

Overall Character

This large character area in the south of the county extends from the Arun Valley in the west to the Adur valley in the east. It is a distinctive landscape of exposed rolling chalk hills with a steep north facing escarpment and softer dip slope to the south.

Key Characteristics

- Elevated chalk hills.
- Smooth, gently rolling landform, cut by trough-shaped dry valleys, sometimes branching.
- Dramatic, steep, mostly open escarpment, deeply indented by rounded coombes.
- Open, expansive landscape mostly with few trees and hedgerows.
- Areas of woodland mostly limited to narrow belts along the edge of the scarp slope.
- Spectacular panoramic views over the Low Weald to the north.
- Arable farming predominates in large, rectilinear fields.
- Surviving fragmented and isolated blocks of species-rich chalk grassland on steeper slopes and on the escarpment.
- Distinctive historic landscape features including hill forts, barrows, cross dykes, ancient chalk tracks, field systems, windmills and dew ponds.
- Isolated yet prominent farmsteads and barns.
- Strong sense of remoteness and solitude in some areas.

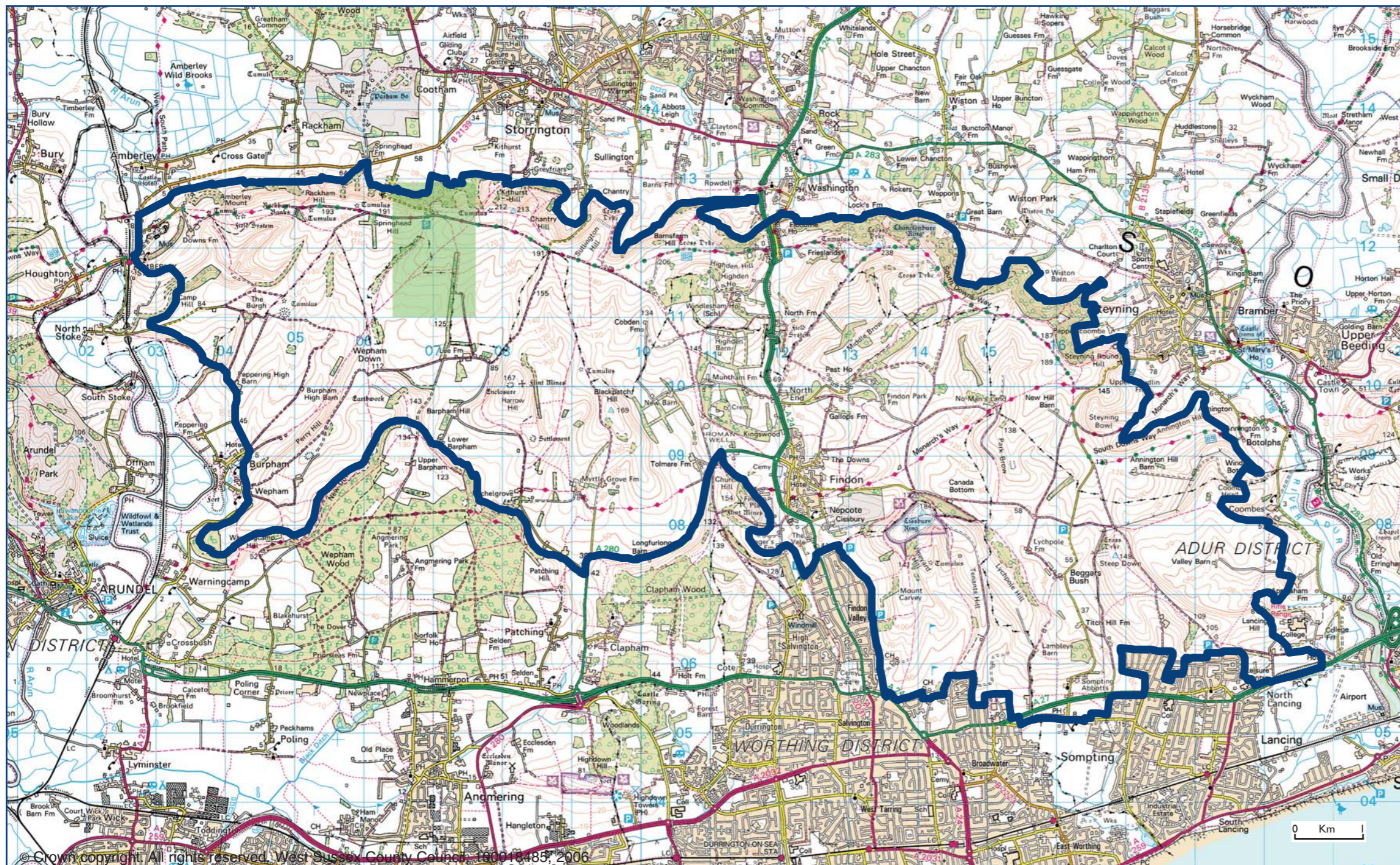
Sheet SD3

Central Downs

South Downs

The area covered by the Sheet is derived from:

Eastern Downs (F1) Landscape Character Area as defined in the unpublished **West Sussex Landscape Character Assessment** (November 2003).



Historic Features

- Bronze Age burial mounds.
- Hill forts at Cissbury and Chanctonbury Ring.
- Field systems, cultivation terraces and earthworks.
- Cross ridge dykes.
- Ancient routes and track ways e.g. South Downs Way.
- Flint mines such as at Harrow Hill.
- Deserted medieval village sites at Upper and Lower Barpham.
- Parliamentary enclosure fields.

Biodiversity

- Remnant species-rich chalk grassland and scattered scrub. The more significant sites are designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) or Sites of Nature Conservation Importance (SNCI).
