE
	low	moderate	high

Sensitivity

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition

Poor.

Pattern of elements:	Coherent.
Detracting features:	Many.
Visual Unity:	Interrupted.
Cultural integrity:	Variable.
Ecological integrity:	Moderate.
Functional Integrity:	Coherent.

Sensitivity

Moderate.

Distinctiveness:	Characteristic.
Continuity:	Historic.
Sense of Place:	Moderate.
Landform:	Apparent.
Extent of tree cover:	Intermittent.
Visibility:	Moderate.

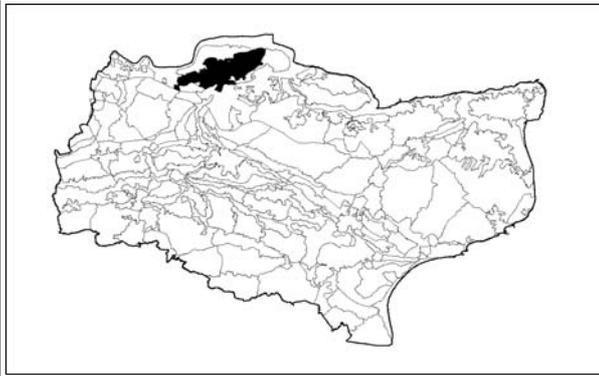
SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

RESTORE AND CREATE.

Restore wooded edges
 Control the impact of visual detractors
 Create new rural highway features and restore enclosure to highways
 Create a woodland framework to transport corridors

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HOO PENINSULA



The Hoo Peninsula is a discrete tract of landscape lying between the Thames and Medway estuaries and bounded at its western end by the urban edge of Gravesend and the North Downs at Shorne. Land uses are generally typical of other parts of the North Kent Agricultural Belt but a distinctive character results from its relative geographical isolation and the pervading influence of the coast and sea. The extensive coastal marshes and significant industrial landmarks of Grain and Kingsnorth are also influences on the character of this otherwise predominantly agricultural area.

Above the flat low-lying alluvial marshes to north and south, the undulating form of the Tertiary Beds is marked by a series of more prominent landform features. Within the central part of the peninsula, an outcrop of London Clay gives rise to an elevated complex of hills and valleys at Chattenden, which has a distinctive character of its own and creates a visual barrier between north and south. Other prominent features include Beacon Hill (also on the London Clay) the slopes of which drop steeply to the Medway Estuary on its southern side, and Northward Hill, which overlies the Thanet Sands and forms a prominent hill along the northern coastline.

Farmland is the predominant landcover but its character varies quite markedly. At the eastern end of the peninsula, the landscape is dominated by large-scale arable cultivation, largely devoid of trees or hedgerows. In contrast, Chattenden Ridge and other prominent hills are clothed in broadleaved woodland mixed with areas of pasture. To the west of the ridge, the farmed landscape has a more traditional pattern of orchards, shelterbelts, hedgerows and mixed cropping. However, the effects of Dutch Elm disease and the progressive loss of orchards are changing the landscape to a more simple, open character. This is more marked at the far west of the zone where open arable farmland once again becomes the predominant landcover type.

Settlement comprises scattered farms, small, rural villages (with some more recent extensions) and the larger settlement of Hoo St. Werburgh. The army barracks at Chattenden have a distinctive campus style character. Industrial land uses lie mainly within adjacent marshland areas and have significant influence on landscape character.

Apart from the fringing marshes (see Eastern Thames Marshes and Medway Marshes), the most important features of nature conservation importance within the peninsula are areas of broadleaved woodland. The wooded ridges of Chattenden, Northward Hill, Beacon Hill and Tower Hill are designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest, while other smaller fragments of woodland associated with these areas and near Fenn Street, are of county significance.

The Hoo Peninsula is best remembered as the home of Charles Dickens, at Gadshill. 'Great Expectations' was also set here. The River Medway and Upnor Castle were subjects of Turner's paintings and engravings in the 19th century. Notable buildings are Cooling Castle and Cliffe Church both dating from the 14th century. Cliffe Church was the setting for the opening scenes of Dickens' 'Great Expectations'.

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HOO PENINSULA

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Prominent hills and low-lying alluvial marshes.
 Flat/undulating farmland. Decline in orchards and mixed farmland with shelterbelts.
 Intensive, open farmed arable land. Intrusive influence of industrial development.

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

There is very little coherent landscape pattern here. Visual detractors in the landscape occur on a large scale (industrial horizon) and detailed scale (industrial farm buildings). Isolated patches of woodland provide clusters of semi-natural habitat, but there is very little opportunity for ecological interest within the open arable fields. The occasional large brick farmhouse and the nature of the alluvial marshland augments the cultural and functional integrity of the area, but overall it is considered to be weak.

Sensitivity

The historic framework to this landscape is mainly indistinct. The highways retain some characteristic features. Brick farmsteads, and isolated development associated with the railways contribute to local distinctiveness in a minor capacity. The sense of place is considered to be weak.
 The contrast of the low hills against the surrounding marshland is an apparent feature in the open view. Views are long and visibility is high.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

Restore pockets of small scale farmland in the area and, where it is appropriate, around existing settlement.
 New landscape elements may need to be created around new settlements, using characteristic elements adapted to developing uses of the land - to include large-scale agriculture, transport and residential uses.
 Create new ecological bases within the farmland which may also act as recreational resources for residential areas.
 Create woodland links within the farmland in order to develop wider networks with the existing hilltop woodland areas.
 Restore the integrity of the coastal fringe by linking the remaining undeveloped flatlands together, finding design opportunities within the peripheral built areas to reflect the ecological and visual qualities of the surrounding marshland.

CONTEXT

Regional: Thames Gateway

Condition

good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE
moderate	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
poor	CREATE	RESTORE & CREATE	RESTORE
	low	moderate	high

Sensitivity

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition

Poor.

Pattern of elements:	Coherent.
Detracting features:	Some.
Visual Unity:	Coherent.
Cultural integrity:	Poor.
Ecological integrity:	Weak.
Functional Integrity:	Very Weak.

Sensitivity

Moderate.

Distinctiveness:	Indistinct.
Continuity:	Historic.
Sense of Place:	Weak.
Landform:	Apparent
Extent of tree cover:	Open
Visibility:	High.

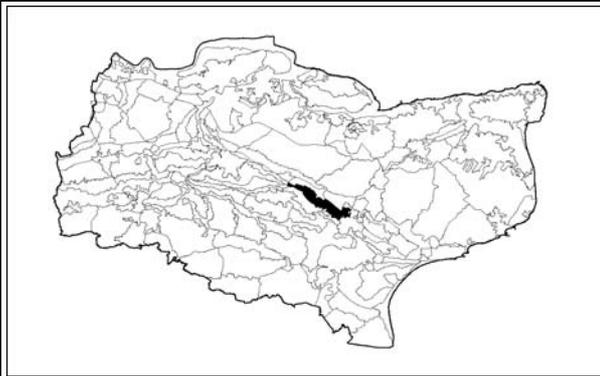
SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

RESTORE AND CREATE.

Create new ecological/recreational resources such as regenerative woodland in farmland
 Restore small pockets of heritage landscape around existing settlement
 Restore the physical coherence of the coastal marshland

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HOTHFIELD HEATHY FARMLANDS



The heathy farmlands extend over an undulating landscape from Sandway eastwards to the outskirts of Ashford, and are formed on a mixed geology of the Folkestone beds, the underlying Sandgate Beds and the alluvial deposits of the Great Stour. Unlike the Leeds-Lenham farmland, it is the headwaters of the Great Stour that cut into the landscape, draining to the east.

It differs from the landscape to the south in the inferior quality of the soils, these being generally poor and acid or subjected to seasonal waterlogging. This has led to a greater frequency of grassland and cereals, similar to the Leeds-Lenham farmlands. On soils of better quality, mainly south of the motorway, a greater frequency of arable crops are grown in a more open landscape.

Settlement is scattered in villages such as Lenham and Charing Heaths, Tutt Hill and Hothfield, where 20th century development has enlarged but not overwhelmed the vernacular centres. Little Chart is a fine and seemingly secluded example. These villages are connected by a winding network of tranquil lanes, often crossing north-east to south-west as in the Weald- the pattern of the old 'drove' roads which were used to take swine to the summer grazing in the wooded Weald.

A particular feature of the area are the historic parklands, including Chilston Park, Hothfield Place and Godinton. Chilston, that straddles the headwaters of the Stour, was described by John Evelyn in the 17th century as "..... a sweetly watered place." He considered it one of the finest parks in England. Now its northern part is severed by the M20, with its trees dying. Hothfield has lost part of its parkland character to cultivation and its mature trees are also declining. There is evidence that other parks existed in this area as well, possibly becoming disused as deer parks in Tudor times.

Whilst extensive broadleaf woodlands are not a feature of the landscape, small copses and plantations of chestnut coppice do occur for example at Hurst Wood and near Calehill House. Larger-scale woodland can be found, however, at Ashford Warren, Hothfield Common and Hothfield Lake.

The most distinctive feature of this south east area is the heathland of Hothfield Common, a valley bog enclosed by birches formed at the junction of the sandstones and the clayey Sandgate Beds. This is just a small remnant of the once far greater extent of heathland that extended in the Greensand Belt in the past, as evidenced by many of the place names such as Lenham and Charing Heath and Hothfield.

This farmed landscape is divided for much of its length by the A20 or the M20, the latter crossing under the railway at Tutt Hill to avoid the Gault Clays. Whilst not highly visible in much of this undulating landscape, it is audible for many miles and intrudes on the tranquillity of the small lanes. This transport intrusion is compounded by the Channel Tunnel Rail Link.

Ashford Warren, the golf course and the coppice woodlands south of the M20, help contain the western outskirts of Ashford at the current time. Considerable residential development is proposed to the north-west of the town, however, at Potter's Corner, Hoad's Wood and around Goats Lees that could have a tremendous impact on this end of the character area, and the nature of Ashford itself.

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HOTHFIELD HEATHY FARMLANDS

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Undulating landscape of mixed farmlands. Heathland or heath characteristics on the Folkestone Beds. Historic Parkland.

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

This landscape has a coherent pattern of small scale mixed use with notable heathy characteristics influenced by the sandy soils. The scale and pattern of the area is interrupted by motorway and rail link routes and by unsympathetic land uses and quarries. There are clusters of semi-natural habitats of high ecological importance, which include wetland, heathland and small pastures; there are also areas of intensive arable cultivation. Built development has a moderate positive impact, but landscape heritage features of woodland and field enclosures are poor.

Sensitivity

There is a moderate sense of place, in many cases influenced by the heathland and parkland features. The time depth is mainly historic, although historic rural elements of woodland and field enclosures no longer contribute greatly to the local distinctiveness. Recent visibility is low as tree cover is intermittent over an unremarkable landform. The sensitivity of the landscape is therefore low.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

- Create woodland and regenerative scrub framework to transport routes, encouraging appropriate heathy species.
- Create a code of use and design for neglected land and for agricultural buildings.
- Link clusters of ecological importance to create semi-natural habitat frameworks.
- Create vegetative edges to enlarged settlements.

CONTEXT

Regional: Greensand Belt

Condition

good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE
moderate	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
poor	CREATE	RESTORE & CREATE	RESTORE
	low	moderate	high

Sensitivity

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition

Poor.

Pattern of elements:	Coherent.
Detracting features:	Many.
Visual Unity:	Interrupted.
Cultural integrity:	Variable.
Ecological integrity:	Moderate.
Functional Integrity:	Coherent.

Sensitivity

Low.

Distinctiveness:	Characteristic.
Continuity:	Historic.
Sense of Place:	Moderate.
Landform:	Insignificant.
Extent of tree cover:	Intermittent.
Visibility:	Low.

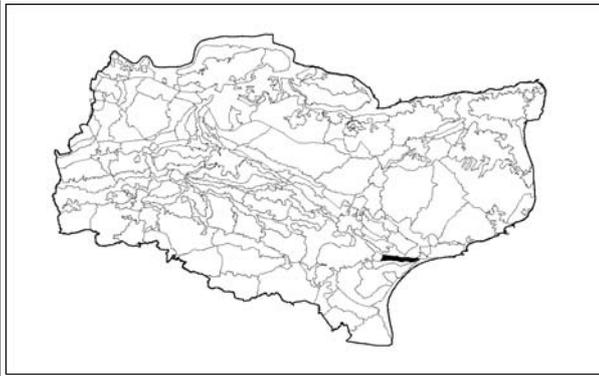
SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

CREATE.

- Create acid woodland and scrub framework to transport routes.
- Create distinctive design elements for agricultural buildings and neglected land.
- Create habitat networks around existing areas of ecological importance.
- Create urban edges.
- Create heathland where appropriate.

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HYTHE ESCARPMENT: LYMPNE



HYTHE ESCARPMENT

The Hythe escarpment, unlike the chalk face of the Downs, is furrowed throughout its length by small streams, which emerge from the sandstone, high up on the hillside and run down into Royal Military Canal. To the east of the Port Lympe Wildlife Sanctuary, most of the scarp face is botanically rich rough grassland, with a considerable amount of scrub encroaching up the slopes. The sparse vegetation and the pitted, unstable soils produce a bleak, wild landscape, reflecting its exposed location. To the west, however, it becomes shallower. Remnant hedgerows are still evident across the slope, while bright green fields of improved grassland jar with the softer, seasonally changing colours of the rough pasture. Many of the buildings, including Lympe Castle, are built in the local ragstone.

The simplicity and integrity of this landscape and its high visibility from much of Romney Marsh mean that any developments or changes which take place on its slopes will have major effects not only on the immediate landscape but also on the wider setting of Romney Marsh.

LYMPNE

The Hythe Escarpment forms part of the larger character area of Lympe.

The most southerly part of the AONB extends from Hythe west to Aldington. The character area includes part of the Hythe escarpment, which overlooks Romney Marsh. Until the early Middle Ages, this scarp formed the edge of a large, marshy lagoon. Gradually, however, the lagoon was reclaimed, through a combination of the natural accumulation of silt and shingle, the construction of sea defences and sustained drainage. The resulting land now forms one of the most fertile areas in Kent, with a particularly long growing season.

Most of the Hythe escarpment is the eroded face of the greensands and in particular of the calcareous Kentish ragstone. Over the centuries the surface has gradually slipped to form a steep, uneven slope, enclosing the northern edge of the marsh. The vulnerability of the coast to attack has left a legacy of old military defences scattered across the area, from the tumbled walls of the Roman fort of Lemanis, to the 19th century Royal Military Canal at the foot of the escarpment and the last of the Second World War 'Sound Mirrors' behind Burmarsh, 'listening' for approaching aircraft.

The scarp is highly visible from the flat marsh, forming a long hillside of rough grassland, dotted with scrub. Several large deciduous woodlands break up the sweep of the landform, being more characteristic in the west around Aldington. Between these woodlands, there are spectacular views across Romney Marsh and the English Channel.

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HYTHE ESCARPMENT: LYMPNE

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Sandstone scarp with rough grassland.
Remnant hedgerows.
Unimproved agricultural grasslands
Scrub at base of slopes

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

This is not an entirely traditional landscape; the view of agricultural grasslands is occasionally interrupted by wire fencing and inappropriate planting. Prominent castles and extensive houses have a high positive impact on the area. Inaccessibility is also a strong element of this landscape. Rough pastures on the scarp and the strong corridor of the canal and ditches at the base of the scarp provide much ecological interest within the more sterile improved grasslands. The condition of this area is considered to be good.

Sensitivity

The scarp is a dominant landform, particularly as it looks over the wide expanse of coastal marsh. The limited tree cover does not curtail the high visibility within and around the landscape.

