

ALDINGTON RIDGE

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Raised landscape with steep slopes down to neighbouring character areas. Good quality loam soils. Mixed, generally open farmland. Landslips in association with the underlying clays. Dramatic views to the Low Weald, Romney Marsh and the Downs.

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

The ridgeline landscape is strongly unified with few visual detractors. Built form has a moderate positive impact - large farmsteads and houses are interspersed with 20th century linear development. Ecological interest is weak due to sparse woodland cover and intensive arable use over large areas.

Sensitivity

There is an ancient time depth to the area which is influenced by the isolated ridgeline farms, the ridgeline road, and the occurrence of some remaining pastures and small copses. Historic features such as hedgerow and field boundaries do not contribute greatly to the local distinctiveness. Ragstone farm buildings constitute a unique element in this landscape which adds to the strong continuity. Tree cover is limited and visibility is high within this area.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

Restore the frequency of woodland areas to the lower slopes of the ridgeline.
 Restore a smaller scale, but more open landscape by removing field boundary divisions.
 Conserve the open settings of the farmsteads.
 Conserve the infrequency of built form and conserve open views.
 Conserve the open nature of the field system.
 Conserve and restore small woodland areas.
 Restore ecological interest by the sensitive management and restoration of small pastoral grasslands.

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: Unified.

Detracting features: Few.

Visual Unity: Strongly Unified.

Cultural integrity: Variable.

Ecological integrity: Weak.

Functional Integrity: Weak.

Sensitivity

High.

Distinctiveness: Characteristic.

Continuity: Historic.

Sense of Place: Moderate.

Landform: Apparent

Extent of tree cover: Open

Visibility: High.

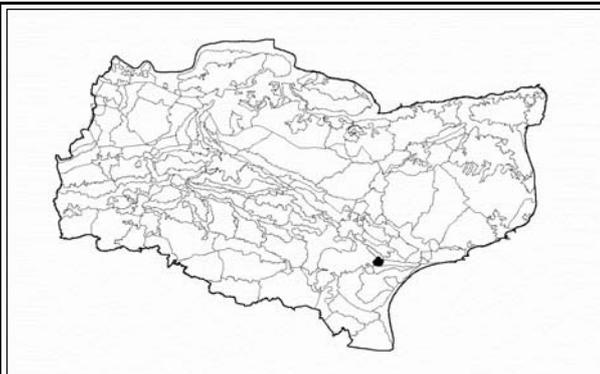
SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

CONSERVE AND RESTORE.

Conserve and restore small woodlands.
 Restore open areas of farmland.
 Conserve the infrequency and scale of built form.
 Restore the ecological interest of pastoral land.

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ALDINGTON: LYMPNE



ALDINGTON

In the extreme west of this area, the underlying sandstones gradually give way to the heavy Weald Clay, resulting in softer, more rounded slopes. This change is also reflected in the high proportion of deciduous, ancient woodland, most of which was formerly coppiced, which dominates the scarp at Aldington. The gentle topography of the lower slopes, however, allows some arable cultivation and as a result the wild, bleak appearance of the eastern sections is lost. The loss is reinforced by the elements of suburbanisation associated with the substantial properties which are scattered across the area, overlooking the magnificent views.

LYMPNE

Aldington lies within 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 of 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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ALDINGTON: LYMPNE

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Rounded slopes
Deciduous woodland dominates the scarp.
Gentle lower slopes with arable cultivation.
Large properties with views over the marsh

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

This is a strongly unified, simple landscape with very few visual detractors, dominated by heavily-wooded ridges. Broadleaf woodland and managed coppice provide widespread semi-natural habitats. The limited number of secreted residential properties overlooking the marsh have a positive impact on the area. This area functions well - it is ecologically robust and has a clear cultural focus. It is considered to be in a very good condition.

Sensitivity

Although on a dominant scarp landscape, views are well enclosed by woodland, therefore the visibility is limited to 'moderate' within the area itself. There are open views over the adjacent marsh from points at the top of the ridge. The sensitivity of the area remains high due to the very strong time depth of the woodland and steep, wooded lanes. Other characteristic elements are more recent, such as the ridgeline residential development.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

Conserve the limited influence of built development within the area and in views of the scarp
Conserve the wooded, narrow characteristics of highways
Conserve the scale and unity of broadleaf woodland coverage over the area

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: Few.

Visual Unity: Strongly Unified.

Cultural integrity: Variable.

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.

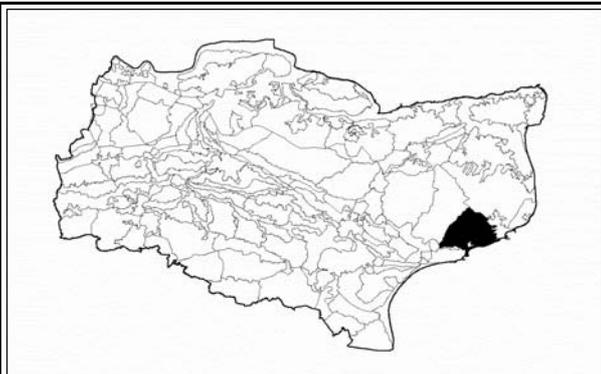
SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

CONSERVE.

Conserve the scale of woodland coverage
Conserve the limited influence of built development
Conserve the key characteristics of highways

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ALKHAM: EAST KENT DOWNS



ALKHAM

This area is dominated by the long ridges and isolated valleys, which feed into the Dour Valley. Near the coast, the ridges become increasingly narrower and the valleys closer. There are fewer woodlands here than in the west, and most occur on the steep valley slopes, where cultivation has been uneconomic. Many, therefore, are very old and of high nature conservation value. Few are actively managed. Much of the hedgerow network on the plateau, which was largely a 19th century creation, is being replaced by post and wire fence, so that gradually the former unenclosed landscape is being unintentionally recreated. The decaying hedges, derelict buildings and abandoned farm machinery which also occur in this are further signs of a landscape under economic stress.

