

Overall Character

The rolling vale of the Rother Farmlands extends from the Hampshire border to Fittleworth near the junction of the Rivers Rother and Arun. Large arable fields form a broad grid across the rolling relief, providing long views across the area. Sunken lanes bordered by hedgerows with stag headed oaks form hidden corridors. The unifying influence of the large estates of Cowdray Park and Petworth Park is evident in many of the small villages and towns with well detailed estate stone cottages and walls.

Key Characteristics

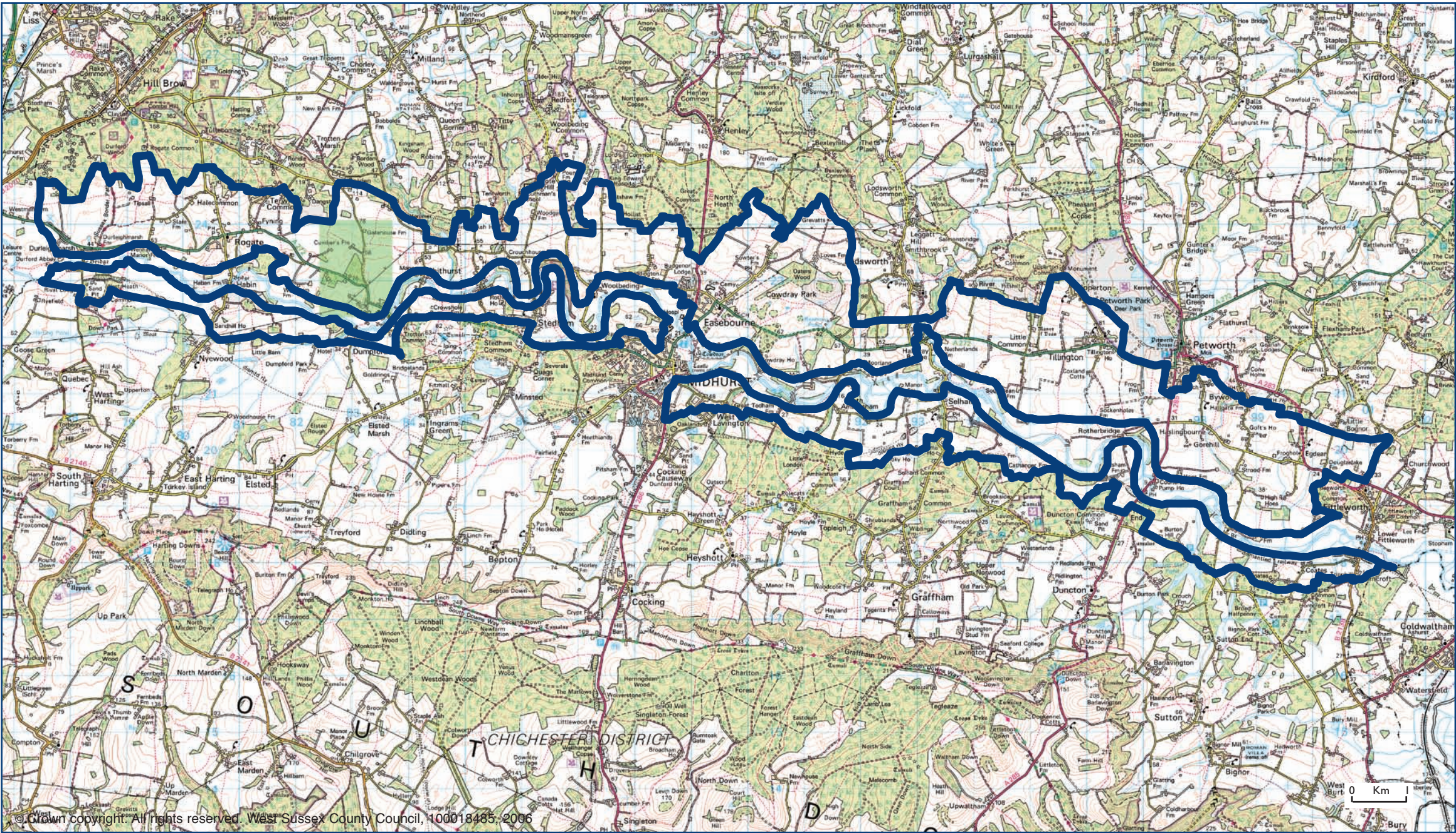
- Rolling vale within Sussex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).
- Distinctive sandy yellow or red soils.
- Large arable fields with fragmented hedgerow boundaries, typically containing over-mature stag-headed oak trees.
- Individual isolated mature hedgerow oaks.
- Scattered woodland cover.
- Long views across the large arable fields.
- Small sandstone villages clustered at road junctions. Numerous small hamlets, scattered farms and cottages.
- Parks, estates and manor houses which influence the vernacular styles of boundaries and buildings.
- Localised suburban development around the market towns of Petworth and Midhurst.
- Historic parkland provides a more wooded character to the north east of the area.
- Small streams with woodland fringes.
- Deeply sunken lanes, running north to south, with bracken clad banks and sandstone walls.