There are notable unique ancient and historic sites within this landscape. Historic farmsteads also follow a distinct pattern on the strong landform, contributing to the strong sense of place. The sensitivity of the area is considered to be very high.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

Conserve the setting of ancient/historic sites and monuments by ensuring long views to sites, but retaining the element of inaccessibility.
Ensure the sensitive management of rough and pastoral grasslands in key areas.
Conserve the woodland cover to the ridge tops, and links with small copses on the scarp.
Conserve the network of drainage courses feeding the canal, using sensitive management to realise the full ecological potential.

CONTEXT

Regional: Kent Downs AONB

Condition

good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE
	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
moderate			
poor	CREATE	RESTORE & CREATE	RESTORE
	low	moderate	high

Sensitivity

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition

Good.

Pattern of elements:	Coherent.
Detracting features:	Few.
Visual Unity:	Unified.
Cultural integrity:	Variable.
Ecological integrity:	Moderate.
Functional Integrity:	Coherent.

Sensitivity

Very High.

Distinctiveness:	Unique/Rare.
Continuity:	Ancient.
Sense of Place:	Very Strong.
Landform:	Dominant.
Extent of tree cover:	Intermittent.
Visibility:	High.

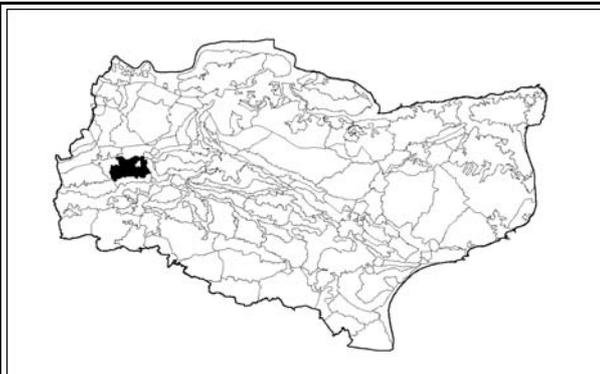
SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

CONSERVE.

Conserve wooded top to the scarp
Conserve rough and pastoral grasslands
Conserve the canal, wetlands and drainage courses
Conserve open views to/from sites and monuments

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IGHTHAM GREENSAND: SEVENOAKS RIDGE



IGHTHAM GREENSAND

East of Sevenoaks the Greensand Ridge retains its densely wooded appearance, but gradually descends from the heights of Toy Hill and Goathurst Common towards the lower land around Ightham. Small irregular pastures nestle between the trees, and the lanes wind through dense strands of conifers and birch. The steep, wooded scarp softens out into a series of gentle slopes in the east, opening up the landscape and signalling a change in land use.

South east of Ivy Hatch, a slight variation in soil encourages fruit growing, giving rise to a richly patterned landscape of intensively cultivated apple and pear orchards. Towering between them, rows of poplars or alders provide shelter from wind and frost and turn tiny country lanes into deep enclosed corridors. In a few remaining pockets, occasional cobnut groves or platts still remain, their gnarled, twiggy trunks contrasting with the near well-ordered rows of apple and pear trees elsewhere.

Along the eastern boundary of Sevenoaks, the sweeps of pasture between heathy woodland in the historic parkland of Knole House, form the largest and most important area of unimproved acid grassland in Kent. The mix of oak, beech and sweet chestnut woodlands continues beyond the park as far as Seal Chart.

SEVENOAKS RIDGE

Ightham Greensand lies within the larger character area of Sevenoaks Ridge.

The ridge around Sevenoaks is the product of the underlying acidic sandstone, which in the south rises up off the clay vale of the Low Weald in a steep, tree-covered scarp between Crockham Hill and Shipbourne. Offering panoramic views towards the High Weald and Tonbridge, the Greensand Belt reaches over 245 metres at Toys Hill, while its gentle northern slopes are scored by a series of deeply cut valleys. Much of the ridge is covered by dense, mixed woodland, producing an intimate, secretive landscape, shaded by swathes of beech, and conifer forest. The poor soils of the sandstone, however, discouraged early settlers and, while the river valleys and fertile vales of Kent had been settled for centuries, this area remained dense forest interspersed with occasional summer pastures until the tenth and eleventh centuries. Today, the dominant characteristics of this landscape are still the thick woodland and heathy commons, within which small pockets of farmland lie.

The acid greensand provides a variety of sandstones, which have been quarried since pre-Roman times. This abundance of stone has given rise to an alternative name for the area - the Chartland. Chart derives from the Scandinavian kart, meaning stony ground and still occurs in several place names, such as Brasted Chart. Historically, these stones were widely used for construction and can still be seen in buildings around Sevenoaks.

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IGHTHAM GREENSAND: SEVENOAKS RIDGE

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Densely wooded greensand ridge. Small irregular pastures. Heathy woodland and pasture around Knole. Unimproved acid grasslands. Conifer and birch stands. Gentler slopes with ordered rows of fruit growing and shelter belts towards the east. Heavily enclosed narrow lanes.

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

This is a unified landscape with few visual detractors. The variety of tree cover, hedgerow and parkland provides a strong ecological base. Acid grasslands occur, which are rare in Kent. Woodlands are varied and well-managed, but do not constitute an intensive use of the land. Heritage features such as sunken lanes and vernacular buildings are an important and characteristic part of the landscape and have a positive impact on the area. This area is considered to be strongly unified.

Sensitivity

This is an historic landscape with notable ancient landmarks and characteristic historic settlements. The woodland and parkland reinforces the very strong time depth. Rare acid grassland is also associated with the grazing management of the ancient parkland. Vernacular materials are widespread and distinctive. Views of expanded historic villages are contained by woodland. Visibility is generally low as the widespread tree cover encloses most views. Although the sense of place is very strong, the sensitivity of the area is considered to be moderate due to the low visibility.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

Conserve the rare and ancient elements which are highly characteristic of this landscape area and are also ecologically significant such as the ancient parkland, heathy woodland and acid grasslands. The management and replanting of heathy woodland plant communities should be encouraged. Similarly, the management and retention of the dense hedgerows along narrow, vergeless lanes should be encouraged. Small hamlets and villages, and farmed areas are visually contained, and often entirely screened. This containment should be reinforced by characteristic woodland and hedgerows, of appropriate and characteristic species. The woodland edge within most views is a feature which visually reinforces the high proportion of woodland in the area, and is therefore important to conserve. The use of vernacular materials, scale and form, should be reinforced.

CONTEXT

Regional: Kent Downs AONB

Condition

good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE
	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
moderate			
poor	CREATE	RESTORE & CREATE	RESTORE
	low	moderate	high

Sensitivity

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition

Very Good.

Pattern of elements: Unified.

Detracting features: Few.

Visual Unity: Strongly Unified.

Cultural integrity: Good.

Ecological integrity: Strong Network.

Functional Integrity: Very Strong.

Sensitivity

Moderate.

Distinctiveness: Characteristic.

Continuity: Ancient.

Sense of Place: Strong.

Landform: Apparent.

Extent of tree cover: Enclosed.

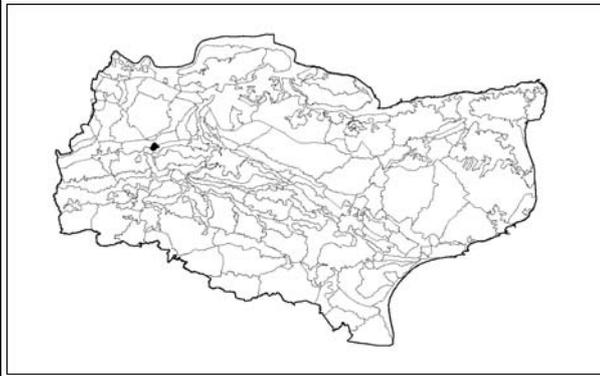
Visibility: Low.

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

CONSERVE AND REINFORCE.

Conserve acid grasslands
 Reinforce heathy woodland
 Reinforce the enclosure of roads with dense hedgerow, no verges
 Conserve parkland and ancient landmarks and land patterns
 Conserve the visual isolation of hamlets and settlements
 Reinforce the small-scale and enclosure of other land uses within the woodland.
 Reinforce the use of vernacular materials

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This small undulating character area forms an extension to that already described in The Kent Downs Landscape (Kemsing Vale - Kent Downs AONB). The landscape is developed on the stiff clays of the Gault which have generally discouraged settlement but have encouraged a patchwork of small woodlands and pastures and larger arable fields on its loamy clay soils. Within this character area these are centred on Wrotham Park and Park Farm. This land was almost certainly part of a medieval deer park which was no longer used as a deer park by the 16th century, but retained the word 'park' in many of the named features.

The character area is virtually enclosed by motorways with the M26 running through the south of the area and the M20 to the north. Despite its agricultural land use, therefore, it is far from tranquil.

South of the M26 extraction for clay and sand takes place.

Visually the landscape is dominated by the chalk scarp to the north with the scar of Wrotham Hill standing out.

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Undulating landscape on wet stiff clays. Patchwork of small woodlands, pasture and larger arable fields. Infrequent settlement. Chalk scarp dominates to the north. Enclosure by motorways.

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

The visual unity of the landscape is interrupted by the visual and aural impact of the motorway. To either side of this intrusive corridor, the irregular pattern of the wooded edge and pastures remain strong. The hedgerow pattern is extant, but hedges are often over-mature and in poor condition.

Sensitivity

Historic landscape features are characteristic of this area. It is considered that there are no outstandingly unique landscape influences. Recent, indistinct elements such as large agricultural buildings, motorway planting and road junctions are becoming more widespread. The landform is apparent in the landscape, and views are enclosed intermittently by small copses. The sensitivity of the area is therefore low.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

The patchwork of small woodlands and pastures may be extended to integrate the motorway into the surrounding landscape, creating a new landscape element, but ensuring that the corridor has some lateral links with existing features. Reinforce the impact of the wooded edge. New ecological bases may be developed by the sensitive management of existing and new pastures. Where it is in a manageable context, existing hedgerow should be reinforced by replanting or re-laying the plant stock. The estate-farm elements such as trackways, boundary features, drives, mature ornamental planting may be reinforced. Encourage the development of sympathetic farm buildings

CONTEXT

Regional: Greensand Belt

Condition

good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE
moderate	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
poor	CREATE	RESTORE & CREATE	RESTORE
	low	moderate	high

Sensitivity

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition

Good.

Pattern of elements:	Coherent.
Detracting features:	Some.
Visual Unity:	Coherent.
Cultural integrity:	Good.
Ecological integrity:	Moderate.
Functional Integrity:	Strong.

Sensitivity

Low.

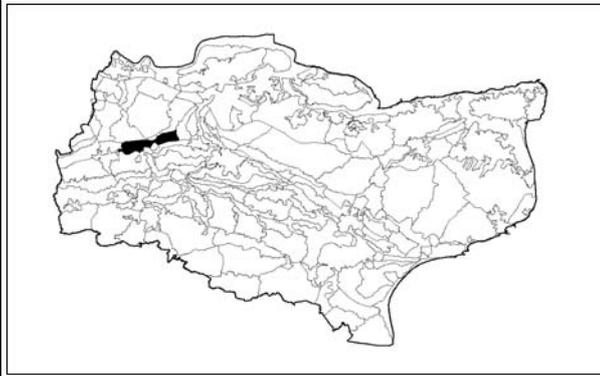
Distinctiveness:	Indistinct.
Continuity:	Historic.
Sense of Place:	Weak.
Landform:	Apparent.
Extent of tree cover:	Intermittent.
Visibility:	Moderate.

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

REINFORCE.

Create a patchwork of small woodlands and pastures around the motorway corridor
 Reinforce the existing woodland edge
 Create new ecological interest by the sensitive management of new and existing pastures
 Reinforce existing hedgerow
 Reinforce the estate-farm features within the landscape
 Create sympathetic designs for farm buildings

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The Kemsing scarp offers spectacular views south across the vale to the Greensand Ridge. The scarp in this area is steep and narrow, with an almost continuous blanket of woodland along the top. These woods are dominated by beech, yew and whitebeam, interspersed in places by extensive tracts of rough, unimproved chalk grassland. Much of the woodland and grassland is of national nature conservation importance, supporting a wide variety of scarce flora and fauna. This pattern of wood, scrub and rough grass gives the slopes a strong untamed and natural quality, which contrasts with the tidy, square fields of the vale.

The large, intensively cultivated arable fields of the scarp foot are visually prominent here, surrounded by narrow, trimmed hedges. Along the northern boundary of these fields, the thick overgrown hedges of the Pilgrim's Way stand out, often festooned with swatches of white Old Man's Beard (*Clematis vitalba*). In contrast, the gault clay vale to the south supports a rich patchwork of mixed farmland. Individual mature trees are very important in this landscape, giving scale and interest to the otherwise flat countryside. Many now stand isolated, like parkland trees left behind after hedges have been removed to enlarge fields.

Despite the apparently dense woodland on the scarp, many trees here were lost in the 1987 storm. On the vale itself, the characteristic field pattern is threatened by gradual decay or piecemeal removal of hedges and hedgerow trees. This affects not just the pattern of the landscape, but also its ability to absorb the considerable visual impacts of the M26 and M20 motorways, which pass through the area. Quarries in this area can have similar impacts, as the landform and sparse vegetation provide little natural screening.

KEMSING VALE - KENT DOWNS AONB

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Steep scarp with continuously wooded top.
 Patchwork of woodland and chalk grassland on slopes.
 Large scarp-foot arable fields with trimmed hedges and isolated mature hedgerow trees.
 Visual impact of M20/M26.

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

There is a simple, unified landscape pattern which relates directly to the landform, accentuating the base of the scarp slope. Urban development and transport routes detract from the view, but the visual unity of the area remains strong. Built development has a positive impact, mainly due to the historic farms and estate houses which have a definite settlement pattern along the base of the slopes. Intense arable cultivation at the foot of the scarp reduces the ecological interest in the area, although there are small patches of woodland and grassland. It is the cultural strength and clarity of this landscape which has a positive effect on the area and is a deciding factor in its good condition.

Sensitivity

The high visibility of the steep scarp augments the sensitivity of the landscape. There is an ancient time-depth associated with highways and the Pilgrim's Way, but the historic settlement and farming pattern is more characteristic. It is also felt that the occurrence and nature of the estate houses and farmsteads is a unique feature. The natural heritage of woodland and parkland is becoming indistinct - mature vegetation is vulnerable as a feature due to lack of replanting. Overall, the sense of place is moderate.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

Conserve the historic nature of the settlement pattern and the grand isolation of farmsteads, ensuring that historic estate features such as avenues, entrances and estate boundaries are perpetuated. Encourage the managed, rural character of estate farmland.
 Conserve the openness and large scale of the arable landscape.
 Conserve and enhance all existing woodland blocks and shaws.
 Conserve the characteristics of ancient highways, maintaining their narrow form and clipped, hedgerow enclosure.

CONTEXT

Regional: Kent Downs AONB

Condition

good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE
moderate	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
poor	CREATE	RESTORE & CREATE	RESTORE
	low	moderate	high

Sensitivity

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition	Good.
Pattern of elements:	Unified.
Detracting features:	Some.
Visual Unity:	Unified.
Cultural integrity:	Variable.
Ecological integrity:	Moderate.
Functional Integrity:	Coherent.

Sensitivity

Sensitivity	Very High.
Distinctiveness:	Characteristic.
Continuity:	Ancient.
Sense of Place:	Strong.
Landform:	Apparent
Extent of tree cover:	Open
Visibility:	High.

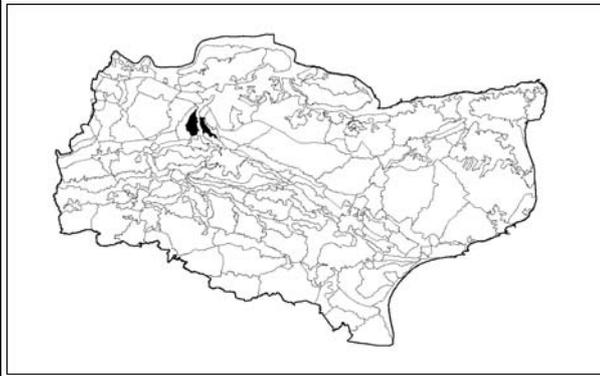
SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

CONSERVE.