The coastal downs of the Dover-Folkestone Heritage Coast form a dramatic landscape of open, cliff-top fields, exposed chalk cliffs and tumbled, scrub-covered rock-falls along the under cliff. The austerity of the cliff-top landscape is emphasised by the scarcity of trees and hedges. Only small pockets of scrub or tattered strips of remnant hedge fleck the smooth sweep of the landform. The beauty of this landscape lies in its simplicity and drama and the sense of "wilderness" which it offers.

EAST KENT DOWNS

Alkham 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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ALKHAM: EAST KENT DOWNS

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Long ridges and isolated valleys, formerly an ancient unenclosed landscape. Some woodland of high nature conservation value on steeper valley slopes. Coastal downs, open hill-top fields, wild with pockets of scrub.

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

The open, mainly pastoral landscape has a coherent pattern of elements but has some visual detractors in the form of recent ridge-top settlements and the motorway corridor. Woodland cover is intermittent, but there are some patches with high nature conservation interest. Open pasture is interrupted by post and wire fencing.

The condition of this area is affected by the negative impact of 20th century farmsteads, residential areas and the linear development of villages along access roads. However, the extant open hill-top fields and pockets of scrub and naturalistic vegetation restore an element of functional integrity to the area.

Sensitivity

Indistinct remnant historic field boundaries overlie the ancient characteristics of the open, pastoral landscape. This area has intermittent tree cover and scrub which often limits views. Woodland cover in general, and much of the built form, is not of distinctive character, but the inherent pattern of open, coastal downs and isolated valleys contribute to a moderate sensitivity.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

Conserve the distinctive qualities of small woodlands and open, pastoral hilltops, creating and conserving grasslands to enhance the ecological integrity of the area.
 Conserve the isolation of undeveloped valleys and the isolated farmsteads within.
 Create a new pattern for development of existing settlements along existing access routes in the lower valleys.
 Create a design code for farmsteads to distinguish form and function of local farm development.

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

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

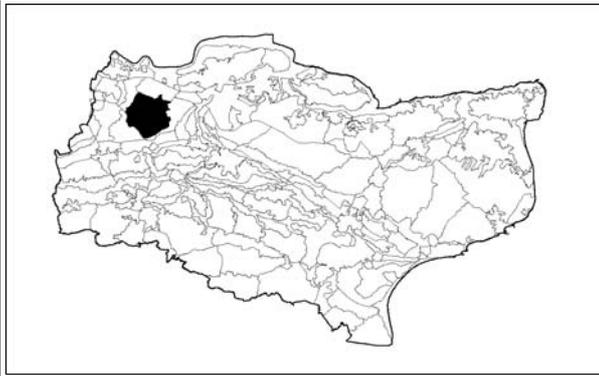
SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

CONSERVE AND CREATE.

Conserve unimproved grasslands and pastures
 Conserve and create open grassland areas
 Conserve existing woodlands
 Create woodland on steeper valley slopes
 Create design code for farmsteads

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ASH DOWNS



A mix of deep, dry valleys with wooded ridges and broad plateau tops, containing a mix of small villages and larger 20th century settlement, this landscape extends broadly from the A20 to the A227 in the east, and north past Horton Wood to the London to Chatham railway line, incorporating the settlements of Meopham and Longfield.

The land use is a mix of grassland with extensive arable farmland, notably on the plateau tops where larger machinery can be used and the hedgerows have been removed. Along the winding lane network the bushy hedgerows are largely intact which, with the remaining woodlands, helps retain the sense of this being an enclosed Downland landscape.

The fragmented pattern of small woodlands includes Horton Wood near Fawkham Green, an ancient woodland developed on the Clay-with-flints above the dry valley floor. Hartley Wood is also an ancient mixed broadleaf woodland, formally managed as coppice with standards and with old woodbanks.

Amongst this pattern of undulating landform and enclosing trees and hedgerows are contained many scattered farmsteads, villages and larger, more recent settlements such as New Ash Green and Hartley. Further away from the main roads such as the A20, in narrow wooded lanes, such as Scratcher's Lane, the effects of the concentration of this settlement can be seen in the erosion of the lane edges and the presence of scattered litter in the woodlands.

At New Ash Green, although the settlement is well-screened by the remaining woodland, the intensity of traffic has led to carriageway problems and pedestrian erosion of woodland edges. The village centre itself is developing a muddled appearance with some of the distinctive exposed aggregate surfacing replaced with bland concrete pavers. The village green too is disjointed by unsympathetic choices of brick.

Between New Ash Green and Longfield the mix of housing styles and eroded hedgerows, fences and lanes gives a more chaotic element to the landscape. From New Ash Green to Hartley and Longfield the lanes have become more degraded, being used for short-cuts. Occasional unsightly uses, such as car-breakers, are frequent but incongruous elements in the landscape.

In contrast to these 20th century settlements, the remaining historic villages are dispersed on the flat dip slope of the Downs, cut by its dry valleys. Fairseat is an attractive flint, brick and clapboard village. Stansted too, which is further down the same dry valley, is in a dramatic wooded setting enclosed by the steeply sloping valley sides.

Frequently, the winding lanes are closely wooded or enclosed with high bushy hedgerows containing Old Man's Beard, and a profusion of holly and hazel, hawthorn and field maple.

Further east, Meopham Green clusters around an historic core, a pre-Domesday settlement, birth-place of an Archbishop of Canterbury and the famous John Tradescant, traveller and collector, notably of plants overseas. The land use is a mix of grazing and arable fields, which after cultivation exposes the flinty soils. The fields are framed with attractive shaws and hangers of beech on the low ridge tops. As the land rises towards the scarp, nearer to the A20, the landscape flattens and opens out and there are occasional tremendous views north to the Queen Elizabeth II Bridge.

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ASH DOWNS

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

A pleasant mix of deep, dry pastoral valleys enclosed by wooded ridges and species rich hedgerows, with broad plateau tops beyond.
 Small valley-bottom villages and large 20th century settlements on plateau.
 A winding network of narrow, historic lanes often eroded by traffic

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

The pattern of landscape elements is coherent and in most cases reflects the underlying landform. Some visual detractors such as commercial buildings and unsympathetic land uses intrude into some of the views. The high ecological value of the area in general, supported by the wooded network on ridges and shaws, is reduced by the intensity of arable cultivations on the plateau. The condition of heritage features such as field boundaries and vernacular buildings is good, however, much recent isolated development using unsympathetic materials has a negative impact. Overall, the area is considered to be in good condition.