Rother Farmlands

Wealden Greensand

The area covered by the Sheet is derived from:

Rother Farmlands (I I) Landscape Character Area defined in the unpublished **West Sussex Landscape Character Assessment** (November 2003).



Historic Features

- A number of historic parklands and estates are in the Rother Farmlands including Cowdray Park, Fittleworth House, Coates Castle, Hammerwood House and Rotherhill House and a small part of the southern section of Petworth Park.
- Bronze Age bowl barrows at West Heath Down.
- Lime kilns.
- Medieval stone churches including St Marys Church, Easebourne and St Peters, Terwick.
- All Hallows Church, Tillington - the tower is topped by curved buttresses which form a crown, the only one in Sussex.

Biodiversity

- Biodiversity is limited due to the extent of intensive arable farmland.
- Some small areas of heathland - for example, West Heath Common, a Site of Nature Conservation Importance (SNCI).
- Sunken lanes with adjacent banks and hedges are important to connect scattered habitats such as heathland and woodland.
- The Notable Road Verge along the A272 provides an important wildlife habitat and wildlife corridor.

Change - Key Issues

- Silt and sand run off from the steep agricultural fields resulting in loss of top soil and siltation issues in the Rother Valley.
- Continuing road improvements particularly on the A272 with increasing traffic and loss of tranquillity.
- Expansion of salad crop production under large polytunnels and fleece which appear industrial in the landscape.
- Loss of hedgerows and trees due to increased field sizes, intensive arable farming and lack of strategic management.
- Increasing pressure for development in villages and on the edge of towns.
- Highly visible edges to villages caused by loss of tree cover and hedgerows.
- Increase in reservoirs on farmland.
- Change in farming practices has led to an increase in vineyards.
- Localised intrusion and traffic from sand quarrying operations.

Landscape and Visual Sensitivities

Key sensitivities are:

- The mostly open character of the farmland allows long views across the area. Any development or agricultural buildings or material, such as fleece, is therefore highly visible.
- The loss of hedgerows and hedgerow trees affects biodiversity, visibility and scale within the landscape.
- Large estates and landowners have created locally distinct vernacular styles of estate stone buildings, walls and boundary treatments of a high quality. The use of suburban styles and materials in new developments degrades the quality of existing settlements.
- Localised visual intrusion, changes in landform and road improvements from sand quarry operations.
- Changes in land management due to new recreational uses such as golf courses.