Conserve existing woodland and shaws
 Conserve characteristics of narrow highways with trimmed hedges
 Conserve the isolated nature of estate houses
 Conserve the open, large scale of the landscape and views

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KENT DOWNS - MEDWAY, WESTERN & EASTERN SCARP



Either side of the Lower Medway Valley, the river corridor is bordered by the lower slopes of the Kent Downs. Gently sloping chalk is overlain by head brickearths which are more widespread on the eastern side of the river. These character areas form an extension to that already described in the Kent Downs Landscape assessment.

The Kent Downs AONB (Medway Valley character area) covers the scarp and scarp foot of the chalk hills. However, it excludes the areas described here, which are the flatter areas bordering the river, having a concentration of industrial and urban developments.

Light, chalky soils washed down from the scarp slopes have resulted in arable land of high fertility and intensive cultivation. Some of the earliest permanent settlements in Kent were to be found here, and there is evidence of prehistoric sites, ancient trackways and later Roman settlement. Riverside settlements were often the landing stages for ferries across the river. Later development around these villages has taken the form of ribbon development, based on paper-making and other industry in the area. Villages have been severed by road improvements and railway lines.

On the western slopes, where the land is still in agricultural use, the open fields have a very sparse hedgerow network which strengthens towards the wooded hilltops in the AONB. Much of the landscape however has been transformed by chalk quarrying. The white scars of former chalk pits are slowly being colonised with scrubby growth, but a wet pit near Halling holds startlingly blue water at the base of the steep, white chalk faces. Large cement works with tall chimneys already dominate this side of the river and there are plans to extend the existing quarry and works at Holborough.

The eastern slopes are also marked by former chalk quarrying. Scrub vegetation and rough grassland are recurring features of the landscape, especially around the old quarries and the marshy edges of the river. The landscape is open, with large fields and few hedgerows, but is overlooked by the dense woodland of the AONB on the tops of the Downs. This side of the valley is relatively quiet, bypassed by the major through roads in the area, but is subject to pressure for housing development.

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KENT DOWNS - MEDWAY, WESTERN & EASTERN SCARP

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Gently undulating arable farmland. Sparse, remnant hedges leading up to wooded ridges. Open and wild on eastern slopes with wide views. Quarries

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

This is an incoherent landscape in which features do not readily reflect or enhance the landform. There are many visual detractors in landscape views; these include large-scale detractors such as quarry faces and ridge-line housing. Ecological bases are likely to be of most interest in the woodland on ridges and on the quarry face, but these are limited and isolated and do not form a strong network of semi-natural habitat. In addition, the eastern scarp has much intensive arable coverage. The condition of heritage features is poor - hedgerows are fragmented and tree cover is very limited. Characteristic historic settlement on the river, and notable ferry crossing points are mostly overwhelmed by 19th and 20th century development. Built development is frequent in the view and has a high negative impact. The area is considered to be in very poor condition.

Sensitivity

The Medway valley has a significant landform as a whole. However, the lower slopes of the western and eastern scarp described here have an unremarkable landform when considered in isolation. It is an open landscape, and visibility is considered to be moderate. The inherent historic landscape features are now indistinct: hedged field boundaries and woodland are very limited. Settlements tend to be predominantly recent in character although the sites themselves are ancient and historic. A few historic buildings are in evidence. The sensitivity of this area is low.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

Create a landscape framework to provide an urban edge and peripheral enclosure to the arable fields and other farmland.
 Encourage a more diverse agricultural use of the land and encourage less intensive use of arable fields. Create shaws or wide hedgerows as enclosure and to provide a network of semi-natural habitats.
 Create small areas of regenerative woodland to provide intermittent tree cover and enhance the ecological interest of the area.
 Create landscape features which enhance and recognise the ancient highway routes at the upper edge of the floodplain, ensuring that urban development on the waterfront is limited to specific historic nodes and that large open areas remain between the river and the highway. Use woodland and wooded shaws to create an urban edge to existing development.

CONTEXT

Regional: Greensand Belt

Condition

good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE
moderate	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
poor	<u>CREATE</u>	RESTORE & CREATE	RESTORE
	low	moderate	high

Sensitivity

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition **Very Poor.**

Pattern of elements:	Incoherent.
Detracting features:	Many.
Visual Unity:	Significantly Interrupted.
Cultural integrity:	Poor.
Ecological integrity:	Weak.
Functional Integrity:	Very Weak.

Sensitivity **Low.**

Distinctiveness:	Indistinct.
Continuity:	Historic.
Sense of Place:	Weak.
Landform:	Insignificant.
Extent of tree cover:	Open.
Visibility:	Moderate.

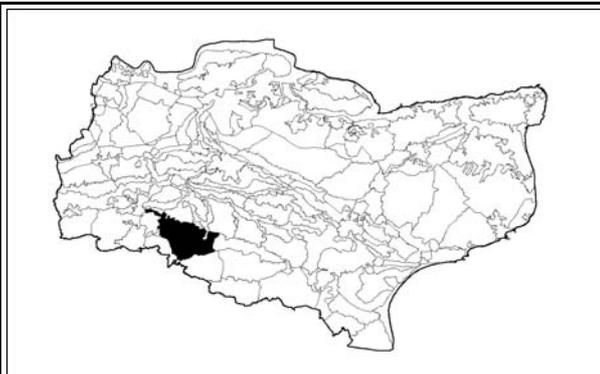
SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

CREATE.

Create ecological interest within the farmland by diverse cropping and areas of less intensive cultivation.
 Create enclosure for urban areas using characteristic woodland
 Create coherent land patterns - define farmland, urban areas and small blocks of woodland
 Enhance existing historic and ancient features based on historic settlement, ferry points, and ancient highways

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KENT FRUIT BELT: KENTISH HIGH WEALD



KENT FRUIT BELT

In this intimate, densely settled area, small lanes twist through a seemingly endless maze of high hedges and tidy orchards. During the summer, when the fruit trees are in leaf, there is a sense of being submerged in this landscape. The valleys and ridges to the north-west, around Matfield and Brenchley, are small and gentle, rarely offering long views out, so that the occasional open fields between the orchards seem to provide a breathing space and a slight sense of relief.

Intensive fruit cultivation gives way to large arable fields along the Teise Valley, between Lamberhurst and Horsmonden. These fields are backed by extensive tracts of mixed woodland, in which a certain amount of coppicing takes place. The fairy-tale manor house of Scotney Castle lies hidden beside the River Bewl, which feeds into the Teise through a landscape of open, tree-lined pastures. Around Goudhurst and Spelmonden, regimented ranks of hop poles cast harsh shadows in the winter sunlight. In summer they disappear under a mass of coarse leaves and clinging tendrils, which snake out along the overhead wires to intertwine with each other.

The intensity of cultivation in this area has resulted in a thick scattering of houses along the lanes, from tile-hung cottage to twentieth century bungalow. Oasthouses and packing sheds serve as a reminder that this has always been, and remains, a working landscape. In spring, a closer look at the apparently timeless fields of apple-blossom reveals that the flowers are emerging from trees festooned with the latest technology, where artificial 'spiders webs' are wrapped around the trees to prevent bird damage.

KENTISH HIGH WEALD

The Kent Fruit Belt is part of the larger character area of the Kentish High Weald.

The Kentish High Weald stretches from Pembury to Rolvenden, including Lamberhurst, Bewl Water and Bedgebury Forest. This landscape has a general north easterly orientation and, from the higher land between Pembury and Lamberhurst, around the southern edge of Bewl Water and between Goudhurst and Benenden, long views stretch out over the Kent Weald towards the North Downs. Kent is known as the Garden of England and the Kentish High Weald plays an important part in this tradition. This is a richly textured landscape, where the angular patterns of the orchard and hop garden contrast with smooth sweeps of arable or intensively grazed pasture. Despite a continuing decline in fruit cultivation, this area still owes its gardenesque feel to the abundant orchards and hop gardens. Once, however, this landscape was famous, not for its fruit but its cloth. Flemish weavers, settling here in the 14th century, built up a thriving woollen industry centred on Cranbrook. Until the 17th century, this industry remained a major source of employment and wealth accumulated by the wool merchants is evident from the substantial medieval houses in the town.

This tapestry of land uses is set within a framework of dense shaws, thick hedges and stretches of broad-leaved woodland, some of which are still coppiced. The large conifer forests at Bedgebury, Hemsted and around Bewl Water, uphold the tradition of commercial timber production in the High Weald, their expanses of deep green enriching the countryside during the winter. This is a well-settled area, where it is rare to be out of sight of farmstead or cottage. Oasthouses dot the landscape, some tiled and some asphalted, and in the east windmills form occasional local landmarks. Many of the villages are of picture-postcard quality, their rose-covered cottages clustering around a pond or tiny green, the local pub sharing its tourist trade with the stone-built church beyond. Nevertheless, this charming image conceals a landscape under pressure, as agriculture becomes increasingly difficult to sustain.

Several minor ridges, running north-west from Pembury and south-east to Tenterden, define this area. The River Teise cuts through these ridges at Lamberhurst and Goudhurst, whilst to the south Bewl Water is enclosed by gentle ridges. In the fruit belt around Matfield there are a number of small ghylls, whilst the ground gradually becomes flatter and more open towards Cranbrook.

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KENT FRUIT BELT: KENTISH HIGH WEALD

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Small-scale intimate enclosed valleys and ridges.
 Small scale orchards and high hedges. Some hops.
 Mixed woodland, intensive cultivation. Small lanes, many small villages and dense settlements.

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

The uniformity of the small-scale landscape pattern is interrupted by the significant decline in orchards. The rural landscape elements reflect the underlying landform. The pattern of elements within the area is considered to be coherent and there are few visual detractors. The patchwork of small woodlands, hedges and streams provide a moderate ecological base as their value is modified by areas of open arable fields. The functional integrity of the area varies; built development has strongly vernacular appeal, but the small scale of the rural landscape is vulnerable to changes in land use. The farming basis of this landscape is not robust. However, this is a largely unified landscape and the condition is considered to be high.

Sensitivity

Although there are ancient overtones of woodland and routes of highways, the time-depth of the area is mostly historic. The small-scale and variety of rural land use is characteristic along with scattered small-scale built development. In some areas, the characteristic scale has been lost due to the decline in field boundaries and loss of woodland. There is a moderate sense of place which is due to the significance of the historic landscape features. The enclosed valleys and ridges are apparent and views are intermittently enclosed by shelterbelts and small areas of woodland. Visibility throughout the area is therefore moderate. The sensitivity of the landscape is moderate.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

Conserve the historic features such as small, scattered rural settlements with characteristic vernacular detail, and a consistent coverage of small-scale enclosure - hedgerow, shelterbelts and small woodlands on the ridged landscape. Historic features are common in this landscape, and it is this attribute (the consistency of these coherent features) which should be reinforced. The use of appropriate broadleaf species in woodlands and hedgerow, both in amenity and farmland planting is declining and should be reinforced to sustain the local distinctiveness. The decline in the importance of fruit growing has contributed, amongst other causes, to the loss of wildlife habitats. The ecological interest of the area may be reinforced by the sensitive management of woodland and the reinstatement of wooded ghylls.

CONTEXT

Regional: High Weald AONB

Condition

good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE
moderate	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
poor	CREATE	RESTORE & CREATE	RESTORE
	low	moderate	high

Sensitivity

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition	Good.
Pattern of elements:	Coherent.
Detracting features:	Few.
Visual Unity:	Unified.
Cultural integrity:	Variable.
Ecological integrity:	Moderate.
Functional Integrity:	Coherent.

Sensitivity	Moderate.
Distinctiveness:	Characteristic.
Continuity:	Historic.
Sense of Place:	Moderate.
Landform:	Apparent.
Extent of tree cover:	Intermittent.
Visibility:	Moderate.

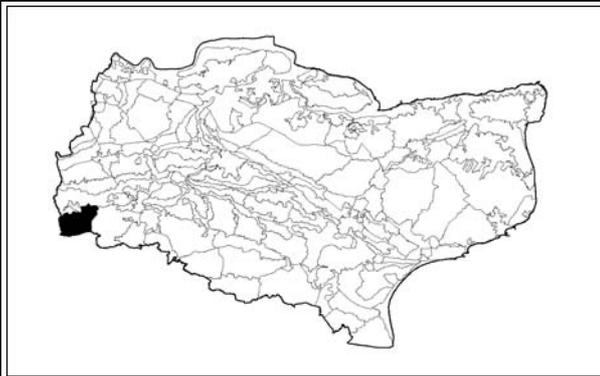
SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

CONSERVE AND REINFORCE.

Conserve and reinforce woodland
 Conserve and reinforce broadleaf hedgerow
 Reinforce the small-scale of land use
 Reinforce the use of vernacular materials

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KENT WATER: UPPER MEDWAY



KENT WATER

The gentle valley of the Kent Water meets the river Medway between Blackham and Fordcombe. To the north of this valley, the landscape is dominated by Dry Hill, which rises to 172m, topped by the ancient ramparts of an Iron Age hill fort. Dry Hill lies in the centre of a remarkably secluded pocket of the High Weald, where public access is by foot only, and many of the farmsteads lie far off the roads. The lower slopes of the hill are fissured with little ghylls, which drain either south into the Kent Water or north into the River Eden.

Many of these ghylls support strips of once coppiced woodland, where starry clusters of white wild garlic flowers smother the stream banks in early May, filling the air with the pungent scent of onions.

Elsewhere, large irregular blocks of woodland clothe the hill-sides. Some of these woods are abandoned coppice, whilst others are a tangle of conifer plantations and naturalised rhododendron. In winter the footpaths through these woods are a quagmire of thick, black leaf-moulded and slippery clay, picking their way through shallow pits that are so frequent as to suggest that these woods were once war-torn minefields. In fact they were originally surface pits for iron extraction. The iron industry was a major presence in this area, with big forges at Scarletts Farm and Cowden.

Tucked away between these woods, on the upper slopes of Dry Hill, is an area of orchards and soft fruit, protected from the wind by distinctive rows of Lombardy poplars. This was once an area of considerable hop and fruit production and occasional oast-houses still dot the landscape. The warm red local brick has long been used here, and there are a considerable number of half timbered, half brick-built houses constructed during the urban expansion which occurred with the coming of the railways, in the nineteenth century.

North-east of Mark Beech the land begins to flatten out. Substantial coniferous and deciduous woodlands occur in a sweep from Chiddingstone Hoath to Hever, interspersed with large arable fields, which stretch between trimmed hedges or narrow shaws, as if hinting at the approaching boundary with the Low Weald and the flat Eden valley.

UPPER MEDWAY

Kent Water lies within the larger character area of the Upper Medway. The Upper Medway straddles the Kent and East Sussex Border. Therefore some of the areas in the character area description below are outside of the study boundary. The condition and sensitivity assessment refers only to the Kent area.

This area covers the gentle folds of the Upper Medway valley, from Weir Wood Reservoir in the west along the northern edge of Ashdown Forest to Chiddingstone and Groombridge in the east.

The gentle topography of these valleys and the flatter, rolling land to the north around Markbeech, made this area easier to farm than the steep sandstone ridges and valleys, which characterise other parts of the High Weald. This has resulted in a landscape of relatively little woodland, dominated by mixed agriculture, where the fields are frequently bounded by narrow hedges or post and wire fence and dotted with hedgerow trees. Only in the west, around Ashurst Wood and Forest Row, does the typical High Weald landscape of deep ghyll and ridge reassert itself, where small, less intensively grazed fields are hidden between larger woodlands.