- Large areas of intensive arable fields with reduced biodiversity.
- Narrow belts of deciduous woodland along the scarp slope with some blocks of ancient woodland.
- Unimproved grassland.
- Chalk pits and quarries at Washington and Amberley.

Change - Key Issues

- Continuing loss of biodiversity as a result of intensive arable agriculture.
- Introduction of new crops.
- Expansion of scrub on chalk grassland associated with the decline of sheep grazing.
- Soil erosion from increased autumn ploughing on steep slopes.
- Expansion of horse grazing with associated overgrazed paddocks, post and wire field boundaries, jumps, ménages etc.
- Increasing traffic noise impacts from major road routes across the Downs, eroding tranquillity.
- Recreational pressures near the urban edge, e.g. golf courses, four wheel driving, busy recreational sites or “honey pots.”
- Large agricultural buildings.
- Impact on the landscape of exposed pylons and telecommunications masts.

Landscape and Visual Sensitivities

Condition is good, although chalk grassland has become fragmented. The landscape has a high sensitivity to change due to its open and elevated form. It is particularly sensitive to development along the skyline. *Key sensitivities are:*

- Development on chalk causing chalk scars.
- High sensitivity to impact of encroaching urban development both on the urban edge of Worthing and Lancing to the south and in the Low Weald to the north.
- Views from the Downs both north and south are highly sensitive to visually prominent development.
- High sensitivity to development on skyline, for example, masts and pylons.
- Species rich downland grassland becoming fragmented and reduced to remnants.
- Archaeological remains which are vulnerable to damage and loss.
- Road improvements.