Sensitivity

The characteristic features of this landscape are strongly represented and portray both an historic and ancient time-depth. Recent development of urban areas has a localised effect; the area retains local distinctiveness and a strong sense of continuity. The existing highways and the evidence of vernacular materials (such as flint) in historic buildings, in particular, enhance the sense of place. Visibility is moderate due to the intermittent tree cover. The area is considered to be of high sensitivity.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

Conserve the small scale of the agricultural use of the valley slopes, retaining hedged enclosure and applying long-term management plans for this purpose.
 Conserve the wooded edge to the arable plateau which encloses the landscape and contains the wider views.
 Conserve and enhance the use of vernacular materials and the scale of historic built form.
 Resist the intrusion of large-scale buildings or groups of buildings into the view.
 Conserve the settlement pattern with isolated, small villages on valley bottoms and hamlets on the plateau.
 Conserve the dominance of the broadleaf woodland in the landscape.

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

Good.

Pattern of elements:	Coherent.
Detracting features:	Some.
Visual Unity:	Coherent.
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.

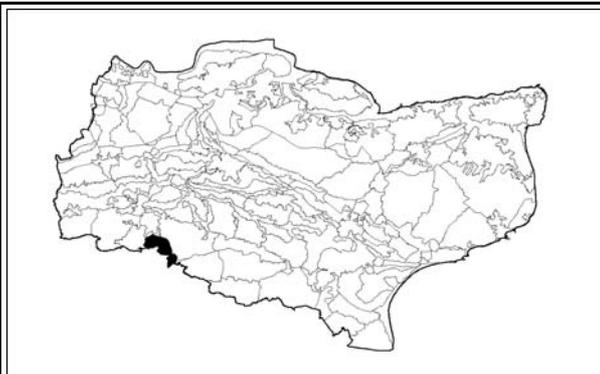
SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

CONSERVE.

Conserve broadleaf woodland cover
 Conserve small scale field pattern on valley sides
 Conserve wooded edges to arable plateau
 Conserve the impact of vernacular materials and the historic scale of built form
 Conserve the enclosure of settlements within wooded areas
 Conserve original highway characteristics

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BAYHAM: CENTRAL HIGH WEALD



BAYHAM

The traditional pattern of Wealden land use is still to be found in this area. On the shallower slopes, sheep graze the pastures, whilst the steeper hill-sides are clothed by large areas of deciduous woodland. In these woods, when the winter trees are bare, the whine of chainsaws and the acrid smell of wood smoke give away the presence of small gangs of coppice-workers cutting out the young poles to be used for fencing or firewood. The short cycle of cutting and regrowth, taking place in the sweet chestnut stands perhaps every 15 - 20 years, changes the appearance of this area from year to year, so that the open glade of one spring becomes the dense thicket of the next. Constant throughout the seasons, however, are the tall oaks and Scots Pines, which remain unharvested between the coppice-stools. Below the woodlands, in the Teise valley, lies Bayham Park, originally designed by Humphrey Repton. Within this landscape, the ruined walls of Bayham Abbey rear up from the flat valley bottom like an ancient skeleton washed clean by the nearby river.

Most of the farms here have oast-houses, a reminder of the wide-spread hop-gardens in the 19th century, none of which now remain. Today, ease of access to Tunbridge Wells has seen most of these farms and oast-houses climb the social ladder under the influence of non-agricultural wealth and the release from the necessity of farming.

Throughout this area, tiny roads squeeze between small fields and thick hedges, and secretive green lanes entice the passer-by onto a maze of sunken footpaths and almost forgotten tracks.

CENTRAL HIGH WEALD

Bayham lies within the larger character area of the Central High Weald.

The Central High Weald surrounds Tunbridge Wells, which exerts a strong influence on the neighbouring countryside. It extends south to Crowborough, west to Chiddingstone and east to Pembury and Bayham.

This is the landscape of the great estates, such as Penshurst Place, where dignified expanses of parkland impart a genteel appearance to the countryside. Much of this landscape can be seen from the Mark Cross to Tunbridge Wells ridge, from where the overall impression is of large commercial woodlands and unintensified pastures, interspersed with sweeps of parkland and occasional orchards. Along the northern reaches of the Medway valley beyond Penshurst, the woodlands are replaced by wide arable fields, whilst the steep valleys around Speldhurst and Bidborough are a patchwork of tiny meadows and strips of ghyll woodland.

Despite the peaceful, timeless quality of this landscape, this was an industrial district in the later Middle Ages, with major iron-workings at Eridge Park and Bayham and, in the 19th century, paper mills at Chafford. Many of the houses, especially those belonging to the large estates, are built of local sandstone, whilst the farms which nestle into the valley slopes off the ridge are frequently of warm red brick and tile, sometimes partially timber-framed. Many of these farmsteads are actually a group of several buildings, including barns and cottages, where several farm workers' families would have lived. In the 18th and 19th centuries, when hops became widely used in beer, almost every farm in this area had a hop garden. Nowadays they have almost all gone, but the red-tiled, white-cowled oast-houses still haunt the farmyards and in springtime, wavering, green arms of naturalised hops still reach up from the hedges, as if searching for the long-lost hop-poles.

Tunbridge Wells, founded in 1606 around one of the local iron-rich springs, has gradually influenced the character of this part of the High Weald. As wealth and employment have been created, so the pressure on this landscape has increased. Developers are eager to build on the surrounding fields, commuters use the tiny lanes to avoid the busy main roads and the local population find recreation and escape amongst the gentle slopes of this area.

Tunbridge Wells lies on a ridge. Around the edges of this ridge, especially at Speldhurst and Bayham, steep ghylls descend into the more open, rolling valleys of the River Medway and River Teise. In the north beyond Penshurst, the landscape flattens out towards the valley of the River Eden.

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BAYHAM: CENTRAL HIGH WEALD

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Rolling hills and ridges. Large areas of deciduous woodland on hillsides. Chestnut coppice with pine and oak standards. Farmsteads, oasts, narrow small roads, fields, thick hedgerows.