This part of the AONB bears considerable evidence of the long history of man in the High Weald. West of Dormansland, the ancient hill-fort of Dry Hill offers magnificent views of the surrounding countryside, whilst the Roman highway from London to Lewes passes between Marsh Green and Holtye. The iron industry which flourished here can be traced from the redundant hammer ponds and substantial medieval houses built with the ensuing wealth, such as Gravetye Manor.

Extensive cultivation of hops and fruit until the early part of this century has left a legacy of occasional orchards and a variety of oasthouses. The proximity of East Grinstead and its railway station have encouraged people to move out into the neighbouring countryside, causing many farms to be split up and the outbuildings to be gentrified into houses. This has increased commuter traffic on the roads, whilst urban-edge land uses, such as golf courses, steal out to the very edge of the AONB.

This area comprises a series of parallel ridges and valleys running east to west, whose watercourses combine to form the upper reaches of the River Medway. This river has a narrow floodplain, extending as far as Upper Hartfield. In the north, the gently rolling landscape gradually flattens out towards Hever Castle and the River Eden.

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KENT WATER: UPPER MEDWAY

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Hills with wooded ghylls at base. Secluded, limited access. Isolated farmsteads. Coppice, naturalised rhododendron and conifer plantations. Orchards and soft fruit in sheltered areas. C19th urban developments near railways.

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

This is a unified landscape with a strong and varied relief and intact landscape features. There are a few visual detractors. The ecological interest of the area is moderate: the strong woody network and small pastures give way to a more open arable landscape on the more gentle slopes. The condition of heritage features is good; the small irregular pastures are enclosed by dense woodland and hedges, wooded shaws and wooded edges are widespread and actively managed. Built form has a strong vernacular emphasis and has a positive impact on the landscape. The condition of this landscape is considered to be very high.

Sensitivity

The landform is apparent in the landscape view, but not dominant. Tree cover is intermittent and overall visibility is moderate. There is a very strong sense of place underpinned by ancient land patterns and historic parkland features and buildings. The local vernacular use of Bargate stone is a unique feature. Due to the time-depth of landscape features, the area has a high sensitivity.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

Conserve the small scale and irregular pattern of pastoral clearings.
 Conserve the density of woodland cover, ensuring with long term management plans that large mature specimen oak and ash remain as characteristic features within the woodland.
 Conserve the dominance of vernacular detail.
 Conserve the small scale and infrequent, isolated nature of settlement
 Conserve hedged field enclosures in the lower fields.

CONTEXT

Regional: High Weald AONB

Condition

good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE
	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
moderate			
poor	CREATE	RESTORE & CREATE	RESTORE
	low	moderate	high

Sensitivity

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition **Very Good.**

Pattern of elements:	Unified.
Detracting features:	Few.
Visual Unity:	Strongly Unified.
Cultural integrity:	Good.
Ecological integrity:	Moderate.
Functional Integrity:	Strong.

Sensitivity **High.**

Distinctiveness:	Characteristic.
Continuity:	Ancient.
Sense of Place:	Strong.
Landform:	Apparent.
Extent of tree cover:	Intermittent.
Visibility:	Moderate.

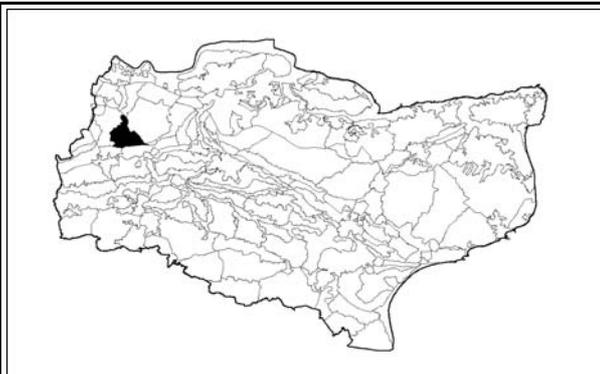
SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

CONSERVE.

Conserve vernacular detail in built form
 Conserve settlement patterns
 Conserve woodland
 Conserve hedgerow enclosures

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KINGSDOWN: WEST KENT DOWNS



KINGSDOWN

Kingsdown takes its name from having been part of a large pre-Norman Conquest royal estate, centred on the Darent Valley. In Kent "-down" or "-dun" implied thickly forested hills, indicating that at this time the area was heavily wooded. Today the southern part of this area still contains a considerable amount of formerly coppiced, mixed woodland and Scots pine, interspersed by small, irregular pastures and thick hedges. This results in an enclosed, intimate landscape, which succeeds in absorbing much of the bungalow development that has spread through the area. In the north, however, most of the former woodland has been lost, revealing rolling sweeps of downland and the chalky white soils of intensive arable cultivation.

There is considerable pressure in this area from suburbanisation. Many properties have long back gardens, which extend up the valley side or into the surrounding trees, resulting in a landscape of tiny smallholdings, horse pasture and "gardened" woodland. This has introduced a wide and disparate range of fences, sheds and ornamental conifers into the landscape, giving an inappropriate urban-edge feel to the area, reinforced by recreation developments, such as golf courses and caravan parks.

WEST KENT DOWNS

Kingsdown lies within the larger character area of the West Kent Downs.

The south-facing, chalk scarp between the Medway and the Darent provides a strong visual boundary, dividing the Kemsing Vale from the deep, dry valleys and wooded plateau of the West Kent Downs. This sense of separation is increased by the extensive tracts of ecologically valuable deciduous woodlands along the top of the scarp.

Woodland is very significant in this landscape, providing an important backdrop for the rolling landform, the network of small country lanes, the scattered settlements and the extensive valley pastures. In the east, around Luddesdown, the fields are contained by thick 'walls' of woodland, and strips of remnant coppice, or shaws, occur frequently along the steeper valley sides. Hidden away among the trees are several medieval buildings, such as Luddesdown Court, constructed from the local Kentish ragstone, while the villages of Vigo and West Kingsdown are set deep in the woodlands themselves.

The clay-with-flints soil on the plateau and ridge tops is reflected in the pasture and woodland dominating these areas; in the valleys, the extent of the finer silt soils is reflected by the predominance of arable cultivation. The downland becomes increasingly open in the north, where the intimate character of the scarp top gives way to a large-scale landscape of intensively farmed, rolling valleys and large blocks of deciduous woodland. West of Rochester, the mature woodlands and historic parkland of Cobham Hall are severed from the deciduous coppice woodlands of Shorne Wood Country Park by the busy A2 trunk road.

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KINGSDOWN: WEST KENT DOWNS

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Rolling downland.
Intensive arable cultivation in north with open fields of chalky-white soils.
Enclosed, irregular pastures in south, thick coppice and mixed woodland.
Suburbanisation, horseyculture and smallholdings.

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

This area of the Downs is considered to be in good condition, despite the detracting features associated with some amenity uses of the land and 20th century linear residential development of existing hamlets. The strong ecological value of the woodland and hedgerow network is reduced by the negative influence of the intensive arable cultivation in the north of the area, and is therefore considered to be moderate. However, in many areas, the landscape pattern is very strong and there is a maturity to the dense enclosures and other features, indicating the high functional and cultural integrity of the land use.

Sensitivity

The rolling landform is a dominant element in the view; but the tall, frequent enclosure reduces the visibility within the dominant landform to moderate.

20th century additions to the landscape, such as new housing and golf courses have added elements that do not contribute to the local distinctiveness. However, the historic and ancient landscape patterns remain the dominant elements in the wider countryside, and the sense of place and sensitivity remain strong.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

The dominance of broadleaf woodland in the area should be conserved. Conserve woodland as an edge to residential developments.
Small-scale pastures and enclosures to be retained, and the use of small enclosed parcels of land to be monitored.
Conserve the isolated nature of historic hamlets or cottages.
Conserve roadside hedges, ensuring that they are consistently managed as tall hedges with standards
Conserve the broad mix of species within hedgerow and woodland

CONTEXT

Regional: Kent Downs AONB

Condition

good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE
moderate	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
poor	CREATE	RESTORE & CREATE	RESTORE
	low	moderate	high

Sensitivity

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition

Very Good.

Pattern of elements: Unified.
Detracting features: Some.
Visual Unity: Unified.
Cultural integrity: Good.
Ecological integrity: Moderate.
Functional Integrity: Strong.

Sensitivity

High.

Distinctiveness: Characteristic.
Continuity: Ancient.
Sense of Place: Strong.
Landform: Dominant.
Extent of tree cover: Enclosed.
Visibility: Moderate.

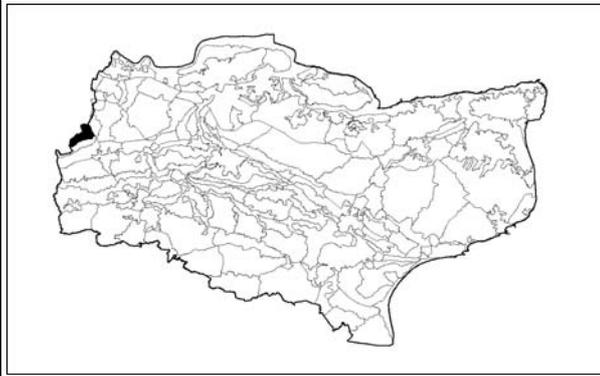
SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

CONSERVE.

Conserve woodland
Conserve and manage tall hedges on roadside
Conserve the range of species in woodland and hedgerow
Conserve pastures and irregular field patterns
Conserve historic, isolated settlement

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KNOCKHOLT DOWNS



This is an intimate, enclosed landscape of ridges and dry valleys extending north-west from the scarp within the West Darent character area of the Kent Downs AONB.

Although densely settled, the undulating topography and extensive network of lacy woodlands often conceal the suburban dwellings that have straggled down the country lanes earlier this century. Suburbanisation is often intensified, however, by the presence of pavements on the lanes, conifer hedges and brick walls around gardens, the latter often accessed through elaborate entrance gates into the larger properties.

The ridge-top broadleaf woodlands and remnant shaws enclose small grazed fields, particularly in or close to the dry valleys that dissect the landscape to the north. The hedgerows and fields are often distinguished by large, mature oaks and beech, which may mark lines of old hedgerows or shaws. The views north and west over the valleys to the wooded ridges of Bromley give an impression of an enclosed and seemingly sparsely populated landscape which is deceptive. On the flatter, plateau areas between the dry valleys and the scarp top, the land is often cultivated in larger, open fields.

Between the suburban housing are the vernacular centres of what were once smaller villages such as Halstead and Knockholt itself. Here the older buildings are characteristically brick or flint.

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KNOCKHOLT DOWNS

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Undulating topography of ridges and dry valleys. A network of fragmented broadleaf woodland and shaws on the ridge tops enclosing pastures in the valleys. More open arable landscapes on the plateau areas. Characteristic flint and brick buildings forming the cores to the suburbanised villages.

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

The pattern of broadleaf woodland and enclosed valleys is interrupted by individual clearance for residential development, and is becoming incoherent along developed roads. New housing has a moderately negative impact due to the density of development in comparison to the formerly isolated small-scale settlements. Tree cover, however, is still widespread, although over-mature in some areas, and the ecological value remains high.

Sensitivity

This area retains small amounts of ancient woodland. It is the enclosed nature of the remaining narrow lanes, often cross-contour, which exemplify the historic and rural character of the area. Views are relatively enclosed throughout the ridged landscape and more open farmland is fringed with wooded edges. The sensitivity of the area is considered to be moderate.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

Woodland remains a characteristic feature although this is a perception of an area which is otherwise well developed. Existing woodland should be conserved to retain the effect of enclosure, new woodland should be created as a setting for residential development, and to enhance wood cover around open arable areas in the north. It is important that new woodland has a function and that the common boundary between woodland and housing is manageable. The dominance of existing broadleaf species - beech, oak and chestnut coppice - should be conserved in large woodlands. All the characteristics of the narrow, cross contour roads should be conserved. Existing parkland characteristics with ornamental planting could be recreated to enhance residential settings. Create design codes for development which reflect the distinctive nature of the area.

CONTEXT

Regional: North West Kent

Condition

good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE
moderate	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
poor	CREATE	RESTORE & CREATE	RESTORE
	low	moderate	high

Sensitivity

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition Moderate.

Pattern of elements:	Coherent.
Detracting features:	Some.
Visual Unity:	Coherent.
Cultural integrity:	Variable.
Ecological integrity:	Moderate.
Functional Integrity:	Coherent.

Sensitivity Moderate.

Distinctiveness:	Characteristic.
Continuity:	Ancient.
Sense of Place:	Strong.
Landform:	Apparent.
Extent of tree cover:	Enclosed.
Visibility:	Low.

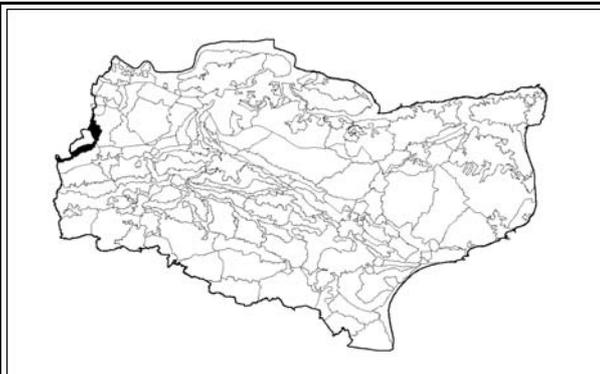
SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

CONSERVE AND CREATE.

Conserve the dominance of the woodland cover.
 Conserve existing and create new woodland
 Conserve the occurrence of dominant woodland species such as oak and beech
 Conserve narrow roads and their enclosure/wood banks
 Create distinctive design elements for housing and new boundaries within woodland.
 Create formal parkland features within residential areas
 Create appropriate and manageable woodland boundaries to the common boundary between existing woodland and housing

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KNOCKHOLT: DARENT VALLEY



KNOCKHOLT

The dense woodlands along the top of the western escarpment conceal a small-scale landscape of mixed farming and deciduous coppice woodlands, which stretches north towards Bromley. Several dry valleys, extending out of the AONB, give the countryside a gently rolling character. It is a densely settled area, where overgrown hedges and hedgerow trees are interspersed by ornamental conifers, concealing an increasing amount of pony paddock fencing and suburbanisation.

The M25 motorway, although hidden in cutting for most of its length, exerts considerable influence on the landscape through the background roar of traffic and the physical barrier it forms between the Knockholt area and the Darent Valley itself. The proximity of Bromley and outer London also imposes pressure on the agricultural fabric of the area, resulting in the loss of land from commercial farming to provide extended gardens and hobby farms for the commuter population.

DARENT VALLEY

Knockholt lies within the larger character area of the Darent Valley.

The Darent is the most westerly of the three rivers cutting through the Kent Downs and is strongly contained throughout its extent in the AONB by steep, often wood-topped, scarps and by the Greensand Ridge to the south. It has been called one of the earliest cradles of English settlement in Kent, and its long history of habitation and passage has clearly shaped its present character. There is a rich legacy of Roman remains, including Lullingstone Roman Villa, and several historic tracks run through the valley. In fact its peaceful, rural character today belies a busier and more industrial past. By the time of the Norman Conquest, the natural course of the river had already been diverted to power watermills, a tradition which continued until the beginning of the 20th century. Today only converted mill-houses and occasional ditches remain to indicate the former nature of the valley.

The name 'Darent' comes from the Celtic for 'oak river' and the river still meanders for much of its length through a narrow, tree-lined corridor. From Westerham, it flows east through the wide, clay vale between the chalk and the greensand, before swinging north at Sevenoaks to cut through the Downs. Once, it supported an extensive area of seasonally flooding water meadows, but over abstraction of river water, changes in farming practice and gravel excavation have virtually eradicated such features and much of the floodplain is now arable. North of Shoreham the chalk scarps widen out, supporting large, undivided arable fields which reveal the open, curving back of the chalk downs.

