

Overall Character

This large Character Area extends from West Harting Down and Stansted Forest in the west to Arundel Park in the east. With its enclosed valleys, wooded chalk uplands and a densely wooded escarpment, the landscape in many places conveys a strong sense of enclosure, seclusion and remoteness. The ridgeline gives panoramic views over the downland itself and the hilly sandstone country to the north. Views within the area are more limited except from the higher ground, due to the enclosed nature of the valley landscapes and high tree cover. Prominent beech and mixed woodlands, together with swathes of conifer forest are interwoven with large sweeping arable fields and grassland in the rolling plateau and ridges. The steep slopes of the dry and intermittent stream valleys and on the escarpment typically carry mature beech and yew hangers, which appear as a backcloth from the lower ground. The ancient yew hanger of Kingley Vale near West Stoke is particularly distinctive where the dark trees dominate the slopes of the valley. Where mixed hangers occur, the dark green yew provides a colour contrast in summer and autumn to the lighter greens and golds of the beech. The changing colours of the beech woodlands and cereal crops provide a strong seasonal element in the landscape. Much of the area comes under the management of large estates and contains notable areas of historic parkland. The area is lightly settled with valley villages, farms and houses. Extensive tracts of this secluded countryside area are particularly tranquil.

Key Characteristics

- Rolling chalk uplands with a bold combination of woodland, farmland and commercial plantations, often connected by copses and dense hedgerows.
- Steep, wooded northern escarpment which is broken up by patches of chalk grassland.
- Broad, branching valleys of the intermittent (winterbourne) streams of the Rivers Ems and Lavant.
- Distinctive beech and yew hangers.
- Large fields and woodlands on the ridges, smaller in the valleys.
- Large estates and parklands, especially on the lower parts of the Downs.
- Wealth of historic features including prehistoric earthworks, trackways, and ancient strip-lynchets.
- Traditional clustered flint villages linked by spinal valley roads. Low degree of settlement, with valley villages and farms.
- Sense of remoteness and tranquillity.
- Extensive tracts of secluded countryside remaining remote from major through routes.
- Enclosed valleys and rounded open hills.
- Low density of hedges and hedgerow trees on the upper slopes.
- Some very significant, although isolated, areas of unimproved chalk grassland occur on the slopes of Treyford to Bepton Downs, Harting Downs and Kingley Vale.

Western Downs

South Downs

The area covered by the Sheet is derived from:

Western Downs Landscape Character Area (E1) as defined in the unpublished **West Sussex Landscape Character Assessment** (November 2003).



Historic Features

- Many prehistoric archaeological remains. Notable features include the Neolithic long barrow, Bevis's Thumb, the Bronze Age burial mounds on Bow Hill and the Devil's Jumps at Treyford, Iron Age hillforts at Torberry Hill and at the Trundle. Upland enclosures of prehistoric date are found on Bury Hill (Neolithic) and Beacon Hill (Iron Age). All are designated Scheduled Ancient Monuments (SAM).
- Strip-lynchets.
- Stane Street (SAM) Roman Road, from Eartham to Bignor.
- Trackways and steep winding tracks up the downland escarpments (bostals).
- Important historic parklands including Goodwood, Stansted, Uppark, West Dean, and Arundel Park. Remains of medieval deer parks.
- Halnaker Windmill - post medieval.
- Small, medium, and large irregular and rectilinear assarts, many subsequently incorporated into 18th and 19th century estate farmland.

Biodiversity

- Ancient yew woodland at Kingley Vale of international importance and designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), and National Nature Reserve (NNR).
- Many large ancient woodlands, for example, West Dean Woods (SSSI) and Tegleaze Woods, have particularly rich ground floras.
- Chalk grassland with scattered scrub, semi-natural broadleaved woodland, lane verges and old hedgerows provide a rich mosaic of habitats.
- Major areas of chalk grassland, notably at Treyford to Bepton Downs (SSSI), Kingley Vale (National Nature Reserve), Harting Downs (SSSI) and on the Trundle (Site of Nature Conservation Importance, SNCI).
- Dewponds.
- Intermittent (winterbourne) streams with watermeadows along the River Lavant and River Ems.
- Species rich path and roadside verges, providing remnants of the characteristic chalk downland flowers and a habitat for butterflies.

Change - Key Issues

- Past hedgerow removal due to arable intensification and enlargement of fields.
- Planting of game cover crops.
- Decline of traditional woodland management.
- Development or fragmentation of large country estates and smaller parklands.
- Impact on the landscape of exposed pylons and telecommunication masts.
- Changes in farming practices, in particular the reduction in livestock. Stewardship Schemes could be a positive force for change.
- Expansion of horse grazing with associated overgrazed paddocks and divided fields with post and wire / tape boundaries.
- Increased recreational activities such as horse riding and large scale events held at country estates.
- Gradual suburbanisation of the landscape, loss of locally distinctive building styles and materials, and the widespread use of modern fencing.

Landscape and Visual Sensitivities

Key sensitivities are:

- Views from the Downs are highly sensitive to visually prominent development.
- Species rich downland grassland is becoming fragmented and reduced to remnants.
- Archaeological remains are vulnerable to damage and loss.
- Increasing traffic noise on the road routes across the Downs, due to increased recreational pressures, eroding tranquillity.
- Changes to the scattered low key settlement pattern, or small scale incremental development in villages and hamlets, bringing in urban and suburban features and materials.
- High sensitivity to the impact of encroaching urban development, modern farm buildings, masts and pylons and new roads, reinforcing the cumulative visual impact of buildings and other structures.
- Loss of extent and diversity of woodland cover, much of which is ancient woodland.
- Changes in farming practices leading to changes in field size and/or loss of hedgerows and hedgerow trees.
- Loss of wider visual unity of historic parkland landscapes due to development or fragmentation of the large country estates.
- Agricultural inputs may impact on watercourses that emanate from the base of the Downs.
- Management of this area is key for maintaining hydrology and water quality of the aquifer.