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

Landscape features are intact and clearly reflect the landform in this landscape. There are very few significant visual detractors amongst the rolling hills and ridges. The large areas of deciduous woodland, which include standard trees, are linked to tall hedgerows and wooded ghylls, and therefore provide a very strong ecological network. Farmed areas are generally non-intensive and pastoral, and therefore contribute to the ecological strength of the area. The condition of heritage features is very good, woodland and thick hedgerow are widespread, although slightly vulnerable to over-maturity. Overall, the landscape is in very good condition.

Sensitivity

The ridged landform is very apparent in the landscape, but is generally dominated by the dense enclosure of the tree cover. Visibility is low. Unique landscape features associated with the Bayhall and Bayham Estates give the area a very strong sense of place. The highways and woodlands have an ancient time-depth. Other characteristics associated with land use and built development tend to be historic in character; the infrequent oasts and brick farmhouses are a distinctive historic element. Due to the low visibility of the area, the sensitivity of the landscape is considered to be moderate.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

Conserve the extent and diversity of tree cover, reinforcing woodland on denuded hilltops. Reinforce the incidence of standard trees - oak, ash and beech - within managed woodland, coppice and hedgerows. Conserve the estate parkland features such as open grasslands and mature standard trees. Conserve the infrequency of built development, ensuring that the woodlands and pastures retain their distinctive tranquillity and isolation.

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:	Strong Network.
Functional Integrity:	Very Strong.

Sensitivity Moderate.

Distinctiveness:	Unique/Rare.
Continuity:	Ancient.
Sense of Place:	Very Strong.
Landform:	Apparent.
Extent of tree cover:	Enclosed.
Visibility:	Low.

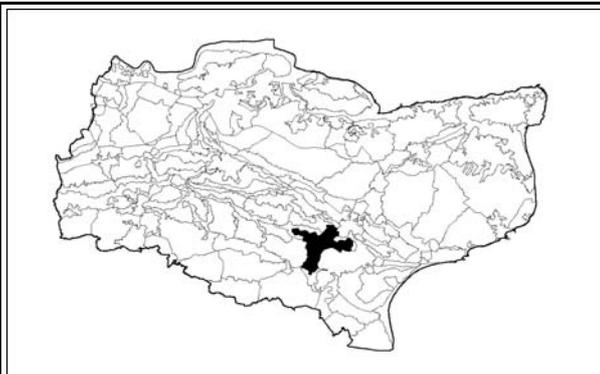
SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

CONSERVE AND REINFORCE.

Reinforce tree cover, ensuring the long-term incidence of standard trees within the woodland. Conserve and manage parkland, maintaining the proportion of mature standard trees. Conserve the infrequency of built development.

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BETHERSDEN FARMLANDS



This is a varied landscape extending from the rise at Bethersden, through flat farmland to Great Chart and east to Kingsnorth, extending south through more varied landform to Woodchurch on the edge of Shirley Moor. The grey, shelly Paludrina Limestone, that forms the resistant strata of the Bethersden rise, has been used in the past for church building, notably the tower of Bethersden church itself.

Ancient settlement in this landscape is evidenced by the line of the Roman road to Tenterden that crosses near Shirkoak and the vernacular village centres of Bethersden and Kingsnorth. There is also dull 20th century development, however, in association with these villages, for example.

Although around Bethersden and Woodchurch, the typical Wealden pattern of small fields and bushy hedgerows remains, where the land is flatter, from Great Chart, around Stubb's Cross and across to Kingsnorth, this has broken down with fields enlarged and hedgerows removed to allow mechanisation for arable farming. Where this has occurred a smooth, simple landscape has resulted, often with the garish hues and pungent odour of oilseed rape dominating in summer.

Enclosure is provided at the perimeter of the character area by the large blocks of woodland of the Old Romney Shoreline landscape that enclose these farmlands to the south.

Here there is a definite sense of being on a plateau and of height, and then suddenly the ground plunges away towards Woodchurch with long views to Great Heron Wood and the Isle of Oxney.

The farmlands along the B2067 form an enclosing, undulating backdrop to the flat, remote expanse of Shirley Moor, the scene punctuated rarely by vernacular farmsteads or small settlements. Woodchurch itself, with its mix of brick and white weatherboard buildings and the conspicuous church of All Saints provides a historic landmark for many miles for what is, in part, a seemingly unpopulated character area.

Population pressure is focused on the flatter lands to the north where both agricultural intensification and expansion of Ashford, notably through proposals for Chilmington Green and Park Farm are changing the established rural landscape patterns to one that is both less varied and less tranquil.

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BETHERSDEN FARMLANDS

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Flat, open arable landscape.
 More intimate undulating landscape of mixed farming towards Shirley Moor.
 Remote, unpopulated feel.
 Pastures.

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

This is a coherent pattern of small and medium-scale field patterns which reflect the landform. Some hedgerow boundaries are in decline, but there are some strong wooded edges. Woodland clusters, pastures and minor water courses provide a network of semi-natural habitats within variable intensities of pasture and arable farmland. The ecological integrity is therefore moderate. Rural heritage features, with the exception of hedgerows, are in good condition; woodland cover and wide-verged roads are regular features. Vernacular buildings, such as small barns and oasts, are much in evidence. Culturally, the area retains a remote, rural atmosphere. The condition of the area is considered to be very good.

Sensitivity

The landscape has a consistently historic time depth in which most of the key characteristics (farms, woodlands, pastures) have a sense of mutual continuity, i.e. they have evolved either together or in a sympathetic manner to each other. Visibility is moderate. Sensitivity is also considered to be moderate.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

Conserve the areas of small scale field patterns and reinforce the less intensive use of these.
 Reinforce wooded edges around settlements and around arable fields.
 Conserve the remote and rural atmosphere of settlements.
 Conserve the wide verges and hedged boundaries along highways.
 Reinforce the occurrence of standard trees (characteristically oaks) in hedgerows, and generally at key points in the landscape by long term management and replanting.

