

Overall Character

This long narrow Character Area extends between West Wittering and Shoreham and comprises the majority of the West Sussex coastline. It is a distinctive low, open and exposed landscape which has an overriding visual and physical association with the sea. Its wide and gently curved bays are further defined by the protruding shingle headland of Selsey Bill, and the chalk headland of Beachy Head in neighbouring East Sussex. This is a dynamic character area whose key characteristics are linked by coastal evolution, weather and tides. The character varies considerably according to weather condition and seasons.

Key Characteristics

- To the east of Selsey Bill, mainly shingle banks with bands of sand and mud exposed at low tide.
- To the west of Selsey Bill, mainly sandy beaches, dry sand dunes and grassland habitats.
- Influence of extensive linear urban coastal resort development. To the east, almost continuous conurbation of Bognor Regis, Littlehampton, Worthing and Shoreham. To the west, notably villages of West Wittering, East Wittering and Bracklesham. Separated by distinctive village of Selsey at Selsey Bill.
- Low sweeping coastline. Open, exposed foreshore.
- Dominance of the sea. Noise of waves, wind and birds.
- Dynamic seascape of constantly changing weather, light and tidal conditions.
- Movement of shingle and sand along the coast, linked to coastal evolution and geomorphology.
- Relatively narrow undeveloped sections of coastline behind beaches. Bounded by low growing scant vegetation and small areas of wind-sculpted scrub and trees. Often providing separation of urban areas. Areas of both high ecological and landscape importance.
- Shingle and sand dune habitats of national importance, notably at West Wittering, Shoreham and Climping.
- Reed beds, streams and deep drainage ditches known as rifes.
- Frequent wooden and rock groynes and breakwaters.
- Distinctive historic piers at Littlehampton, Bognor Regis and Worthing.
- Fleets of small fishing boats beached along the shoreline.
- Caravan parks and other built holiday accommodation facilities.
- Yachting, surfing, windsurfing and commercial boat traffic are frequent in seaward views.
- Diving areas off Bracklesham Bay



South Coast
Shoreline

South Coast Plain

The area covered by the Sheet is derived from:

West Wittering to Shoreham Coast (Area A1) Landscape Character Area as defined in the unpublished **West Sussex Landscape Character Assessment** (November 2003). It also includes Wittering Coast (Area F2) of the **Chichester Harbour AONB Landscape Character Assessment** (June 2005).



Historic Features

- Cakeham Tower, Church Norton Mound and St.Wilfrid's Chapel.
- Remains of Atherington deserted medieval village are visible at very low tide.
- Selsey windmill.
- Timber groynes and beach huts.
- Traditional inshore fishing boats.
- Piers at Bognor Regis and Worthing point to the former grandeur of seaside resorts and their 19th century architecture.
- Wartime pillboxes, barracks, anti-aircraft batteries and anti-tank blocks dot the area.

Biodiversity

- A few undisturbed sand dune and shingle habitats remain. Most of the surviving examples are designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and Sites of Nature Conservation Importance (SNCI), such as at West Wittering beach, Climping and Shoreham beach.
- Dry sand dunes and grassland habitats.
- Tidal lagoons such as Widewater lagoon – a distinctive saline lagoon near Lancing.
- Small areas of unimproved coastal grazing marsh, including saltmarsh, acid grassland and rushy pasture.
- Reed beds and deep drainage ditches (rifes).
- Coastal scrub including large areas of Tamarisk and limited groups of trees.
- Areas of undeveloped coastline are of high ecological importance.

Change - Key Issues

- High levels of formal and informal coastal recreational pressure with large seasonal crowds.
- Highly visible intrusion from urban, industrial and caravan development.
- Likely longer term rise in sea level and increased storm frequency threatening the stability and permanency of the coastline and leading to the loss of coastal habitats.
- Managed re-alignment of the coastline may be particularly influential in the future, providing opportunities for creation of new coastal habitats.
- Loss of distinctive coastal habitats through reclamation and dredging, development, coastal defences and recreation.
- Coastal habitats are fragmented, however, there is good survival of some characteristic coastal habitats particularly at Shoreham.
- Coastal geomorphology linked to weather, seasons, coastal processes and tides.
- Replacement of timber groynes with rock groynes and rock islands.

Landscape and Visual Sensitivities

Coastal development disrupts visual unity and fragments habitats. The landscape has a high sensitivity to change due to its openness and high intervisibility created by the wide curving bays. *Key sensitivities are to:*

- Erosion of coastal habitats due to visitor pressure and natural processes.
- Unsympathetic urban development.
- Loss of open views.
- Rise in sea level.
- Recreational development such as car parks and caravan sites.
- Car borne summer holiday traffic reducing tranquillity.
- Potential for dramatic landscape and ecological change due to dynamic movement along the coast, which also affect harbour entrances of both Pagham and Chichester.



