

Overall Character

Bordering Surrey in the north of the county, this area has a pastoral and densely wooded character. Low wooded ridges are dissected by steep wooded gills and narrow lanes. Interspersed between the woodland is a patchwork of mostly small to medium sized pastures enclosed by thick hedgerows and shaws. Homes and farms are scattered throughout this area. Remnant parkland and field corner ponds are recurring features. Despite the relative proximity of Gatwick Airport and Crawley to the east, the area retains a strong rural character.

Key Characteristics

- Undulating, low and densely wooded ridges running mostly east-west. Distinct escarpment to the north of Horsham and low escarpment at Rowhook.
- Blocks and strips of interconnecting woodland, including a large number of blocks of ancient woodland. Western area characterised by woodland of some size.
- Mostly rural character with intricate patchwork of small to medium size pasture fields with a combination of sinuous and straight boundaries. Larger, more open, field patterns in the east.
- Strong pattern of shaws and hedgerows enclosing fields with mature single oaks in hedgerows and fields.
- Network of narrow lanes, sometimes sunken, cross the area with strong definition north-south. Many of them are former droveways for cattle, pigs and sheep.
- Steep, secretive wooded gills.
- Hidden hammer ponds near Roman Woods with characteristic narrow form.
- Remnant parkland in the north east, north of Warnham.
- Includes the main tributaries of Arun; North River and Boldings Brook which meander through mostly narrow valleys with undulating valley sides, dissecting area north to south.
- Dispersed settlement pattern of scattered farms, cottages, hamlets and linear villages. Linear ridgetop villages such as Rudgwick and Rusper are set on higher ground. Farm cottages dispersed along lanes. Rusper forms a particularly attractive area with a traditional core. Some suburban development on village edges.
- Strong historic vernacular of sandstone, half timber and plaster/brick, tile hanging and weatherboarding. Rich collection of timber frame buildings in Rudgwick and surrounding area. Local landmark of Rudgwick Church spire.
- Occasional clay quarries/pits and brickworks. Notably in Kingsfold Valley.
- Suburbanisation along the A281.

Sheet LW4

Low Weald Hills

Low Weald

The area covered by the Sheet includes:

The Upper Arun Valley (Area P1), the Rowhook and Rudgwick Wooded Ridge (Area I1), and the Warnham and Rusper Wooded Ridge (Area I2) Landscape Character Areas defined in the unpublished **Horsham District Landscape Character Assessment** (October 2003).



Historic Features

- Path of the Roman road, Stane Street.
- Moated sites.
- Small to medium-sized linear fields associated with old droveways.
- Small and large irregular fields carved out of woodland (assarts).
- Many historic farmsteads and cottages.
- Hammer ponds and remains of iron workings.
- Ancient woodland.

Biodiversity

- Extensive semi-natural broad-leaved woodlands linked by hedgerows and shaws particularly on the heavy clay hill tops and alongside gill valleys. Inter-connected woodland of special value.
- Many ancient semi-natural woodlands, but some coniferised.
- Woodland important for tree species such as small-leaved lime and wild service tree.
- Gill woodland.
- Mosses and liverworts in the gill woodlands are of national significance.
- Field corner ponds add to habitat interest. Support amphibian populations.
- Upper tributaries of the river Arun contain marginal vegetation and wetland trees.
- Many shaws.
- Unimproved pasture with a concentration south of Kingsfold valley.

Change - Key Issues

- Noise from Gatwick Airport.
- Localised development pressures for urban development.
- Localised intrusion from suburban features.
- Localised loss of hedgerows and shaws.
- Expansion of horse paddocks.
- Increasing development on narrow historic lanes.
- Increasing traffic pressures on narrow lanes and minor roads due to proximity of urban areas of Horsham, Crawley and around Gatwick.
- Poor woodland and hedgerow/shaw management.
- Poor pond management.
- Loss of parkland features and introduction of high fences in the Rudgwick and Rowhook area.

Landscape and Visual Sensitivities

Overall sensitivity to change is high. Despite the high degree of enclosure in many parts of the area, some ridgetops and slopes are prominent with distinctive long views to both North and South Downs and across the Crawley Vale to the High Weald Forests. *Key sensitivities are:*

- Loss of woodland along ridgetops and valley slopes.
- Cumulative impact of small scale change.
- Any large scale housing/commercial development.
- Cumulative impact of vertical structures on ridge slopes and ridgetops.
- Small scale incremental land management change, e.g. expansion of horse paddocks.
- Erosion of the narrow country lanes.
- Loss of parkland features, e.g. parkland specimen trees/tree belts etc in Rudgwick and Rowhook.
- Any development that would damage the integrity of gills or river valleys.
- Unsympathetic flood defences or works to hammer ponds.