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 **Very Good.**

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

Sensitivity **Moderate.**

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

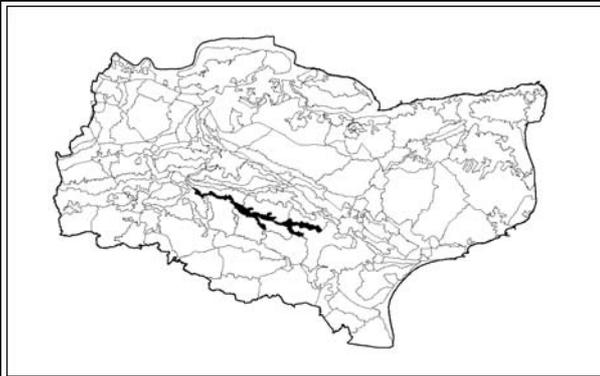
SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

CONSERVE AND REINFORCE.

Conserve and reinforce woodland cover
 Reinforce the wooded setting of farmsteads and settlements
 Conserve highway characteristics - wide verges and hedges
 Reinforce standard trees

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BEULT VALLEY



This long, narrow character area extends from close to the river's two sources near Bethersden and Pluckley station to the junction with the River Medway at Yalding. The incised river channel of the Beult meanders through a floodplain fringed with well-vegetated banks and distinctive lines of willow or edged with woodland copses enclosing small pastures. Intermittently, weirs contribute to alternating pools and sections of fast flow in the channel, but generally the flow in the river is slow reflecting the low fall from Smarden to the junction with the Medway at Yalding. The upper reaches near Bethersden are distinguished by the frequency of small field ponds and the isolated feel of the landscape.

In its western reaches arable cultivation extends into this narrow river corridor from the wider floodplain beyond blurring the boundary between the poorly drained alluvial soils and the river brickearths that surround them. This effect is accentuated by some loss of hedgerows and riverside vegetation. Despite this, the river Beult from Smarden to Yalding has been designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) for its diverse clay-river fauna and flora. Indeed, the bankside vegetation is often the only visual clue to the course of the river and gives variety to the narrow channel and thence to the broader floodplain.

The landscape of arable fields is also one of sparse human activity, the presence of several large oasts at the margins of the valley being a reminder of the once busy landscape of the hop gardens in the recent past. Settlement is scattered, rarely occurring on the river alluviums themselves apart from infrequent farmsteads and manors. The river is often crossed, however, by historic bridges, many of medieval origin. In particular, those of the historic villages of Yalding and Smarden, form attractive crossing points, with the Greensand ridge providing a dramatic backdrop at Yalding to the seven-arched medieval bridge. The rich patterns of the Greensand orchards are also visible from Rabbit's Cross and Stile Bridge.

Smarden forms a picturesque feature at the tranquil eastern end of this character area being composed of many vernacular brick and tile or weather-boarded houses. The village, whose name means 'butter valley and pasture', clusters around the church of 13th century origins, set above the reach of the Beult's floodwaters.

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BEULT VALLEY

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Flat, low-lying land around incised river channel. Rural open landscape of mixed farming. Small slow flowing river of high ecological value. Sparse but historic settlement. Many historic bridging points. Frequent small ponds in upper floodplain.

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

The Beult river itself is of high ecological value, however, in visual terms, the area is incoherent as a river valley with much intensive, open cultivated farmland and little apparent riparian vegetation. Historic bridging points are visually unremarkable. Although the area retains tranquillity and inaccessibility and has few visual detractors, the floodplain has lost the diversity of features. Built development has a coherent pattern on the edge of the floodplain, but generally has a moderately negative impact on the area.

Sensitivity

This flat area has intermittent groups of trees which give a moderate visibility throughout the valley. Historic features such as ditches and mature tree groups within the farmland are no longer distinctive visual features - ditches do not appear to exhibit noticeable marginal or wetland vegetation although there are more characteristic willow and poplar on the river itself. The ditches along the highway contribute to some local distinctiveness.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

Although tranquil and rural, the specific natural attributes of the river valley are not fully realised, despite the ecological value of the river. The historic characteristics have also diminished in importance in the landscape. A new emphasis on the natural characteristics and form of the wider river floodplain would re-introduce sustainable distinctive features compatible with the changing land use. This involves the sensitive management of some existing agricultural land.

The creation of a wider landscape corridor would re-introduce landscape features of ecological interest to include open shallow banks and willow/black poplar groups. The characteristics of field and roadside drainage ditches could be augmented by encouraging marginal grasses and wetland flora.

The significance and appeal of the bridging points may be enhanced by appropriate detailing and treatment of the immediate river banks.

The upper edge of the floodplain may be delineated by the creation of small woodland blocks.

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: Incoherent.

Detracting features: Few.

Visual Unity: Coherent.

Cultural integrity: Poor.

Ecological integrity: Moderate.

Functional Integrity: Weak.

Sensitivity

Low.

Distinctiveness: Indistinct.

Continuity: Historic.

Sense of Place: Weak.

Landform: Insignificant.

Extent of tree cover: Open.

Visibility: Moderate.

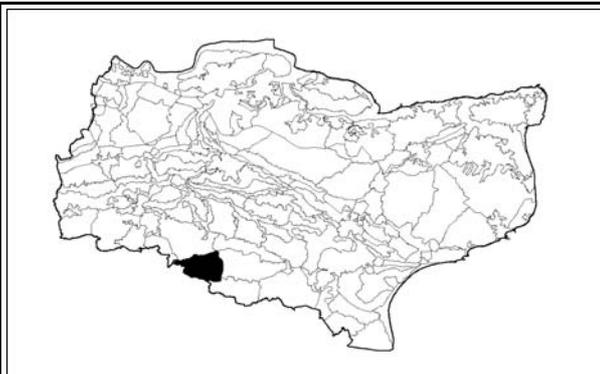
SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

CREATE.