Worthing Pier



West Wittering Beach Huts

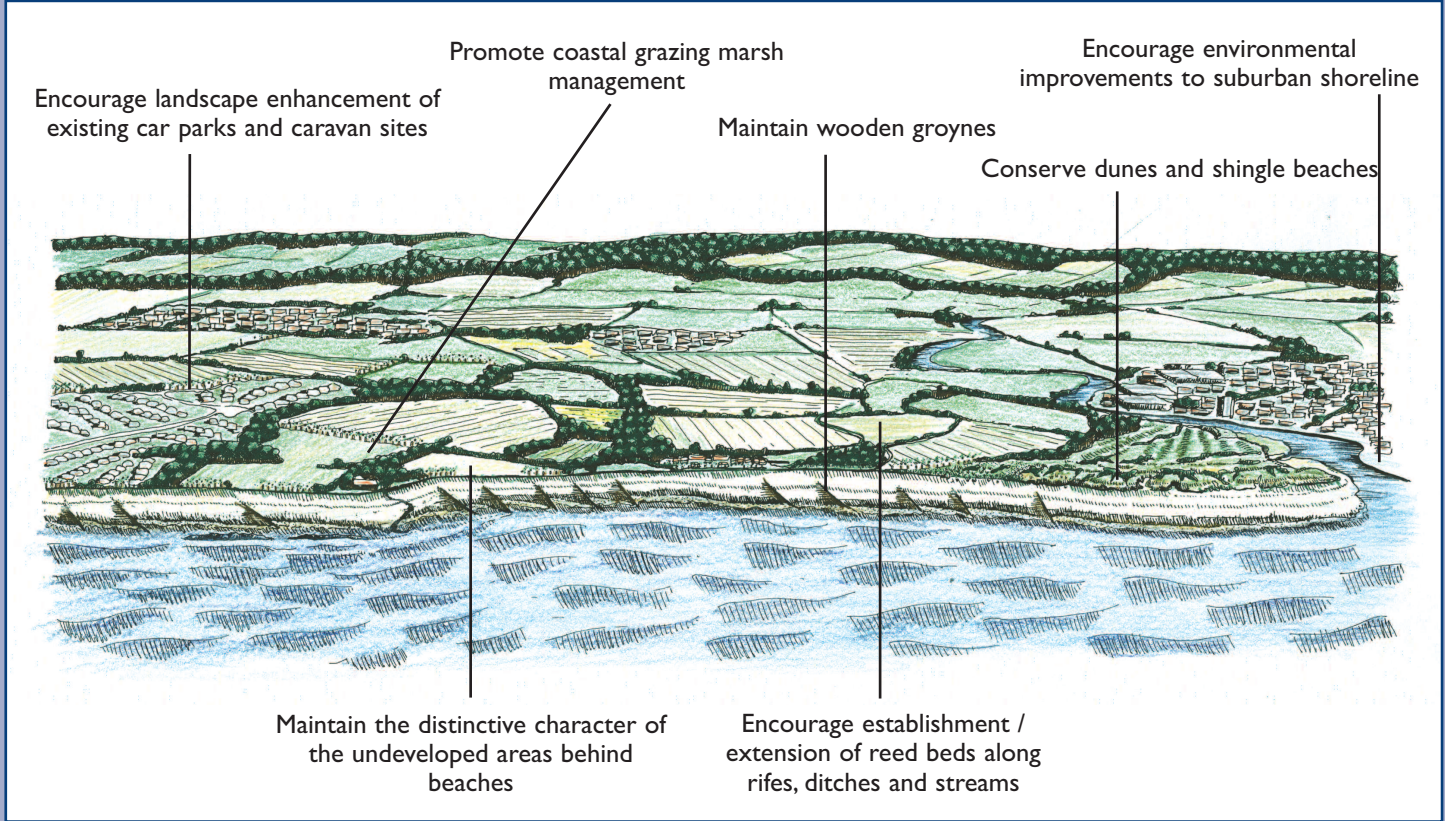


Fishing Boats - Worthing



Sand dunes - West Wittering

Land Management Guidelines



Conserve the open, distinctive coastal character of the area and maintain tranquillity.

- Ensure any new development does not result in adverse impact on open character and characteristic views.
- Maintain the distinctive character and identity of the undeveloped coastal grazing marsh and other open green areas behind beaches.
- Maintain the historic character of the shoreline including the fishing boats, beach huts, wooden groynes and piers, and other sea defences including those from wartime.
- Conserve and enhance the natural landscape features of the coast including shingle beaches and banks, saline lagoons, dunes, coastal scrub and trees, rifes and ditches through sympathetic management.
- Conserve and enhance the vegetated shingle habitat.
- Promote coastal grazing marsh management.
- Assess options for coastal management in a comprehensive way, reflecting the dynamic and interdependent processes of erosion and deposition. Where practical, favour “softer” coastal management solutions such as coastal re-alignment, or ensure sympathetic design of any engineered defences.
- Encourage environmental improvements to the suburban shoreline.
- Encourage landscape enhancements of existing car parks and caravan sites especially with the use of small copses, hedgerows and coastal scrub planting.
- All new planting to be of coastal tolerant plants which are adapted to the maritime winds and seaside conditions. Particular care needs to be taken in species selection in sensitive coastal habitats.
- Establish new areas of dense scrub and tree groups through the creation of sheltered areas using sympathetic measures such as low stone walls and earth mounds and nurse species for wind protection.
- Protect the remaining open spaces behind beaches by implementation of strategic gap policies supported by landscape character assessment.
- Promote and extend conservation of sand dunes by protecting and managing existing vegetation and where necessary planting marram grass to encourage stabilisation, using brushwood fences to reduce wind erosion, and controlling visitors especially on areas with special ecological interest.

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.
- Selsey Bill to Beachy Head Shoreline Management Plan, (under review).