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KNOCKHOLT: DARENT VALLEY

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Small scale-gently rolling with dry valleys.
 Mixed farming and deciduous coppice woodland.
 Settlement associated with railway.
 Suburban planting and paddocks.
 M25 physically dominant and noisy.

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

This area is considered to have a unified pattern of elements with some detractors; mainly that of the motorway which is physically very dominant. Dense, varied woodland and rough pastures provide a very strong ecological resource. The cultural aspect of the area is slightly reduced by the effect of more recent residential development of poor or indistinct design which is found throughout.

Sensitivity

The dry valleys are a dominant landform element of the area, but views are well-enclosed by the widespread woodland. Much of the woodland is recognised as ancient woodland, and the incidence of mature standards, including those within coppice-managed woods, affirm the historical nature of the natural features. In addition, the small, isolated farms indicate a strong time-depth. The sensitivity of this area is therefore high.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

Conserve the woodland element and the continuity of this dominant land use. The characteristic detail of the woodland is very important, such as the mature beech, oak plantations, and the variety associated with coppice management of some densely wooded areas. The infrequency of the small-scale farms is also an important feature to conserve, in addition to the small, enclosed pastures. Small details such as wood banks and passing places are also important.

CONTEXT

Regional: Kent Downs AONB

Condition

good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE
moderate	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
poor	CREATE	RESTORE & CREATE	RESTORE
	low	moderate	high

Sensitivity

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition **Very Good.**

Pattern of elements:	Unified.
Detracting features:	Some.
Visual Unity:	Unified.
Cultural integrity:	Good.
Ecological integrity:	Strong Network.
Functional Integrity:	Very Strong.

Sensitivity **High.**

Distinctiveness:	Characteristic.
Continuity:	Ancient.
Sense of Place:	Strong.
Landform:	Dominant.
Extent of tree cover:	Enclosed.
Visibility:	Moderate.

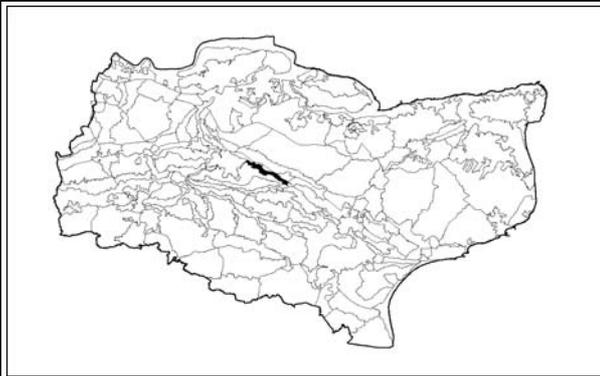
SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

CONSERVE.

Conserve the dense woodland cover
 Conserve narrow roads and details
 Conserve isolation of farming settlements

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LEEDS-LENHAM FARMLAND



This is generally an undulating rural landscape of narrow lanes of mixed farmland of medium sized arable fields and pastures and small copses developed on the well-drained sands and loams of the Folkestone Beds. It includes slivers of land to the north of Maidstone at Sandling, including Cuckoo Wood, and further east around Newnham Court Farm. Along the streamlines to the south through Vinter's Park and along the railway line the soft Folkestone Beds have been eroded away to expose the harder Hythe Beds below.

East of Bearsted this character area includes a narrow belt of mixed farmland as far east as Sandway. The landscape is distinguished from its neighbours to the south by a higher percentage of pasture and few if any orchards due to the poorer quality of the sandy soils. Traditionally cereals, potatoes and field vegetables would have been grown as well as extensive pasture.

The soils give rise to distinctive flora such as woodrush, broom, foxglove and creeping hair-grass in Pope's Wood. At Leeds Castle sessile oak is dominant on the acid, sandy soils with the pedunculate oak found on the wetter Gault. The farmlands at Leeds Castle exploit the generally good, loamy soils of the Hythe Beds with the poorer quality sandy soils being under woodland or forming the ancient deer park. The geological boundary runs roughly along the line of the Len.

Leeds Castle forms just one of many fine parklands that exploit the free-draining loams of the Folkestone Beds, where enhanced by marshy alluvial streams feeding the river Len.

Settlement consists of scattered farmsteads working the thin soils, although there is also a long tradition of extraction for the fine sands and several sand pits are found close to Charing. More recently, however, the rural and tranquil nature of the area has been shattered by the alignment of the M20 and Channel Tunnel Rail Link which cuts through the north of the character area. A single carriageway by-pass is also proposed for the villages of Leeds and Langley Heath which may affect the western end.

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LEEDS-LENHAM FARMLAND

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Undulating farmland development on well-drained sandy loams. Small copses with heathy characteristics. Historic parklands. Mineral extraction. Transport corridor.

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

The small scale landscape pattern, which has areas of dramatic local relief, is fragmented by the CTRL. Road and rail transport corridors and areas of mineral extraction produce many large scale visual detractors. The visual unity of the area is significantly interrupted. Networks of semi-natural habitats are also physically fragmented - the remaining pockets of woodland and mature trees are vulnerable. Heritage hedgerows are widespread, but many are unmanaged and appear redundant. Built form has a moderate positive impact on the landscape and includes some vernacular housing, but some hamlets are now isolated by the transport corridors. The condition of the area is very poor.

Sensitivity

The inherent landscape characteristics are mainly historic, with more ancient overtones of woodland and highways. The effect of fringe development and physical fragmentation of the area has resulted in the loss of many of the distinguishing features, in particular highways and woodlands. The land form is apparent and views are intermittent. The sensitivity of the area is considered to be low.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

Create a coherent framework for transport corridors using small scale copses and parkland features.
Create new settings for fragmented and isolated settlements so that they develop a new focus and identity, using small woodland and small scale land use with much enclosure by trees and hedgerows.

CONTEXT

Regional: Greensand Belt

Condition

good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE
moderate	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
poor	<u>CREATE</u>	RESTORE & CREATE	RESTORE
	low	moderate	high

Sensitivity

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition

Very Poor.

Pattern of elements:	Incoherent.
Detracting features:	Many.
Visual Unity:	Significantly Interrupted.
Cultural integrity:	Poor.
Ecological integrity:	Weak.
Functional Integrity:	Very Weak.

Sensitivity

Low.

Distinctiveness:	Characteristic.
Continuity:	Recent.
Sense of Place:	Weak.
Landform:	Apparent.
Extent of tree cover:	Intermittent.
Visibility:	Moderate.

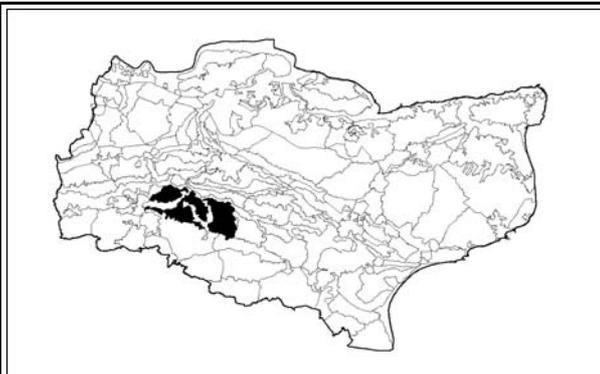
SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

CREATE.

Create a coherent framework for isolated hamlets
Create a coherent framework for the transport corridor
Create a network of semi-natural woodland and heathland habitats

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LOW WEALD FRUIT BELT



Forming a large part of the flattest land of the Low Weald and extending over the freer-draining river brickearths outside the river valleys, the Fruit Belt stretches from Tonbridge in the west to Staplehurst in the east. This is a flat or gently undulating landscape of predominantly dwarf fruit trees, extensive open arable fields, with hops and pasture locally important. The roadsides are intermittently characterised by tall well-managed poplar windbreaks, but are replaced locally by dark, gloomy conifers.

Ponds are locally frequent, as at the Hale Street ponds and pasture SNCI, and around Laddingford the winding lanes have wide verges with ditches reflecting the wet nature of this stream-side settlement. In fact, much of the land at the confluence of the Medway with its tributaries is subject to infrequent flooding.

Traditionally, however, orchards and hops were widespread as the soils are well drained. These crops were most prosperous in the late 19th century, the 20th century seeing a conversion of orchards and hop gardens to horticultural and arable crops. This has been due in the main to the susceptibility of traditional hop varieties to disease and an increase in competition from growers overseas for both hops and the fruit market. In part, however, it is the result of the post-war development of disease resistant strains of hop that have a greater 'bitting' capacity and greater cropping rates on the dwarf top-fruit varieties, both requiring fewer hectares of these crops to be grown. This change of land use has had the effect of blurring the boundaries with the adjoining Medway Valley character area.

Where the shelterbelt or hedgerow network is intact it produces a small-scale landscape with a strong visual unity and pleasant sense of enclosure, but where this has been removed or replaced with conifers, the unity is fragmented.

Locally, as the ground rises and undulates towards the High Weald, small woodland copses of oak standards with coppice, carpeted in spring with shady bluebells increase the intimacy of the scale.

Where extensive large open arable fields occur, a simple unity is re-established, but it is at the cost of variety, colour and features in the landscape. The conifer hedges are particularly alien, dark and monochromatic in the almost flat rural landscape.

Frequent and often large groups of oasts, such as the Whitbread Hop Farm at Beltring, form strong features in the landscape although others have been swallowed up in bland 20th century suburbanisation, for instance around East Peckham. These oasts have usually been converted for housing or occasionally are used for storage. Scattered hamlets are also characteristic here as elsewhere in the Low Weald.

The somewhat unkempt edges of East Peckham, Hadlow, Golden Green, Marden and Paddock Wood and the railway also encroach into the farmland scene, the latter encouraging built expansion in the past, notably at Staplehurst.

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LOW WEALD FRUIT BELT

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Flat or gently undulating mixed, farmed landscape of dwarf fruit trees, arable, hops and pasture. Remnant alder or poplar windbreaks. Broad-verged lanes with ditches. Frequent groups of oasts.

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

The elements of the landscape - the flat fields, large hedges and shelterbelts as field boundaries, and ditches within the fields and along roads, frequent oasts and farmsteads - are coherent as a well-managed mixed fruit-farming/pastoral landscape with historical context. The variety of landcover which formerly included a large proportion of hops and traditional fruit trees, is diminishing. There are some open, arable areas, particularly around floodplains, which are on a larger scale than the fruit enclosures. Within this changing landscape, the ecological corridors of floodplains and streams are becoming isolated, although there is much evidence of water-logging and the presence of natural drainage. Remnant mature oaks punctuate the landscape, many stagheaded or senescent. Visual detractors include the suburban influence of recent development, in particular around Paddock Wood, and the railway line.

Sensitivity

This area has a strong sense of place which reflects historic land use and the natural conditions. The many oasts and farmsteads add to the historic character. Mature oaks in the hedgerows and small broadleaf copses give a more intense time-depth and an intermittent tree cover over the relatively flat landscape. This intermittent enclosure on the relatively flat landform means that the sensitivity of the area is low.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

Conserve the tranquil, rural settlements and their agricultural setting which is small-medium scale, of intermittent enclosure, well-managed, with the interest of a rich and productive land. New agricultural uses for the farmland should be explored.
 Reinforce the suggestion of a more ancient time-depth by managing and replanting mature tree stock within a proportion of the hedges.
 Reinforce the natural potential of the area by identifying main watercourses and ditches and managing them to enhance the wildlife interest. Management techniques such as seasonal cutting and piecemeal clearance could extend to the wide roadside verges and drainage ditches.
 Reinforce the enclosure pattern around settlements such as Marden and Collier Street with hedgerow and mature tree planting. Link these with floodplain copses.

CONTEXT

Regional: Low Weald

Condition

good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE
	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
moderate			
poor	CREATE	RESTORE & CREATE	RESTORE
	low	moderate	high

Sensitivity

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition	Good.
Pattern of elements:	Coherent.
Detracting features:	Few.
Visual Unity:	Unified.
Cultural integrity:	Variable.
Ecological integrity:	Moderate.
Functional Integrity:	Coherent.

Sensitivity

Moderate.

Distinctiveness:	Characteristic.
Continuity:	Ancient.
Sense of Place:	Strong.
Landform:	Insignificant.
Extent of tree cover:	Intermittent.
Visibility:	Low.

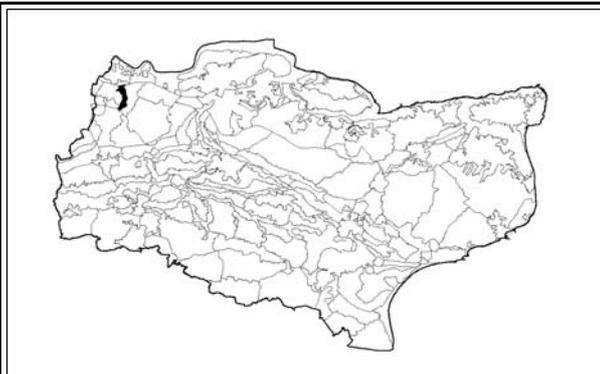
SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

CONSERVE AND REINFORCE.

Conserve the rural elements of the landscape around the settlements
 Conserve the scale and tranquillity of rural settlements and hamlets
 Conserve and manage mature tree stock
 Reinforce enclosure patterns
 Reinforce the ecological interest of ditches and watercourses
 Conserve and reinforce the attributes of rural lanes

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LOWER DARENT VALLEY



This narrow character area extends from the village of Farningham northwards from the AONB down the Darent valley through Horton Kirby and Darent as far as Junction 2 on the M25. It is defined by the narrow band of alluvial floodplain gravels which form a substantively flat, wet landscape now characterised by water-filled gravel pits. Low water levels in the river which affect amenity value and wildlife have caused concern since the 1960s.

The slopes of the West Kent Downs rise beyond the Darent area but, unlike the valley sides of the North Darent character area in the AONB south of Farningham, the slopes in this lower valley are broader and more open. The road towards Sutton-at-Hone, the A225, is a busy link. To the south there are quite dramatic views to the Darent Downs above Horton Kirby. Motorway noise is intrusive near the M20. Soon the road narrows, with narrow steep lanes feeding off to the west back up the steep valley side.

Away from the A225 the lanes around Horton Kirby wind gently above the valley floor occasionally crossing the Darent over narrow flint bridges through towering trees. The M20 is visible and audible close to Horton Kirby sitting up starkly on its high embankment through the overgrown, gappy hedgerows and pasture grazing sheep and cattle.

Despite Horton Kirby's unremarkable architecture of post-war social housing and late 20th century bungalows, and a backdrop of pylons, the narrow, winding lanes that lead to it still feature the occasional flint building, and isolated parts are attractive. The railway viaduct and brick chimney at South Darent are striking features in the landscape, visible from some distance away. The landscape north of Horton Kirby is rural but with suburban influences.

South Darent is equally undistinguished in terms of its architecture, but with a small section of pretty built river frontage. The A225 from Sutton at Hone merges with Hawley close to the M25.

The valley in this area is characterised by extensive Roman remains, highlighting the importance of the river corridor for movement through the Downs in ancient times.

It is an important green link from the countryside of the AONB into the Kent Thames-side area, and has been identified as a major component of the proposed 'green grid'.

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LOWER DARENT VALLEY

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Flat, wet landscape marked by water-filled gravel pits. Meandering river still fringed in part by riparian vegetation and crossed by several narrow flint bridges. Many suburban and transport influences.
Extensive Roman remains

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

The shallow, fluvial valley is well settled, with intense arable and horticultural uses, and many visual detractors in the form of new urban edges, pylons and transport corridors. It is coherent as a river valley with occasional riparian vegetation on the river bank. In addition, wet gravel pits accentuate the line of the water course. In many cases, land uses echo historic patterns, although now more intensely settled. The ecological corridor of the river is very much reduced in scale and has been further weakened in recent years by drought conditions. The farmland retains very little in the way of enclosure or natural habitats. Post and wire fencing is much in evidence as are suburban uses of the open land near settlements.