Create a riparian corridor with some open bankside and some intermittent woody riparian vegetation. Create distinctive flora communities in ditches along the highway, in ponds, wet field boundaries and other wetland habitats such as riverbanks by sensitive management techniques. Create interest at bridging points by revising bridging details to appropriate characteristics and form, by group plantings of willow and black poplar where appropriate and by enhancing open views of the immediate water course. Create a wider riparian corridor by encouraging the non-intensive management of ditches and grasslands and by allowing occasional areas of regeneration of woody species. Create small woodlands at the upper edge of the floodplain and large pastoral enclosures in the existing open fields

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BEWL AND BEDGEBURY KENTISH HIGH WEALD



BEWL AND BEDGEBURY

The upper tributaries of the River Bewl were dammed and flooded in 1975 thus creating the largest artificial area of water in the south-east. The steep ghylls, which are so characteristic of the High Weald, have become narrow bays and inlets, separated from each other by rolling arable ridges, edged with occasional hedgerow trees and small deciduous woodlands.

To the north and east, expanses of coniferous forest rise up beyond the water's edge. Despite its scale, Bewl Water is surprisingly well hidden from the surrounding countryside. Lying in an elevated 'basin', between Wadhurst, Ticehurst and Lamberhurst, brief glimpses are occasionally possible from the enclosing ridges but it is only at close quarters that its full scale can be appreciated.

This huge stretch of water catches the endless changes of light and weather which sweep across the Weald, reflecting steel-grey clouds and vivid orange sunsets. There is room here for sailing dinghies to flicker over the waves without disrupting the solitude of fisherman and bird-watchers, whilst in summer the wide, glittering views provide a retreat for those who simply wish to sit and contemplate.

The mixed woodlands to the north-east of Bewl Water wrap round the Flimwell ridge to Bedgebury Forest. Straddling the watershed between the Teise and the Rother, this vast conifer plantation is interspersed, as so often in the High Weald, with feathery veins of birch, which flush to a delicate green in spring. Despite the roar of traffic on the main roads between Cranbrook, Hawkhurst, Flimwell and Lamberhurst, this is a peaceful area, where the sheer scale of water and forest is able to contain the intrusion of these roads within the landscape.

KENTISH HIGH WEALD

Bewl and Bedgebury lie within 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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BEWL AND BEDGEBURY KENTISH HIGH WEALD

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Peaceful rolling ridges.
Well hidden Bewl Water reservoir in elevated basin.
Large coniferous plantations and mixed woodland.
Intrusion of A21

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

This is a strongly unified landscape in which there are few visual detractors and in which the landform and landscape pattern are unified. The large areas of deciduous woodland, coppice and thick shaws form a very strong ecological network. Tree cover is extensive and the wooded edges to small scale fields are generally good. Other features include estate parkland and conifer plantations. The scattered network of small villages, some enlarged, have a high positive impact and contribute to the very strong functional integrity of the area. The condition of the area is considered to be very good.

Sensitivity

The ridged landscape is a dominant part of the area, but visibility is moderate due to the enclosure of the extensive woodlands. There is a strong continuity to the landscape which contributes to the strong sense of place, and it is considered to be highly sensitive.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

Conserve the frequency and density of woodland cover on the ridges and slopes. Ensure that appropriate species are used for replanting.
Encourage the retention of small scale pastoral clearings and the low-intensity agricultural use of these clearings and other enclosed areas.
Conserve the narrow form of lanes; protect wooded edges to vehicular routes and replant where these have been lost.
Conserve the characteristics of thick shaws/hedgerows by replanting with appropriate species and maintaining the level of vegetative enclosure to field systems and settlements, and on steep slopes.
Conserve the scattered and isolated nature of the network of villages and hamlets.

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:	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.

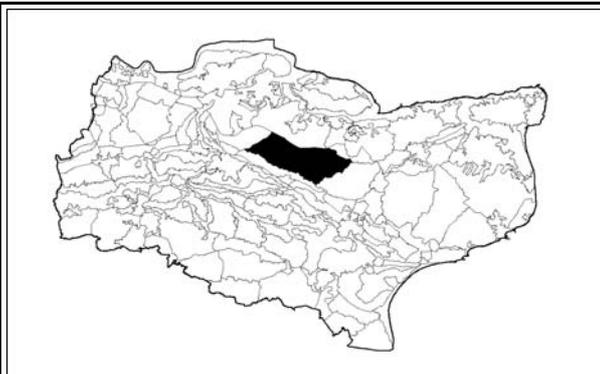
SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

CONSERVE.

Conserve woodland and wooded areas.
Conserve the small scale and pattern of scattered settlement.
Conserve the wooded and narrow characteristics of existing highways
Conserve the small scale and low intensity use of pastoral clearings

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BICKNOR: MID KENT DOWNS



BICKNOR

This landscape has a pattern of wide, arable fields contained by dense belts of woodland, which run along the upper slopes of the dry valleys. A network of small, often sunken, single-track lanes connects tiny, scattered villages, giving a timeless, 'well-settled' feel to the landscape. Tile-hung oast-houses are a common feature and there are a number of pockets of historical parkland. Orchards and hop gardens, along the northern edge, mark the gradual transition from the Downs to the fruit belt, and there are fine views across to the Swale estuary.

MID KENT DOWNS

Bicknor 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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BICKNOR: MID KENT DOWNS

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Chalk ridge with wide arable fields contained by dense belts of woodland. Views across Swale estuary.
 Small sunken lanes, scattered villages.
 Historic parkland, hops and orchards.

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

This is a coherent, sparsely settled area with arable farmland and woodland which reflect the chalk and clay soils of the plateau. Dry valleys are a particular feature of the landform. There are a few visual detractors some due to unsympathetic management of agricultural land such as dead trees and scraps of hedgerow. Suburban influences to small settlements and pylons through the open fields also detract from the view. Built development is infrequent, but is considered to have a moderate impact on the area. The dense woodland belts generally follow the upper slopes of the dry valleys and provide clusters of semi-natural habitats, but there is no corresponding habitat network through the large arable areas. The ecological interest of the area is therefore moderate.