Narrow lanes



Remnant parkland features

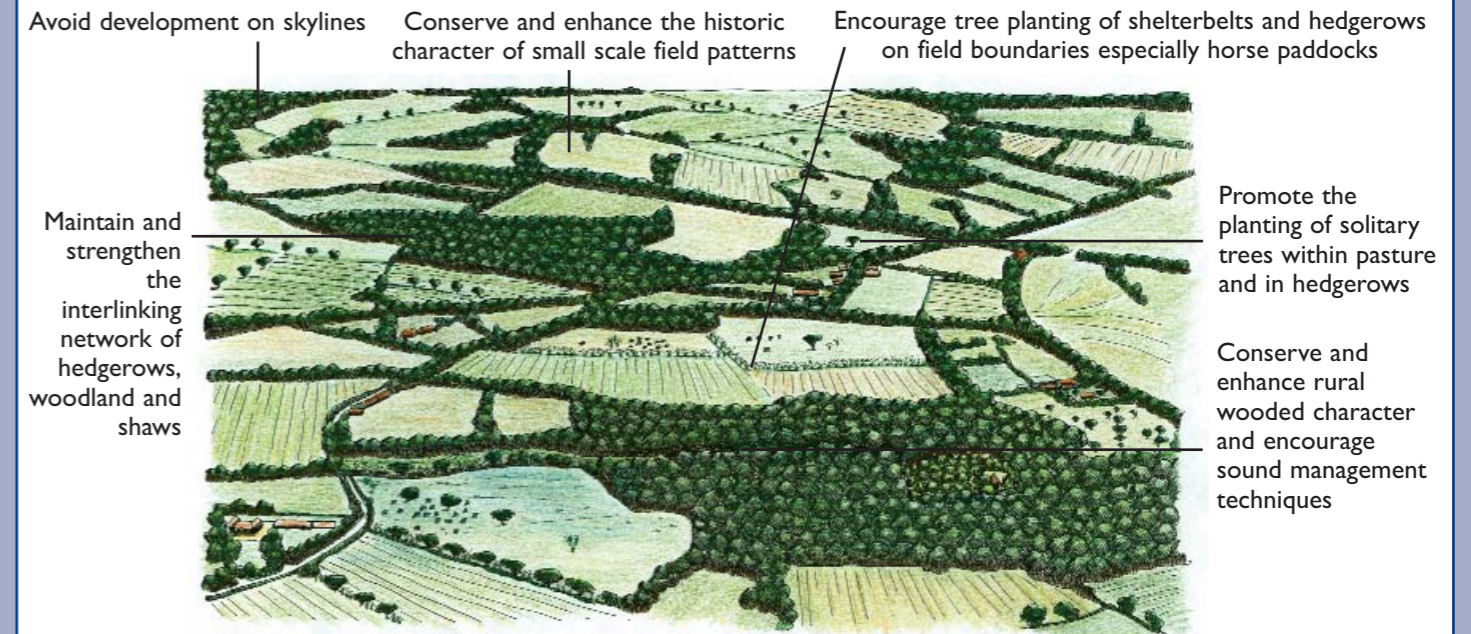


Small scale field patterns



Interlinking hedgerows, woodlands and shaws

Land Management Guidelines



Conserve the rural quality of the area including the pattern of the agricultural landscape, the intricate patchwork of small scale fields, and linked woodland, and the intimate and unobtrusive settlement pattern throughout much of the area.

- Conserve and enhance rural wooded character, including the distinctive form of ridgetop woodlands and gill woodlands. Encourage positive management and long term woodland regeneration.
- Maintain and strengthen the interlinking network of hedgerows, woodland and shaws. Restore shaws/hedgerows and single hedgerow trees throughout pasture land.
- Ensure any development respects historic settlement pattern and form, and building materials.
- Conserve and enhance the historic character of small scale field patterns, scattered development, and moated sites.
- Respect the historic character of rural roads and lanes notably those with sunken profiles. Consider appropriate traffic management strategies to reduce traffic pressures on the narrow lanes.
- Conserve the integrity and characteristic narrow form of hammer ponds.
- Conserve and replant parkland and garden features such as avenues and designed vistas, parkland trees and estate boundary features.
- Manage the upper tributaries of the Arun to retain nature conservation interest. Ensure any development respects the form, aspect and natural features of river valleys and watercourses.
- Maintain and manage field and woodland ponds, for landscape and nature conservation value.
- Consider the cumulative impact on landscape character of small developments and land-use change, and avoid the introduction of suburban styles and materials.
- Avoid skyline development and ensure any new development is well integrated into the wider landscape. Use new woodland, shaw and hedgerow planting as appropriate.
- Pay particular attention to the siting of telecommunications masts.
- Plant new woodland and hedgerows around village fringes and along busy urban routes such the A281. Promote the planting of amenity trees throughout new housing development.
- Establish screen planting around claypits and brickworks notably around the Kingsfold valley.
- Encourage more sympathetic management of horse paddocks. Avoid unsightly fencing. Encourage new hedge and tree planting outside unsightly fence lines. Conserve and enhance existing hedgerows and tree belts around paddocks.

The Guidelines should be read in conjunction with:

- County-wide Landscape Guidelines set out in *A Strategy for the West Sussex Landscape* (November 2005) published by West Sussex County Council.