View from Cissbury Ring towards Findon



Arable farming

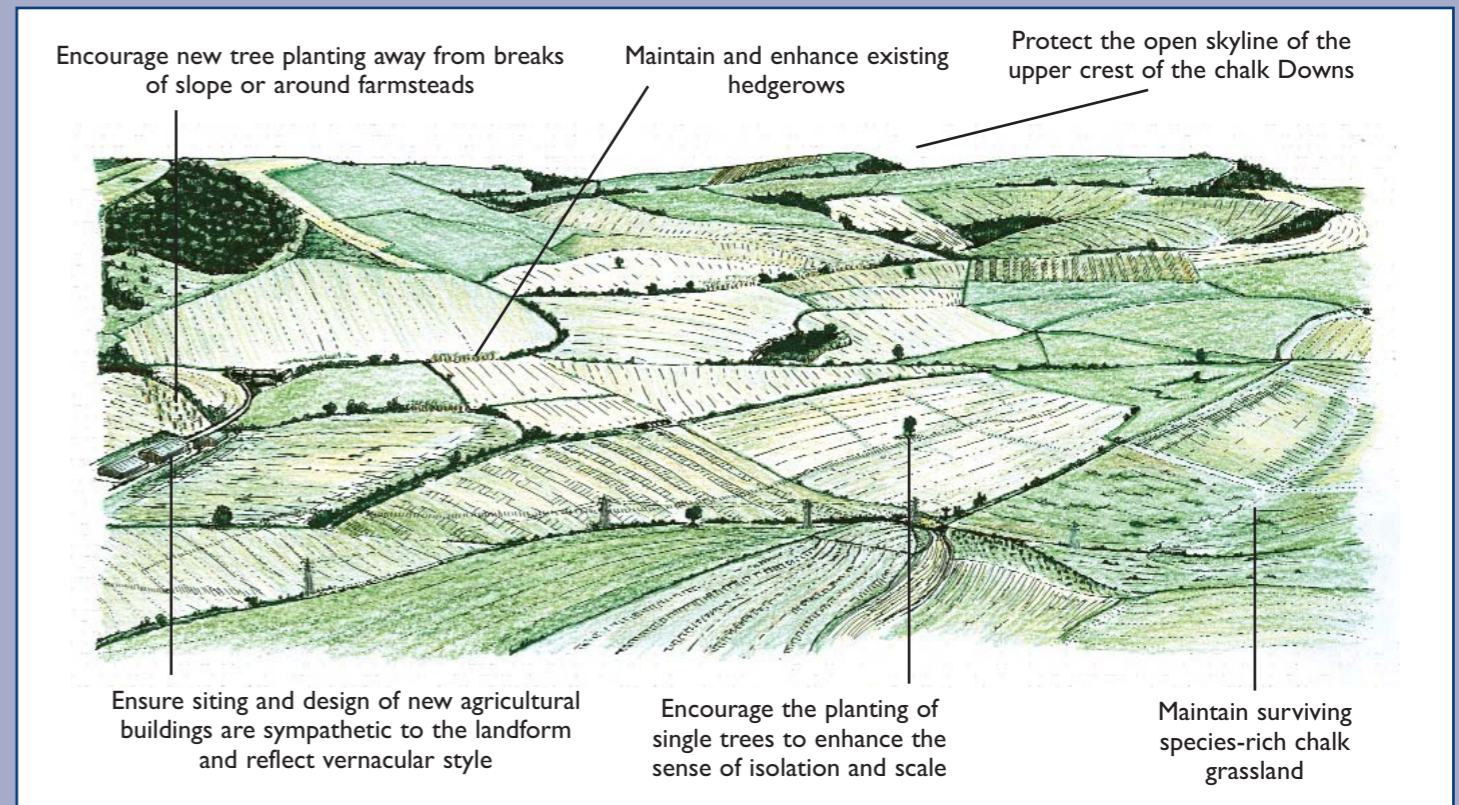


Isolated farmsteads



Open landscape with narrow belts of woodland

Land Management Guidelines



Conserve and enhance the predominantly open and largely tranquil character of the area and its wide views.

- Maintain the strong historic character of the area, including typical features such as archaeological monuments and their settings, ancient chalk tracks, windmills and dew ponds.
- Maintain surviving species-rich chalk grassland and target restoration of chalk grassland on the upper slopes of the downs and around recreation sites, using the Environmental Sensitive Stewardship Scheme where appropriate.
- Encourage landscape enhancements of the existing urban edge between Worthing and Shoreham.
- Protect the open skyline of the upper crest of the Chalk Downs.
- Maintain and enhance existing hedgerows. The planting of new ones should be limited to the more sheltered minor valleys and restoration of the historic hedgerow pattern.
- Restore and manage visually important tree clumps and belts where this does not conflict with historic and nature conservation features.
- Encourage the planting of single trees to enhance a sense of isolation and scale.
- Encourage new tree planting away from breaks of slope forming special hilltop features or around farmsteads following contours.
- Encourage landscape enhancement schemes for existing car park, “honey pot” recreation sites.
- Conserve and enhance the setting of historic farmsteads and barns.
- Ensure the siting and design of new agricultural buildings is sympathetic to the landform and reflects the vernacular style.
- Conserve and enhance the experience of the South Downs Way long distance path and other rights of way.
- Conserve existing narrow chalkland roads.

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.
- Objectives and actions contained in the *Interim South Downs Management Plan* (March 2004) published by the Sussex Downs Conservation Board.