Sensitivity

Ancient woodland is a characteristic feature although the form of the woodland varies from broadleaf to plantation conifer to chestnut coppice. The historic features of tall hedges and standard trees are indistinct, and wooded edges are often pushed back to the horizon. Vernacular styles and flint are not strongly represented, although oast houses are common in some areas towards the north. More recent ridgeline residential development is indistinct in style and form. Roads follow ridgeline and cross-contour tracks, and contribute to the time depth of the area. This area has a very varied time depth which ranges from the ancient emphasis of mature broadleaf woodland to isolated and indistinctive development with little time depth.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

The dense belts of woodland are a characteristic feature. They reinforce the pattern of the landform and provide some large-scale enclosure, reducing the potential scale of the current arable fields on the plateau. The emphasis of the belts of broadleaf woodland may be reinforced by replanting where woodland blocks have become fragmented and creating new woodland on open ridges, to follow contours. New woodland edges may also be created to absorb and integrate the edges of the more recent settlements, linked into highway hedgerow where appropriate. Highways are also a characteristic feature. Their narrow form and cross-contour or ridgeline alignment should be recognised and retained. Sympathetic traffic management may be applied to arrest the wear on verges and allow space for new roadside hedgerows. The retention and acceptable form of roadside hedgerows is also dependent on cultivation techniques which allow margins for the hedgerow's root system. The opening up of the arable plateau may be halted by the reintroduction of roadside hedgerows and shaws, commencing at the peripheries of the plateau, leading out from existing 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 Moderate.

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

Sensitivity Low.

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

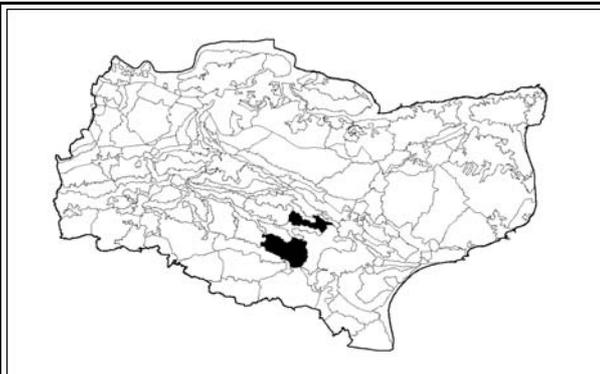
SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

CREATE AND REINFORCE.

Reinforce the broadleaf woodland cover
 Create broadleaf woodland to ridgetops where these are open
 Create wooded edges to settlements
 Reinforce the ancient characteristics of highways of narrow carriageways and hedged boundaries

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BIDDENDEN-HIGH HALDEN WOODED FARMLANDS



Although similar in character to the Staplehurst-Headcorn Pasturelands, this area is distinguished by its more varied topography and frequency of small woodlands such as Pond Wood near High Halden. Generally these woods are concentrated on the hilltops with more open arable fields on the south east slopes.

This higher, undulating land on which, for instance, High Halden with its distinctive church and the vernacular village of Frittenden are set, is on the edge of the High Weald. This elevation generally provides attractive views over either the rest of the Low Weald, or the higher ridges of the High Weald to the south. The historic village of Biddenden is sited on flatter land and here the views are back to the Greensand ridge.

The traditional pattern of small woodlands and hedged fields reflects the poor soils that led to isolation and lack of settlement until relatively recent times. Here too are found the scattering of field ponds, so characteristic of the Staplehurst-Headcorn Pasturelands, indicative of the wet clays below. Hedgerow and field oaks are not as extensive as elsewhere in the Low Weald and some have been lost through conversion of pasture to arable. Those that remain are sometimes gappy or poorly managed. Ribbon development along the few major roads, notably along the A28 and A262 at High Halden has also broken down this pattern locally, although the structure of small woodlands that remain and the undulating landform help to contain this intrusion.

Where conversion to arable has taken place, the result is large arable fields with often fragmented unmanaged remaining hedgerows. The more monochromatic greens of improved pasture and arable crops contribute to a decrease in the visual variety of the scene. Close to High Halden, where there are increased population and traffic levels, there are some problems with rubbish in the laneside ditches, perhaps related to overuse.

The local character is also changed, as elsewhere in the Low Weald, by the conversion of redundant barns and oasts to dwellings, which saves the fabric of the building but can have a suburbanising effect in the detail used.

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BIDDENDEN-HIGH HALDEN WOODED FARMLANDS

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Flat undulating topography with views over Low Weald.
Frequent small woodlands and field ponds. Small to medium scale pattern of fields, small woodlands and hedgerows with standard oaks.

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

This is a unified landscape with few detracting elements. Small to medium sized fields with clipped hedges, ditches and standard oaks combine with pasture, wet meadows, remnant orchards, frequent small woodlands and ponds to create a feeling of tranquillity and remoteness, enclosed but with a feeling of space. The few detracting elements include pony paddocks and the intrusion of alien conifer boundaries to some gardens. There is a strong ecological and cultural integrity from the well-developed networks of woodlands, streams, ponds and pasture. The large woodland blocks are generally mature oaks and over-mature hornbeam coppice, field boundaries are also over-mature and their clearance is starting to be an issue. Built development generally has a positive impact with scattered farms and manors but with some 20th century farmhouses and linear residential development.

Sensitivity

The landscape has a strong character with the hornbeam coppice and hornbeam hedges as the most distinctive elements of an ancient or historic time depth. Other elements such as woodland, pasture and ponds, traditional orchards and hop gardens, built environment, are generally rated as characteristic and historic. Landform is relatively insignificant with intermittent tree cover combining to create a relatively low visibility rating and therefore a moderate sensitivity.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

Conserve and reinforce the distinctive but over-mature hornbeam coppice through appropriate management and through encouraging the planting of new woodlands extensions.
Conserve woodlands through appropriate management to ensure their long term survival.
Reinforce hedgerows by gapping up, and conserve them by ensuring appropriate regular maintenance. Use hornbeam where this is locally distinctive.
Conserve and retain ponds.
Plant new oak standards to ensure continuity of tree cover before senescent specimens die.

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 **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:	Unique/Rare.
Continuity:	Historic.
Sense of Place:	Strong.
Landform:	Insignificant.
Extent of tree cover:	Intermittent.
Visibility:	Low.