Halnaker Windmill



The Trundle, Goodwood

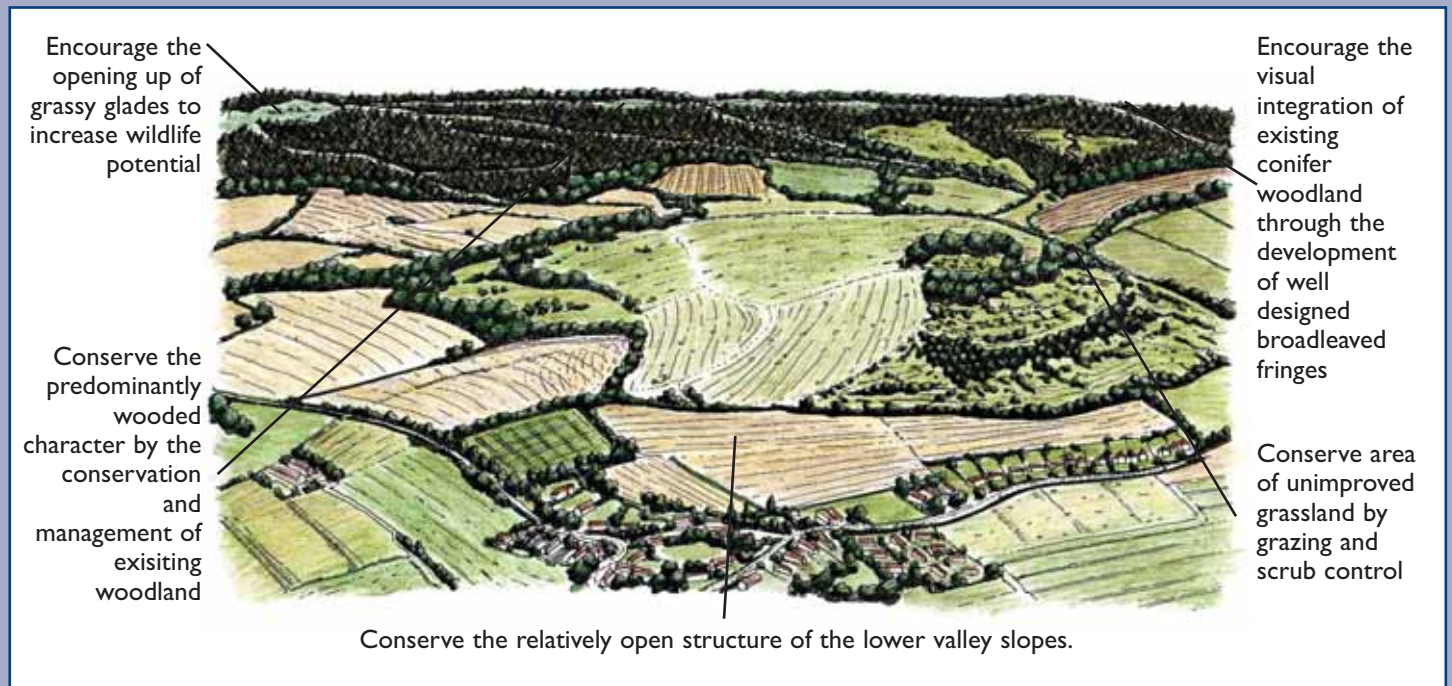


Parkland at West Dean



View of the South Downs Way at Cocking Hill

Land Management Guidelines



Conserve the largely remote, tranquil character of the area.

- Maintain the rich historic character of the area, including archaeological monuments and their settings, distinctive historic field patterns and historic parklands.
- Enhance visual influence of parklands in the landscape by identifying and revealing views towards them.
- Conserve the character and setting of the historic villages and farmsteads.
- Implement carefully designed native tree and shrub planting around farm buildings and detracting features.
- Conserve the pattern and character of winding lanes.
- Conserve the smaller scale field patterns and discourage further enlargement of fields.
- Promote good forestry design avoiding geometric shapes. Reflect the existing scale and structure of the landscape and encourage the visual integration of existing conifer woodland through the development of well-designed broadleaved fringes. Some former ancient woodland sites, converted to conifer plantations, are now being restored to broadleaves through PAWS (Plantations on Ancient Woodland Sites) programme.
- Conserve the predominantly wooded character of the area by the conservation and management of existing woodlands.
- Seek opportunities to extend existing woodlands where this does not conflict with historic and nature conservation sites.
- Maintain ridge top woodlands to preserve the overall sense of enclosure of the valley setting.
- Conserve and manage hanger woodland to provide varied age classes.
- Create grassy glades and rides in forests to increase wildlife potential.
- Maintain and restore hedgerows, tree clumps and single tree features.
- Maintain and enhance existing chalk grassland by grazing and scrub control. Link areas of grassland where possible.
- Encourage the formation of chalk grassland headlands around large arable fields and linkages between existing areas along tracks.
- Conserve the relatively open structure of the lower valley slopes.
- Encourage management of traditional water meadows along the River Lavant and River Ems.
- Manage woodland along the South Downs Way to introduce light and encourage drying out of paths.

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 South Downs Management Plan (October 2007) published by the South Downs Joint Committee.