Sensitivity

The dished landform is apparent, especially from the upper slopes; woodland cover is very limited, confined to recent riparian vegetation.
This landscape area has a moderate sense of place which reflects the occasional historical characteristics of the well-settled valley. Villages have occasional flint churches, houses and bridges amongst the more overwhelming recent residential development. Historic mills and structures such as the viaduct and brick chimney have become distinctive landmarks. Many of the rural heritage features, however, are indistinct, and the character of the area is dominated by recent features such as the wet pits. Overall, the sensitivity of the area is high due to the openness and high visibility.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

Restore a strong sense of the river valley to the area. This may be effected by restoring the emphasis of settlements centred around nodes on the river and enhancing the route of the river within the valley by riparian planting and also by open bankside habitat.
Restore ecological diversity along the water course by introducing sensitive water management within the river floodplain and encouraging areas of regenerative semi-natural habitats.
Support the aims of the River Darent Action Plan to reduce abstraction, increase depth of flow and enhance natural habitats.
Within the agricultural land, restore sympathetic field management which includes hedgerow enclosure to the up-slope side of fields, and less intensive agricultural practices such as low intensity grazing near the river course.
Restore distinctive detail in built form by emphasizing views of current landmarks and historic buildings.

CONTEXT

Regional: North West Kent

Condition

good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE
moderate	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
poor	CREATE	RESTORE & CREATE	RESTORE
	low	moderate	high

Sensitivity

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition

Very Poor.

Pattern of elements:	Coherent.
Detracting features:	Many.
Visual Unity:	Interrupted.
Cultural integrity:	Poor.
Ecological integrity:	Moderate.
Functional Integrity:	Weak.

Sensitivity

High.

Distinctiveness:	Indistinct.
Continuity:	Ancient.
Sense of Place:	Moderate.
Landform:	Apparent
Extent of tree cover:	Open
Visibility:	High.

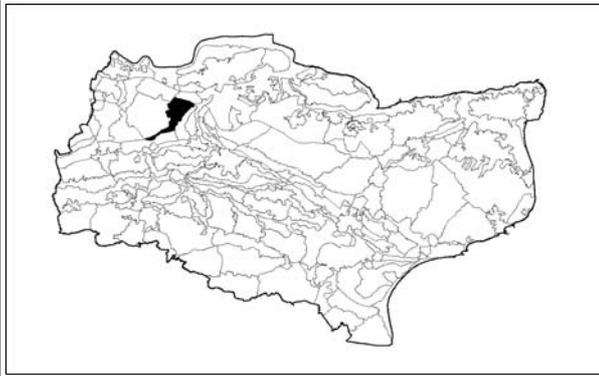
SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

RESTORE.

Restore riparian and open bankside habitats to the river and floodplain and increase the depth of flow by management of the river corridor at strategic sites for the benefit of natural habitats and amenity use
Restore the locational emphasis of settlement on limited nodes on the river
Restore a vegetative framework to the fields on the lower slopes
Restore the emphasis on distinctive detail to built form
Emphasize views of current landmarks.

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LUDESDOWN: WEST KENT DOWNS



LUDESDOWN

This is a rich agricultural patchwork of rolling, valley-side pastures and extensive, undulating arable fields. Large areas of mixed woodland dominate the skyline, and form thick walls around fields, giving a strong definition to the fields. Extensive hedgerow removal, for arable cultivation, has increased the importance of these woodlands in giving structure to the landscape.

Threatened from the west by creeping suburbanisation and from the east by urban and industrial influences, it is still a peaceful, rural area. The thick belt of woodland along the eastern and southern scarp top plays an important role in preserving this atmosphere by sheltering the area from the Medway towns and factories.

WEST KENT DOWNS

Luddesdown lies within the larger character area of the West Kent Downs.

The south-facing, chalk scarp between the Medway and the Darent provides a strong visual boundary, dividing the Kemsing Vale from the deep, dry valleys and wooded plateau of the West Kent Downs. This sense of separation is increased by the extensive tracts of ecologically valuable deciduous woodlands along the top of the scarp.

Woodland is very significant in this landscape, providing an important backdrop for the rolling landform, the network of small country lanes, the scattered settlements and the extensive valley pastures. In the east, around Luddesdown, the fields are contained by thick walls of woodland, and strips of remnant coppice, or shaws, occur frequently along the steeper valley sides. Hidden away among trees are several medieval buildings, such as Luddesdown Court, constructed from the local Kentish ragstone, while the villages of Vigo and West Kingsdown are set deep in the woodlands themselves.

The clay-with-flints soil on the plateau and ridge tops is reflected in the pasture and woodland dominating these areas; in the valleys, the extent of the finer silt soils is reflected by the predominance of arable cultivation. The downland becomes increasingly open in the north, where the intimate character of the scarp top gives way to a large-scale landscape of intensively farmed, rolling valleys and large blocks of deciduous woodland. West of Rochester, the mature woodlands and historic parkland of Cobham Hall are severed from the deciduous coppice woodlands of Shorne Wood Country Park by the busy A2 trunk road and the Channel Tunnel Rail Link (CTRL).

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LUDESLOW: WEST KENT DOWNS

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Rolling valleyside pasture and extensive undulating arable fields. Large areas of mixed woodland dominate skyline. Peaceful and rural, but threatened by suburban influences and industrial developments. Many hedgerows removed.

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

The unity between landform and landscape elements is slightly interrupted by loss of hedgerow and the intensity of some areas of cultivation. However, there are very few visual detractors - some unsympathetic farm complexes and pylons amongst other minor detractors. The strong and extensive ecological base of wooded ridges is modified by the intensive agricultural use within arable areas on the lower slopes. The condition of heritage features is variable: tree cover is good, but field boundaries are few and declining. The scattered and isolated historic farmsteads are dominated by piecemeal residential development in the west of the character area. Characteristic building styles are of mixed age and have a moderate positive impact. The condition of the area is considered to be good.

Sensitivity

The area has a strong time-depth, reinforced by the distinctive ridgeline woodland and ancient highway routes. The historic hedgerow pattern is in decline and no longer contributes to the local distinctiveness. Many of the characteristic narrow, banked roads are open within arable areas, having lost their hedged boundaries. However, where they persist, they have a distinctive mix of species and are characteristically tall. Visibility is moderate as the landform is apparent and tree cover is intermittent. Sensitivity is considered to be high.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

It is the ancient characteristics which are the strong element of this landscape, which should be conserved and enhanced. The unity between landform and the landcover is another very positive attribute. The loss of hedgerow in the arable areas may be addressed by conserving and extending remaining hedges along the highway, but this is possibly not appropriate within arable fields. The isolation and small-scale of farmsteads and hamlets should be conserved.

CONTEXT

Regional: Kent Downs AONB

Condition

good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE
moderate	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
poor	CREATE	RESTORE & CREATE	RESTORE
	low	moderate	high

Sensitivity

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition	Good.
Pattern of elements:	Coherent.
Detracting features:	Few.
Visual Unity:	Unified.
Cultural integrity:	Variable.
Ecological integrity:	Moderate.
Functional Integrity:	Coherent.

Sensitivity High.

Distinctiveness:	Characteristic.
Continuity:	Ancient.
Sense of Place:	Strong.
Landform:	Apparent.
Extent of tree cover:	Intermittent.
Visibility:	Moderate.

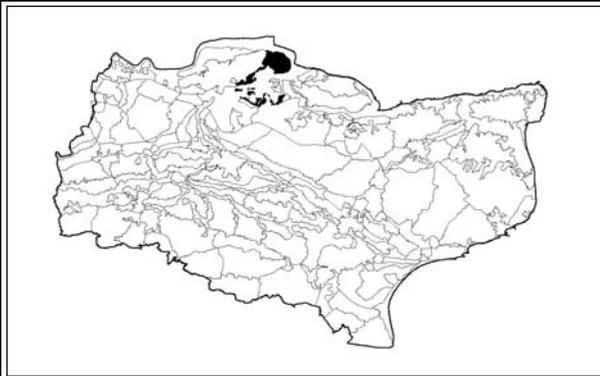
SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

CONSERVE.

Conserve the ancient characteristics of the landscape such as woodland cover and the isolation of settlements. Conserve woodland on ridges, and enhance woodland by extending wooded shaws into lower slopes. Conserve mix of hedgerow species and management of tall hedgerow. Conserve the characteristics and enclosure of ancient highways.

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MEDWAY MARSHES



The Medway Marshes are typically low lying and flat, with huge open skies and extensive views. To the north of the river, the marshes are dominated by the massive industrial complexes of Grain and Kingsnorth which sit in grand isolation amidst open marshland. This contrasts markedly with the more confined and 'hectic' industrial marshland landscapes of parts of the Thames Marshes and the more tranquil, pastoral landscape of the Swale Marshes. The southern Medway Marshes are much smaller and fragmented and have a much less coherent character.

Landform and geology have a profound influence on the character of the marshes which, having been formed from marine alluvial deposits, have a distinctively flat relief. A small outcrop of valley brickearth and gravel forms the higher ground of the Isle of Grain but the landform is obscured and dwarfed by the refinery complex and does not register prominently in the landscape.

The majority of marshland is reclaimed and protected from tidal inundation by coastal walls, although fragments of saltmarsh persist to the seaward side and as islands within the estuary itself. The traditional landcover is coastal grazing marsh, and large areas of typically flat, low-lying pasture with characteristic patterning of creeks and dykes still remain to the west of the Isle of Grain, with smaller fragments at Barksore and Horsham Marshes to the south.

The trend towards arable cultivation is less marked than in the Swale but, instead, the Medway Marshes have come under significant pressure from industrial and urban development. Large areas of the north Medway Marshes are now occupied by extensive industrial complexes, with their associated jetties, roads and rail links, while to the south of the river smaller-scale urban and industrial development has occurred in a piecemeal fashion along the immediate coastline where marshes now barely exist.

The saltmarshes, mudflats and grazing marshes of the Medway form an integral part of the North Kent estuarine and marshland habitat complex which is of international importance for nature conservation. The grazing marshes which separate Allhallows and the Isle of Grain also form part of the North Kent Marshes Environmentally Sensitive Area.

The landscape of the Medway Marshes has long been associated with industrial use. The Romans established extensive salt and pottery workings around Upchurch and the shore was later used for the winning of estuarine clay. Like much of the north Kent coast the Medway marshes were of strategic military importance as illustrated by the blockhouses of Darnet Fort and Grain Tower.

In the 19th century George Chambers, John de Jardin Snr., Francis Moltino, W. D. Doust and William Wyllie painted this coastal landscape. In the 20th century the watercolourist and art historian Martin Hardie worked in this area. More recently Vic Ellis, Rowland Fisher and Hugh Lynch are associated with the Medway Estuary.

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MEDWAY MARSHES

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Low-lying and flat fragments of marshland with extensive views, dominated by industrial complexes to the north of the river. The southern marshes are less coherent. Some coastal grazing marsh and salt marsh, some coastal smaller and walls, creeks and dykes. Historical military features.

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

The group marshlands have coherent elements of grazing marsh and salt marsh, ditches and creeks. All are coastal marsh with close estuarine influences, some are fragmented by industrial complexes. There are also many visual detractors within the area, including industrial lighting and residential development amongst others. The potential for semi-natural habitats is reduced in areas of arable cultivation, and the ecological integrity is therefore thought to be moderate. Large scale industrial building and recent residential form has a high negative impact, however, some creeks remain relatively tranquil and retain their cultural links with the waterside. The condition of the area is considered to be poor.

Sensitivity

Historic features of ditches, counter walls, and the legacy of military installations along the estuary are key characteristics which give the landscape a cultural time-depth. New access roads and built development lack local distinctiveness and do not contribute to a sense of continuity in the landscape.

The low-lying, flat nature of the fragments of marshland is apparent in the open view, and visibility is high.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

Restore the cultural emphasis, occasional use of open, inaccessible land.
 Restore the dominance of the natural features.
 Create semi-natural grassland and marshland.
 Restore and maintain traditional grazing marsh and associated elements such as counterwalls, ditches and creeks.

CONTEXT

Regional: Thames Gateway

Condition

good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE
moderate	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
poor	CREATE	RESTORE & CREATE	RESTORE
	low	moderate	high

Sensitivity

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition	Poor.
Pattern of elements:	Coherent.
Detracting features:	Many.
Visual Unity:	Interrupted.
Cultural integrity:	Variable.
Ecological integrity:	Moderate.
Functional Integrity:	Coherent.

Sensitivity

Moderate.

Distinctiveness:	Characteristic.
Continuity:	Recent.
Sense of Place:	Weak.
Landform:	Apparent
Extent of tree cover:	Open
Visibility:	High.

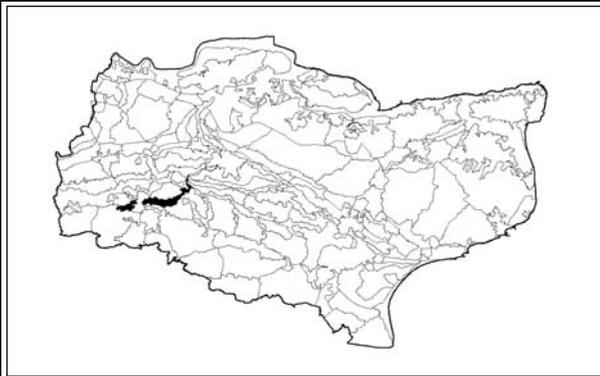
SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

RESTORE AND CREATE.

Restore cultural and natural elements of the marshland
 Maintain areas open landscape

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MEDWAY VALLEY



A corridor of flat, open landscape bordering the river Medway from Penshurst in the south up to Nettlestead close to the Greensand, but one of considerable interest for its complex network of small streams and ditches.

Generally the scene is one of large fields of vegetables, grain and occasional hops, but with pastures and damp copses locally significant. Many hedges have been removed, including those along the roadsides, which can give the landscape an exposed feel. The river can at times be traced in the landscape by the small groups of willow along its edge but many have been removed to aid mechanisation.

Neither woodlands, orchards or settlement are characteristic of the floodplain because of the traditional risk of flooding, although locally these land uses do occur. Standing water is common, both as small ponds, such as those at the East Peckham Site of Nature Conservation Interest (SNCI), and in the large reservoir at Haysden, built for flood alleviation but which is also a haven for overwintering birds.

The functional unity of the landscape is being changed from that of the traditional wet meadows, hedged and grazed, to open, larger fields of leafy vegetables and other arable crops that were once confined to the better drained soils of the Fruit Belt.

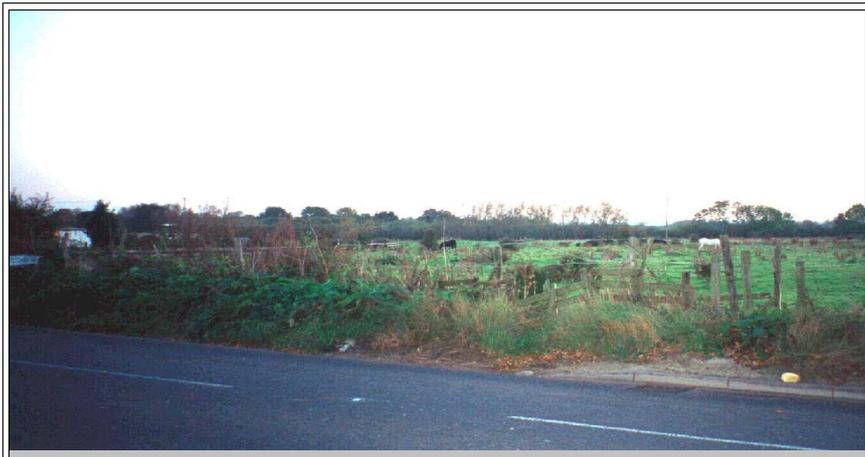
Visual harmony is disturbed by the large areas of the monochromatic blue - greens of the vegetable crops with the incomplete or lost hedges creating a neglected air.