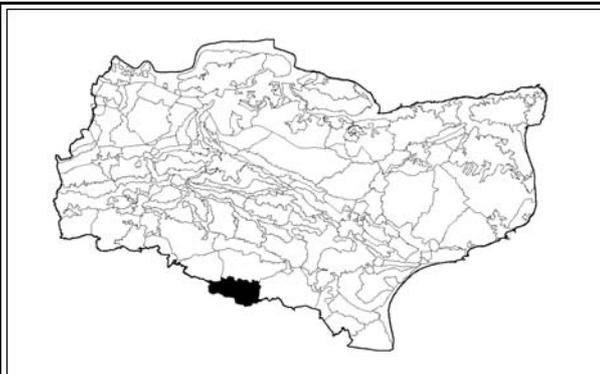
SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

CONSERVE AND REINFORCE.

Conserve, extend and manage hornbeam coppice
Conserve woodlands
Conserve the ancient woodland and hedges
Reinforce hedgerows and improve management
Conserve historic buildings
Conserve the character of farms through restoration, design and screening
Protect standard oaks and instigate replanting

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BODIAM: LOWER ROTHER VALLEY



BODIAM

Few castles can be more outwardly perfect than Bodiam. Sitting solidly on the northern bank of the Rother, halfway between Robertsbridge and Newenden, it still dominates the river valley, as it has for the last six hundred years. The castle marks the point where the Rother valley begins to lose its wild, marshy appearance and is gradually enclosed by increasingly wooded ridges. Narrow lanes wander across the upper slopes between high hedges and unmanaged shaws and the intimate topography of the High Weald begins to reassert itself.

Nevertheless, this is still a large scale landscape, where big arable fields are surrounded by overgrown hedges and wide views open out from the ridges. Despite the network of drainage ditches, extensive flooding can occur during the winter, and the valley floor becomes a great sheet of brown water, reflecting the bleak, grey skies overhead. There is a thicker scattering of trees and scrub on this floodplain, than in the valleys of Brede, which reduces the open aspect of the landscape. The hop gardens and orchards, however, with their distinctive shelterbelt hedges, have declined. Once they were a major feature of the area. This leaves a landscape which lacks the cohesion of the smaller scale farmland of the High Weald, without taking on the great open horizons of the lower river levels.

LOWER ROTHER VALLEY

Bodiam lies within the Lower Rother Valley character area.

The Lower Rother Valley runs east from Robertsbridge to Rye, stretching as far north as Tenterden and as far south as Peasmarsh. The Rother was one of the most important rivers in the High Weald, and still dominates the eastern end of the AONB.

This area has historically been subject to alternate flooding and silting and the river has changed its course several times over the centuries. During the Roman occupation, tidal estuary and mudflats extended far up the valley and the Isle of Oxney was a true island. The ancient sea cliffs at Rye, Playden and Oxney are a constant reminder that here, as in Brede, the shape and role of this landscape has changed dramatically over time. The river levels are drained by a network of small ditches and flecked by patches of scrub and stunted trees. Although the Brede and Rother valley floors contain most of the best agricultural land in the AONB, the intensively farmed, arable fields are still interspersed with considerable areas of sheep grazed pasture. The gentle open slopes which rise up onto the enclosing ridges support a network of large, regular fields, surrounded either by overgrown hedgerows closely trimmed, gappy hedges and sporadic trees. Both the river levels and the valley slopes have a bleak, wind-swept feel, despite the intensive agriculture.

Further west, around Bodiam and Sandhurst, the valleys close in. Despite the large fields, there are more small woodlands and thicker hedges, although many are unmanaged and in decline. The terracotta coloured soils of the Hexden valley still support occasional orchards and most of the red-brick or timber framed farms have a pair of redundant oasthouses. In the villages, such as Northiam and Sandhurst, weatherboarding is common, whilst very occasionally a thatched cottage can still be found, a reminder of the days when reeds from the river-levels were a valued roofing material.

The Lower Rother Valley is a wide, flat bottomed valley, whose rolling valley slopes are drained by small ghylls. At the mouth of the valley, where it opens onto Walland Marsh in the east, the Isle of Oxney forms a gentle mound on the flat levels, around which the River Rother and the Reading Sewer flow.

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BODIAM: LOWER ROTHER VALLEY

PHOTOGRAPH



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Large scale landscape, wide views. Valley floodplain meets low wooded ridges. High hedges, unmanaged shaws, some trees and scrub on valley floor.

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Condition

This flat floodplain with water margin trees of willow and alder and gently undulating surroundings with wooded ridges and copses, has a unified pattern of elements. Agriculture is mainly arable, often with a large field pattern but with some pasture enclosed by overgrown hedgerows with mature oaks. Ditches, orchards and hop gardens contribute to the diversity of the landscape. There are few visual detractors, mostly confined to commercial developments on main roads. The ecological integrity is strong with well developed networks of wildlife corridors, and a moderate intensity of land use. The linear villages and scattered historic farmsteads (often regularly sited on distinct ridgeline roads) are of predominantly red brick, tile hung or weather boarded construction. The imposing stone built Bodiam Castle is an important heritage site, and other buildings generally have a positive impact on the landscape. The landscape is in very good condition.

Sensitivity

Sense of place is well developed with many characteristic features being well expressed. Bodiam Castle is a unique heritage feature and much of the landscape is at least historic, with some areas of ancient woodland. The landform is an apparent element, and the intermittent tree cover means that the visibility of the landscape is moderate.

LANDSCAPE ACTIONS

Conserve the network of small ridge-top woodlands and copses through appropriate management, especially to ensure the full wildlife potential.
 Ensure continuity of specimen standard oaks, through allowing new hedgerow trees to grow up and by planting.
 Conserve the pattern of hedgerows and ensure that hedgerows are appropriately managed and maintained to ensure their continuity and to maximise their potential as a wildlife habitat.
 Conserve ditches and streams and ensure their sensitive management to encourage wildlife.
 Conserve the historic vernacular buildings and ensure that new buildings and additions are sympathetic to the existing character.
 Conserve the distinctive waterside willows and alders by appropriate pollarding and ensuring that bankside clearance is sensitive to wildlife and landscape impacts.

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:	Strong Network.
Functional Integrity:	Very 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 small ridge top woods and copses
 Conserve hedgerow trees by planting and allowing new trees to grow up
 Conserve and maintain the pattern of hedgerows
 Conserve ditches and streams for wildlife
 Conserve historic vernacular buildings
 Conserve waterside willows and alders

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