Notable Road Verge, near Rogate



Vines on the slopes looking across the Rother Valley, Upperton

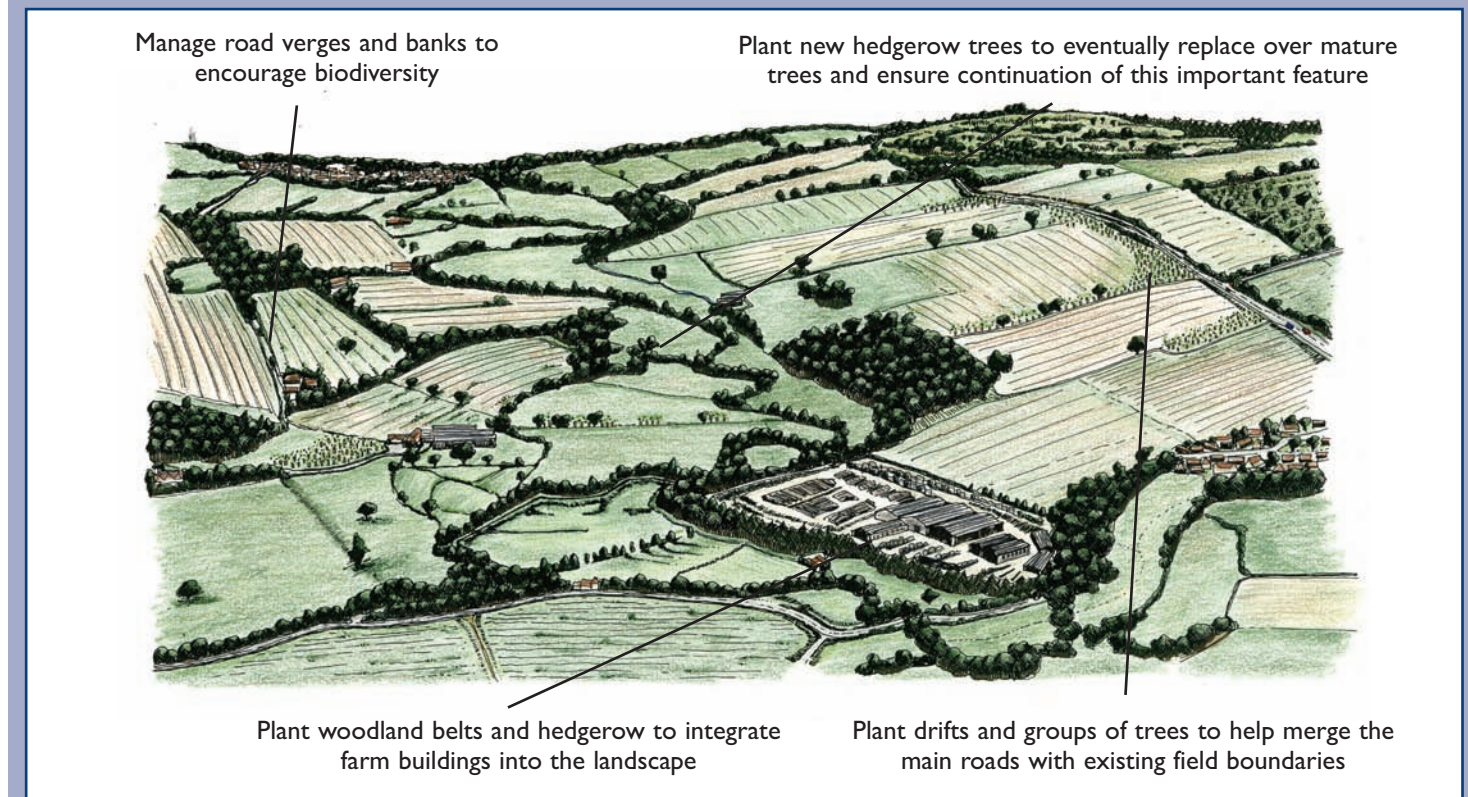


Farmland - large open fields, near Rogate



Historic parkland on the Cowdray estate

Land Management Guidelines



Conserve the rural qualities of the area generally, maintaining the farmland mosaic.

- Conserve the deep cut leafy lanes as distinctive features.
- Extend existing woodland areas and replant tree belts, hedgerows and hedgerow trees to closely reflect the landform.
- Plant new hedgerow trees to eventually replace over-mature hedgerow oaks and ensure continuation of this important feature.
- Conserve and manage existing small woodlands.
- Manage road verges and banks with adjacent hedges to encourage biodiversity.
- Conserve the historic character of the area including its parklands, historic manor houses and farmsteads, cottages and stone walls.
- Encourage the preparation of whole farm conservation plans.
- Encourage landscape improvements at the edges of villages.
- Encourage roadside environmental improvements to suburban areas.
- Ensure new development is integrated into the landscape within a structure of hedgerows and woodland tree planting.
- Plant drifts and groups of trees to help merge main roads with existing field boundaries.
- Plant woodland belts and hedgerows to integrate farm buildings into the landscape.
- Promote the use of current Stewardship schemes or equivalent.
- Encourage the restoration of sand quarries to a range of habitats to increase their wildlife value.
- Encourage appropriate screening of all quarry works by planting, carried out in advance of quarrying wherever possible.
- Encourage the use of locally appropriate materials and styles which are rural and not suburban.
- Consider the cumulative impact on landscape character of small developments and land use change.

The Guidelines should be read in conjunction with:

- County-wide Landscape Guidelines set out in *A Strategy for the West Sussex Landscape* (October 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.