Tonbridge has spread mainly on the higher land with better drained soils, to avoid the frequent flooding in the past, leaving many parts of the valley free from development. The town and its suburbs are now protected from flooding by the Haysden reservoir scheme, but the river is still liable to spill outside its valley into the broader floodplain and the Fruit Belt, especially at its junction with the Bourne and Teise.

The suburbs of Tonbridge, the A21 and railway, and lines of pylons sometimes intrude on the flat, rural scene.

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PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Flat, open, mainly arable landscape.
Few settlements or roads in floodplain due to seasonal flooding.
Historic bridging points.

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

The area of the Medway Valley within the Low Weald is often incoherent as a river floodplain, appearing as a flat, open arable landscape in many areas. It retains an aura of inaccessibility apart from the historic bridging points, but is well-used for industrial and commercial purposes, and gravel workings. Arable fields run to the edge of river banks, and flood defences define the river. There is little transitional land from river to farmland. Where there are commercial properties, these dominate the river bank. Scrub and riparian vegetation grow in a limited natural corridor and in regenerative groups around mineral works.

Sensitivity

In a landscape which historically has little or no settlement, the dominant elements in this landscape are comparatively recent such as commercial buildings, post and wire enclosures and the embanked dual carriageway. The river flows through an unremarkable landform with open views over in cohesive land uses. The tree cover is sparse and this raises the sensitivity of the area to 'moderate'.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

Create areas of gentle transition from the river on the lower contours to the rural landscape on the upper contours. Encourage the regeneration of riparian vegetation, especially around junctions of streams and tributaries, allowing some wetland to develop. Encourage sympathetic farming practices especially in areas immediately adjacent to the river. Restore some natural areas of the river floodplain and tributaries, creating a wider river corridor.
Restore seasonal accessibility to designated areas of the floodplain, possibly in association with the development of commercial land use and natural habitats.
Identify areas of unmanaged land, or land managed unsympathetically to the context of the floodplain, and agree a code of land use.
Create containment to existing urban edges by using riparian landscape elements and existing natural features such as landform and vegetation. Agree a design code for the distinctive new design of built form and flood defence structures.

CONTEXT

Regional: Low Weald

Condition

good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE
moderate	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
poor	CREATE	RESTORE & CREATE	RESTORE
	low	moderate	high

Sensitivity

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition

Poor.

Pattern of elements:	Coherent.
Detracting features:	Some.
Visual Unity:	Coherent.
Cultural integrity:	Poor.
Ecological integrity:	Moderate.
Functional Integrity:	Weak.

Sensitivity

Moderate.

Distinctiveness:	Indistinct.
Continuity:	Recent.
Sense of Place:	Very Weak.
Landform:	Apparent
Extent of tree cover:	Open
Visibility:	High.

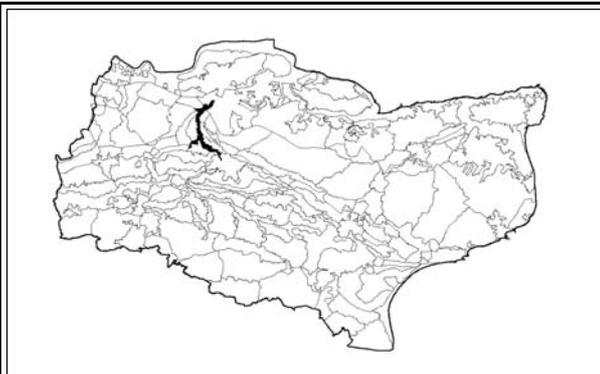
SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

RESTORE AND CREATE.

Create areas of transition from the fluvial to the rural landscape
Create wetland areas
Restore riparian vegetation to riverbanks and at fluvial junctions.
Create a design code for commercial properties and flood defence structures.
Create and restore seasonal accessibility to the floodplain
Create a positive land use code
Restore field boundaries and a cohesive land use to the upper contours
Create a new edge to existing urban areas using riparian elements.

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MEDWAY VALLEY LOWER



The Medway Valley divides into two distinctive sub-areas as it cuts first through the high Greensand Ridge, producing a narrow, contained valley, then a broader landscape as it crosses the softer Gault Clay vale and on through the chalk.

The latter is the Medway Valley Lower which is essentially a flat landscape developed on the valley alluviums around the meandering river Medway between the tidal lock at Allington on the Maidstone outskirts to Halling downstream. The landscape extends laterally over a broad area around New Hythe and Aylesford defined by the river deposits, but narrows as the Medway cuts through the chalk which encloses the landscape to the north.

Much of the landscape is a rather untidy sprawl of settlements and industry such as Snodland, New Hythe and Forstal that have developed along the river's flanks, most particularly in the west of the valley. It is distinguished by dramatic mineral sites associated with gravel and clay extraction, either still working as at Ham Hill Sandpits, Snodland, or reclaimed as at the lakes at Leybourne. Amongst the enterprises that traditionally used the river, some remain. Many of these are of an industrial nature, such as scrap metal yards, which inevitably detract from the visual quality of the riverside.

The river itself forms an important and distinctive feature within the character area, much of it being either a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) or a Site of Nature Conservation Interest (SNCI). This includes marshes on the east bank of the Medway at Wouldham, part of which are also in an area of Local Landscape Importance. Here an area of extensive unimproved grassland and reedbeds, divided by dykes, remains under grazing. It is hoped to raise the water levels in some of these dykes to improve their nature conservation value.

At the river's margin, areas of reeds and other common emergents, mudflats and wading birds at low tide contrast strongly with the more industrialised areas to the south.

The lakes at Leybourne are an important site for migrant and breeding birds and are variously used for bird-watching or are stocked for fishermen. On the west bank, the landscape is dominated by housing, industry, pylons and arable farming. Snodland is not distinguished by its architecture and whilst Halling retains an attractive riverside church with long views to the chalk scarp, it is dominated by a mélange of 20th century development. Recent redevelopment of old industrial sites on this bank has intensified the built fabric so that when viewed from the east the impression is of continuous development. Allowance should be made for vegetated buffer zones adjacent to the river, to enhance its aquatic habitats and amenity value.

The quieter stretches of the east bank of the river are used for recreation by children, walkers at the water's edge itself and along the bank-top path that meanders down much of this bank, passing occasional old boats nestling on the peaceful bankside. Pleasure craft occasionally make their way up to Allington lock from the estuary. A general sense of quiet pervades on the river, however, especially at low tide when, for many craft, the river is unnavigable.

Much of the east bank remains a tranquil although degraded landscape. Additional new development is proposed at Peter's Pit, Wouldham and at Eccles. New vehicle and pedestrian bridges are proposed across the river as part of the development brief. The area's current relative isolation is likely to be affected by these proposals.

Recreational pressure may be put on the areas of conservation value. Traffic management measures and accessible public transport may be needed to manage the potential traffic impact on the rural lanes. The development proposals are also likely to be highly visible from the Kent Downs AONB.

A further influence on the river valley landscape would be the imposition of dredging, vegetation clearance and other flood-plain management which may be required around new built development and could be in visual conflict with the local landscape character.

The related aspects of reduced rainfall and increased abstraction of the river water have contributed to the changing face of the lower Medway Valley. Low water levels and variable water quality considerably diminish the amenity and the experience of the waterside and the expansive, spacious tidal flood-plain.

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MEDWAY VALLEY LOWER

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Tidal river with well-developed meanders. Residual unimproved grasslands and reedbeds forming important areas for nature conservation. Well developed industrial mineral and urban sites particularly on the west bank.

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

Visual unity is incoherent and there are many detracting features. Views are contained by the surrounding Downs but the wide tidal river valley landscape is fragmented by extensive industrial works, floodplain management structures, new riverside residential developments and valley side quarries. Clusters of habitat include wet pasture reed beds and regenerative scrub, but industrial, residential and quarrying activities fragment the ecological interest overall. Aylesford Priory ragstone and flint churches and historic floodbanks are important heritage features, but field boundaries and tree cover are in poor condition. The built development generally detracts from the landscape, with massive industrial complexes, dramatic chimneys and high density residential areas in highly coloured brick. Overall, this is a landscape in very poor condition.

Sensitivity

The strength of character is weak with a lack of local distinctiveness and, in many areas, only a relatively recent time depth. Landform is an apparent element and the lack of significant tree cover creates a highly visible landscape.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

Restoration and creation of unimproved pastures and reed beds should be used to increase the nature conservation potential and naturalistic landscape qualities of the river floodplain. Tree planting proposals need careful consideration to avoid destroying the open character of the landscape. Scrub and hedges may be more appropriate in integrating the built developments into the valley.

Where they are in a manageable context, existing hedgelines should be gapped up and properly maintained. New hedgerow proposals should aim to link existing remnant hedgerows.

Where appropriate, new developments should be sensitively sited and designed to reflect the riverside context.

CONTEXT

Regional: Greensand Belt

Condition

good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE
moderate	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
poor	CREATE	RESTORE & CREATE	RESTORE
	low	moderate	high

Sensitivity

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition **Very Poor.**

Pattern of elements:	Incoherent.
Detracting features:	Many.
Visual Unity:	Significantly Interrupted.
Cultural integrity:	Variable.
Ecological integrity:	Weak.
Functional Integrity:	Weak.

Sensitivity **Moderate.**

Distinctiveness:	Indistinct.
Continuity:	Recent.
Sense of Place:	Very Weak.
Landform:	Apparent
Extent of tree cover:	Open
Visibility:	High.

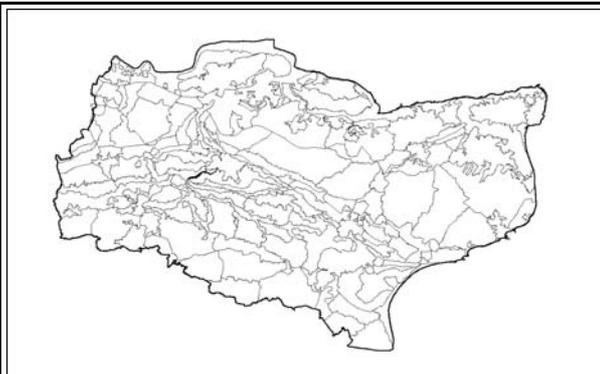
SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

RESTORE AND CREATE.

- Restore and create pasture and reed beds
- Use scrub and hedgerows to integrate built developments
- Gap up and maintain existing hedgerows
- Link existing hedgerows with new hedges
- Site new developments sensitively

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MEDWAY VALLEY UPPER



The Upper Medway extends from Nettlestead where the river begins its journey through the Greensands to the southern outskirts of Maidstone at Tovil. The deep valley sides that the river has cut through these strata provide one of the most picturesque landscapes of the Medway, notably where it flows beneath the striking historic bridging points.

This stretch of the river forms part of the Medway navigation from the tidal lock at Allington to Leigh near Tonbridge. Perhaps the most important use of the river is for recreation, although before the coming of the railway it was also significant for commercial traffic. Boating, canoeing, and fishing as well as walking dominate the activities. Several moorings and boat yards are available between Wateringbury and Allington.

There is concern that erosion of the banksides by powered vehicles occurs when they are driven at excessive speed and that some owners dispose of untreated effluent and rubbish into the river. Dominance of stretches of the river footpaths by fishermen can also cause conflict with canoeists and wildlife because of the danger of lines and litter.

The maintenance of water levels for navigation through the use of locks has resulted in algal blooms and associated water quality problems in past years, particularly in summer.

Further, continued dry summers could result in surface flows becoming more seasonal in the headwater streams that feed the Medway.

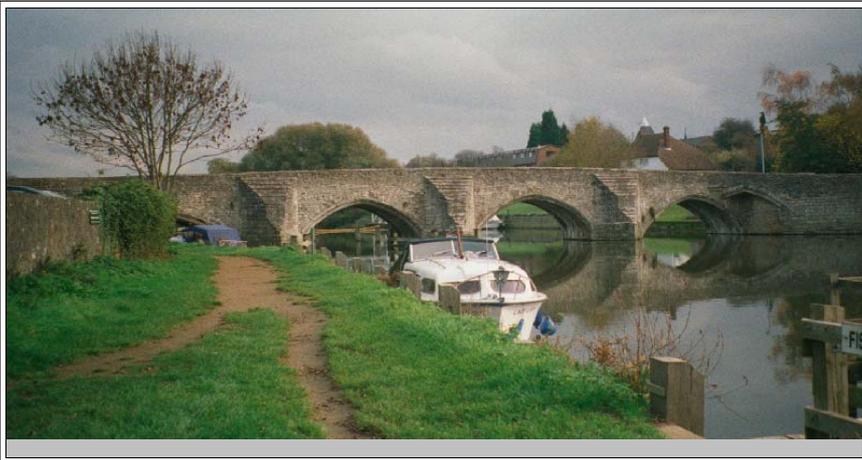
Beyond the river channel the landscape has changed markedly over the past thirty years due to the reduction in fruit and hops that are grown, with their distinctive high hedges or windbreaks, and due to the expansion of the suburbs of Maidstone. This has resulted in a reduction in enclosure and visual variety, opening out views to the suburbs.

The land use change has also corresponded to a fragmentation in landholdings, for instance at Tutsham Hall, Court Lodge and Gallant's Farm, and the gentrification of associated buildings such as oast houses, most of which have now been converted for residences. These changes are still progressing, although less dramatically.

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MEDWAY VALLEY UPPER

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Steep sided valley cut into the Greensand. Picturesque rural landscape. Historic bridges and locks. Lots of pleasure craft on the river.

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

The river corridor has coherent landscape elements with some views interrupted by waterside development. Visual detractors include flood control and holiday developments, lighting and a proliferation of boat moorings. The strong corridor of ecological interest is modified by encroaching agricultural land use and the limitations of riparian vegetation. Vegetative heritage features such as pollard willows are poor and built development has an overall negative impact, despite the influence of historic buildings and the frequent use of ragstone. Bridging points are strong features.

Sensitivity

The river corridor is an open landscape with an apparent landform, and visibility is therefore high. Historic bridging points, settlement and pollard willows define the time depth of the landscape, although there is little distinct vegetation with any sense of continuity. The area is considered to be of high sensitivity.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

- Restore riparian vegetation to selected undeveloped stretches of the river corridor to emphasize the river and augment the ecological interest.
- Restore the visual and physical containment of the foci of settlement on historic bridging points of the river.
- Restore the emphasis on existing vernacular detail.
- Restore and manage the setting of bridging points.
- Restore managed vegetation to settled parts of the river bank.

CONTEXT

Regional: Greensand Belt

Condition

good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE
moderate	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
poor	CREATE	RESTORE & CREATE	RESTORE
	low	moderate	high

Sensitivity

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition Poor.

Pattern of elements:	Coherent.
Detracting features:	Many.
Visual Unity:	Interrupted.
Cultural integrity:	Variable.
Ecological integrity:	Moderate.
Functional Integrity:	Coherent.

Sensitivity High.

Distinctiveness:	Characteristic.
Continuity:	Historic.
Sense of Place:	Moderate.
Landform:	Apparent
Extent of tree cover:	Open
Visibility:	High.

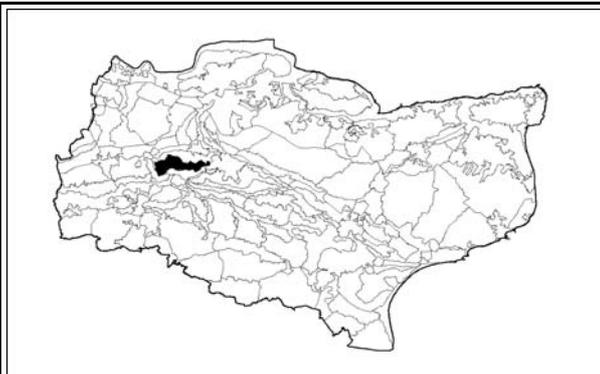
SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

RESTORE.

- Restore the riparian corridor
- Restore the emphasis on historic bridging points and settlement patterns
- Restore managed vegetation to appropriate stretches of settled river bank

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MEREWORTH WOODLANDS



An area of extensive broadleaf coppice woodland, mainly of chestnut but including hazel, with oak standards, and conifer plantation, this is an enclosed wooded landscape of green shady lanes, of historic and landscape value, that incorporates Hurst, Mereworth, Hoath and Oaken Woods, and the mixed farmland and developments in between.

This generally flat, wooded landscape, often of high ecological value and scant settlement, corresponds to the poor quality, acid soils that developed on the head deposits lying on the gentle dip-slope of the Hythe Beds. The Hythe Beds themselves give rise to better quality soils which have been more extensively cultivated such as in the fruit-growing areas roundabout.

The woodlands are generally unfenced and criss-crossed by a mix of bridleways, footpaths and private forest tracks. A large section of Mereworth Woods, however, along the A228, 'Seven Mile Lane', is given over to military use and is inaccessible to the public.

At the eastern end of the character area, around East Malling Heath, is a more mixed landscape of arable, grassland and new orchards, with pockets of development, including the emerging business park and residential area of Kings Hill on the old West Malling Airfield. Some of the new housing in this area is fronted by old chain link fence from the days of the airfield.

Whilst the main part of Kings Hill is generally well screened from the rural landscape by the woodland at its perimeter, the smooth, mown entrance of the new access from the A228 is not in keeping with the enclosed wooded feel of the rest of the character area. The result is a disharmony which may be exacerbated by the proposed widening of the West Malling by-pass and the proposed third access to Kings Hill. Already the existing by-pass intrudes where it crosses over the local lanes with some of the mitigation mounds sticking up steeply in an otherwise gently rolling landscape.

Elsewhere farmlands nibble at the edges of the wooded belt, above Crouch, Comp and Herne Pound. Tall hedgerows often line the roadside, the fields a mix of fruit and arable crops.

A strong feature of the southern part of the character area is the extensive and superb views from its edges over the varied rural scarplands, the Medway valley and the Low Weald beyond. The quality of much of the Mereworth landscape is recognised through its designation as a Site of Nature Conservation Interest (SNCI). Part of Oaken Wood is a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) for its geological value.

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MEREWORTH WOODLANDS

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Plateau landscape with poor quality soils. Extensive broadleaf coppice woodlands. Narrow shady winding lanes. Sparse settlement.

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

The strong and simple pattern of dense coppice woodland and some pasture/heathland is infrequently interrupted by smallholdings and residential properties and has begun to be impoverished by some unmanaged land and increasing residential use, although the strong woodland cover remains coherent. The coppice management system of much of the woodland maintains a strong ecological base and is an appropriate use of the poor quality soils. The functional integrity of the area is therefore strong.

Sensitivity

There is a strong time-depth element in this character area with its sparse settlement, narrow enclosed roads and dense woodland, although comparatively recent chestnut and coniferous plantations now dominate the tree cover. The landform is unremarkable from within the area itself, appearing generally flat, and views are well-contained within the heavy enclosure of the tree cover.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

Conserve the woodland cover and the characteristics of the narrow lanes. Reinforce the wooded edge to existing development and encourage planting of high forest species (such as oak) at visual nodes and boundaries to supplement the existing mature stock. Develop management techniques of the woodland, heath and pasture to promote ecological interest. Increase areas of heathland.

CONTEXT

Regional: Greensand Belt

Condition

good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE
	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
moderate			
poor	CREATE	RESTORE & CREATE	RESTORE
	low	moderate	high

Sensitivity

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition **Good.**

Pattern of elements:	Coherent.
Detracting features:	Some.
Visual Unity:	Coherent.
Cultural integrity:	Variable.
Ecological integrity:	Moderate.
Functional Integrity:	Strong.

Sensitivity **Moderate.**

Distinctiveness:	Characteristic.
Continuity:	Ancient.
Sense of Place:	Strong.
Landform:	Insignificant.
Extent of tree cover:	Enclosed.
Visibility:	Very Low.

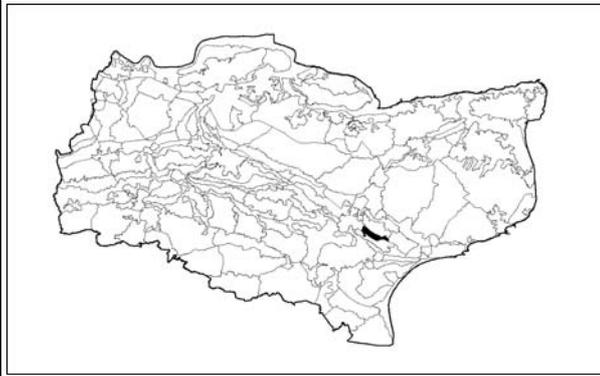
SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

CONSERVE AND REINFORCE.

Conserve woodland cover
 Reinforce the occurrence of mature woodland trees
 Reinforce wooded edges to development
 Reinforce heathland

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MERSHAM FARMLANDS



This small character area on the Hythe Beds south-east of Ashford is an undulating farmed landscape on the Hythe Beds at around 60 metres. The landscape is one of open arable fields and small-scale pastoral farming with small copses and old gappy hedgerows. The good quality soils used to support a few orchards but these were never typical of this area and have now gone. Suburban housing wraps around the village centre at Mersham with its pleasing ragstone and red brick buildings.

The remaining pasture and hedgerows are vulnerable both to potential removal for arable use and, some have been lost to the Channel Tunnel Rail Link. It is likely that the proposed mixed use development at Cheeseman's Green to the south will have a profound effect on the tranquillity and character of Mersham and the surrounding farmland. Increased traffic levels could put pressure on the narrow lanes and village for 'improvements' that would destroy their rural character. This small character area is gradually being enclosed by development on three sides.

Although not often visible in the undulating landscape, the M20 remains audible within these otherwise quiet farmlands.

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MERSHAM FARMLANDS

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Undulating landscape with good quality soils. Mixed farmland with small-scale pastoral farming and more open arable fields. Small copses and gappy hedgerows.

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

The condition of this area is influenced by many visual detractors which include the Channel Tunnel Rail Link, urban edge development and unsympathetic farm buildings. The landscape pattern itself is a coherent pattern of farmland and settlement around the ridgeline, interrupted by loss of hedged boundaries. Many fields are intensively farmed, woodland is limited and hedgerows are declining - semi-natural habitats are therefore not widespread and the ecological integrity of the area is weak. Heritage features of hedgerow and tree cover are vulnerable.

Sensitivity

Landscape features do not contribute to a real sense of local distinctiveness. The narrow highways retain some character, following ancient routes. Settlement is recent and undistinguished. A sense of place is very weak. Historic features such as field boundaries are becoming obscure. Views are open over and apparent landform, and therefore visibility is high. This area has a moderate sensitivity due to the high visibility.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

Restore the cultural integrity of the landscape by enhancing the setting of the ridgeline road and the setting of existing settlements.
 Create integrity within the farmland by removing redundant hedgerows and replanting small copses on the lower slopes.
 Control the effect of visual detractors. Maintain views where possible.
 Create more diverse habitats by the sensitive management of selected pastoral and arable farmland.

CONTEXT

Regional: Greensand Belt

Condition

good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE
moderate	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
poor	CREATE	RESTORE & CREATE	RESTORE
	low	moderate	high

Sensitivity

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition **Very Poor.**

Pattern of elements:	Coherent.
Detracting features:	Many.
Visual Unity:	Interrupted.
Cultural integrity:	Poor.
Ecological integrity:	Weak.
Functional Integrity:	Very Weak.

Sensitivity **Moderate.**

Distinctiveness:	Indistinct.
Continuity:	Recent.
Sense of Place:	Very Weak.
Landform:	Apparent
Extent of tree cover:	Open
Visibility:	High.

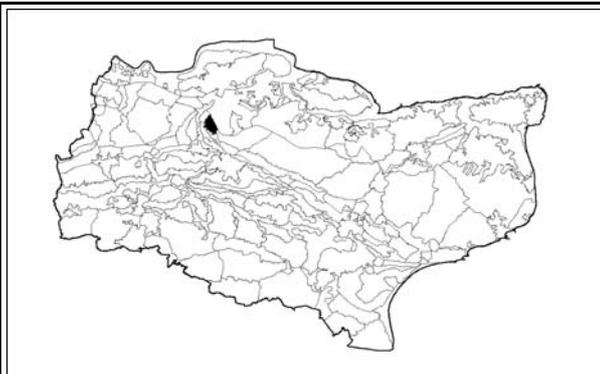
SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

RESTORE AND CREATE.

Create small copses
 Create diverse grassland and arable farmland
 Create open landscapes where appropriate

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NASHENDEN VALLEY: MID KENT DOWNS



NASHENDEN VALLEY

To the west of Walderslade, a series of tiny, steep valleys run north east into the Nashenden Valley. The M2 motorway, which cuts along the north side of this valley, forms the boundary between the AONB and Rochester. This is an open, sweeping landscape of huge arable fields and large blocks of dense, deciduous woodland.

Despite the proximity of the motorway and Rochester, this area still remains a strong rural character. Nevertheless, the long views within the valley make it vulnerable to development, as there are few hedges or shaws to provide screening.

MID KENT DOWNS

The Nashenden Valley lies within the larger character area of the Mid Kent Downs.

The long spine of the Kent Downs in this area stretches from Chatham in the west to the Stour Valley in the east. Although there are local variations in the appearance of the landscape, there is a strong underlying pattern to the landform, which imparts an overall character to the region. Throughout the length of the chalk ridge a series of narrow, steep-sided dry valleys carve their way down the gentle northern dip-slope of the Downs to the flatter land of the North Kent Fruit Belt, around Sittingbourne and Faversham.

The historical poverty of this area resulted largely from the stiff clay-with-flints soils, which overlie the solid chalk. Despite their striking, rich-red colour, these soils are relatively poor and difficult to cultivate, especially as they occur on the exposed upper plateau of the Downs. Edward Hasted, writing in 1798, consistently describes the area in terms such as "an unpleasant dreary country, the soil of which is very poor, being chalky, and much covered with flint-stones". In his day the land was used widely for sheep grazing, interspersed by arable on the lower slopes and large blocks of woodland. Today appreciation of the landscape has changed and the remote, undeveloped ridges and valleys, which resulted from the historical poverty of the soils, are considered one of the most beautiful features of the AONB. Although mechanised farming over the last hundred years has seen an increase in the area of arable land, much of the original ancient woodland survives, walling in the arable plateau and enclosing the rounded, valley bottoms.

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NASHENDEN VALLEY: MID KENT DOWNS

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Chalk ridge with some narrow steep dry valleys.
Open, sweeping landscape with huge arable fields and large blocks of dense woodland.
Few hedges or shaws.

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

A coherent land pattern follows the top of the scarp and the plateau. The visual unity is interrupted by plantation woodland and sweeping open spaces. Broadleaf woodland and shaws form large clusters of semi-natural habitats around large arable areas. Built development appears generally unremarkable. The condition of heritage features varies - tree cover is widespread, some highways are narrow and well-wooded, wooded edges to arable areas are felt to be vulnerable.

Sensitivity

The area has a strong sense of place, influenced by the dominant landform and the continuity of both the woodland and the form of the common land. Visibility is high due to the dominant landform, although views are intermittent. The area is considered to be highly sensitive.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

Conserve the localised woodland characteristics such as hazel coppice and many oaks within the mix of other broadleaf species.
Conserve the historic form of pastoral/common clearings with wooded edges.
Conserve wooded edges to roads and encourage the sensitive management of wooded edges to arable areas.
Conserve wooded shaws.
Conserve the remote quality of the landscape and the lack of settlement.

CONTEXT

Regional: Kent Downs AONB

Condition

good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE
moderate	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
poor	CREATE	RESTORE & CREATE	RESTORE
	low	moderate	high

Sensitivity

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Condition

Good.

Pattern of elements:	Coherent.
Detracting features:	Few.
Visual Unity:	Unified.
Cultural integrity:	Variable.
Ecological integrity:	Moderate.
Functional Integrity:	Coherent.

Sensitivity

Very High.

Distinctiveness:	Characteristic.
Continuity:	Ancient.
Sense of Place:	Strong.
Landform:	Dominant.
Extent of tree cover:	Intermittent.
Visibility:	High.

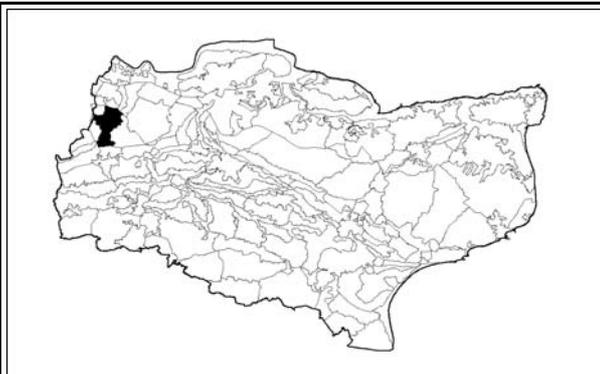
SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

CONSERVE.

Conserve the historic form of open common land
Conserve wooded edges by sensitive management
Conserve broadleaf woodland and woodland cover generally
Conserve the sparseness of settlement

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NORTH DARENT: DARENT VALLEY



NORTH DARENT

At Sevenoaks, as the Darent turns north, it passes from the flat arable floodplain, where a string of new lakes indicates the presence of former gravel quarries into the seclusion of the rural, northern valley. Here the character derives from the cohesion between the steep wood-topped scarps, the lower, intensively farmed scarp foot with its strong pattern of hedges and shaws (thick strips of mature broadleaf trees and small blocks of once coppiced woodland), and the thick belts of trees along the river, road and railway in the valley bottom.

Although the river is largely hidden from view, several stretches of thin Lombardy poplars along the banks send strong visual signals of its presence, making a focal point in the valley. In the north, the ordered pattern of hedgerows gives way to the ancient, unenclosed wood pastures of Lullingstone Park and the open arable fields around Eynsford. These vast chalky expanses are broken up only by occasional thick, overgrown hedges or small shaws, which cast striking lines across the landscape.

Despite its apparent rural seclusion, the North Darent Valley is under considerable pressure. The M25 motorway cuts through its western edge, creating a constant hum of traffic and isolating small sections of the AONB. The fragmentation of farm holdings is allowing the gradual introduction of urban-edge land uses, such as horse pasture and golf courses, into the agricultural landscape.

DARENT VALLEY

North Darent lies within the larger character area of the Darent Valley.

The Darent is the most westerly of the three rivers cutting through the Kent Downs and is strongly contained throughout its extent in the AONB by steep, often wood-topped, scarps and by the Greensand Ridge to the south. It has been called one of the earliest cradles of English settlement in Kent, and its long history of habitation and passage has clearly shaped its present character. There is a rich legacy of Roman remains, including Lullingstone Roman Villa, and several historic tracks run through the valley. In fact its peaceful, rural character today belies a busier and more industrial past. By the time of the Norman Conquest, the natural course of the river had already been diverted to power watermills, a tradition which continued until the beginning of the 20th century. Today only converted mill-houses and occasional ditches remain to indicate the former nature of the valley.

The name 'Darent' comes from the Celtic for 'oak river' and the river still meanders for much of its length through a narrow, tree-lined corridor. From Westerham, it flows east through the wide, clay vale between the chalk and the greensand, before swinging north at Sevenoaks to cut through the Downs. Once, it supported an extensive area of seasonally flooding water -meadows, but over abstraction of river water, changes in farming practice and gravel excavation have virtually eradicated such features and much of the floodplain is now arable. North of Shoreham the chalk scarps widen out, supporting large, undivided arable fields which reveal the open, curving back of the chalk downs.

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